

Slide 1: Aqueous Humours: Fluid Ground

- This paper will be delivered in two parts: introduction to a larger research project/approach and then a tangible output of this project (experimental)

Slide 2: Bodies of Water

- Fluid Ground attempts to queer our planetary relations, the tools and systems that we use to mediate and relate to the planet, as what we use uses us (Sara Ahmed) – ‘uses’ are dictated by systems that wire our thinking and behaviours
- Climate change is largely caused through human manipulations of the planet, which have become the well-used path (Ahmed), a normative and violent trap whose wiring recedes into the background
- How to relate differently?
- As ‘Bodies of Water’ (Neimanis), we can be situated in the entanglements of the planet and wider bodies of waters and their matters (terraforming actor)
- This is counter to western traditions from religion to ‘Modern science’ (Stengers and Barad), that situate humans above or outside of the planet. Modern science (Stengers) conjures abstract data in an objective realm of measurement produced in a neutral setting (laboratory). They are presented as answering their own questions, which do not relate to wider matters (Gaia), nor critically engage with their own agendas/apparatus

Slide 3: From Mapping Water to Fluid Mapping

- Mapping tends to produce similar relations to Stengers’ ‘Modern science’, as it constructs a ‘what’ (terrain) and can ignore the ‘how’ and ‘who’ (lens) involved in the fabricating of the map - naturalising the approach (wiring disappears)
- Normative mapping reduces water to anthropocentric concerns (consistent H₂O molecule - hydrological cycle, obstacle for boats or bathymetry, minerals on the sea floor) while placing the mapper and viewer (humans) outside of the map

- Rather than mapping water, we should aim to learn from water as an agent that is co-composing our environment and situate ourselves in this fluid mapping

Slide 4: Curating as Picturing Relations (Mapping)

- Mapping is related to curatorial practice, in that curators often construct a terrain and mediate how it is experienced or comes to matter
- Curating is also haunted by pseudo-scientific theories, of the Art Historical timeline (evolution - telos - progress) and the neutrality of the gallery cum laboratory (sterile – objective truth – outside in the text)
- Instead, we should stage curatorial decisions and subjectivity in the mapping of exhibitions, situated horizontally alongside the art works (intra-actions)

Slide 5: Aqueous Humours: Fluid Ground

- Came out of a dialogue between myself and the artist Melanie Jackson, and the invitation for me to curate a publication to be published by The Poorhouse Reading Rooms in Dorset, which also hosted artist residencies
- The book, 'Aqueous Humours: Fluid Ground' was a situated response to these waters but also the wider bodies of research by commissioned artists and waters that they are located near
- Dorset waters: From Lyme Regis mudslides that reveal ammonite fossils like those found by Mary Anning (1799 – 1847), to St Wite's Well which held healing properties (St Wite AD830) or St Candida's church still housing her Catholic shrine (AD881 – built by Alfred the Great – King of the Anglo-Saxons then 1190 Benedictines renamed St Candida)
- Artists responded via experimental non-fiction, fiction, diagram, image and scent

Slide 6: When Site Lost the Plot

- Plotting is important to recognise in relation to the site, as the site and plotter are plugged into wider systems that are not autonomous (site-specific)
- Curatorial fluid mapping needs to listen to areas of concern (mattering) across the works, as well as what matters in relation to wider contexts (water and Gaia)
- Using a process of 'Diffraction' (praxis suggested by Karen Barad) – in physics, the study of waves as they fracture to move around an object – can register the multiple waves across the works to explore the patterns that emerge from the artistic commissions and construct them anew to suggest areas of concern (matters)
- 'Agential cuts' (Baradian) – simultaneously register what is internal and external to the phenomena that is being co-created through the cut – and are a way to tangibly register the 'who' or 'lens' in the plotting of an entangled reality, what has been cut out as an area that matters and to reflect on the ramifications of that cut

Slide 7: Shadow Zone

- 'Agential cuts' will produce the threads or key to the topography of the book (AHFG), here we will be exploring one such 'agential cut', the Shadow Zone
- Shadow Zone (Pacific Ocean) is an area of stagnant water that sits 2.5km below the surface between currents from the surface and the ocean floor, and it is over 1,000 years old
- Different timeframes exist in the Pacific Ocean, and it is water's ability to trouble a linear notion that the three works (which I am focussing on here due to time parameters), which are entangled with this watery time from their own subjective (research/practice) positions
- Maggie Roberts' text has two key protagonists, La Sirèn (fossil) and Many Things Under A Rock (contemporary), which are octopuses that are communing between times to construct an alternative future. Suggesting that a different watery embodiment and decentred consciousness could bring a new planetary relationship into being, one that

acknowledges the deep time of Gaia and through the lens of whom we can learn to compose with water (Stengers and Haraway). Maggie is deploying a fictional theory of Topographical Anomalies that she locates as portals in Dorset through which the octopuses can traverse time:

'A Topological Anomaly delivers synchronous visibility, a counter temporality. Dots are not so much joined here, as mashed together as things needing to come out from being hidden, out from the silencing made possible by the disappearing capacity of linear timeframes.'

- Michelle Williams Gamaker's response is through the lens of a camera and via the mode of first person and script. In the section that I am going to read out to you, a Jawless fish releases eggs into the mouth of the Amazon to give birth to a different planetary relation which connects to wider embodied issues, such as the representation of ethnic actors in films. Posturing that perhaps a flashback (travelling back through time) could produce a new set of planetary relations: interrupting chronological sequences by interjecting events of earlier occurrence. Michelle considers the 'flashback' with voiceover narration, as an important time-travel device to signal a deepness to subjectivity and interiority which can be deployed to re-humanise previous performers of colour.

- Joseph Noonan-Ganley's text produces a shadow zone that is held between two points, a Landslip in Devon and a fashion campaign. He introduces the text by registering the contemporaneity of two past events, *'Michel Serres will exclaim 'all authors are our contemporaries'. Since then, we say 'all events are contemporary'. Today we visit Max Factor's collaboration with designer Rudi Gernreich on their 1973-74 South American Beauty campaign FUTURO, and The Great Landslip of Christmas Day 1839 in Devon, England.'* Joseph's shadow zone is a deep time or state of emergency which haunts both Gernreich's fashion designs for a hostile future and the landslides caused by an increasingly water-logged land. These timeframes are held tentatively apart but on the brink of collapse.

Slide 8: Several Dimensions of Octopus, The Numinous Wite and a Topographical Anomaly,

Maggie Roberts

An Octopus in the Bay. The year 2024.

50.723117,-2.936825 manifold > <480°, w=0 infinity plane, -xz=y² g(uv)

She arrives once more, grey-white, exhausted in translucent ribbons. Just shy of the speed of light, she blurs in and out of sight, carrying tiny particles of 21st century seawater back into the Braid before coalescing through a cabin porthole in the wreck of the Baygitano, torpedoed in 1918. She establishes a temporary den into which she flows and settles, feeling the grunts and squeaks of fish and crustacean fade around her. She focuses on the tiny vibrations of kin travelling towards her from the North Cornish Atlantic coast after their sudden flourishing in the cooling Gulf Stream.

Protean, accustomed to moving fast between visible and invisible states, she must concentrate on not liquefying again. Undying involves a set of complex autophagy manoeuvres. Her clan possess the capacity to fully regenerate appendages, internal organs, nerve, muscle and skin tissue, which usually takes a year to complete. She is Many Things Under a Rock (given her name in an earlier epoch by a people far North who know how to listen). A pluralism of individual and collective being, she is here in her many simultaneous perspectives to signal an alarm. A time rider.

[...]

There is another octopus waiting in Deep Time, an ancient residue tasted by the octopuses moving along the South Coast, she is geological, cosmic and ancestral. The geological time she is compressed in, is now an insistent spectral presence in the everyday, in range and impacting with increasing visibility as cliff erosion escalates. She feels the tremors of violent transformation in the rock she thinly covers. She is an evolutionary feedback calling for presence. Her name is La Sirèn. She registers an unprecedented frequency that has just whipped cataclysmic through the strata. Solid matter is suddenly dissonant and lurching again. She responds with phantom body memory to the volcanic surge that once threw the

seabed into the air and fixed it there, so many creatures folded with her into its heavy settling. Now La Sirèn responds with slow telepathic capacity.

Slide 9: *The End of the River*, Michelle Williams Gamaker

On our designated tea break, I check my emails. My friend, JOEL FURNESS has sent me a phone recording he has taken of our friend, Film Historian DR KULRAJ PHULLAR discussing *The End of the River* (1947) at the BFI.¹

[...]

