



ResearchSpace@Auckland

Version

This is the Accepted Manuscript version. This version is defined in the NISO recommended practice RP-8-2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/>

Suggested Reference

Longley, A. M., Fitzpatrick, K., Sunde, C., Ehlers, C., Martin, R., Brown, C., . . . Waghorn, K. (2013). Streams of writing from a fluid city. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 19(9), 736-740. doi:10.1177/1077800413500936

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/issn/1077-8004/>

<https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm>

streams of writing from a fluid city

An article for *Qualitative Inquiry*

January 2013

Corresponding Author:

Alys Longley

Dance Studies
National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries
The University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland
New Zealand

Phone 0064 9 3737599 # 85297 or 0064 9 4824531

Email: a.longley@auckland.ac.nz

Alys Longley (Lecturer, Dance Studies Programme, The University of Auckland) is an performance maker, researcher and teacher with a primary focus on writing and experimental documentation in performance making. Her research foci include practice-led research, interdisciplinary projects, ethnography, narrative research, somatic education methods and inclusive dance education.

Authors:

Dr Alys Longley (PhD), Dance Studies, The University of Auckland

Dr Katie Fitzpatrick (PhD), Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland

Dr Charlotte Šunde (PhD), Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland

Dr Clark Ehlers (PhD), Centre for Microbiological Innovation, School of Biological Sciences, The University of Auckland

Dr Rosemary Martin (PhD), Dance Studies, The University of Auckland

Associate Professor Carol Brown (PhD), Dance Studies, The University of Auckland

Professor Gary Brierley (PhD), School of Environment, The University of Auckland

Kathy Waghorn (BFA, BArch Hons), Architecture and Planning, The University of Auckland

Abstract

What is the relationship between qualitative research and environmental activism? At a time when the effects of environmental damage are becoming increasingly more visible and flooding our daily lives in unpredictable and sometimes devastating ways, how do qualitative methods of research and writing respond to current environmental challenges? This article discusses an arts-science-education collaboration entitled *fluid city*, which disseminates critical research on water ecology to the wider public of Auckland City, New Zealand through creative and performative means. An experimental approach to narrative washes through the style of this article in an attempt to have the encounter of reading flow with the logic of ecological thinking and liquid perception.

Key Words

arts-science-education collaboration

sustainability

water research

liquid perception

experimental writing

ecology

“the water we seek is the fluid that drenches the inner and outer spaces of the imagination” (ivan illich 1985 p 24)

1

at this point of beginning we have a request we'd like you to read this with a glass of water beside you and to transfer the water from cup to cells for the passage of time that you spend with this article also to notice a fluid body the slight moisture of fingertips meeting cup or glass (glass is also a fluid, moving inconceivably slowly) viscosity of eyeballs spiraling of bones allowing the progress of every movement blood supporting organs the rolling tide as you swallow

2

this is a story about an event about a tiny and transient city this is a story about all of our transient cities all of our transient bodies it's a story about water and research and pedagogy and art it's a story about an attempt it's a story about an attempt to evoke something so embedded in the daily life of all living beings that (in this city of auckland at least) it seems to be habitually taken for granted it's a story about an attempt to have research move beyond the languages and walls of the university into forms that evoke the imaginations of all sorts of people as they move with and around their city

this writing aims to evoke a sense of liquid perception¹ that follows streams and flows passage and connectivity and as such draws on the writing style of poet david antin who describes his style of writing against standard prose traditions as “dispensing with its nonfunctional markers regular capitalization most punctuation marks and right and left justification which i see as merely marking propriety and making a dubious claim to right thinking and right writing” (antin 2005 p x) antin’s poetics form a creative resource in this attempt to evoke in the tone and structure of a text the logic of fluids resisting the territorial resource based thinking encapsulated in logics of ownership and privatization an undercurrent of this writing evokes form or style as a materialization of thinking drawing on gilles deleuze who emphasizes the active way in which ideas come alive through a style of language

one’s always writing to bring something to life to free life from where it’s trapped to trace lines of flight the language for doing that can’t be a homogeneous system it’s something unstable always heterogeneous in which style carves differences of potential between which things can pass come to pass a spark can flash and break out of language itself to make us see and think what was lying in the shadow around the words things we were hardly aware existed (deleuze 1995 p 141)

¹ Deleuze coined the term *liquid perception* in his first book of cinema and philosophy as ‘a perception that no longer has the solid as object, condition or milieu’ (1986, p.80).

this emphasis on style highlights the processual nature of writing just as a focus on fluid perception re envisages the city in terms of movements connecting spaces

4

so there are some questions that may emerge what kind of city? how and why *all* of our transient cities and bodies? what do you mean by the logic of fluids?

