

Contemporary Art & Extractivist Culture (Lleida/Barcelona, 14–15 May 25)

Lleida / Barcelona, Spain, May 14–15, 2025

Deadline: Mar 3, 2025

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1st International Conference: Contemporary Art & Extractivist Culture.

14 May 2025: Facultat de Lletres, Universitat de Lleida;

15 May 2025: Facultat de Geografia i Història, Universitat de Barcelona.

Keynote Speakers: Dr. Juan Martín Prada (Universidad de Cádiz), Dr. Rick Dolphijn (Utrecht University), Dr. Joaquín Barriendos (Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey), Dra. Bárbara Fluxá (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Dra. Paula Bruna (artist and researcher), Gabriela Bettini (artist and researcher)

Direction: Dr. Christian Alonso (Universitat de Lleida), Dra. Anna Maria Guasch (Universitat de Barcelona), Dra. Nasheli Jiménez del Val (Art, Globalization, Interculturality).

Organised by: Research and development project “Visualidad y Geoestética en la Era de la Crisis Ecosocial” (VIGEO, PID2022-139211OB-I00), Universitat de Barcelona.

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Coordination: Alessia Gervasone, Anna Pérez Milán.

Extractivism refers to a mode of wealth accumulation based on the extraction of raw materials and more-than-human life forms for its commercialisation. As geographer David Harvey (2003) has argued, this process of accumulation relies on the dispossession of common goods through processes of privatisation, financialisation, crisis management and manipulation, and the state redistribution of income. The origin of this pattern goes back to the European colonisation of the Americas in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, and the practices of plunder and expropriation of goods, bodies, and knowledges that this entailed. As semiotician Walter Mignolo (2007) maintains, the process of colonisation itself established the conditions for the extraction of resources and the enslavement of labour. Today, extractivism is more relevant than ever, at times even promoted by progressive governments who tend to invest more of the profits of extractivism into public services and social policies. However, despite the redistribution of wealth and social welfare that these governments preach, progressive extractivism continues to generate a profound impact on ecosystems and communities.

Although it is often framed as a fundamentally technical issue (as an ‘industry’), in reality extractivism is a multifaceted phenomenon, encompassing the fields of politics, economics, ecology,

research and science, society and culture. These fields establish the conditions of possibility for the legitimisation and application of extractivism. Moreover, the implementation of these practices by governments is based on the argument that they help overcome poverty, generate jobs, and contribute to economic growth. Yet extractivism's negative impact on ecosystems and people is all-encompassing, including the depletion of resources, loss of biodiversity, environmental pollution, production of large-scale waste, and dispossession of local communities' territories. State and corporate responsibility for its impact is limited to compensation and restitution of damages, rendering the affected people and their territories effectively invisible. Extractivism has not only generated negative environmental impact; it has also produced citizen resistance through activism championing the discontinuation of predatory projects, the alleviation of the lives of communities suffering the consequences of extractivism, and the promotion of alternative practices rejecting a development model based on unlimited growth sustained by the intensive extraction and commodification of natural resources.

Based on advances in science and technology, capitalism has turned extractivism into a widespread form of exploitation. Currently, extractivism is not only based on the exploitation of natural resources, but also on the extraction of socio-cultural, epistemological, biotechnological, and digital resources. 'Natural extractivism' refers to a growth model centred on the extraction of natural resources (oil, gas, metals, minerals) and the ensuing exportation of these goods. As researcher Macarena Gómez Barris (2017) argues, 'extractivism' is based on a persistent colonial worldview and a series of technologies of power that convert highly biodiverse environments into mere exploitable resources. 'Socio-cultural extractivism' describes the appropriation of territories, knowledge and cultures for commercial purposes (Escobar, 2014). This appropriation is based on the structural inequality that exists between white and non-white knowledge (Segato, 2013) and on the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2024). The fragility, uprooting, and expulsions produced by neoliberal urbanism's processes of gentrification can also be considered a form of extractivism that hinders access to housing, hijacks the right to a dignified life, and generates social injustice (Elliot-Cooper et al., 2020)

'Epistemological extractivism' refers to epistemological practices in the Global North based on the extraction of data and knowledge from countries in the Global South without the participation, acknowledgment or consent of local communities. It also refers to the legitimisation of the scientific produced by extractivism, and the monopoly of internationally refereed scientific literature in English, which promotes disconnection with territorial realities. In recent decades, other forms of extractivism that require the mediation of biotechnologies or information and communication technologies have become popular. More recently, the concept of 'biotechnological extractivism' has been used to refer to the commercialisation of modified genetic material, such as seeds sterilised to prevent their reproduction and thus secure consumer dependence on agricultural companies, a process that philosopher Vandana Shiva has described as a form of biopiracy (2001). It also refers to the editing and commercialisation of genetic material for health or reproductive purposes, which demonstrates, according to philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2009), that living matter constitutes fundamental capital. Finally, 'digital extractivism' refers to the ecological footprint of digital technologies, the precarisation of digital labour, the capitalisation of social networking activity, and the illicit extraction of public data. What is more, artificial intelligence does not only extract data; it also exploits invisibilised and non-remunerated cognitive labour (Terranova, 2004) and creative labour (Goetze, 2024).

