



RADIUS
Center for Contemporary Art and Ecology
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5 Underland

7 EMOTIONS ARE OCEANS

9 Floorplan

10 Artworks

Underland Year Program 2022–2023

RADIUS commences its first year of existence with an exhibition program consisting of four chapters. Partially modelled after the eponymous novel by Robert MacFarlane, the *Underland* exhibition cycle is an exploration of subterranean spaces as observed through art, literature, mythology, science, ecology, memory, and the physical landscape. We descend into RADIUS' subterranean exhibition spaces, through the surface of the Earth's biofilm, to make an observation about what takes place underneath man-made layers of concrete, tarmac and the constructed artificiality of our surroundings, to examine our relationship to darkness, life and death beneath ground level.

In four chapters, *Underland* invites you to join on a series of journeys through “deep-time”—a vast geological time—along water sources and caverns, composite layers of soil, mines and drilling sites for unearthing minerals and fossils, fungal and root networks, and storage and hiding places providing shelter and protection within the increasingly unstable environment of the Anthropocene, the current era in which humankind dominates. The basis for considering the Anthropocene as our current geological epoch rests on the claim that the historically accumulated, planetary environmental effects of an expanding human population, technological innovation, and economic development have become inseparable from the Earth's geological processes.

The compounded crises of capitalism, sociopolitical unrest, environmental catastrophe, and technological transformation is becoming increasingly pressing and tangible, both on a local level and on a planetary scale. In addition, the struggle for social emancipation and the role of colonialism and racism are inextricably linked to the current ecological depression, re-drawing attention to the fragility of Earth and life itself. The gravity of the situation is such that it is no longer possible to place ourselves outside the ecological breakdown equation. As the underground journey at RADIUS begins, the obscured depths of the underland are blazed with open-hearted encounters across deep time that reveal pathways to weather the Anthropocene.

The *Underland* exhibition cycle is developed to provide a sense of grounding for the art center in its early beginnings, but predominantly serves as a public conversation starter for a continuous program around ecology and climate concerns, as facilitated through current artistic practices. Not dissimilar from science, art has the capacity to raise perception and consciousness for those elements, processes and dimensions that bypass our human sensorial capacities altogether. Both engaged in developing languages to inform an understanding and gain traction with our speculative present, we believe that art as a field must extend and apply itself without invitation, to trigger responses where none have been called for, and to confront what we take for granted. Moving through critical zones, the artists in *Underland* seek to unearth and undermine a singular human-centred perspective as to register more reality thanks to multiple templates, for which pluralism is understood not as a plurality of perspectives on one reality, but as a multiplicity of agencies that register numerous realities.

From fieldwork-taking to patchwork-making, *Underland* is envisioned as a space for synthetic thinking, science fact and fiction, forging new bonds between human and non-human forms of agency. From thinking and acting in a human-centered vacuum, to a life continuum.

Burning Out in the Age of Fossil Expressionism

BIANCA BONDI
JULIAN CHARRIÈRE
AMALIE JAKOBSEN
REGINA DE MIGUEL
AGNIESZKA POLSKA
LISA RAVE
OLIVER RESSLER
MIRIAM SENTLER
SAM SMITH

CLIMATE OF CONCERN is the second exhibition of the Underland year program, examining the current over-reliance on fossil fuels and minerals through the work of nine artists.

In 1991, the petrochemical business group Shell released the documentary *Climate of Concern*, which displayed the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change: increasing drought, extreme weather, floods, crop failures, disappearing islands, and migration. Nevertheless, Shell, alongside other companies such as Exxon and BP, deliberately hid internal reports carried out in the nineteen-eighties that predicted the catastrophic planetary consequences of the increasing emission of carbon dioxide released by fossil fuels extraction. Still to this day, Shell continues to do business as usual by profiting from fossil fuel extraction, actively contributing to climate change. Coal, petroleum, and natural gas have become an inseparable part of all aspects of industrial and energy production, and a substantial part of the technological 'progress' in history has been possible through the extraction of such resources. As a consequence, we have become intertwined with fossil memory so much so that there is no single aspect in our lives that is not somehow impacted by the (ab)use of fossil fuels. Everywhere we look there is a manifestation of what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has called 'fossil expressionism'¹: from the buildings we inhabit, the pavement they stand on, and the cars that pass them by, to the clothes we wear or the wrapping of our food; traces of fossil fuels are part of our daily landscape, identity, and existence.

