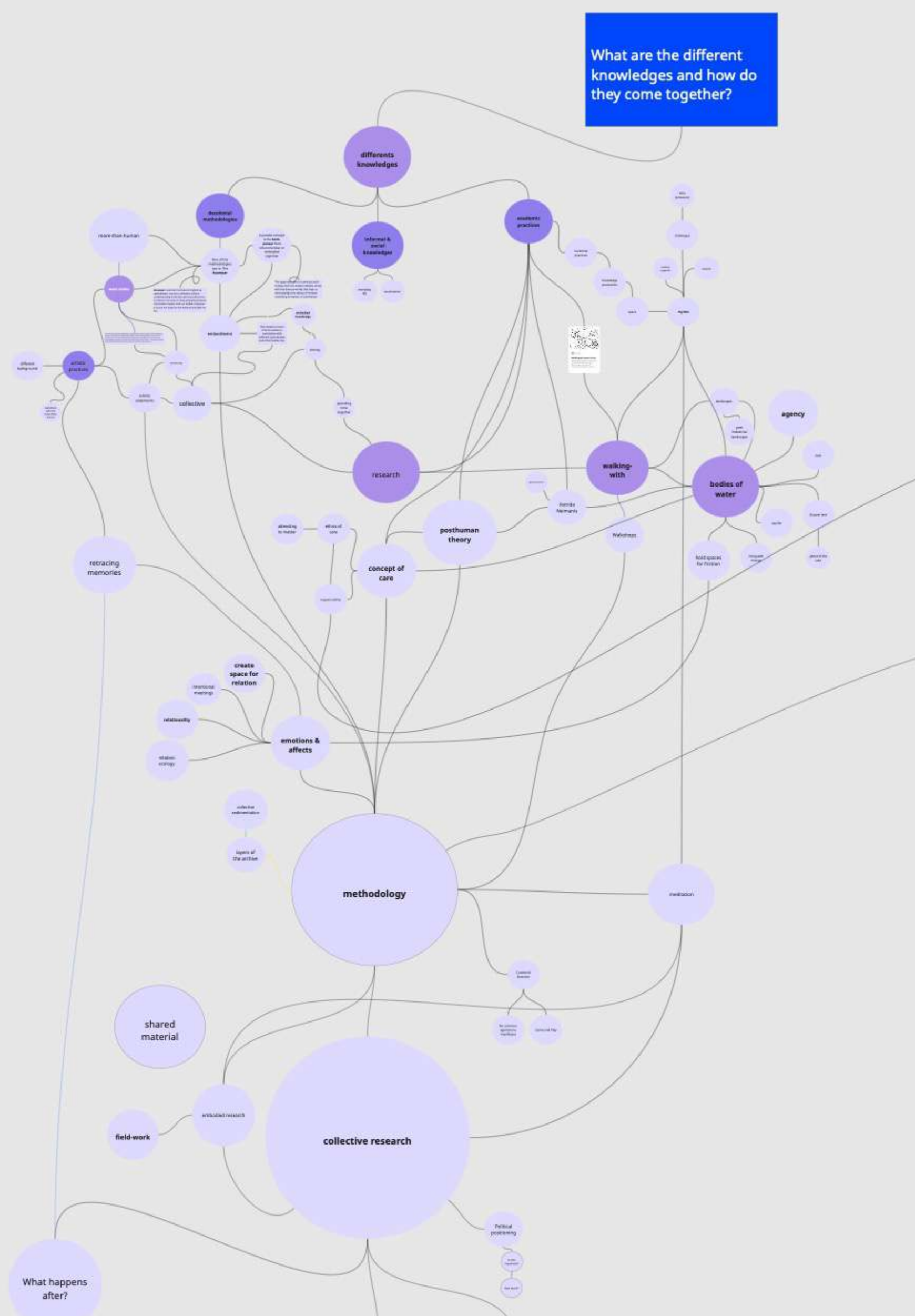


WALKING WITH WATER GHOSTS: COLLECTIVE SEDIMENTATION



What are the different knowledges and how do they come together?

LIMINAL QUESTIONS

What do we mean by "collective"?

What do we mean by "research"?

How does materiality of the more-than-human shapes both collectivity and research, with a focus on water, water bodies, landscape, specific sites?

What are the different knowledges and how do they come together?

What kind of practice/methodology did we develop? How did we perceive the process and which grades of entanglement between individual and collective were there?

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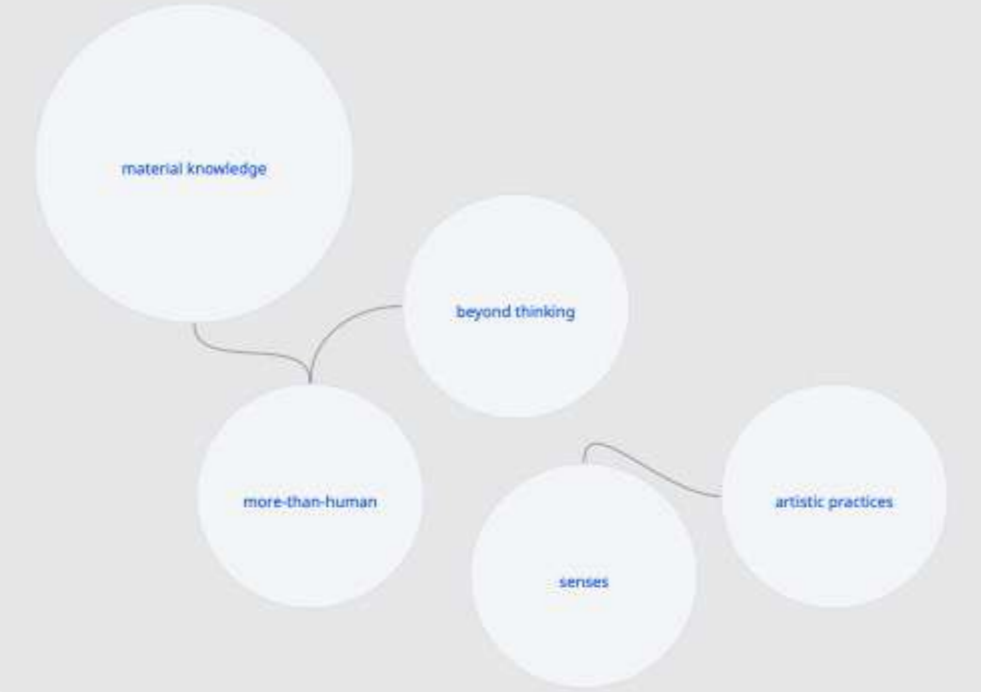
What where the tensions between individual and collective approaches and between curatorial setup and collective process? What other obstacles did we encounter?

