

# The Tributaries Project

Catalogue

Edited by  
Andrea Hurst



SARCHI Chair-ISCIA (Identities and Social Cohesion in Africa)  
Nelson Mandela University  
Room 103A, First Floor  
Eendrag Building (Bird Street Gallery)  
Bird Street Campus  
Tel: 041 504 4848  
Email: [andrea.hurst@mandela.ac.za](mailto:andrea.hurst@mandela.ac.za)  
Website: <https://isciachair.mandela.ac.za/>

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## *Acknowledgements*

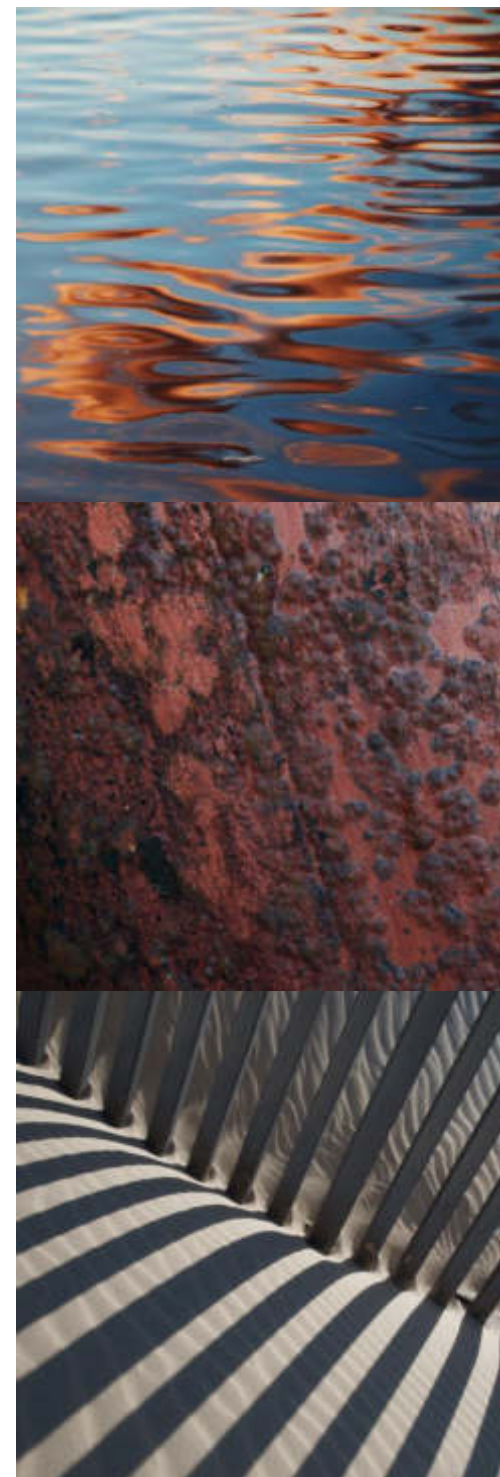
The Tributaries Project (2019) was initiated by Prof Hurst (ISACA), in conjunction with Prof Nyoni and Prof Duker (Visual Arts Department), and Dr Du Plooy (Engagement Office), at the Nelson Mandela University, PO Box 77000, Port Elizabeth, 6031.

This catalogue pays tribute to pilgrims, speakers and poets who created the multimedia works in this catalogue, which were exhibited, performed or delivered in 2019, at the following events: Sea-to-Source Pilgrim's Art Exhibition (18-25 Nov); The Tributaries Project Colloquium (20

Nov); The Tributaries Project Narratives event (21 Nov); The Tributaries Project Seminar (15 Feb-17 Nov). Experts who delivered on-site pilgrimage talks and tours are also gratefully acknowledged, as well as project organisers, whose "mojo" made the project flow smoothly. The pilgrimage organisers were Prof Andrea Hurst, Dr David Pittaway and Ms Harsheila Riga. Prof Hurst and Dr Pittaway conceptualised the itinerary and contacted speakers for on-site talks and tours. They made food, travel and accommodation arrangements, together with Ms Riga.

Prof Hurst hosted the seminar series, with administrative support from Ms Riga. Ms Riga organised the Exhibition Week (Pilgrim's Exhibition, Colloquium and Narratives Event) in collaboration with Dr Holtzman, and assisted by Prof Hurst, Dr Pittaway and Mr Manona. Mr Gareth Williams created videos for and of the exhibition opening. Prof Hurst designed this catalogue, basing the cover on the Sea-to-Source Exhibition Pamphlet by Ms Elmien Waring. Prof Hurst selected material, wrote and/or edited text in tandem with participants,

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## *Contributors*

Ian Buchanan, Professor, Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong

Mary Duker, Professor, Visual Arts, Nelson Mandela University

Belinda Du Plooy, DLitt et Phil, Manager Engagement Office, Nelson Mandela University

Emma Hay, Lecturer in Sociology, Rhodes University, Permaculture expert

Glenn Holtzman, PhD (Musicology), Senior Lecturer, Music, Nelson Mandela University

Andrea Hurst, Professor, Philosophy, ISCIA Chair, Nelson Mandela University

Gary Koekemoer, PhD Candidate (Philosophy), Nelson Mandela University

Nehemiah Latolla, PhD Candidate (Chemistry), Nelson Mandela University

Margaret Lowies, MSc (Geography), Ass. Director (DEFF), lecturer in Dept. Civil Engineering

Ethan Thomas, HONS (Music), Nelson Mandela University

Lungelo Manona, MA Candidate (Media Studies), Nelson Mandela University

Nomtha Menye, MA Candidate (Sociology), Nelson Mandela University

Phelokazi Mntwini, HONS (Philosophy), Nelson Mandela University

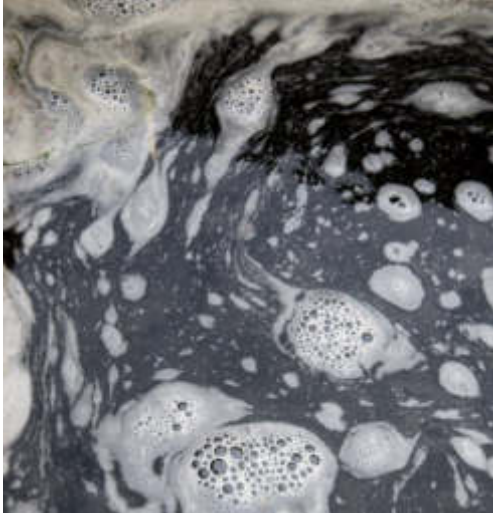
Mbokazi Ngayeka, Chemistry and *cri*SHET Researcher, Nelson Mandela University

Sibu Nhlangwini, HONS (Graphic Design), Nelson Mandela University

Thandazani Nofingxana, HONS (Fashion), Nelson Mandela University

Vulindlela Nyoni, Associate Professor, HOD Visual Arts, Nelson Mandela University  
Grettel Osorio Hernández, MA Candidate (Painting), Nelson Mandela University  
Adeolu Oyekan, PhD Philosophy (Lagos), Postdoctoral Fellow (ISCIA)  
David Pittaway, PhD Philosophy (UFS), Postdoctoral Fellow (ISCIA)  
Thabang Queench, *cri*SHET researcher, Serves on Board of Directors (SADRAT)  
Harsheila Riga, Administrative support, ISCIA  
Nonnie Roodt, Professional Artist and Art Teacher, Port Elizabeth  
Luke Rudman, Student (Visual Arts), performance artist, Nelson Mandela University  
Sharon Rudman, PhD (Philosophy), Lecturer in Applied Languages, Nelson Mandela University  
Alida Sandison, PhD (Psychology), S. Lecturer in Psychology, Nelson Mandela University  
Bernadette Snow, PhD (Botany), Lecturer in Development Studies, Director CMR  
Heather Snow, School Pupil, Amateur Photographer, Collegiate Girls High School  
Luan Staphorst, MA Candidate (Philosophy), UWC, MA Candidate (Linguistics), *cri*SHET  
Danai Tembo, Lecturer in Development Studies, Nelson Mandela University  
Christi van der Westhuizen, Associate Professor, CANRAD, Nelson Mandela University  
Silvon Windsor, Student (Literature and Philosophy), Nelson Mandela University





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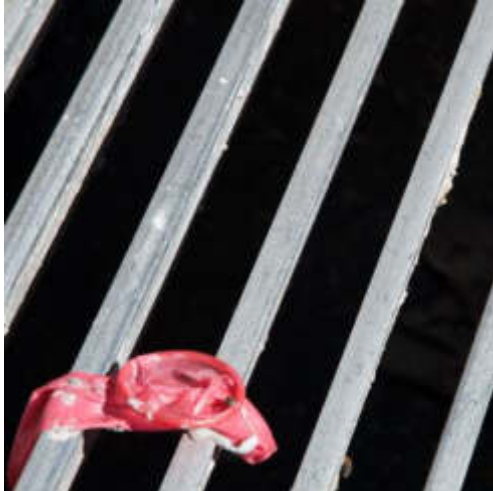


## *About the ISCIA Chair*

Achieving a culture of unity in diversity is a multi-faceted challenge. How is a society realised that is both deeply aware of, and responsive to, its fractious past (which calls upon South Africans to recognize and strengthen local identities) and committed to social cohesion (which calls upon us to unbind the kind of purist identities that lead to social antagonism and new forms of marginalization that weaken integration)? A basic assumption of ISCIA's overall research project is that this double bind may be negotiated by creating an identifiably South African way of being that is flexible and fluid. Further, the Arts draw upon a unique power to involve individuals

emotionally in questioning, raising doubts, creating dialogue, and opening spaces in which to imagine and hope for community-led solutions that foster healing and restore dignity. "Aesthetic wisdom," therefore, offers a powerful resource to help academic and other communities approach this ethical task. The relevance of such aesthetic exploration is at once pedagogical and ethical since it aims to involve a broader community in reflective spaces of dialogical interaction between diverse voices and create new ways to see and be in the world. The Chair's research is conducted from a philosophical standpoint and aims to foster different ways of thinking and novel





concept creation. Situated within the paradigm of complexity-thinking for the humanities, it is assumed that knowledge production depends on making a paradigmatic shift beyond both self-confident conceptual models and self-assertive anti-conceptual strategies. Researchers are called to modify ingrained habits of thought and configure not top-down theoretical methods to articulate the complexity of events, but heuristics. Heuristics are educational devices, or helpful procedures, rather than fixed-rule models, which stimulate independent critique and encourage people to imagine solutions for themselves. But, the academy is traditionally the

seat of intellectualized, instrumental education, where theoretical knowledge production predominates and aesthetics is underplayed. As a counterbalance, the Chair focusses on the power of “aesthetic wisdom” to develop the critical and creative innovators needed to re-imagine emancipatory social spaces and dynamics. It aims to provide a safe and stimulating environment for intellectual experimentation and a re-conception of knowledge production, which draws on emotive and affective responses to experiences, senses and bodies, to stimulate the imagination and critical reflection in novel and unique ways.

## *About The Tributaries Project*

The Tributaries Project, which was initiated at the beginning of 2019, grew out of the ISCIA Chair's mandate to engage with the dilemma of the relation between identities and social cohesion, not only through philosophical and theoretical research but also through experiment and experiential learning in aesthetic wisdom. The Tributaries Project began to take shape when three main events chanced to flow together at around the same time. Prof Andrea Hurst, the ISCIA Chair, together with Prof Vulindlela Nyoni, Head of the Department of Visual Arts, proposed to set up a seminar series for the year where art and philosophy could meet for creative

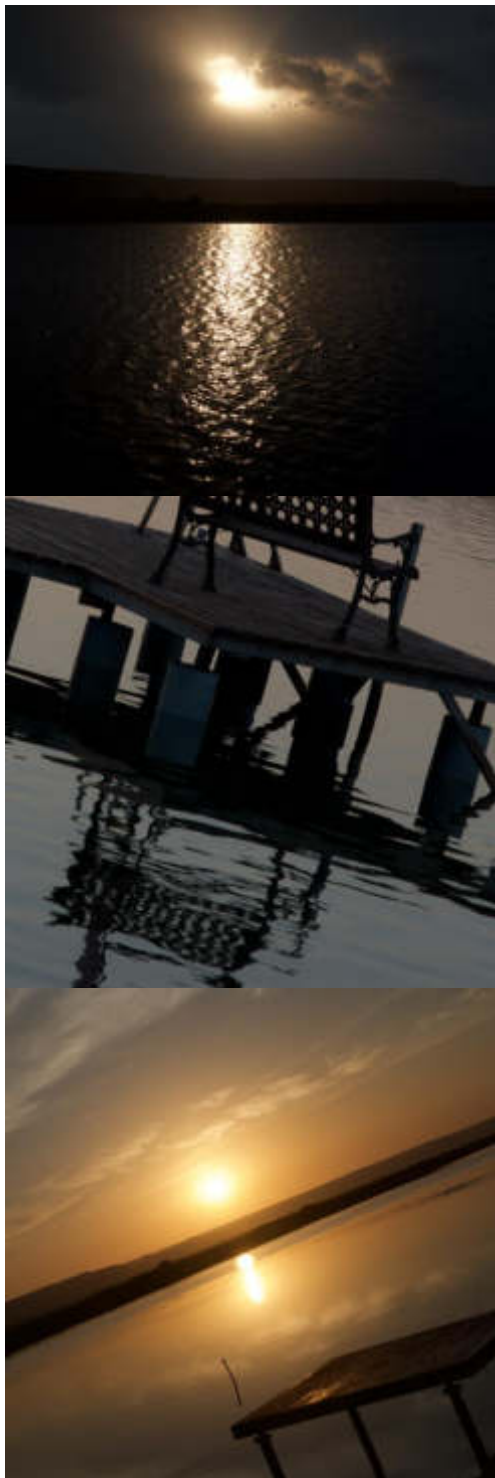
discussion. Simultaneously, at the suggestion of Dr Belinda Du Plooy of the Nelson Mandela University Engagement Office, Prof Hurst collaborated with Prof Mary Duker of Visual Arts to complete the third year of an existing multi-disciplinary art-meets-science engagement project. This collaboration, among other things, highlighted the intrinsic link between social and ecological issues, with the reminder that social cohesion must be achieved in the context of a contemporary global condition of urgent environmental crisis. Although contributing to the development of an "environmental humanities" is central to this project, it did not propose to





resolve environmental issues directly. Its aim was to foster cohesion among diverse people guided by the hypothesis that cohesive communities are realised if individuals are bound by a shared concern, which is rich enough to encompass diverse passions and multidisciplinary interests, and to inspire the re-imagination of human identity at a species level. In view of the global water crisis (very evident in a drought-stricken region), as well as the shared identity of the Nelson Mandela University and the City of Port Elizabeth (beside the ocean), “water” was selected as a fitting theme. The art-meets-science project laid the basis for cross-disciplinary engagement activities

beyond the four walls of the academy. This inspired the ISCIA Chair to create a “heterotopia,” which is, following Foucault, an “othered” space, where people may temporarily lay aside ordinary habits and experiment with “otherness.” The third event that flowed into this growing river was Prof Hurst’s desire, having walked part of the life-changing Camino de Santiago, to create a local pilgrimage. A pilgrimage is a journey to a sacred place, usually for religious reasons. But for religious and non-religious alike, undertaking a ritualised journey – each pilgrim travelling differently along the “same” pathway – is a paradoxical combination of isolation and



solidarity. From this the question arose of whether social cohesion (also a paradoxical combination of isolation and solidarity) among the urbanised staff and students of an ocean-side university in a port city, could be fostered by re-thinking the idea of a pilgrimage for the secular space of academic engagement. Prof Hurst imagined a “water walk” along a waterway from untouched coastline, through industrial zones, before turning upriver into the interior and ending at the river’s source in freshwater springs. From the combination of these three events, The Tributaries Project began to take shape. At the first seminar, names were considered, and “Tributaries” is owed to Prof

Vulindlela Nyoni (Visual Arts) and “Sea-to-Source” to Dr David Pittaway (ISCI Postdoctoral Fellow). The Project consisted of three events. The Tributaries Project Seminar was created as a heterotopic space of regular multi-disciplinary interaction (art, science and philosophy), tied to the theme of water. A standing open invitation was issued to anyone who wished to present a seminar related to the topic of water. During the year, the Seminar hosted twenty richly diverse presentations, which generated lively on-going discussions. Three Sea-to-Source pilgrimages formed a unique water pilgrimage experience. This, dictated by pragmatics and logistics,

became a three-day journey from sea to source (rather than a lengthy walk). On three occasions, groups of eleven extremely diverse pilgrims embarked on “the same” journey, in which they were offered opportunities to experience and respond to different kinds of human engagements with water. Pilgrims followed a route from the wide open sea (starting at Sardinia Bay), along the coastline through the industrial zones (the Cape Recife lighthouse, the waste water treatment works, the PE harbour) and then moving up the poisoned Zwartkops Estuary, towards the sacred source of the Zwartkops River in Groendal Wilderness Area, where the water is pure enough to

scoop up into your hands and drink. Participants in the project were requested to create an aesthetic or academic response to their experiences, to be showcased during a culminating week of public events at year-end. The Tributaries Project Exhibition Week included an exhibition opening where works were performed, an art exhibition at the university’s Bird Street Gallery, A one-day colloquium where academic papers were presented, and a narratives event, where poetry was read and stories were told. These responses speak quite clearly of the value of configuring a sea-to-source pilgrimage as a contemporary ritual in a secular, academic space.



## *About the catalogue*

The discussion of the multimedia works collected together in this exhibition catalogue follows the temporal flow of The Tributaries Project Exhibition Week, beginning with the celebratory opening night (Nov 18) on the Nelson Mandela University's Bird Street Campus. On this night, a musical composition was performed, a performance artwork happened, and fixed artworks were exhibited. The order of works discussed moves from the two performances through to the Bird Street Gallery space. Contributions of fixed artworks are discussed in the order that these artworks could have been encountered as a person moves through the gallery. The path of the

discussion then moves on to The Tributaries Project Colloquium, a day-long event that took place on the third day of the Exhibition Week (Nov 20). Its next stop is The Tributaries Project Narratives Event (Nov 21), where stories were told and poetry was read. In this way, the various creative and intellectual responses of pilgrims are considered first. Then the order of works discussed moves back in time, so to speak, to presentations from The Tributaries Project Seminar Series. There is also a brief acknowledgment of the experts who offered talks, tours and activities on the pilgrimages. While this pathway describes the flow of the discussion of works in this





catalogue, many of the project's participants offered multiple contributions. Where this is the case, a person's various contributions are all discussed together in the same section. Transcriptions were also made of some of the recorded or filmed reflective responses that participants made before and after the pilgrimages. Lightly edited excerpts of these transcriptions are included where appropriate. As designer and editor of the catalogue, I took responsibility for transcribing and editing, as well as writing some of the text (and for possible errors). However, I borrowed liberally as far as I could from what participants themselves

wrote in the form of exhibition labels and abstracts, and from what many said in audio and video recordings. I hope, therefore, to have captured something of the multivocal nature of the project. Each participant had the opportunity to contribute to the writing up of the works showed here, and to suggest amendments to the text and image selection prior to publication. All photographs that were not taken by me have been credited to the photographer in the accompanying text. Finally, all contributors featured in this catalogue approved their sections before making the text public.

Andrea Hurst (September, 2020)



# Water Works

Glenn Holtzman



“Water works” is a multi-movement musical composition, designed by Dr Glenn Holtzman and co-created with music theory and composition students. It was premiered at the Bird Street Concert Hall, 18 Nov,

2019. With Dr Holtzman as primary composer and pianist, the co-creators and performers were: Luxolo Ntamo (piano); Zama Mbotho, Sinelizwe Hole, Zizipho Rala, and Lilitha Bidla (vocals);

Nkosintle Nkabi (bass guitar & piano); Phakamani Pungu-pungu (percussion); Sicelo Ngozwana (water percussion). Performance photos are taken from the live video recording by Gareth Williams.





Glenn notes that the pilgrimage's sea-to-source path catalysed the thematic storyline of four distinct movements, linked by innovative water percussion. The work begins with "Beaches and buoy bells," a solo piano tone poem accompanied by whistling, wailing, and Xhosa lamentations. The second movement "A love song for/from water" is a solo voice ballad in English and Xhosa, with back-up vocals, piano, bass guitar, and additional percussion. "A water ritual" follows. This movement is an indigenous/folkloric vocal, including polyrhythmic African hockets, Xhosa incantations and praise singing, accompanied by percussion and piano. The final movement, "Sipping the sacred source" is a solo voice

hymn in Afrikaans with back-up vocals, piano, bass guitar, and percussion. Dr Holtzman designed the work's structure and composed the first and fourth movements. The two inner movements were co-created with students. In experimental rehearsals, students led more strongly with much loved Xhosa musical idioms and Jazz soundscapes. While specific students engaged in 2 months of extra-curricular rehearsals, many curious on-lookers gathered at rehearsals to see the experiments with "saturated sounds." Since many more students wished to participate, some rehearsals were offered as open masterclasses, offering exciting ways of learning beyond the traditional classroom.



Glenn remarked that, “‘Water Works’ was at first just a nickname as I sketched out the composition. When I recruited students to help build and execute some movements, we still referred to ‘the



water works’. Eventually ‘Water Works’ came to represent both the music and our collective work as co-creators. ‘It works!’ was Sicelo Ngozwana’s joyful exclamation when our experiments to create



distinct water-based sounds successfully enhanced the composition. The title ‘Water Works’ became a resounding ‘yes!’ to the question: ‘Can water work as a musical instrument?’”



## *From Glenn's Reflections*

“The water pilgrimage was a deeply moving experience for me. I don’t quite think I can shake off this feeling of, somehow, being reduced to some microscopic being on this planet in relation to the size of the problems ... as a result of our recklessness and of our neglect of systems that are supposed to ensure that we function efficiently in our management of our waste, especially our human waste, and our plastic pollution. And it just makes me want to do every little bit that I can to ensure that I contribute somehow to a sustainable ecosystem, a sustainable planet, a sustainable ocean system and clean beach ... if there is light at the end of the tunnel for me, the lighthouse at Cape Recife ... was also quite moving ... I like the permanence of the lighthouse, the fact that it has withstood so many storms, that there are so many back-up systems to ensure its operation and that the core function of it is actually so significant in navigating the oceans. I think of it as a metaphor, for each one of us trying to educate others and change and adapt our own lives.”

## «Saturated Sounds»: Making Water Music

In “Saturated Sounds” presented at the Tributaries Seminar (Aug 16) and Colloquium (Nov 20), Dr Holtzman argues that human relationships to water’s soundscapes are expressed in aesthetic interpretations of what he calls “saturated sounds.” On the Sea-to-Source Pilgrimage he found diverse opportunities to experience and record “saturated sounds.” His interest in water’s soundscapes sensitised other pilgrims to water’s sound intensities emanating, for example, from machinery at the waste water treatment works, rain on the roof at Redhouse (besides the Zwartkops River), and small tributary streams at Groendal. In response to the “saturated sounds”

experienced on the pilgrimage, he designed a musical composition, to be assembled collectively with selected students. In his words: “The composition and performance of this work is a tribute to the fluidity of the connection between water and humans, and also the connection between humans and humans, working together in fluid, creative cohesion. The result is a prayerful meditation on the notion of harmonisation as fluidity.” In the presentation, he considers the fluidity of [human] nature as a sonic metaphor, describes the creative processes used, the timbral palette selected, and the ideas and affects related to making music with, and about, water.







«The composition and performance of this work is a tribute to the fluidity of the connection between water and humans, and also the connection between humans and humans, working together in fluid, creative cohesion. The result is a prayerful meditation on the notion of harmonisation as fluidity.»

~ Glenn Holtzman



# Plastic Monsters

Luke Rudman



The pilgrimage ignited Luke Rudman's deep distress at the monstrosity of plastic pollution in oceans and nature's sacred wild spaces. In response, he created 12 "plastic monsters"; a performance

artwork released as a radical protest against plastic pollution on Nelson Mandela University South Campus, Aug 26, 2019. The work took on a life of its own in partnership with Greenpeace SA, and its multiple

performances attracted extensive media coverage including SABC TV, Channel24, and The Herald. It was awarded a Commonwealth Litter Programme STOMP Award (Stamp Out Marine Plastic Pollution).





Each of the work's 12 figures (photo, page 18: Sharon Rudman) combine body-painting and costuming, created from plastic trash collected along the Nelson Mandela Bay coastline. They all show aspects of the multi-faceted plastic pollution crisis. The centrepiece, "Blue Plastic Monster" (shown on the left), personifies the marine plastic pollution crisis. Luke performed this piece at The Tributaries Project Pilgrim's Exhibition, and also highlighted the "Fast Food Monster" (shown on the next page), first performed by Nehemiah Latolla. He describes this figure as an incongruous, surreal representation of everyday, single use plastic cutlery and receptacles, which hopes to prompt a fresh perspective on their environmental effect and renewed conviction

regarding action to avert the plastic crisis. The "Capitalist Monster," first performed by Joshua Rudman, critiques the waste generated by consumer culture. The "Green Monster," first performed by Mmeli Mdala, personifies land plastic pollution. The piece combined leaves and flowers crafted from plastic discarded in local fynbos areas. The "Microplastic Monster," first performed by Britney Govender, evokes the fear of our daily ingestion of microplastics in food. The wounded "Styrofoam Angel," first performed by Andrea Hurst, depicts the distressing desecration of serene and majestic natural spaces by plastic pollution. Two untitled pieces, first performed by Jessica Swan and Shannon Pika, pairs discarded plastic with human-like features to show the complex

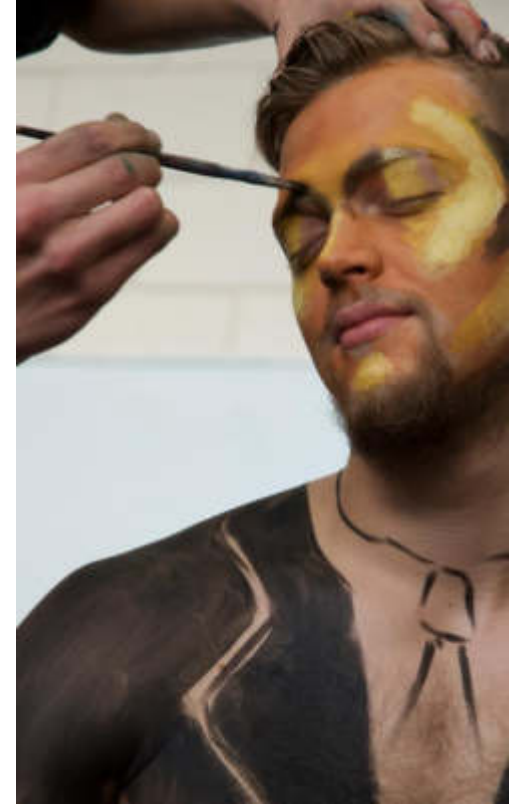




man-nature dynamic. The “Spider-web Monster,” first performed by Courtenay Webster, shows how everyday life is entwined and interwoven with single-use plastic. The “Protesting Plastic Monster,”



first performed by Brian Dibela, wielded two large, wing-like protest banners, nodding toward traditional forms of protest and campaigning for environmental concern. For the two untitled pieces, first performed



by Alexie Kalenga and Phelokazi Mntwini, a vast amount of plastic trash was collected to create oversized costumes that overwhelmed the performers, evoking a sense of how extensive



the plastic pollution crisis is. Using sewing, wirework and heat, the plastics were moulded to form the intricate symbolic details on the wearable art pieces. These were combined with bright body paint



and make-up, designed by Luke and created for the performance, with help from two assistants. In crafting the monsters, Luke made sure that some of the plastic waste used was left unchanged from its original



state so that viewers could easily read the figures as collectively highlighting the crisis of plastic pollution, and find clues for interpreting the specific issue addressed by the individual figures.



## *«Beauty and the Beast»: Performance art against plastic pollution*

In “Beauty and the Beast,” presented at The Tributaries Project Seminar (Apr 26), Luke offers an account of how performance art can challenge traditional forms of gallery art, and therefore art’s commodification. This makes it ideal for inspiring social change. “Body art” he adds, is an off-shoot of performance art, where the human body becomes the canvas. This introduces novel connotations into the artist’s symbolic palette, which are particularly interesting in view of the plastic problem. There is a sense in which human bodies and environments are significantly “becoming-plastic,” not only due to the ubiquity of plastic goods used and carelessly discarded, but also to

the internal invasion of hormones, chemicals and microplastics, leeches into our bodies from plastic containers. In the seminar, Luke presented initial ideas for his performance artwork against plastic pollution. Using the human body was central. Referring to a clean-up project where a whale-shaped cage was made, into which people threw trash collected in the area, he also planned to use plastic trash picked up locally. But he envisaged structures that people can wear, turning the tables in the sense that performers would not throw trash out, as we have been doing for so long, but would themselves, as human bodies, be filled with, covered by, and bearing this trash.

## *Reconfiguring the Everyday: Performance Art against Plastic Pollution*

In “Reconfiguring the Everyday” presented at the Tributaries Colloquium (Nov 20), Luke teamed up with Dr Sharon Rudman (see page 152) to consider the much publicised and discussed issue of plastic pollution. They argue that despite this publicity, our everyday reliance on single-use plastics has not changed enough, suggesting that the public “talk” is just about “knowing what to say” instead of an

authentic response of genuine change. Sharon Rudman examines this philosophically, while Luke considers how “performance artwork” – using his “plastic monsters” campaign as a case study – may grab the attention of viewers by reconfiguring everyday objects, thereby disrupting how we ordinarily experience them. He took the over-familiar plastic objects that we discard as everyday waste (single-use plastic containers and wrappings) and rearranged them to







form his perceptually shocking “plastic monsters.” To ensure the message regarding plastic waste remained “readable,” the plastic objects were still easily identifiable in these now uncanny figures. Then,

by re-presenting these strange figures in everyday contexts (a university campus or mall), he caused consternation and confusion, particularly when all 12 monsters performed

together, with a “flash-mob” effect. Despite the “shock-effect” of the performance, the aim was to provide the catalyst for experiencing the crisis of plastic pollution anew.



«My involvement in The Tributaries Project gave me weekly access to ways of thinking and doing that would otherwise have been inaccessible to me as a first-year student. I drew my inspiration for '12 Plastic Monsters' from the Water Pilgrimage and many doors have since opened allowing me to continue exploring my performance art as a catalyst for societal change.»

~ Luke Rudman

# Trash and Treasure

Nonnie Roodt



“Trash and Treasure” consists of five sculptural works, responding to a moment in the pilgrimage when Nonnie Roodt was most struck by the discrepancy between a “throw away” attitude and care for the

environment around us. These works were made, in a way, as resistance pieces. They resist the “throw away” attitude in which unwanted objects are heedlessly tossed into the spaces around us

and, because of this carelessness, are converted into ugly, polluting forms of trash and litter. But many of these, when seen carefully, have a beauty all of their own, and may be salvaged and restored.

This series of works is symbolic of the human condition in which there is a parallel need for and potential for restoration and rehabilitation. To enact this dynamic between resistance and rehabilitation during the pilgrimage, and in returning to the spaces that the pilgrimage passed through, Nonnie found and picked up objects that had been thrown away. She then re-converted or re-assembled them into art-objects where they could reclaim value, beauty and a new significance. Instead of being reduced to junk by the “throw away” attitude they can now convey an opposite message – the urgent need for us to take care of our environment. In this way the works try to draw something affirmative out of the negative. “Whale watching from the dunes,” pictured

to the right, responds to a highlight of the pilgrimage. The joyful sight of whales from the vast dunes at Sardinia Bay, shared with a group of like-minded people, was a sublime moment. Because of this, it brought with it a cutting pain at the thought of the destruction caused by ocean pollution. This pain was amplified at the beach clean-up the next day, which showed the harm we, as humans, are doing to nature. However, the beach clean-up also shows the desire for rehabilitation, and it helps to know that you can make a little bit of a difference. There are always these moments of hope, especially when you encounter people willing to share their immense love for and knowledge of the natural world. The activity of a handful of people can make a difference.





