

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2259-7931>

Kristina Pranjic

Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts
kristina.pranjic@zrc-sazu.si

HYDRO-ECOLOGICAL AVANT-GARDE: TOWARD A SITUATED AESTHETICS OF THE NORTHERN ADRIATIC

Abstract: This article introduces the concept of the “hydro-ecological avant-garde” as an ecofeminist and ecocritical approach to art history and visual culture studies, developed from the perspective of the Northern Adriatic. It approaches the Adriatic Sea not only as a geographical reality but also as an epistemic and methodological space, foregrounding the material agency of water, relational aesthetics, and more-than-human epistemologies. By situating avant-garde practices across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the study reconsiders Western and Eurocentric narratives that have marginalized East-Central European experimental avant-garde art, highlighting how ecological fragility, shifting borders, and cultural entanglements shaped experimental visual cultures. While the broader project combines archival research, art, cultural history, and digital cartography, the article contributes a conceptual and historiographical reframing, drawing on posthuman and feminist materialist theory, as well as environmental and blue humanities. Its transversal approach unfolds across three periods marked by crisis – the interwar avant-garde, the post-World War II neo-avant-garde, and contemporary eco-art – organized into three clusters: “Adriatic Mythopoetics,” “More-than-Human Engagements,” and “Resistance to Extractivism.” These clusters trace how artists mobilized water as metaphor, method, and environment to articulate ecological and feminist concerns, cultivate multispecies accountability, and resist extractive and normative visual regimes. The article positions the Adriatic as an active agent in visual history rather than a passive context, suggesting how peripheral archives and eco-situated practices generate alternative genealogies of the avant-garde. In doing so, it lays conceptual ground for an eco-aesthetic framework that integrates spatial and ecological dimensions into art studies, advancing a hydro-epistemological critique grounded in situated aesthetics.

Keywords: Adriatic Sea, situated aesthetics, ecofeminism, ecological art history, East-Central European avant-garde, blue humanities

1. Introduction: why water, and why the avant-garde today?

This article proposes the concept of the “hydro-ecological avant-garde” as an ecofeminist and ecocritical framework for art history and visual culture studies, developed here from the perspective of the Adriatic Sea. It focuses specifically on the Northern Adriatic, considering the sea not only as a geographical basin (nowadays shared by Croatia, Slovenia, and Italy), but also as an epistemic space and methodological lens. Approaching avant-garde practices from this region in such a way illustrates how visual culture can be understood as processual, situated, and relational. This approach also enables both a transnational re-reading of avant-garde trajectories and a reconsideration of visual epistemologies shaped by ecological, environmental, and historical entanglements. The artistic cases are presented as illustrative clusters that exemplify methodological possibilities of writing an alternative (transversal, ecofeminist, and ecocritical) history of radical avant-garde art. From the early twentieth century to today, such practices have pursued the organized aesthetic and political task of critiquing normative structures and contributing to the shaping of alternative futures.

The study forms part of the broader *Eco-Transversal Remapping of Northern Adriatic Avant-Gardes* project (2025–2028), which combines archival research, art and cultural history, as well as digital cartography. Within this context, the “hydro-ecological avant-garde” designates artistic practices that foreground water’s material agency, relational aesthetics, and more-than-human epistemologies. These practices articulate ecological and feminist concerns, engage fluidity (water’s shifting form) as both material and method, foreground situatedness by embedding artistic strategies in the Adriatic’s environmental and historical contexts, and resist centralizing, nation-based art-historical canons.

By “situated aesthetics,” I refer to an approach that ties aesthetic experience to the ecological, historical, and epistemic conditions in which it arises. Rather than presuming a detached observer, it foregrounds embeddedness: artworks orient viewers through partial, embodied positions attentive to place and narrative. It resonates with Donna J. Haraway’s notion of situated knowledge and with feminist and post-humanist epistemologies that privilege partial or diffractive perspectives, embodied accountability, and the co-production of meaning and reality. The concept of situated aesthetics connects place-based epistemology, materiality, relational politics, and local practices, thereby resisting universalist and Eurocentric claims to disembodied vision (“view from nowhere”).

Contemporary art history requires reorientation. Eurocentric narratives of twentieth-century aesthetic innovation have marginalized peripheral practices that offer environmental, decolonial, and feminist insights, privileging instead the radicalism of cultural centers such as Berlin and Paris. As for the Adriatic region, Trieste and Gorizia Futurism is frequently framed within Italian national narratives, while Yugoslav avant-garde practices are often described as secondary to Western modernism rather

than recognized as innovative in their own right. These genealogies are further complicated by shifting borders: over the twentieth century, the same regions and cities moved between Austria, Italy, and Yugoslavia, and today are parts of Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. Ecological themes, moreover, have often been treated in isolation – confined to particular artists, movements, or socio-political contexts¹ – without tracing their continuity across time and space. The hydro-ecological avant-garde contributes by decentralizing and diversifying dominant chronologies and epistemologies, offering eco-aesthetic alternatives (knowledge systems and visual aesthetics) grounded in the material and symbolic dynamics of the Adriatic. As Hal Foster observes, “the time consciousness articulated in avant-garde art is not simply ahistorical; it is directed against what might be called a false normativity in history.”²

