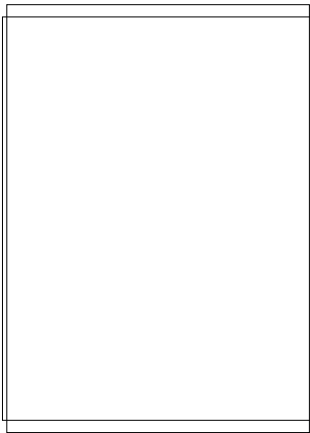
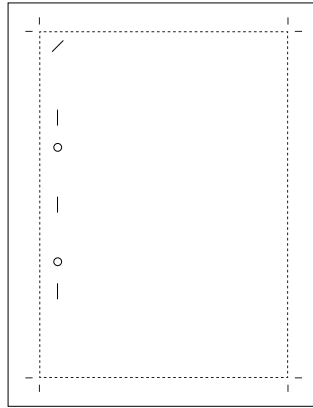


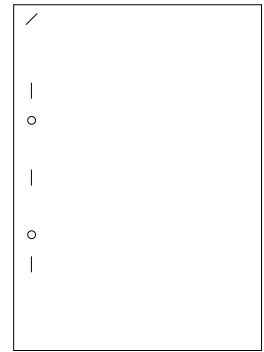
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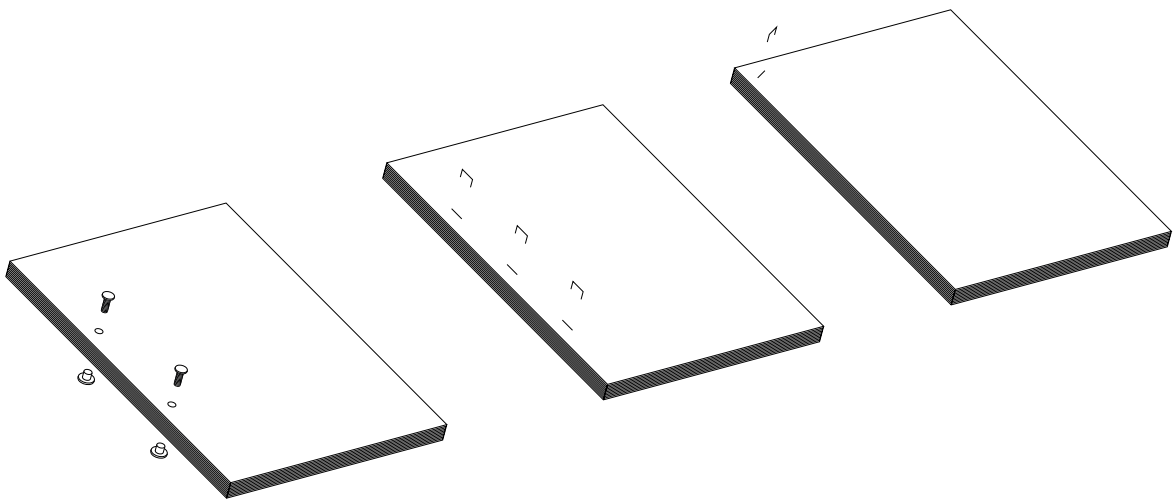
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(1) PAPER SIZE	use A4 (210 x 297 mm) or US Letter (215.9 x 279.4 mm)
(2) PRINTING AND TRIMMING	print in “actual size”. choose single sided printing. use crop marks to trim the edges of the paper
(3) BOOK SIZE AND GUIDE	final size should be 240 x 172 mm (9.44 x 6.77 in). use the other marks as a guide for binding
(4) BINDING	we suggest using screws or staples. a binder can be used for collecting multiple articles

issue #001

T. J. DEMOS

Blackout: The Necropolitics of Extraction

DISPATCHES JOURNAL

This essay addresses extraction, its visual cultures, as well as the politics and aesthetics of emergent forms of resistance today. In view of spreading sacrifice zones given over to resource mining, accompanied by exploitative international trade agreements and the finances of debt servitude, what forms do the cultural politics of opposition take, and how are artist-activists materializing the images and sounds of emancipation and decolonization against capitalism's rapacious commodification of anything and everything? With reference to the diverse artworks of Angela Melitopoulos, Allora & Calzadilla, and Ursula Biemann, which variously consider geographies of conflict in such diverse regions as Greece, Puerto Rico, Canada, and Bangladesh, this analysis considers a range of select artistic approaches that adopt an aesthetics of intersectionality that both reveals complex causalities and effects of global extractivism, and proposes forms of movement-building and solidarity with those on the frontlines of opposition.

Withdrawal of Value and Agency

An epic four-channel video installation of 109 minutes shown recently at documenta 14, Angela Melitopoulos's *Crossings* (2017)—made with collaborators Angela Anderson, Maurizio Lazzarato, Pascale Criton, Oktay Ince, and Paula Cabo Guevara—presents an interlinking of people, matter, finance, and agency that defines a globalized political ecology of inequality and dispossession. One intersection, among several related others found in the piece, focuses on the financial interests arrayed around the planned industrial extraction of gold, copper, and rare earths from the Skouries mine in the Halkidiki Peninsula, near Thessaloniki in northern Greece. Those exploitative interests are shown to connect directly to the EU-driven withdrawal of political agency from the Greek citizenry. As dramatized by the astonishing reversal of the 2015 bailout referendum by Alexis Tsipras of the formerly considered left-wing Syriza government, voted in explicitly to challenge EU dominance, the popular rejection of austerity economics imposed by Brussels as the condition of continuing membership in the Eurozone, was itself rejected by the government, at the behest of European financial demands (what Syriza's former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis likened to neocolonial gunboat diplomacy¹). These two formations—the opening up of Greece to transnational mining interests, and the betrayal of popular sovereignty by treacherous EU politics—speak to the global conditions of extraction today, and enter into direct correlation, as well as conflict, in *Crossings*. In one passage, environmental activists are shown passionately protesting the wanton destruction of regional forests and rivers by



