FKW // ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR GESCHLECHTERFORSCHUNG UND VISUELLE KULTUR

FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURAL CRITIQUE.
LIFE-AFFIRMING PRACTICES AGAINST CAPITAL

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FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURAL CRITIQUE.
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EDITION

EDITORIAL

Liebe Leser*innen,

die Ausgabe *Feminist Infrastructural Critique. Life-Affirming Practices Against Capital*, herausgegeben von Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg und Claudia Lomoschitz, fragt nach feministischer Infrastrukturkritik in Kunst, Architektur und Vermittlung. Die 14 Artikel von insgesamt 36 Autor*innen und Kollektiven stellen gegenwärtige Projekte vor, die als „life-affirming practices" mit existierenden Infrastrukturen und Orten arbeiten und diese – auf ihnen aufbauend oder sie abbauend – verändern und umgestalten, um einen Beitrag zum Zusammenleben zu leisten.

Die hier versammelten Texte bewegen sich, mit wenigen Ausnahmen, alle außerhalb der bereits viel diskutierten Infrastrukturen der Kunst wie Museen, Sammlungen oder temporäre Ausstellungen. Neben ehemaligen Industrie-Gebäuden, Bauten des öffentlichen städtischen Raumes oder Bildungseinrichtungen stehen dabei Praxen im Vordergrund, die sich mit infrastrukturellen Eingriffen der Menschen in Naturräume auseinandersetzen. Allen gemein ist ein ortsspezifischer Ansatz, der in engem Austausch mit vor Ort lebenden Wesen realisiert wird – mit Menschen, Tieren und Pflanzen. In der Einleitung schlagen die Herausgeberinnen unterschiedliche „Lesewege" vor, die als thematische Gliederungen der Textbeiträge ergänzende inhaltliche Brücken zwischen den einzelnen Texten bauen.

Die dem Heft beigefügte Edition „Rewilding and Rewriting" wurde von der Künstlerin und Aktivistin Joulia Strauss gestaltet. Joulia Strauss ist auch als eine der Autor*innen des Textes „Ecologies of Care. Infrastructures Under Pressure: Practicing with Sites of Struggle" in dieser Ausgabe vertreten.

Unser großer Dank gilt den Gastherausgeberinnen Elke Krasny, Sophie Lingg und Claudia Lomoschit, allen Autor*innen sowie Nancy Katraki für die Mitarbeit am Korrektorat. Außerdem danken wir sehr herzlich Brian Dorsey für die Unterstützung bei Lektorat und Korrektorat, Fabian Brunke von Zwo.Acht für die Gestaltung dieser Ausgabe sowie Polonca Lovšin, für ihre Fotografie

a Plan with a Goat (fotografiert von Tomaž Tomažin), die auf dem Cover zu sehen ist.

Die kommende FKW Nr. 75 *Landschaft, Wetter, Kraut und Kritter – Anthropozän-Diskurs und Visuelle Kultur*, von Kerstin Brandes und Marietta Kesting herausgegeben, nimmt die sich gegenwärtig beständig beschleunigende Dynamik des ohnehin nicht unproblematischen Anthropozän-Diskurses in den Blick und fragt danach, wie ein Haraway'sches *staying with the trouble* aussehen könnte – was also Ästhetik, Visuelle Kultur und darauf bezogene Theoriebildung *tun können*, wenn der Verstrickung mit extraktivistischen Praktiken und Bedingungen niemals gänzlich zu entkommen ist. Dazu stellt die Ausgabe eine Nachhaltigkeit theoretischer Konzepte und wissenschaftlicher Erkenntnisse zur Diskussion, indem sie zu einem *neu* Lesen, zu einem Recycling von Theorien, Bildern, Texten und Visualisierungen einlädt. Mit „Landschaft", „Wetter", „Kraut und Kritter" sind in diesem Zusammenhang drei betont lokale und lakonische Kon/Figurationen fokussiert, die gegenwärtig in wissenschaftlichen Debatten und Tagesnachrichten gleichermaßen präsent sind.

FKW Nr. 76 erscheint unter dem Titel *Re-Lektüre des Gartens: Queere Ökologien, Kolonialismus, Gewalt* und wird von den Gastherausgeberinnen Friederike Nastold und Thari Jungen verantwortet. In den aktuellen Diskursen der Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft um Klima und Anthropozän ist der Garten bislang eher wenig thematisiert worden. In historischer Perspektive erscheint er als ambivalenter Nährboden für ästhetisch-politische Diskurse um Geschlecht, Körper, Kolonialität und Gewalt. FKW Nr. 76 setzt sich damit auseinander, wie eine Beschäftigung mit dem Garten als Ökosystem *en miniature* Antworten darauf geben – sowie auch weitere Fragen stellen – kann, wie wir in Zukunft miteinander leben wollen.

Als neues Mitglied der FKW-Redaktion möchten wir herzlich Franziska Rauh begrüßen. Sie ist Kunstwissenschaftlerin und Lektorin am Institut für Kunstwissenschaft – Filmwissenschaft – Kunstpädagogik der Universität Bremen. Wir freuen uns auf die Zusammenarbeit!

Wir wünschen viel Vergnügen beim Lesen!

Die FKW-Redaktion

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FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURAL CRITIQUE. LIFE-AFFIRMING PRACTICES AGAINST CAPITAL

Feminist Infrastructural Critique is dedicated to understanding how infrastructure impacts on the condition of life and the planet. Today, bodies, minds, feelings, and spirits of living and sentient beings, including human beings, as well as environments and resources, are fully infrastructuralized. Infrastructure includes all kinds of essential infrastructure, technological and digital infrastructure, as well as social and caring infrastructures. We are all living with infrastructures, which, most of the time, are not ours, in the sense that we ourselves have neither developed nor constructed them, but also not decided over their making. *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* manifests through use and inhabitation as much as through new imaginaries and critical theories. *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* manifests through an insistence on care, repair, and maintenance, as well as through resistance, refusal, protest, or, sometimes, attack. Through practices of use and resistance, new infrastructural imaginaries come alive in order to overcome infrastructural oppression, violence, and discrimination. Daily infrastructural labors are at the heart of *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* and new infrastructural imaginaries.

⎯⎯ Even though most of us have not been actively involved in building the infrastructures we use, we dedicate time and energy to their maintenance and repair and engage with them through emotional investments including feelings of anger, frustration, or even despair when infrastructure fails to work. We find ourselves relying on infrastructures that have not been constructed following democratic procedures of decision-making, while often not even seeing the effects of normalization or injustice these infrastructures have on the condition of daily life. We are connected to, and through infrastructures, for which taxpayers' money is being invested, while these infrastructures often serve the interests of capital and do not follow principles of infrastructural justice and solidarity. In light of the intensification of globalized neoliberal capitalism, austerity politics, ongoing climate ruination, environmental destruction, and increased social injustice because of rampant extraction and exploitation, infrastructure has emerged as a key concern of critical theory and study beyond fields and disciplines claiming the expertise on infrastructures such as urban planning, engineering,

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environmental sciences, digitalization, or policymaking. Infrastructure was seen as instruments of power in the hands of capital, planning, bureaucracy, and technocracy.

_____ In 2016, Bergen Assembly, a triennial international art event dedicated to new formats of artistic engagement and public events in the city of Bergen, used "infrastructure" as its keyword and wrote the following: "By looking at many different understandings of this keyword – from legacies of colonial and early capitalist systems of governance to current conditions of the financialization of the cultural field to the subversive possibilities of thinking and working with infrastructures as sites of affect and contradiction – infrastructure emerges as the invisible force of manifest culture today" (Rogoff et al. 2016; Bergen Assembly 2016). This infrastructural turn has not only led to cultural and art-based investigations of infrastructure, but also to the formation of infrastructural humanities, most broadly understood. In the contexts of art and architecture and their visual and spatial expressions with which we are concerned here, there has been much critical engagement of artists, artivists, and critical spatial practitioners with the infrastructural condition, with a focus on both infrastructure for the arts, as well as how art-based practices can question, appropriate, or even destroy existing infrastructures.

_____ The editors' interest in infrastructure in the contexts of art, architecture, and curating comes out of their long-term engagement with concerns of care (Krasny et al. 2021, Krasny, Perry 2023). Care always relies on infrastructure, as infrastructure requires to be cared for in order to be reliable infrastructure. During the COVID-19 pandemic, public political speech mobilized the terms "essential infrastructure" or "critical infrastructure" to make the centrality of infrastructure to human life as well as to the economy understood. The global pandemic between 2020 and 2023 also made it apparent that the interests of human life and those of the economy are not only not easily aligned, but in actual violent conflict. The pandemic also made abundantly clear that infrastructure is deeply embedded in social, ecological, and technological relations, and that infrastructure shapes and organizes the conditions of daily life under specific political and economic regimes. Living through the pandemic raised our awareness of these infrastructural entanglements and made us interested in how feminist practices in art, architecture, and curating, as well as their critical and activist scholarly study, respond to infrastructural complexities and contradictions. All of this also made us aware of the fact that there is a need for a distinctly feminist analysis and critique of this infrastructural condition.

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_____The original call invited contributions that would develop a distinctly feminist critique of infrastructure. As the contributions kept coming in, we realized that together they expressed a very distinct form of critique: avoiding the lamentations of "there is no alternative" and resisting giving in to resignation and depression, the authors describe life-affirming practices aiming to re-learn, re-invent, and re-use existing infrastructures which were built in the name of capital. Life-affirming practices articulate the rights to infrastructure and render legible the "slow violence" (Nixon 2011), as well as the "continuous labor" to prevent infrastructure from failing vulnerable and precarious bodies and environments and to change the oppressive system, which is at once held by the infrastructure and holds the infrastructure. Given the catastrophic and crisis-riven conditions of our global present, it is necessary to understand the ways in which all elements of life, such as water, air, or earth, have all been historically transformed into capitalist infrastructure by colonial patriarchy. Such capitalist, colonial, patriarchal infrastructure, sometimes built or imagined centuries ago, continues to enforce superiority over living beings. *Feminist Infrastructural Critique*, as articulated in this issue, addresses such historical infrastructural violence and harm and its afterlife. The multiple perspectives brought together in *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* include dimensions of legal imaginaries, the rights of citizens, the rights of nature, and policy as a terrain of feminist intervention and analyze colonial, patriarchal, heteronormative, ableist infrastructural relations marked by power, violence, extraction, exploitation, and exclusion.

_____Writing with and from practice, all the contributors to this issue contribute towards introducing and further developing a distinct notion of *Feminist Infrastructural Critique*. Infrastructures are the material legacies of modern, colonial, patriarchal capitalism and the current expression of contemporary, neo-colonial, neo-patriarchal, and neo-liberal capitalism. Feminist approaches to infrastructure show that critique is a form of practice that acknowledges infrastructure interdependencies and searches for ways to undo infrastructural violence and to re-imagine infrastructures beyond the ruling ideas and hegemonic regimes of power. *Feminist Infrastructural Critique. Life-Affirming Practices Against Capital* comprises a broad spectrum of texts as an introduction to a variety of life-affirming infrastructures. As feminism is not monolithic, all texts in this collection are situated in specific contexts and localities, some are written collectively, with living beings involved. Yet there are deeply rooted connections that we aim to make visible.

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The overall questions "How are existing infrastructures used and maintained to become life-affirming?" as well as "How are existing infrastructures critiqued in order to be used otherwise?" guide this issue.

_____The introduction opens up different ways of reading this issue on *Feminist Infrastructural Critique*. As editors, we bring our expertise in curating and education to this issue and invite you, dear readers, to make use of the practice-based and theoretical offerings in different ways, which highlight dimensions and strategies of life-affirming practices against capital. The longer we engaged with the different contributions, which together present contemporary approaches to what *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* does, we came to realize that there could be more than one table of contents; that is to say more than one table of contents would make sense as there are different, meaningful ways of grouping and organizing the contributions. Therefore, we have decided to share with you three different reading paths in addition to the structure of the table of contents. A reading path offers possibilities how one can read a text or, in our case, a constellation of texts that together produce contemporary *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* across art and architecture. The three reading paths open up a number of productive resonances and relationships between the fourteen different contributions written by 36 authors. They bring to the fore that distinctly feminist infrastructural concerns are shared across sites in different geographies. The three reading paths are the following: Reading Path One: Basic Needs and Political Rights; Reading Path Two: Sites and Conditions; Reading Path Three: Elements and Natures.

_____In what follows, we introduce the contributions in their order of appearance in the table of contents. The structure we chose as editors followed from related infrastructural concerns and resonances we felt between the practices of the contributors. The order takes the readers to different contexts and sites and their complex infrastructural conditions. We move from plantations and gardens, which also serve as infrastructures for practicing witchcraft and gossip in the Seychelles (Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe) to organizing resistance, research, and visual activism for Indigenous rights and against new transport infrastructure for capitalist extraction in the Brazilian Amazon (Transdisciplinary Network of the Amazon RETA) and then to ancient myths, water prayers, and other forms of lively resistance manifested in the narrations of three Indigenous women who act as caregivers of Pakistan's Indus River, its fish, wetlands,

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and mangrove forests (Marvi Mazhar). Slovene artist Robertina Šebjanič's work is used to discuss infrastructural dimensions of water in relation to feminist approaches to human-animal relations (Mojca Puncer). Curatorial and artistic practices open up uses and imaginaries for urban infrastructures under pressure because of capitalist extraction, exploitation, and speculation in cities in Slovakia, Portugal, Italy, Greece, Germany and Hungary (Ecologies of Care – EOC, Urška Jurman, Vida Rucli, Joulia Strauss, Rosario Talevi, Inês Moreira, Alessandra Pomarico, Gabi Scardi, Nada Rosa Schroer, and Eszter Erdosi). From water we move to seeds and earth. The seed practices introduced by artist Jumana Manna connect diverse sites such as seed vaults or research centers in Norway, Lebanon, Syria, and Morocco (Lilah Leopold). Clay and ceramics are introduced as vital elements of how Puerto Rican ceramic artists work out pre-colonial, colonial, and decolonial dimensions of domestic labor (Emilia Quiñones Otal). From the sites of reproduction in the home, we move to squares and streets in Buenos Aires as this public urban infrastructure is appropriated for feminist mass protests for reproductive rights (Verónica Orsi). Infrastructure for the arts, which was provided by the San Marino Pavilion at the 2023 Venice Biennale, was used as a starting point for hosting under conditions of hostility particularly in relation to marginalized people, migration, displacement, and refugee care in Venice, Brussels, and Nablus (Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden). Infrastructure in relation to conditions of displacement and the life of refugees takes us to Gaziantep at the Turkish-Syrian border and the idea of unconditional hospitality based on local infrastructures of communal kitchens (Merve Bedir). Public artworks in Vienna are used to discuss public art as caring for social infrastructure beyond the normative expectations of policies that regulate what public art should provide in public space (Miriam Kreuzer). From the physical realm of public space, we move to the digital public space and its knowledge infrastructure exemplified by the online encyclopedia Wikipedia, which is critiqued through self-organized feminist workshops (Hannah Schmedes). From the digital public realm, we move back to the physical urban realm, which is critiqued and joyfully inhabited differently in collective public performances that take back the night and counteract the patriarchal supremacy and oppression of public infrastructure (Elke Krasny, Claudia Lomoschitz, and Sophie Lingg) and re-appropriated with a focus on using public art to redesign outdoor spaces, making them useful as infrastructure for neurodiverse publics (Lindsay Harkema).

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_____ Reading Path One: Basic Needs and Political Rights focuses on how infrastructures provide for the basic needs of bodies, how infrastructures enable bodily sovereignty and are a prerequisite for public political life and articulation. Reading Path Two: Sites and Conditions focuses on how specific sites were shaped by colonial and patriarchal capitalism and provides examples of how feminist care, repair, maintenance, and resistance transform the conditions of these sites. Reading Path Three: Elements and Natures considers how the regime of capitalism has transformed elements like the air, water, and the earth, as well as plants and animals, into Man-made natures as infrastructural resources and includes new perspectives on restoring these natures' liveliness. Emphasizing that the contributors approach the themes of three different reading paths by way of focusing on different infrastructural dimensions, we seek to raise awareness for the complex resonances and multiple learnings opening up between the different essays.

READING PATH ONE: BASIC NEEDS AND POLITICAL RIGHTS

INFRASTRUCTURES FOR NOURISHMENT AND HOSPITALITY _____
Emilia Quiñones Otal; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Merve Bedir; Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; Lilah Leopold; RETA Network; Marvi Mazhar; Urška Jurman – EOC; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC

INFRASTRUCTURES FOR HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE _____
Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; Verónica Orsi; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Merve Bedir; RETA Network; Lindsay Harkema; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Marvi Mazhar; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC

INFRASTRUCTURES FOR THE RIGHT TO EXIST AND APPEAR IN PUBLIC SPACE _____ Verónica Orsi; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Merve Bedir; Hannah Schmedes; Lindsay Harkema; Feminist Nightscapes; Miriam Kreuzer; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC

INFRASTRUCTURES FOR KNOWING OTHERWISE _____ Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; RETA Network; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Verónica Orsi; Mojca Puncer; Lindsay Harkema; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem

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Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Hannah Schmedes; Feminist Nightscapes; Marvi Mazhar; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Merve Bedir; Lilah Leopold; Urška Jurman – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC; Vida Rucli – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC

READING PATH TWO: SITES AND CONDITIONS

PUBLIC SQUARES AND STREETS _____ Feminist Nightscapes; Miriam Kreuzer; Verónica Orsi; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Merve Bedir; Marvi Mazhar; Lindsay Harkema; Urška Jurman – EOC; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC

GARDENS AND PLANTATIONS _____ Lindsay Harkema; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Urška Jurman – EOC; Lilah Leopold; RETA Network; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe

DOMESTIC INFRASTRUCTURES _____ Merve Bedir; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Verónica Orsi; Urška Jurman – EOC; Vida Rucli – EOC

KITCHENS AND TABLES _____ Emilia Quiñones Otal; Merve Bedir; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden

FORMER INDUSTRIAL SITES AND MINES _____ Rosario Talevi – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Inês Moreira – EOC

PRODUCTION AND TRANSPORT _____ Verónica Orsi; RETA Network, Lilah Leopold; Marvi Mazhar; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Inês Moreira – EOC; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC

BORDERS _____ Merve Bedir; RETA Network; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE _____ RETA Network; Miriam Kreuzer; Hannah Schmedes; Feminist Nightscapes

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COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURES _____ Merve Bedir; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; RETA Network; Rosario Talevi; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC; Joulia Strauss – EOC

READING PATH THREE: ELEMENTS AND NATURES

AIR _____ Gabi Scardi – EOC; RETA Network; Feminist Nightscapes

WATER _____ Marvi Mazhar; Mojca Puncer; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Inês Moreira – EOC

EARTH _____ Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; RETA Network; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Verónica Orsi; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Marvi Mazhar; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Merve Bedir; Lilah Leopold; Urška Jurman – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Inês Moreira – EOC; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC

ANIMALS _____ RETA Network; Mojca Puncer; Marvi Mazhar; Urška Jurman – EOC; Vida Rucli – EOC; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Inês Moreira – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Nada Rosa Schroer – EOC; Eszter Erdosi – EOC

PLANTS _____ Hélène Frichot and Mairi O'Gorman together with Najea Barbe; RETA Network; Lindsay Harkema; Vida Rucli – EOC; Alessandra Pomarico – EOC; Joulia Strauss – EOC; Urška Jurman – EOC; Gabi Scardi – EOC; Rosario Talevi – EOC; Emilia Quiñones Otal; Lilah Leopold; Luce Beeckmans, Alessandra Gola, Shila Anaraki, Tasneem Nagi, and Heleen Verheyden; Feminist Nightscapes; Miriam Kreuzer

_____ While we hold that there is still much work to be done to further develop the concept of *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* and life-affirming practices against capital, we also want to acknowledge the work of many theorists and practitioners who have raised awareness of infrastructural concerns, infrastructural violence, and infrastructural ethics. Working toward the novel idea of *Feminist Infrastructural Critique*, we hosted and organized a reading group in the context of the symposium *Feminist Infrastructural Critique* at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2022. We want to share here in the form of an extended reading list some of the texts we

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discussed in the reading group, but also other references seminal to critical infrastructural thought. An exhaustive overview of articles, books, artworks, architectures, spatial practices, and exhibitions dealing critically with infrastructural concerns goes far beyond the space of this issue.

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// Hélène Frichot
& Mairi O'Gorman
with Najea Barbe

AN ISLAND INFRASTRUCTURE OF GARDENS, GOSSIP, AND *'GRIGRI'*

ABSTRACT _____ This essay considers a complex skein of inter-connections between gendered gossip, creole gardens, and 'grigri,' that is, magic and witchcraft as it is so named in the context of the Seychelles islands where we locate our work. Rather than the pernicious circulation of gossip and 'fake news' that today contribute to the derangements of neoliberal platform Capitalism with its distribution of violent misogynistic memes, or the work of gossip mobilized as surveillance in repressive societies of control, we argue that gossip can be resituated as a feminist infrastructural support system, one privileged setting of which is the pharmaceutical garden. The gossip, as Italian feminist scholar and activist Silvia Federici explains, was the name once given to a female friend. While Federici situates witch-hunting and witch trials in the context of the combined emergence of colonialism and capitalism – as products of the enclosure of the commons, the disenfranchisement of women, their expulsion from the guilds, and their removal from areas of expertise including midwifery and reproductive know-how – a history of ethnographic literature studying the Seychelles has tended to treat *grigri* as mere superstition (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 96), and to stigmatize the gendered knowledge in which it is rooted. Gossip, we argue, can manifest as a powerful mode of creative resistance that enables the support of modes of life via expressions of self-care and community care, upon which women and those who identify as women as "weavers of memory" (Federici) and cultural and material knowledge depend. Drawing on Mairi O'Gorman's previous ethnographic research in the Seychelles where she looks to the ambivalent role of gossip as it pertains to land scarcity and the role of magic or *grigri*, and Hélène Frichot's work on infrastructural love, we home in on the situated practice of gossip in the creole garden and how grigri as a form of arcane knowledge is deployed, with both good and bad intentions.

ARRIVING IN THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES _____ Once you pull back the curtains on the bucolic beach scenes, and exit the tourist any-place-whatevers, other forms of life and modes of cultural prac-tice can be found in the Seychelles archipelago. For one of us, Hélène, this was the first time we had set foot in the Republic of Seychelles, renowned the world over for its picture-perfect postcard visions of crystalline waters and leaning palms. For the other of us, Mairi, this was one of several fieldwork and family visits, returning again and

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again to celebrate a different, more situated point of view on the islands, one that acknowledges an emerging creole (in Seychellois *kreol*) cultural and material identity with associated practices. For both of us, there pertains shared Seychellois heritage and what this means for the complex conundrum of colonial and post-colonial spatial memories and material relations. Together we collaborated with a third of us, Najea, in order to venture into the creole, or rather, the *kreol* garden, to understand its recuperative powers from one who holds this knowledge most intimately. Paying attention to what we can learn together in the garden, in this essay we aim to celebrate its pharmaceutical and restorative powers, articulating modes of life in the sustenance and medicinal garden as lessons to be learned for feminist creative practices. We visit the *kreol* garden, acknowledging its association with *lakaz Kreol* (the creole house), which means situating these cultural formations against a colonial history of the Plantationocene (Haraway 2015; Chao 2022). This is a darkened historical backdrop dependent on a former slave trade through the "middle passage" of the Indian Ocean, a history of enslavement and indentured labor, as well as undervalued knowledge practices that have survived violent displacement. For the three of us, feminist creative practices seek to revalue that which has been oppressed, though each of the authors of this article situate what this means for them in different ways. Creative and material practices enable a shared process of learning emerging as forms of empirical magic procured in the simple act of gathering together.

_____ In the *kreol* garden, which we enter following a generous invitation from Najea, we suggest that there are at least two kinds of feminist creative practice at work: the one that draws on ethnographic and field philosophical ways of paying attention and listening carefully, the other that situates itself as an embodied and embedded practice on the ground, feeling the good earth, knowing what each plant and each flower can achieve for sustenance and well-being, and to treat all kinds of ailments. The provision plot, 'slave garden,' and yam field, have been discussed in depth in Caribbean postcolonial literature, but less so in the Indian Ocean context of the Seychelles. The important work of Penda Choppy (2021), Mairi O'Gorman (2019), and more recently Michael Palmyre (2023), has offered significant contributions. The provision garden commenced as the means of basic sustenance for formerly enslaved workers on Plantation estates, but in time they became locales of cultural rejuvenation (Wynter 1971; McKittrick 2011 and 2013; DeLoughrey 2011 and 2019; Carney 2021). Choppy writes that the "creole garden emerged as a survival strategy" and then proceeded

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to become central to "creolization in the Seychelles" (2021: 12). She further argues that the *kreol* garden depends on diminishing cross-generational sharing of knowledge practices in urgent need of new modes of transmission (ibid.:12). As for *grigri*, it is a local form of witchcraft and magic loaded with good and bad intentions, benefits, and harms. As Palmyre explains, only fleeting attention has been paid to witchcraft and *grigri* in the Seychelles – very little literature exists, and that literature is challenging to source, or else written from an anthropological outside – an omission his doctoral thesis seeks to redress (2023: 58). Two of us, Hélène and Mairi, situate our interest in *grigri* as a reflection on what might be foraged in the *kreol* garden, and how this might inform creative feminist practices. Learning with the third of us, with Najea, has allowed us insight into the wonders of the garden.

_____ So we decided to situate ourselves, each in our respective positions, each with distinct concerns and knowledge practices. Together we sketch out an island infrastructure of gardens and gossip, while speculating on *grigri*. We must stress that subsequently, and based on our shared conversation, two of us (Hélène and Mairi), continued to reflect on what it might mean to reclaim *grigri* as an empirical craft to be shared. For we realized in the process of our fieldwork, driven as we were by our curiosity, that it was necessary to be cautious and sensitive to the specific situation of the Seychelles.

_____ Gossip, as well as *grigri*, can both be considered ambivalent circulatory practices. There is the pernicious contagion of gossip, recognized in the contemporary explosion of fake news, and there is the gossip that a small island society such as the Republic of Seychelles can circulate as a means of surveillance and control when abrupt shifts in political power take place. In these ways, gossip, as a form of communication, can quickly inflame a body politic, but it can also be understood as an expression of infrastructure defined as social communication. Scholars Abdou Maliq Simone and Ash Amin both speak of infrastructure beyond transport systems, utilities, and telecommunications, as a social form, going so far as to consider "people as infrastructure" (Simone 2004; 2021). Simone speaks of the "continuous recombinations of people's experiences and practices" in their collective lives, binding together households, communities, and institutions as messy assemblages that are alive to pasts, presents, and futures (Simone 2021: 1342). Simply, infrastructure is established through our profound social and environmental interdependencies. Ash Amin, identifying an infrastructural turn in geography and related fields, locates infrastructure in the "liveliness of socio-technical systems" (Amin

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2014: 138) collecting material things and social actors together in their daily spatial and political relations. Infrastructures are what connect us together, at least until they fall apart, leading to the breakdown of social relations as much as technological ones. What we are keen to collaboratively collect are the social infrastructural effects that emerge between *kreol* gardens, the gossip we share with each other as a means of learning, and the *grigri* we aspire to resituate as a kind of empirical craft, while acknowledging the entanglement of *grigri* with constructions of race in relation to colonization, capitalism, and modernity (Palmyre 2023).

_____ We mix our methods, drawing on feminist theories and practices, the architectural and environmental humanities, ethnographic field stories, and what has been recently identified as "field philosophy" (Buchanan / Bastian / Chrulew 2018). Field philosophy challenges the formerly privileged position of the researcher as an objective outsider privy to forms of knowledge that their "informants" are supposed to have no access to. Instead, field philosophy humbly opens itself to a diversity of positions and ways of knowing, seeking to learn, rather than impose what are presumed to be superior epistemological systems of classification. As philosopher Vinciane Despret argues, the field does not simply pre-exist a field of inquiry, or a "field-to-be," though a lively milieu most certainly does pre-exist the arrival of the concerned field philosopher (Despret 2018: 423). That is to say, when we venture forth, we compose a field based on our situated points of view and on our interests, with the hope of addressing pertinent problems. For her part, feminist philosopher of science Isabelle Stengers remarks: "Field philosophers must certainly break with the master defining and appropriating what he claims that he can know" (Stengers 2018: 408). Such an orientation is also described in her argument for an ecology of practices (2005). In a context, such as the Seychelles, emerging from a colonial past, the residual violence sheltering under the denomination 'master' needs to be acknowledged. Rather than assuming a master/slave dialectic, a field philosopher is instead open to what unfolds in the encounter, generously facilitating opportunities for situating the work we might do together, without undervaluing extant modes of existence that would be within their rights to find what we do quite useless or unnecessary.

_____ The work that we do here is shaped by our positionalities, overlapping yet distinct. In what follows, we choose to refer to ourselves by our first names, as an expression of the familiarity we shared. Hélène and Mairi are both scholars embedded within global North institutions, differing in seniority, but sharing an

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experience of belonging to the Seychellois diaspora. Hélène's paternal family are part of the *gran blan* plantocracy who fled the islands in anticipation of the profound political shifts of the mid-twentieth century, departing in advance of the socialist coup of 1977. She has written a series of essays on the Seychelles, engaging in the role of critical care and infrastructural interconnnectivity (Frichot 2019; Frichot 2022). Mairi's maternal family are mixed Afro-Creole "Kenya-borns," raised abroad in the context of large-scale economic migration to the continent, who returned to their wider kin network in the islands during this same period of change. Mairi has completed an important doctoral thesis, *Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life* (2019) addressing *kreol* material culture in the Seychelles. Najea, born in Seychelles to Afro-Creole Seychellois parents, is least embedded in the Northern university and most firmly situated in the islands – she has witnessed the rapid political changes of the Seychelles in person, coming of age in the post-liberation Republic. Throughout her career in civil society and the third sector, as much as through growing her garden, Najea has lived and worked in profound intimacy with Seychellois *Kreol* culture, and the efforts of culture bearers to integrate it into global frameworks of heritage management, classification, and knowledge production.

Anthropological studies of the connection between gossip and *grigri* on the Seychelles are not new, but nor are they numerous. This is also why we are so keen to reposition ourselves as feminist creative researchers when we venture into the *kreol* garden as our composed "field." We do not want to impose ideas, nor allow our curiosity to get the better of us, though we will undoubtedly do this despite ourselves as we arrive with our thought-forms already packaged. We share a history characterized by the uneven distribution of violence, both physical and spiritual: from colonial expansion; through to the establishment of a plantation system that persisted long after it had collapsed in other parts of the world; to the upheaval of a decolonization that was never a clean break from what had preceded it. We are divided by this history, too – each racialized differently both within Seychelles and outside it, with a range of experiences of class and material in/security, with different pasts that shape how we each engage with the concept of womanhood. Our aim has been to secure a culturally safe and appropriate rapprochement. Field philosophy aspires to be non-extractive, as such we hope to move beyond some of the famous early anthropological works situated in the Seychelles, while also learning from their insights.

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AN ABRIDGED HISTORY _____ The Seychelles is an archipelago of around 115 islands, situated 7 degrees south of the equator in the Western Indian Ocean; most of the population (approximately 100,000 people) live on the main island of Mahé, along with the Inner Islands of Praslin and La Digue. Though the islands were well-known to Asian and Arab seafarers, it was not until the late eighteenth century that they began to be considered potentially valuable to expansionist European powers – claimed by France in 1771, and subsequently passing into British control in 1814. The French, and the British after them, administered the islands as a set of plantation estates founded on the forced labor of enslaved Africans and, after the abolition of slavery, indentured Asian workers and so-called "Liberated" Africans.[1] The collapse of the economic viability of the plantations, which began in the nineteenth century and continued well into the twentieth, occurred in parallel with the rise of parliamentary and decolonial politics. In 1976, the islands became independent from Britain under the SDP (Seychelles Democratic Party); in 1977, a *coup d'etat* led by the SPUP (Seychelles People's United Party) ushered in an era of one-party rule. Multipartyism was formally reinstated in 1991, but it is only in very recent years that the effects of this have been felt on the ground. In 2015, support for the ruling party began to weaken and the balance of power within the National Assembly shifted, and in the presidential election of 2020 the LDS (*Linyon Democratik Seselwa,* Seychelles Democratic Alliance), a coalition of the former opposition parties, came to power. Throughout this economic and political history, surveillance, centralized power, and authoritarianism have been countered by gossip, rumor, and acts of resistance, large and small. *Grigri* (witchcraft) is just one of the means by which ordinary Seychellois could envision and enact alternatives to the prevailing order.

_____ Palmyre has highlighted that the small existing literature of *grigri* is dominated by non-Seychellois voices (2023: 58) and also by racist tropes. This tone is perhaps best exemplified by Ozanne's early twentieth-century account, which dismisses *grigri* as a "hotch-potch of popery and voodooism that baffles any attempt at scientific examination" (1936: 107). Alongside outright dismissal, some writers adopt a softer, exoticizing tendency that is no less rooted in a colonial mindset (Emerson 2010). However, *grigri* is not in fact inexplicable; Palmyre has identified several recurrent discourses surrounding this practice of "influencing" others. Among these is the contention that *grigri* is rooted in slavery and the memory of African religion (Palmyre 2023: 59; Scarr 2000:

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This term refers to those captured by the British Royal Navy from Arab slave ships; they were subsequently re-settled across the British Empire, from South Africa to Aden, and often forced to work in conditions that materially resembled slavery (Durup 2010). In Seychelles, where planters were unsuccessful in petitioning the British government for funds with which to import Asian workers, their labor was central to the continuation of the plantation system. While Hélène and Mairi carried out fieldwork in 2023, archival images of Liberated Africans were becoming commonplace on tourist handicrafts, and were the basis of a celebrated set of artworks by Emmanuel D'Offay.

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30); that it combines both "black" (meaning malign) and "white" (benign) forms or combines harm and healing (Franda 1982: 31; 32; Carpin 1996: 51); and that it brings together various "modes of action" (Benedict 1966: 64) that essentially function as "weapons of the weak" (Scott 1985) in a repressive social context. The work of Seychellois anthropologist Jean-Claude Mahoune has added some nuance to this idea of *grigri* as primarily African, highlighting its links to freemasonry and European mystical traditions (1987), but nonetheless *grigri* functions as a "raced concept" (Palmyre 2023: 63) at the interstices of negative stereotypes surrounding Blackness, black magic, and Africa (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 89).

_____ The work of Marion and Burton Benedict exemplifies some of the historical tendencies of ethnography, both taking *grigri* seriously as a form of action, while reproducing it as a "raced" concept. Their work is situated in the same Marxist-materialist vein as Sylvia Federici's analysis of the witch-hunt in Europe (2014), and that of Michael Taussig in Latin America (1977) – which is to say that they treated belief in *grigri* as a product of immediate socioeconomic realities. They depicted *grigri* as having purchase in a "matrifocal" society characterized by deprivation and "dependence" (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 115). Writing just in advance of the massive political upheaval of Seychellois independence in 1976, shortly followed by the socialist coup of 1977, Burton Benedict observed: "In general, female networks are denser and more supportive than are male networks. A female with less direct access to money than a male must work harder to forge the obligations that make up their network" (ibid.: 108). He was dependent on his wife's careful fieldwork to be able to make this observation. There are clear gender divisions of intellectual labor at work in the Benedicts' co-written book on the Seychelles.

_____ For her part, Marion Benedict wrote incisively of her tentative friendship with CM, an aspiring healer interested in cultivating the art of reading cards, and an insatiable gossip, at least according to Benedict. From CM, Benedict learned the power of naming, for to know as many people as possible in your local community, and to know their names "helps to control them, helps to gain power over them. Knowledge about them, acquired both directly from them and indirectly through innuendo and gossip, yields more power over them. Manipulation of gossip becomes an important source of power, which I have called gossip power. It cannot operate without names" (Benedict 1982: 100). Benedict was excited to observe that gossip and *grigri* are entangled: "Gossip seemed to take on a life of its own, apart from being thoughts in peoples' minds and words

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on their tongues…Gossip when applied became black magic. And, conversely, black magic becomes applied gossip" (1982: 96). Here the arts of paying careful attention to and engaging in the circulation of gossip could be directed at ends both helpful and harmful in one's social relations.

_____ Her relationship with her informant CM led Benedict to a much-anticipated visit with a local witch doctor, a *bonhomme de bois* (or in Seychellois *Kreol*, *bonnonm dibwa*) where she made the powerful connection between *grigri* and gossip, one that has piqued our interest. What she did not make explicit is the connection of gossip and the practice of witchcraft or *grigri* to the medicinal garden, the source from which most of the mixtures and concoctions of the *bonnonm dibwa* are derived. It is as if in bringing into focus the material conditions which produced belief in *grigri,* the material properties of the plants used by practitioners became obscured. When Benedict visits the local witch doctor, materially present before her in a bundle of powders and sticks that are prepared in different combinations to treat the specific complaints of each 'patient,' there is concrete evidence of the resources of the garden. The *bonnonm dibwa*, or *bonnfanm dibwa* is, literally, the good man or woman of the forest; he or she knows where to forage for healing plants, barks, and other vegetative materials and he or she knows how to cultivate, prepare, and apply them. Franda explains that it is often older people who tell fortunes, doing so by using "packs of cards, seeds, tea or coffee strainings, mirrors or palm reading" and by building on their deep knowledge of "human foibles" (1982: 32). Marion Benedict's 'knowing' relation with the *bonnonm dibwa* was expressed by the anthropologist as though they had some secret agreement between them. She conveys to her reader that while he maintains his power over the locals, by tacit agreement he can hold no power over her. In this, Benedict reveals all the privileges, and perceived superiority of her position, and she also makes assumptions about who her audience of readers is likely to be, making them complicit in her claimed position in knowledge. Benedict has reproduced, from Ozanne's earlier and more explicitly colonial treatment of *grigri,* the racialized non-modern or irrational subject who undertakes a practice that is lacking in scientific reason, thereby diminishing the care that might be discerned in their craft.

_____ We hope we can avoid being so presumptuous when we seek to learn about the socio-material connections between the *kreol* garden, gossip, and *grigri*. We must all the while acknowledge the delicacy of our positioning.

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A GIFT SHOP _____ We went to visit Najea in the gift shop where she works. The shop is packed with tourist trinkets, many of them made elsewhere, in Thailand, Bangladesh, or India. We were overwhelmed by the scent of the many novelty soaps available for sale. Najea diplomatically encouraged a last tourist to make her decisions and purchase her trinkets, so she could close up shop for the evening.

_____ Mairi had first met Najea at a workshop dedicated to developing the framework of Intellectual Property in Seychelles, and subsequently formed a friendship. Najea was keen on removing ourselves from the tourist haven – a recent luxury development – where the gift shop is located and finding a place more amenable to conversation. Soon enough we found ourselves discussing the complexity of property relations. Property relations compose a perennial point of discussion in the Seychelles, often pulling families apart as they disagree with each other on how land will be passed on and who gets what proportion of what. Properties that are the subject of disputes are often evident in their dilapidated state of disrepair. As Najea makes her successful journey through the juridical and bureaucratic systems that determine Seychellois land tenure, it also causes family disputes.

_____ To tend one's own plot of land was a government initiative in Seychelles post-coup, aimed at returning those who had labored for the plantocracy to subdivided land that they could now claim as their own. This can be situated in a wider East African context. When the SPUP claimed power in 1977, and Albert René claimed the presidency, it was with the support of a Tanzanian militia (Franda 1982: 19–20; 53–55). Land reform in postcolonial Tanzania had been based on the centrality of agricultural production to a uniquely African socialism (Brennan 2012: 144), and Seychellois socialism was colored by the close relationship between the two nations (Franda 1982: 119). A radical redistribution of resources was partially achieved and tenaciously held onto: "The new regime had one immediate reform in mind: to redistribute wealth, including land and capital" (Rojid / Afif / Sacerdoti 2013: 2).

_____ The reforms could not help but echo earlier logics of subdivision. One of these was the process of familial inheritance, by which land was inherited by all descendants of a landowner, divided and subdivided until it had to be either sold or maintained as a small plot (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 212). This process has its origins in Napoleonic civil law and the earliest days of the colony, and remains extant; it is part of the reason for the emotional charge of property disputes (including Najea's). The second was the nineteenth-century *moitie* system by which the formerly enslaved were "granted" land

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on which they were "apprenticed" to their former masters (perpetuating conditions similar to slavery, and allowing these landowners to maintain or increase the size of their concession) (Durup 2013: 30; Choppy 2022: 18). This persists as a historical undercurrent, structuring property relations and requiring prowess and determination to disrupt its logics – racism and social disadvantage still linger (Choppy 2020: 59).

_____ But in contrast to the often indiscriminate accumulation of land that occurred under the old system, the new divisions were premised on productivity. One of our interlocutors explained that in the 1980s, land reforms led to the creation of the "block" system, under which a contractual commitment to agricultural production was central to being granted a plot of land. It worked with varying success: Some families were able not only to tend the land for their own sustenance but to produce enough to sell at the market, while others (though they had made the same commitment to develop their plot) followed the acquisitive logic of the older system, and left it to remain undeveloped.

_____ Before we rush to judge, a wariness about a residual colonial "ideology of improvement" (Bhandar 2018: 8–10) might be reflected upon here. Improvement presumes that what came before was insufficient or lacking in civilization, was yet to be instituted appropriately according to judgment criteria in favor of the colonizer, or perhaps, those currently in political power. Though land sometimes has the appearance of intrinsic value, it is in many respects an abstraction (Hall 2017: 3) and a "fictitious commodity" (Li 2014: 600). It is *through* labor that its value becomes inscribed (ibid.: 589), so that it is impossible to speak neutrally of land as productive without interrogating the conditions under which it is made to produce.

_____ Today, agriculture on the small island nation-state that is the Seychelles has become even more crucial to food security, with the government's purported aim, as of 2015, "to have a resilient and sustainable agricultural sector that enhances food and nutrition security, contributes to economic growth and respects the natural environment" (SNAIP 2015). This project is full of tension: between the needs of the resident population, tourists, and the environment. During her time in the third sector, Najea collaborated with other culture workers on a book project and initiative *Every Home a Garden* (see Pointe 2020), and it has become commonplace for medicinal gardens to be reinstated on former plantation estates. Still, Najea's journey to reclaim the land on which her family now lives, which her grandfather had managed, which her father had

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worked, and her mother had tended, required determination and the wherewithal to stake her legal claim.

———Drawing on her own involvement in the complexity of property relations in Seychelles, Najea discussed how, after the 1977 coup, the government commenced the process of redistribution: "they were taking lands from people who has lots of lands and was not using it properly." This was what happened to Madame C, on whose estate Najea's family had lived since her parents married – something that was possible because Najea's maternal grandfather had been the plantation overseer. Madame C ceased farming, no longer keeping chickens and pigs, and so her land was requisitioned by the government, though not without a fight, according to Najea. "So the government decided to take the land, and it's like a village: one for you, a piece for you…" Because Najea's family had lived there so long, they were not displaced but allowed to stay. But family relations continued to become more strained with her father, especially in relation to Najea and her elder brother.