The climate crisis reinforces the urgency of such reorientation. Visual culture studies must foreground situatedness and environmental accountability. Escalating planetary ecological and social crises require what T.J. Demos identifies as “many names to account for the sheer complexity and multiple dimensions of this geo-politico-economic formation, as well as to identify effective sources of resistance and inspire emergent cultures of survival.”³

This study draws on posthuman and feminist materialist theory as well as environmental and blue humanities. Alongside its alignment with global art history, it follows the material and spatial turns in the humanities by highlighting the ecoregional and material characteristics of the Adriatic Sea and their entanglements in avant-garde art. A transversal⁴ approach unfolds through three historical moments of crisis, each connected to a period: the interwar avant-garde, the post-World War II neo-avant-garde, and contemporary neo-avant-garde (intermedia and art-science practices).

Building on my recent monograph *Jugoslovanska avantgarda in metropolitan-ska dada (Yugoslav Avant-Garde and Metropolitan Dada, 2024)*, which challenged canonized Western readings of the European historical avant-garde by tracing transnational Yugoslav networks, this article presents an attempt at a long-term ecocriti-

¹ See e.g., M. Fowkes, *The Green Block: Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism*, CEU Press, Budapest 2015; A. Pužar, *On the Position of the Organic Unbuilt Nature in the Poetics and Ideology of Eastern Adriatic Futurism*, “Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 2022, no. 22, pp. 271–288; A. Srebnik, *Kosovel’s Tragedy on the Ocean: The Modern Subject, Ecological Crisis and Constructivist Ethics* [in:] S. Bru et al. (eds.), *Crisis: The Avant-Garde and Modernism*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2022, pp. 481–496; D. Roberts, *Surrealism and Natural History: Nature and the Marvelous in Breton and Caillois* [in:] D. Hopkins (ed.), *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 2016, pp. 287–303.

² H. Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Seattle 1983.

³ T.J. Demos, *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2017, p. 87.

⁴ See, an example of transversal research bridging historical avant-garde and contemporary intermedia practices in an ecocritical framework: K. Pranjic, P. Purg, *Spreminjanje imaginarija napredka in rasti v avantgardnih in intermedijskih umetniških praksah*, “Primerjalna književnost” 2023, vol. 46 (3), pp. 21–39.

cal remapping of Adriatic avant-garde practices. Its purpose is not to provide a full cartography but to show how often-overlooked artists and collectives in the Adriatic zone have used water as metaphor, method, and environment to articulate regional entanglements and formulate situated critiques of extractivism and cultural normativity. More broadly, the article lays the basis for an eco-aesthetic framework that integrates spatial and ecological dimensions into avant-garde art studies, advancing a hydro-epistemological critique grounded in peripheral archives, ecofeminist genealogies, and the materiality of the Adriatic.

2. Theoretical framework: water epistemologies and visual culture

Andrew Patrizio proposes a non-hierarchical, connective approach to art history by way of a “horizontalising ecological eye”: “reclaiming the visual *ecologically* and resisting the elite structures that still have a hold over parts of our work.”⁵ In a related but distinct register, Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos in *Hydrojustice* reconceives justice itself as “hydrojustice”: a horizontalization in which bodies move alongside one another, with water as the element that binds human and non-human bodies.⁶ While Patrizio reorients vision, Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos shows that justice, too, must be rethought through water’s spatial and relational force. Together, these perspectives call for ecological imagination and elemental justice as critical orientations in the analysis of cultural and art practices.

For Patrizio, the ecological crisis is also a failure of imagination, whether political, economic, or communal, and thus requires a reconfiguration of the ecological imaginary as a precondition for meaningful action. Creativity and imagination, often overlooked in traditional art history focused on value, preservation, and expertise, are repositioned here as critical to developing ecological sensibilities and alternative social imaginaries. The following section builds on this ground by focusing on two connected theoretical orientations: first, expanded epistemologies, including embodied, feminist, and hydro-epistemologies, and second, methods of layering and entanglement that can inform a transnational, ecofeminist, and ecocritical mode of art-historical research.

2.1. Embodied epistemologies and the hydrological turn

To analyze Northern Adriatic avant-garde art, this approach integrates ecofeminist concepts such as Haraway’s notion of entanglement and her concept of *terrapolis* – a multispecies ontology of “worlding and storying,” where companion species are engaged in ongoing processes of becoming-with a shared world. In this framework,

⁵ A. Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2019, p. 3.

⁶ A. Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, *Hydrojustice*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2025.

“natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not pre-exist their intertwined worldings.”⁷ Haraway’s emphasis on situated knowledge, where occupying a place implies responsibility, supports a shift from detached observation to accountable, relational forms of knowing.

