

Overflow

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### EDITORIAL

Usually imagined as the domain of the solid, the settled and the dry, the city of the twentieth century appears to be intimately dependent on its capacity to manage, tame, and regulate flows - and preventing overflows. Much of urban life is essentially about blocking and channelling, bridging and bottling, drinking and flushing, depurating and sculpting, that is, controlling flows and overflows by means of instituting legal, symbolic and physical boundaries between the dry and the wet, the land and the water, the drinkable and the poisonous. Under the unstable conditions of contemporary environmental and politico-economical landscapes, however, these boundaries progressively deteriorate, increasingly vulnerable to liquid overflows.

Dry thinking and imagination aside, the actual cities in which the majority of the world populations live are fundamentally fluid, flowing, and wet. While urban studies have not been short of watery metaphors to describe the contemporary urban condition as fluid and liquid, it is hard, beyond metaphor, to imagine how cities could exist at all without the liquid flows that traverse them, from the macro-flows of rivers and canals, water-pipes and sewers; to the micro-flows of coffee and beer, taps and WC. Recently, works on urban political ecology have done a remarkable job in embedding the liquid reality of the urban - most notably, water - into socio-political relations and structures, accounting for how the intractable, uncompressible and overflowing quality of the liquid intersects with various structural inequalities, which is especially the case in the face of rapidly changing environmental conditions. At the same time, the liquid micro-flows traversing the city at the micro-level (e.g. water, caffeine, tea, alcohol and energy-drinks, etc.) have been variously explored in relation to public health, security and socio-cultural issues.

Less attention had been given, however, to the agentic capacity of urban liquids to reshape and

overflow - rather than simply being overdetermined by – the relations and structures constituting the urban, by producing different spatialities and temporalities in ways that are never fully predictable, understandable or categorisable. It is this 'aquatic unthought' (Lo Presti, this issue) of urban life that this issue takes up, in the vein of Appadurai and Breckenridge's notion of wet theory, that is, 'a way of building explanations and models which accommodates flux, flow and other boundary-blurring phenomena'. The following texts differently engage with the city's liquidscapes, attending to the materiality and overflowing agency of urban liquids by exploring how their micro- and macro-flows, and their leakages and spillages – whether through storm-drains, leaking pipes or bladders and bowels – shape the contemporary city.

We begin in the city of Cochin, in the Indian South-West, held together by an 'intricate web of islands and mud flats', in which water and land negotiate their space in a delicate rhythm constantly punctuated by a litany of flows and (increasingly dramatic) overflows, as the Summer of 2018 most tragically showed. Here, as May Joseph narrates, ambitious projects tied to the logistics of global flows clash against unstable hydrogeology and precarious existences. As a result, the delicate archipelagic knowing emerging from this fragmented coastal life is eroded, threatened by political myopia, careless planning and meteorological instability, increasingly turning into an existential fatalism that is perhaps one of the Anthropocene's most evident (and dangerous) symptoms.

Next we move to Palermo, Sicily, where Laura Lo Presti interrogates 'the overlooked relationship between landscape and waterscape' by also taking her lead from urban floods, albeit of a rather less dramatic kind, to explore the way they overflow normatively and affectively urban life. From wakeboarding on a suburban street to fishing from one's garage roof or bathing on a public fountain, she describes the 'hydro-idiocy' that 'wet epiphanies' as these let unfold in the city, as naïve, incomprehensible and absurd ways to 'breach the ordinary, bringing the acquatic unthought into the urbanescence of life'.

In her piece, Mary Geary focuses on the systematic abstraction that water undergoes by being embedded within the English water management regime, showing how 'water efficiency' is produced as a post-political discourse that outsources responsibility onto the consumer's behaviour, while disconnecting this very behaviour from the water bill, in turn dependent on the company's investing performance. The result of this typically neoliberal pattern is the significant distance which 'has deliberately been created between ourselves and our water resources', a technocratically manufactured unthought which is, again, very symptomatic of our socio-climatically precarious times.

In the trending neighbourhood of NoLo, Milan, Alessandro Gerosa tackles 'the logistics of alcoholic flows' and their role in shaping aesthetic and socio-economical transformations in the urban fabric. Alcohol is an ambiguous substance, a 'liquid pleasure' and simultaneously an intoxicating one. It may be 'disreputable' and contribute to the 'degraded' image of the place that NoLo had, or it may be rechanneled in different flows so as to become distinctive and contribute to the upscale and trendy image that NoLo has. Yet, new and old conduits are not impermeable, they keep leaking into each other, as alcohol's agentic potential overflows their compartmentalised logistics, triggering social conflicts in the process.

It is still alcohol to be the protagonists in Holly Randell-Moon's exploration of the heavy-drinking student culture in Dunedin, New Zealand, and especially in the area around the University in which students and their disreputable overflows (binge drinking, vomit, urine, waste, as well as offensive language) are contained by a contradictory mix of poor transport system and social control, but also silent acceptance, given the role this 'subculture of excess' plays in branding the local university as 'enticing and cool for newer students'.

Liquid overflows, it seems, produce sociomaterial formations that remain transversal to accepted categories of order, control, and capital, as Elena Caccin and Fabio Bertoni describe by looking at the empty vessel of alcoholic flows, i.e. bottles, and their socio-spatial life once they exit the logistics of alcoholic flows and, becoming voids, enter a novel socio-economical valorisation via the Pfand system of void recollection in Germany. With a fine ethnographic eye, Caccin and Bertoni explore the novel configuration of waste, consumption and recycle that this system triggers, as well as the way it is overflown, while reflecting on the methodology that is more appropriate to capture the overflowing banality of the urban.

Another quintessentially urban liquid, coffee, is the focus of the following contribution in the context of US Starbucks drive-thru. Here, Sarah Marusek describes the way flows of gasoline and caffeine intersect with the American car- and fast-food culture, repurposing coffee drinking into a linear, highly individualised normativity, while rechanneling expectations as regards coffee consumption, public space, social interaction, vehicular movement, and urban life at large. While this highly-normatised coffeescape appears to be particularly attuned to the current zeitgeist, it is not invulnerable to overflows, as Marusek narrates.

Some further consequences of the wettheoretical approaches that percolate through this issue are drawn by Vincent Van Uffelen and Rocio von Jungenfeld. They address the notion of fluid design, as a way to engage with the urban as a constellation of flows which are relational, dynamic, in becoming and productive of novel and not always predictable meanings and sociospatial relations, within and beyond the human domain. Their proposal for designers to 'opening up to flow' echoes Jones and Macdonald's proposal to conceptualise urban water 'in terms of flows and movement through the city, with the management of water being concerned with attempting to script that continual performance'; and offers a stimulating complement to the other approaches.

In the closing piece we, the editors, wrap up the multiple inspirations this journey provoked, engaging with the materiality and agency of urban liquids through, as well as beyond, the socio-political relations in which they are embedded — by seeking to attend, that is, to their essential capacity to overflow. Rather than being simply framed as a negative counterpoint to urban governmentality, we argue, this capacity should be explored as constitutive in itself — in excess — to urban life. What does it mean then to think the city through its overflows? It is this question, which seeps through all the contributions to this issue, that our text reflects upon, soaking in a variety of urban liquidscapes and, in the process, unavoidably overflowing.





### Kerala Deluge Archipelagic Knowing

#### **May Joseph**

#### **Archipelagic Knowing**

Mud flats, reclaimed land, networked islands, these logics shape the barrier island city of Cochin. Composed of an intricate structure of estuarial ecologies and ocean topography, the city is always negotiating its watery futures between land and sea. Monstrous storms, furious monsoon rains and cyclonic waves are just a meager roster that living along the Kerala coast implies. I have come to understand this complex array of water knowledges required by coastal Malabar as an archipelagic knowing, nuanced by the intricate web of islands and mud flats that have held the city of Cochin together.

The informal knowledge of archipelagic knowing that cuts through the social life of the Malabar coast includes a logic fueled by canoe travel between islands, the morphing landscape of island topographies, and their culturally insular island cultures. These small island spaces that have been inward looking and cohesive for centuries are now swiftly being transformed into the intermediary economies of transit hubs, which many of Cochin's islands are being developed into. Water shapes the life of living in Cochin. But the torrential rains of Summer 2018 burst open the watery precarity of Cochin's futures.

Life in Cochin since August 2018 is a nervous one. On the one hand there is the relentless push forward of inventing Cochin as the biggest port of South Asia constructed around its barrier islands. India is investing large amounts of military and economic capital into the development and transformation of Cochin as India's largest container point. The brutal transformation of the region from quiet port city into mega port terminal has torn apart the city's languorous and largely neglected coastal ecologies, which were preserved through low impact engagement. The ecology of urban wilderness, protected wetlands, and some of the last biodiversities bearing the flora of colonial incursions, with its exotic blend of Dutch, Portuguese, African and East Asian plant species, have been entirely decimated on the islands of Bolghatty and Vipin Islands. Some of the richest wetlands of the Malabar region have been filled in without environmental oversight, damning the flow of the Periyar river and its tributaries along the undulating coast.

On the other hand is the looming threat of the catastrophic eventuality that the intricate system of over 80 dams networked across Kerala's 41 river systems will reach unsustainable levels leading to a calamity of unimaginable proportions along the pathway of the many dams. Unregulated development, land reclamation, unsanctioned sand mining, and the aggressive erosion of coastal wetlands has depleted the Kerala coast of its protective habitat. The shoreline is open to the tumultuous sea, bereft of its multilayered topography of foliage, coastal gradations and mud ecologies. The port with

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its mega development projects geared towards trade stands in mock juxtaposition with the island city's archipelagic precarity, situated under the shadow of the oldest and largest dam in Kerala, the Mullaperiyar Dam in the Idukki district of Kerala.

#### **The Torrent**

August 2018 saw the most violent precipitation over a century in the Kerala region. Within a period of two weeks, the state's dams were flowing at capacity. Inundated without a respite, the region's water management technocrats were in a crisis. The question of how much water to release, and how to manage the flow of such large volumes of excess water, failed to register at the national or regional level. Furthermore, the technical quandary that Kerala's largest dam structure — the Mullarperiyar Dam complex — is governed by the neighboring state of Tamil Nadu, complicates water management issues. A logistical left over from the colonial British era, Tamil Nadu's decision making along the Mularperiyar Dam impacts environmental consequences on the Kerala side of the Annamalai region.

Consequently, in August of 2018, large swaths of the Kerala population were uninformed of the impending catastrophe of dam overflow. Like much of India, the informal residential patterns of many hamlets and local enclaves along the path of the dam's surge path meant that breaching the large number of dams could create a major disaster of unimaginable proportions.

Imagine the fury and fear of a relentless cataclysm of thundering rains followed by the threat of voluminous water rushing down the mountains from released dams. The incomprehensible actions of the Tamil Nadu government's decision to release water from the Mullarperiyar dam without adequate information and preparation with the Kerala government, is still hard to fathom. How such far reaching repercussions of impending human harm could be handled in the manner it was — where people along the path of the overflow from 80 dams on the Kerala side of the border, were just swept away, or entirely displaced —, is still to be grappled with.

#### **Climate Anomalies and the Terror of the Deluge**

Escalating extreme weather along the Kerala coast over the last two decades has created a culture of precarity along the Kerala coastline. Beginning with the 2004 tsunami which washed away many villages with its surge along the Malabar, an emerging awareness of the ocean's disturbance has percolated into daily lives. Spiritual practices along the coastal promontories incorporate mythic narratives of apparitions and miraculous rescues from the catastrophic deluge that occurred as a result of the Sumatra-Andaman earthquake in the Indian Ocean. A new consciousness of an atmosphere out of balance informs people dwelling along the coastline.

Fishermen, laborers, longshoremen and former sea faring families speak of a difficult ocean whose inconsistencies stem from human hubris. Their accounting of the increasing disruptions to a long history of coastal weather patterns is embedded in a new environmental vulnerability. Coastal inhabitants of towns between Cochin and Kollam speak with remarkable lucidity about an increasing ecological forgetting of the sea's delicate balance. They narrate escalating symptoms of human abnegation of environmental understanding rising around them: overfishing, unregulated overbuilding, ocean degradation from garbage dumping and an increasing toxicity of the waterways upon which they depend for their livelihood.

Surrounded by lush landscapes and rich coastal topographies, coastal Keralites have embraced their topographical wealth without comprehending the significance of its climate vulnerabilities till recently. One young man from Kollam remarks, "For my generation, taking nature seriously is a new concept. We have grown up in a lush landscape without really comprehending the meaning of nature." The young man's observation rings true across the different coastal villages that were disrupted by escalating floods.

Wedged between the imposing Annamalai mountains and the Arabian Sea, Kerala's fragile but verdant ecology is delicately poised between ocean, wind, mountain and rain. The coastal settlements comprise a series of barrier islands, settled sand islands, and a vast interconnected series of floating landmasses that have been cultivated over millennia to constitute the archipelagic structure of the Malabar coast. An interlaced system of land and sea boundaries creates an intercoastal network of coastal villages whose exposure to the sea is porous and gaping. The rise of storm surges has led to a vast scenario of climate refugees and an informal culture of disaster relief zones. The long-term

viability of many of the existing coastal villages is caught between impending sea levels rising, and the real estate devaluation affecting the fishing communities of the region. The question of resettling coastal peoples away from the coast is an active and urgent one, as impover-

Real-Time is the fiction that can be measured with more accuracy by humans; almost, an utopian desire to measure the instant, the fleeting present

ished communities in these areas grapple with their harsh options.