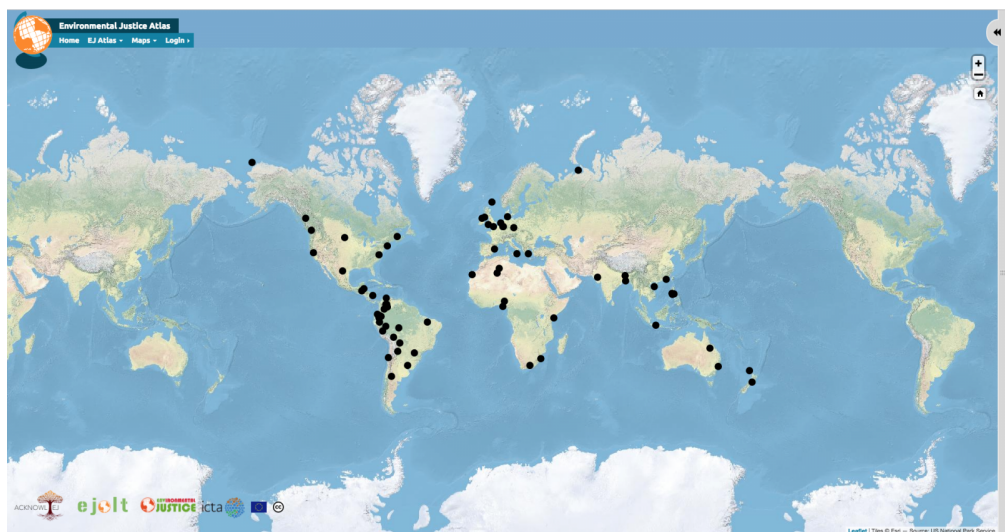
ANGELA MELITOPOULOS
Crossings, 2017

mining companies, including Eldorado Gold of Canada and the Greek subsidiary Hellas Gold, and are brutally suppressed by militarized police. With these scenes, we confront the widespread fact that police charged with enforcing law tend to protect corporate power rather than defend democratic will, as political disenfranchisement compounds material dispossession.

Crossings visualizes nothing less than the workings of extractivism, the dominant paradigm of advanced capitalism. According to theorists Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, extractivism identifies both historical and current modes of wealth accumulation based upon the withdrawal of raw materials and life forms from the planet's surface, depths, and biosphere in the production of financial value, which run in coordination with expansive politico-economic and socio-technological systems pledged to its operations.² Fundamentally, extractivism comprises a calculus of accumulation by dispossession, to use the terms of David Harvey, an accumulation without corresponding deposit (except in the form of waste, disease, and death), which transforms whatever it touches—be that mines, forests, rivers, oceans, or human and nonhuman life—into economic value, employing whatever means at its disposal, including machinery, architecture, labor, finance, logistics, and media.³ It includes virtual processes as well as dense materials, prison labor and debt servitude, bioprospecting, genetics, and informatics. It drives real estate speculation, tuition increases, and rent as much as structural neglect and privatization, and bends policy and trade agreements to its will. Extractivism consequently designates a common motivating logic of institutions, museums, universities, corporations, and states, organizing their trade deals, social forms, labor policies, data mining, energy systems, and technologies. As a global formation, “the ‘new urban frontier’ is continually opening in diverse contexts, prompted by the appropriation and expropriation of spaces, values, infrastructures, and forms of life that are submitted to capitalist valorization.”⁴

War of the Worlds

While Melitopoulos's video may be focused on the case of Greece, the extractive logic it uncovers is pervasive worldwide in the global movement toward illiberal politics, authoritarian capitalism, and growing socio-economic inequality. The current US administration is representative of this nexus, where disaster capitalism and expanding sacrifice zones converge under its reign, linking politico-financial and natural resource exploitation to the overwhelming benefit of corporate wealth. Such an arrangement not



Map of Blockadia, 2018
Environmental Justice Atlas
<https://ejatlas.org/featured/blockadia>

only mobilizes disasters for further neoliberalization, but also produces countless disasters in its wake. For instance, the 2017 US tax plan, recently forced through Congress with little public support, lowers corporate rates from 35 percent to 21 percent, constituting a trillion-dollar transfer to the wealthiest, just as the same bill opens the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve to oil, gas, and coal drilling exploration (with all of the US's coasts, save Florida's, to follow). The maneuver joins the pillaging of public finances to that of natural resource mining, moving the US toward historically unprecedented levels of environmental threat and economic disparity.⁵ According to this formation, again global in character, taxes are weaponized in an asymmetrical class war.⁶ Politics become reduced to a massive police operation, as multitudes lose faith in representative systems, and not surprisingly, enviro-economic structural adjustments are accompanied by the gradual withdrawal of civil liberties, as activism becomes increasingly subject to control, repression, and illegality.⁷ Internationally, environmentalists are exposed to growing state violence and extrajudicial killings, as dramatized by the case of Berta Cáceres in Honduras, who joined with the Indigenous Lenca people in waging a grassroots campaign that successfully pressured Chinese state-owned Sinohydro, the world's largest dam builder, to pull out of the Agua Zarca Dam project. She was one of thousands of activists murdered in a country operating under the US-supported 2009 deposal of democratically-elected President Manuel Zelaya. More, her case forms part of an international trend of increasing levels of state and corporate violence visited upon environmentalists, Indigenous activists, and independent journalists opposed to extractivism's world order.