Jane Bennett’s theory of vibrant matter similarly affirms the agency of nonhuman forces in shaping perception and cultural production.⁸ Within this framework, water is a co-constitutive agent that shapes the epistemological conditions of both seeing and knowing, underpinning an eco-aesthetic methodology for mapping the Northern Adriatic avant-garde, in dialogue with the environmental humanities⁹ and blue humanities.¹⁰ It foregrounds art’s role in cultivating ecological awareness and emphasizes the Adriatic as more than a mere context to human history. As one of the most impacted and fragile parts of the Mediterranean, the Northern Adriatic exemplifies how rivers, coastlines, and seas are both shaped by human activity and generative of new cultural imaginaries.

As articulated in *Thinking with Water*,¹¹ attending to water’s materiality – the so-called hydrological turn – redirects focus toward multiplicity and relationality. To engage with water is to engage with fluidity, movement, and transformation, both materially and metaphorically. It necessitates openness to shifting boundaries and relations, whether between humans, more-than-human, and environments, or between artistic forms and disciplinary frameworks, and invites new modes of collaboration, perception, and aesthetic engagement.

Astrida G. Neimanis’s proposition that “we are all bodies of water” reframes embodiment as porous, distributed, and relational; it aims to overcome assumptions of bodily autonomy and discrete identity, and instead positions subjectivity as relational and co-constituted through watery flows and dependencies.¹² This situated hydro-phenomenology emphasizes that knowledge and affect emerge through material embeddedness in watery environments.

Building on this, Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris’s *The Hydrocene* proposes a new “wet ontological shift” and an eco-aesthetic framework grounded in water’s agency,

⁷ D.J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016, p. 13.

⁸ J. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham 2010.

⁹ C. Weidner et al., *The Emergent Environmental Humanities: Engineering the Social Imaginary*, “Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate” 2019, vol. 28, pp. 1–25.

¹⁰ S. Oppermann, *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023; S. Alaimo, *The Anthropocene at Sea: Temporality, Paradox, Compression* [in:] U.K. Heise, J. Christensen, M. Niemann (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, Routledge, London–New York 2017, pp. 153–162.

¹¹ C. Chen, J. MacLeod, A.G. Neimanis (eds.), *Thinking with Water*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2013.

¹² A.G. Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, Bloomsbury, London 2017, pp. 2–3.

movement, and relational aesthetics.¹³ As both curatorial and critical lens, the Hydrocene highlights how water-based artistic practices engage ecological crises not through representation alone, but through immersion, process, and co-composition with watery environments. It operates as a disruption or a “hack”¹⁴ to the Anthropocene way of thinking and doing by challenging dominant narratives, languages, and epistemologies.

Karin Ingersoll’s seascape epistemology offers an Indigenous, place-based model grounded in Hawaiian relationships to *ke kai* (the sea). Knowledge here emerges through sensory, historical, and relational engagements rather than abstract mapping: “The power of seascape epistemology lies in its organic nature, its inability to be mapped absolutely, and its required interaction with the intangible sea.”¹⁵ In the Adriatic context, this resonates with Predrag Matvejević’s *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*,¹⁶ which reads the sea through tactile, historical, and fragmentary traces – winds, stones, habits, and words. Together, these approaches reposition visibility through watery relations, challenging normative and extractive optics, and opening toward situatedness, multiplicity, and sensuous materiality. Egidio Ivetic frames the Adriatic as a shared historical and cultural space, shaped by entangled identities and long-term networks of exchange,¹⁷ suggesting that it can be approached both as a culturally coherent space and as a bioregional system whose ecological and material specificities inform its visual history and cultures. In practice, a blue humanities perspective here emphasizes the Adriatic as an active, shaping force – neither backdrop nor symbol alone, but formative in aesthetic production. To speak of an Adriatic “character” is thus to acknowledge both the works’ creation within this region and their engagement with its environmental specificities and the sea’s material and symbolic agencies.

2.2. Transversal convergence and layered landscapes

Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman epistemology critiques humanist universalism and proposes a “transversal convergence” that embraces heterogeneity across organic, technological, and ecological realms. “Posthuman knowledge is fuelled by transversality and heterogeneity: multiplicity and complexity shall be our guiding principles

¹³ B. Bailey-Charteris, *The Hydrocene: Eco-Aesthetics in the Age of Water*, Routledge, London–New York 2024.

¹⁴ A.G. Neimanis, J. Hamilton, *Hacking the Anthropocene IV: DIT*, project website, 2019, <https://hackingtheanthropoceneiv.wordpress.com/> (accessed: 7.07.2025).

¹⁵ K.A. Ingersoll, *Ways of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016, p. 6.

¹⁶ P. Matvejević, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, trans. M.H. Heim, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1999.

¹⁷ E. Ivetic, *History of the Adriatic: A Sea and Its Civilization*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2021.

and sustainability our goal.”¹⁸ Braidotti calls for new methodologies or cartographic tools that move beyond human exceptionalism and map entangled “naturescultures” through inclusive and non-hierarchical perspectives. This orientation aligns with the project’s goal of visualizing Adriatic avant-garde practices as environmentally and historically entangled networks, underpinned by the creation of a digital cartography that traces these relations across media, geographies, and time.

