

Navigating Between Dystopias and Utopias (Krakow, 13–15 Apr 23)

online / The Pedagogical University of Krakow, Apr 13–15, 2023

Deadline: Jan 31, 2023

Ewelina Jarosz, The Pedagogical University of Kraków

DEEP SEA BABIES: NAVIGATING BETWEEN DYSTOPIAS AND UTOPIAS FOR THE BLUE PLANET.

We are seeking paper proposals for the international interdisciplinary and academic conference Deep "Sea Babies. Navigating Between Dystopias and Utopias for the Blue Planet", organized by the Institute of Polish Philology, the Institute of Art and Design at The Pedagogical University of Krakow, Poland in cooperation with the Intermedia Department at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow, Poland.

"Bodies of water" (Neimanis 2017) and "transcorporeality" (Alaimo 2010) are the concepts that represent both the dystopian and utopian states of our current ways of inhabiting the Blue Planet (Earle A. Sylvia, McKibben Bill 2009; Skinner, Winifred 2011). The massive scale of riverside, lake depletions in droughts and heatwaves, decreasing aquatic biodiversity, rising sea levels, and ocean acidification are human-made phenomena that produce the dynamic and diverse reality of the Hydrocene (Bailey-Charteris 2021) or Aquatocene (Šebjanič 2021). These terms are used in the environmental humanities and art to keep hope alive or raise critical awareness in our epoch of multispecies alliances for surviving in less hospitable waters of the ableist patriarchal capitalism (Gumbs 2020), infested with (micro)plastic waste, underwater networks (Starosielski 2015), and poisonous substances. They all produce ubiquitous and viscous "hyperobjects" (Morton 2013) and phenomena such as the Great Pacific Patch or mass extinction in the river Oder.

The titular "deep sea babies" is a hydrosensual attempt (Sprinkle, Stephens 2021) to grasp our contemporary transitional and ephemeral more-than-human environmental identity. Will it emerge from the encounter with life out of sight and out of reach embodied by unfamiliar beings inhabiting the alien oceans (Helmreich 2009) and human-engineered rivers? Different forms of water pollution and inequality have become an integral part of our everyday lives. Humans recognize the experience of environmental embodiment in relation to water species at risk. Although we all are immersed in the post-apocalyptic condition, we seek how to engage positive ecospheric emotions to open up new fluctuating possibilities of environmental consciousness, action, and agency. Therefore, there is much to learn in terms of adaptation, healing, and recovery in face of the growing challenges in environmental movements and their politics.

Still in its infancy, yet developing intensely, the postcolonial dialog between science and environmental humanities (DeLoughrey, Didur, Carrigan 2015) may often come with individual exhaustion with societal collapse or activist burnout that leads to ultimate withdrawal from creative and

engaged action. In the precarious hydrosphere we inhabit, new ideas and enthusiasm clash with despair. Utopias for sustainable natureculture futures meet the dystopian reality of alarming science data on the global water crisis, producing an environment where planning has become increasingly impossible. Hence, our constant drifting back and forth between dystopian and utopian turns into a diagnosis of our collective efforts to save the Earth, where sometimes we are even tempted to escape our planet and search for the potential of habitability beyond it – on the icy moons of Jupiter or Saturn’s vast oceans (Hand 2020).

With this conference, we would like to address the very moment of navigating in the troubled waters of climate crises with no safe harbor to moor or river to follow, to refer to the popular song by Lykke Li. Also, looking back at the characters of elderly people rejuvenated by aliens in the science fiction comedy *The Cocoon* (1985), we are seduced by the contemporary wrecked otherworldliness of our planet. But perhaps we do not need to wait for an alien intervention to come and save us. After all, environmental art, critical visual and performative culture imagines multiple ways of how to reinvigorate the Blue Planet, e.g. through mixed ecotechnological feminist engineering (Åsberg 2021). The concept of “deep sea babies” invites contaminated multispecies hybrids we all are to help us envision the possibility of growing-with-the trouble of global and local ecologies.

No more “talking heads” conferences! We are open to experimental formats in producing and relaying knowledge: tentacular academic thinking, artist performance talks, and activist presentations. We invite extraordinary expressions of wisdom, rituals, magic, and politics. Thematic costumes are welcome.

We are seeking proposals for 20-minute presentations addressing the following or similar topics:

- hope and despair as pivotal to methodological concerns of blue (post)humanities and critical ocean studies in media, cultural studies, and environmental visual studies
- the concept of planetary identity perceived through the lens of queer ecologies
- emerging ecotechnologies to enhance and support the protection of the depleting biodiversity of salt and freshwater
- the ideas and postulates of the rising Fifth Wave of Feminism
- microplastic contamination and hormones (xenoestrogens) in water
- non-human agents in hydrology e.g. using clams to control water supplies
- the river Oder catastrophe, the war destruction of the hydrosphere in Ukraine, the floods in Pakistan, recent flooding and storm surges in the Global South Countries, Asia, Europe, and the Americas
- transition from state control over nature to social democratic governance
- the consensual relations and the posthuman turn in judicial systems
- the condition of suspension or in-betweenness that encompasses both exhaustion of extractivist dystopian reality, mourning, grief, and yet possible experimental engagement into inventing new ways of living that invite estrangement, bewilderment, and adaptation to the post-apocalyptic aqua-systems
- decreasing or cutting environmental costs in cultural, artistic, and media production
- baby steps towards regaining curiosity in the wounded Blue Planet to examine the current chances for healing and recovery

- ideas, practices, and strategies for developing environmentalism at the intersection of hydrofeminism and ecosexuality.

The conference will be held in English.

Confirmed keynote speakers: Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris (University of New South Wales, UNSW), Ewelina Jarosz (Pedagogical University of Krakow), Justyna Górowska (Academy of Fine Arts, Krakow).

Please email your paper proposal (abstract max. 250 words and a short CV) to deepseababiesconference@gmail.com.

The deadline is 31 January 2022.

Important dates:

31 January 2023 – deadline for proposals

15 February 2023 – announcement of conference speakers

1 March 2023 – announcement of conference programme

2 April 2023 – registration of conference speakers

13-14 April 2023 -- conference at Galeria Podbrzezie, Kraków and online

14 April 2023 – presentation of the Blue Humanities Archive project, Dom Norymberski, Krakow.

15 April 2023 – a hydrofeminist film screening and talk with the artists at Dom Norymberski, Krakow.

Organising Committee: dr Ewelina Jarosz, and dr Karolina Kolenda, in cooperation with dr Justyna Górowska.

Conference Scientific Committee: dr hab. Magdalena Stoch, dr hab. Tomasz Sikora, dr Małgorzata Kaźmierczak.

References:

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Alaimo Stacy, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Indiana University Press 2010.

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Helmreich, Stefan, *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2009.

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Sprinkle, Annie, Stephens, Elizabeth with Klein, Jennie, *Assuming Ecosexual Position. The Earth as Lover*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, London 2021.

Starosielski, Nicole, *The Undersea Network*, Duke University Press, Durham and London 2015.

Reference:

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