In this antagonism that pits petrocapiatlist states against environmentalists and in many instances Indigenous peoples—from Greece to Brazil, Honduras to the Philippines, Indonesia to Russia—biopolitics (the governance of human lives), transforms into necropolitics (the administration of death), and scales up and down to geontopolitics (the governance of the relations between life and nonlife), constituting an ascendant politics of earth-being in our age of extraction.⁸ Such is clear with Standing Rock, which figures as one hyper-visible focal point of Blockadia, the expansive and transnational conflict zone in which grassroots movements are set in opposition to petrocapiatlist developments.⁹ In 2016, members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, joined by other Indigenous nations and countless allies, challenged the construction of the Dakota Access Pipe Line, expressing popular resistance to both the exploitation of fossil fuels placing natural environments and water sources at risk, and the negation of Indigenous rights in the face of ongoing neocolonial land grabs and



ANGELA MELITOPOULOS
Crossings, 2017



ANGELA MELITOPOULOS
Crossings, 2017

domineering state sovereignty. Yet the event also centered around the corporate-government complex's attempt to control and manage the difference between life and nonlife—specifically when it comes to oil and water. When water protectors insisted upon *mni wiconi!*, or water is life! / water is alive!, in the face of militarized police advances and private security assaults, shielded bulldozers, chemical weapons, and menacing police dogs, the event constituted both a biopolitical rift over human rights, with necropolitical implications, and a geontopolitical challenge to the neoliberal logic whereby elements, environments, and nonhuman life forms are violently reduced to commodities within the unfolding drama of an ecologically-devastating and climate-changing economy of accumulation by dispossession.

At a time when contemporary politicians increasingly flirt with neo-fascist (alt-right) formations, events such as Standing Rock speak to the delegitimizing of liberal electoral politics as it merges with corporate corruption. The situation continues to unfold today. Yet there's also been a growing intensity of thinking and living politically outside of that domain—as at Standing Rock—which is to say in the civic realms of culture and the arts, where the politico-aesthetic imagination asserts itself and challenges petrocapialist extractivism. In proliferating instances, aesthetic practices themselves shift character and modulate within this geopolitical framework; the artistic blurs with social movements, producing an expanded field of aesthetics with cosmopolitical scope, focused on the formation of liberated values, and joined in contexts where nothing less is at stake than a contemporary war of the worlds.¹⁰ Against the extractivist logic of the Capitalocene—a world sacrificing the earth itself to the interests of short-term profits—artists and activists, as well as communities set on doing politics differently, are restoring and inventing alternative forms of life and creative modes of ethical being-in-common. They are drawing on existing wisdoms and proposing new knowledges, remaking the world as we know it in imagination, representation, and practice. Let's consider three such examples: the artwork of Angela Melitopoulos, Ursula Biemann, and Allora & Calzadilla, which cover a spectrum of cultural practices referencing and intervening in diverse sites in the global North and South. Their practices include political documentary, speculative analysis linked to insurrectionary social movements, and gallery-bound sculptural and audio-visual experiments, which all give form to socio-political and environmental violence, as well as to inspiring sites of resistance.

Governing by debt

Crossings places viewers uncomfortably in the crossfire of its four large screens, constructing an audio-visual confrontation approximating its war-zone geography. While the video provides interviews with Greek environmental activists who discuss the political and ecological stakes of their struggle, it also expands that rift-zone to Greece's refugee crisis, including the views of migrants interned at the Idomeni camp, located north of Thessaloniki, and at the Moria Camp on the island of Lesbos, just off Turkey's coast. Migrants speak of deteriorating conditions in their home countries of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. It becomes clear that migration is itself symptomatic of the social breakdown that occurs in the face of political authoritarianism, economic inequality, and environmental-military violence—in other words, the very extractivist order that has had devastating effects on homelands in the Middle East and Africa. Asylum-seekers tell of desperate conditions in the camps, the cruelty of police and guards, and the interminable waits that make their experience of dislocation allegedly worse than life in places like war-torn Afghanistan. While these circumstances explain the many protests against camp conditions and migration policies—some of which are shown in *Crossings*—Melitopoulos's video also sees in these demonstrations contemporary echoes of ancient slave rebellions staged in the same region. This area was also mined by forced labor more than two thousand years ago, and rebellions then, as now, materialized demands for political transformation.¹¹

Crossings also includes interviews with refugee camp inhabitants who are members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which continues to defend autonomous zones beyond state sovereignty and against extremist Islamic formations like ISIS in northern Syria and Turkey. In these interviews, they discuss their revolutionary politics and affirmatively pro-feminist culture, as well as their support for Kurdish leader and PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, who, remarkably, was influenced by US social ecologist Murray Bookchin and his 1960s and 70s anarchist theories of libertarian municipalism and environmental well-being.¹² Set in crisis conditions, the militant implications of current social movements become explicit. Just as one older Halkidiki-based anti-mining activist is shown admitting his hopelessness regarding conventional political transformation in the current EU system, speculating that violent resistance may be the only remaining response in Greece, PKK refugee camp residents sing songs in praise of revolutionary guerrillas set to the Greek bouzouki. In the brutal conditions of war fought by economic means, wherein debt is a weapon of mass destruction and migration a descent into powerlessness, life must be defended by any means