The barrage of water from the Annamalai mountains in 2018 introduced a new, manmade threat from the hills. Sudden, unexpected, and frighteningly furious, the torrent from above onto the Kerala terrain of river towns and villages, has pushed to the fore the yawning gap between nature and human decision making. Climate disasters are no longer merely acts of god beyond human control. They are also the terrifying results of infrastructural mismanagement and poor decision-making across the expansive dam technology that has produced modern Kerala's artificial habitat. Unease about the next gush ghosts the daily lives of people picking up the shreds of their existence along the affected pathways of the 2018 floods from above, caused by human intervention. Trust in science and technology to look out for the public good has been shattered in a disconcerting way. When asked how people affected by the floods are doing, some reply "This is India. Floods come and floods go. Life goes on."

The flip remarks I receive to my searching questions of accountability, outreach and salvage, foregrounds my own increasing anxiety at the knowledge that my mother's Cochin apartment lies right along the projected path of a burst, should the aging Mullarperiyar Dam release another spate of water. On the one hand, such dark thoughts appear to be irrational and paranoid. "Nothing's going to happen to the dam" is the general approach to living precariously along the coast. On the other hand, as my car weaves its way across destroyed roads, damaged homes, and randomly muddy expanses of earth where a road or house once stood, I realize my worries are perfectly reasonable though unregistered by my relatives, who think of the cascade from above as merely floods caused by rains, and therefore — anomalies of climate, rather than the catastrophic decisions of water management.

The tenuity of the eighty dams in Kerala with their scenario of increasing rains is undeniable. Political skirmishes between the Tamil Nadu and Kerala governments along with corruption stands between addressing climate disturbances and infrastructural planning along the Malabar Coast. It leaves the region unprepared for what lies ahead. What is to be done? "Pray" my mother suggests, as she dog-gedly refuses to sell her home and relocate. But I suspect that the gods have left on the first boats. We must deal with the consequences of the Anthropocene with eyes wide open.







### Hydro-idiocy Bringing the aquatic 'unthought' into the dried landscape of Palermo

#### Surfing, fishing and swimming the urban

With the title 'Why go to the beach when you can wakeboard on the street?', a YouTube video shot in 2009 and then shared online by a local newspaper in August 2019<sup>1</sup> shows a wakeboarder surfing the *streets* rather than the waves of the city of Palermo (Italy), taking advantage of the flooding of the bathing area of Mondello, which was previously a swamp and today one of the most popular city's seaside villages. In September 2018, after a storm, the ZEN, an economically deprived quarter on the northern outskirts of Palermo and close to Mondello, flooded, with the local newspapers seduced by another farcical act: a boy decided to take his rod and pretended to fish from the garage's roof in the courtyard of his neighbourhood.<sup>2</sup> At the end of May 2017, an image immortalising two children in bathing suits immersed in the fountain of the Garraffello Square, in the ancient neighbourhood of Vucciria, in the city centre, started to be virally shared on social media, this time followed by the readers' comments not only over the alleged idiocy of the act but also on the lack of civic education of these children.<sup>3</sup> The fountain, which was previously abandoned and without water, had been recently restored and gated to preserve it from a long-standing degradation.

The three vignettes, gathered from local newspapers and social networks, are certainly hilarious – truly idiotic we might say (as those people were often intended to be idiots in newspapers and social media's comments) – but actually elicit many ruminations on the relations between the *limited* and *inadequate* infrastructure of water containment, the *unusual* appropriation of public space and, especially, the continuous *unsettling* and *disruption* of normative behaviour. As a result, though in a very playful way, these exquisite 'subversive' figures seriously speak to the many urban infrastructures' malfunctions, failures and uneven access that are experienced every day in the city of Palermo and, more significantly, stage new acts of creation that will help us to rethink anew the apparent disconnection between water and land in the city.

#### 'Water and people cannot be contained'<sup>4</sup>

In Palermo, water infrastructures are indeed old and poorly maintained. They cannot apparently block, contain or interrupt the intrusion of the water in the urban system. Mafia control over water,

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<sup>1</sup> https://www.balarm.it/news/perche-andare-a-mare-quando-puoi-fare-wakeboard-per-strada-succede-a-palermo-21398

<sup>2</sup> https://www.palermotoday.it/video/maltempo-allagamenti-pesca-zen-costume-partanna.html

<sup>3</sup> https://palermo.meridionews.it/articolo/55419/piazza-garraffello-i-bimbi-nuotano-nella-fontana-i-palermitani-sidividono-sulla-foto-della-discordia/

<sup>4</sup> According to Sicilian folk wisdom *acqua e populu non si ponu tèniri* ('water and people cannot be contained'). This insight shows a curious correspondence between 'aquatic' and 'human' overflows.

but more generally a public policy driven by clientelism and careless about environmental sustainability and people's needs, contributed to create the imagery of an inefficient city. In the last decade, as an effect of climate change, torrential rains have started to inundate and congest the city. During these occurrences, wells and sinkholes explode, making objects, vehicles and people float and flow along the streets that once were fluvial beds. There *was* in fact an internal hydrography of the city, silently fermenting on the bed of ancient rivers and springs, which has been indiscriminately erased through the centuries to accommodate the concrete structure of the urban. As a result, in the ordinary

As an effect of climate change, torrential rains have started to inundate and congest the city. During these occurrences, wells and sinkholes explode, making objects, vehicles and people float and flow along the streets that once were fluvial beds life, citizens would be typically disentangled from *aquatic experiences* because of the water's concealment within the urban sphere. Yet, as these three extra-ordinary examples tell us, something is changing in the way that water events of the city ask to be lived, sensed and enacted by local

dwellers when the *absurd* becomes *ordinary* and urban normativity loses its take on human agency.

Yet, what is the *trigger* of these non-ordinary behaviours? Considering that Palermo has often complained of a shortage of water and the threat of drought — in Sicily, for instance, there are still many religious processions and ceremonies invoking the rain — both ordinary people and the municipal government appear utterly unprepared to face and tame the water as it infiltrates within the dried city. And so, how to respond to water's intrusive *excess* if not through an *excess of mood*, both aquatic and idiotic?

#### From idiocy to hydro-idiocy

Although 'idiocy' is often used as a term of denigration, the speculative character of the idiot has differently solicited the interest of many thinkers, philosophers, poets and writers, from Deleuze and Guattari (1994) to Zizek (1995), from Dostojesvkji — with his famous novel *The Idiot* (1869) — to Artaud (1995), all enticed by the idiot's exorbitant capacity to exceed and transgress a normative boundary or rule by way of a genuine, unthinking and naïve behaviour. In philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari explain that 'the old idiot wanted, by himself, to account for what was or was not comprehensible, what was or was not rational, what was lost or saved; but the new idiot wants the lost, the incomprehensible, and the absurd to be restored to him' (1994: 63). The old idiocy is 'the naturalization of thought as a capacity of a thinking subject', while the new idiocy claims to 'the denaturalization of thought and the irruption of the unthought into life' (Shaw, 2016: 3).

By adopting and transferring aquatic behaviours over the surface of the urban, the three idiotic examples may also seem incomprehensible and meaningless, which is exactly why they breach the ordinary, bringing the aquatic unthought into the urbanescence of life. By doing so, they powerfully evoke the wet epiphanies of the urban, the striking appearances of floods and liquidities in the city that reveal the coalescence and co-presence of aquatic and terrestrial *matrices* and *moods*. Well, this might be seen just as a mere speculative proposition, but I am more than convinced that such acts of idiocy occurred in Palermo may help us to re-consider the overlooked relationship between land-scape and waterscape. As Vannini and Taggart (2014: 98) noted, we usually dwell on waterscapes for how they differ from landscape but 'what would happen if we instead viewed the land from the perspective of water? What would happen if we wanted to see similarities and overlaps between land, as much as between water and the urban, might actually emerge if we began to take more seriously and speculatively the idiotic behaviour sketched above — that is, an ironic, fleeting and disorienting

act that subverts the concreted order of things.

In this sense, the overflow ceases to be seen only as a material phenomenon that disrupts the dried imagery of the contemporary city, and can be conceptualised as a bizarre public mood that manifests through eclectic but nonetheless critical agencies that are consistent with the extraneous advent of water in the urban context. We might refer to this behaviour as 'hydro-idiocy', which alludes to amateur, creative, meaningless, humorous and stupid acts of subversion of the ordinary way to experience the city as a dried environment. As Goriunova (2012: 3) puts it, 'idiocy is about gathering and crafting "rubbish" that does not give answers or that has direct access to truth, but that enquires and stages encounters with the real through its force of insignificant, false and preposterous doings'. What happens, in short, when the aquatic overflow suddenly turns into a social-psychotic overflow, an excess of thought and action? But more importantly, which insights and encounters with the real can an idiotic or an excessive mood offer to a fuller understanding of the city from the perspective of water?

#### Rethinking the urban through hydro-idiocies

The ridiculing and mocking of the urban overflow by urban dwellers fruitfully highlights the urban complicity with water. After all, even if the indomitable force of water tends to be held away from or contained in the land, it can nonetheless reappear in unexpected places (e.g., in the city, sneak-ing into its buildings and streets through jets, leakages, overflow and flooding), but especially in unexpected ways (through many liquid metaphors and behaviours). This is particularly true for the threefold exploratory scenario sketched above. Through the acts of surfing, fishing and swimming the urban landscape of Palermo, the above experiences instil in the urban psyche the shock of a liquid experience. In the first vignette, for instance, we encounter the 'absurd' act of surfing a street. Obviously, surf'is both a fluid and temporary phenomenon, and as such would not necessarily be considered as a place from a sedentary, terrestrial perspective' (Anderson, 2014: 75). Yet, in Palermo, the hearth of the Mediterranean Sea, the metaphorical and anthropological relationship with water originates rightly from the visceral and material bond that people experience with a particular aquatic manifestation: the sea.

The preposterous act of surfing the urban actually transposes an aquatic event into a terrestrial ground, by eliciting a collision between two familiar spaces and temporalities. In fact, in the dazzled merging of the two spaces, the motorboat comes to be replaced by a car, the surfer still keeps on his shoes, and a guy in the background nonetheless tries to bike the flooded path. Besides idiocy and humour, the epiphany of living the urban as a marine performance disrupts the solid imagery of the terrestrial city by performing the unique and dirty hybridity of the water-land system. To reveal how material, imaginative, and discursive practices are held together with water (Anand 2017), such hydro-idiocy looks to benefit, in particular, of the continuous breakdown of infrastructures. In the area of Mondello, every torrential rain causes a flooding because, as many city dwellers and organisations complain, the collector created in 1891 to manage the natural outflow of rainwater into the sea is, let's say, a bit outdated to address the aquatic challenges of the XXI century.

The immersive experience of both hydro-city and hydro-idiocy comes back in the episode of the fisherman-citizen in September 2018. Even if farcical and pointless, this act returns to question the traditional boundaries between the urban and the liquid sphere, by presenting an urbanscape soaked in water that 'logically' requires an aquatic mood. Even here, it nonetheless reveals the malfunction and shortcomings of water containment. The experience of overflow does not spare anyone, from the wealthy citizen to the disadvantaged. In the final case, we find innocent children swimming and splashing in the waters of a historic fountain. A deplorable gesture, certainly. As it can be seen from local journals' articles and from comments on Twitter and Facebook, the 'model citizen' condemned the exchange of identity of the fountain made by kids with a swimming pool as an act of *usurpation* 

of a public good. Yet this playful gesture sadly reminds us of the scarcity of recreational facilities in the historic centre that cannot accommodate and satisfy the children's aquatic desires.

Such events are thus also interesting because they question the meaning of the public space by perturbing its imagery with private experiences of *unusual* appropriations, rather than usurpation, of ordinary places. Digging deeper, an idiotic gesture sheds light on the original meaning of the Greek word'idiot', which actually alludes to the personal, private and outsider experience of the cityness. In this sense, hydro-idiocy should be also theorised as the intrusion of a private experience, aquatic and idiotic, into a public setting. Finally, from a more phenomenological perspective, the three idiotic examples suggest that the relationship with water is not felt as immediate and pure but always mediated through hybrid devices. We find both urban things such as cars, street signals, fountains and buildings along with surfboards, masks, swimming suits and fishing rods. Therefore, the estrangement might be due by the commingling of sea and urban elements and by the coalescence of familiar objects and habits in an unstable setting. However, when the water *steals* the urban scene, who and what are really out of place? The surfer or the driver? The fisherman or the biker? The swimmer or the civic dweller? Through humour and un/usual correlations, we actually discover the urban and water as more entangled than we think, 'giving rise to a nebulous and fluid environment' (Lahiri-Dut, 2014: 507).

#### Some very last ruminations on the material and moral overflow of Palermo

The hydro-idiotic perspective tells us that the urban adaptation to the water ontology is not only possible 'once a "switch" is made' (Vannini and Taggart, 2014: 97) in the urban normative behaviour, but is perhaps also needed in the new context of climate change that is decentring the human from his land-centric experience. The urban idiot then becomes also a warning, the redolent figure of an imminent change. Irrupting through and against the urban solidity during the overflow, the recalcitrant 'hydro-idiocy' opens up a singular and outlandish hybrid space where the entrenched dichotomy between the liquid and the solid, the aqueous and the terrestrial, the human and the non-human, the facetious and the serious, can be alternately addressed. From a geographical perspective, this hybridity shows, as Lahiri-Dut puts it, 'environments that can morph from one into another, and can fuse into each other' (2014: 512). But it is the force of an extra-ordinary behaviour, the idiocy and paradoxical combination envisioned by its citizens, that helps to visualise, for better or for worse, the aquatic urbanity that moulds and affects the city both materially and psychologically.

