

Anna Zilahi

Portfolio 2023

Pear Tree on the Inner Island

Soundwalk with Bori, Kokó and Aunt Mari

(oral history sound piece, 35', booklet 2023)

The representation of a landscape, which is mainly based on tourism, mostly covers the services it offers to its visitors. In Tihany, the Benedictine Abbey, the magnificent view of Lake Balaton and the lavender fields are among the typical attractions depicted. This kind of pictorial reduction of a village also has the effect of obscuring the community behind the scenes, the daily lives and perspectives of the people who actually live there, and the ecosystem that provides a background for the tourists recharging.

For instance, who would believe that a pear tree once stood on top of a small island in the middle of the Inner Lake, which emerges in times of drought or was it an apple tree? How did a bench end up in the middle of the lake during the Russian occupation, and where did the fish come from when it used to be a popular fishing lake? Who put the oleaster trees surrounding the promenade on the shore and are there females among the grey cattles? Why don't the lavender-clad hillsides produce wine anymore? Through questions like these, the walk gives an insight into the past and present of the fishing village, its social and ecological transformations. Bori, Kokó and Aunt Mari lead us into the landscapes of local memory.

Listen to the sound piece in Hungarian here:
<https://t.ly/mnN1S>

Participants from Tihany:
Borbála Kántás
István Kovács (Koko)
Aunt Mari (Imréné Malkó)

The "Pear Tree on the Island of Inner Lake" soundwalk is organised by Anna Zilahi and the PAD Foundation with the support of the Veszprém-Balaton 2023 European Capital of Culture.



ANNA ZILAHÍ

PEAR TREE ON THE ISLAND OF THE INNER LAKE

A walk with Bori, Kokó and Aunt Mari

B: And I guess it's all digitised now.

K: The mother doesn't count, it's the sire that counts, so that he doesn't get mixed up with his own one. They bring a bull from another team and put it into this team. It's here for two years, then they take it away or replace it, because by that time the heifer is in breeding age, and they don't want the sire to impregnate it.

B: But the greys, haven't they been here for twenty years already?

K: About that, yes.

B: They haven't been around too long.

K: No. In 2000, there were no greys, remember.

AUNT MARI

There are those greys where the stables are. We used to have a garden there, they gave us a garden, but it was a very good garden there, because everything could grow, you just watered it. Then there was when the fish keeper gave us his boat, and we put in it what we picked: vegetables or carrots. Then we came across the lake by boat, and ended up at the manor, at the end of the house, yes.

I wonder whether there is a canal or a back stream or something leading there? I haven't been there lately, but they say there's an island peeking out in it.

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6.

ISLAND

K: Well then, the island. There stood a tree on it, I think it was a pear or an apple tree, I don't know anymore. It still had its stump for a long time, but the water level used to be about a metre higher there. A metre higher than it is now.

B: And we could see the island now, but I don't remember having seen it as a child.

K: No, because when you were a child there was ice on the island. There was 30-40 centimetres or as much as 50-60 centimetres of water on the island. But I had been on it when I was a kid.

A: And did that pear tree grow fruits?

