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ECOSLAY
an Anthology

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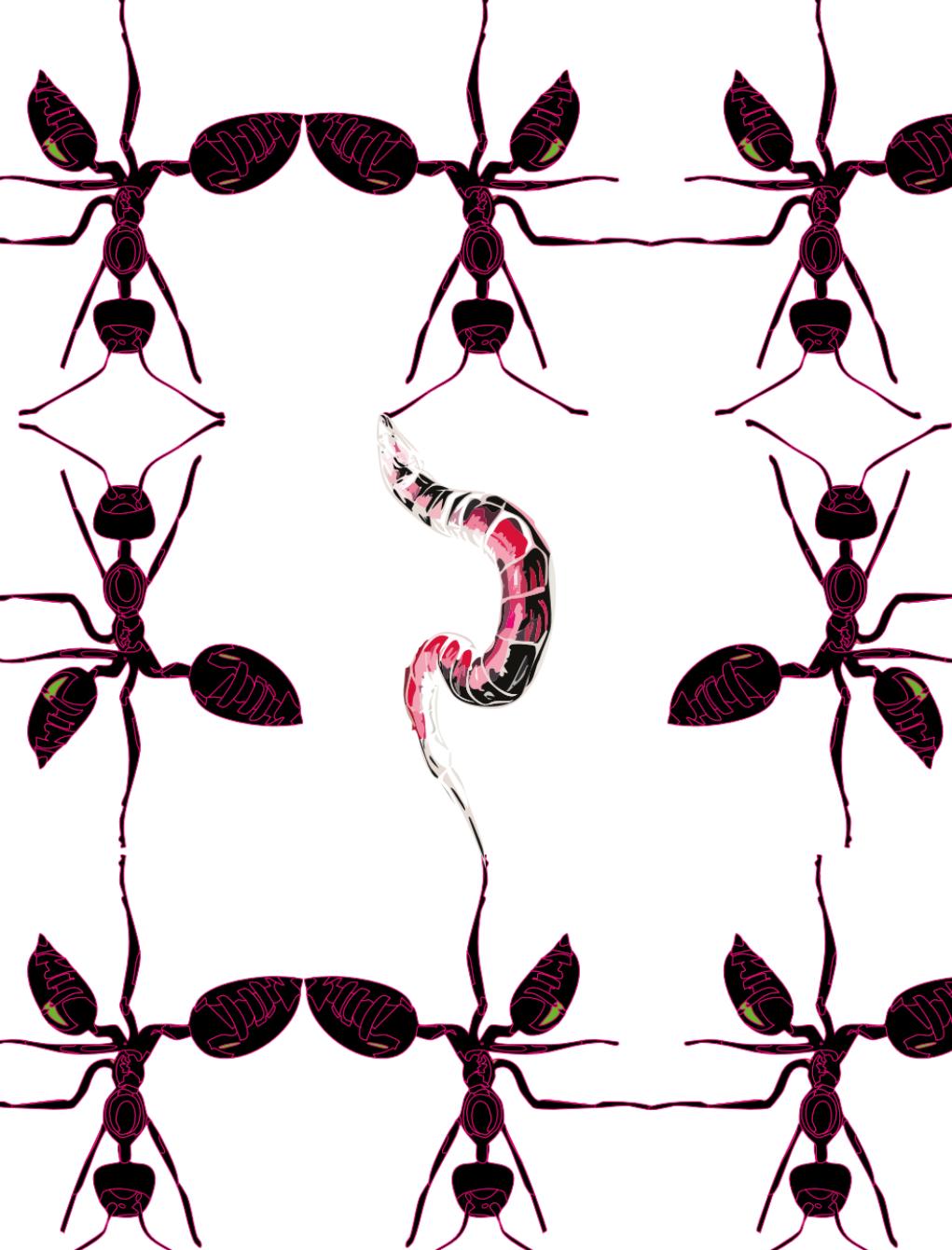
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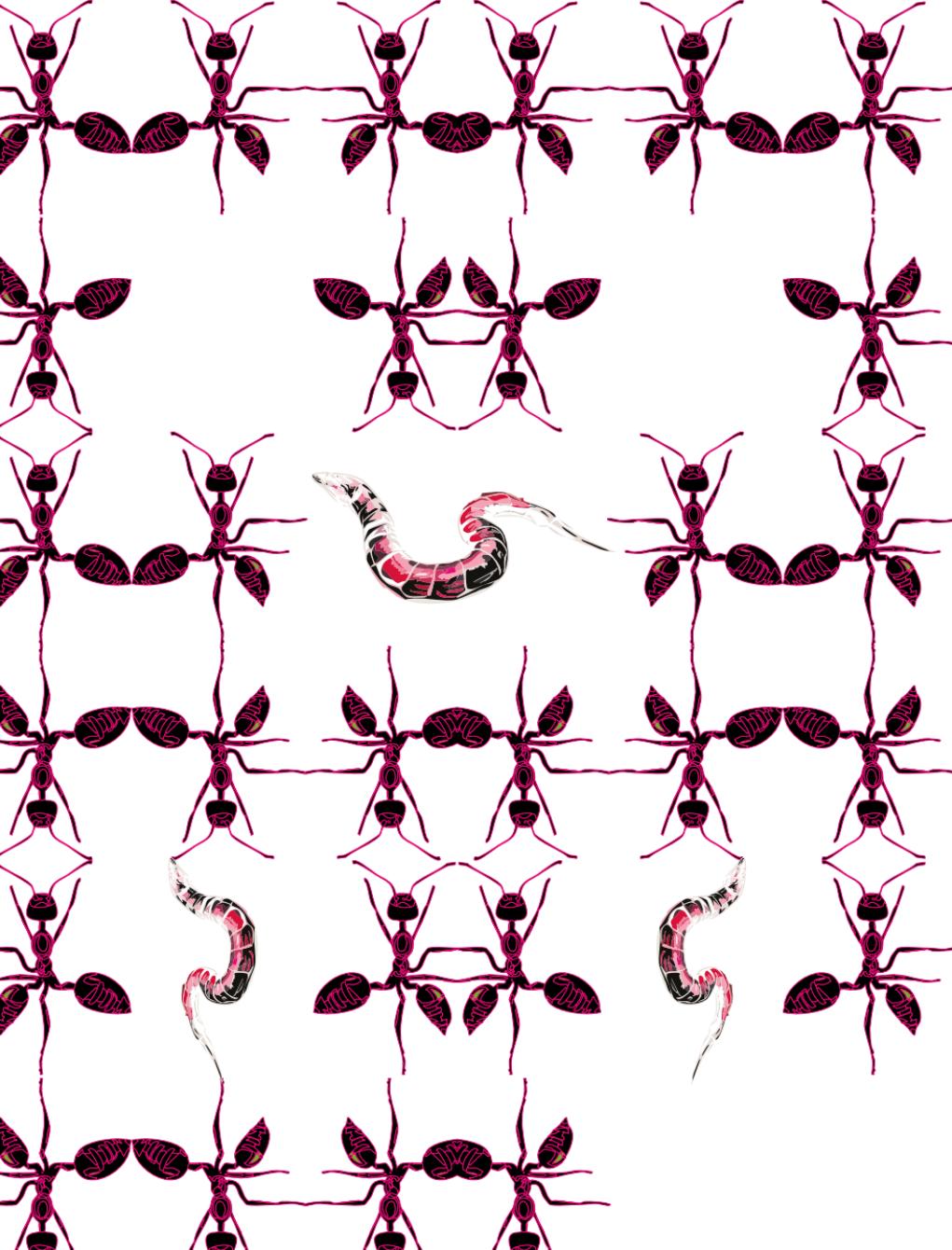
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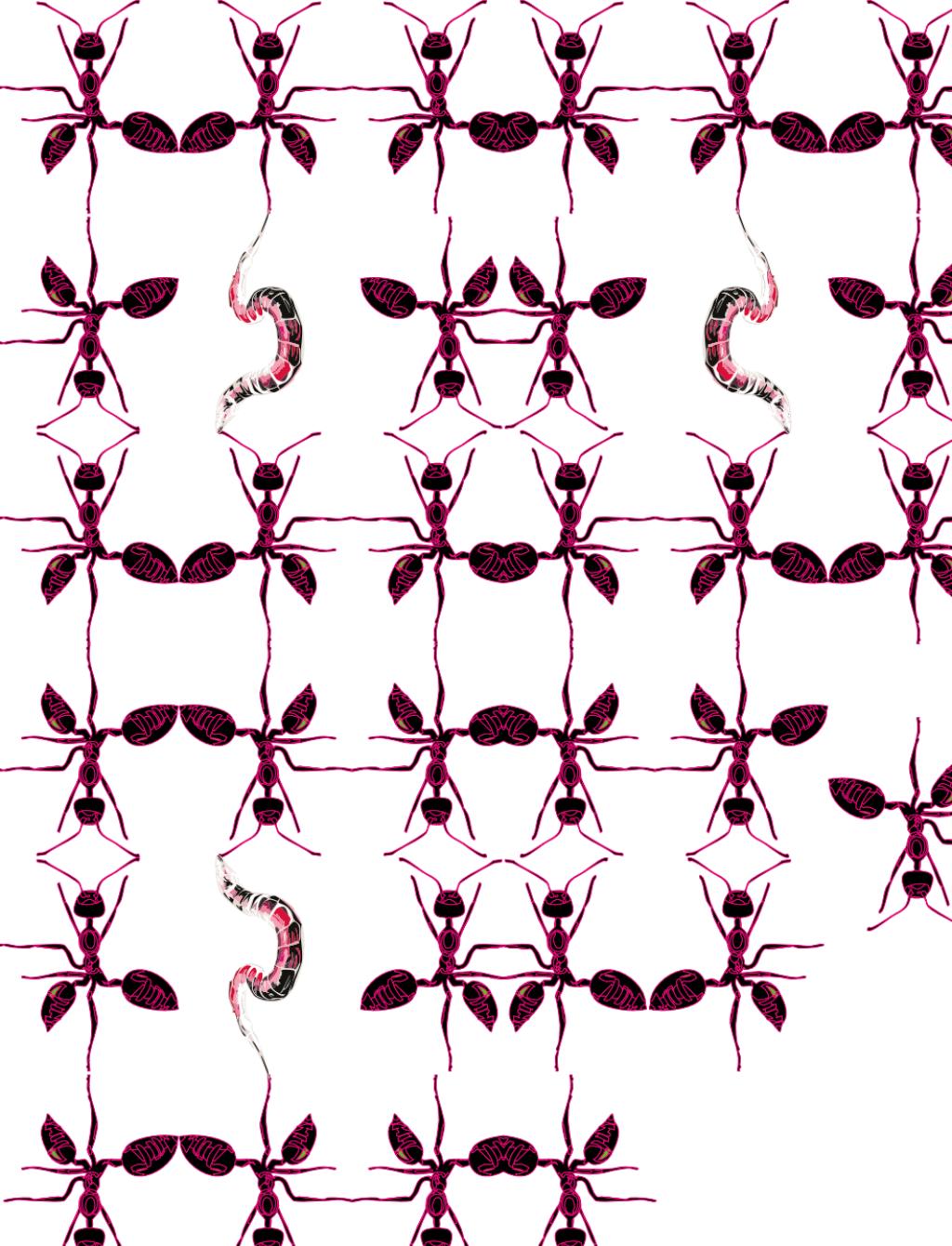
To all the beautiful glossy critters...



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An Introduction to *Ecoslay*

Camille Belmin

Disaster upon disaster, headline after headline. Billionaires hoard wealth while shattering the last remnants of our humanity and democracy. As the climate crisis burns and floods, it feels that the ability to live on our planet is slipping away. Each day brings the delivery of fresh catastrophe, each ever more revealing of socio-ecological multi-crises, and foreshadowing crumbled worlds. Aren't we all exhausted doom-scrolling through our times?

Numbness, denial, depression, and anxiety. This is what they want. They want us to feel that hope is lost. But we refuse: instead of despairing and looking away, we believe that it's high time for a little makeover of the environmental and social justice movement. Let's take our world back with style and nerve, and slay our way out of despair. Let's build alternative narratives and generate new hopeful, perhaps pink-hued possibilities for tomorrow.

Why must ecology always be communicated using the same earthy green-brown-beige aesthetic? Why are our only options apocalypse or a going-back-to-the-land fantasies? Pop culture has the alchemy, language, and codes to mobilize the masses. What is more powerful than the excitement of a stadium of Swifties in trance?

This collaborative publication introduces *Ecoslay*, a movement that rethinks environmental communication through the lens of popular culture. This first edition explores *Ecoslay* through the original icon – the Girl. She is hyperfeminine, seductive, and

ambiguous, but above all, always ready to pop out a lip gloss. Could the Girl help us unearth the environmental movement and rescue it from its aesthetic sloppiness? Eight contributions from international artists, researchers, and cultural workers take up this question, offering interpretations of *Ecoslay* through Girlhood as a cultural force for environmental action.

What is *Ecoslay*?

Ecoslay is, as it sounds, a movement – and a method – to absorb intersectional environmentalism into mainstream culture and to rethink the way we communicate ecological and social crises. *Ecoslay* uses and subverts pop cultures as a vehicle to reach broader, not-yet-convinced audiences. And since popular culture¹ is not a monolithic entity but has many facets, *Ecoslay* aims to spread across various grounds – cultural icons, influencer lifestyles, visual art and music, sports and whatnot. The possibilities are infinite. Acknowledging that popular culture is shaped by capitalism – the system largely responsible for environmental destruction – *Ecoslay* seeks to adopt and twist its codes in pursuit of an intersectional environmentalism that strives for the liberation of both people and the planet.²

The 5 C's of Ecoslay – Connect, Cry, Cute, Confidence and (pop) Culture – are necessary guiding pillars to rethink environmental

1 John Storey provides six definitions of popular culture. See Storey, J. (2021). *Cultural theory and popular culture: An introduction*. Routledge. For the sake of simplicity, in this text we use the most simple definition of popular culture as a “culture that is widely favored or well-liked by many people; it has no negative connotations.” However, Storey provides further relevant definitions that see popular culture through the lens of the relationality between the “dominant and subordinate classes.”

2 Thomas, L. (2022). *The intersectional environmentalist: How to dismantle systems of oppression to protect people + planet*. Souvenir Press.

communication, a foundation laid in the first contribution of this publication by Camille Belmin (page 93).



Ecoslay and the Girl

Before *Ecoslay* can spread its tentacles across various dimensions of popular culture, let us start somewhere close to our heart: Girlhood – a cultural reference and identity marker for Millennials and Gen Z who grew up in the 2000s with pink furry diaries and an idealization for hyper-femininity and low-cut, bleached, and rhinestone-encrusted jeans.

The figure of the “Young-Girl” has been depicted as a fundamental negative force in the world,³ a character only navigating on the superficial level of the world of commodities. But we rather see the Girl as an ambiguous figure. Yes, she might be the product of

3 Tiqqun. (2012). *Preliminary materials for a theory of the young-girl*. MIT Press.

capitalism and restrictive gender norms, but she is also a seductive figure with magical powers. Alex Quicho, the brains behind the Girl Theory, explains that, through her heightened sensitivity, she holds the power “to release our extreme feelings and affects,”⁴ those feelings that have been numbed by ongoing suffering and eco-anxiety. We need a Girl to feel the ground under our feet.

Rather than being a passive projection screen for gendered societal norms, we see the Girl actively reclaiming her image for her own emancipation. She can “maneuver, offer false leads, seduce to trap, using aesthetic harmony to anesthetize [her] audience, like the praying mantis does to its partner.”⁵ The Girl is powerful, and the *Ecoslay Girl* is a green gun.⁶

Most of the contributions in this book explore and create novel cultural narratives that depict the Girl and performative femininity as vectors for promoting, embodying, or symbolizing environmentalist values. In her speculative *Campaign for a8e – Pro-Ageing Skin Care*, Janina Weißengruber invites us to embrace decay as a way to connect with our own mortality, while critiquing the ideals imposed on femmes by the beauty industry (page 25). At *Snail SPA*, you can get your skin care routine done while making kin with snails, bees, and swampy friends. Find the menu on page 86, by Lisa Jäger.