URSULA BIEMANN
Deep Weather, 2013
Video essay, 9 min
Still



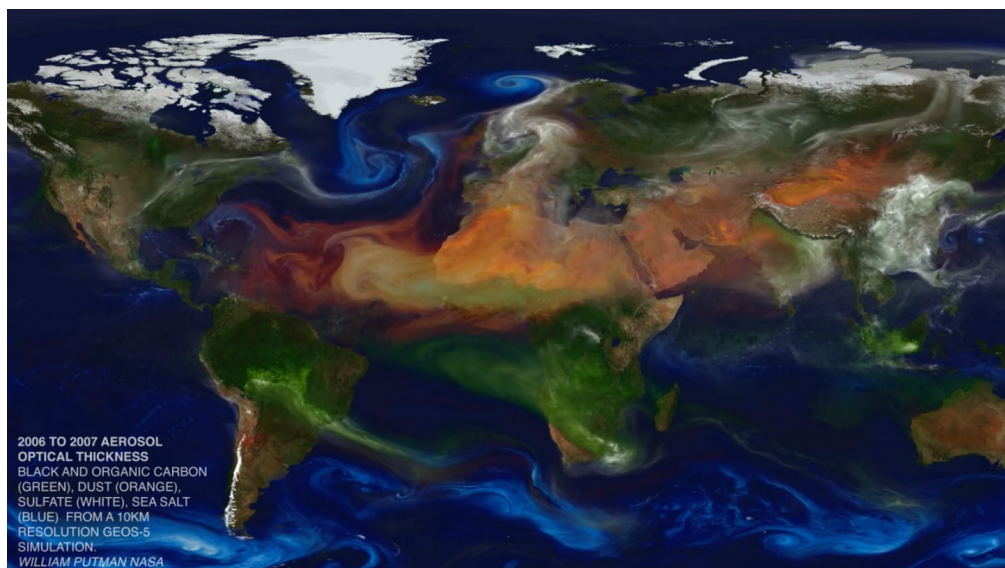
URSULA BIEMANN
Deep Weather, 2013
Video essay, 9 min
Still

necessary. Such militant convictions lead *Crossings* to its concluding speculation: if democratic voting offers no effective means of politico-ecological phase shift—whether in ancient slave-holding states of patriarchal imperialism, or in today’s post-neoliberal unfolding of authoritarian capitalism—then we must look beyond electoral politics for ways of reclaiming justice, equality, and environmental liveability, inventing new solidarities on those bases.

Climate Crimes

Similarly advancing a relational-geographies approach to global petrocapiatist extraction, and with an explicit focus on connections between North and South, Ursula Biemann’s short video *Deep Weather* (2013) begins by depicting the topography of Canada’s Alberta Tar Sands, one of the greatest sources of climate disruption on the planet. On the grounds of what was once a pristine boreal forest, corporations have industrialized an area roughly the size of England, mining dirty and hard-to-access hydrocarbons in the form of bitumen, a heavy, black oil mixed with clay, sand, and water. In the process of clearing the forest’s biodiverse ecology—commonly denigrated as “overburden” by the mining industry—and transforming it into so many carbon geologies, extraction firms such as ConocoPhillips, Petro-Canada, and ExxonMobil have brought ruin to the environment and heavily impacted the lives of First Nations peoples who live nearby, among whom cases of cancer, asthma, diabetes, and mental illness caused by air and water pollution have risen dramatically over the last decade. This includes the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, for whom “the land is the essence of...culture, values, and spirituality,” and who have filed grievances with Shell for practicing ecocide, as well as with the Canadian government for reneging on historical treaties and failing to protect the health of Indigenous populations (though so far these lawsuits have been without success).¹³

Biemann’s video provides aerial shots of the vast oil fields in the Athabasca River region, narrated by the artist in a whispered voice-over (or rather, a hushed and humbled voice-under) that speculates about the geological impacts of these corporate activities both locally and globally. Offering a useful meteorological visualization of these global dynamics, research architect Adrian Lahoud has undertaken in a separate context a geospatial analysis linking aerosol emissions, including carbon and sulfates, in the Northern Hemisphere with desertification and warming in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America. Drawing on the high-resolution NASA computer modelings of the atmospheric circulation of natural and human-made particulates assembled by



ADRIAN LAHOUD

Aerosol Optical Thickness from 10km Resolution GEOS-5 Simulation

William Putman, NASA, as appearing in Lahoud's "Climate Crimes,"

<https://www.forensic-architecture.org/file/climate-crimes/>

William Putman of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, this interconnected system constitutes, for Lahoud, "a new geopolitical cartography that ties together distant fates, linking industrialization in the North to deprivation [and climate disruption] in the South."¹⁴ His modeling of forensic climatology provides evidence of what Lahoud calls a "climate crime," with perpetrators including not only the petrocapitalist industry, but also UN climate negotiators who institutionalize global warming targets that spell future disaster for regions in the South. While two degrees Celsius warming may be the near future global average, different regions are predicted to be more or less affected. According to such a scenario, Africa will burn, according to Sudanese diplomat Lumumba Di-Aping and Nigerian environmentalist Nnimmo Bassey, whose activism has exposed a new order of politico-environmental violence practiced through "weapons of mass destruction" that surpass the ability of any court at present to prosecute—particularly at a time when agency and culpability are distributed across complex systems of production, regulation, and governance (which also increasingly includes cybernetic and algorithmic forms).¹⁵ Building cases for future justice, the visualizations of Lahoud are prefigurative, and Biemann's *Deep Weather* provides a case study of specific evidence.

"...cases of cancer, asthma, diabetes, and mental illness caused by air and water pollution have risen dramatically over the last decade".