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### Fluid logic The effluence and the affluence behind urban water efficiency paradigms

Human connectivity with water is complex, irrational, historically specific, ideologically shaped; intimate. "We are all bodies of water" (Neimanis, 2012: 2). Water use is a series of personal and political, material, corporeal, cultural, social and spiritual interconnections which shape ourselves as humans and our relations with other humans and the more-than-human. Water is power; our dependence upon it is irrefutable. As a result, the potable water resources which continue to underpin political economies relationally bind together public and private domains, our bodies and others' in complex hydrosocial entanglements increasingly bound up with the financialisation of capital (Linton and Budds, 2014). Understanding how these tropes of hydrosocial relationships continually remake themselves reveals the power dynamics which shape the control of capital across the globe (Swyngedouw, 2015).

This paper examines one element of this relationship through exploring the monetisation of the concept of waste prevention within current neoliberal practices of water provision. This is particularly pertinent for late-modern developed economies with established water resource management mechanisms. 'Water efficiency' embodies a holistic, ideational and ideological set of approaches, propositions and technologies which combine to evangelise 'doing more with each drop' of water. This includes improved irrigation networks in agriculture; digital sensors to monitor water movement within piped networks; reusing water in-situ through innovative recirculation of fit-for-purpose water qualities and, most importantly, pedagogic information campaigns with end-users to encourage pragmatic levels of consumption.

Within modern political economies water sector water efficiency initiatives are heralded as an essential component of demand-led water security. Guarding the inflows and outflows of water circulation are viewed as an essential component of national security. Further, climate change science is used to legitimise the surveillance, command and control and moralising narratives which combine to place water efficiency discourses within a post-political paradigm (Swyngedouw, 2007), creating what Molle (2008; 132) has termed totalizing 'nirvana concepts'. What this paper seeks to explore is the ways in which capitalism utilises the water efficiency paradigm to secure further profiteering. It is suggested here that water efficiency's focus on the responsibility of the end-user, the householder, the farmer, the industrialist, to use much less water distracts public discussions away from who actually controls the flows of water in modern economies. Certainly in England, where water supply is fully privatised, water provision is a vast profit making economic activity for an elite number of global shareholders. If the resource is under threat these shareholders will still want guaranteed returns on their investments. Water efficiency, as Molle's 'nirvana concept' suggests, enables the unit cost of water to rise over time, justified through both the cost of developing new auxiliary infrastructure and

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as a 'nudge' to change consumption practices. Compulsory water metering, a key technology of the water efficiency paradigm, is shaping new personal subjectivities (Loftus *et al.*, 2016): every drop counts — or rather, is counted.

Water efficiency is embedded within the English water management regime. Since 1993 each water company has had a duty under section 93A of the 1991 Water Industry Act to promote water efficiency to its customers. No clear definition of what water efficiency means has ever been stipulated, leaving the term open to interpretation. In essence the term seems self-explanatory: maximising the use of water and reducing wastage. A lack of a formal working definition, which both government agencies and private water companies must adhere to, must be viewed as a deliberate lacuna. Responsibility can be seamlessly shifted from asset manager to consumer. As stated by the Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management: 'Water efficiency effectively provides additional headroom in the supply demand balance through reducing demand' (CIWEM, January 2017). In other words, the consumers are the ones tasked with controlling their behaviours, their consumptive practices, to protect water resources to ensure that the 'additional headroom' is assured.

Education campaigns supporting water efficiency have emphasised not only the importance of changing water consumption behaviours at home but also the consequences of how personal use impacts on the wider water environment, effectively transforming water users into water stakeholders. Using water considerately is, of course, logical, sustainable and necessary. For householders and business users, a central water efficiency incentive is that using less water will save money, both through less volumetric use of the resource, potable water, but also because water use is tied to energy use. The Energy Savings Trust (2014) state that 55% of water used in the home is heated water. Hence, less water means less gas or electricity use. An outcome of a reduction in volumetric water use is that how we clean ourselves and our homes, and how often, opens up to public scrutiny. There is a watery 'blurring' between the public and the private realms (Appadurai and Breckenridge, 2009) suggestive of a crisis in our most basic application of citizenhood (Marshall, 1964). Our most intimate habits and domestic rituals are deemed needing review and remedial action. We, the domestic public, are communicated with as unwitting delinguents needing guidance and support in reducing our voracious demand, fuelled by an ignorance concerning where our water comes from, and a lack of disregard as to where our wastewater flows. By focusing on our own personal responsibilities we are drawn away from considering how overconsumption in all aspects of urban metabolism is increasing pressure on water resources close to population hubs (Neville, 2018; Gandy, 2004).

This 'responsibilisation' of the end user reinforces the hierarchy between asset owner and asset user. Information flows downwards only. The water company communicates their role as protector of our water resources through paternalistic interventions. Water bill informatics compare domestic user use with those of 'average' households. Corporate stalls at community events distribute toilet cistern 'hogs' and sand-timers to encourage reduced water use by lessened volume or shortened duration. Tie-in TV programmes highlight the impact of household toilet habits on sewerage blockages; drain flushers in high-vis jackets become national heroes. This move towards 'responsibilisation' of asset protection away from those who profit from water use to those who rely upon them can be viewed as part of a wider neoliberal shift. We must pay attention to the ways in which water efficiency is not a neutral term; but is highly politicised. As Trottier (2008, 201) states:

Understanding why certain epistemic communities promote a specific version of the "water crisis" requires us to understand the power relations they are immersed in, the ones they actually believe in . . . such interaction between agency and structure brings about both the evolution of a society and the reproduction of its structure.

The hydrosocial construction of late-modern modes of water management calls our attention to questions concerning water efficiency as a 'discursive construction'. We can argue that it synthesises extant technocratic hydrosocial practices and governance to now include embodied responsibilisation. A cursory review of public reports, working papers, and website data from the regulatory and subsidiary agencies involved in English water management reinforces these new water ethics. Climate change looms large in the presentation of facts, figures, statistics and other research data relating to potable water use and efforts to support efficient reuse and management of our effluent. As a paradigm water efficiency is compelling; drawing upon both emotive and empirical terminology, connecting humans and water environments in a mutually responsive dialectic.

Yet these targeted water efficiency initiatives seem ineffectual when we consider that the official leakage rates of the water companies remain at 25.6% for Thames, 16% for Southern and 26.7% for Severn Trent (OFWAT, 2010). For Thames, in a water stressed area, that is the

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equivalent of 665 million litres of lost drinking water every day. These losses are creatively termed as 'returns to the system' by the water companies. For Thames alone this is the equivalent of 44 million toilets being unnecessarily flushed every day. More pertinent perhaps is the question of direct benefits to the consumer. If customers are being asked to change their behaviour around potable water in a fully marketised water supply sector then that drop in use should be reflected in a distinct savings in their water bills. Instead bills continue to rise; as do the profits of the water companies. Any small savings in volumetric charges are usurped by concomitant rises in service charges. As Allen and Prvke state (2013: 426): 'the operational side of the water business, indeed the actual cost of water itself and the amount used do not themselves seem to figure as part of the financial equation'. The actual volumes of water used by consumers seem almost an irrelevance. Revenue from domestic water customers is a locked-in, guaranteed income for the water companies; English household consumers cannot buy their water services from anyone else. These assured revenues are used by the water companies to finance high-risk, high-return investments in other financial sectors. Helm and Tindall go on to argue that the volumes of water involved do not figure in the landscape of the five year planning cycle for water pricing. Allen and Pryke note: 'Ofwat determines household water bills on the basis of how much the water companies invest, whether that is raised through equity or debt' (2013:426). Ofwat state in their 2010 Price Review: 'Promoting water efficiency will not affect company revenues. The revenue correction mechanism, which we will introduce from 2010-2011 will make sure that companies are not penalised if consumers use less water then we assume when we set price limits at PR09.'

Charging customers more to use less water can only succeed because the water efficiency paradigm has been deliberately manoeuvred into a 'postpolitical' framing (Swyngedouw 2007, drawing on Žižek and Rancière). To question the veracity of water efficiency is to present yourself as a climate change denier; a flat-Earther. We can go further. The shame we associate with our effluence — the desire to rid our homes of water once it is contaminated with urine, faeces, spent shampoo, shaved hair - equals the shame we are made to feel through profligate water use. To be asked, if not required, to use less water is challenging in both pragmatic and affective ways. How we dispose of our effluence reflects wider cultural mores around health, elimination and natural physical processes (Žižek, 2010). As Leone (2012:254) suggests the 'cultural semiotics of bodily waste practices' are learned, not natural processes. Cultural, psycho-social and material phenomena shape how we learn to value, or disvalue, water in all its various articulations. Our revulsion with the waste we produce through our bodily functions is reinforced through the architecture of wastewater infrastructure. The white

porcelain of the toilet bowl enables a brief, usually solitary, inspection of our excreta before being channelled out through black soil pipes and invisible labyrinthine underground sewers. Toilets, waste pipes and drains, all act as both threshold space and conduit, connecting human bodies and material culture in a Bachelardian (1994) relationship of intimacy, both with ourselves and others.

The combination of domestic effluent in shared drainage systems, the mixing of our bodily wastes with others, human strangers, other animals and ephemera is relocated away from the private spaces we use for sanitation, to deep underground, away from our sense-making. Rarely do we contemplate what happens once we pull our flush and our waste departs. Like the intricacies of our own bowels, our sewerage networks remain a mystery to us, even as our daily comfort and flourishing depends upon their operation. As Robert Macfarlane (2019) reflects, the *Underland* is where we bury our waste and our treasure — and this porous, alchemical flux state between hiding and retrieving is true too for our wastewater. From it we can glean our next iteration of drinking water, phosphates and nitrates for fertiliser, other nutrients for aquaculture.

Effluence and money have then a complex and closely linked history before, and outside of, water company profiteering using water efficiency discourses. Before the advent of connected hydraulic systems in cities the 'night soil' collectors linked urban centres with the farms and market gardens which fed them (Geismar, 1993). Human waste was used for agriculture, in a recognised closed-loop symbiotic relationship; and still operates in similar ways within countries with no sewerage infrastructure (Jewitt, 2011). Private entrepreneurship enabled a human-waste management system before state intervention. The rise of hygiene, purity and disease as public health concerns, and as so-cially constructed concepts which used scientific language to legitimise the entanglement of private and public domains (Douglas, 1966), can be traced across Europe from the 16<sup>th</sup> century on (Laporte, 2000). By casting effluence as dirty and sullied, rather than as the result of natural processes, it becomes the material for state led practices of surveillance and admonishment. Water use, both within and outside of the body, coalesced with other techniques of control to determine how, when and where we socialise, dwell and work.

Water infrastructure is then intrinsically connected to capitalism. In the emergent cities of the Industrial Revolution water borne diseases were perceived as a significant threat to labour efficiency and capitalist enterprise. State led civil engineering enterprises in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century to develop water resources across the global North are now viewed as less concerned with philanthropy and more with empire building. As such, nascent economic expansionism could be deemed the driving force connecting effluence with affluence in the global North. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards outflows of bodily waste justified large capital works in urban centres, as the metabolism of the city densified and speeded up. The night soil collectors were no longer needed as hydraulic engineering works, funded through taxation and capitalist philanthropy, embedded water provision and sewerage as a perk of urban living, enabling the optimisation of labour efficiency. Night soil was relegated to the era of the pre-modern; a practice of the uncivilised. Water efficiency has always been as much concerned with the wastewater we eliminate as with the water we consume. As a paradigm then water efficiency in developed economies now represents yet another hydrosocial epoch; one in which we are reliant on accessing resources through privatised or semi-privatised organisations, with the bogey of water scarcity as the justification for paying more for less water.

Across the globe water resources management and governance approaches increasingly need to become sensitive to social justice concerns. Access to water resources, particularly for domestic water supply and sanitation, is not universal. Even in 2019 millions of global citizens struggle to access enough clean water to ensure their health and wellbeing. Current water efficiency initiatives seek to humiliate us into complicity, using climate change, water stress and water security as the driving narratives to justify increasingly penetrative forms of intervention. These include real time water

metering information, encouraging neighbourhood surveillance during hose pipe bans (Hackman 2015, Milbrandt, 2017) and public shaming by government officials. The UK head of the Environment Agency, Sir James Bevan, declared in May 2019 that 'we need water wastage to be as socially unacceptable as blowing smoke in the face of a baby or throwing your plastic bags into the sea' (Carrington, 2019). Our choices about sustainable water use are complicated by the distance that has deliberately been created between ourselves and our water resources. Both the inflow and outflow of our water use is mediated through money; we pay to have water delivered and we pay again to have it taken away again. The reality that our effluence underpins the affluence of a select number of anonymised global shareholders of the UK water companies is blurred, obscured, baffled through networks of complexity as dexterous as the pipes which service our cities' water metabolism.

To end, a restatement. Water is elemental, to be revered and respected. Our lives depend upon it, as do our more-than-human brethren of animals and other biological life. That money and profiteering should pollute our relationship with our water resources needs to be challenged. Water efficiency needs to be recognised as a 'discursive construction' which enables forms of neoliberalised global finance to continue exploitative relationships with our natural resources.