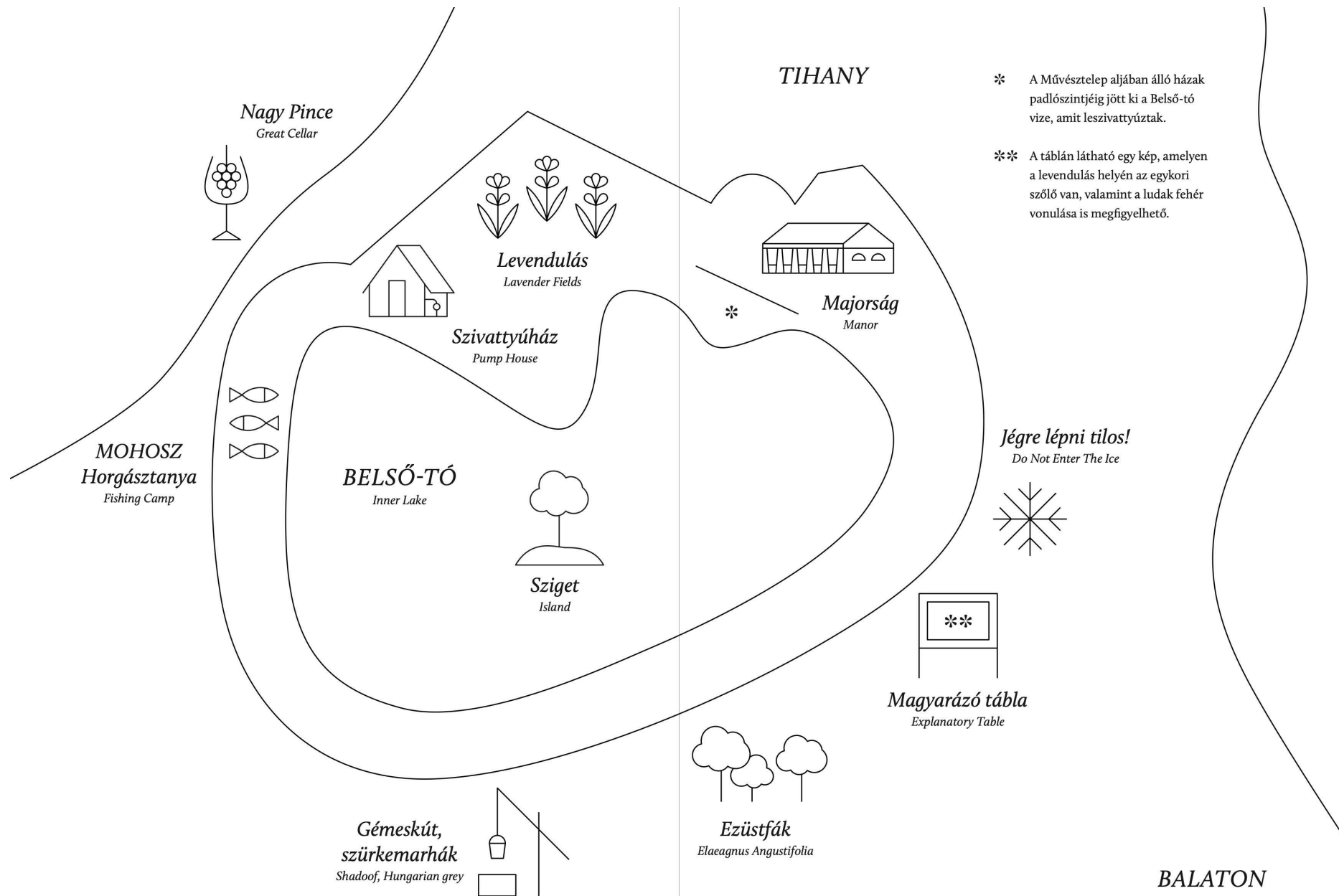
K: Sure, well, I remember it did. Now it might have been an apple tree, I don't know.

AUNT MARI

A: Do you have any memory of swimming or bathing in the lake?

M: Not swimming, but we bathed in it. We didn't swim in the lake. The Russians brought a big bench with them. They sat on it and fished from it. Because they brought it into the water, sat on the bench and fished in the lake. When they left, they turned the bench over and left it in the water. With the girl next door, about my age, we went to the lake. We went into the water waist deep to get the bench. You can imagine, the back of the bench was pressed into the mud, but we pulled it out at 15 or 16. We could barely get it to the shore of the lake, it was a bench so big it was four metres long. We took the saw and sawed it in half. One of us took one part and the other one took the other part (laughter).

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- * A Művésztelep aljában álló házak padlószintjéig jött ki a Belső-tó vize, amit leszivattyúztak.
- ** A táblán látható egy kép, amelyen a levendulás helyén az egykori szőlő van, valamint a ludak fehér vonulása is megfigyelhető.