collective research = research collective? What do we mean by "collective"? What do we mean by "research"?

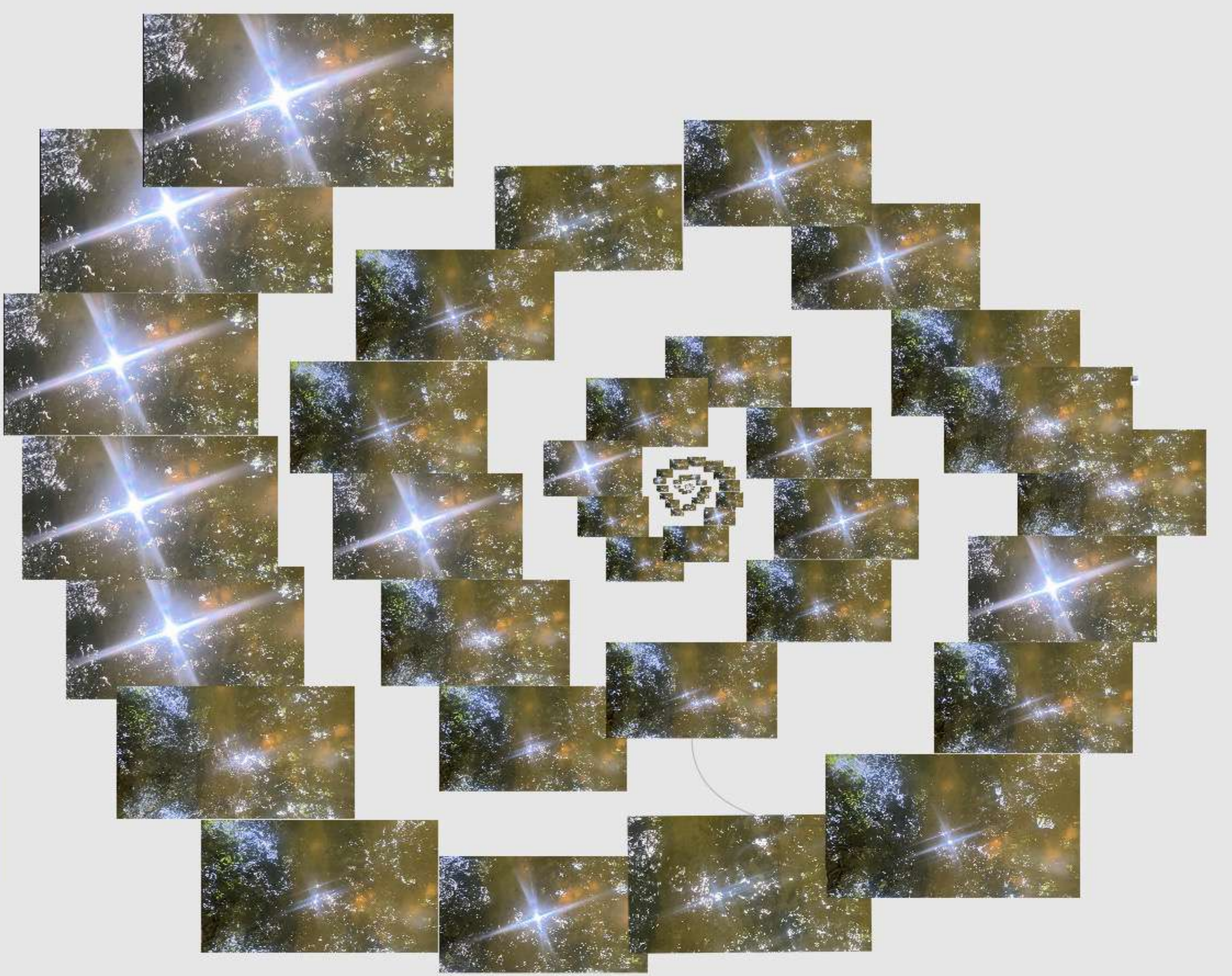


INITIAL QUESTIONS

- How to involve the senses into artistic practice and research on water?
- How do we connect with the more-than-human beyond thinking?
- Collaboration beyond talking and writing in artistic research and practice
- How can collective thinking lead to a collective practice that involves the more-than-human?
- What can we learn from water when collaborating artistically?
- How can process-oriented collective experiences lead to collaborative artistic production?
- How does the materiality of water shape our collective knowledge & art production? – multiple corporealities of water?
- What are the "invisible strings" of this collaboration? E.g. personal relations, community building, collective eating, spending time, the weather (...)
- How does knowledge pours and dams between us?
- How do various academic and artistic backgrounds and practices inform and merge in collective writing?
- How did the entanglement of academic, embodied, artistic (etc.) ways of knowing converge/what were the struggles of confluence?
- How do you perceive the relationship between "curatorial framings" – topics and rules already set – the individual artistic research process and the collective research process?
- What is "collectivity" in this context?
- What research in our context given that it is practice led and artistic and only informed by academic?
- How does the more-than-human shape the collective process?
- Why are those processes interesting to you?
- How does the main actor "water" shape the organizational structure within our common process?
- How could a non-linear and multiplicity of voices-research look like?
- When do you feel an entrance, or the space, to entangle with another practice, within this collective research?
- In what ways does "being on the field" (fieldwork, following the river) influence how we work together?
- And how do location and our situatedness (specific sites) as a group influence the collaboration? The mine, the Gilbach, the Speedway, the Paringsmar?
- How does time spend matter? Temporality, speed, slowness?
- How does the weather influence things?