———Just before her father finally decided to divorce their mother and leave the family, Najea came to be haunted by an idea: What if her father decided to kick them all out of the house, and off the land? Her brothers, her sister, her mother? Najea discussed this concern with her mother, and they decided to go and see the relevant minister at the time: "…because a lot of people were trying to get a piece of land to buy. We went to see him, we talked to him, and he agreed…without my father's knowledge." Government officials came, they "earmarked the land they were going to give to us and I start doing all these paperwork." While this was happening, and soon after her father had moved out, someone put an idea in her father's head – this is of course how gossip of a pernicious kind usually spreads. Someone alerted him to all that he had to lose in leaving behind the house and the land, and so he decided to fight back. He took not Najea's mother, but Najea and her younger brother to court. It was Najea and her younger brother who were actively trying to claim the property on behalf of the rest of the family. Her father lost, and the land was maintained by Najea, her brothers, her sister, and their mother. This all unfolded around 2004–2005, close to thirty years after the 1977 coup, and 170 years after the abolition of slavery.

GOSSIPING ON GRAND ANSE, WRAPPED IN THE WIND———The three of us huddled on the beach, conspiratorial, as the wind blew and the waves crashed, and a couple of desultory troupes of tourists made an attempt at a swim. We could see a small island off the coast, Ile aux Vaches, the island of cows. We were sitting in a bay

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called Grand Anse, the Grand Beach, and behind us was the school that Najea once attended as a child. It is an idyllic setting, with the beach close by, though she never learned to swim so well. Najea sat between us, and we wondered whether – what with the wind and waves – the recording would work at all, or whether we would later find only the voice of the wind whipping and teasing. Cloaked in the wind, sand between our toes, soft drinks in hand, and dried sweet potato chips to snack upon, it was like we were sealed in our own acoustic privacy, as though it was important to keep the secrets to ourselves, because the ancient island itself might otherwise listen in and carry our secrets to other parts, at our own peril. In the three or so weeks we had been here for this field visit, on several occasions allusions to the animate life of the islands themselves had been made, whether through the cipher of ghosts, or *grigri*, or the Seychellois figure of the *dandosya* (zombie), and further, in the *longue durée* of its deep geological time.

_____ Palmyre explains that *dandosya* "figure into gossip about who may be involved with *grigri*, and a common claim concerned people who kept tidy yards and gardens who, the claim went, could only do so because they kept *dandosya*" (Palmyre 2023: 176; see also 59). One interlocutor told us that a young girl *dandosya*, purportedly controlled by a local witch doctor whose house was located close by a plantation estate, came to play with the children of the estate workers and was chased away by our interlocutor's father. The unwilling labor of the *dandosya* in the garden or estate – a zombie, a figure situated perilously between death and life and not owning a will of their own – speaks powerfully to a history of slavery, where peoples were displaced from their traditional lands, forced to suffer the "middle passage" packed in the hulls of boats (Glissant 1997), and rendered as property by the colonizer who put them to work against their will, at the limit working them to death.[2]

_____ Though most history books insist that the islands were uninhabited when first settled by a party from the island of La Réunion, Choppy argues that some of the first settlers must be recognized in those enslaved peoples who managed to escape, the early maroons (Choppy 2022B: 14; Nicolls 2022: 28). Rather than the habitually cited line up of "fourteen white men (including a commandant, a surgeon and chief carpenter), seven black slaves, five Indians, and another person described as a 'negress'" (Nwulia: 1981 17; see also Franda 1982: 7), another story might be told of first settlers (Nicholls 2022).

_____ From the beginning, women were involved in land ownership in the Seychelles. Françoise Vergès has described La Réunion as an "island of men," where a pronounced gender disparity in the original

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AN ISLAND INFRASTRUCTURE OF GARDENS, GOSSIP, AND *'GRIGRI'*

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population gradually ossified into a fundamentally "*masculine* society" (2007: 141), dictating the character of *créolité* that emerged. A slightly different trajectory is evident in Seychelles. While a dominant French plantocracy claimed the most powerful hold on *habitations* measured in *arpents* (designating the apportioning of land in blocks to colonial settlers) (Nwulia 1981: 27), their hegemony was undone in parts and parcels. One of the earliest landholders was the free Malagasy woman Vola-ma-Effa (Durup 2013: 18). By the twentieth century, while it was unusual for women to purchase land themselves, it was relatively common to be given land by a "paramour" (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 211) and also possible to inherit it via the process described in the preceding section. The Benedicts explained this as the origin of the common designation "Mme So-and-so's land" (even where the land was legally owned by a man) (ibid.: 211), and this way of relating to property has persisted.

_____ The land on which Najea and her late mother had grown up was owned by Mme C. Now the land, the outline of which can be barely made out on Google Maps, if you know what you are looking for, includes Najea's own garden, as well as the "Magic Garden" her older brother, a brother barely a year older than herself, has been tending for over twenty years. Najea's younger brother is a landscape designer, and it is clear these three siblings are dedicated to the garden as a place of cultural and familial memory, hands-on practiced knowledge as well as recuperation. Property first claimed through colonial apparatuses of property ownership and improvement can be undermined in gardens such as Najea's through feminist practices of alternative land use, a focus on sustenance and sharing rather than exploitation and expropriation. Najea's mother's presence is still felt throughout the house, and the garden is formed in the shape of what she taught her children.

_____ Najea's maternal grandfather was the overseer of this land when it was part of Mme C's estate. Her father was a worker on the estate, while her mother tended to their own provision garden, a smaller one near the house, and a larger one further inland, a short walk up the hill. During the holidays Najea and her brothers and sister would clamber to receive small jobs on the plantation. Some days they would venture into the woods with their parents to collect cinnamon bark. It was very exciting, said Najea "You had your bag, you had your lunch, and you would go up there and get all the fruit. You had pineapples, oranges, jackfruit, and you would…" Here Najea paused to mimic spitting the seeds out as the children wander into the woods, and this would mean, as she explained, that yet

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more fruit trees would grow in time. When school was still on, the moment Najea and her brothers and sister arrived home they would be directly set to work in the family provision garden. Her father would check whether the garden had been sufficiently watered by the children by sticking his finger into the earth. Sometimes he would send the children off to buy *kalou* for him to drink, an alcoholic beverage made of coconut palm sap and sold to workers by the estate. There was always more work to be done. Kitchen refuse could be collected from houses of this Madame and that Madame and used to feed their pigs and chickens. Najea was always curious, keen to learn, constantly asking questions to her mother and grandmother, incrementally embodying the craft of tending to the garden and learning what it was good for.

_____As a child, Najea remembers selling produce in a streetside stall outside the family bungalow on Saturdays. She also remembers carrying produce such as watercress on the local bus to the main market in the capital Victoria, the Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke Market. For the children such a visit to town happened rarely, and was considered as exciting as a trip overseas, filling Najea with a mix of emotions, excitement, and anxiety. Now Najea explains that her aspiration is to open her own shop on the main road in the small, two-story hut that has been recently constructed, but which appears to remain incomplete, waiting in anticipation. It is clear she would be happy to leave the gift shop in the tourist haven behind and claim self-determination in her own localized commercial venture. This would mean more time in the garden, for there is never enough time to tend to the garden, between her work in the gift store, the long bus trip between home and work, and with only one day a week that she can claim as her own.

_____This desire for autonomy must be understood in the context of the relationships engendered by the plantation. Even after Najea and her mother had succeeded in securing their plot, old habits died hard. She recalled Mme C passing them as they returned home from fishing, and asking to see what they had in their bags. Najea's mum replied, "Oh no, this is my bag. What do you want?" Mme C thought, Najea surmised, that they had taken 'her' coconuts. "It was good to actually hear her say it," Najea told us. "She was a lady, I would say."

ARRIVING IN THE MAGIC GARDEN_____We paid two visits to Najea and her partner's house and garden. They live at the back of the house, while her sister lives in the front section with her children. Najea cooked *kreol* coconut curry, including a cinnamon leaf from her own garden, a crucial ingredient. On the second visit, Najea arranged

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for us to meet her brother, F., even though we had insisted that it is her we are interested in speaking with, and her garden we would enjoy learning more about. It soon became apparent why it was so crucial to venture toward the rear of Najea's garden, past the small river where she and her siblings bathed as children, and where it was once possible to catch prawns, though less likely now. Tentatively, we followed Najea in a single file, and by the time we returned, we were covered in mosquito bites, while Najea remained unaffected. It is as though the local environment is prepared to accommodate her, but we remain visitors there, under cautious notice.

// Figure 1
Hélène Frichot, At the bottom of Najea's Garden, July 2023

_____ To arrive in the Magic Garden, we followed a path through Najea's medicinal and sustenance garden. The two gardens are connected by sibling bonds, building on the cross-generational knowledge passed down from a mother to her children, and before that, grandparents. We passed through a metal gate, and along a minor avenue of leaning pink flowers which partially obscure the way. Najea pointed out the tortoise pen on the right, an attraction common to many former plantation estates, and still found at former plantations that have been transformed into tourist attractions, such as the Jardin du Roi, the Takamaka rum distillery (a reconstruction of the former estate of La Plaine St. André settled in 1792, and once owned by Hélène's grandmother's family, the Jorre de St Jorres, placing her in uncomfortable proximity to the colonial French plantocracy), and the Union Estate on the island of Praslin.

_____ Najea's older brother, F. greeted us cautiously after his barking dogs alerted him to our arrival. We were reading a handmade sign that describes a plan of the Magic Garden, showing the layout of the picturesque paths, including simple illustrations of the hand-crafted timber bungalows where the older and the younger brother live, as well as separate huts and shelters, some accommodating cooking ovens and hot plates, resting places, look-outs, sheds and areas where seedlings can be cultivated. Along the garden path there are sign posts directing the way. One simply reads "Hope & Faith My Masterpiece…" Najea's brother spoke of how the garden teaches him about time; he gives all his time to the garden, and the garden reciprocates. One look-out includes a memorial with images of F.'s personal history as he cared for his garden over the years. His hair is bundled into a mass of Rastafarian dreadlocks expressing his pan-African philosophical beliefs. In his youth, this resulted in his

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father expelling him from the family house, and F. sleeping in a tree for months in what would become, in time, his Magic Garden.
———— It dawned on us that we were venturing into a private domain, usually only accessible to close family and intimates. We acknowledge the honor of this invitation. Even if, at first, the reason for our keen interest was greeted with some suspicion, slowly, as we tour the marvelous garden, and exclaim at how it flourishes, Najea's brother warms to us. It became clear that for the most part Najea's older brother composes and tends this garden for his own pleasure, and yet it is also a test site, a laboratory of sorts, for the younger brother's landscape practice, which benefits from what is discovered in the Magic Garden. By coincidence, Hélène discovered that a local Seychellois architect she was in dialogue with had arranged for Najea's younger brother to offer landscape design advice on his plot of land in the same neighborhood. An ecology of practices emerges amongst the siblings in connection with the gardens they share and the local knowledge they glean and circulate. They share produce, much as they offer advice to each other, and advice is mixed with gossip, ghost stories, and memories of the adventures they shared as children.
———— Ecology of practices is a formulation borrowed from the thinking of Stengers, who forwards concept-tools dedicated to thinking immanently, here and now, through what is happening to us (Stengers 2005: 185; Frichot 2018). We use our (garden) tools to "actualise the power of a situation" (Stengers 2005: 185), to enable us to think with each other, with the soil and the plants in the garden. This is a form of empirical and pragmatic craft, which, we venture, can be offered as a redefinition of magic, where magic is associated with ritual, and where ritual is understood as a form of gathering that makes present our concerns, pulling us out of ourselves as self-serving, individuated subjects. The ritual of gathering can "make us think and feel and wonder about what sustains us" (Stengers 2008: 51), and also what does not.

INCANTING GOSSIP AND *'GRIGRI'* AS FEMINIST CREATIVE PRACTICES
———— When it comes to the beneficial role of gossip, feminist activist and scholar Silvia Federici explains that:

> "In many parts of the world, women have historically been seen as the weavers of memory – those who keep alive the voices of the past and the histories of the communities, who transmit them to the future generations and, in so doing, create a collective identity and profound sense of cohesion" (Federici 2018: 41).

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The gossip, Federici explains, was once simply the word for female friend. Gradually, gossip has come to be associated with idle and informal talk, deployed at the risk of damaging reputations or causing unrest. Because it is assumed that gossip is a mode of discourse specific to women, Federici argues that the further assumption is that women have nothing better to do with themselves and suffer from "having less access to real knowledge and information and a structural inability to construct factually based, rational discourses" (ibid.: 41). Knowledge here is split between two modes, a privileged form of knowledge that is abstract, scientific, universally transferable, and know-how as a specific embodied form of knowledge, handed down through generations, enabling community cohesion, and shared as "medical remedies" and to soothe "the problems of the heart" (ibid.: 41). Federici's point is that women's knowledge practices are diminished through the derogatory usage of the term gossip, wherein their intentions are assumed to be malign and self-serving, characteristics that then prepare the ground for accusations of witchcraft. Feminist creative practices can turn this devaluation around in an act of reclamation, returning to gossip in its relation to empirical arts and the sharing of know-how via bonds of female friendship, including cross-generational relationships. Federici reports on a meeting she attended discussing the meaning of witchcraft where a woman there remarked that magic pertains to the fact that "we know what we know" (ibid.: 42). Eco-feminist, self-proclaimed neo-pagan witch Starhawk explains that magic is what we might habitually assume to be performed in the sleight of hand of the magician, or the supernatural spell and evil manipulations of the stereotypical witch. Instead "Learning to work magic is mostly a process of learning to think things, to experience concretely as well as to think abstractly" (Starhawk 1997: 27). Magic helps us pay attention to material things and their relations.

Gossip travels, expressing itself through indirectness, euphemism, and cloaked asides. Gossip, like *grigri*, can be curative, or it can be toxic. Gossip (or Seychellois *kankan*) and surveillance can work together in a heavily surveilled environment in which *grigri* can take root. Some of these coded means of communication have become crucial for the survival of a *kreol* reclamation of history on

// Figure 2
Hélène Frichot, A timber pavilion in the Magic Garden, July 2023

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the Seychelles, while other forms of gossip are pernicious in their will to surveil, producing knowledge as a form of "power over." This indirectness has been remarked upon by the Benedicts in their early field research, contributing, or so they claim, to attitudes and practices which mean you never go against someone directly. Instead, you go in secret to the *bonnomn dibwa* who confirms what you suspected and then acts secretly against the other person. Najea is more circumspect, suggesting that the Seychellois get along with things:

> "This is how I see it. Seychellois, when there is something just happened, it's hard, they argue about it, we say this this and that, in a few days we [are] so happy! We forget! We adapt, we say OK, but we just say, you know this this is, we will talk to ourself, we not happy with it, but we're not gonna – it's like, we don't do strike. Have you heard Seychellois do a lot of strike? Never!"

———— There is a resilience expressed in coping with daily challenges communicated in Najea's story of her own travails. As Choppy remarks, the Creole people of the Seychelles have always "had to find creative ways of surviving in very harsh conditions. This is why Creole culture and identity is a triumph of creativity and sustainability" (2020: 58–59). Friendship among women (and those who identify as women) can support a social infrastructure dedicated to solidarity. A struggle takes place here to reclaim the benefits of gossip as female relations of power-from-within. Federici explains, "when a term commonly indicating a close female friend turned into one signifying idle, backbiting talk, that is, talk potentially sowing discord," then what takes place is "the opposite of the solidarity that female friendship implies and generates" (ibid.: 36). It is the eco-feminist witch Starhawk, a figure of inspiration for Stenger's concept of ecology of practices (Stengers 2005: 194; Stengers 2008), who speaks to the distinction between "power over" and "power-from-within" (Starhawk 1997: xxv). The latter is immanent within ourselves and our forms of gathering. The witches, Starhawk explains "were the wise women and cunning men of the country villages. They were herbalists and healers, the counsellors in times of trouble" (1997: xxvi). It is much the same story Federici relates when she connects gossip to witchcraft, and the central role of the commons in advance of their devastating enclosure (2018; 2014). For us, in the Seychelles context, the commons is located in the *kreol* garden where material knowledge practices manage to survive, despite great impediments

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_____ How, finally, does this pertain to feminist creative practices as an ecology of practices of the everyday, of ordinary affects, of collective work, of gossip and *grigri* in the garden? Gossip proliferates, it is contagious, it carries home truths and advice for survival and sustenance, and it can also mislead, casting aspersions on the one who unwittingly becomes the subject of gossip. When we bent our three heads together to hear about Najea's garden, and her struggles for securing the title on the land for her family, what we were doing was gossiping. We were passing informal modes of knowledge between us and sharing intimacies, but were we also dabbling in *grigri*? No, at least, not in any kind of straightforward way, though we were exploring the "power-from-within" each one of us could bring to our gathering, especially in what it means to trust each other enough to share our stories. We must be clear too that the work Najea does in the garden is not *grigri*. Rather, the healing and harmful properties of the garden form the basis for a spectrum of practices – household provisioning, herbalism, and traditional healing, all the way through to the power of the *bonnonm dibwa* and *sorsye* (witch) – that come to constitute daily life in Seychelles.

_____ Michael Palmyre explains that *grigri* is "located in a murky domain between legal herbalism and illegal witchcraft. It is located on the side of the illegal in that its use could be dedicated to undermining state activities (Palmyre 2023: 82). Furthermore, post-coup, a gender divide is discernible in approaches to *grigri*, between the authority of the herbalist (formerly associated with the figure of the *bonnonm dibwa*) and their condoned, science-adjacent practice, and the suspicious spells and potions of the one who practices *grigri*. This perhaps deepens the distinction that Marion Benedict noted between men as *bonnonm dibwa*, and women as mere cartomancers and dispensers of love potions (Benedict / Benedict 1982: 88).

_____ Palmyre himself never encountered a *bonnfanm dibwa,* though he did hear stories of women practitioners from his interlocutors (2023: 77). He suggests that this absence is explained partially by his own identity as a male researcher, and that of the men he spoke to – who tended to refer him on to other men (ibid.: 76). But he also speculates that the "masculinization" of the Creole world, as described by Vergès, plays a role in the gendering of witchcraft (ibid.: 78); that the struggle for control over reproductive power identified by Federici in the witch hunts of Europe also has salience

//Figure 3
Hélène Frichot, Hope and Faith in the Magic Garden, July 2023

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in the post-coup landscape of Seychelles (ibid.: 148, 156). In La Réunion, the masculinization of *créolité* was realized through the revolutionary deployment of the figure of the *marron*, who rebelled against slavery to kill his masters, at the expense of the more prosaic figure of the enslaved woman charged with enduring sexual violence, bearing and nursing the children of the colony (Vergès 1999: 43). In Seychelles, this figure of the *zonm lib* (free man), sometimes identified as a counterpart to the *dandosya* (Palmyre 2023: 173), has likewise obscured feminine and feminized figures within the national imaginary. The relative social power of women in Seychelles (see Yoon 2011: 104–5; Campling, et al. 2011: 53) does not change this, but rather contributes to the construction of a sphere of "culture" in which men are positioned as experts and expertise as masculine. The figure of the herbalist exemplifies this, and the ambivalence *bonnonm dibwa* underscores it.

_____ Palmyre observes that "'grigri' as a concept is held together by discourse more than by any standardised community of practice" (2023: 111). Part of its power is expressed through rumor, innuendo, and gossip. When circulated through gossip, practitioners can be marginalized, and yet the rumor of their powers expands their reputations (ibid.: 115), hence the role that gossip plays, at least in the continued discursive circulation of *grigri*. Herbalism can be incorporated into a vision of Seychellois Creole culture that is legible both through the lens of science and that of living cultural heritage (see Jeffery / Rotter 2016); *grigri*, as Palmyre argues, is entangled with "bodies, discourses, and practices" (Palmyre 2023: 29) that contribute to its status as racialized and abject.

_____ A comparison with *moutya*, a traditional form of dance once associated with the rebellion of enslaved Africans, sexual freedom, and occult practices, is instructive. *Moutya* has been the focus of a concerted revival, reclaimed and celebrated (Parent 2020: 10), and now inscribed as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Seychelles (UNESCO 2021). It is part of Seychellois *kreolite*, even if its form has changed somewhat in the process. *Grigri*, Palmyre argues, persists as a "racialised signifier," albeit a floating one (2023: 30, 118), encompassing both negative stereotypes of Africanness and positive revaluations. The *bonnonm dibwa* thus occupies an ambivalent position in relation to the modern Creole nation: an emblem of harms, past and present, actual and imagined; and a repository of traditional knowledge.

_____ But in speculating on the potentialities of resituating *grigri* as a material feminist creative practice, of learning from one another, we are not attempting to reposition the *bonnonm dibwa* or to

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question the authority of the accredited herbalist. We must be cautious, for strictly speaking *grigri* remains illegal, even if near impossible to prosecute, partly on account of the difficulties of legally defining witchcraft (Palmyre 79–80). Two of us are relative outsiders to Seychelles, and remain at risk of exoticizing and thereby sensationalizing *grigri* as an occult art.

Instead, we are thinking of Najea's mother. By drawing on the herbal practice of her own mother, who would instruct the children to go to the garden and gather "seven things" when they were ill, Najea explains:

> "Let's say you get one takamaka, one needs to be lemongrass, one needs to be – so seven types, orange, lemongrass, lemon, but it has to be seven. For you to make this bath, for you to take your bath to make the fever go away."

Najea links this to the treatment of *tanbav*, a form of impetigo that is common across the Indian Ocean, and which is understood to be derived from a traditional Malagasy framework in which the child's body must be properly incorporated into the father's lineage in order to be healed (Pourchez 2017). This cosmological and spiritual aspect is not necessarily part of how the illness is understood in Seychelles, where it is merely an inconvenience and annoyance for a busy mother. But the care, the meticulousness, and the potent power of the herbs all ground it back in the regenerative power of the garden.

When we seek to reclaim *grigri* as a material practice undertaken in intimate relation to the *kreol* garden, celebrated as a source of sustenance and knowledge of herbal remedies, we query the ways in which *grigri* has been figured as a force to be expelled from the construction of contemporary *kreol* identity. Beyond discourse, it is in the entanglement of "bodies, discourses, and practices" (Palmyre 2023: 29) that we seek opportunities for rethinking the value of *grigri*.

The weaving of memory and the reclaiming of the garden from an extractive colonial past can become the means by which the feminist creative practitioner takes courage in her self-determination and her expertise, individually, and more importantly, collectively and collaboratively, in solidarity. Feminist creative practices in the garden include: the sharing of embodied practices and knowledge of what is good, and what is toxic, what plants can be used for what

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ailments, and how this might change from one application to the next (*grigri*); the circulation of know-how in the tending of the garden and the cross-generational transfer of knowledge from grandparent to parent to child as well as between friends and neighbors (*gossip*); the practice of tending to the garden by acknowledging its needs as needs one shares in (*the garden*). What we learn while walking alongside Najea and learning with her is how in the garden you are not only working toward your harvest, but when you look back, things that appeared as frustrating or obstacles become part of the story of what you have gained. All these we consider as contributing to forms of feminist creative practice attentive to the refugia we carve out in everyday life, in the garden, as elsewhere.

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FLOWING INTO BEING: UNVEILING GENTLE ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

ABSTRACT ⎯⎯⎯ The Transdisciplinary Network of the Amazon (RETA), comprising over 30 grassroots organizations, operates between the Madeira and Purus rivers, a region altered by the BR-319 highway's construction in the 1970s. This 870 km stretch, cutting through traditional and Indigenous lands, symbolizes infrastructural disruption, threatening biodiversity, autonomy, and food security. Despite challenges, RETA resists daily, denouncing environmental crimes and advocating for community rights. The essay, written in the format of a conversation between RETA members, artists, and designers, discusses one of RETA's key challenges and actions: the continuous efforts of rendering the network visible while fostering awareness of its existence, integrating political and artistic processes to enhance community engagement and co-creation, addressing the urgent needs of the region.

KEYWORDS ⎯⎯⎯ Brazilian Amazon, BR-319 Highway, Modernity, Infrastructure, RETA Network, Relationality, Environmental Justice, Anti-Colonialism, Transdisciplinary Collaboration

"I have no doubt that confluence is the energy propelling us towards sharing, recognition, and respect. A river doesn't cease to be a river when it merges with another; instead, it remains itself while integrating with others, thus growing stronger. When we converge, we don't lose our identity; rather, we become ourselves and others – we blend. Confluence is a force that yields, that augments, that expands. That's the essence. Indeed, the word 'confluence,' laden with meaning, came to me at a moment when our ancestry cradled me. And, truth be told, it still does! I've been feeling it." – Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2023)

BACKGROUND ⎯⎯⎯ For over a decade, RETA, the Transdisciplinary Network of the Amazon (or *Rede Transdisciplinar da Amazônia*) has been active in the interfluve of the Cuary and Cuxiuara rivers, the Indigenous names for the Madeira and Purus rivers in the Brazilian Amazon – an extensive area that boasts 41 conservation units and 69 Indigenous territories. Within RETA, a dynamic coalition of more than 30 community organizations thrives, representing both riverine and traditional forest communities, with a predominant representation of women leaders.

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_____ In Portuguese, "RETA," translated as straight line, is a term that resonates deeply with the construction of the BR-319 highway. Built during the Brazilian military dictatorship in the 1970s, this 870-kilometer stretch sliced through the Amazon, leading to chaotic settlements and altering long-standing living patterns of ecosystems, and Indigenous and traditional communities. Today, this disruption is amplified by widespread illegal deforestation, mining, and labor exploitation, with disproportionate impacts on women and children, further unraveling the social and ecological fabric of the region.

_____ In contrast to the destructive impact of the highway, the network builds connections to strengthen a dynamic web of relationships driven by shared sensitivities, affections, dignity, and the common good. RETA operates as a living organization where relationships and interactions – social, cultural, with biodiversity, and infrastructural – can be articulated, responding to emergent challenges and violations of land, water, and bodies. Drawing inspiration from the late Argentine feminist philosopher and activist María Lugones (2010), RETA embodies ways of being that prioritize affirmation of life over profit, communalism over individualism, and *estar* (being) over enterprise. It champions a philosophy where beings are interconnected rather than divided into hierarchically and violently ordered fragments. These principles of existence, valuation, and belief stand as a resistant response to the enduring impacts of coloniality, showcasing the enduring power of alternative ways of being that resist the colonial paradigm.

VISUALIZING AND RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT THE NETWORK _____
Starting in 2021, RETA initiated a long-term initiative to address a fundamental challenge: visualizing the network and raising awareness of its existence. Initially, this involved online conversations with local activists, youth, women, and environmental agents to share stories and explore their connections to the network's actions.

_____ By 2023, these efforts had evolved into weekly online meetings where RETA categorized 15 action processes into intersectional themes such as gender equality, agrobiodiversity, conservation, and anti-slavery efforts.

_____ The next phase of this work involved developing visualizations that act as counter-cartographies, mapping out RETA's processes. These served as experiments in visualization, with a particular emphasis on developing an approach to empower these communities in their everyday collaborations.

_____ RETA decided to use visual and artistic processes as a

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means to articulate and engage individuals within the context of lived experiences, or what we prefer to call the field of the real. Here, visualizations and representations play a significant role in highlighting RETA's efforts to nurture relationships, collaborations, and processes. Key among these initiatives are activities dedicated to empowering women, encompassing activities such as leadership training for governmental roles, advocating for strategic involvement in gender-related agendas, and combating violence against women and adolescents.

_____ Our process also echoes other artistic and activist practices in Latin America, or more precisely, in the Abya-Yala territory. For instance, the counter-cartographies developed by Iconoclasistas (Julia Risler and Pablo Ares, Argentina, since 2006) illustrate the significance of collective mapping (*mapeo colectivo*) as "a process of creation that challenges dominant narratives of territories, drawing on the wisdom and everyday experiences of participants" (Iconoclasistas 2013: 12). This approach involves reshaping visual productions and educational methods, engaging with communities and social movements, and leading to subsequent actions. Similarly, Carolina Caycedo's geocoreographies (2016: 106) of the body as resistance and ancestral force provide another poignant reference for RETA. Caycedo's work encompasses listening processes, collective cartographic narratives, writing, films, maps, and photographs, deeply immersing in the ways of life of Indigenous groups and communities persistently affected by major infrastructural projects.

_____ We are currently researching methods to represent actions in motion and challenging static forms for depicting dynamic relationships. Our inability to "capture" RETA in a single representation, map, or image also underscores the multiplicity and complexity of RETA's network.

// Figure 1
Screenshot of online meeting with RETA articulators: Dionéia Ferreira, Jolemia Cristina Nascimento das Chagas and Fran Araújo in the Brazilian Amazon, and in the bigger picture Ligia Nobre Cláudio Bueno; Eduardo Staszowski, Beatrice Perracini, and Laura Pappalardo in São Paulo, Author: N/A, August 2023
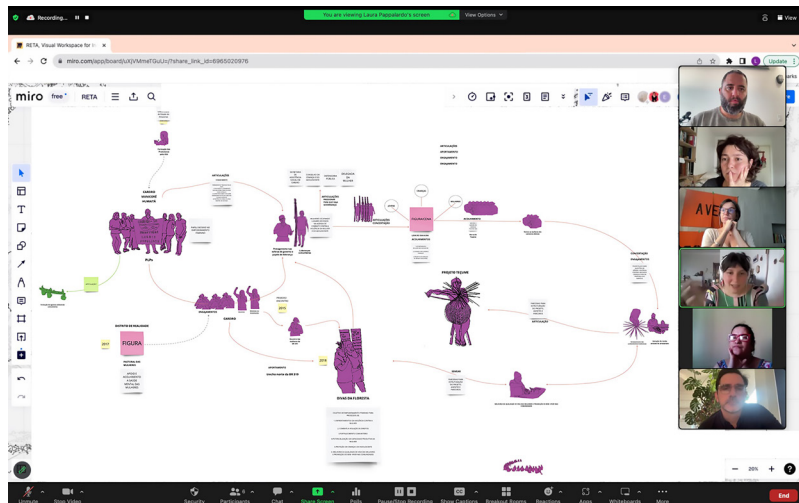
// Figure 2
Screenshot of the online meeting during the participatory process of visualizing RETA's network. N/A, October 2023

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Take, for instance, the visualization of projects such as *Pé-de-pincha* [1] and *Teçume* that showcase the intersectionality between combating gender-based violence and territorial conservation. In these initiatives, young people and women play active roles in strengthening communities through activities like land management and environmental protection. As we grappled with the complexities of representing these multifaceted actions in motion, we recognized the challenge of capturing the dynamic relationships within RETA. Actions flow seamlessly into one another, revealing the network's inherent potentialities and the continuous nature of our efforts in visualization and network awareness.

To shed light on this work and deepen the comprehension of RETA's initiatives, Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas, longtime members of the network, address questions regarding the impact of infrastructure, the importance of artistic and educational strategies in promoting community involvement, and the diverse range of activities and methodologies that invigorate RETA's mission.

// Figure 3
Drawings of RETA's Block elements, RETA: Beatrice Perracini, Cláudio Bueno, Eduardo Staszowski, Laura Pappalardo, and Ligia Nobre in dialogue with Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas, August 2023

The formidable challenge we face in our work with RETA lies in rendering visible the vibrant, self-sustaining network of activism within the Amazon, a region disrupted by numerous infrastructural projects. These projects have been planned for our region since the 1970s, but now Pandora's box is being opened. In addition, more projects are being planned for the region. How do you view the disruptive and harsh intrusion of infrastructure into traditional communities, especially in light of the BR-319 highway?

JOLEMIA CHAGAS (JC) Infrastructure represents the reshaping of landscapes through a technological lens, funded, constructed, and exported to nations where the concept of modernity still holds commercial appeal. Spreading as a web loaded with fetishes, it influences individuals and societies through emotions of attachment, pride, and disappointment. This establishes a shared visual and conceptual understanding of modernity. With its development-oriented components, infrastructure forms a territorially-focused network, driven by economic motives and separating diverse life forms.

In the Brazilian Amazon, one such example is the BR-319 highway. From a technical standpoint, highways like the BR-319 link disparate geographical areas, facilitating the movement of vehicles,

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goods, and people. The BR-319 traverses between two significant rivers in our region, the Cuary and the Cuxiuara rivers (known today as the Madeira and Purus). These rivers are integral to our existence and our bond with what's essential, providing us with sustenance. To us, a river is kin, a nurturing mother offering water, fish, and beauty. Traveling on a river, we join the natural flow, akin to the fish, seeds, fertile soil, and all life it supports, obtaining nourishment and navigating in specially adapted boats.

_____ Nevertheless, landscape transformation via infrastructure leads to profound social and environmental repercussions. The BR-319 highway's construction has notably severed traditional and Indigenous communities' connections to their living environments. As people relocate closer to the highway, their lifestyle and traditional interactions undergo significant changes. Highways introduce notions of connectivity, development, and accessibility to local communities. Yet, their realization brings about territorial violations, rendering local, traditional, and Indigenous groups invisible, forcibly displacing them or subjecting them to vulnerabilities, including exploitation.

_____ The Amazon fosters a network of organization where diversity thrives through interaction. This isn't a static resource pool for exploitation but a dynamic interplay of mutual dependence among traditional and Indigenous peoples. Through their engagement with the environment, these communities cultivate and uphold their knowledge, customs, and actions, securing socio-environmental independence and preservation. They strategize against developmental pressures to preserve their lifestyle and habitats. Amazonian family agriculture exemplifies this, deploying varied strategies in production and social work organization, demonstrating viable, environmental integration. This isn't a utopian vision but a tangible reality. The question arises: Why are these life methodologies continually overlooked or consumed in the name of progress?

DIONÉIA FERREIRA (DF) _____ In our communities, infrastructure projects are often designed and executed without engaging those who have long inhabited these areas, making adaptation and dialogue challenging. The BR-319 and BR-230 (Transamazonian) highways serve as examples, abruptly and destructively imposed on the local populace and ecosystem in the 1970s, inflicting a profound and enduring impact. These infrastructural projects, synonymous with *aberration* and *unchecked devastation*, have decimated millions of hectares of forest, adversely affecting countless life forms that call this place home.
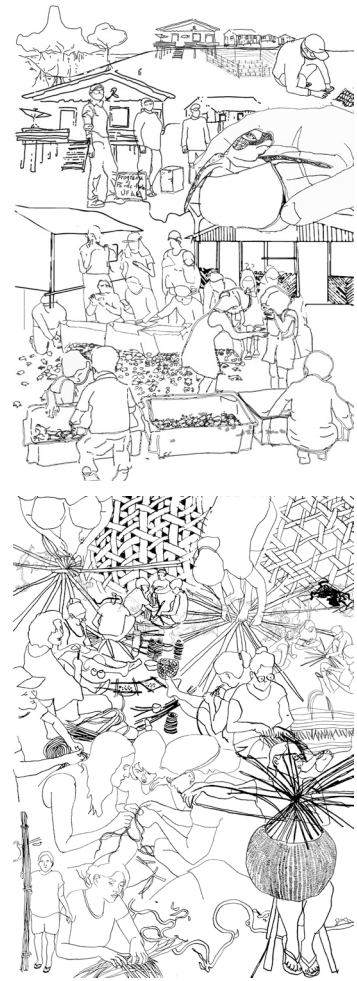
// Figures 4 & 5

Posters with RETA's processes and articulations such as *Teçume*, RETA: Beatrice Perracini, Cláudio Bueno, Eduardo Staszowski, Laura Pappalardo, and Ligia Nobre in dialogue with Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas, August 2023

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_____ Reflecting on the imposition of these structures reveals their profound impact. After five decades, there is a misconception that these roads have always existed and become integrated into local lives, which is misleading. If roads are considered part of local life, they represent a tragic chapter for Indigenous inhabitants. Over time, communities have inadvertently organized around these roads, lured by the prospect of economic opportunities, distorting their perception of the roads' benefits.

_____ By establishing communities along these highways, locals gradually disconnect from their ancestral lifestyles, posing a significant risk to their autonomy. Moreover, the BR-319 and BR-230 have not only negatively impacted local lives but have also served primarily as conduits for illegal agricultural expansion rather than as standard roadways, further complicating the lives of those in the vicinity.

_____ *How does RETA confront the aggressive spread of infrastructures like the BR-319, given its role in weaving together various ways of life in the Amazon? How has RETA been effective in fostering and preserving the dynamic, organic networks within the Amazon?*

DF _____ RETA is more than an organization; it symbolizes the very foundation that emerges beneath our feet, guiding us towards ongoing conversations between our actions and the lifestyles of our community. It unifies us, shielding us from alliances or collaborations that could harm local interests. Moreover, RETA enables us to engage with diverse actors across multiple levels within the territory, essentially acting as a complex infrastructure for social interaction and cohesion. Unlike typical infrastructures designed to facilitate development, RETA does not cater to any specific sector or agenda. Our network is deeply rooted in the tangible, living environment and stays clear of processes that cater to capitalistic development often justified by invasive projects in our land.

JC _____ For over a decade, RETA has been operating in the *campo real* (real field) of the BR-319 highway, prioritizing conservation and *bem viver* (good living) in our places of life. As an autonomous grassroots network, we are committed to elevating our societal and political contributions. By avoiding formal legalisms that might detach us from our territorial identity, we lay the groundwork for meaningful social participation and the reinforcement of

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governance over our living spaces. Our operation as an unincorporated network brings to light our diversity and proactive stance as individuals who are either directly or indirectly impacted by infrastructural developments. The broad range of participants we mobilize helps mitigate risks and threats to individuals.

_____ RETA's initiatives are responsive to the immediate and critical needs of the local community, addressing the structural aspects of public policies. State oversight and private agribusiness ventures have adversely affected traditional communities, leading to escalated deforestation, land invasions, increased forced labor, and violence in rural areas.

_____ In response, RETA focuses its efforts on regions facing intense pressure and the threat of destruction, particularly along the BR-319 and BR-230 highways. We collaborate with governmental enforcement agencies to call out environmental offenses and rights violations.

_____ Through dialogue and conservation activities, we aim to safeguard the essential components necessary for biodiversity, self-sufficiency, and food security. Our collaboration extends to communities, villages, and associations, emphasizing the participation of women and youth in non-partisan political actions.

_____ We advocate for transparency from institutions operating within the territory, urging them to share project details and data with local communities. This approach allows us to generate informed content on environmental issues relevant to local advocacy. Such efforts have solidified our presence in areas vulnerable to agribusiness expansion.

_____ Operating within an unstructured network enables various stakeholders, affected by the BR-319, to mobilize. This collective action reduces the risks faced by local communities. However, despite RETA's progress, regions, particularly in southern Amazonas, are still under threat from land encroachment and agribusiness expansion. It is crucial for collectives to recognize their role within the network.

_____ RETA encourages us to critically assess our political engagements in sustaining our livelihoods. It defends against the dilution of genuine grassroots initiatives. As we expose territorial realities, some institutions may exploit local resources, converting them into commercial products. Hence, it is vital for interactions between local networks and formal bodies to be participatory and democratic, focusing on empowering local capacities.

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_____*RETA views artistic and cultural practices as closely attuned to the territory and the concept of* bem viver *(good living), sparking our ongoing effort to visualize and raise awareness about the network. Can you elaborate on when and how this collaboration began?*

DF _____ Our lives in the Amazon are deeply intertwined with the arts. Every day in the forest, local populations engage in a continuous artistic collaboration with nature. This stems from the constant experience of beauty, immersion in various sensory stimuli, and the harmony with the natural rhythms of the river waters. For those in traditional communities, beauty is not just an occasional encounter but a daily and constant experience, shaping their existence.

_____ However, the intrusive and harsh invasion of modern technologies into traditional communities threatens to silence the deep meanings associated with the forest that generations have preserved. The narrative of modernization, accompanied by the imposition of *modernity*, undermines vital cultural aspects such as food, clothing, and music, disrupting the continuity of local life culture.

_____ Recognizing this challenge, RETA identified the urgent need to act by integrating local content and specificities into the formal education system within the communities. This effort required individuals sensitive enough to grasp the multidimensional aspects of places and ways of life. Artists, with their deep connection to sensory experiences and their commitment to social causes, were natural allies in this mission.

_____ In 2014, an alliance was formed with Cláudio Bueno and Tainá Azeredo, artists and curators from São Paulo. This collaboration was initiated amidst mounting pressures and threats on our territory, consolidating RETA's struggle for the preservation of our cultural heritage. Our initial project, Intervalo-Escola, was a dynamic artistic residency that produced significant outcomes, including the new Igapó Açu school. The pedagogy of this school, shaped by continuous dialogue among staff, community members, and artists, nurtures an atmosphere of play and communal sharing, even during class breaks. Moreover, Rádio Floresta, a web radio station, originated from this residency, currently involving young people in programming and presentation endeavors, with a focus on collective interests.

_____ Recently, we have embarked on a journey to visually articulate RETA's essence. Teaming up with RETA's architects, designers, and artists such as Ligia V. Nobre, Beatrice Padovan, Laura Pappalardo, Cláudio Bueno, and Eduardo Staszowski, our objective is to understand RETA's multifaceted nature, embracing its diverse

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scales, actors, and layers. By diving into each of our processes at the heart of this understanding, we aim to foster a sense of belonging and ownership among community members, enabling them to contribute to and benefit from RETA's initiatives.

JC _____ Design and art serve as catalysts for our perceptions and sensations, enabling us to comprehend the meaning and significance of the Amazon for local communities. Art integrates with the environment, bridging what is often perceived as external to the realm of the real. Through art, we can navigate the intricate relationships and interactions within the Amazon, revealing its nuances and complexities.

_____ Our collaboration aims to visualize the organic, autonomous network of activism in the Amazon territory disrupted by man-made infrastructures. The "noisy and cruel invasion" of infrastructure, exemplified by the BR-319 highway, presents profound challenges for traditional communities. These infrastructural interventions, while intended to connect geographical regions, often overlook the profound connections between local populations and their environment.

_____ The construction of highways like the BR-319 disrupts the delicate balance of traditional and Indigenous communities with their places of life. The physical alteration of the landscape and the intrusion of highways into these areas not only displaces communities but also undermines their cultural heritage and socio-environmental autonomy. Indigenous peoples, however, demonstrate resilience by maintaining their ways of life and developing strategies to resist these disruptive forces.

_____ In contrast to the objectification imposed by infrastructure, traditional communities and Indigenous peoples transform these interventions into poetry, weaving their existence into the fabric of the Amazon. Yet, their voices and perspectives are often marginalized in the name of development, raising questions about the disregard for their lived realities in favor of progress-driven agendas.

DF _____ Therefore, based on our experiences, we can only describe infrastructure as an *aberration* or *rampant destruction*, considering the extensive destruction of millions of hectares of forest and the detrimental impact on diverse forms of life. It is crucial to critically examine how these infrastructures were established, as the passage of time may create a false perception that roads have always been integral parts of people's lives. However, if roads have become integrated into communities over time, they represent a

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tragic chapter in the history of those who have long inhabited these regions.

——— Communities often form along highways, driven by the hope that the increased traffic will bring opportunities for employment and income. However, this perspective can distort the community's perception, leading them to believe that the presence of roads is beneficial. Unfortunately, this integration with highways poses a significant risk to the autonomy and traditional ways of life of local populations.

——— Moreover, these highways have primarily served the interests of criminal agribusiness activities rather than facilitating safe travel for local populations. This realization underscores the disproportionate negative impacts of these infrastructures on the lives of Indigenous and traditional communities, further exacerbating their vulnerability and marginalization.