The joint trace-effects of advanced capitalism, technological transformation, and the resulting environmental breakdown are increasingly becoming matters of urgent socio-political changes that transcend humanity and apply to every living organism on the planet. The second chapter of *Underland* explores how the current over-indebtedness on fossil fuels provides both the framework and the backdrop for our ways of thinking, being, and acting to an untenable regime of ecological collapse. What are ways of abandoning fossil fuel culture and shifting towards sustainable practices of living? How can this Devil's bargain with non-renewable energy be reversed, and what alternative relationships can be established for a future beyond fossil-based lifestyles?

¹ For more information, read Yuk Hui & Peter Lemmens, "Reframing the Technosphere: Peter Sloterdijk and Bernard Stiegler's Anthropotechnological Diagnoses of the Anthropocene", *KRISIS*, issue 2 (2017): 26-41. <https://archive.krisis.eu/reframing-the-technosphere-peter-sloterdijk-and-bernard-stieglers-anthropotechnological-diagnoses-of-the-anthropocene/>

The all-pervasive use of fossil fuels shapes our thinking, acting, and capacity to relate to things and to one another; artist and author Brett Bloom has coined it petrosubjectivity.² Petrosubjectivity is in our food, our healthcare, our means of transport, our clothes, our sex. While conditioning every action and thought we produce, it hinders any attempt to reverse it. This is exemplified in renewable energy, or, what Bloom suggests calling more accurately, ‘fossil fuel dependent energy’. In order to produce windmills and solar panels, huge amounts of waste and emissions are produced. By 2050, the International Renewable Energy Agency estimates that close to seventy-eight million metric tons of solar panels will have become obsolete, and that the world will be generating about six million metric tons of new solar e-waste per year.³ Turbine blades, on the other hand, shortly become obsolete, and the energy production in wind farms gradually decrease over time, becoming remnants of ‘green’ alternatives that nevertheless keep on disrupting the landscape and altering biodiversity. That is not to say that individual, more sustainable choices are to be dismissed: it is rather a matter of dismantling the misleading impression of ‘green’ alternatives and products promoted and lobbied by fossil fuel companies in the hypocritical practice of greenwashing.⁴

In the Anthropocene, fossilization does not only occur organically. Humans have substantially modified landscapes through the urbanisation of cities, which will leave behind a fossil record both above—skyscrapers and highways—and below ground—metro and sewage systems. Humans have also altered the streams of rivers, the pH of oceans—causing acidification—and the composition of the atmosphere. All these alterations intervene directly in the geological development of the planet, causing major shifts that could eventually compare to great geological changes that radically transformed life on Earth. Land, conceived as a commodity for human use and enjoyment, is abused for the sake of our current carbon-infused lifestyles.

As writer Robert MacFarlane postulates, the Anthropocene compels us to insert our thinking in ‘deep time’, a time scale that stretches beyond human life and challenges the presumption that the world exists for human profit only, in eternal availability.⁵ Fossil fuels are limited, and yet fossil-burning enterprises are keen on making and burning as many new fossils as possible, as quick as possible. Professor Donna Haraway envisions the near future geologists reading our fossils in the strata of rocks both on land and underwater.⁶ Yet geologists are currently able to do so, as human waste is already fossilising in plastiglomerates, a composed material made of rock and molten plastic. Despite continuous evidence of fossil culture’s effacing consequences and the thin chances of surviving them, we have little capacity to comprehend how our idea of self, subjecthood, and the world is shaped by oil relationships because of their implicit ubiquity. Making petrosubjectivity explicit stands as a most urgent need to eventually free ourselves from our current dependency to it. How can we prepare on as wide a scope possible for subverting fossil culture? How can we still operate in systems of required extractivism, and what does that entail for our concepts of nature, culture, and ecology? What are the chances of worldly commitments to recognising the urgency to develop alternative logics of existence?