One equatorial zone impacted by Tar Sands emissions is portrayed in the second half of Biemann's video, where the socio-environmental consequences of fossil-fuel climate breakdown are witnessed in Bangladesh's Ganges-Brahmaputra delta. Bringing the camera down to a human-scaled ground level, *Deep Weather* shows the collective efforts of coastal communities to construct barriers against the rising seas. Here, some volunteers pack sandbags with mud by hand, while others deliver them to the growing seawall. The manual labor of these volunteers, motivated to protect their homes and communities from submersion, contrasts sharply with the high-tech extractive infrastructure in Canada, as the unequal access to technology and geoengineering resources is dramatically juxtaposed. Providing another version of forensic climatology, Biemann's relational analysis demonstrates the manner in which faraway regions are linked by industrialization and climate disruption. The monumental effort

carried out by Bangladeshi collective labor represents nothing less than a human externality of the oil industry, a consequence generally disavowed by corporations (including the recent conservative and pro-drilling government of Stephen Harper in Canada, as well as the pro-extraction administration of Justin Trudeau¹⁶). Envisioning a future of environmental justice, one wonders what form of climate debt could possibly repay such impacts.

With a sealevel rise of three feet—a low estimate for near-future impacts—20 percent of Bangladesh would be under water, displacing more than 30 million people, including Dhaka’s population of 16 million.¹⁷ The Bay of Bengal is the largest delta region on Earth, and when its ocean surges fifty to sixty miles inland during storms, the salinity contaminates drinking water and renders agricultural land less fertile. The result spells disaster for the region, and will propel future waves of intensified climate migration. More, the anthropogenic melting of Himalayan glaciers has at times swollen rivers that pour into Bangladesh from Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and India, even while the loss of ice threatens future water supplies. Swaths of the Sundarbans—the world’s largest mangrove forest located in the Ganges River delta—have already begun to disappear in the rising seas. How can we begin to visualize such scenes of territorial loss? Climate breakdown defies the imagination and its representational powers, part of what the writer Amitav Ghosh calls our era of “the Great Derangement” of climates and culture alike, even while many artists are nonetheless making efforts at creative intervention, struggling against the tide.¹⁸ Along with Brazil’s Amazon, Montana’s Glacier National Park, and the Congo Basin, the Sundarbans are considered disappearing landscapes, which shockingly offer further sites of commodification via climate-change tourism, exemplifying extraction’s general logic of destructive production and productive destruction—nothing less than a race to the bottom in a world of finite lands and recourse.¹⁹ Faced with such catastrophic territorial loss, our market system—free only from regulation it seems—can only see opportunities to intensify its economic logic of scarcity: the less land available, the more it will be worth. Biemann’s poignant analysis of the causes of climate disaster contests such fatalistic narratives: not only does *Deep Weather* depict the collective efforts to fortify geographical defenses, it also identifies the causes and portrays the building of the collective agency of resistance.

Disaster Capitalism

An alternative to the documentary-essay approaches of Melitopoulos and

Biemann—where footage making truth-claims unfolds within analytical frameworks of interpretation—Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla’s recent work assembles an audio-visual and sculptural poetics that draws together politics and ecology, particularly as they co-materialize in the scars of past and ongoing extractive violence in Puerto Rico. Theirs is an intersectionalist aesthetic, formed of fragmented machinery and industrial architecture that is drawn from sites of international trade, transportation infrastructure, and energy generation. Their sculptural piece *Blackout* (2017) presents a large section of an electromagnetic power transformer that exploded in Puerto Rico in 2016. The explosion led to one of the many power failures that have plagued the island in recent years; scandalously, six months after the 2017 hurricane season hobbled the electricity system, a majority of people on the island remained without power. The fragments of ceramic insulators and transformer coils that appear in *Blackout* were sourced from the Aguirre Power Plant in Salinas, a station operated by the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA). Chronically underfunded as a national utility set up in 1941, and nominated recently for privatization, PREPA is also one of the largest bond issuers responsible for the island’s current and growing 74 billion dollar debt. *Blackout* draws these strands together, giving creative form to the joining of debt servitude and energy production.

As the artists make clear in their research notes, creditors of the island’s debt include US investment firms and vulture hedge funds that profit by recuperating dues, even if they come at the expense of brutal structural adjustments, not dissimilar to the debt-subjection of Greece. Consequently, Puerto Rico’s economy, controlled currently by an unelected Financial Management and Oversight Board appointed by the US congress in 2016, siphons resources from public schools (179 were closed in that year alone, and even more recently), the country’s public university system, hospitals, pensions, and infrastructure, and redirects them to creditors, effectively placing profits over people. The result is what some call the formation of a debt prison, which is only exacerbated by the island’s environmental misfortunes.²⁰ The island’s economic configuration, moreover, implemented over decades of US policy and constitutional law, excludes the option of declaring bankruptcy that is commonly available to US cities and corporations in financial duress, and instead prioritizes loan repayments over social welfare expenditures.²¹ The frayed, mangled, and corroded body of Allora & Calzadilla’s resonant sculpture presents a state of material de-composition that sources and expresses this depraved politico-financial and environmental network, precisely embodying these unjust economic distortions, structural disfigurements, and legal



ALLORA & CALZADILLA
Blackout, 2017

maladjustments.