Ian McHarg’s 1960s arguments for design with nature and the “layer-cake method” demonstrate a systematic approach to visualizing landscape complexity through overlays of environmental data.¹⁹ By stacking layers representing soil conditions, hydrological patterns, vegetation distribution, and human settlement, McHarg’s methodology created composite images that were meant to reveal otherwise hidden ecological relationships. While developed primarily as a practical planning tool, his approach treats landscape as a stratified, dynamic system where multiple environmental factors interact to shape spatial conditions. This methodology provided a technical framework for understanding complex environmental interactions, though McHarg’s work remained focused on land-use optimization rather than broader questions about agency or knowledge production.

Elena Cirkovic extends this principle into what she terms “cosmolegality,” examining how Earth system processes and outer-space activities interlock in uncertain feedback loops that challenge anthropocentric law.²⁰ By incorporating orbital debris, atmospheric dynamics, and planetary monitoring systems into her layered framework, she demonstrates how legal and ecological domains are inseparably entangled. Transposed to Adriatic avant-garde practices, this layered methodology suggests attending to how artistic engagements with aquatic systems intersect with broader environmental networks, industrial and technological infrastructures, and archival traces of ecological change.

3. Rethinking avant-gardes in East-Central Europe

The traditional historiography of avant-garde movements has operated on a center-periphery model, positioning Paris, Berlin, London, and New York as key sites of radical innovations while treating East-Central Europe and the Balkans as derivative. This hierarchical framework has characterized peripheral avant-garde practices as lacking originality and canonical value, serving primarily as evidence of cultural diffusion radiating from established centers. Such interpretive approaches have privileged artifact-focused methodologies that emphasize finished works, clear chronologies, and

¹⁸ R. Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2019, pp. 18–19; R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013.

¹⁹ I.L. McHarg, *Design with Nature*, Natural History Press, New York 1969.

²⁰ E. Cirkovic, *The Law of Complex Earth and Outer Space Systems: The Cosmolegal Proposal*, Routledge, London–New York 2025, pp. 89–90.

unified aesthetic programs – criteria that inherently favor well-documented Western movements over the more ephemeral, hybrid practices of the peripheral regions.²¹ Yet scholarship increasingly demonstrates the opposite: so-called marginal spaces were often sites of radical experimentation.²²

Studies of East-Central European avant-gardes have often described them through metaphors of fragmentation and incompleteness – “flashes,” “years of disarray,” or “impossible histories”²³ – reflecting an interpretive lens that measures them against Western models. The Yugoslav avant-garde in particular has been cast as fragmented and reactive. Yugoslav avant-garde historiography has emphasized discontinuity and transformation rather than evolutionary development,²⁴ with patterns of interruption and renewal that complicate conventional periodization. Rather than operating according to a center-periphery model, the avant-garde often emerges through diffuse and rhizomatic structures of exchange.²⁵ It is more accurately understood as a network of nodes and relations, shaped by irregular temporalities and localized interventions.

Nonlinearity, decentralization, and spontaneity are not symptoms of deficiency but constitutive features of the avant-garde. As Yuri Lotman’s theory of the semi-sphere²⁶ suggests, the borderland is often the most generative site, where cultural production arises through translation, friction, and external interaction. From this

²¹ D. Ayers et al. (eds.), *Globalizing the Avant-Garde: European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies 8*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2025; T. Ørum et al. (eds.), *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries*, Brill, Leiden 2016–2022; P. Bäckström, B. Hjartarson (eds.), *Decentring the Avant-Garde*, Rodopi, Amsterdam–New York 2014; M. Tiampo, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011; J.M. Harding, J. Rouse, *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2006.

²² Z. Božić Blanuša, *Decentred Geographies: Poetics and Politics of the Avant-Garde*, “Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 2020, no. 18, pp. 49–66; B. Joyeux-Prunel, *Internationalization through the Lens: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Art Periodicals and Decentred Circulation*, “Journal of European Periodical Studies” 2019, vol. 4 (2), pp. 48–69; S.A. Mansbach, *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.

²³ See e.g.: J. Vinterhalter, *Flashes of Avant-garde in the Croatian Art of the First Half of the 20th Century*, Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb 2007; D. Djurić, M. Šuvaković (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003; K. Srp (ed.), *Years of Disarray 1908–1928: Avant-gardes in the Central Europe*, Arbor Vitae Societas – Muzeum umění Olomouc, Olomouc 2018.

²⁴ M. Šuvaković, *Impossible Histories* [in:] D. Djurić, M. Šuvaković (eds.), *Impossible Histories...*, op. cit., pp. 2–35.