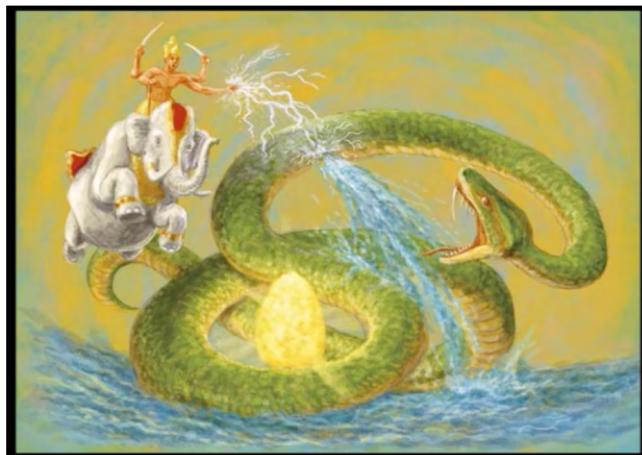
4 Alex Quicho in Poliks M. & Alonso Trillo, R. (2025, January 23). *A Girl is a Gun (with Alex Quicho)*. [Podcast episode]. Disintegrator Podcast.

5 Delvaux, M. (2018). *Serial Girls: From Barbie to Pussy Riot*. Between the lines.

6 In reference to Alex Quicho’s quote “A Girl is a gun,” heard in Poliks M. & Alonso Trillo, R. (2025, January 23). *A Girl is a Gun (with Alex Quicho)*. [Podcast episode]. Disintegrator Podcast.

The *slay* in *Ecoslay*

You slay, I slay, we all slay. “Slay”, as we know it today, was popularized by Queer Black and BIPOC performers in the ballroom scenes of the 60s and 70s. However, it dates back much further than that. Originating from Old English, it is officially defined as “killing.” “Slaying dragons,” for example, is an English expression that means overcoming adversities or difficulties, whether physical or psychological. The theme of the dragon slayer appears in many traditional stories and mythologies around the world. The most famous example in the Western world might be Saint George, a Christian saint venerated for slaying a dragon that was extorting human sacrifices from villagers. In Hinduism, Vritra is a personification of drought who assumed the shape of a dragon-like creature and blocked the course of the Rigvedic rivers, provoking major droughts. The Hindu god of weather, Indra, eventually slayed Vritra, restoring life on earth. Who are the contemporary dragons we need to slay, like Indra, to prevent an ecological collapse?



In the face of major profit-driven disasters and wars, alongside the rise of fascism and politicians' use of "shock and awe" tactics to paralyze the public, we must don our armor of tenderness and confidence to tackle the difficulties of our time to not only survive but, yes, slay!

"Slay" can take many shapes. Just like "cute," it can shift along the cultural phenomena it is trying to tag⁷, and serve as a vessel for different conceptualizations.



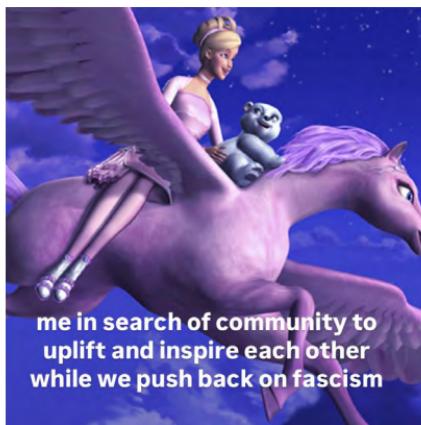
In *I-Slay-and*, the para-Center for Island Research (paraCIR) and Daniel H. Pineda explore what "slay" might convey in the context of natural territory, and speculate on its potential significance for

⁷ Ireland, M. & Kronic, M.B. (2024). *Cute Accelerationism*. MIT Press.

urban planners in a Danubian territory at the beginning of the nineteenth century (page 56).

Ecoslay as an anti-fascist riposte

The past couple of years have witnessed a transformation in the figure of the Girl. Media spaces are now being flooded with Girls with undertones (and overtones!) of authoritarianism, white supremacism, pro-natalism, and fascism – as we can see in the rise of *Tradwife* influencers and young Girls instrumentalized in conservative politics.



While keeping anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist values at its core, *Ecoslay* seeks to reclaim the Girl to subvert the means of communication used by the far-right, ultimately to bring more people into the environmental and social justice movement. This means considering new bold strategies, building on and engaging with provocative discourse and visual narratives, which may sometimes feel at odds with our core values. We need

to grieve the idea that people will react to ecological facts with appropriate actions and political demands, embrace the complexity of our intricate capitalistic system, and adopt appropriate strategies to shape the anti-fascist and environmental riposte.

Two contributions in particular explore the intersection between conservative ideas, Girl culture and environmentalism. In her essay, Nari Sarmini situates *Ecoslay* within the landscape of trends such as Tradwife, Cottagecore, and Clean Girl, and asks what an *Ecoslay* aesthetic might look like (page 33). Alokin Jaywalker's contribution, through an analysis of the Hawk Tuah girl trend, delves into the fascinating interplay between Girl culture, MAGA culture, urban climate mitigation and AI. It also questions the limits of reclaiming the figure of the Girl in the name of environmentalism (page 109).

Ecoslay beyond the Girl

In this publication, we explore the intersection between Girlhood and environmental communication. But ultimately, *Ecoslay* should expand beyond the Girl and go across all boards. Or, rather, girlify all layers of popular culture. After all, the Girl is not to be identified with a gender, and even less so a binary gender ("Everyone is a girl"). Being a Girl is a mode of living.⁸ Allow yourself to be emotional, cute, and cringe, as Diana Andrei so compellingly lays out in her contribution, *I AM CRINGE BUT I AM FREE* (page 102).

It is about linking all the diversity of identifications⁹ to the envi-

8 Alex Quicho in Poliks M. & Alonso Trillo, R. (2025, January 23). *A Girl is a Gun* (with Alex Quicho). [Podcast episode]. Disintegrator Podcast.

9 Here, we will speak about identification rather than identity, as the latter confines people to a particular condition, whereas the former describes a process.

ronmental movement. As environmental psychologist Per Espen Stoknes explained, one hindrance to climate action is that our identifications are closely linked to consumption patterns that are not climate-friendly.¹⁰ What if we shifted this around and associated our identifications to environmental action? As an example, in her contribution, Ramona Gomez poetically explores the culture of pigeon fancying as a way to build inter-species solidarity (page 72).

You will notice that this publication is not an academic theory monster. *Ecoslay* aims to be accessible, inclusive, and playful, yet grounded in scientific facts and rigor. While the contributions are peer-reviewed by the group, we have tried to avoid an overly academic style and jargon.

What you will read is the crystallization of a year-long process of passionate exchange between its authors, a group of *Ecoslay* enthusiasts. This is merely the beginning of the journey: *Ecoslay* is just a baby (Girl)! It can expand, morph, bend, and infiltrate. And in order to grow, it needs to be fed by you. It needs to suckle at the nipple of its community.

If you like what you read, join the *Ecoslay* movement and our community!

10 Stoknes, P.E. (2015). *What we think about when we try not to think about global warming: Toward a new psychology of climate action*. Chelsea Green Publishing.





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is the new
old.



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a number.

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From Cottagecore to *Clean Girl* to *Tradwife*: Recycling Femininity and Romanticizing Nature in Internet Aesthetics

Nari Sarmini

The rise of internet aesthetics – particularly *Cottagecore*, *Clean Girl*, and the *Tradwife* movement – are not merely about lifestyle and fashion but are deeply entangled with broader cultural and social shifts, as the digital and physical realms continuously shape one another. For example, in the podcast *A Bit Fruity*, Matt Bernstein and his guest speakers reflect how domesticity and femininity are being rebranded to align with traditionalist and capitalist values, and argue that these aesthetic trends are components of a broader conservative strategy.¹

Other video essayists and internet researchers have argued that the *Cottagecore* aesthetic evolved into the *Clean Girl* trend and has now re-emerged in the form of the *Tradwife* movement.² While each aesthetic³ appears distinct, they share common themes: a

1 Bernstein, M. (2025, February 7). *How Conservatism Infiltrated Pop Culture*. [Podcast episode]. A Bit Fruity podcast.

2 See also Shanspeare [@shanspeare]. (2024, November 24). Girl Math & Girl Power: The Conservative Politics of “Girl World” [Video]. Youtube. Retrieved April 9, 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BaKs8ijpG6c> and Jessica Kellgren-Frozard [@jessicaoutofthecloset] (2024, September 12). You don’t need to be her: why the “clean girl” trend is problematic [Video]. Youtube. Retrieved April 9, 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaRO9k1sSbg>.

3 Although the terms *aesthetic* and *trend* are often used interchangeably in this context, it’s important to note that *aesthetic* here refers not to its traditional definition deriving from Western philosophy – the study of beauty and taste – but rather to a visual style or “vibe” that circulates online. These aesthetics are primarily defined by their curated visual appeal and are widely disseminated through platforms like Instagram, TikTok and Pinterest.

longing for simplicity, an idealization of femininity, and a shared sense of purity. These trends do not only influence consumer behavior but also shape the way individuals form their identity and perceive their role within society and the environment. In this way, style becomes politics, and online culture functions as ideology.

But how are these aesthetics intertwined? And how does an internet trend – essentially a lifestyle or fashion trend – become entangled with an entire philosophy and way of living with significant socio-economic implications? And more importantly, in the context of *Ecoslay*, how do these trends engage with ecological themes, our surroundings, and the ways we interact with the environment?

This essay traces the lineage from *Cottagecore* to *Clean Girl* to *Trad-wife* in order to introduce and position *Ecoslay* as a new counter-aesthetic. By examining how femininity and nature have been visually and ideologically coded in recent internet cultures, I ask: how might *Ecoslay* be situated within this landscape of trends? What would it mean to reclaim ecological care and entanglement with nature without reproducing the oppressive politics, consumerism or regressive gender roles embedded in dominant aesthetics?

Rather than dismissing these aesthetics outright as mere regressions, the goal is to read them critically – as entry points into deeper reflections on femininity, sustainability, and care labor. In this context, the *Ecoslay Girl* emerges not simply as another aesthetic, but as a lived practice – one that centers ecological awareness and mutual care, all while keeping it *sexy*. Their⁴ way of being offers an alternative model that benefits not just humans, but non-human

⁴ The *Ecoslay Girl* is not defined by gender (least of all a binary one), class, or ethnic background. They can be anyone who commits to an ethic of care for the planet.

life forms and whole (eco-)systems, inviting a more expansive, relational approach to contemporary femininity and environmentalism.

1. Cottagecore and the hopeless Romantic

Cottagecore is an aesthetic that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as a romanticized retreat into nature, emphasizing self-sufficiency, traditional crafts, and rural life. It provides an escape from modern anxieties, like urban loneliness, by resurrecting a nostalgic past of pastoral beauty and slower living.

From the perspective of Romanticism, nature becomes an object of contemplation – something observed from a distance, admired for its beauty, power, and unpredictability. It evokes a sense of awe, whether standing at the top of a mountain, gazing at the vastness of the ocean or looking up into the starry night sky. This aesthetized, objectified nature is both sublime and terrifying at the same time. It relies on a subject-object relation that positions nature as something external and observed rather than participated in.⁵

This framing has shaped how we *still* perceive nature today, especially in urban settings – as something to admire or fear, rather than something we are fundamentally entangled with. Nature becomes a refuge, a backdoor escape when life becomes overwhelming. Like a forgotten attic – still part of the house, yet disconnected from daily life – it is seen as a separate, often romanticized space

⁵ This way of thinking is not accidental but comes from Cartesian dualism. The mind-body separation laid the groundwork for seeing nature as something outside of the human experience, rather than something we are part of. Although the Romantics reacted against Enlightenment rationalism, they still inherited this split. Thinkers like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant described the sublime as moments when a person faces the vastness or power of nature – not to feel united with it, but to feel awe and distance at the same time.



that offers calmness. As Timothy Morton puts it, “The ‘thing’ we call nature becomes, in the Romantic period and afterwards, a way of healing what modern society has damaged.”⁶ But this form of relation often takes place through idealization rather than entanglement. It maintains a fantasy of purity, otherness, and passive beauty – rather than recognizing the sometimes messy realities of living within ecological systems.

Cottagecore is deeply rooted in a conception of nature derived from Romanticism, as it idealizes life in nature while often denying its more labor-intensive and uncomfortable realities. Activities such as baking sourdough, foraging for mushrooms, or gardening are presented through a soft, filtered lens that emphasizes simplicity, beauty, and the product, but rarely acknowledges the physical and time-consuming labor they actually require. More physically demanding or viscerally intense practices – such as hunting or slaughtering animals – are noticeably absent. This selective portrayal reinforces a romanticized vision of rural life, distancing it from the bodily, material, and sometimes graphic realities that underpin such a way of living.

2. Aesthetics of Obedience and Defiance: *Clean Girl* to *Tradwife, Witch* to *Ecoslay Girl*

As shop doors and national borders reopened after the COVID-19 lockdown and societies returned to high productivity to fuel the accelerationist capitalist machine, the *Cottagecore* aesthetic domesticated into the *Clean Girl* trend, which retained some aspects of simplicity, but in the form of modern urban minimalism (talking dewy skin, slicked-back buns, Pilates body).

⁶ Morton, T. (2009). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Harvard University Press.

Beige trenchcoats and blue jeans replaced prairie dresses, and iced matcha lattes the sourdough starters.



This shift was not as organic – it was shaped by the makeup and skincare industry, which marketized the *Clean Girl* aesthetic as a new beauty ideal.⁷ Even without wearing visible makeup, consumers are encouraged to adopt a ten-step skincare routine – a regimen involving cleansers, toners, serums, and SPF – just to maintain the illusion of a “natural,” effortless glow.⁸ This trend draws heavily on the K-beauty industry where it is known as “glass skin,” referring to a flawlessly smooth, luminous, and poreless complexion.⁹

South Korean society has been widely criticized for reinforcing narrow and superficial standards of femininity, placing intense pressure on women to center their value around youthfulness, flawlessness, and external appearance.¹⁰ This emphasis not only

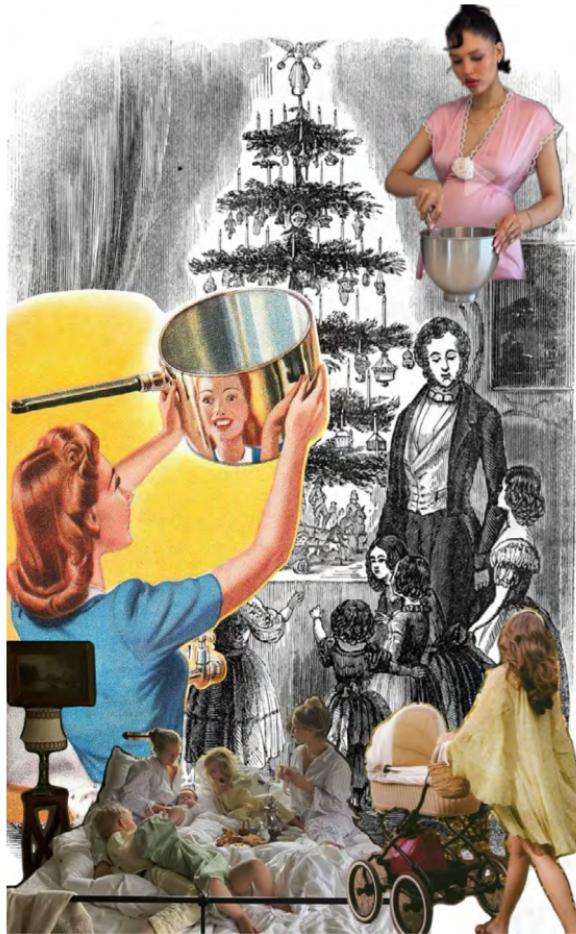
7 In a Harper's BAZAAR article from late 2021, the author explores the anticipated growth of the skincare industry in the upcoming year. They highlight terms like “skinimalism” and “clean” to characterize the aesthetic currently being targeted. See March, B. (2021, December 17). 8 beauty trends that will explode in 2022. *Harper's BAZAAR*. Retrieved August 12, 2025 from <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/uk/beauty/a38525352/beauty-trends-2022/>.

8 Balagam, I. (2024, July 6). Breaking Down the 10-Step Korean Skincare Routine. *Vogue*. Retrieved July 29, 2025 from https://www.vogue.com/article/korean-skin-care-routine?utm_.

