



Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Liquid passions: bodies, publics and city waters

Journal Item

How to cite:

Watson, Sophie (2019). Liquid passions: bodies, publics and city waters. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 20(7) pp. 960–980.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2017 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor Francis Group

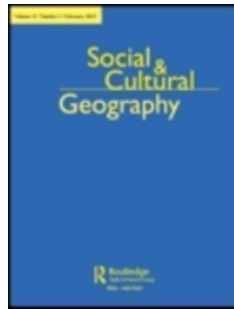
Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/14649365.2017.1404121>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk



Liquid passions: enrolling bodies in city waters

Journal:	<i>Social and Cultural Geography</i>
Manuscript ID	RSCG-2017-0086.R1
Manuscript Type:	Original Paper
Keywords:	Water, Publics, Passions, Politics, Blue space, Vibrant matter
Abstract:	<p>Abstract</p> <p>This article explores water's capacities as a vibrant matter with specific properties that generates passions, attachments and a sense of belonging, and which enrolls bodies in new connections, socialities, alliances and politics in unpredictable ways. Based on research into practices and engagements with water in a large urban public space the paper builds on studies of blue space. It concludes that water has the capacity to enhance a sense of well being in those that swim in it and to mobilise a very particular sense of embodiment which gives this form of public space its distinctiveness constituting new forms of sociality and connections amongst diverse individuals. It seeks to do this by paying attention to the experiences of things themselves and the active participation of nonhuman forces in events and the 'vital materiality' that runs through and across bodies both human and non human. The article also explores water's capacity to be constituted and defined by experts as dangerous and risky matter, and to thus engender political associations and connections amongst diverse groups who seek to oppose such expert interventions.</p>

Liquid passions: bodies, publics and city waters.

Sophie Watson

Department of Sociology
Open University,
Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes,
MK7 6AA

In 'Ulysses' James Joyce's masterpiece published in 1922, the hero's admiration of water knew no bounds. For Leopold Bloom it was *'its universality: its democratic equality and constancy to its nature in seeking its own level the simplicity of its composition, two constituent parts of hydrogen with one constituent part of oxygen: its healing virtues..... its docility in working hydraulic millwheels, turbines, dynamos, electric power stations, bleachworks, tanneries, scutchmills'*. Bloom is by no means a lone voice. Water's centrality and significance to all forms of life has long been recognized and analysed across the biological, environmental, and geographical sciences. Cultural artifacts from literature and poetry to the visual arts are steeped in images, representations and references to water in its ubiquity of forms. Although it has always been a central actor in urban planning, civic engineering and policy arenas, what is more recent is an attention to water in the more socio-cultural and socio-technical accounts of the city (e.g Foley, and Kistemann, 2015; Game and Metcalfe, 2011; Volker and Kistemann, 2013; Whatmore, 2013)

This article explores the practices and engagements with water in a large urban public space- Hampstead Heath in North London. The aim was to unpack water's capacities as a material thing, with specific properties, that generates particular passions, attachments and a sense of belonging, and which enrolls bodies in new connections, socialities, alliances and politics in unpredictable ways. The paper builds on studies of blue space (Volker and Kistemann 2011; Coleman and Kearns 2015; Foley 2015) and Strang's (2004; 2005; 2006; 2009) work, most of which have been conducted in rural areas focusing instead on a large tract of land embedded in a highly urbanized metropolitan area. It sought to do this by paying attention to the experiences of things themselves and the active participation of nonhuman forces in

1
2
3 events and the 'vital materiality' that runs through and across
4 bodies both human and non human.