5

once upon a time a tiny and transient city named *fluid city* was created by an urban planner an architect two choreographers a microbiologist a geomorphologist and a critical educator who wanted to find a way to connect the people of their city with academic research on critical water issues² through an arts-science-education collaboration comprising research on water ecology in the city of auckland new zealand

the *fluid city* is anchorless mobile³ taking the form of three cupboard-like structures towed by bicycles each cupboard opening out to invite passersby in a busy public space to view a film test water in a mini science laboratory follow a site specific choreographic performance listen through headphones to different

² The research team came together through a cross-faculty research initiative titled *Transforming Cities* that was established by the University of Auckland in 2010 to promote and support interdisciplinary urban research for sustainable futures. Our project was titled: 'Water in the Sustainable City: An Art-Science-Education Collaboration for Tamaki Makaurau Auckland'. We were driven by the research question: How might an arts-science performance collaboration play a role in fostering awareness and understanding of water issues in Auckland City, thus motivating ecological stewardship and creating experiences that enhance the quality of life in our urban landscapes? A motive for undertaking the collaboration was to explore and produce new ways of disseminating knowledge across the academy, with those who shape policy, and with the diverse public of Auckland.

³ To see footage of the *fluid city* installations on World Water Day, March 2012 see: www.fluidcity.auckland.ac.nz

voices sharing different meanings of what water is⁴ share their meanings memories and concerns about water through writing and drawing on postcards contribute this writing to a kind of washing line in the city space a tapestry of stories and issues and thoughts and pictures of water reflecting a multiplicity of meanings and issues a flow of bodies don labcoats select samples are guided by a microbiologist to see the usually invisible microbial worlds of their waterways active colourful alive and full of creatures finding out what the microbial populations of the water mean for the streams forming veins through bodies of place following characters through a dance and audio work evoking the invisible stories of a reclaimed harbor through movement narrative poetry and sound

6

the impulse behind the *fluid city* project was to create a space for celebration and consideration of water as a material and symbolic substance we wondered what is the role of the academy in facilitating environmental awareness? how might different academic disciplines come together to better understand not only what key research issues and the methodologies for working with them are but how the wider public may be engaged to better understand and act upon research that relates to them? for us this involved working across academic disciplines to consider what the important water issues for aucklanders may be and how these issues might be made lively and meaningful to evoke curiosity and open space for thinking ecologically about the city and the place of water in it⁵ a premise of *fluid city* is that the arts

⁴From children telling a dream about being in a boat at sea with their grandparents to an urban planner talking about how the toxicity of the city travels along roads and drains to the ocean.

⁵ Our consideration of sustainability aligns with the writing of psychologist and environmentalist Niki Harré, who describes sustainability “as a collective, social enterprise

play a vital role in communicating issues of sustainability in innovative ways that capture public imagination and provoke alternative visions of the city

psychologist niki harré discusses the felt affects environmental messages deliver and the difference between whether an issue is communicated so as to evoke fear or optimism indifference or change her research highlights that positive thinking creates conceptual space for new ways of doing that the emotions of curiosity enchantment and anticipation are the most powerful tools in facilitating sustainability

7

so we are claiming that the big picture issues of this article relate to *all* of our transient bodies and cities because every living body on this earth regardless of life form depends on water like story or family or weather water filters our lives water meanings transmute through material symbolic spiritual and recreational spaces⁶ anthropologist veronica strang writes “because of its literal essentiality, its formal qualities and its ubiquitous presence, the core meanings and values encoded in water are extraordinarily powerful” (p 245) and the politics of water ownership are potentially *the* most divisive international political issue we have facing us all “nothing on earth, not even land is more contested” (strang 2004 p 1) water is also so much a part of our every day that the need for consideration as to how we use it and care for it can easily slip away from us

aimed at new ways of managing ourselves. This emphasis is different from most debates about the current state of our planet and its people, which focus on “the problem”. Unfortunately, this problem-based approach tends to invalidate any attempts to create a better world that see “the problem” differently” (Harré, 2011, p.6).