“Drought: Not a drop to drink!” pictured above, was inspired by the question of why humans are so casually willing to risk the known and devastating consequences of climate-change on food production.



“Beach clean-up,” pictured above, responds to the distressing deaths caused by entangling fishing nets, and the realisation that through carelessness, humanity is tightening the noose around its own neck.



“Young girl on the beach,” pictured above, expresses the whimsicality of the carefree seaside that is our privilege, still. But for how much longer? Will our children be able to enjoy this experience?





“Mythopoeitics,” pictured on the previous page, evokes a future in which “water” has vanished from the world, leaving only archaeological traces, or cyphers of its ways, in the heaped remains, fragments and bare bones, of an organic life that once was. This is a future in which all that is left, if any are left to see, are the mysterious myths and poetics of a long past era, when the ocean floor was a vivid, fertile panoply of living forces and wild waters. In the heaped remains one sees the plea of tomorrow’s children, who are calling out for the new myths and poetics of care for our environment that must become our hope and saving grace.



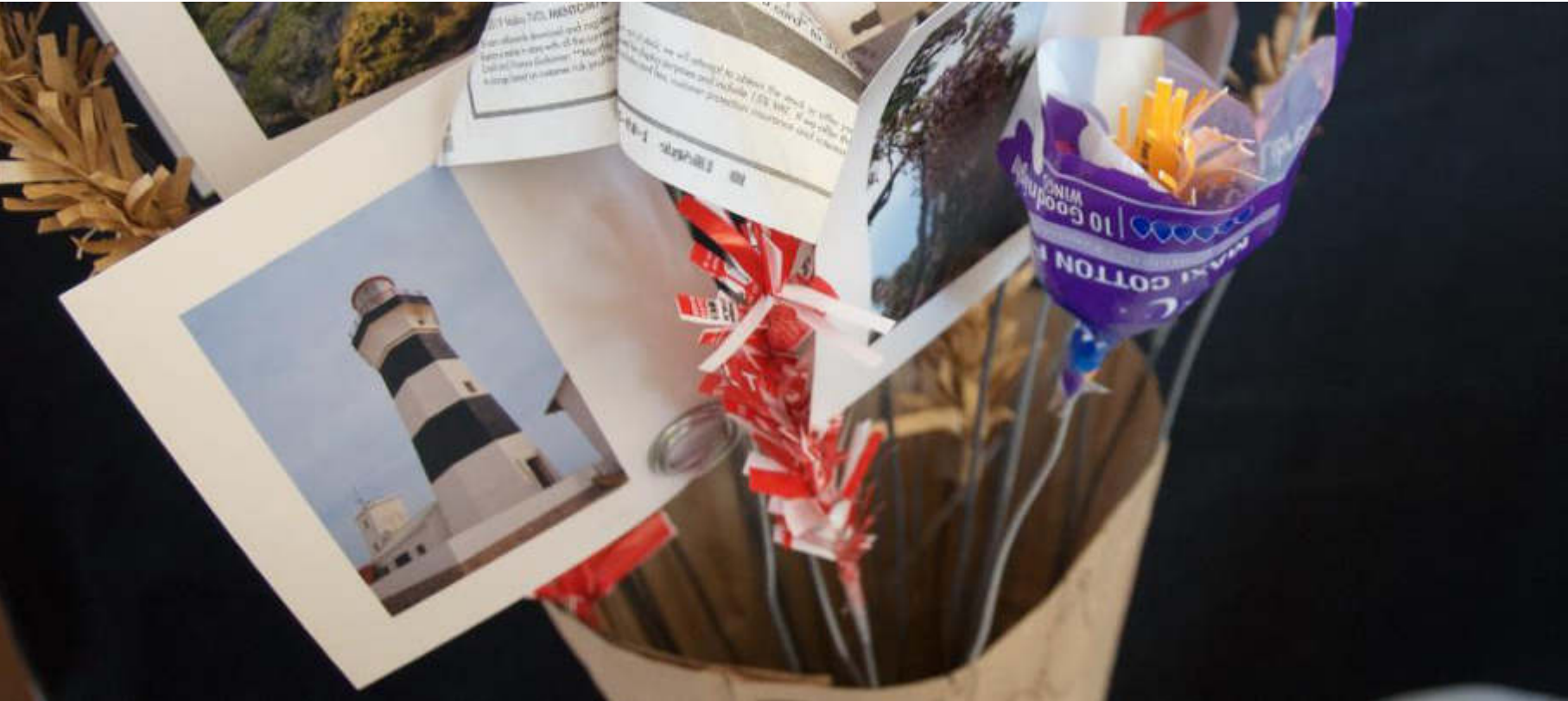
*«Going from a high at Sardinia Bay and actually seeing a whale and then right down to the sewerage works, seeing what we flush down the toilet ... and then Groendal! Into the kloof, drinking that clear, clear water...is something that I will never forget.»*

*~ Nonnie Roodt*



# Stop and Smell the Flowers

Danai Tembo



“Stop and smell the Flowers” is a sculptural work representing a bouquet of flowers in a vase. It is made from waste materials (plastic, paper, tin cans, foil wrappers) and the “flowers” are represented by

polaroid photographs perched on wire stems. The work was inspired by Danai Tembo’s strong reaction to her experience of the wastewater treatment works and all the trash encountered during the pilgrimage.

These disturbing sights and smells were overwhelming reminders of human consumptive behaviour, and yet Danai still saw so much beauty all around her on the pilgrimage, which she captured in polaroid.

## *From Danai's Reflections*

As Danai expresses this experience: "We started off with ... seeing the horrors that are the water works and for me that was very alarming. You know it. This is what happens. This is what needs to be done so that we have clean water, but when you see it, and when you smell it, when you are there, and you experience it... for me it was very alarming." Then, she adds: "In the midst of that overwhelming experience, as we were heading back to the cars, I spotted a pretty pink flower in the grass and I had to stop and take a picture of it. I was so shocked that something so beautiful was growing in a place ... well ... not so beautiful. After that I started to spot beautiful things all around me, even with the overwhelming amount of trash, and I made a point of capturing all of it in polaroid photographs. Seeing the beauty in between the trash inspired my work. Flowers are associated with beauty, so I used some of the trash I encountered to make the flowers and used some of the pictures to add to the bouquet. I chose my favourite pictures from the experience; ones that were the most beautiful for me."







## *Sustainable Fisheries: Bridging the gap between legislation and implementation*

“Sustainable Fisheries,” presented at The Tributaries Seminar (Oct 18), addresses our assumption that solid marine resources legislation in South Africa, together with various entities responsible for its enforcement, should result in both the protection of marine resources in Algoa Bay from over-exploitation and unsustainable utilization, and the promotion of non-consumptive, eco-tourism. But this not what Danai found during her research. Instead she found a very high incidence of illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing. Further, while the non-consumptive operators, related to eco-tourism activities, which did not remove resources from the ocean, were being policed and monitored very

stringently, involving excessive fines and jail time, the opposite was true for the policing of illegal consumptive activities, where fines were negligible and jail time unlikely. Danai’s research revealed that abalone poaching syndicates and corruption posed one of the most immediate threats to marine sustainability. Along with glaring policing disparities, major contributors to this threat were the failures relating to implementation. Her aim was to understand such failures, preliminary to asking how problems of implementation can be tackled. This is, of course, a complex undertaking, given that South Africa has 3000km of coastline, two major currents, and an extremely rich diversity of flora and fauna.



Danai reflects that, “I was excited to be part of the pilgrimage even though I had no idea what to expect from the experience. The whole experience really made me aware of



my ecological footprint and has made me more mindful in my everyday activities. I also got to connect with people I probably wouldn't have connected with if it



wasn't for the experience. It was wonderful and enriching to be part of such a diverse group of people and to learn from each of them.” (Photo, next page, Danai Tembo).



*«I was nervous about my response to the pilgrimage because I had no idea how I was going to express what I had seen, smelt and felt. But preparing my response gave me a chance to reflect, not only on the pilgrimage, but on what my contribution is to make the situation we observed better or worse.»*

*~ Danaï Tembo*

# Perched on Plastic

Margaret Lowies



“Perched on Plastic” is a sculptural work Margaret created from driftwood and debris collected along the Port Elizabeth coastline. Represented in full on page 41, the work depicts the skeletal remains of

a bird, perched arrogantly on a piece of driftwood that is covered with plastic excrement. At a literal level, the work brings sharply to mind the devastating photographs of seabird carcasses, where the

birds have died from starvation because their stomachs are filled and blocked by small pieces of plastic debris (from bottle tops to cigarette lighters), that are mistaken for morsels of food. This is a

sickening reminder of the devastating effect of human carelessness on all of Earth's creatures. At a symbolic level, the work represents the ugly consequences of arrogant anthropocentrism. The bird strikes the condescending pose of a self-important politician, academic or speech-maker, hands clasped behind the long coat-tails, chest puffed out, pontificating at length about human superiority and primacy, as "the masters and possessors" of nature, while it simultaneously "shits itself to death" right where it stands. The reminder is that plastics, especially in the form of invisible micro-plastics, have become so integral to individual human bodies that they literally flow out of us in our

excrement, along with excess, indigestible hormones and other chemicals emanating from the myriad tablets and artificial foodstuffs we imbibe. "Writ large," the very same pattern applies to the human system as a whole. Humans are perhaps unique among Earth's creatures in the catastrophic creation of artificial waste that is not capable of being used productively by another of life's natural, organic processes. Human productive activities all over the world imbibe "megatons" of single-use plastics, and these are, in effect, "excreted" by our systems in the form of the ubiquitous plastic pollution that is slowly choking up Earth's digestive systems (rivers, oceans and other creatures) to the point of death by starvation.









During each of the three pilgrimages, Margaret offered an on-site talk and tour of the Driftsands Wastewater Treatment Works. On the first pilgrimage, where she joined as one of the



pilgrims, she also shared her extensive knowledge of the Swartkops Estuary in a presentation precisely at the point where the river meets the sea. It was a privilege to be accompanied by her



on what turned out to be for most pilgrims a shocking and alarming walkabout through the Works. Through sharing her extensive knowledge and detailed explanations of the processes and



challenges involved in dealing with waste, she made pilgrims aware of the complex issues related to our water usage as city dwellers. Seeing and smelling what happens to the water that is flushed down our household pipes made us realise how concerned we should be about the chemicals and items we drop down plugholes and toilets. These things don't just disappear, but come out again, and cause multiple problems and hazards, at the other end. This was confirmed for us where the Motherwell Canal discharges into the Swartkops River. Margaret also produced a short video response to the pilgrimage, accompanied by her photographs (pictured on the next page), in which she remarked that the pilgrimage was well-balanced, with enough time for interpersonal connections and a rich experience of sharing ideas across disciplines, which opened new perspectives.



*„This experience also emphasised to me that through knowledge and exposure thoughts can truly be influenced as well as actions. In general, I think this is a great initiative and I do hope to add some value to the next two pilgrimages later this year. Thanks!“*

*~ Margaret Lowies*

# Belly of the Whale

Belinda Du Plooy



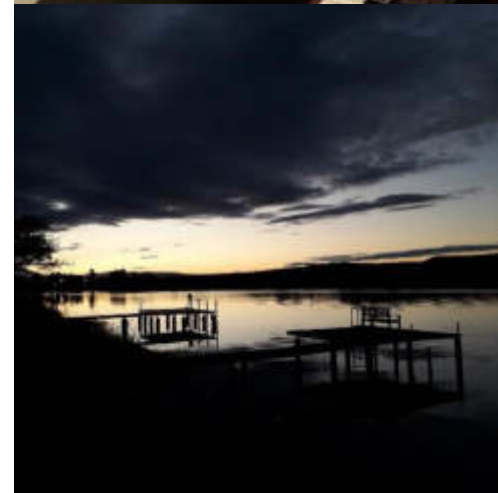
“Belly of the whale” consists of three abstract paintings (depicted above and on the next pages) linked to a poem (page 51) written in response to the pilgrimage. For Dr Du Plooy, these paintings represent

the “spontaneous and instinctive convergence” of observations and insights emerging in relation to the Tributaries experience. These she adds “crystalised during and after the pilgrimage.” Each work may be

described as a “moodscape” which highlights the energy field of moods and insights inevitably stirred up in entranced contemplation of the play of light and motion on the never still surfaces of water.

Details from Belinda's pilgrimage photographs (right) are equally evocative "moodscapes," connecting them to the paintings, where moods play among one another, sometimes slipping down to a subtle whisper, sometimes surging to the foreground. What emerged for Belinda during the pilgrimages, and in these paintings was, in her words "the irrepressible spontaneous flow of golden connections and shining energy between individuals, our world and the sacred; the subtle hues of the power of individuals to influence one another with their actual rather than virtual presence - the power of showing up and sticking around; the mystery of dissonances that strangely also hold together; of beauty amid despair and hope amid

chaos; of the excruciating search for a piece of bright blue clarity and a moment of quiet green peacefulness; of the complete impossibility of fathoming loss and the unspeakable enormity of grief; of millions of bits of loneliness scurrying past each other daily like debris, and the miracle of recognition, sharing and holding on as a sacred antidote; a recognition of the beauty of gentle kindness between people, which surprises our souls at the most unexpected moments; as does the ultimate brave act of definitively saying 'no' when that is needed; and the final reminder that we must never look at ourselves without a gentle dose of levelling humour, for we are never as right, as clever or as important as we may think we are."





## From Belinda's Reflections

"Highlights ... were the surprising moments, the unexpected things, Dave's pyromania, Glenn's and Ethan's impromptu piano ... the sharing and the camaraderie ... and having experienced the thoughtfulness and the maturity of the young people in our group ... has filled me with such hope ... for the future ... if it's in the hands of young people like these, I do think the world will be ok ... A listening attitude is something visceral; it comes from the gut, it's an attitude with which you approach life, and I think it was quite an extraordinary group ... with everybody having an instinctive sense of that listening attitude. Listening to ourselves, our own inner voices, listening to one another, listening to nature, listening to what the experts who talked to us were saying – that was quite a special experience for me, to be amidst all of that and to witness that synergy. Being a scholar of literature ... one of the wonderful experiences for me was ... [being] alongside Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* and their harrowing journey across Swartkops and the Salt Flats... traipsing through Groendal it was as if I could see Dalene Matthee's elephant staring at me through the trees and across the streams ... And then seeing the whales breach at Schoenies felt like a very deep personal message to me."



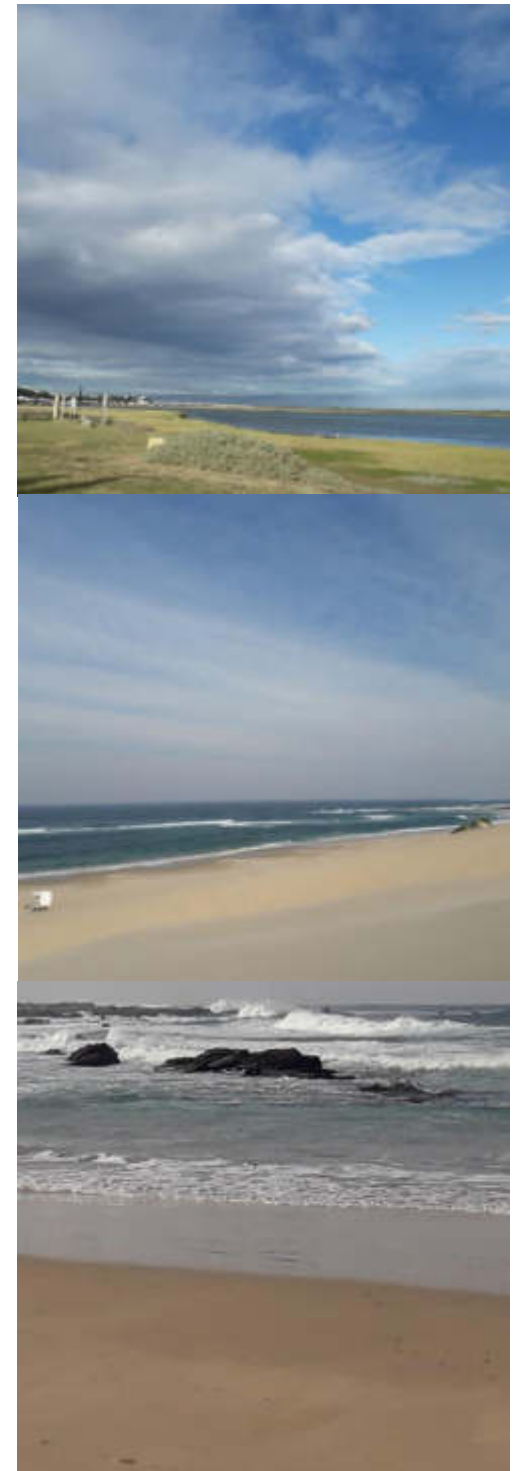




## *Sheroes of the Sea - Popular representations of youthful female leadership*

In this paper, presented at The Tributaries Project Seminar (Oct 11) and Colloquium (Nov 20), Dr Du Plooy discusses two contemporary sea narratives depicting young female leaders. Niki Caro's 2002 film, *Whale Rider*, inspired Disney's 2016 animated film, *Moana*, and both, she argues, tell stories of young Pacific Island girls "and their individual and communal crises of existence and rites of passage. The classic hero's journey merges with the iconic trope of the sea journey (both traditionally male genres) and both are presented as the inner quest of young girls and their subsequent transformation of the communities they eventually will lead." Henry Giroux, Du Plooy adds, "says that 'any discourse about the

future has to begin with the issue of youth, because young people embody the projected dreams, desires and commitment of a society's obligations to the future'. Both *Moana* and *Whale Rider* function at the nexus where feminism, history, indigenous cultures, mythology, narrative practice and film technology converge. As a result, both films participate in the contemporary critical pedagogical revisioning and remythologising task, by providing female equivalents or parallels to previously male dominated mythologies and narratives of heroic journeying and quest, thereby contributing to a tradition of female sheroics." (Photos, right and page 52: Belinda Du Plooy.)





## *Belly of the Whale*

the dark amniotic return so painful  
the piscean silence so complete

rejection by the light  
devoid of every presence  
a ghostly vessel adrift

but for the quiet plod  
of cold sticky blood and bile  
slowed life  
thickly sickly crawling

screaming to be heard  
against the impenetrable darkness  
of a cold journey  
- forever now off course? –  
with no certitude or compass  
directionless lost

lurching fearfully  
unknowing unknown  
grasping for an invisible anchor  
a safe beach on which  
to be spent  
to be known

rent and ruddy  
hungry  
to be touched



*«This weekend has given me a sense that we are at the moment in our world, but also in our Tributaries journey, in the belly of the whale. We've left the known and the certain, we are on our way somewhere, we're not quite sure where we are going, or what the end of the journey will be, but there is a sense of hope and a sense of mission.»*

*~ Belinda Du Plooy*

# Unconsciousness, Anguish, Transcendence

Nehemiah Latolla



“Unconsciousness, Anguish and Transcendence” consists of three garments fashioned by Nehemiah to symbolize emotions evoked on the pilgrimage. Modelled below by Tiffany van Staden and Sisa Zekani,

these garments embody: the “unconsciousness” of the first day; the anguish of the second, when water pollution (plastic and chemical) became darkly thematic, and the transcendence on day three

in the pure waters of the Groendal Reserve. Nehemiah acknowledges Grettel Osorio (paint) and Wiehahn Coetzer (photos, above and pages 55-57) for help with this assemblage of fabrics, plastic and paint.



The first versions of Nehemia's garments were exhibited at the Tributaries Pilgrims Exhibition on mannikins together with a video in which, he remarks, "ideas on 'excess' are explored." Nehemiah



focusses particularly on the tension between the comfort that is afforded to us by our technological advancements and the distress that comfort causes to our environment in the form of water pollution. He



indicates that part of the problem was to grapple with "issues of construction/deconstruction, impending doom and the age-old question of 'whose problem is it anyway?'"

Nehemiah's first garment reflects his sense of "unconsciousness" on day one of the pilgrimage. This is signified, he remarks, in the garment's "constant movement, rocky edges, and no restriction." On that first day, he says "we knew why we there, yet we were so blind to what was happening around us." He adds: "from the selection of the almost weightless vibrant flowy textiles, to the grandiose treatments of cowl and bishop sleeves" and pleating techniques to mirror the persistent flow of water, the garments were deliberately constructed to express the unconsciousness with which "our daily lives seem to flow into each other." We contribute to pollution, yet there are no restrictions as we are blind to the dangers that lurk beneath the water." (Photos, right & next 2 pages: Wiehahn Coetzer.)



Nehemiah's second garment reflects the anguish he experienced on day two. This, he reflects, was a response to "the 'humanness of water' and the anguish of falling into sewage where life and death co-exist." The garments, he explains "express a face to face encounter with the human condition at its apex of neglect and squandering," represented by heavy, muddy, restrictive upholstery fabrics. The garment construction, he adds "has little desire to fluently express flow but rather restricts it." The lack of finishing (hems or linings) aims to communicate the neglectful way in which humans interact with water. "The turning point for me" he notes, "is in the black mesh fabric top (worn by the male model) which is transparent and meant to symbolise my awareness of these issues and the anguish they impart."





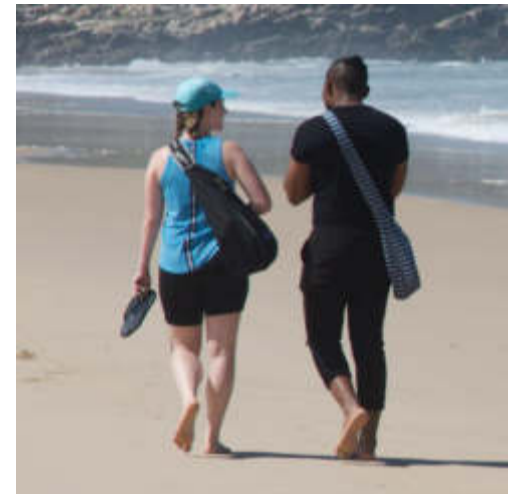
Nehemiah's third garment, "transcendence," represents his encounter, on day three, with "a place where nature and nurture meet." A hike through a kloof led to a crystal pool, pure enough to drink from. The feeling of transcendence was heightened by the previous day's "hopeless and macabre series of events." Nehemiah fashioned these garments to capture not pristine nature, but a transcendent motif for the human condition: the "dynamic tension of opposites." These garments show "how constriction can support flow, and how weightless and heavy fabrics co-exist." Also, he adds, juxtaposed variations of white (solid, stripes and embroidered blossom mesh), and belted fluidity represents a more aware, complex humanity engaging in better ways with water.



## The Meeting Place (Science/Fashion/Poetry and Water)

The basic premise of “The Meeting Place”, delivered at The Tributaries Project Seminar (May 24) is captured in a citation from Dickson Adom: that “science and art are but sides of the same coin, academic siblings of the same parents who share and learn from each other. Excellent artists are scientists and erudite scientists are artists.” As a scientist, Nehemiah’s interest lay in water samples which were collected at the Swartkops Estuary, and then dried and prepared for analysis through ICP of their heavy metal content (ug/g). Science begins to overlap with art in the use of chromatography to demonstrate the colourability of heavy metals.

Combining two Greek words, “colour” and “write,” chromatography implies “writing with colour,” and suggests how humans communicate detailed messages, unconsciously, through colour. Fashion takes this principle further, adding form and texture to the mix. Nehemiah showed how famous fashion designers mimic astonishing nature (e.g. butterflies), with forms, textures and colours to communicate subtle messages about nature and beauty. He adds that humans best mimic what science shows via chromatography, and fashion shows via form, through poetry. Taking this “meeting place” to heart, he coined





the term "artivism" to reflect his aim to create a critico-poetic narrative on the crisis of water pollution. In his words: "I am left with a sense of a calling: to become



more conscious of the devastation that mankind is inflicting on nature through our daily acts. I am now acutely aware of how I interact with water and what I throw down the



drain." This said, "a lot is left to be desired in terms of our industries and the water pollution they contribute." (photos: details from photos by Wiehahn Coetzer)

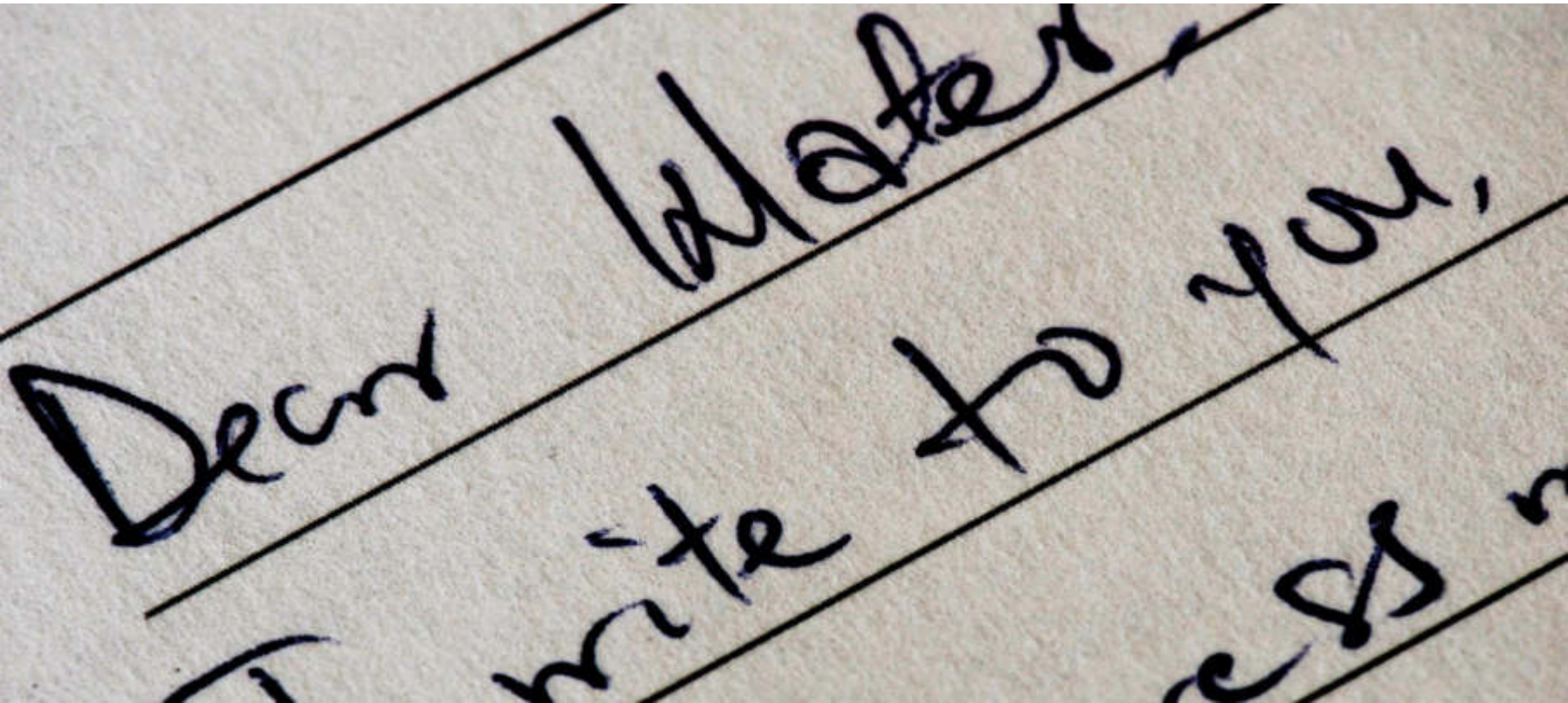


*„I feel endowed with the power of small personal acts that can effect change in my immediate circles. This extends to my thinking around my scientific research in chemistry, my creativity as a designer and my interactions with colleagues, friends, and family. With the responsibility of not only answering the call but to pass the message along.“*

*~ Nehemiah Latolla*

# A Letter to Water

Adeolu Oyekan



Adeolu Oyekan writes “A letter to water” (pages 65-66 below) in the candid idiom of a child’s letter to a nourishing parent. With the flow of watery ink along the textured paper ground, thoughts about humanity’s

relationship with water are released in a way that subtly follows the path of the pilgrimage: from the heights of grateful appreciation, plunging to the depths of despair at water’s suffering in our careless hands, and

rising again towards hope in the pledge of remedial action. The letter models an ethical stance in which humanity ought to acknowledge, and extend the proper apology to, a greater being.

## *From Ade's Reflections*

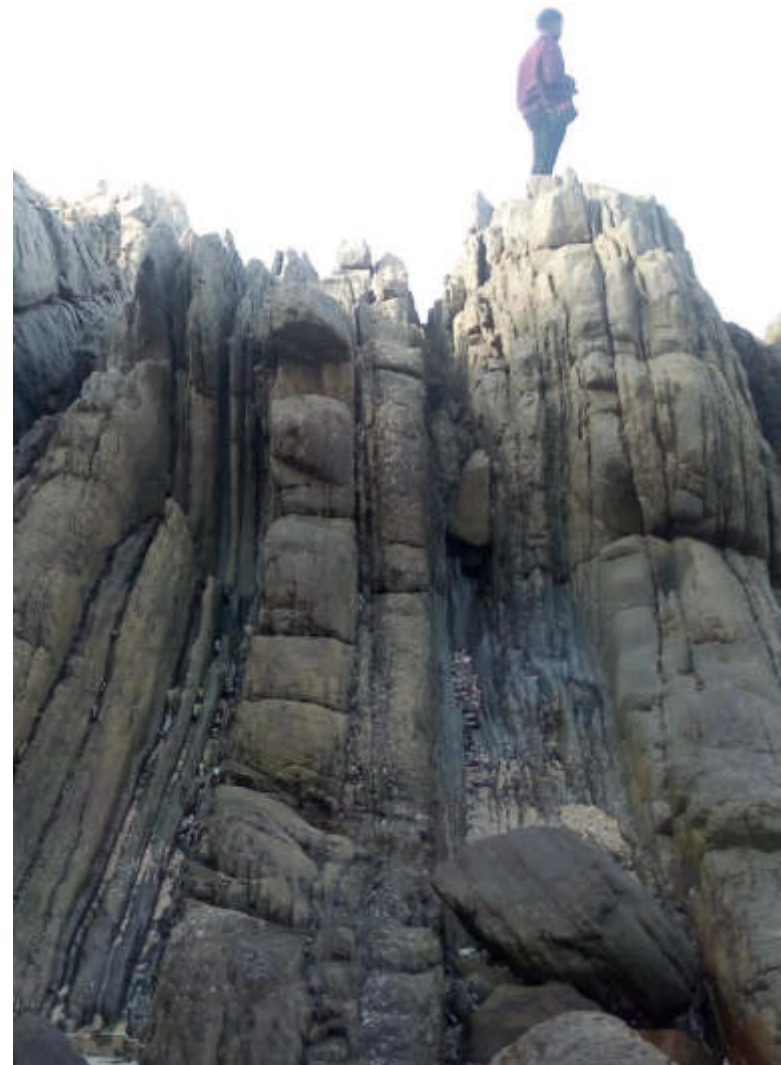
The photographs accompanying these reflections (pages 62-64) were taken by Ade. In his words: "The visit to Sardinia Bay was a very beautiful one. I saw a very beautiful beach and I can only hope that it maintains its cleanliness and beauty for a very long time to come. I enjoyed the visit to the wastewater treatment plant. The sheer complexity of what goes on in that plant and the knowledge that just a tiny fraction of the waste in Port Elizabeth is what goes there for management, struck me. So many people work behind the scenes to make sure that many of the things we take for granted on a day-to-day basis are taken care of in a way that does not make us uncomfortable or become a threat to us ... back home in Nigeria we have an approach that makes people dig their own soak-aways, and manage their own waste. And that creates its own challenges, because ... we do not





have a uniform process of waste management, most especially because enforcement can sometimes be very daunting. Of-course a centralised process of managing this waste has its own challenges too. From what we learned, the wastewater treatment plant was built to manage just one tenth of what it is presently managing, and the cost of expansion is ... humungous, and so in the face of limited resources it also raises the question of whether other means of managing waste by involving more people, by involving the primary users, can be explored ... The visit, the following morning to Algoa Bay, I found very educational. I saw young men, old men, children, young women, people who are from different backgrounds, coming to do their bit to keep that beach clean. And that for me is encouraging. The peculiarities of our

beaches in Nigeria make it a little bit difficult, but I think it's something that can be replicated ... when I get back to Lagos. I enjoyed the tour of the Swartkops River. Dr Paul [Martin], as our tour guide, exhibited a very impressive level of expertise and knowledge of that river from the estuary back to its source, and it was very good to learn about the diversity of the lives that the river sustains, even if things were a bit ... not so encouraging. The weird manner in which the bridge was constructed, for instance, which narrowed significantly the flow of the river ... The fact that a canal that was supposed to take care of wastewater from another side of the city empties its dirty water into the river also was a sort of low point, and the lesson that it leaves with me is the need for different agencies of government to synchronise their objectives."



