

Metabolic Commons: Against Entropic Zones and the Ecology That War Built Feminist Political Ecology Workshop: Call for Papers

21–22 September 2026

Ca' Foscari University of Venice
Dorsoduro 324, 30123 Venezia (Aula Mario Baratto and Sala Marino Berengo)



Image credit: Marwa Arsanios, "Who Is Afraid of Ideology? Part 4: Reverse Shot", 2022

The dominant frameworks that inform contemporary environmental governance, climate policy, and energy transition emerged from Cold War military research, colonial field sites, and postwar techno-scientific infrastructures that shaped not only which questions could be asked but which ones were elided. The energy-flow paradigm that organizes contemporary systems ecology, climate modeling, and green transition planning follows a genealogy from Wilhelm Ostwald's energetics through Alfred Lotka's physical biology to Howard T. Odum's maximum power principle. This lineage, in which life was progressively reformulated as a thermodynamic process where competition was encoded as an ecological necessity, systematically excluded political accountability from its descriptive apparatus. The ecology that naturalized maximum energy describes the behavior of ecosystems and market economies with identical indifference to *what* is being maximized, *for whom*, and *at whose expense*. When contemporary systems ecologists, biophysical economists, and green transition planners deploy this vocabulary, what political silences does that inheritance carry, and what happens to questions about property relations and labor when they are posed using a grammar of energy flows?

In thermodynamics, entropy refers to irreversible dissipation: energy converted to a form that makes it unavailable for further work. The entropic zone is its political-economic equivalent, a territory, community, or body whose social-ecological energy reserves have been irreversibly dissipated through extractive operations. Metabolic labor, ecological knowledge, common resources, and reproductive capacities are all converted into factors of capitalist accumulation, and made to appear as a natural background of that accumulation rather than its structural precondition. As such, this workshop employs the thermodynamic vocabulary against the grain of its inheritance.

Capital's planetary metabolism operates by establishing networks of entropic zones. The planetary scale of contemporary mineral extraction connects spatially dispersed sites, from Lubumbashi, DRC, to Wolfsberg, Austria, or Southern Greenland to the Atacama Desert in Northern Chile, into a single infrastructure of accumulation. Meanwhile, the entropy it produces remains local, absorbed by communities at points of extraction. Land, water, energy, and reproductive labor are constituted by capital as freely available and then consumed at rates determined by valorization rather than regenerative capacity, resulting in accelerating depletion. Without critical reflection, the energy transition risks merely reorganising rather than resolving this structure. It proposes to shift the extractive frontier, subsidising the transition with reproductive and subsistence labor whose contributions remain unaccounted.

The metabolic commons, the specific configurations of land, water, and collective practice and organization through which communities reproduce the conditions of life, are historically produced configurations of collective life, often gendered and racialized, and under threat from operations that treat landscapes as reservoirs of natural resources for extraction. The bodies that sustain metabolic processes, women's bodies, colonized bodies, in relation to specific ecologies, appear in these models only as components of an energy circuit, never as agents with differential relationships to the entropy the circuit produces.

The feminist materialist tradition has consistently demonstrated that the gendered division of labor is not a secondary feature of capitalist accumulation but its originary template. The operation that first constituted regenerative work as nature's free gift, established the infrastructure through which capitalism would subsequently organize all metabolic relations. That destruction does not stop at the landscape, it registers in the microbiomes of the communities who absorb it, the microbial ecologies accumulated through generations of specific land-based diets and ecological relations irreversibly depleted by the same industrial food systems, antibiotic regimes, and toxic exposures that abolitionist geography describes as organized abandonment: the deliberate withdrawal of life-sustaining infrastructures from communities and territories rendered surplus to capitalist accumulation.

This workshop brings together ecological Marxism, feminist materialism, the history and philosophy of science, decolonial science studies, and political ecology to further a feminist political ecology of metabolic commons adequate to the conjuncture of green transition, rearmament, and reorganized extractive frontiers. It takes seriously both the material processes that the thermodynamic tradition describes and the political relations it was built to obscure. It takes its starting point from the knowledge generated within metabolic practice rather than from the supervising position of ecological governance and the ecology that war built, the "mud epistemology" embedded in the specific metabolic relations as social relations, inseparable from the metabolic labor through which those relations are sustained, defended, and composed anew under conditions of extraction and organized abandonment.

The workshop asks what forms of metabolic commons are already being built from within entropic zones, what knowledge they generate that the energetic models cannot accommodate, what political subject they constitute, and what feminist political ecology adequate to their specificity would look like.

Call for Papers

We invite contributions from scholars, artists, and organizers working across feminist political ecology, ecological Marxism, feminist materialism, the history and philosophy of science, decolonial science studies, critical energy and environmental humanities, abolitionist geography, Indigenous studies, and art theory.

Contributions may address themes including:

The history and politics of ecological knowledge production, and the specific institutional, military, and colonial conditions that shaped dominant frameworks for theorizing planetary metabolism. The political economy of the thermodynamic tradition: what the energy-flow paradigm can and cannot say about entropic zones, and how its grammar excludes the question of perpetrators. The value-entropy relation under capitalist social relations, and the political economy of devalorization and abandonment. Feminist metabolism theory and the relationship between reproductive labor, subsistence commons, and extractive frontiers, including the feminist critique of energetics' constitutive invisibilities. The gendered and racialized organization of metabolic commons under conditions of historical and present enclosure, colonial expropriation, and energy transition. Indigenous territorial practices and subsistence ecologies as sites of metabolic knowledge that the thermodynamic tradition

has historically displaced. The epistemological dimensions of metabolic resistance: what knowledge is generated from within conditions of extraction and organized abandonment, and how it differs from the knowledge produced by dominant energetics based positions of ecological governance and transition management. Art and infrastructural critique as modes of engaging the material and epistemological dimensions of extractive capitalism, including artistic practices that produce counter evidence against thermodynamic naturalization. The relationship between ecological Marxism's metabolic tradition and feminist materialist accounts of reproductive commons, and what their synthesis requires theoretically and politically. Alternative conceptions of society, science, and industry beyond frameworks of energy maximisation, cosmic evolutionism, and cost–benefit analysis.

We are particularly interested in contributions that engage specific material sites and geographies and in work that brings together theory with place-based, grassroots, and artistic modes of engagement.

Practical Information

The workshop will be held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice on 21–22 September 2026. There is no participation fee. Limited financial assistance may be available to independent scholars and those without a research budget.

Scholars, artists, and organizers from all disciplines are invited to submit a 2-page position paper, accompanied by a brief biography with institutional affiliation. Applications should be sent to antonia.friedman@unive.it and r.gush@tugraz.at before 1 July 2026. Notification of decisions will be communicated by 15 July 2026.

Organized by the *Radical Epistemologies: Political Ecology and Transversal Praxis* research cluster at NICHE Centre for Environmental Humanities, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, in collaboration with IZK Institute for Contemporary Art, Graz University of Technology and the ERC project HealthXCross at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of Ca' Foscari University of Venice. This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme (GA n. 949742 ERC-HealthXCross).

Curated by:

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Workshop committee:

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