5
6 There is now a well-established body of work that has provided
7 important insights into the significance of water in the social
8 production of space and contributed to the still fruitful attention to
9 infrastructures as lively actors and protagonists in the city (see
10 Amin, 2014). Gandy's work (2002,2004), for example, has been
11 important in investigating the social and political implications of a
12 shift from the development of modern integrated hydrological
13 networks and infrastructures to the ways in which the provision of
14 water in the contemporary era is fragmented and differentiated.
15 Here he deploys the substance of water to think through the
16 materiality of urban space and the changing relationship between
17 the human body and urban technological networks (Gandy,
18 2004,p.365). Proposing the notion of the bacteriological city, with
19 its focus on pollution and disease control, he suggests that this
20 idea was crucial to the public realm both in physical and
21 political/governmental terms (ibid, 367). Gandy and others have
22 explored different dimensions of large water infrastructures and
23 their connections with new forms of urban governance and a
24 distinctive technological and municipal landscape (Gandy,
25 2002,2004; Swyngedouw, 2004; Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2002;
26 Kaika, 2005). As Gandy (2004, p.373) puts it: 'Water implies a
27 series of connectivities between the body and the city, between
28 social and bio-physical systems, between the evolution of water
29 networks and capital flows, and between the visible and invisible
30 dimensions to urban space. But water is at the same time a brutal
31 delineator of social power which has at various times worked to
32 either foster greater urban cohesion or generate new forms of
33 political conflict'.

34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
60
Though this work has been helpful in providing a wider context for
my thinking, the focus here is different. My concern is water's
capacity to activate passions, to promote attachments and a
sense of belonging, and to summon new alliances, socialities,
connections and contestations in urban public space. In this I am
building on a relatively new direction of research in public space,
which has shifted the analysis of public space as a predominantly
dematerialized realm of sociality, encounter and connection albeit
in often liminal and marginal rather than formalized spaces (e.g.
Watson, 2006; Rhys Taylor, 2013), to the notion of public space
as co-produced within networks of different actors, which may
include humans, non-humans, objects and matter (Carter et al,
2011;Molotch; 2010;Watson 2015). In this article, water as a

1
2
3 substance with very specific attributes, associations, and
4 meanings is the matter of concern.
5
6

7 In the debates on public space, until recently, the importance of
8 water in enrolling multiple publics has been remarkably absent
9 from debates and investigation, with a few exceptions. An
10 important new direction of research has articulated the
11 significance of blue space, as opposed to green space. For
12 Volker and Kistemann (2011, p.449) 'the term 'blue space'
13 summarises all visible surface waters in space as an analogy to
14 green space, not as a sub-category'. The majority of research to
15 date explores ocean and river waters rather than urban blue
16 spaces, for example, Coleman and Kearns (2015) consider how
17 blue space shapes the everyday life of living on an island in a
18 New Zealand context which helps maintain the sense of well
19 being amongst older people, Foley (2015) explores swimming as
20 a healthy body-water engagement in outdoor Irish swimming
21 spots. In an urban setting Völker and Kistemann (2013, 2015)
22 explore the importance of urban blue spaces for health and well
23 being in two German cities. Another focus, particularly in
24 Australia, has been the space of the beach (Fiske, Hodge, and
25 Turner Fiske, 1987; Game, 1990; Booth, 2001; Obrador-Pons
26 2007), where the beach has been seen as a signifier of a national
27 identity that rejects separations of class, as inherited from Britain,
28 and gender but strikingly not race (Poynting, 2006). In this respect
29 Lobo (2014) in a study of a beach in Darwin suggests that
30 whiteness constitutes a force that exerts affective and wounding
31 pressures on non-white bodies in hypervisible public spaces
32 constituting racially differentiated everyday experiences.
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 Another arena of public space that has commanded attention is
43 the waterfront. In her book on Amsterdam waterscapes, for
44 example, Kinder (2015) explores the conversion of water into a
45 performance space for the mobilization of different identities-
46 hippies living in house boats, queer parties on the canal, and
47 more recently the emergence of cultural events on the canals,
48 such as the Gay Pride Parade, Queen's Day pleasure boating
49 and the Canal Festival. The materiality of water artifacts in the
50 shape of the public toilet represents the frame through which
51 Molotch and Noren (2010) explore the politics of sharing in public
52 space.
53
54
55

56 This research builds more directly on Strang's (2004, 2005a,
57 2005b, 2005c, 2009) extensive and illuminating research from an
58
59
60