These new ways of obtaining and accumulating wealth constitute a form of expanded extractivism that operates on material, virtual, semiotic, and cognitive relations. 'Neo-extractivism' (Mezadra and Neilson, 2017) describes deterritorialised forms of extractivism, such as gene editing and data mining, in addition to more "literal" extractivism, such as mining and agribusiness. New forms of extractivism demonstrate that under the logic of advanced capitalism life as a whole becomes an object of monetisation, exploitation, and commercialisation, both at molecular and planetary levels. Underlying the extractivist model is a utilitarian paradigm that enables the normative subject to control, dominate, exploit, and commodify human and non-human subjects. Today it is imperative to rethink the development model beyond humanism and anthropocentrism, to ask ourselves who benefits from extractivism and who is detrimentally impacted by its effects. We need analyses that navigate the paradoxes of extractive capitalism, which, by failing to distinguish between potentially marketable human and non-human entities, generates a form of post-anthropocentrism that participates in multi-species ecologies. Today it is necessary to place life at the centre of ethics, politics, and economics, to reconsider ways of valuing human and non-human life, and to promote democratic practices based on the common good, Buen Vivir (Acosta and Martínez, 2009), and the rights of Nature (Gudynas, 2014).

The 1st International Conference Contemporary Art & Extractivist Culture aims to generate a space for reflection and debate on how artistic practices can contribute understanding, critiquing and resisting extractivist dynamics in their multiple forms. The conference invites artists, art historians, critics, curators, philosophers, anthropologists, and other disciplines linked to the humanities and social sciences to develop presentations that explore the role of art in mapping processes and materialising alternatives to extractive capitalism. In order to encourage interdisciplinarity and collaboration between academic and citizen research, proposals will also be accepted from activist collectives or other social agents with or without institutional affiliation. Proposals should choose one or more of the thematic axes described above: natural extractivism, socio-cultural extractivism, epistemological extractivism, biotechnological extractivism and digital extractivism.

Programme

14 May. Aula Magna, Facultat de Letras, Universitat de Lleida

Session 1. Keynote "Artistic Creation, Data Capitalism and Digital Extractivism" by Dr. Juan Martín Prada (Universidad de Cádiz).

Session 2. Keynote "Property or Possession: Rethinking the Land and the Colonial" by Dr. Rick Dolphijn (Utrecht University).

15 May. Aula Magna, Facultat de Geografia e Història, Universitat de Barcelona

Session 3. Keynote "Extraction and Postnature: Redefining Art History in the Age of Energetic Brutalism" by Dr. Joaquín Barriendos (ITESM Guadalajara).

Session 4. Roundtable discussion "Mining, Drought, Colonialism". Participants: Dr. Bárbara Fluxá (Universidad Complutense de Madrid), Dr. Paula Bruna (artist and researcher), Gabriela Berti (artist and researcher). Moderator: María Íñigo Clavo (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya)

Abstract Submission Instructions:

Interested persons must submit a document containing the following information:

- Title of the paper
- Author/s and institutional affiliation (if applicable)
- Chosen thematic axis
- Brief description of the paper (300 words maximum)

The description of the paper will be accompanied by a brief biography of the author (150 words maximum), including his/her training, lines of research and relevant projects. Bibliographical references are not included in the 300 word-count.

Languages: Papers may be presented in Catalan, Spanish, English.

Deadlines: The deadline for submission of proposals is 3 March 2025. Notifications of acceptance will be made on 28 March 2025.

Submissions: Those interested should send their proposals to the following email address: extractivisms@gmail.com

Presentation Modality: papers may be presented in-person or online. The length of the presentations will be 20 minutes maximum.

Selection Criteria:

Proposals will be evaluated by a scientific committee that will assess the following criteria:

- Originality and relevance of the proposal.
- Pertinence to the conference's subject matter.
- Defined objectives, approach, methodology and preliminary conclusions.
- Critical and innovative perspective.

For any other enquiries, please contact extractivisms@gmail.com

Reference:

CFP: Contemporary Art & Extractivist Culture (Lleida/Barcelona, 14-15 May 25). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 11, 2025 (accessed Apr 6, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43922>>.