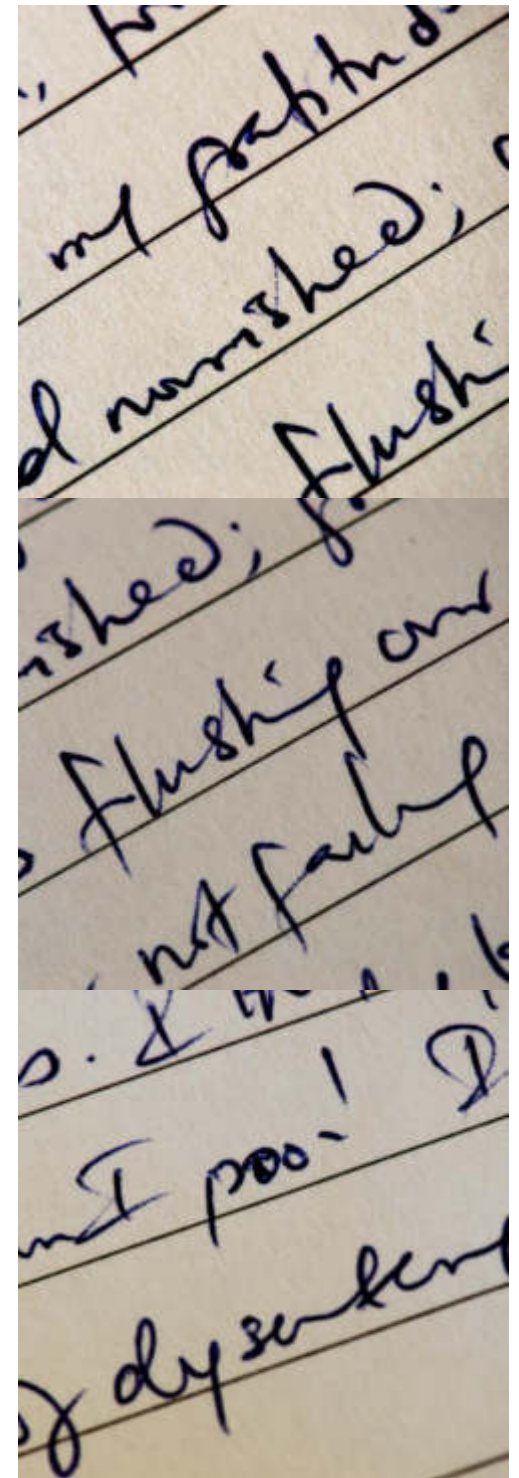


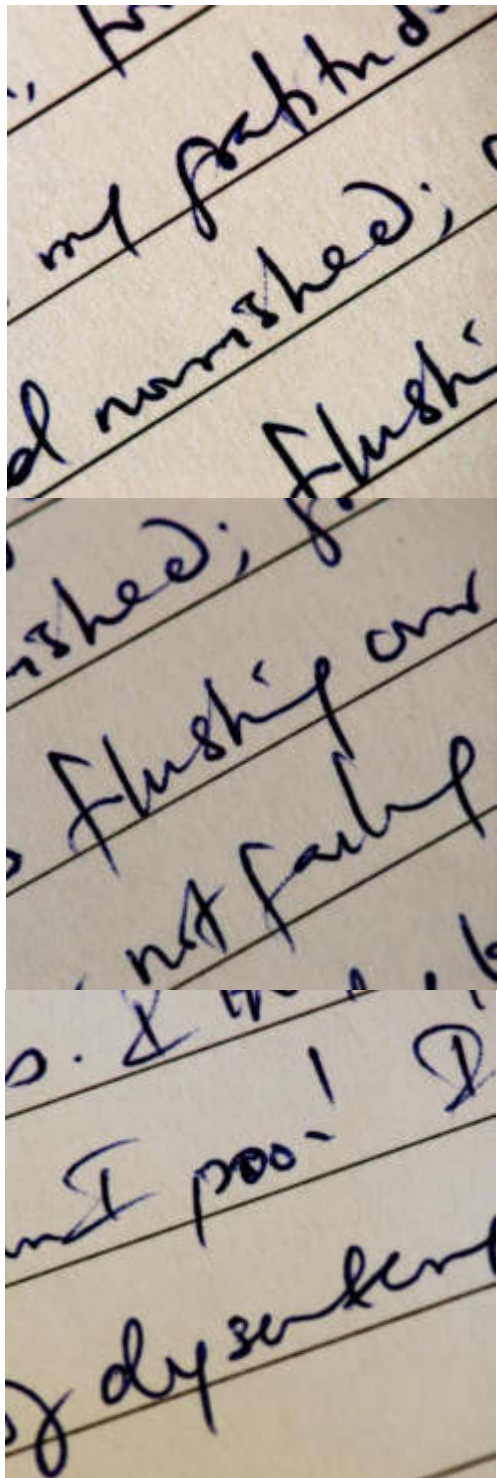
## A Letter to Water

Dear Water,

I write to you for a number of reasons, the first of which is to express my gratitude. Gratitude for wetting our plants to keep us fed and nourished; gratitude for quenching our thirsts, washing our dirt and flushing our wastes. I thank you for being there when I cook, and for not failing me when I poo! It is easy to miss the fact we would all easily be dead of dysentery or cholera, were you to choose not to be there.

I write you, dear water, to acknowledge my attitude, our attitude, which has affected you in ways that hurt us too. Explorations and exploitations of unfathomable degrees you have suffered, in our pursuit of wealth, which now threatens our health and well-being. The attitude is evident in the welter of oil spilled in the delta, the harvested deaths of aqua and human life, all in the endless pursuit of profit. It is evident in the negligence and indifference in Flint, and obvious as well in the greed that makes the multibillion dollar plastic.





industry empty its wastes into you without care In truth, we hurt you, not so much because we do not know, but because we have an appetite we've failed to tame. Now we worry not just about your depreciated quality, but also about the quantity as well. We have diminished your capacity to continuously sustain us.

What shall I do to be right by you? Gratitude is best expressed, when it reflects the right attitude. So I wish to make you a solemn pledge today, to stop being a threat and start being a friend. To influence businesses, policies and politics in the right way, and to be more conscious that treating you right is in my best interest. Respecting you is not a favour but a form of self-help.

In high tides and low ebbs I'll play my part, do my best to stem the rise for which pollution accounts. I wonder though, if I still have the chance, to reverse the damage my actions have caused

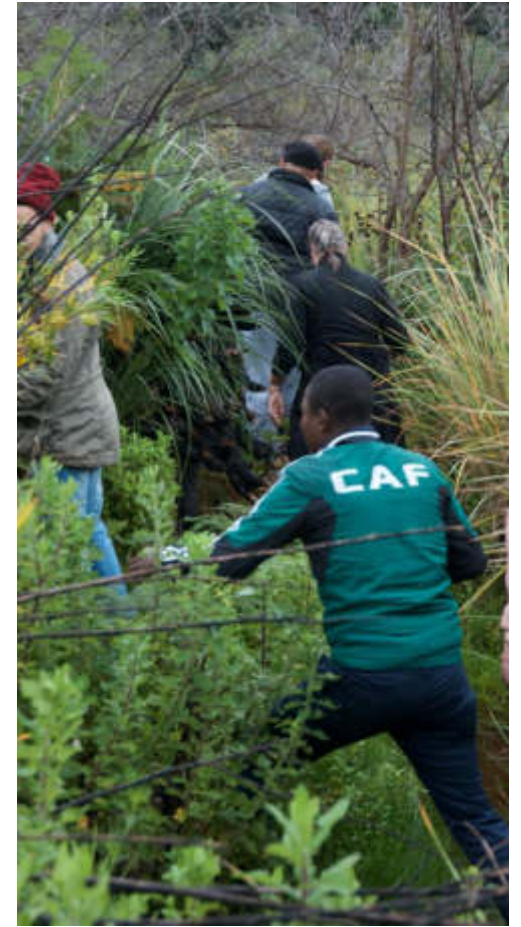
Yours,  
Homo Aqua



“The visit on Sunday morning to the source was ... breath-taking. We walked through that reservation for hours ... and it was just beautiful, one could just have gone on and on and on ... It’s a thing of joy to see



it’s been declared a reservation so that in the future expansion activities do not encroach on it and destroy its beauty. ... it’s important for us to take care of this resource, ... because if we do not, the



consequences and the ramifications, or the implications, may be farther reaching than we may presently imagine.”  
(Photographs above far left and next page by Adeolu Oyekan).



*„I hope that more and more people will participate in this kind of pilgrimage in the future so that together we can collectively continue to raise the level of awareness in our different communities and countries about what our obligations are to the environment from which we take so much. Once again, I want to appreciate everyone who has made this possible and I would love to be a part of it again. Thank you!“*

*~ Adeolu Oyekan*

# Singqunga Ndawonye

Thandazani Nofingxana

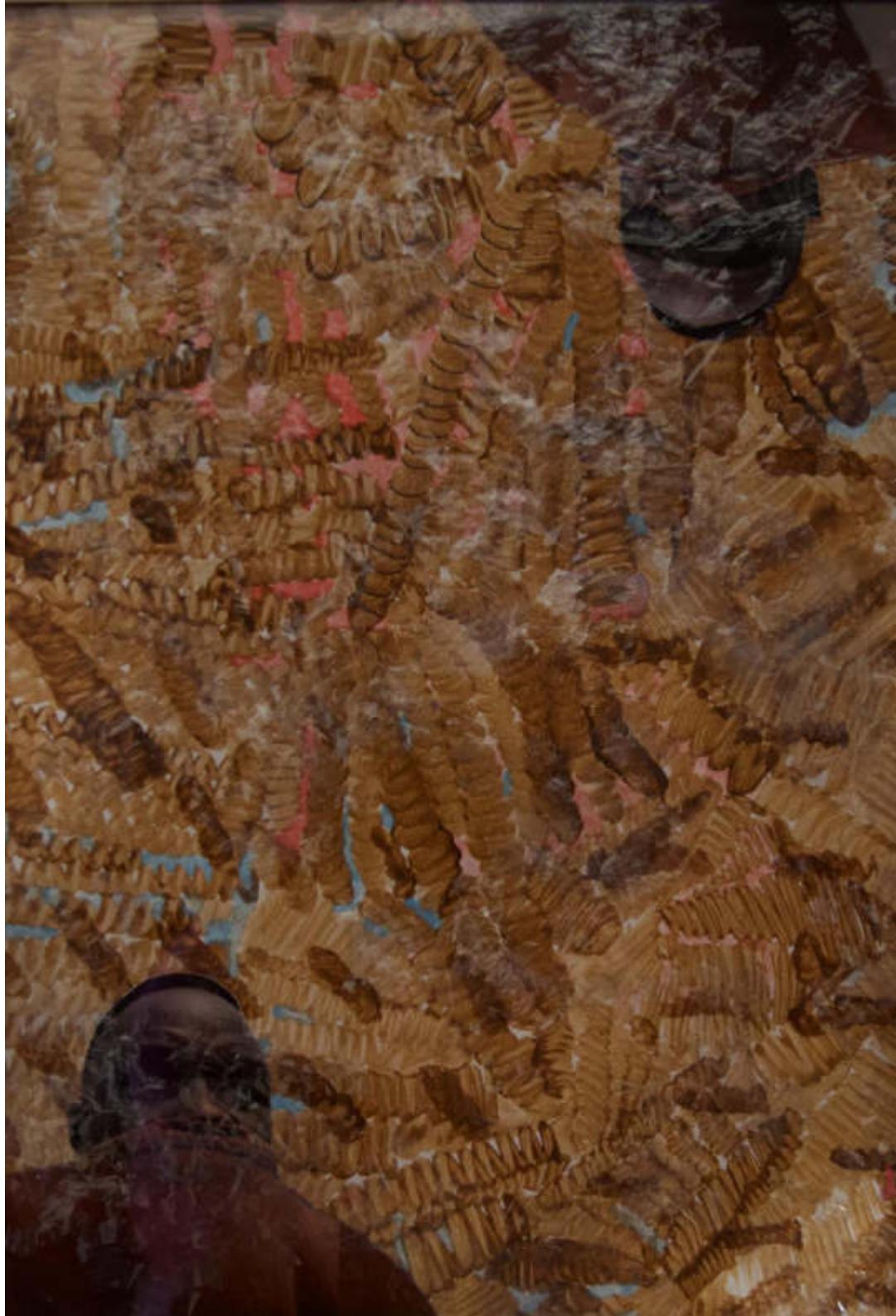


*“Singqunga Ndawonye,”* (“we are running in circles,”) consists of two mixed media works that combine photography, plastic and tiny sketches made by Thandazani during the pilgrimage. The work is

small, inviting spectators closer to share intimately a nauseating, confrontation with the overwhelming extent of wastage, reflected by Thandazani’s facial expressions in reaction to the smell

of human waste at the Driftsands Wastewater Treatment Works. Yet, as the work’s paradoxical title suggests, when this overpowering immediacy passes, we circle right back to where we were before.

The contradiction between the work's imagery and its title reflects the discrepancy that Thandazani highlights between, at first, the traumatic, visceral disgust humans tend to feel when confronted with the overwhelming excesses of our own waste (whether this is wastewater, garbage islands or supermarket aisles) and then the bland, circular return to "business as usual" when the moment of visceral disgust passes. Although we rise up in disgust when immediately confronted, we quickly return to our same habits in the name of comforts and conveniences. This discrepancy offers us, pilgrims included, a sharp and pointed call for self-critique. What are we really achieving on such a pilgrimage? Will the evocative, overwhelming, sensory experiences on the





pilgrimages, both of the beautiful and the sublimely horrific, quickly fade away from our consciousness, leaving us, at the end of the journey, right back at the beginning, having in a sense gone nowhere? Will there be significant lifestyle changes after the joys and the horrors of the pilgrimage experience have faded? This work picks up on a concern reiterated among pilgrims through all of the pilgrimages, that intentionally to change behaviour on a large scale drastically and quickly enough to save humans from extinction seems impossible from where we stand now. There is a sense from the work's imagery that humans are smothered to the point of drowning in our own plastic-coated waste materials. Perhaps the desires that lead to self-destructive stupidity



are just intractable and cannot be addressed intentionally at all. This artwork poses a challenge to philosophers to consider whether there is a way beyond the implicit radical nihilism of its title. Has it too



quickly dismissed the transformative potential of “aesthetic perception?” Such perception is achieved by an intentional shift, when you encounter a living, vibrant, sensory



immediacy, and an intensity in which you are fully enveloped. Simply placing your body in space is not enough. You have to pay attention to your perception, and this takes time, energy and





concentration. When you achieve this shift, your relationship to the world changes, your sense of familiarity falls away and is replaced with a sense of wonder that can make your flesh crawl. Perhaps significant moments of such “defamiliarization” actually occurred informally, even unconsciously, on the pilgrimages, and was a big part of their success. The effect of these experiences is not measurable, and often they subtly lead to behaviour changes. On anecdotal evidence, most participants were significantly affected by the journey, but whether, or in what ways, this kind of experience might translate into sustained attitude or behaviour change; is open to question. Are we indeed running in circles?



*„The title Singqunga Ndawonye (we are running in circles) suggests that even after having learnt so much about the pollution in the city I still buy food packaged with plastic.»*

*~ Thandazani Nofingxana*

# Pilgrimage, Patterns and Water

David Pittaway



David, as an ISCIA Postdoctoral Fellow, hosted a podcast with fellow pilgrims and colleagues, Andrea Hurst and Belinda du Plooy, about The Tributaries Project, which he describes as a “unique and ground-

breaking” event that shows “how dynamic things can be in the university context.” What struck him most was the reference to “the sacred,” unusual in the academy, but also apt, he notes, “considering

the need across contexts to reconnect with each other and our environment.” Excerpts transcribed here; available at: <https://archive.org/details/perspective-project-audio-007-andrea-and-belinda>.

## *Podcast: Andrea Hurst and Belinda du Plooy on The Water Pilgrimage*

David: "It's an experimental project that we'll be talking about; this is ... an experimental conversation as well ... let's see where we go."

The excerpts focus on David's reflections. As a pilgrimage organiser, David "deliberately focussed on the autumn and spring equinox ... and the winter solstice, so those are symbolic, cyclical dates for the movement of the sun, and our skies." For him, it "ties nicely with "pilgrimage." He adds: "a destination, such as the end of the pilgrimage, be it Groendal in our case, or other sacred spaces that

people voyage to, is more of an alibi ... to go out of your comfort zones, your ideological bubbles, and encounter people in a true philosophical encounter. It's not something you can pre-empt, it's not something you can direct." Philosophical solidarity, David remarked, starts out when you speak to the people you know, "and then about things that you are familiar with each other about ... but by the end, you're just walking with each other and sharing strange stories, maybe, sometimes experiences in your life that you



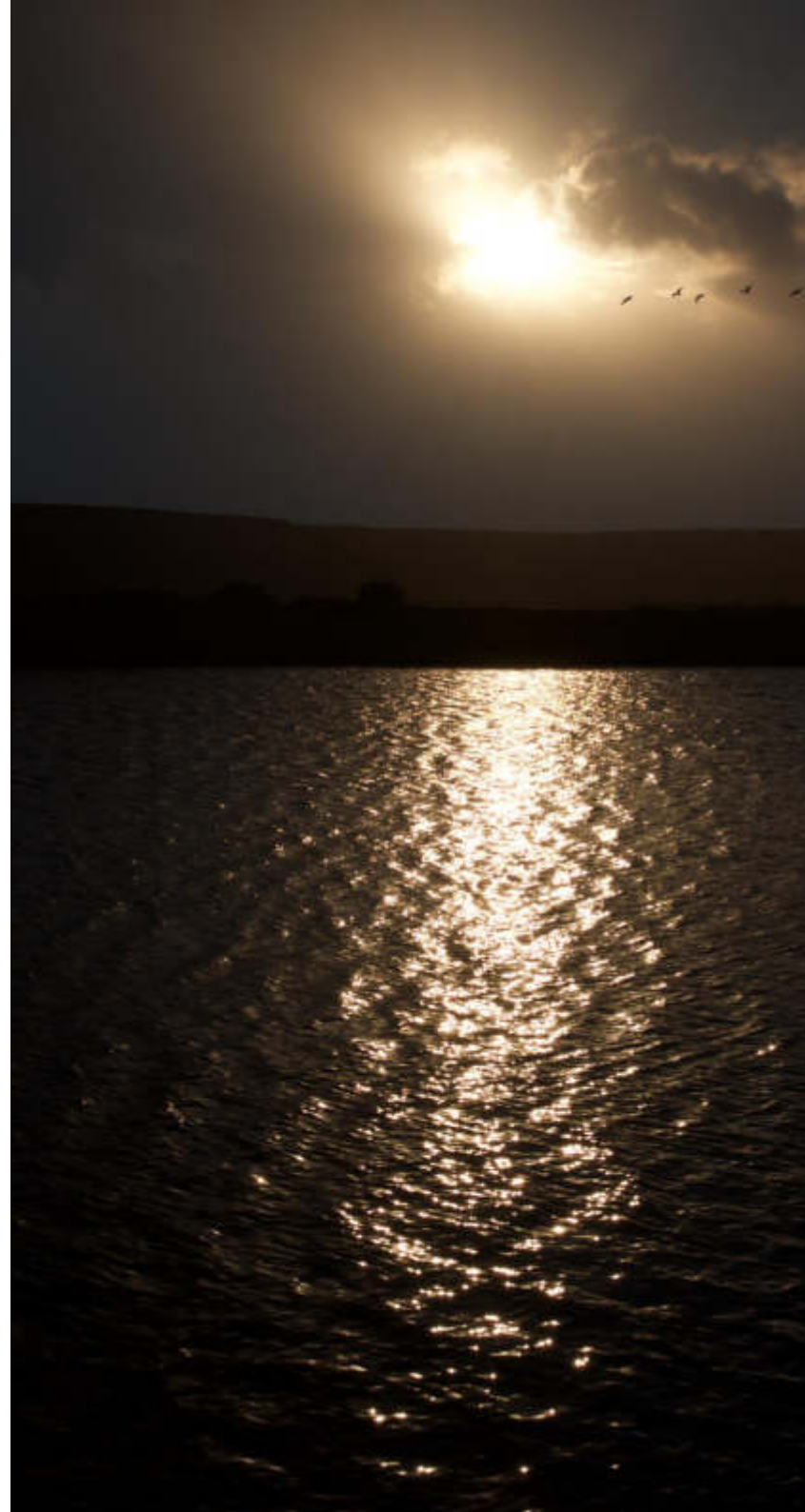
would never talk about in the university context; it's beyond the surface level." He continues, "I wonder how many people would have heard of Pierre Hadot's ... work on the notion of philosophy as a way of life ... it stands in strong contrast to philosophy as an academic ... discipline ... Part of what Hadot writes about is 'cosmic consciousness' and he emphasises that the ancient Greeks and Hellenes used to endeavour to resonate with the cycles, patterns and processes of nature. It involved meditation, it involved being austere; sometimes it involved speaking to people in different

ways; it always involved putting you out of your comfort zone ... that academics from different disciplines could come together, out of their comfort zones ... this is really unique, something beautiful, something that can be learned from in different parts of the university ... I would also like to add that on two of the events, we picked up litter for beach clean-ups, one was for international beach clean up day, and for the most recent event we also attended the international climate strike ... the value of picking up litter on a beach is immeasurable not just for yourself, but for the people you are doing it with. It

inspires others ... to do something small ... but I don't think we should expect to be able to deal with all of society's problems by, for example, engaging in a beach clean-up, or going on a pilgrimage. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't do those things. Some people are very optimistic that we can rise to the challenges, collectively as a species ... but if you hope for a positive outcome in those bigger contexts and you don't see one, you can get very demotivated, so my hope is that people do things because it is inherently valuable, and if it is instrumentally valuable, then that's the cherry on the top."

## *From David's First Reflections*

“Pilgrims, now you have seen empirical evidence for two of the claims I have made in the Friday afternoon seminars of weeks past. ... [the claim that] centralised systems are no longer appropriate for the size of the human population in general, and in particular because of the effects these systems have on the environment. We saw the constant flow of sewerage and plastic-laden water into only one of several wastewater treatment works in the area. But that water contained more than just plastics. It contained all sorts of chemical poisons and heavy metals, that, along with the plastics, get pumped into the ocean. This is



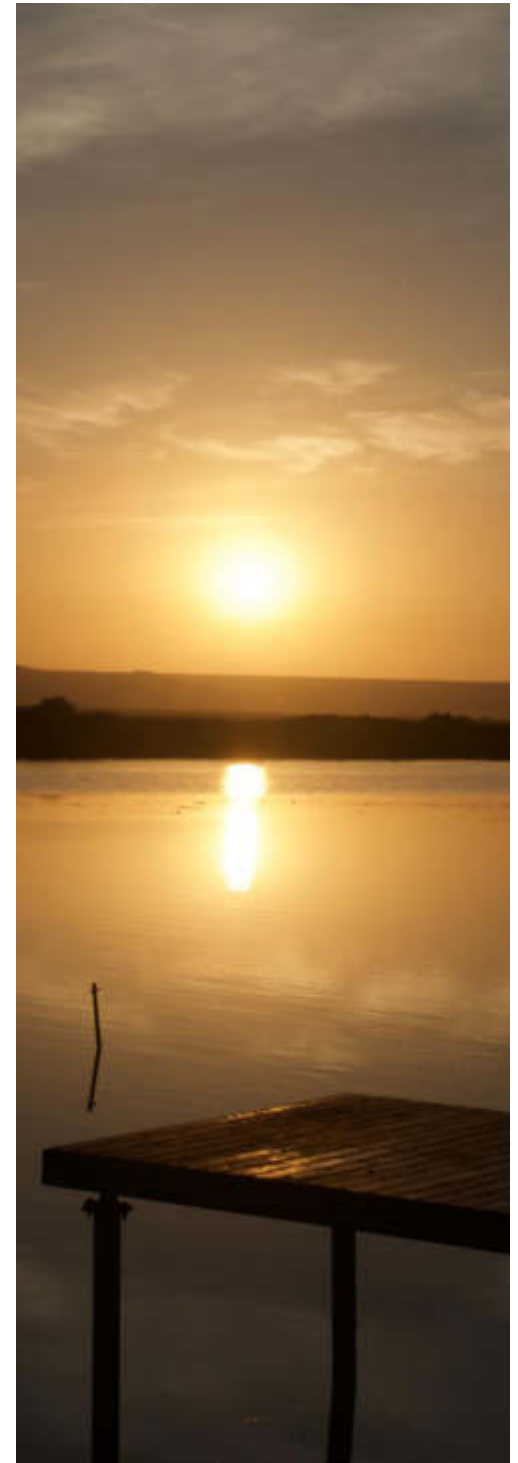


one major cause of the death of our precious seas and the collapse of the ecologies that support life on this rare planet ... That was one steady flow of absolutely toxic water coming through the sewer pipe, and all of it is flushed down the toilet or a basin by you, or somebody else. In a saner world flush toilets would be looked at as weapons of mass ecological destruction; so would the chemicals that constitute the pharmaceuticals that humans take. This is one reason why you should not swim in the Swartkops river, or any river where a steady flow of human sludge flows into the river constantly. ... And this is a most worrying state of affairs, as we saw. We have no time for niceties anymore.”

## *Pilgrimage, Patterns, and Water: Reflections and Conceptual Elaborations on Three ISCIA SARChI Chair Engagement Events*

About this paper, presented at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), David writes: “In 2019 three water pilgrimages were organised by ... [a small team working with the ISCIA Chair]. Three different groups of participants (a.k.a. ‘water pilgrims’) met on the two equinoxes and the one winter solstice of the year, to embark on a several-stop journey from sea to source, including visits to a wastewater treatment facility, a lighthouse, an estuary with an ecologically fraught history, and to the pristine source of the estuary in the Groendal Nature Reserve near Port Elizabeth.

As an organising and facilitating member of the three pilgrimages (which means I attended them all), I would like to reflect on the events from the perspective of a philosopher whose formative years theory-wise were heavily influenced by the question of the role of philosophy in the context of the ecological crisis. Some insights from Pierre Hadot, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou will feature in the paper, and I will explain how some aspects of the pilgrimages can be seen to have practical implications for the role of philosophy in and beyond the context of the ecological crisis.







## *From David's Second Reflections*

“So, that was the second pilgrimage for me ... I think I was somewhat, maybe, desensitized to the experience of the wastewater treatment works ... because I make compost, a lot, often using human manure. But I’ll spare you those messy details. The ... quandary we face hit home after the very enjoyable and information rich trip along the Swartkops River ... the river has so much potential for ... creating local jobs through eco-tourism, if we had the right, dare I say it, political will or broader public vision to go in that direction. [But] ... the trend is more towards technological progress, ‘quote unquote progress,’ ... a ‘technology will save us’ trope, which I think is a myth. ... Part of my quandary is, what do we do about it? Do we become more socially active ... or do we take action in our own lives? That’s the route I’ve taken ... Reclusiveness seems really attractive at times, and maybe I’m taking that route more and more. But overall, I had a really enjoyable second pilgrimage; maybe not as hard-hitting as the first, because I was a bit desensitized, and hopefully the third will be a kind of a full cycle for me, where I can look back at my desensitization now ... and re-assess my own experiences, my own reactions to things.” (Photo: Christi van der Westhuizen.)



