

Critic: **Karla Rothstein**

Associate Faculty / Studio Mentor: Ece Cetin

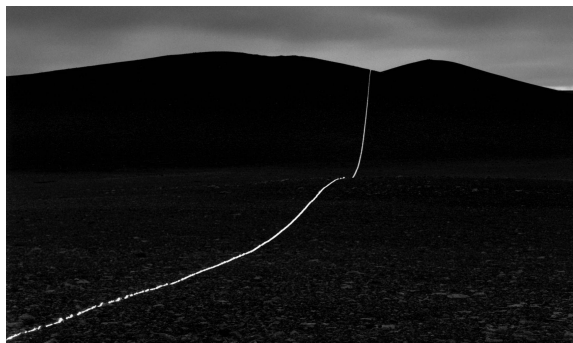
LIMINAL DOMAINS: no longer<>not yet

In Japanese Buddhism the term **Shōji** translates as Life-Death.¹ Beyond all binaries and dualities, a thin line **connects and characterizes inextricable simultaneities across multi-scalar cycles of life and death.**² This basic yet profound compound concept is the heart of this studio. While seemingly discernable, the components of life and death are inseparable, each defining the other in a shifting gradient of presence and absence. This semester's timely and timeless projects will integrate transcendence with critical quotidian being in the world.



In architecture, shoji are migratory translucent wall-window-doors – unfixed, transmissive, bridging-elements that facilitate fluid thresholds of illumination, ventilation, and view. Described by the poet Kimiko Hahn in *Brain Fever* (a collection prompted by neuroscience), shoji are a “paper screen that slides the interior in.”³ Their **transience renders boundaries, light, shadows, and time indefinite and adaptive.**

Both understandings of shōji resonate with the **liminal** – a time and state of transition, simultaneously occupying both sides of a boundary or threshold. Liminality is **a fluid, fluctuating, non-binary space of change.** It is a zone neither here nor there. Always both-and-other, a temporal simultaneity: no longer and not yet. It **defamiliarizes and disassociates, creating necessary disquiet in order to radically renew.** We will explore the liminal as both experience and space, braiding life and death, language and imagination, city and nature. We will engage complexity, change, evolution, ecosystems, transformation and syncopations across improbable, evolving, finite and infinitely interconnected lives.



“Liminality disrupts settler colonial ideologies through a dissolution of linear time, hierarchies, and certainty. Much like the land, there will always be moments of instability and impermanence. Liminality rejects a level of knowing, anticipation, or predictability and replaces it with humility in the unknown.”

- Adrienne Huard⁴

Originally coined by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909, the term *liminal* is related to cultural and social rites of passage where **intervals of transformation are both destructive as well as constructive**. In the 1960s Victor Turner further situated liminal experiences as instrumental in shaping thinking, personality, and agency.⁵ Liminality facilitates **transformation of social-hierarchies**, expectations, and beliefs. It may include dis- or reorientation in the process of transition – relevant, for example, when we know the methods of the past are inadequate, but have not yet achieved what we believe to be necessary and possible. You will identify and analyze liminality as an instrument **to defamiliarize** the familiar, to **define** the conceptual territory in which you will operate, to **challenge** the status quo, and **hypothesize** future potential.



Times of civilizational uncertainty require asking and pursuing radical questions, commensurate with the challenges we face. The urban cemetery, in its most familiar form, is functionally obsolete and impractical. New spaces for death - architectural ‘memoryscapes’ addressing complex interconnected challenges and **regeneration** – will coexist with spaces for everyday life. Together, they serve as an **adaptive barometer of evolving cultural priorities** and a scaffold for urban interpersonal and interspecies dynamics.

"The realization of impermanence is paradoxically the only thing we can hold onto, perhaps our only lasting possession."

- Sogyal Rinpoche⁶

AGENCY AND OBJECTIVES

Individual student teams will define a topic of research and will develop a **critical thesis on life and death** that informs their project’s position amidst a polyphonic world, where the **urban commons** is reimagined as instrumental to **synergistic networks of repair**. Projects will strategize and evidence architecture’s responsibility and capacity to contribute to a more civil future - negotiating the **temporal and spatial entanglements** of humans with one another, with other species, and with the delicate ecosystems of our time. Throughout the semester you will revise and amplify your project’s objectives relative to what aspects of heritage will be safeguarded (past<>present – built<>social); how atonement and remembrance may be enabled – and to what dynamic ends.