Different states of water - could they also represent us? How can we invite the water, or any other non-human actor to join our collective writing? Do we need/have a common language? How to deal with ontological multiplicity? We are like separated waterdrops coming together to share time and space. But what does the an openness to confluence require?



QUOTATIONS

"As the element essential to life and to all processes of production and reproduction, water permeates every domain of human existence." (Strang 2019: 1)

"Water is not just the object of social relationships, or merely a natural resource on which claims are made, to which meanings are attached, and over which political conflicts erupt." (Krause, Strang 2016: 633).

"The fact that we share water with—or withhold it from—other humans, as well as animals, plants, soils, and watercourses, makes water an excellent element through which to explore the simultaneously ecological and political dimensions of its use and distribution. The social and the ecological are not distinct spheres, but part of a multifaceted yet basically continuous field of relationality." (Krause/ Strang 2016: 635)

"Waterscape as a site of more-than-human agency, where material transformation and the production of water knowledge unfold through relations between people, other living beings and technologies." (Hurst 2022: 2)

"Water quality operates as a malleable concept that connects different social contexts, organisms, ways of knowing, technologies, and institutions, but also creates divides between them." (Scaramelli 2013: 158)

"[...] the multiplicity of competing interests, embodied practices, and values attributed to water by different groups situated in complex relationships of power and identity." (Scaramelli 2013: 151)

"As a result of the serendipitous relationship between the two elements, hydrogen and oxygen, grey clouds, rainstorms, mist, rainbows, rivers, tsunamis, sharp icicles, gentle snowflakes, enormous floating and land-gouging glaciers, steam and our cells – amongst numerous other things – developed. The power of water to shape the materials of the world, therefore, cannot (and should not) be underestimated or understated." (Attala 2019: 23)

"Our wet matters are in constant process of intake, transformation, and exchange – drinking, peeing, sweating, sponging, weeping. Discrete individualism is a rather dry, if convenient, myth. For us humans, the flow and flush of waters sustain our own bodies, to other worlds beyond our human selves." (Neimanis 2017: 2).

"[...] water's materiality connects individual bodies to the collective body politic; for example, by transporting vectors of disease and pollution." (Bakker 2012: 619)

"For new materialists, the Anthropocene condition entails an uncanny double movement. On the one hand, the Anthropocene signals an increase in the world-making powers of (some) human beings over others, including many natural environments. On the other hand, the ecological crises and subsequent lack of human responses simultaneously demonstrates the limits of human powers and reminds us that the Earth is inhabited by many entities whose powers outstrip humans many times over." (Ejsing 2023: 16)

What do we mean by "collective"?

The first collectiveness I felt during our initial encounter emerged through a shared passion, curiosity and care for water (Pug de la Bellacasa 2017). Of course, only five minutes had to pass until the first of us mentions Astrida Neimanis' "Bodies of Water" (2017) – our bible. "Our" or "mine"? I am not sure if everyone would agree on that, yet from my perspective, her ideas were the river bed of our encounter. I remember the first high after our first days – building hydrophones, losing our minds looking into the abyss of the Hambacher coal pit, listening to an activist, and endlessly talking about water in its eternal shapes.

Our bodies sharing space, place-making, and being on a collective mission defined our collectiveness. Our human bodies were thus not separate. Someone of us would make sure to remind the group that we pee in the same toilet and drink the same water. Nobody is ever separate from water, yet the attention and the love that encompasses this "arts of noticing" (Tsing 2015: 37) formed our togetherness with the cyclicity of water.

"I am not sure if it makes sense to talk about that now", someone would say in a discussion. Another would respond: "we don't have to be linear". That's what I mean: water has shaped, in its most beautiful way, our hydrosocial (Boelens et al. 2016) relations.

Taking the approach "thinking relationships through water" (Strang, Krause 2016) means thinking our togetherness through the rivers Rhine, Ert, and Gilbach. I characterize our collectiveness as partially miscible—we float together while maintaining alterity, just as the rivers carries organic solvents.

On Entanglement

The landscape we were moving through, the so-called TERRA NOVA, the new earth, is a damaged landscape. A place where, even when the lines aren't straight, when they seem curly, flowing, and round, even when they feel strangely straight. The coal mining area in the Rhineland has been stripped of chaos, of coincidence.

This landscape tells a tale of control and dominance. It is shaped, formed, reconstructed after being turned upside down. This patch of earth had its bowels removed and was then taxidermied.

As I walk along the paths beneath which a lignite mine once exposed the rock strata like a gaping wound. I think about control. Control and coincidence, chaos and rectangles. It is an environment, a space surrounding me, as I walk through, that has been robbed of agency and dignity of self-determination, of love. At first, it seems as if there was no life here, just stunted trees and meadows that lack tenderness. That is, when my gaze is dominating, when my sight is informing my perception. As I get closer, I feel it becoming soft while I admire this landscape's strength. There is a beauty to its harshness, as well. The moss releasing its smell of earthy wetness, the puddle that holds ancient drops of crystal clear water, the sun hitting the leaves that dance barely perceptibly in the tender wind, the sound of a gurgling and whispering stream. When I am, when I allow myself to be, I see, smell, sense, hear, taste the presence of the more-than-human. At first glance, the TERRA NOVA feels like a landscape that has become a prime example of the Western desire for control and subordination. To a degree, that is certainly the case. The more I allow myself to dive into it though, the more I open my mind and body to a more sensual experience. I can get a sense of a shift of perspective. It is in me who is an extension of this place, I feel reflected by that wound that has scarred now, I am deeply entangled with its tenderness and simultaneous harshness.