Some activists believe that the overwhelming debt—approximately 123 billion dollars, when factoring for the country’s 49 billion dollar pension burden—is simply unserviceable or even illegal. These opponents are demanding forgiveness or at least economic development first, though the Oversight Board, beholden to corporate stakeholders, will likely continue to do everything in its powers to guarantee immediate repayment before all else. Others contend that with ever more multitudes subjected to politico-economic disenfranchisement in a world of growing resource inequality—dramatized particularly in the post-disaster zones of Houston, Puerto Rico, Detroit, New Orleans, and Haiti, to mention only those in the Americas that form an interconnected field of structural and purposeful neglect—we are witnessing a spreading blackout that is socio-economic and structurally racist in origin. Indeed, for Achille Mbembe, this system represents the geographical expansion of the centuries-long conditions of profound inequity that once characterized primarily the slavery of those of African origin. Now called “precarity” and released from strictly racial classification (though this is not to say that racial capitalism does not still persist), we face what Mbembe terms the “becoming black of the world.”²² The phrase designates the globalized blackout of impoverishment, necropolitics, and dispossession—the dispossession of the power of self-determination, of control over one’s future, even the free access to time and the possible. To Mbembe’s diagnosis of this new norm of precarious existence, I would add the exposure to extraction’s waste-zones, befouled elements, colonized atmospheres, toxic externalities, and public health emergencies, where becoming-black is evidenced in urban pollution, degraded water, mismanaged waste, and indebted and diseased bodies. While its zones may be expanding globally, exposure is still based on differential vulnerabilities and unequal resources of protection, with the interconnected relations between the two inspiring further cycles of commodification (targeting health care, education and housing as much as the primary elements of water, air, and soil).

In joining energy production with financial debt servitude, Allora & Calzadilla’s *Blackout* identifies the key neocolonial logic of extraction, which is, as we’ve seen, operative in the environment of finance capital that has itself becoming globalized.²³ The two are indeed intimately connected, justifying their double metonymic referencing in the piece’s literal inclusion of the electromagnetic transformer from an indebted public utility—a transformer that can be understood here



ALLORA & CALZADILLA
The Night We Became People Again, 2017
Still

as being a generator of both energy and financial flows, as well as of pollution and climate disruption. The fact that PREPA runs primarily on fossil fuels, despite being located on a Caribbean island rich in solar potential, and that its energy's high cost (three times what US mainlanders typically pay) is borne by Puerto Rico's captive consumers, only reinforces the significance of the connection of energy and debt production.²⁴ For Puerto Rico's debt is symptomatic of the global arrangement by which the world's eight richest people own as much wealth as the bottom half of the human population, some 3.6 billion, whereby enrichment is also cause and consequence of impoverishment.

To these dynamics, Allora & Calzadilla add a sonic dimension, transforming *Blackout*'s transformer into a tuning device for a vocal-acoustic performance based on *mains hum* (2017), an original score by composer David Lang that begins with a quotation by US founding father Benjamin Franklin: "In going on with these Experiments, how many pretty systems do we build, which we soon find ourselves oblig'd to destroy! If there is no other Use discover'd of Electricity, this, however, is something considerable, that it may help to make a vain Man humble." Franklin's words are ultimately rendered illegible in the music itself (as if nothing is freed from the transformer's distortions), but the irony, of course, is that this humbling of Man—referenced indirectly by the humming singers, who, in matching the humming pitch of the transformer, transform these words into a collective buzzing that builds off the sonic continuum of *Blackout*'s machine—has been far from the case. Even in the shadow of multiple power failures, including the recent period following 2017's summer of disaster, the burned out mass of infrastructure on the island still inspires visions of yet more economic potential. Out of the ashes emerge ever greater machinic monsters of wealth accumulation, and as the widespread paradigm of disaster capitalism expands, catastrophe offers further opportunities for advancing ever more intense neoliberal and extractive agendas.²⁵

Hope in the Dark

With these projects by Melitopoulos, Biemann, and Allora & Calzadilla, we encounter diverse approaches to extractive zones where exploitation simultaneously implicates natural resources and finances, where ecological and economic violence are inseparable. The techniques of this exploitation include earthmoving machinery as well as operational logistics, trade agreements as well as legal arrangements, police brutality and coercive economics, tax evasion and offshore accounts, even while the

artistic projects tend to focus on community-scaled geographies of human and environmental costs. Nonetheless, these extraction and sacrifice zones formed at the intersection of extreme weather events, environmental de- or non-regulation, and creditor-debtor inequalities, also offer scenes of what author Rebecca Solnit has called “hope in the dark.” For Solnit, the phrase describes acts of non-exploitative mutual aid, as when, in the absence of state or NGO assistance, neighbors come to each others’ support, form collective kitchens, deliver disaster relief, distribute essential services, rebuild homes, and save lives.²⁶ Perhaps most directly portrayed in *Deep Weather*’s account of Bangladeshi people fortifying their coastlines against storm surges, such practices also occur in the community-building and self-organized education of Greece’s refugee camps, and in Puerto Rico’s post-hurricane geographies of *autogestion*, self-management, or more broadly translated as self-directed becoming, which is speculatively schematized in Allora & Calzadilla’s cinematic visions of collective transformation. In the latter’s short film *The Night We Became People Again*, the artists invoke pre-colonial Taíno cosmology as a resource for postcolonial survival. Its scenery transitions between a cave of indigenous mythological reference alluding to the beginning of time, and the dark interior of a decrepit Puerto Rican power plant. The film’s visuality features swirling bats and flickering stars, invoking the formation of new worlds, which, in converging with a post-apocalyptic imaginary of infrastructural breakdown and collective reinvention, charts out a new configuration of post-anthropocentric, post-extractive social being.²⁷

“What is clear is that we need a transnational movement answering and preempting the current distributive globalization of financial power...”