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Both bodies of work attempt to expose the failure of the modern city to contain and control people and nature. They have been taken while undertaking a series of walks through

the city that deliberately avoid the rigid right-angles and ordered spaces of the urban form, following instead the 'desire lines' of the city: informal paths underneath municipal bridges, or alongside free-way on-ramps, or through holes in fences to cross the railways. Along these desire lines ordinary people reorder the city, not as a form of deliberate politics but as a kind of quiet embodied presence; a kind of uncontrollable overflow.

http://www.dala.org.za/







### Alcohol and the city The logistics of alcoholic flows in urban transformations

#### Alessandro Gerosa

#### Introduction

NoLo, an acronym for 'North of Loreto'. is the way a semi-peripheral area of Milan has been recently renamed by a group of new inhabitants, middle-class students or workers between the thirties and the forties attracted by affordable rents that triggered an upscaling process in an area with a previously bad reputation (Novak & Andriola, 2008). Due to this sudden transformation two co-existent stratified visibilities are still visible (Brighenti, 2010): the first is that of an unsafe neighbourhood devoured by urban blight, threatened by drunken people that when the sun goes down swarm through the streets bringing alcoholism and drug addiction; the other is that of a growing trendy scene of cool bars serving craft beers and cocktails. Alcohol, with its containments, leaks and overflows is a protagonist of both visibilities with two evident, opposite directions: in the first it is an intoxicating poison, in the second a 'liquid pleasure' (Burnett, 2001). This can be exemplified from the following notes, taken during a meeting concerning the plan for creating a Urban Commercial District [DUC] in the area:

Representatives from more than thirty neighbourhood shops and associations are seated in circle. In few minutes, the debate becomes monopolised by a discussion over migrants' shops, and alcohol. For the delegate of the merchants' association, they constitute the main problem for the neighbourhood as they sell cheap alcohol underhand all night long. The main category to adverse this representation is composed by other alcohol retailers, owners of hipster bars: one says that he talked with an illegal vendor that now stopped selling alcohol after midnight, others illustrate good experiences with them. When this debate stops, the discussion becomes focused on the best strategy for the area to be recognised as DUC: the cool bars are now mentioned as the main resources to rely upon, and they take the lead when a "control room" is formed to pursue the next steps. In this brief article I will start analysing the empirical case of NoLo. Then, based on the preliminary findings, I will advance a conceptual framework, using alcoholic flows as analytic lens to read urban transformations and inequalities.

#### Channelling, dosing, and leaks in NoLo

'In the end, all this movement started from the desire to drink a beer together without having to go elsewhere'. This is how Lia, an inhabitant, explained me NoLo essence. Alcohol was previously available in the area, but as a 'disreputable pleasure' (OMalley 2004), under the guise of a cheap and rough liquid. What lacked was a local scene capable of channelling alcoholic flows into an aestheticising circuit to be transformed and poured to become resonant with the upscale taste of new consumers.

The low rents of commercial spaces and the recent internal migrants (distinct from previous foreign

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migrants) created the conditions for the development of what I propose to define as a localised logistics of containment, channelling, and dosing of alcoholic flows.

This process did not happen as entirely planned from above or spontaneously from below: it was a mix of the two, with owners of commercial spaces starting to consider more convenient to rent these spaces rather than leaving them unused, and mostly young micro-entrepreneurs seizing the opportunity. The first new 'hipster bar' opened in January 2016, selling craft beers and cocktails with immediate success: in the following months, many bars opened in vacant spaces while existing

Alcohol, with its containments, leaks and overflowings is a protagonist of both visibilities with two evident, opposite directions: in the first it is an intoxicating poison, in the second a 'liquid pleasure' ones refurbished their interior and/ or name to become part of the expanding circuit.

To optimise its logistics, both externally and internally, some expedients were taken. For example, to gain visual predominance over those of the 'degraded' neighbourhood, the

bars clustered tightly in a small area: while NoLo refers to a wider area, the new commercial venues grouped alongside two short streets and a small roundabout. An internal optimisation can also be observed, allowing bars to coexist symbiotically as each of them occupies a distinctive niche, focusing on a singular product or atmosphere: walking by the two streets and square composing 'NoLo alcoholic circuit' in few minutes a wanderer will pass by one bar tailored for a LGBTQ+ clientele, another specialised in multi-ethnic happy hours, the perfect one to sip organic wine, the best where to drink a refined cocktail, and so on. This way everyone benefits from the positive externalities of the network, without harsh intra-competition.

Alcohol is the protagonist of this process: aptly transformed and altered, it becomes the defining feature of bars, that can take part in the circuit depending on the quality of their alcoholic offer. This manipulation is not only physical, but cultural too: as another inhabitant told me referring to a pub that remained excluded from NoLo circuit: 'it is not a matter of the products served, but of the atmosphere you experience'. The double identity of bartenders as both manual and cultural workers here becomes evident: they do not only need to craft the cocktail in itself (or to spill craft beer), but also to 'culturally' craft them to match the taste and ethos of consumers in coherence with the other bars composing the circuit, while also resonating with the genius loci of the area. Lodo, an owner and bartender of one of the bars, performed this task elaborating part of the cocktails on the menu as 'stories', inspired from experiences with customers and people of the neighbourhood; Lao, another bar-owner, expressed this necessity by stating that 'You need to adapt your style: to open a hyper-chic bar here would be madness, this is a popular zone, where you need a warm, not cold, welcome'.

Alcohol agency is also evident as binder of the bars to their environment, in its attractive function of facilitator of new connections for entrant inhabitants and to the development of a collective community identity. However, the process of transformation of alcohol from disreputable to respectable pleasure is not absolute: leaks always stream at the margins of established circuits. In NoLo, migrant groceries and small shops continue to sell underhand cheap alcohol to those unable to afford the refined drinks, lacking the cultural capital to enjoy them, or simply refusing to do so. If the ideal type of cool bar's refined alcohol is the cocktail assembled by the mixologist, or the craft IPA, the ideal type of this other kind of alcohol is the Moretti double-sized beer bottle.

These alcoholic leaks have a function too: they allow lower-class inhabitants to enjoy the pleasures of inebriation and thrill during leisure, but the downside of their low price and high accessibility is that their sources are small shops unequipped of internal spaces and toilets.

It is in these situations that alcohol shows its historic and 'original' characterisation of liquid bearer of sensorial attacks against established notions of decorum, due to its overflowing nature: alcohol is usually consumed for its positive sensorial effects, but at the same time it tends to overflow over the environment in the form of urine on walls and doors, vomit, night-time noises and quarrels. Therefore, the above outlined processes of channelling and dosing of alcoholic flows in NoLo are not only finalised to refine alcohol to the upscale aesthetics and taste of new inhabitants, but also to control and curb the overflowing externalities of alcohol that constitute an attack to decorum, leaving at the same time intact its quality of pleasant liquid for the palate of customers of the socially accepted nightlife economy. In this sense, my suggested notion of logistics of alcoholic flows not only refer to the entire range of operations that allow the aestheticisation process to take place and to function efficiently over time, but also to the governance of alcoholic flows that prevent their overflowing nature to erupt and reveal itself in the urban fabric.

This governance process can be empirically observed in the reaction that occurs when it fails, and alcoholic overflows concentrate in small areas. In other words, when alcoholic threat to decorum becomes again visible and under media spotlight, as for instance happened in a small public garden in NoLo. An easily accessible area within the urban fabric, in a zone otherwise devoid of squares, the *Transiti* small garden became an easy meeting place for people that bought alcohol at the shops and then consumed it there. Problems followed, linked to night-time noise, fights, and drug dealing. After vast media coverage and inhabitants' protests, the local administration decided to close the garden with an iron fence to prevent people from gathering there and 'disreputable' alcohol to clot in a single space.

The two populations are not necessarily in conflict: the multicultural neighbourhood identity is part of the allure for new inhabitants, often possessing an open attitude toward migrants: when asked why she was so attached to NoLo, Cinzia, another bartender of the area answered that 'Milan is usually a cold city, but here this multiculturalism, this thing that there are many young people from the north, south, foreigners, gives me a great desire to be together'. Conversely, people drinking cheap alcohol can appreciate hipster bars and urban regeneration. Miguel, a local inhabitant living next to an 'hipster bar', explained that he does not hang out at that bar because he does not want to spend 7 or  $8 \in$  for a cocktail and usually buys beers from groceries, but he is happy that it opened because it helped to re-qualify the road and limit alcoholism, a serious issue in the area, as did a couple of Arab shops too that do not sell alcoholic drinks for religious reasons. Nevertheless, in the eyes of public opinion, depending on whether it spills from the circuit's faucets or from the marginal leaks, alcohol becomes a cool pleasure for respectable people or a disreputable pleasure for urban blighters. Applied to urban toponymy, it divides what is perceived as 'trendy NoLo district' from the 'dangerous Via Padova'.

### The logistics of alcoholic flows as analytic lenses to read urban transformations

Existing literature has already analysed alcohol as a liquid with an agency (Barua, 2013) and has focused on its contentious history as disreputable pleasure to look at class and power relations (Rorabaugh, 1979, p. 176). With this brief contribution, from empirical findings in the new Milanese area labelled as NoLo I suggested the usefulness to consider alcohol as a 'vibrant matter' (Bennett, 2009) in the field of urban studies, so as to look at the *ad hoc* configurations of human and nonhuman forces at work in nightlife entertainment economic circuits. To comply with this task, I suggested that it is the logistics of alcoholic flows, their containment, channelling, dosing through regulated faucets as well as that the governance of their overflowing nature that the researcher should look at, insofar as such logistics could be considered one of the hidden infrastructures beneath the construction of

'authentic urban places' (Zukin, 2010).

However, it is not only through these flows and their shifting governance that alcohol is transformed, and such transformation is not simply socio-cultural, and moralistic: the material composition of alcohol undergoes significant alterations too. This may occur in the moment of sourcing (as bars may buy higher quality ingredients), production (e.g., the process of craft brewing), or preparation (as in cocktails skilfully made by a mixologist): in all these cases the transformation is material and perceptual, physical and cultural. Channelled and regulated, alcohol nevertheless shows its own agency by overflowing social, legal, and physical circuits. It shapes physical spaces and intermediate cultural practises, drives gentrification or regeneration processes, and triggers social conflicts between categories. It leaks through aestheticised circuits, reappearing in its humbler guise as poisonous and disreputable pleasure for the populations that cannot afford its upscale version.

Assuming alcohol as a liquid with its own agency thus entails, first and mostly, a perspective turn: not only to see how individuals treat, manipulate and consume alcohol, but how alcohol influences the individuals involved in these circuits and the ones outside them and what the materiality, effects and flows of alcohol can tell us, as analytic lens, about urban transformations, conflicts and inequalities. The boundaries of the alcoholic circuit sign the boundaries between decorous and undignified consumption patterns, or in other terms between allowed and deprecated consumption, particularly in the Italian case where the discursive dyad of decorum and decay has been observed as active governmental instrument for the production of marginality (Tulumello & Bertoni, forthcoming).

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# Frigid flows Containment and excess in the sociospatial production of

studentification in Dunedin. Aotearoa New Zealand

#### **Holly Randell-Moon**

Splash, groan, gurgle, smash, pierce, exhale, sirens.

Residential students at the University of Otago in Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand have a notorious reputation for vandalism, rubbish, offensively themed parties and flat names, and the excretion of bodily fluids over private and public properties. The University is located in Dunedin or Ōtepoti at the bottom of the South Island (or Te Waipounamu) in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is the oldest higher education institution in New Zealand and is typically ranked in the top research performance metrics. think an Oxford for the arctic. Due to its perceived isolation in the South Island, away from the major capital cities and more populous North Island, the University's student experience involves young adults being away from home and family (see KILROY 2012). This transitional period and geographical remove fosters enclaves of experimentation or bubbles of boisterousness, with a perception that student time exists in a state of suspension before being burst by capitalist exigencies. Frigid climates meet hot messes in the liquid flows of alcohol consumption which create waste across spaces in Dunedin that connect and contribute to broader strategies designed to capture overflow. Attempts to fortify the fluvial dimensions of student culture by University and municipal authorities further reinforce the sociospatial practices of studentification. A concomitant fluvial governing response however, might recognise the flows of capital and mobility that contextualise students' relationship to the city as transitory and exploit that transition as the basis for transforming city-student relations.

#### Splat, smack, bursting.

Student life at the University of Otago is materialised against a series of processual constraints that inevitably overflow ostensibly settled and dry infrastructure. Students who are not local to the area generally take up one of two forms of residential living: enrolling in the residential colleges maintained by the University or seeking private rental tenancy. Due to Dunedin's poor public transport and hilly terrain, it is more affordable and expedient for students to live close by the University. Student flatting is concentrated predominantly around Castle, Leith and Dundas Streets, and south of the campus, surrounding Frederick, Leith, Grange and Albany Streets.<sup>1</sup> These areas exemplify studentification. Where gentrification generates flows of income into neighbourhoods that work to push out lower income residents, studentification leads to the deterioration of 'the physical environment ... as the students are temporary residents with minimal commitment to the area' (Avni and Alfasi 2018: 1250). A reverse make over, studentification dislodges through degradation. As transitional residents with minimal disposal income due to debt-financed education, students generate sociospatial

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<sup>1</sup> For a visual accompaniment to the above description, please refer to the image (compiled using Google Maps), see Figure 1.

distinction in the student area through scarfie culture. Thought to derive from the frequent use of scarves to combat frigidity, scarfie culture has generated significant media and public interest. The popular independent film, *Scarfies* (1999), documents this southern subculture of excess. Subcultures might chafe against social norms but can produce their own internal forms of mobility. Subcultural capital refers to the social privileges that accrue to subcultural group membership (Thornton 1995). For scarfies, subcultural capital derives from the capacity to produce waste.

Such waste is an overflow from the consumption of alcohol that overlays Dunedin's already rainsoaked environment, taxing municipal systems designed to contain the city's liquid flows. Dunedin's settlement is fraught with infrastructural wetness. Large areas were built on recaptured swamp lands and portions of the harbour, resulting in parts of the current city being below sea levels. As Pamela Wood outlines in *Dirt* (2005), sewage, dead bodies, and refuse commingled in the street surfaces of the early town. Aridity in Dunedin is a futile if hopeful endeavour. In drying out public space, municipal systems putatively distinguish between the privately disposed and intimate flows involved in bodily digestion and the publicly ordered channels for industry and climate flows. Scarfies cultivate public liquid-scapes of overflow as a means of organising a distinctive sociality. Students have been expelled for flat hazing rituals where initiants are encouraged to drink until they vomit (Lewis 2018). A notorious element of scarfie culture, couch burning, has been outlawed by the city, making its occurrence even more conspicuous (Elder 2017).