9 The “glass skin” and “clean face” aesthetics can be seen as a continuation of the “no-makeup makeup” trend prevalent in many Western countries. In East Asia, however, it often centers more explicitly on achieving a fair, porcelain-like complexion – free from blemishes, discoloration, or even natural features such as beauty marks, aside from perhaps a single “signature” mole. This ideal is frequently maintained through dermatological treatments and strict skincare routines. Importantly, the preference for light skin in Korea is historically tied more to class than race: fair skin traditionally signified a life spent indoors, away from outdoor labor, and for women, it indicated roles such as caring for children and serving family members – making it a visible marker of higher social status. See Hu, E. (2023). *Flawless: Lessons in Looks and Culture from the K-Beauty Capital*. Penguin.

10 See Mina Le [@gremlita]. (2025, June 30). The Crazy World of Korea's Plastic Surgery Industry [Video]. Youtube. Retrieved July 29, 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BsBSgtkmjak>.

reflects conservative view points but especially the strong conformist culture prevalent in South Korean society, where fitting in and maintaining social harmony often means adhering to rigid beauty norms. In this sense, the *Clean Girl* inherits not only its products but also its gender politics – steeped in conservative and



conformist ideals that quietly reassert control over women's bodies and self-worth under the guise of self-care.

With populist right-wing parties recouping popularity in Europe and the USA, the *Tradwife* movement takes the conservative agenda further by explicitly reintroducing traditional gender roles and domestic ideals – the latter also prevalent in *Cottagecore*. By using nostalgia to render regressive gender norms appealing to contemporary digital culture, this lifestyle recycles long-standing associations between femininity, nature, and purity.

Historically, these associations were forged not only through ideology but through material systems of control. In the European context, as Silvia Federici argues in *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (2004), the rise of capitalism required the violent reorganization of land and bodies alike: the enclosure of the commons – meadows, wild pastures, lakes, forests – and the subjugation of women. They were increasingly tied to the domestic sphere, redefined as reproductive laborers and caregivers, framed as “closer to nature” and therefore less rational, less political, and more controllable. This symbolic association enabled both the marginalization of women and the exploitation of land under emerging capitalist systems.¹¹

Federici uses the figure of Caliban (as in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*) not only as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance, as seen in Caribbean literature, but also as a representation of the global working class – especially the exploited body as a site of struggle against capitalism. Closely linked to this figure of oppression is the witch Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, who was exiled from Algeria to an isolated island

11 Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia.

for her magical powers. Caliban inherits both a claim to the island and a legacy of otherness from her that will be violently stripped away by European colonizers. Sycorax embodies a range of female figures whom early capitalism had to eliminate to consolidate power: “[...]the heretic, the healer, the disobedient wife, the woman who dared to live alone, the obeha woman who poisoned the master’s food and inspired the slaves to revolt.”¹² Together, Caliban and Sycorax represent two interlinked modes of resistance: one rooted in class and colonial rebellion, the other in gendered and reproductive defiance. In this context, the witch reemerges as a powerful archetype – resisting enclosure, reproductive control, and colonial violence. The *Ecoslay Girl* draws from both of these legacies, yet they transcend the categories that once confined them. Free from fixed definitions of gender, race, or class, they embody a new form of political resistance: ecological care.

3. The Female Body: A Display of Alienation?

This symbolic connection between womanhood, the female body, and land persists today, particularly in some spiritual strands of ecofeminism where Earth is imagined as female, fertile, and divine. The metaphor of childbirth as a generative, life-giving force reinforces an essentialist association between women and nature – especially in a hyper-industrialized world where the nature-culture divide remains intact. Such narratives ripple through contemporary digital aesthetics. Silvia Federici argues that the feminist discourse on the body seeks to challenge and reclaim the degraded image of femininity, which has historically been tied to nature, matter, and corporeality – areas dominated and controlled by

12 Federici, S. (2004). *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia.

men. However, she emphasises the misconception of perceiving women's liberation as merely a "return to the body." Rather, the female body symbolizes a domain of reproductive labor that has been appropriated by men and the state, transforming it into a tool for producing labor power. This process enforces strict sexual norms, aesthetic standards, and punishments. Thus, the body represents a profound alienation that can only be overcome by dismantling the work-discipline that governs it.¹³

Federici extends Karl Marx's analysis on commodity fetishism¹⁴ to the domestic sphere, showing that capitalism not only relies on wage labor but also on unwaged reproductive and care work, mostly performed by women to keep the system running. Essential tasks such as cooking, cleaning or child-rearing are treated as "natural" or outside the economy, rendering them invisible and further alienating women from the value they create. In other words, the home is not outside capitalism, but it is deeply embedded in its functioning.

This lens helps us better re-contextualize not only the *Tradwife* movement but also the *Clean Girl* aesthetic, which promotes a polished look centered on self-discipline and high-efficiency. Unlike *Cottagecore* or *Tradwife* imagery, *Clean Girl* is modern and sleek, but still builds on the intensive labor of self-maintenance like skincare, grooming, and fitness. By presenting this as effortless, the actual financial and time costs behind this kind of lifestyle

13 Ibid.

14 Karl Marx argued that capitalist alienation occurs through the systematic concealment of labor in the value of commodities. What we see is the shiny product, not the work that produced it. This is what Marx called "commodity fetishism": the illusion that commodities possess inherent value, rather than the value of human labor embedded in them. See Marx, K. (1876). The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret thereof, Volume I, Chapter 1, Section 4, in: Capital. A Critique of Political Economy.

composed of organic food, regular Pilates reformer classes, and an expensive skin care routine is obscured.¹⁵

Furthermore, the *Clean Girl* aesthetic has faced criticism for promoting a narrow, racially coded standard of femininity, closely tied to whiteness, thinness, and elitism (see also the *Vanilla Girl* trend). What unites these three aesthetics is their ability to obscure and aestheticize labor, whether in the home, in the garden, or on the body itself, while blindly reinforcing broader capitalist and gendered ideals.¹⁶

Since the Romantic period, nature has been used to support the capitalist theory of value and to undermine it; to point out what is intrinsically human, and to exclude the human; to inspire kindness and compassion, and to justify competition and cruelty.¹⁷

Nevertheless, I argue that the actual consumption of an aesthetic's products is not essential to embody it – though money still accelerates achieving the desired look. Instead, digital appearance and content consumption now primarily shape our understanding of societal norms, reflecting a significant shift in how we perceive and adopt styles. This phenomenon is analogous to the “Romantic consumer” described by Timothy Morton: it is less about consu-

15 A counter-trend that emerged in 2024 alongside Charli xcx's highly marketed “brat summer” is the *Messy Girl*, which stands in direct contrast to the *Clean Girl*. This trend rejects daily self-care routines and strict diets, often embracing a lifestyle fueled by alcohol, nicotine, and other substances instead. This trend evokes the continuation of the ‘90s heroine chic, reminiscent of figures like Courtney Love, Kate Moss, or Fiona Apple. See Fisher, J. (2025 April, 8). “Messy Girl”: Warum dieser Trend noch schädlicher ist als die Clean-Girl-Ästhetik. *Elle Germany*. Retrieved August 12, 2025 from <https://www.elle.de/lifestyle-femaleempowerment-social-media-messy-girl-aesthetik>.

16 Cao, S. (2023, February 7). White women want their power back. Substack. Retrieved August 9, 2025 from https://stefficao.substack.com/p/white-women-want-their-power-back?utm_source=direct&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web.

17 Morton, T. (2009). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Harvard University Press.

ming material goods and more about internalizing and projecting idealized identities. As he exemplifies, “[O]ne doesn’t just eat carrots, one styles oneself as a carrot eater.”¹⁸ He describes a person who engages with nature primarily for emotional or aesthetic satisfaction, treating it as a source of personal meaning while ignoring its material or ecological reality. Morton critiques this attitude for reinforcing the harmful divide between nature and culture, and for enabling superficial environmentalism that avoids real ecological responsibility. Much like commodity fetishism which alienates the labor and systems behind production, this mindset idealizes nature as something separate and pure, to be admired or preserved, rather than understanding the dynamic processes from which it emerges.

When it comes to consumer identities today, they are frequently performed and shaped in digital spaces. Here, it is less about the consumption of actual consumer goods and more about the projection of identities onto them. The digital self reflects not only one’s own desire for belonging, but also the expectations and perceptions of others – hence, visibility. In this sense, just as one no longer needs to physically consume products to be part of an aesthetic, the performativity of digital identity enacts social belonging both individually and relationally. The body, in this context, becomes a canvas shaped by algorithmic influence and visual expectation.

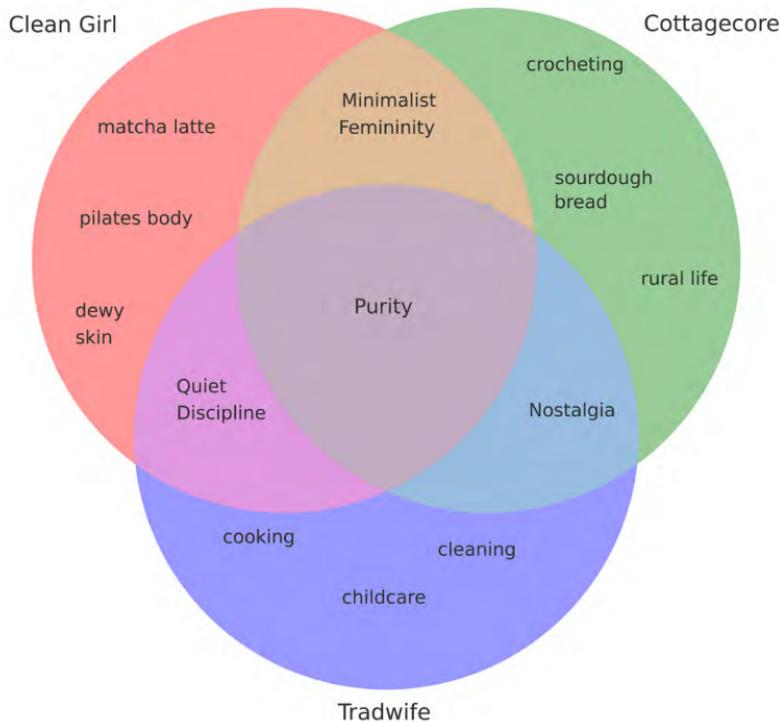
4. Purity, Patriarchy, and Power

The discussed internet trends reflect the contradictions of contemporary life: an idealized past coexists with a digital present, and

18 Ibid.

a desire for simplicity mediated through consumer culture. Pre-modern thinking in a post-digital world. Ultimately, these aesthetics reveal not only how the internet shapes cultural ideals but also our perception of gender, labor, and the environment.

When *Cottagecore*, *Clean Girl*, and *Tradwife* are visually represented in a Venn diagram, their intersection reveals a defining concept: purity. Across these three, purity is idealized in different ways – through an untouched rural life, an effortlessly “natural” beauty, or a morally virtuous homemaker. This emphasis on purity



reflects long-standing cultural narratives that associate women with innocence, immaculateness, and is reflected in the backwards image people often have of nature itself.

Purity is not just an aesthetic ideal, but a deeply ideological construct that has historically been used to reinforce conservative values. In these internet aesthetics, purity is tied to a specific vision of nature: one that is orderly, harmonious, and untainted by values of liberation. This mirrors the way conservative ideologies often romanticize a return to a “natural” order, particularly in gender roles.¹⁹

Psychological research supports the idea that purity is a key driver of conservative and authoritarian ideologies. Neuropsychological studies by Dr. Robert Altemeyer identify three major factors that underpin right-wing authoritarianism: a fear of impurity, a resistance to change from long-standing traditions, and a strict adherence to social hierarchies. Research suggests that individuals who gravitate toward far-right ideologies exhibit an intensified emotional response to perceived contamination – whether physical, cultural, or moral. This exaggerated disgust reaction translates into a fixation on purity in various forms: ethnic purity, religious purity, artistic purity, national purity, sexual purity, and cultural purity.²⁰

The *Tradwife* movement explicitly connects purity to morality, positioning traditional femininity as a safeguard against perceived birth rate decline and population collapse. The link between aesthetic purity and ideological purity is particularly evident here,

19 See the trend “I am not a feminist” on TikTok: <https://www.tiktok.com/discover/im-not-a-feminist>. Retrieved July 29, 2025.

20 See Altemeyer’s Right-Wing Authoritarianism Scale in Altemeyer, B. (1996). *The authoritarian specter*. Harvard University Press.

where a “pure” vision of womanhood, free from modern feminist influences, is idealized through the digital visibility of home-making tasks such as baking Easter cookies from scratch for your toddlers.²¹

Influencer and model Nara Smith has emerged as a prominent face of this aesthetic, often portrayed as the picture-perfect home-maker. Yet her presence also reveals contradictions within the *Tradwife* narrative: as a BIPOC woman and a working model, she doesn’t fully conform to the white, non-working stereotype associated with this role. However, her Mormon faith, frequent domestic content, and growing number of children reinforce key *Tradwife* ideals, particularly those surrounding devotion to family and the domestic.²² This intersects with pronatalist ideologies advocated by prominent figures like Elon Musk, who promote high birth rates – especially among certain demographics – as a means of preserving “civilization.”²³

In this way, the *Tradwife* aesthetic becomes entangled with broader political currents, where femininity, fertility, and morality are mobilized to support deeply conservative and fascist agendas, in which women’s reproductive capacities are treated as national resources. Critics warn that these narratives are reviving eugenic

21 Nara Smith [@naraazizasmith]. (2025, April 18). part 2 tomorrow! #easyrecipe #homecooking #easter #fyp #momtok #toddlersoftiktok #baking [Video]. TikTok. Retrieved July 29, 2025 from <https://www.tiktok.com/@naraazizasmith/video/7494758347581951278>.

22 Betancourt, B. (2025, April 2). The Un-Trad Rise of Nara Aziza Smith. *Harper's BAZAAR Arabia*. Retrieved July 25, 2025 from <https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/culture/junior/the-un-trad-rise-of-nara-aziza-smith>.

23 Shoichet, C. E., Brunswick, D., & Duerson, M. (2025, April 10). Tech bros and tradwives are unlikely allies in a little-known movement that's gaining momentum. CNN. Retrieved July 25, 2025 from <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/04/10/us/pronatalism-elon-musk-birth-rates-cec>.

ideas – valuing certain populations over others, defining who should reproduce (and who should not), and promoting quantity over autonomy. In this context, the *Tradwife* aesthetic – when paired with pronatalist ideology – can serve not only as a life-style choice, but a vehicle for regressive, racialized, and patriarchal biopolitics disguised as “empowerment.” Reproductive technologies like in vitro fertilization (IVF) play a significant role not only in enabling elite pronatalist goals, but also in exposing inequalities. While IVF is often seen as a technology that enables reproductive autonomy, it is often regarded in conservative circles as a means of engineering ideal offspring: genetically screened, carried by surrogates, and accessible primarily to wealthy, predominantly white families.²⁴ Its use can blur the line between reproductive freedom and technocratic population control, especially when embedded in nationalist or market-driven agendas.

[I]n the Enlightenment, nature became a way of establishing racial and sexual identity, and science became the privileged way of demonstrating it. The normal was set up as different from the pathological along the coordinates of the *natural and the unnatural*.²⁵

Here again, what is considered as normal/natural and pathological/unnatural can be tied to a very strict view on purity and contamination. Ultimately, the purity ideal not only shapes how these trends engage with femininity and reproduction, but also

24 Some loud voices of the pronatalist movement’s “tech-camp” advocate for in vitro fertilization and embryo screening for health and intelligence. At a pre-Natal Conference cocktail party in Austin in April 2025, they introduced journalists to leaders in gene editing and genetic engineering. See Hagen, L. (2025, April 25). They say they want Americans to have more babies. What's beneath the surface? NPR. Retrieved July 29, 2025 from <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/25/nx-s1-5371718/pronatalist-birth-rate-musk-natal-conference>.

25 Morton, T. (2009). *Ecology without nature: Rethinking environmental aesthetics*. Harvard University Press.

how society continues to define and interact with nature itself – as something to be managed, corrected, cleansed, and “saved.”