⁶ Author Jacquie Clarke articulates the way in which water defines both our material existence and our thinking; “Walking is a kind of streaming. Our bodies are made up of water, and we gravitate towards bodies of water. We think in liquid verbs. We absorb quiet, reflect upon yesterday, thoughts flow and our dreams dissolve” (Clarke, 2010, p.116).

imagine you are sitting on an upturned yellow bucket you have a post card in each
of your hands one asks you to “share a water story (or drawing or poem or
picture)” the other asks “what do you think are important water issues for auckland
city?”

the following text distils and translates the contributions of over eighty visitors who
gifted their postcards to the *fluid city* washing line the themes and turns of phrase
that form it are drawn from a vast array of different kinds of writing from pre
schoolers just learning to write to the most eloquent and learned penmanship and
sentence structure⁷

remembering water

conjures family mortality rest holidays

times where life is full of the heart of living

water should be worshipped

as our ultimate gift

our source of life itself

as strong and nimble as a panther

precious endangered powerful beyond belief

being in the water is like having a hug from the planet

⁷ This poem cites phrases and images from the postcards gifted to the *fluid city* project. In order to create a sense of stylistic cohesion, we have added in text and taken liberties with the structuring of lines and stanzas.

a dream space

healing cleansing purifying

connecting

yet

the travel of rubbish is endless the quantities of plastic and of waste

from farms industry households roads

makes the toxicity of seas and waterways a terrible reality

(cigarette filters in a snapper's⁸ belly)

we have quantity but are so quickly

losing

quality

(once I saw an eel attempting to make its way up a tiny scum infested creek near
my house)

a simple and profound lack of appreciation haunts our water

as it roams the tides of our lives the edges of our city

the structure of our cells the quality of our being

(keeping the oceans, lakes and rivers clean for future generations should be number
one)

⁸ Snapper are a very popular fish for recreational fishing in New Zealand.

reflecting on sorting through and writing out of the postcards that were created by visitors to the *fluid city* evokes the hundreds of people that came across this project the wide range of contributions taught us a huge amount about water in this city the drawings from children only two or three years old of the beach or the creek by their house the scratchy handwriting of their grandparents evoking memories of waterways irrevocably changed the practical handwriting of passionate aucklanders who care deeply about the city and are enormously knowledgeable about what we can do to improve it while deeply frustrated by the seeming apathy of the city as a whole the environmental degradation that is occurring in our city and in cities across the planet incites anger passion desire to change

it is our hope that in evoking the *fluid city* research project this article contributes to bodies of methodologies concepts ideas and frameworks on interdisciplinary research in environmental sustainability the authors of this article leafed in surprise as we searched for a recent article in *qualitative inquiry* on environment or ecology and qualitative research and we found that environmental or ecological sustainability is a relatively rarely covered topic of research for thinkers in qualitative methods at the present moment much more popular are topics focused on human rights human emotions and human social justice

which had us considering a potential paradigm shift in qualitative research from 'human rights' to 'biotic rights' a term coined by performance academic baz kershaw discussing the rights of all living species among which humans are one animal among many biotic forms and how that would effect the field of qualitative research

in the grand scheme of earthly things human beings are still a tiny percentage of total living creatures even if we exclude bacteria and other microscopic organisms what's more we humans are dependent on them so taking that as a scientifically factual basis of biotic rights has profound implications for any conception of human rights in respect of environmentalism and for the purposes of my argument i invite readers to temporarily adopt this perspective on non-human biotic rights in an environment of global warming produced by homo sapiens from that standpoint human rights might look like yet another sick joke of modernism and postmodernism gone wrong or perhaps, pace bateson, like a profoundly paradoxical kind of insanity (kershaw 2012 p 268)

such a paradigm shift involves thinking ecologically following gregory bateson (1972) ecologies consider the interrelationship of material and conceptual forms wherein all elements in an ecology impact on all others and as such the style or form through which ideas move such as the writing style of this article have ecological impact in terms of the travel of affects and the modes of thinking they engender

9

have you finished your glass of water yet? did you feel the transfer as liquid became body? the hydration of brain the feeding of blood? this story's only conclusion is its intention to keep moving as *the fluid city* maps a tour to visit a series of schools plans its residency in an art event in a regional park on a river in serious

need of revitalization to grow the momentary residents of a transient city
gathering stories of water and celebrating its value here and everywhere

Bibliography

Antin, d. (2005). *i never knew what time it was*. berkeley: university of california press.

Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Clarke, J. (2010). Living Waterscapes: The practice of water in everyday life.

Performance Research: A journal of the performing arts, 15:4, 115-122

Deleuze, G. (1986). *Cinema I*. London and New York: Continuum.

Deleuze, G. (1995). *Negotiations 1972-1990*. (H.Tomlinson, trans.). New York: Columbia University Press.

Harre, N. (2011). *Psychology for a better world: strategies to inspire sustainability*.

Auckland: University of Auckland Department of Psychology.

Illich, I. (1985). *H2O and the Waters of Forgetfulness: reflections of the historicity of stuff*. Dallas: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.

Kershaw, B. (2012). Performance ecologies, biotic rights and retro-modernisation.

Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance, 17(2), 265-287

Strang, V. (2004). *The meaning of water*. Oxford and New York: Berg.