

WATER looks at how crisis spreads and seeps. Water is both remedy and poison, a source of life but also a fetid fluid within which microbes, toxins, and contaminants collect and rot. Today's crises have a liquid quality to them – they move unpredictably without any sense of direction, they ebb and flow, penetrating deep into the cracks and bypassing structures intended to maintain stability. When the floodgates open, the waves rush out. This volume looks at the toxic consequences of ecological short-sightedness both literally as well as metaphorically. Corruption takes place in the world of business and politics, but like poison diluted in water corrupt forces begin to tear away at the social and environmental fabric, generating waste, violence, and inequity. The planetary scope of transition – from one climatic aeon to another – also corrupts categories of knowledge, where once stable entities such as “human” or “nature” are now fluid and murky.

In his piece *How can designers create conditions that support life?*, **Adib Dada** attempts to articulate the real challenges posed by ecological thought to urban development, especially in Beirut. He is founder of theOtherDada, a transdisciplinary architecture and design practice that works on site-specific projects that integrate positive social and environmental impacts. Such practices are especially important in a local and regional context where ecological sensitivity is hardly factored in – from planning and policy to everyday sensibilities. The piece focuses on an urban strategy project theOtherDada is developing as a proposal to rehabilitate the Beirut River. Encased in concrete in 1968 and flanked by highways on either side, the river is disconnected from both its ecosystem and the communities that neighbor it. The project BeirutRiverLESS proposes spatial interventions that re-connect the river

to its setting and renew access by surrounding co-habitants. The ways in which deregulated policy failures have managed to not only destroy lived environments but also to divest communities from the context of their surroundings, withdrawing tradition whilst contaminating both land and spirit, is a concern of **Angela Anderson and Angela Melitopoulos**. This two-part contribution, *We are not activists* and *Dustism*, is the result of their long term collaboration as part of the anti-mining struggles taking place in Halkidiki, northeastern Greece, where the Canadian firm Eldorado Gold is constructing an open-pit gold mine in the Skouries forest. Much of their practice has involved spending significant time with local villagers in this region, taking up their causes and concerns. From this engagement, they have generated film and video material, initiated gatherings and discussions, and broadcasted a live radio transmission that connected the ongoing struggles with bigger philosophical and political questions. Mines belong to a regime of extraction that is fundamental to the operations of global capital, fueled by deregulation and extra-national market forces that reduce the world, its inhabitants, and their environments to mere financialized units of speculative value. Thus, the struggle against the Skouries mine is part of the greater self-organization undertaken by indigenous communities, the dispossessed and disenfranchised, and the colonized against Capital and its agents. How can one resist this totalitarian economy of extraction? How can the “elemental” be re-activated into a political philosophy that seeks a remedy? In this case, to turn poison into an antidote against contemporary forms of *akrasia*, that short-sighted instance of acting against better judgment, to do wrong even if you know it will harm many and benefit few. The alienation from tradition is often met by attempts

to re-ground the body, to purify it, to rediscover the earth, water, and sky as a remedy against the ills of modernity. **Marwa Arsanios** picks up this concern in her experimental text *Falling is not collapsing*. Our narrator here is Magda Saleh, an Egyptian ballerina who in 1977 gave up her stage career to travel the Nile and encounter, observe, and record the dances of the local population – dances she and many others thought were disappearing. The thesis Saleh wrote, part-travelogue, part-ethnography, part-dance notation entries, connects the movement of bodies to her movement down the Nile, and to the greater movements of the Earth and its geological processes. Ballet, a modern invention based on a mechanical imaginary of the body as flying machine, has long been part of the “statist” project: it extends the logic needed to militarize, mobilize, and expose the citizen’s body to routines of exhaustion and endurance. The aim is a strong body and a strong nation. Perhaps the fusion Saleh was seeking between dancer and river is a response to the sense of collapse the history of catastrophe makes palpable in different ways and at different times – the fatigue of the dancer, the strain of the struggle. Can defeat be re-worked as a process of evolution, not as a definitive end but as an unsure beginning of something yet to come? It is from this “futur-ological” premise that **Ewen Chardronnet** departs in his essay *Becoming-Phototroph*, taking seriously instances within science fiction where the future evolutionary trajectory of the human species has been imagined as a symbiotic merger with photosynthetic plant life. The essay looks at the history of the concept of “symbiosis” within the life sciences. This post-human imaginary is already present in geochemist Vladimir Vernadsky’s early 20th century writings on the biosphere and noosphere. Human autotrophy, the ability to self-nourish, would involve a techno-scientific

intervention into life processes that would simultaneously release humankind of the metabolic limitations of the species while making this new creature ever the more responsible towards its energetic environment. The piece examines the different evolutionary epistemologies and laboratory experiments on endosymbiotic alliances between photosynthetic algae and marine animals in order to contextualize the debate around the “future” of the human. Returning to the site of the Beirut River to evoke the performative tension through which the past and the present converge deliriously, **Jessika Khazrik’s** script *Excerpts from When We Were Exiled, Water Remained* posits contradictory, confusing, and enlightening narratives that contaminate the narrative logic of historical happening. The main thread focuses around Dr. Wilson Rizk, one of the three scientists belonging to the SEDRA Group brought together in 1988 by the Lebanese government to investigate toxic waste illegally imported from Italy to Lebanon by mafia forces aligned to a Lebanese political party. The investigation ceased in 1995 when one of the group members was accused of being a “false witness.” Nevertheless, SEDRA had researched and proposed remediation plans for waste sites and energy sources in Lebanon, an unwritten history of transgressive imagination that could readily be applied to the Beirut River today. Here, the concrete stage of the river is a set for a play taking place in six acts – a political theater of the absurd where the Society of False Witnesses, one of the working identities of the artist, wishes to excavate a site long transformed into a dump. How to exorcise those forces of waste and displacement that not-so-secretly possess the built environment? How to stop nourishing those strategies of exclusion and instrumentalization so carefully maneuvered in the hands of the corrupt and in the name of nature?

Ashkan Sepahvand