We arrived with different backgrounds, but it was the water that brought us together. Walking together, listening, staring at the water, making hydrophones to listen underwater, it shifted how we related. Collaboration became less about talking and more about sensing. The surrounding environment asked us to slow down, to be present, to respond to what was there.

Making things together and sharing meals created a intimacy. The embodied exercises – shaking, meditating, guiding each other with closed eyes – opened up new ways of relating not just to each other, but also to the river, lake and stream. We weren't just studying the water, we were in it, with it.

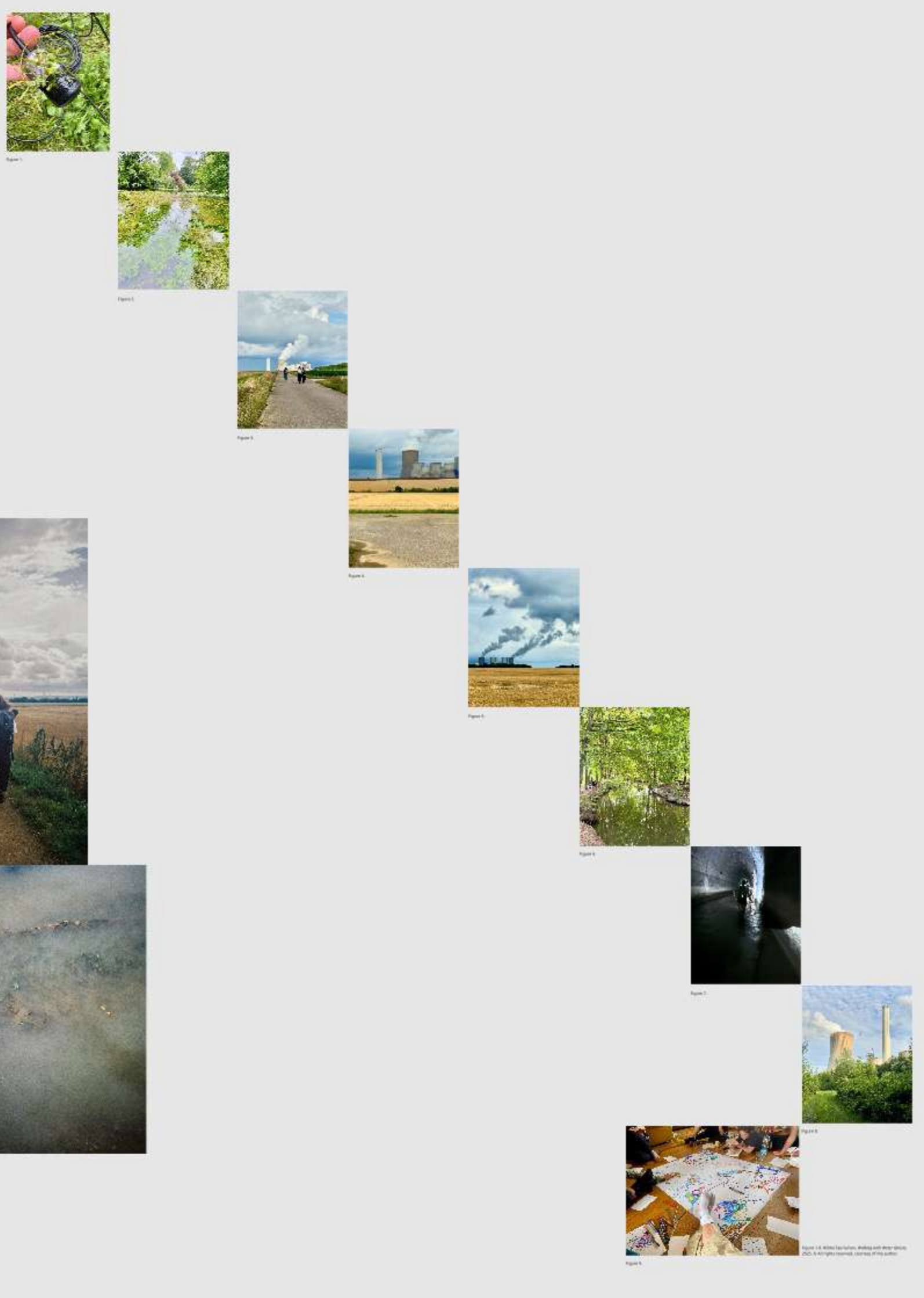
Each site shaped us differently. The weather was always present. The wind at sunset shaped our conversation with Maria at the mine.

At one point, the rain stopped our exercises at the Gilbach. Instead, we sat in a circle under a tree, close together and enjoying the intimacy of the moment. The wetness in the air, the sheltering branches, the proximity of bodies shifted something. We felt a strong connection. Plans changed. We improvised.

Walking by the stream, seeing and perceiving human presence where there are no humans visible, forms images in my mind. What do the people who built this little bench by the stream do here when sitting on it? Do they listen to the whispering water? Do they talk over it? Do they count the drops of the rain forming little circles on the surface?