These practices reveal emergent spaces of potentiality, ones suggesting and building toward a politico-ecological paradigm shift, a self-governing movement overcoming the privations and manipulations of disaster capitalism. They even enliven modes of disaster communalism, or, as Ashley Dawson phrases it, disaster communism: “collaborative, altruistic, and often improvised forms of collective provision echoing Marx’s dictum ‘for each according to ability, to each according to need’”.²⁸ These forms glimpse new horizons of the possible, and by insisting on the ethical imperative of collective survival, they extend beyond loyalty to capitalism in expressing the

dreams of decolonial transformation and emancipatory revolution.²⁹ If so, then in those areas of disaster communism emerging in the blackouts of the energy grid following extreme weather events, we also witness becoming-black as a modality of decolonized subjectivation, a building of unrecognizable and ungovernable sovereignties, of prefigurative, post-capitalist mutual aid societies, inspiring a scaling up toward transnational solidarities and a coming movement of movements.³⁰ As with the mobilizations at Standing Rock threatened with the blacking out of its water sources, and extending to widespread and transnational activist networks such as Black Lives Matter, these are aesthetic, social, and political spaces where blackout potentially flips into positive expression, a productive discontent with pessimism where blackness becomes “a symbol of beauty and pride,” as Mbembe writes, “a sign of radical defiance, a call to revolt, desertion, [and] insurrection”; indeed, in such places, we can discern blackout as “an island of repose in the midst of racial oppression and objective dehumanization.”³¹

That said, one would be right to question if these instances of volunteerist social formations emerging in disaster zones—in colonized Greece, flood-risk Bangladesh, and post-Hurricane Puerto Rico—are not also symptomatic of neoliberal entrepreneurialism in the vacuum of governmental accountability, where self-organization in defunded and indebted territories operates as self-extracting cheap or unpaid labor, conveniently relieving the state of its responsibilities? Are these not instances where “recovery” ultimately means the return to capitalism’s status quo and even more extreme versions of it, to its dependent sovereignties and unquestioned hegemony? If so, at what point do such collective efforts catalyze social emancipation beyond extractive capture, when blackout might designate radical degrowth economies, ecological downsizing, hope not only *in* the dark but also *of* the dark, an obscurity or strategic opacity resistant to surveillance, algorithmic capture, and media spectacle alike?

It’s difficult to answer these questions, and to clearly separate hope from despair, especially when the topologies of revolt and normalization, desertion and capture, are so complexly intertwined, and where the effects and outcomes of these events are never simply punctual or secure. What is clear is that we need a transnational movement answering and preempting the current distributive globalization of financial power, operating within and between nation-states that no longer function solely according to the logics of democratic representation and accountability, as is shown in

Melitopoulos' *Crossings*. "Ultimately, the only way to begin dismantling imperialist relations of domination and truly liberate the new debt colonies from their economic subjugation is for the working classes and social movements of both the debtor and the creditor countries to become aware of their shared interest in building a unified front against the impositions of global finance," writes Jerome Roos.³² It's exactly this need for internationalist solidarities that the work of the above activist-artists show as pressing. In them, we see some of the transnational social energies uniquely capable of challenging and transforming petrocapiatist systems of governance. In these blackouts of fossil and financial power, we see the signs of radical defiance, a call to revolt, desertion, and insurrection.

- 1 See iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis, "We Come Bearing Gifts"—iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis on Documenta 14 Athens," *Art Agenda*, June 7, 2017, <http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/d14/>; for a critical analysis of Varoufakis's interpretation, see Jerome Roos, "The New Debt Colonies," *Viewpoint Magazine*, February 1, 2018, <https://www.viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/new-debt-colonies/>.
- 2 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, "On the Multiple Frontiers of Extraction: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism," *Cultural Studies*, vol. 31, issue 2-3 (2017). Also see Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham: Duke, 2017): "the 'extractive zone' names the violence that capitalism does to reduce, constrain, and convert life into commodities, as well as the epistemological violence of training our academic vision to reduce life to systems," (xix); and the 2018 special issue of *Social Text* dedicated to the topic of "Beyond the Extractive View," edited by Macarena Gómez-Barris, https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_topic/beyond-the-extractive-view/.
- 3 David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For an exposé of additional extractive processes of automation, Big Data, fee and fine farming, services, privatizations, ways to extract wealth from impoverished and indebted, and racialized forms of expropriation, see Jackie Wang, "Carceral Capitalism," *The New Inquiry*, January 22, 2018, <https://thenewinquiry.com/carceral-capitalism/>.
- 4 Mezzadra and Neilson, 12. Also: Jason W. Moore and Raj Patel, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), shows how the modern world has been made through seven cheap things: nature, money, work, care, food, energy, and lives, where "cheapening" has been, in part, a complex technology of capitalism involving debt, war, conquest, colonialism, and slave labor over five-hundred years.
- 5 For an overview of Trump's deregulatory efforts to date, see: Nadja Popovich, Livia Albeck-Ripka, and Kendra Pierre-Louis, "67 Environmental Rules on the Way Out Under Trump," *New York Times*, Jan. 31, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/10/05/climate/trump-environment-rules-reversed.html>.