CONCLUSION ——— This essay represents just a snapshot of the invisible labor and ongoing collaboration dedicated to addressing the complex challenges faced by RETA and the myriad collectives it represents. By enhancing visibility, representation, and awareness, we aim to illuminate the intricacies of physical, moral, and epistemological violence, alongside the diverse forms of resistance that emerge in response. Similar to the interfluve delineating the region, our collective work mirrors a river, flowing into being and intertwining the currents of advocacy and solidarity.

——— In our quest for justice and equity, we also draw inspiration from Audre Lorde's words. Lorde's call to consciousness resonates profoundly with RETA's ethos, particularly her reminder of the need for tenderness and care within marginalized communities. She writes:

> "We have to consciously study how to be tender with each other until it becomes a habit because what was native has been stolen from us, the love of Black women for each other. But we can practice being gentle with ourselves by being gentle with each other. We can practice being gentle with each other by being gentle with that piece of ourselves that is hardest to hold, by giving more to the brave bruised girlchild within each of us, by expecting a little less from her gargantuan efforts to excel. We can love her in the light as well as in the darkness, quiet her frenzy toward perfection and encourage her attentions toward fulfillment. Maybe then we will come to appreciate more how much she has taught us, and how much

she is doing to keep this world revolving toward some livable future." – Audre Lorde (1984: 175)

_____ As we look to the future, united in purpose, we continue our journey, unwavering in our pursuit of justice, equity, and sustainability for the Amazon and its communities, always mindful that what we capture here is but a glimpse into the vast, dynamic network of collaboration and the gentle acts of resistance at play.

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Figure 1: Title: Screenshot of online meeting with RETA articulators: Dionéia Ferreira, Jolemia Cristina Nascimento das Chagas and Fran Araújo in the Brazilian Amazon, and in the bigger picture Ligia Nobre, Cláudio Bueno; Eduardo Staszowski, Beatrice Perracini, and Laura Pappalardo in São Paulo. Author: N/A. Date: August 2023

Figure 2: Title: Screenshot of online meeting during the participatory process of visualizing RETA's network. Author: N/A. Date: October 2023

Figure 3: Title: Drawings of RETA's Block elements. Author: RETA: Beatrice Perracini, Cláudio Bueno, Eduardo Staszowski, Laura Pappalardo, and Ligia Nobre in dialogue with Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas. Date: August 2023

Figures 4 & 5: Title: Posters with RETA's processes and articulations such as *Teçume.*
Author: RETA: Beatrice Perracini, Cláudio Bueno, Eduardo Staszowski, Laura Pappalardo, and Ligia Nobre in dialogue with Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas. Date: August 2023

Figures 6 & 7: Title: Visualization of some of RETA's actions.
Author: RETA: Beatrice Perracini, Cláudio Bueno, Eduardo Staszowski, Laura Pappalardo, and Ligia Nobre in dialogue with Dionéia Ferreira and Jolemia Chagas. Date: October 2023

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amazônicos: um olhar pela lente da complexidade," in *Edgar Morin. Homem de muitos séculos: um olhar latino-americano*, eds. Elimar Pinheiro do Nascimento, Mauricio Amazonas and Alfredo Pena-Vega (São Paulo: Edições Sesc São Paulo, 2021).

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FLOWING INTO BEING: UNVEILING GENTLE ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON

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// Lilah Leopold

CROP SEED MOVEMENTS AS FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURE

ABSTRACT _____ This article analyzes Jumana Manna's video documentary *Wild Relatives* (2018), and its exposition of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. In 2008, the vault became an international "doomsday backup" of duplicated agricultural seeds to preserve global agricultural biodiversity in event of human or natural disaster. *Wild Relatives* tells the story of a particular collection of crop seeds as they travel between Syria, Svalbard, and Lebanon as part of the vault's first seed withdrawal from October to November 2015, set into motion by civil war in Syria.

_____ These various locations and their human and infrastructural components all become elements of landscapes that can, as Manna describes, fold. The concept is generative and reveals the histories and futures of seemingly far-off locations as intimately entangled with a collection of crop seeds. My feminist reading of the vault asks if moments when human hands and seeds connect could offer a new mode of thinking about infrastructure.

CROP SEED MOVEMENTS AS FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURE _____ The infrastructural means by which multinational organizations attempt to control agricultural futures are bound by colonial, settler-colonial, and imperial hierarchical metrics of control. Settler-colonialism especially exhibits a continual desire to expand across space and control time (Simmons 2019), and even seeks to pervade the very air we breathe as well as the memories we hold in common (Simmons 2017). To examine infrastructures of food in such a climate, with such pervasive settler "atmospherics" (Simmons 2017, 2019), requires wielding space and time beyond linear limits of so-called progress which facilitate violence against nature and women (Shiva 2009), among a range of globalized othering that manifests on Native lands, through anti-Black and environmental racisms, and which entangle in global networks of extractivist industries and their toxic afterlives.[1]

_____ Visual artist and filmmaker Jumana Manna wields film, sculpture, and words in ways that help audiences of her work ply apart such pernicious atmospherics. This article addresses one way in which her work investigates geopolitical aspects of landscapes, through what she describes as "folding" (Manna 2017: 48–51). A fold, for Manna, means bringing multiple historical layers of a site into conversation with each other. It also means revealing how the histories and futures of seemingly disparate and far locations intimately entangle.[2]

1)
See, for example: Arvin / Tuck / Morrill 2013; Byrd 2011; Day 2015; King 2019; Liboiron 2021.

2)
This article makes use of contextual footnotes. I use "intimate" primarily in the sense of Lisa Lowe's articulation of scales of colonial encounter and exchange, both in archives and along global conduits of empire (Lowe 2015), but also in how Katherine McKittrick posits "think[ing] big about the intimacies among social justice, creativity, writing, and racial politics" (McKittrick 2015: xi).

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Manna's *Wild Relatives* – a sixty-four-minute video art documentary in Arabic, English, and Norwegian (Manna 2018), for example, folds together the landscapes of Lebanon's Bekka Valley and the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard. *Wild Relatives* follows crop seeds relocated from Syria to Lebanon via the Svalbard Global Seed Vault due to the escalation of civil war following the Syrian Revolution in 2011. In Lebanon, we observe workers in agricultural crop research fields in the Bekka Valley **[fig. 1]**.

_____On Svalbard: scientists, priests, diplomats, a global agriculture seed repository, a coal mine, and older remnants of coal infrastructure. In both Lebanon and on Svalbard, Manna also reveals traces of Green Revolution industrial agricultural reform. Yet in *Wild Relatives*, seeds and their plant bodies remain central.
_____Manna folds Bekka and Svalbard with precision, transforming a potentially unwieldy set of enmeshed human, more-than-human, and built systems and infrastructures, as well as their partial and ephemeral traces into filmic form. This article highlights the labor of women and young women who appear on screen in moments of physical proximity to and in contact with crop seeds, including grasses and legumes, faba beans, and cereals. Through Manna's filming of the extraction of labor by the unnamed women, we encounter a wide array of built and human infrastructural systems: the minutia of seeds gathered, sorted, and tested by hand, as well as multiscale agricultural operations, and their ties to fossil fuels. *Wild Relatives* allows us to stay close to the seeds as multiple systems vie for their lives. In *Wild Relatives*, the seeds become central figures, as forms and as live beings whose life cycles offer their own kind of folding of space, time, and landscape. Seeds embody links from times ancient to present, and also "carry an obligation to the future" (Sanne 2008), that is, seeds offer repeated nourishment, but in a manner that reminds us how we treat seeds now will have direct bearing on their (and our) futures. I offer continued living with *Wild Relatives*, through times of war in which seeds and their sustenance become increasingly weaponized, withheld, and denied. Moments of connection between seeds and human hands in *Wild Relatives* become a useful tool for dwelling in the more intimate and affective (Lowe 2015), yet no less politically complex and specific scales of

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otherwise vast pathways of colonial, settler-colonial, imperial, and capitalist infrastructures.[3] Though infrastructure itself is not inherently pernicious, it "is the *how* of settler colonialism" (LaDuke / Cowen 2020: 245). Infrastructure, especially in proximity to points of human contact with seeds, also carries the potential for both injustice and resistance (Hurley / Insko 2021: 348). In *Wild Relatives*, seeds become connections revealing feminist infrastructural critique and transformation.

WILD RELATIVES AND SEED MOVEMENTS IN BEKKA _____ The title of Jumana Manna's film – *Wild Relatives* – evokes the so-named wild relatives of the plant world. As key maintainers of biodiversity, wild relatives are plant species that exist in the world, without agricultural interference. They are related to (meaning in the same gene pool as) their domesticated varieties but have not been cultivated. In agriculture, the crossbreeding between favored domesticated crop varieties and their wild relatives is what helps maintain a healthy gene pool and which also helps crops accommodate, as much as possible, to shifting climates and their ongoing breakdowns. Seeds from wild relatives are included in saved collections, yet their continued existence outside of seed banks, seed archives, and seed libraries is what makes wild relatives so highly prized by farmers and the agricultural organizations that both support and control them. Wild relatives grow unincumbered by modifications to their genetic material; they are organisms made robust by surviving, on their own, the extremes of temperature, humidity, and all manner of environmental change. They take full part in living ecosystems. _____ Near the five-minute mark of the film *Wild Relatives*, we, the viewers, are poised to enter the interior of a crop research center outside the Village of Terbol in Lebanon's Bekka Valley, which is operated by the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA). ICARDA, as part of a global network of agricultural research centers titled the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), works to develop and distribute agricultural, water, and environmental solutions (CGIAR 2024; Fadda 1991) to alleviate rural poverty and reduce food insecurity. This includes work on high-yield, climate-resilient crop varieties through plant breeding in open fields. But large-scale agricultural operatives such as ICARDA or the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) both rely on *and* threaten the existence of wild relatives, crop seed diversity, and seed exchange among farmers (Shiva 1993: 23–49; Manna 2017). Biodiversity thrives within a wide and intricate variety of human,

[3]
Each of the above modes also has distinct parameters that this article does not wish to collapse.

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social, and environmental relationships. Networks of large-scale operations supplant difference with decisions over what and how much of what is grown, by whom, when, and how, vastly reducing the available crop gene pool (Shiva 1993: 20).

_____In *Wild Relatives*, inside the ICARDA research center outside of Terbol, in a laboratory space, we witness four young women at work as they sort and prepare for vacuum-sealed storage seeds of the following crops: forages (which include grasses and legumes), faba beans, lathyrus (whose seeds are used for unleavened bread and to feed livestock), as well as the wild relatives of cereals and pulses (which are the edible seeds of legumes) (Sheikh 2018; Manna 2017; Bresciani 2019). As these women sort, weigh, and package the seeds, we also hear a woman's voice on the radio as she reads the day's weather report – the very conditions that plants related to the seeds seen on-screen are experiencing outside the walls of the research center. The scene is like a moving tableau: It is a highly organized setting, and the women use brisk yet calm movements as they pass the seeds between one another. One woman, hands gloved in blue, pinches the edges of a brown paper bag whose top edges are torn, reducing its height, and allowing it to function as more of a bowl. She taps its sides, shakes it, and empties its seed contents into a large green container. We hear each crunch of the bag over the sound of the radio and the rapid and variable percussion of seeds sliding against the paper and plastic containers that they come from and fall into. We hear, too, the sound of the seeds hitting each other. The shifting of containers and seeds continues. A different woman maneuvers seeds between containers with the aid of a small tray, perhaps the lid of a different receptacle. Her hands are not gloved, and her fingers touch the edge of a plastic container, while her other hand transfers the seeds on the tray into a slightly shallower container perched on a nearby scale. The sorting, weighing, and packing continue; these movements happen almost simultaneously in an order of operations not easy to quickly discern.

_____The film then shifts orientation. We now witness the weighing and continued pouring of seeds from above, though still in close proximity to the table surface. It is as if we are watching our own gloved and ungloved hands. The hands on screen skim over a table filled with paper documents. We can tell there is a color-coded system, though there is no way for us to know precisely what that system signifies. There is also a cell phone, charger, and power strip – other quotidian elements of classification, communication, and infrastructure, entities that belong to multiple networks (Star 1991). Feminist, queer, anti-colonial, and Indigenous technoscientific scholarship

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amplifies that such presumably static objects exist along multiple boundaries of nature and culture and are themselves beholden to a full array of different relationships (Liboiron; Tsing; Murphy; LaDuke / Cowen; Akrich 1992). Seeds, too, are objects beholden to multiple uneven webs of human and more-than-human relationships. Their proximity to the quotidian lab materials in this scene reminds us that they, too, are entities that belong to multiple networks. As such, seeds offer a potent location for resisting the pull of any one of the systems in which they are involved (Star 1991: 26–56).

_____We might then consider that seeds, like those in this particular scene in *Wild Relatives*, offer positions from which one could question the entirety of the operations surrounding them. The seeds in *Wild Relatives* offer an entry into the large seed-vaulting process to which they are tethered: into questions of never-neutral scientific categories and standards, hidden ethics, and politics of large-scale agricultural operations, and who benefits from them (Star / Bowker 1999). The motions of close work with the seeds we see on screen are part of the human infrastructure of such systems.[4] As the women sort and package the seeds and eventually vacuum-seal them by machine, not a single seed goes astray. Their movements clue the viewer into how closely monitored, and how precious, this seed collection is. Its contents are linked to the earliest agricultural communities spanning the eastern Mediterranean basin along the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers to the Persian Gulf. The seeds, under Manna's careful eye, are the protagonists in this film. We watch as they traverse lab spaces, cold storage, and transform into crops in fields – where they become forms that produce the next generation of seeds to enter this cycle.

SEED PERAMBULATIONS BETWEEN BEKKA AND THE ARCTIC _____The indoor seed-sorting sequence in Jumana Manna's *Wild Relatives* is not the only moment when human hands and seeds come into close contact. Throughout the film, this degree of proximity to the seeds at the level of touch only happens in moments of women's work. These scenes also form a pattern: they precede scenes that include institutional, religious, and scientific leaders. They suture together and occur between wide landscape views of the Bekka Valley and the Arctic. Unlike in these scenes, Manna's voice-over goes silent when the women work closely with the seeds. They labor in the nearby shade of the ICARDA complex walls and bushes, separating seed from wheat stalks with what appears to be a small, mechanized thrasher and then sift through the seed by hand using grates placed over wooden boards. In adjacent research fields, women

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disappear in and out of a sea of wheat during harvest time; they wear gloves with thumb and pointer finger removed to hold tweezers and meticulously cross-pollinate plants adjacent to the wheat fields **[fig. 2]**.

_____Women and young women also ward off pests by grasping the neck of inverted plastic bottles filled with rocks and shaking them while simultaneously blowing whistles. Manna also includes moments that escape the various tasks at hand: a pause to light a cigarette, a miffed look toward the bottle-rattlers and whistle-blowers who have disturbed a moment of fine tweezer work. These everyday actions sit within the intricate operations of ICARDA. They are also all quotidian "enactments of embodied practice" (Taylor 2003: 274). ICARDA is dependent on the movements and bodily gestures of its workers, yet this level of action escapes full legibility by the system.

_____We encounter this particular set of workers at ICARDA in Lebanon, but we learn from Manna's voice-over that the young women and many other workers at this particular ICARDA center outside of Terbol have been displaced from Syria (Manna 2017; Sheikh 2018). The globally significant collection of crop seeds we encounter in _Wild Relatives_ in Lebanon has also survived multiple displacements. ICARDA initially established its headquarters in Lebanon in 1976. After one year, due to Lebanon's then-widening civil war, the center relocated to Tel Hadya, roughly twenty-five miles outside of Aleppo in Syria (Manna 2017: 49; Fadda 1991). There, operations continued from 1977 to 2015. Damage to Tel Hadya in 2012 during the civil war initiated a redistribution of staff members and large portions of the seed collection to Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Turkey. Research operations at Tel Hadya, and its lengthy seed redistribution process, were able to continue until 2015. So-called rebel forces protected Tel Hadya in exchange for food from the center (Badr 2014).

_____The seed, staff, and worker displacements we encounter in _Wild Relatives_ also involve hemispheric border crossings. The seed collection was moved from Syria to Lebanon via the high Arctic, with the use of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault. The vault lies just outside the Norwegian settlement on the Svalbard archipelago – itself roughly midway between the North Pole and

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mainland Norway.[5] The Svalbard Global Seed Vault, by way of Norwegian public art policy, also includes an artwork: Dyveke Sanne's *Perpetual Repercussion* (2008) – an installation of fiber-optic lighting cables, refracting glass, and reflecting mirror fragments.[6] The daily operations of the vault are governed by the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Nordic Gene Resource Center (NorGen), and the Global Crop Diversity Trust (Crop Trust), with guidance from an international council of advisors. ICARDA began shipments to Svalbard in 2012, and in 2014, began to redistribute portions of the seed collection from Svalbard to Lebanon and Morrocco, where the seeds are grown in research fields such as those outside of Terbol that we see in *Wild Relatives*. This process of seed redistribution via Svalbard also allows the seeds to be copied – grown into plants whose seeds can in turn be collected to replace the seeds used with their next generation. These copies are then returned to Svalbard for cold storage, thereby safeguarding a "backup" collection of regionally (and increasingly globally) significant genetic material that can be used as needed (see **fig. 3** for a portion of ICARDA's holdings).

_____ The seeds vaulted on Svalbard are, however, only copies of a formerly abundant diversity of crops.[7] The vault, as well as ICARDA, CIGAR, and related international organizations, attempt to safeguard vast biodiversity previously insured through agrarian societies. Their operations nevertheless contain traces of the twentieth-century so-called Green Revolution of industrialized agriculture that has decimated global biodiversity. The Green Revolution was a project to end hunger worldwide by way of developing high-yield plant varieties, ensuring their success with specialized pesticides, and tying participating countries into market-based (rather than agrarian) economies (Shiva 1993, 2012; Manna 2017; Bresciani 2018; Sheikh 2018). ICARDA "develops" and "distributes" agricultural, water, and environmental "solutions"; these terms echo those of technology transfer, or the movement of knowledge, innovations, and intellectual property rights between organizations or people, or from one organization to many others.[8] Green Revolution ideals rely on decisions made for many resting in the hands of a few.

// Figure 3
Jumana Manna, *Wild Relatives*, 2018 (still), HD video with sound, 63 minutes 55 seconds © Jumana Manna, courtesy of the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London

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The circulation of seeds in *Wild Relatives* depicts a routine way the Svalbard Global Seed Vault was designed to function: seeds are stored, and can be retrieved and replaced as needed. Yet until the relocation of the collection from Syria to Svalbard to Lebanon and Morrocco, the vault had only publicly functioned as a receptacle, a collecting point – accumulating seeds from across the globe, since 2008 (and for decades prior from only the Nordic countries). The use of the vault to not only collect seeds and keep them dormant at a stable negative-eighteen-degrees Celsius, but to open the vault to redistribute select so-called accessions (seeds) from its backup archive was framed as a massive surprise by scientists, journalists, and researchers alike: nuclear war and the complete melting of Arctic permafrost being no longer the only publicly imagined events that would trigger the opening of this so-called "doomsday" vault. And even at this moment, of opening the vault to assist in redistributing ICARDA's seeds, this supposed shock was immediately framed by these same parties as an anomaly, an assurance that doomsday is not yet here.[9]

Yet Jumana Mana's *Wild Relatives* crafts a cinematic space that does not simply illustrate the spectacular route of the seeds. We instead remain as close to the seeds as possible and see who exactly circles in close proximity in the multi-locational efforts to duplicate the seeds moved to Lebanon. We enter the process mid-cycle, with seeds only briefly stored on Svalbard already growing in ICARDA's research fields outside of Terbol. Manna's consistent proximity to the seeds also helps dispel an understanding of the distance between the vault and Lebanon by vast geographic distance alone. Such a representation would indeed be incompatible with recent understanding of the deeply interconnected web of activity related to the Syrian Revolution and subsequent civil war. Conflicts involving "foreign" actors acting not at great distance, but at very complex and proximate entanglements (Martínez 2019), which have also massively displaced agricultural families and workers (Sajadian 2022). The process of replicating ICARDA's collection will continue for at least the next ten years.

I do not wish to critique the intentions behind the operations of the vault, but I do want to recognize how it maintains a seed collection caught in perpetual cycles of displacement. In *Wild Relatives*, seeds temporarily dormant on Svalbard awaken in soil via the hand-labor of young women whose lives have also been violently reconfigured – all in the name of progress. Notions of progress also violently disavow "women's seed and food knowledge" (Shiva 2009: 17) among so many gendered, raced, classed, and sexed violences.

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WHERE HANDS AND SEEDS MEET: SEED GESTURES _____ Seemingly unwieldy, impermeable systems of global order might begin to look different if we allow *Wild Relatives* to also become a way of engaging with more amorphous and ephemeral waves of infrastructural relationships. Connections built of human and more-than-human relationships – those of moments where seeds and human hands actually meet. I would like to refer to these physical, fleeting junctures of human and seed movements as "seed gestures," while also acknowledging that this term names only one of many relationships in which these seeds exist – only one of many ways that human, mechanic, bureaucratic, imaginative actions are taken that involve the seeds in question. If we view *Wild Relatives* in terms of its included seed gestures, then they are what initiate moments when landscapes fold. Seed gestures offer a structure more supple and buoyant that is usually attributed to more static and untactile understandings of infrastructure.

_____ In *Wild Relatives*, we never view the seeds out of reach of those working most closely with them. It seems crucial that the moments linking scenes across vast geographic distances are not abstracted aerial views but are instead representations of the seed gestures themselves. A focus on seed gestures helps hold central one of Manna's guiding questions: In whose hands are the seeds today? Or, as posed at the conclusion of *Wild Relatives*: "After us, who would water the grapevines? Who would fill the baskets?" These lyrics from the Lebanese pop song *Baadana* ("After Us"), sung by Aida Chalhoub, plays at the close of *Wild Relatives* (Terracciano 2023: 12), supplanting the refrain of a low, beating drone of sound that initiates the film and which returns at moments to haunt.[10] *Baadana* plays when two young women working in ICARDA's wheat fields play with the rhythm created by shaking the bottles filled with rocks to ward off pests. They catch each other's attention and come together to dance a version of the *Dabke* – a Levantine folk dance of syncopated footwork whose participants link hands or arms, for any occasion of celebration, resistance, solidarity, or all of the above (Rowe 2010; Mills 2016). Does the future designed by the vault include these young women? And the seed's other daily attendants?

_____ This article considers each movement, each seed gesture, as part of an infrastructure of seed labor. An infrastructure of seed gestures, then, becomes an embodied and ephemeral chain of movements that relate to the seeds in question, yet also always diverge from them. The human body always simultaneously juggles many movements, thoughts, desires, automatic and semi-automatic processes. A seed gesture is an ephemeral link within a web of

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movements and gestures. Recall the scene of seed-sorting: Each woman simultaneously enacted portions of multiple movement tasks, demonstrating the ability of the body to calmy live with dizzying simultaneity, while withholding its thoughts from the viewer. Perhaps this kind of a haze could supplant settler atmospherics.

⎯⎯⎯ Seed gestures in *Wild Relatives* (2018) occupy significantly less screen time than in Manna's more recent film *Foragers* (2022).[11] Seed gestures nevertheless fuel the folding landscapes of *Wild Relatives* and stitch together the film in its entirety. So, what obstacles exist to recognizing seed gestures in this particular film?

SEED GESTURES IN A FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE WITH AN ENGINE OF COAL ⎯⎯⎯ Seed gestures in *Wild Relatives* share screentime with a powerful entity: the history of coal mining on Svalbard, with which Manna confronts us before any seed gestures enter the film. Yet it is also in the opening sequence of coal mining in *Wild Relatives* that we are trained to attend to movement and gesture in ways that prepare us to encounter seed gestures throughout the film.

⎯⎯⎯ We enter *Wild Relatives* by following Manna deep into the steely-gray underworld of the one remaining active coal mine on Svalbard (of a previous seven). This is "Mine 7," which lies along the same fjord as the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, west of Longyearbyen, the Norwegian settlement on Svalbard.[12] In 2021, the Longyearbyen *Lokalstyre* (Local Council) approved a transition from coal to diesel originally set for late 2023, as an interim solution while developing renewable energy systems to implement by 2030 (by about when the full replacement of the backup seed copies relocated from Aleppo is expected).[13] The expiration date of coal on Svalbard was then postponed to 2025, due to European and Nordic energy issues associated with the war in Ukraine (Dell'Orto 2023; The Local 2023). So, although in *Wild Relatives*, we are deep within Mine 7, it is presented as the ur-space of the seed vault itself, which we do not visually enter in *Wild Relatives* until after we first travel to Bekka. The vault itself occupies the space of one of the formerly operating coal mines.

⎯⎯⎯ Deep within Mine 7, we are confronted with an orchestrated soundscape of pounding, repetitive low tones that pulse and vibrate deeply, raising and lowering in tone that can be felt in the body. We become surrounded by the epitome of the targeted removal of minerals or materials from the earth: natural resource extraction. From our first views within the mine, Manna primes us as witnesses to detect many speeds of motion: Eerie whistling wind sends soft clouds of particle dust across a pile of coal remnants that nearly

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fill the screen, its size impossible to discern in relation to a wash of steely gray surrounding rock, tones of deep purple and light yellow barely discernable. We traverse the uneven tunnel deep into the mine in a nauseating car ride. We face a cast of machines navigating shallow space; their headlights and the headlamps of workers monitoring their progress provide some of the only

lighting in this setting. For one extended moment, we are brought uncomfortably close to the unsettling whirring of mechanical "continuous miners" – machines whose sharply-toothed circular faces devour the mine wall with enough force to rattle the machine itself while generating wind that visually affects the clothing of the nearby worker. We learn to attend to constant motion. Even a static view of one of the mine rock walls is set into motion under a kaleidoscopic display of ever-shifting light created by the constant movement of workers wearing headlamps, and, presumably, the film crew.

_____ From the mine we suddenly re-emerge and take in a blinding sun against a clear sky. And then encounter a sea of wavering young wheat plants, verdant and gently swaying to a breeze reaching their upper stalks, while we (the camera) are placed beneath their topmost reaches, nestled into their collective forest **[fig. 4]**.

_____ This strange, tri-partite movement, from growing mine shaft to light, to young, still verdant wheat, offers a striking inversion of an expected plant diagram (soil, roots, stalks, tips), in which soil has been replaced with a mined void (the surrounding permafrost that helps keep the vault cool is left out). This is the only scene of active coal mining in the film, yet it is crucial for how we approach seed gestures.

_____ Extraction, or the targeted removal of certain elements, minerals, materials, or wealth from land and people, can take many forms. Various spaces and processes are beholden to extraction as an ideological position and a process – one that seeks full site conversion (and all life and matter therein) into profit for colonial capitalist enterprises (Gómez-Barris 2017), which are themselves beholden to raced, sexed, gendered, and classed "carceral geographies of empire" (Gilmore 2019). Ways of conducting research, whether scientific or otherwise (whether the whaling industries and scientific exploration on Svalbard which preceded its mining

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operations, or my own academic training) are also not exempt from extractive tendencies (Liboiron 2021). And there is much about amassing a global collection of crop seeds that could be said to be extractive in its own right – a separating of seeds from the people who have lived with them, and from a more open exchange of seeds among farmers. From conditions supporting self-reproduction, and robust biodiversity insured by the proximity of forests to fields (Shiva 2011, Shiva 1993: 27–39). There is also the extraction of labor from the young, mostly female Syrian refugees who carry out ICARDA's field labor in Bekka. This could be an opportunity to further explore the relationship between the seeds and this subset of workers as engaged in carceral capitalist and neoliberal logics, or, in conversation with ecofeminist scholar Jennifer James, as also embroiled in the idea of an abolitionist ecology (James 2023). From the clear delineation of land as a mine space, to its reincarnation as a tightly sealed vault space, to evenly marked and highly controlled field and lab spaces, there is much about the stark, geometrically rendered settings of *Wild Relatives* that reflect the continued presence of colonial understandings and uses of land: driven by the will to select, control, and sever from existing, robust and varied relationships to the environment (Liboiron 2021). The undertow of the many faces of extractive processes in *Wild Relatives* is potent.

_____ How Antwerp-based Nigerian artist Otobong Nkanga and U.S. writer, artist, and activist A. Laurie Palmer each research sites of prior and current mineral and material extraction also deeply guides my thinking about gesture in *Wild Relatives*.[14] Nkanga and Palmer include the human form and experience in their metrics of research: both that of their own as well as those of others they encounter on-site and in their travel preparations. Each artist also offers representative strategies for understanding where and when moments are and are not connected to the ongoing engine of extractive processes.[15] Manna's physical presence in Mine 7 on Svalbard affords us, as witness-viewers, proximity to active coal mining, just as her presence in Bekka permits our close viewing of seed gestures. *Wild Relatives* thereby links the location and velocity of a churning, active "underworld of movement" (Ballestero 2024) to the gestures inherent to cycles of seed-saving, sorting, planting, pollinating, harvesting, and testing that we also witness on-screen.[16] Manna exhibits a full range of movements associated with the vault while the language of seed gestures serves to herald further investigation into the many live, never-fully subjugated portions of movement witnessed on-screen; her careful direction ensures seed gestures are not overburdened, flattened, or entirely subsumed by the visual and sonic undertow of extraction in the film.

14)
I also further attend to the work of Nkanga and Palmer in my dissertation chapter.

15)
For example, their work also keeps extracted material present as itself, as earthly material in its own right with its own physical and temporal properties (Nkanga 2015: 149, 168; Nkanga 2017).

16)
Though Ballestero here references the movement of underground water and not coal mining, her work promotes applying an imaginary of the subsurface as a lively place to decisions made about natural resources and their management.

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CONCLUSION: EMERGENT GESTURES _____ *Wild Relatives* opens the mechanics of one operation of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault to closer examination. Seed gestures emanate from scenes of women's labor, drive the folding of seemingly far-off landscapes and their histories, and transform the eerie and disorienting drama of the opening coal mine sequence into a final sequence of percussive dance. The experience of shared space and time among Manna, her collaborators, and worker-subjects also exists outside of the metrics of extracted seeds and labor beholden to state, international, and global-level operators.

_____ The medium of film offers a linear temporal experience of a sequence of fractured moments; seed gestures in *Wild Relatives* become embroiled in the movement of a particular segment of living agricultural heritage between Lebanon and Svalbard. We might describe the film screen as offering Manna a way to mediate the actions and choices of seed gestures; these movements extend toward us, caught in a contradictory pull between what art and film historian Kris Paulsen describes as "being here and being there" – a multidirectional tension that resists a unidirectional mode of viewership (Paulsen 2017). A model encompassing a plurality of representational relationships and modes also crucially differs from the unidirectional movement of extraction, a process of severing certain material or matter from its surroundings by all means possible (Gómez-Barris 2017; Palmer 2014; Nkanga 2015).

_____ And perhaps in the initial seed sorting sequence, and with other seed gestures in *Wild Relatives*, we are also witnessing a kind of folding. Not only of the locations preceding and following this particular sequence, or of encounters with previous histories of locations and seeds, but, too, in the moments just prior to the seeds becoming vacuum-sealed, movement of shared air exchange among the women at work, the seeds, and the filmmakers. Immersed in ephemeral cycles of breath, attention, gestures, growth, dormancy, and movement, perhaps in seed gestures we have the ingredients for something emergent – laden with the potential to fuel what adrienne maree brown names as "emergent strategy": "plans of action, personal practices and collective organizing tools that account for constant change and rely on the strength of relationship for adaptation" (brown 2017: 23).[17] Works of art set in conversation with our planet's only global seed vault, all tethered to seeds which are themselves forms that mutate, grow, and change, demand thinking with emergence and relationship (yesterday, today, and tomorrow).

_____ Are we currently witnessing events that will again endanger and forcibly displace the seeds and workers currently outside Terbol?

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While 1938, 2023–24, and times ancient and coming, continue to fold into the present, seed gestures offer one metric by which tethers to settling and colonizing systems are exposed as neither strong nor flexible enough to endure critique or to extinguish transnational feminist solidarity.

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// About the Author

Lilah Leopold is currently a Ph.D. Candidate in Art History in the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her dissertation, *Agricultural Futurism: Seed Gestures and Art Now*, analyzes how select works by three contemporary artists, Jumana Manna (Palestine), Monique Verdin (Houma), and Sara Siestreem (Hanis Coos), include food crops, seeds, and plant matter to imagine and enact futures that exist beyond settler-colonial conceptions of land use. Lilah's work has been supported by the Humanities Research Institute and Graduate College at the University of Illinois and the Kate Neal Kinley Memorial Fellowship.

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

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*

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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,

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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).
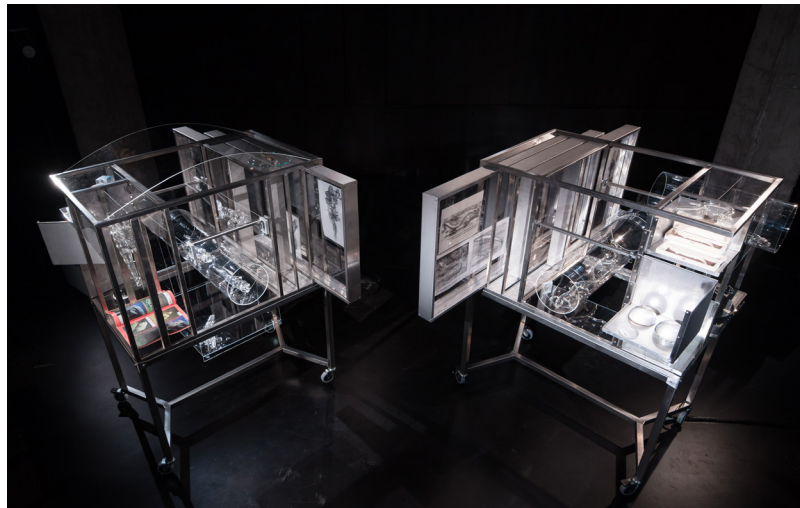
⸻ The projects under consideration develop a unique approach that can be defined by a posthuman feminist understanding of concepts such as figuration. Astrida Neimanis proposes understanding figurations in a similar way to Haraway and Braidotti, namely as *embodied concepts* (2017: 5). They are not a 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

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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.: *philéō*) 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

// 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.**

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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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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

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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).

// 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.

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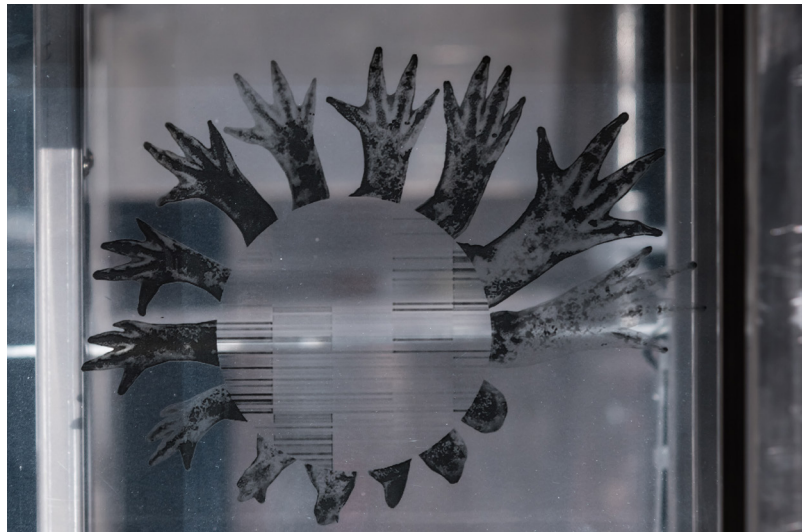
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to enable the restoration of the natural environment – including the aquatic environment with the need to maintain and repair massive hydrological infrastructures – by using both material and symbolic means to sensitize the public with an urgent call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

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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/

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NOURISHMENT: CERAMICS AND THE DOMESTIC INSTITUTION IN PUERTO RICO

ABSTRACT ـــــــ As part of the curatorial process for the project *La materialización de lo doméstico-corporal* (The Materialization of the Bodily-Domestic), the author researched contemporary ceramics made by women in Puerto Rico, especially the ones that center around the subject of domestic labor, care, and nourishment. The product was an exhibition presented between November and December 2022 in the Art Gallery at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez Campus. This article presents the findings of the investigation made as part of the curatorial steps. In Puerto Rico, domestic labor exists in a liminal space between modern and non-modern and women ceramists have developed a body of work that, when analyzed together, provokes conversations about the home as a feminist collectivist space, but also as a place where we must survive disaster. The artwork of female creators that deal with the subject of domestic space and is made with clay—a medium associated with care and reproduction—give a central role to the making process, merging form with content. With this paper, I propose a reading of the work of Puerto Rican contemporary artists Alice Chéveres, Zuania Minier, Andrea Pérez, Dhara Rivera, Elizabeth Robles, and Daniela Roselló to explore how, using clay, they address the act of "feeding" others, as mothers and women—as a metaphor for care work—and its relationship with the land. These artworks link body and domestic space by questioning the Colonial/Modern Gender System and the contradictions between non-modern feminized knowledge and the imposition of a colonial modernity. The habitable space—both body and home—is pondered as a feminist space that is the stage for oppression and violence, but also the setting for creation and conspiracy.

NOURISHMENT: CERAMICS AND THE DOMESTIC INSTITUTION IN PUERTO RICO

ـــــــ Ceramic relates to women's bodies both metaphorically and physically. Its primary material, soil, is also a provider of food. This is why, in poetry, fiction, and the visual arts, the feminized being is often related to the earth (Quiñones Otal 2022): both provide nutrition and life.[1] As part of the curatorial process for the project *La materialización de lo doméstico-corporal* (The Materialization of the Bodily-Domestic), the author researched contemporary ceramics made by women in Puerto Rico, especially the ones that center around the subject of domestic labor,

[1]
However, this link must also be questioned because it equates women with nature and men with culture and establishes a human-nature association that has been used to divide humanity into racial groups. The latter considers white bodies—especially male ones—as reasoning and civilized and, therefore, in control of nature and non-white bodies as part of nature.

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care, and nourishment. The product was an exhibition presented between November and December 2022 in the Art Gallery at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez Campus. This article presents the findings of the investigation made as part of the curatorial steps. The works that will be studied in this essay establish a link between the body and the domestic space based on a questioning of the modern/colonial gender system (Lugones 2007) and the dialectic relationship between non-modern feminized knowledge and the imposition of a colonial modernity. In that sense, both the domestic space, as the locus of care and feminized labor, and the body as the provider, are considered "infrastructures" that work within and against the patriarchal gendered colonial way of defining labor and its exploits. With this essay I intend to analyze how Puerto Rican female-identified ceramists approach the domestic with their creations, generating objects that explore how women connect our bodies with the spaces we inhabit, and the labor linked to it.

_____ The proposal of a modern/colonial gender system is made by María Lugones in articles published between 2007 and 2010. Her approach to the idea of gender in the colonial system is a response to Aníbal Quijano's article "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" where he establishes his views of gender in the colonial system as a dispute over "sex, its resources and products" (2001: 97) as related to racial relationships and a dispute that occurs only between men. Thus, Lugones argues,

> Quijano appears to take for granted that the dispute over control of sex is a dispute among men, about men's control of resources which are thought to be female. Men do not seem understood as the resources in sexual encounters. Women are not thought to be disputing for control over sexual access. The differences are thought of in terms of how a society reads reproductive biology (2007: 194).

_____ Using this debate as the basis, Lugones establishes that gender in societies that have been subjected to the coloniality of power is not a simple line of power from men to women, but a complex system in which racialized (non-white) females are categorized as human or not human depending on the needs of capitalism and enslavers. "[...] heterosexual rape of Indian [sic.] or African slave women coexisted with concubinage, as well as with the imposition of the heterosexual understanding of gender relations among the colonized—when and as it suited global, Eurocentered capitalism, and heterosexual domination of white women" (2007: 203). But, as

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Oyèrónké̩ Oyewùmí has presented, gender is a colonial imposition and female subjects were not defined as inferior to males until the invasions of European civilizations in the Americas and Africa. So, the modern/colonial gender system is one where "Colonized females got the inferior status of gendering as women, without any of the privileges accompanying that status for white bourgeois women" (2007: 203). In an important quote, Lugones also lets us know the conditions of white women in comparison to those which native women enjoyed before colonization to further understand the implementation of the modern/colonial gender system as part of the coloniality of power: "the stories Oyewùmí and [Paula Gunn] Allen have presented should make clear to white bourgeois women that their status is much inferior to that of Native American or Yoruba women before colonization" (2007: 203).

_____ By the 1970s, white Marxist feminists were already analyzing the role of domestic labor in the production of value and capital (Federici 2012: 16). They argued that women's roles at home are essential to maintaining and reproducing the labor force and, therefore, the stability of the capitalist system (Safa 1975: 377). This premise is true, however, it is only true for societies in which a European modernity rose up, or where forms of production have been transferred from Western culture, as in the case of some communities in Latin America. The analysis of white feminists from the 1970s cannot be transferred to non-modern societies (Aparicio / Blaser 2015: 107). This would imply that domestic work in non-modern groups is established with a distinction between nature and culture (Latour 2007: 148), when it is not the case.

_____ The capitalist system in Puerto Rico has developed since the intrusion of Spain, with characteristics that have been mutating according to the needs of the European or North American empires that invaded the country. Puerto Rico was one of the territories where, since 1517, the first forms of enslavement related to racial policies were implemented (Baralt 1981: 13) and, where the raw materials that built European capitalism and industrialization were extracted. It has also been a territory for industrial production throughout the twentieth century.

_____ For these reasons, the work of Puerto Rican women cannot be excluded from capitalist development. Since the invasion, there has been capital production based on women's labor. However, since the fifteenth century, throughout the Caribbean, there has been resistance to the exploitation and imposition of a modernity (Rodríguez López 2011) that did nothing but segregate and rape our peoples. Care work—which has been associated with what is

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understood in the West as "women," even before the imposition of the colonial project[2] (Saidi 2020)—faced the assignment to gender with the European invasion (Oyěwùmí 1997) and a movement from the outside to the inside (Segato 2019: 30) and from the communal to the individual. This has been exacerbated by the subsequent liberal and neoliberal trends experienced in this archipelago, as well as in other territories of Abya Yala (Bonilla 2004).

　　　But, just as there was resistance to the invasion, colonial ways of doing—including the individualization of care—are still being challenged (Marisol Plard Narváez). In impoverished areas of Puerto Rico, especially urban ones, food continues to be collectivized in certain situations. And, when faced with moments of crisis, the most humane practices of cooperation resurface.[3] This resistance has created pockets in which a non-modern domesticity has developed. Even so, colonial discourse racialized Puerto Ricans and placed us in non-modern categories, so the distinction only applies to some ways of doing, including the domestic. For these reasons, in Puerto Rico, family service labor must be analyzed as a generator of capitalist wealth, but also as a non-exploitative economy where the reproduction of humanity is a necessity.

　　　Humans must survive and to do so we need food. Women, in any type of society, have historically assumed the most important tasks required for the multiplication and physical maintenance of each individual. Although the domestic space has not existed throughout human history, it is largely the place where the labor of procreation and subsistence of humanity is carried out. Feminized artists from around the world are the ones who have made most of the utensils necessary for care and feeding, because they are the creators of the home and work in it. Just to present an example, Lawrence Waldron suggests that in both Taino and Salaloid societies, women formed an important part of the ceramic producers (2011: 6).[4] Likewise, from a conceptual point of view, female artists are the ones who think about domestic spaces and construct narratives about their situation within them. Ceramics have been amongst the most used mediums in this context, due to the availability of materials and their importance in the production of kitchen tools.