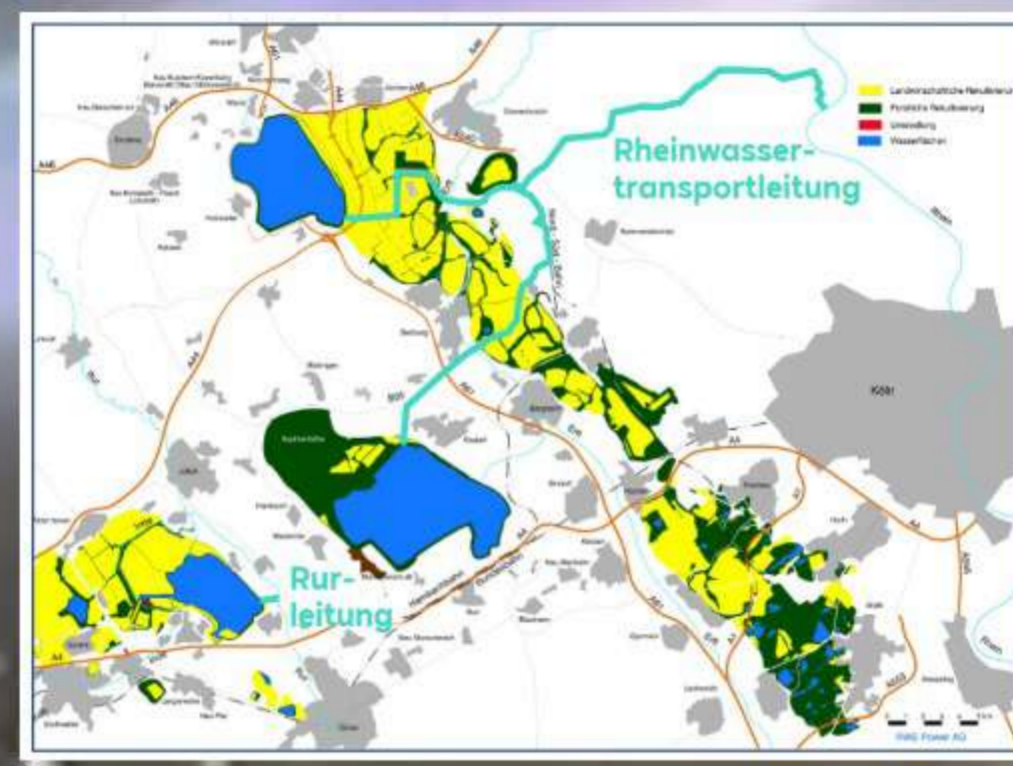
Imagining, envisioning: This suggests that images are created in the mind before they find a receptacle, a physical representation. The water, its sounds and smells, the reflections of sun on the water, bring images to me.

We walk together in silence, feel each others presence. We walk alongside, not at. We walk-with, it starts raining, we gather under a tree, share umbrellas and are forced to take a break. Now we sit-with, in a circle. Being outside and with the weather means giving up control. The schedule will not be met, the program of the day has to be changed. In collective discussions, we change the plan. Being exposed to water, rain and temperature is part of the collective experience. Negotiating and relinquishing control creates space for collaboration. It is the basis of our collaborative approach: Being flow-y, flexible beings that recognise their limitations is at the core of this process. The collective process means to also give up personal agendas. Attuning is not easy, letting go of a plan is easier when you didn't make the plan or know of it in detail in the first place.



Which entities shape the choreography of those sites?