1
2
3 anthropological and political ecology perspective, which posits
4 water as 'a vital "natural symbol" of sociality and of human-
5 environmental interdependence' (Strang, 2006, p.155), something
6 which she attributes to water's specific qualities of fluidity and
7 transmutability which mobilise discourses and metaphors about
8 flows and interconnections. Like others, Strang points to the
9 composition of human beings as approximately 60 - 75% water
10 which promotes a particular affinity with this element. Central to
11 her research has been an exploration of different cultural groups'
12 engagements with water in a diversity of contexts- the Stour river
13 in Dorset (2004), the Brisbane and Mitchell rivers in Queensland
14 (2009), and the ways in which these interactions mediate and
15 constitute wider individual and collective identities within a
16 complexity of social, cultural, economic, material, political and
17 institutional relationships. Comparing different water sites, Strang
18 (2004) draws attention to cross cultural differences in cultural,
19 spiritual, political and environmental meanings of, and
20 attachments to, water while also suggesting there are
21 universalities across time and space in the diverse
22 interconnections between living organisms who are themselves
23 composed largely of water- and water in its myriad of forms. The
24 major part of Strang's fascinating research into the identities and
25 socialities constituted in human interactions with water, have
26 taken place in rural areas. Where her focus has shifted to the
27 urban, she has explored water features in Brisbane as a material
28 culture supporting practices directed towards establishing or
29 maintaining community identities and celebrating social cohesion
30 (2012,p.99). Strang's (2004, 2005a,2005b, 2005c, 2009) research
31 draws attention to water as a site of belonging and attachment.
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41

42 Interviews at my research sites support this contention. So also,
43 water mobilized discourses of spirituality and healing, which
44 confirm Anderson's (2103) argument based on Australia based
45 research that the surfed wave is not simply a site of human-
46 nature relations, but is also a space of spirituality which evokes
47 transcendent experiences. Perhaps, the use of water in religious
48 ceremonies and practices- baptism in Christianity, the washing of
49 feet and hands in Islam, immersion in the Ganges in Hinduism-
50 and creation myths deploying images of water (Seamon and
51 Mugerauer 1985, p.265), play a part in constituting everyday
52 water spaces as religiously inflected matter with special powers.
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Much of the work discussed so far argues for the affective powers
4 of water, connecting with a now fairly well established set of
5 literatures on emotional geographies (Anderson and Smith,
6 2001). Some of this work engages also with insights from non
7 representational theory (Thrift, 2007) with its attention to the
8 experiences of things themselves and the active participation of
9 nonhuman forces in events and the 'vital materiality' that runs
10 through and across bodies both human and non human (Bennett,
11 2010). This approach draws attention to particular occurrences
12 and agency as emerging from, and distributed across, human and
13 non-human forces. The entanglements of bodies with water make
14 this approach all the more salient, since its very fluidity, vibrancy
15 and transparency makes possible total immersion and oneness of
16 the bodies that enter it. Anderson and Peters (2014 p. 4-5)
17 similarly seek to demonstrate how the sea is 'alive with embodied
18 human experiences' and a space which 'in and of itself that has
19 material character shape and form... and is in a constant state of
20 becoming'. In this vein Foley (2015), following Andrews et al
21 (2014) and their argument that non- representational theory can
22 uncover, 'how the well comes into being', explores the experience
23 of swimming as a well being component of everyday life, where
24 sea and the sky (blue spaces) are deeply implicated in the
25 production of feelings of well being. Drawing on a Bachelard's
26 phenomenological notion of 'lived space' Game and Metcalf
27 (2011) make a related argument in suggesting that it provides a
28 relational alternative to Euclidean understandings of space as
29 empty and inert, by foregrounding space that is both inside and
30 outside, where emotions emerge not from the subject but from
31 living space.