Condemnations of this waste only further reinforce the production of more waste as a transgressive activity subject to attention and spectacle, facilitating subcultural capital. Corporeal excretion of bodily fluids is not the only unsavoury aspect of scarfie culture. Often flat names and flat themed parties use deliberately offensive language as well as racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and Islamophobic rhetoric (see Randell-Moon 2014). These elements of scarfie culture are sociospatial because both the geographies and economies of student flatting work to produce flows of students into these areas and corral them there. Nufar Avni and Nurit Alfasi describe the sociospatial flows of studentification as a 'vicious cycle'. This is because the transitory nature of study and impending graduation mean there is little incentive for students to engage with the broader city as permanent residents do (2018: 1249). While the content of the matriculating student cohorts differ, 'their presence as a group . . . is long-term' (1250). Repetition not specificity is foregrounded in cycles of flows.

Smooth, burning, sweet, heavy, buzz.

In the liquid-scapes of studentification, alcohol lubricates overflow. Local ordinances regarding public alcohol consumption canalise scarfie practices away from the city centre and into student neighbourhoods. The current liquor ban (of public alcohol consumption) in the centre of the city ensures pedestrians consume alcohol in the cluster of pubs and clubs in the area (Dunedin City Council n.d.). Such ordinances also serve to push out unsheltered populations from the city centre. Recently the Dunedin Local Alcohol Policy was approved (Dunedin City Council 2019) which introduces lockout ordinances regarding alcohol consumption, such as a one-way door policy after 2.30am and other reductions in trading hours at night. Dunedin's liquor ordinances have the combined effect of making the city centre increasingly unattractive for student patronage. The location of a Liquorland chain store directly opposite the University on Albany Street and near to student flats serves as a more economically feasible alternative.<sup>2</sup> Here the city's systems for diverting the flows of alcohol consumption and their secretion into properly private reservoirs discloses the moist contradictions of urban planning premised on capitalism. Students are exhorted to consume but not publicly discharge consumption's smelly consequences.

<sup>2</sup> For a visual accompaniment to the above description, please refer to the image (compiled using Google Maps), see Figure 2.

Corporeal liquidity unleashes subcultural capital but finds an inverse in the housing economy's valorisation of aridity. Where dryness is paramount to preserving housing integrity in Dunedin, market liquidity is threatened by the excesses of scarfie culture lowering the value of surrounding property (see TVNZ *Sunday* 2015), connecting the private hydraulics of bodily waste to public solvency. The reason for repeat student tenancies in these locations is that the residential infrastructure is often cheap due to lack of insulation and degraded amenities. Without discounting the damage student parties have caused private and public property, it's worth noting that significant parts of

the infrastructure of these areas is already trashed (see McNeilly 2018, O'Mannin 2018). Living in a residential flat throughout winter with no heating can compel creative ways to pass the time.

Student life at the University of Otago is materialised against a series of processual constraints that inevitably overflow ostensibly settled and dry infrastructure

Pop, clang, drain, slurp.

A subculture of excess can be recycled for further retail. Scarfie culture renders the University an attractive sociospatial destination for prospective students. The expectation of student 'mischief' is materialised in the 'Proctoral Justice' stocks placed opposite the Proctor's office, situated roughly in the middle of campus, which 'humorously' denote the punishment meted out to student infractions. The local popularity of this device is illustrated in the photos taken of subjects in mock bondage (Otago Alumni News 2015). You too can play at being subjugated in a nod to the reliance on slave labour used to build parts of Dunedin (see Davidson 2018). Unlike these prisoners, students are transitory residents of Dunedin. Their capacity to generate flows elicits overlapping institutional responses because of the multiple subjectivities that students embody. Because students are private renters they are managed by landlords and the New Zealand Tenancy Tribunal. Because students are residents as well as members of the University community, their off-campus behaviour falls under the purview of the Proctor's office and Campus Watch. Because they are city residents, students are also subject to the local ordinances of the Dunedin City Council as well as the authority of the police. Institutions exist to contain. Scarfie culture to profane. Excess is therefore maintained.

Despite the fluvial nature of student sociospatial practices, 'the framework in which the students interact with the city is relatively stable, and so are the sociospatial relationships that they create' (Avni and Alfasi 2018: 1250). There is friction between the flows of students who change each year and the dry infrastructural, governing, economic, and civic relations with the city that remain the same. Dehydrating the liquid-scapes of scarfie culture through disciplinary actions reinforces the subcultural capital derived from being seen to resist civic and social norms of decorum. Even though students may perceive this subcultural capital as a benefit to them, this capital largely accrues to the University in branding its residential student areas as enticing and cool for newer students, while also subjecting successive student populations to increased surveillance based on the actions of the previous matriculating cohort (see Uni News 2017).

The frigid flows of Dunedin's education climate creates sociospatial practices that facilitate transitory student connections to the city. Per Avni and Alfasi (2018), exploiting this transition as the basis for transforming these connections would help to dissipate the current sedimented approaches to scarfie culture. A complementary fluvial governing response to student migrations could include connecting study more directly to projects and communities in the city in order to brand this as a distinctive University of Otago graduate competency as well as locating campuses and study centres in other parts of the city. Flows generate other flows. Their ontology is relational. The University could recognise that investing in wider city and educational policies that effect mobilities such as free education, better





public transport, housing conditions, as well as night–life economies, diversifies the city experience for all residents (however transitory). Economic pressures drive the commodity and educational flows that deliver students to Dunedin. In channelling these flows for futures beyond Dunedin, students deserve better than a liquorland of excess.

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### Pfand and bottles Drinking patterns in the city

#### Elena Caccin Fabio Bertoni

Some objects stand in an ambiguous, interstitial position of visibility. They are ubiquitous and invisible at the same time, they find themselves somewhere outside memory or representation, they are so obviously part of our daily routine that their presence is never questioned. Glasses, cans and bottles, half-filled or empty, left on a street corner, are a perfect example. It is a presence so obvious that we don't normally even notice them, but once one starts *actually* looking, they're almost too easy to find. Bottles are left everywhere and anywhere, as if there was no place where they could be recycled, as if they were not real trash that people throw in the bins (which in fact they are not – at least some bottles in some countries).

The present contribution finds its roots precisely in the will or acquired ability of the authors to break the habit of daily sights, noticing and recording these objects instead. The element sparking our attention in the first place was what could be called the social value of bottles in Germany's biggest cities (the personal experience of one of the authors relates to Cologne and Berlin). Elena started taking pictures of bottles around the city mainly to record the unusual places where they were left, and because to her these abandoned bottles were a typical feature of Berlin, both in their physical presence and in their social meaning. There is more to bottles and cans than Pfand value, i.e. their deposit: they are left around everywhere, and they can sometimes be put more or less intentionally in specific spots.

But the notice-and-photograph activity did not end in Berlin and continued after moving back to Italy again, and then elsewhere. During the last couple of years, a little over 150 pictures were taken in various European cities and will be published soon in an Instagram profile (@pfandosophy). The project can be described as original, DIY and as 'authentically of the street', based on the same meaning that Henri Cartier-Bresson (1952: 4) attributed to street photography, i.e. its role as 'deal[ing] in things which are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again.' Moreover, the pictures could also become an unusual archive of daily moments, portraying bottles as the main character in the picture and at the same time as a trace of a whole series of events and processes, whose common element is the presence of some sort of liquid substance being drunk, transported or spilled, and whose life is being prolonged in the form of its bottle.

Both the nature and the sheer quantity of bottles in public spaces (when noticed) highlight the intrinsic banality of the initial event, as well as that of all derived events, which sometimes develop in unpredictable directions. Precisely because of their banality, they deserve a closer look, as they can open up deeper interpretations on the complexity of daily life. These events take place both in physical and virtual spaces, in the essential and constant dynamic of opening up new possibilities

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(Seigworth, 1990). Besides, as Michel De Certeau already acknowledged, "banality" can cause the 'overflowing of the common in a particular position' (1984: 5). It 'overflows specialty and brings knowledge back to its general presuppositions' (1984: 4).

The ability to put daily elements into question through banality, overflowing their borders, brings to mind another kind of overflow, highlighted by abandoned bottles on the streets: the presence and visibility of an object being put, albeit temporarily, outside of its predetermined route, i.e. the system of hiding and disposal of all objects identified as waste. Production and consumption are creative

Bottles are left everywhere and anywhere, as a trace of a whole series of events and processes, whose common element is the presence of some sort of liquid substance being drunk

processes that define, order and classify material things by creating the concept of 'waste' as opposed to the value (Douglas, 1966).

Precisely when an object is conceived as being merely a container of some other thing, this subordination turns

it into waste immediately after consumption; and as waste it should be removed and isolated, in physical sense too (Douny, 2007; Orlandi, 2015). Leaving a bottle, just as placing it or collecting it, is then a small gesture exceeding or going beyond the organized system; in fact, the system itself becomes clearly evident when its rules are bent, or challenged.

This is linked to the idea, in Benjaminean terms, of the aura created by detritus and ruin, and its ability to reconceptualize experiences through the conditions of its impossibility. In line with this view, we intend to suggest a methodology which considers a trace not as a residual object fetishizing the signature of the past, but instead as a mark of culture that is an appearance of nearness (Benjamin, 2002): in other words, a detritus is seen as a vivid element, that permits a renewal of the chances to counter the bungled and capitalist adaptation to the technology as form of reproduction of the order (Hansen, 2008). Anything but a clearly defined object, detrituses highlight the different incongruous genealogies of reality, developing a nodal productivity in their conceptual fluidity.

Taking pictures of such fleeting transgressions adds another layer of potentiality, widening their trace and impact even beyond the intricate, ever-specialized system of waste management (Rogers, 2005). The system involves not only jobs and institutions for waste collection, but also regulations and taxes distributing costs and responsibilities, or examples of collective participation based on sustainable principles, community practices or "civic sense", all combined to steer the waste flow in its "natural" direction.

We will now present a few selected pictures in order to exemplify the aforementioned small and "minor" forms of reinvention and disturbance. Our intention is to focus on the constant presence of interferences to the orderly, planned, solid construction of a clean structure: it is indeed somehow ironic that solid containers, i.e. waste, by-products of liquid products, when seen in the context of an increasingly centralized mass consumption which essentially defines urban space, produce that kind of epistemological inversion defined by Appadurai and Breckenridge (2009) as *wet theory*:

The knowledge of space builds on the identity between territory and dry land (terra firma): the space so defined is governed, controlled, and subjected to order. Observing those practices that create and define territories from a fluid perspective, then, becomes a way to recognize their complexities and spill-overs (Lahiri-Dutt, 2014). The attention is not on great strategies and their goal of soaking up and reinstate order; it is drawn, instead, to what is dripping out, trying to reshape reality.

This remains valid when applied to the urban space, if we divert our attention from its structures and cycles of organizing solidity and focus instead on the way in which wet materials, alcohol and beverages flux and flow, changing and blurring the boundaries, forcing a reaction in the form of political,

social and theoretical strategies and the creation of new absorbing and filtering practices.

The first form of overflow recorded in the project is the case of the German *Pfand* as institutionalized system of exchange for value with differences in legislation between cities or Lander and different shares (Fallahranjabar, Chen, Dietyrich, 2018). Every beer bottle is worth 8 cents, some are worth 15, and all plastic bottles are worth 25 cents. The sum is added to the price of the bottle when it is purchased. When they're empty, bottles can be taken back to any supermarket selling that brand, where they are scanned by a special machine and end up in specific centres where they are cleaned, sterilized and then filled again. In exchange, the machine prints a coupon of the value of the bottles. The coupon usually allows for grocery shopping in that specific supermarket.

Similarly to what happens in other European countries, or in some Federal States in the US, the logic behind the Pfand system is the perfect example of the implementation of recycling and waste reduction policies based on pecuniary incentives. The rationale behind it stems from the concept of the individual consumer who analyses costs and benefits and in this case chooses a more sustainable practice. Although the sustainability of the German Pfand system is sometimes disputed,<sup>1</sup> what is interesting here is the reverberation beyond the impact of Pfand *per se* and its consequences, overflowing the banks of individual, economically driven practices.

There are people living almost entirely out of the money they make by collecting empty bottles and taking them back. On a lucky day they can even make up to 100 euros, with summer being of course the peak season. Special events such as street fests or football matches are another safe bet for bottle collectors. What's interesting is that there seems to be a clear understanding and a willingness to leave these bottles to people who need them most as a source of income. 8 or 25 cents won't make a difference to some average person earning an average income, but they will be important for some-one struggling to make ends meet. People in parks finish their beer in a sip when the bottle collector is arriving, only to get rid of the bottle and give it to them, leave their bottles orderly in line next to the bin so that they are be readily available for someone walking by. There seems to be a general awareness of the system, and it is considered less annoying than begging for money. It involves some kind of effort, and it can be considered just another, more complex way of giving our change or the coins in our pockets to someone begging.<sup>2</sup>

The specific way of valorising bottles, then, is accompanied by further widespread and collective actions, abandoning and collecting bottles, involving other people otherwise excluded from these practices and giving them new meanings through the opening up of other trajectories. Moving from this overflow, which represented the basis of Elena's project and thus of our standing point in noticing and discussing bottles in urban spaces, we started to see how the peculiarity of bottles being abandoned is reshaping and conferring meaning to the places where they are left. One only needs to think of a typical nightlife street, outside a pub before dinnertime or outside a club at sunrise. Empty bottles are left on the pavement, next to the club's door or around the bins when they are full, and they become both footprints of drinking activities in the urban space and proof of the existence of lively activities in that place. A typical sign of a recent party, bottles can however also be an element of disorder, dirt and degradation to the eyes of some. In some way, abandoned bottles contribute to the atmosphere: their nature of non–engineered, random, unlawful elements means they challenge the lawscape and find themselves at its fringes.

