

Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez
**For Slow
Institutions**

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e-flux journal #85 — october 2017 [Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez](#)
For Slow Institutions

An institution of contemporary art can be described as a public, civic, citizen, or common space, coproduced by its staff and by the continuous line of actors – subjects or objects – who inhabit it temporarily. How can we work within and with institutions today, as cultural workers and artists, at a time of violent racialization and profound ecological crisis, when heightened surveillance reinforces the organized and transnational governmental abuse of natural resources and the commons? How do we engage various institutional constituencies in countries of the Global North, when precisely their governments cause and contribute to inhuman civil wars and drone strikes in certain regions of the world, forcing thousands of people into displacement and dispossession, whereby many of them drown, suffocate, starve to death, or are exposed daily to violence by those they encounter on their route?

This is an invitation for curators operating in distinct geographies but within an intertwined geopolitical reality to slow down their ways of working and being, to imagine new ecologies of care as a continuous practice of support, and to listen with attention to feelings that arise from encounters with objects and subjects. This is a call to radically open up our institutional borders and show how these work – or don't – in order to render our organizations palpable, audible, sentient, soft, porous, and above all, decolonial and anti-patriarchal.

In contrast to the competitive environment of institutions that foster “best practice” models, the plea of Isabelle Stengers to slow down research in the social and hard sciences offers an important alternative. Transcribing Stengers's call to undo the symbiosis between fast science and industry, let's think together about some proposals for how institutions of contemporary art can counter the imperatives of the late-capitalist and neoliberal progress-driven modes of living and thinking. Decisions about fossil-fuel divestment and institutional exercises to embrace degrowth as a necessary condition in the Global North are starting to take shape within institutions that deal with the past and future of cultural heritage.

Resilience

A few years ago I proposed “Resilience” as a working title for the Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia, held at the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana.¹ After more than twenty-five years of exchanging “socialism with a human face” for savage capitalism, this region still has very little private investment in the arts and only symbolic public funds. Immediately, the theme of the triennial grew into a metaphor for a younger generation of artists who were and still are



Workers sorting electronic waste in China. Photo: Kai Loeffelbein.

barely surviving amidst a contemporary mess of artistic and cultural overproduction. This young generation is formed by resilient subjects that live and work under today's conditions of crisis, where minor and major disasters continually follow one another.

Resilience stands counterpoised to the idea of socio-technological development. First emerging as a concept within the study of the ecology of systems in the 1970s, resilience evolved into a science dealing with complex adaptive systems, becoming established as the prevalent strategy adopted in risk and natural-resources management.² Over the past two decades, resilience has been incorporated into discussions about the so-called "commons society" in the social sciences, international financial, political economy, the logistics of crisis management, terrorism, natural-disaster management, corporate risk analysis, the psychology of trauma, urban planning, healthcare, and as a proposed upgrading of the global trend of developing sustainability in the societies of the Global North.³ The term is used widely, with a variety of connotations: in the natural sciences or physics, a resilient body is described as flexible, durable, and capable of springing back to its original form and transforming received energy into its own

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reconstruction; in psychology, resilience refers to the subject's ability to recover its original state relatively quickly after some significant stress or shock, continuing the processes of self-realization without a major setback.

Applied more narrowly in the sphere of cultural work, resilience is more than just the ability to adapt, as promoted by the concept of the flexible subject over the past two decades, which was adopted by corporate capitalism and neoliberalism and which triggered the mass movement of precarious labor.⁴ Resilience encompasses reciprocal dependence and the finding of one's political and socio-ecological place in a world that is out of balance and that creates increasingly disadvantageous living conditions. Rather than trying to find global solutions for some indefinite future, or projecting a possible perfect balance, resilient thinking focuses on the diversity of practical solutions for a specific locality, and on the cooperation and creativity of everyone involved in a community or society.