　　　In Puerto Rico, the house is a refuge for women and, at the same time, a space of instability. This is due to tropical conditions, impoverishment, and gender-based violence.[5] It is also the place where we must carry out tasks imposed by patriarchy and where we have our own space to think, create, conspire, and feel comfort. From these numerous points of view, artists Alice Chéveres, Zuania Minier, Andrea Pérez Caballero, Dhara Rivera, Elizabeth Robles,

[2)]
This does not mean that people who were designated as women after the development of the colonial project were subordinated, and their jobs conceived as inferior before the European invasions (Oyěwùmí 1997: 9–10).

[3)]
Examples of these are the Mutual Support Centers or the Solidarity Brigades that emerged after the passage of Hurricane María through Puerto Rico and continue to be active organizing soup kitchens around the archipelago, proving to be essential after the earthquakes of 2020 and the passage of Hurricane Fiona in 2022.

[4)]
Archeologist Miguel Rodríguez-López has also suggested it in comments during lectures attended by the author.

[5)]
One of the highest in Latin America (OIGALC 2021) (Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico 2022: 2).

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and Daniela Roselló examine our relationships with the concept of home. Their artworks speak to us about sustenance, by linking the feminized body with domesticity and ceramics. They speak about the imaginary, especially the creation of myth around the relationship between women's anatomy as the first provider of food and the representation of nourishment.

_____ The six artists explore the connection between body and home—as inhabitable space—through the performativity of their works. In 2022 Elizabeth Robles created *Danzando con las Abejas* (*Dancing with the Bees*), a piece of performance art produced around the artwork *Panal de espirales* (*Honeycomb of Spirals*, 2020) **[fig. 1]**, by the same artist. The second one is an assemblage that contains ceramic mounds surrounded by honey. For *Dancing with the Bees*, Robles served honey to the public in 3 x 2-inch, unpainted ceramic containers that look like a vulva or a flower **[fig. 2]**. The act of licking honey from them makes audience participation an important part of the work. In *Ocupar(se)* [6] (2022), Andrea Pérez Caballero works with the body as well, interchanging performance and clay, as she does in most of her artwork. *Ocupar(se)* is a video performance in which the body of the artist moves up and down, putting effort into her arms, shoulders, and back, imitating the movement made when kneading clay to create ceramics.

_____ *Honeycomb of Spirals* is made up of five ceramic mounds surrounded by honey that suggest the women's breasts from which food emanates and, also, a landscape essential for agriculture. The artist painted the protruding and rounded pieces with minerals and fired the pieces several times to achieve a shiny black surface. The mounds lay on a plastic tray—filled with honey—that rests on a table. Between the shine of the enamel and the honey, the artwork is reflective.

_____ When looking at *Honeycomb of Spirals* we can think of a landscape, suggested by the mounds of earth above a reflecting lake. This connects the piece with the Puerto Rican tradition of landscape painting and Indigenous inspired ceramic sculpture (Hermandad de Artistas Plásticos de Puerto Rico 1998: 78–89, 290–314). In that sense, Elizabeth Robles uses a language known in Puerto Rico, but delves into contemporary subjects, beyond the beauty of Puerto Rican land or an ode to the ancestral. The artist presents us with a landscape linked to food security and provokes conversations about the source of sustenance and the relationships between production and consumption. Honey is confused with the brightness of the mountains and seems to emanate from them, as the ceramic bowls we use to eat and the plants—that heal us and

// Figure 1
Elizabeth Robles, *Panal de espirales (Honeycomb of Spirals)* (detail), 2020, assemblage-sculpture, ceramic, honey, plastic tray, table, © Elizabeth Robles)
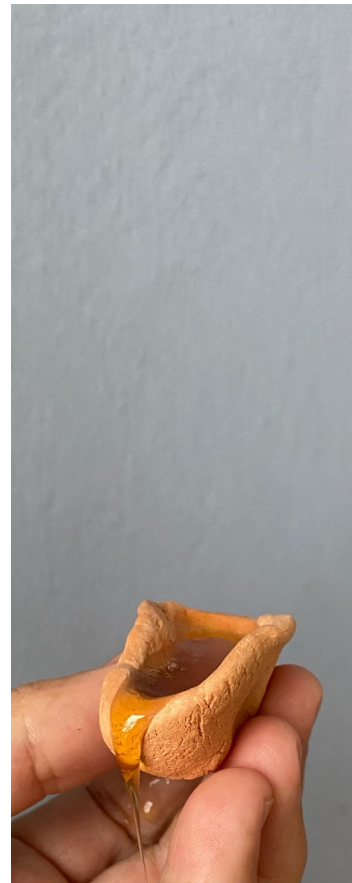
// Figure 2
Elizabeth Robles, unpainted ceramic container where honey was served *for Dancing with the Bees*, 2022, table, © Elizabeth Robles

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provide us with food, shade, and oxygen—emanate from the earth. This also suggests breasts from where milk flows, thus, equating a woman's body with the earth.

_____ The conceptual proposal of *Honeycomb of Spirals* is supported by the piece that accompanies it: *Dancing with the Bees*. It is through the latter that we can understand how Robles conceives the act of breastfeeding or nurturing as one of love and affecti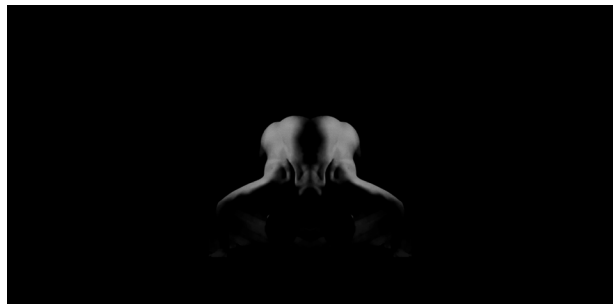on between humans. The action of serving honey to the public, directly from the tray, created a connection between the artist and her audience through their interaction, reminiscent of that of a mother and her child. It is the act most closely linked to the domestic space, that of feeding and being fed. For the action the artist carried out each homely task: She created the bowls to serve the honey, sewed a white apron, put it on, served the honey, and gave it to anyone willing to take it. The artwork not only reproduces a daily domestic exercise metaphorically, but also recreates the action of communal feeding, playing with the idea that, although neoliberal individualism prevails in the Puerto Rican way of doing things, we resist following non-modern trends.

_____ In *Ocupar(se)* **[fig. 3]**, by Andrea Pérez Caballero, the modeling medium becomes an abstract and conceptual element. The action of kneading clay and creating ceramic objects with it is as domestic and feminized as the act of nurturing itself. Working the raw material is an invisible labor, since the person who uses the object only sees the finished piece. What more direct metaphor can exist for women's daily labor than that of a body performing an invisible task that serves as the basis for the reproduction of humanity?

// Figure 3
Andrea Pérez Caballero, *Ocupar(se)* (detail), 2023, video, © Andrea Pérez Caballero)

_____ The way Andrea Pérez Caballero kneads recreates this invisibility. *Ocupar(se)* is a video performance in which the artist moves her torso and arms forward and backward, up and down, imitating the movement made when kneading. However, there is no visible clay. The body we observe is naked; we can barely decipher a space or backdrop because there is little light. The public can associate each of the symbols with the act of putting domestic labor aside, not taking it into account, pretending that it was not done. However, we cannot deny that physical pain and effort are present because it is the only matter we can see clearly in *Ocupar(se)*.

_____ According to Federici—and any woman could have said it before—the concealment of family service work is a strategy of capitalism for the reproduction of tasks that, even today, are not

paid (2012: 18). "To say that we want wages for housework is to expose the fact that housework is already money for capital, that capital has made and makes money out of our cooking, smiling, fucking" (Federici 2012: 19). In *Ocupar(se)* Andrea's body works and works. It cooks, smiles, and fucks. Creates. It produces ceramics, kneads clay, feeds, nourishes, since each bowl, each amphora, and each pot serve to feed, to sustain.

_____ In addition to the palpable and indispensable performativity of the pieces by Elizabeth Robles and Andrea Pérez Caballero, the Puerto Rican artists who explore the domestic space through ceramics make us question the security proceeding from the image of the home. They do so with works in which the creation process is important too. In *La purga: sin parangón* (*The Purge: Unparalleled*, 2013–2019), Zuania Minier presents an effigy of the Virgin Mary, a three-dimensional figure that is part of the daily scene of a Puerto Rican home. She does so in an irreverent way, playing with the concept of the religious surveillance of bodies. On the other hand, with *Fachadas* (*Facades*, 2017) Daniela Roselló Ledesma displays an uninhabited and destroyed landscape that provokes dialogues about the instability of the tropical territory and gender-based violence in Puerto Rican homes. In both cases, the artists make use of broken ceramics, a cathartic action that invites the public to think about oppression and resistance.

_____ Minier's *The Purge: Unparalleled* **[fig. 4]** departs from the traditional statues of the Virgin Mary usually made in plaster and acquired in garden stores, or religious figurines that are placed on home altars. These sculptures have decorative or worship purposes, or even announce to visitors and neighbors that in said residence the virgin has spiritual preeminence. Traditionally, they come in one of two postures: those with their arms folded and hands joined together on the chest—in an attitude of prayer—and those with their arms lowered but slightly separated from the rest of the body at the bottom and with the palms of the hands in the direction of the person looking, welcoming the viewer. Minier imitates each of these poses, which create meaning around the different traditional views that Latin Americans make of the virgin as a Judeo-Christian society where Catholicism dominates.

_____ However, the figures in Zuania's work do not reproduce our traditionalist gaze, but rather reverse it, tarnish it, punch it, and destroy it. Each of the figures of the Virgin Mary—or inspired by

// **Figure 4**
Zuania Minier, *La purga: sin parangón (The Purge: Unparalleled)* (detail), 2013-2019, clay, ceramic pigments, wood, © Zuania Minier

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her—in *The Purge: Unparalleled* lacks a head (or face), hands, and feet. In the traditional, homely statuettes these anatomical elements are the only ones visible; the rest of the body is *hidden* below a mantle. Then, in Minier's creation, the Virgin Mary is not there; her body does not exist under the mantle that is supposed to cover it. However, the clothing *covers* the silhouette of the body, in the same shape as it would have been if it was inside the mantle. In each of the sculptures there are notable characteristics that make us question the imposition of an ideology associated with the Virgin Mary in Latin America, especially on the anatomy of women. All are created with an immaculate white, except for one of the figures that has a gold detail. From left to right we see how the surfaces mutate to generate doubts. The first features traditional elements and a smooth surface. In the second one we already observe damage on the surface, like the plaster sculptures on the front lawns of Puerto Rican houses, affected by high temperatures and humidity. Further on, spectators can see very small figurines and images that allude to the Virgin of Guadalupe, with a mandorla, golden heart, and flowers under her feet. The last images in *The Purge: Unparalleled* present a figure that turns her back to the audience, a broken figurine inside a wooden niche—as if it had fallen to the ground and had been placed again in its original location—and a third sculpture that is gently bent, on top of the same niche. The latter seems to have melted while the ceramic was being fired.

_____The irreverence with which Zuania Minier treats the virgin figurines arouses dialogues about the prominence of the Virgin Mary in the patriarchal manipulation of feminized bodies at home. By presenting the sculpture of *the virgin* from her back, bent or broken, Minier questions the ideas associated with the Virgin Mary that are the basis for the construction of the coloniality of gender (Lugones 2010) and that promote submission to men, and sexual control in Latin American women: virginity until marriage and sexual work on demand after it (Federici 2004: 230). Ortiz-Torres et al. explain how the figure of the Virgin Mary was used as a source of inspiration to impose submission on colonized women:

> As part of Latin America's colonization process, the Catholic Monarchy that ruled Spain utilized Catholicism as an effective strategy to dominate and conquer the indigenous population in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico [...] both Catholicism and Protestantism played a major role in disseminating ideal female images such as the Virgin Mary and other Biblical women (e.g., Ruth, Elizabeth, Sarah) (2000: 863).

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The traditional figures that represent the Virgin Mary doubly act on our bodies from inside the domestic space because that surveillance over our anatomies is also related to the maintenance of the home and its members. In Latin America, the role of caregiver imposed on feminized humans has deeper consequences than in other cultures due to what has become known as "Marianismo" (Morales / Rojas Pérez 2020). Latin American women—or Latinas in the United States—see the act of caring for all members of their family as their duty and resort to paid assistance for this type of tasks less than white women. "[A study of] Mexican American women caregivers found that both highly acculturated and lower acculturated caregivers felt that caregiving was an integral part of being a good daughter [...]. Women are socialized into the marianismo role beginning in early childhood, which guides normative behaviors of femininity, submission, weakness, reservation, and virginity" (Mendez-Luck / Anthony 2016: 927).

The fact that until recently both Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic were agrarian societies also helped in the promotion and reinforcement of the values and beliefs discussed here. In the case of Puerto Rico, coffee production (under Spanish rule) and sugar plantations (under United States control) were labor-intensive activities. Therefore, large families were used to maximize work capacity. Values that promoted reproduction were well-suited for the economic survival of the family and society (Ortiz-Torres et al.: 864). "In agrarian societies, the transmission of wealth from one generation to the next depended on clear paternal linkages, which in turn relied on women's virginity until marriage (legal or consensual) and on their fidelity during marriage" (ibid.: 864). The white figures of the Virgin Mary in *The Purge: Unparalleled* suggest the purity and absence of stain—sexual sin—expected of women. But the white color loses its force when the figure is broken or bent. Based on the religious imposition that was part of the colonial project, Mary, the mother of Jesus, becomes a central symbol for the subjugation of women, and the constructed significance results in denying reproductive rights. "Another important component of marianismo is to see the Virgin Mary as their role model. Hence, Latinas must stay pure and asexual until marriage" (Morales / Rojas Pérez: 247).

Minier's work is not just an object hanging in an art gallery, it is also a process because the viewer can imagine the artist throwing the statuette to break it and then placing it in one of the six niches that make up the work, in which the eight effigies are located. Likewise, it becomes a process when we think about the steps she had to follow to burn another of the figures in a non-traditional way or to

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leave behind the classical teachings about the process of ceramics and the use of the kiln. In this way, she managed to make one of the images bent or become *melted*. The process could be imagined as part of a cleansing or a purge, as its title says. Minier is trying to get rid of the forces that monitor our bodies and seek to eliminate our reproductive rights. She also calls, with the irreverence with which she treats the divine figure, for the destruction of the idea of a specific behavior in women, from inside the very home.

_____ Marianismo is also an ideology that sustains gender violence and reproduces it, since Latin American women are expected to submit to their partners (Moreno 2007: 343–344), this is one of the palpable subjects in *Facades* **[fig. 5]** by Daniela Roselló Ledesma. The artwork is an installation composed of six ceramic structures that resemble the front of a traditional urban Puerto Rican home. In all of them there is a balcony and a back skeleton that could be a complete home or just a part of it. The buildings that make up the piece are broken or cracked. In that sense, they also converse with Minier's work. The cracks are complemented by various elements that the artist includes in the piece. The walls and interiors of buildings have silt and lichen on both sides. It grew little by little because Roselló left the sculptures outside her workshop in San Juan and the humid climate of Puerto Rico was not forgiving. However, she decided to accept it as part of the installation (Roselló Ledesma 2022), since it contributes to the content of the work. Thus, the *Facades* are presented as broken or unsafe homes. In Puerto Rico, the precariousness of a dwelling can come from an abstract perspective, such as distrust in the house structure and its protective capacity or in the domestic institution that is exacerbated by the tropical/colonial situation: gender-based violence.[7] For many women, home is where sexist attacks occur, so even without the physical conditions of a broken or unsafe house, it does not have the capacity to protect us. However, safety is understood as a home's most important objective. If, in addition, we create an analogy between the walls of a house and our skin, the cracks can symbolize punches or pain. The cracks can also be a form of catharsis against this concept of home instability, just as Minier did with the Virgin Marys in *The Purge…*

_____ The landscape that we observe in *Facades* is quotidian for those of us who live in Puerto Rico. The balconies are similar to those that are part of houses in historic centers of most of the

// Figure 5
Daniela Roselló Ledesma, *Fachadas (Facades)*, 2017, ceramic, © Daniela Roselló Ledesma

cities and towns in the archipelago. In recent decades these homes have become abandoned (Asiedu, et al.). On many occasions, the balcony is built of cement and the rest of the structure is made of wood, and with desertion comes the rotting of the organic construction typical of the tropics; however, the section made of concrete remains. Puerto Rican towns have become a collection of natural gardens behind balconies. With the growth of real estate speculation since 2017 (Bonilla 2018; Suárez et al. 2022), we have observed a lack of housing for the inhabitants of our archipelago (ibid.; Cañizares 2023); historic urban houses nonetheless remain abandoned (Asiedu, et al.). The image that Roselló Ledesma creates with her installation incites mixed aesthetic feelings because we can find them beautiful, and they even provoke nostalgia but make us recognize the insecurity of housing in Puerto Rico.

_____ Through *Facades*, Roselló explores subjects related to the Puerto Rican tropical/colonial context and how it reveals and is the catalyst for Puerto Rico's real estate instability. The unsafety of the home is related to violence against women but also, in the tropical scenario, is often destroyed by hurricanes. The passage of Hurricane María in 2017 showed evidence of the poverty and the housing and health crisis that has developed in Puerto Rico. Since the implementation of the Fiscal Control Board by U.S. President Barack Obama in June 2016, the habitants of the territory have experienced four catastrophic events that have worsened poverty, caused the death of thousands of people, and deepened the housing crisis: the passage of hurricanes Irma and María in 2017 that left the entire archipelago without electricity (Redacción 2017) and approximately 60,000 homes lost their roofs (McCormick / Schwartz 2018); an earthquake event between December 2019 and February 2020, with its highest point on January 7 (6.4 on the Richter scale) (USGS 2020); the pandemic caused by the global spread of the COVID-19. This led to an increase in digital nomadism (Gil / Baptista 2022) and the number of white people from the United States who moved permanently to Puerto Rico, causing housing prices to rise, and the crossing of Hurricane Fiona in September 2022, which brought more than thirty inches of rain (Tolentino Rosario 2022). The artwork by Daniela Roselló-Ledesma is better understood if it is compared with images of these events in the news and media.

_____ Even though the destruction is palpable in the work, viewers are also faced with an installation that inspires strength. On the one hand, the firing technique used by the artist creates a texture similar to cement. On the other hand, the houses in the piece evoke the balconies—made with concrete—of traditional urban homes in

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Puerto Rico, where the rest of the house—made of wood—has been destroyed. Just as Minier and Roselló's actions of throwing or breaking the pieces of ceramic evoke resistance and questioning the domestic reality of women in Puerto Rico and Latin America, we can also think of a future in which our resistance bears fruit and we achieve a control of the home that responds to our own needs and not to those of capital and patriarchy.

_____In the same way, Dhara Rivera reverses the idea of the home as an unstable one to one that becomes a refuge. Since the 1980s, the artist has focused her work on elements of nature, sometimes in relation to the spaces we inhabit by associating organic objects, water, and earth with *habitat*. Her ceramic productions titled *Bulb*, *Organic Garden 3*, and *Buds*, all from 2022, link image and material to create three-dimensional pieces that evoke the garden of a house, which is a space for retreat and pleasure, as well as food—edible or fruit-bearing plants—and care—herbs or other parts of the plant that are healing. Both *Bulb* **[fig. 6]** and *Organic Garden 3* **[fig. 7]** are rounded ceramic objects, with indentations and protrusions, similar to a growth or a flower's pistil. They are abstract shapes that may be associated with fantastic vegetation, due to their shape and size, similar to that of a potted plant. Both have perforations: *Organic Garden 3* has two and *Bulb* has more than twenty. From these holes emanates the light of a light bulb that the artist introduced inside each piece. Both rest on two round wooden plates. The ceramic objects are placed on the wood in an asymmetrical manner, imitating biological reality, where the perfection of compositional balance does not exist. *Buds* **[fig. 8]** has a less abstract form than the previous works and is similar to a succulent *kalanchoe laetivirens* in a pot. The lower part, almost spherical, has light tan tones and the upper part is black. The colors were acquired from the clay with which the piece was created. Likewise, it is supported by two oval wooden plates, without perfection in its circumference or exactness of shape. A series of chains hang from it, providing texture and dissociating the plant-like design from the naturalistic figuration. This detail turns the piece into a contemporary work of art that shows us how the artist uses her garden as a space for reflection. The artist has several specimens of the plant that inspired *Buds* in her garden. It is a species that reproduces easily because its *children* grow on its leaves and are emitted when they have already taken root, allowing them to reach

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the ground as small plants. The chains can also be a metaphor for the row of children that the plant leaves, which reminds us of the tasks of domesticity and reproduction.

_____ Urban gardens have become a feminized place that exists in the liminal territory between: the domestic and the outdoors; personal pleasure and the tasks of reproduction; the coloniality of gender and the resistance associated with witchcraft and non-modern knowledge. Judy Skene analyzes the feminization of the garden and its relationship with women's creativity and resistance to the world that men were creating as modernity developed:

> Reading Alice Walker's essay ["In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," 1984] made me question whether gardens, as transitional spaces between the natural world associated with women and domesticity and the cultural world dominated by men, provided for some women a space where they have been able to achieve a blurring of stereotypical gender roles (1996: 18–19).

_____ For Skene, as we already discussed in this essay, modern Western philosophical thought was structured around a series of binaries: man/woman, mind/body, reason/passion, and culture/nature that "have privileged the masculine and devalued the feminine" (ibid.: 21). For this same reason, anatomy is linked to the domestic space, because it is conceived as part of nature, especially feminine nature, and gender roles associated with care are conceived as a natural element with which women are born and not as matters of upbringing and culture (Federici 2012: 16). With this series of works Dhara Rivera listens to the relationship between the body she inhabits, her organic space, and the vegetative corporeities that live in her garden. She explores the link between accepted gender roles and external or botanical knowledge acquired through practice and transmission of knowledge from mothers to daughters and from grandmothers to granddaughters. However, with the inclusion of artificial elements that are part of technology, such as light bulbs and cables, it links the natural (ceramics and wood) with the artificial, dismantling gender theories that suggest that women are linked to nature, and not to reason. Likewise, the artist associates non-modern knowledge with that of modernity, which can coexist.

_____ As Dhara Rivera's work uses earth and its products, both as material and inspiration to speak about the domestic and sustenance, Alice Chéveres obtains the raw materials for her ceramic

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creations from her home surroundings. The latter makes a historical recovery of the work of the people who populated the islands of Borikén and Ayití-Kiskeya before the European invasion, reclaiming, also, the history of the aesthetic productions of the women of these territories. Chéveres uses traditional techniques—clay taken from her backyard, shaped and fired in a campfire—to create objects that straddle the line

between the ceremonial and the useful. Although in our context most of the works created by Chéveres are used as decorative pieces, the utensils reflect an inspiration in the Taíno forms that arose from the extraction of the spirit (Oliver 2009: 53–54) that was contained in the object itself. Most of the works produced by the artist are kitchen utensils such as pots, bowls, or plates, but some look similar to a *cemi* or other sculptures used in different rituals, especially that of the cohoba.

_____ *The Artisan's Soul* (2019) **[fig. 9]** presents a fantastic scene inspired by Taino stories. It is a type of glass or bowl surrounded by two anthropomorphic figures. They could also be interpreted as two figures surrounding an abyss, which forms the container. The artwork is not so directly related in form to the archaeological finds of Taíno ceramics in the archipelago of the Greater Antilles as other pieces by Chéveres, but it helps us understand how, from the languages of the original populations of the Caribbean, a contemporary work can be derived. The piece approaches the decolonial by proposing new ways of looking at and studying the non-modern culture of Taíno women and how their knowledge has not only survived to this day, but also inspires current proposals in the face of our realities as women who resist coloniality.

_____ The rest of Alice Chéveres' production should be analyzed in a contemporary, non-modern/modern context to promote the inclusion of everyday objects made to be used in the domestic sphere in the contemporary art discourse. Pots, cups, vases, and other useful pieces made by this, and other artists, link the feminized ceramic tradition with the anthropological performativity of service tasks in the home. The reason for this perfect coupling of Alice Chéveres' oeuvre with the theoretical precepts of this essay is that the first is always related to the need for survival, care, and feminized roles, whether at a time before or after the development of the modern/colonial gender system. Her works, *The Emergence of the Soul* and *The Rest of the Spirit*, both from 2022, reflect the artist's recent production which relates spiritual expression and domestic shores.

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The three works are bowls in which zoomorphic heads or bodies can be seen surrounding the hole that makes the object useful. *The Emergence of the Soul* **[fig. 10]** presents a prominent face that resembles an animal head associated with an amphibian or a reptile. However, on both sides of the head we see the skeleton of wings similar to those of a bat. Reptiles, amphibians, and bats were constantly represented in Taíno ceramics, usually fused together to build fantastic figures that reflected the supernatural or the invisible (García Arévalo 2019: 161). The figure is between life and death, since we can imagine it as a live bat whose bones are visible through the skin, or a dead fantastic animal. For Taíno mythology, the representation of the liminal space between life and death was important for communication with ancestors and "the afterlife" (ibid.: 143). Finally, in *The Rest of the Spirit* **[fig. 11]**, two heads surround the vessel, each one on either side, looking upward. Like the head in *The Emergence of the Soul*, these are somewhere between a human head, an animal head, and a skeleton. On the upper edges of the plate, we can see geometric and linear designs created through incisions very similar to the Capá (García Goyco 2021: 360) Taíno style. By producing traditional ceramic objects, also manufactured by all settled cultures, but in this case with specific elements that refer viewers to the history of Borikén art, the artist retakes the history of women in Puerto Rico as creators and caregivers.

We have seen how, for all the works analyzed in this essay, form is linked to the content by associating domestic shores with the task of creating the artwork. We saw that both the pieces by Elizabeth Robles and Andrea Pérez Caballero relate the staticity of ceramics with action to provoke dialogues about the daily work done with the body: sexual relations, cleaning, and feeding. By breaking and melting their ceramic creations, Daniela Roselló and Zuania Minier tell us about the domestic space as one in which the tasks of sustenance are reproduced, and as a place of instability and surveillance. The works of Dhara Rivera and Alice Chéveres rescue the non-modern knowledge of creation and botany of contemporary women in relation to our historical ancestors. In their pieces, the interest in the tasks essential for human survival is palpable, which, in the modern case, have been used for the reproduction of capital and, in the non-modern case, serve a purely human need.

// Figure 10
Alice Chéveres, *The Emergence of the Soul*, 2022, bonfire-fired ceramic, © Alice Chéveres

// Figure 11
Alice Chéveres, *The Rest of the Spirit*, 2022, bonfire-fired ceramic, © Alice Chéveres

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Also present in the set of works is the analysis of the habitable space—body/home—as a feminist place, which is the scene of oppression and violence (associated with gender), but also a framework of creation, dispersion, and conspiracy, where women can have our own place from which to speak, communicate and create community. All the works explore ideas associated with women as a home, as caregivers, but also as beings who need and desire, all linked to the concept of sustenance and the fulfillment of human demands. The art pieces analyzed in this essay make us wonder where we want to direct our—constant—work as women and how we can feel complete, finally breaking the neoliberal barriers of individualistic domestic work that locks us in and isolates us without a salary for our labor.

Ceramics as a medium is essential in all the works discussed. In Zuania Minier's piece, for example, the melting of the final figure is caused by high temperatures in the kiln, just as the shattering of another of the figures was possible with this particular material. In the case of Andrea Pérez, kneading the clay is what makes her performance a domestic one, evoking the idea of production. We have seen how ceramics (clay) is also a medium that alludes to the subjects explored in the artworks discussed here, since this is where food comes from, just as milk for breastfeeding comes from our bodies. Likewise, it is a medium that has been associated with women and with the original creation of humanity in various mythologies around the world and throughout history.

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DECOLONIAL FEMINISM, INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS, AND THE AESTHETIC IMPACT OF THE ARGENTINEAN PRO-CHOICE GREEN SCARF

ABSTRACT _____ The green scarf for the right to legal abortion is the material culmination of the Argentinian feminist struggle against gender violence and macho culture. This vibrant object creates empowering alliances and opens debate on participation, representation, and inclusion. Its function is to build a decolonial, queerfeminist infrastructure for greater and more unbiased healthcare. However, the green scarf utilizes exclusionary and colonial-normative infrastructure, reproducing patriarchal dynamics. Challenges to the production, distribution, and political objectives of the green scarf have yet to be addressed. Thus, its very existence both opposes and upholds oppressive infrastructures. Focusing attention on the aesthetic impact of the embodied apparition of the green movement, I will analyze its ambivalences and critically review the infrastructural contradictions that the mobilization of the green scarf is based upon. Although no spaces for feminist debate exist outside of white, colonial patriarchy, the green scarf framed the debate on reproductive justice and found an aesthetic of feminist struggle, allowing us to imagine another future.

_____ Since 2003, a 'green scarf' has symbolized the national campaign for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion.[1] Until the passage of the law in 2020 in Argentina, the green scarf went from being a symbol of identification related to the bill to an emblem of feminist self-determination and sovereignty over one's own body and a symbol of resistance against patriarchal violence. During the pro-abortion protests in the country, the synchronized use of raised scarves together with feminist phrases on flags, banners, and on the skin of the protesters, the rhythm of the constant drumming, and the smell and color of smoke from the flares re-created a moving protest monument in the urban space. Through the performative and mobile use of the scarf, the washable phrases on bodies, and the ephemeral scenography of colored smoke, a living statement was shaped time and again with the assemblies like a giant wave of green cloth, smell, and sound.
_____ The green scarf came to inaugurate and frame a space for political debate on reproductive justice and to found a (functional) aesthetic of feminist struggle, introducing a color – green – , an

[1]
In Spanish *pañuelo verde*, in U.S.-American context green bandana.

object – a triangular cloth scarf – , diverse forms of showing that specific object – open with the arms up, around the neck, around the wrist – , songs – most of them with drums and lyrics – and specific texts/emblems to wear on the skin/naked body. Since its creation in 2003, it played a foundational role in what over the years became a key feminist symbol for the political participation of historically underrepresented groups and the right to decide whether to carry a pregnancy or not or whether to give birth or not – ultimately, a symbol for the autonomy of bodies.

_____ What I propose is that this bodily, visual, and acoustic experience brings a (functional) aesthetic that allows another possible world to be imagined (see Butler 2018 and Ponce de León 2021) and can be observed as a visual and performative practice. The feminist green tide borrows an aesthetic language/vocabulary and turns a militant act into an embodied perfor-mance in space. To this end, I suggest analyzing the staging of the feminist pro-abortion protest through its aesthetic relevance, since it is through it that it reconfigures the way we think about feminism and, thus, the way we think about the world we live in. On this basis, an infrastructural feminist critical analysis of the green scarf as a vibrant object, and of the ambivalences within the movement arising from it, can be made. The aim is to provide relevant insights into certain contradictions such as the scarf being produced in conflicting infrastructural contexts, and yet not wanting to reproduce precisely this and fighting for another world. I argue that an analysis that allows the understanding of the entanglements of aesthetic practices with infrastructural dimensions in feminist activism or feminist movements can make a rich contribution towards a broader understanding of the intertwining of feminist movements, politics, art, and life. This is to some extent close to Butler's (2020) argument that we need infrastructures to fight for them; in this case, aesthetic mediums and performative practices to fight for the healthcare infrastructures they mobilize for. Yet these infrastructures embody white, colonial, supremacist patriar-chy, so these processes merit a critical infrastructural analysis in pursuit of a further development of the feminist movement. Based

// **Figure 1**
Luciana Rolón (@luliroleta), Demonstra-tion with the scarves (Pañuelazo) for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion in Buenos Aires in front of the National Congress of Argentina, on February 19, 2018. Printed on the scarf of the Argen-tinian Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion) is the emblem of the campaign: Educación sexual para decidir, Anticonceptivos para no abortar, Aborto legal para no morir (sexual education to decide, contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion not to die), 2018, Photography.

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on this case study, I propose a method of analysis useful for other feminist activist movements, in order not to embody neo-colonial, white-supremacist, patriarchal infrastructures when that, in fact, is what we are trying to overthrow.

QUEERFEMINIST DECOLONIAL INFRASTRUCTURE _____ The green scarf for abortion rights is a queerfeminist political object and an actor with agency. It brings protesters together, makes them debate, and empowers them. The use of the scarf has a very particular function, as it makes people visible and allows them to take over the urban space and move through it by creating a massive and partly unspoken choreography.[2]

_____ The green scarves in movement highlight the bodies of the people wearing them and the inscriptions on their bodies. Phrases such as *Las ricas abortan, las pobres mueren* (The rich have abortions, the poor die), *Aborto legal ya* (Legal abortion now) and *Que sea ley* (Let it be law), allow the demonstrators to claim their bodies as their own territory. These insignias, together with the purple feminist symbols and the colors of the LGBTIQ+ flag, configure and make visible the representational complex of the movement. Bodies and scarves come together to say "we are here, we are together and we matter." In addition, the gatherings include singing and drumming, whereby an articulation of visual and acoustic elements also create a soundscape, a living intervention in the urban space. Bodies, fabric, music, and smells fill the space with a vibrant energy that resonates and bursts into the urban infrastructure, so that the materiality and visibility of the green scarf open a space for debate on feminist visibility, gender equality, and social as well as reproductive justice. In this debate, for example, the categories of *woman* as a political category (Vergès 2021: 23) and *gender* as a cultural category (ibid.: 31) are questioned and the experience of everyday oppression of certain groups based on sex and gender is critically reflected upon. Around the green scarf, symbolic and physical violence is also understood within the logic of a state-patriarchy-capital matrix (ibid.: 23), and the oppressive norms of Western body politics are debated (ibid.: 27). The green scarf also opens a space of resistance and total rejection of patriarchal norms in which rape and murder are not only accepted, but even encouraged as weapons to discipline women (ibid.: 6). The goal of the protesters is to create a more decolonial queerfeminist infrastructure for greater and more unbiased health care, as well as inclusive spaces of intersectional empowerment. Throughout this process, the boundaries between (functional) aesthetics, performativity, and activism become fluid,

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affirming that the power of the green tide is (also) explained by the multisensory and embodied spectacle created and inhabited by its protesters.

_____ Now, the purpose of the green tide is not to carry out performative practices in urban space, but to embed a decolonial queerfeminist infrastructure within the healthcare system, as well as an infrastructure for a space of intersectional visibility and empowerment. For this, the feminist movement of the green scarf uses one infrastructure to build another one, which provokes a high dependence between them (existing infrastructures, infrastructures in formation, and infrastructures to be built). In this context, the contributions of Austin (2009) and Butler (2020) are particularly useful to think of the performatic as a fundamental component in the formation of infrastructures and as a generator of reality. For Austin (2009), who observes language and the performance of speaking, language exists exclusively in the performance of speaking. Furthermore, he claims that certsain forms of linguistic utterances are capable of changing the states of the social world. Judith Butler (2020), addressing performativity in gender, argues that the subjects who set performative acts are also the result of performative utterances. This interrelation between performativity thought as a generator of reality and feminist infrastructures becomes useful to think about how the decolonial feminist mobilizes and deploys.

_____ According to Vergès (2021), decolonial feminism is an umbrella term that proposes to think feminism from an anti-colonial perspective and looks at the connections between birth control, forced abortions, colonial slavery, European colonialism, and racism (ibid.: viii). It is multidimensional and intersectional, emphasizing the connections between reproductive and environmental justice, an end to femicide, and critiques the pharmaceutical industry (ibid.: 20) for its exploitative and patriarchal business model. It is an anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, and anti-nationalist feminism and identifies with an intersectional struggle for economic, cultural, political, reproductive, and environmental justice (ibid.: 66). It is a feminism that accepts the existence of other feminisms and enabling transnational and international alliances (ibid.: viii). Focused on post-pandemic outbreak recovery, for Krasny, a matter of care-feminist planetary imagination is at issue (Krasny 2023: 159). Around the green scarf, all these ideas are taken up with the aim of fighting against the oppressive structures that determine colonized bodies-territories and therefore their freedom. Yet this is not free of tensions. Different forms of power relations and domination coexist

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within the green scarf. In it, partisan politics, notions of social and environmental justice, anti-speciesism, anti-abolitionism in relation to sex work, trans-visibility, the struggle for legal, safe, and free abortion, and notions such as the separation between Church and State are intertwined and discussed not always in a way that is liberating and overcoming for all. Narrow political ideas, certain forms of classism and racism, sex-work-abolitionism, and transphobic discourses also inhabit the green scarf, and are expressed during street gatherings and in the movement's discursive construction.

⎯⎯As for the creation of better infrastructure in the public health sector, based on the assertion that abortion has to be treated as a public health issue, it is a combination of three measures that accompanied the campaign: The Law for Integral Sexual Education, the National Program for Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation, and the Protocol for the Integral Care of Persons with the Right to a Legal Abortion. The *Ley de Educación Sexual Integral ESI* (Law for Integral Sexual Education) was passed in 2006 and provides sex education in Argentina from kindergarten to the end of high school, with a focus on a human rights and gender perspective. The main objective is for children and adolescents to cultivate positive values related to sexual and reproductive health, in addition to developing self-confidence and respect for human rights and gender equality (Amnestía Internacional Argentina 2021). To this end, it strengthens the capacities of children and adolescents to live their sexuality in a free and pleasurable way. It encourages them to know their rights, develop critical thinking, and enrich the exercise of their civil rights, as well as to become aware of the responsibility for their own choices and behaviors (especially in relation to how they may affect others). The *Programa nacional de salud sexual y procreación responsable* (National Program for Sexual Health and Responsible Reproduction) is a law promoted by the women's movement as part of the claim for the right to decide, involving the State in the full exercise of human rights (Peker 2021). Its main objectives are to guarantee universal and free access to contraception and to reduce class inequalities. It also focuses on teenage pregnancy, clandestine abortion, contraception, women's participation in decisions about their fertility, as well as the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (ibid.: 2021). The *Protocolo para la atención integral de las personas con derecho a la interrupción legal del embarazo* (Protocol for Integral Care of Persons with the Right to a Legal Abortion) is a policy instrument that, as of the approval of the law in December 2020, establishes standards in Argentina for access and quality of care related to abortion and the post-abortion period.

The Protocol also establishes standards for the support and backing of the institutions that guarantee this right (Ministerio de Salud de la Nación Argentina 2021). It ensures that the procedure in Argentina is consistent with international standards for the protection of the human rights of women and people with childbearing capacity and promotes a normative model that focuses on health and allows for a greater level of social justice in the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive rights of the population. In particular, it expands the capacity of the State and all health systems (public, social security, and private) to guarantee the safety and opportunity of abortion (ibid.: 2021). Within this framework, according to Article 2 of the aforementioned law, women and persons with childbearing capacity have the following rights: to decide on an abortion; to request and access an abortion in the health system services; to request and receive post-abortion care from the health system, regardless of whether the decision to terminate is contrary to the assumptions allowed by law, and to prevent unwanted pregnancies through access to information, comprehensive sex education, and effective contraceptive methods (ibid.: 2021).

‗‗‗‗ It is clear that the traction of the movement has permitted another possible world to be imagined and to even manifest it in reality. Because all these measures together with the premise of a decolonial-feminist debate are fair, we are allowed to think that the green scarf symbolizes the struggle against a misogynist, racist-colonial, and patriarchal infrastructure. However, the green scarf simultaneously opens up a space for debate that is not free of colonial power relations and mechanisms of sexist and classist oppression. Therefore, in the following section I will analyze in terms of a decolonial-feminist epistemology in and from the South the ambivalences of the visibility and the use of this symbol of protest.

INFRASTRUCTURAL CONTRADICTIONS ‗‗‗‗ The green scarf is an ambivalent political object. At the same time that it represents the feminist struggle for more public healthcare, more rights, and more visibility of the women's collective, it makes use of an infrastructure that mimics oppressive, racist, and sexist logics. I will briefly review different aspects in which I argue that the green scarf movement makes use of the infrastructure that sustains neoliberal capitalism and therefore abuses the collectives affected the most by the crisis, labor informality, racism, migrantism, and/or hetero-cis-sexism.

‗‗‗‗ The fabric types of the various scarves vary between modal, acrylic, nylon, polyester, and other blended fabrics with synthetic content. This type of fabric is light and cheap, can be mass-produced,

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as well as very easily used and washed. Such material is rarely produced in Argentina, so it is assumed that in most cases it would be imported for little cost given a high volume of orders. Interestingly, this information is missing, which raises some questions about global interdependencies and the invisibilization of exploitative-capitalist infrastructures linked to the green scarf. In addition to the question of the origin and working conditions of the people producing the cloth, as well as the environmental impact of synthetic fabric production, a second question arises concerning the production of the scarf itself, once the cloth is shipped to Argentina. On behalf of the official campaign for legal abortion, since 2003 the countless green scarves have been made by nine different women's cooperatives throughout Argentina. Scarves were also produced by individuals who made them on their own and by independent producers not commissioned by the campaign; however, these are not the focus of interest here, but rather the women's cooperatives. These cooperatives are self-organized and self-managed groups that live off their own resources. These are mostly women workers of color excluded from the wage economy who produce at risk with their own resources, so the commissioning of women's coopera-tives in the popular economy can also be critically examined. An anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, anti-sexist, and anti-nationalist movement that denounces the inevitable intersection of economic, cultural, political, reproductive, and environmental justice (see Vergès 2021 and Wilkes 2015), accepts neoliberal capitalist condi-tions to informally produce the green scarf at incredibly low prices and with long-term polluting synthetic materials (Küchler 2015). In this way, the production of the scarf makes visible an ambivalent aspect of the movement by not questioning the infrastructure of the neoliberal system that exploits women of color in precariousness and contributes to environmental pollution, to the use of fossil resources, and therefore to climate collapse.

———— Another debatable aspect of the green scarf is how it bases its performativity on the neoliberal capitalist infrastructure necessary for the staging of the protest. In terms of a feminist infrastructure critique, it is arguable that the green scarf feminist movement makes careless use of the infrastructure provided by all the people who participate in the movement but are left out of the protest. I am referring to the infrastructure created by the drivers of the buses, trains, and taxis that take the protesters to the center of the big cities and back; by the people who clean and tidy the hotel rooms where the protesters stay overnight; by the precarious street vendors who informally sell food and drinks to the protesters (see Zakaria 2022);

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by the people who care for the protesters' children and families; by the people who initially produced and imported the green fabric; by the people who clean the street after the protest; and by all the people I do not mention, mostly precarized women of color often with migration backgrounds, whose work makes it possible for more privileged women in the green movement to fight for justice.

