**Session 3 — Elemental Convivialities & Thinking-Feeling with the Water**

**Overall Idea of the Session**

This session explores water beyond its status as a mere resource, inviting us to think with water as a relational, elemental, and more-than-human presence. How do we engage with water not just as an extractable material but as something that shapes, carries, and exceeds human knowledge? How do contemporary struggles over water—such as those of riverine communities and ecological justice movements—reflect deep tensions between colonial, capitalist, and bureaucratic control over water systems, and other forms of relation, reverence, and resistance? Ivan Illich’s H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness critiques modern urbanization’s reduction of water to a technical and sanitary concern, severing it from its cultural and historical significances. Luce Irigaray’s Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche challenges masculinist, rationalist traditions of philosophy, instead proposing a fluid, embodied way of thinking through water’s movements. Riverhood: Political Ecologies of Socionature Commoning examines contemporary struggles for water justice, looking at how communities resist the enclosure and commodification of rivers and fight for a more reciprocal and relational way of living with water. Astrida Neimanis’ Thinking with Water proposes an “aqueous imaginary” that challenges dominant ways of knowing, urging us to engage with water’s unknowability, movements, and materialities as central to ethical and political life.

How do these texts help us rethink water beyond extractivist and colonial frameworks? What would it mean to develop a practice of living with water, rather than managing or conquering it? How do contemporary struggles for water justice reflect broader issues of autonomy, ecological conviviality, and resistance to capitalist enclosures?

**Summaries of the Readings**

**Ivan Illich, H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness**

Illich explores the historical transformation of water from a vital, mythic, and sacred element into a sterile commodity within modern cities. He critiques the modern technocratic approach to water management, which abstracts it from its cultural and ecological entanglements. For Illich, this detachment not only reshapes our physical landscapes but also alters our social and spiritual relationships with water, leading to what he calls a “waters of forgetfulness”—a loss of historical and symbolic depth in human-water interactions.

**Luce Irigaray, Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche**

Irigaray presents water as a feminist, fluid counterpoint to the rigid, vertical structures of Western metaphysics. She critiques Nietzsche’s philosophy for being overly focused on transcendence, mastery, and overcoming, instead proposing a philosophy that embraces flow, immersion, and the unknowable depths of relationality. Water, in her reading, is not simply a metaphor but a fundamental way of being, one that challenges the dominance of solid, bounded identities and embraces becoming, difference, and interconnection.

**Rutgerd Boelens et al., Riverhood: Political Ecologies of Socionature Commoning**

This text explores how rivers are not just natural resources but also sites of deep political struggle. The authors examine contemporary movements resisting the enclosure and commodification of rivers, showing how communities engage in “river commoning”—reclaiming rivers as relational, shared entities rather than privatized, extractable assets. Through examples from global water justice movements, Riverhood highlights how local knowledge and ontologies of water challenge dominant hydrocratic and capitalist governance models.

**Astrida Neimanis, Thinking with Water: An Aqueous Imaginary**

Neimanis develops the idea of “thinking with water”—an epistemology that resists rigid categories and embraces fluid, relational, and unknowable ways of being and knowing. She examines how water is often treated as a passive backdrop in Western thought, and instead calls for a radical re-imagining of water as an active collaborator in shaping life, ethics, and politics. Water, she argues, teaches us about interdependence, planetary vulnerability, and the limits of human control.

⸻