32
33
34 This paper seeks to extend these studies in a more urban context
35 through an exploration of the practices and engagements with
36 water in a large urban public space- Hampstead Heath in North
37 London. In so doing it takes up the theme of affect and aims to
38 investigate the capacity of water as a material thing with specific
39 properties to generate passions, attachment and belonging. Its
40 more novel departure is to connect these arguments with the
41 capacity of water to enroll bodies in new connections, socialities,
42 alliances and politics in unpredictable ways. One way in which
43 these new publics are mobilized politically through water, in
44 Hampstead Heath as we shall see, was through struggles around
45 the notion of risk- that is, of water as a potentially dangerous
46 thing. It concludes by suggesting that water constitutes a key, but
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 often overlooked, actor in public space in cities, and supports the
4 growing body of literatures that consider the role of matter in
5 animating and co-producing public space and a multiplicity of
6 publics.
7
8

9 10 Methods

11
12 This research was based on a range of qualitative research
13 methods (Atkinson and Delamont, 2010) committed to Back's
14 (2015, p.821) notion of 'cultivating a sociological sensibility
15 (which) allows us to remark on what is otherwise passed over as
16 unremarkable'. The research was carried out from June 2015 to
17 September 2016. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with
18 the local officers, engineers, local residents and swimmers.
19 Interviews were recorded and transcribed. The participants were
20 selected to represent key participants in the dam project on the
21 one hand, and active swimmers on the other. After initial contact
22 with the Information Officer for Hampstead Heath, and the Chairs
23 of the Parliament Hill Lido and Women's Pond User groups, I
24 followed up their suggestions as to who would be most beneficial
25 to contact for subsequent interviews. No one that was contacted
26 refused to meet with me. Themes for the swimmers covered-
27 respondents swimming histories and social practices, the
28 significance they attached to swimming on a regular basis, their
29 involvement in social and political activities at the Lido or ponds.
30 The interviewees associated with the dam project were centrally
31 focused on the construction of the dam, its rationale, and the
32 politics generated. I also attended several consultation meetings,
33 and accompanied the information walks conducted by the
34 Corporation with BAM representatives for interested publics
35 recording notes and conversations throughout the two-hour walks.
36 As a local dog walker and swimmer, I took field notes,
37 photographs and noted conversations of passers-by on a regular
38 basis during the research period. Archival information, including
39 planning documents, council meeting minutes and local
40 newspapers, was also drawn upon. Consent was obtained for the
41 interviews and their use in my research. Names were
42 anonymised.
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53
54 In the next section I introduce Hampstead Heath. This is followed
55 by a discussion of key moments in the recent history when water
56 on the Heath, in its different forms, has mobilized dissension and
57 contestation amongst diverse publics involved with the site. The
58
59
60

1
2
3 point here is that water has the capacity to enroll multiple publics
4 in its defense, and that it is at moments of conflict that the depth
5 of passions for watery spaces and sites is revealed. The paper
6 then turns its attentions to water as a site of passionate
7 attachment, and water in its capacity to enrol bodies in a
8 multiplicity of connections, socialities, alliances and politics.
9
10

11 12 13 Hampstead Heath and its water. 14 15

16
17 Hampstead Heath is a large open space in North London (320
18 hectares /790 acres) bordering Hampstead on its Western edge,
19 Highgate on the Northwest, Dartmouth Park on the East and
20 Gospel Oak on its South side. This is an area of London where
21 houses typically cost well over £1 million, and the majority of
22 residents have high levels of education and income, including
23 concentrations of the new global wealth elites (Webber and
24 Burrows, 2015) and are white. Hampstead Heath has been a
25 popular public space since for Londoners, particularly since the
26 early nineteenth century when Hampstead Heath station was
27 opened (Jackson not dated). In 1871 the Metropolitan Board of
28 Works purchased the original 220 acres of heath from a wealthy
29 landowner and the Hampstead Heath Act 1871 was passed which
30 established the Heath as a natural space in London for the
31 'benefit of all users and for the prevention of development or
32 encroachment upon it' and which included a clause that: "the
33 Board shall at all times preserve, as far as may be, the natural
34 aspect and state of the Heath."
35
36