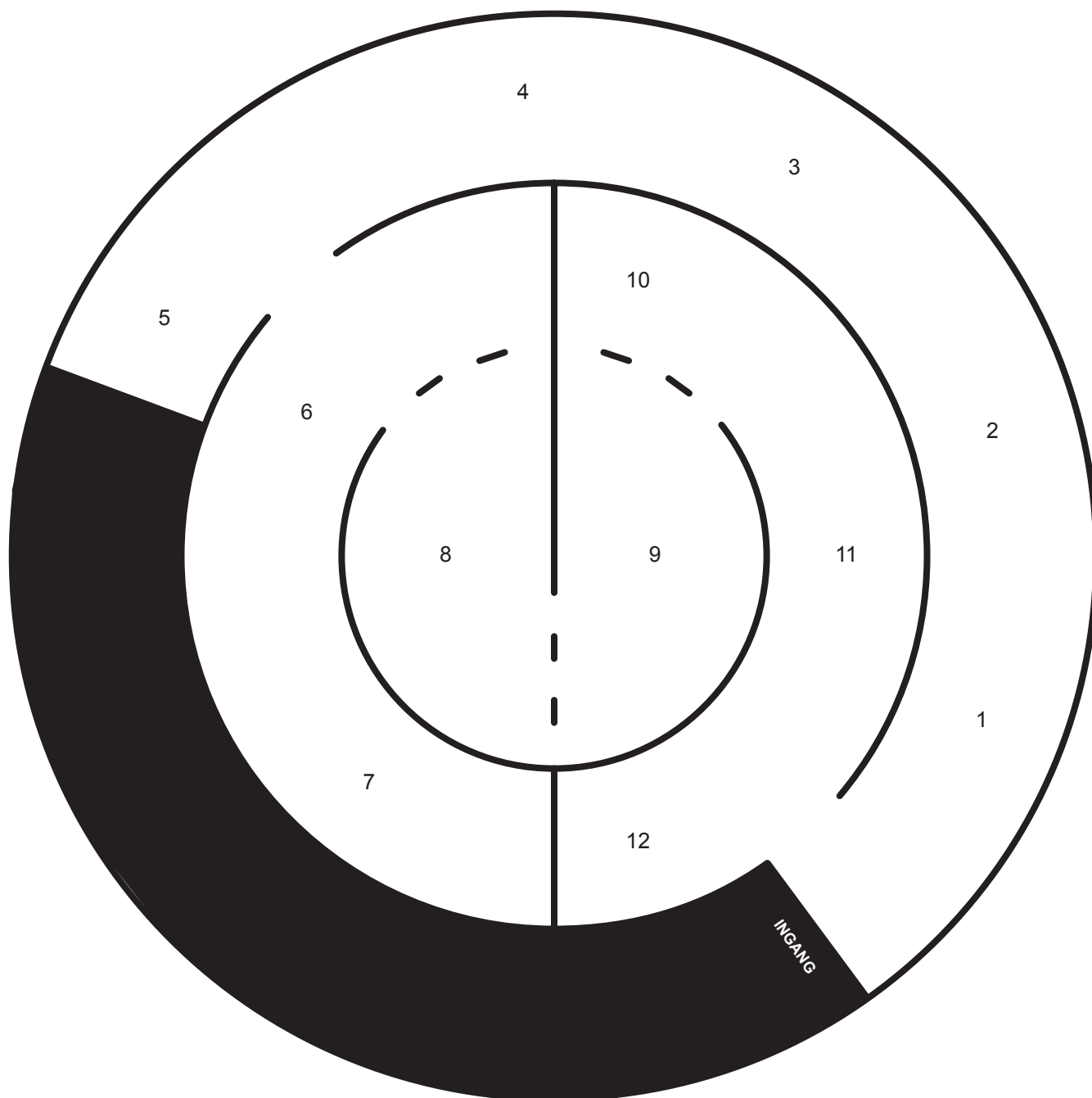
² Brett Bloom, *Petrosubjectivity: De-Industrialising Our Sense of Self* (Ft. Wayne, IN: Breakdown Break Down Press, 2015).

³ Maddie Stone, ‘Solar panels are starting to die. What will we do with the megatons of toxic trash?’, *Grist*, August 13, 2020, <<https://grist.org/energy/solar-panels-are-starting-to-die-what-will-we-do-with-the-megatons-of-toxic-trash>>.