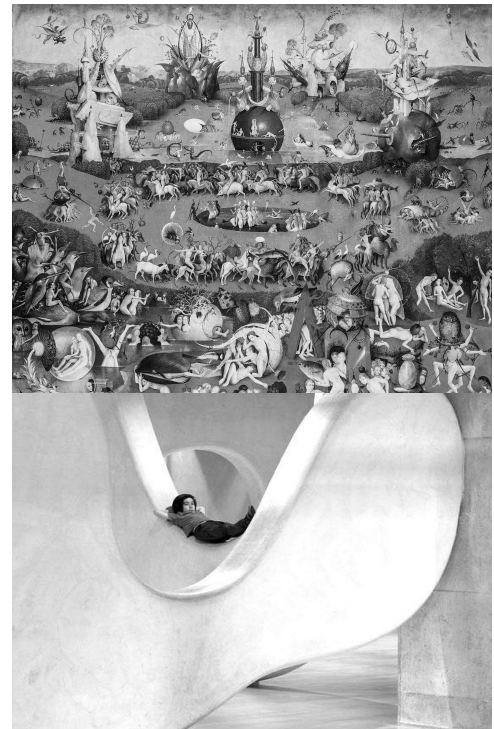
Projects will develop in dialogue with [Columbia GSAPP DeathLAB](#), engaging **civic-sacred infrastructures** of human mortality alongside other understandings and scales of loss and healing. **Ossified, unsustainable practices of all definitions are ripe for radical change**. U.S. cemeteries and the funerary industry have long been complicit in capitalist structures of extraction and property ownership. With increasing awareness of the resource consumption and negative impacts of embalmed casketed burial and flame-based cremation, innovative ecologically responsible options at death are emerging. Dignified, biologically-based disposition processes and temporal, shared urban memorial spaces are central to DeathLAB’s ongoing research.

The studio will transcend anthropocentrism and other structures that impede **personal and planetary healing**, to (re)define legacy to facilitate a future that is continually informed by the bodies that inhabit it. Engaging the **transformative agency** of the liminal, students will identify territories of investigation that resonate with personal priorities and values.

In addition to addressing the 50,000 individuals who die in NYC annually, new **social infrastructures** may engage:

- Existential Loss, Grief + Grievances, and the solace provided by connection with wild and other-than-human aspects of the organic world
- Climate Crisis / Extinctions / dying in nonhuman animals⁷
- Inequities - specific historical and/or contemporary constructed, structural, (*so-called*) “gaps” that have aggregated to form an abyss
- Destruction / Obsolescence of buildings, neighborhoods, infrastructures

Ambitious confidence allows one to navigate complex terrains, embracing doubt while crafting maps that open new horizons of possibility. The Studio, as a whole, will build a mosaic of irregular spaces and landscapes: wild<>tame, tangible<>intangible, in<>out, human<>more-than-human, ordinary<>extraordinary, damage<>repair, past<>future – with each unique proposition contributing to an exquisite ensemble celebration of future possibility.



“We must wander through landscapes, where assemblages of the dead gather together with the living. [...] Endings come with the death of a leaf, the death of a city, the death of a friendship, the death of small promises and small stories. The landscapes grown from such endings are our disaster as well as our weedy hope. [...] Death, after all, may not be the end of life; after death comes the strange life of ghosts. [...] Such strangeness, the uncanny nature of nature, abounds in the Anthropocene, where life persists in the shadow of mass death”

Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene,
- Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, et.al., 2017



ICELANDIC IMMERSION

In March we will travel to Iceland, at a time when the earth's orientation relative to the sun results in extended twilight - allowing us to linger in the liminal space and expanded edges between darkness and light. We will experience the terrestrial dynamics of horizon, ice, fire, wind, sea, and moss...

