

This text is a collection of droplets, a basin of thoughts, concepts and conversations we have had across screens and oceans, and across borders and states. We trace the undercurrents of our collaboration called Curating Waste, a project supported by a bilateral collaboration between Radboud University in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, and Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. In this multi-locational project, we have discussed the political implications of waste in particular that of plastic waste – and its expanding presence in cultural and environmental contexts. We wondered what waste actually is, what art is, and what happens when the two meet. As all of our research locations are deeply connected to bodies of water, the Waal and Rhine rivers in the Netherlands, and Thames River/Deshkaan Ziibing in Southwestern Ontario, we have been physically and intellectually influenced by waters as radically relational matters that have brought us together across an ocean and time zones.

To engage with bodies of water in the Netherlands, we walked along parts of the river Waal's waterside in Nijmegen – an industrial shipping route carrying vessels and cargo in a continuous flow – and collaborated with artistic researcher Martine van Lubeeck for a deep listening session with our students. The session took place at the windy banks of a pond nearby: both a fixed geographical location and a watery site "continually being reproduced by mobile molecules, [...] simultaneously encountered as a depth and as a surface" (Steinberg 2015, p. 252). It was raining. According to van Lubeeck, our listening expands as soon as we start recognizing "that dripping differs from dripping, leaking from seeping, and sprinkling from spraying" (Lubeeck van 2022). Deep listening is a way to create intimacy, and to make kin in this world. It requires time and practice. Or, after Alexis Pauline Gumbs: "How do we stay deep when distracting distractions distract us?" (Gumbs 2020, p. 129). Gumbs turns to marine mammals' use of echolocation to navigate the(ir) waters. Sound, like water, needs membranes to resonate or banks to collide against. Through their materialization, boundaries may become sites for transgression and possibility (Gumbs 2020; Wilk 2020). What can a practice of bouncing sounds teach us about our situatedness in the depths and surfaces of this world?

After warming up our shivering limbs through moving and breathing exercises, guided by the artist, we entered a collective space of attentive listening – listening with, through and as bodies of water. We were invited to envision the inhaling and exhaling of hydro particles, to tune in to internal noises and let extraneous sounds enter our ears. In relative silence, we were experiencing our porous bodies interpermeating their surroundings (Neimanis 2017). Deep listening, as a potentially transformative method of multidirectional and multispecies navigation, became our embodied strategy of collecting, sorting, interpreting and stay with the data. For the second part of the workshop, we decided to move indoors to warm up and have a hot drink. Seated around a table, we scribbled down the sounds we had encountered during the listening session – phonetically, on a surface of connected white sheets of paper. In a collective group reading of this improvised map of words, we performed the perceived soundscape simultaneously and created one anew. In the audio recordings of the reading, a plurality of voices and noises becomes a diversely curated map, archive, memory co-authored by the various entities and elements that flocked near the pond that day.



Mapping the self at Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam

M A P P I N G T H E  
S O U N D O F  
W A T E R S

B O D I E S O F W A T E R

In a guest lecture at Western University, Friederike points to a map on the screen showing the Atlantic Ocean, and traces the watery pathway connecting Lake Huron to Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, the St Lawrence seaway and Atlantic Ocean across to the Netherlands. As the neptune balls move back and forth on the beach, staid in their relationship to water and land, waters flow, transporting goods along the lines of capitalism, bringing consumables and manufacturing back and forth between Rotterdam and Montréal. Despite these relations, we decide that the neptune balls can't travel – they would require a phytosanitary certificate, a plant passport to carry them across a border that exists only because it is decreed to be so.



Neptune balls collected November 1, 2022 as part of the Curating Waste field trip, Grand Bend, Ontario





Workshop with Martine van Lubeeck, November 17, 2022, creating a phonetic map of the bodies of water we listened to at Sonsbeek park, Arnhem

# E X H I B I T I O N C U R A T I N G W A S T E

London, Ontario is located on a peninsula of land that juts below the 49th parallel that is, for the rest of North America, the dividing borderline between the United States and Canada. The peninsula is a landmass that separates the huge bodies of water that make up the Great Lakes Watershed. Together the five Great Lakes hold 21% of the world's surface fresh water reserves, provide potable water to 35 million humans, and are the location of extensive manufacturing, including the production of plastics. Despite their often-pristine appearance, the waters of the lakes are immensely polluted, particularly with plastic waste that comes from industrial manufacturing, fishing, and land-based detritus (Corcoran et al., 2020). On the shores of Lake Huron, naturally occurring sand dunes and beach grasses play an important role in sustaining beach ecosystems. When grasses die, or when they are pulled into water by storms, they are tossed back and forth between dune and shoreline by heavy winds, forming into small dense spheres. Increasingly, the natural interweaving of sand, grass, and wind is interrupted by plastic pollution, as plastic threads, fishing gear, balloons, and garbage are entangled into the nest-like so-called "neptune balls".

Accompanied by ten students, we explore the beach of Lake Huron, gathering neptune balls that make their way into an exhibition at Western University titled *Ist Das Kunst Oder Kann Das Weg/Curating Waste*. What does it mean to photograph and display these accumulations as aesthetic objects? It is a question we have to leave open ended, though it is decided that as much plastic as possible will be removed from the spheres, and the gathered neptune balls will be returned to the beach.

We understand curating as a splashy process of gathering and juxtaposing objects and conversations in an effort to come to terms with the watery relations and tensions between bodies of water. In addition, we consider the encounter with and in land, sea and any other natural matter of care as a potentially political act to imagine more spatially just and inclusive futures (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). In countries where relations of land, (be)longing and legacy are contested due to the ongoing lingering of colonial politics, we start to write and map our encounters across the bodies of water that connect us.



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## A N D T H E P O L I T I C S O F

### Sticky Blues

Neptune Diner  
London, ON  
October 1, 2023

sticky profits  
profiteroles  
profiteroles  
glued to ideas  
the idea that growth will set you free  
the deep-down outsides of a place no longer  
on a map  
is this your heritage road?  
weeds of property relations  
an arte fact with no number  
no numbers sunken into irreparable grounds  
the museum needs another wing, she says  
a gush, a slush, a rush, a hush  
hands for oil, hearts for gold  
wind builds this union  
fleeing but telling  
huddled together  
in a tumbling fall  
of this multi-species party  
weed weddings  
wedding w do then  
my eyes write, my hands follow

you're leaking  
your orientation is nebulous  
the fading promise of direction  
luring yet imposing yet misrepresent  
flatness  
all maps are broken

on the ground, we trip and fall  
in the ocean, we drown and crawl  
when has your dissolution begun?  
where is your water's end?  
why is an ocean not a river?  
why is a river not an ocean?

we are all bodies of water  
life vest philosophy  
get wet  
get humble  
get baptized in the mid



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Waste

ISBN 978-90-9037382-9

Design by Martine van Lubeeck

Curating