²⁵ We understand the network as *réseau* in the sense of Bruno Latour, within the context of his actor-network theory (ANT), where the term signifies both the “network” itself and the activity of “networking.” One can imagine a three-dimensional structure in constant becoming, encompassing connections that are not only “between” but also “alongside” focal points, as well as loose ends at the periphery. It thus represents a fluid, non-hierarchical structure that exists as long as the flow of interactions between various elements and entities (both human and non-human) continues.

²⁶ Y.M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. A. Shukman, I.B. Tauris, London 1990, pp. 141–142.

perspective, the avant-garde practices appear less as unidirectional transfers than as instances of dynamic hybridization, shaped by local conditions of permeability and resistance. Tomáš Glanc has similarly described such processes of macro- and micro-transfer as resulting not in simple adoption but in subversive reconfiguration.²⁷

In Yugoslavia, this dynamic is evident in figures such as the “barbarogenius” or the concept of the “Balkanization of Europe,” together with the plural political project of Yugoslavia itself. These functioned as original entry points into the avant-garde, asserting the creative power of the Balkans while resonating with global modernist dynamics such as Oswald de Andrade’s *Cannibalist Manifesto* (1928). This transformative “anthropophagic avant-gardism”²⁸ sought to “make their own claim to modernity,” opening “new possibilities of revolutionary aesthetics and politics.” By subverting the center–periphery paradigm, the Yugoslav avant-garde asserted its agency as both recipient and generator of innovation.

Recent scholarship on Dadaism in the region further underscores this point by shifting focus from “movements” and “manifestos” to Dadaist tactics – ephemeral performances, lifestyle practices, magazines, and other hybrid outputs.²⁹ This methodological turn reflects a move away from artistic outputs toward the practices and transformative potentials of the avant-garde,³⁰ demanding closer attention to the localization of cultural activity within specific socio-political and geographical contexts. In parallel, new volumes revising East-Central European art historiography challenge hierarchical, artifact-centered models and emphasize fragmentation, discontinuity, and the generative potential of the (semi)periphery.³¹ In these contexts, the avant-garde’s horizontal,³² nonlinear, and non-narrative connections aligned with its own production methods: collage, assemblage, chance, and the transgression of boundaries between art and non-art. Through this broader lens, avant-garde practice appears as a mode of experimentation that destabilizes the boundary between art

²⁷ T. Glanc, *Transfer as the Key* [in:] M. Mrugalski et al. (eds.), *Central and Eastern European Literary Theory and the West*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023, pp. 613–631.

²⁸ M. Tiampo, *Pluriversal Avant-Gardisms: Deworlding, Reworlding, and Worlding the Avant-Garde* [in:] D. Ayers et al. (eds.), *Globalizing the Avant-Garde: European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies* 8, De Gruyter, Berlin 2025, p. 29.

²⁹ O.A.I. Botar et al. (eds.), *Cannibalizing the Canon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe*, Brill, Leiden 2023; L. Dickerman, *Introduction* [in:] L. Dickerman (ed.), *Dada: Zurich, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, National Gallery of Art, Washington 2006, pp. 7–9.

³⁰ M. Hagener, *Mushrooms, Ant Paths and Tactics: The Topography of the European Film Avant-Garde* [in:] P. Bäckström, B. Hjartarson (eds.), *Decentring the Avant-Garde*, Rodopi, Amsterdam–New York 2014, pp. 145–167.

³¹ C. Preda, M. Radomska (eds.), *Plural and Multiple Geographies of Modern and Contemporary Art in East Central Europe*, Routledge, London–New York 2024; A. Jakubowska, M. Radomska (eds.), *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, Routledge, London–New York 2023.

³² P. Piotrowski, *Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde* [in:] S. Bru et al. (eds.), *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2009, pp. 49–58.

and life, pluralizes the artwork, and foregrounds its intrinsic relation to politics. To understand avant-garde practice in this way is to embrace its incompleteness and embeddedness in place, moving beyond a canon of finished works toward a theory of artistic process as situated world-making. This theoretical turn also opens a bridge between the historical avant-garde and contemporary eco-situated strategies, where decentralization and resistance to normativity and extractivism continue to shape experimental artistic and cultural productions in the Adriatic.

4. Three clusters of the Adriatic avant-garde: rhizomatic and eco-situated cartography

Working across three temporal phases – historical, neo-avant-garde, and contemporary neo-avant-garde – this section groups works into three clusters: “Adriatic Mythopoetics,” “More-than-Human Engagements,” and “Resistance to Extractivism.” These are illustrative groupings, not comprehensive analyses. They serve as overlapping zones rather than fixed categories, highlighting distinct yet connected modes of engaging the Adriatic’s materialities and histories. Read together through an ecofeminist lens, they foreground critique, care, and multispecies accountability while tracing imaginative and material currents that link environment, water, culture, and artistic production across the last century.

In this article, the transversal periodization turns on three crisis-marked moments: the early twentieth-century interwar period, marked by war devastation, industrialization, habitat loss, and the emergence of the historical avant-garde; the post-World War II era and the Great Acceleration, rising environmental awareness, and early eco-art within the neo-avant-garde; and the contemporary moment, escalating planetary crises, intermedia and art-science practices within a renewed, eco-situated contemporary neo-avant-garde.