5. Reclaiming Aesthetics as Ecological and Feminist Tools

While *Cottagecore*, *Clean Girl*, and *Tradwife* may recycle long-standing ideals of purity, femininity and nature, their popularity also signals a deep cultural yearning: for simplicity, connection, and meaning in an increasingly fractured world. Despite their flaws and dangers, these aesthetics reflect not only a nostalgic retreat into nature and domesticity but also a potential opening for re-engaging with life in ways that could be more conscious, critical, and transformative.

If approached reflexively, these trends can become entry points for deeper ecological awareness. *Cottagecore*'s emphasis on homegrown food, crafting, and slowness could shift from romanticization to political action – highlighting the environmental cost of mass production and the importance of sustainable, localized living. The *Clean Girl* aesthetic, despite its consumerist edge, gestures toward care – for the body, for wellness, through discipline – which could be reimagined beyond capitalist self-optimization, namely as a politics of self-respect and social responsibility.²⁶ Likewise, the *Tradwife* movement's focus on domestic labor – often devalued and invisibilized – can be reframed (and renamed!) not as a return to submission, but as an opportunity to address reproductive and care

26 Just as trends come and go, several new aesthetics have emerged in direct opposition to the Clean Girl look. Recently, the hashtag #Purseface has been trending, introduced by none other than Hailey Bieber, the figurehead of the Clean Girl aesthetic. It refers to doing your makeup quickly, using whatever you can find at the bottom of your purse, like a lip liner. See McMenamy, A. (2025, August 7). Purseface Is The Low Effort Beauty Trend That's Quickly Replacing The Clean Girl Aesthetic. Betches. Retrieved August 12, 2025 from <https://betches.com/purseface-low-effort-beauty-trend/>.

work as essential forms of labor, worthy of recognition, redistribution, and rethinking it beyond gender binaries.

To deconstruct the conservative ideologies digital aesthetics risk reinforcing, we must make visible what they obscure: the labor behind the image, the systems behind the ideal, and the histories beneath the surface. That means disentangling purity from morality, femininity from subservience, and nature from passive admirability. It also means crafting new cultural narratives – ones that no longer cast nature or women as things to be tamed, curated, or consumed, but as agents in their own right.

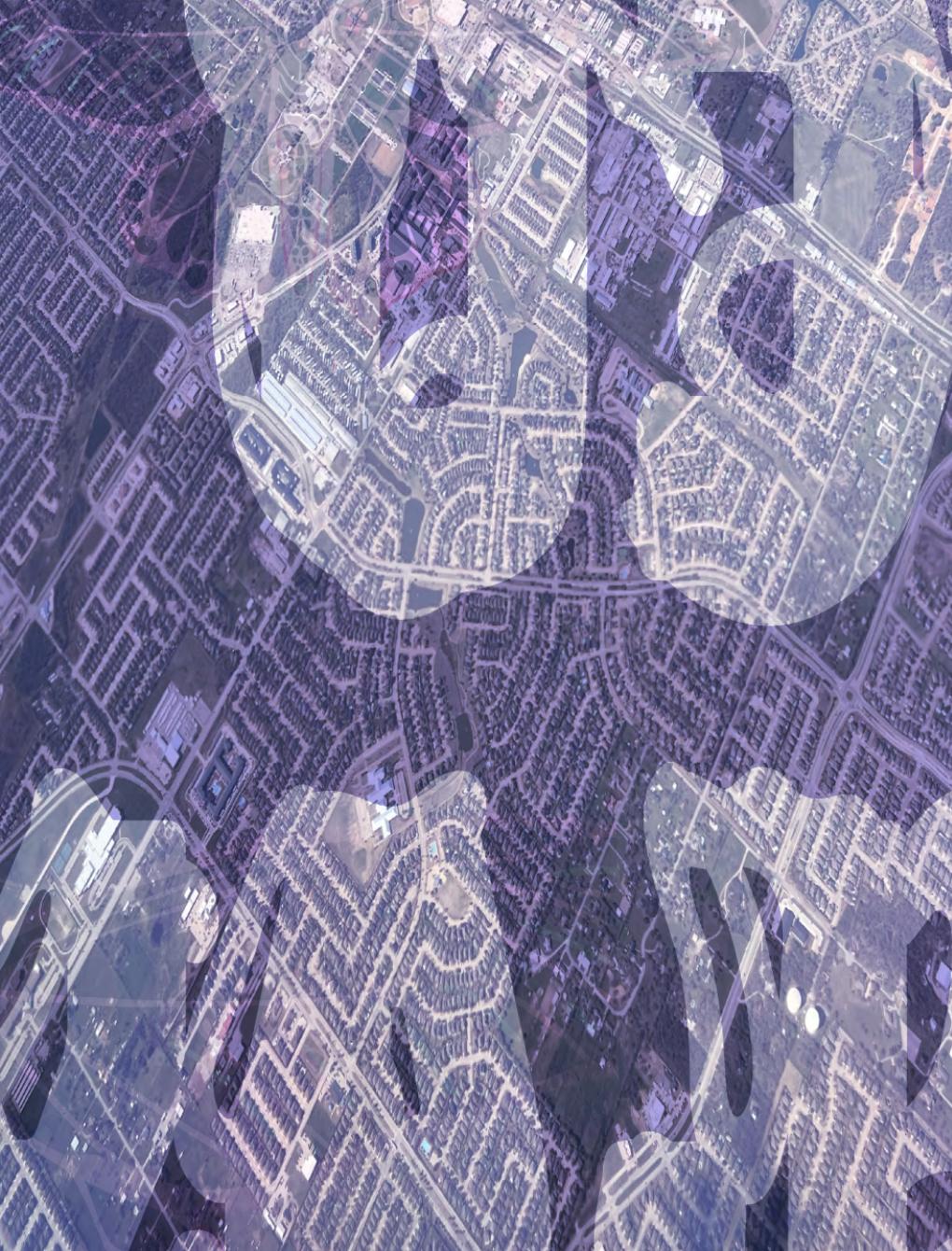
This is where the *Ecoslay Girl* emerges as a critical reimaging. Rather than approaching nature as an aesthetic backdrop or moral refuge, they engage with it as a living relationship. They garden, compost, forage, and learn from seasonal change. Their hands, nails and bodies get dirty – not in a symbolic gesture of “authenticity,” but through daily acts of care, repair, and connection – entrenched in muddy waters and composted matter. They disrupt consumerist models of femininity by embedding ecological consciousness in embodied, reciprocal practice. It is not about being perfect, it is about being accountable.

The *Ecoslay movement* also challenges traditional environmentalism by centering those historically excluded from it: BIPOC, working-class, and immigrant communities who have long practiced sustainability – not as a lifestyle trend, but as tradition, resistance, and survival. It honors ancestral knowledge, collective wisdom, and radical forms of care that extend far beyond minimalist aesthetics or homesteading tutorials. The word *slay*, rooted in Black and Latinx drag and Ballroom culture, celebrates fierce self-expression, defiance, and unapologetic presence. Reclaiming

that energy, *Ecoslay* embodies a politics of ecological care that is grounded, joyful, and uncompromising.

Ultimately, internet aesthetics hold more than surface-level appeal. They reflect our cultural contradictions and desires for transformation. If read critically and reimagined creatively – through frameworks like *Ecoslay* – they can become tools for building more equitable, ecological, and care-centered ways of living.









I-Slay-and

paraCIR & Daniel H. Pineda

I-Slay-and was an island mapping workshop instructed by the para-Center for Island Research (paraCIR) and Daniel H. Pineda at the Kaisermühlen district of Vienna in spring 2025. During the field trip, participants were introduced to the region's transformation from a wetland and fishing ground into an unregulated settlement area in the early 20th century, to a city-trash-dump which finally mutated into a garden in the 1960s. This land is now surrounded by Austria's tallest buildings and the headquarters of the United Nations.

Following the methodologies of paraCIR, the participants were asked to share their visual interpretation of SLAYING in relation to this region.

To do so, they mapped the region in four installments, guided by the following questions:

I – What do you see? Make a map of where we are.

II – What is slaying? Picture it.

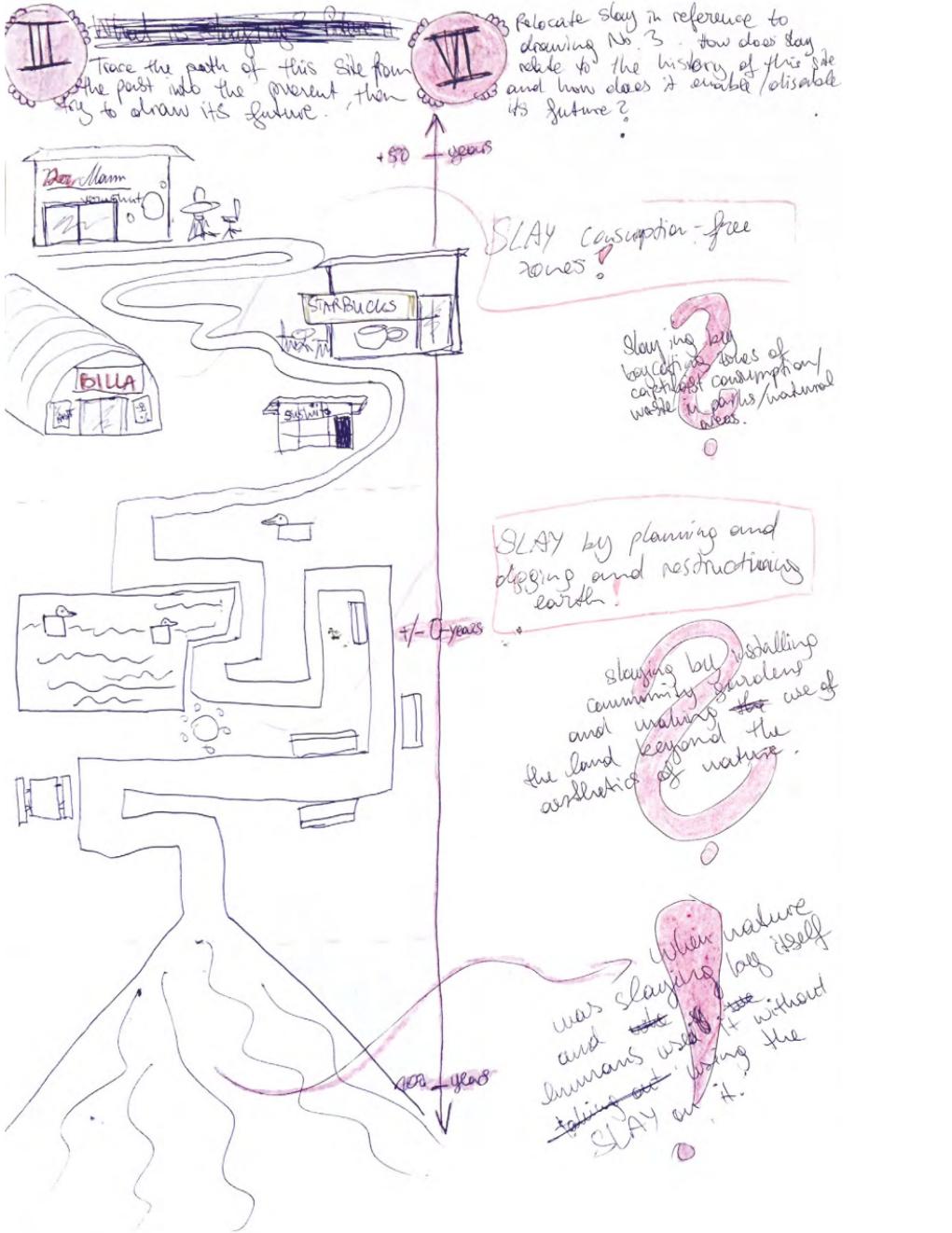
III – Trace the path of this site from the past to present to future.

IV – Relocate “slay” in reference to drawing III. How does it relate to the history of this site? How does it enable/disable its future?

During the workshops, conversations sparked questions like:

What's more slay – controlling and managing ecosystems, or rewilding the land? Building high shiny towers on top of trash or slaying down capitalistic development and letting space for worm-eating crows and colorful dears?

What you can see in the following pages are both the Eco-slayed vision of Kaisermühlen as well as the Danubian critique of the *Ecoslay* movement. These maps function not only as guides to understand the region or the movement, but also as testaments to the transformations they have undergone and continue to undergo.





What is Slaying? Picture it.

- is destruction
- is not giving a damn
- is the ~~actual~~ opposite of caring much

SLAYING norms or gender codes can be liberating /fostering confidence/ create culture (as in public culture)

But SLAYING a landscape can be destructive and unequal. Slaying a landscape means to ~~kill~~ ~~the~~ structure it based on the needs of humans with power.

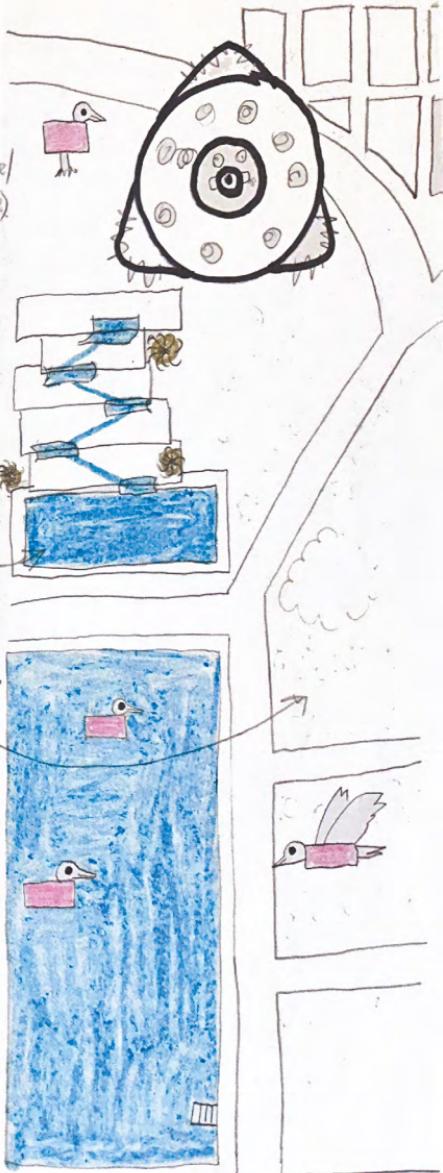
Putting it under control or letting it fulfill the decorative needs of a city

Like this, cityscapes become ~~and~~ ~~are~~ a parallel to natural landscapes.

An excavator/digger is the ultimate slayer of landscape. The urban planner is its advocate.

Plans in their two-dimensional form are their contact.

What do you see? Make a map of where we are.



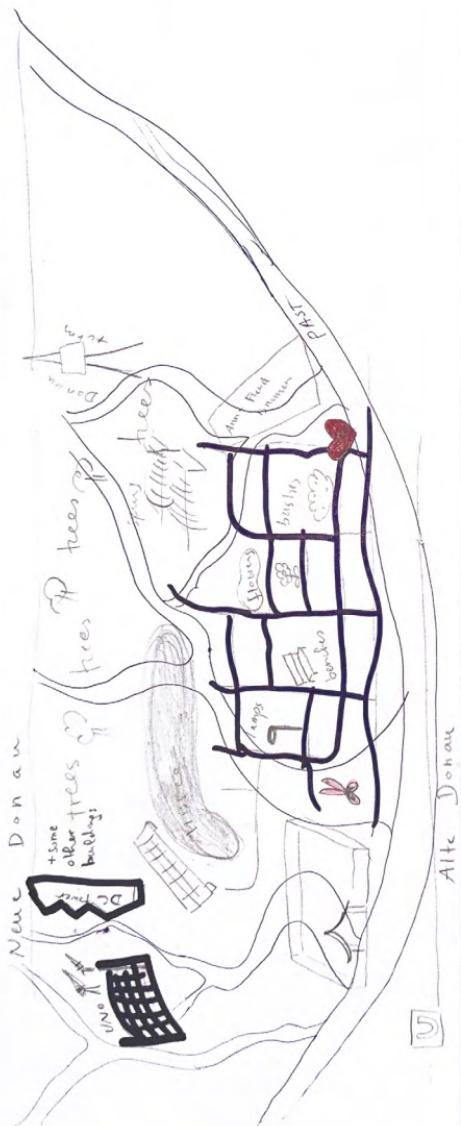
IV) Relocate "slay" now in
reference to drawing nr. 3.

How does it relate to the history
of this site & how does it en-/disable
its future?