*I have learned to walk barefoot through nature, as I did at Groendal on Sunday. It is a symbolic gesture of soft-treading, as well as a means of fully absorbing the spirit of nature in the same way that our distant ancestors did. You may believe that you can't walk barefoot in this manner. I couldn't a few years ago, either. Start now, and in a few year's time, you will be able to. This is true of the route to taking matters into your own hands.*

*~ David Pittaway*

# Becoming Water

Lungelo Manona



In Lungelo Manona's "Becoming Water", a human head, modelled in clay, is mounted on canvas painted with heavy impasto to mimic the rippled water into which the head sinks. Light shines through the back

of the canvas, revealing the skull's fragility. It is traced through with dried-mud cracks. The work, however, is coated with a "wet-look" glaze, capturing the immense energetic tension between fire and

water that characterises the life force. Instead of respecting this natural dynamism, humankind risks an extremism that will destroy it (signified by the cracked, parched skull of a being who, in truth, is

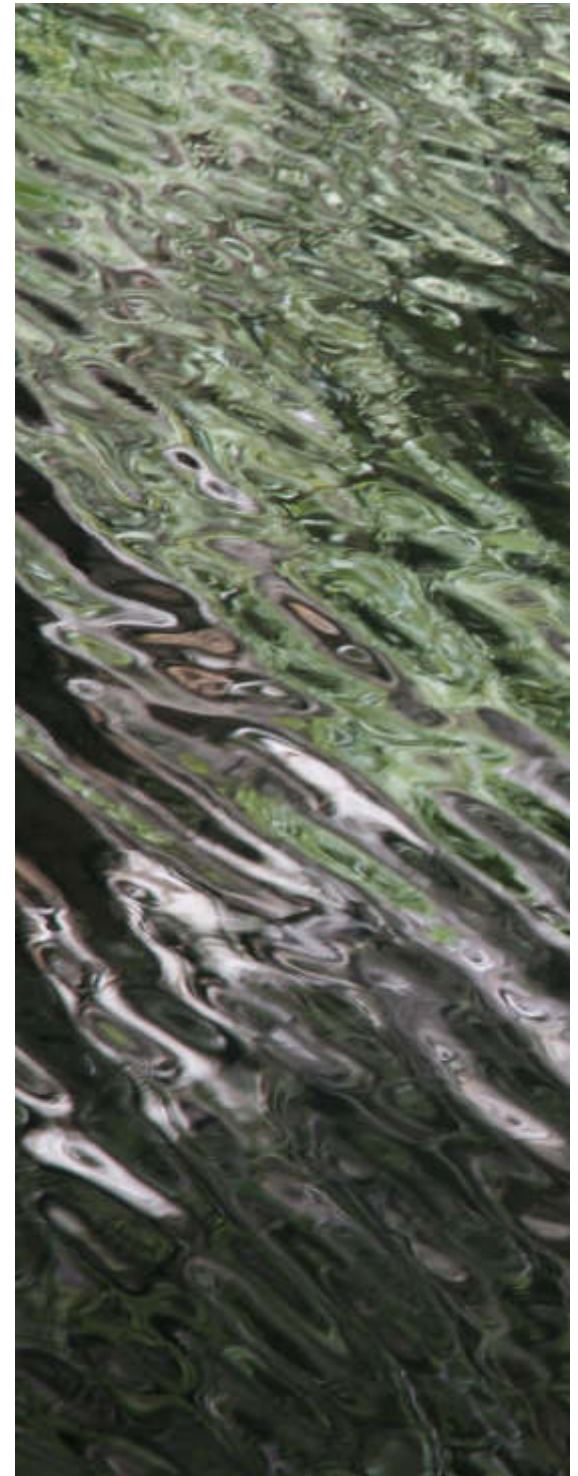
mostly constituted by water). There is no life force without the animating fires of desire. They create the hot, energetic steam that rises above the cooling, smothering, dousing damp, and they break loose a creative vitality that gives us hope for the future. But the mud-cracks suggest that human desire is burning out of control in an all-consuming greed that sucks dry life's vital resources, destroys its energetic tension and leaves us lethally parched. The culprit, signified by the single, enclosed figure, is the bounded, individual ego, and the solution to over-consumption is ego-release. This is akin to the immense relief when the rains come at last and healing water seeps into the desperately cracked mud bed, softening the glassy edges and re-forming the clay into the





unity needed to sustain life. The work captures a profound sense of boundary loss, as the waters rise and we float, face to sky, in a body of water. We can no longer look downwards in an objectifying and mastering gaze that egotistically hones-in on a foregrounded item of interest. Instead, our vision must relax upwards, placing our bodies under the sky, under the clouds, under the trees, in a moment of release, giving way and giving over, that re-places the ego with the fragile, small, body, rippling outwards in soft boundaryless connection with the surrounding water, the infinite sky above and the abyssal depths below. As our eyes close, the immensity overwhelms and the movement in this work shifts from the life-giving relief of healing waters, to water's powerful invitation towards a

submerging, sinking death. The death-mask feel of the figure suggests the end of the ego, and more powerfully a final dousing of the human fire as we succumb to the downward pull of water's cooling, relaxing peacefulness. But, importantly, the figure does not succumb fully to this invitation, but remains permanently, suspended in a tension between the light of the internal fire and the surrounding blue depths of the cool water. It does not lie still. The work represents an eternal becoming, an energetic movement of fiery light and rippling water. The message is not that of radical deep-ecology where the best thing a human can do for the environment is commit suicide. Instead, humans need to find out what life wants from us, and the aphoristic answer has to do with "becoming water."





## *From Lungelo's Reflections*

Lungelo sees his work as “a commentary on our broken relationship with water.” In his words: “The human figure depicts cracked, parched land and the light that shines through the cracks reflects the hope that I gleaned from my participation in the Tributaries Project Sea-to-Source pilgrimage. It speaks to a journey of becoming more aware of our impact and the necessity of taking responsibility and taking corrective measures in the way we approach our relationship with water, and water itself, especially in our water scarce region of the world. It represents the immense tensions that are evident within humanity’s relationship with water. It shows how everything we are is made of it, how human existence is dependent on it and submerged in it, yet we are responsible for so much that degrades and destroys this precious element. The sooner we come to the realisation that we are water the better.”



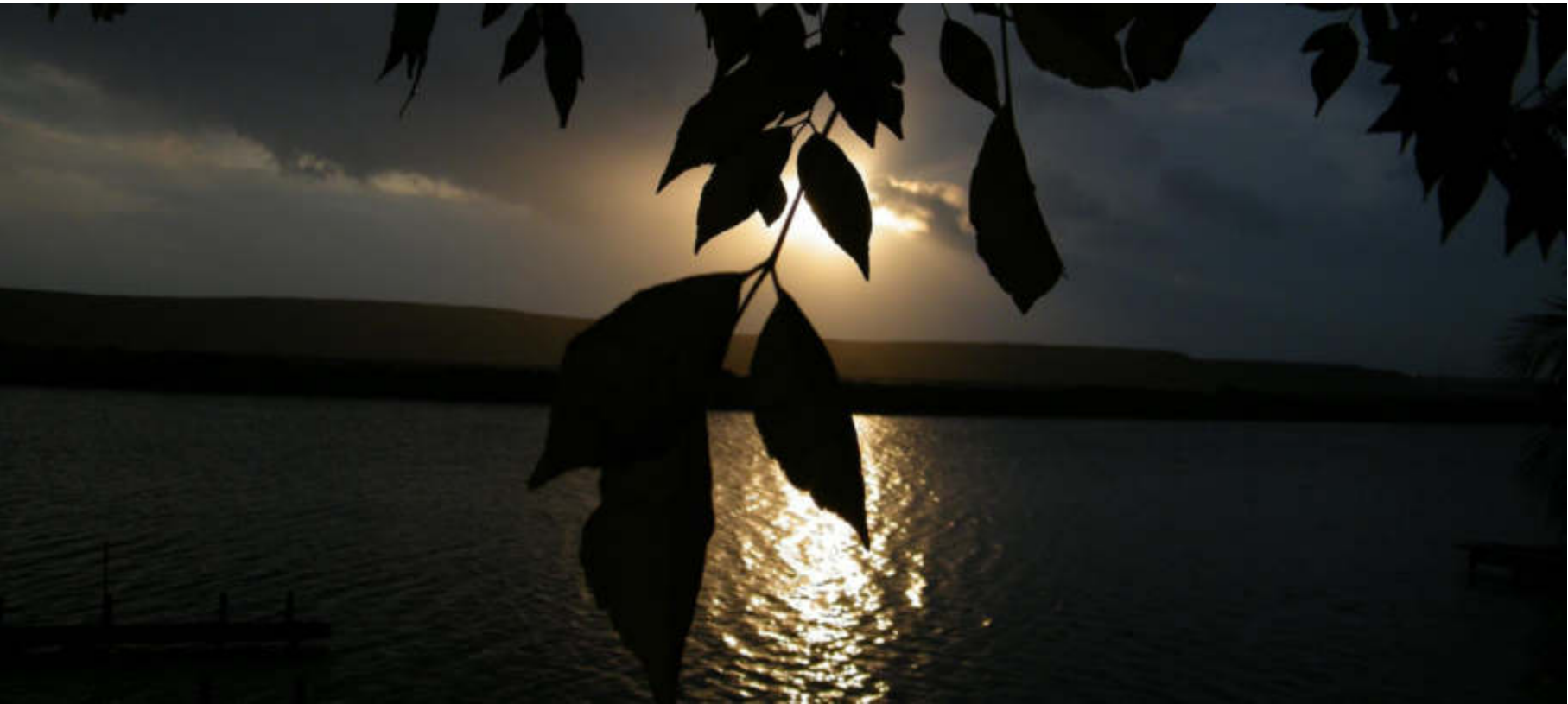
*«We as a group were hit by a sense ... that we are drowning in all of this information, and all of this effluent, if I can put it that way ... so what do we do now? There was almost a sense of panic. But the nice thing is that, with the ones that followed up ... some sort of action was included.»*

*~ Lungleo Manona*



# Moments on the Pilgrimage

Heather Snow



In “Moments on the Pilgrimage” Heather Snow “speaks in pictures.” Her photographs (pages 89-94) offer a wordless expression of some of the most significant moments she encountered on the Sea-to-

Source pilgrimage. All of the images capture the deep silence that comes upon us in the moment of internalisation and contemplation, which, paradoxically, is a necessary precursor to what Heather

articulates as “the feeling of connectedness to the surrounding environment, water, as well as my fellow pilgrims.” This feeling of connectedness is evoked in the image above, by the way in which



the spectator's gaze is captured by the intense interplay of sun seemingly striving to divide the waters, soon to be swallowed and covered over. This is highlighted by the partial obscurity created by the

leaf curtain. It is also particularly, for Heather, the moments of discovery that signify a contemplative opening out to the world. A mood of "discovery" is evoked by the artist's own discovery of astonishing beauty

in life's tiny spaces: as in her "Pebbles" (depicted above) and "Lily with water drops" (next page). In a different sense, the tragedy of the human desire to discover hidden treasures is evoked by the



figure of the contemporary beach-comber (right), whose search for monetary “treasure” with awkward technological prosthetics, like extra limbs, and one arm tellingly encased in a plastic “wrapping,” seems strangely warped and misplaced in the natural setting of relatively pristine beach sand. This image stands in sharp contrast with the image (page 94) of a child’s similarly deeply internal, but purely aesthetic play in the sand, expressing a connection with the environment that remains innocent of the toll placed on it by the insatiable inhuman desire for the wrong kind of treasure.





For the Tributaries Project Pilgrims' Exhibition, Heather selected six of her photographs to mount and display in the intimate setting of a cabinet. Even the structures of the abandoned cottage and the austere lighthouse, set against the deep blue sky, and indeed the strangely (mis)placed bone-structure of a sheep's skull contribute to the overall mood of internalisation and stasis from which the "deep seeing" of aesthetic contemplation works its magic. Along with "Lily with Water Drops," and "Pebbles" (discussed above), the paradoxical "water pool" that comes across as a bed of pebbles, show aspects or moments of Heather's reflective encounters with water.



*«It opened my eyes to so many things I would not have experienced if I had not gone on the Tributaries adventure with so many different people or visited so many different places. A passion is to express myself through photography and this gave me the space to do so.»*

*~ Heather Snow*

# Armoire Assemblages

Mary Duker



In response to her pilgrimage experience, Prof Duker created an installation of found objects under LED lights. “Armoire Assemblages” combines two works in three layers. Armoire Assemblage # 1 is subtitled

“Oh I do like to be beside the seaside” (above and next page) and Armoire Assemblage # 2 is subtitled “What you see is not always what you get” (pages 97-99). “Armoire Assemblage # 1” consists of a

brightly lit top layer (above) and a second layer (next page) nearly hidden underneath. This work’s associated “label” questions the retrospective sense making of the moment by placing each attempt



~~“under erasure.” Childhood  
memories from back in the day;  
Searching the intertidal zone for  
special finds to Treasure; Wrapped  
in a soggy beach towel — shells,  
feathers, sea beans, sand~~

~~encrusted; The smell of the sea;  
(Stickily, magically) Transported  
homewards; **Here is the reality of  
the now.** Ironically, this last bold  
insistence draws the audience into  
the play of sense making, inviting~~

the question of what *hic et nunc*  
reality is “here.” The work’s overall  
title “Armoire Assemblage” offers  
clues. Firstly, an “assemblage” is the  
deliberate arrangement of content,  
according to an idea that functions





as a mechanism of selection, behind which is a desire for an intended effect. Secondly, what binds these found objects together into an assemblage, rather than just a collection placed in a cabinet, is the strategic use of the word “armoire”: for inscribed in it is the original use of such cabinets to store arms (weapons). The work’s layers subtly lead downwards from the bright light beauty of luminous and pearly intertidal “treasures,” to their implicit underside – the toxic threats that lie hidden in the underlayers and sediments. “Armoire Assemblage # 2” (an old laboratory tank, with containers of river/sea water, under LED lights) brings this idea out of hiding: In Prof Duker’s words: “I embarked upon a silent, mindful journey of my own, collecting river and sea water from some of the sites





we had visited on the Sea-to-Source Pilgrimage, and other sites closer to home. These ritual harvestings have been allowed to settle, and are displayed under lights (with a nod

to the laboratory and the science of water, and a second nod to the delightful optics of the lighthouse lenses). The scary thing is that despite its luminous clarity and its

transparency, water can conceal the toxicity it contains. What you see is not always what you get....”

*There is no water  
coming out of my TAP!* 😡

In this paper, first delivered at The Tributaries Project Seminar (March 8) and reworked for presentation at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), Prof Duker offered a reflection that, as she put it, “is intended as a wry and tragicomic autoethnographic narrative about the relationship between privileged suburbanites and water. I take as a point of departure the social media posts to a local group (of which I am part). These posts indicate, through the copious use of emojis representing ‘crossness,’ the frustration, bewilderment and, ultimately, the disturbing ineffectuality experienced in





a middle-class suburban world of plenitude and privilege when its denizens turn on the tap and no water pours out of it. Who do they turn to and with what ends in mind? How do they express their frustrations, and who do they blame? How do they construct understandings of the realities of the often tap-less and decidedly unprivileged world outside the borders of leafy neo-liberal suburbia? The paper is informed by theoretical writings on urban geography. These writings provide an understanding of the suburb as a social artefact, and they offer an illuminating lens through which one can look at the water narratives that issue from neoliberal suburbia, characterized as it is by [white]privilege.”



*For me the Tributaries pilgrimage was an eyes wide open experience - it was in equal measures disturbing, discomforting, enriching, thoughtful, and strangely head clearing.*

*~ Mary Duker*

# Sea-to-Source

Andrea Hurst



Prof Andrea Hurst, as SARCHI Chair (ISCIA), was responsible for the design, development and implementation of The Tributaries Project. In this role, she documented the three Sea-to-

Source pilgrimages in images. She gathered together a selection of photographs, which touched on the often missed details, and assembled these as free-floating tiles (above, page 104 and scattered through this

catalogue). The aim was to represent the movement from sea to source both pictorially (top right to bottom left) and literally in the suspended tiles, whose movement in a breeze reflects surface water.

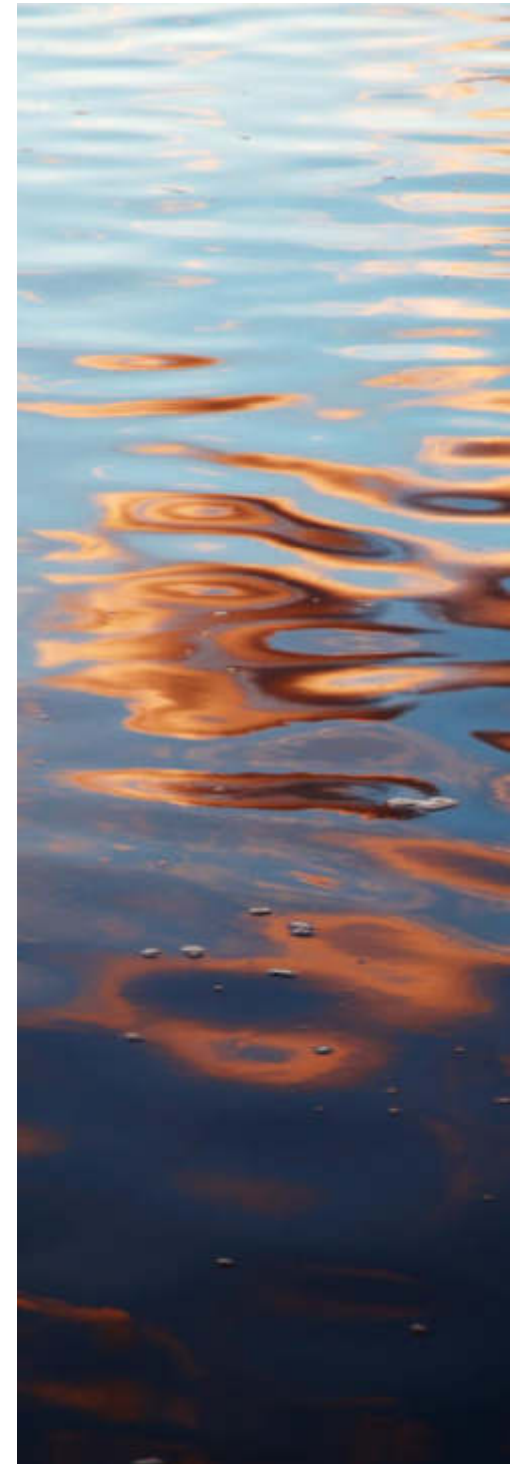




## *Researching The Tributaries Project*

In this paper, presented at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), Prof Hurst notes that the idea of The Tributaries Project was to promote cross-disciplinary co-operative academic engagement and creative activity to gain insight into social and environmental challenges related to water. She added that ecological and social problems should be addressed together. From an initial, quite vague idea, the project gained momentum and grew in a way that retroactively justified its name. In the paper she discusses ways to take the project forward into more formalized research projects. She is particularly interested in philosophical research and, she says, it is worth discussing the

following. “The project gathered to itself interests/passions that were ready to stream in, but perhaps just needed the impetus of ‘one more drop’ to set them flowing and add substance to what is set to become a broad flowing river. Is this an interesting theoretical way to imagine how social cohesion might work? Can aspects of this project fruitfully be framed in the terms offered by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘assemblage?’ What analytical advantages does it offer to think of it in this way? Can useful insight be gained by considering the project in terms of Pierre Hadot’s account of Philosophy as a way of life, including, for example concepts of ‘cosmic consciousness’ and ‘aesthetic perception?’”



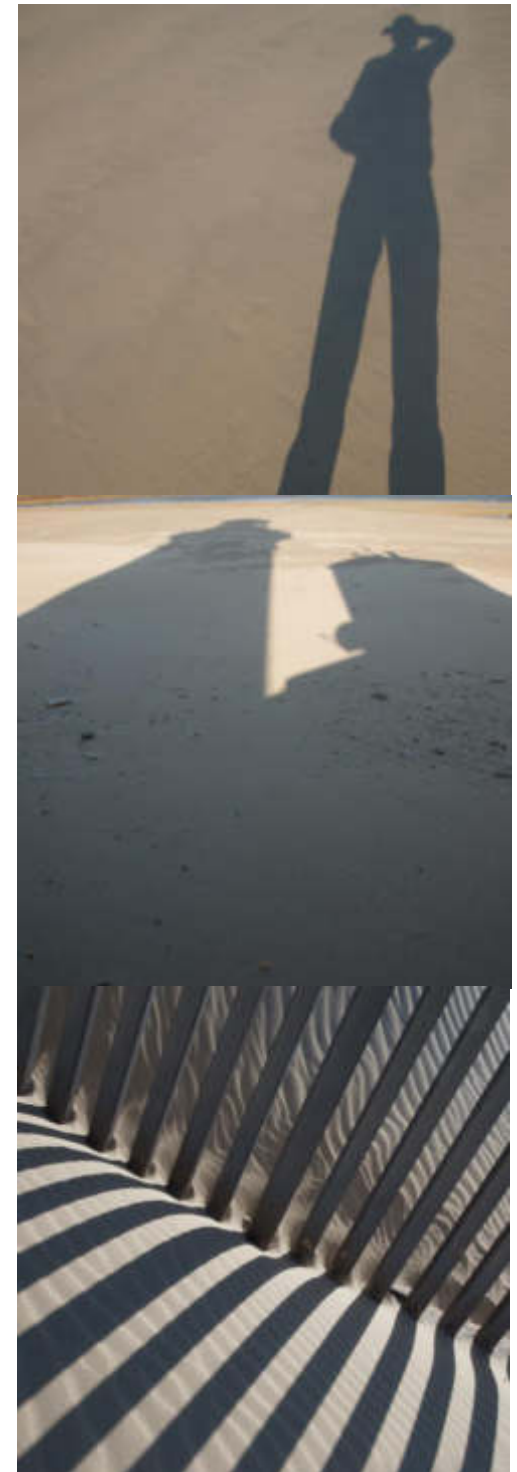
## *From Andrea's Reflections*

“An idea like this [The Tributaries Project] arises out of a whole lot of micro events, micro forces ... A couple of years ago, I walked the Camino de Santiago, and I do think of myself as a fairly pragmatic person, a realist, a sceptic (the esoteric stuff is not really my thing and religious ideology just gets on my nerves), so I approached the Camino as an interesting hike. But for some reason, and I can't fully explain this, that journey was life-changing for me ... there was something about the process, I think, something about walking, being out of time ... Then I participated in a kind of 'respect for water event' another engagement project of the university. It seemed like a really lovely idea, but ... I felt disengaged. It didn't grab me, and I had to reflect on that quite carefully ... I thought ... 'it's looking at past ceremonies, and I am a present, contemporary, urbanized academic ... what would potentially grab me from my location right here and now?' Wouldn't a walk from sea to source (and at that stage I was imagining ... a three week walk from Sardinia Bay, up the Swartkops River to Groendal) ... grab a more



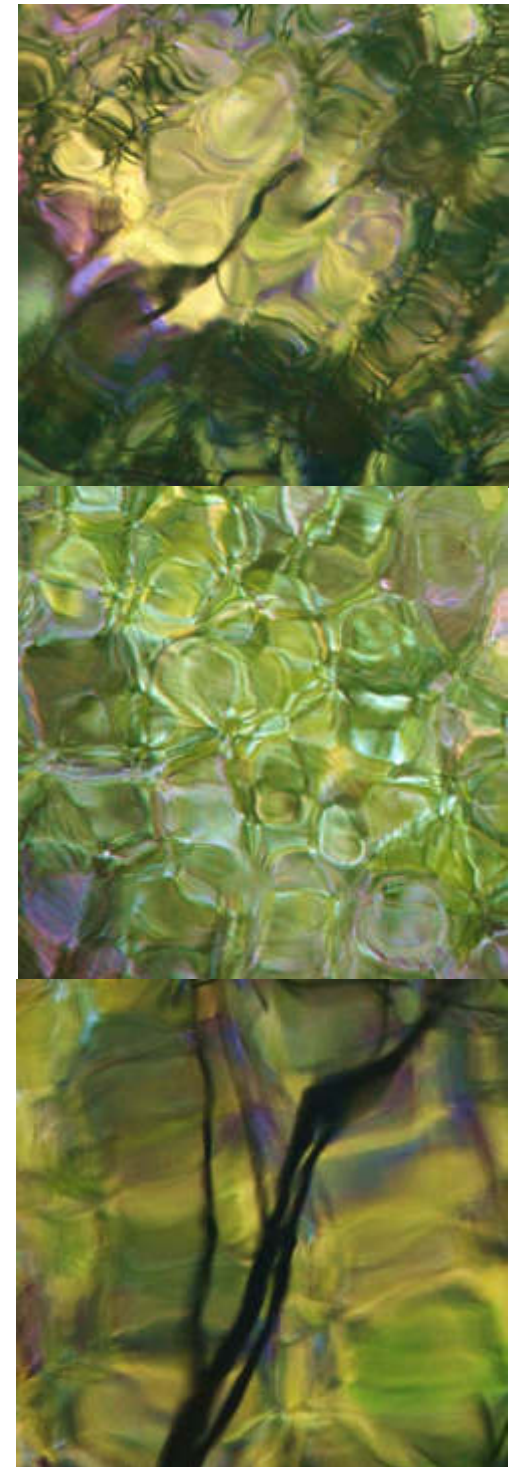
contemporary urban academic?  
And then there was this colloquium about the sea ... and that reminded me of how unbelievably rich the metaphor of water is ... That was playing in the background too. And ... something very pragmatic, but also a major force: I had to write an annual report for the SARChI Chair in December, and ... the Chair had not yet come into its own ... in engagement. Being a thoroughly academic philosopher, engagement was something I really didn't know too much about ... I met Belinda, fortuitously, in a yoga class ... and said 'help!' ... Belinda put me in contact with Mark Duker ... she thought that this project could form the third leg of [her] broader 'Art-

meets-Science' project. So those forces were starting to come together, and then I thought, okay, well, how about a water-pilgrimage in relation to all of that ... so I put that to Dave, and in two-week's time, the thing was organised! ... The pilgrimage was ... a u-shape ... intentionally. So, you start on a very, very high note ... opening out ... but then you descend ... into the 'gates of hell' and you have to pass through multiple 'gates of hell' before you emerge again at the end 'in heaven' ... One of the things that struck me ... is that jarring contrast in all three of the pilgrimages between those moments of utter beauty, and then the trash in every single crack and crevice, the



moment that you look a little bit closer ... some of those tiny particles that look like beach sand are in fact micro-plastics ... nurdles .. and they spilled in Kwazulu Natal, and they are ending up on our beaches. They are everywhere. And that was shocking to me ... In the second and third pilgrimages ... we introduced a moment of activity ... beach clean-ups. We didn't have that in the first pilgrimage, and it was a good addition ... it gave the sense that there was something, small, that you could actively do ... Is it going to help in the long term? ... No... [But] it is not necessarily the outcome that motivates you ... the motivation for ... acting in whatever way you can ... has to do with the

inherent value of the action and not in any optimism or pessimism about the future ... One of the things I want to talk about is Groendal wilderness area ... the source. That's ... the sacred place the pilgrimage is leading towards, and there's something about that place ... a *genius loci* (the spirit of the place) ... something inspirational ... something sacred ... and I think ... part of the ingredients that enabled the social bonding to happen was moving into that space at the end and absorbing the *genius loci* of the place ... Every participant was willing to step into something ... to have the courage to open themselves up to an experience without really having a good sense of what this





was about, and then also embracing that autonomy of creating the space, creating its meaning ... its sense. That was part of the responsibility of being a participant



in this thing. So, it was the participants in these pilgrimages, and in the Friday Seminars, who made the project happen. We opened a space for them to thrive,



and they did, which ... gives you an encouraging sense that if these spaces are opened up people rise up to them and do all sorts of interesting and exciting things.”

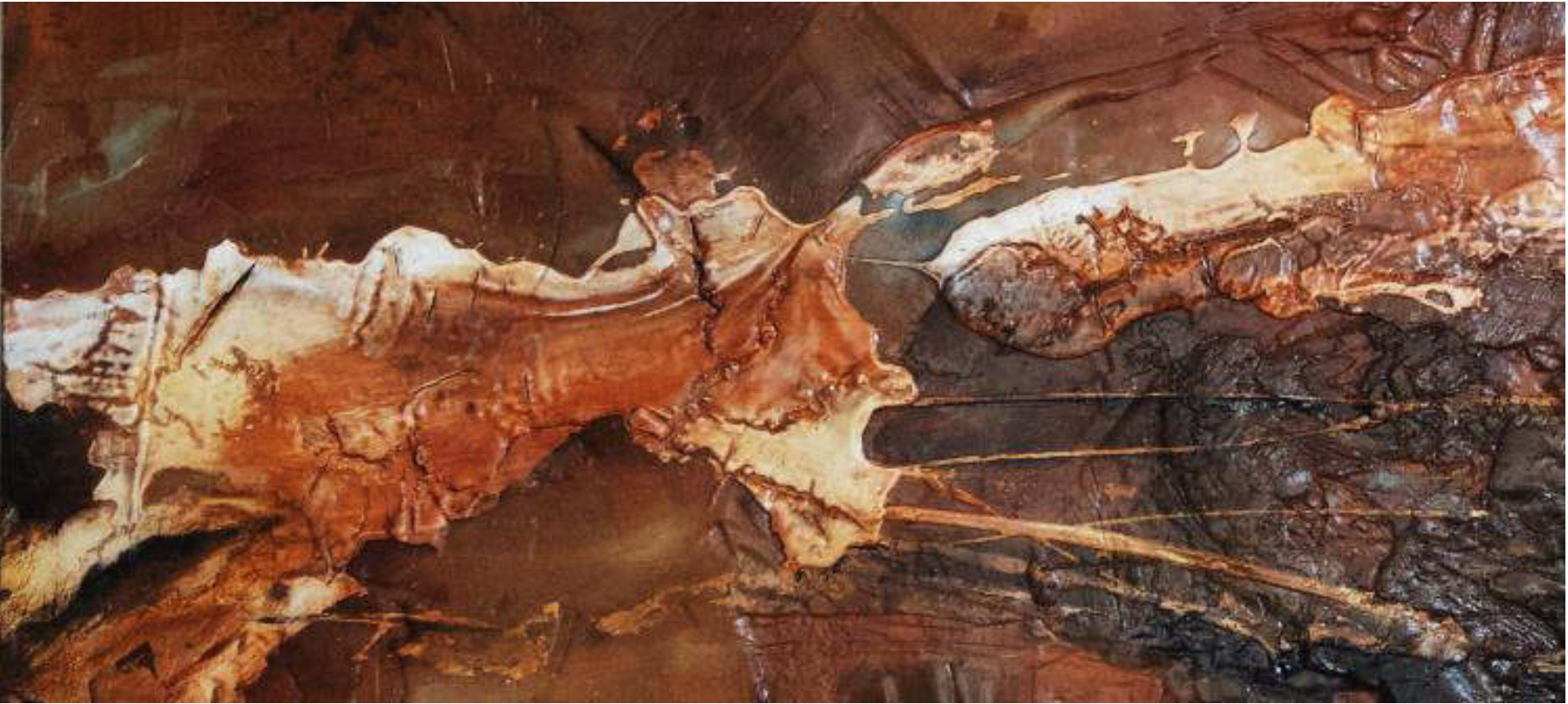


„It was very important to just create a space where you have a sense of what it is that you want to do, but you have to let every single participant configure that space in the way that they see it, and then contribute what they contribute. And in that way if you don't manipulate and control and try to ... offer people a narrative of this thing, you end up with such a rich diversity of responses.“

~ Andrea Hurst

# Visceral Sludge

Grettel Osorio Hernández



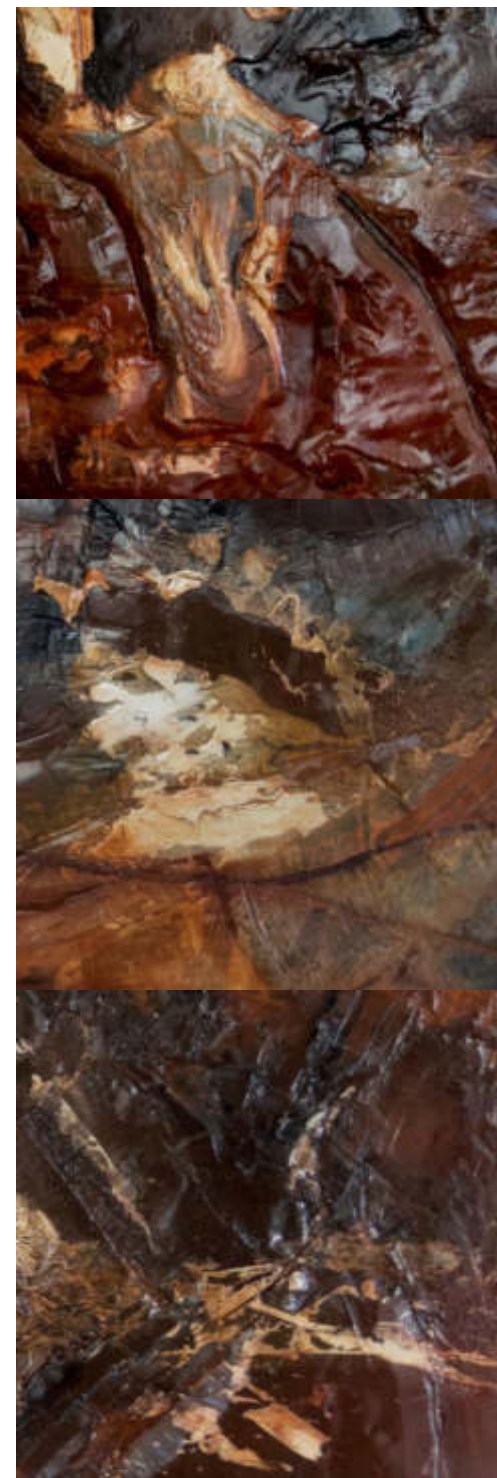
As Grettel noted, “the second day of the pilgrimage was depressing to say the least, because of how aware we were made of the amount of pollution that surrounds us, especially in the Swartkops River.”