Resilient thinking looks at the critical and dystopian near future; unable to anticipate or postpone it, it can only react by adapting to it. "Your utopia, my dystopia," said Françoise Vergès recently, in the framework of the project Atelier, a research group that has been meeting



"Greetings from Beyond the Construction Site," an action by the KUD Obrat collective at the opening of "Resilience: U3 – Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia," Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, 2013. Photo: Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez.

and working in and around Paris once a year on the notions of racism, decoloniality, and capitalism.⁵ As a concept, resilience has drawn a lot of criticism, with the main reproaches focusing on its depoliticized nature (which makes it vulnerable to appropriation by neoliberal thought and action), its favoring of resources while ignoring conflict, and its emphasis on reestablishing a previous status quo rather than effecting change.

During the research for the triennial, I began examining contemporary art production in Slovenia at the same time that the Occupy movement in the US was coming to an end, and when the all-Slovenian uprising was organized, a right-wing government fell and another took office, and drastic austerity measures were introduced not only in Slovenia but across the entirety of Europe. The growing discontent with social, political, moral, and economic crises echoed in my conversations with a younger generation of artists. My main challenge for the triennial was to see how the ideas on sustainability emerging from discussions around “commoning practices” – such as community gardens, the sharing of public space, new forms of crowdsourcing, and new ways of collaborating such as coworking, do-it-together, and do-it-with-others⁶ – could enter into the exhibition-making and remain after the end of the triennial, in the museum itself or in its immediate surrounding.

Limits to Growth

While working with the concepts of resilience and commoning, I encountered one of the many predictions for a future of scarce resources. It was in the form a diagram, published in the magazine *Wired*, predicting various global changes that would supposedly take place by the year 2025. Air travel, announced *Wired*, would become a luxury, and local initiatives and grassroots thinking would bring neighborhoods together in a web of self-organized, sustainable societies. This prediction, however, is almost a reality already, given the global scarcity of oil, grassroots calls to leave the remaining fossil fuels in the ground, and a general awareness of how much pollution air travel generates. In another example, scientist Frank Fenner has predicted that by 2100, humans will become extinct due to climate change, overpopulation, and a scarcity of resources. Lately, scientists have begun to issue warnings to a concerned public about imminent shortages of the minerals that are essential for laptops and cell phones, but also for hybrid and electric cars, solar panels, and copper wiring for homes.⁷

A number of contemporary artists and filmmakers – such as Danish director Frank

Piasecki Poulsen, in his documentary *Blood in the Mobile*⁸ – have explored the disastrous labor conditions and contemporary forms of enslavement involved in the extraction of such minerals. “Coltan as cotton,” says poet Saul Williams, confronting us with the necessity of letting this phrase resonate with us, within us.⁹ Minerals are obtained through extractive labor in the Global South, relying on the abuse of bodies that live and work in inhuman and dangerous conditions, repeating the very same colonialist and racial capitalist structures that we have known for centuries. This extraction represents an entangled form of the continuing exploitation of both humans and nature. We can observe this entanglement in a series of photographs taken between 2009 and 2011 in the historically charged mining area of Kolwezi, in the Katanga region of the Democratic Republic of Congo, by the artist Sammy Baloji, who was born in this region. Images of breathtaking landscapes, flooded open-pit mines, and ant-sized workers document “artisanal” copper and cobalt mining at a time when the Chinese government was granted access to these mines in exchange for rehabilitating parts of the Congolese infrastructure. This depiction of a “Zero World,” as Achille Mbembe describes such landscapes, shows