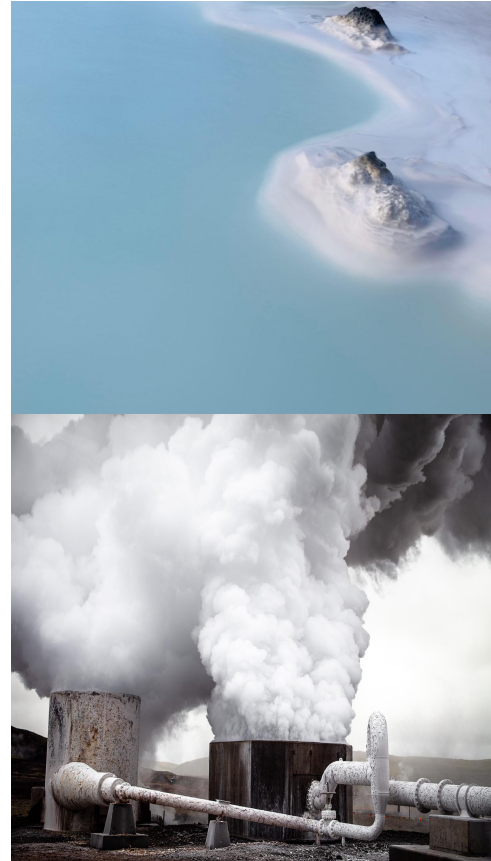
on an island whose mass is paradoxically rising as the climate crisis causes gigatons of ice to melt annually. We will immerse in the complex forces of nature and explore the challenges and coexistence of natural heritage and human-made sustainable energy production during visits to geothermal and hydropower sites, meetings with artist-architect-activists and journeys to land that is both disappearing and has only recently risen from the sea.

Sublime <> Anti-Sublime

Our goal is to experience Iceland's sublime ecological conditions and deep connection to the planet to awaken associated feelings of **awe, respect, and humility**, acknowledging and transcending natural phenomena while simultaneously heightening awareness of dissonant circumstances including ecosystem disruption, resource extraction, and climate crises. As architects, you will **embody and critically translate these vital relationships amidst urban opportunities**.

Sustainable

Practically all of Iceland's stationary energy is derived from renewable resources. In 2014, roughly 85% of primary energy use in Iceland came from indigenous renewable resources. Geothermal sources account for 66% of Iceland's primary energy use.⁸ We will engage technology, controversy, questionable incentives, aspects of "greenwashing," and exploitation through tours of infrastructural facilities and the writings of Andri Magnason, the author of *Time and Water* and *Dreamland: A Self-Help Manual for a Frightened Nation*. Nature-Post-nature realities require inventing new modes of awareness, thought, imagination, responsibility, and action.



Local Conditions:

Temperature in Iceland in March will be around 0°C. (avg. low -2.2°C / 28°F – avg. high 3.3°C / 38°F). Warm, waterproof jackets with hoods, wool base layers, gloves, and bathing suits... recommended.

Daylight ± 11 hours; with extraordinary lingering low twilight periods at dawn and dusk. Darkness enables light to be perceived. The night skies are magical. Attention to circadian rhythms and (mis)alignments encouraged.

Local Coordination:

Anna María Bogadóttir is a licensed Icelandic architect with a focus on building as a cultural and critical practice. Anna works with transformation, heritage, and media as a creative force across diverse platforms.⁹ She is the founder of Úrbanistan, a spatial design practice engaging the intersection of architecture, art, and urban culture, and an associate professor in architecture at the Iceland University of the Arts. She holds an M.Arch. from Columbia University, an M.A. in cultural studies and an M.Sc. in design, media, and communication. Anna was Karla's GSAPP student in 2005.