4.1. Adriatic Mythopoetics

This cluster brings together works that turn to mythological and poetic imaginaries of the sea, highlighting the Adriatic as a symbolic and cosmological horizon. It examines how artists engaged with elements such as wind, vegetation, animals, and water, often through cosmic narratives that foreground nature’s agency while also addressing industrial progress and ecological disruption. These practices draw on Adriatic and Mediterranean mythology, folk traditions, and poetic imagery, reinterpreting symbolic systems within modernist and avant-garde frameworks. Central here are historical avant-garde experiments that merge verbal and visual forms, especially *parole in libertà* and visual-concrete poetry, where language becomes spatial, material, and affective.

Three early twentieth-century nodes illustrate this dynamic. The first is the Futurist *milieu* in the Gorizia–Trieste transcultural border region, represented by Sofronio Pocarini (*Bora+polvere*, 1924) and Tullio Crali (*Swaying on the Dalmatian Islands*, 1938). The second emerges in avant-garde practices across Ljubljana, the Goriška region, the Karst, and Trieste, where Srečko Kosovel developed both romantic eco-poetic and constructivist forms (*Flying Ship*; manifesto *To the Mechanics!*), while Bauhaus student and constructivist Avgust Černigoj drew on Adriatic motifs in works such as *Viaggio sul mare* (1927) and in his decorative commissions for transatlantic ships. A third node is Rijeka, where early avant-garde activity engaged with the city’s multilingual port culture, industrial modernization, and maritime ecologies, exemplified by the poetic work of avant-gardist Janko Polić Kamov.

4.2. More-than-Human Engagements

This cluster focuses on artistic practices that explore multispecies entanglements, ecological consciousness, and the porous boundaries between bodies, environments, and ways of knowing. These works challenge anthropocentric visual regimes by cultivating affective, sensory, and epistemological attunement to nonhuman agencies such as the sea, wind, geological formations, and animal life. Here, visibility is not simply reoriented but fundamentally reconfigured as a relational, situated, and embodied practice.

A key node in this cluster is the Slovenian collective OHO, active in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Alongside conceptual artists in Croatia and the *Arte Povera* movement in Italy, OHO developed a distinct ecological and phenomenological sensibility. Their practices – often described as early forms of eco-art and minimal land art – foregrounded the interaction between bodies, landscapes, and matter through playful yet critically engaged gestures (e.g., Tomaž Šalamun’s performance *The Sea* [1969]; David Nez’s photographic works from the same year, including *Adriatic and Atlantic Sea*, *David Nez Makes the Bora*, and *David Nez Drinks the Sea*). This orientation was further shaped by OHO’s “reist” (thing-centered) doctrine, developed in the 1960s, which proposed a new, non-functional aesthetic relation to objects. Rather than treating objects as passive or utilitarian, OHO emphasized their autonomous existence, acknowledging them as entities with their own being and right to presence. In parallel, *Arte Povera* artists engaged in process-based actions and sculptural practices using organic and everyday materials. Collectively, these practices articulated early versions of what might today be termed a posthumanist aesthetic: one rooted in permeability, relationality, and the undoing of human–nature dichotomies.

A significant precursor to such strategies is Wanda Wulz, a Trieste-based photographer active in the interwar period. Her 1932 photomontage *Io + Gatto (I + Cat)* – a superimposition of her own portrait with that of her cat – offers a striking image of interspecies entanglement. The resulting hybrid figure, at once feline and human, blurs boundaries between species, gender, and identity, and anticipates later

feminist and posthumanist aesthetics. Emanuela Marassi's *The Cross-eyed Sea* (*Mare strabico*, 2013) extends this posthumanist optics: through shell-like apertures and an aquatic sound field, the work reverses the look so that the sea itself gazes back from the Trieste pier.

4.3. Resistance to Extractivism

This cluster examines how artists contest the ecological and geopolitical transformations of the Adriatic under industrialization, militarization, mass tourism, and resource exploitation. Rather than reproducing dominant visual regimes that commodify the sea as an extractable resource, these works reveal submerged ecologies, silenced histories, and toxic legacies. They intervene through counter-archival, sonic, and performative strategies that foreground situated knowledges and environmental justice, often deploying unusual forms of representation and substitution to reimagine the environment and its fragile futures. This ecofeminist critique links extractivism to gendered and colonial dynamics, reframing visual culture around practices of accountability and care.

One trajectory is developed by Toni Meštrović, whose video and sound installations (e.g., *Continuum* [2004] and *Continuum Continuum* [2007–2012]) attend to Adriatic coastal communities and maritime heritage. His immersive audiovisual strategies register how natural and cultural rhythms are disrupted by tourism and modernization, resisting simplified or touristic imaginaries through sensory attentiveness to place.