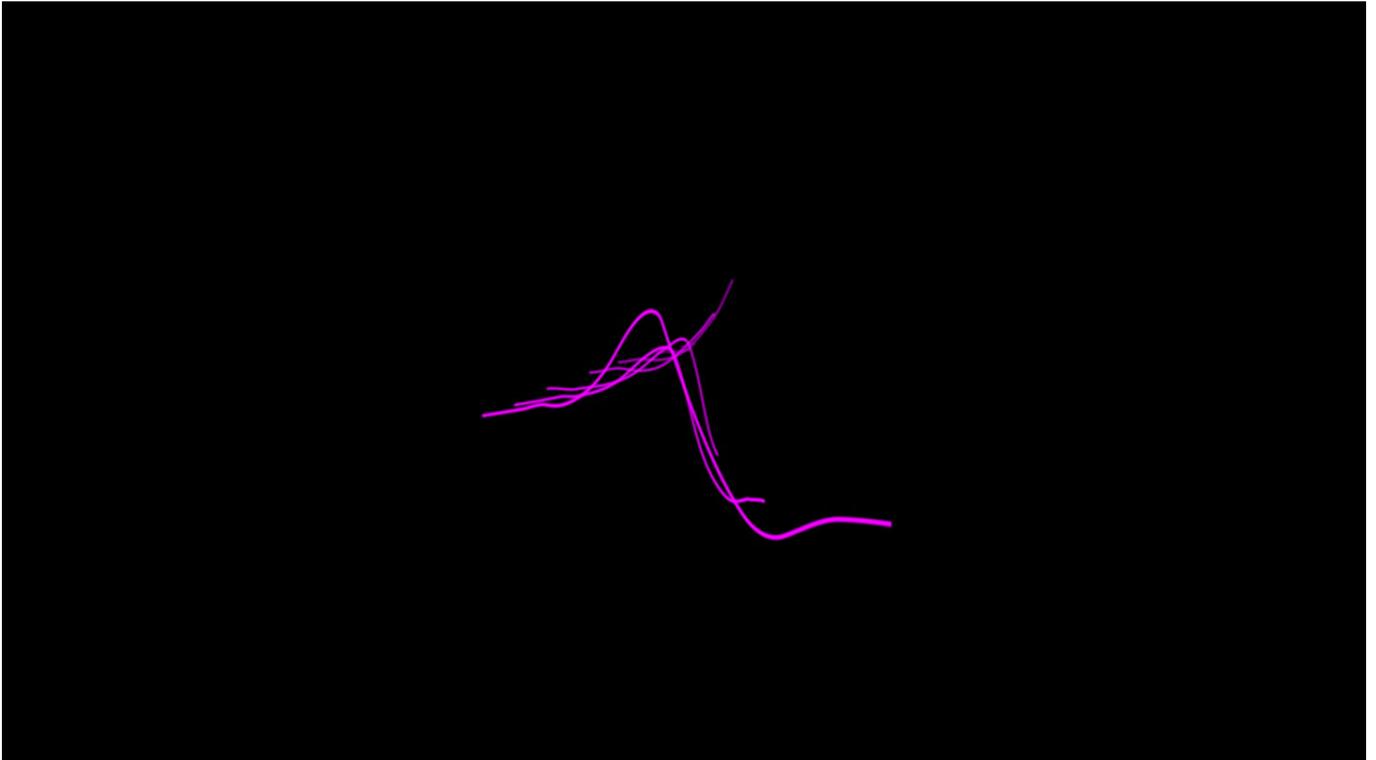
the ant-men, termite-men, men of lateritic red, who attack the very edge of the slope with pickaxes, plunging into those tunnels of death and, in a movement of self-burial, become one body and one colour with those tombs from which they extract minerals.¹⁰

Talking about the roots of this exploitation, activist and author Firoze Manji describes how, since its origins,

the growth of the capitalist economy has always been achieved at the expense of the ecosystem of which humans are a part. It has involved enslavement of millions, genocide, colonisation, amputation of non-renewable resources, pillage, piracy, militarisation, theft, poisoning of ecosystems, loss of species of animals and plants, dispossessions and imprisonment of cultures and societies within capitalist social relations of production, all in the interest of accumulation of capital by a few.¹¹

Sociologist Razmig Keucheyan draws on the notion of ecological debt that social movements from the Global South have put forward in recent years:

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Pedro Neves Marques, *The Limits to Growth*, 2013. Digital animation, 4' 42", loop, color.