⁴ Greenwashing is the practice of conveying a false impression or giving misleading information on how a product or service follows an environmentally friendly system of production, distribution, and usage. Greenwashing is used to deceive people into believing unfounded claims of ecological awareness so that they develop a positive consideration towards a company or campaign and feel inclined to spend money on it.

⁵ An indicator of this delusion is Earth Overshoot Day, which marks the date when humanity’s demand for ecological resources and services in a given year exceeds what Earth can regenerate in that year. In 2022, it lands on July 28.

⁶ Donna Haraway, ‘Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene’, *e-flux Journal*, issue 75, September 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/>



1. Agnieszka Polska, *The New Sun*, 2017
2. Amalie Jakobsen, *Orbital Harvest*, 2022
3. Oliver Ressler, *Carbon and Captivity*, 2020
4. Bianca Bondi, *Bloom*, 2017 - ongoing
5. Regina de Miguel, *CAT BASIS*, 2020
6. Vibeke Mascini, *Lethe*, 2022
7. Vibeke Mascini, *The World is a Verb*, 2022
8. Vibeke Mascini, *Blind Men*, 2022
9. Julian Charriere, *Future Fossil Spaces*, 2017
10. Sam Smith, *Lithic Choreographies*, 2018
11. Miriam Sentler, *Fossil Fuel Mnemosyne*, 2022
12. Lisa Rave, *Europium*, 2014

1 AGNIESZKA POLSKA

The New Sun

2017

Duration: 12 minutes, 15 seconds

This is a tale of painful love. The Sun, with its crooning voice and inescapable eyes, recites and sings a monologue to us, its lover. In a collapsed world where only words and language prevail, the Sun, shifting from heartfelt confessions, comedic speech, and eerie observations, stands as a loving yet ominous witness to human decadence.

The starting point of *The New Sun* was a poem by Maria Konopnicka, a nineteenth century Polish poet, in which she describes the modesties of daily rural life from the aerial viewpoint of the Sun. In Agnieszka Polska's film, the Sun is an attentive and helpless witness to human existence on Earth. In a state of bewilderment from what it sees, the Sun adopts different personalities to address us. While trying to entertain us and intimately connect with us, it also warns us of the prospects of our actions. After predicting incoming calamities, the Sun becomes deeply sorrowful, and fears the loss of the species it has lovingly observed since the beginning of time. The Sun's words go beyond the vows of love and comedic escapism, as it itself declares that one day they will build the world order after the current one collapses.

The Sun speaks of many generalised contemporary anxieties which, despite their factual nature, are still contested in a time of post-truth politics, in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than pleas to emotion and personal belief. The delirious state of emergency that Agnieszka Polska expresses in her work is derivative to it, a time where the overwhelming list of facts that enunciate climate change create contested grounds for patriotism and moralism. The film also seeks to destabilise the idea of truths about climate as a choice between 'real' or 'fake': in the face of doom, the denial of facts is a highly irresponsible act.

2 AMALIE JAKOBSEN

Orbital Harvest

2022

Orbiting around the Earth and encroaching the Moon and other planets of the solar system, five thousand satellites and more than one hundred and seventy million objects larger than one millimetre clutter space. All of them are

technofossils: synthetic objects that conform humankind's technological footprints that will exceed our existence. The presence of our material remnants in outer space reveals that human activity has already carved itself into the geological records of extraterrestrial worlds.

Amalie Jakobsen presents a set of sculptural remnants from future asteroid mining. The asteroids are metallic husks mined for their coveted minerals. They are speculative technofossils that remind us of the consequences of expanding extractive economies into outer space. Although space mining is not yet a reality, there are a handful of businesses investing in it, and countries such as the United States and Luxembourg have already set legal structures to recognise materials extracted in space as private property. These initial steps signal a shift from space exploration to space exploitation, expanding the capitalist agenda beyond the boundaries of the Earth.

The commodification of outer space exposes the expiration date of earthbound extractive economies and the refusal to prioritise alternative modes of resource management. The exportation of systems that are wreaking the Earth to other planetary bodies not only exacerbates the disruptive human imprint on extra-terrestrial ecologies, but it also continues to reinforce the belief that all is available for humans to (mis)manage.