A different approach is taken by Neja Tomšič, whose performative and research-based works explore extractive and imperial economies. In *Jadran Resort: A Novel in the Landscape* (2023, with Natalija Vujošević and Tara Langford), she reimagines the Adriatic coastline as speculative fiction shaped by neoliberal tourism, class asymmetries, and post-Yugoslav fragmentation. Her ongoing project *Opium Clippers* (2017–) links maritime trade, colonial violence, and addiction economies through ceramics and narrative performance, exposing the entanglement of global extractive histories with Adriatic contexts.

Robertina Šebjanič extends this resistance into the aquatic sensorium itself. Her long-term project *Aquatocene – Subaquatic Quest for Serenity* (2016–ongoing) makes underwater noise pollution audible, revealing it as a pervasive but invisible ecological violence. By recording and remixing hydrophone data from sites such as Koper, Dubrovnik, and Korčula, she reframes listening as a practice of ecological care. More recently, in *Echoes of the Abyss* (2024), she traces the toxic afterlives of war through the chemical leakage of sunken munitions, combining scientific research and speculative installation to show how military histories continue to shape marine ecologies. Across these works, Šebjanič advances a feminist posthuman aesthetic that

challenges anthropocentrism and imagines multispecies coexistence under extractive pressures.

5. Conclusion

This article has proposed a situated, hydro-ecological perspective on visual culture, grounded in Adriatic art practices and framed by ecological and feminist accountability. Instead of tracing linear progress or influence, it has followed transversal, often submerged trajectories of artistic engagement, suggesting how visual culture is shaped by water, ecological fragility, history, and more-than-human entanglements. The Adriatic emerges not as a passive setting but as a central force in the formation of aesthetic and epistemological practices. From early avant-garde poetics and constructivist experiments to neo-avant-garde actions and contemporary eco-art, artists have responded to environmental transformations and geopolitical complexities with practices that resist extractivism, disrupt anthropocentrism, and cultivate relational forms of attention.

The three clusters – “Adriatic Mythopoetics,” “More-than-Human Engagements,” and “Resistance to Extractivism” – make visible the persistence of hydro-ecological concerns across time while refusing fixed categories or linear narratives. Together, they outline methodological entry points for an art history attentive to place, ecological vulnerability, and peripheral archives. Further transversal research, including diverse mapping approaches and digital cartography, could extend this orientation by tracing resonances and disruptions across the Adriatic and by advancing new awareness of water, seas, and oceans as agents in cultural and ecological history.

At the same time, the study acknowledges its limits. The project’s interactive digital cartography is grounded in uneven archives across Northern Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia, which preserve materials of avant-garde and eco-art histories. Many contemporary artists, including those discussed in this article, actively intervene in this terrain by creating artistic archives and counter-archives through sonic, performative, and speculative strategies, often making audible or visible material layers excluded from institutional records. The *Eco-Transversal Remapping of Northern Adriatic Avant-Gardes* project also plans to involve local communities, artists, and cultural workers in co-creating narratives, emphasizing participation as a mode of knowledge production. This multiplicity of case studies, drawn from institutional, personal, and artistic archives, aims to strengthen accountability while opening art history to collective and dialogical forms of memory in the Adriatic context.

Rather than aspiring to comprehensive coverage, such peripheral archives are approached not only as sources but as epistemological sites that model alternative, accountable, more diverse, and decentralized ways of writing art history, in line with ecofeminist and posthumanist commitments to partial perspectives and situated aesthetics.

References

- Alaimo S., *The Anthropocene at Sea: Temporality, Paradox, Compression* [in:] U.K. Heise, J. Christensen, M. Niemann (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, Routledge, London–New York 2017, pp. 153–162.
- Ayers D. et al. (eds.), *Globalizing the Avant-Garde: European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies 8*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2025.
- Bailey-Charteris B., *The Hydrocene: Eco-Aesthetics in the Age of Water*, Routledge, London–New York 2024.
- Bäckström P., Hjartarson B. (eds.), *Decentring the Avant-Garde*, Rodopi, Amsterdam–New York 2014.
- Bennett J., *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Durham 2010.
- Božić Blanuša Z., *Decentred Geographies: Poetics and Politics of the Avant-Garde*, “Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 2020, vol. 18, pp. 49–66.
- Botar O.A.I. et al. (eds.), *Cannibalizing the Canon: Dada Techniques in East-Central Europe*, Brill, Leiden 2023.
- Braidotti R., *Posthuman Knowledge*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2019.
- Braidotti R., *The Posthuman*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2013.
- Chen C., MacLeod J., Neimanis A.G. (eds.), *Thinking with Water*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2013.
- Cirkovic E., *The Law of Complex Earth and Outer Space Systems: The Cosmolegal Proposal*, Routledge, London–New York 2025.
- Demos T.J., *Against the Anthropocene: Visual Culture and Environment Today*, Sternberg Press, Berlin 2017.
- Dickerman L., *Introduction* [in:] L. Dickerman (ed.), *Dada: Zurich, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, National Gallery of Art, Washington 2006, pp. 7–9.
- Djurić D., Šuvaković M. (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-gardes, Neo-avant-gardes, and Post-avant-gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003.
- Foster H. (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, Seattle 1983.
- Fowkes M., *The Green Block: Neo-avant-garde Art and Ecology under Socialism*, CEU Press, Budapest 2015.
- Glanc T., *Transfer as the Key* [in:] M. Mrugalski et al. (eds.), *Central and Eastern European Literary Theory and the West*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2023, pp. 613–631.
- Hagener M., *Mushrooms, Ant Paths and Tactics: The Topography of the European Film Avant-Garde* [in:] P. Bäckström, B. Hjartarson (eds.), *Decentring the Avant-Garde*, Rodopi, Amsterdam–New York 2014, pp. 145–167.
- Harding J.M., Rouse J., *Not the Other Avant-Garde: The Transnational Foundations of Avant-Garde Performance*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 2006.
- Haraway D.J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016.
- Ingersoll K.A., *Ways of Knowing: A Seascape Epistemology*, Duke University Press, Durham 2016.
- Ivetic E., *History of the Adriatic: A Sea and Its Civilization*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2021.