<sup>1</sup> For various reasons, and mostly because of the fact that the difference between reusable bottles (*Mehrwegflaschen*) and disposable ones (*Einwegflaschen*) was not clearly indicated on the bottles until 01.01.19. <u>https://www.vzhh.de/themen/</u> umwelt-nachhaltigkeit/muell-verpackungen/mehrweg-einweg-verwirrung-total 2 See for example, <u>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk2ShGsplkA</u> and <u>https://www.youtube.com/</u>

watch?v=21eUhpG8c8M

Not only are bottles left abandoned as waste placed outside bins and containers (whose purpose would precisely be hiding waste), but they also create a network of connections between subjects leaving them, the objects themselves and the people coming next. As an example, one could mention pictures taken and shared online of floors, pavements or bins where the number of bottles is proudly shown as proof of the party, as demonstration of the exceptionality and the exaggeration, or containers reused as street signs or street art, or again, by contrast, bottles being smashed against the walls as expression of the punk ethos (Beer, 2014) and attitude, acting in esthetic contrast to the habit of drinking as socially recognized, widespread activity and to the urban space as orderly, tamed and "peaceful".

These practices are part of the wider structural dynamics of commercialization, pacification and spectacularization of socializing in public spaces; at the same time, though, they leave room for a new aesthetics with redemptive power in developing forms of critique, thus becoming enabling conditions for a destabilisation of the norms that rule and keep together space, subjectivity, and representation (Dubow, 2004). Despite their differences, the common element of all relationships between subjects and bottles is the fact of leaking out of the predetermined path of definition, control, and removal of waste. As Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos (2013: 36-37) puts it, 'wherever one is in the city . . . one swims with and against the various normative flows that constitute the materiality of its lawscape' but'things can on occasion overflow, exceed themselves and embark upon a flight of radical self-redefinition.'

The waste system and its functioning is related both to the materiality and the organization of daily life, and to the moral dimension defining waste as a sub-product, less valuable than other goods. The audience varies and it can be virtual or physical, generic or restricted to some specific countercultures and thus able to read through the signs; in any case, the leaking of bottles outside of their predetermined life cycle is always a gesture aiming at the creation of a bond between the abandoned object and the person encountering it later. This leak is realized mainly, but not exclusively, on a spatial level. The container is put somewhere it shouldn't, and it remains in the urban space, it becomes a subject for relationships, avoiding its "destiny" as waste, as a mere container deprived of its meaning once the liquid it was supposed to contain has been drunk. There are many examples of bottles left in a somehow ironic way, and in these cases the bottle is not only sign and symbol, as it refers to something else, but it also acquires absolute value as an object, as decorative feature on monuments or statues, as finishing touch to street furniture, or as an element able to alter and overturn one of the intrinsic meanings of the urbanscape and of the parts it is made of.

The creative dimension of this ephemeral intervention not only touches upon the sphere of practice and meaning, but allows for an opening (on the level of imagination) of the possibility to reproduce this gesture as such, as well as other small and ironic acts interfering and questioning the solidity and solemnity of the architectural strategy. In Lisbon, the statue of Fernando Pessoa is often decorated by people walking by after a night out in the Bairro Alto neighbourhood with beer cans, wine bottles, cigarette packages or newspapers from the previous day left in the poet's hand. A long chain of small interventions, each one being an independent action but connected to the others through mutual referral, inviting to look for new solutions to further develop the already complex relationship of direct and mediated encounters between objects, cities, and strangers passing by.

All these forms can be seen as deviations from the planned path for waste, and together with interactions and meanings — sometimes aleatory, sometimes consolidated in routines or collective imaginaries — they highlight how abandoned bottles can take directions and acquire meanings which can hardly be reduced to individual will or to some certain intention. The feeling of surprise becomes even stronger when looking at (or photographing, as in Elena's project) the whole network of

social and spatial interactions between bottles and other elements – humans or non-humans. In their unexpected trajectories, thus, bottles become active subjects, co-constitutive of their sites, places and spatial relations (Tolia-Kelly, 2013). The stories, uses, and impressions we presented are therefore to be seen as an example and an invitation to further interpretation of the different modalities in which bottles and their liquid content have vital materiality and the ability to influence outcomes through connections, disruptions and flow (Bennett, 2010).

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### Coffee and the Queue Linear Normativity and Vehicular Flow of the American Drive-Thru

#### Sarah Marusek

In the United States, as in many places in the world, coffee is an urban liquid framed by normative availability and everyday rituals of consumption. Of course, while not everyone drinks the stuff, those of us who do drink it in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening. We drink it hot. We drink it cold. We drink it in our homes, at work, at leisure, and even in our cars. In its purest form, coffee is the fuel for drivers on the go, just as gasoline is the fuel for cars that move. In this vehicular society where cars serve as personalized vessels of transport, coffee on the go is ubiquitous, for sale at gas stations, convenience stores, fast food restaurants, even specialized coffee houses with drive-thrus, such as Starbucks.<sup>1</sup> At the American Starbucks drive-thru, a line of waiting cars wraps around a building in which drivers form a queue for cars mimics the queue of customers inside the store: wait, order, pay, wait, receive coffee. Paradoxically, the practicality of a drive-thru is premised upon the flow of cars and movement in which a driver sits stationary behind the wheel of a car that is moving through the line. The success of a drive-thru depends on the managed spillage of cars from the flow of traffic into a queue for ordering. That spillage is the overflow of cars and consumption in urbanized settings that generates a linear sense of normativity stimulated by caffeination.

Even while Starbucks founder Howard Schulz opened the first Starbucks in 1971 and aimed for a third space, or space that was "not a home, not an office" but a place modeled after an Italian café experience that would be "consistent across the globe" (BBC 2014), by 1984, the third space of contemporary Starbucks extended beyond the store to the customer's vehicle with the opening of the first Starbucks drive-thru in the hegemonic car-dominated landscape of Southern California. Jim Donald, Starbucks' president and chief executive at that time, described the drive-thru experience in light of the increasing vehicularization of American culture, "We have a habit of giving customers what they want, and when a customer has six kids in their car or their favorite pets and it's raining or snowing, that's creating an experience for them that will want to make them use a drive-thru" (*Convenience Store News* 2005).

In seeking out the ultimate cup of coffee, Bruncevic and Linné (2018) characterize the tastescape of coffee as ways in which law and the senses intertwine to foster understandings of cultural heritage and public space amidst a brand-based lifestyle. In drawing upon Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos's (2015) foundational concept of the lawscape, Bruncevic and Linné (2018, 220) consider coffee as the source of the "entanglement of law and space." If we were to map the drive-thru queue, we might

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<sup>1</sup> Starbucks is my particular research example of the drive-thru for this article. This is not to suggest that Starbucks is more or less unique than other drive-thrus serving coffee, except of course through their distinct sizing and specialized beverage combinations.

use Tim Ingold's theory of mapped lines. Ingold (2007, 84) describes the relationship between storytelling and lines as essential in drawing a map of "the lines of movement" as interpreted knowledge and further notes "the 'walk' of the line retraces your own 'walk' through the terrain" and that "what count are the lines, not the spaces around them". In mapping 'McStarbucks', the linear normativity of fast-food-ness compels the customer to steer the car into the line and wait on what's next in drawing upon the factory-logic of neoliberal consumerism. The assembly line of coffee consumption at Starbucks is in contrast to less ordered ways of drinking coffee in non-vehicular spaces that range from slow sipping espresso in specialty hipster atmospheres to paying for a (probably styrofoam) cup of instant brew from a coffee vending machine in the corner of a stuffy corporate staff room.

The unbroken queue of customers, personalized only through the name on the cup associated with the order, is contrasted by the more public and less individualized vending machine coffee that does not distinguish drinker-ship nor rewards sitting in self-imposed queue habituation. In a critique of this laziness, Hawaiian author Lisa Linn Kanae (2018, 123-25) speaks of the distinctions of Mr. Coffee and home-brewed coffee with the "high maka maka of trendy caffeine addiction" illustrated by "pretentious Starbucks types who have made coffee drinking one elitist pastime. Granted, vending machine coffee kind of sucks. However, vending machine coffee represents da working class. I may not be one of da privileged, but at least I get da right amount of quarters". Kanae's insights challenge the elitist image of Starbucks as a homogenous site of overpriced, elitist caffeinated beverages and speak to the shallowness of conscious consumerism even in the form of payment.

The parceling of the public through the spatiality of their own cars in the drive-thru queue is the ultimate rejection of public space (Kohn 2004). Through the car window, interactions with others are limited for the purpose of ordering, and then paying for a beverage. Otherwise, there is limited public interaction among drivers in the queue except to follow the car ahead in the line. In a café, patrons interact with chaos as noise, people, furniture, and unknown interactions pervade the space. However, at the drive-thru, coffee can be organized as an urbanized liquid that generates a flowing vehicular queue of individual desire, privatized space, and the absence of public engagement through the open car window. In this coffeescape of positionality (entering the queue; forward motion within the queue; exiting the queue), the drive-thru represents a site of law in which people in cars construct and reaffirm a practice of legality associated with rules, order and structure.

Obeying the queue is the first rule. Waiting is the second. Communication and payment are the third. All for a hot cup of coffee. But even as 78 year-old Stella Liebeck of the 1994 American 'hot coffee' case reminded us in 1994, the coffee really can be *too* hot. While the spillage of Liebeck's coffee was the source of much corporate-driven ridicule resulting in the common (mis)perception of the American legal system as being overrun by 'frivolous lawsuits' (*Hot Coffee* 2011), the reality of social expectations in this vehicular queue boils to the surface through criticisms: one shouldn't be drinking coffee and driving; one shouldn't sue for one's own faults; cars should come equipped with drink holders. Yet, behind this ridicule and misperception, Liebeck was severely burned over 16% of her body and required extensive skin grafts as the coffee has been brewed at temperatures approximately as hot as a car's radiator (180-190 degrees Fahrenheit) according to McDonald's policy at the time (*Hot Coffee* 2011).

Since this terrible accident, the material necessity of drivers and passengers to safely drink beverages while in the car has shifted where many cars today have constructive adaptations as an inhabited space of consumption. The spillage and overflow of law in this sense is that linear normativity is contradictory in nature. Through the drive-thru, Starbucks has expanded its delivery of coffee to the individual consumer inside the individual car. Similar to other drive-thrus, such as fast food restaurants, there is a priority on serving the customer what the customer wants. Yet even the experience of

consumerism through the car is limited by the body's own needs to expel waste.

In thinking further about these coffee-related spillages and overflows that test the presence of the queue, Olivia Barr (2016, 25) describes jurisdiction as the movement between technology and common law. In furthering Blomley (2011), the hegemonic rationality of the drive-thru is challenged by a car in the queue that breaks down, or through a car that for some reason decides to park in the drive-thru lane. The queue may be said to develop Richard T. Ford's (2001, 201) concept of jurisdiction as a "discourse, a way of speaking and understanding the social world": following the line is a

phenomenon of law based on order and the performance of hierarchy through position in the line (first come, first serve). Furthermore, cars that drive forward in a stop and go manner and are sandwiched between cars in front and cars behind characterizes the fluid momentum of the queue as a river of prepared,

At the drive-thru, coffee can be organized as an urbanized liquid that generates a flowing vehicular queue of individual desire, privatized space, and the absence of public engagement through the open car window.

individualized consumption. Conceptually, wet theory, according to Appadurai and Breckenridge (2009, foreword) is a "theory that is indefinitely open to absorbing or 'soaking up' new contextual information without bending the context or breaking under the strain of its own rigidity". Applying this idea further, the drive-thru is fluid in its ability to adapt to changes that continue, yet change the forward momentum. In the same way, the fluidity of fuel as gasoline in cars becomes remarkably similar to the fueling of a body through caffeine.

Yet this standardization is incomplete, as Starbucks seeks to individualize the experience of coffee through the consumptive experience associated with ordering. In a complex tethering of standardization to individuation, the beverage itself is a measure of quality of Starbucks could be personalized, such as "Venti lced Skinny Hazelnut Macchiato, Sugar-Free Syrup, Extra Shot, Light Ice, No Whip".<sup>2</sup> With the taste of the product being the same regardless of location, the uniformity of the experience is the standardization of consumption, thus continuing the fast-food-ness of the Starbucks experience. Having the same personalized product by waiting in the queue in one's own car in a line of cars is what Marc Augé (1995, 93) might describe as "supermodernity" or a "non-place". The drive-thru is such a non-place, a supermodernizing statement on consumerism and positionality premised upon automobility. In terms of gendered spaces (Sanger 2001), capitalist aggression (Campbell 2006), or as simply just the realities of everyday life (Vanderbilt 2008), automobility is premised upon movement, movement of cars and of people in spite of the spillages and overflows of the normative linear vehicular environment.

The infrastructure of the drive thru gives even the most rural of places an urban feeling that is associated with a vehicular presence. The microflow of the drive thru as it spills from the street to the queue and then once again drains back onto the street is a statement on the vehicularization of order and citizenry that waits in the car rather than gets out and mingles with the public while waiting for one's order. The car provides the facade of shelter from the public and allows the driver just to sit, pull forward ever so slightly, and be waited upon. The spatiality of the Starbucks drive thru is linear, fluid (in motion), legal (vehicular jurisdiction), cultural (lifestyle and ritual), has a commodified logic of public space that exhibits a tension between standardization and local uniqueness in terms of coffee taste and localized ritual. Consumption is governed through the queue (Brigham 2009) as the

<sup>2</sup> Just one example of a specialized Starbucks beverage as described in "The Most Obnoxious Starbucks Drink Orders: You Want a Venti, Quadruple Shot, Half Caff, Non Fat, What?!" *Huffington Post*, December 6, 2017, available at <a href="https://www.huffpost.com/entry/starbucks-drink-orders\_n\_3671496">https://www.huffpost.com/entry/starbucks-drink-orders\_n\_3671496</a>

drive thru is socially constructed space (Low 2017) mapped through the vehicularized lines of coffee consumption.