Reckoning outer space as a boundless extraction domain sets a worrying prospect with deep political, environmental, and ethical concerns. Amalie Jakobsen's work invites us to reflect on the competitive, overachieving, and overreaching financial systems within capitalism and how indebted to it we inevitably have become.

3 OLIVER RESSLER
CARBON AND CAPTIVITY
 2020
 Duration: 33 minutes

Despite the incessant calls to move away from a fossil fuel economy and embrace sustainable alternatives for energy production, politics continue to globally fail at facing the urgency. Oil and gas corporations are seemingly invisible in parliament chambers, yet they have been funding climate change denial and lobbying against effective legislation for decades, in spite of being aware of their actions on the planet for long. As their role has become more evident in the public imagery due to the increasing visibility of climate change, they have veered toward misleading oil extraction procedures under the façade of technological progress. Oliver Ressler's film focuses on one of them, Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS).

CCS is the process of capturing carbon dioxide (CO₂) before it reaches the atmosphere and storing in underground geological formations for centuries, usually under the seabed. Although CCS is presented as a solution to mitigate global warming, it is a very recent and dangerous technology: the likelihood of leakage and release of carbon into the atmosphere is high, as seen in the cracks in the North Sea seabed rocks where CCS has been tested.

Ressler's film is set in the world's largest facility for CCS testing, the Technology Centre Mongstad, financed jointly by the Norwegian state and three of the biggest oil extraction companies: Equinor, Shell, and Total. Even though CCS requires large amounts of energy and it is very costly to implement on a big scale, the promise of a technofix to CO₂ release into the atmosphere attracts vast public funding for a post-oil economy transition. Becoming a shareholder in CCS testing is of high interest to oil and gas companies, as the slow decarbonisation it promises allows them to continue extracting fossil fuel as usual in the meantime, in addition to greenwash their names and get the sympathy of the public.

As the film's title points out, a fossil-dependent economy will keep us captive to extractivism until the Earth has been depleted and liveable ecologies have vanished.

4 BIANCA BONDI
Bloom
 2017 – ongoing

Bianca Bondi refers to her sculptural series *Bloom* as "living still lifes": carefully studied compositions of organic materials and household objects lay oxidised and crystallised in glass cases. Each element has been meticulously chosen in consideration of its materiality, its social or historical context, as well as its

transformational potential. Each composition stands as a decadent yet captivating vanitas of an transitory world, slowly fossilising into domestic remnants of a decaying Earth.⁷ For this exhibition, the artist has made a new iteration of the series specifically inspired by Robert McFarlane's book *Underland*, after which RADIUS' first year program is modelled.

Bianca Bondi's practice is found at the convergence between experimental scientific research, occultism, and speculative fiction. All of them are combined to speak of the current environmental deterioration and its consequences on human and non-human realms. By using both chemistry and esoterism, she questions our representations of nature whilst pointing out its current fragility, underlining the urgency for a holistic approach—one that encompasses knowledges beyond strict rational science—to come to grips with the ecological derangement.

Professor Kathryn Yusoff argues that “To imagine ourselves a fossil is to become the body/thing that is abandoned to time and given over to the chaotic churning of the Earth. [...] intensified by the passage of time [...] the fossil then is an abandoned being that suddenly in the midst of the present reconfigures the possibilities of times, of past and future...”⁸ Bianca Bondi's work familiarises us with fossil imagination and its usefulness to read the past, fuel the present, and speculate of the future. Through both the alchemical and the symbolical, Bondi exposes the mutuality between body, object, and sediment through ominous enclosures of our future traces.

5 REGINA DE MIGUEL

Catábasis

2020

Duration: 1 hour, 12 minutes

Gold, substance of desire and wonder, has long been a coveted element for which systemic violence over people and landscapes has been deployed in order to obtain this valuable material. Set in the Colombian department of Chocó and in the surroundings of the river Tinto in southern Spain, the film *Catábasis* exposes the threads that bind the histories of colonial extractivism with contemporary mining activities while giving voice to resistance and social activism.