- Jakubowska A., Radomska M. (eds.), *Horizontal Art History and Beyond: Revising Peripheral Critical Practices*, Routledge, London–New York 2023.
- Joyeux-Prunel B., *Internationalization through the Lens: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Art Periodicals and Decentred Circulation*, “Journal of European Periodical Studies” 2019, vol. 4 (2), pp. 48–69.
- Lotman Y.M., *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. A. Shukman, I.B. Tauris, London 1990.
- Mansbach S.A., *Modern Art in Eastern Europe: From the Baltic to the Balkans, ca. 1890–1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.
- Matvejevic P., *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, trans. M.H. Heim, University of California Press, Berkeley–Los Angeles 1999.
- McHarg I.L., *Design with Nature*, Natural History Press, New York 1969.
- Neimanis A.G., *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, Bloomsbury, London 2017.
- Neimanis A.G., Hamilton J., *Hacking the Anthropocene IV: DIT*, project website, 2019, <https://hackingtheanthropoceneiv.wordpress.com/> (accessed: 7.07.2025).
- Oppermann S., *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023.
- Ørum T. et al. (eds.), *A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries*, Brill, Leiden 2016–2022.
- Patrizio A., *The Ecological Eye: Assembling an Ecocritical Art History*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2019.
- Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos A., *Hydrojustice*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2025.
- Piotrowski P., *Toward a Horizontal History of the European Avant-Garde* [in:] S. Bru et al. (eds.), *Europa! Europa? The Avant-Garde, Modernism and the Fate of a Continent*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2009, pp. 49–58.
- Pranjić K., *Jugoslovska avantgarda in metropolitanska dada* [The Yugoslav Avant-Garde and Metropolitan Dada], Založba Sophia, Ljubljana 2024.
- Pranjić K., Purg P., *Spreminjanje imaginarija napredka in rasti v avantgardnih in intermedijskih umetniških praksah* [Transforming the Imaginary of Progress and Growth in Avant-Garde and Intermedia Art Practices], “Primerjalna književnost” 2023, vol. 46 (3), pp. 21–39.
- Preda C., Radomska M. (eds.), *Plural and Multiple Geographies of Modern and Contemporary Art in East Central Europe*, Routledge, London–New York 2024.
- Pužar A., *On the Position of the Organic Unbuilt Nature in the Poetics and Ideology of Eastern Adriatic Futurism*, “Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne” 2022, no. 22, pp. 271–288.
- Roberts D., *Surrealism and Natural History: Nature and the Marvelous in Breton and Caillouis* [in:] D. Hopkins (ed.), *A Companion to Dada and Surrealism*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester 2016, pp. 287–303.
- Šuvaković M., *Impossible Histories* [in:] D. Djurić, M. Šuvaković (eds.), *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 2–35.
- Srebnik A., *Kosovel's Tragedy on the Ocean: The Modern Subject, Ecological Crisis and Constructivist Ethics* [in:] S. Bru et al. (eds.), *Crisis: The Avant-Garde and Modernism*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2022, pp. 481–496.

- Srp K. (ed.), *Years of Disarray 1908–1928: Avant-gardes in the Central Europe*, Arbor Vitae Societas – Muzeum umění Olomouc, Olomouc 2018.
- Tiampo M., *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2011.
- Tiampo M., *Pluriversal Avant-Gardisms: Deworlding, Reworlding, and Worlding the Avant-Garde* [in:] D. Ayers et al. (eds.), *Globalizing the Avant-Garde: European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies 8*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2025, pp. 13–33.
- Vinterhalter J., *Flashes of Avant-garde in the Croatian Art of the First Half of the 20th Century*, Muzej Suvremene Umjetnosti, Zagreb 2007.
- Weidner C. et al., *The Emergent Environmental Humanities: Engineering the Social Imaginary*, “Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate” 2019, vol. 28, pp. 1–25.