In response, she created “Visceral Sludge” as two paintings that form part of a project to capture the thickly congealing flow of chemically polluted water, not only through its representation in a traditional

painting, but also by using a multi-disciplinary approach whereby some of the very pigments used are laboratory distillations from dried water samples collected from the tragically polluted Swartkops River.

Grettel found that a question was ringing in her ears throughout the pilgrimage. She wondered how the art of painting (if just a matter of using paint on board) could possibly communicate any kind of impactful message about the pollution of water by invisible chemical pollutants and microplastics. As she noted: "This made me feel more deflated." But she speaks of a moment of inspiration in the afternoon of that second day. "That afternoon there was a moment when we were having a group reflection alongside the Swartkops river, and I thought, maybe this landscape should paint itself." She decided that the way she could connect painting (something intrinsically visual) to invisible chemical and plastic micro-pollution was through its translation into

colour. She asked Nehemiah, a fellow pilgrim and Chemistry student and lecturer, if the chemical pollution could be extracted from the river and made visible as a colour. His answer was affirmative. Firstly, you can directly collect water samples and then dry them out in the chemical laboratory under a slow heat. This leaves you with an actual sediment, a "dust," that you could mix into pigments. But secondly, heavy metal content in a fluid medium can be analysed through the process of chromatography, which represents metals through colour. In other words, if you cannot collect enough actual pigment, you can use the chemical analysis to provide you with a pallet of colours with which to represent the invisible. Grettel set out to do both.







For Gretel, “Dust is constantly moving through space, although it cannot create a place, it allows us to represent physical substance that dwells and moves through the same space as we do.” Dust in space is isomorphic with chemical pollution in water.



Grettel remarks that, “simply relying on the pigment of traditional paint does not afford the opportunity” to explore the problem of chemical pollution in water. She decided that “extracting pigment from the pollution and combining it with traditional media would be more impactful.”



## *«Landscape/Water»*

In this paper, presented at the Tributaries Project Seminar (May 21), Grettel discusses the theoretical approach of the overall project which inspired the making of “Visceral Sludge.” She moves beyond a traditional conception of landscape painting as a static image representing a scene viewed from a human perspective. Instead, she sees a landscape as a field of forces always in motion. Things are never still, but always in transition, always becoming. This is nicely captured in the concept of the “liminal.” The word “liminal,” derived from the Latin word for “threshold,” suggests an uncertain “moment between,” when an entity is “no longer one thing” but not yet another. She

aims to capture that abstract, uncertain “time between,” when change is about to happen. If the surrounding environment is a dynamic interplay of forces, permanently in transition and always a ceaseless movement between invisible particles, then pollution too, must be thought of in these terms. Contemporary micro-pollution is the underlying meaning which runs below the surface appearance of all landscapes, even the most seemingly pristine. Grettel’s question becomes one of depicting contemporary landscapes through the lens of dust and, now, invisible micro-level water pollution, and the aesthetic problem is how to capture this in a painting.



*The Tributaries Project was the most meaningful thing I have ever done in an academic context so far. This project is close to my heart and I am looking forward to revisiting, as well as fully exploring it later on. My lifestyle has certainly changed since then, it is not comfortable, but it is possible and worth it to make small changes over time. I am deeply grateful to have had this opportunity; many great things have come from it in an academic sense and personally, apart from gaining moments that initiated life-long changes I have also gained life-long friends. I am excited to see what the ripple effects of this Project will be in both the near and far the future.*

# Water as Crisis

Silvon Windsor



As a student of languages and philosophy, Silvon responded to the pilgrimage by offering an audio reflection and writing a paper entitled “Water as Crisis and Culture in Frank Herbert’s *Dune*,” which he

presented at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20). From his audio-reflections, it is clear that Silvon was struck by what he learned on the pilgrimage about the practical and social complexities of

human waste management, particularly concerning the perplexing challenges associated with both the political will and individual or community responsibility to address these.

## *From Silvon's Reflections*

“Waste management and the ecological footprint that we leave as communities and individuals ... was largely the centring theme, or social theme of our trip, especially things like the water supply and wastewater; how we dispose of wastewater, how much we recycle, how much is not recycled.” Silvon does not wish “to say that one party is right and one party is wrong.” Instead he offers “thoughts about these perspective issues” and asks, “how do we change them in the long term?” He expresses concern that there is no “difference between the water supplied for drinking and consumption and the water supplied for bathing and toilets.” What also stood out for him was “seeing the litter in almost every area that we went” and hearing of the “clear effects that this has, not only on the aesthetics of the



environment and what that means for the Bay in broader terms, but also, of-course, and more importantly, the ecological effects of this littering.” Silvon acknowledges that “there are many dimensions and complexities to this which make it a ... difficult to tackle issue.” He cites both “the Metro not doing the job it is meant to do” and the reality that many South African communities “don’t see dumping or littering as a primary issue ... because of the complexities going on in these social areas and the problems that they face already when it comes to living, like hunger and housing which of course are always going to take precedence for people over something like littering.” Silvon also remarks that the question that generally goes hand in hand with this is this: “Should we be trusting the government to just solve these problems for us – these problems of waste management – or should we be taking them





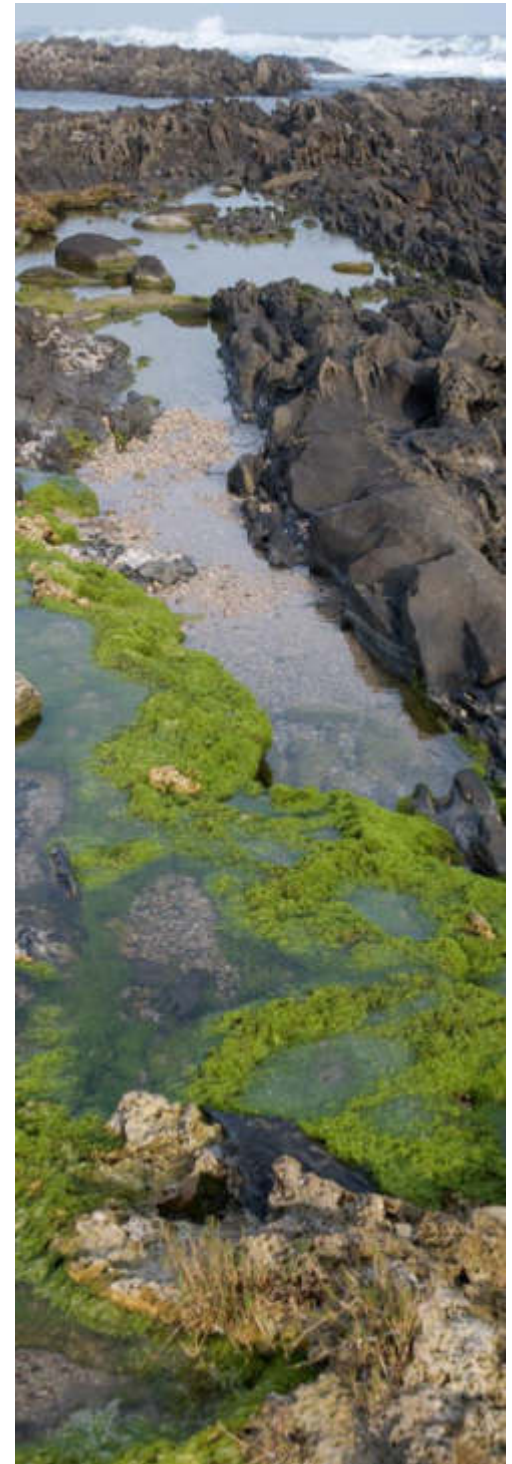
into our own hands as individuals and close-knit communities?” Beyond the direct theme of waste-management, Silvon adds that he has been thinking of “intersectionality,” as “a concept that really grounds what we are doing here ... with getting various disciplines and communities and individuals involved to consider social problems that affect everyone in the larger sphere. At this point we see only a few individuals or groups (such as the Zwartkops Conservancy or the protestors, or others) that are aware of these problems and are willing to take action. So I think we just need to grow those kinds of sentiments on a larger basis.” He adds that, especially thinking in terms of “intersectionality,” it becomes important to consider how to address problems by bringing diverse people together, “because I think that’s really what needs to come first.”



## Water as Crisis and Culture in Frank Herbert's *Dune*

In a paper presented at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), Silvon argued that, “Frank Herbert’s *Dune* is a critique of traditional western culture and – very broadly – the ways it attempts to solve problems or overcome threats.” In his view, Herbert’s fiction not only “offers a powerful metaphor for our engagement with the theme of water and water scarcity,” but “the central narrative itself offers a brilliant illustration of the futile desire for ultimate solutions to fundamental problems.” He adds that the novel offers a “counter narrative to the dominant agents of control that dictate the events of the text” and “the author takes his readers into

the world of a – quite literally – marginalised people and the way of life that has allowed them to resist extinction despite their oppressor’s best efforts. On a planet where water is hunted for like gold, where the wealthy water palm trees and the poor recycle body moisture for months, how do those on the periphery respond to crisis? How do they carve a life for themselves out of the desert sand they are given? And how does the phenomenon of culture actualise in a space seemingly entirely defined by survival?” In analysing the answers raised and given by the novel, Silvon aims to make a critical contribution to the project of inter-disciplinary action, where, like Herbert, he



he directs attention towards the periphery of political control, where people actually live with the issues and problems related to water scarcity. In his discussion he aims to “consider how Herbert replies to these enquiries” and then “draw a connection between the social metaphor of such literature and lived contextual issues such as the water crisis we face today.” His specific aim is to “accentuate the diversity of cultural perspectives in approaching these social issues and the need to conceptualise problems through the perspectives of the people who experience them directly.”

*„It was an amazing experience. I experienced many things and learned many things that I have never been exposed to in my life.“*

*~ Silvon Windsor*



# Water is my Symbol

Emma Hay



Emma combines a strong social focus with an enduring concern for the natural environment. “For me,” she says “and I think for many people intuitively, our relationship to water is one of nourishment.”

She explains that “we actually benefit physiologically from being in or around bodies of water.” Water’s nourishment is “not just physical.” It is also “emotional, and nourishment for our human psyche.” “And I saw

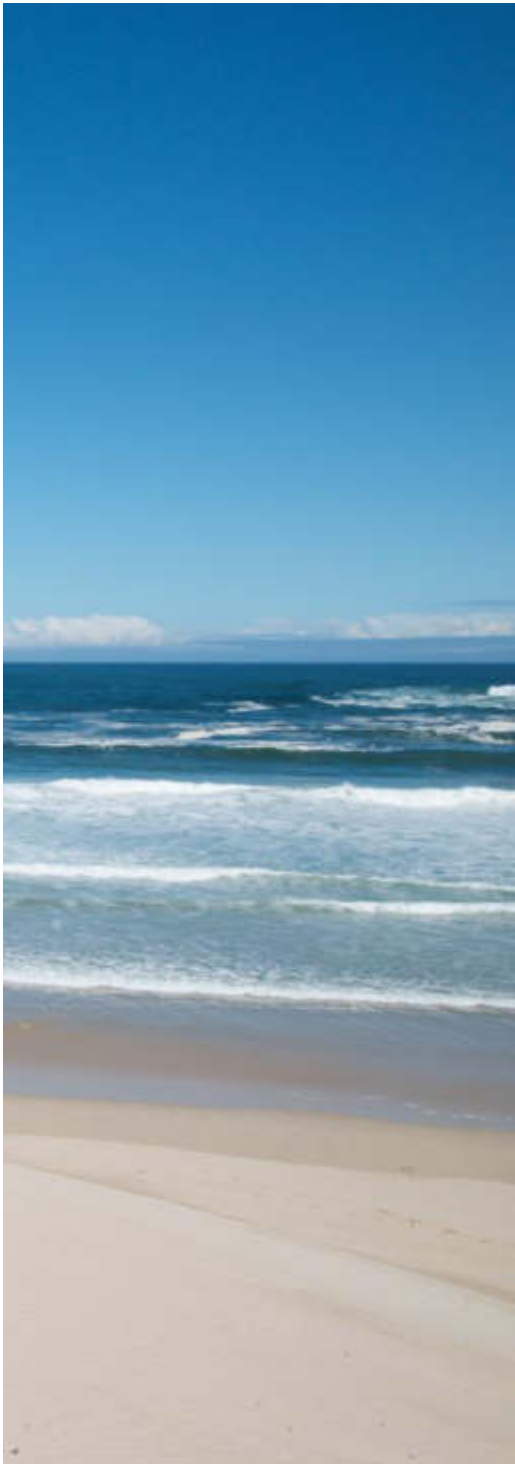
that on the pilgrimage with people” Emma remarks at a Tributaries Project Friday Seminar: “It was clear, even today I’ve heard people mention the working of magic and the fuel to be creative.”

## *Water is my Symbol*

In response to the pilgrimage, Emma presented “Water is my Symbol” as a paper and experiential practice at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20). She writes: “The throbbing gush of a waterfall; the rhythmic turn of the tides; the still calm and serenity of a river reflecting the dusk infused sky.... Many, sailors, scribes, poets and artists have attested to the feeling of wellness and peace that comes over them when they’re in, or near, bodies of water. ‘Blue Mind’ science confirms this effect. It may be suggested that we all know intuitively that water is deeply nourishing and healing to the

human psyche – reflective of a universal human primordial reverence for nature if you will. Our collective relationship to water is not only one of nourishment, however. We also relate to water problematically as a collective. As witnessed on the pilgrimage in the overloaded waste water systems, the pollution of rivers, estuaries and oceans etc., the direct experience of our collective impact serves to remind us that our relationship to water is also symbolic of our wider relationship to nature. Such a standpoint may be broadened further to indicate something of the nature of the relationships we hold





to one another in society, and to ourselves. The multiple crises we face collectively (economic, social and spiritual) are considered here intertwined with the ecological crisis at large in this 'Age of the Anthropocene.' The intersection between the modes of perception we harbour, and the relationship we hold to our planet on the macro level, is considered intimately connected to the way in which we relate to ourselves (the micro) and to one another at the meso level. Thus, it is suggested that ultimately all our crises contain at root different manifestations of a crisis of perception. Resonating contributions from environmental

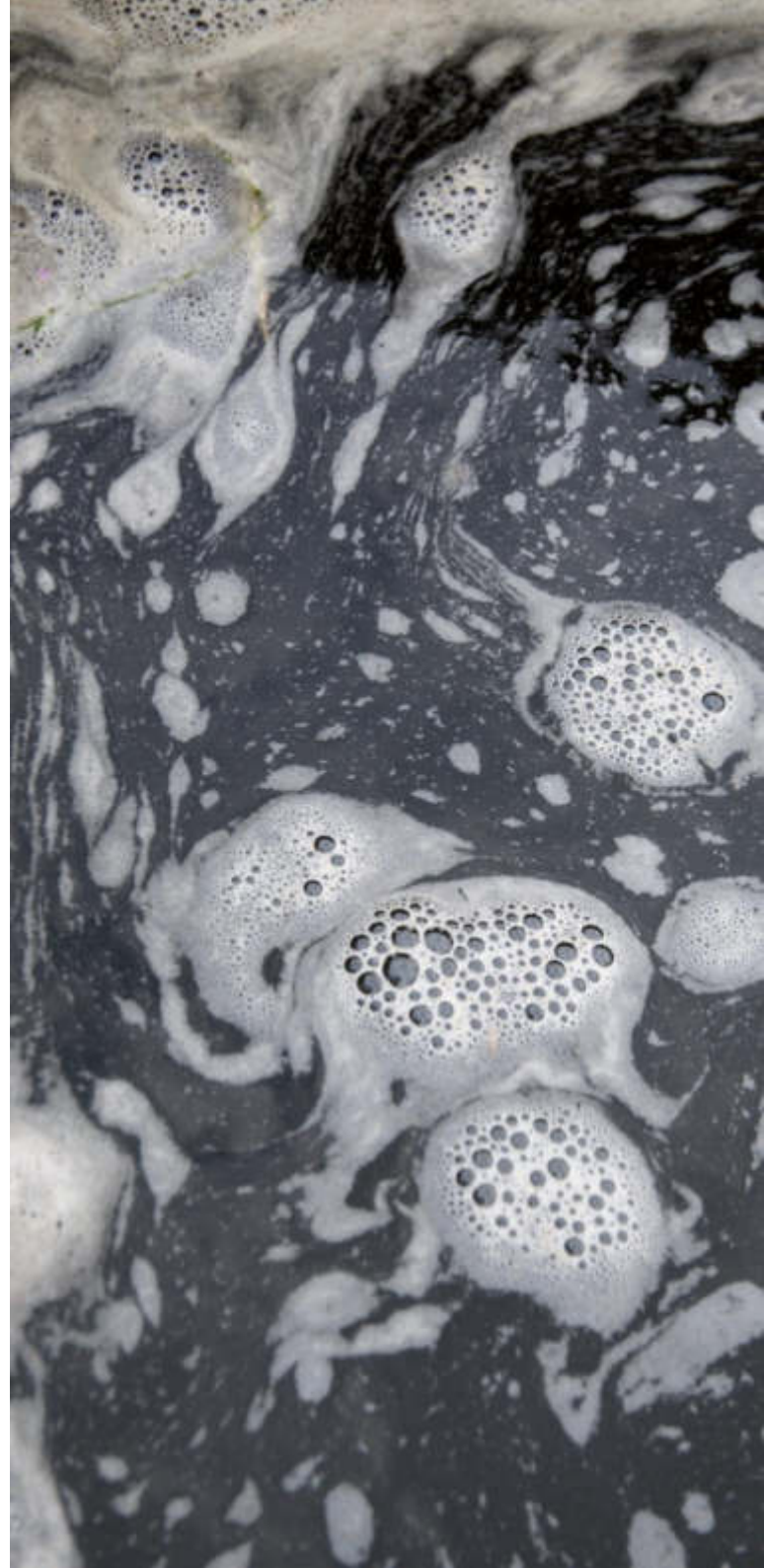
philosophy, critical social theory, sociology and ecopsychology, when interweaved, illuminate the radical importance of the perceptual underbelly that steers our relationships, to water, wider nature, and beyond. It is postulated that responding to these crises will require, first and foremost, a shift in habitual perception. A holistic and trans-disciplinary experimental approach is evoked here in order to assist in our understanding of imbalanced and so problematic elements of what I call 'fragmentary frameworks,' in order to attempt to espouse offerings of the perceptual conditions that may evoke and enable pro-social change."

## *From Emma's Reflections*

"I am in Grahamstown right now ... for work, and it is quite an apt pace to be after the pilgrimage because the water situation here is particularly bad. Water trucks are bringing water into the university and ... we are very careful in the town not to flush the toilets too often, and I bring water with me, my rainwater, to drink and even to wash up with. So, there's a very clear relationship with water going on, but there's also this other side of things, where in the staffroom at work, there are people who live in the community on the outskirts of town that are not under the Rhodes jurisdiction and in townships, so to speak, and those people have not had any water whatsoever for weeks now. They are also suffering load-shedding at the same time. So there's this real division going on right now, that I can see, between being on



campus and having some water and electricity, and being off campus and having no water and no electricity. ... The pilgrimage has heightened that, and I did expect, on the pilgrimage, to feel kind of a renewed sense of depression and despair, hopelessness, there's nothing we can do ... seeing devastation that I was already quite familiar with through my own personal story and research. But, actually ... after the pilgrimage, I don't feel like that. I have got a renewed sense of ... desire to, be a bit more active in speaking about particular issues, which surprises me because I thought my energy would be depressed. For example... a fish farm in the sea ... was proposed by DAFF and this was rejected a couple of years ago successfully. I was part of that appeal process. This year it has resurfaced ... And before the pilgrimage, I had decided just to step aside [but] since the



pilgrimage, I have decided, no, I'm going to get really involved with this. Funnily enough, despite seeing the travesties that our collective species is tacitly or not, deliberately or not, imposing on the environment, I feel a desire to respond to it. That's an unexpected outcome of the pilgrimage. For now, the social side of things is really impacting on me ... I thought ... without an environment that is healthy and sustaining for humans, there's no point talking about social issues, because we all rely on our environment for our survival ... But being back in Grahamstown since the pilgrimage and seeing the divisions in the haves and have-nots in terms of the fundamental resources required for life, and seeing how the people who were struggling so badly already are struggling even more now ... a lot of thinking about this distinction between different areas, and access to the privilege of







responding to ... environmental problems that we face, including the water issues ... even being aware of it and having any ability to respond to it at all is an absolute privilege, and I don't mean

necessarily in a good way. It is not everyone who has the access, and that's important to consider ... It was a great process ... I'm still processing, I'm still thinking about it, the effects are still rolling

through. I'm not done yet with considering all ... that was ...on the pilgrimage. I'm very grateful for the experience and to meet everyone ... I will keep thinking and hope to hear what you all have to say."



*„The Tributaries project has gifted me with the reminder that water is my teacher. The essential essence of all life on Earth, from sea to source, water opens me up to the knowledge that everything links, everything connects, everything is co-dependent – and that includes our place as human animals within this Great Mystery. So from this reflection, I will take with me an intention to work with my own relationship with water, and I will do so by remembering my own deep reverence for water, for life, and for our beautiful blue planet.“*

*~ Emma Hay*

# What the Water Brought

*Christi van der Westhuizen*



Christi van der Westhuizen is an Associate Professor, Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy, Nelson Mandela University. In response to the pilgrimage, she presented a paper

at the Tributaries colloquium entitled “What the Water Brought.” She writes that: “Visiting sites that feature as landmarks in the colonial settlement of Port Elizabeth, listening to the tales told along the

way, and witnessing the degradation and economic and racial inequalities poisoning the water masses, compelled me to find out more about the ghosts that haunt these places.”

## *What the water brought: Ghost stories of a postcolonial city at the confluence of river and sea*

“What the Water Brought” is the title of the paper presented by Christi van der Westhuizen at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20). Christi prefaces her paper with the following quotation from an SA Venues webpage. “[L]ife on the Swartkops River is such that the sea needn’t feature in your holiday. The constant call of birds, river sailing and boating, swimming, skiing and river cruises mean that days easily slide into a happy water-filled existence... But if living the colonial lifestyle in Redhouse... becomes a little tedious, then Amsterdamhoek ... is a wonderful place to catch a magnificent sunset, drink in hand.”

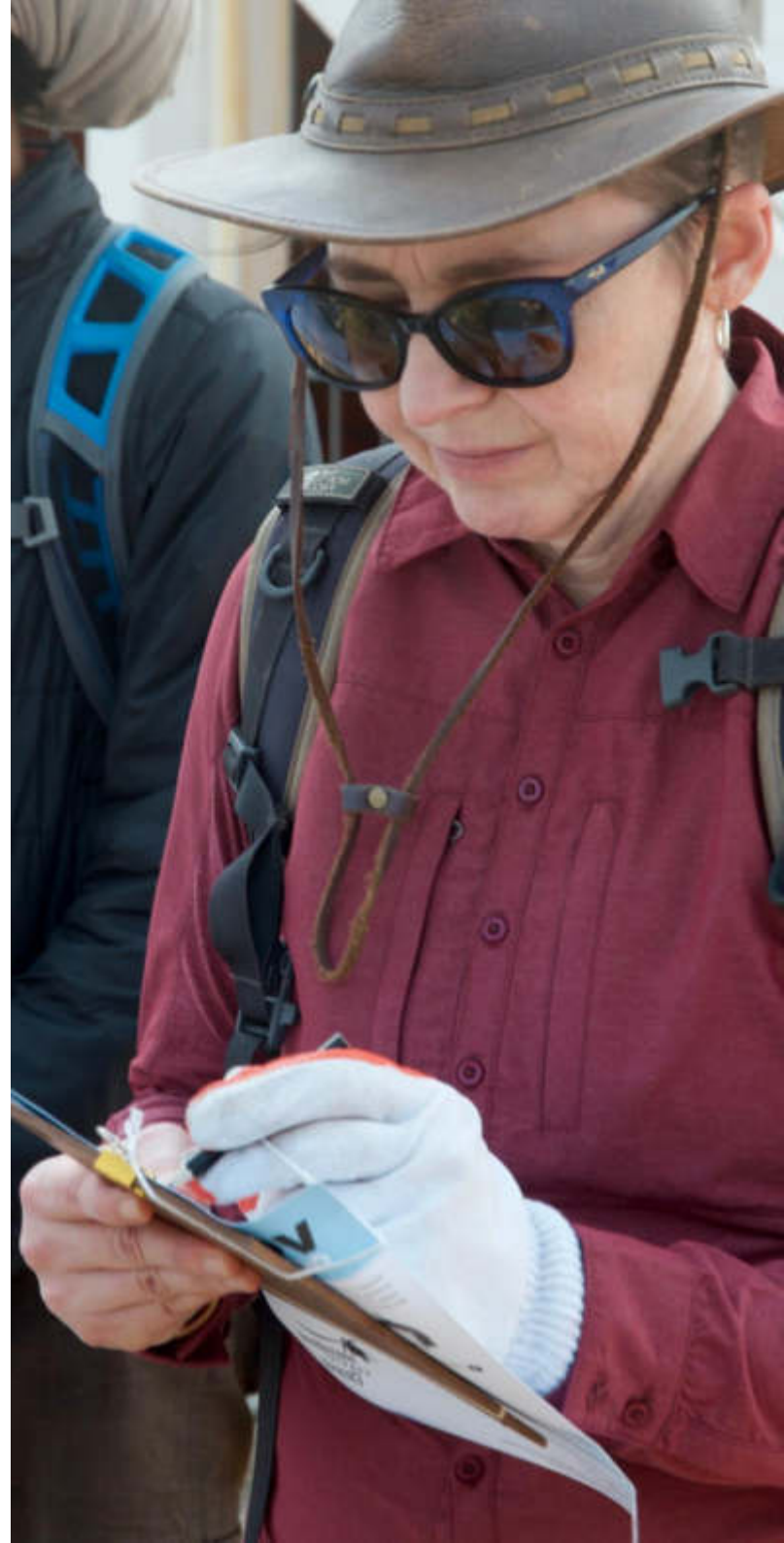
The paper contains preliminary reflections on socio-political discourses circulating in a postcolonial coastal city haunted by its origin as an outpost of the British Empire. An academic pilgrimage to explore the causal factors of the environmental degradation of the Swartkops river and estuary in Nelson Mandela Bay confirmed the truism of the interconnectedness of the social and the ecological. The surrounds of the river and estuary consist in large part of an industrial wasteland marked by apartheid geographies. Even human waste treatment is still to some extent racially segregated.





A fluctuating tide of trash and toxic effluent pollutes the river from the moment it emerges from the Groendal nature reserve outside Uitenhage. The city's continuing racial division is demonstrated by differential human interactions with the river and estuary. The ecological crisis of the Swartkops is the consequence of a social and a political crisis. To make sense of these multiple, mutually reinforcing crises, the paper homes in on discourses swirling around two sites visited on the pilgrimage: the Cape Recife Lighthouse and the stretch of the Swartkops estuary in the vicinity of Redhouse. Sedimented histories reveal themselves through colonial lore and nostalgia that these sites invoke. Across the postcolonial wasteland drift deceitful phantoms and spectres, foreclosing futures.

In her photographs depicted on the next two pages, Christi captures something of the pilgrimage experience: The first shows the despair felt upon reaching the source. Where we expected running water, we found dry rocks. The second, she writes “is a snapshot of a haunted landscape left in colonialism’s wake: a derelict basketball court overlooking the polluted Zwartkops estuary reminds of a past of human recreation and fun. These were once ‘wonderful waters,’ as described in a newspaper advertisement in 1940. But the wonderful waters were only for white people. While the waters are finally for all, a bitter twist of postcolonial factors has made them toxic and dangerous. In the background loom the smokestacks of a decommissioned power station.”







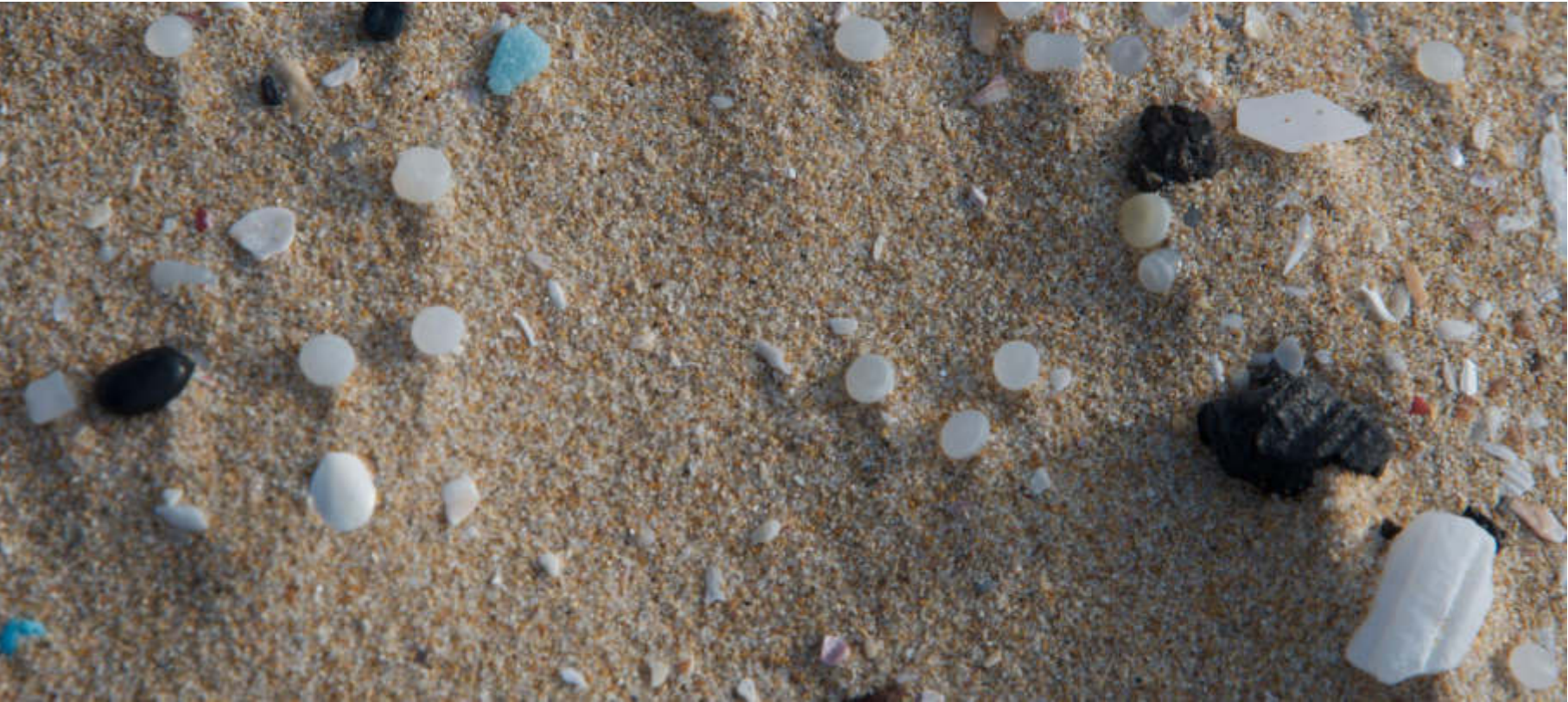
*As Jacklyn Cock writes about the nearby Kowie River, rivers 'have the power to connect us to nature, to our past and to our collective selves'. When things go wrong with a river, as with the Zwartkops, we can see reflected in the water various social and ecological ruptures, also historically. With the pilgrimage, we became witnesses of these disconnections and divisions through a visceral experience that has sparked much thinking.*

*~ Christi van der Westhuizen*



# A Personal Pilgrimage over Time

*Bernadette Snow*



Bernadette Snow joined the sea-to-source pilgrimage as both pilgrim and expert speaker. Dr Snow lectures in Development Studies at the Nelson Mandela University, and directs the Institute for Coastal and

Marine Research. She not only offered a formal on-site talk on the first evening of the pilgrimage, later worked into the colloquium presentation discussed below, but also informally shared with pilgrims

her extensive knowledge about coastal and marine life. She explained, for example, that the “grains” depicted above are plastic “nurdles,” not shell fragments, as pilgrims first thought. Her work as



Director of the CMR brings her face to face with multiple and diverse issues related to human interaction with the ocean. On the pilgrimage she spoke of her philosophical concern that this interaction most

often devolves into the mere commodification of natural resources. Even in environmental and conservation sciences, she argues, the tendency is to value nature in terms of its contribution

to people; the eco-system services that are being offered, or that is, what we get from it. It is essential to take an ethical turn instead towards considering what humans should be offering rather than taking.