Indigenous genocide and settler colonialism are part of the extractivist logics of mining by states and international corporations. Accumulation of rare minerals for the sustainability of luxury lifestyles and the computational industry requires dispossession and the subjugation of cheap labour to economies of violence. It is a slow violence, one of steady destruction that is out of sight from its beneficiaries, one that prolongs colonial logics and erodes local identities, one that is often not even regarded as violence.⁹

In *Catábasis*, Regina de Miguel maps three cartographies of gold abstraction: the Museum of Gold in Bogotá and the archaeological remnants of the Muisca people and the colonial myth of El Dorado; the mining pits around the river Tinto in Huesca, Spain, where the first environmental demonstration ever in Europe in 1888 ended in a massacre; and the Colombian region of Chocó, one of the main gold extraction areas in the country where activists like Yuli Correa fight for Black Feminist resilience.

Planetary depletion combined with an increasing market demand for minerals require rendering geology as a material technology of extraction, one that is indifferent to the identities and ecologies where it is enforced.¹⁰ *Catábasis* is a journey across the exploitation-based relations with the Earth with critical readings and counteraction to abate them.

9 JULIAN CHARRIÈRE

Future Fossil Spaces

2015

The Salar de Uyuni is the world's largest salt pan—a large flat area covered in salt and other minerals—and is located in the Bolivian Andes. The current site is the result of the evaporation of prehistoric lakes throughout thousands of years, which led to the salinification and flattening of the area. Consequently, a vast pool of brine—a high-concentration solution of salt in water—conforms the Salar, making it extraordinarily rich in lithium. As a matter of fact, the Salar de Uyuni holds one-third of the Earth's lithium reserves, and despite attempts to develop its extraction by foreign companies, a strong local opposition has left the Salar exempt of mines and largely unexploited.

Lithium has many uses, but it is remarkably necessary in the production

⁷ A vanitas is a symbolic work of art depicting the transience of life, the futility of pleasure, and the certainty of death, often contrasting symbols of wealth and symbols of ephemerality and death. Best-known are still lifes, a common pictorial genre in Dutch and Flemish art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁸ Kathryn Yusoff, “Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures, or Do Fossils Dream of Geologic Life” (unpublished manuscript, April 2022), II. <https://eprints.lanccs.ac.uk/id/eprint/73620/1/GeologicLife_April2012_yusoff.pdf>

⁹ For further information, read Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Kathryn Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 14.

of batteries for electric cars and mobile devices. Nevertheless, the extraction and manufacturing of lithium presents notable environmental and health hazards: it contaminates water, causes respiratory issues, degrades ecosystems and landscapes, and uses unsustainable amounts of water.

In *Future Fossil Spaces*, Julian Charrière presents a reflection on the material extraction required for an ever-increasing digital and sustainability-oriented world. The installation consists of salt-brick columns and lithium vats from the Salar de Uyuni, towering formations that recall the slow geological formation of lithium salts as opposed to their fast-paced extraction. The columns sprout as inverted spaces of future mining carved into the Earth, which are expected to progressively multiply in order to sustain the technosphere—the part of the environment made or modified by humans. This installation is exemplary of the artist's practice of "future archaeology," which refers to a set of methods for interpreting the material residue of the past and the geological excavation of the future. Hence the title *Future Fossil Spaces*: speculative traces of how the enlargement of digital systems and sustainable lifestyles can equal to a relentless hollowing of the world's natural resources.

10 SAM SMITH

Lithic Choreographies

2018

Duration: 49 minutes

Lithic Choreographies is an experimental documentary that zooms into the different ecological assemblages present in the Swedish island of Gotland, with a focus on the minerals that circulate in economic, cultural, and agrarian contexts. Working with islanders over two artistic residences to ground the film's investigations within the communities and landscapes of Gotland, Sam Smith chronicles the different modes of engagement between organic and inorganic matter in the island's millennial geological constitution.

According to the myth, Gotland was an enchanted island that was under water during day, only arising again at night. It was discovered by a man called Tjelvar, who broke the spell by making the first fire, and the island never sank again. The legendary origin of the island pinpoints the beginning of Smith's exploration on the ever-changing relationship between humans and nature and the contrast between the rigorous protocols of science and the production of knowledge out of intuition and alternative knowledges.

