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Andrea Muehlebach (Bremen)

Life as Debt or Debt to Life? Water Insurgencies in Europe

This talk explores two kinds of debt – and two kinds of forms of valuation – that come into play as public water utilities are privatized and financialized. On the one hand, the financialization of water utilities and infrastructures set in motion a politics of frantic municipal debt repayment; as infrastructures become financial assets, they also become vehicles for the measure of future monetary returns that hinge on the calculation of the cost of capital. On the other hand, the financialization of infrastructures also almost inevitably provokes a very different calculus of debt – that of debt to life. Here, water movements in Germany, Italy, and Ireland articulate a very different kind of value – an incalculable, that is to say transcendent value that derives from all of life's indebtedness to water. My goal is to offer a glimpse of how this debt to life articulates with and constantly pushes against the ways in which neoliberalism seeks to extract value from life and from the infrastructures like water utilities that make it move.

Andrea Muehlebach is a Professor of Maritime Anthropology and Cultures of Water at the University of Bremen in Germany. Her forthcoming book ("A Vital Frontier: Water Insurgencies in Europe," April 2023, Duke University Press) is an exploration of European water movements' struggles against the privatization and financialization of water.

Institutskolloquium Wintersemester 2022/23 (Leitung: Heike Drotbohm)

Wann? Dienstag, 31. Januar 2023, 18:15–19:45 Uhr

Wo? Philosophicum P4

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