_____ A further pending debate is the diversity of strategies and methods of emancipation, autonomy, and liberation of women and people with childbearing capacity in relation to abortion. The case of how Mapuche women, one of the *Pueblos Originarios* [3] of Argentina, approach abortion is a clear example of this. In the Mapuche community, abortion is practiced with traditional ancestral medicine. Western medicine, on the other hand, is perceived as colonial and patriarchal, and is therefore rejected. One of the most important representatives of the Mapuche women's collective and co-founder of the *Movimiento de Mujeres Indígenas por el Buen Vivir* (Indigenous Women's Movement for a Good Life), Moira Millán, explains that they advocate the decriminalization of all medical practices that protect life and self-determination over bodies and territories (Meyer 2018). Among them is the Mapuche medicine, which allows contraception and abortion. When *white* feminists ask the women of *Buen Vivir* about this, they explain that they do not talk in detail about their abortion practices because the reactions have proven to be disrespectful, neocolonial, and racist. They explain that in Argentina they have historically been persecuted for much less than practicing their ancestral medicine (ibid.: 2018) and therefore prefer to remain silent and painfully respond that the exchange of knowledge with *white* feminists has never been equal. This has to do with the way in which women from the *Pueblos* have been systematically excluded from the *white* feminist collective, having been denied participation in discussions for decades, or only allowed to express their views briefly, or in the final moments of meetings. This long experience of exclusion and racism led them to organize internally.[4] As for the legalization of abortion after the green tide, Mapuche women are skeptical. For them, the debate on abortion among *white* women is not about legalizing it, but about turning it into a commodity for sale with Western medicines, which they reject as colonial and patriarchal (ibid.).

_____ Taking all this into account, the same feminists who fight for broader justice and political representation become those who exclude, allowing mechanisms of oppression and violence to be reproduced within this liberation movement. In the face of this, Women for *Buen Vivir* argue that feminism must necessarily be

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decolonial; otherwise, it remains patriarchal (Frontera / Litvinoff 2019). We must continue to reflect on these ambivalences in order to, while finding critical points, acknowledge that feminism has reached an unparalleled potential and is undoubtedly the great social movement of the twenty-first century.

TOWARDS AN OVERCOMING POLITICAL PRACTICE ———— As the pro-choice movement quickly recognized the power of the green triangle to construct a political identity and an atmosphere of shared, affective belonging, the scarf became progressively and indisputably part of feminist iconography. Using this symbol as an example, I showed that there are no public spaces for feminist debate outside of *white* colonial patriarchy. Even in the context of the intersectional feminist movement in the South, the structure that sustains colonial and patriarchal power remains nearly intact. Through these infrastructures (the one necessary to produce and distribute the scarf, the one created by the scarf itself, and the one that the green scarf actually aspires to create) things are held together and bodies, things, and technologies are organized.

———— In my analysis, I argue that there are several infrastructures involved around the green scarf for abortion rights. One is the infrastructure that supports the production and distribution of the green scarf. The second is the infrastructure that the green scarf produces, staging the scarf, agglomerating feminists, and creating meaning. The third is the infrastructure in the judicial and health systems that the green scarf really wants to create. What I argued in this text is that a critical analysis of how the different infrastructures involved contradict each other in their methods and foundations is urgently needed. From the mistakes and failures in the creation of the infrastructure that the green scarf produces and distributes, the infrastructures that the green tide creates and the one that guarantees health around the decision to carry out a pregnancy could (and should) learn. For almost three years after the legalization of abortion, the third one (infrastructure to legal, safe, and free abortions) is still in the process of formation. The law decriminalizing abortion in Argentina now exists, but not all medical professionals perform abortions, not all patients who wish to have an abortion have access to clear and accurate information, and not in all cases in which an abortion takes place is there feminist accompaniment and guidance. This is central because one further infrastructure that I did not mention in this text (only indirectly linked to the green scarf and therefore not in the foreground of this analysis) is the infrastructure created by force of solidarity

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and feminist militancy: *Socorristas en red*, a network of informal first aid workers that helped and accompanied persons interrupting ongoing pregnancies clandestinely until 2020. These not always heard first aid workers know firsthand the lack of infrastructure or rather what the infrastructure that the green scarf wants to create needs in order to be more feminist, sensitive, empathetic, and humane. I emphasize this because throughout my analysis I have stressed that it is not quite obvious that the feminist agenda is based on supportive, inclusive, and sustainable infrastructures when, ultimately, all these infrastructures in formation and types of cohesions have a single purpose: to treat women and people with pregnant bodies in a more humane way.

‗‗‗‗‗ Feminism in Argentina, with its (infrastructural) contradictions, came to contribute with a (functional) aesthetics capable of thinking of a transcending political movement. What I proposed in this article is that it is essential to critically analyze the infrastructures involved in this feminist movement, since at different levels infrastructures determine bodies. That is why the aesthetic and performative practices around the green scarf can and should be read in their interrelations with the respective infrastructures, since they have a direct link with the bodies. However, the intention of my contribution is also to rethink the infrastructural implications not only around the green scarf for the right to abortion but also in relation to social movements fighting for more rights. A genuine feminist infrastructural critique must accompany the whole process for the political struggle to be truly liberating and overcoming.

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// Image Credits

Figure 1: Verónica Orsi, The green scarf of the Argentinian *Campaña Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito* (National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion). Printed on the scarf is the emblem of the campaign: *Educación sexual para decidir, Anticonceptivos para no abortar, Aborto legal para no morir* (sexual education to decide, contraceptives not to abort, legal abortion not to die), 2023, Photography.

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Verónica Orsi (she) is a consultant for diversity and inclusion, feminist and hegemony-critical education, and diversity-sensitive opening processes with a focus on discrimination-critical cultural work. She is also an expert on the transnationalization of the feminist movement in Latin America, the mass demonstrations against femicide *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less), and the campaign for the right to legal, safe, and free abortion represented by the green scarf. She studied Visual Arts and Museum Management and Communication and is a Ph.D. candidate focusing on decolonial trans-feminism at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences Berlin.

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ABSTRACT _____ In this article, we reflect upon the curational process of the exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* in which we explored the porous line between hosts and guests through seeing like an infrastructure. By this, we mean that we used infrastructural objects as heuristic devices to facilitate a nuanced understanding of the tensions inherent to hosting in hostile environments. Our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* tried to push the boundaries of infrastructure as (feminist) methodology, as over the course of time, infrastructure started to curate us and eventually the exhibition. As a result, we found ourselves unsettled by infrastructure which required a persistent recalibration of our positionality.

_____ Since the 'infrastructural turn' in social sciences and beyond, there is an overall recognition that there is nothing purely technical or material about infrastructure. Instead, as Amin argues in *Lively Infrastructure*, "infrastructures – visible and invisible, grand and prosaic – are implicated in the human experience of the city and in shaping social identities" (Amin 2014: 139). Building on this broad understanding of infrastructure as a socio-technical or socio-material assemblage through which citizens and states negotiate citizenship (Lemanski 2020), our exploration of infrastructure takes a novel direction by framing it as a (feminist) methodology. This perspective emerged organically as we – an *ad hoc* collective of five women coming from different parts of the world and spanning disciplines such as architecture, anthropology, and performative arts – were developing our residency at the San Marino Pavilion of the Venice 2023 Biennale, entitled *Ospite Ospitante* (Guest Hosts). As the title suggests, the provocation of the pavilion was to invite its residents to reflect on the relationship between hosts and guests in a "Hospitality Lab" bearing in mind that "[t]ime, political and historical circumstances, the thresholds of inclusion of different species, and the needs of the moment make the distinctive lines between host and guest porous" (Kaethler / Pierini 2023). By referring to Derrida, curator Michael Kaethler (2023) further complicates our understanding by stating that "[h]ospitality teeters on a fine line between a radical acceptance of the 'other' and controlling that 'other' – it is no wonder then that hospitality and hostility share the same etymological root."
_____ It is in this line that we sought to tease out the tensions that confront and are embedded within acts of hospitality, and hence

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our exhibition and proposed set of interventions was entitled *Hosting in Hostility*. In contrast to conventional notions of hospitality as a reciprocal relation in which the hosting needs to be repaid at a later moment, our conception of hosting in hostility is about radical hospitality (a distinction elaborated on in Kaethler's text). The latter is an unconditional type of hospitality that opens up to everyone with no expectation to receive something in return. It is, in fact, about ensuring everyone's right to the city, everyone's right to access infrastructure, particularly where

formal constellations perpetuate exclusionary practices based on structural processes of othering (and artificial divisions between citizens and "non-citizens"). Or in the words of Butler (2015: 127), and in line with the *Feminism for the 99%* manifesto (Arruzza et al. 2019), the "demand for infrastructure" here is "a demand for a certain inhabitable ground, and its meaning and force derive exactly from that lack." It is precisely with this definition of infrastructure in mind, that we, during our residency, incrementally started to develop infrastructure as a (feminist) methodology. In the following, we will unravel that process in four steps.

INFRASTRUCTURE AS (FEMINIST) METHODOLOGY _____ To explore the tensions within hospitality, we draw from two spaces that host in hostility and that were active agents in our thinking, work, and lives over the past years: Globe Aroma in Brussels (Belgium) and The Yalla Project in Nablus (Palestine). Across the two different contexts, both Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project act as spaces of hospitality in hostile environments.

_____ Globe Aroma is a sociocultural organization that specifically welcomes "newcomer artists," irrespective of legal status or origin, and this within a European context that is increasingly anti-immigrant. It supports newcomer artists by offering workspace, materials, and connections in the arts field and acts as a social hub catalyzing community building for newcomers. The Yalla Project is an applied research center on socio-spatial issues related to the everyday lives of communities and their living environment. Within the old city of Nablus, The Yalla Project pursues the revitalization of a part of the city heavily affected by urban warfare and the presence of the Israeli military occupation. It works on the ground through a social enterprise in the sector of hospitality to facilitate the regeneration of the local spatial, economic, and cultural tissue. Core to this effort is

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the Turquoise Guesthouse through which the project aims to build a sense of homeliness and belonging to the city. Using its design and activities, the goal is to create a safe and welcoming space that fosters encounters and exchange between visitors and locals.

_____ In conceptualizing our exhibition, we explored how to represent the tensions that emerge in the daily practice of hosting in hostility of these two spaces. The real challenge was finding a way to capture and move across complex and multi-scalar geographies and power relations from which these spaces of hospitality emerge and the dynamics within them gain meaning. How can we represent, through the mediums afforded to us within the pavilion in the heart of Venice, the context of the Belgian authorities' failure to house asylum seekers in Brussels and the fierce political struggle around it? Or the disruptions caused by Israeli raids on life in Nablus, where streets can transition from festive to battlefields in an instant, and minutes later reverse again from a war scene to the most ordinary everydayness? In other words, how to represent the situated knowledges (Haraway 1988) that are drawn from the specific conditions of each context and space of hospitality and our engagements with them? As many of us are architects and/or actively engage with space as anthropologists or artists, we started to conceptualize space as a 'heuristic device', which is an understanding of space to be added to Heynen's (2013) threefold thought model on the interaction between space and society: space as a receptor (a more or less neutral background to social activities), as an instrument (of social change), or as a stage (on which social life unfolds and on which social life impacts). If we conceptualize space as a heuristic device, it means that we mobilize space to enable our understanding or knowledge of the tensions of hosting in hostility.

_____ Indeed, only when we zoomed into specific moments firmly situated in space, it was possible to highlight the observed tensions within acts of hospitality with more precision. We tried to condense the complex interplay between hosts, guests, space, and history by grasping concrete temporal and spatial instances through infrastructural objects – as particular, functional manifestations of space – such as the wall, the door, the bed, or the table. Infrastructural objects, captured figuratively and literally through photography and film in our exhibition, therefore became methodological tools to understand and represent tensions in hosting in hostility. In doing this, we align with Thompson's (2001: 14132) reading of Haraway (1988), in asserting that situated knowledge is not only about problematizing the subject where "all positionings are open to critical re-examination," but is also conversely about

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recognizing that "the extraordinary range of objects in the physical, natural, social, political, biological, and human sciences about which institutionalized knowledge is produced should not be considered to be passive and inert." The operation that we propose thus centers specific objects as agentic elements that embody, reflect, and affect. An example is our use of *the sofa* as a heuristic device in the case of Globe Aroma: the sofas in Globe Aroma were acquired after the Brussels Court of Labor found the Belgian State on more than 8,600 occasions in breach of its legal duty to maintain minimum standards for reception conditions. After the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) failed to pay more than 275 million euros in fines, the Court confiscated its furniture for auction. In an act of political protest, five sofas were purchased at the auction,[1] and together with the *Stop the Reception Crisis* movement, they were equipped with wheels, adorned with banners, and pushed across Brussels to a building occupied by homeless asylum seekers, to bring the reception center to those who are denied access to these reception centers. The last two sofas found a place at Globe Aroma, where they are currently a part of the organization's *hospitality area*, a space in which asylum seekers and other newcomers are welcomed and supported. Within our exhibition, the object's visualization in video and photographs – the sofa on the street in the protest and the sofa used within the space of Globe Aroma – represent the material culture of Belgium's reception crisis and the tensions therein.

––––– The operation of using space, or, in this case, infrastructural objects, as heuristic devices, diffuses the need to set a fixed category of, or boundary between host and guest, as it materializes complex social relations to foreground a momentary encounter or tension. Our varied positionalities are indeed the lens through which we are reading the moments of tension, but we are reading them through the infrastructural object, which in turn reflects the particular dynamics between space, time, and power relations. This interconnectedness between subject and object may represent Haraway's (1988: 595) notion of "material-semiotic nodes" whose "boundaries materialize in social interaction." What is furthermore notable in this approach is that we have been selecting mundane, everyday domestic objects: the door, bed, sofa, table, toilet, etc., to substantiate political and territorial tensions. In relating Globe Aroma to The Yalla Project, we observe how these seemingly universal objects travel across spaces to gain new and different meanings. Hence, we used these infrastructural elements to gather a variety of understandings on hosting in hostility across a variety of borders.

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How the object travels, not only through geography, but also across scales of the building, city, nation, and across borders, became an exciting exercise. It became a creative process to oscillate and map such domestic objects, often integral to notions of hospitality, across the urban scale. Could this set of infrastructural objects be read as a deconstructed home? What would mapping them as fragmented elements on the scale of the city reveal about urban hospitality? In other words, how can we understand the right to the city through infrastructural elements, and what frictions does this lens reveal?

SEEING LIKE AN INFRASTRUCTURE _____ It is with these questions in mind that we set up our exhibition in the San Marino Pavilion at the Venice Biennale: not merely as a completed exhibition, but as the beginning of a new chapter in its journey. Throughout our five-day residency, we continued to explore the porous line between hosts and guests. The exhibited images, texts, and video fragments of three infrastructural objects for Globe Aroma (a door, sofas, a wall) and The Yalla Project (a door, beds, and a table) enabled us to transfer our situated knowledges from Brussels and Nablus to Venice and served as a starting point for a conversation.

_____After having set up the Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project parts of our exhibition, our objective was to expand it with three infrastructural objects from Venice. To achieve this, we embarked on an exploration of the city in which we ourselves were guests, using the same methodological approach: employing infrastructural objects as a heuristic device to identify tensions inherent to hosting in Venice.

_____Drawing an analogy from Amin and Thrift's (2017) *Seeing Like a City*, we adopted the perspective of 'seeing like an infrastructure.' In their seminal work, Amin and Thrift see like a city, as a means to break away from the dominant (epistemological) frames imposed by nation-states, which, for instance, include the delineation of borders, and determine who is a citizen and who is not. They regard this approach as a specific lens to break with methodological nationalism and a gesture that allows us to see the world-making power of cities both within and independent of nation-states. Building further on Amin's (2014) conceptualization of infrastructure as sociotechnical

// Figure 2
Dinner table in The Yalla Project as shown in the exhibition, September 11, 2023, © Authors/The Yalla Project

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arrangements or assemblages, they posit that "(t)hese arrangements are more than a mere 'infrastructural' background, the silent stage on which other powers perform. The mangle of sociotechnical systems in a city is formative in every respect, regardless of its state of sophistication" (Amin / Thrift 2017: 3). In a similar vein, seeing like an infrastructure enabled us to move beyond a narrow focus on a certain area (or the city as a whole), space, or imagined category of people, and instead take into account intersecting and superdiverse actors across spaces. The infrastructural objects then revealed how the actors are affected by them, what tensions surround them, and allowed the recognition of the differential access they co-produce. Hence, seeing like an infrastructure is a lens that enables us to grasp the broad spectrum of politics and regimes within a city while simultaneously narrowing down our focus.

———— More so, the term *infra* denotes "under," while *structure* signifies that infrastructures "structure the spaces all around us" (Easterling 2014). Therefore, a gaze at infrastructural objects reveals what is underneath the structural, such as hidden political and capitalist agendas that are at the base of hostile practices and policies across spaces and geographies. This entry point facilitates the tracing of processes and politics sustaining the gendered and racialized dimension of maintenance and social reproduction. Hence, exploring a social process through the lens of infrastructural objects serves as a method for conducting a feminist critique and enables the exploration of tensions and ambiguities inherent in spatial practices of hospitality, along with some of the political and economic forces acting upon the city. This approach aligns with feminist critiques inasmuch as it critiques the exclusion and disempowerment of (gender) minorities and marginalized groups and "destabilizes those institutions that depend on the reproduction of inequality and injustice" (Butler 2014: 10).

———— We initiated our endeavor to see like an infrastructure by venturing out to explore the city. Guided by background research and information we received from people and collectives, we visited a range of places in Venice that could inform us about hosting in hostility. In a manner reminiscent of Raja Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks* (2009), which aimed to physically encounter and challenge power geometries, our journey in search for infrastructural objects sought to disrupt idealized imaginaries and to find non-dominant realities and struggle within the city. The wandering of five women with very diverse personal trajectories and the intent to watch, listen, and learn as an act of confrontation with our own patterns of privilege connects with the feminist understanding of *flânerie*

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as a way to enact the ethics of care advocated by de la Bellacasa by moving "away from prescriptive viewpoints and instead tak[ing] up mutual responsibility for our shared ecological communities." (Bellacasa in Sun / Muntean 2021: 98)

_____Over the course of three days, this journey led us to discover three infrastructural objects that were relevant to our critical engagement with hosting in hostility: toilets, beds, and tables. Seeing through these three infrastructural objects, we gained insights into the interconnectedness of diverse immaterial situations and processes and gradually moved into the socio-political and economic textures present in the city. In the following, we will delve into one example: the table. At some point during our residency, we supported and participated in a local protest by joining a *breakfast table* against an eviction from an apartment. This non-violent mobilization was situated within the context of Venice's residential politics, which prioritizes luxury and tourist housing projects over affordable housing for all. Concurrently, the city leaves over 11% of the main islands' social housing units empty, citing inadequate maintenance standards due to decay. As a result, a significant portion of the Venice community has been compelled to leave the island, leading to a steady decline in the number of Venetian residents. The apartment in question had been left empty and neglected by the government before being occupied, and the successful fight for the right to (affordable) housing took place by means of a convivial resistance breakfast table to which we were invited. During the resistance breakfast, the table served as a platform for political action in support of the right to a home: a home where the inhabitants of the occupied building not only live and have their daily breakfast but gather to organize and mobilize against the hostile neoliberal forces that perpetuate inequality and displacement in the city. Hence, the table as infrastructure takes on a "double meaning of 'the infrastructural'", being at once the infrastructural object around which the political performance of resistance unfolds and the condition of the "inhabitable ground" it fights for, a home in which one lives, sleeps, and has breakfast (Butler 2014: 2).

_____After having spent three days exploring and documenting various parts of the city, including decayed social housing estates in Venice and the communities displaced from the island who now reside alongside numerous migrant communities in Mestre, we

// Figure 3
Venice "breakfast table" against an eviction of an apartment, September 14, 2023, © Authors

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identified the table, along with beds and toilets, as significant infrastructural objects in the city.

_____ Leveraging our disciplinary backgrounds in architecture, anthropology, and the arts, we processed the objects by drawing on the visual and tangible dimensions present within these infrastructures. Using printed images of the objects as placeholders, we engaged in conversations and critical thinking processes, weaving together the storylines we had captured during our explorations of Venice. We arranged the printed images on a large table. This allowed us to sort, shuffle, and rearrange them, facilitating connections between different situations and highlighting underlying tensions. For instance, we had come across and photographed signs in touristic areas restricting toilet use to customers only. This limited access to toilets in the city disproportionately affects street vendors who, due to the aforementioned housing politics of Venice, live on the mainland and commute to the touristic parts of Venice Island. To use a toilet, they are forced to walk long distances between their sales stand and storage space. By linking the image of a third infrastructural object, our own beds, to discussions around housing accessibility (the tables) and sanitary facilities (the toilets), we were able to reframe our own position within the broader dynamics in the city leading to displacement and resistance. Additionally, the beds opened a discussion about those who maintain our tourist beds, i.e., mostly migrant women performing exploitative shadow work. Hence, the elements of a home allow us to think of infrastructures as social reproduction that play an active part in the interlinkage of processes, practices, and people that maintain and sustain existence (see Hall 2020).

_____ Our work with images following our fieldwork not only deepened our understanding of some of the hidden ways in which the lives of people are (infra)structured, but also structured our understanding of the relatedness of the situated stories in various geographical locations. The images enabled us to interlink the various struggles and positions people inhabit in the city and included our own position within them. They are indeed "the overt point of contact and access between us all – the rules governing the space of everyday life" (Easterling 2014: 11). In this sense, this approach

// Figure 4
Activist table in a decayed social housing estate in Venice, September 12, 2023,
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// Figure 5
Tabel discussion with the team around printed images, September 13, 2023,
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offered a further elaboration of the situated work we started in Globe Aroma and The Yalla Project, as we now explored infrastructural objects across multiple environments and positionalities in the city. The work with infrastructural objects, as Mitropoulos suggests, became "a field of experimentation and variation rather than repetition of the self-same, to amount not to reproduction and therefore standardisation but, instead, to an ongoing and critical engagement with the between" (Mitropouos 2021: 177).

_____ In the next sections of this paper, we will discuss how we shared our findings in the exhibition space, as well as our positionality. Before venturing into our final day's exchange with the visitors of the pavilion, where we reflected (on our residency, method, and gathered knowledge) to think forward (by imagining alternative scenarios for the city), it is essential to acknowledge our own immersion in the tensions present in the city. We, too, slept in beds in Venice, used its toilets, and dined at tables. Therefore, it is crucial to discuss our own positionality within the complex fabric and tensions present in the city.

INFRASTRUCTURE TO UNSETTLE (OURSELVES) _____ The transference of the method from Brussels and Nablus to a different geographical context contributed to other forms of situated knowledge, one of which involved a reflection on our own positionality. Following approaches within relational ontology, we see infrastructural objects as being inherently relational, hence "existing within a relational context of action, material, and environment" (Ingold 2007: 175), an approach which is reminiscent of Haraway's "material-semiotic nodes" (1988: 595). We therefore start from the assumption that it is impossible to analyze infrastructural objects without looking at ourselves while observing them. María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) goes a step further by stating that because situated knowledge is relational, it is inherently related to thinking with care. For de la Bellacasa, however, knowledge-making based on care is not a smooth process: "a feminist inspired vision of caring cannot be grounded in the longing for a smooth harmonious world, but in vital ethico-affective everyday practical doings that engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences" (ibid.: 199, see also Fitz / Krasny 2019). In what follows, we will adhere to de la Bellacasa's non-idealized and non-innocent approach of caring in relating while we reflect on our own positionality through the infrastructural objects.

_____ During our residency, we started observing how we ourselves interacted with the infrastructural objects that we were analyzing

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and recognized how our own positions intersected with and sometimes even contributed to larger structures of exclusion within the city that we tried to understand. This process of self-reflection through infrastructural objects enabled us "to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political" (Adams et al. 2015: 2). While at times unsettling, it also revealed "the political potential of valuing the world of sticky mediations" (de la Bellacasa 2012: 210). Or as Haraway asserts in her rejection of purity: "one must be in the action, be finite and dirty, not transcendent and clean" (Haraway 1997: 36).

// Figure 6
Discussion at the dinner table of Morion,
September 12, 2023, © Authors

_____ Our own beds served as an example of this dirty, reflexive work between the self and society. During our stay in Venice, the number of tourist beds had just surpassed the number of Venetian residents, exacerbating the housing crisis. Looking at our own Airbnb beds and knowing how we were part of the touristification and housing challenges unsettled us, and served as a mirror to question the impact on the city through our exhibition. Another example of beds that we came across during our residency were those from German architecture students who stayed in the social center Morion for a few months while doing renovation work in the city in the framework of the German pavilion. These beds shed light on another tension. A discussion over dinner with two young Italian women from the Venice housing movement ASC (*Assemblea Sociale per la Casa*) informed us about the frictions between the city and the Biennale. In their opinion, a short stay such as ours in the framework of the Biennale cannot build up a meaningful relation to the city and its local population, but rather intensifies the extractive pressures of tourism. An analysis of our Airbnb beds and the beds in Morion revealed the tensions between extraction and contribution, between short-term and long-term engagement with the city.

_____ The method of thinking through infrastructural objects, and the unsettling feelings this evoked, prompted us to reassess our approach and our relationship with the city and its residents in a more sustainable manner. Conscious of the potential ambiguity of our role as tourists, we arrived at the Biennale with an awareness that our actions could inadvertently contribute to hostility. Therefore, we had decided to focus our interventions in the Hospitality Lab of the San Marino Pavilion on the theme of hosting in hostility.

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Initially, our aim was to seek out people in need of space in the city and to utilize our privilege of having temporary access to infrastructure by offering it to them. We hoped that by doing so, we could challenge and disrupt the power relations between guests and hosts. Our intention was to detect potential hosts in the city who could transform the pavilion into an infrastructure of hospitality. We imagined activists needing a space to meet, local organizations needing a space to organize a dinner, or (homeless) people needing a place to charge their phones.

// Figure 7
Table conversations with passers-by during lunch in front of the pavilion, September 11, 2023, © Authors

⸻ However, on our first day in Venice we realized that we, too, were guests in the city and that the act of *allowing* people a space in *our* pavilion and to host people to host in our pavilion, "highlighted the self-contradictions and limits in the performative act of hospitality" (Katz 2022: 4). By looking for people that *we* thought were in need of space, and by offering them space in the framework of the Biennale, we disregarded a genuine and profound engagement with the local community. Prior to taking on the role of hosts in a foreign city, we recognized the significance of embodying the qualities of good guests. This involved approaching people without preconceived agendas and sincerely listening to their stories and experiences, allowing us to grasp the multi-layered realities of hospitality in Venice.

⸻ During the first days of our residency, as we conversed with visitors at the pavilion, exchanged greetings with passers-by during lunch in front of the pavilion, and established connections with local organizations, a tangible unease began to permeate within us. As a group of five women, these feelings were shared and acknowledged and became an important epistemic vehicle for personal and political transformation. The heightened awareness of embodied experiences and situated language among women echoes the ethos of the *autocoscienza* groups in Italian feminism during the 1970s, "where it was possible to consider as meaningful matter for discussion what have been previously understood as unpolitical or pre-political, for example experiences, feelings, and even silences" (Equi Pierazzini et al. 2021: 1265), and how those experiential relatings allow one "to construct a common political consciousness" (ibid.).

⸻ On the second day of our residency and after sharing those feelings with each other, we collectively decided to refrain from pursuing our initial intention of seeking hosts in the city under the guise of an artistic intervention. Instead, we embraced a new

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approach, viewing our residency as a form of field research. This shift from coming to Venice with a tentative agenda, to allowing ourselves to get affected by the conversations that arose around the infrastructural objects, seems reminiscent of what Ingold (2014) describes as "the creativity of undergoing." By actively immersing ourselves in the unknown, we relinquished control and allowed our research to be guided not by mastery but by submission (ibid.). This willingness to be affected and unsettled became the driving force behind our research.

// Figure 8
Table debate with food and drinks in the pavilion, September 14, 2023, © Authors

_____Our collective sense of unsettlement ultimately culminated in the collaborative act of re-editing the exhibition text during the final days of our residency. Gathered together, the five of us sat before the text, crossing out words and rewriting sentences, creating a visible palimpsest of our situated knowledge-making for the visitors of the pavilion.

INFRASTRUCTURE AS CONVERSATION _____ The closure of our Venetian journey took the form of a conversation centered on the significant infrastructural objects encountered in the field. We engaged with representatives from the realities we came across, and from which the same meaningful objects were taken. Confronted with the subjectivity and limitations of our understanding of these infrastructural objects and the underlying realities they belong to, we felt the urge to engage directly with those who daily operate with and through these objects. In a quasi-forensic manner, we laid out symbolic representations of these objects in the form of images on our table in the San Marino Pavilion.

_____The table, well-filled with food and drinks, served as a setting for these images, which in turn functioned as bodies of evidence during our conversation with the representatives of the social center Morion and of the *Assemblea Sociale per la Casa* (ASC), who joined us for a talk.

_____The bed, the toilet, and the table worked as media to challenge our preconceived notions about local realities by considering the point of view of the communities we met in Venice. The relatability and tangible nature of these infrastructural objects facilitated discussions ranging from mundane issues to more general and theoretical arguments. Starting with inquiries about who each of us thought a certain bed, toilet, or table belonged to, and what it was for, we delved into discussions about the right to the city and

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the frictions between hosting and hostility in Venice based on our respective experiences with these significant objects. Eventually, the conversation led to the least visible sources of these tensions and disparities, tackling the impact of global economic trends on an iconic location, the local political apparatus, and its neoliberal policy that progressively shifts Venice from being a city *for its citizens* to a commodified *city-as-an-attraction* (Salerno 2022), where revenues from destination consumption and overtourism (Visentin / Bertocchi 2019) are prioritized over the needs of local communities.

_____ Here, the infrastructural objects steered the discussion towards a constructive critique aimed at envisioning possible solutions and counteractions. Through their tangible presence, toilets, beds, and tables helped us to imagine alternative, fairer scenarios in Venice, and to consider how these could be achieved. The reflection began within the space where we were meeting, the San Marino Pavilion, a former warehouse, recently acquired by an affluent family expanding its activities to arts patronage. Situated in the San Lorenzo neighborhood, one of the few remaining places in Venice still vibrant with a rich local community, the space was adapted to be more conducive as an exhibition space, adding first of all a toilet – again. We collectively imagined how a space like this could be the ground for negotiation between local residents and external property owners in Venice, and how a major urban stakeholder such as the Venice Biennale could be drawn into a more virtuous process.

_____ The reflection scaled up to explore opportunities that could benefit the broader city, identifying a potential site in the Biennale's Giardini, a conspicuous and unique part of the city owned by the Biennale, usually only accessible during festivals upon the payment of an entry ticket. This area could instead be made freely accessible all year round and integrated with facilities and services for residents to respond to the overall lack of spaces dedicated to families, children, and recreation. Our conversation eventually dwelled on potential processes to initiate a dialogue with the owners to gain their consideration, as well as the role universities and the local school of architecture at the Università Iuav di Venezia (IUAV) could play in supporting this process with mature proposals encompassing design, policies, and practical implementation.

_____ Reflecting on our journey and presence at the Venice Biennale, we observe a notable shift in the role of infrastructural objects throughout the process. A consistent element in this transformative process was the power of infrastructural objects to move people into different realities by evoking ordinary scenes

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of others' everydaynesses. In the preparatory phase, significant items served as means to encapsulate, transport, and stimulate conversations around the diverse experiences of Brussels' Globe Aroma and Nablus' The Yalla Project. However, during the residency, objects took the agency as guides in the exploration of an unknown context: their materiality and ordinariness offered a sense of the local, socio-spatial complexity and provided an entry point to the everyday experiences of some of the city's communities, offering tangible insights into routines, conditions, and spaces. In the closing phase of the residency, these everyday infrastructural objects turned into a collaborative medium for envisioning and debating alternative scenarios (Kemp 2011). The bed, the toilet, and the table belong to the individual, domestic sphere. However, they also evoke the more complex systems they are part of. Consequently, the negotiation around these objects could extend to dynamics of homing the city, exploring ways to make them more inclusive and fairer (Low 2016).

INFRASTRUCTURE AS A METHODOLOGY FOR CURATION _____ Recently, some scholars have reconceptualized curation beyond the museum as a qualitative research methodology to collect, organize, research, conceptualize, select, contextualize, arrange, interpret, and, finally, transfer findings surrounding a particular topic (Persohn 2021). It was with this perspective in mind that we stepped into the curational process of our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility*. As argued by Persohn (2021), the curational process, oftentimes long, iterative, and demanding, provides "a lens for seeing other meta-ideas" across the material. Indeed, we used the format of an exhibition, and the act of curation in particular, to examine tensions related to hosting in hostility across scales and borders. Taking up our curating role necessitated distancing ourselves from the work we were doing in the two (and later three) spaces of hospitality (in Brussels, Nablus, and Venice). This was essential to ensure that the content became comprehensible and ultimately transferrable, utilizing the visual realm as the medium of transfer. As a (transferrable) method, curation appeared to be open for experimentation, creativity, and care (towards others and ourselves), all features that we value but that we often miss in more conventional methods (a similar remark was given by Bruno Latour on the thought exhibition *Reset Modernity!* that he curated). In that sense, and as highlighted before, the exhibition also functioned as a conversation that we moderated, echoing Farver's (2001: 59–60, cited also by Persohn 2021) words: "As moderator of the 'discussion,' the curator must be able to elicit passionate, even extreme, opinions, yet keep the dialogue lucid and well-paced."

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_____ It is not exaggerated to say that our exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* pushed the boundaries of infrastructure as a (feminist) methodology, as over the course of time we relinquished control as curators. Instead of us curating the exhibition, the infrastructural objects we emphasized as heuristic devices from the very start started to curate us and eventually the exhibition. Hence, infrastructure, as a methodology to understand tensions related to hosting in hostility, began to curate *Hosting in Hostility*. This shift raises important questions about the role of infrastructure as a curatorial methodology. What does it actually mean when infrastructural objects start to curate? When infrastructure becomes a methodology for curation? For us, it means that we ourselves are no longer central in the curational process. The infrastructural objects instead become the lens through which we perceive structuring forces, underlying agendas, and their daily consequences, and ultimately become a decisive force in the curational process. We did not intend to write ourselves out of the exhibition. On the contrary, the objects also tell our story. They tell a multitude of stories on hosting in hostility, as many as there are people to think through infrastructure. By sharing our curatorial position through infrastructure, we aimed to distribute authority more evenly. Indeed, the infrastructural objects allow for a (relatively) horizontal sharing of knowledge because they function as "material-semiotic nodes" (Haraway 1988: 595) that generate all kinds of stories including all kinds of positionalities. It is here that Butler's claim of vulnerability "as a form of activism" materializes in infrastructure, as infrastructure opens up unknown ways to share new narratives and thus resist dominant discourses. (Butler 2015: 123) Acting as moderators of the discussion, the infrastructural objects invite everyone to step in.

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// Image Credits

Figure 1: Photo taken by the authors while setting up the exhibition *Hosting in Hostility* in the San Marino Pavilion, September 11, 2023.

Figure 2: Dinner table in The Yalla Project as shown in the exhibition, September 11, 2023,

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Figure 3: Venice "breakfast table" against an eviction of an apartment, September 14, 2023,
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Figure 4: Activist table in a decayed social housing estate in Venice, September 12, 2023,
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Figure 5: Table discussion of printed images on a large table, September 13, 2023, © Authors
Figure 6: Discussion at the dinner table of Morion, September 12, 2023, © Authors
Figure 7: Table conversations with passers-by during lunch in front of the pavilion, September 11,
2023, © Authors
Figure 8: Table debate with food and drinks in the pavilion, September 14, 2023, © Authors

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KITCHEN WORKSHOP: CITYZENSHIP AS INFRASTRUCTURE

ABSTRACT⎯⎯⎯ This essay focuses on the Kitchen Workshop, a collective by women from Syria and Turkey, initiated in 2015, based in Gaziantep, Turkey. The aim is to explain how the Kitchen Workshop interchanges the roles of hospitality and re-creates the infrastructures of living together. Questioning citizenship as nation-state infrastructure, the paper asks how and what kind of feminist thinking and acting can re-conceptualize and re-articulate the infrastructure(s) for living together, thinking with spaces of migration, migrants as political subjects, and the agency of solidarity.

⎯⎯⎯The departure point of this essay is "Vocabulary of Hospitality," my ongoing work since 2012, which includes research, curating, and design about the spaces of illegalized migration and solidarity in Istanbul and elsewhere in Turkey, along Fortress Europe, Hong Kong, in Melbourne, and elsewhere in Australia. This essay particularly focuses on the "Kitchen Workshop," a collective of women from Syria and Turkey, which I am also part of, initiated in 2015 and based in Gaziantep, Turkey. In this essay, questioning citizenship as nation-state infrastructure, I ask how and what kind of feminist thinking and doing can re-conceptualize and re-articulate the infrastructure(s) for living together, thinking with spaces of migration, migrants as political subjects, and the agency of solidarity. I aim to explain how the Kitchen Workshop interchanges the roles of hospitality and re-create the infrastructures of living together. The importance of feminist infrastructures is in their language and exploration towards an equal, free, and just world, despite the patriarchal migration regimes built on uncertainty, exceptionalism, and racism. Feminist thinking "can never be satisfied with equivalences until we have equality, never satisfied with legal rights until we have justice, and never satisfied with democracy until individual freedom is calibrated on the basis of freedom for all" (Arruzza / Bhattacharya / Fraser 2019). In this framework, first I introduce how migration is an emergency to the modern nation-state, and I articulate this relationship in reference to hospitality, law, and citizenship. Then, I discuss this in the context of a broken modernism and nation-state, the inside/outside condition of migration not being enough to understand hospitality and citizenship. Building up on these, I present the Kitchen Workshop, its initiation as a collective, its progression as a temporary physical space and later around a floor table. Finally, I

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introduce and discuss "cityzenship" as feminist infrastructures that move based on proximity and participation.

_____ Migration is an emergency to the nation-state, not only as a matter of defining il/legality, but also as a matter of citizenship. I use the term "illegalized migration" to highlight that the illegality of migrants is a result of the laws of the nation-states, rather than a matter of human rights, or an intrinsic feature of migrants (Bauder 2013: 3–4). I use the term "good citizenship" as an infrastructure of the nation-state, with elements of language, education, culture, and others, and these are created for raising the good citizens to live together (see Lemanski 2020). Even if today's nation-state infrastructures are more and more broken, the good citizen is still the basis of its construct, and the migrants, by their very nature, are an emergency to this construct. I utilize the notion of "hospitality" to highlight several dimensions of this emergency, not only from a legal perspective, which is of the nation-state, but also from a socio-economic and cultural perspective, which is of citizenship. I adopt the term "unconditional hospitality" as the search for an understanding of feminist infrastructures based on the entangled roles of hosts and guests who have the right to hospitality in different temporalities.

_____ My discursive references follow two main directions. One is on feminism and spectral thinking by Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019). In relation to them, I also adopt Ulus Baker's theory of intervals (1976). A second strain of references comes from migration and philanthropy, where I mainly go back to Bülent Diken and Carsten Bagge Laustsen (2005), Derrida (2000), and Kant (1795) about territory and hospitality.

_____ Whereas citizenship is the formal infrastructure of the nation-state, illegalized migrants inhabit the gaps, the boundaries and borders, the cracks of this infrastructure; they hold its invisible aspects and act as the glue of these infrastructures through their unregistered economy, however unacknowledged. This essay reveals the inherent hostility in the laws of hospitality of the nation-states and international legal frameworks and is thereafter dedicated to unconditional hospitality as the feminist articulation of a spectral infrastructure, where everybody has the right to host. I explain how unconditional hospitality performed by women in the Kitchen Collective acts upon the infrastructures of the nation-state by focusing on the migrant as a social and political subject, where the representation of the migrant is acknowledged as that of the citizen – not only from a position of mutual aid, care, and responsibility, but also from within the existing but less-used legal

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frameworks. I claim that feminist infrastructures infuse through what is already there in the infrastructure and regenerate it, but are made invisible through the territorial claim of the sovereign. I claim that if hospitality as feminist infrastructures did not exist, the formal infrastructures of the nation-state would not function either. Hospitality, in this unconditional form, is vital to the formal infrastructures of citizenship, while citizenship is not essential to hospitality. Finally, I claim that while citizenship includes rights and equality for citizens, unconditional hospitality as feminist infrastructures imagine plurality, accessibility, and justice for all. This is where the idea of cityzenship comes to the fore as possible feminist infrastructures. Cityzenship defined based on belonging to a city, working based on proximity and participation facilitate relations that can propose unconditional hospitality where everyone is entitled to be hosts and guests in different temporalities.

ON EMERGENCY AND HOSPITALITY _____ Feminist infrastructures of migration work to create accessibility towards an imagined world of equality and justice for all. The patriarchal thinking and politics are based on the distinction between "us/inside" and "them/outside." Schmitt (1985: 55). The state of emergency – in this case the act of migrating and the arrival of migrants at the border of the nation-state – enables the sovereign (host) to suspend the law, creating an ambiguous, uncertain territory for the migrants (guests). Kant's and Derrida's discussions on the right to hospitality (*Perpetual Peace* ([1795] 1917: 137–138, and *Of Hospitality* [2009]) highlight the nation-state and philanthropy; where simply by asking the guest their name, they are enjoined to the realm of legality.

_____ This can be furthered by the explanation of Diken and Laustsen (2005: 80) that the nation-state keeps illegalized migrants "inside" by making them subject to itself, but also "outside" by keeping them as guests, and not letting them participate in the law. The articulation to be made here is about migrants being "inside" the law through a registration process of their own, hence being subject to the law if necessary, yet remaining "outside" the law, in temporary protection, exempt from the rights to work, from social security, and from citizenship. In such politics of migration, "inside" and "outside" is not enough as a conceptualization.

_____ Furthermore, the guest (illegalized migrant) introduces a different world to the host's (nation-state) space of sovereignty, representing alternative values, languages, cultural practices, and behaviors that might or might not suit that of the host. The nation-state is built on the idea of the "good citizen," whereupon all

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its mechanisms are devised for this purpose, via legal structures, education, work, and leisure, and by organizing culture and daily life. The guest has to learn the values, customs, and languages in order to live together with the good citizens, but still may or may not become a citizen (legally), or a good citizen (socially and culturally). This means that guests (migrants) are already an emergency to the modern nation-state because they do not fit the nation-state's established understanding of the good citizen. This means unconditional hospitality is impossible for the nation-state, since giving migrants the right to reside without teaching them to be good citizens is impossible for it. The "inside" and "outside" entangle both on a legal, social, and cultural basis.

_____This entanglement can also be observed in labor. The formal infrastructures of work established by the nation-state, which include just payment schemes, taxing, and social security, do not apply to guests (migrants). Illegalized migrants, while not having the right to work, still make the economy work, through their informal, seasonal, undocumented labor, and the related time, solidarity, maintenance, and consumption, which altogether create infrastructures that the nation-state's formal infrastructures depend on. Here, it is necessary to re-iterate that "inside" and "outside" are not necessarily enough as a conceptualization, because illegalized migrants, while being exempt from the rights related to labor, social security, health care, and retirement, are interior to the workplace and labor infrastructures through their labor.

HOSPITALITY AND NATION-STATE _____Turkey's national politics have treated migrants differently according to their identity, class, as well as the international political context at the period of arrival. While the political and legal actors have referred to migrants as "guests," some were granted citizenship, some were relocated to "developed" countries, while others have remained in transition or unregistered, making them illegalized migrants indefinitely. Important to note here is that this pattern was not assumed to function until the turn of the century; migrants arriving in Turkey were expected to move on towards Europe; thus, Turkey was a temporary refuge. However, a consequence of the Twin Tower bombings on September 11, 2001 has been the implementation of increasingly harder international policies of asylum which have resulted in periods of stay for migrants in Turkey gradually increasing from three months to six years (Ek 2014: 363–386), and currently longer (without any formally declared waiting time anymore.)