Urtica

(performative video piece, 2022
ongoing artistic research)

Anna Zilahi's ongoing investigations with *Urtica dioica* (Common nettle also known as the Stinging nettle) tells a story of reconnection. It also offers the observation that distancing oneself from painful encounters has become a norm in contemporary human interactions with nature and with one another. The Nettle is a multifaceted weed intrinsically linked to one's childhood imagination. It cannot be touched because it stings and causes a rash. Establishing contact and connection with this plant fosters instant pain. Whereas its botanical Latin name (*urtica*) stems from the burning pain it causes, its many beneficial properties such as improving blood circulation and anti-inflammatory properties are downplayed and often overlooked.

Touching a nettle bears the ambivalence of humans and their relationship to Nature which ever since the Enlightenment we seek to dismiss as a force to be controlled. In the shadow of and heightened realization of the current ecological crisis, Zilahi proposes a different approach: openness, and, the realization that pain is inherent to all sorts of relations. Getting to know the other, enriching ourselves is not possible without dissolving our boundaries.

Urtica is based on Hans Christian Andersen's tale, *The Wild Swans*, where the princess saves her brothers, who are transformed into swans by sewing them an armor shirt made from nettles. She cannot whimper, cry out nor exclaim her pain while completing this task. Ultimately, the nettle cloth liberates the brothers and allows them to return to their human bodies. Liberation is possible through the acceptance of pain.

In this performative video, a nettle dress is created, prompting a reverse transformation: touching the plant reconnects one with their non-humanness and animality – their *swanness*. The play with the white gown symbolizing the swan reflects how we oscillate between our human consciousness and our more visceral selves that makes us part of the natural world.

Urtica was realised within the framework of Umwelt Art & Science Summer Academy 2022 at Kisapáti, Hungary. It was also presented as an exhibition at Koda House, Governors Island, NYC from October 30 – November 12 in the framework of Residency Unlimited.



Videostills from the film *Urtica*
Camera: Gergely Ofner



Videostills from the film *Urtica*
Camera: Gergely Ofner



Videostills from the film *Urtica*
Camera: Gergely Ofner

Missa Echologica

(video, choir piece, 13", 2021)

The echo of Tihany is a sound phenomenon that also has a notable place in cultural history, as it became a well-known natural-cultural treasure through Csokonai Vitéz Mihály's poem addressed to Echo. The echo has faded in recent decades, but it has not entirely disappeared. The change can be linked to simply identifiable causes: elites are systematically acquiring property and building new real estate on the fishing village occupying the peninsula. Through this, they overburden it both infrastructurally and via tourism. This occurs hand-in-hand with the destruction of the ecological environment and the alteration of the sound-environment. These processes also amplify one-another. For instance, if they destroy the trees on the slopes of the mountain or excavate parts of the mountain, there will be nothing that can absorb the noise from the road encircling the village.

The mythological explanation of an echo provided a point of departure for the piece, alongside understanding the physical characteristics of sound's diffusion. The poet János Garay elaborated on the tale of Echo, a nymph, from Ovid's widely-read *Metamorphoses* in a 19th century piece he wrote. According to the legend of Tihany, the son of the lake's king fell in love with the princess who was looking after a herd of goats, but she did not reciprocate his feelings. The king of the lake hexed her in response. He turned her into an echo by taking her voice and, thereby, identity, only allowing her to repeat the sounds of her environment. In contrast to the writer's nearly two century old interpretation, the legend of the Tihany echo is not a tale about a selfish and narcissistic girl who deserves to be punished. From a critical perspective, this narrative can rather be read as a tale of patriarchal retribution.

Ecological destruction and patriarchal oppression are rooted in the same logic of power. The two strands converge in a votive antiphon, a responsorial festive choir piece.