Gotland's natural landscape of sea stacks, fossil coastlines, and towering rock formations is shared by the artificiality of concrete production facilities and limestone quarries. From calcified marine organisms to permaculture practices, Gotland is testimony of a long-standing geological memory entwined with human activity. The film features a perception of the island and its vibrant and active rumble over thousands of years under the impact of human industrialisation.

Sam Smith's film aims at reimagining modes of engagement between ecological agents within a changing landscape shaped by a vast geological time and the mythical and scientific readings humans have layered into it. The pursuit of a sentient consideration of the island is embodied by a dancer, who culminates the film in a subtle and introspective choreography with a large rock, an intimate assemblage of organic and inorganic matter.

11 MIRIAM SENTLER

Fossil Fuel Mnemosyne

2022

The worship of Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, used to begin with a ritual of initiation consisting in first drinking the water of Lethe (forgetfulness) to forget all previous thoughts, and afterwards drinking the water of Mnemosyne, which brought back the memories of what the devotee saw in his descent in the river. Extrapolating the ritual to today's manufacturing of fuel from fossils that have been forming under the sea for thousands of years, many memories of the sea reappear and remind us of the knowledges and lives that are subject to rapid destruction.

Miriam Sentler weaves water and oil myths through time travel and speculative fiction in *Fossil Fuel Mnemosyne*, a tapestry produced in collaboration with the TextielLab from the Textielmuseum in Tilburg. This work is the result of research carried out over two residencies: one in the United Sardine Factory, Bergen (NO), and another as part of the Knockvologan Studies in the Inner Hebrides (UK), both located in the proximity to oil platforms.

Oil has long been attributed with mythical and magical properties. Shark and whale oils were used for weather forecasting, as well as healing ointments for wounds, respiratory issues, and infertility. Nowadays, oil is not exempt of mythification: oil companies use branding techniques to name their facilities after heroes of the Bible and the Nordic Saga. Interested in the various storytelling of oil cultures, Sentler presents a rich iconography of characters and symbols that weld oil and myth throughout time. By doing so in a tapestry, the artist references the tradition of commissioning tapestries by the rich and powerful to depict myths and stories with educational purposes and political undertones. In *Future Fossil Mnemosyne*, the artist seeks to review the importance of myth as a tool to challenge capitalistic fossil fuel branding methods and to grasp the industry's growing influence on the management of Earth's resources.

12 LISA RAVE

Europium

2014

Duration: 20 minutes

Europium is one of the rarest elements found on earth. It is often used to enhance colour brilliance in television sets and other screens. Europium thus plays a crucial role in the screen where you are watching this film and in the computer where this text has been written. Likewise, Europium is also used as an anti-counterfeiting component in Euro banknotes, as its phosphorescent features cannot be imitated artificially. In order to obtain the mineral in large quantities, it is likely that the first ever deep-sea mining intervention takes place in the Bismarck Sea, a body of water within the nation of Papua New Guinea that still bears its name from its German colonial past. Despite being named after the European continent and used for euro currency, the exploitation of the mineral happens far away from it, in persisting colonial dependencies in the Pacific. The intersection between ecology, currency, spiritism, and commodification is sequentially unravelled in Lisa Rave's film, just like the spiraling compartments within the nautilus shell structure that Europium possesses.

The film departs from the history of Tabu, a shell currency in Papua New Guinea which is still used and has official status. It is not only a financial transaction method, but also a source of social, cultural, and spiritual bonding between locals. During the German colonialism of the islands, colonisers tried to forge a counterfeit after the European goods they were exchanging for island goods saturated the economy the locals began asking for Tabu. One century after, German company Nautilus plans to mine gold, nickel, copper, and rare elements in the seafloor of Papua New Guinean territory for commercial purposes.

The phosphorescent effect of Europium allows us to see vivid images of untouched nature, in high resolution on smartphones and advertising screens. At the same time, the mining of this element near these very landscapes significantly threatens the natural environment it helps to digitally represent. In her film, Rave explores this contradiction, and the mysteriousness of the apparent perfection of these pristine representations of nature.

Europium calls attention to the systems that place economic value as an inherent property of commodities, disregarding their social and cultural dimension, and how they indebted us to logics of unsustainable exploitation for the use of the technologies that surround us.

Underland, Chapter 2
CLIMATE OF CONCERN
July 9 – September 11, 2022

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