_____The first law on migration and asylum in the history of Turkey,

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"Law Nr. 6458; Law on Foreigners and International Protection" (Official Newspaper no. 28615, April 11, 2013), which was fully accredited with the European Union framework, has recognized those notions of asylum and refuge, although it exempted the migrants arriving from non-European countries. This exemption integrates emergency as an assumption in the law, within the state's philosophy of defining citizenship. Every time migrants arrive from outside Europe (which is the main pattern of migration towards Turkey) is an emergency, which leads to the possibility of a continuous illegalizing of migration, and a continuous uncertainty for illegalized migrants.

_____ Since the beginning of the Syrian War in 2011, Turkey has become the largest host country in the world, with 3,644,342 registered people under temporary protection (UNHCR 2019), the majority of whom reside in major cities of Turkey, and in cities close to the border with Syria. Gaziantep is one of the border cities where both camps and urban environments provide temporary protection. Migrants from Syria make up 22% of the city's population (437,844), and only 3% of them are located in the camps (UNHCR 2019). Most of the migrants from Syria in Gaziantep have come from Aleppo (Akdemir 2017), a city that Gaziantep was actually a part of during the Ottoman Empire. After the First World War, the national border that was drawn separated extended families, relatives, and friends who were originally from the Vilayet of Aleppo into the respective cities and nationalities of Turkey and Syria. Gaziantep is the largest and the only metropolitan city in the southeast of Turkey, and a project city of modern Turkey, established through the modern infrastructures to raise good citizens. Since the revolution and extended conflict in Syria, Gaziantep has been the first destination for migrants from Aleppo, precisely because of the centuries of relationship between the (now) two cities. Syrian migrants were seen to be moving closer to their friends and families in Turkey, but this time legally becoming their guests under temporary protection (Kavuncu 2018: 42).

_____ In 2016, after signing the EU-Turkey Joint Action Plan on migration (European Parliament 2016), which covered issues of the return of illegalized migrants from Europe to Turkey and the resettlement of illegalized migrants from Syria, Turkey started implementing new policies, including providing citizenship to eligible migrants from Syria, as well as implementing a mobility
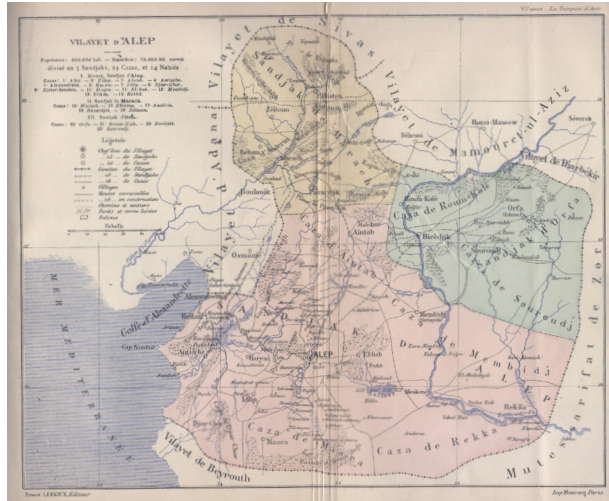
// Figure 1
Map showing Gaziantep as part of the city of Aleppo during the Ottoman Empire (between 1890 and 1895, Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie D'asie*. Open access map. Printed in Paris.)

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restriction regime, limiting their movement only to the cities they are registered in (UNHCR 2017). This has meant that the migrants cannot leave the cities they are registered in without obtaining permission from the State Department of Migration. This context attests to the guesthood of migrants under temporary protection, taking them hostage, whereupon the borders of a city spatially reproduce the borders of the nation-state. Between the national and international laws and the agreements between the EU and Turkey, the city replaces the camp.

KITCHEN WORKSHOP AND CITYZENSHIP _____ The nation-state border is where humans are identified as hosts (citizens) or guests (migrants), and it is the nation-state borders that are reproduced as the borders of camps, neighborhoods, and cities in order to further define, expand, or limit the laws of hospitality. The camp is the space of management and confinement where the migrant is hostage, shares guesthood, or becomes a ghost. Although the city is re-legislated to become a camp, and the neighborhood is where the migrant is a guest, there lies the possibility of becoming a host through social relationships and solidarity. Feminist infrastructures inhabit these borders of the inside and outside amongst national borders, as well as those perpetuated; intersecting and parallel worlding, in the borders and across the boundaries, along the peripheries, as well in the rooms and cracks of the broken nation-state infrastructures.

_____ At the end of 2014, a solidarity kitchen was initiated by a women's group in Gaziantep, based on shared feelings and issues among the hosts (citizens) and the guests (migrants), such as working conditions, children's education, public health, racism, discrimination, segregation, women's visibility in public space, and violence against women. This kitchen was located in the Bey neighborhood, down a side street that leads to Atatürk Boulevard, on the ground floor of a heritage building owned and used by the Kırkayak Cultural Center, a registered NGO in the city. The kitchen was created as an epilogue to two years of activities by women who made use of different spaces in the city. These activities included self-defense workshops, performative group therapy sessions, and meetings with different Turkish and Syrian NGOs about what can be done to create better conditions for living together in the city. The women who set up the kitchen come from different backgrounds in Gaziantep and Aleppo, and they either know each other from Aleppo or Gaziantep, but all have participated in different previous activities at the Kırkayak Cultural Center. The first gathering for the Kitchen Workshop was made via the initiative of a smaller group of

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women, which enabled all those interested women to come together
for a conversation, although the idea was not necessarily to set up
a physical kitchen. This particular idea and others emerged and
evolved over time. Later activities included cooking, walking in
the city, visits to other sites and organizations, conversations on
culture and cultural production, language, daily life, women's issues,
migrants' issues, and so on.

‾‾‾‾‾ One of the main directions of conversation in the Kitchen
Workshop was the historical connection between Gaziantep and
Aleppo. The fact that Gaziantep was once part of Aleppo cancels out
what is commonly thought today, that the people from Gaziantep
are the hosts to those from Aleppo. This brought the conversation
towards the idea of "cityzenship" (*hemşehri* in Turkish and Arabic),
thus defining the socio-spatial condition of being from the same
city. Cityzenship is also a concept acknowledged by Turkey's "Law
No. 5393; Municipality Law" (Official Newspaper no. 25874, May
3, 2005), which maintains that people living in the same city are
bonded with the concept of belonging to the same city, which is
re-phrased in this article as "cityzenship," and they have the right
to participate in the decision-making mechanisms in/regarding
the city. However, this law and the particular aspect of the law on
local representation have been overlooked and neglected. These
social and legal dimensions of cityzenship made it one of the main
discourses that the Kitchen Workshop communicated later on,
emphasizing how the Municipality Law brings forward an under-
standing of hospitality, living together in the same city, and the
representation of cityzens. The Kitchen Workshop took the notion
of cityzenship as a basis, and reflected on unconditional hospital-
ity as a physical space, not as a question of nationality (original
belonging), but a question of collective belonging to the city, and the
Kitchen Workshop assuring the right to remain and participate in
decision-making, not based on a territory of the city, but based on
inhabiting the city. This approach was about sharing the common
struggles of being a woman in the city, which is built on patriarchal
rules, as well as leaving out a categorization related to migration,
by acknowledging the collective belonging, and the interchanging
roles of hospitality.

THE TEMPORARY KITCHEN‾‾‾‾‾ The idea of cooking went forward
in 2016 with a physical kitchen, created by renovating an existing
space on the ground floor of the Kırkayak Cultural Center. This
space opened directly onto the street with its own entrance, making
it accessible before and after the cultural center's opening hours.

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The outside door was not locked most of the time, making it possible for people to come in, cook, produce, organize activities, or rest during different times of the day. The space was composed of two rooms: a smaller back room that stores food and equipment, and a front room that has a free space in the middle and auxiliary niches embedded in the walls. The front room was square in plan, with a free-flow space in the middle, making it suitable for activities of different temporality. The use and design of the spaces were decided collectively, experienced through self-observing the use of space during common activities. The stone load-bearing walls had niches that were used as temporary storage for stools, floor tables, jars, books, etc. The floor cover was not only functional for the activities of/for women, but also suited to the culture – such as eating on the floor or gathering around a circular floor table. A niche by the window place overlooking the street was used as the display facade, presenting various temporary displays of banners and posters to the outside.

_____ In this case, the Kitchen Workshop functioned as a space of sharing and sustaining the struggle for hosthood, for women from different backgrounds, both from Gaziantep and from Aleppo, based on their common issues. Working as a network, women mobilized and organized workshops, as well as continuous cooking activities. Food was not perceived as a cultural commodity, but appeared as a metaphor for production, constituting a space in itself for cooking up, researching, and preparing ideas of living together in the city. The Kitchen in this instance also performed as a space of unconditional hospitality, where the one who comes and cooks for the time being is the host at the kitchen during that time.

POLITICS OF THE FLOOR TABLE _____ The world went through the COVID Pandemic of 2020–2022. This was another time of rupture in Gaziantep and Turkey, like elsewhere, a time of isolation and further insecurity for all, but especially for the illegalized migrants. Access to hygiene, masks, and health care (testing and medicine) were major issues, in addition to the worsening work conditions within the precarity of capitalism and the undocumented economy. It was impossible to operate the kitchen as an interior space in this period, but togetherness was important more than ever.

_____ The kitchen as the physical space in the Kırkayak Cultural Center was given to a family in need of shelter, and the kitchen decided to gather out in the open. Helped by the warm climate of Southeast Turkey, the floor table enabled the collective to take place in parks and other open public spaces, creating commons

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from within the NGO and the urban space of the city. The politics of the floor table was brought into conversation, where people sit on the floor around a circular table and share the food. The floor table is an extremely politicized object in Turkey. Presented as a lack of civility by the modern republic, the floor table represented those who are unmodern, uneducated, rural, and uncivilized, whereas the modern dinner table was where the good citizen was represented with chairs, individual plates and cutlery, and table manners. Since 2012, around the same time as the migration from Syria, there were different winds of populism in Turkey, this time embracing the floor table, adding tradition and religion in the mix of representational rhetorics of the floor table. The conversations within the Kitchen Workshop moved on with the possibility of re-appropriating the narrative and taking ownership of the floor table, from a position of commoning both the floor (ground) and the table as objects for collective inhabitation.

TOWARDS FEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURES _____ Ulus Baker's theory of intervals (1976) was useful to bring forward in these conversations. Originally from the philosophy and theory of visual culture, where Baker deals with film and moving images, they emphasized the proximity between two things, and the principle of participation as the elements of the theory of intervals. The conversations were about how the proximity and participation of the rules were continuously redefined in the Kitchen Workshop, so, instead of thinking territory, the idea was to think of proximity; instead of thinking borders, the idea was to think of participation. These motivations hold the basic working process of the Kitchen Workshop in order to create the sustenance of living through the disasters in the unjust spaces that the nation-state's formal infrastructures produce.

_____ This map visualizes the process and ethics of gathering in the Kitchen Workshop across Gaziantep, Aleppo, and the border landscape. The elements of the map were brought together collectively by the women thinking about mobility and movement, the memory of places, objects, and people, and the experience of labor and livelihood. Terms, sentences, and figures are representations of different processes, traumas, desires, symbols of togetherness, separations, and gatherings. These were then brought together for presentation and made into this map.

_____ Kitchen Workshop put forward proximity and participation as a process of creating other infrastructures that possibly work outside the formal infrastructures, or by hacking them, or by flowing/filling their gaps and incompetent parts. Feminist spaces and acts

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can be defined upon feminist infrastructures; however, the aim is not to stay in the cracks but to transform and create anew. Here the words of Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser (2019) need to be re-iterated: Feminist thinking "can never be satisfied with equivalences until we have equality, never satisfied with legal rights until we have justice, and never satisfied with democracy until individual freedom is calibrated on the basis of freedom for all."

_____ Towards feminist infrastructures, I conclude by bringing forward the sentences from the Kitchen Workshop map **[fig. 2]**: "The values of cityzenship are sharing, collective belonging, equality, participation, learning together, self-organization, solidarity, unconditional hospitality, freedom and justice for all. The floor table is the guarantee of sitting in equal intervals. The basis of the floor table is equity in participation; both in sharing the labor, and the decision-making. The kitchen is a space of unconditional hospitality. The kitchen is a space of gathering, a space of collective inhabiting. Learning to live together is the practice of commoning. The collective belonging in the kitchen is 'cityzenship.' Equality, justice, and freedom for all are shared aspirations and the basis of solidarity."
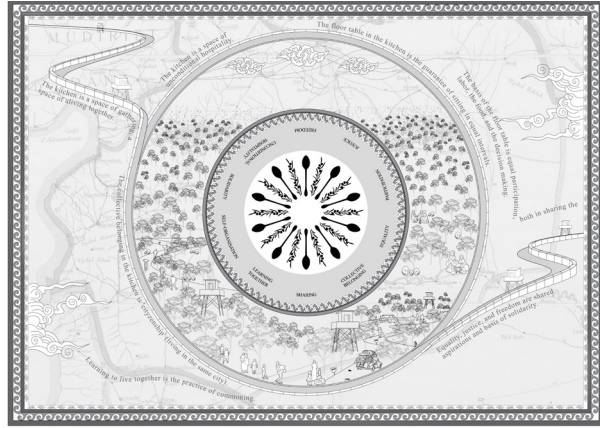
// Figure 2
The Kitchen Workshop Map (2020–2022). Mapping process by women in the Kitchen Workshop, prepared by Merve Bedir. Courtesy of Kitchen Workshop and the *Designing Peace* exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

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// Image Credits

Figure 1: Map showing Gaziantep as part of the city of Aleppo during the Ottoman Empire (between 1890 and 1895, Vital Cuinet, *La Turquie D'asie*. Open access map. Printed in Paris.)
Figure 2: The Kitchen Workshop Map (2020–2022). Mapping process by women in the Kitchen Workshop, prepared by Merve Bedir. Courtesy of Kitchen Workshop and the *Designing Peace* exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum.

// About the Autor

Merve Bedir is an architect based in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the spatial dimensions of hospitality and mobility and their politics. Her most notable works are framed under "Vocabulary of Hospitality," which has been published in *The Funambulist*, reviewed by *The Guardian* and the *Avery Review*, and exhibited at the *Istanbul Design Biennale* and at the *Smithsonian Design Museum*, among others. Bedir holds a Ph.D. from Delft University of Technology, and B.Arch. from Middle East Technical University in Ankara.

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PUBLIC ART AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE. RE-IMAGINING AND RE-WRITING URBAN POLICY

ABSTRACT _____ The contribution develops the understanding of public art as "social infrastructure" (Klinenberg 2018) and proposes using this perspective as a basis for art funding and associated urban policy. To examine the role urban policy attributes to public art in shaping public space as a place for socio-political discourse, the tax-based public art funding agency Public Art Vienna is used as an illustrative case study. Within the policy analysis of its funding guidelines, "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers / O'Neill 2012) and the feminist concept "care" (Fisher / Tronto 1990) are used as critical lenses to identify hegemonic notions in the understanding of public space. This analysis is informed by feminist infrastructure critique, spatial theory, and an interview conducted with the managing director of Public Art Vienna. To demonstrate that public art approaches public spaces in a much more nuanced, intersectional, and politically critical way as demanded by urban policy, five public art projects funded by Public Art Vienna are referenced. The contribution re-imagines public art as "social infrastructure" and consequently proposes the care-ethical re-writing of Public Art Vienna's funding guidelines.

_____ This contribution analyses the role that urban policy attributes to public art in shaping public space as "social infrastructure" (Klinenberg 2018). Furthermore, it re-imagines this transformatively by employing a care-ethical infrastructure critique and referencing artistic projects.

_____ In light of contemporary undemocratic endeavors in European countries, there is an increasing emphasis on the potential of public space to facilitate public interactions among strangers and democratic discourse – its potential to be a "social infrastructure." Urban policy strives to cultivate this potential and identifies public art as a tool for revitalizing public spaces. Public Art Vienna (*KÖR Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*), a publicly funded institutional body responsible for organizing and delivering public art in Vienna, aligns with this aim. In its mission statement, it states that public art shall revive public space "as an agora – a place of sociopolitical and cultural discussion" (Public Art Vienna 2023a). As outlined in Public Art Vienna's funding guidelines, funds are allocated to artistic projects that engage with freely accessible public space for everyone, as well as highlight and deepen the urban identity

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(Public Art Vienna 2024). Here, the funding guidelines function as a policy instrument. By using Public Art Vienna as an example, the contribution explores what role urban policy attributes to public art in fostering social infrastructures.

_____As a basis for the critical analysis of the funding guidelines, their institutional origins and references to art theory are retraced. Here, Public Art Vienna's website (www.koer.or.at) and its extensive online archive (www.koer.or.at/en/projects/) are referred to, as well as an interview with the managing director, Martina Taig.[1] Through this, I examine which understanding of public space is inscribed within the funding guidelines. To highlight hegemonic notions within this understanding, the concept of "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers/ O'Neill 2012) is used as a critical lens.

_____Building on this critique, I propose a re-writing of the funding guidelines aligned with re-imagining the role of public art in creating social infrastructures. Here, the feminist concept of "care" (Tronto 2013) serves as an ethical foundation. Furthermore, I think through and with artistic projects funded by Public Art Vienna. I use these as reference points to underscore that the care-ethical re-formulation of the funding guidelines corresponds to contemporary artistic practice. This substantiates that public art engages with public spaces in a more nuanced and intersectional way than dictated by policy. Thereby, public art not only fosters public space as social infrastructure but _is_ a social infrastructure itself.

_____With reference to spatial theory, infrastructural violence, and care, the contribution expands a feminist infrastructure critique to include care-ethical aspects and argues that this should encompass both critique and re-imagination. By using Public Art Vienna as an example, it demonstrates how feminist infrastructure critique is adaptable to urban policy. Thus, it has the potential to be applied to other policy documents formulated by various public art institutions.

PUBLIC ART AS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURES _____In urban policy as well as by Public Art Vienna, the potential of public art to create spaces of social interaction and democratic exchange is recognized. This is based on a specific understanding of space that conceives public space as "social infrastructure." The concept of "social infrastructure" is situated in Urban Theory and was introduced by the American sociologist Eric Klinenberg in his book _Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life_ (2018). Social infrastructures encompass physical public space such as sidewalks, parks, community gardens and playgrounds, which both enable and shape public interactions.[2]

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By inviting people into public space, social infrastructures foster face-to-face encounters within specific social groups, as well as among social differences (Bloomaert 2014; Klinenberg 2018). Its aim is to facilitate sociality (Latham / Layton 2019: 3).

_____ Indeed, public space is not a *social* infrastructure per se. Rather, it is an infrastructure with the potential to be social, although this potential is not always realized. Public space is, after all, inherently political. By regulating the relations between goods, people, and resources, infrastructures determine who is connected, who has access, who can control movements, and who cannot. They enable or prohibit certain forms of social life and multispecies coexistence (Beck et al. 2022: 9). Due to their power over regulation and accessibility, infrastructures are instruments of politics. Thus, public space can foster social cohesion and equal access, but at the same time reproduce infrastructural violence.

_____ The term "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers / O'Neill 2012) describes the fact that infrastructures play a certain role in (re)producing socio-political inequalities (Star 1999; Larkin 2013; Lemanski 2019: 21) and global social asymmetries. These structural injustices manifest themselves in various forms of colonialism, racism, sexism, and classism (Beck et al. 2022: 9). Moreover, infrastructures (literally) transport narratives of economic growth, technological progress, and neoliberal equality across the globe (Anand et al. 2018: 3). Therefore, when discussing infrastructural violence, it is crucial to consider the exploitation of natural resources and environmental degradation as well. It can be stated that infrastructural violence hinders public space from being a social infrastructure.

_____ Public space is not a place of vivid sociopolitical and democratic discussion per se. It has to be *produced*. In this regard, public art can play an activating role by initiating conversations, interactions, and political discussion.[3] It not only fosters public space to be a social infrastructure but acts as a social infrastructure itself. Here, public art is part of the described ambivalence as well: While it has the potential to address and challenge infrastructural violence, public art can also reproduce urban power structures (Liinamaa 2014: 531). Therefore, it is crucial how policy documents define the role of public art in engaging with public space.

CARE-ETHICAL INFRASTRUCTURE CRITIQUE OF PUBLIC ART VIENNA'S FUNDING GUIDELINES _____ Public Art Vienna (*KÖR Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*) is an example of the tax-based funding of public art in Europa. As the most important institutional public

art body in Vienna, it has organized and delivered public art since 2004.[4] It receives funding from three different departments: Vienna's municipal administrative units of Housing, City Planning, and Culture. This demonstrates that public art is not solely funded out of artistic and cultural interest. Rather, its significance in shaping public space is acknowledged as well. Thus, public art can be seen as an interface practice between art, architecture, and urban development. Consequently, it must not only embody artistic value, but also engage with its urban context. So, how does Public Art Vienna, as an actor of urban policy, expect public art to engage with public space? How can this understanding be re-imagined in order to foster public art as a social infrastructure?

———— To answer these questions, the funding guidelines of Public Art Vienna are critically analyzed. They serve as one of the central instruments in the funding process[5] and are thoroughly considered by artists.[6] They determine basic conditions and formal characteristics for submissions by encompassing the "principles and perquisites for funding" (Public Art Vienna 2024). In addition to a multitude of legal and bureaucratic conditions outlined in nine sections, one addresses the practical implementation of submitted projects.[7] Within this section, there are two paragraphs (2.1 and 2.2) particularly describing how public art should engage with public space. They state that public art engages with freely accessible public space for everyone and emphasize the importance of public art in highlighting and deepening urban identity (Public Art Vienna 2024). Both paragraphs refer to the agora as an ideal for public space as referenced in Public Art Vienna's mission statement (Public Art Vienna 2023a).

———— In the following, I will examine hegemonic notions inscribed in the understanding of public space as expressed by these paragraphs and the reference of the agora. Therefore, I use a care-ethical infrastructure critique as a transformative tool. Care is embedded within feminist theory and is defined as an activity of maintaining, continuing, and repairing multispecies livelihood (Fisher / Tronto 1990: 40). Thus, care relationships can be observed in all areas of human and more-than-human coexistence (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Moreover, care encompasses a theoretical critique of power, patriarchy, and capitalism, as well as highlights practical and daily effects. Considering (social) infrastructures, it draws attention to care inequalities and the hegemonic distribution of care—specific types of infrastructural violence. Furthermore, care is an ethical concept that is connected to other concepts such as interdependency, responsibility, vulnerability, maintenance, and solidarity. Budling

[4)]
Initially, Public Art Vienna was founded by Vienna's municipal administrative units of Housing, City Planning, and Culture. In 2007 it was transformed into a limited liability company (GmbH) (see Public Art Vienna 2023a).

[5)]
As Taig explained, the funding process consists of several elements: Submitted projects must adhere to the funding guidelines and meet the proposed deadline. A jury reviews the submissions and announces its funding decision (see Taig 2023). Since its foundation, Public Art Vienna has funded almost 400 permanent and temporary artistic projects (see Public Art Vienna 2023b).

[6)]
In conversation with artists, I learned that the funding guidelines are closely considered for submission, while the mission statement and the guiding principles (re)formulated by each selected jury are not.

[7)]
This weighting represents Public Art Vienna's attempt to maintain openness to a variety of submitted projects, a responsibility it holds as a central player in the field of public art funding, according to Taig. She further explains that Public Art Vienna aims to provide orientation within its guidelines, but at the same time to avoid restricting and predefining what Public Art is or can achieve (see Taig 2023).

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on these concepts, I re-imagine public art as social infrastructure. To demonstrate how specific care-ethical aspects are already considered by contemporary artistic practice, I reference five public art projects funded by Public Art Vienna. These projects represent various formats, including performance, monument, artistic research, art competition, and city walks. The re-imagining results in a care-ethical re-writing of Public Art Vienna's funding guidelines.

THE AGORA – A PATRIARCHAL PUBLIC SPACE _____ Public Art Vienna references the agora as a "place of sociopolitical and cultural discussion" (Public Art Vienna 2023a), a well-functioning social infrastructure. Thereby, the Greek agora serves as the archetype. Historically, the agora was the socially and structurally central element of Greek cities in 700 BC (Hölscher 1998: 161) – a place of gathering and policy-making (ibid.: 161–162; Dickenson 2017: 1). As an archetype of practiced democracy, it continues to influence Western culture (ibid.), particularly in urban planning and urbanism. Referencing this, Public Art Vienna declares public art's potential to contribute to the revival of the agora (Public Art Vienna 2023a; Taig 2023). However, through the lens of a care-ethical infrastructure critique, the agora as a political ideal can be critically examined.

_____ Upon closer examination of the historical context of the Greek agora, a significant gap between the Western ideal and its actual circumstances becomes evident: those engaged in lively public discourse were adult, free – meaning they had civic rights – , male, and owned property (Wildner / Berger 2018). Only due to their "privileged irresponsibility" – their ability to exempt themselves from care work through financial means and patriarchal oppression (Tronto 2013: 59–61) –, these men could afford the time and rights to congregate at the agora. Meanwhile, women and slaves were excluded from these spaces and thus from political participation. Furthermore, the Greeks devalued the private sphere as "idiotic" because it was "merely" concerned with reproduction (Arendt 2016: 89). It is apparent that the Greek agora was not a democratic space for everyone, but rather for a few privileged male citizens.

_____ The agora can be seen as an urban and structural manifestation of the strict division that existed(exists) between the public and private spheres. Its contemporary reference is an example of what cultural theorist and urban curator Elke Krasny describes as a strategic ignorance of the "violent contradictions between the political idea of public space and [its] (the) material, economic, and social histories" (Krasny 2022). It is essential to critically examine the ideals promoted by policy. What is glorified and strived for

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matters significantly. If urban policy fails to address hegemonic power structures connected to these ideals, their invisibility and effects are reinforced – whether intentionally or not.

ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC SPACE AS A DEMAND, NOT A STATUS-QUO

_____ In its funding guidelines, Public Art Vienna demands that:

> "Projects shall be implemented in the City of Vienna's freely accessible public space where art can be experienced by everyone. They have to be accessible and experienceable free of charge" (Public Art Vienna 2024).

_____ Drawing on spatial theory and a care-ethical infrastructural critique, the notion of public space as freely accessible to everyone has to be critically examined.[8] In the following, I expand on care-related issues of hegemonic exclusion and discrimination, though there are numerous other concerns as well. Urban exclusion arises from hegemonic decisions in urban planning and policy. Infrastructural needs of oppressed and vulnerable groups often go unaddressed in public spaces: There is a lack of toilets, breastfeeding facilities, and consumption-free places; car traffic is prioritized over public transport, cycling, and walking; numerous physical barriers hinder access to public spaces, transport, and institutions for every*body*; participatory urban projects take place when public childcare is unavailable and require educational and temporal resources; to name just a few. There is a continual denial of infrastructural needs, leading to a restricted design and use of public space. Moreover, paradoxically, most people caring for urban spaces are excluded from them. Maintenance workers do the labor required for the constant and uninterrupted restoration of the normal state (Krasny 2021: 200) – the cleaning, repairing, and servicing. Despite urban life and public spaces depending on this work, it has to remain invisible in capitalist societies. This results in the social and monetary devaluation of maintenance work, as well as its racialized and gendered distribution, further reinforcing urban exclusion and discrimination (Vergès 2019). Moreover, by excluding maintenance workers from public debates and policies, this problematic is systemically reinforced.

_____ Thus, public art does not take place in and engage with freely accessible public spaces. Rather, it has to interact with spaces that

// Figure 1
Agnes Bakucz Canário, *A Common Kingdom or Two Cuts Lie Parallel in the Same Flesh*, 2023, © Aaron Josi Sternbauer, 2022

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hegemonically exclude marginalized and discriminated social groups. This fact is highlighted by the performance *A Common Kingdom or Two Cuts Lie Parallel in the Same Flesh* (2023) by Agnes Bakucz Canário. In this performance, a heterogeneous group of performers with various experiences of discrimination traverses Yppenplatz and Volksgarten in Vienna. Making their marginalized bodies visible in public space forms an act of disruptive resistance.[9] The performance conveys that a freely accessible public space – as built environment and social infrastructure – is a *demand*, not a given status quo.

_____If public art aims to strengthen democratic and inclusive public discourse, it has to acknowledge that it operates within hegemonically designed spaces to avoid reinforcing infrastructural violence. Heike Mutter and Ulrich Genth exemplify this awareness by installing a *Sleeping Horse* cast in bronze on Vienna's Reumannplatz. This square has a multifaceted history as a site of right-wing mobilization, labor dispute, exploitation, consumption, deportation, migrant life, and a famous ice cream parlor. "So what kind of monument does Reumannplatz need?" asks art theorist Nora Sternfeld in her review (2023). Mutter and Genth recognize the hegemonic history of the place and propose an unheroic monument that rejects authoritarian power. Moreover, the *Sleeping Horse* is a counterpart to heroic equestrian monuments throughout Vienna.[10]

// Figure 2
Heike Mutter and Ulrich Genth, *Sleeping Horse*, 2023, © Iris Ranzinger, 2023

_____Concerning a care-ethical infrastructure critique and the described artistic practice, I propose a feminist re-writing of the examined paragraph:

> *Projects shall be implemented in the City of Vienna's public space. They have to prioritize maximum accessibility [11] and be available free of charge. Moreover, they have to be aware that selected public spaces are not equally accessible to everybody due to hegemonic power structures.*

THE PLURALITY OF URBAN IDENTITY _____The second content-related paragraph of Public Art Vienna's funding guidelines states:

> "The object of funding shall be projects in which the artists' discourse and mental interchange with urban space contributes to highlighting and deepening the urban identity of the City and its districts" (Public Art Vienna 2024).

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_____ In the interview, Taig explains that this point refers to *site-specificity* [12] – a particular term in public art. She also talks about Public Art Vienna's experience that artistic projects engaging with a particular site – its historical context as well as its built environment and social use – produce a higher quality. Furthermore, facing Vienna's rapid urban development and the emergence of new districts, the necessity for elements that foster identity arises (Taig 2023).
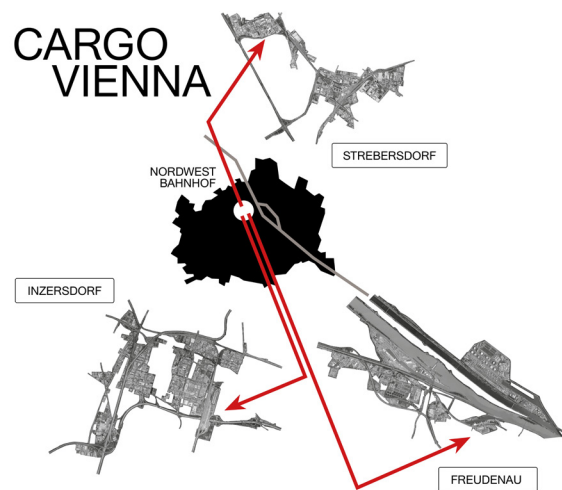
_____ It can be questioned whether there is something like *the* urban identity, as described in the paragraph. Identity is a heavily disputed term in contemporary discourse about migration and racism. These debates determined that there is nothing like a singular – German, Austrian, or Viennese – identity. Rather, identity is the subject of political and social struggles and negotiations. It always consists of various facets: history and self-perception, but also external ascription and social construction. These facets apply to urban identities as well. Moreover, the notion of *the* identity does not correspond to the current diversity in urban centers such as Vienna.

_____ Public art is part of the production of urban identity. This can be misused by processes of gentrification and capitalism, as cultural and art scholars such as Miwon Kwon and Saara Liinamaa criticize. Public art and its site-specific approach can be applied in urban marketing to create uniqueness and distinctions from other cities (Kwon 2002: 4). It can be used to activate the economic potential of particular districts and living areas (ibid.). At the same time, public art has the potential to critically engage with different urban identities within a specific place.

_____ In this context, Taig addresses public art's ability to tell new narratives. These narratives have the capacity to positively reclaim depreciated places, uncover displaced histories, and shape new facets of places' identity. For example, this is exemplified by the project *Cargo Vienna – Urban and Logistics Landscapes as Changing Work and Living Spaces* which critically engages with the *Nordwestbahnhof* – a former logistic hub in the middle of Vienna. The *Tracing Spaces* collective examines fragments of its history, as well as the displacement of crucial infrastructure and its employees to the city's periphery. By organizing bus tours and founding a museum, they discover and convey various stories associated with this place (Hieslmair / Zinganel: 2023).

// Figure 3
Tracing Spaces*, Cargo Vienna – Urban and Logistics Landscapes as Changing Work and Living Spaces*, 2023, © Tracing Spaces, Hieslmair & Zinganel, Geodaten Stadt Wien, 2023

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_____ Further, Kwon states that site-specific art can highlight repressed histories and marginalized groups (Kwon 2002: 3). This was demonstrated through an open competition organized by Public Art Vienna in cooperation with the Viennese Anti-Discrimination Office for LGBTQ issues (*WASt*) from 2021 to 2022. The two-stage competition called for proposals for a "Memorial to the Men and Women Victimized by the Persecution of Homosexuals in the Nazi Era." The artists Sarah Ortmeyer and Karl Koblitz won with their concept for the sculpture *ARCUS (Shadow of a Rainbow)* – a symbol for remembrance and mourning in solidarity.[13]

_____ Moreover, public art discovers places that have been obscured by dominant culture (Kwon 2002: 3). Therefore, the project *Wandertag* (a day of walking) curated by Nora Mayr serves as an example. It started in 2021 as an ongoing series and invites participants to break out of their everyday urban routes and discover new places in Vienna. Artist Julischka Stengele was part of the first "Wandertag." She created a humorous tour through often overlooked places and informal paths in Vienna's 10th district.[14]

_____ As artistic theory and practice demonstrate, public art produces identit*ies*. Hence, I propose a care-ethical reformulation of the examined paragraph:

> The object of funding shall be projects that adopt a context-sensitive [15] approach to the sites and their multispecies inhabitants where they take place. They shall critically examine and contribute to the plurality of urban identities in the city and its districts.

CONCLUSION _____ Public art examines public spaces in a much more nuanced, intersectional, and politically critical way, as demanded by urban policy. As a practice, it critically approaches hegemonic spaces and discovers emancipatory moments. It has the ability to strengthen the demand for accessible public spaces and to discover the variety of urban identities. Thereby, it acts as a social infrastructure. In order to foster this potential and concern the ambivalent role of public art in producing public space, urban policy has to be reflective and precise in attributing a certain role to public art. As the analysis of Public Art Vienna's funding guidelines demonstrates, this requires a re-imagining of existing political and spatial ideas and a corresponding re-writing of contemporary policy documents.

_____ A care-ethical infrastructure critique is a transformative instrument for this endeavor. By building on spatial theory,

// Figure 4
Sarah Ortmeyer and Karl Koblitz, mock-up of *ARCUS (Shadow of a Rainbow)*, 2022, © Markus Wache, 2022

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infrastructural violence, as well as care as an ethical concept, it stimulates both a feminist critique and re-imagination. Thereby, this approach can be applied not only to the example of Public Art Vienna but to other European art institutions that fund public art. Through funding, these institutions determine which kinds of public art are supported and which ethical requirements they have to fulfill. Therefore, policy documents are crucially important for recognizing and fostering public art as social infrastructure.

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Figure 1: Agnes Bakucz Canário, *A Common Kingdom or Two Cuts Lie Parallel in the Same Flesh*, 2023, © Aaron Josi Sternbauer, 2022

Figure 2: Heike Mutter and Ulrich Genth, *Sleeping Horse*, 2023, © Iris Ranzinger, 2023

Figure 3: Tracing Spaces, *Cargo Vienna – Urban and Logistics Landscapes as Changing Work and Living Spaces*, 2023, © Tracing Spaces, Hieslmair & Zinganel, Geodaten Stadt Wien, 2023

Figure 4: Sarah Ortmeyer and Karl Koblitz, mock-up of *ARCUS (Shadow of a Rainbow)*, 2022, © Markus Wache, 2022

Figure 5: Julischka Stengele and curator Nora Mayr, *1st Wandertag – a performative guided tour by Julischka Stengele*, 2021, © Hannah Mayr, 2021

// About the Author

Miriam Kreuzer is currently researching a feminist care perspective on urban policy. She is investigating the concept of *Caring Urbanism* as part of her Ph.D. at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and KTH School of Architecture Stockholm. Furthermore, she works as an author, lecturer, and designer in the field of Urban Practice and Transformation Design. As part of this work, she co-edited the publication *MACHT STADT SOLIDARISCH – Denkanstöße für eine solidarische Urbane Praxis* (2022) and the article "Barrieresensibilität in der Stadt" (2023), which was published in the *BundesBauBlatt*. Moreover, she is a founding member of the *Zukunfts*archiv* collective, which examines feminist approaches for an eco-socially just transformation.

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–1.153 CHARACTERS. TOWARDS A QUEERFEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURAL CRITIQUE OF WIKIPEDIA

ABSTRACT _____ This contribution explores the concealed biases, power dynamics, and inequalities within Wikipedia's infrastructural framework. Building upon the works of queerfeminist scholars such as Susan Leigh Star, Leslie Kern, and Eve Sedgwick, it uncovers how Wikipedia's infrastructural opacities perpetuate systemic biases. Star's research on infrastructure is employed to dissect the hidden labor and dependencies sustaining Wikipedia's knowledge production. This article culminates in a discussion of the epistemological possibilities that arise with a feminist infrastructural critique of Wikipedia, highlighting the potential of reparative media practices to reshape not only the encyclopedia itself but also broader epistemological narratives and perspectives. It specifically draws on the artistic practices of the queerfeminist collective Feel Tank Chicago, which created an assembly of unfinished definitions, a polyphonic Tool Kit that defies the epistemological boundaries of conventional encyclopedic projects.

_____On September 17, 2019, two friends and I organized a feminist writing workshop in a Kreuzberg (Berlin) project space. We set ourselves the goal of authoring Wikipedia articles together in order to create articles we found would contribute to diversifying the online encyclopedia. Without extensive prior knowledge, we invited others to join the process and learn to edit together with us. The workshop went on for four hours, in the period of which we researched, wrote, exchanged trivia about the content of our articles, and ate cookies together. In the end, we published our articles, feeling a sense of satisfaction. As we finished our workshop, our increased zest for action was suddenly slowed down: The article about the "Feel Tank Chicago," a queerfeminist group of theorists, artists, and activists, had already been marked for "quality assurance." This means that the article is provided with the reference that it does not correspond to the self-established standards of Wikipedia and requires a critical revision. Three minutes after we published the article, user Schnabeltassentier deleted the asterisk (*) that we had used for gender-neutral designations and instead changed them to generic masculine. The user also added a reason for their changes[1]: "Wikify" (Wikipedia "Feel Tank Chicago"). We promised each other to update the article the next day, so that this marking would be removed as soon as possible. But when we opened the article again, it was

1)
In the "settings" section on German Wikipedia you can only specify whether you want to be addressed with male or female pronouns. Although there is a third option to be addressed as "gender-neutrally" as possible, in the case of the generically masculine language on Wikipedia this means that you are addressed as a male user. Due to these limitations, I will generally use the pronouns "they/them."

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already removed from quality assurance. Instead, it was proposed for deletion.

——— This contestation can be made visible on the article page by an inserted module, but the discussions happen on the "talk pages" and within the special pages of quality or deletion discussions, which we as a group didn't know existed. Although easily accessible if you are familiar with them, these pages are rarely visited by readers. As such, they form the concealed, yet visible protocols of an article's development. Conversations on the talk pages, e.g., about an article's relevance, its writing style, references, content, or the possible deletion of an article, are structurally hidden from view. And all too often, and especially with articles that deal with gender identity, these discussions become antagonistic power struggles between higher-ranking users and newcomers. Though, as Melissa Adler writes, "[f]or the most part, however, these kinds of conversations are unnoticed and hidden beneath the entries that appear to have achieved consensus. The erased minority points of view are hidden in layers of a palimpsest" (Adler 2016: 39). Although these debates seem to be concealed and taking place in a kind of back room that usually only higher-ranking, active editors access, the debates fundamentally influence the content and fashion of the visible articles themselves. Daniela Agostinho, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, and Kristin Veel have highlighted how Wikipedia's "performative openness produces new opacities [that] conceal patterns of abuse and discrimination" (Agostinho et al. 2023: 5).

——— As Heather Ford and Judy Wajcman have shown, "the systemic bias of the encyclopedia is important because Wikipedia has become one of the most powerful global media of our time" (2017: 2). This may certainly be one of the reasons why Wikipedia also has "become a crucial site of feminist and decolonial interventions, where scholars and practitioners engage with the opensource infrastructures to counter its male, white, Western bias through edit-a-thons that seek to amplify the presence of women, people of colour and the narratives and perspectives from the Global South" (Agostinho et al. 2023: 5). With regards to positions of queerfeminist and decolonial criticism of infrastructure, I will explore the relationship between epistemic injustices, the infrastructures that Wikipedia is built upon, and the social category of gender. I will further investigate editing as an act of reparative queerfeminist media practice. To this effect, I understand the online encyclopedia as a socio-technical discursive infrastructure that only works due to multimodal dependencies and constant maintenance work. Referring to epistemological questions towards digital information infrastructures in regard to access,

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selection, omissions, and classifications, my contribution will deal with the "Infrapolitics" (Agostinho et al. 2023) of Wikipedia.

_____In the following sections, I will analyze Wikipedia as an infrastructural platform with a reading of Susan Leigh Star's notions on infrastructure. Following this, I will propose potential reparative queerfeminist media practices along with artistic practices established by associates of the Feel Tank Chicago. The closing chapter will examine and think with forms of queerfeminist infrastructural critique within the Wikipedia ecosystem.

TOOLKIT: DOUBLE VISION AND HIDDEN LAYERS_____Infrastructure has gained highly scholarly traction in the last few years. Contemporary queerfeminist infrastructural critiques emphasize the invisibilized but yet essential maintaining and reproductive labor that enables the functioning of infrastructures. This perspective offers the possibility to re-read and analyze material-discursive and space-encompassing technologies that are inscribed with racist, sexist, ableist, and classist inequalities (Kern 2021; Boehmer / Davies 2018; Bee 2021). Susan Leigh Star's pioneering research in Infrastructure Studies provides a valuable toolkit to frame the infrastructural characteristics and dissect the hidden complexities of Wikipedia. The properties that she defined for infrastructures can be accurately applied to the encyclopedic platform: Wikipedia is "sunk into and inside of other structures" like the networked servers it runs on, the MediaWiki open-source software that powers it, and its privileged ranking in online search results. Wikipedia is relatively "transparent to use" for people with basic digital literacy, editing "is learned as part of membership," and its content "shapes and is shaped by the conventions of a community of practice." Furthermore, the guidelines for editing are an "embodiment of standards" and the encyclopedia "is built on an installed base" (Star 1999: 381–382) that I will simplistically call "internet infrastructure."