## *A Personal Pilgrimage over Time*

In this paper, presented at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), Dr Snow aligns her presentation with the idea of a water pilgrimage. The presentation, details a collection of water journeys, travelled in the past, to be continued in the present, and still to be travelled in the future. As she explains it, the three kinds of journeys are gathered together “in what I think of as my own personal pilgrimage over time.” She adds that: “In the presentation I detail my constant engagement with water as I travelled the multiple journeys along the path of a career that led to my current position as Director of the Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR).” Beginning with the journeys already (photo right: Heather Snow)



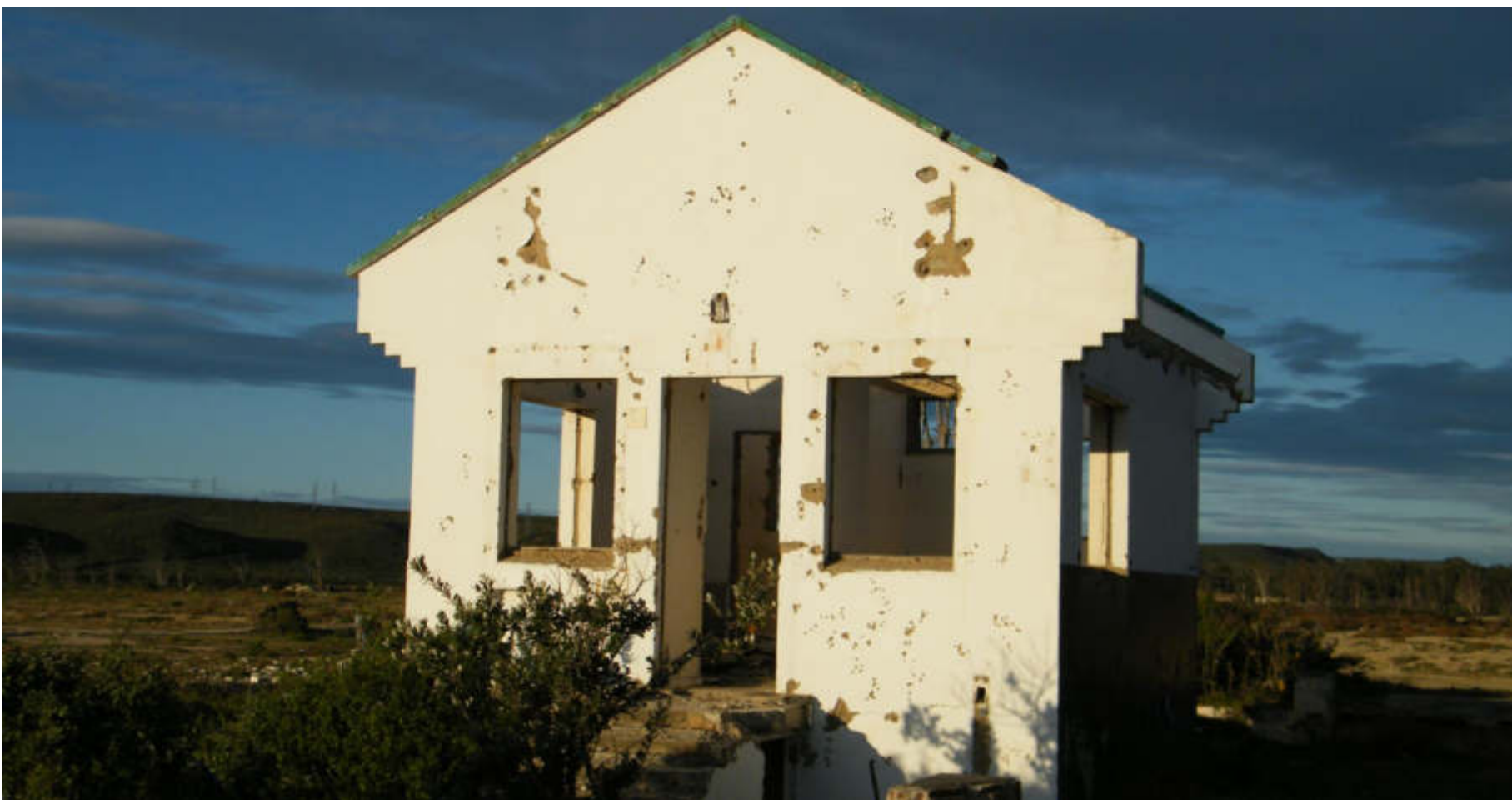
travelled, she details the personal influences and career change moments that led her to her transdisciplinary PhD journey on complex socio-ecological systems. As she explains it, she discovered along the way that general attitudes regarding the relationship between environment and society were pessimistic. Most people view the current ecosystem as being in crisis, and many believe that there will be a future increase in power struggles and inequality, and they foresee a general breakdown in traditional systems. Motivated to challenge and reverse this pessimism, Dr Snow goes on, in the presentation, to describe in detail the Ocean Sciences journey that lies ahead. She presents the focal research and engagement projects CMR is undertaking, including iconic research (photo right: Heather Snow)





projects such as the One Ocean Hub project and the Cities and Coast Project building climate resilience. As she explains: “The main aim of my future research is to partner with Port Elizabeth decision makers to see how to integrate diverse, often uncoordinated objectives of coastal and marine planning and management, to enable better adaptation to climate change in vulnerable coastal cities.” Regarding the pilgrimage, Bernadette wrote: “I had also never taken the time to think of why and how I got to where I am, as I usually follow the tides and make my way, this experience and preparation for my presentation made me think, really question on why I am here and why I love what I do. I highly recommend it.”

(Photo next page: Heather Snow)



*„I found the tributaries journey deeply inspiring, tragic, reflexive and a joy. It evoked an ocean-full of emotions as complex as her (The Ocean) moods. You encounter beauty and filth, degradation and the pristine, oh the confusion of emotion one feels on such a journey or in life.»*

*~ Bernadette Snow*

# Seeing Complexity

Gary Koekemoer



Gary Koekemoer is deeply committed to the combination of political and ecological activism. Thanks to his involvement with WESSA, pilgrims on the second and third pilgrimages participated in

organised beach clean-ups, and on the third pilgrimage, were privileged to join him for a demonstration in solidarity with the Global Climate Strike (21 Sept, 2019). Gary contributed actively to The

Tributaries Project Seminar, and presented a colloquium paper which aimed to, as he puts it, “unpack the pilgrimage experience as a walk-through exercise in ‘seeing’ complexity.”

## *Algoa Bay – Complexity on our Doorstep?*

Gary presented “Algoa Bay – Complexity on our Doorstep?” at The Tributaries Project Seminar (March 1). As he noted: “I am very connected to the Bay, I swim in the Bay, I dive in the Bay. I serve on the local WESSA structure and have a number of friends who do stuff. So, I thought what I would try to do is introduce the Bay as an example of complexity ... You have heard that saying: ‘the sum is greater than the parts.’ So, that’s basically what complexity is. The problem with complexity is that you need boundaries for meaning ... you have to draw the line somewhere ... it’s always a pencil line ... I have decided to draw the line on something called Algoa Bay ... That specific selection allows me to have a conversation about a body of water







that we are trying to relate to, and it's not just the sea, but also the water that feeds into the sea." Gary goes on to detail the astonishing diversity brought together in the small strip of coastline fondly called

"the Bay" and seen as a place of myriad wonders, including the world's highest concentration of bottle-nosed dolphins. He also details the multiple tragic consequences of living in close

proximity to humans for marine life. For him, the Bay's biggest problem is its multiple seats of authority, including two ports, suggesting legislative fragmentation rather than flexible complexity.

## *Water Conflicts in the Bay*

Gary followed on from his first presentation on complexity in Algoa Bay with a second presentation entitled “Water conflicts in the Bay” (May 3). “We have a brewing conflict arising in the Bay again, and I have been involved from the WESSA side ... the basic issue is “fish farms.” In this so-called aquaculture development, he explains, commercial cages are placed into the water and fish are farmed in them. The idea of the presentation was to “unpack some of the conflicts behind it.” “The basic message” he argues, is that on a finite planet, “there are limits to growth.” “If the present trends (over-population, commercialization food production, resource depletion, reliance on fossil fuels) continue unchanged, we are 51 years away from reaching the limits of our planet. That is, we are close to reaching the tipping points that





change the system and the dynamic. He points out that if, for example, sea levels rise, generally rich people live on the hills, poorer people live lower down. In short, “climate change will

disproportionately affect developing countries and the poor.” One of the sustainable development goals is to ensure that by 2030 all men and women have equal rights to economic resources. So we are in a

country where this is not the case and we have 11 years to get this right. Another goal is to double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small scale food (Photo above: Danai Tembo)



producers, particularly women and indigenous persons. This includes fishing communities. Another goal is to improve water quality by removing pollution and unregulated dumping, and another is to



sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems. Aquaculture seems to be an attractive way to meet some of these goals. (if we can farm fish and end over-fishing perhaps we can



restore the wild populations.) Yet the pollution and ecosystemic disruption caused by aquaculture and its industrial scale violates other goals. Gary's question concerns where the pencil line is to be drawn.



## *Seeing complexity by walking the construct*

At The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20), Gary presented a paper entitled *Seeing complexity by walking the construct.* Outlining the paper, he writes: “One of the consistent problems for humans is seeing the complexity of things. Our senses have evolved to process information in a particular way that limits us to what we can experience simultaneously. Because of these biological limitations we are inclined to reduce complex systems to simplistic, atomistic and individualised views of ‘reality’ – seeing wholes is for us particularly challenging. Using a slide show of

photographs from the third water pilgrimage, I will unpack the pilgrimage experience as a walk-through exercise in ‘seeing’ complexity. Thereby suggesting a practical means of building complexity constructs. I will frame this experiential process within the dialogue work of Otto Scharmer’s Presencing/Theory U process and demonstrate how the pilgrimage journey closely follows the process suggested by Scharmer et al.” The pilgrimage, Gary wrote “brought into stark clarity the damage we are doing to ourselves in using the ecosystems as dumps and as unconstrained resource ‘pools.’”



*"I loved the opportunity to 'walk the construct.' Physically journeying from sea-to-source with a few stops in-between really brought to life the notion that we as humans are very much part of the eco-systems we depend on... Had a great time too connecting with fellow travellers on this complexity journey. An awesome experience at all levels!"*

*~ Gary Koekemoer*

# Reconfiguring the Everyday

Sharon Rudman



In response to her encounters on the pilgrimage, particularly the wastewater treatment works and the beach clean-up, Sharon offered reflections in a retrospective video created by Gareth Williams (photo,

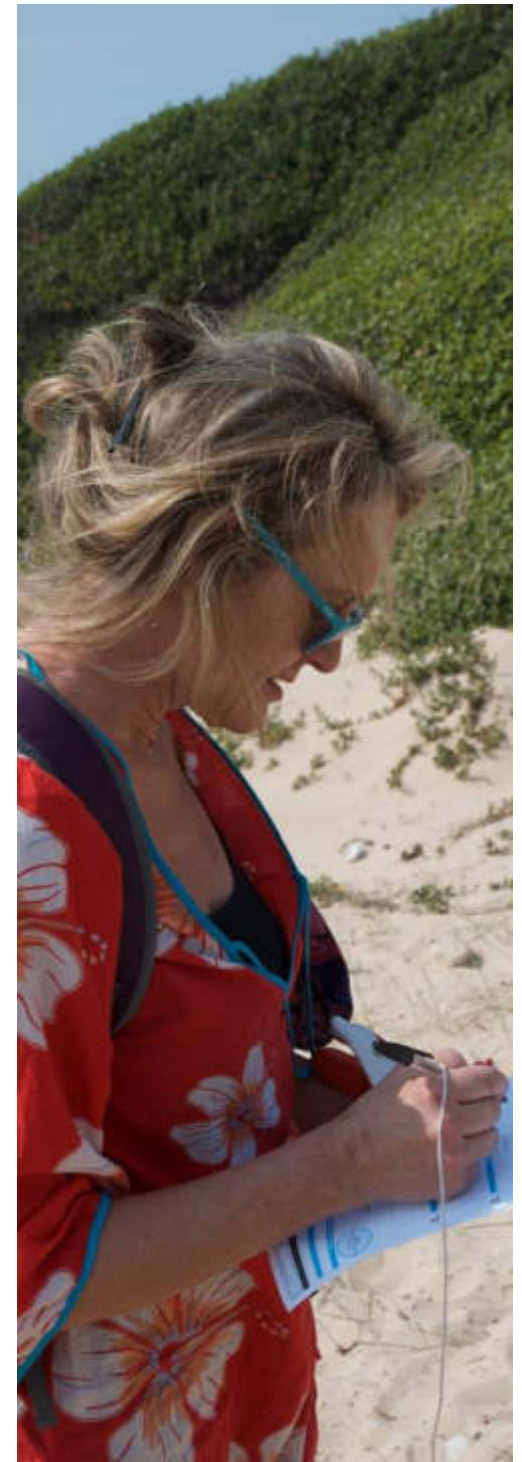
page 154: from this video). She remarks, "I kept thinking, if this is what's happening right here, then imagine this on a global scale, there are so many people and there are all these systems working, and I

found it very overwhelming in that sense ... in a sensory sort of way coming to encounter these issues ... you smell it and you hear it, and you see it and you're right there! So that to me was very powerful."

## *Reconfiguring the everyday: Performance art against plastic pollution*

Dr Rudman teamed up with her son Luke Rudman to present a paper at The Tributaries Project Colloquium (Nov 20). Plastic pollution, they argue, “has, in recent times, become a much publicised and discussed issue. Despite this, most of our society’s practice regarding single-use plastics, has continued in much the same manner, suggesting that the ‘talk’ about this issue is largely a matter of ‘knowing what to say’ instead of an authentic response implying change. This incongruity between what is said and what is done is examined through the lens of Heidegger’s theories on the ‘everydayness of discourse’ which, according to him, is characterised by ‘idle talk,’ ‘curiosity’ and ‘ambiguity’. Idle talk

and curiosity produce the semblance of knowledge but without authentic understanding or experience, which then leads to a sense of ambiguity regarding the relationship between that which is said and that which is done – resulting in a discourse characterised by an abundance of talk and an absence of real or meaningful action. Heidegger suggests that genuine understanding, as opposed to the ‘understanding’ inherent in everyday discourse, can be sought by attempting to interact with the world around us in a different manner. A potential response to this could be found in Ranciere’s suggestion that an artwork comprising an alternative and even







disruptive representation of the material world, could prompt one to experience aspects of this world 'anew' and, consequently, allow for a different kind of understanding and response. This paper considers the potential of performance art as a catalyst for experiencing the problem of plastic pollution 'anew' and thus potentially prompting fresh attempts to address the issue in our everyday contexts. Luke Rudman, a performance artist and student at Nelson Mandela University, has been working on such a project and his work will be considered as a case study in considering the above proposition.



*«The pilgrimage allowed for a tangible experience of an issue that I often only thought of theoretically - and thus a different kind of conviction, more connected to the reality of the crisis. The physical journey, but also very much the people with whom I undertook it, moved me to view the whole ecological crisis from a different position.»*

*~ Sharon Rudman*

# Drops, Rivers and Oceans

Phelokazi Mntwini



In response to the pilgrimage, Phelokazi wrote an original poem, entitled “Drops, Rivers and Oceans” which she recited at The Tributaries Project Narratives event (Nov 22). The poem is written as a deeply

respectful tribute to the sacred and divine permanence of water, which both threatens all life in the places that it becomes absent through drought, as well as when it becomes terrifyingly over-present in storms

and floods. But through all this, Phelokazi notes that it is only water that is able to sustain all life on Earth. It does this without effort or intention, in a majestic gesture that is greater even than love.

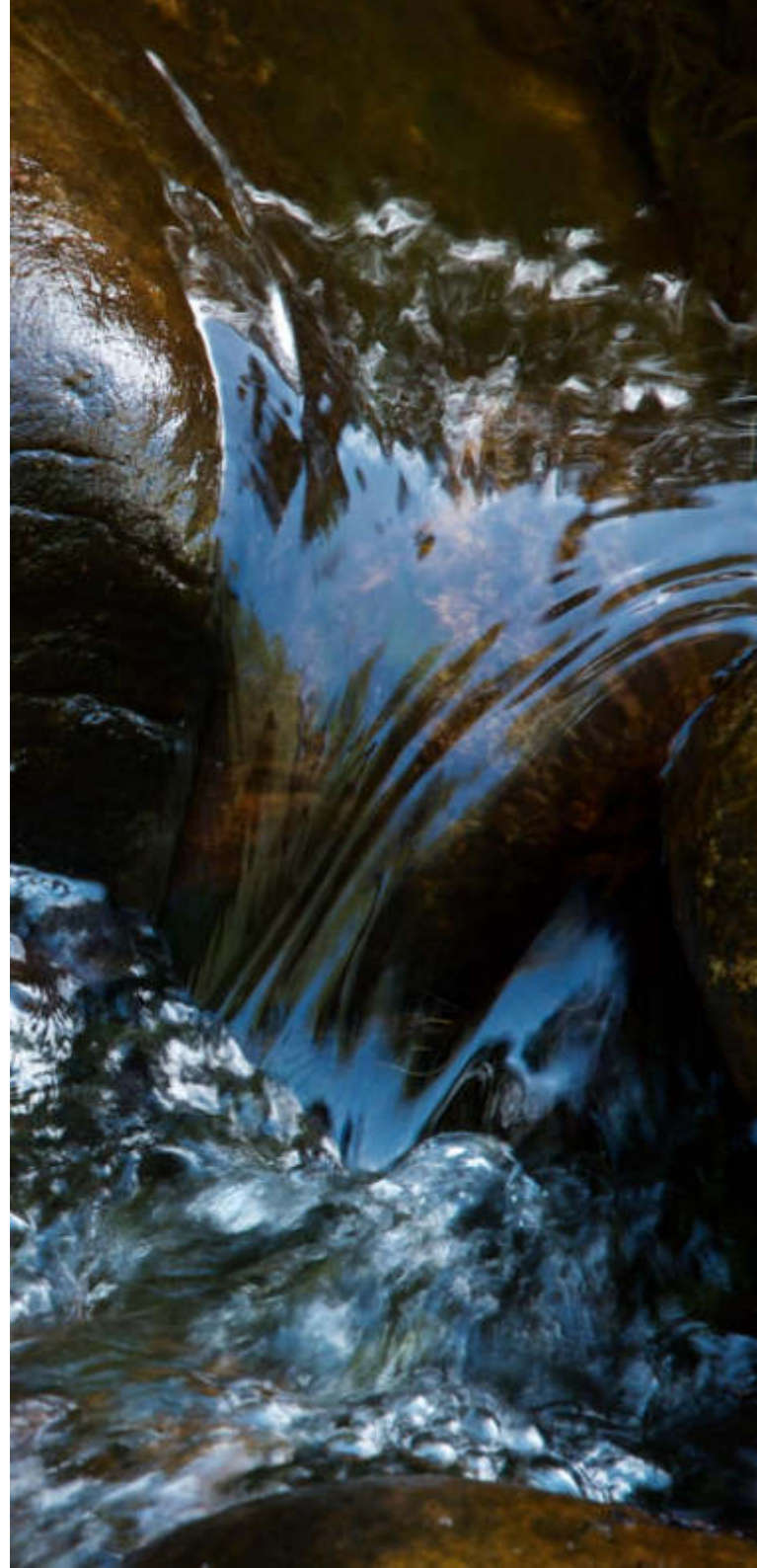
## *Drops, Rivers and Oceans*

From the tan and golden dunes  
to spiking reefs of green,  
and shimmering gleam  
Where earth meets water there's glee  
Testified by lighthouses echoing your tunes

Always flowing and all knowing you are not a  
subject of time.  
You reside in all of us, but no one call you mine.  
Evolutions will come and go but you remain  
fearless  
You've had your place since the separation of  
light to darkness.

From the lack in a drought  
To the destructive over-abundance of a flood  
With both,  
leaving earth's inhabitants in a brood  
demanding respect in your in presence  
like blood

Your greed leaves me in gutter and bother  
But remember this  
'thousands have lived without love,  
but not without water'





As a fellow pilgrim on the first pilgrimage, Phelokazi also performed as one of Luke Rudman's "Plastic Monsters" in his performance artwork, which was first released as a radical protest against plastic pollution on Nelson Mandela University South Campus, Aug 26, 2019. Phelokazi's natural physical beauty inspired Luke to create a figure that is encased in, and overwhelmed by, an oversized costume made from a vast accumulation of extremely ugly plastic trash. This stark contrast between beauty and ugliness highlighted the travesty of the situation, where human beauty, which is parallel to, and even synonymous with, natural beauty is slowly being surrounded, overwhelmed and imprisoned by plastic trash. Luke did not title the figure, suggesting the unspeakable tragedy, which is beyond words. (Photo, next page: Mbokazi Ngayeka)



*«Being a part of the tributes project was a holistic learning experience for me. It has allowed me to «step» out of my rigid worldview and has enhanced my need to connect with nature.»*

*~ Phelokazi Mntwini*

# Who do we tell our dreams to?

Mbokazi Ngayeka



In response to her pilgrimage experiences. Mbokazi took photographs and wrote a poem entitled “Who do we tell our dreams to?” She then put these together as the digital “visual

poem” which she presented at The Tributaries Project Narratives event (Nov 22). The poem is transcribed below and a selection of her photographs is included. Mbokazi made an audio recording,

transcribed below, where she reflects on striking, inspirational moments on the pilgrimage and explains the motivation behind her poetic work. The photos from pages 160 to 166 were taken by her.

## *From Mbokazi's Audio Reflections*

“Immediately when I found out that the pilgrimage was about water, everything that has to do with water bodies started appearing in my experience. Lyrics about water started jumping out at me in the music I was listening to. Articles about water appeared more often in my browser, and suddenly drinking water from the tap was not as ordinary as it was for me before. To the journey, I brought with me my camera because I wanted to take pictures of whatever would inspire me along the trip. When we got to Sardinia Bay, I was in awe by how much the ocean was shaping the landscape; how the dunes were slowly taking over and covering up the parking lot. There I took pictures of these strange looking rocks. They looked as if they had faces, and those faces were screaming and scared. Of-course the faces on these rocks had been shaped like that due to weathering by the salts and acids in the seawater, and this is a natural process, but it is often accelerated in polluted water. I contrasted these scared rocks with the joy on some of the pilgrim’s faces as they were swimming and having fun in the sea. It was as if the rocks knew something about the water that we didn’t know. Our next step was the Driftsands Water Treatment Facility. For me, it was eye-opening to see the process, but I must say I







had no artistic inspiration at all. I wasn't even inspired to take pictures. I guess it's true when they say, its hard to get inspiration when you are in a shitty place. But nonetheless, it got me thinking about another process we take lightly, which is flushing the toilet. Another highlight for me was the beach clean-up, where we collected piles and piles of rubbish. While doing that, we spotted different groups of people performing spiritual rituals by the seashore. We spotted around four different groups of people doing this. It got me thinking about what the water and the ocean, the sea, means for African spirituality. How do people draw healing from the water? And how does polluted water affect or impact this? These are some of the questions I want to centre my

contribution around, and looking at the healing the seawater provides from a scientific perspective. Looking at these people who were performing these rituals, I got reminded of my favourite song by Zahara called "Away," where in her opening lines she says, "I travel the seas and waters; Trying to find my redemption song." This made me look at water as a healing place. But then I quickly got reminded of my two favourite songs by Florence and the Machine, one entitled "What the water gave me." In the lyrics, she is inspired by the way Virginia Woolf died in the water. And the second song is "Never let me go," where she finds peace in dying underwater. These songs made me look at water as a dying place. So, my contribution will also explore these multiple facets of water.

## *Who do we tell our dreams to?*

Who do we tell our dreams to?

If you tell them to the waters,  
they shall call you;  
call you  
to a place  
where dreams do come true.

If you tell your dreams to the waters,  
your reflections  
will appear  
from the blue,  
crystal clear  
from every view.

And your soul will be sparked anew.

Who do we tell our dreams to?

If you tell them to the oceans,  
you will meet your spirituality.



The oceans will show you  
your dreams  
vividly;  
take you on a path of clarity.

If you tell your dreams to the ocean  
it will provide you  
with tranquillity.

Tell your dreams to the ocean,  
and the ocean  
shall dream with you.  
It will tell you  
of troubled waters  
and unsettle you;  
call you on a journey  
and follow you.

Tell your dreams to the water  
and it will tell you  
its fears,  
drown you in its  
tears,



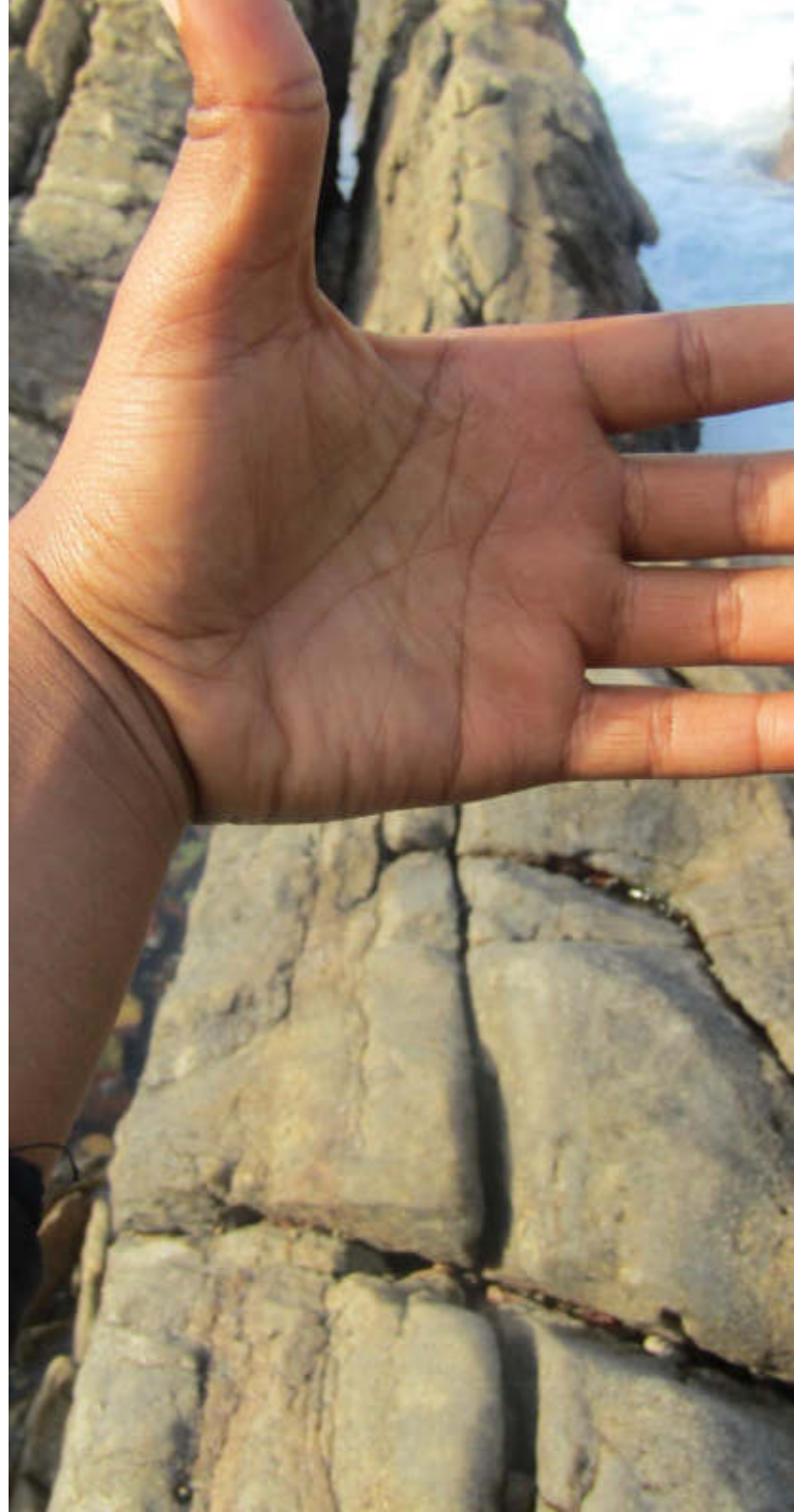
demolish your ego  
and awaken  
your consciousness.

You will listen to the ocean  
and it will  
tell you about its moods.

Sit quietly!  
Pay attention  
to its tunes!

If you look quietly  
you will see  
its subtle pains,  
hidden by the comforting rain.

And if you go into the water  
you will feel its force  
and it will take you  
from the sea  
to the source.