By exploiting their natural resources, and hence by durably damaging their environment, industrialised countries owe a huge debt to countries of the South. This ecological debt is much bigger than the financial debt the South supposedly owes the North. Taking it into account would completely transform the way we think about the global economy.¹²

Contemporary scientific and scholarly reports about impending ecological disaster recall a famous older document. In 1972, *The Limits to Growth* was published. It was the first world report examining the human impact on the environment. Supported by the Club of Rome (a group of entrepreneurs and financial experts concerned with the ecological impact of worldwide industrialization) and spearheaded by a team from MIT, *The Limits to Growth* made explicit the long-term consequences of exponential economic growth. The report stated that if human habits did not change, if the industrialized economy did not revolutionize, and if ecology was not inscribed into the capitalist business model, in the next fifty to one hundred years we would reach the limits of the earth's resources. As a result, a series of catastrophes would occur: natural-resource depletion, crop failure, out-of-control pollution, population increases, and environmental collapse.

In a video entitled *The Limits to Growth* (2013) by the artist Pedro Neves Marques, animated computer simulations depict some of the various alternative scenarios that were outlined in the Club of Rome report. In these scenarios, only drastic environmental-protection measures would be capable of changing the direction of the world system and maintaining both world population and wealth at consistent levels. (As we know, so far the necessary political measures have not been taken.) Together with Mariana Silva, Neves Marques wrote a text to accompany his video, drawing an analogy between the report and the institutions of contemporary art:

Looking back at the turn of the 21st century, museological narratives and displays had become in themselves preemptive gestures, attempts at capturing the modulation of capital and social erasure, as violence sunk in ... Finally, beyond the control of cultural workers and civic representation, art institutions were slowly recognized as also possessing their own psychological states.¹³

Even as it has done research into what these

preemptive institutional gestures could be, the artistic and cultural sector of the Global North has exceeded its sustainability, and seems to be caught in a vicious circle in which advanced professionalization via art academies is coupled with a lack of financial or systemic support for myriad artistic institutions. Despite the culture of austerity that followed the financial crash of 2008, artistic institutions in the developed countries keep increasing in number, and by and large their logic continues to be one in which the "event economy" (French: "événementiel") and accumulation reign. A prominent symptom of this phenomenon has been incessant "biennialization" and the expansion of cultural tourism.

Racial Capitalism

Many historians of the twentieth century – W. E. B. DuBois, Eric Williams, Walter Rodney, and Kwame Nkrumah, to name a few – have documented the impact of the Atlantic slave trade and colonialism on the growth of industrial capitalism in Western Europe and North America. The transatlantic slave trade – that transformation of human beings into property, setting them outside the realm of history – excluded these slaves from narratives about historical progress and denied them personhood, a process that has continued for over four centuries in the form of organized colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. Profits from the slave trade went directly into urban, marine, and merchant development, accumulating substantial wealth for slave-owner families mostly in Europe and the US. A recent generation of scholar-activists from universities in South Africa, India, the US, Europe, and South America have initiated a reparations movement. As long as the "former" West continues to promote the idea of technological and economic progress based on combustible resources and extractive labor from the Global South, the same old colonial capitalist drive that organized the transatlantic slave trade will continue to run rampant.

In his inspiring book *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?*, Ghassan Hage gives us insight into the historical and contemporary conditions of racism – in particular Islamophobia – and their destructive relationship to the environment. He shows us how colonial racist exploitation reproduces and legitimates the very wild, unchecked, and inhumane capitalism that governs the overexploitation of nature. He also examines how this exploitation is the structuring principle of both ecological and colonial domination.¹⁴

Juxtaposing a map of transatlantic slave-trade routes and a map of global underwater



Nicholas Mangan, *Ancient Lights*, 2015. Video installation running on solar-powered batteries. Installation view as presented at the exhibition "Let's Talk about the Weather: Art and Ecology in a Time of Crisis," Sursock Museum, Beirut (curated by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Nora Razian), 2016. Copyright: Nabû Productions.

cables reveals a fascinating analogy. It's like a road map of world trade: the big international shipping routes tend to mirror major cable routes, linking the US with Europe and Asia. Africa and South America are less well served. Since they're hugely expensive to lay, cables have traditionally been placed between more developed countries, but new routes are constantly being added worldwide. South-South partnerships are being forged by nations on the two sides of the Atlantic, once united by the transatlantic slave trade. Underwater cables for internet traffic follow this reconnecting.

