

GHOSTS OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Project proposal for Resonances IV on NaturArchy
by Nonhuman Nonsense and Caterina Cacciatori



"a digital concept image of a ghost of the
Anthropocene, in a droplet of water" (DALL-E)

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Life in our times entails an apparent dissolution of the proper separation of things; nature – culture, human – nonhuman, life – nonlife, existing – non existing. What emerges in this crisis of the natural is an uncanny eeriness; sunbathing reminds us of global warming, breathing city air of pollution, drinking water of microplastics and toxins. Unseen anthropogenic entities are haunting our experience. The classical image of the unseen, uncanny haunter are the ghosts, ghouls, spirits, and specters. The destruction of ecosystems and disruption of fundamental planetary cycles are now conjuring these eerie beings back into existence; the ghosts of the Anthropocene have awakened!

How do we keep living on a damaged planet? We propose a ghost hunt! To go head on into the blurry deep-seated conceptual boundaries between human and more-than-human that separate us from otherness.

In “The gems of water” project at the JRC, Caterina Cacciatori and her colleagues are sending out a measuring tool to local citizens around the world to monitor and collect information on contaminants present in water. They aim to empower citizens to understand their own ecosystems and relationship with water, how they are affected by pollution, and to demand change from the bottom up. The project also enables a network of local actors to connect with each other, and the international scientific community.

The starting point of our exploration is to compare this water monitoring tool to ghost hunting tools, and the local citizens to ghost hunters. By meeting the ghost hunters and hearing their stories of how they relate to the land, the contaminants, and the ghosts, we aim to open access to that which lies beyond measurement and absolute language.

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Which mythologies and spirits are present? What do they have in common with the contaminants? How do they relate to the haunted land? If we let the ghost contaminant speak, what are they saying? What are their stories, what do their traces speak of? What are their histories in this place? What is the trajectory, can they help us see into the future? What future do they speak of?

The possibility to explore water quality, its material, cultural, political and spiritual (read "as spirit") occurrence links to an interpretation of water beyond the hydrologic cycle, in which water flows are merely objects of study and technical manipulation. For Linton et al.¹ the approach we have towards water should rather be guided by the hydrosocial cycle "a socio-natural process by which water and society make and remake each other over space and time". By making and remaking each other water and society are hybrids, in

which the relationship is constituting rather than connecting. The contaminants-ghosts appear from such hybridity taking one of its multiple forms and, practically, the (urban) water cycle can be redesigned as a physical ghost-hunting map², where ghosts appear in wastewater discharges, underground aquifers or private water taps, to tell us stories and let us create new ones.

The ghost hunt seeks to connect the world of mythology and science, the local and the global. It attempts to make the invisible contaminants visible by using stories, characters and Symbols. By anthropomorphising the contaminants, relating to them as if they were driven by agency or intention, we can start to form a different, closer relationship to these ghostly entities, making them a larger part of our concern.

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0016718513002327>

Hydrosocial ghostly cycle



— point source contamination
••• diffuse contamination
●● water quantities

x pharmaceuticals
▲ pesticides
○ industrial products

●● ghosts water-society hybrids



Paranormal detection equipment

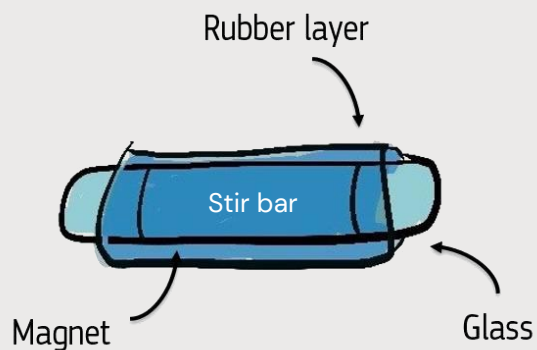
The gems of water monitoring kit

1. Information and instruction manual,
2. Gloves
3. Sample bottles
4. Labels for sample bottles
5. Stir bars in vials
6. Magnetic stick and magnet
7. Magnetic stirrer
8. Adaptor
9. Internal standards vials
10. Pipettes
11. Sampling pole



SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

“The gems of water” is a capacity building project developed within the work of the Social Engagement Platform of the World Water Quality Alliance aiming to connect local communities and citizens to wide-screening measurement of around 300 organic contaminants in surface, underground and drinking water. In the framework of the activity, local communities become Science Embassies, enhancing knowledge exchange and communication with scientists, local and international organizations, policy makers and artists to make use of scientific data for on the ground change and action.



As a starting point of “The gems of water”, the JRC communicates with local Science Embassies to understand what are context-specific water quality problems, only then, providing training materials and a monitoring tool to capture what and in which concentrations organic contaminants are present, those are

pesticides, pharmaceuticals and industrial compounds. The monitoring method in use is the Stir Bar Sorptive Extraction (SBSE), a small glass magnetic bar coated with a sorbent layer of silicon rubber on which water organic contaminants are captured through magnetic rotation. Because of the simplicity of the procedure as compared to other extraction methods, it was tested and appears to be fit for use in on-site measurements carried out by the Science Embassies, which become actors in the sampling and extraction of water samples. The stir bars are then sent back to the JRC Water Quality Laboratory, where analysis of the contaminants absorbed on the stir bars is conducted. The data obtained are shared back to the participants and aim to be used in various forms, such as data platforms, publications, reports, workshops and last but not least artistic productions. “The gems of water” is currently under testing in 5 locations spread around the globe, in Costa Rica, Romania, Tunisia, Uganda and Vietnam.



Stir bars in vials

RELATION TO NATURARCHY

To move away from contaminants as something technical and inert, and begin to see it as part of a haunted presence of human-nonhuman relations resonates in several ways with the NaturArchy theme. It is part of a movement of seeing nature not as a background upon which we live our foreground lives on, but as a deeply entangled process that ultimately is us. Communicating across this assemblage will entail activating and understanding all parts of the human, not only the rational and analytical. Curiously and compassionately approaching the paranormal, and learning from our ancestors and non-western peoples how to navigate liminal space between past and future, life and non-life, existing and non-existing, is to us more urgent than ever.

RESIDENCY

TECHNICAL FRAMEWORK

BUDGET

For the residency, we would like to divide the 10 days into two periods:

1. period at JRC to interact with the Gems of Water project, gain deeper understanding of the science of water monitoring and experiment with the tools.
2. period on one or multiple sites, (e.g. Romania, Uganda, Costa Rica), collecting ghost stories and interacting with the local community. (could be longer than 5 days)

After the residency we would like to use the collected experiences, stories and insights to ideate on the final outcome for the exhibition, it could be a performative telling of ghost stories and a collection of haunted objects, a fiction-documentary film about the ghost hunt or something else. We would also like to go to one or more "The gems of water" sites after the residency, to collect more stories, footage and ghosts.

Preliminary technical rider:

- Screen/s
- Speakers/headphones
- Projector (for possible fiction documentary concept film)
- Plinths, exhibition furniture
- Water containers/cylinders

Since the final outcome of the project is not yet clear this will come to change.

Budget (rough estimate for production):

Artist-fee(3people)	9000€
Materials/Installation	4000€
Travels/Accommodation	2000€
Shipping	1000€
Outsourcing/film-making	2000€
Contingency	1000€
TOTAL	19000€

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THANK YOU

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