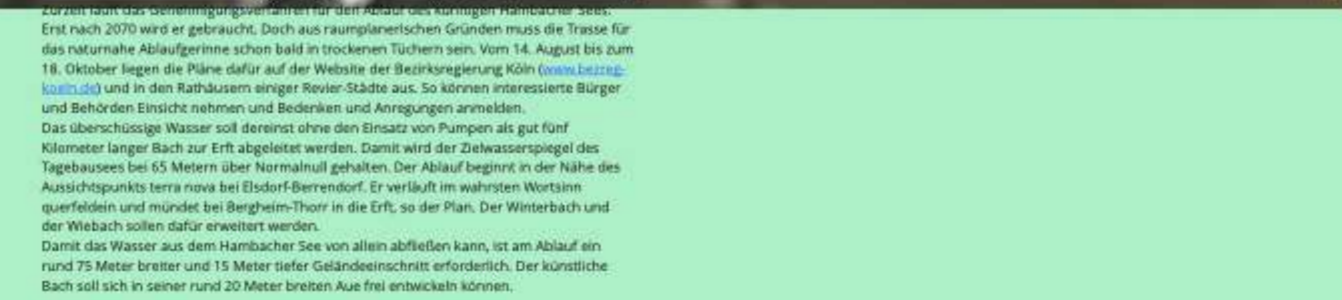
open cast lignite mining pits



Imagaries of a future lake in the Hambach mine / marketing CGI by RWE



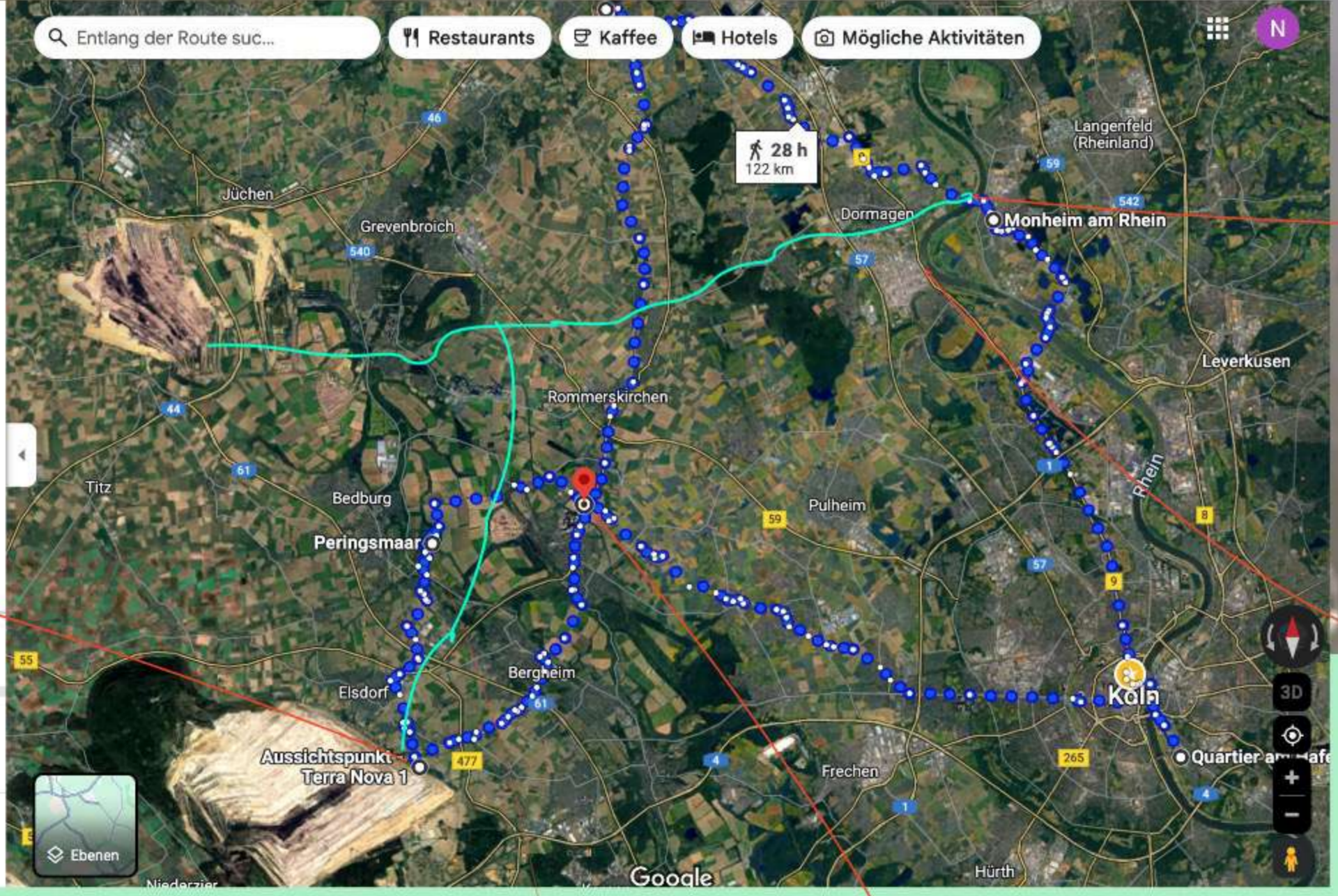
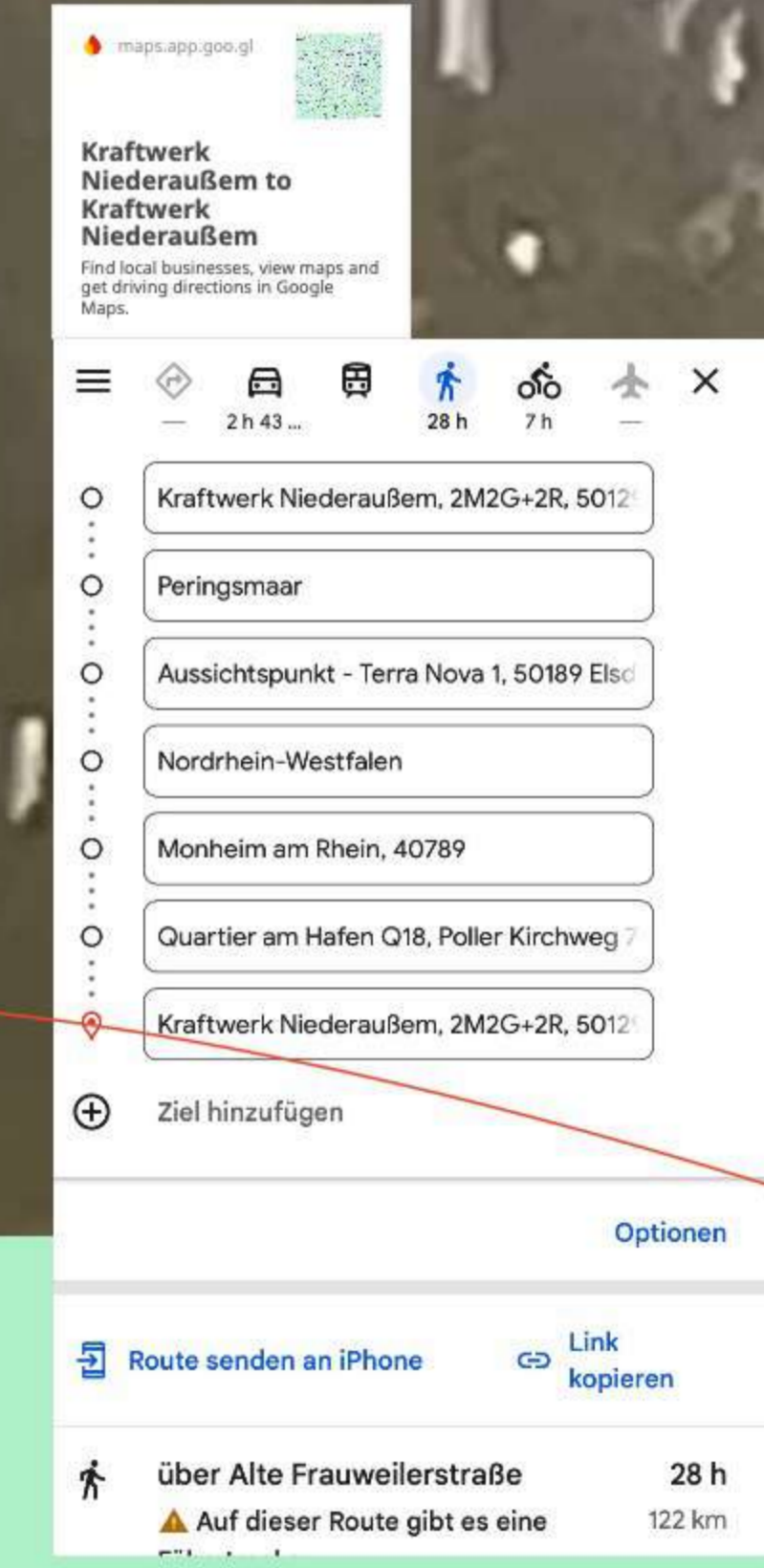
Radio Feature on the planning of the post-mining lake



paradigmatic site of extractivist modernity
how to move from a fossil mindset to a hydro-sensitive one?