Scholars agree that accountability, recovery, remediation, and repair of the archival traces of black lives as a means of contesting racism and its legacies should have a political purpose and not only be "a plea for inclusion within the foundational promises of liberal modernity."¹⁵ Even if financial accountability for slavery might not be able to unsettle the deep injustices and power imbalances that permeate our world, reparations movements are an example of the necessary work of decolonizing recorded history.

The Productivity of Shame

As intersectional feminists of the Third Wave and postcolonial theorists have argued, liberal claims to know or represent the experiences of others through the process of empathy often involve forms of projection and appropriation on the part of privileged subjects, which can reify existing social hierarchies and silence those at the margins. These discourses routinely take for granted the socially privileged subject as potential empathizer. That is, in the vast majority of these cases, it is an imagined subject with class, race, and geopolitical privileges who encounters difference and then chooses whether or not to extend empathy and compassion. This act of choosing to extend empathy can itself be a way to assert power. The less privileged (poor, nonwhite, and/or third-world) other remains simply the object of empathy and thus once again fixed in place. In her recent book *Affective Relations: Transnational Politics of Empathy*, feminist scholar Carolyn Pedwell offers a reading of postcolonial affects like anger, sadness, and shame, exploring how these affects can be affirmative in their demand to reopen the archives of history, to keep the past alive precisely for the political work of the present.

In *L'Abécédaire*, Gilles Deleuze said, "The shame of being a man ... is there any better reason to write?" Deleuze approaches creating or writing as resistance, and states that one of the greatest motifs in art is a certain "shame of being a man." He commented on Primo Levi's book *Survival In Auschwitz*, which Levi wrote

after he returned from the camp and in which he said that his dominant feeling, after being freed, was that of the shame of being a man. As Levi, and Deleuze after him, explained, this beautiful confession doesn't at all equate the killers with their victims or suggest that all humans were guilty of Nazism. Levi rather asks how *some* humans – other than himself – could do that, and how one could take sides and survive. The feeling of shame is thus born of having survived when others haven't.¹⁶ Deleuze believes that art arises from that shame of being a man; it liberates lives that have been imprisoned over and over again.

Acknowledging exploitation within the history of humanity is also present in the proposal by the scientists Simon Lewis and Mark Maslin to date the beginning of the Anthropocene to the colonization of overseas lands by European explorers and settlers and the subsequent extermination of indigenous peoples and their way life.¹⁷ Taking 1610 as the starting date of the Anthropocene corresponds to a shift in carbon deposits due to the deaths of more than fifty million indigenous residents of the Americas in the first century after European contact – the result of genocide, famine, and enslavement. The term "Anthropocene" was officially presented as a new geological era by Paul Crutzen, a Dutch chemist, in 2000. Crutzen proposed to link it to 1784 and the invention of the steam engine – the instrument that accelerated the extraction of resources from the earth and drove even more colonial expansion. Ever since Crutzen proposed his idea of the Anthropocene, it has been challenged and tested, for example by Donna Haraway, who proposes the term "Chthulucene" instead, or Françoise Vergès, who proposes "Anthropocapitalocene." The effort to connect the Anthropocene to the near extermination of indigenous communities has yet another sociopolitical implication. It suggests that art institutions today should not pretend that they have been built out of the neutrality of the white cube and its Western Enlightenment legacy, as if these have no material or cultural link to the centuries-long exploitation of the Global South by the Global North.