*„The water pilgrimage was, for me a very new experience, because here I was, going on a journey with people I didn't know, and these people didn't even know me – a three-day journey to conscientize myself about something we are often so lax about you wouldn't think our survival actually depends on it. And this thing is water. I was extremely nervous, I must say, but immediately I recognised that water itself was doing something profound here; it was bringing people together.“*

*~ Mbokazi Ngayeka*

# I am a Pilgrim

Thabang Queench



In response to his pilgrimage experiences, Thabang recorded a voice note (excerpts transcribed below) in which he remarked on the delights of aesthetic perception made possible when you step into a

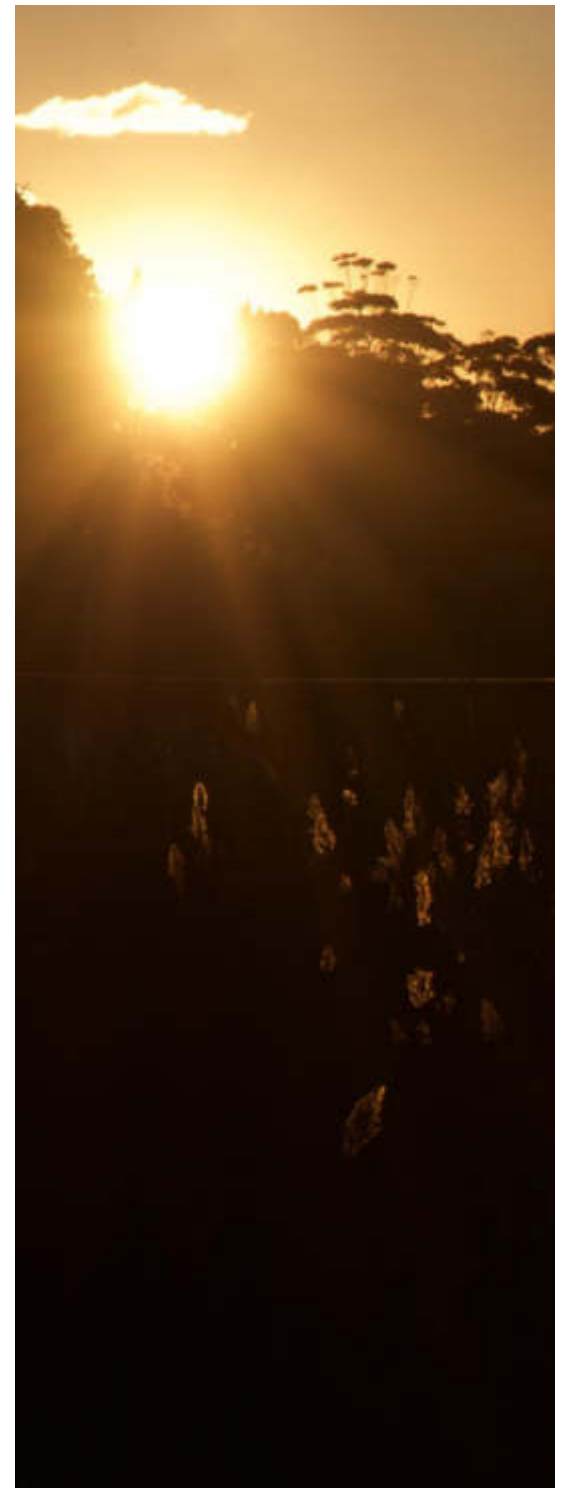
space and time beyond the everyday. He also reflected on the multiple issues and questions related to the risk human action, and misdirected political action, is placing on ecologies and societies

alike. These preoccupied him on the journey, and he described some of the new learning for him. He also wrote a poem, “I am a pilgrim,” and recorded it for the Tributaries Narratives event (Nov 22).

## *From Thabang's Reflections*

“For me the pilgrimage provided an opportunity to get away from daily life and connect with nature, and by so doing connect with myself. I experienced joy in every little thing that I observed, things that I usually take for granted. The joy of waking up to a fresh day, delighting in the observation of my life-giving breath, experiencing some great wonders around me, the trees, the water, the mountains, the sky ... even the unique aromas around me, the sounds of the birds .... the sensation of the soft breeze... The other pleasure I derived was to observe myself, my environment and the people around me and also to observe how everything is interconnected, the

interdependence of my life and the environment around me. The pilgrimage also provided me the opportunity to have some quiet time away from the demands of my normal daily life, so I could reflect deeply. As you know ... this life provides us with less time to get in touch with ourselves, because we are so preoccupied with other things, relationships, work and other troubles of this world. So, the pilgrimage, in a way, provided me with a break from all that; the worries ... because it gave me a much needed chance to clear my head, to focus on positive things and gain a renewed perspective on life. Within our group there was an observable diversity, which gave me







an opportunity to learn more about other people's cultures. I was so fascinated with Danai's explanations of the Zimbabwean culture, the vegetation that grows there, the kind of food that they eat ... I also

want to focus on the shortcoming which I observed in much of the academic work ... on socio-ecological restorations and other struggles." For Thabang this is based on "a limited understanding

of what politics means ... a view of politics as a practice associated solely with government; so much focus tends to be placed on bigger, broader policy issues ... I am now beginning to look at exploring

the political potential of the unofficial realms of collective action and I strongly feel that this is an area that needs to be looked at. Throughout the pilgrimage there were several questions which preoccupied much of my journey. ... How do we strike the balance for sociological, religious, cultural or traditional human needs and the ecological requirements of the estuaries? How do we cascade ecological and advocacy programmes to the most vulnerable communities; for example, communicating the presence of concentrations of particular substances in the water such as the nutrients, the physical variables and some toxic substances? What was new learning? There were quite a number of new learnings for me. Such as the operational plans ... targeted at protecting diversity within, for example, the Swartkops Estuary ... [to] ensure that diversity, distribution and abundance of plants and fish is maintained or restored.  
(photo on p. 171: Mbokazi Ngayeka.)





## *I am a pilgrim*

I am a pilgrim on this earth,  
Possessed by mother-nature.  
Wherever I may be,  
It is neither where I ought to be,  
Nor where I dream of being.  
A vague yearning from the inside  
is summoning me,  
To explore places and spaces in time.  
Self-discovery is the destination of significance.  
True identity is the ultimate quest,  
Seeking and finding meaning in this  
overscheduled world.  
I have to leave the safe and familiar to a road less travelled.  
But each step I make is beckoning,  
Calling me closer to the source.

In the wilderness I am lost and I am found.  
To lose myself is to find myself anew.  
Delighted in the moment of life-giving breath,  
Experiencing all the wonders presented around me,  
The trees, the flowers, the sky, the mountains,  
the unique aromas,  
The sounds of birds, the sensation of soft breeze  
on my melanin skin  
This pleasure is all mine to cherish.  
I am inextricably bound to this earth,  
The environment, the people, all is connected.  
At the culmination of this journey,  
The pilgrim returns home,  
Only to discover that meaning lies in the familiar,  
Of one's own world.  
I am the seeker of these many truths,  
I am a pilgrim on this earth.





## *More From Thabang's Reflections*

Thabang argues that action plans “should be coupled with actions to deal with enforcement issues, the policies, the by-laws, the laws of the country. There is an enormous variety of species that are highly or partially dependant on estuaries, and they need protection. So, the issue of non-protection of a range of habitats associated with fauna and flora as well as breeding, roosting and feeding sites for the birds remain a very great concern for me. There is also a range of human activities taking place at the Swartkops Estuary such as boats, without regulating carrying capacity, bait collecting without looking at the method of collecting,

rate of removal of some of the species; those things need to be considered thoroughly. The other highlight for me was the Groendal walk that we took. It was for the first time that I took that journey and I must confess that I came back reinvigorated with a fresh mind and vigour to get my act together and do the minimum elegant steps which are necessary and I can take within the limited capacity that I have as an individual, and also to be part of local movements and initiatives, which are aimed at highlighting the danger that we are in as human beings if we don't look at the ecological risk that we are in.”



*„The pilgrimage was indeed a much-needed experience and I am very grateful to the organisers, and I am also very thankful to my other pilgrims that were on the same journey with me, and all their conversations; the thought-provoking questions which remained unanswered during that journey. I am so grateful for Everything. Thank you very much!“*

*~ Thabang Queench*

# My Pilgrimage

Alida Sandison



Alida is a senior lecturer in Psychology at the Nelson Mandela University. In response to her pilgrimage experience, Alida wrote a reflective narrative, entitled “My Pilgrimage,” which she presented at

The Tributaries Project Narratives event (Nov 22). She also recorded a voice note (transcribed below). In both texts, Alida begins her narrative with a personal anecdote or story and then goes on to draw

psychological insight from the isomorphic structure that these show to striking feelings (anger at water waste and the sense of being overwhelmed) which were evoked by the pilgrimage experiences.

## *From Alida's Audio Reflections*

"I got to the basin today, and unfortunately the tap had been left on ... the water was absolutely streaming out, and I have no idea how long the tap was open for. I felt absolutely appalled at the waste of this beautiful, pure water. I have the sense that my reaction was stronger today than it would have been had that same thing happened before our pilgrimage. I have been thinking a lot about it ... the irresponsible waste and the destructive side of water usage ... I need to believe that as we put this new narrative out there, there will be a value shift ... Systemic change comes from society itself demanding that its people value something, or focus on something, and I need to believe that that is going to happen ... I really do think that the weekend we experienced is a great example, then, of the power of education and exposure, because part of that education was really the experiential component of what we had. Also today I found myself spending probably too much money on a glass eco-bottle ... but I did it consciously, because I didn't want to buy plastic, and I wanted to feel like I was moving away from that. I wanted to feel like I was doing something positive and acting from a new place of knowing."





## My Pilgrimage

Alida begins her narrative from a personal angle ... and then draws insight from the story in relation to the pilgrimage. "I'm not sure if any of you have tried to get into a wetsuit," she begins "you all know that it's a little bit more complicated than one thinks." "For my sins I started doing triathlons a little while ago and I needed to learn how to start to swim in the sea, and that journey started with first getting into a wetsuit. So, I borrowed a wetsuit from a friend, and I thought, as I was going on a group swim the next day, I should probably try on the wetsuit at home. Which I did. But there is a whole process ... because it's this thick material, really hard to get on, and it's got a zipped back, and you

pull on this thing to zip yourself up, and then you feel like a sausage. And I looked in the mirror, and I thought, ok, these things aren't flattering but it's ok, it fits, I can do this... Then I had to get out of the wetsuit, which also entailed a ... wriggle ... and the more I pulled, the more the zip was not going anywhere. And this stuff is really thick, and it was the middle of December, so I was starting to sweat, right, and still nothing, and then I started feeling panic. So, I phoned a friend who lives round the corner from me to say: 'please, come help me out of the wetsuit!' But the friend did not pick up her phone. ... I am now seriously sweating. So, I took this sheepish face, in this wetsuit, off to my





neighbour, who is about eighty-five, and said 'please help!' And she had a good giggle, saying, 'see, it's not just old people who struggle to get out of their clothes!' She helped me pull the zip down, and that was the beginning of this journey of learning to swim in the sea, which then became a whole new different chapter." An audience member asked Alida: "But, why couldn't you get the zip down?" Alida answered, "I couldn't get the zip down because I had the wetsuit on back to front – so the zip wouldn't run ... note to self, 'don't do that again'!" Another comment: "So your wetsuit was inside out?" "Yes, inside out." Showing a photo (previous page), Alida continued, "So, that there is proof that I now am able to get in and out of a wetsuit. They are still not flattering ... but I went from that to learning how to swim in the sea.

Now, if you don't swim in the sea, people underestimate this, right, because usually when you go to the beach, there is a lot of paddling that takes place. But with triathlon ... picture swimming lengths in a pool. You have swim ... and on a race day in a triathlon, you don't know what the sea is going to look like ... What you're dealing with is what we call 'chop' and 'swell.' So, 'chop' is the literal splashing up of the water into your face ... picture when you are trying to swim and every time you breathe there is a splash." Alida gestures how this disrupts your forward momentum and how you need to paddle frantically to regain it. "Then you get swell, where the water is literally taking you up there and dropping you. So, you could literally be swimming and then you start flapping in the air. And then sometimes you have chop *and*



swell! I literally felt like this little piece of driftwood spinning around in the ocean, and I would have this inward dialogue of: 'I'm not coping with this; this is not good; I can't do this, I'm going to drown' ... and I really struggled with anxiety actually about whether I could cope and whether I should just give up this sport. And then somebody that I know quite well who does this kind of thing said: 'Take control of your mind. You decide what you think about.' And now I have a song; I go into the water, sing my song, focus on my song, and it helps because what I learned is that when you are in the sea your mind is giving your body an instruction. And if you are not coping, it starts with the words 'I'm not coping.' It's been quite a journey, learning how to do this, and every time I go in, I build a little bit more confidence. I still don't

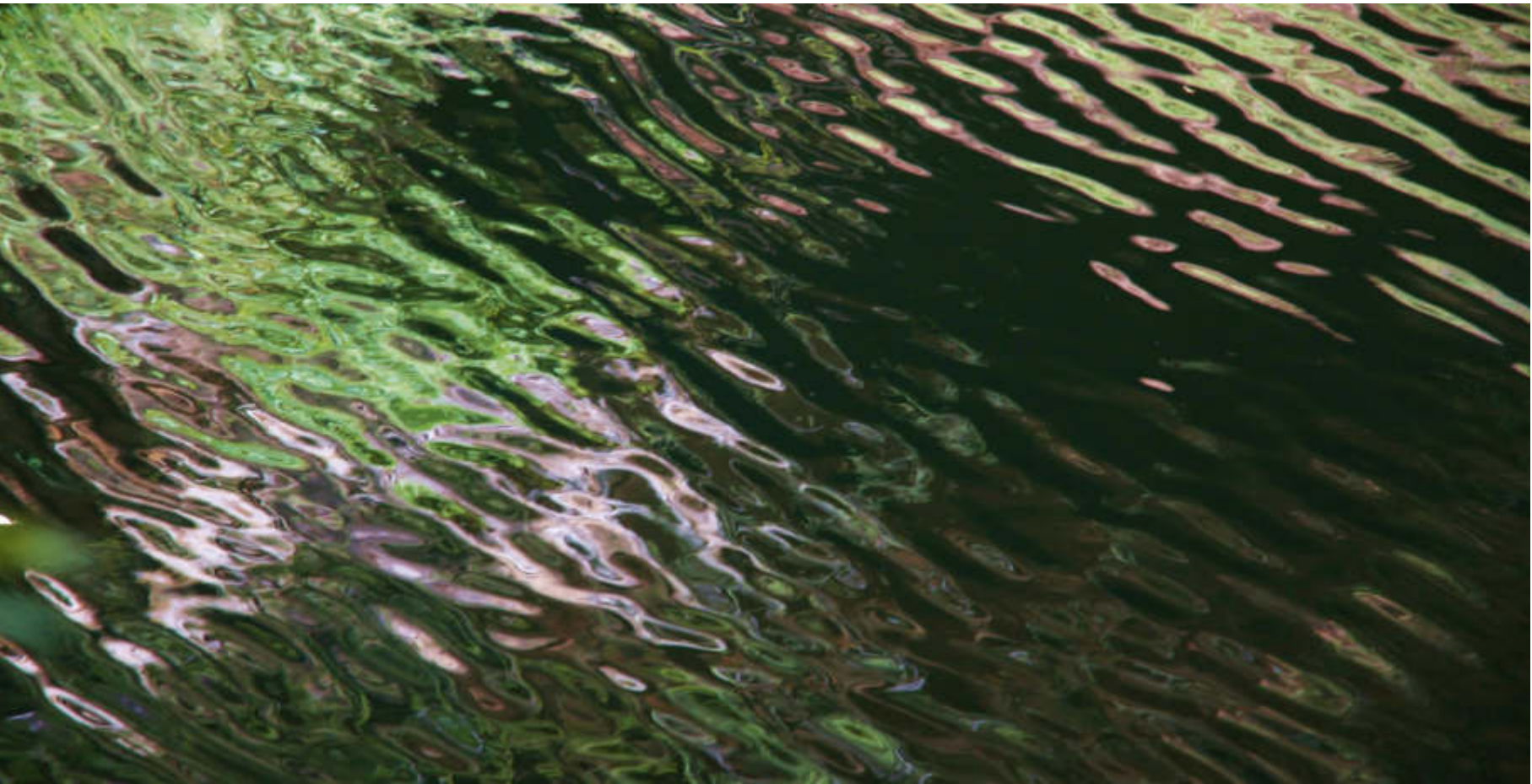


think it's wise to go swimming in the sea alone, but, you build up a little bit more confidence as you go along. But I really did feel quite vulnerable initially. So, that has been my sea journey to date, and it is still a journey, I think. I started thinking about what this means in terms of water and water pilgrimage ... Psychologically, water has the connotations of being soothing and peaceful ... but often that feeling occurs when we are looking at water from the outside. But, here [swimming in the sea] it feels like you are experiencing water from the inside, it feels like water is overcoming you.

For me, there's this interesting interaction between what I take in and what takes me in ... I am simplifying things, but there is a process by which we build and we take in. But we can still also feel like we are being taken in; that we are being overcome ... engulfed by something. We come back to: 'what do I take in and what am I overcome by, or what am I sinking into.' And, initially, in this pilgrimage, I felt a little bit 'taken in,' too, or 'overcome by.' I felt very overwhelmed ... by all these things I was exposed to ... and initially that was very much about exposure to the ideas of waste, pollution, destruction, death. I felt a little bit lost, like I was on the receiving end of that water. And I think part of what is overwhelming is feeling like we are stuck there; feeling like we are fighting upstream, fighting wars,

and feeling like we are battling in the sea ... So, psychologically, I need to ask myself, what to do, in terms of how to process this. 'What am I going to take in?' Because I need to change my psychological position on this. I feel like there is a degree to which I will continue to be taken in because these issues that we talked about are so big, but I also, on some level, need to change the position and say: 'What am I going to take in; what am I going to process from my position?' ... As healthy adults we learn to spit out the bad, take in what we can, to digest, and in a sense hold the good and the bad. And, I think that there is a lot of bad that we are guilty about, and I'm not trying in any way to deny that. But I think we also need to situate ourselves in the good, in terms of what we do have. And, for me, one of those things ...

is the idea that there are so many people, from so many different walks of life, that have been part of this project, that are trying to make a difference despite the sense of being overwhelmed. And it's a matter of principle. Even if we can't change certain things, we can act from a position of principle. And I find that really inspiring. And I find that, that is who I want to be. So, firstly, that's the one thing I'd like to digest from this process. And then, through that, there's an interconnectivity – maybe it's very much saying the same thing, but I think we reflect accountability. And it's firstly an accountability to myself: who I want to be; where I want to position myself. Then it's an accountability to others, in terms of me trying to make a difference to others and then, importantly, to the surrounding environment.”



*«So, yes, in terms of what I have learned from this process, the journey it has taken me on, I guess, it is learning about where I am in terms of the principle of this, and who I am accountable to ... because that's what I have; that's what I can work with.»*

*~ Alida Sandison*

# (I)MP(ACT)

*Sibu Nhlanguwini*



Sibu Nhlanguwini, a graphic design student, was inspired by her pilgrimage experiences to consider how to use design to inspire action on campus. Highlighting visually the play in the word “Impact,” which

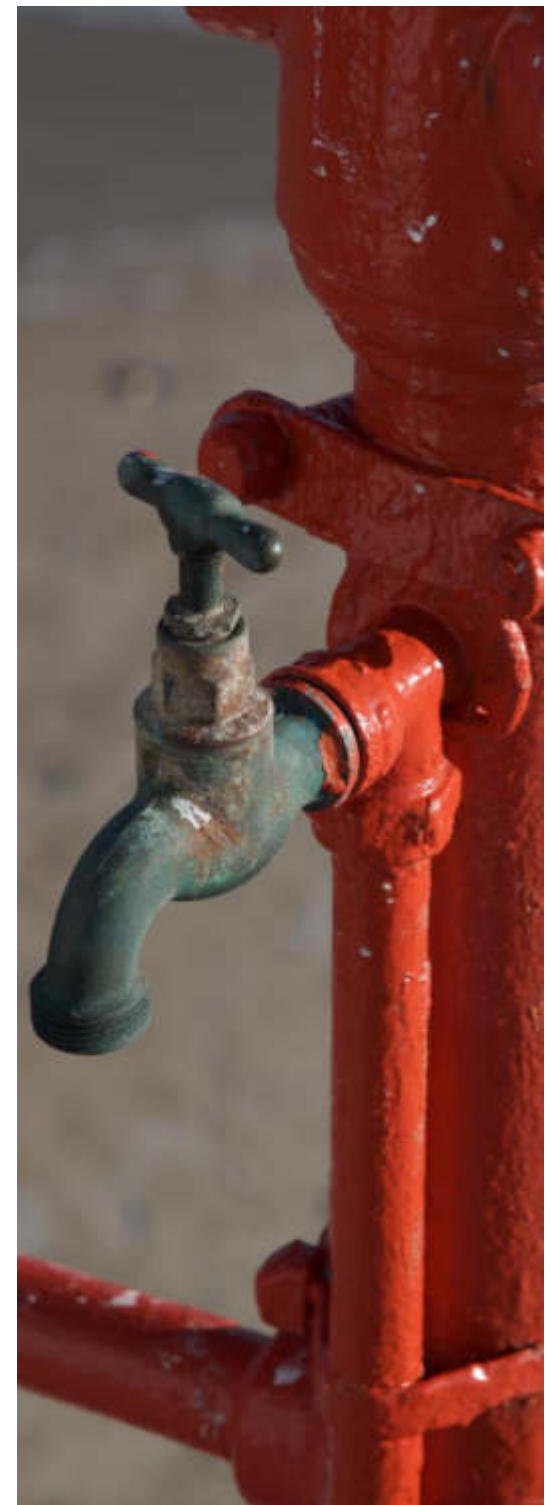
begins with “I” and ends with “act,” Sibu first created a logo that brought together in a nutshell her desire “to act to make an impact.” At The Tributaries Project Seminar (April 5), she presented her ideas on

what it may take to create a meaningful action campaign on campus, which would not remain in the digital space, but would allow for the kind of physical participation exemplified on the pilgrimage.

## «(I)MP(ACT)- I act to make an impact»

Sibu began her presentation by showing the iconic photograph of “a pale blue dot” – an image taken in 1990 of Earth at about 6.4 billion kilometres away. This image made her reflect about “the world, where we are” and its meaning, given the “trillions of crazy things that are happening in this particular blue dot.” The sense of vulnerability evoked made her feel strongly “that we need to preserve and cherish this blue dot.” To confront ecological issues, and change people’s attitudes and actions, she notes, it is important to understand that people perceive things diversely, and different approaches are needed to engage with diverse communities. She says: “in this

particular seminar, the way we interact with water, the way we talk about it isn’t limited to a certain type of thinking – this is a perfect condition in order to engage in honest and reflective conversations about water and the environment.” But, when we leave the seminar setting, she adds “the conversation has to continue; it can’t be limited to when we are sitting together as a unit.” So, she asks “how do we then take this conversation into the outside world where people who don’t necessarily think the way that we do can engage with it?” Speaking of campus residences, she says “it would be very difficult for me to have the same types of conversation in that particular







space.” These questions are important for Sibü in view of her desire “to make some real change around the campus area where I live and where I engage with students.” Her idea is to use the graphic design platform to create awareness, and “make people a little bit uncomfortable here and there.” She remarks: “It is important to ... go beyond a piece of paper that says ‘save water.’ I have driven past those ‘save water’ posters for basically most of my life and it has never really connected to me in any particular way.” Now, however, she notes: “When going back into spaces such as Res, I notice leaking taps all the time. I think, in terms of maintenance, we have a lot of piping issues. We also have a lot of plastic bottle usage ... and there

isn’t a specific way in which we are able to manage our waste. If you actually had to walk into Res, you’d be disgusted at the sight of just a trail of rubbish that usually inhabits our passages. ... It’s a very crazy and contentious space to be in – currently being bombarded by all of these things that you know are wrong.” Sibü interviewed the chairperson of the Green Campus Initiative, but was disappointed in the conventionality of the strategies proposed for greening the campus. She argued that no-plastic and no waste campus campaigns are useful, but instead of merely throwing a problem out there, one needs to offer alternatives. What she learned from the pilgrimage was the power of an approach that engages people experientially.



*«Had we not gone to the wastewater treatment works, had we not gone on the pilgrimage, I would not have been so engaged or actually have had my eyes opened. There needs to be more of that, even in smaller ways, or in ways that engage people, take them out of their comfort zones, and allow them to see the cause and effect physically.»*

*~ Sibu Nhlanguini*

# Salt Pans and Memories

Ethan Thomas



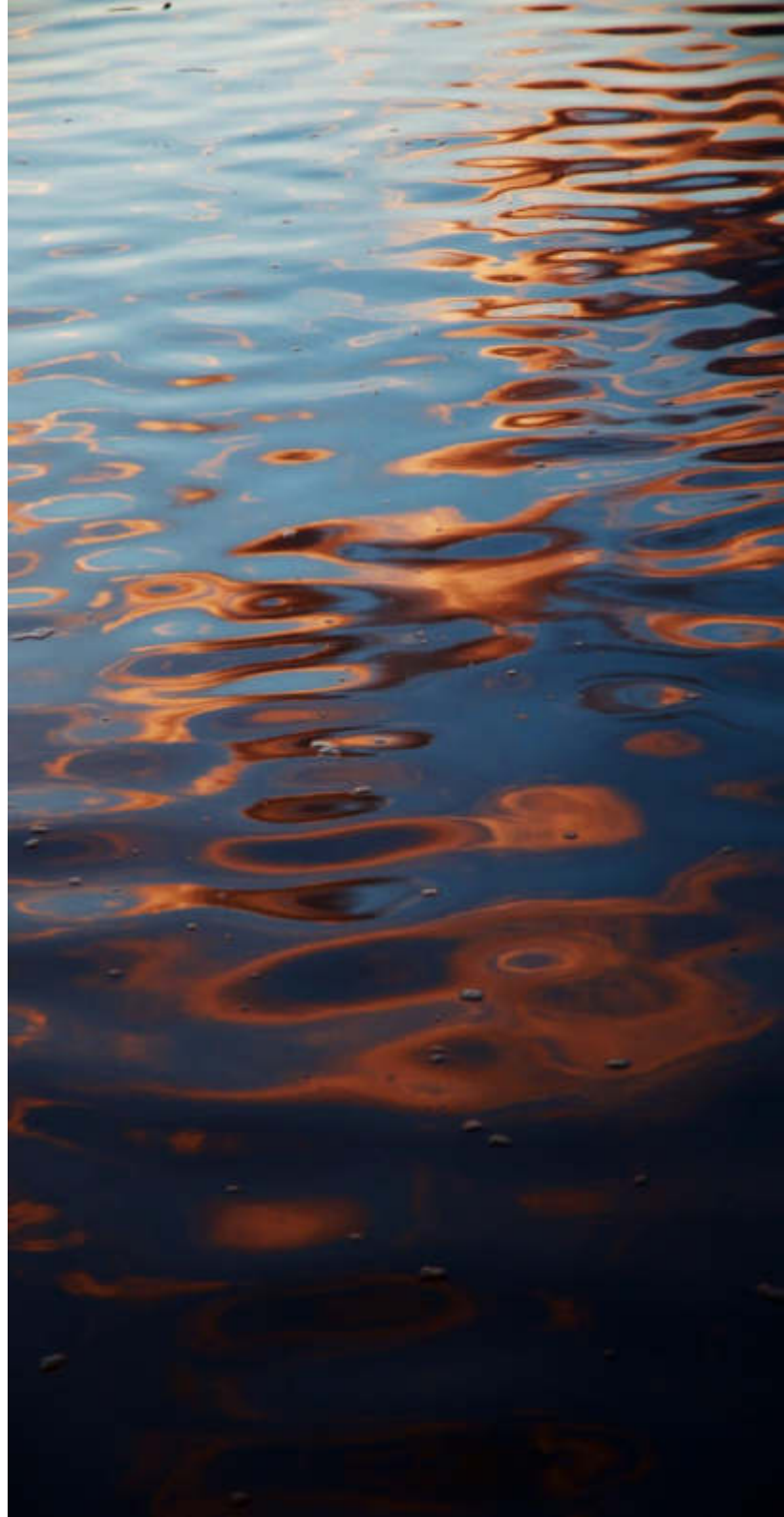
Ethan Thomas, who identifies himself as “a Port Elizabethan,” studied music at the Nelson Mandela University. In response to the pilgrimage, he created a lyrical word-image, entitled “Salt Pans,

Memories & The Water Pilgrimage: An Image.” As the title suggests, the work was inspired by the Salt Pans, which were as part of an inspiring tour of the Swartkops Estuary, given by zoologist, Dr Paul Martin. For

Ethan, this stopping point triggered a childhood memory of the night time view across the Salt Pans from his grandmother’s home, situated on the other side, high on the hill, overlooking the pans and the city.

## *Salt Pans, Memories & The Water Pilgrimage: An Image*

“An early image from my childhood is the night-time view from my grandmother’s balcony. The house is located on the upper flank of Hillside which grants it a view of the lower adjacent neighbourhoods, important centres of the city, main roads, highway junctions, and also the trees and bushes peppered throughout, the alleyways, cul-de-sacs and small streets uniting this concrete matrix, and all the little poems glistening this side of Port Elizabeth. The image in question is a paste-up of the street-lights – ambers, yellows, whites, and uncanny alloys – which illuminate the salt pans of Salt Lake, Bethelsdorp. These manifest in various blues, hues, oranges, pinks, and perhaps, peaches. Memories, like colours, can be vague. “Illumination” isn’t the most fitting word,





though. A light is thrown on the city's urban waters and metal thoroughfare but what I see is a more unassuming light; a dark blaze on its back foot; glow, lustre, an unglaring glare, a glow without the audacity of full illumination. That being said – learning about the history of water and water-systems in Port Elizabeth was illuminating. I learnt about our dams, birds, the communities inter-knitted with public schools, and more. I learnt about the lighthouse, fishermen's lives, twin bridges built along Zwartkops river in 1972 and 1974, and more. Fishing is a loved past time among my family beginning with my grandfather. It was good to learn about fish. I also learnt many people's names which stayed with me for quite some time and fondness."



*„Said image will have always already been enough for me but the experiences and overarching experience of the water pilgrimage affected my memory of the image not unlike the inter-movements of the twinned streetlights and salt pans themselves.“*

*~ Ethan Lyle*

# assemblancing water

Luan Staphorst



Luan Staphorst twice presented “water-y likeness: the un-common archetype in poetry & song” in The Tributaries Project Seminar (Apr 12; Oct 25). While unable to join a pilgrimage, he offered

“assemblancing water” for the Tributaries Project Narratives event (Nov 21). His seminar focussed on water’s “evermoving unfixeness,” while “assemblancing water,” finding water in the objects and

words of his “everyday, everytime entanglements,” attempts to fix this daytime “wateriness” through photos (p. 191-197), which are then juxtaposed with ekphrastic poetry (six poems).

## *water-y likeness: the un-common archetype in poetry and song*

Luan began the presentation by citing part of the |xam-Bushman creation myth; the story of the youngest sister, “Waters.” Of all the anthropomorphic environmental figures (mountains, plains) that were once humans, he remarks, “Waters” is the ambiguous one (and it makes sense that her name is in the plural). “Waters” is the only one that can change in the cosmology. The wind is a bird, and it can never not be a bird, but water can take myriad forms. The ambiguity of water, as Luan notes, got him thinking about the notion of archetypes – these are associations “that go back millennia.” They are “engraved in our primordial mind.” If this is so, then the associations with them should be universal and static. But a brief look at poetry and music will show that this is

not the case with water. There just is no specific archetype for water (such as, birth, life and nourishment), but instead myriad differentiated ideas of what water is, means and could be. Luan adds that “water” can be seen as a “hyper-object”: it defies attempts to say “here it is, here it is now” and to put it in a box, contain and localize it. It defies time and space. Water cannot be phased, it moves between phases, between spaces, between objects. Also, he reminds us “we are seventy percent water. So we are more water than we are not water. Water controls us as much as we think we might control it.” This does not mean that we lack symbolic ideas and understandings of what water is, where water comes from and what we might associate with it. It is just

that these are not fixed – as an archetype is fixed. Luan went on to show and discuss diverse, mostly South African, poems and music, during which the audience was asked to note striking words, ideas, phrases, associations or memories evoked by what is seen, read or heard. Towards the end of his presentation, audience members began to engage in a lively exchange first evoked by the music that Whitacre set to Paz’s “Agua Nocturna” (Water Night). For one audience member the effect of the night sea in the dark was strongly present, while another (a daytime swimmer) couldn’t see the sea in the music. Conversation moved across a vast array of associations with water – confirming the truth-value of the ancient creation myth first cited.