_____Star, a feminist sociological scholar who studied the importance of information and standardization in society, often emphasized the unobtrusive labor, dependencies, and maintenance efforts required to sustain the functioning of infrastructures. In addition, she dedicated her research to the perspective of the marginalized as a starting point for her analyses. Star saw marginality as a position of being an outsider and an insider at the same time (Star 2015 [1994]: 155–156). She explains this as "[o]ne of the great lessons of feminism," starting from the "double vision" with which the various aspects of standardization and classification can be viewed (Star 2015 [1990]: 283). By applying this double vision to Wikipedia, the

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platform appears on the one hand as open and collaborative. Its knowledge production process thrives on the collective efforts of its editors, administrators, and contributors, and is marked by a constant interplay between individuals who are both users and producers of information. On the other hand, this seemingly democratic and accessible knowledge creation model conceals layers of complexity that require examination. Articles can be created, edited, and updated by anyone with internet and computer access. While this should allow for a diverse range of voices and perspectives to contribute to the encyclopedia, it also exposes hierarchies, biases, exclusions, and misinformation.

_____Star's concept of "double vision" offers a squinting view on the encyclopedic infrastructure. One that takes into account the seemingly paradoxical nature of its accessible and open editing process, as well as its exclusionary mechanisms. Wikipedia's editing process often remains unnoticed by the readers, who may interact with the platform primarily through the instantly visible content. However, it is within the infrastructure, the behind-the-scenes labor, and the maintenance work that substantial power dynamics and systemic biases are at play. These hidden layers of Wikipedia are what enable it to function as a vast repository of information while simultaneously obscuring the inequalities embedded within. Precisely this intangible labor of maintaining Wikipedia's infrastructure extends beyond the act of writing new articles. It encompasses tasks such as monitoring and examining changes, engaging in or resolving disputes, ensuring verifiability through citations, organizing and maintaining portals and support groups, constantly updating content, as well as revising articles that have been proposed for deletion. This behind-the-scenes labor and the discussion pages on which it takes place are at the same time where Wikipedia's exclusionary mechanisms become the most graspable.

MAPS OF FEAR _____To access Star's metaphor of the hidden mundane requires questioning for whom these infrastructural settings are invisible and for whom they are not. This is accompanied by the question of the infrastructural barriers that restrain participation and camouflage the exclusionary mechanisms at play. In order to get closer to an answer, I consulted perspectives from queerfeminist infrastructural critique. Above all is feminist geographer Leslie Kern's *Feminist City* (2021), which offers valuable insights into built-in inequalities of urban environments, as well as personal maps of fear that have seeped into their structure. Although Kern explores urban spaces and their gendered dimensions in eastern

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Canada, her analysis is a useful illustration of the infrastructural deterrents for Wiki editors. Concentrating on performative aspects, Kern uses the imaginaries of "dark alleys" and "stranger danger" to show that the "female fear" of cities, night-time, going out alone, and sexual violence "isn't even necessarily related to fear of men or physical harm," but often an imaginary that is "dissolved in the bloodstream" (ibid.: 119) and that produces habitually performed acts of safety and precaution in line with gendered socialization. And just as urban spaces are populated by "our personal mental maps of safety and fear" (ibid.: 149), so are fear, caution, and restraint inscribed in the way marginalized editors behave and interact on Wikipedia. There have been numerous studies from Information Sciences that documented "the need [of women editors] to consider safety risks involved before editing certain topics or entering contentious spaces" (Tripodi 2021: 1688) on Wikipedia (Menking / Erickson, 2015; Menking et al. 2019). Francesca Tripodi has investigated that in order to manage their personal and emotional safety, female editors often withdraw to the "quiet corners of Wikipedia, avoiding topics or areas prone to harassment" (Tripodi 2023: 1689). The question I am asking and approaching with Kern's insights in mind is: Why is that and how is it connected to infrastructural settings?

_____ Though there are 323 active Wikipedias for different languages; the extents of its gender bias form a more or less common ground of the online encyclopedia. Several studies have suggested that the demographics of its contributors directly affect its topical coverage, resulting among other things, in topical and linguistic biases. Put simply, it means that the overall coverage of topics is predetermined due to the gendered interests of its editors and the reportedly different language used when speaking about different genders (Wagner et al. 2016; Tripodi 2021). The WikiProject "Countering Systematic Bias" highlighted this influence of its contributors' interests on its topical coverage (Wikipedia 2004). One of its findings, despite indeed oversimplifying gender as binary and essentialist, was that "traditionally male-linked subjects" received much more coverage than "traditionally female-linked" interests. This topical bias is, in addition to a more-than-binary understanding of gender, exacerbated when social categories like sexuality, race, religion, and socioeconomic status are taken into account. Xiang Zheng et al., for example, have recently investigated that user demographics correspond not only with topical, but also with its citation biases, demonstrating that Wikipedia "reflect[s] the Anglo cultures more than other cultures" (2022: 221).

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———Topical biases are not a "women's problem." Despite the lack of studies concerning LGBTQIA+ participation on the German Wikipedia, transantagonism and homophobia are reported issues on online social platforms. The discussion page of the German Wikipedia article on transphobia bears witness to this (Wikipedia, "Diskussion: Transphobie"). Online queer- and transphobia as well as heterosexism are not only expressed through ridicule, insults, and threats, but all too often result in online doxing and calls for organized stalking actions (Wörz 2022; Keighley 2022; Giese 2018). This hostile atmosphere inscribed into the scaffolding of online social media platforms restricts and decides who gets to learn "as part of membership" (Star / Ruhleder 1996: 113) and who prefers to stay away. This wall of fear and restraint seems to predominantly affect FLINTA*, queers, and racialized subjects (in unequal proportions) and thus prevents the specific perspectives and multiple interests they bring along. My friend, who wrote and uploaded the Wiki article on Feel Tank Chicago onto Wikipedia, told me that for her "it was an experience that confirmed clichés I knew before: that Wikipedia is a hostile environment. And especially hostile towards bringing in a body of knowledge that is situated within the political realm of queerfeminism. That gets singled out and attacked particularly quickly" (voice message sent to the author, September 30, 2023). In the case of the online encyclopedia, the phenomenon of the masculinized "Edit War" as well as cases of gendered and racist online harassment tag its discussion and talk pages as "places to avoid" for people affected by this violence. While Wikipedia is an anonymous platform that advertises itself as participatory, collaborative, and open to all, the encyclopedia is inscribed with a barrier nurtured by "personal experiences of danger and harassment but also media, rumours, urban myths" (Kern 2021: 149).

———Far from being formed only by personal experiences, these maps of fear are built on top of an epistemic hierarchy that informs the infrastructure of Wikipedia's reference system. What can be written and how is narrowed down due to the specific standards that the platform operates upon. In the following section, I will explore these standards building upon the thesis that just as urban environments can either empower or marginalize individuals based on their gender, sexuality, race, ableness, or socio-economic status, platforms like Wikipedia can either reinforce or challenge existing hierarchies of knowledge.

BUILT ON A HAUNTED BASE ———The fact that biographical articles, one of the largest categories within Wikipedia, predominately cover

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white cis-males is not only due to the demographic of the editorial community, but is also infrastructurally induced. The relevance criteria for articles, i.e., criteria that decide whether a person, group, or topic is suitable for an entry, are based on an epistemological paradigm that reproduces and is itself embedded into a hetero-patriarchal and colonial matrix.[2] "Gendered and colonial infrastructures also contribute to an unequal distribution of representation in Wikipedia – which remains largely white, and gendered in favor of masculinity – and continue to inform the framing of articles, for instance, by drawing on romantic or nationalist accounts of colonial pasts rather than critical voices" (Agostinho et al. 2023: 2). I understand this topical unevenness not only as a mirror of contemporary patriarchal colonialist fantasies, but also as a product of the historical contingencies embedded in the encyclopedic project itself.

_____ Following Ina Ulrike Paul's account (2005: 11), the European Enlightenment was the historical period in which encyclopedic lexicons flourished. The emergence of this storage medium was made possible by advanced technologies of printing and typography, particularly the invention of printing with movable type and the resulting increase in published knowledge. Although there had been lexical traditions and dictionaries long before the seventeenth century in non-European countries, the role of encyclopedias in the European Enlightenment demonstrated a specific imperial and universal endeavor to collect *all* knowledge and therefore establish "a monopoly of the locus of enunciation of 'objective,' scientific knowledge about the modern world" (Lander 2000: 527). These efforts were embedded in a colonial matrix that organized differences by categories such as 'races' or 'cultures' in which the White West was seen as the highest stage of human development (Brunner 2020, 46f; Mignolo 2009; Quijano 2007). As Adler observes, "[i]n American- and European-designed systems patriarchy, heterosexuality, whiteness are universalized, as are Western ideals about knowledge, research, education, and truth" (2016: 38). These historical origins continue to shape and influence the encyclopedic platform of Wikipedia, for example, through the requirement of verifiability, which places significant constraints and guidelines on what qualifies as legitimate knowledge. Information verified by what are considered legitimate sources takes precedence, effectively marginalizing forms of knowledge that are not deemed qualified to contribute. The German Wikipedia, for instance, establishes criteria for the relevance of authors, which stipulate that authors must have published a minimum of two monographs, received recognition through a prestigious literary award, or produced a

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work recognized as a standard reference in reputable external sources (Wikipedia, "Relevanzkriterien"). On the one hand, these criteria are "built on an installed base" (Star / Ruhleder 1996: 113) of the modern encyclopedic project which, in turn, are oriented towards existing structures such as the publishing industry with its specific barriers and exclusions. This makes it difficult to produce articles about people or topics that have not found their way into Western standard reference works due to a lack of documentation and "epistemic privilege" (Mignolo 2009: 166).

————On the other hand, these relevance criteria are formulated so openly that their interpretation becomes a point of contention. The level of strictness with which these are applied often depends on the topic itself. While anything that can be verified can be written, it can only be verified with sources that are already an exclusion criterion due to their media form. Matthew A. Vetter and Keon Mandell Pettiway stated that with "its adherence to Western print culture (itself also an accompanying feature of Western Enlightenment), Wikipedia also marginalizes the knowledge-making practices of cultures with limited access to print sources" (2017). While there have been a few instances where this adherence was criticized and effectively overturned, these "interventions emphasize that Wikipedia is haunted by many of the structural inequalities, colonial and patriarchal focal points that also skew most other encyclopedias in terms of topics, profiles, and framings" (Agostinho et al. 2023: 6). The challenges and debates within Wikipedia's editorial ecosystem illustrate how relevance criteria and quotable sources pose a systemic barrier that is often modulated in order to prevent or control content and users. For example, blogposts, fanzines, or oral histories can indeed be understood as reputable sources of information, but are often revised because they are not seen as authoritative as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

ANOTHER TOOLKIT: REPARATIVE QUEERFEMINIST MEDIA PRACTICES

————One strategy to deal with the inhospitable infrastructure on Wikipedia is the creation of supportive wiki pages as well as off-wiki safe spaces like mailing lists and digital or physical support groups. We also resorted to this strategy when, after the deletion request of the article "Feel Tank Chicago," we agreed to edit and adjust it according to the criticism so that it would remain. User Count Count justified the deletion request with: "Encyclopedic relevance not demonstrated. In my opinion, 'Feel Tank' is not an established term" (Wikipedia, Löschkandidaten/17. September 2019 [my translation]). We tried to show, with the help of reports and newspaper

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articles, that the queerfeminist group fulfills the relevance criteria and has already been widely received. What surprised us, however, was the unexpected support of user Pinin, who immediately joined the deletion discussion with an informed and lengthy post about the reception of Feel Tanks, Affect, and Queer Theory after Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick's seminal work in Queer Theory, particularly the essay "Paranoid and Reparative Reading" (1997), introduces the concept of reparative reading as a transformative practice within literary and cultural analysis. Reparative reading stands in contrast to paranoid reading, which focuses on uncovering and exposing supposedly hidden motives and agendas. Reparative reading emphasizes a more affirmative approach to texts and narratives. As Mary Shnayien has precisely shown, Sedgwick's point is not to attribute greater validity to a reparative stance over a paranoid one, but rather to draw attention to the different outcomes that can arise from varying positions and situations. "Choosing a form of knowledge production that is reparative rather than paranoid draws different circles, designs different narratives, and so also changes the perceived possibilities for critique and thus for one's own action" (2022: 62 [my translation]). Applied to editing Wikipedia, the practice of "reparative critical practices […] as changing and heterogeneous relational stances" (Sedgwick 1997: 8) could involve a shift from a purely exposing and anticipatory stance to one that seeks surprises and unforeseen alliances. In light of the above-sketched challenges, I will explore the potential for reparative queerfeminist media practices, understood as interventions by users dedicated to fostering a sense of care and collaboration. These interventions exemplify how queerfeminist engagement can challenge systemic biases and contribute to a more equitable representation of knowledge.

———— A powerful starting point for thinking about reparative practices is by consulting artistic practices and artistic interventions towards archival encounters with missing knowledge, encyclopedic universalism, and alternative epistemological narratives. One vivid example can be found within the work of Feel Tank Chicago, whose Wikipedia article we tried so hard to save after our initial workshop. The Feel Tank Tool Kit serves to document important concepts and theorems that are formative for the work of the group. It is a thought-provoking approach to how general reference works, such as encyclopedias, could function differently. The unconventional pool of lemmata offers a compelling alternative model for encyclopedic knowledge collection, one that prioritizes the gathering of situated and particular understandings of terms and the pooling of diverse perspectives (Feel Tank, n.d.).

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Traditionally, encyclopedias have often been seen as repositories of objective and universally valid knowledge, striving for a neutral and rational stance on various topics. However, this conventional approach can inadvertently reinforce existing knowledge hierarchies and uphold dominant narratives. The Feel Tank Tool Kit challenges this paradigm by embracing partialness, polyphony, emotion, and situated context as integral components of knowledge. The experimental alphabet includes "terms with decidedly political connotations, such as struggle, revolution, protest, but also such as emotionality, empathy, desire, etc." (Königshofer 2018: 14 [my translation]) and reframes how we conceptualize, standardize, and organize information. Instead of seeking a single definition for a term, this approach encourages the collection of multiple interpretations, experiences, and perspectives. It recognizes that terms and concepts as well as their meaning are inherently personal and contextual, shaped by individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and socialization.

This alternative model suggests that encyclopedic entries could incorporate a multiplicity of voices, emotions, and viewpoints. Rather than privileging a single authoritative perspective, such entries could serve as hubs for diverse narratives, anecdotes, and insights. This approach challenges the notion of a monolithic, one-size-fits-all definition. The "Feel Tank Wiki" offers an opportunity to reflect on the existing knowledge hierarchies within platforms like Wikipedia that often strive for a perceived neutrality. By embracing alternative models that acknowledge partiality and context, a vision of encyclopedias as dynamic sources that actively engage with the multiplicity of understanding rather than attempting to impose a single, normative perspective can be nourished.

Daniela Agostinho, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, Nanna Bonde Thylstrup, and Kristin Veel have deployed Sedgwick's notion of "reparative reading" for a concept of "reparative critical practice." Rather than constituting a conclusive or final action, repair is characterized by the authors as "a process of ongoingness that emphasizes the need to continue to tend to" (2023: 12). This implies that repair, rather than simply restoring something to its previous state, "is tied to a poetic dimension" (ibid.: 12). With reference to Sedgwick, repair is situated as a dynamic, transformative, and everyday micro-labor in reshaping the past into something new. The authors propose that reparative practice involves acquiring the skills to cultivate "worlds of sustenance from infrastructures [...] in order to cultivate and live out a different future" (ibid.: 12).

_____ Existing reparative queerfeminist media practices within Wikipedia are not limited to editing articles but encompass building supportive communities, engaging in discussions, and amplifying marginalized voices. Wiki support groups, for example, serve as a political move to counteract the exclusion and hostility that marginalized editors may encounter within the Wikipedia community. By fostering a sense of belonging and solidarity, these groups provide emotional support and mentorship. Cooperatives like *Art+Feminism, Noircir Wikipédia, les sans pagEs*, and *Who writes his_tory?* organize edit-a-thons and collaborative editing events focused on filling participatory and content gaps related to gender, race, and other marginalized identities. They bring together editors to collectively improve and create articles that center on women, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, LGBTQIA+, and other underrepresented groups. From these support groups, queerfeminist reparative practices are organized to collectively intervene within the encyclopedic platform, thus undermining the infrastructural barriers of Wikipedia and tagging personal maps of fear with collaborative action.

_____ Another strategic move in reparative queerfeminist media practices is the effort to bring backgrounded discussions to the forefront. Wikipedia's talk pages, where editors engage in discussions about article content and disputes, are often overlooked by the general readership. These discussions can be sites of contestation and negotiation, but they are not always visible to those outside the editing community. As a feminist political agenda, Matthew Vetter and Keon Mandell Pettiway have advocated for the inclusion of summaries or chapters on disputes and controversies directly on the main page of Wikipedia articles (2017). This approach aims to make the editorial process more transparent and accessible to the wider public, shedding light on the struggles and debates that shape the content. By elevating these discussions, the illusion of Wikipedia articles as neutral products of consensus is contested and its dynamic and processual nature is highlighted instead.

SHAPING A QUEERFEMINIST INFRASTRUCTURAL CRITIQUE _____ When we successfully intervened in the deletion discussion with Pinin's support and the article's deletion request was finally withdrawn, we were relieved. User Count Count provided the discussion with the closing words: "Reception is now sufficiently presented. Deletion request withdrawn. It would be nice if the reception could be incorporated into the specialist literature" (Wikipedia, Löschkandidaten/17. September 2019 [my translation]). Nevertheless, this initial experience of the deletion discussion and criticism of the

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Feel Tank Chicago article had consequences for our behavior on the platform. When editing articles now, we make sure that we include a chapter on "reception" that shows how much coverage the person or topic has received, and signals that this is a relevant addition to the encyclopedia. Telling this from our shared and my own experiences means telling it from a pretty privileged perspective. Framing this text with the relatively innocuous initial experience I had on Wikipedia is itself an expression of this privilege, as I did not encounter trolling, insults, or aggressive behavior targeting my body, language, race, as well as educational or social background. Having an extended confirmed Wiki user account and a user page that signals that I am a white cis-woman in academia, I know that in most cases I can engage in online discussions without fearing the risk of being personally attacked or harassed. This privilege does not negate gendered exclusions, but it informs my experience as well as my own topical biases.

_____ I have tried to show how Wikipedia's infrastructural barriers are built into its policies, standards, and guidelines that determine what or who can be represented in the encyclopedia. In addition to these structures built on an unevenly installed and biased basis, aspects of fear and epistemic hierarchies that permeate the social component of Wikipedia were also addressed. This resonates with the examination of digital infrastructures, highlighting the significance of questioning and reshaping the structures that underpin our information systems.

_____ One key lesson from Kern's *Feminist City* is the notion that feminist transformation often involves reimagining and redesigning the very infrastructure that shapes our lives. This resonates with the potential for change within Wikipedia's architecture. While Wikipedia operates within a volunteer-driven framework with limited editorial oversight, it is not immune to structural adjustments or workarounds that can facilitate queerfeminist interventions. Transforming entrenched structures, whether physical or digital, is a complex and often contentious process. Wikipedia's fundamental principles, editing norms, systemic biases, and resistance to change are challenges that queerfeminist editors must navigate. To the question of how to deal with this inhospitable architecture, I would like to respond with precisely those queerfeminist media practices that are dedicated to a reparative and infrastructural critique: On the one hand, the analysis and reflection of those transparently made barriers and exclusions. On the other hand, the establishment and nourishment of infrastructures of solidarity, as they already exist in the form of mailing lists, writing or support groups. My

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friend and editor of the article, with whose words I would like to end here, told me that this shared experience has left in her "a certain defiance. In the sense that I was in a solidary writing context where it was possible to push the article through together." (Voice message sent to the author, September 30, 2023).

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// Elke Krasny,
Sophie Lingg
& Claudia Lomoschitz

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

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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).

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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

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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.

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CRITICAL WALKING THEORIES FOR APPROACHING URBAN INFRA-STRUCTURES _____ *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

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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

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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.

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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?

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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.

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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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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://ecologiesofcare.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.

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// 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

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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.

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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

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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

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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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// 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.

————*Avtonomi 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

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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.

// 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."

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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

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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]

// 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

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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 Ligioi, 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

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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).

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_____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 participation[3] 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 cosmoliving 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.*

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// **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

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INFRASTRUCTURES UNDER PRESSURE: PRACTICING WITH SITES OF STRUGGLE

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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 cyclicality. 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.

_____ The project was made possible thanks to the support of the Italian Council (2022). Courtesy of the artist and Lo schermo dell'arte.

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1)
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 back-ground and which enables the foreground-ing 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

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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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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 occured 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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// 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

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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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Exercises in Collective Thinking, edited by Julia Haarmann and Nada Rosa Schroer (Stiftung Künstlerdorf Schöppingen, 2023) and "Am Rande des Raums" in *Curatorial Learning Spaces. Art, Education and Curatorial Practice*, Nada Rosa Schroer et al. (eds.) (kopaed, 2023).

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DIVERGENT SPACES, AFFIRMATIVE INFRASTRUCTURES

ABSTRACT _____ Feminist and disability theories reveal how human embodied experiences are situated – shaped by their environments, cultural contexts, and systemic oppression based on race, gender, disability, fertility, etc. In public spaces bodies can be supported, disabled, policed, or celebrated, according to their perceived (non) conformity. As such divergent bodies are more vulnerable to oppression. Against false neutrality, the agency of *divergence* [1] can convert public spaces into affirmative infrastructures.

_____ How could the built environment better serve diverse embodied needs? Could public spaces be designed more strategically to support specific human identities and in doing so create more affirmative spaces for everyone? Could practices of immersive public art and grassroots activism offer tactics for the conversion of public spaces as infrastructures that enable divergence rather than conformity to conventional norms? Architectural canons have long celebrated notions of autonomy, universality, and singularity in the design of the built environment. However, these concepts deny the multiplicity of real human bodies, identities, experiences, and individual preferences. These dynamics are political, as "the struggles of the last century were at heart about the right to be free of oppression based on the kind of body you inhabited" (Laing 2021: 305). Design practices and their built outcomes have historically relied on the idea of a standard user, from false depictions of a typical body [2] to reductive assumptions about human sensory perception. [3] Rather than expressing the inherent multiplicity of human embodiment, these narrow conventions reveal a disciplinary bias toward false standards that are typically male, white, cisgender, and normate. [4] Embraced for their utility in design, they are exclusive simplifications that negate the actual diversity of non-conforming human bodies and minds, reinforcing "the social process of making cultural otherness from the raw materials of human physical variation" (Thomson 1996: 60). As described by disability scholar and self-advocate Aimi Hamraie, "value-neutral built environments" are built from "material-discursive phenomena that mask the dominance of perceived majority identities and bodies" (Hamraie 2013: 8). Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, how could the design of affirmative infrastructures meet specific human needs by deviating from, rather than conforming to conventional norms? _____ As an architect who works on public spaces in New York City

[1]
Feminist and disability discourses are rooted in the politics of identity, acknowledging the experiences of oppression and inequity shared by individuals who are marginalized or excluded according to aspects of their personal identities such as race, gender, class, etc. Important critical movements have also emerged within these discourses through divergence from their mainstream identities. See The Combahee River Collective's "Black Feminist Statement" and Bonnie Sherr Klein's "We Are Who You Are: Feminism and Disability," both in Ryan, Barbara (ed.) (2001): *Identity Politics in the Women's Movement*, New York: New York University Press.

[2]
Architectural discourse is full of examples of the appropriation of human bodies into standard forms and figures. Le Corbusier's Modular is one of the most significant and recognizable. Le Modular is a depiction of a white, male human body enhanced by geometrical concepts. For further critique, see Buzzi, Federica: "'Human, All Too Human': A Critique on the Modulor." https://failedarchitecture.com/human-all-too-human-a-critique-on-the-modulor/. Male-centric bodily standards persist in other industries as well. In 2020, NASA was criticized for their lack of adequate spacesuits to fit women astronauts. In 2023, the first female car crash dummy was created based on female body traits. Prior to this, crash dummies were based on average male body composition and proportions, scaled down to approximate women and children.

[3]
Neuroscientific research explores various modes of sensory perception other than the conventional five senses of sight, smell, touch, sound, and taste. See Sepenta, Farzam (2022): Here's how you really experience architecture – according to science. Fast Company. December 13, 2022. https://www.fastcompany.com/90823500/5-senses-architecture (May 8, 2024).

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through research and design projects that aim to make those spaces more accessible, inclusive, and experientially diverse, I am interested in ways that generic public spaces are converted into radically alternative spaces. Such examples can be found in immersive public artworks, acts of protest or resistance, and events or uprisings that rapidly transform their environments, often in defiance of or deliberate difference from the immediate context. Sometimes the possibility of conversion is imposed from the top down, in spaces whose transitional nature is a product of administrative regulation. Sometimes it is instigated or claimed through ground-up actions. Could these often-temporary conversions of public spaces offer guidance for longer-lasting adaptations of the fabric of the city that could enhance its diversity and inclusivity? How might we understand such divergent spaces as essential affirmative infrastructures rather than exceptions from the norm? The following text explores the agency of divergence as it relates to bodies, minds, spaces, and infrastructures that deviate from the norms of their surroundings. Selected references from disability scholarship, intersectional feminism, immersive public art, grassroots activism, neuroqueer world-building, and design for neurodiversity underscore pose powerful counternarratives to dominant tendencies toward spatial standardization. Perhaps these exceptional spaces and the methods by which they are claimed, appropriated, inserted, cultivated, imagined, and realized, could offer techniques for implementing spatial infrastructures that affirm difference and divergence in the built environment.

THE CURB CUT EFFECT _____ Structural injustice manifests in built environments that are shaped by and reinforce social inequality. This occurs most intimately at the human scale, in circumstances such as inaccessible buildings, hostile architectures,[5] or gender-binary restrooms.[6] These spaces exclude or diminish specific bodily needs, and in particular those of people of color, LGBTQIA+ and gender expansive folx, individuals with disabilities, people who identify as neurodivergent, women, teenagers, immigrants, and others. Often underrepresented in design and decision-making processes, their lived expertise rarely informs the design and construction of built environments. "Bodies are there in a way that architects don't want or can't afford to recognize. But the body is there in an incontrovertible way. The point is to affirm that it's there, and to find the right kind of terms and values by which to make it profitable for architecture to think its own investments in corporeality" (Grosz 1991: 14). To create affirmative environments,

4)
"Normate" is a term coined by Rosemarie Garland Thomson in her 1996 book entitled *Extraordinary Bodies*, referring to a white, cisgender, able-bodied male human identity that is unassociated with any visible stigmatized features related to race, gender, illness, disability, etc.

5)
See Hu, Winnie (2019): "'Hostile Architecture': How Public Spaces Keep the Public Out." The New York Times, November 8, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/nyregion/hostile-architecture-nyc.html (May 8, 2024).

6)
See Sanders, Joel (2017): "Satalled!: Transforming Public Restrooms." In: *Footprint*. Autumn / Winter, pp. 109–118.

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diverse embodied knowledge is necessary to inform spatial design practices and built outcomes.

_____ The "curb cut effect" describes how design for specific, non-normative needs and identities creates transformative spatial conditions that benefit and enhance experiences for everyone (Blackwell 2017). These are informed by the lived experiences of self-advocates who navigate the challenges, limitations, and hostility of conventional environments in their everyday lives. Designed for wheelchair users, physical curb cuts – i.e., sloped depressions to create a flush transition where the sidewalk meets the street – also benefit caretakers pushing strollers, delivery workers pushing carts, people with limited physical mobility, and more. Rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, the curb cut serves multiple and diverse needs through its specificity, providing a choice for how to safely navigate space that is essential for some and beneficial to many. Now universal, the prevalence of the curb cut in urban environments reveals the potential for scalable design responses to other kinds of human divergence. What forms could a "curb cut" inspired by neurodivergence take? Affirmative design approaches celebrate difference by supporting a range of embodied identities and needs instead of perpetuating spatial homogeneity. Recognizing that access, use, and appropriation of space are political, they center the needs of individuals and groups that are made vulnerable, excluded, and underrepresented in conventional built spaces.

DIVERGENT BODIES _____ The term *divergence* describes the sponta- neous or strategic claiming of an alternate path or the straying from a norm. Its opposite, convergence, refers to a strategic coming together of disparate entities – an "encounter between different actors and movements in a given space without them losing their relative autonomy" (Farris 2017: 6). In contrast, divergence is an expression of difference – a separation from an assumed trajectory that asserts a critical distance, autonomy, or exception of the divergent actor. A key concept of feminist theory, difference is the distinction between individuals that contributes to the multiplicity of human experiences and identities. Perhaps more than shared traits, humanity could be better understood through this incredible capacity for difference. In this way, divergence could be a source of mutual understanding and a framework through which new forms of community might emerge, rooted in shared experiences of otherness.

_____ To equitably shape the composition of the built environment, necessary expertise comes from the lived experiences of individu- als whose embodied identities do not conform to the false neutral

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standards that govern conventional design. Their experiences defy societal and behavioral norms that built environments are created to support. In his book *Architecture and Disability*, disabled designer and historian David Gissen argues that the contemporary architectural notion of the environment is far more constrained than the more expansive understanding of human experiences explored in contemporary disability theory that questions "the human norms built into spaces, artifacts, and institutions – from the design of public parks to the physical form and location of human-scaled elements" (Gissen 2022: 108). In their podcast *Dreaming Differently*, neurodivergent artist and creator Jezz Chung explores the possibilities of worldbuilding through joyful neurodivergent expression, or "how we can redesign our reality to work with our brain" (Chung 2023). Instead, the built environment is typically organized according to a relatively narrow understanding of human cognition. Architectural design discourse and practice have much to learn from the expansive range of physical, intellectual, and cognitive disabilities and the embodied knowledge gained through the "layered," "nuanced," and "cosmic" lived expertise of people who experience them (ibid.: 2023). Instead, conventional architectural approaches to worldbuilding reinforce assumptions that human perception and experience are finite and controllable by design.

⎯⎯⎯Enabling individuals to interpret and engage their immediate surroundings in open-ended ways goes against conventional design tendencies that prescribe program, behavior, spatial sequence, and experiential narratives in constructed environments. It also goes against common approaches to design for disability that are often limited to adherence to regulations like the American Disability Act (ADA) in the US. These hard-fought measures, achieved through prolonged, radical activism of disabled self-advocates in the 1970s and 80s, have resulted in the hugely necessary transformation of built spaces in the US to enable access for people with physical disabilities. However, just as sustainability cannot be reduced to LEED standards, design for human disability should not be limited to a formulaic checklist of solutions that verge on another form of standardization. Post-ADA concepts of universal design inadvertently promote disability-neutrality in their emphasis on design solutions that work for "everyone." Hamraie calls this confusing "because it does not clarify what 'everyone' means in a world that devalues particular bodies. Similar to the idea that we live in a post-racial society, wherein race is a fiction and civil rights laws have mandated equality, rendering oppression immaterial, terms such as 'everyone' give the impression that legible belonging in a

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population is unmediated by historical, political, or social ways of knowing" (Hamraie 2017: 11).

Rather than centering bodily needs and identities, accessible design components are often tacked on as afterthoughts in built spaces. Even so they are often celebrated for their benevolence despite achieving only the bare minimum of accessibility requirements. For Gissen, this reluctant accommodation underscores just how inherently disabling normative built spaces are, designed according to a "deterministic and mechanistic understanding of human physiology" (Gissen 2022: 96). Designers tend to align "aspects of human experience and perception with programmatic needs in literal and uniform ways" (ibid.: 96) that negate the inherent multiplicity of how they are perceived, felt, maneuvered, and adapted by the people that use them.

While approaches to accessibility in the built environment have largely focused on physical disabilities, the discourse of neurodiversity offers a broader understanding of the range of human experience and divergence. Neurodiversity refers to the "infinite variation in neurocognitive functioning within our species" (Walker 2021: 45) and encompasses both diagnosed and undiagnosed neurological conditions like autism, ADHD, Tourette's, and more. Though definitions vary widely, broader interpretations of the term also include psychological and emotional conditions like bipolar depression, PTSD, and anxiety, all of which impact a person's experience of and sensitivity to their surroundings.[7] Put simply, humans experience the world differently because they are different individuals with unique cognitive traits. This acknowledges the myriad of factors, biological and experiential, that shape the ways people perceive and respond to the world around them.

The term "neurodivergent" describes individuals whose minds function in ways that "diverge significantly from the dominant societal standards of 'normal'" (Walker 2023), having a similar relationship to the term "neurotypical" as that of "queer" to "straight" (Walker 2023). Research conducted with neurodivergent individuals indicates the significant impact of spatial characteristics on their experiences. For example, students with autism and their educators often make strategic spatial alterations to learning environments to improve the student's ability to focus and engage in educational activities, customizing the space around them to fit their needs. This might include arranging separate spaces for different learning formats or providing escape spaces for retreat and transition in between. Researcher and architect Magda Mostafa, who has documented these behaviors as part of her research about

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neurodivergence and environment, notes that "most interventions for autistic individuals, predominantly medical, therapeutic and educational, deal with the sensory malfunction itself and the development of [coping] strategies and skills for the autistic individual to use" (Mostafa 2014: 145). Her work identifies an alternative, human-centered design approach, through spatial interventions that adapt the environment in ways that make it more supportive, rather than seeking to change a neurodivergent individual's behavior.

_____ Mostafa highlights the benefits of "altering the sensory environment, i.e., the stimulatory input, resulting from the physical architectural surroundings (color, texture, ventilation, sense of closure, orientation, acoustics etc.)" (ibid.: 145). From her research, she has developed design guidelines for educational and interior environments offering criteria for spatial and experiential improvements that benefit neurodivergent users by increasing the range of environmental conditions. These include considerations for acoustic and sensory performance, spatial compartmentalization, and sequencing, creating distinct experiential areas and transitional zones spaces between them, and offering spaces for escape when feeling overwhelmed or overstimulated (ibid.: 145). Rather than prescribing how spaces are used, this design approach invites variation and choice, creating diverse yet specific spatial options that contribute to the overall accessibility for a range of human needs.

_____ Conventional approaches to accessibility in the built environment tend to do the opposite by incorporating "barrier-free" or "universal design" strategies that aim to solve for everyone rather than responding to individual needs. The notion that environments could have zero barriers for anyone or be universally accessible for everyone always is as unrealistic as that of the standard human body, again negating the real multiplicity of human differences. Hamraie writes,

> "Fitting and misfitting are material-discursive, relational, and interdependent categories. In order to sustain itself, the normate template relies upon the impression that normates are normal, average, and majority bodies. Misfitting shatters this illusion, marking the failure of the normate template to accommodate human diversity" (Hamraie 2013: 9).

_____ Some things fit for some bodies while for others they don't. This reality underscores the need for a shift in design thinking from seeking holistic solutions to providing environmental variation and

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choices, enabling individuals to determine which spatial conditions best meet their specific needs in the moment.

_____ Beyond the design of built spaces, bodies are marginalized by and within the same systems of oppression that have pushed humankind and all forms of planetary life to the brink of irreconcilable crisis – colonization, capitalism, resource extraction, fossil fuel industries, pollution, white supremacy, autocracy, patriarchy, ableism, etc. The effects are experienced disproportionately based on a person's unique and intersecting bodily vulnerabilities, geographic location, socioeconomic status, and social context. While "humans may all be in this together, we are in it in very different ways. Our humanness is textured by compelling differences in circumstance, location, and accountability" (Neimanis 2021: 8).

_____ Feminist and disability theories oppose notions of universality, recognizing and celebrating human differences and embodied experiences that are shaped by environmental conditions. Intersectional feminism emphasizes the role of compounding factors of injustice (e.g., race, class, sex, gender, disability) in the pursuit of alternative narratives of human liberation. Rooted in subjectivity, these worldviews draw from both oppositional forms of knowledge that are defined against oppressive systems (anti-racist, de-colonization, anti-patriarchy) and creative practices that explore individual ways of being in relation to others (worldbuilding, community building, self-empowerment). For feminist and disability experts, the critical and constructive go hand in hand. Important texts like Rosemarie Garland Thomson's *Extraordinary Bodies* (1997) and Patricia Hill Collin's *Black Feminist Thought* (1990) explore subjectivity and identity as tools for the "dismantling of a unitary category [of] woman" (Thomson, 1997: 24). "Emphasizing the multiplicity of all women's identities, histories, and bodies, [this approach] asserts that individual situations structure the subjectivity from which particular women speak and perceive" (ibid.: 24). By highlighting the importance of Black women's self-definition, Collins emphasizes the necessity of questioning the "intentions of those possessing the power to define" (Collins 1990: 114). Trusting one's own self-knowledge and lived understanding rejects "the assumption that those in positions granting them the authority to interpret our reality are entitled to do so" (ibid.: 114).

DIVERGENT SPACES _____ Access to space and the appropriation of it is political. The spaces "we have, don't have, or are denied access to can empower us or render us powerless" (Weisman 2000: 4). Public spaces are often designed to be neutral, following a universal

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design approach that achieves at best a "one-size-fits-most" level of accessibility. Instead, by reinforcing the status quo, this neutrality promotes conventional normativity and complacency with oppressive systems in place rather than offering alternatives or enabling divergence. Without those possibilities, generic public spaces become less accessible for anyone without a generic identity. The lack of spatial variation in an open plaza might render it inaccessible for someone who has heightened sensitivity to over-or under-stimulation. Acknowledging the importance of environmental range and choice, the insertion of divergent spaces into the public realm could offer experiential "curb cuts" to improve human accessibility and affirmability.

_____Radical conversions of public spaces are more often achieved through artistic or activist appropriation than systemic design. Some public artworks exist as singular objects and neoliberal symbols that reinforce oppressive systems. Others that instigate spatial transformation as critical resistance, promoting divergence through their medium and message. One example of the latter is Agnes Denes' *Wheatfield* that converted of a portion of what was then a vacant brownfield of the Battery Park landfill (created from the excavated soil and rock from the construction of the World Trade Center) into a two-acre field of wheat grain and anti-capitalist statement against the backdrop of Lower Manhattan's financial district and its inherent symbolism of world commerce (Denes 1982). More recently, Pamela Council's *A Fountain for Survivors* inserted a sculpted, curvilinear sanctuary meticulously textured with pink and purple acrylic nails into the bustling, chaotic environment of Times Square.

_____In the words of the artist, *Fountain* was "both an ode to the ways in which we maintain ourselves and an exuberant life-affirming monument for survivors of all kinds" (Council 2021). Experientially, the artwork created an inhabitable escape from the dehumanizing overstimulation of its immediate surroundings, analogous to the self-preservation required to survive oppression to which the work refers. In both *Fountain* and *Wheatfield*, the exceptional nature of the site conditions contributed to the radicality of the artwork.

// Figure 1
Pamela Council's *A Fountain for Survivors* public art installation in Times Square, 2021

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In different ways the works created divergent spaces in contrast to their surroundings, inserting softness against hardscape, humanity against commerce, empathy against apathy. Highlighting themes of maintenance and regeneration, the works drew from feminist care ethics in their respective messages.

_____ Like bodies, divergent spaces challenge restrictive notions of normativity and whether they should hold the level of importance society often gives them. By deviating from formal, social, political, or other conventional systems around them they hold space for difference, creating opportunities for immediate and lasting transformation within and beyond their footprints. In this way, non-compliance yields spatial agency, situated within but evading the rules of immediate administrative systems. At its best, public art can offer powerful counternarratives to the existing through compelling spatial transformation. Could the experiential transcendence of public art be implemented into the built environment as a system rather than spectacle?

_____ At the same time *Wheatfield* was being cultivated on its grand Lower Manhattan stage, a smaller scale of feminist, community-based seed-sowing actions were implanting other divergent spaces in underserved neighborhoods across New York City. During the 1970s and 80s, local activists in these communities threw "seed bombs" over fences into vacant lots that were otherwise unmaintained by the city. These acts of guerilla gardening were instigated by groups of artists, residents, and grassroots organizations frustrated by the city's neglect. Attempting first to beautify the abandoned spaces, the collective actions gained momentum as networks of these ad hoc gardens emerged across the city. Their instigators advocated for the official designation of community gardens[8] as autonomous, collectively maintained zones in neighborhoods like the Lower East Side, Harlem, the South Bronx, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and East New York that had been most affected by blight and decay, caused by broader economic crises, property abandonment, and gentrification in other areas of the city. "Community gardens were marginal spaces on the spatial maps of capitalism [...] they negated, and to some extent reversed, the destruction that prevailed around them" (Eizenberg 2013: 22).

_____ The convertibility of the vacant, sometimes foreclosed lots was enabled by the simultaneous presence and absence of municipal oversight. "Whether struggling to establish the gardens in the midst of urban decay or later on struggling to preserve them in the face of powerful market forces and unsupportive municipality, the gardens can be understood as an alternative force and counter-reaction to

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the prevailing urban order" (ibid.: 22). Resisting the top-down systems that had disenfranchised the spaces and their communities to begin with, the emergent network of gardens instigated a ground-up network of divergent spaces as affirmative infrastructure. Feminist practices of care, cultivation, and maintenance were integral to the spatial and experiential identity of the gardens. Eventually the city granted community gardens official status, providing resources to support their maintenance and operation by local citizens. Today there are hundreds of community gardens across New York City. No longer illicit, the gardens continue to be spatially and experientially distinct from their surrounding contexts. Amidst the dense, privately owned building fabric, they offer lush pockets of community-maintained outdoor spaces that are regularly, though not continuously, accessible to the broader public.

// Figure 2
Liz Christy, founder of the rebel gardening group, Green Guerillas, in the community garden named after her in the Bowery, 1975

———— Operating within and outside their contexts, their spatial divergence enables them to serve human needs not otherwise met in their normative surroundings.

AFFIRMATIVE INFRASTRUCTURES ———— The examples of NYC public spaces converted in temporary and lasting ways through artistic and activist actions offer precedents for the implementation of divergent spaces in urban environments. While the public art references are stand-alone occurrences, community gardens demonstrate the possibility of a more systemic spatial impact. To achieve that impact, a pre-existing network of readily convertible sites was necessary. The exceptional or deviant nature of those sites made them more agile and able to be transformed. In urban contexts various spaces of exception exist as gray areas – liminal zones that are controlled, neglected, maintained, or marginalized by the complex regulatory contexts in which they exist. The absence or abundance of administrative control in their immediate surroundings contributes to their vulnerability and agency, creating the possibility for their conversion.

———— In contexts built on structural inequity, strategic conversions of public space through divergence occur when the street becomes a protest, the plaza becomes a demonstration, the vacant lot becomes a lush, planted terrain, or the street becomes a refuge. These transformations defy the existing norms of their surroundings, enabling alternative, insurgent sites of "radical openness and possibility" (hooks 1990: 153). bell hooks locates this possibility in the margins,

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referring to both physical location and social identity. "To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (hooks 1984: xvii). Rather than an obscure space, the margin becomes "a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse" (hooks 1990: 149). For spaces and people, to be "marginal" is to be both marginalized by existing systems and to assume the divergent power of the margin, shifting away from the dominant center.

_____ Empowered marginality is central to queer theory that celebrates divergence from normative gender expression. Gender is constituted by a person's behavior and actions in relation to "culturally conditioned habits of embodiment and activity" (Walker 2021: 241). Within a heteronormative context, the dominance of cisgender expression "can be subverted, transformed, modified, loosened, escaped from, and/or rendered more fluid through engagement practices that creatively deviate from [it]" (ibid.). Practices of "queering" are defined not by set characteristics but rather by their divergence from restrictive normative frameworks. There are infinite ways that an individual's self-expression might defy such norms. This multiplicity reveals the limits of constructed gender binary standards and how they fail to encompass the full range of human identities and orientations.