The Complicity of the White Cube

The body of a cyborg, according to Donna Haraway in her *Cyborg Manifesto*, is "oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence," a position whose legacy is explored by Vinciane Despret in her conversation with Haraway and Isabelle Stengers: "The non-innocence seems to unravel the problems, explore the unexpected and imperceptible folds, to create a discomfort but without paralyzing

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action or thought.” Learning how to recognize, assume, and think this discomfort, says Despret, can lead to greater attentiveness and a fruitful form of hesitation. In her writing about the dead, Despret affirms that spaces in which sightings of ghosts have been reported are usually associated with histories of violence. These ghosts, says Despret, are somehow still there, without us being able to understand or imagine what they do. But they are there and we have to take them into account, even if we don’t perceive them.

In recent decades, artists and scholars have attempted to tackle these ghosts through artistic and curatorial practices of institutional critique and in new forms of institutionalism in the Global North.¹⁸ But the specter of the neutral white cube still haunts many architectural visions, museum directorships, and newly built art institutions. In her master’s thesis, Whitney B. Birkett notes that while eighteenth-century aristocratic collectors favored symmetrical hangings that allowed viewers to compare the strengths and weaknesses of different artistic movements, nineteenth-century American institutions such as New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art and Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts began to present artworks as didactic tools rather than as treasures, with the aim of “civilizing” the working class and educating a

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nation.¹⁹ In the 1930s, New York’s Museum of Modern Art and its director, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., developed the aesthetics of the “white cube” based on art movements in the US as well as Bauhaus design. This new display method focused viewers’ attention on a select number of masterpieces. As Birkett writes, “By presenting art as self-sufficient symbols of freedom in a capitalist society, Barr created a space that perfectly fit the needs of an era and was emulated by museums and businesses alike.”²⁰ MoMA also minimized its interpretive wall text, allowing viewers to form their own interpretations of what they saw, and leaving the artworks to act as symbols of their creators’ supposed autonomy and artistic genius. But as Birkett shows, this space was far from being free of ideology, since it was designed to promote artistic freedom in support of a democratic, capitalist society and the “American dream.”

However, the best critique of the ideological premises of the white cube remains a series of essays written by Brian O’Doherty in 1976, collected in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. Writing from within the context of post-minimalism and conceptual art of the 1970s, but also from the point of view of artistic practice, O’Doherty argues that the gallery space is not a neutral container, but a historical construct. The white cube divides that



The Citarum River, Indonesia, is considered one of the most polluted in the world.

which is to be kept outside (the social and the political) from that which is inside (the value of art):

The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access. It is a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct line to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location ... It is mainly a formalist invention, in that the tonic weightlessness of abstract painting and sculpture left it with a low gravity ... Was the white cube nurtured by an internal logic similar to that of its art? Was its obsession with enclosure an organic response, encysting art that would not otherwise survive? Was it an economic construct formed by capitalist models of scarcity and demand? ... For better or worse it is the single major convention through which art is passed. What keeps it stable is the lack of alternatives.²¹

As Simon Sheikh writes, O’Doherty offers a critique of the understanding of the white cube as

a place free of context, where time and social space are thought to be excluded from the experience of artworks. It is only through the apparent neutrality of appearing outside of daily life and politics that the works within the white cube can appear to be self-contained – only by being freed from historical time can they attain their aura of timelessness.²²

In Sheikh’s view, the task of O’Doherty’s seminal text is to continue the ongoing struggle to find ways of escaping the white cube’s ideology of commodity fetishism and eternal values.

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In the book *The Future of Heritage as Climates Change: Loss, Adaptation and Creativity*, edited by David Harvey and Jim Perry, the authors of the essay “Strategies for Coping with the Wicked Problem of Climate Change” suggest that organizations and institutions confronted with the challenges of climate change should engage in adaptive governance:

An organisation’s adaptive capacity results from a unique combination of values and principles, institutional culture and function, commitment to public engagement, financial and human assets, acquisition and use of information, know-

how and a mandate for decision-making.²³

They assert that assessing an institution’s readiness to adapt to climate change is the initial step, which should be followed by a commitment to address social, gender, and cultural issues in ecologically meaningful contexts. Poetically speaking, let’s listen to Fred Moten’s call to slow down:

So we have to slow down, to remain, so we can get together and think about how to get together. What if it turns out that the way we get together is the way to get together? ... Come get some more of these differences we share. Are differences our way of sharing? Let’s share so we can differ, in uncommon misunderstanding.²⁴

In opposition to accelerationism and in favor of slowing down, Isabelle Stengers has been a fervent opponent of globalization and neoliberalism, especially in her support of the struggle of anti-GMO activists. In many of her writings in recent years, she has underlined the fact that the new politics of public research promotes only the potential for research to generate profit in the competitive academic marketplace. To counter this, Stengers suggests that researchers should take her “plea for slow science” seriously. Slow science, she writes, is “about the quality of research, that is also, its relevance for today’s issues.”²⁵ Stengers was motivated to start a debate about rethinking the conditions of public research after professor Barbara Van Dyck was fired from her position at Leuven University in 2011 for publicly endorsing action against genetically modified potatoes in Wetteren, Belgium. According to Stengers, her colleague was fired because of a position she took as a citizen, not as a researcher. This prompted Stengers to claim that she stands firmly against the idea of the neutral, disinterested production of knowledge. She describes how the genesis of “fast science” in the nineteenth century had an impact on the whole of scientific research, creating an atmosphere in which all research was supposed to contribute to the immediate (usually profit-driven) progress of its given field.

Stengers says that in the face of younger generations who have entered universities with the hope of gaining a better understanding of the world we live in, she feels ashamed. Referring to Deleuze’s reflections on how shame drives art as well as philosophy, Stengers states:

We know that those who enter university today belong to the generation that will have to face a future the challenges of

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which we just cannot imagine ... Our ways of life will have to change, and this certainly entails a change in the way we relate to our environment, social and ecological, but also in the ways our academic knowledge relates to its environment.²⁶

In arguing that scientific reliability should no longer be based only on scientific judgment, but also on social and political concerns, Stengers proposes slow science as “an operation which would reclaim the art of dealing with, and learning from, what scientists too often consider messy, that is, what escapes general, so-called objective categories.”²⁷ Drawing on the work of ecofeminists and other activists from the US, she calls for learning to listen to each other in order to recognize the emergent values that arise only because “those who meet have learned how to give to the issue around which they meet the power to effectively matter and connect them.” What sustains those moments when someone is mesmerized and forever transformed by understanding the perspective of someone else – when transformative power comes from participants thinking together – is “more similar to the slow knowledge of a gardener than to the fast one of so-called rational industrial agriculture.”²⁸ As Stengers writes in her recent book *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*, in the point of view of fast science, paying attention is equated with a loss of time; but from the perspective of slow science, paying attention can teach research institutions and researchers to be affected and to affect the creation of the future.

How could Stengers’s notion of slowing down be introduced into public cultural institutions? How can they transform themselves from white cubes into slow institutions? These questions are debated in the e-publication *Ecologising Museums*, edited by L’Internationale Online with Sarah Werkmeister.²⁹ In one of its contributions, Barbara Glowczewski says:

A slow museum should be especially attentive to collaborating with concerned populations and artists, Indigenous or not, who create new worlds in response to traumas of the past and the present ... Acceleration of history, in which ongoing events become archived before being finished, is a real issue to be thought about in a slowed-down, more thought through process, both within art and within cultural institutions.³⁰

The most important priorities seem to be developing practical solutions that relate to the actual buildings and their infrastructure, and to

the production of the exhibitions themselves; working on the content of exhibitions collectively with the staff of institutions; creating opportunities for staff members to share competences; and including staff in discussions about sustainability and resilience.

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Much of this text was developed over the course of two lectures – the symposium “How Institutions Think” at the LUMA Foundation, Arles, in 2016, and at the symposium “Instituting Ecologies,” De Appel, Amsterdam, 2016. A version of this text appears in the forthcoming publication “How Institutions Think: Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial Discourse” (MIT Press, 2017), edited by Paul O’Neill, Lucy Steeds, and Mick Wilson.