KULRAJ stresses that ‘one of the most powerful ways in which Classic Hollywood Cinema, British and other European Cinemas worked to dehumanise characters of colour, was by denying them subjectivity within those films. So, to have flashback and voiceover narration, signal subjectivity, interiority, signs of life, consciousness, the ability to think and individuality – that’s one of the reasons this film is so important, as one of the first talkie films, with actual performers of colour to enable this.’

[...]

I’M HAVING A FLASHBACK

We have just returned from a trip to ST WITE’S (CANDIDA’S) WELL. It is surrounded by a WOODEN ENCLOSURE, an unassuming small, square well chamber sits snugly in the Dorset earth. The water is supposed to have curative properties for eye complaints. I kneel and bathe my eyes, hoping for some respite from the barrage of images that have flooded me during my time here. The water is cool, and trickles down my face. WREN asks me if I am crying and then repeats my gesture by dabbing well water at the corners of her eyes.

¹ Kulraj Phullar introduced Derek Twist’s 1947 film *The End of The River* as part of BFI’s Powell and Pressburger season, December 2023.

[...]

The only female vertebrates to lack oviducts are the jawless fishes. In these species, the single fused ovary releases EGGS directly into the body cavity. [...] The fish eventually extrudes the EGGS through a small genital pore towards the rear of the body, releasing them into water.

I picture each egg dispersing into every type of water body; from wells to puddles and fetid pools, to bodies, lakes and seas before reconstituting itself at the mouth of the Amazon.

EXT. AERIAL VIEW OF BRAZIL. DAY (B&W)

[...]

A PROPELLER PLANE circles the skies revealing the vastness of Brazil. Waves lap at the Marajó Archipelago, studded across the Mouths of the Amazon.

[...]

SABU guides BIBI FERREIRA to the moonlit river. GIANT LILY PADS cover its surface.

[...]

BIBI is beautiful and SABU looks at her for a while, before casting his eyes downwards.

SABU

Are you civilised?

BIBI

I can read and write.

SABU

Is it the salt that made you civilised?

BIBI

Salt?

Slide 10: Futuro 1973 – 1839..., Joseph Noonan-Ganley

Now the woman's head in the spacesuit/suit of armour appears close to ours again – looking us eye-to-eye, then she slides back revealing an army of duplicates flanking her side by side as well as behind her.

A complete orchard and turnip crops intact in their fields are seized by the movement of the convulsion from the hillside to which they once belonged, then redistributed further downhill, towards the sea. Hedgerows and boundaries continue atop the surfaces of islands of land, massive chunks, which haven't yet crumbled or been swallowed by the chasm. If this event could be reversed these land markings could be used as a key in reassembling the terrain, but this new mess of land, rock and soil is so extensive a return to the previous geography is unthinkable.

[...]

The emergence of this new place challenges the binary of land and sea, possession and relinquishment, use and waste, known and unknown, surface and depth, contemporary and historic because it is neither solid nor liquid, chartered nor unchartered. It is figured across the gaps of sinking and ascending ground, where Jurassic fossils meet turnips and starfish.

[...]

As the American man says these outfits predict the future. They visit us from outer space, bringing with them supernatural technology that allow the wearer to travel into the future, by bringing the future into the present. By bringing the cosmic down to earth. If these costumes allow the wearer to time travel into the future, then what is stopping them from

travelling into the past too? To a place and time that is surely an example of a shared future of catastrophe, if the design of the costumes is anything to go by.

[..]

1839 and the previous year has been excessively rainy. As the upper layer of land 'imbibes all the atmospherical water falling on the surface', this water filters down, across the seams of the land and rock, intermingling with the clay to produce great underground rivers of rain water, silt, and mud that undermine the structure of the land by eroding boundaries between strata, leaving vulnerabilities to collapse in times of increased burden. The grey and muddy rivers joyously spurt out of the land at regular fault lines visible along the beaches, where bulbous mounds of mud amass and estuaries of minerals until recently buried deep inland present beautiful sheets of deposit across the surface of the sand. The agent of collapse being caught during its escape, surrendering itself for the inspection of evidence of a crime, for which the evidence and the agent, the mud and its movement are one – the effects cannot be separated from the material, they are co-conspirators. This extraordinary disturbance from today, December 25th, 1839 will be strikingly familiar to future readers. The two figures on the ground in Devon, clinging onto the edge of the world, witnessing its collapse, will too remember why they need their body suits. They may even look for a more robust design.