In conclusion, the coffeescape of the American drive thru as a liquid lawscape in which vehicularized identity privatizes public interaction within the fluid motion and performative aesthetic of consumption in motion. The coffeescape is a vehicular space in which drivers who want to order coffee leave the flow of traffic to enter into a queue of stop and go cars at the coffee drive thru that are waiting in a line to place their orders for their particular beverage and then pay for that beverage through their car window. Once the transaction is complete, the caffeine-enriched driver in the car re-enters the flow of traffic. From getting into the queue, staying in the car, paying at the window, and reentering the flow of traffic, the coffeescape is spatially rich with linear normativity, a performed aesthetic of fluidity, and consumption in motion. The larger meaning of queues, lines, and normative expectations frames the drive-thru as a vehicular terrain in which the commodified logic of uniformity creates a fluidity of understanding about the relationship of high-end coffee to the driver in the line. Even as there are leakages as pedestrians find their way between cars to enter the café and return to the consumerist, public, albeit third space of the modern Starbucks on foot, the permeation of the public oozes forth despite the restrictive opening of the car window in the vehicularized flow of the drive-thru queue.

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# Fluid Design

#### Vincent Van Uffelen Rocio von Jungenfeld

In every age someone, looking at Fedora as it was, imagined a way of making it the ideal city, but while [s]he constructed [her/]his miniature model, Fedora was already no longer the same as before, and what had been until yesterday a possible future became only a toy in a glass globe. Calvino, 1974

*Fluid design* attempts to use new insights and thinking paradigms to explore the idea that designers may find new means to positively influence our complex world by shifting their focus away from products and towards identifying the problems and their solutions for the environments where products and life coexist. We discuss *fluid design* in light of three current transdisciplinary paradigms: the relational, complexity, and performative turns; and suggest using these paradigms as ways to *think with*. Firstly, we explore how these turns influence contemporary design practices. Secondly, the turns allow us to see the world as the product of a dance between rigid structures and flows, so we discuss how design practices can incorporate this paradox. Lastly, while looking at applied design practices (e.g. matter, time, energy, information, actions, policies) and the diversification from material to immaterial outcomes. These paradigms allow us to bring forward the notion that designers can actively engage with a variety of sources, which allows them to mediate and affect (the flows of) heterogeneous collections of flows: ecosystems.

Like turning a kaleidoscope, each of the turns reveals a different projection of an incomplete picture. These projections may even contradict each other, and result in a splintered, paradoxical worldview. Similarly, the rigid structures and flows that make our world may depend on and contradict each other at the same time. A flow may bring forth structures while dissolving others, and a rigid structure may support some flows while impeding or modifying others. Making turns, changing perspectives may reveal that the same flows and structures interact in dramatically different ways. We acknowledge that taking these turns often means changing the things ones scrutinizes, and in agreement with Aristotle (*there can be no knowledge of that which is in flux*) we have chosen to discuss a few cases where designers and cities are *in flux* but are also concrete subjects of study.

Herbert Simon defines a designer as someone *"who devises courses of action aimed at changing exist-ing situations into preferred ones"* (Simon, 1969). Under this premise, when, for example, designing cities designers may need to consider existing situations and project those situations into preferred,

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alternative futures. However, as cities are emergent, layered, complex flows of matter, life, energy, information, thoughts, and emotions, designers also ought to grasp that, just as Calvino's Fedora, cities are made of simultaneous fleeting situations that are difficult to pin down or predict, and that, once executed, designs may have unintended consequences that spill over a city which no longer is what it once was.

In order to face the upcoming challenges, we need to embrace theories and practices to make alternative preferred cities possible. The three turns bring different perspectives into play. First, the

Liquids mediate relationships of energies, substances, and processes, often over large distances and time, and evade in this capacity a clear distinction between substance or relation *relational turn* presents a shift from a world of interacting substances (subjects, things, objects, or even systems), towards a world of relationships that bring substances into life. Second, driven by findings in physics, biology, and computer science, the *complexity turn* describes

a world of energy and particles that move, interact, and self-organise to create structures that remain in a constant spatio-temporal-informational process of *becoming*. Whereby, substance and structures emerge from cascades of countless, layered interactions, which are never fully finished nor predictable; change remains the only certainty. Third, the *performative turn* describes two related perspectives: one shows how matter (e.g. bodies, objects, structures) produces social and cultural meaning; while the other assumes a posthumanist position where meaning is necessary for substance to arise, and matter being the result of choices between alternatives.

Using the three turns' perspectives we can see the world as a dynamic, emergent, self-organised *system of systems* made of material and non-material systems, such as molecules, single cells, animals, information, cities, or ecosystems. All these systems may be alive (autopoietic) or human made (allopoietic), are governed by irreducible processes, laws, and actions, and constantly evolve by irreversibly stumbling from one (re-)constituting event to the next. These events are often changes in incoming or outgoing flows which may put pressure on the (semi-permeable) borders of the system and lead to saturation and overflow. Sometimes the presence of just the right flows and individuals in a limited space allows a new ecosystem to emerge. Hosting both autopoietic and allopoietic systems, our ecosystems strive to balance the needs of all the constituent parts while also being able to recover from external and internal perturbations. Ecosystems are highly efficient at distributing flows, however, if unable to provide for the needs of all by keeping a balance in the rhythmic changes of too little, enough, and too much, they eventually fail.

Thinking about our world through these three turns may intrigue designers to work with *flows* as material to further their aims. While in our examples we address the material flows of liquids, we want to highlight that these flows can also be non-material (e.g. energy, information, money, emotions) or even the forceful flows between living and nonliving agents, and the systemic patterns that emerge from these actions. In any case, designers may want to shape the flows of ecosystems through actions such as: shifting the system's borders, working with systemic layers, targeting emergence, influencing processes, fostering or impeding growth, changing the course of flows, or treating flows like waves that can be modulated in frequency, phase, and amplitude.

Before we delve further into the three turns, we would like to explain our interest in fluids and their subform liquids. Fluids are made up of tiny vibrating particles of matter, such as atoms, that are held together by intermolecular bonds; they are complex systems that in turn are the essential building blocks of higher level complex systems such as living beings or even ecosystems. Liquids and fluids

are constantly on the move between two points of pressure and can only be contained by rigid structures, which they ceaselessly strive to escape from. They bring in the new, take out the unwanted, and their often rhythmically changing patterns of absence, presence, abundance, or even overflow are one of the essential beats of any ecosystem.

If one considers the four states of matter (solid, liquid, gas, and plasma) and their transitions, fluids are placed in the interesting position of being between solid and gaseous. Wedged between rigid structures and the chaotic movements of gas molecules, they can act as either; sometimes they are the reliable, comforting base for life and sometimes they just take everything with them (e.g. torrential flood). By being able to bond and relate with other of their kind, the molecules of a liquid become more than they would be on their own. Once the molecule joins many, many others it becomes a mass that fills any gap in a container, that erodes slowly but surely surrounding solid structures, that washes things away, and stores energy in its constant movement.

Liquids mediate relationships of energies, substances, and processes, often over large distances and time, and evade in this capacity a clear distinction between substance or relation. When noticing that urban planners in the city of Portland (USA) added hydroelectric generators to their gravity fed water supply lines to skim off some of the energy that the water flowing through the pipes collects on its way into the city, one can only wonder what the water in this context is? Is it an energetically charged substance that drives the propellers of the generators? Or is it a link between the mountain range and the city? In this case, water might be best described as a flow whose complexity the fluid designers of Portland decided to partially divert into carbon free generated energy.

By looking at flows and their potential to be either substance or relationship, we can engage further with the mentioned *relational turn*. In practice, fluid designers can look at the manifold ways in which flows can be modulated into either substance or relationship. Often, designers will create structures to divert the flow (as substance) or connect it with other flows to strengthen its relational potential. Considering liquids as substance may involve building fortifications to keep water out, to flush it out, or to contain it, as for instance the flood gates along the Thames river in London, or the rainwater drainage system in the Los Angeles river. Similarly, placing infiltration plots to store vast amounts of stormwater protects the city from flooding, but also serves a second function by slowly releasing the water into the ground to replenish the water table. In this case water is not only treated as substance but as a relational medium connecting living and non-living things which operate at different scales (from microbe to ecosystem) and times (from now and into the future). Like water, life is a mesh of substances and relations, always entangled with other life forms and non-living things, always in flow. Being alive is not only about individual being and becoming, but, as Donna Haraway proposes, also about collaborations with others to ensure that life remains *ongoing*. It is liquids, their relations, complexity and performative capacities that, to a large extend, drive this ongoingness.

Another important aspect about liquids to be aware of is one of the key findings of the *complexity turn*. Liquids are complex systems; to interfere with them means to try to tame chaos and to accept that certainty is being replaced by probability. Rain might come or not, a drop of blood might contain a virus or not, and two waves far out in the Atlantic ocean might meet at the right angle to become a "freak wave" or not. When dealing with fluids, designers often build contraptions that amplify or dampen the potential that a flow carries. This can be, in a literal sense, the re-direction of a flow. For instance, the city of Paris set up plant bucket urinals to collect nitrogen-rich urine which would otherwise be flushed away into the sewage system, or in the case of the Estonian Soomaa National Park, the seasonal floods pouring over the forests has lend itself to the rebranding of the areas as the Estonian Amazon which might divert the flows of tourisms into the region.

As this last example shows, liquids can also be used as conveyors of meaning, a notion that the





performative turn engages with in depth. By not separating matter from meaning, fluid designers can find different insights into the situations they are designing for and identify alternative pathways that support the desired outcomes. When designing with (not for) ecosystems, fluid designers may find that the flows of meaning and emotions between elements within the ecosystem are one of the most powerful forces that holds the system together. Aiming to change the meaning of things or processes by carefully triggering events may be part of any fluid designers' toolbox. These events can be the switch-like moments of sudden absence, congestion, overflow, or transgression that trigger adaptation, but also the moments when small but compounding positive (amplification) or negative (friction) feedback slowly changes habits or structures within the ecosystem, and while doing so also change the meaning. However, it is worth mentioning that these events do not need to be (hu) man-made nor need they be meaningful only to humans, and may better resonate with wildlife and micro-organisms. Re-wildling and conservation initiatives that protect natural flows such as the flamingos of the "Fuente de Piedra" Lagoon in Malaga (Spain) are good examples of this. Visitors are invited to respectfully observe the lagoon's flows, a delicate ecosystem that gives identity to the area and nearby village. Both, the lagoon and village are intertwined and highly dependent on rainfall. If it rains, flamingos come and with them visitors; if the lagoon floods, more wetland is available for other species, and wildlife in the lagoon is more vibrant for longer. Water means avian visitors and the growing respect for the lagoon's flows and the livelihood of the local population.

Designing with ecosystems entails considering the complexity of these irrepressible systems. While the myriad flows that make our cities, parks and backyards resits to be pre-planned by all-encom-passing master plans, their patterns, changes, and effects can be accommodated for by eco-systemic design approaches. In this context, fluid design is a proposal to add relationships, process, flows, and patterns to the traditional design concerns of form and meaning. Opening up to flows (and their changes over time), may enable designers to engage with environments in ways that are more sympathetic towards the sympoietical way in which life unfolds. We envision fluid designers to take action, make cuts, modify volumes and paths, identify things that are worth interfering *with*, and shape substances, meaning, and energies with the intention of triggering change. Only by concocting events that trigger reactions, will fluid designers be able to meddle *with* the flows of a given system and invite it (and where needed only some of its parts) to change over time, to grow or shrink, to solidify or evaporate, to level or overflow. Since fluid designers are aware that they will never know enough about all the flows of any given system, they may choose to design openly, generating actualisable potential in their designs instead of actually seeking to actualize this potential.

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# Liquidscapes of the City

#### Alex Wafer Andrea Pavoni

The cistern contains, the fountain overflows. William Blake, Proverbs of Hell

*Yesterday, there was water running down the crooked and pot-holed path that cuts through the* warren of small shacks, connectina the residents of Kva Sands informal settlement, Johannesbura, to a suburban tarred road – the only way into and out of the informal settlement. It was running because a communal tap, put in by the municipality so that residents have some rudimentary access to clean water, had broken. Possibly it had broken yesterday, possibly it had broken weeks ago. There is always water running down the path, creating a little stream of fetid water, over which residents must gingerly step, from which strav doas drink, and from which mothers have to stop their children splashing. Several weeks ago, someone from the mayor's office had berated the local community for the constant breaking of taps, threatening them with the removal of the tap, letting slip that as much as 40% of municipal water is lost through broken infrastructures throughout the city. We are in the middle of a drought; and residents of the city at large have been told to expect water restrictions soon. By the end of the long dry winter this little path will be running like a raging river as the afternoon storms burst the banks of the nearby perennial river, on the banks of which the little settlement is located. Rain will leak into the gaps in the informal structures, flow under doorways, and drip through roofs of old corrugate steel. Last week the municipality tried to evict some of the shack-dwellers who live close to the river flood-plain, using violence and intimidation to do so. There is water everywhere, a resident complained, except where it is supposed to be.