ICELAND ITINERARY (Draft):

05.March (Sun)	Arrival
06.March (Mon)	Immerse: Hike (Reykjanes/Pingvellir/other); tour Geothermal plant Hellisheiði/Svartsengi; Reykjanes UNESCO Geopark
07.March (Tu)	Explore: South Coast – Sogið by Þingvellir (Icelandic Institute of Natural History) + glacial river Þjórsá / tour Hydroelectric power plant
08.March (Wed)	Discover: Ferry: Landeyjahöfn to Vestmannaeyjar Westman Islands / Eldfell volcanic cone formed just 40 years ago
09.March (Th)	Soak: South Coast / geothermal waters + greenhouse villages
10.March (Fri)	Reflect-Translate
11.March (Sa)	Linger or depart from Keflavik

“We are surrounded by intelligences other than our own... Objectification of the natural world reinforces the notion that our species is somehow more deserving of the gifts of the world than the other 8.7 million species with whom we share the planet... By learning from other species, we might even learn humility.” -Robin Wall Kimmerer, 2015¹⁰



CIVIC-SACRED

The liminal is a **spatio-temporal expansion of the edges of the ordinary**: the intertidal where land meets ocean, the chimera where human meets non-human, confluences and clashes of past and future relationships and cultural conditions, simultaneously fragile and resilient. In ecology, the **“edge effect”** describes a phenomenon where ecosystems meet and influence each other, particularly in their territories of transition. These threshold zones support increased species diversity creating thriving localized ecologies.

In the realm of human-crafted ecosystems and the collective work of citymaking, the *civic-sacred* urges crucial aspects of social connection into a **vitality of coexistence**: the metropolitan-civil-communal coincides with the hallowed-exalted-mythological. Here *sacred* is capacious yet intimate. Uplifting reverence and respect for all life, diverse beliefs (including atheism) are embraced, while avoiding the exclusionary dogmas of any single doctrine. Traditionally sequestered **sacred activities are exfoliated and intentionally re-situated to intertwine with quotidian life, allowing the work of memory, lamentation, and healing to be seen and shared.**

Surfacing the past with dignity in the present is essential to instigate **responsible and radical conversations with the future**. We are, as Pinar and So Sinopoulos-Lloyd have written in *Beyond the Human*, “ecological beings within an ecocidal culture.”¹¹ Standing amidst the traumas and wonderment of our planet, we gain insight and compassion necessary to motivate recovery of the collective. Civic-sacred spaces catalyze

convergence and transformation. They are centripetal and infinite at the same time. Strategically tuned to the zeitgeist, they can offer essential **scaffolds of solidarity** and the capacity to inspire social change.