It either can be slayed in sense of
the parc getting destroyed, demolished and used for
building housing infrastructure -
with a small part of the parc
remaining, probably the horticulture
area.

Or · They let the plants stay again
by not interfering too much, cutting
everything down, ^{to} mowing.

I) What do you see?
Make a map of where we are.



II What is slaying?
Picture it.

- We are.
- The flowers.
- The meticulously shaped garden slays the uncontrollable growth of plants and bushes and trees.
- The tall buildings slay the ~~open~~ park landscape.
- The gardeners are slaying with their mecca-like tractors and other sharp gardening tools.

III Trace the path of this site from the past into the present. Then, try to draw its future.



I What do you see?
Make a map of where we are?

II What is Slaying? (verb)
What is Draw it Picture

- I see tamed "NATURE"
I see high gloss buildings
I see pumped WATER



I see relatively less tamed "NATURE"

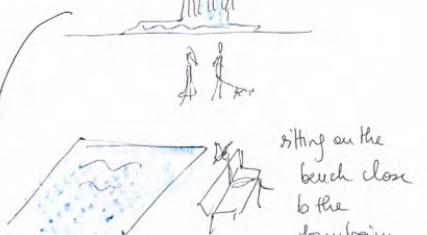
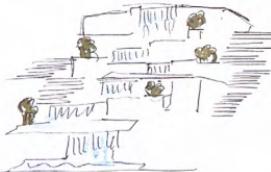
Slaying is being very cool, impressive modern, fashionable.

This fountain I see is very slay. It is slaying. It is very sleek, the water is clear and shines bright. Before humans used the power of the natural ^{water} flow of the Danube to find grain (Mühle). Now, Danube has been tamed and humans use electric power to pump the water of this fountain.

NATURAL FLOW + technology (muh) = ENERGY (+ FLOODS occasionally)

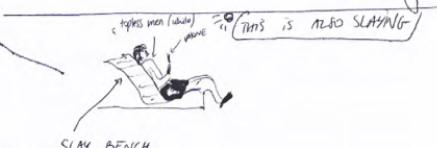
ENERGY + technology = CONTROLLED FLOW OF WATER (+ SLAYING)

THE SLAY FUNCTION ↓



sitting on the beach close to the fountain

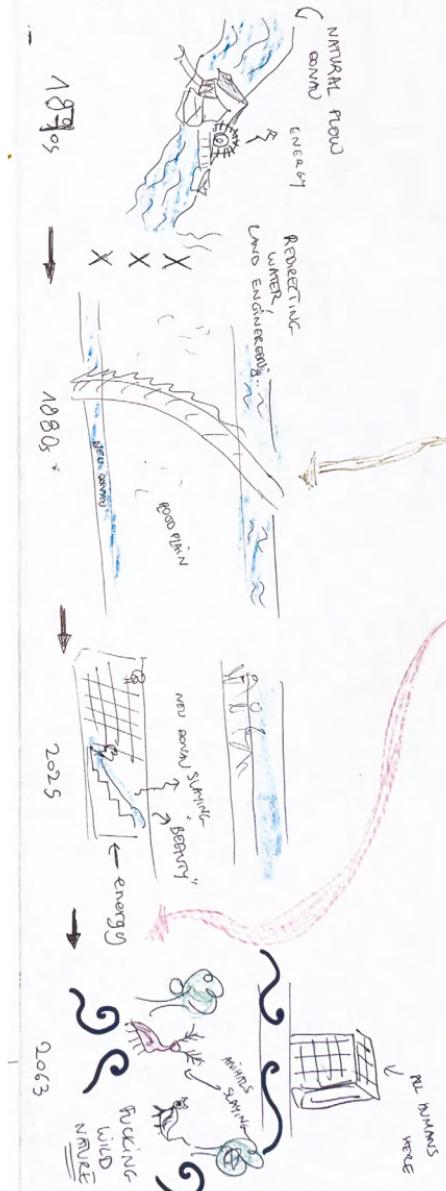
is slaying



↑ takes man (water) away = "This is also SLAYING"

SLAY BENCH

III Trace the path of this site from the past into the present. Then, try to draw its future -



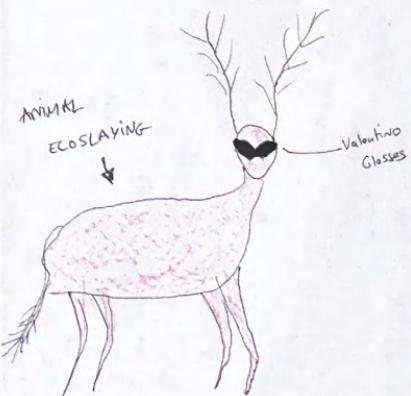
IV relocate "SLAY" (as a noun) in reference to drawing

3. how does it relate to the history of this site. How does it enable / disable it's future? (slay)

There are two types of slay.
old fashioned slay from the 1970s ("Thirty Glorious") which enabled the present through control over nature. (Killing/slaying Natural ecosystems).
and the future of slay, which means restoring natural ecosystems while being beautiful, cool and respectful of humans and non-humans -

The first type of slay happened where they engineered the dams and created fenced nature parks, dams, UV city and full of concrete UV center.

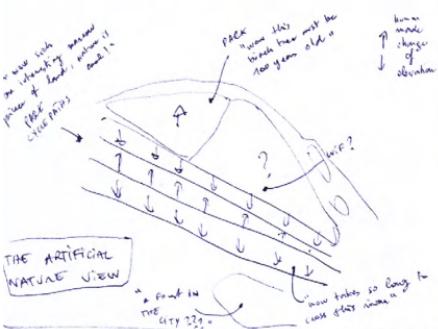
The next slay (ecoslay) will happen as we rebuild this area, stop having straight lines. Animals will be here ecoslaying.



I

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

MAKE A MAP OF WHERE WE ARE.



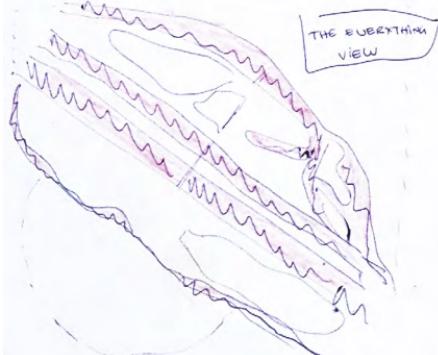
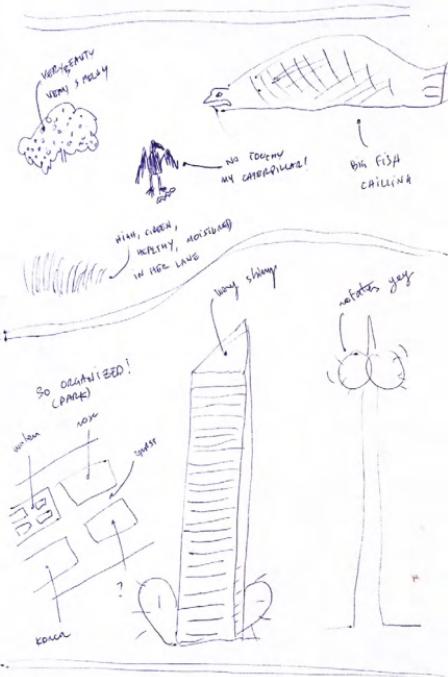
THE MONEY / DEBT VIEW



II

WHAT IS SAYING?

PICTURE IT!



★ THE ECONOMIST MOST LIVABLE CITY IN THE WORLD (BETTER THAN CALGARY)! ★

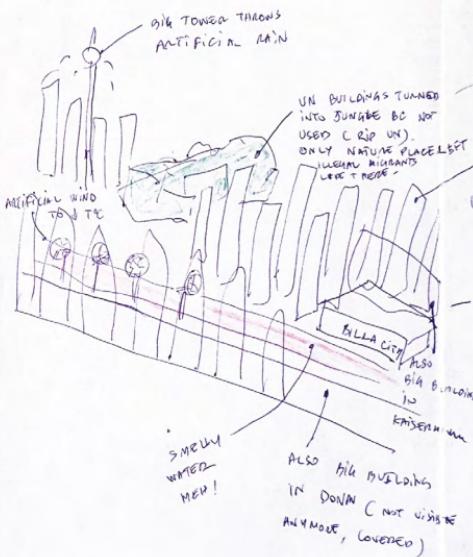
III

TRACE THE PATH OF
THIS SITE FROM PAST
TO PRESENT THEN DRAW
THE FUTURE

PAST = SEE I

PRESERENT = SEE II

FUTURE :



IV

RELOCATE "SLAY" IN REF
TO III. HOW DOES IT RELATE
TO THE HISTORY OF SITE?
HOW DOES IT ENABLE / DISABLE
ITS FUTURE?

PAST

OLD winding
river

→ SLAY! BEAUTIFUL
NATURAL RESOURCE

ENABLED

ENERGY, BUSINESS

DISABLER

Flooding

PREDICTED

THERE
AVAILA

Lucky
TALL

↓ (C (yay))

↓
SLAY! SHOWCASE OF AUSTRIAN
CRAFTSMANSHIP AND INTERNATIONAL CO.

ENABLED

UN

DISABLER
CONSULTANTS
UN

FUTURE

NOT SLAY.

UN JUNGLE IS PRETTY COOL.

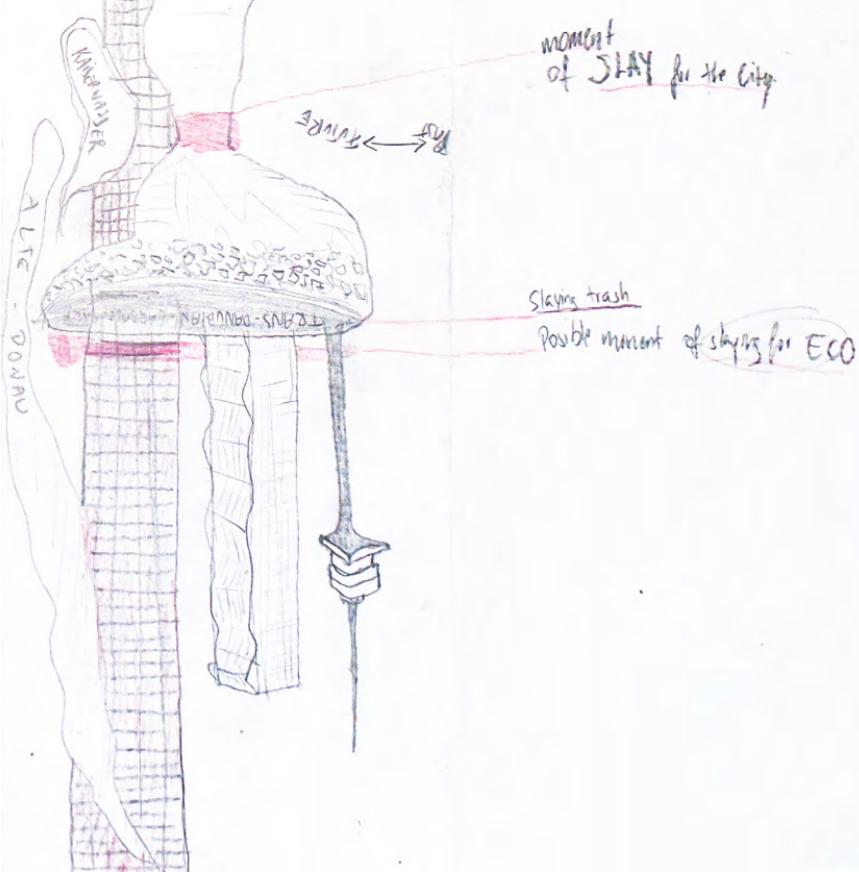
ENABLED

SOMON OVER.

DISABLER

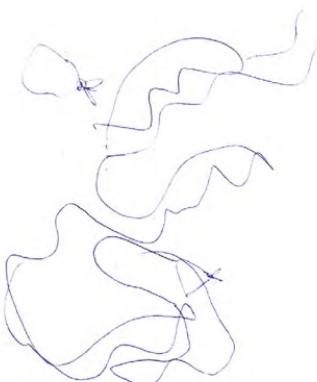
BY DESIGN.





III

Trace the path from this site
from the past into the present
trace its future.



I DON'T
KNOW
REALITY
DEPENDS

REVERSED HIS LAND TO INTEGRATE
THE TRADE COULD BE THE SAME
WE CAN NOT WAIT ON THE SIDE
OF TRADE (AND BECOME A MALL)
OR KEEPS BUILD MORE HOUSES
BY SAME USE FARMERS NEEDS SO
BUT THEY DECIDE TO SO
CREATE MARCH FARMING
DO WHAT TO THIS LAND
THIS A BORN LAND? WHAT & THE
NATURAL ECONOMY OR FARM?
MANY HOMES WILL BE A PARK
SOMETHING PREDICTABLE WITH
A POSITION MADE OF GROW

IV

Belmont Slag now (a ~~broken~~)
in reference to drawing 3
how does it relate to the
history of this site and
how does it enable / disable
its future?

W
E
S
O
R

T A M E D
U N
V I R G I N I A
S T A T E

V A N I S H E D
G I V E N
W H Y ?

V A N I S H E D
G I V E N
W H Y ?

(I) what do you see?
Make a map of where we are.

A garden so big it needs a little train to conquer the fish so proper, they float effortlessly through the rounded lake. Cool, a water chicken, they are very rare. Let's go beg to the laundress it is freshly cut! Someone stepped on a mushroom but we still gasped when we saw it. Where are we? Here for the first time. Apparently on a lot of trash. But you can't see or smell it. And it looks like every other public park. And I say this in an exciting way. Last time, when I walked into uncharted nature, I saw a wild pig (that was magical and scary). Here there are only worms that feast on caterpillars.

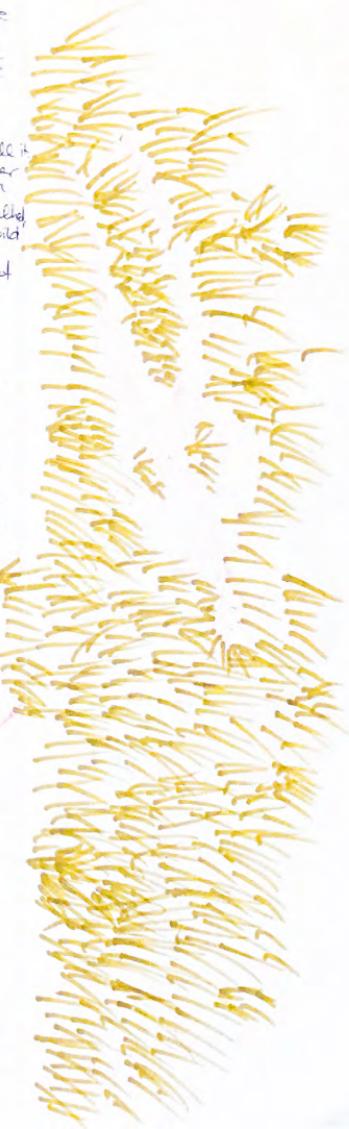
(II) What is slaying?
The tree in garbage grass and
tan in the sun.
It's morday, & nice. It smells like
grill and grass. I would love to
take a nap in the bushes.

feast is
uncovered so
nicely



I'M LAZY AND I CAN SEE

A DEPICTION OF THE
DONAUPARK WITH LITTLE
EFFORT (you get the point)











Doves the Color of Lead

Ramona Gomez

When Mohammed is fleeing from the Queresh,
He hides in a cave.

Spiders weave a web over the entrance and dove makes a nest,
so his pursuers do not bother to look inside
and he is saved.

The dove in this tale
is the common street pigeon.
Also known as the Rock Dove,
Or *Columba livia*, meaning
Dove the Color of Lead.