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Cities are not born out of a clear demarcation between land and water. It was out of a more ambiguous formation, the *wetland*, 'between rivers' ( $\mu \acute{c} o c$ ,  $m \acute{e} sos + \pi \circ \tau \alpha \mu \acute{o} c$ ,  $potam \acute{o} s$ ), that ancient settlements did emerge: no separation between the dry and the wet, but a diffuse *wetness*, a seasonal rhythm of flows and overflows where the flood was not an unexpected and damaging boundary-crossing event, but the ordinary pulsation of a fertile land-water interaction. In this literally murky existence, James Scott writes, 'the work of civilization, or more precisely the state . . . consist[ed] in the elimination of mud and its replacement by its purer constituents, land and water.' Yet this opera-

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<sup>1</sup> James Scott. Against the grain: a deep history of the earliest states. Yale University Press, 2017, 56; 'Beautified, ordered,

tion is never fully completed, the demarcation never fully accomplished, the excess never fully tamed.

Attending to this overflowing reality does not only mean to think the city as liquid, as itself a set of flows. We are not proposing flow and overflow as metaphors for the city understood as an elusive assemblage of fluid networks (although we recognise some useful and productive attempts to do just that).<sup>2</sup> Rather, we want to think about the materiality of the city as fundamentally a constellation of actual liquid flows, blockages and overflows. While there is of course a politics about access to water, there are also material everyday worlds in which liquid metabolisms are made possible, durable and even the subject of cultural performance. A broken tap in Kya Sands might indeed be the material manifestation of networks of power and capital and subjectivity. The water running down the rutted path may be a condition around which communities can build a politics, to hold authorities to account. But it is also a material presence that the body as bare life must confront. These material realities need not only be liquid; but we want to argue for the liquid as nevertheless fundamental to them.

The liquid reality of the urban has been often explored in the field of urban political ecology, which has considered the ways in which the city is actually stitched together or pulled apart by the physical flows of liquids, the submerged city made of pipes, tubes and sewers, a hidden network in which the drinkable and the wasted liquids intersect and flow asymmetrically. Many of these works have been crucial in embedding water in socio-political relations.<sup>3</sup> However, often at the cost of reducing water to said relations, falling short of attending to water's *agentic* capacity, failing to consider the *encounter* between those socio-political relations and the materiality of the liquid itself.<sup>4</sup> Usually framed through questions of power, inequality, consumption and cultural meaning, rarely these studies have engaged with the materiality and agency of urban liquids and, most crucially, with their *essential* capacity to overflow. In this propositional piece, we ask the question: what does it mean to think the city through its overflows?

#### **Governing excess**

Especially engagements with the city of the global South have shown how traditional networked infrastructures and the so-called 'formal' city (read colonial city) leak and bleed outside of the ordered frames within which the *orderly city* might originally have been imagined. Liquid overflow may be physical, cultural, social or legal, and may materialise into flooding or scarcity, gentrification or intoxication, socialisation or excess. Overflowing occurs at the physical, semantic, and normative level: what an overflow is, after all, firstly depends on the lines and boundaries with respect to which the behaviour of a liquid is perceived and defined as over-flowing.

The grammar of landscape employed to define, delimit and manage water, for instance, is often found wanting. This is what Marisol de la Cadena finds in her investigation of the conflictual interaction between a mining corporation, environmentalist movements and the local population around the 'water' of a Peruvian lagoon, which 'the guardians of the lagoons' see neither as a resource to be exploited nor one to be protected or replaced by other sources of water: for them, 'it is local water, and as such, nature, yet untranslatable to H<sub>2</sub>O<sup>25</sup>. As Jamie Linton wrote in his seminal work, Western discourse did produce 'modern water' as a particular kind of abstraction, most explicitly symbolised

aggrandized, and sublimated, the town opposes itself to the mud of the countryside', Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*. MIT Press, 2002, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Gandy. Rethinking urban metabolism: water, space and the modern city. City 8(3), 2004: 363-379.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Filippo Meng and Erik Swyngedouw, (eds). Water, Technology and the Nation-state. Routledge, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters. Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: Giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33(2), 2015: 247–264.

<sup>5</sup> Marisol De la Cadena. Uncommoning nature. *E-Flux Journal 56th Biennale*, 2015, <u>http://supercommunity.e-flux.com/</u> texts/uncommoning-nature/

by a chemical symbol (H<sub>2</sub>O), and an ubiquitous appliance (the water tap).<sup>6</sup> Thus removed from place, time and relations, water has been discursively abstracted into a neutral matter that can be measured, assessed, controlled, and acted upon. Indirectly, this has shaped a disciplinary and repressive framework aimed at controlling the liquid's 'unruliness' and 'deviance' – that is, its overflow – mostly by means of imprisoning waters into physical, discursive and normative pipelines.

Phil Jones and Neil Macdonald read the modern history of water management as an attempt to control water's recalcitrant behaviour by intensifying repression and implementing a 'harsher discipli-

nary regime.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Antina von Schnitzler shows how the pre-paid water meter has emerged as a tool for the control not only of the 'excessive' use of water by poor communities in South Africa, but also for the governmentalisation of 'responsible' behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Overflowing water risks

For all their control, regulation and exploitation, macro- and micro-flows of urban liquids keep over-flowing

overflowing civil disobedience, as a sort of 'broken-window' approach is applied to the provision of basic bodily requirements. Again, an unquestioned grammar of landscape implicitly defines the overflow — the excess — and morally frames it only as a negative counterpart: an assumption that often spill over dominant attitudes towards poverty, working-class alcohol consumption, and so on. This grammar is shaped by the sense of security and control that comes with imposing a precise binary order on a fluid element, 'a false order upon a fluid milieu for which we lack an imaginative grasp.'

Yet, water's unruliness is not easy to define, let alone govern. For all their control, regulation and exploitation, macro- and micro-flows of urban liquids keep over-flowing. In his book on hydraulic citizenship Nikhil Anand portrays the liquidscapes of the city as always flowing, leaking and excreting through pipes and taps and sewers and pumps, and the resulting politics as one in which shitting, pissing and bathing are extremely curtailed and delimited possibilities for the majority of people.<sup>10</sup> Some populations are not even considered deserving of reticulated water, relying on a kind of officially-sanctioned 'overflow' for their endurance.<sup>11</sup> At other times, the overflow may become a site of community claims of belonging, in ways which also disrupt Western logics of the control of the environment.<sup>12</sup> Even a flood, in fact, may be overflown by a multiplicity of socio-natural meanings and relations that cannot be contained within alluvial definitions, to the point of appearing as 'the symptom', to paraphrase Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, of the series of efforts to create fixity in a terrain of change, to create hard edges in a world of flow, and to cordon of wet and dry spaces from what are in fact wet and dry moments in a temporal drama of ocean and estuary, coast and beach, rain and tide.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Jamie Linton. What is water?: The History of a Modern Abstraction. UBC Press, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Phil Jones and Neil Macdonald. Making space for unruly water: Sustainable drainage systems and the disciplining of surface runoff. *Geoforum* 38(3), 2007: 534-544.

<sup>8</sup>Antina von Schnitzler. Citizenship prepaid: Water, calculability, and techno-politics in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34(4), 2008: 899-917.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Wiener. Grounding Water. Scenario 05: Extraction, 2015. https://scenariojournal.com/article/grounding-water/

<sup>10</sup> Nikhil Anand. Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai. Duke University Press, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Michelle Kooy and Karen Bakker. Technologies of government: Constituting subjectivities, spaces, and infrastructures in colonial and contemporary Jakarta. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2), 2008: 375–391.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth A. Povinelli. 'Might be something': the language of indeterminacy in Australian Aboriginal land use. *Man* 28(4):679–704.

<sup>13</sup> Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge. Wet Theory: a Foreword. In Anuradha Mathur and Dilip Da Cunha (eds.). *Soak: Mumbai in an Estuary*. Rupa & co. 2009, ix.

#### Nightmares of overflow

There is an argument to be made about how the material and elemental qualities of liquids have made cities, almost through their negation, containment and domestication (at least in Western planning logic), but also in their spectral and haunting qualities: the threat of bursting forth. Whereas the Frankfurt school and their acolytes were interested in the ways that the order — the rhythm — of the city is always shaped by the temporal and spatial rhythm of industrial capital, the flows and spillages of liquids in the cities of the global South expose that these orders have only ever partially pertained. Colonial authorities controlled the consumption of alcohol for indentured workers and subject populations, as well as delimiting access to 'native' parts of the city for fresh water. So the consumption of alcohol in many poor parts of the city on weekday mornings, the spillage of sewage from broken pipes, and the flowing of water from the broken communal tap shared by dozens of households for washing and laundry and drinking — all of these things expose other orders and normativities that produce the city not only as a controlled and governmentalised space, but as something that exceeds this, and that is produced by this excess, or rather, by its *relation* with this inevitable excess.

The fluid, liquid and overflowing quality of the urban appears as constitutive of it in ways that are more profound than simply being a negative counterpoint to urban governmentality. It also produces the possibilities for politics to 'overflow', as when residents are able to reclaim some degree of citizenship through diverting the flows of water, as Morten Nielsen has suggested describing how a massive flood that effectively destroyed a part of Maputo allowed for residents to reclaim access to parts of the colonial city in ways that contested the dominant social order but which was accepted by the authorities, because it maintained the spatial order of the old city.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, though less directly politically, the overflowing potholes in Kinshasa slow down traffic in certain busy parts of the city, allowing local traders to set up stalls selling cold-drinks.<sup>15</sup> While in many ways the city is the triumph of the control of these otherwise organic and uncontrolled flows, at the same time cities are reliant on them: dams, aqueducts, irrigation schemes, have all made urban settlement and civilization possible. So when they spill and leak, when they exceed the order that is imposed on them, they expose the underlying order inherent in the city. And this is not just broken infrastructures. The spilling of alcohol, the pissing and vomiting on street corners by drunken revellers on a weekend, all expose the order that contains and controls urban life.

'Water draws to itself all images of purity', Gaston Bachelard wrote, emanating a kind of 'natural morality' against which water's uncontainable, uncompressible and alive quality manifests itself in its internal composition, in its capacity to become foul, poisonous, and lethal.<sup>16</sup> The rivers and the streams that run through cities have often been things abandoned, left to be fouled and polluted. Early urban planning and public health in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century was an obsession with these flows. John Snow's famous discovery of the cholera epidemic in London in the 1850s was connected to the contamination of pump water by a fetid stream that ran under the city. The birth of alcohol may as well be tied to the need to respond to the toxic potential of water via the purifying (albeit intoxicating) capacity of yeast, the 'divine parasite' that prevented death by contamination, by making dark water drinkable.<sup>17</sup> Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in places like London, beer consumption was no mere

<sup>14</sup> Morten Nielsen. Mimesis of the state: From natural disaster to urban citizenship on the outskirts of Maputo, Mozambique. *Social Analysis* 54(3), 2010: 153–173.

<sup>15</sup> De Boeck, Filip. "Poverty" and the politics of syncopation: urban examples from Kinshasa (DR Congo). Current Anthropology 56, no. S11 (2015): S146-S158.

<sup>16</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Pegasus Foundation, 1983: 14. 17 Michel Serres, *The Parasite Vol.* 1. U of Minnesota Press, 2013.

matter of recreation but also a way to hydrate oneself while avoiding the city's dangerous waters.<sup>18</sup> Alcoholic flows, however, in turn trigger different overflows that will have to be differently contained, repressed, or indeed exploited: the urban is traversed by flows of alcohol as well as other addictive liquids (coffee, tea, energy-drinks, sugar-based sodas) that it capitalises upon and that may as well overflow in the form of violence and disease, degradation and waste.

Overflow is the *eventful* disruption of an ordered system of circulation, an eruption, but also an interruption, one that may take the form of a local solidification that blocks or impairs the flow. In the smooth circulation of waste that occurs under the urban surface, this 'static overflow' may be most remarkably seen in the *fatberg*, gigantic formations made out domestic and industrial liquid fats that agglomerate and then solidify by congealing, to the extent of blocking circulation in the sewers. Here waste takes a new life, i.e. the overflowing vitality of bacteria, flies, moths and worms that thrive in these emergent ecosystems.<sup>19</sup> So foreign to the crystalline morality of water, *fatbergs* may assume mythical morphologies as in the 'Whitechapel Monster', as heavy as 130 tonnes of weight and measuring more than 250m of length, whose 'monstrous' characterisation spells the moral injunction to not succumb to the temptation to 'feed the fatberg'.<sup>20</sup> This overflow does not flow past a given edge, but rather occurs by overflowing a certain degree of internal composition to the point of triggering a change of state, a solidification. Overflow as a change of state: is this what Bachelard pointed to, when reflecting on the profound force of a matter that is liquid insofar as de-forming or form-less, that is, insofar as exceeding formation?

Attending to the overflowing liquidscapes of the city might not constitute an exhaustive theory of the contemporary city, but it does say something about its material presence and the forms of inequality and endurance that constitute everyday urban life. It is about exploring water not 'simply as H<sub>2</sub>O, showing how it flows through multiple spaces, materially and discursively, and how it flows in and out of different meanings'.<sup>21</sup> It is about considering not only the material agency urban liquids but also their 'immaterial power to shape the way we think about stasis and movement in time and space'.<sup>22</sup> It is about the way we conceive notions of wild and civilised, life-giving and life-threatening, order and disorder, as always overflowing — and about how we think and attend to these persistent overflows.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew Green. The Lost World of the London Coffeehouse. *The Public Domain Review*, August 7, 2013. https://publicdomainreview.org/2013/08/07/the-lost-world-of-the-london-coffeehouse/

<sup>19</sup> Fatberg, a conversation between Natsai Chieza and Mike Thompson. *Mold Magazine* 3, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> In the words of Thames Water's Becky Trotman: 'This display is a vivid reminder to us all that out of sight is not gone forever, so please help keep London and all the sewers flowing — don't feed the fatberg' Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-42986433

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Bear and Jacob Bull. Water matters: agency, flows, and frictions. *Environment and Planning A* 43(10), 2011: 2261-66, 2262.







lo Squaderno 52 Overflow

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In the next issue: Neighbourhood Portraits

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