Missa Echologica is an ecofeminist prayer, which simultaneously speaks up for a nature exploited by humans and pushed into the background as well as the liberation of the identity-stripped Echo. The O Antiphon is composed of nine verses, all of which are centred on different symbols linked to femininity and the ecosystem of Tihany. Laura Szári, the conductor of Varsányi Szlrének, composed the music. She initially draws on Gregorian melodies, but follows the path of music history that lead to contemporary melodies by the end. At the beginning of the piece, the part repeating the melody of the choir (the echo) is still distinct from the choir, but during the musical piece it fuses with it and by joining this community, it is able to find its own voice.

The minerals, plants, and animals that are at the centre of verses also appear in the performance created with the Varsányi Szlrének choir. These, in-themselves, are crucial components of the ecological circle and they also allow for the sensual grasp of different attributes that are linked to femininity's construction. Bone, mud, algae, reed, goat hoof clams (*Conger ungula caprae*), a golden haired herd of goats, swan, nymphaea, and, lastly, the community of sound all represent the celebration of the plurality and differences of women-images. The piece was written by Anna Zilahi and its music composed by Laura Szári, the conductor of the choir.

Singers: Blanka Bolonyai, Dóra Ferenczy, Bettina Horváth, Dóra Király, Rita Szántó, Laura Szári, Diána Takács, Eszter Tóth, Virág Török, Anna Zilahi.

Video: Gergely Ofner

Sound: Ferenc Juhász

The choir piece can be watched at the link:

4 minutes cut: <https://vimeo.com/552331569>

Whole video work: <https://vimeo.com/544499589>



Videostills from the film
Camera: Gergely Ofner



The River Knows Better (Ophelia Lives) (meditation sound piece and performance, 2019)

The poem meditation titled *The River Knows Better (Ophelia Lives)* draws on a famous anecdote in music history: John Cage intended to experience absolute silence in the anechoic chamber of Harvard University, but even there he heard two sounds, a low- and a high pitched one. The engineer explained to him that these were the sounds of his nervous system and blood circulation. The piece departs from the question of what would have happened, if in the aftermath of this experience, his interest had not turned towards external sounds, but inner ones?

During the meditation, in contrast to the poetically portrayed robotic and accelerated functioning in the poem, the slowed down and relaxed human body turns into a sound source, the individually experienced inner sounds become constituents of the recited poem. The kind of presence necessary for the reception of ephemeral media is not only activated by listening here, meditation as a medium activates all our senses. This is how bodily experiences become part of the happening art piece.

Ophelia's body drifting in the river is a female body, fallen victim of the abuse of power. Meditation's autonomous body experience aims to reclaim one's own body. The synchronised sensation of the addressed and reinvigorated body parts make it possible to experience a body functioning for itself, and thus allowing it to relive lost autonomies. Meditation as a medium works through presence, which enables being in the center effortlessly. Ophelia's lungs gradually fill up with oxygen again as she comes to her senses in the toxic blue river, while the listeners slows down to their own breath and heartbeat.

Contemplation and different modes of immersion are human activities which played a significant role in the evolution of Western culture. These seem to be very foreign dispositions in our accelerated work environments that build upon multitasking. The return to the body thus bears a political meaning, especially if it is rooted in community and not in isolation.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-2020-the-river-knows-better-ophelia-lives/s-HR610>



The River Knows Better, exhibition view, Sonic Thoughts, Studio Gallery, Budapest 2019

xtro realm

(interdisciplinary art project, 2017 – ongoing)

Xtro realm is an art group organizing a series of interconnected art events, launched in October 2017 in Budapest. The project applies an interdisciplinary and transmedial approach to make contemporary post-anthropocentric philosophical and ecological thoughts more accessible for the art scene and a broader audience.

Members of the artist group are visual artists Gideon Horváth and Rita Süveges.

<http://xtrorealm.hu>



extrodaesia book launch in Berlin, Flutgraben, 2019

extrodæsia

(Typotex, Budapest, 2019)

extrodæsia – Encyclopedia Towards a Post-Anthropocentric World is a multidisciplinary bilingual (English-Hungarian) encyclopedia including ecologically themed and new realist and ecological entries with prose poems of six young Hungarian writers and visual artworks that sensually approximate the landscapes of the Anthropocene.