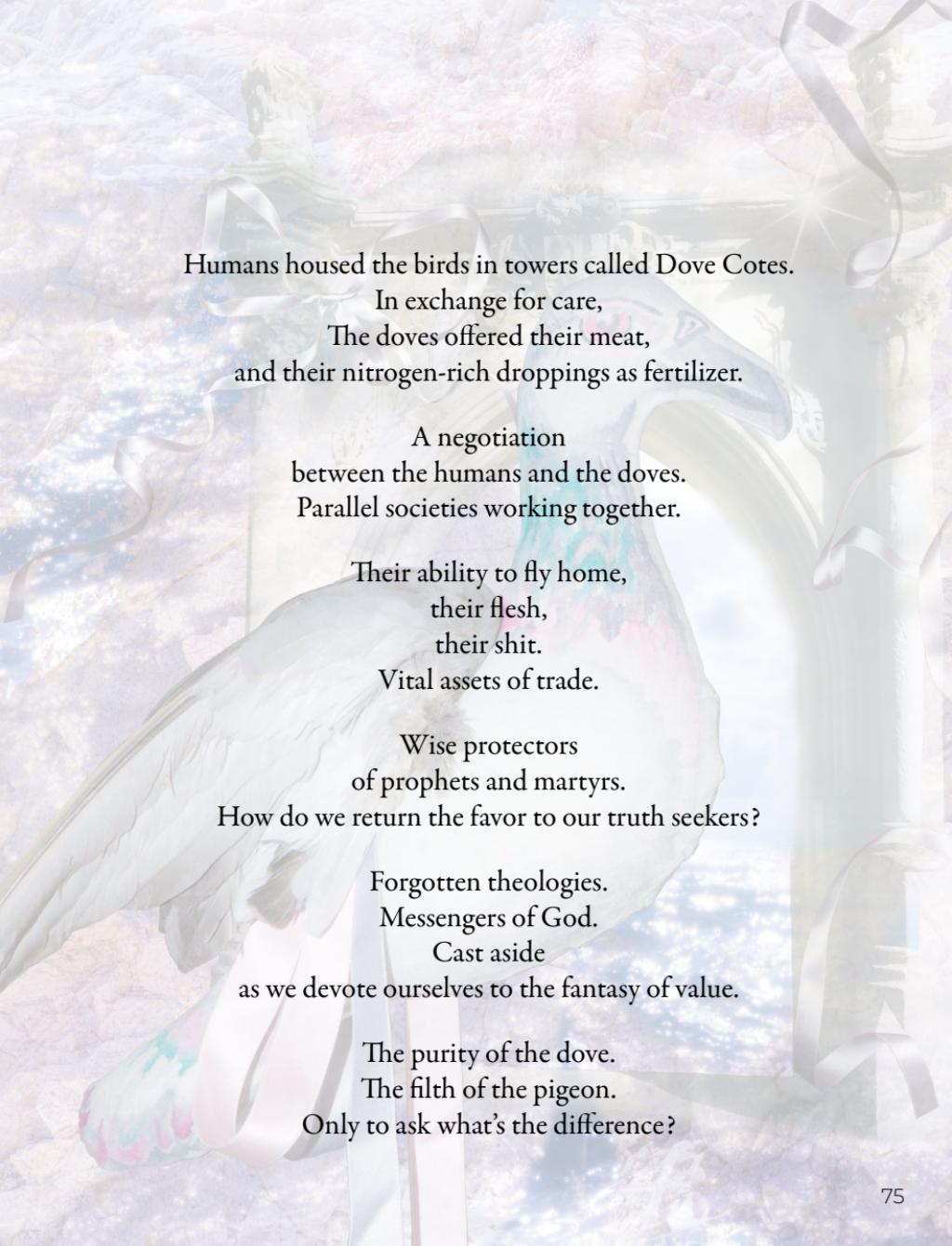
Where did the pigeons come from?
They haven't always just been there.

Adorning decorative facades,
spreading seeds and debris alike.

This is a tale of the doves' fall from grace.
The descent into pigeonhood.

A construction of value
spun by the histories of Imperialism
and the fantasies of Accelerated Capitalism.

Human teeth marks on pigeon bones.
Egypt 3000 b.c.
Evidence of our earliest encounters.



Humans housed the birds in towers called Dove Cotes.
In exchange for care,
The doves offered their meat,
and their nitrogen-rich droppings as fertilizer.

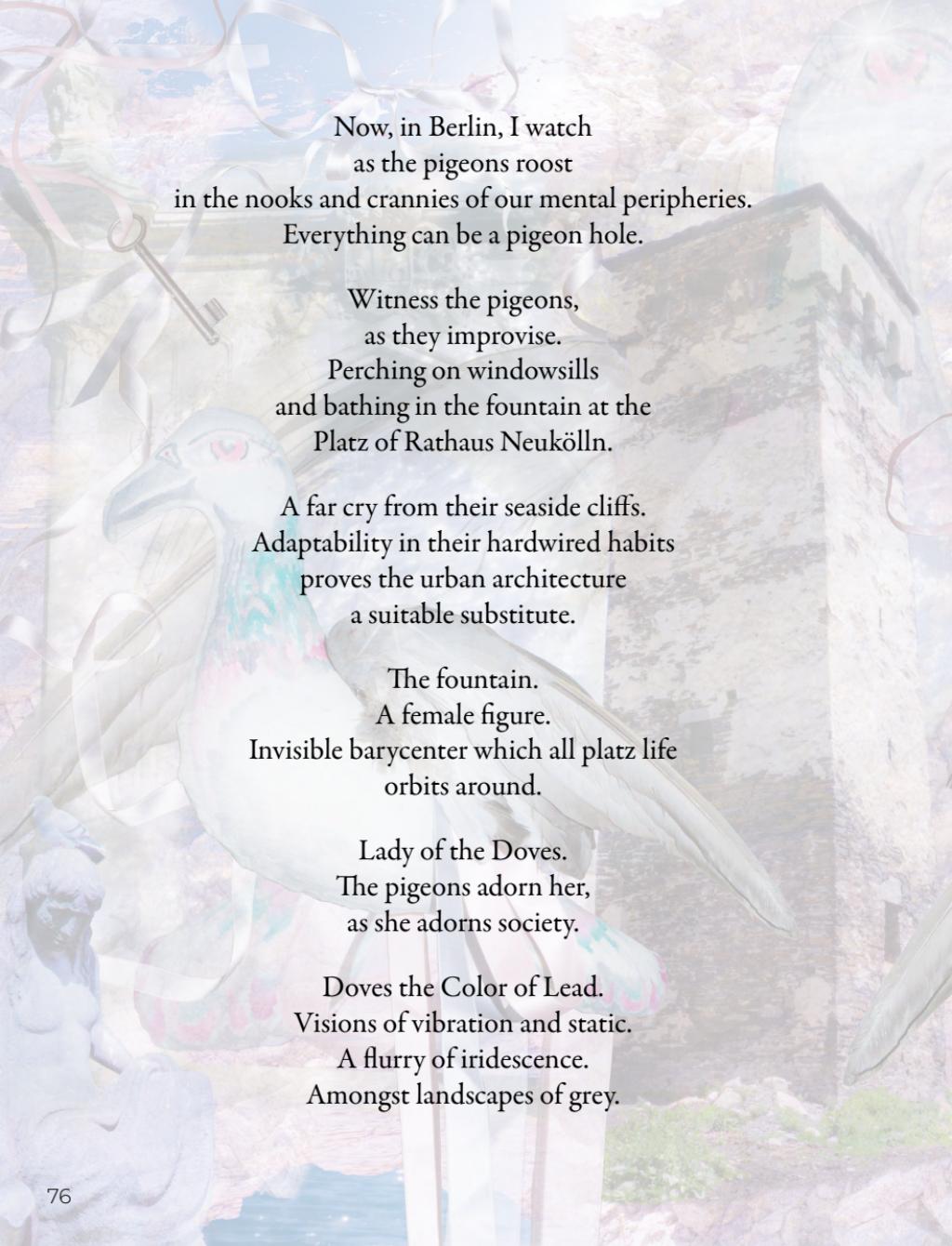
A negotiation
between the humans and the doves.
Parallel societies working together.

Their ability to fly home,
their flesh,
their shit.
Vital assets of trade.

Wise protectors
of prophets and martyrs.
How do we return the favor to our truth seekers?

Forgotten theologies.
Messengers of God.
Cast aside
as we devote ourselves to the fantasy of value.

The purity of the dove.
The filth of the pigeon.
Only to ask what's the difference?



Now, in Berlin, I watch
as the pigeons roost
in the nooks and crannies of our mental peripheries.
Everything can be a pigeon hole.

Witness the pigeons,
as they improvise.
Perching on windowsills
and bathing in the fountain at the
Platz of Rathaus Neukölln.

A far cry from their seaside cliffs.
Adaptability in their hardwired habits
proves the urban architecture
a suitable substitute.

The fountain.
A female figure.
Invisible barycenter which all platz life
orbits around.

Lady of the Doves.
The pigeons adorn her,
as she adorns society.

Doves the Color of Lead.
Visions of vibration and static.
A flurry of iridescence.
Amongst landscapes of grey.

Social outcasts.
We consume objects of mass manufacture.
Pigeons consume our waste.
How many beings of dignity can we throw away?

We've consumed you.
Now you consume us.

We look to a future which doesn't exist.
You try to tell us something.
That it's time to survive.
But we are blinded by the shine of rewards.

Look!
Doves the Color of Lead.
How they've endured.
How we must, too.





Witnessing the Chaos from Above

Ramona Gomez

I grew up with birds.

My grandmother, born in Berlin in 1931, survived WWII.

After the war, she obtained her nurse's license.

Leaving behind Berlin and the darkness of her past,
she set out for California.

In its golden light she created a full life.

She had a family, animals, learned to fly planes,
taught swimming lessons from her backyard pool atop a hill, at
the end of the cul-de-sac.

All against the backdrop of sunny skies, palm and orange trees.

She cultivated an exotic parrot collection.

I grew up with birds.

As a baby, I was bit by a Red Crowned Parrot
and still have the scar.

The memories of war never left my grandmother,
Try as she might, she couldn't escape the basement in which
she hid to save her life.

I experienced her horrors vicariously through her stories
and flashbacks.

I sought out Berlin, to understand.

There, I missed the birds.

So I began noticing the pigeons.

And unlocked a secret greater than I could have ever imagined.

Pigeons are synanthropes, animals living in close relationship
with humans for millennia.

To witness contemporary urban pigeons
in the current constellation with us

is to witness thousands of years of entanglement with the narrative of human global imperialism.

In Berlin, many different groups are invested in the task of caring for pigeons,

such as Turkish-German pigeon Fanciers, pigeon Advocacy Groups, and numerous independent actors.

Pigeon activist initiatives such as

HauptStadt Tauben and Stadttauben Projekt
rescue injured birds, nurse sick pigeons,
and facilitate humane population control
through egg swapping.

Berlin faces critical questions about the future
regarding class tensions

as a result of diaspora and migration,
as well as the issue of integration vs. assimilation
in the face of the current rising wave of neo-fascism.

Specifically Turkish-Germans, a population that has built the country's industry and economy since the mid-20th century through the *Gastarbeiter* initiative,

face increased hostility.

The migration of pigeons and the history of Turkish migration in Berlin intersect, as pigeon fancying,
or domestically raising pigeons,
dates back in Turkish culture for centuries.

Turkish migration to Germany was popularized by the *Gastarbeiter* initiative beginning in the 1960s.

Migrants to re-built the infrastructure and economy
of the war-destroyed country
without the certainty of citizenship for themselves

or their children.
In early 2000s Berlin,
on the roofs of abandoned warehouses
and empty lots
of the former East,
Turkish-Germans kept domestic pigeons.
Fostering their generational knowledge of
caring for the birds.

Humans and birds
caught in the net of migration.
In an unfamiliar and unwelcoming place.
The Neo-Colonial project attempted to sever cultural memory
of language, craftsmanships, spiritual practices.
But the doves took to breeding in the empty lots.

To live in Berlin Neukölln in 2025
is to experience multiple realities at once.
Trace an animal, plant, fashion, shop sign design back through
a history of globalization and extraction.
We are here now, but also everywhere else at another time, too.

The Kiez of Neukölln functions as an urban ecosystem.
All the flora and fauna, humans, working in symbiosis
to keep the whole healthy and functioning.

Now, Neukölln finds itself in the larger German current political context of anti-Muslim rhetoric, Palestine solidarity movements, deportations of migrants and refugees, and city-level increased police funding and brutality.

Corporate urban development replaces locally owned neighborhood businesses, endangering the Kiez we call home.

As citizens, embodying methods of cultural and biological preservation is crucial.

As the public discourse, shaped by government and institutions in Germany and Berlin, becomes increasingly hostile towards refugees, migrants, especially Arabs and Muslims, it is vital to build autonomous communities within the repressed state to preserve the vitality of our urban gardens.

Pigeon fancying in a contemporary urban context in Berlin can be a catalyst to ignite inter-class and inter-species collaboration and solidarity, to learn from our entangled history of co-species collaboration to envision blueprints for us to carry towards a new paradigm based on radical community, grassroots organizing, and resistance.

The religion of value is deeply ingrained in us.
We believe in a Capitalist-engineered phenomenon of scarcity and preciousness.

Let's look to the pigeon.
Face our fears head on.
Perhaps the plastic in their guts and the soot on their wings
can be defined as valuable.
Symbols of survival.

We've all arrived to this point, where each of us finds themselves culturally, socially, physically, geographically, through the Neo-Colonial project, whether to our benefit or not, Or something in-between.

In the face of ecocide and genocide
fueled by Corporate Capitalism,
we must imagine our survival.
Can we work together with the doves?

Instead of allowing our communities to be stripped of autonomy,
let's create space to learn from each other.

Reclaim generational knowledge of pigeon fancying and
reimagine ancient practices in a new paradigm.

Let's set the doves free
from this static position in our perception
and recognize them as a key to our mutual survival.
It is our intertwined past with the pigeon
that brought it with us here into our current reality.

To reconnect to our urban ecosystem, we can empower ourselves
from being passive consumers to active agents of change.

It is the intention of the Neo-Colonial project to sever us from
our lands, histories, heritage, skills, and cultural practices.

Everyday practices of creation can be resistance.

Let us retract dependence on Accelerated Capitalist systems of
mass production and exploitation.

Let us make our own things.

Let us grow self-sufficient communities of care through sharing
our heritage crafts,
pigeon fancying for one.

Let us build rooftop gardens in our urban centers, grow our own
food, cultivate and fertilize our own soil,
graced by the shit of pigeons.

Let us reclaim our autonomy and own sense of humanity by
discarding our
human supremacist mindset.

Let us claim an alternative hedonism.
Pleasure not from consumption,
but from creation.

Building secret dove cotes on our roofs.
Would you find liberation in feeding your rooftop garden with
pigeon shit
alongside your neighbors?

Many animal species on this earth will not survive until the end
of this century.

But the pigeon has learned to live with us,
off of us.

For this they deserve recognition as precious, a value ascribed to
those who learn to survive in these Capitalist ruins
despite all efforts of eradication.

To care for the people, plants, and animals in our environment, to
have physical contact, to have our own earth to tend for, our own
food to grow, our own things to make, is what connects us to our
humanity.

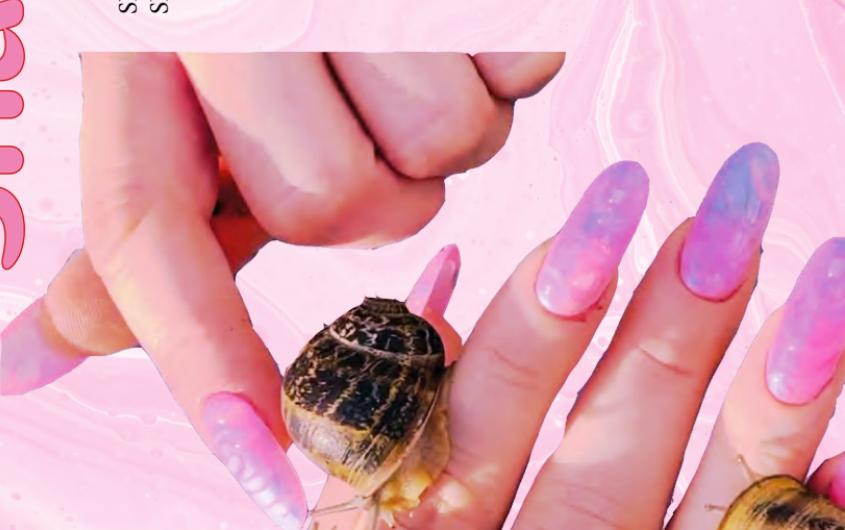




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**Distance
Denial
Doom
Identity
Dissonance**

The 5 Cs of Ecoslay

Camille Belmin

In 2015, psychologist and researcher Per Espen Stoknes introduced the 5 Ds of climate inaction¹ – Distance, Denial, Doom, iDentity, and Dissonance – to help understand why people often struggle to act upon climate change.