- 6 Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e), 2015).
- 7 See Wang, "Carceral Capitalism."
- 8 Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture*, 15.1 (Winter 2003):11-40; and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
- 9 See the Blockadia Map of the Environmental Justice Atlas project: "Originating from movements such as the Ogoni People against Shell in the Niger Delta since the 1990s and the Yasuni initiative in Ecuador to leave the oil in the soil, local people and activists are demanding we keep fossil fuels in the ground. Today there are diverse and widespread resistances such as the Ende Gelände mass civil disobedience in Germany; the indigenous-led Standing Rock camp against the Dakota Access Pipeline; the movement in Kenya to "deCOALanize"; and, amongst many others, the campaigns #BreakFree and #SaveTheArctic." <https://ejatlas.org/featured/blockadia>.
- 10 Bruno Latour, *War of the Worlds: What about Peace?*, trans. Charlotte Bigg (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2002); and T. J. Demos, "The Great Transition: The Arts and Radical System Change," e-flux, April 12, 2017, <http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/accumulation/122305/the-great-transition-the-arts-and-radical-system-change/>.
- 11 For an additional analysis of Crossings, see T. J. Demos, "Learning from documenta 14: Athens, Post-Democracy, and Decolonization," *Third Text*, August 23, 2017, <http://thirdtext.org/demos-documenta>.
- 12 See Alex de Jong's critical take on Öcalan's Bookchin-inspired libertarian municipalism: "The New-Old PKK," *Jacobin*, March 18, 2016, <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/03/pkk-ocalan-kurdistan-isis-murray-bookchin/>.
- 13 See Jenna Winton's report on one of the leading spokespersons of the ACFN, "Eriel Deranger: Fighting the World's Largest Industrial Project, the Alberta Tar Sands," *Cultural Survival*, February 4, 2014, <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/eriel-deranger-fighting-worlds-largest-industrial-project-alberta-tar-sands>; and Red Power Media, "Court sides with Feds in Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation's case," January 9, 2015, <https://redpowermedia.wordpress.com/2015/01/09/court-sides-with-feds-in-athabasca-chipewyan-first-nations-case/>.
- 14 <http://www.forensic-architecture.org/file/climate-crimes/>.
- 15 Cathy O'Neil, *Weapons of Math Destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality and Threatens Democracy* (New York: Crown, 2016).
- 16 Bill McKibben, "Stop swooning over Justin Trudeau. The man is a disaster for the planet," *The Guardian*, April 17, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/apr/17/stop-swooning-justin-trudeau-man-disaster-planet>.

- 17 See Robert Glennon, "The Unfolding Tragedy of Climate Change in Bangladesh," *Scientific American*, April 21, 2017, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/guest-blog/the-unfolding-tragedy-of-climate-change-in-bangladesh/>.
- 18 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
- 19 "20 Destinations to see before they disappear," *Rough Guide*, November 29, 2016, <https://www.roughguides.com/gallery/20-destinations-to-see-before-they-disappear/>.
- 20 For more on the current situation in Puerto Rico, see the work of Defend PR, a multimedia project designed to document and celebrate Puerto Rican creativity, resilience, and resistance: <http://www.defendpr.com/>.
- 21 Juan González, "Puerto Rico's \$123 Billion Bankruptcy Is the Cost of U.S. Colonialism," *The Intercept*, May 9, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/05/09/puerto-ricos-123-billion-bankruptcy-is-the-cost-of-u-s-colonialism/>.
- 22 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, trans. Laurent Dubois (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 6: "Across early capitalism, the term 'Black' referred only to the condition imposed on peoples of African origin (different forms of depredation, dispossession of all power of self-determination, and, most of all, dispossession of the future and of time, the two matrices of the possible). Now, for the first time in human history, the term 'Black' as been generalized. This new fungibility, this solubility, institutionalized as a new norm of existence and expanded to the entire planet, is what I call the *Becoming Black of the world*."
- 23 See Mezzadra and Neilson, "On the Multiple Frontiers of Extraction"; and "Extraction: Decolonial Visual Cultures in the Age of the Capitalocene," the conference organized by the Center for Creative Ecologies at UC Santa Cruz in 2017, <https://extraction.sites.ucsc.edu/>.
- 24 Ashley Dawson, "Let sun & wind power Puerto Rico's future," *New York Daily News*, October 11, 2017, <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/sun-wind-power-puerto-rico-future-article-1.3554322>.
- 25 Kate Aronoff, "Disaster Capitalists Take Big Step Toward Privatizing Puerto Rico's Electric Grid," *The Intercept*, October 26, 2017, <https://theintercept.com/2017/10/26/disaster-capitalists-take-big-step-toward-privatizing-puerto-ricos-electric-grid/>; and Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Penguin Press, 2008).
- 26 Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (New York: Nation Books, 2004).
- 27 For more extensive analysis of this film, see T. J. Demos, "The Night We Became People Again: On Allora & Calzadilla's Art of Intersectionality," *Blackout: Allora & Calzadilla*, ed. Hou Hanru and Anne Palopoli (Milan and Rome: Lazy Dog and MAXXI, 2018), 52-71.

- 28 On “disaster capitalism” see Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*; on “disaster communism” see Ashley Dawson, *Extreme Cities: The Peril and Promise of Urban Life in the Age of Climate Change* (London: Verso, 2017), 246.
- 29 See the Center for Creative Ecologies’ recent questionnaire on revolution, on the centennial of the 1917 Russian Revolution, <https://creativeecologies.ucsc.edu/revolution-at-100-questionnaire/>.
- 30 See Naomi Klein, “The Battle for Paradise: Puerto Ricans and Ultrarich ‘Puertopians’ Are Locked in a Pitched Struggle Over How to Remake the Island,” *The Intercept*, March 20, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/03/20/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-recovery/>; and on the “life-affirming creativity” of “collective art-making” as a “connection-building process” in “laying the groundwork for a long-term infrastructure of movement culture,” see Yates McKee, “On Flooded Streets and Breathing-in-Common,” *Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition* (London: Verso, 2016), esp. 209.
- 31 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 47-48.
- 32 Roos, “The New Debt Colonies”: “What is needed is a revamped popular internationalism that focuses all its energies on opposing the politics of dispossession and dismantling the rootstock of capitalist imperialisms both past and present: the structural power of finance.”