Dr. Andrea Ballesteros is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at Rice University. Their work looks at the unexpected ethical and technical entanglements through which experts understand water in Latin America. She is particularly interested in spaces where the law, economics and techno-science are so fused that they appear as one another. In recent years she has been following the paths of water pricing in Costa Rica, bureaucratic care for water in Brazil, and traveling water knowledge throughout Latin America.

Dr. Ballesteros also runs the Ethnography Studio, an interdisciplinary experimental space that brings together students interested in the peculiarities of ethnography as a textual form, as a research strategy and as a modality of knowledge production. The Studio is structured as a space where intellectual labor grows out of generosity, rigor, and collaboration.

How do people commit to intervening in the future while acknowledging its unruliness? I propose the figure of the techno-legal device as a lively space where we can learn how people constantly negotiate the form of the worlds they want to bring about. In this talk, I will focus on one device: a list of water types produced by Costa Rican congressional representatives during the discussion of a constitutional reform to recognize water as a public good and a human right. During the fifteen years it lasted, Libertarian representatives made a series of seemingly outrageous claims: they theatrically declared that if the reform passed, ice cubes would become state property; they claimed that since all human bodies are 70% water, the reform would automatically turn 70% of their bodies into state property. Session after session, they produced a typology of state-owned waters that challenged any definition of what water is, of where its borders sit, and of what liberal ideas such as public goods entail. In this paper I explore their list as a techno-legal device to ask how people establish relations with facts, matter, and politics. I will argue that when taken as a techno-legal device, the list helps us see the making of a future history of water, a series of preconditions that can only be recognized as meaningful in the yet to come.

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