Have you ever felt oddly numb while scrolling through images of devastating floods and wildfires on your phone? That's *Distance* at play – when climate impacts feel far away, whether in space, time, or relevance. This mental disconnect makes it harder to emotionally engage and take meaningful action.

Then there's *Doom*. As the media floods us every day with catastrophic news, our nervous system often shuts down and we feel hopeless, paralyzed, or indifferent. As our Western societies are shaped by religions that prophesize an apocalypse, we are conditioned to accept the idea of a final, total collapse. This fatalism dampens our willingness to act.

Denial is finding comfort in escaping, negating, ignoring, or looking away to avoid fear and guilt. It is not out of ignorance or lack of information, it is a natural self-defense mechanism.

iDentity. In Western capitalist societies, we have been deeply conditioned to cultivate individualist identities. If you've built your identity and self-esteem around materialistic wealth or owning an SUV, for example, part of the climate solution will certainly clash with that construction of yourself.

1 Stoknes, P.E. (2015). *What we think about when we try not to think about global warming: Toward a new psychology of climate action*. Chelsea Green Publishing.

Finally, there's *Dissonance*: the uncomfortable gap between what we know and how we live. You know flying harms the planet, but you book that vacation anyway. According to Stoknes, when our behaviors conflict with our values – and when there is little social support for change – we tend to downplay the facts to relieve the tension.

Although Stoknes dives deeper and proposes some solutions to counter the 5 Ds in his book (which we recommend reading) we propose an alternative framework:

The 5 Cs of Ecoslay:

Connect, **C**ry, **C**ute, **C**onfidence & **(pop)C**ulture

These principles are the necessary pillars for reinterpreting and diffusing environmentalism across all boards and for stepping up our communication strategies about ecology.



Connect: Connect with the troubles of our times and make kin with the life forms around you, both human and non-human. Feed a hungry pigeon, lend an ear to a friend in need, befriend a chicken, talk to a tree or smell some fresh compost. Connect to the dramatic metabolic march of the world. Feel the oxygen in your lungs that plants have produced for you.



Cry: It's OK to cry. Species are going extinct and ecosystems are collapsing. Meanwhile, the rise of fascism and Western imperialism is attempting to crush and test our last bits of humanity. It's devastating. Go outside, smell a flower in bloom, and burst into tears. Feeling grief for what has been lost and what is yet to disappear is the only way we can feel compelled to save what can survive.



Cute: Find refuge not in denial, but in cuteness. Play with a baby or stick your head into your cat's belly fur, send your friends that video of otters cuddling and floating along rivers. However, cute is not only a coping mechanism but also has undeniable powers and is, as Simon May puts it, a “weapon of mass seduction.”² We must use it.



Confidence: Be hot and confident. Use your magical powers of attraction to influence. Be convinced that together, we can make

2 May, S. (2019). *The power of cute*. Princeton University Press

things happen. Use your imagination to build a future reality on the ruins of capitalism. It's also OK to lose all hope, confidence, and attitude on some days – cry and bounce back the next day! *Their* strategy depends on *our* despair and self-doubt. Let's disconcert them.



(pop)Culture: Ride on the taste of the masses. If we want climate action to go viral, we need to speak in the language of memes, movies, music, fashion, and Labubus. We must make sustainability sing and biodiversity sexy. A stadium full of fans in trance can move mountains.

Connect
Cry
Cute

The background of the image is a vibrant, abstract composition dominated by shades of pink and magenta. It features several organic, flowing shapes in a darker green or lime color, resembling stylized leaves or petals. These shapes are scattered across the frame, with some appearing in the upper left and others in the lower right. The overall texture is reminiscent of a close-up photograph of a flowering plant or a microscopic view of organic tissue.

**Confidence
Culture**







I AM CRINGE BUT I AM FREE

Diana Andrei





Dear Lover,

What do you feel when you look at *those* images? You know the ones – hands cradling the Earth, a polar bear on a melting chunk of ice, maybe even a white lady holding a tree. “Generic climate change photo,” right? Honestly, sometimes when I look at them, I can feel how my lips are quietly mouthing the word: **cringe**.

I know, dramatic. But maybe that’s the point. Maybe we *need* to realize how dramatic it is to react like that. It’s time to shake off that inner bully and reclaim the narrative. But how do we break free from “too-cool-to-care” prison? My suggestion, by loudly and wholeheartedly proclaiming: **“I am cringe but I am free!”** You’re frowning, I can feel it. But stay with me.

First things first: What *is* cringe? That one is hard to define since cringe is an ever-flowing sensation ranging from moralizing subjective opinion, aesthetic perception, to socially conditioned emotional reaction. So I would like to put it more simply: To me, cringe is the Regina George* (*internationally known and beloved archetypal school bully in the 2004 cinematic classic *Mean Girls*)

of social code: Like Regina, cringe loves to dictate us what to like, what to do, who is hot and who is not. Just imagine this showdown: Greta Thunberg vs. Regina George. You already know who the media sides with and who they choose to bully. And for the ones who aren't sure: Just remember how poorly Greta got treated by edgelords AND the media worldwide in the past years. Not very fetch* (*last *Mean Girls* reference, I promise).

So yes, **CRINGE is... cringe.** But also, not all cringe is created equal. Let's be honest: when Arnold Schwarzenegger tells us to take the train while flying private, *that's* real, high-gloss hypocrisy

cringe. But someone earnestly caring? Feeling too much? Being vulnerable and loud about it? That's not cringe. That's courage.

Following Logan Smigles' Cringe theory, cringe is a cultural reflex. It's how we're trained to feel shame when we step outside the arenas of "cool" and "normal." Hence, cringe polices vulnerability. It teaches us not to care too loudly, not to love too deeply,



not to be too earnest. It's a tool of normativity – a social enforcer wearing ironic sunglasses with a condescending smile.

And what is this ideology of cool and normal based on? In my humble opinion, capitalism has a whole lot to do with it. Because in a capitalistic world, we are trained to be numb and apathetic towards the world. Why? So we keep quiet and comply with whatever horrendous thing is happening around us. This even goes



as far, in the words of Mark Fisher (R.I.P. babes), that it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

Or at least, that's where we are actively kept. So we write dystopias. Concrete jungles. Acid rain. No birds, no joy. Always Blade Runner, never *Cottagecore*. Why do we keep imagining futures that hurt to live in? Science fiction is a self-fulfilling prophecy: what we imagine, we build. But when did we stop dreaming bigger?

Let's pause for a moment and let that sink in. What if we stopped trying to be cool and redefined this cringe for the eco? Where to start? Maybe the first step is to reclaim all that has been unfairly labeled as cringe. Emotion. Vulnerability. Sincerity. Turning them again into expressions of strength. Let's take it even further; this is where *Ecoslay* comes in. *Ecoslay* is about flipping the script – making care, emotion, and engagement part of what's stylish. Rebranding sincerity. Taking back “cool” and giving it a heart afresh.

Ecoslay allows us to break free from the shackles of cringe and invites us to embrace the cringe of it all. To write bad poetry. To rhyme. To feel. To be entangled with the world yet again. As the internet once

declared: “**I am cringe but I am free!**”, and in a world that profits from our apathetic, hardened souls, cringe is revolutionary.

We need to dream again. And maybe dreaming starts with embracing cringe. Because being a lover of cringe means being a lover of the world. And lovers aren’t afraid, neither of care, awkwardness, or being too much.

So, let’s gather and talk – not with sarcasm or detachment, but because we *care*. That image of someone cradling the Earth? Not a meme. Not a punchline. A prayer. A sincere cry for cringe. Let’s unlearn the shame and bring back cringe – with soft hearts and open arms. Let’s make tenderness our rebellion. Let’s all cringe and slay – awkwardly, sincerely, together.

Your lover girl,

Diana xx

I am cringe

@GH0mkus

But I am free





Sex sells... even socio-ecological narratives?

Alokin Jaywalker

Sex sells, as the saying goes... movies, clothes, and whatnot.

Also politics? Politicians have long used sexual issues as campaign tools, framing the regulation or liberation of sexuality as urgent matters requiring voter action.

But beyond politicizing sexual issues, what about instrumentalizing sexual content to promote a politician? As in, using a buzzing TikTok video... with a young woman talking about sex... and appropriating it as the new mascot of a presidential campaign?

Well, that's what Donald Trump's 2024 campaign did: turn the "Hawk Tuah girl," a girl mimicking fellatio during a street interview, into political meme fuel.

This story triggered many emotions in me. I was simultaneously grossed out by the shamelessness of this appropriation, but also deeply intrigued by the socio-cultural moment that was unfolding. This story felt like yet another example of the (American) Left losing ground to increasingly unhinged (far-)right communication strategies. I wondered how to best react.

In this essay, I narrate how this initial internet moment came about and how it took unexpected, interesting turns, bleeding into IRL. This is a story of successive co-optings from the Right and the Left, in which I want to compare the respective messages shared, strategies, and treatments of a human turned into a communication medium.

This story is relevant to *Ecoslay*'s exploration of provocative discursive and visual narratives about socio-ecological transformations. It speaks to the “eco” part through the topics chosen by the leftist co-opting, namely, transportation politics in cities that have high social and environmental relevance. This gives an occasion to reflect upon the effectiveness of leftist communication strategies. It also addresses the “slay” element, specifically examining the ethical boundaries of the provocative intent by questioning which aspects of the approach might conflict with fundamental feminist and anti-capitalist principles.

One disclaimer: I am writing from the perspective of a white European bisexual cis man about the politicization of female bodies and the sexual agency of female-socialized bodies, which are loaded topics. I hope that my perspective, as a man, talking about problems created by men, can be valuable. If this text may be seen as provocative, it is by no means prescriptive.



Blowjobs & Trump shirts

The Hawk Tuah girl phenomenon started in June 2024 when Haliey Welch, a young white woman from Tennessee, went viral after a street interview in Nashville. When asked, “What’s one move that makes men go crazy every time?” she answered, “You gotta give ‘em that ‘hawk tuah’ and spit on that thang!” The clip rapidly spread across social media platforms, transforming Haliey from an ordinary person into a recognizable internet personality.

The first turning point relevant to us happened when Trump’s 2024 campaign co-opted the viral catchphrase to energize their base – especially younger, male, “bro” voters – by plastering it on Trump-style merchandise and rally banners like an anti-woke badge.

At the same time, and seemingly inconsistently (but who cares about consistency in these circles?), right-wing commentators started comparing Democratic figures, such as Kamala Harris, to a “Hawk Tuah girl,” in a bid to sexualize and undermine them.

While the word “tuah” describes the sound of spitting, it also resembled the language of Native Americans in the eyes of white supremacists, so “Hawk Tuah” also became a racialized slur against Native Americans.

So “Hawk Tuah” was used in a variety of ways that support MAGA narratives.

And eventually, Haliey was just disposed of.

Haliey was attacked online by people like Andrew Tate (eww), and pundit Laura Loomer. And what was bound to happen, happened: Haliey was asked if she would give Trump a blowjob during an interview. And of course said she wouldn’t. “It’s nothing to do

with politics,” she said, “but come on, he’s not attractive.” The vibe quickly shifted with her reply, as Loomer deemed her a “degenerate” and a “moron.”

Matt Bernstein’s *A Bit Fruity* podcast dedicated an hour-long episode called “Hawk Tuah: From Harmless Meme to Right Wing Symbol” to the story.¹

Towards the end of the podcast, Matt’s guest Taylor Lorenz jokingly proclaims: “The gays should have co-opted her before the Republicans!” Matt can only agree. “Fuck! Yeah. You are right,” he giggles. Matt later also remarks that he sees charisma in her and speculates about her becoming a pretty good podcaster...

Blowjobs & walkable cities

Matt’s vision actually became reality: Haliey soon after started a podcast called “Talk Tuah.”²

The wish to see Haliey promote progressive narratives also kinda happened. Kinda indirectly.

The “Hawk Tuah Girl” phenomenon has often been described as a “15 minutes of fame” moment. Video creator Diana Regan, running the account Cities by Diana on various social media platforms, saw a parallel with another 15-minute concept.

A 15-minute city is an urban planning concept where residents can access most of their recurrent needs – work, shopping, healthcare, education, and recreation – within a 15-minute walk or bike

1 Bernstein, M. (2024, July 17). *Hawk Tuah: From Harmless Meme to Right Wing Symbol*. [Podcast episode]. A Bit Fruity podcast.

2 Talk Tuah with Haliey Welch [@TalkTuahPod]. (n.d.). Home [Youtube Channel]. Youtube. Retrieved August 8, 2025 from <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCiaBs6n4kky-dGFnzwiEbSg>.

ride from their home. This concept has been proposed as a way to improve quality of life in cities, while contributing to global climate change mitigation efforts, by cutting down travel distances and the associated energy required for motorized transportation.

Although there are, as always, scholarly disputes about this concept, it is arguably quite *Ecoslay*. 15-minute cities are undoubtedly more *Ecoslay* than the status quo: car-oriented, sprawling urban areas such as in the US and elsewhere. Full of highways and congestion, asphalt, honking, and exhaust smoke, US cities are terrible for most people and for the planet.

But Conservatives hate the 15-minute concept, and conspiracy theories flourished during COVID. Right-wing underground circles made claims online about a secret government plan to enforce toll systems for outside-of-neighborhood travel, enforced by camera and AI surveillance.

Deep down, the real issue the Right has with the 15-minute city concept is that it would significantly diminish car travel dependence. And cars are arguably one of conservatives' biggest fetishes.

Diana's idea is a parody, or perhaps a pastiche, of Haliey's podcast "Talk Tuah," where she has candid discussions with guests, not about Right-wing or Left-wing politics, but about easier topics such as health or relationships, while sipping on some OJ or eating a taco.

But Diana's parody is actually deepfaked. Voices are generated with AI. Through Diana's manipulation, Haliey becomes a very well-read girl who is an anti-capitalist and anti-car advocate. She invites people to "walk tuah" instead of taking their cars!

Diana's Haliey quotes Henri Lefebvre and Jane Jacobs, two famous



urban scholars, to claim people's right not to live in "concrete and asphalt hellscapes." She calls for public gathering spaces for community building and escaping the daily grind – here referring to Ray Oldenburg's Third Places concept³ – which must be accessible to all without a car. She goes beyond the urban realms to discuss Ricardo's and Marx's theories of value, urging workers to win back the value they have created, and describe the pernicious impact of private equity on the real economy.

Haliey: "You gotta give it that Walk Tuah metro station and get on that train! Because even if you own a car, increasing your usage of public transportation when available is a great way to save money on gas, see your city from another perspective, and reduce congestion for other commuters whose only option is driving."⁴

³ Oldenburg's Third Place concept refers to a place of refuge other than the home or workplace (the two first places) where people can regularly visit and commune with friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even strangers.

⁴ Diana Regan [@citiesbydiana]. (2024, September 28). You gotta give it that WALK TUAH Metro Station and get on that TRAIN! [Video]. Instagram. Retrieved August 5, 2025 from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5oDnnNhOt4/>

As for the guest, she mainly “talk tuahs” with Rush Limbaugh, whose voice is also AI-generated. Real-world Limbaugh was, from the late 1980s until his death in 2021, an American radio host known for his unapologetic and inflammatory conservative viewpoints about women, minorities, and liberals. He is believed to have shaped modern conservative media and political discourse, as well as having deepened political divisions in the US. An uncontrollable guest who will for sure take up all the space to mansplain Haliey about any topic! A weird choice?



Not really, as the heated debates quickly works in favor of Haliey, who reverses both the young-old and female-male power dynamics. Haliey very skillfully details facts to support her ideas, while Limbaugh recites the typical conservative canon of free market, free movement... and free labor.

Haliey: “I am a proud patriot. I love my country, and true freedom comes from having the right to choose. Are you saying you don’t

support a woman's right to choose [to walk tuah instead of drivin-g]?”⁵

Rush: “Of course, I support a woman's right to choose! I support a woman's right to choose to drive a Ford Explorer on the Expressway or a Dodge RAM 1500 on the turnpike.”⁶

But in today's post-truth politics, where emotions can play a bigger role than facts, deepfake Haliey also plays that emotional card very well – with witty, incisive, and sometimes borderline-offensive comments that destabilize Limbaugh. She speaks the language of the new generations and makes Limbaugh look like an antiquated member of the old guard, calling him “unc,” “lil bro” and “chad,” or his opinions “cringe” and “cold-ass takes.”