VALUES

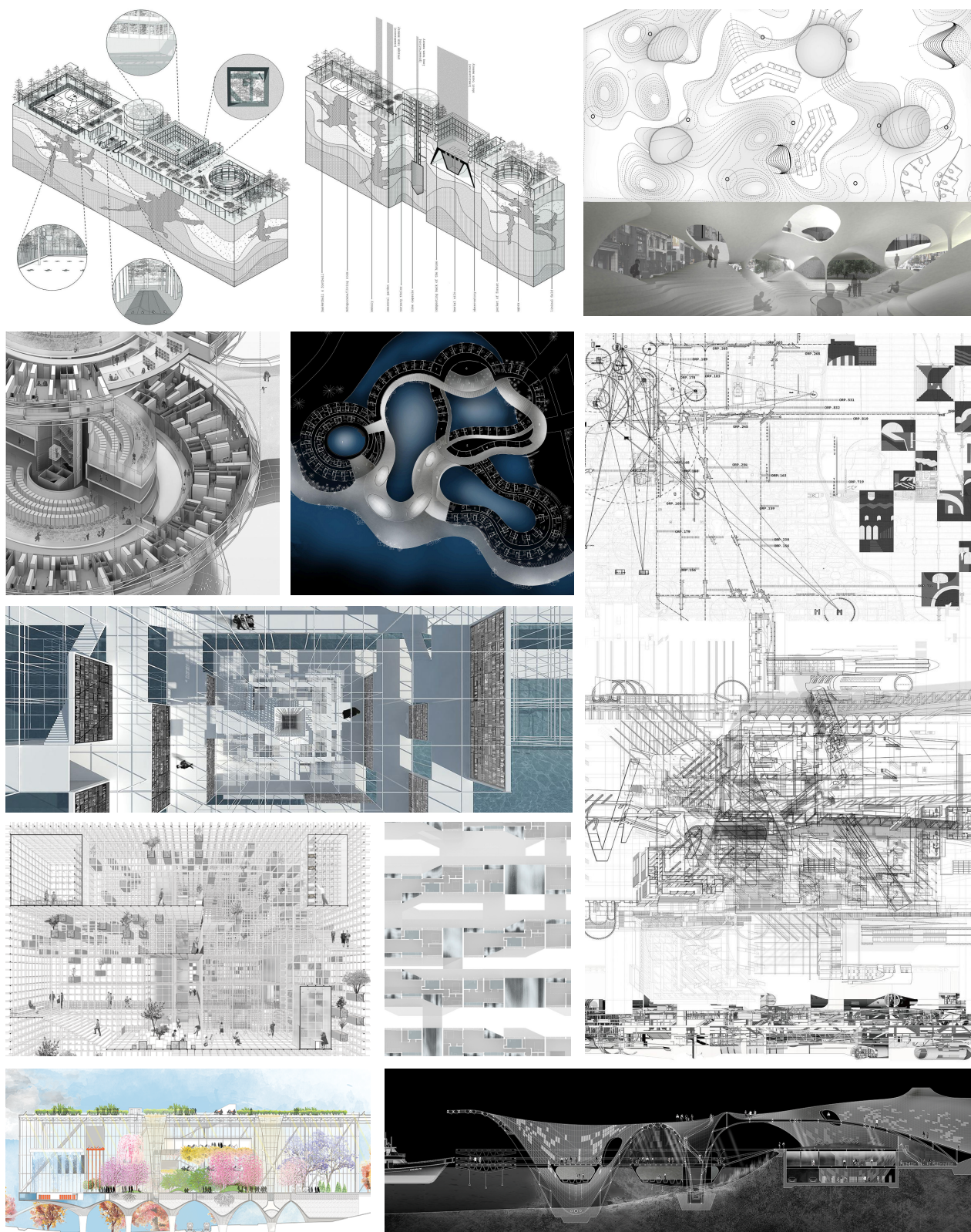
Socio-environmental inequities will be identified and ad(re)dressed as opportunities for re(dis)framing, re(decon)structing, upsetting and/or re(im)balancing the status quo. Commensurate with the year-long conversations on *Practicing Uncertainty* we will celebrate unique, creative opportunities to **expand imagination** and inspire the possibility of large-scale change. **Invention and counter-canonical programs**, processes, environments, stealthy micro interventions, graphics, and modeling techniques will challenge inherited frameworks and methods with **new intentionality**. The consequences of your proposals will be hypothesized and iteratively tested. Drawings and physical models will be thoughtfully and exquisitely crafted to convey the **palimpsest of transformation over time** and a diversity of perspectives including those beyond the human.

Awareness regarding socio-political-economic contexts, gender, sexuality, and race contribute to shaping personal reality, critical thinking, compassion, and **agency**. We will draw on values expressed by Paulo Reglus Neves Freire (1921 – 1997), a Brazilian advocate of critical pedagogy (conscientização) – including a pluralistic sensibility supporting confidence, humility, and willingness to risk;

a belief that **dialogue** is the life-affirming route to **emergent discovery**, and that all education is political, opening the opportunity to **critique and change reality**.

SEMESTER FLOW

WEEK 00	Studio Lottery<>Prologue (first assignment will begin Friday for pin-up on Monday 23.Jan)
WEEKS 01-02	Research<>Reciprocity
WEEKS 03-04	Position<>Proposition
WEEKS 05-06	Validate<>MIDTERM Friday 24.February, Ware Lounge
WEEKS 07-08	Travel<>Research
WEEKS 09-10	Synthesis<>Development
WEEKS 11-12	Refinement<>Consequence
WEEKS 13-14	Reveal<>FINAL REVIEW Thursday 27.April, 115 Avery
WEEKS 15-16	Archive<>Exhibition<>Graduation



STUDENT WORK: Kabir Sahni + Seid Burka, Chasce Tang, David Zhai + Alexis Burson, Zhengyang Yue, Chengyu Zhang + Yilin Zheng, Zhuo Guo, Michael McDowell, Michaela Metcalf + Tom McKeogh, Lincoln Antonio + Marcela Rueda, Zhao Gao + LiLing Lin

