Metabolic Commons (Venice, 21-22 Sep 26)

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

Rose-Anne Gush

Metabolic Commons: Against Entropic Zones and the Ecology That War Built.

The frameworks that govern environmental governance and climate policy inherit from Cold War military research, colonial field sites and postwar techno-scientific infrastructures, which shaped both, which questions could be asked, and which were foreclosed. In that lineage, life was progressively reformulated as a thermodynamic process, onto which competition was encoded as an ecological necessity. The ecology that naturalised maximum energy describes an ecosystem and a market economy with identical indifference to what is being maximised, for whom, and at whose expense. This ecology survives in ecosystem services, carbon stocks and natural capital; rearmament and the green transition are being financed at the very same moment. Without critical reflection, the transition reorganises the structure it claims to resolve, shifting the extractive frontier and subsidising itself with reproductive and subsistence labour.

This workshop uses the thermodynamic vocabulary against the grain of its inheritance. An entropic zone is a territory, community or body whose social-ecological reserves have been irreversibly dissipated through extraction, then made to appear as the natural background of accumulation. Capital's metabolism works by networking entropic zones, from Lubumbashi, Wolfsberg, to southern Greenland and the Atacama, joined in a single infrastructure of accumulation.

Feminist historical materialism identifies the gendered division of labour as the originary template of that accumulation. The operation that first constituted regenerative work as nature's free gift built the infrastructure through which capitalism has organised every metabolic relation since. In existing models of energy, the bodies that sustain metabolic processes appear only as components of a circuit, never as agents with differential relationships to the entropy the circuit produces. The destruction registers in the microbiomes of the communities who absorb it, in microbial ecologies accumulated over generations of land-based diet and depleted by industrial food systems, antibiotic regimes and the toxic exposures that abolitionist geography names as organized abandonment.

Across two days, thirty speakers work from specific ground: the Ahwar marshes in Iraq and the former US Navy range at Vieques, Soviet oil shale waste in Estonia and Soviet training grounds in Brandenburg, the Punjab canal system, Louisiana's Cancer Alley, the swamplands of Lowcountry South Carolina, Campania's Land of Fires, mining subsidence beneath Sámi land at Kiruna, lithium in Serbia's Jadar valley, coastal Jamaica after the plantation, the phosphate fields of Italian-occupied Libya.

The starting point is the knowledge generated within metabolic practice embedded in metabolic

relations as social relations, inseparable from the labour through which those relations are sustained, defended and composed anew. The commons is not settled ground here, and we ask whether commoning names a strategy for taking power or a practice that depends on a power it cannot itself produce and cannot defend. We will learn with practices underway in the present, including assemblies against lithium extraction in Serbia, the legal communalisation of land in North Lebanon, grassroots organising in the Land of Fires, the Kisan Andolan in Punjab, the Convivial Blue Commons Lab in post-plantation Jamaica. We will learn from practices of the past: the swamp commons of Lowcountry South Carolina, autoriduzione in Turin in 1974, peasant cooperatives under famine, anti-nuclear organising after Chernobyl.

During the workshop, we will ask what forms of metabolic commons are already being built from inside entropic zones: what forms of knowledge the energetic models cannot accommodate, what political subject they constitute, and what a feminist political ecology adequate to their specificity would look like.

This workshop is curated by Rose-Anne Gush (Graz University of Technology) and Antonia Majaca (Ca' Foscari University of Venice) and organised 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. https://www.unive.it/web/en/21142/home#c245788 / https://www.tugraz.at/events/izk/metabolic-commons#c766123

PROGRAM

Monday 21 September 2026

9.30-10.00 — Introduction
Francesca Tarocco (NICHE) and Roberta Raffaetà (ERC HealthXCross, Department of Humanities, Trento University)

10.00-11.45 — Panel 1: Unsettled Ground
Chair: Justas Patkauskas
Avi Varma — Flume Study 5: Anataxonomy of Waves
Christina Chalmers — Reproduction, the inorganic, and the multiplicity of the metabolic rift
Henrike Kohpeiss — Erosion and Anthropocene Affects in the Swedish Arctic
Jeff Diamanti — Bloom and Hypoxia: Introducing The Inorganic Composition of Capital

11.45-12.00 — Break

12.00-13.45 — Panel 2: Cheap Nature and the Unwaged
Chair: Pietro Daniel Omodeo
Katerina Genidogan — Whiteness as Entropy, Blackness as Ectropy: Development, Ecology and the Colonial Genealogy of Climate Governance
Jason W. Moore — Class, Metabolism and the Commons: Capitalism, Socialism, and Why "the Commons" are a Goal and not the Means

Ana Teixeira Pinto — Mind Children
Terike Haapoja — Animal Capitalism and Subsumed Life

13.45-14.45 — Lunch

14.45-16.30 — Panel 3: Accumulation by Armament
Chair: Giulia Dal Maso
Antonia Majaca — Energy of War Ecology: The Maximum Power Principle
Philipp Sattler — Calculable Ground: Agrarian Violence, Property, and Administrative Conversion
Lorenzo Feltrin — Critical minerals, fertilisers and war: The political ecology of phosphate
Michaela Büsse — Blazing Heath/Heideglühen: On the Production of Environmental Knowledge in Military Ruins

16.30-16.45 — Break

16.45-18.30 — Panel 4: Commons in Contaminated Grounds
Chair: Jasmine Pisapia
Farah Alkhoury — Against Purity: Toxic Remediation in Militarized Landscapes (online)
Morgan P. Vickers — Entropic Wetlands, Swamp Commons
Aleksei Borisionok — Negative commons of post-socialist radiation and anarchy
Antonio del Giudice — Metabolic Resistance: Wasting relationships, and commoning in the Italian wasteland

Tuesday 22 September 2026

9.30-11.15 — Panel 5: The Productivity of Waste
Chair: Valentina Bonifacio
Rose-Anne Gush — Double Negative: Figures of Entropy as Anchors of Value
Monika Halkort — Metabolic Commons at the Extractive Frontier
Imani Jacqueline Brown — And still, the brightness shines through the holes in the earth, with a screening of The Remote Sensation of Disintegration (6 min)
Lama El Khatib and Jule Ulbricht — Wastelands: Imperial Warfare and Ecologies of Decay

11.15-11.30 — Break

11.30-13.15 — Panel 6: The Point of Reproduction
Chair: Roberta Raffaetà
Carina Brand — The Human Gut Microbiome, Primitive Accumulation, and Fossil Agriculture
Andreas Petrossiants — Autoreduction Against the Social Factory: Assembly Line or Circulation Struggle?
Marco Baravalle — Curatorial Ecologies: Towards a Definition
Ana Vilenica — Periphery in Movement: Against Displacement in Place

13.15-14.15 — Lunch

14.15-16.00 — Panel 7: In Defense of the Commons
Chair: Wietske Maas
Maria Chehonadskih — The Collective Infrastructure of Even Distribution

Louise Carver — Reconstructing the Metabolic Commons: Energetics, Enclosure and Convivial Blue Commoning
Marwa Arsanios — The Metabolic Image of Land Struggle
Denise Ferreira da Silva — Negative Accumulation or that which happens without time (online)

16.00-16.15 — Break

16.15-17.30 — Closing discussion

Throughout both days
Kellie O'Dempsey — Drawing the Room: Metabolic Witness and Live Archive

Reference:
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