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1
“Resilience: U3 – Triennial of Contemporary Art in Slovenia” took place in 2013 at the MSUM in Ljubljana
<http://u3trienale.mg-lj.si/en/about/>.

2
A significant text on resilience and ecology is the Canadian ecologist C. S. Holling’s “Resilience and stability of ecological systems,” *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics* 4 (1973): 1–23. A more contemporary work on this topic is Brian Walker and David Salt, *Resilience Thinking: Sustaining Ecosystems and People in a Changing World* (Washington: Island Press, 2006).

3
A commons society, unlike the market-oriented one, entail a new understanding of natural and social resources as collective and common.

4
According to Suely Rolnik, who develops the concept of flexible subjectivity based on Brian Holmes, this is the product of the emergence of the creative class in the 1950s, which led to existential experimentation and a radical break with dominant forces: “Flexible subjectivity was adopted as a politics of desire by a wide range of people, who began to desert the current ways of life and trace alternative cartographies – a process supported and made possible by its broad collective extension.” Suely Rolnik, “Politics of Flexible Subjectivity: The Event-Work of Lygia Clark”
<http://www.pucsp.br/nucleode-subjetividade/Textos/SUELY/Flexiblesubjectivity.pdf>.

5
For a manifesto entitled “Dystopies / Utopies / Hétérotopies,” written following the fourth Atelier, see <http://www.fmsh.fr/fr/college-etudesmondiales/28533> (in French).

6
Deriving from the do-it-yourself (DIY) ethos, the concept of “do-it-together” emerged on the internet just under a decade ago, most notably in the sphere of art and activism, as a form of collaboration based on principles of open-source information, nonhierarchical relations, and networked co-creation.

7
“Warning of shortage of essential minerals for laptops, cell phones, wiring,” *Science Daily*, March 20, 2017
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/03/170320110042.htm>.

8
See
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TV-hE4Yx0LU>.

9
Saul Williams’s slam poem “Coltan as Cotton” serves as a main inspiration for the upcoming Contour 9 Biennale that I have the privilege of curating. See
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXE0ZT-0Nxo>.

10
Achille Mbembe, “The Zero World: Materials and the Machine,” in *Elements for a World: Fire*, eds. Ashkan Sepahvand with Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez and Nora Razian. Published as part of the exhibition “Let’s Talk about the Weather: Art and Ecology in a Time of Crisis,” at the Sursock Museum, Beirut, 2016
<https://sursock.museum/content/lets-talk-about-weather-art-and-ecology-time-crisis>. A selection of Balaji’s photographs from this series formed the opening chapter of this exhibition.

11
“Degrowth is not a choice available to those impoverished by capital: Interview with Firoze Manji,” *La Décroissance*, September 26, 2015
<https://newsclack.in/international/degrowth-not-choice-available-those-impoverished-capital>.

12
Razmig Keucheyan, “Division, not consensus, may be the key to fighting climate change,” *Guardian*, May 5, 2014
http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/05/division-inequality-key-fightin-g-climate-change?CMP=twt_gu.

13
Pedro Neves Marques and Mariana Silva, “Limits to Growth,” 2013.

14
Ghassan Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017).

15
Laura Helton, “The Question of Recovery: An Introduction,” *Social Text* 125 (2015). On accountability, see the many research threads in “Legacies of British Slave-ownership,” an ongoing project organized by the historian Catherine Hall and other researchers and students at University College London
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/project/cupbook>. On the notion of meaningful remediation, see Clémentine Deliss, “Collecting Life’s Unknowns,” *L’Internationale Online*, June 11, 2015
http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/27_collecting_lifes_unknowns. The artist Kader Attia uses the term “repair” in the titles of some of his installations, and the term has also been debated by Wayne Modest, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, and Margareta von Oswald in “Objects/Subjects in Exile,” *L’Internationale Online*,

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http://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/89_objects_subjects_in_exile_a_conversation_between_wayne_modest_bonaventure_soh_bejeng_ndikung_and_margareta_von_oswald.

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