NOTES

1. Shō can also be translated as *Birth*. *Shōji* is among a collection of essays in Shōbōgenzō, "Treasury of the Eye of True Teaching," composed in the thirteenth century by Zen master Eihei Dōgen, founder of the Sōtō Zen school.
2. Ostaseski, Frank. *The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully*, 2017
3. From "The Dream of Shoji" in *Brain Fever*. W. W. Norton, 2014
4. Adrienne Huard is an Indigiqueer Anishinaabekwe journalist and artist. *This excerpt is from The Land is Liminal* in ATMOS, June 2021
5. Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage," in *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967.
6. Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* Part One: Living / Chapter 2: Impermanence (p. 16) Harper, San Francisco, CA; Reprint edition, May 1994
7. Roughly 1 million species of wildlife face extinction worldwide, according to a recent UN report. Nov.2022
8. National Energy Authority. <https://nea.is/geothermal/>
9. *LAST RITES* (2017). "How do we end a building? As an enlightened reflection on movement and time, construction and demolition, the Industrial bank on Lækjargata Street was read its last rites shortly before its demolition. Artists gathered to listen to the building allowing it to resonate and illuminate the city for the last time. When the building was erected half a century earlier, it was an agent of international affairs. An icon, and an embodiment of future ambitions. The demolition of the building takes place in a period of new development in the center of Reykjavík. The welcoming and farewell of future dreams coincide."
10. *Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let's Start by Ditching "It."* Calling the natural world "it" absolves us of moral responsibility and opens the door to exploitation. In YES! Magazine Spring 2015. Robin Wall Kimmerer is a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, and founding director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment
11. "Beyond the Human," in ATMOS, April 2022. <https://atmos.earth/beyond-the-human-machine-animal-artificial-intelligence-binaries/>

IMAGE CREDITS

- p.1 (top) Berenice Abbott_Night View, NYC 1932<>Svartsengi Geothermal power plant Iceland 2022; (bottom)Magdalena Jetelova_Iceland Project 1992
- p.2 *Untitled* from the 2018 exhibition *Mark Steinmetz: Terminus*
- p.3 (top) Hieronymus Bosch_*Garden of Earthly Delights*; (bottom) Junya Ishigami_Cloud Garden Nursery
- p.4 (top) Svartsengi Geothermal power plant Iceland 2022; (bottom) Vulkan Krafla Geothermal Kraftwerk
- p.5 ACZ_Trampoline bridge over the Seine, Paris
- p.6 (top) MIT Mediated Matter Group. *Lazerus child*; (bottom) Alex Wong / Getty: rally in front of the U.S. Supreme Court in response to the leaked Supreme Court draft decision to overturn Roe v. Wade

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“Nature Needs a New Pronoun: To Stop the Age of Extinction, Let’s Start by Ditching “It”,” Robin Wall Kimmerer, in YES! Magazine, March 2015.

<https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/together-earth/2015/03/30/alternative-grammar-a-new-language-of-kinship>

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<https://www.villagevoice.com/2008/05/06/olafur-eliassons-anti-sublime-enchantment/>

Additional References / Inspiration

Everything That Breathes, 2022 documentary film directed by Shaunak Sen (Best Documentary award at Sundance and the L’OEil d’or for Best Documentary at Cannes.)

Museum of the City of New York, exhibition: *City of Faith: Religion, Activism, and Urban Space* (from 18.Nov 2022) 1220 5th Ave., NYC

<https://atmos.earth/> Atmos is an exploration of climate and culture, a nonprofit biannual magazine and digital platform curated by a global ecosystem of artists, activists, and writers devoted to ecological and social justice, creative storytelling, and re-enchantment with the natural world.

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DeathLAB. www.gsappDeathLAB.org

On Being with Krista Tippett podcast <https://onbeing.org/series/podcast/>

On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous. Ocean Vong

Poetry Unbound. Pádraig Ó Tuama’s podcast. <https://onbeing.org/series/poetry-unbound/>

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The Geothermal Ecocide of Reykjanes Peninsula

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Sigur Ros - Live Lisbon Show, Sept.2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR_HpOSsBm8