because of the pumps water ecologies changed significantly
ground water level dropped 450 meter

'water management' infrastructure (e.g. pumps, pipes and wells) around mine



Confluence Gillbach - Erft



Planned water intake point for the Rhine water transport pipeline

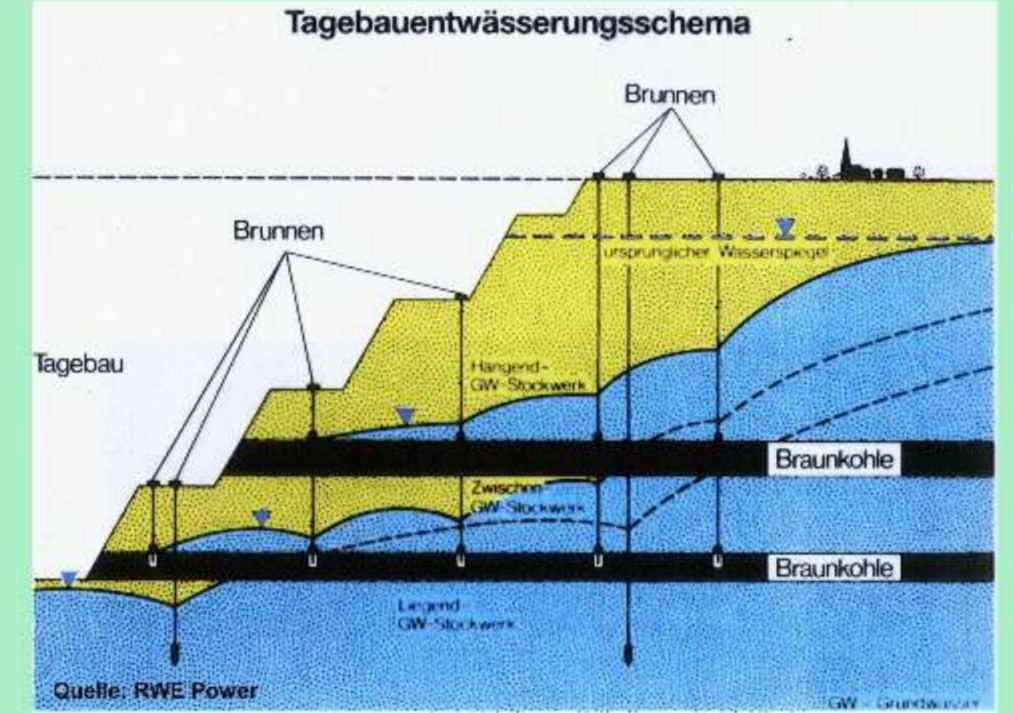


Chempark Dormagen near the planned intake point

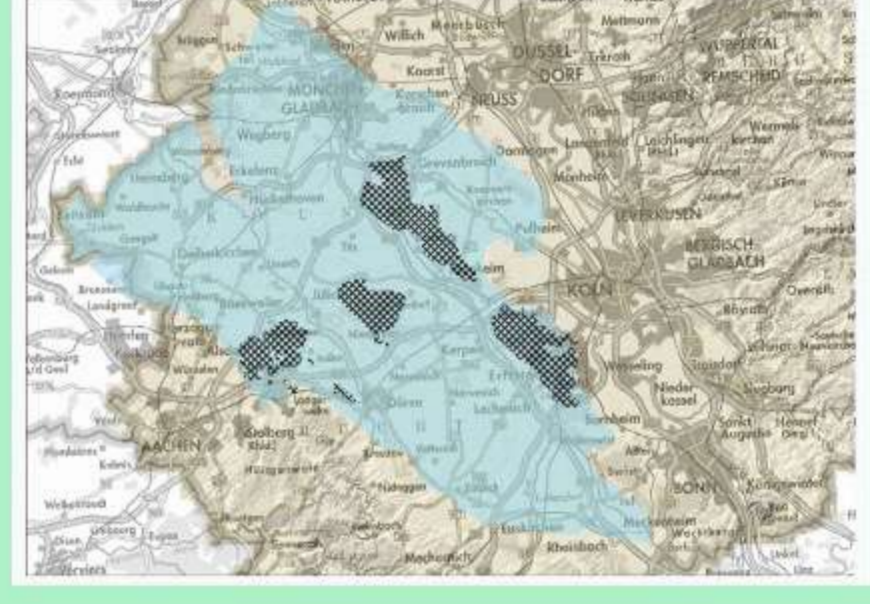


Greenpeace warnt: Die Konzentration der Ewigkeitschemikalie PFOS im Rhein überschreitet Grenzwerte
Die Konzentration der gesundheitsgefährdenden Ewigkeitschemikalie Perfluorooctansulfonsäure (PFOS) überschreitet im Rhein den durchschnittlichen Jahresgrenzwert.

Pumps all around the area of the mines pump out the groundwater to keep the mines dry, the water is used for various measures, e.g. irrigation of wet lands, drinking water, as cooling water, to spray down dusk. Half of the water is discharged into so-called receiving waters, such as the Erft. The Erft flows into the Rhine.



Keeping mines dry creates a large funnel. Aquifers are literally emptying themselves into the mine. Because of mining water management, the groundwater level sank down for around 500 meters, 10% of the area of the region is affected by falling groundwater levels.



