

Water

Ways

In September 2020 at the Master Exerce program “recherche et representation” I staged *In study with bodies who flood*, a hybrid dance performance and speculative lecture on water bodies: how they move, their behavior, and what’s getting in their way. This zine is a way of collecting some of the materials, strategies, and questions I encountered through making this performance.

– marion storm, Montpellier 2023

In study with bodies who flood

Centre Chorégraphique National Montpellier

September 16, 2020

I begin by moving as a benthic layer water-body, buoyant and spilling.

I wear a wetsuit, and it brings a heavy quality into otherwise quick and slippery movements. The floor underneath collects traces of my sweat, like the floodplain a river runs through.

My body is caught and shaped by overlapping processes as I move—planetary processes that indicate movement : sedimentation on the riverbed, diffraction of currents, the absorption of toxins through a whale’s thick skin, the rhizomatic growth pattern of marsh plants, the “positions of meander” a river assumes through time, the inability to move that signals the end of a glacier’s life.

From this watery state, I emerge somehow to arrive very presently here in this room. I consider you, my body, and the ground as I stand up and walk like how a person walks to cover the ground in emergency blankets and quick-dry camping towels. There’s a computer ready in the corner of the space, and as a series of captions come onto the screen I go over to advance a slide show.

I say to you :

There is a real story, there is a true story, of a river who drowned.

There is a true story of a coral reef who healed itself.

There is a real story of a landfill whale.

There is a real story of a glacier who froze.

I say : We have time for just one story, so I'll tell you about the glacier.

And then I tell you of Okjokull, one of many glaciers who has been "declassified" as a glacier because [it/she/they] could no longer move. Declassified, because move is what glaciers do.

I tell you, then, of a group of Icelanders who gathered to create a memorial for Okjokull, and who installed a plaque on the mountain where she used to live. The plaque is called "A letter to the future."

As I finish this story, I propose that maybe the work I'm doing here today in this performance-lecture, moving as a water body and then talking about this in memoriam to a glacier, is my own kind of letter to the future. A letter that welcomes an "otherwise" into how things are going between us and the planet.

I ask you, the witness, if it's a letter we can write together.

To finish the performance I suggest that we close our eyes. I say :

I'd like to take the temperature of the room, to ask ourselves as individuals of this group to see what roles we might offer to play in a speculative future, as soon as we walk out this door. It might even be a role that you're taking on right now. When you hear a role that you feel curious about, please raise your hand. If you feel called to raise your hand more than once, please do. It's best if we close our eyes.

I read out some roles :

high tide witness

wetlands steward

whale translator

at once river and girl

a mother, who searches for our sons' bones in the sea

microplastics collector

water bearer

coral reef doctor

biographer of a raindrop

The final moment of the performance never happened, because of strict institutional commitments to following Covid distancing protocols at the choreographic center where the work premiered.

But what happens next is, I ask you to open your eyes, and I pass out glasses of water. And then I say, if you are ready for an otherwise, join me in the center of the studio. I'm going to count down from 5, and when I reach 1 we yell "HEY!" and pour the water all over ourselves.

Ready?

5

4

3

2

1

HEY!

At the end, I hope you are wet.

pacing (excerpt)

ENDLESS
ONGOINGNESS
PLODDING
UNCEASING
GRADUAL

DILIGENT
INCESSANT
STEADY
IT'S A KIND OF WORK ETHIC
INEXHAUSTIBLE
DETERMINED
ONWARDNESS
FLOW
ITERATIVE

CONTINUOUS PRESENT
PERSISTENT
RECHARGING
RESTORING
RE-CYCLING ENFOLDING

It's not just that this river *could* flood,
it's that it has before and will again !!!

Questions to consider when considering the logics of a floodplain :

| | | |
|------------|-------------|------------|
| there's | there | |
| regular | are | is |
| rain? | natural | the |
| combined | buffers? | floodplain |
| with | grasses, | extra |
| snow | trees, | dry? |
| fall? | wetlands? | |
| a | | how |
| huge | | does |
| rain | who | wetness |
| storm | is | edge |
| every | feasting | into |
| now | on | dryness? |
| and | the | dryness |
| again? | nearby | into |
| hurricane? | vegetation? | wetness? |
| | drought? | |
| the | | |
| river | | |

flows
through
an
already-paved-by-waters-before-it
pathway?
or,
is
the
river
in
the
process
of
flooding?

(REFERENCE: Sara Ahmed, on use & Toni Morrison, on *flooding*)

Actions I moved through in establishing my own “floodplain logics” for *In study with bodies who flood* :

Listening to the (under)ground

Coursing (fluid, streaming)

Arranging the shapes of me

Dancing for the dead

Aspirating

Resting, waiting

Navigating multiple currents at once

Striving, steady, toward the
shore

Conditioning the
body as a milieu for events to
emerge

Accessing
the memory chain

carried by the local river

Tuning in to a
rhythmic pattern of the
current

Anchoring: parts of the body
submerged under riverbed as others
float

Sedimenting
Internal sensing of
water

Spilling that
sensing outward,
toward the witness

(eye contact, proximity,
acknowledgement, receptivity, address)

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2023

Montpellier, France

English version