_____ Queer spaces are those where individuals whose gender expression diverges from heteronormative standards are free to act in ways that affirm their identities. They exist "in a spectrum of different forms, shaped by and catering for a range of different queer communities and individuals" (Furman 2022: x). They are situated, each with its own "story, urban and architectural contexts, needs, aesthetics, tribulations and joys" (ibid.: x). Though the formats, typologies, and characteristics of queer spaces vary, they are spaces defined by their ability to affirm specific aspects of human identity. "In contrast to the highly urbanized, hard outside, the inside of the nightclub is luscious, soft and colorful. [...] Spaces throughout are for abilities which are seen and unseen, from physical capacities to spectrum disorders and sensory sensitivities." (Summers 2022: 80). By supporting the specific needs of one marginalized aspect of human identity, queer spaces become mutually beneficial for many. Operating both within and outside the conventional homogeneity of the built environment, queer spaces instigate affirmative transformation from within.

DESIGN FOR NEURODIVERSITY _____ Like the neurodiverse human population it serves, an equitable built environment should offer affirmative infrastructures that celebrate variation, divergence,

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and multiplicity rather than perpetuate false neutrality. Despite their layers of administrative oversight, regulatory standards, and functional requirements, public spaces could become more radically inclusive if their homogeneity were more often disrupted. To implement the affirmative infrastructures to do so, a set of opportunistic site conditions should be defined. As shown through the examples discussed in this text, spaces situated within transitional, exceptional, and marginal contexts might hold greater potential for conversion.

_____ Streets are simultaneously regulated and haphazard spatial infrastructures where a range of human vulnerabilities and shared needs converge. They are where people move, linger, meet, gather, act, pause, sleep, perform, and express themselves, as well as arteries of various public and private modes of transportation, and where vital utilities and services are delivered to residences, businesses, and essential municipal systems. As cities shift away from car-centric planning toward more pedestrian and multi-modal transportation networks, streets are being reimagined as vibrant, adaptable, and restorative community spaces.[9]

_____ Heightened demand for the transformation of streets surged in NYC during the COVID-19 pandemic that instigated the rapid conversion of more than 83 miles of city streets into car-free, pedestrian-friendly open spaces for multiple shared uses during the time when collective gathering in indoor spaces was restricted.[10] The NYC Open Streets program instigated a rapid and widespread conversion of streets, despite their inherent complexity of infrastructural systems, vehicular and foot transportation, sanitation networks, utilities, goods and services delivery, the pedestrian right of way, and more. Successful instances of Open Streets showcased how the suspension of vehicular traffic and private parking could create opportunities for gathering, recreation, outdoor classrooms, street festivals, political activism, artistic expression, and other forms of cultural and community use.

_____ As pandemic-driven initiatives to re-appropriate available outdoor spaces catalyzed a visible rethinking of streets across New York City, they also created new opportunities for designers and artists to participate in their conversion. In 2021, the feminist design practice WIP Collaborative, of which I am a co-founding member, created a streetscape installation in response to an RFP calling for designs to invite and encourage people to re-emerge into public space after months of social isolation during the pandemic. The installation, entitled *Restorative Ground*, boldly transformed a street in Lower Manhattan into an immersive landscape of choice,
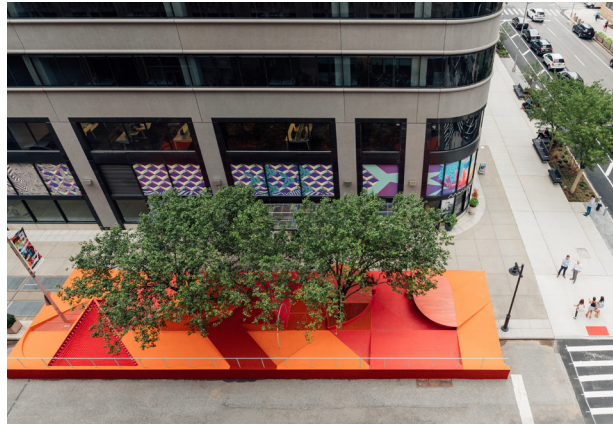
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offering a range of environmental characteristics to support diverse needs.

_____ The design of *Restorative Ground* was informed by interviews WIP conducted with neurodivergent self-advocates and neurodiversity experts about their spatial preferences. Our findings emphasized the importance of environmental variation and choice to suit a range of individual needs. Through open-ended conversations with the design team, participants responded to a visual collage of images displaying various characteristics ranging from spatial to material to activity and use.
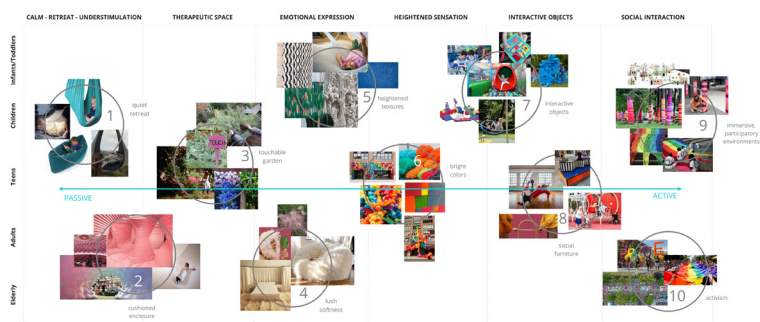

// **Figure 3**
WIP Collaborative's *Restorative Ground* in Hudson Square, Lower Manhattan, 2021

_____ Self-advocate responses revealed the insufficiencies of conventional public spaces. For families of autistic children, it is beneficial to have access to calm, semi-protected spaces adjacent to more open environments, where they can pause or "escape" when feeling over-stimulated. For neurodivergent young adults, spaces to play and be active that aren't restricted to young children can be difficult in typical urban environments. Physical qualities like various surface textures, material tactility, spatial compartmentalization, and incorporating different color families can be positively stimulating and soothing for individuals with various sensory sensitivities. In response to these conversations and findings, WIP's design of *Restorative Ground* integrated different spatial characteristics into a cohesive streetscape installation offering a variety of accessible spatial experiences and use options.

_____*Restorative Ground* provided a range of experiential qualities in carefully crafted high and low stimulation zones with tactile materials and textures. Intended to support specific individual needs and sensory preferences by offering areas with distinct environmental qualities, its design enabled individuals to inhabit and use the space in ways that felt most supportive to them. The installation maintained a cohesive overall geometry while offering specific elements such as large communal tables for focused use, an angled

peak for active play, and an oversized hammock for calm relaxation.

_____As an infrastructural intervention, *Restorative Ground* straddled a portion of the street and sidewalk, occupying the allowable

// **Figure 4**
Digital collage used for interview with neurodivergent self-advocates, experts, and family members, 2020

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footprint designated by the NYC Open Streets program for private restaurant dining, claiming the eight-foot-wide street parking lane and extending over a portion of the adjacent sidewalk. Reimagining this space for collective use rather than private business, the design both conformed to and diverged from the design guidelines for street seating structures under these programs. In keeping with those requirements, the geometry provided a flush, accessible edge at the sidewalk and the required 36-inch-tall protective barrier along the street-facing side. The resulting wedge-like volume was carved and sculpted to create the installation's dynamic terrain punctuated by shapes and surfaces to invite various kinds of occupation and engagement.

// Figure 5
People enjoying the hammock in the calm zone of *Restorative Ground*, 2021

_____ The distinctive color, material, and finish applications of *Restorative Ground* including orange-red recycled rubber, stained marine plywood, rough synthetic turf, and soft nylon netting enhanced both the distinction of specific zones as well as the overall continuity. These were design choices made to foster a shared space intended to ease some of the tension, uncertainty, and trauma associated with public spaces during the pandemic. Having learned from the neurodivergent self-advocates about their lived expertise in navigating generic public environments and which spatial characteristics feel most comfortable and engaging to them, WIP aimed to create a space that was immersively distinct from its context, providing both flexible specificity and open-endedness in its composition.

_____ Through its dynamic form, multi-textured surfaces, and non-prescriptive approach to the design of public space, *Restorative Ground* offered an alternative to conventional urban streets and open spaces. At the time of the installation's construction in 2021, outdoor venues for individual respite, social gathering, and collective healing were desperately needed as society re-entered the public realm after the pandemic lockdown. This extended period of COVID-19 emergency was defined by many top-down actions from lockdowns to prevent disease spreading to the city-mandated conversion of streets to enable outdoor gathering. That conversion revealed the agency of streets to be transformed, affirmative infrastructures, offering divergent spaces of refuge amidst broader circumstances of uncertainty. *Restorative Ground* offers a prototype for that transformation by designing for specific and diverse aspects of human identity and experience instead of conventional norms.

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WIP Collaborative is now engaged in a long-term, phased research and design prototyping effort called "The Neurodiverse City" in partnership with The Design Trust for Public Space and a collaborating design team from Verona Carpenter Architects. Building on the learnings from *Restorative Ground*, WIP has developed a research approach to better understand the experiential qualities of streetscapes through a surveying process with neurodivergent self-advocates. Through both on-site and digital surveys, the project aims to better understand how individual preferences shape human experiences of existing street conditions, to design and test ways they could be improved through physical alterations and additions. Moving from singular installations towards systemic change, the project seeks to further explore how divergence could be supported and enabled in the built environment at the scale of accessible urban infrastructures that could be implemented on streets across the city.

Incorporating qualities of both art and infrastructure, *Restorative Ground* offered a site-specific conversion of a public space in a moment of transition. Like the other public works discussed, the spatial transformation it created responded to both physical and sociopolitical contexts, posing broader questions of societal values and systems of power. Like queer spaces and the self-appropriated learning environments of neurodivergent users, affirmative infrastructures instigate spatial alternatives to the conventional standards of the built environment to better support specific human needs that are not typically addressed. Importantly, they pose counternarratives to the status quo and against the generic homogeneity of their contexts. They might occur at different scales, but always in support of a range of human behavior and the various ways bodies move, sit, rest, lounge, linger, gather, climb, jump, hunch, rock, lurch, swing, lean, tuck, embrace, and stand alone and together.

To affirm is to assert as valid, to express belief in, and to confirm human identities made vulnerable by power imbalance, structural inequity, social disenfranchisement, or their own divergence from norms. Affirmation is the work of intersectional feminism, disability justice, queer liberation, and other social justice efforts. In the built environment, affirmative infrastructures enable divergence from the generic, one-size-fits-all composition of space, offering flexible agility rather than static complicity.

For practitioners of the built environment, designing for divergence begins by centering the interests and expertise of individuals and groups that are underserved in conventional public

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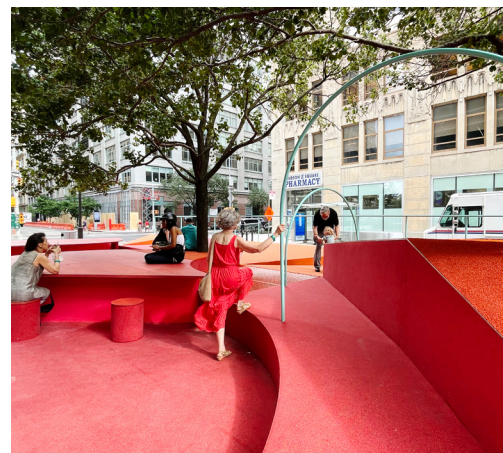
spaces because their identities and bodies do not conform to the normate standards that have guided conventional design practices to date. It combines techniques learned from artistic and activist spatial practices and seeks opportunities to productively deviate from regulatory conditions. As articulated in feminist, disability, queer, and critical race theories of human liberation, the lived experiences of persons whose identities counter dominant norms offer powerful, alternative ways of knowing and worldmaking. They elicit conspirative spatial practices that can shape built environments in ways that affirm both individual identities and collective needs, and the multiplicity of human experiences they represent. By embracing the divergence of bodies, minds, spaces, actions, and human expressions, the design of the built environment can foster the affirmative multiplicity necessary to truly serve and support every body.

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Figure 1: Pamela Council, *A Fountain for Survivors*, 2021, © Michael Hull for Times Square Arts, Source: https://www.pamelacouncil.com/artwork/a-fountain-for-survivors
Figure 2: Photograph of Liz Christy in her community garden on Bowery and Hudson, 1975, © Don Loggins, Source: https://joannaingrid.wordpress.com/2013/04/23/remembering-liz-christy-on-earth-day/
Figure 3: WIP Collaborative, *Restorative Ground*, 2021, © Hudson Square Properties
Figure 4: WIP Collaborative, Digital collage, 2020, © WIP Collaborative
Figure 5: WIP Collaborative, *Restorative Ground*, 2021, © WIP Collaborative
Figure 6: WIP Collaborative, *Restorative Ground*, 2021, © WIP Collaborative

// About the Author

Lindsay Harkema is an architect, educator, founder, and co-founding member of WIP Collaborative, a shared feminist practice of independent design professionals based in New York City. Her research and design projects center on care, equity, and co-creation in the built environment and engage the public realm at a range of scales to create opportunities for positive change. With WIP Collaborative, she is engaged in long-term research projects about feminist spatial practice and community-led design for neurodiversity in the public realm. She teaches architecture studios at Cornell University, The City College of New York, and Barnard College, and has previously taught at Syracuse University and The New School. Harkema completed her Master of Architecture at Rice University and her undergraduate degree in architecture at Washington University in St. Louis. She is a licensed architect in New York state. Recent publications include: Harkema, Lindsay and the members of WIP Collaborative (2023): Community and Collaboration. In: Fiehn, Rob et al. (eds.), *Collective Action! The Power of Collaboration and Co-design*, Design Studio Vol. 6, pp. 30–39; Harkema, Lindsay (2021): Towards a Generic Public. In: Kenniff, Thomas-Bernard / Lévesque, Carole (eds.), *Inventories*, Montréal, Bureau d'études de pratiques indsciplinées, pp. 66–75, and Harkema, Lindsay (2019): The Private Space of Collective Resistance. In: Bhatia, Neeraj and White, Mason (eds.), *Bracket [Takes Action]*, Vol. 4, pp. 58–67.

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"*MILAAP*: WHERE SALT MEETS THE SWEET WATER" LEARNING FROM INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL SPATIAL JUSTICE WOMEN/WATER/LAND/FRACTURED RELATIONS

ABSTRACT _____ *Milaap* is a documentary film that tells the story of three women and how their lives are impacted by negligent urban and rural planning and its consequences on the river and the sea. "*Milaap*" is an Urdu word that translates to "union." *Milaap* is an ode to continued struggle, learning from the knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples from the Indus River, who call themselves residents of the water and have a distinct language, script, and culture. *Milaap*, conceptualized and researched by Marvi Mazhar and Abuzar Madhu and directed by Zohaib Kazi, documents water prayers, poetry, and songs from different geographic coordinates along the water terrain. The film focuses on three locations and three stories near the river and the sea of activist fisherwomen who explain environmental toxicity between urban and rural development. My activist practices are rooted in the understanding that environmental, social, spatial, and infrastructural justice is urgent. They emerge from a contested atmosphere as I am learning from allies and companions of the Women's Rights Action Forum, the Aurat March, and the Climate March, whose public statements give a sense of freedom and hope.

KINSHIP AND SOLIDARITY IN A FRACTURED LANDSCAPE _____ The Aurat March (Women's March), held since 2018, is a recurring political demonstration organized by local feminists in an effort to raise issues relating to women and reshape political discourse. The Aurat March has made waves on Pakistani social media and gained virality for the slogans they have raised highlighting women's concerns relating to self-determination and consent. Over the years, the march and its organizers have had to face cyberbullying for raising their voices in a way that has been deemed uncivil by the conservative ulema[1] and celebrities. The Aurat March's Lahore chapter wrote on a public platform: "the feminist movement is as strong and vibrant as ever, pushing past fear and hopelessness to make way for resilience and defiance. We carry the history of our foremothers forward to the tune of our own beat. Thank you for everyone who marches with us [...] in 2024, and to those who couldn't – we marched for you. Thank you to all our performers for lending language to the movement and donating time. You are the

soundtrack to resistance. *Jab tak aurat tang rahay gi; jang rahay gi, jang rahay gi*" (So long as the woman is agitated, the fight will continue).[2]

_____With slogans like "These are my streets too,"[3] the Aurat March has become an agent in a wave started by the women of Pakistan to reclaim public spaces. The fight against the control of the movement of marginalized bodies has also been a central focus of mine. From successfully petitioning the state to end the development of fences around Frere Hall to organizing weekly walks to unearth the legacy buried in the Old Town, I have always fought for the principle of unobstructed movement.

_____My work as a feminist architect/advocate and practitioner in the past decade has been largely focused on one question: How might paying attention to the built environment – really paying attention to it, its development, maintenance, and preservation, its relationship to the environment and public infrastructure, and how it organizes itself and other bodies – open up into a different kind of imaginative space, perhaps disrupting existing foundational concepts and beliefs that have been inherited through colonial legislations and politically motivated policies. I find kinship and solidarity in the Aurat March and bring this feminist attention and energy from the "politics of the street" to the politics of water (Butler 2011). This made me think a lot about the watery edge and its relation to land, as Astrida Neimanis observes: "I have been wondering if I think *with* water rather than *about* it, and if I invite water to be a collaborator or an interlocutor in how I imagine or theorize the world, might I also treat water better?" (Neimanis 2012).

_____The floods of August 2022, monumental in the scale of devastation and human suffering, were difficult to understand and digest. The ecological and human damage caused by floods in Pakistan was estimated at $14.9 billion, equivalent to 4.8 percent of the GDP. As a direct consequence of the floods, around 9 million people had likely been pushed into poverty. The most heart-wrenching aspect of the floods was that they weren't entirely unprecedented. Pakistan experienced flood disasters in modern history just 12 years ago. This devastation and years of experiencing fractured systems in the governance of land ownership and the distribution of power led me to develop the project *Milaap*. It is an emotional journey that allows a global public to learn and celebrate the sea's union with the fresh river water in the delta region; listening to songs, folklores of the water, and historical

The rivers have been raising us for thousands of years

// Figure 1
Still from the film: Mai Mukhtyaran from the Punjnad Canal, where five rivers meet (Siraiki Waseb, Pakistan), declares rivers as nurturers, as embodiments of wisdom and love.

"MILAAP: WHERE SALT MEETS THE SWEET WATER"
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knowledge of the moon cycle with the women of the village but simultaneously questioning this *union* which is disrupted and has destroyed the ecosystem through man-made disorder, resulting in a broken, unequal, and toxic promise for the future generation.

LISTENING AND LEARNING WITH FIELD NOTES ____ The Women of the River: Mai Bashiran,[4] Mai Mukhtyaran,[5] and Ammas of the Hindu Village[6]

____ The documentary film *Milaap* (30 min., 2023)[7] attempts to learn from powerful women and caregivers of the river: Mai Bashiran, Mai Mukhtyaran, and the Ammas of the village. The opening sequence is a form of visual investigation to open questions about the significance of land and water protection in times of climate crisis. It moreover provides a deeper insight into the rich, locally shared, inherited knowledge that continues to advocate for living with water, as an ally, in a counter push back towards external development decisions as a form of the future. In this essay, I will build upon stories of three activist fisherwomen from three locations near the river and the sea who will talk about environmental degradation, land rights, and human/non-human epistemologies through poems, songs, and inherited knowledge. The project builds upon existing collaborations with the agricultural land activists and the community-allied fisherwomen.

____ Learning from field notes and conceptualizing the script of the film *Milaap* (Union) is an attempt to learn from the critical knowledge of the women through their lived experiences of action-based, social spatial justice and ecological practices and to understand climate policy from a gender ecology perspective to address the climate crisis. Today, we desperately need new methods for imagining the relationship between humans and nature. *Thinking with Water* (Chen et al. 2013) narrates the ecological breakdown through women living on the fractured watery landscape. Today, wetlands, mangroves, swamps, bogs, marshes, and mudflats have been drained to "improve" land for centuries, be it to impose monoculture farmland, create real estate, displace "fugitive" people, and impose state control through surveillance.

____ Coastlines (islands, coasts, rivers) exist today perhaps in one of the most fragile ecosystems. Investigating the ecological epistemologies of the spaces between land and sea, witnessing the surveillance between the mainland and the islands, the ecological deterioration of the estuary and aqueous terrain – the coastal

The river is like a father and mother to us.

// Figure 2
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): Mai Bashiran shares an intimate moment of her relationship to the river.

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periphery – within the complex layers of the vast urban metropolises' unethical development, industrial, and infrastructural waste directly impacts and affects the vulnerable rural lands resulting into toxic soil, a disturbed water table, and compromised air quality.

_____ "Slow violence" (Nixon 2011) is delayed violence, and its effects are only visible after a while. The sacred geography of the urban/rural estuary where the river (sweet water) meets the coast (salt water) is constantly changing. The extraction of natural resources, capitalistic pursuits, and environmental degradation decrease the amount of water flowing down the Indus River. This prevents seawater from intruding inland by creating a raised shoreline. The film investigates the effects on Indigenous life-making projects, in particular, the impact of extractivism on the delta. *Salt* is understood under the following two aspects: man-made salt pans and the global crisis of the rising sea water level, leaving the wasteland in the delta with a high saltwater table in green pastures. We locate ourselves in between the Indus Delta and Saraiki Waseb (South of Province Punjab) to understand *salt* and its relation to the land and water through an ethnographic exploration.

_____ I relate infrastructural imagination through the concept of the "fish," which represents the fishermen's community. *Palla* is the local name for a river fish, otherwise known as *hilsa*.[8] This fish is the *samandari badshah* (King of the Sea), a monsoonal species that inhabits the ocean's coastline, at the apex of the delta. The *palla* spends most of its life in the ocean and migrates to the rivers of the delta to breed – a spawning migration from salt water to sweet water. Here, the fish, a non-human entity, is victim to the slow violence occurring in the Indus River, starting from the coastal ecological disposal of industrial waste to delta salinity issues leading to dry land, barrages, and dams.

_____ It is important to tell the story of saint Khawaja Khizr, the ultimate guide of the coast, who safeguards the fundamental ecosystem. Khizr's presence is found in various locations along underdeveloped areas of the coast and the river. His presence is celebrated at various geographic locations – some physical, some imaginary, but his ultimate resting space is in the upper Indus River, in Sukkur on a small island.

The saint's power keeps the indigenous communities together on sacred geography

// Figure 3
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): A drone shot of the tributary in Siraiki Waseb, where we discuss the river saint Khwaja Khizr's presence and its relation to water.

Today, the *palla* suffers from traveling to its patron in the Indus River due to infrastructural zoning, irrigational interventions, and unethical fish farming that has resulted in a shortage of *hilsa*.

_____ Here, the fish becomes the analogy of the fishermen

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community which is vulnerably residing on the periphery of the coast, or the islands which are constantly affected by real estate agents/developers putting precious wetlands and the fishermen living around there at risk, or military agencies occupying land in the name of security and making the movement of fishermen tedious. Mai Bashiran speaks to us gently about her relationship with Khwaja Khizr, a direct conversation between her and the saint/ *darya* (river). She claims that when the river is at its peak in a state of intensity, it is the time for *manat* (time for making vows) and she negotiates her request through constant *sewa* (service/care) of the river.

_____ The sacred geographic coordinates are marked by shrines, trails, alignments, and archaeological sites. Throughout the research, I have highlighted several shrines that are important along the contested shoreline of Pakistan. The saints' power keeps the Indigenous communities together on the land and the sea. Believers interact with *sacred thresholds* through offerings, by narrating stories about them, and by communities celebrating saints' powers from catastrophes. These beliefs are not materially marked, but the architecture brings the communities together either weekly as part of paying respect or yearly festive events, *urs*. Yet these *sacred thresholds* keep changing their shape and position continuously because of dynamic environmental conditions and constant, man-made, external interventions, especially the appearance of real estate agents. They develop and redesign the geography for investments or the military creates check posts and bureaucratic urgencies like non-objection-able certification (NOC) to commute to and from the island to the mainland. Today, liquid grounds are controlled by man-made infrastructures, and land is controlled for speculative development.

which are constantly affected by real estate agents

// Figure 4
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): As we stood next to the Taunsa Barrage in the district of Dera Ghazi Khan, we witnessed the river edge taken over by commercial developers, real estate agents, and militarized control.

_____ It is important to observe different developing spatial temporalities of everyday growing landscape in built environment. For example, it is critical to understand the land's relation to the sea, saline water meeting fresh water in the estuary, creating ecological balance, but the developers keep conceptualizing real estate extending outwards beyond the coastal edge as a form of reclaimed land, where fishing grounds have been converted into grid-based housing societies. This makes one analyze coastal capitalism and review archival maps to understand the act or politics of making a land or the process of reclaiming land as a political extension of a state's power and economy. As a result, the ecology gets affected and Indigenous voices disappear.

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_____Mai Mukhtyaran emphasizes countless times of living with *bo*, physically experiencing the toxicity through the rotten smell of the river and the fish. She says "river," which is a metaphor for life, and then questions whether it is possible for rivers to carry that stench. It felt as if Mai described the cruel, patriarchal, and capitalistic system using the metaphor of *bo* (pungent smell). The system has filled humans with greed and lust, a stench of being *behis* (apathetic), with human and industrial waste contaminating the ecology, but this *bo*, a man-made disorder, has invaded our internal soul.

_____Mai Mukhtyaran continues and explains "power." She questions patriarchal infrastructure through the analogy of gender captivity and explains women's rights through dam gates and control. Listening to Mai, the attention turns to the huge concrete structures of the dams and the iron gates of the barrages. Built with loans from the World Bank and major powers in the billions, this inefficient and discarded technology is no longer used anywhere in the world. And how these dams, built at the cost of billions, are slowly causing danger to the river and the earth. Mai Mukhtyaran knows that walls are built so that a free entity can be used for its own interest and purpose. It is no secret that the water of the river does not reach the delta, which has been the course of the river for thousands of years. Who is in control? Where is the river itself? Where is the river's path? That is why Mai was saying that if the *darya* (river) is free, then we women will also be free.

_____In the past decades, however, these liminal landscapes have been legally recognized for being important biodiverse habitats, crucial migratory bird stopovers, water-filtering zones, and invaluable buffers against sea flooding and storms, contributing to overall climate resilience. Located in the lands of the community, megaprojects have rezoned the area from rural to urban, draining the wetlands and fragmenting the grazing commons as a side-effect.

The rivers have also been imprisoned

// Figure 5
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): "It is critical to understand that to colonize water is to colonize certain forms of knowledge and the ability to know differently."

ECO-THINKING THROUGH SONGS OF THE SOIL AND THE RIVER _____

Literature on the climate does not account for ecofeminist theories nor does it address the interrelations between postcolonial and ecofeminist theories. Ecological studies have largely ignored women's relationship to the land and food, despite largely being associated with more domestic jobs, again conforming to the binary whereby women are seen as separate from nature, or more specifically, the

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climate and the injustice it poses. Rehman claims that to some extent the lack of female land ownership can account for this gap.

——According to Rahman, "Environmental justice is inextricably bound to social justice everywhere but especially in places such as Pakistan, where the effects of climate changes are compounded by issues of patriarchy and the landowning class structure" (Rahman 2017: 5). The documentary is an academic study, as well as an archive of various water prayers and songs from different geographic coordinates along the water terrain. The women in this section share their intimacy and beloved relation to ancestorial lands and the ecology through these prayers.

> "Indigenous peoples have deep spiritual, cultural, social, and economic connections with their lands, territories, and resources, which are basic to their identity and existence itself. Their tradition of collective rights to lands and resources – through the community, the region, or the state – contrast with dominant models of individual ownership, privatization, and development. There is growing recognition that advancing Indigenous peoples' collective rights to lands, territories and resources not only contributes to their well-being but also to the greater good, by tackling problems such as climate change and the loss of biodiversity" (UN Development 2018).

——"O Keenjhar Wari" is a song set in the story that appears in the *Shah Jo Risalo* (a book of poems by Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai transmitted orally during his lifetime and compiled after his death as Poetry of Shah) and Noori's story forms part of seven popular tragic romances (*The Shah's Seven Queens of Sindh*). Mai Bashiran sings the song lovingly in remembrance of Prince Jam Tamachi's falling in love with the charming fisherwoman Noori. The poetry is set in between three freshwater lakes: Lake Manchar, Lake Jherruk, and Lake Keenjhar in Sindh. Mai Bashiran explains that "water witnesses" the love and becomes a testimony to their beloved relationship. According to the legend, Noori was buried in the middle of Lake Keenjhar, as it is believed that the water will be the caretaker of Noori.

——Shah Latif sketches the intimacy between humans and nature in his work as a testimony that both are never separate, and the narrative has been woven together for centuries.

// Figure 6
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): Mai Bashiran sings "O Keenjhar Wari" in the middle of the lake in Kot Addu.

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WAHNDE DI MAN TAE

The folk song "On the Bank of the Flowing River," sung by Mai Mukhtyaran, beautifully portrays a profound relationship between two individuals who find love and belonging in the presence of the flowing river. The river serves as a witness to their affectionate bond, with its continuous flow symbolizing the enduring nature of their emotions. Their love is intrinsically tied to the river, as its tranquility and continuity inspire a sense of unity and harmony. The repetitive line "On the bank of the flowing river" reinforces the river's significance as a catalyst for their love, highlighting the inseparable connection between their affection and the River

وائندے دی من تے
لائیاں پکھیاں۔۔
وو وائندے دی من تے
میں نہ لائیاں وو لگ گئیاں اکھیاں
وائندے دی من تے۔۔
پُنہل خاناں،من تل وسایا ای لَہا وو مُلکھ بگانا۔
وائندے دی من تے۔۔

پُنہل خاناں،من تل وسایا ای لَہا وو مُلکھ بگانا
وائندے دی من تے

9)
According to the 2017 Pakistani census and the Pakistan Hindu Council, Hindus make up 2.14 % of Pakistan's population, or about 4.4 million people.

_____The two songs, "O Keenjhar Wari" and "Wahnde di man tae," extend the idea of the co-witnesses' feeling by a shared lens or produced in and by relationship between human and non-humans (Youatt, 2017). Shela Sheikh says that non-human forms of life can actively register environmental conditions and form parts of multispecies' world-making practices, as well as provide us with alternatives to representational schemas. She further expands by using Givoni's framework, in which witnessing holds a distinctive form of ethics and politics. In these two songs the women emphasize to contest individualism, especially the contemporary neoliberal governing mentality.

_____The folk song "On the bank of the flowing river" beautifully portrays a profound relationship between two individuals who find love and belonging in the presence of the flowing river. The river serves as a witness to their affectionate bond, with its continuous flow symbolizing the enduring nature of their emotions. Their love is intrinsically tied to the river, as its tranquility and continuity inspire a sense of unity and harmony. The repetitive line "On the banks of the flowing river" reinforces the river's significance as a catalyst for their love, highlighting the inseparable connection between their affection and the river.
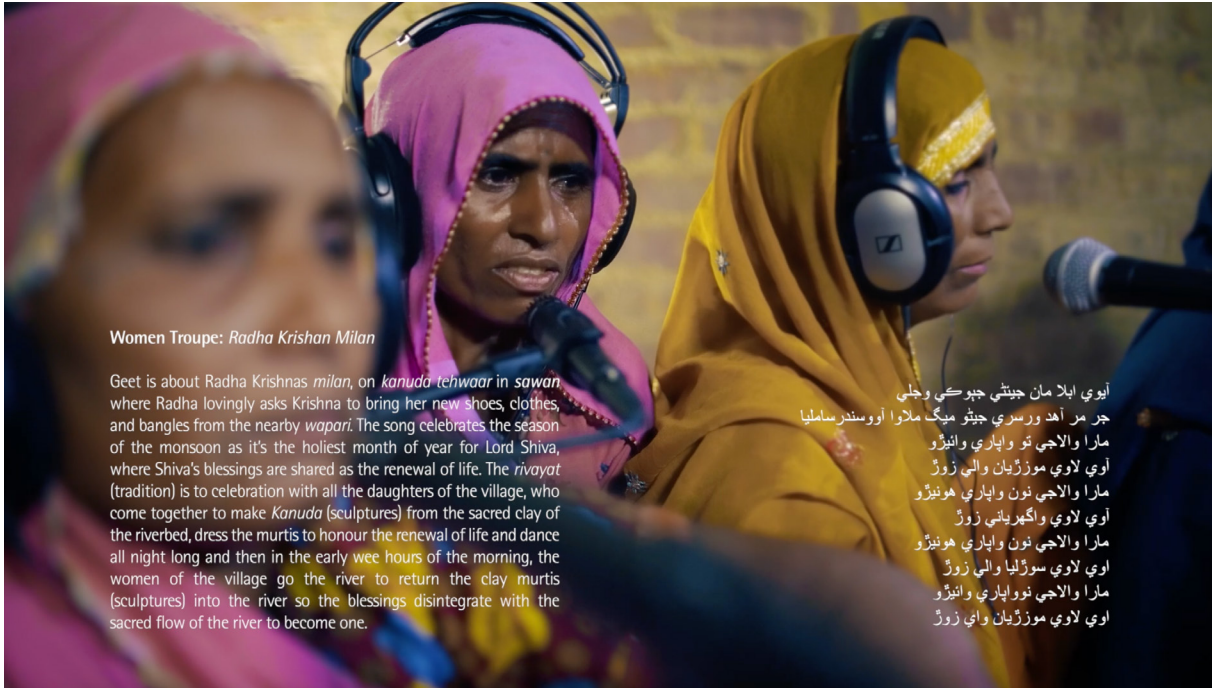
_____The last song, "Radha Krishan Milan," beautifully rendered by the mothers of the Hindu[9] village, is about Radha Krishna's *milan* (coming together) on *kanuda tehwaar* (a religious festival) in *sawan* (spring), where Radha lovingly asks Krishna to bring her new shoes,

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Women Troupe: *Radha Krishan Milan*

Geet is about Radha Krishnas *milan*, on *kanuda tehwaar* in *sawan* where Radha lovingly asks Krishna to bring her new shoes, clothes, and bangles from the nearby *wapari*. The song celebrates the season of the monsoon as it's the holiest month of year for Lord Shiva, where Shiva's blessings are shared as the renewal of life. The *rivayat* (tradition) is to celebration with all the daughters of the village, who come together to make *Kanuda* (sculptures) from the sacred clay of the riverbed, dress the murtis to honour the renewal of life and dance all night long and then in the early wee hours of the morning, the women of the village go the river to return the clay murtis (sculptures) into the river so the blessings disintegrate with the sacred flow of the river to become one.

آيوي ابلا مان جيئشي جبوڪي وڃلي
جر مر آهد ورسري جيئڻ ميگ ملاوا آوسندرسامليا
مارا والاجي تو واپاري وانيڙو
آوي لاوي موزڙيان والي زوڙ
مارا والاجي نون واپاري هونيڙو
آوي لاوي واگهرياني زوڙ
مارا والاجي نون واپاري هونيڙو
اوي لاوي سوڙليا والي زوڙ
مارا والاجي نوواپاري وانيڙو
اوي لاوي موزڙيان واي زوڙ

// Figure 8
Still from the film *Milaap* (2023): Ammas (mothers) of the Hindu village

clothes, and bangles from the nearby *wapari*. The song celebrates the season of the monsoon as it is the holiest month of the year for Lord Shiva, where Shiva's blessings are shared as the renewal of life. The *rivayat* (tradition) is to celebrate with all the daughters of the village who come together to make *Kanuda* (sculptures) from the sacred clay of the riverbed, dress the murtis to honor the renewal of life, and dance all night long. In the early hours of the morning, the women of the village then go to the river to return the clay *murtis* (sculptures) to the river so that the blessings disintegrate with the sacred flow of the river to become one.

——— This beautiful rendition, sung as a form of communal voice, highlights the importance of disintegration and working nature with care and responsibility. These long hours of interviews are an attempt to articulate the potential power of the women living next to the watery edge, sharing, and reimagining the river and ocean-based knowledges. *Pooja* (worship) and *sajda* (bowing down) are an act of submission while thinking and praying to and for river flow in an ever-shifting terrain. The activists continue negotiating for ecological rights within the statehood, capitalism, and challenging development. It is to think of decentering the conversation toward independent, alternative ways of knowing and producing knowledge that allow for empowerment and self-determination within a modern and multisite world. The songs, experiences, and inherited knowledge within the fisherwomen and farmers' community involve a knowledge situated in a specific place and space,

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which is oceanic, and river-based, that privileges an alternative political and ethical relationship with the surrounding physical and spiritual world.

Darya o Darya… tu sada piyo maa asa teray pungay

(River, o river, you are our father and mother, and we are your children).

ٹونگھے دریا او پانی

پونگے تیڈے اساں ماں پیو اساڈا تُوں

تِکھڑی تیڈی دُھپ دریا او دریا

لِکھڑی دی عُمراں گئی لنگھ وچ بیڑیاں

جانی دا دِل ٹسا دریا او دریا

پانی تیڈا کِتھاں پَکھڑو تیڈے کِتھاں

[Text in Siraiki]

_____ River activist Ashu Lal's captivating poem (Lal 2015) reflects the profound river-centric relationship between the Indigenous community and the flowing waters. In just a few lines he paints a vivid picture of the river as a nurturing mother and a caring father to its fish-like children. The poem portrays the river as more than just a physical entity; it is a spiritual and emotional presence in the lives of the people. Ashu Lal questions: Where did your birds go? Where did your water go? And suggests that "we need a new Indus Water Treaty" where its people make a policy for themselves and where the river is regarded as a living entity; how it has been a tradition for many years," as Mai Mukhtyaran says. If we set Khwaja free, then we will also be free because we are in Khwaja and Khwaja is in us.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES _____ If there is anything our 1000-kilometer journey has taught us, it is that we need to develop more dialogue between urban and rural centers. We learned that

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the rural conversation has wisdoms that date beyond the Industrial Revolution and capitalism. We learned that to lend the Indigenous a bigger voice, we need to give the rural centers more reach. We learned that irrespective of our religious beliefs, we are all connected through water.

_____ Feminist ecologies emerge at the intersection of two progressive twentieth-century political movements: one concerned with the fight for women's rights and the other with ecological sustainability within the environment. The capacity of feminist ecologies to reveal the interconnectedness of environmental and social injustices makes it an urgent and timely field of inquiry for the current moment. These field notes arise out of the need to address the challenges of climate change, land degradation, species extinction, and the disproportionate effects of these changes upon particular communities of women and their livelihoods.

_____ To understand infrastructural rupture is to accept that too many regional voices are missing from this landscape when we discuss climate justice. The impacts and solutions are coming from all parts of the world – while the locals battle floods in Pakistan. One witnesses the infrastructural ruptures and disparity along the region, through various disproportionate vantage points. Pakistan is among the ten countries at the highest risk of natural disasters, according to the World Risk Index. All the institutions, policies, plans, and strategies put in place to cope with emergencies are merely limited to paper. In a practical sense, the country has never taken disaster management as a serious matter. Hardly any work has been done on improving the institutions that work on disaster management.

_____ Pakistan has a very diverse landscape that requires different planning in different regions. It is extremely important to understand the politics of water and land through the voice of the community; their voice needs to be part of the planning schemes. It is now critical to draw cross-sectoral linkages and impacts of climate change by centering on solidarities and alliances and by accommodating marginalized communities into planning processes. In the land of the Sufis, where geography is considered sacred, and the relationship is beyond economic transaction. As an architect and infrastructural and spatial advocate, I would conclude with the query: Does Pakistan need to apply global development methodology or spatial democratic justice? In a climate-catastrophic atmosphere, it is now a fundamental function to understand the sacred geography through the lens of care management, and this, in my view, has become more urgent than ever.

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_____A prayer of a fish from the Chenab River written by Abuzar Madhu (a performing artist and researcher):[10]

Ya Khizr
O spiritual guide of the water
Bless us
Our tears are flowing.
Mai is pretty, however she's sad.
The river is drying up.
Chenab is dying.
We can't breathe.
O true guide of ours, intervene for us
The lands have been divided and so have the rivers.
Reincarnate the lost lives of the river.
My beloved
Please fulfill our prayers.

// Field Companions
Mai Bashiran, (Taunsa Barrage Punjab, Saraiki Waseb), Mai Mukhtyaran, (Punjnad Canals/Panjnad head Punjab, Saraiki Waseb) Mai Zainab Dholwali (Umerkot, Sindh), Shaam Bai (Tandoallahyar, Sindh), Bhagat Bhooro Lal (Chauro Bhugri, Mirpurkhaas, Sindh), Meenaxi (Chauro Bhugri, Mirpur-khaas, Sindh), Savita (Chauro Bhugri, Mirpurkhaas, Sindh), Community Welcome Song by Ammas (Women's Troupe)/Radha Krishan Milan, Shehzad Shafi, Ashu Lal, Saeen Nishat, Kamran, Munir Sheikh, Sanwal Gurmani, Fazal Lund, and Dr. Farhat Abbas

// Research & Creativity Companions
Marvi Mazhar, Abuzar Madhu, Zohaib Kazi, Kiran Ahmad, Bilal Sagar, and Corinna Dean

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//About the Author

Marvi Mazhar is an architect and researcher whose practice combines visual culture, spatial advocacy, and interventions. Her present ongoing research focuses on the representation and production of Karachi's urban coastal periphery and its ecology. Mazhar's advocacy creates a dialogue between the changing footprint of Karachi's inner city through personal archives, and the visual ethnography of *purana shehr* (old town) versus *naya shehr* (new/reclaimed town). Through her practice, she continues to examine how cities grow in an isolated architectural design practice versus those in a *mohalla*/neighborhood-based one.

Mazhar co-curated the exhibition and co-edited the book *Yasmeen Lari. Architecture for the Future* with Angelika Fitz (Director of the AzW, the Austrian Architecture Museum in Vienna), and Prof. Elke Krasny (Head of the Art and Education Program at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna) for the Architekturzentrum Wien, published by The MIT Press, 2023.

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REWILDING AND REWRITING
EDITION BY JOULIA STRAUSS FOR FKW NR. 74

// Joulia Strauss
Rewilding and Rewriting, poster of the *Avtonomi Akadimia* program: In the summer of 2023, activists defended the Akadimia Platonos Garden, one of the few public parks in Athens, from the ecocide planned by the right-wing government.

31.5 × 21 cm, colored pencils, ink pen, 2023
Digital print, edition of 10, 2024
Price: € 100

To order, please, write to: jouliastrauss@gmx.de

Joulia Strauss is an artist, activist, and multimedia sculptor: **www.joulia-strauss.net**. She was born in the Soviet Union as a Mari, one of Europe's last Indigenous cultures with a shamanic tradition, and lives and works in Athens and Berlin. Her sculptures, paintings, performances, drawings, and video works have been seen in solo and group exhibitions at the Pergamon Museum and Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin, at Tate Modern, as well as at the Tirana Biennale, the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, the Athens Biennale, the Kyiv Biennial, the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, and documenta14, among others. She is currently training to earn her fourth stripe in Việt Võ Đạo Kung Fu. Strauss is the founder and organizer of *Avtonomi Akadimia* in Athens: **www.avtonomi-akadimia.net** and has recently finalized her film *Transindigenous Assembly*.

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