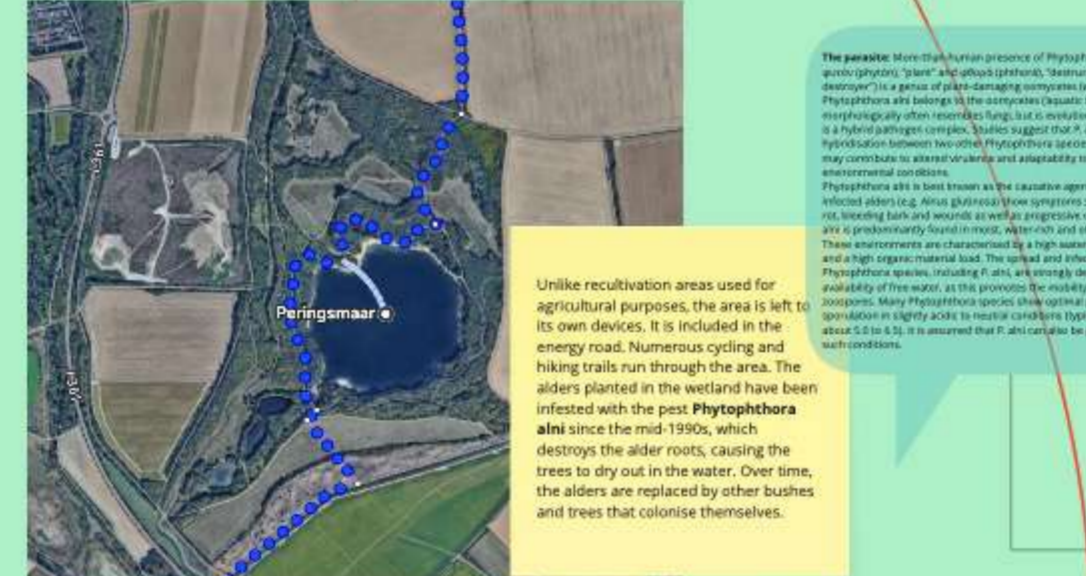
Braunkohle Tagebau und Gewässerschutz

Re-Imagining River Restoration
The restoration of the Erft river began in the 1990s. It brings us to a former centre of industrialisation - the Ruhr valley in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany - and reveals challenges of post-mining, such as pollution and subsidence. Three concepts are...

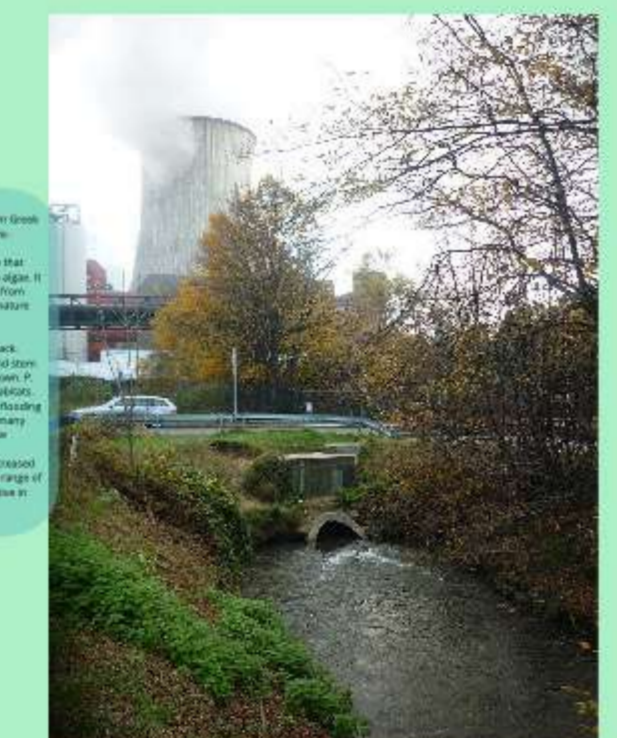


Peringsmaar

The Peringsmaar is an artificial lake where the gillbach used to emerge from springs of the Bethlehem Forest. It is situated on the reclamation area of the Fortuna-Garsdorf open-cast mine that was active until 1993. The body of water filled with pumped groundwater by RWE Power from Hambach, and a connection to the Erft is under construction.



Peringsmaar



The Gillbach's new "Source" is the Kraftwerk Niederaußem



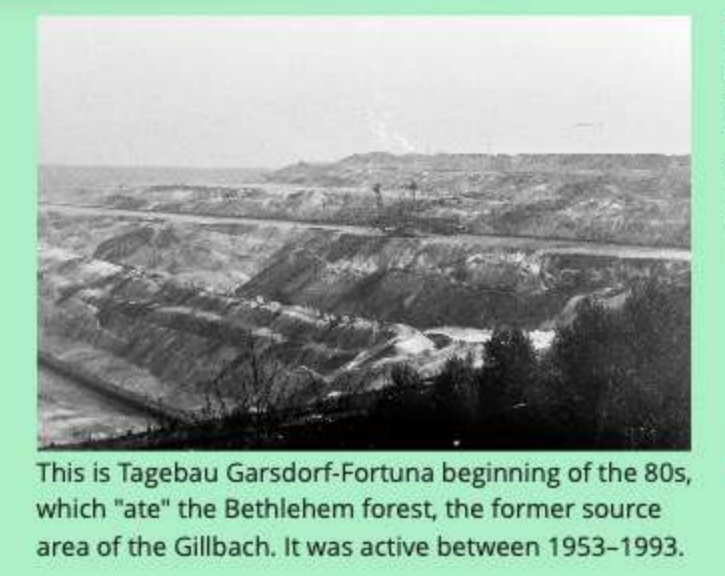
part that is going to be switched off

The upstream Gillbach / part is threatened to be switched off.

discussions are going on if it was a "ephemeral" stream that run dry during summer

if this is the case RWE does not have the duty to resuscitate - but would it be ethical because of response-ability towards grown ecologies and communities that ground their identity on the Gillbach with regular running water? What would be an "ethical" procedure? What does it mean to grieve for a stream that is switched off?

new source of gillbach
site of environmental historical depth due to massive emissions
uses ground water from mine as cooling water



This is Tagebau Garsdorf-Fortuna beginning of the 80s, which "ate" the Bethlehem forest, the former source area of the Gillbach. It was active between 1953-1993.



Tagebau Fortuna-Garsdorf - Wikipedia