Rush: “What are you? Some sort of communist?”

Haliey: “I went to cringe town, and everybody knew you there, el Rushbo,ahaha.”

Rush: “Cringe town? *incoherent rage*. No, I have never been to Cringe town! Sounds like hippie urbanist nonsense!”⁷

This aspect is also present via another deepfake character, Jojo Siwa, who represents a cool but sometimes naive and overexcited person. Talking to her as a friend, Haliey explains she should moderate her excitement for extra car lanes (“The more lanes I can ride on, the more changes I have to steal your hearts, Mamas,” exclaims Siwa, who is a lesbian). Indeed, additional car lanes typically induce additional car demand via the infamous “rebound

⁵ Diana Regan [@citiesbydiana]. (2024, September 28). You gotta give it that WALK TUAH Metro Station and get on that TRAIN! [Video]. Instagram. Retrieved August 5, 2025 from <https://www.instagram.com/p/B5oDnnNhOt4/>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

effect,” leading us further into the asphalt hellscape.

I found all these videos amazing.

Maybe this is because they speak quite directly to me, as I have studied urban planning and economics, so this content falls right into this niche. But I believe there’s more to it, and that this content may speak to a broader audience.

I think these videos have some nice features. They are arguably quite funny. They edulcorate academic jargon with Gen Z slang, which feels like a good middle ground to engage and educate without losing people along the way. They exaggerate the enemy’s traits a little to ridicule him. But not that much (real-life Limbaugh is already ridiculous). And isn’t that also fair to use ridicule as a weapon when one thinks of the daily Trump ad hominem attacks? Another strength is that this content is straightforward enough to seem relatively safe from Republican appropriation. As an example of such co-opting, you may recall the Trump Gaza Riviera video. In this video, Gaza, having been flattened by Israel’s systematic and genocidal destruction of its infrastructure, was transformed into a luxury resort in accordance with Trump’s wishes. The video had originally been produced as a criticism, but eventually was endorsed by Trump and presumably served him – already just because it made a lot of buzz.

Does Haliey agree and how much should we worry about that?

While the Trump 2024 right-wing co-opting raises immediate ethical concerns, is Diana’s leftist co-opting really immune from such issues, even if the videos trigger positive emotions initially?

Is it really OK to manipulate and make use of people’s image

without their agreement?

When discussing this, it may be important to note that Haliey has tried hard to remain apolitical, which probably makes sense for her business. She wants to protect herself and her image, especially given her modest origins. However, she did eventually decide to use her popularity for activism, choosing the less politically divisive issue of animal rights.



citiesbydiana They can stop paying me, but they can't stop the BRAIN NOURISHMENT. Screw it, I needed to share this one.

Haliey and Rush debate "the Right to the City" and land usage on AI-voice alternate reality Talk Tuah and receive a call from a very special guest.

#satire #parody #urbanism #talktuahmemes

While our first reaction may be to oppose any form of co-opting, the good old question lingers: If the Left restricts its option space too much compared to the Right, in order to adhere to the highest moral standards, isn't the Left likely to lose the communication battle?

While I am not attempting to provide a definitive answer to this thorny question in this piece, I believe there are noteworthy differences between the conservative and leftist co-optings.

This raises another question: are there good practices that can make co-optings ethically (more) acceptable?

The first key distinction between Trump's style of co-opting and Diana's is the clear disclaimer about AI-generated content. The caption of each video indicates clearly that we are "on AI-voice

alternate reality” and includes the hashtags “#satire #parody.”

This is in stark contrast with, for example, Trump posting a fake endorsement from Taylor Swift with no context, which clearly was aiming to be deceptive.

Second, the way both sides are treating Haliey differs widely.

While the Right is just appropriating and easily switching to talking terribly about her, people like Diana or Matt display signs of genuine care and affection for the person. There is maybe also some opportunism in using a trend, but also definitely respect for the human being behind it.

A third valuable aspect is the potential feminist reading of Diana's parody. Haliey has been portrayed as someone who became unduly famous based on no merit, whose ethics are questioned for her lighthearted discussions of sex, and has sadly been categorized in the stereotype of the dumb blonde.



Diana, however, portrays her as a strong woman who doesn't get fooled by Rush's mansplaining tricks. She funnily and skillfully dodges every nasty, spurious argument from Rush. She answers with sharp wit, citing numbers, facts, and theory. She is giving an example of a woman with agency and grit.

So, isn't Diana in a way serving and defending Haliey by doing that?

***Ecoslay* and sexy (famous) (female) bodies**

Diana made a series of less than 10 short “Talk Tuah” parody videos exploring various concepts of urban studies and then moved on to another concept. Things move fast on the internet, and these videos are now buried deep in Diana’s profile’s busy video mosaic. But this story provides important reflections on the matter of this book – *Ecoslay*.

Ecoslay also uses the image and sexiness of famous “slay” women to carry socio-ecological narratives. Now, are there any fundamental differences between deepfaking the Hawk Tuah girl and putting leftist arguments in her mouth, and making *Ecoslay* memes with Paris Hilton or Britney Spears adopting the voice of climate justice, as seen on the Instagram page @thats_ecoslay?

There are certainly large differences in terms of the “depth of the co-opting” between deepfaking versus reusing some images that have been memefied for 20 years. But in both cases, people’s image is being co-opted.

So what should we do?

I will finish this piece by listing potential positions without really ranking or judging them, but rather as an open-ended invitation for further discussion.

One may say: we are in deep trouble with socio-ecological challenges, we are having a communication war, and maybe this is all not perfectly moral, but sex sells, so whatever. This seems to be Diana’s position.

One may also say: maybe some images of people are located “more” inside the public domain than others, for example, comparing Paris and Haliey. Perhaps less so from a temporal perspective



(in the sense that one image has been around and used already way more), but rather from a power perspective. In one case, we have a fresh celebrity trying to build her career and thus may suffer from co-optings that diverge from her own agenda, while another one is very established and substantially less vulnerable. This perspective is shared by Matt Bernstein, who, in another podcast episode on “The Political Power of Taylor Swift,”⁸ stated we should not babysit billionaires. They will be fine...

One could say: No co-opting without consent. Yes to sexiness + politics, but one needs to recruit people to say this by themselves, no deepfake. An interesting recent related example also comes from the US, this time from the Democratic party (really??!) during the campaign of Zohran Mamdani to the 2025 New York City mayoral elections. A group of women from New York campaigned for Mamdani using slogans like “You’re voting for

⁸ Bernstein, M. (2024, January 16). *The Political Power of Taylor Swift*. [Podcast episode]. A Bit Fruity podcast.

@zohrankmamdani? That's hot." They included model Emily Ratajkowski, who became world-famous with her highly sexualized appearance in the video clip of the song *Blurred Lines* from Robin Thicke in 2013. Since then, she has used her popularity to carry feminist topics defending women's right to "express their sexuality and share their bodies however they choose."⁹ Mamdani welcomed their support and appeared in one video with Ratajkowski.

Some may say: Why do we need celebrities? In the age of AI, can't we synthetically create morphs that would have the desired physical features and personality traits, but without the potential adverse consequences of co-opting a real-world human? These morphs may hold more or less resemblance to celebrities so that they can be associated with them, for example, the ripped Luigi Mangione x Mario Bros. They may also divert more strongly from any particular individual and could then represent some archetypal hot Instagram influencer.



⁹ Hola.com. (2019, February 28). Kim Kardashian thanks Emily Ratajkowski for defending her nude selfie. *HOLA! USA*. Retrieved July 29, 2025 from <https://www.hola.com/us/celebrities/2016031519128/kim-kardashian-thanks-emily-ratajkowski-support/>



While in this way, no human gets co-opted, there are other ethical concerns about promoting ideas with AI-generated tricks. These concerns may be addressed via transparency about the use of AI, following Diana's approach. But larger questions remain about the proliferation of AI imagery in advertising and other potential adverse effects in terms of accelerating distortions of realities. Think about Ani, the flirty anime AI-assistant from Elon Musk's Grok. Grok explicitly encourages users to grow affection with the model to unlock "adult-rated" features, which likely makes people more receptive to what Ani says but also likely involves emotional coercion. What distinguishes acceptable forms of engagement from unethical affectual manipulation?

One may finally say: Does (heterosexual) sex talk to everyone? Maybe we need morphs that look like and talk to different communities in their language, based on what works for them, and ideally built by them in a decentralized fashion. This means not limiting oneself to one standard in terms of which bodies and which kind

of performativity are sexy and “sell,” but also entering other realms of persuasion than physical appeal. Other emotional features and personality traits may have stronger and perhaps also less superficial effects for various target groups. Indeed, an important question is how to make the engagement last long enough to enable a slow infusion and transfer of ideas. While sex is often good at catching attention, other traits that make people sympathize with and respect the information carrier – for example, Haliey’s wit and grit in Diana’s videos – are essential.

Attempting *Ecoslay*

While I don’t want to single out one approach, these options offer various ways to embody being *Ecoslay*. They contribute to the discussion **and action** on getting more creative to promote more effectively (=virally?) leftist ideas. The bottom line is to try things out both confidently and with an ounce of reflectivity.

Thinking of what attracts people without alienating them. Thinking of how to have fun in the creative process and thereby give one’s product this genuine “fun-icing” that also shines and attracts. Thinking of being bold and incisive and not overly self-censoring, because we can’t let those who have no limits keep making these arrogant wins they have been making. Thinking about care and inclusion as general principles. Thinking about those who are marginalized and those who won’t admit they are too privileged.

Maybe this journey brings one in the direction that eventually isn’t described that well by the specific word *Ecoslay*. But there is certainly a broad spectrum of attempts that are needed to make progress on socio-ecological battles, so that’s no problem!

noag

About the Authors

Diana Andrei, myth to many and legend to some, is a transdisciplinary artist, filmmaker, and writer based in Vienna and (sometimes) Marseille. Living in the trenches of reality, where everything and nothing ever cross paths, she enjoys exploring questions of (hu)man-made artificiality, with a special focus on how ideologies and social doctrines materialize within and from our worlds. Flirting with various media like film, performance, sculpture, text, and YouTube comments, her works become materializations themselves, participating in the entangled discourse of how we (re)create our realities. The contributed text *I AM CRINGE BUT I AM FREE* is part of the *Love Letters* series.

Camille Belmin is a researcher, artist, curator, and lecturer at IIASA and independently. Her work focuses on narratives and modalities of communication that shape socio-ecological transformation, as well as population–environment–gender issues. She founded *Ecoslay*, an independent artistic research project that explores the boundaries of climate science communication, mobilizing the language and aesthetics of popular culture to engage diverse publics with ecological concerns. In her artistic practice, she works with installation, lecture performance, and text, collaborating with metabolic processes ranging from composting and fermentation to social metabolism.

Ramona Gomez is an urban ecologist and artist based in Berlin. From Tongva land, also known as Los Angeles, she holds a BA in Fine Art and Urban Studies from UCLA. Embedded in her works are processes of reclamation, beginning with the serendi-

pity of discovery and the work growing from this initial retrieval. Her work exists outside the gallery space, using interventionist practices of collection, performance, and exhibiting to offer other realities to post-tech capitalism. Hunting for symbols in the peripheries, she sifts through the debris to identify the cracks in the illusion of value, and the art of spinning a capitalist fable to believe in.

Lisa Jäger is a visual artist and curator whose work investigates socio-economic, ecological, and gender norms across media. She is pursuing an MA in Fine Arts at FHNW and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, the University of Fine Arts Hamburg (HFBK), and Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg. Since 2019, she directs WAF Gallery and co-founded Die Feldversuche, Interspecies Art Hub, and One Mess Gallery Vienna, curating programs with pluralistic approaches.

Alokin Jaywalker is a writer who, as his name suggests, likes to cross the street when the pedestrian traffic light is red. He displays similar dispositions in his work about digital culture, politics, and, of course, the tyranny of cars in cities. Via the mundane metaphor of jaywalking, which highlights how we've organized street space and social conventions around capitalism rather than people, Alokin questions what in current discourses feels absurd and driven by power dynamics, but also looks for avenues to get ourselves out of politically engineered cul-de-sacs. Alokin also goes by Nikola Milojević-Dupont when walking on the streets of Berlin, where he lives.

The **para-Center for Island Research** (paraCIR) is a trans-disciplinary platform for artistic and scientific research that is focused on collaboration and cooperation between different disciplines. paraCIR challenges the perspectives which give birth to situated knowledge by opening a discourse where islands and lands are understood as interconnected zones of transition, in-between spaces, ecological as well as social fugues. In their projects, paraCIR unfolds landscapes via experimental and self-developed collective field work and mapping exercises, uncovering submerged entities, stories, and intra-actions that lie deep down in the hidden structures of landscapes.

Daniel H. Pineda is an artist, curator and researcher. He is involved in an array of local, as well as trans-national and cross-disciplinary projects that range from research groups and artist-run spaces to experimental theory and performance networks. Daniel operates mostly in and as adO/Aptive, an assemblage that foments critical thinking, potential action, communication and multiple perspectives through performative adaptations. In 2025, he founded the publishing project *fugue–fuga–fuge* together with Paul Schmidt.

Nari Sarmini is an art historian, cinephile, and food enthusiast with a soft spot for the odd details that make the world sparkle. Their love of ecology sprouted from half-finished anthropology studies, where lectures on environmentalism shifted their world-view. Ever since, she has sought to weave ecological themes into life and work. Reading, writing, and sharing ideas keep her curious and connected. Nari is proud to be part of the *Ecoslay* movement, where vibrant exchanges with members and followers keep inspiration flowing.

Janina Weißengruber is an artist based in Vienna. In her artistic practice, she primarily draws on pop-cultural and mass media aesthetics, as well as its linguistic forms, opening up spaces for reflection – ranging from the state and future of the commodity world to the identity concepts enabled by it. Since 2020, she is also a main-member of the collective adO/Aptive, which is dedicated to a performative, interactive, and collaborative approach to art and theory.

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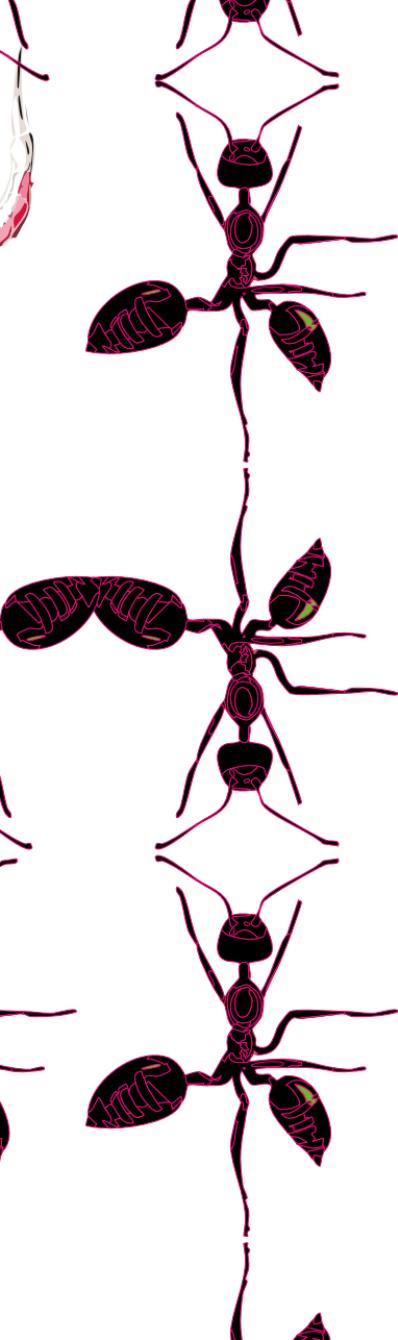
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Ecoslay is a movement – and a method – to absorb intersectional environmentalism into popular culture and to rethink the way we communicate ecological and social crises.

And what better way to infiltrate the mainstream than through the seductive yet ambiguous figure of the Girl? In this first publication, eight artists, researchers, and cultural workers provide their interpretation of Ecoslay through girlhood as a cultural force for environmental action.

“I have been following Ecoslay for a while and I like it a lot.”
Haris Pilton