The art book edited by the xtro realm group contains in both Hungarian and English an amalgamation of definitions of ecological and philosophical terms ('flat ontology', 'Amerindian perspectivism') almost indistinguishable from the prose poems ('the animal gaze', 'technoanimism'). The visual work done by Rita Süveges becomes the map of this post-anthropocentric philosophical landscape, and the book design facilitates the understanding of the textual dimension as part of the landscape itself. The poets involved included young contemporary Hungarian poets Kornélia Deres, Ákos Kele Fodor, Márió Nemes Z., Mátyás Sirokai, Kinga Tóth and Anna Zilahi. The authors of the theoretical definitions were Réka Patrícia Bereznai, Máté Bordás, Balázs Keresztes, Lóránt Kiss and Márk Losoncz and the xtro realm artist group (Rita Süveges, Anna Zilahi, Gideon Horváth).



The encyclopedia performs the dialogue of theory, poetry and visual art, which we envision as non-hierarchical components, where theory shapes the understanding of poetry, poetry makes theory sensually accessible and the visual landscape becomes the stage and framework of our understanding. With the radical juxtaposition of these components, we also wanted to represent a non-hierarchical world order.



xtro realm presents

ACLIM! Agency for Climate Imaginary!

(group exhibition, OFF-Biennale Budapest, 2021)

Can we grasp the planetary ecological crisis through local issues? What kind of knowledge can an ecological network researcher, an environmental psychologist and an artist formulate together, which can help us understand our present and our possible future? These are the types of questions posed by the Agency for Climate Imaginary! (ACLIM!), founded by the xtro realm artist group. The Agency houses research-based artistic projects and transdisciplinary theoretical inquiries dealing with the most burning ecological questions.

In the shadow of the climate crisis, the search for subversive local perspectives and alternative visions of the future is increasingly urgent. The question is not only whether we survive, but within what social framework we do so. The economic and political interests responsible for the exploitation of the ecosystem are not only responsible for the destruction of our habitat, but also impose a dominant constraint on the social imaginary that could lead us out of this dead end.

The agents of ACLIM! proclaim that we must leave our fixed patterns of thought behind to liberate our imaginary. However, this also requires a new idea of knowledge, which, in addition to science, includes intuition, emotional intelligence, the totality of bodily experiences, artistic knowledge, or dialogue itself. The stake is the survival of our home.

Participating artists: András Cséfalvay; Gideon Horváth & Kata Dóra Kiss; Tamás Kaszás; Csilla Nagy; Rita Süveges; Ádám Ulbert; Anna Zilahi

Curated by the xtro realm artist group
<http://aclim.hu>

Photos by Dávid Biró

A C L I M

Klimaközvetítő
Ügyvégek
Agency for Climate
Imagery



MISSION

Az ACO Agency for Climate Imagery a szellemi és szakmai támogatást nyújt a klímaváltozás megértéséhez és a közvélemény tájékoztatásához. Az ACO a kultúra és a tudomány közötti kapcsolatok erősítését célozza, és a klímaváltozás megértéséhez szükséges tudást és készségeket nyújtja. Az ACO a klímaváltozás megértéséhez szükséges tudást és készségeket nyújtja, és a közvélemény tájékoztatásához szükséges tudást és készségeket nyújtja.

MISSION

The ACO Agency for Climate Imagery is a leading organization in providing intellectual and professional support to the understanding and communication of climate change. ACO is dedicated to strengthening the relationship between culture and science, and providing the knowledge and skills needed to understand climate change. ACO provides the knowledge and skills needed to understand climate change, and the knowledge and skills needed to communicate climate change.

Workstation area featuring a wooden table with a laptop, a chair, and several informational brochures laid out on the table.







Research materials of Missa Ecológica

Handwritten text on a piece of paper, possibly a list or notes, located in the upper left section of the display.



A page of printed text, likely a document or article, positioned in the upper right section of the display.



A page of printed text with a small photograph at the top, possibly a newspaper clipping or a magazine article.