*against an unforgiving white wall*

in a tilt invariably so  
the rush of shoulders breaths quick  
checks on curling irons  
leaves it invariably so  
a print subject to forget  
a time passed before the passing of  
trees  
invariably so  
although  
all things unequal  
trees irrelevant for their slow  
movements  
grass growing in absent tomorrows

the only yesterday  
is River riveting in its name  
calling from itself towards those who  
know  
and those who will  
rumbling in the bowels of throats  
the rage of watery blue  
Gamtoos  
skree jy  
    Gamtoos  
    scraping of earth  
        pulling of sky  
            Gamtoos

here there be no silence  
here my feet know no surface  
here I forget the colour green  
in a tilt invariably so  
against hallwaywhite  
we move towards end  
we move towards beginning  
every summer we are baptised anew  
in a sacrament of blue  
the only rite of renewal  
the staphorst of 18 sutherland street  
go through

*I heard tell oupa staphorst*  
never spoke much of the lowlands  
perhaps afraid of a flood  
were he to open the gates  
yet this hung on their wall  
*when we read the word grachten*  
*flows from graven*  
*is it verb or noun*  
*is it the digging or the dug*  
when where it was their'd  
I do not know  
I do know  
it came to be here  
after ouma called from the night  
in the next room  
    vorentoe  
        vorentoe  
    vorentoe  
I knew said dad  
he went her(e) before  
yet mamma had never seen this  
type of door  
sister clipped it to brick  
made it heavy  
now the canals carry me  
to the next question  
did he ever miss them  
did he ever miss them





*before the day constitutes itself*

men of fish could be found  
cut in half  
wading and waiting  
in the water  
my father was such a fishman  
once upon a beach  
when this photo was taken  
and given  
his weight not in frame  
but beyond  
there where his hands are reeling  
in elongation of himself  
his interlocutor out of sight  
and out of the camera's might

still  
the question is marked  
in the arch of his back  
whence will the water weep  
in letting one of its own escape  
the  
edge  
of its deep

my father taught me  
never turn your back on the sea  
if more of it you wish to see  
if more of it you wish to free

*and yet*

my camera looks back at me  
it could not care for polaroid  
nor real  
it frames the frame's frame  
white on white  
could I help but ask  
in the question of my father  
how our people  
once fathomed  
cutting the ocean  
in godly service  
and devotion  
look  
the silhouette is black



*there is a room in our home*

reserved for conversations  
it is a circular sitting room  
and unimaginatively called  
the circular sitting room

between two windows waits water  
a seascape in the key of kitsch  
the notyet  
breaking of waves  
midimage

and then

the obligatory gull in flight  
nearbeneath  
a heavenly sphere  
are  
such shapes not the stock of  
surrealism  
all I think  
all I wonder

is of the splintering of windows  
rushing against wood and pane  
which one will open first  
from where will the ocean come  
what shape will it take  
when conversing in circular rooms  
suddenmomentarilyhere

the sea doth break



*here is a pair*  
of conch shells  
why is the plural of shell shells  
and not shi  
for the purpose of the poem  
it will be.

here is a pair  
of conch shi  
perhaps conscious of their pairness  
and again  
perhaps not  
perhaps in the years spent behind glass  
they have grown apart  
perhaps they never spoke to begin with

and again  
perhaps not  
perhaps their only memory  
is of being cusped taken glassed

to serve as diptych of captured ocean

and again  
perhaps were they given the room  
they would still recall the tides of their womb  
but I think  
probably  
they speak in shi  
whispering sweat seathings  
only they can signify

swa hit beorna ma  
uncre wordcwidas widdor ne mænden



*we would rust together*  
whilst wearing white  
on our way to the beach  
in a brown buick  
dried roses and washedaway  
footsteps

and  
when we get to the other side  
will your pussy still taste like  
pepsi cola  
or at the end of salty days  
like ginger beer soda

assemblancing water

*with gratitude and  
admiration for Andrea  
the keeper of water  
the whisperer of wave*

*~Luan Staphorst*



# Bodies in Flow

Vulindlela Nyoni



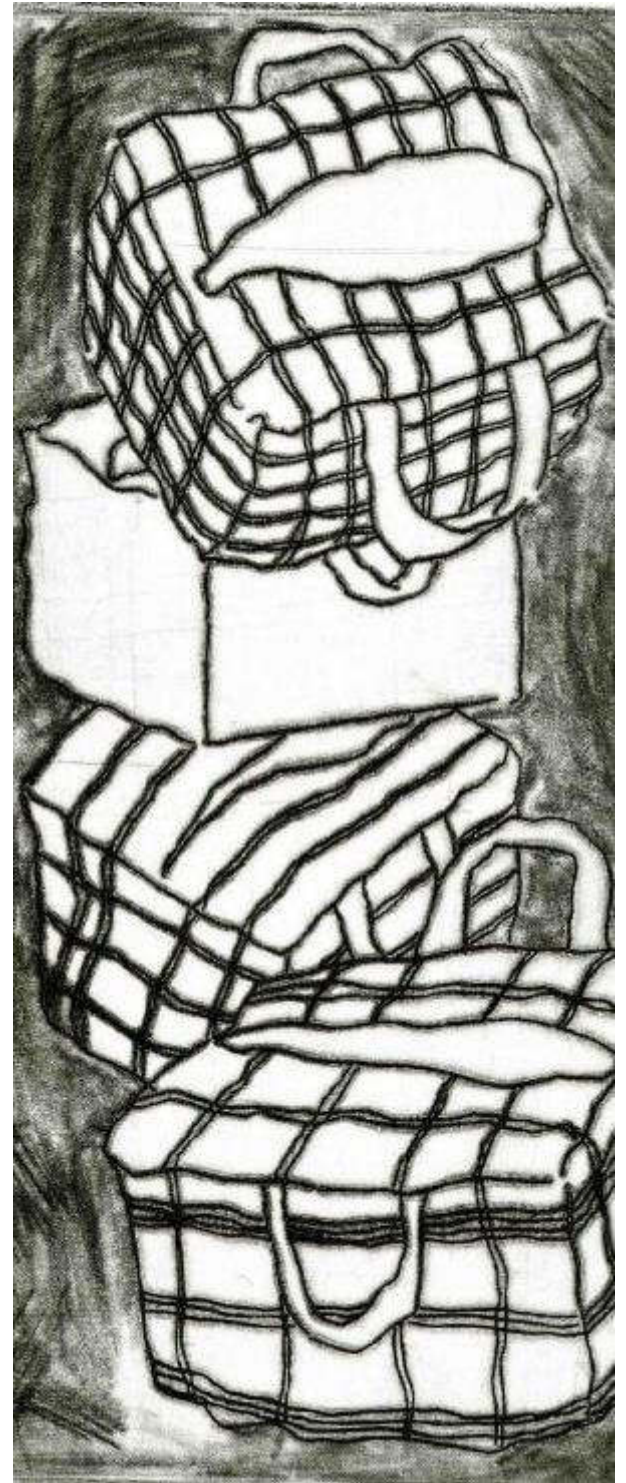
The Tributaries Project Seminar was a collaboration between ISCIA and Prof Vulindlela Nyoni, head of Visual Arts at Nelson Mandela University. While unable to join a pilgrimage, Prof Nyoni gave “Tributaries” its

name, made high quality recordings of the seminars, enabling the catalogue transcriptions, and presented “‘Bodies in Flow’: A brief reflection on cross border movement between South Africa

and Zimbabwe” in The Tributaries Project Seminar (May 10). (Photo: Ihsaan Haffejee, Anadolu Agency, <https://citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/1165647/campaign-against-xenophobia-launched/>).

## *«Bodies in Flow»: A brief reflection on cross border movement between South Africa and Zimbabwe*

In “Bodies in Flow,” water is the metaphor for cross-border flows between migrant and diasporic humans. Prof Nyoni first shows a flow-chart representing the extensive human flows between and beyond African regions. These “inflows,” “outflows,” “return flows” and “regional flows” are part of the way of life, and cultural identity of many African nations, including Zimbabwe. But “bodies in flow” has a dark and terrible aspect too. Nyoni goes on to reflect on the shocking, often tragically violent xenophobia in South Africa, which aims to block the natural ebb and flow of human tides and contradicts a post-colonial ethical stance that abjures (right: detail drypoint print, Vulindlela Nyoni)







exclusion, and national chauvinism. The metaphor of "bodies in flow" takes on a terrifying aspect in the depictions he begins to show of flows reduced to a trickle as, drop by drop, body by body, a desperate way is sought through gaps and fissures in razor wire barriers at arbitrary national borders. Other bodies are forced into rigidly regulated, one-at-a-time flows in concrete official channels at borders, and more explicitly terrifying, bodies and blood rise up in angry floods of violent attack or energetic protest action. It is this protest against xenophobia, that registers, Nyoni shows finally, in the work of three Zimbabwean artists working in South Africa. (left: detail, drypoint print, Vulindlela Nyoni).



*«I found the Tributaries seminar series to be an enriching and edifying experience. The shared voices and attitudes that emerged from reflections on the central concept of 'Water' were engaging both from a scholarly and philosophical perspective. I was struck by the depth of critical knowledge that each of the participants and presenters were willing to share at each session. The sessions also brought a wide range of individuals together who may not have ordinarily found the space or time to think and collaborate in such a way.» (Above «Murmuration,» 2015 Vulindlela Nyoni).*

# The spiritual significance of water

Nomtha Menye



Nomtha Menye, a MA student of Sociology at the Nelson Mandela University, presented “The spiritual significance of water amongst Xhosa’s in the rural Eastern Cape” in the Tributaries Project Seminar (22

Feb). The motivation behind Nomtha’s research is a concern, within the contemporary context of ever increasing water scarcity, to highlight and preserve the value of a more rural, indigenous approach

to water, which respects its spiritual significance, in face of the urban tendency towards the mere commodification of water as a utility (valuable for consumption and washing alone).

## The Spiritual Significance of Water

Nomtha's interest in the spiritual significance of water was inspired by her personal childhood experience of miraculous healing, attributed to ritualistic drinking of the Isinuka waters. In her words: "When I was ill as a child (with mumps) I was taken to that area, because I went to multiple doctors and I couldn't be healed." Isinuka, she explains "is a small town outside Port St Johns, Eastern Cape, named after the Isinuka cave, within which, it is said, there are healing waters. Also, the clay scooped out from under the water is said to treat an array of ailments and diseases. "When I visited the area," she says "the place was filled with people from all kinds of religious groupings, priests, *amagqirha*,

diviners and residents from around the area, who spoke profoundly of the importance of the Isinuka waters in their lives. After two days of using the water and drinking it, I was healed." In response to the question of how she would explain this miracle, Nomtha discussed the possibility of scientifically analysable chemical properties. The cave is divided into parts, and in one of them gas arises, which, she says, "smells like 'Vicks,' and people sniff the gasses for headaches etc." She also suggests that the healing has a lot to do with the power of beliefs and expectations. But importantly, she notes, what she is interested in is not about finding a scientific basis for, or establishing how much of your mind plays into, the healing

power of water. Much more significant, for her, is the fact that "you have a greater appreciation for water when you receive healing from it," and you use it more respectfully and carefully. This proper appreciation for aspects of the natural world (such as water), she argues, is consonant with what is taught through indigenous knowledge systems. These incorporate not only intellectual learning, but also practical and ethical learning derived from the performance of songs, dances, ceremonies, sacred medicines and traditional languages that are carried across the generations. The unity of the living and the non-living and the dynamics of water and drought, for example, are intimately



tied to ancestral belief systems. Rain indicates that ancestors are happy with people's conduct and if you take care of land, you are blessed with water. But if actions cause imbalance in the world, such as drought, "we must find ways of healing the environment, our relations and ourselves." Related rituals are a huge part of a cultural identity that insists on "sustainability and balanced, harmonious living, grounded in a spiritual relationship to the land." This kind of knowledge, she adds, is a crucial component of sustainable living for humans, and "it is our responsibility to know, understand and respect the healing power of performed knowledges." However, this kind of knowing is under threat, firstly due to the devaluation of

indigenous knowledge systems under colonialism and secondly due to urbanisation. As Nomtha admits "In urban areas water is only understood as for consumption and for washing. Having moved there, I didn't have that deeper understanding of the spirituality of water ... I realised that I may have been one of the people who have lost their identities, because I knew nothing about this." Additional threats are imposed due to contemporary conditions of water scarcity and commodification. It is therefore important to understand the implications of water scarcity and commodification for the wellbeing of people for whom water is not just for consumption but is implicated in a sacred way of life. (Photo: Mbokazi Ngayeka)

# The ethics of eating fish

Ian Buchanan



Prof Ian Buchanan (Cultural Studies, University of Wollongong) as a Visiting Professor to Nelson Mandela University, presented “The Ethics of Eating Fish” in the Tributaries Project Seminar (Nov 7).

The presentation was based on his 2019 article “Must We Eat Fish?” In *Symploke* 27 (1-2): 79-90. Insisting that “we cannot have our ocean and eat it too,” Buchanan argues against the claim that, given the

ever increasing human population, land cannot sustainably feed us and the ocean’s biomass (protein derived from seafood) is our only recourse to ensure human survival. (Photo above: Heather Snow)

## *The Ethics of Eating Fish*

On the view Buchanan rejects, human needs are supposedly weighed favourably against the needs of the ocean and its inhabitants, with the conclusion that it is simply not an option for humans to stop eating fish altogether. Further, it cannot be an ethical choice to stop or limit fishing, because this amounts to the loss of important livelihoods for those who catch fish. Most who take this point of view insist that one must, somehow, aim to eat fish sustainably. Buchanan argues, however, that the sustainability stipulation “is noble sounding,” but evidently impracticable in view of the alarming rate of marine species loss. Further, in his words, “science

has long since demonstrated that the ocean does not self-replenish— it can adapt and change to new circumstances, but what is gone is gone, it cannot be recovered or restored.” Thus, on his reckoning, to argue that marine protein resources are essential to feed the growing human population and also to acknowledge “that the ocean’s biomass is imperilled,” is tantamount to arguing that: “To save humanity we must be prepared to destroy the ocean’s inhabitants.” It is exactly this view that Buchanan challenges. He argues that loss of human livelihood can be addressed and alternative modes of employment for fishing communities can be created. This



cannot be balanced against irreversible species loss (extinction). Further and more broadly, while the ocean and its inhabitants would be far better off without humans, “humans do depend on the ocean,” and for something far more important than food. We depend on the ocean for “oxygen (the real lungs of the earth isn’t the Amazon forest, it is the ocean which supplies more than 70% of the air we breathe), ambient temperature and weather systems, particularly rain.” In other words, it requires a false dichotomy to weigh human needs against those of the ocean and its inhabitants. We are in this together, and even from an anthropocentric perspective, the best way to serve

humans is to preserve the ocean. Finally, he argues, there just is no sound evidence that the human population cannot be fed sustainably with careful use of land resources. Buchanan concludes that the time has come to call for a moratorium on all forms of fishing. As he puts it, “like rising CO2 emissions, plastic pollution, and logging old growth forests, it has become one of those environmental concerns that can no longer be ignored. Any proper ethics of eating the ocean must at least take into consideration the possibility that it is time we stopped eating the ocean.”

(Photo right: Heather Snow)





# Pilgrimage Talks, Tours and Activities



Special thanks go to the speakers (listed below) from various organisations, who shared their expert knowledge and passionate interest in water-related topics, from lighthouses to sustainable

fishing, through wastewater, eco-entrepreneurship, the Swartkops Estuary, marine affairs, Algoa Bay, climate change, coastal cleanliness, to shallow waters. These on site talks and tours, shared with pilgrims

at stops along the way on some or all of the three pilgrimages, were immensely interesting and inspiring, making for a rich, diverse and complex menu of experiential, on-site and active learning.



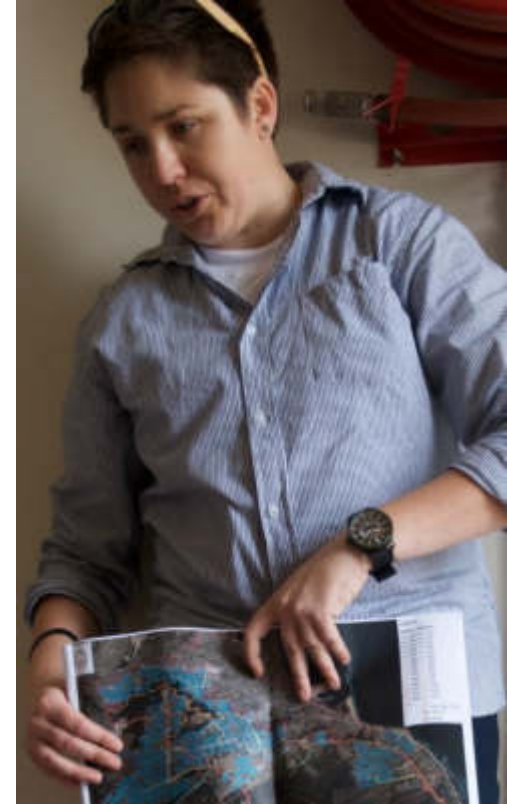
### *Cape Recife lighthouse*

Alan Fogarty shared with us his knowledge of its interesting history and details of its construction and workings, opening the way to understanding more about human/ocean interactions.



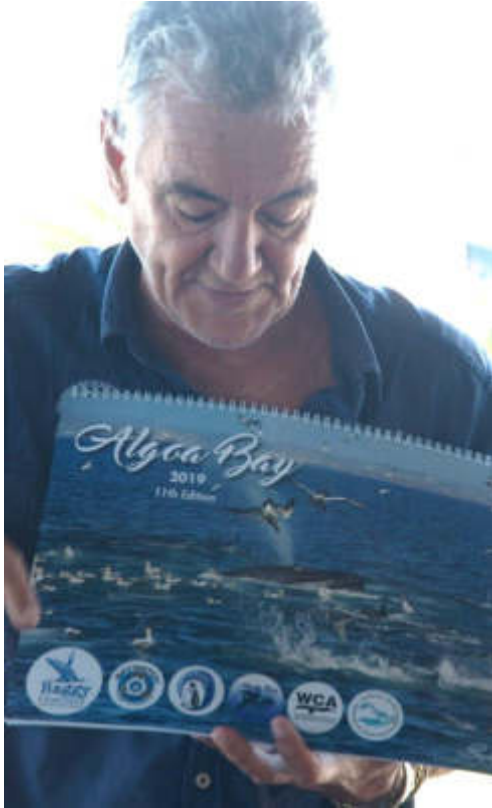
### *Sustainable Fisheries*

Andrew Witte discussed perlemoen poaching, abalone seeding and the complexities of a sustainable fisheries industry, promoting community upliftment, and preserving the ecology of reefs.



### *Driftsands Works*

Margaret Lowies offered, on 3 occasions, a shocking and alarming walkabout through the Works, sharing her extensive knowledge in a detailed explanation of the processes and challenges involved.



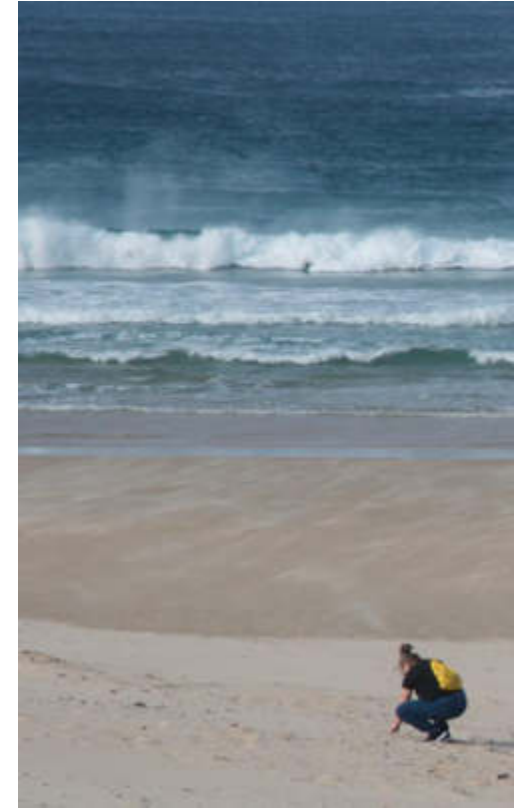
### *PE Harbour*

Lloyd Edwards showed that flexible entrepreneurship can be ecologically responsible. He charters a tourist vessel to fund research and rehabilitation, and offsets the carbon footprint by planting trees.



### *Zwartkops Conservancy*

Jenny Rump & Dale Clayton traced the Zwartkops in images from its pristine source, accumulating toxins from human activity, to the sea. They emphasised water pollution and social difficulties in reducing it.



### *Coastal & Marine*

Bernadette Snow shared a personal journey, showing the many diverse spaces in academia for activities that lie between natural sciences and the humanities, and that these offer diverse kinds of opportunities.



### *Brighton Beach*

Lorien Pichegru (Zoology) shared her passion for the ocean and its many creatures, and her extensive knowledge about our unique region (Algoa Bay) and the complexities of human/ocean interaction.



### *Zwartkops Estuary*

Paul Martin (Zoology, Zwartkops Conservancy) conducted us on an extremely interesting and inspiring on-site tour of the Zwartkops, from the Estuary mouth to the point where salt and fresh water meet.



### *Global Climate Strike*

Gary Koekemoer (WESSA) invited pilgrims to join a demonstration in solidarity with the Global Climate Strike. Port Elizabeth added a few to the millions who supported this worldwide, youth-led climate strike.



### *Solstice / Equinox*

David Pittaway explained that the significance of the dates for the pilgrimages relates to the solstice/equinox, reminding us of bigger patterns of nature that we miss in myopic everyday 'reality.'



### *coastal clean-up*

21 September marked the day of the International Coastal Clean-up, begun 30 years ago. We joined the clean-up efforts from the Beacon towards Flat Rock Beach, hosted by the Sustainable Seas Trust.



### *Shallow waters*

Prof Janine Adams (SARChI Chair in Shallow water systems) shared her extensive, expert knowledge of the complex ecosystem that characterises the Swartkops Estuary in an on site tour and talk.

# outflows



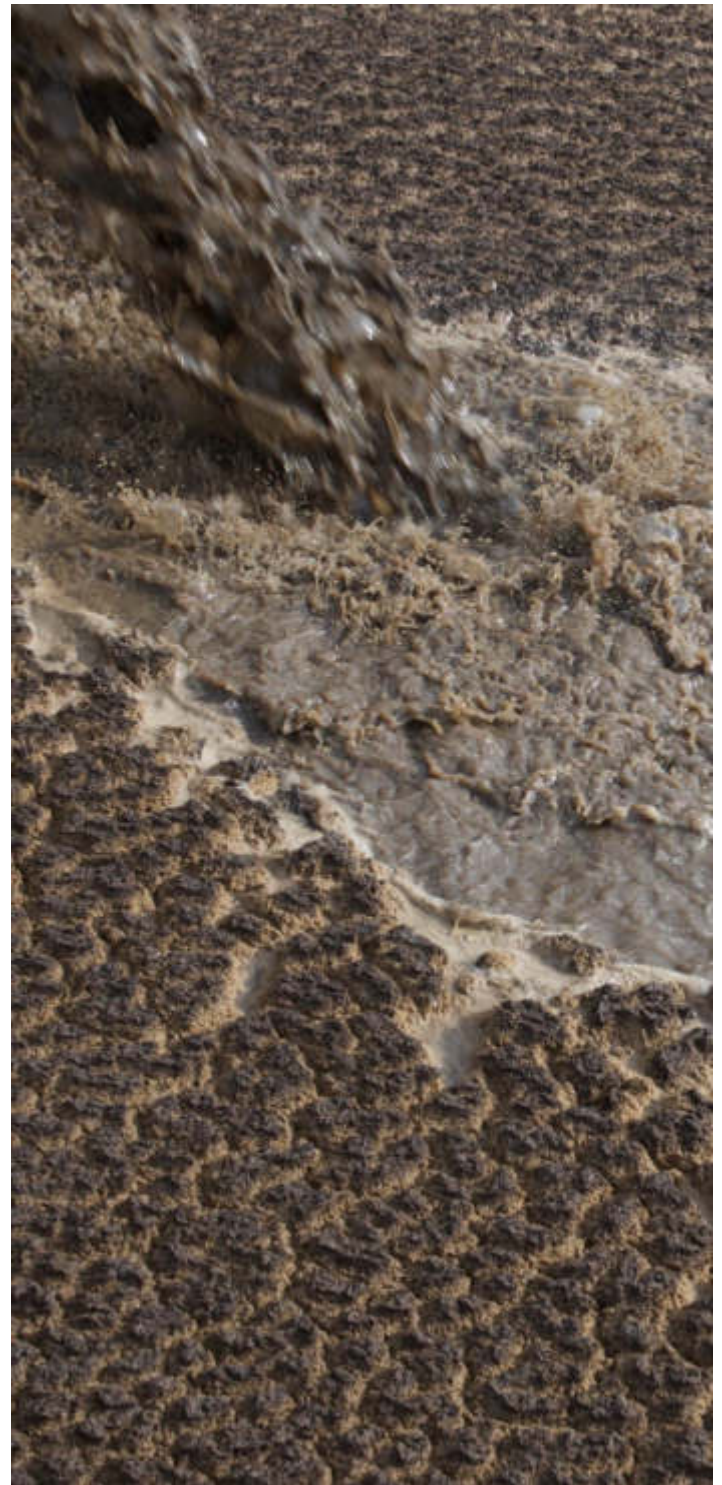
The Tributaries Project formed part of the ISCIA Chair's mandate to engage philosophically and practically with the task of re-imagining local identities in ways that promote social cohesion, in

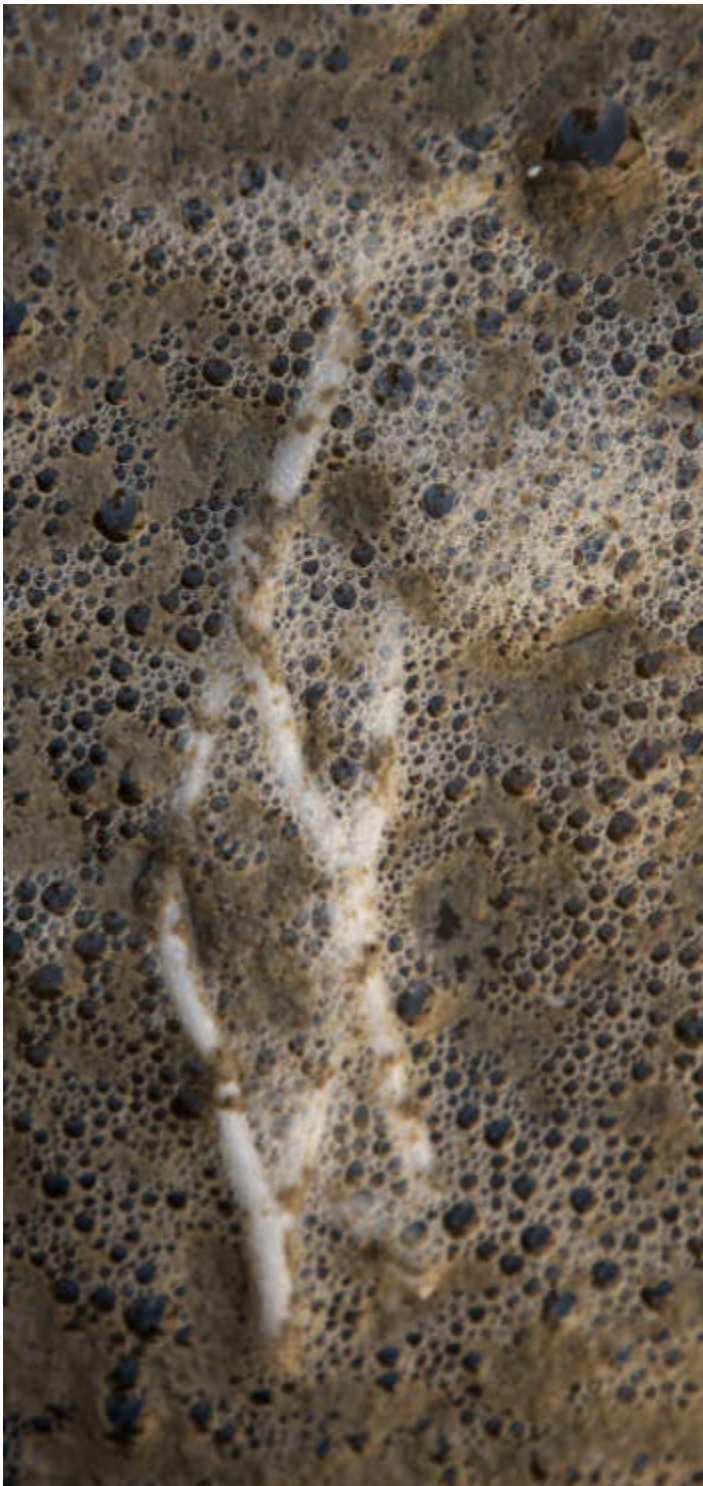
view of a contemporary condition of environmental crisis, which requires us to re-imagine socially cohesive identities in relationship with the environment. Thus, the project's purpose was to foster cohesion

among diverse participants, formed around a shared environmental concern for water, which is sufficiently multiple and urgent to encompass a diversity of interests and passions. It aimed to create

opportunities for experimental and experiential learning out of habitual spaces. The project's impact on its participants and those they influenced is immeasurable. The seminar series brought together 20 diversely inspiring topics, and it testifies to its success that the seminars, held on a Friday afternoon, were attended regularly by a core group and always supplemented by diverse occasional audiences. The most affectively impactful experiences undoubtedly occurred on the three pilgrimages, which involved a large collaborative effort to provide not only alternative experiences on site, but multiple talks, tours and

activities, such as beach clean-ups and a climate strike. No participant was left unmoved, as testified above by the many recorded response clips, as well as the enthusiastic creation and performance of related artworks and further collaborations during the year, and of artworks, academic papers and creative writing for the three end-of-year exhibition events. While the project's outflows were thus many and diverse, special acknowledgement is due to Dr Glenn Holtzman, whose "Water Works" was assembled together with undergraduate student collaborators, and Luke Rudman, who partnered with Greenpeace SA to perform





his “plastic monster” campaign and attracted wide media coverage including SABC TV, Channel24, The Herald, & social media. Luke won the Commonwealth Litter Programme STOMP Award and his work continues to gain momentum. Podcasts recorded by Dr Pittaway and uploaded as part of his “The Perspective Project,” as well as Nehemiah Latolla’s extension of his “Unconsciousness, Anguish, Transcendence” collection contributed to the broader media impact of the project. Special acknowledgement is also due to Dr Belinda Du Plooy who supported academic work on the project through a writing

workshop in January, 2020, and led the way by publishing two academic articles related to her presentation of “Sheroes of the Sea” at the Tributaries seminar and colloquium. She also collaborated with Prof Hurst to write an article on The Tributaries Project, interpreting it as a Higher Education heterotopia, which is forthcoming in the *South African Journal of Higher Education*. They have also co-written an essay on the Sea-to-Source pilgrimages as spaces for aesthetic perception for a book anthology, *Ephemeral Coast: Views from the Edge*, edited by Celina Jeffrey University of Ottawa (Canada).





*„I am deeply grateful to be reminded by the diverse and wonderful people who made this experience so richly inspiring that, in spite of it all, there is also something to be said for the human spirit and for sharing this brief human adventure... and in parting, for everyone who still believes we were the pilgrims, I would like to share Tom Robbins' reminder that: 'Human beings were invented by water as a device for transporting itself from one place to another.'"*

*~ Andrea Hurst*