

Metabolic Commons (Venice, 21–22 Sep 26)

Venice, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Sep 21–22, 2026

Deadline: Jun 30, 2026

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Metabolic Commons: Against Entropic Zones and the Ecology That War Built.
Feminist political ecology workshop.

The dominant frameworks informing contemporary environmental governance, climate policy, and energy transition emerged from Cold War military funding, colonial field sites, and postwar techno-scientific infrastructures. The energy-flow paradigm organizing contemporary systems ecology, climate modeling, and green transition planning descends from a lineage running from Wilhelm Ostwald's energetics through Alfred Lotka's physical biology to Howard T. Odum's maximum power principle, in which life was progressively reformulated as thermodynamic process, competition was encoded as ecological ground, and the question of political accountability was systematically excluded from the descriptive apparatus. When contemporary systems ecologists, biophysical economists, and green transition planners deploy this vocabulary, what political silences does that inheritance carry, and what becomes of questions about power, property, and reproductive labor when they enter a grammar built on energy flow?

In thermodynamics, entropy names irreversible dissipation: available energy converted to a form that cannot be reconverted. The entropic zone is its political-economic equivalent, a territory, community, or body whose available social-ecological energy has been irreversibly dissipated through extractive operations. Accumulated metabolic labor, ecological knowledge, commons resources, reproductive capacity are all converted into the conditions of accumulation elsewhere, made to appear as the natural background of that accumulation rather than its precondition. This workshop borrows the thermodynamic vocabulary deliberately and against the grain of its inheritance.

The energy transition reorganizes rather than resolves this structure, shifting the extractive frontier and subsidizing decarbonization through reproductive and subsistence labor that remains unaccounted for in both capitalist valorization and the energetic models informing transition planning. The planetary scale of contemporary mineral extraction connects spatially dispersed sites, from Lubumbashi to Wolfsberg and from southern Greenland to the Atacama, into a single infrastructure of accumulation, while the entropy it produces remains local, absorbed by the communities at the point of extraction.

The metabolic commons, the specific configurations of land, water, and collective practice through which communities reproduce the conditions of the living, are historically produced, always already gendered and racialized, and under threat from the same operations that constitute natural resources as independently extractable. The concept of metabolism, before its

absorption into energetics, designated the continuous dynamic exchange between organisms and their environments: open, non-static processes whose quality depends entirely on the relations through which they are organized. The feminist materialist tradition has consistently demonstrated that the gendered division of labor constitutes the originary template of capitalist accumulation, and 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 names as organized abandonment: the deliberate withdrawal of life-sustaining infrastructure from communities and territories rendered surplus to 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 present conjuncture.

We invite contributions across the following thematic streams: the genealogy of ecological knowledge and its Cold War institutional origins; feminist metabolism theory, reproductive labor and extractive frontiers; Indigenous and place-based metabolic knowledge against energetics-based governance; the green transition as reorganized sacrifice, from mineral extraction to microbiome depletion; and art, infrastructural critique, and counter-forensic practice as modes of engaging extractive capitalism.

We are particularly interested in contributions that engage specific material sites and in work that brings together scholarly, grassroots, and artistic modes of engagement. The workshop is oriented toward a thematic journal issue, and the development of a longer collaborative research program.

The workshop will be held at Ca' Foscari University of Venice on September 21–22, 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 two-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 July 1, 2026. Notification of decisions will be communicated by July 15, 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 HealthXCross ERC at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University of Venice.

Curated by Rose-Anne Gush (Graz University of Technology) and Antonia Majaca (Ca' Foscari University of Venice).

Reference:

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