37
38 In 1889 the recently formed London County Council took over the
39 management of the Heath, leading to fears that it would be turned
40 from its largely uncultivated meadow-like form into a municipal
41 park, and the subsequent formation of the Hampstead Heath
42 Protection Society in 1897 to preserve the 'natural and wild' state
43 of the heath for public to enjoy. Over the following decades
44 additional land was added from a number of benefactors. In 1972
45 the London County Council was replaced by the Greater London
46 Council (GLC), resulting in a renewed concern that the heathland
47 would be tamed and a reinvigoration of the former Hampstead
48 Protection Society, shortly to be renamed as Heath and
49 Hampstead Society (still in existence). With the abolition of the
50 GLC in the 1986 Hampstead Heath was transferred to the London
51 Residuary Body and, in 1989, to the Corporation of London (CoL)
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 in whose hands it remains. The CoL were the key statutory
4 players during the period of this research.
5
6

7 Water is crucial to the identity and embodied experience of this
8 public space. There is a chain of fresh water ponds, fed on the
9 Eastern side, by the river Fleet, three of which have been used by
10 swimmers since the 1880s. The two ponds that feature in this
11 study are the women's pond and men's pond exclusively
12 accessible to one gender, which are hidden behind trees and
13 surrounded by grassy banks, and which include wooden changing
14 rooms and showers. There are many other ponds, some
15 inaccessible, others designated for dog swimming, model boats,
16 or used by anglers- there are some 342 fishing permit holders on
17 Hampstead Heath. At the southern end of the Heath is the
18 Parliament Hill Lido (61 × 27 meters) which was opened in 1938
19 as part of the London County Council's imitative from 1920-39 to
20 build thirteen lidos across London, to provide healthy recreation
21 opportunity for Londoners. The Lido has separate changing
22 rooms for men and women, with an open shower area where
23 most of the sociality is enacted. Like the ponds the London
24 Residuary Body took over the Lido 1986, followed by the
25 Corporation of London in 1989. The Lido was Grade II Listed in
26 January 1999. An average of 50,000 visitors swim in the Lido
27 each year. In 2005 the Lido was refurbished with a stainless steel
28 bottom, which sparkles in the sunlight. Like most London Lidos it
29 is unheated.
30
31
32
33
34
35
36

37 *Photo 1 Parliament Hill Lido*
38

39 Water Politics

40 In recent years several interventions by the Corporation of
41 London (CoL) into Hampstead Heath have revealed the capacity
42 of water in public space to mobilise passions and to enroll bodies
43 in new connections and politics. These have had significant
44 consequences for the unfolding of water-human interconnections
45 in Hampstead Heath. In both major struggles between locals and
46 the CoL discourses of risk have been key (following Beck's (1992)
47 notion of a shift to a risk society) as risk analysis came to
48 dominate decision-making. In brief, in 2004 the Corporation of
49 London attempted to restrict winter swimming in the ponds in
50 2004. This was articulated as necessary to limit the risks
51 associated with cold-water swimming. Expert reports were
52 mobilized by the COL or justify their argument that cold-water
53 swimming was hazardous to swimmers, particularly novices, who
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 were liable to suffer heart attacks when entering cold water.
4 Opposition from the winter swimmers was fierce, with swimmers
5 arguing that it was their choice if they wanted to risk their lives in
6 the ponds, and that the probability in any case was negligible.
7
8

9
10 CoL's intervention to construct a dam at one of the ponds was
11 similarly articulated around the notion of risk. The key legislation
12 affecting the ponds and reservoirs on Hampstead Heath are the
13 Reservoirs Act 1975 and the Floods and Water Management Act
14 2010. Under the Reservoir Act the designation of a body of water
15 over 25,000 cubic meters defines it as a reservoir. This initially
16 only applied to three of the ponds on the Heath. However the
17 Floods and Water Management Act 2010, and not yet enforced,
18 reduced the definition of statutory reservoirs to 10,000 cubic
19 meters, and those in a chain with a combined volume greater than
20 10,000 cubic meters, effectively therefore affecting all the ponds
21 on the Heath. A report was commissioned by the City of London
22 from hydrologists, Haycock Associates, in 2011 to determine the
23 ponds' compliance with the two Acts, which concluded that during
24 'extreme rainfall events,' the dams retaining the ponds on
25 Hampstead Heath could not be relied upon to store the additional
26 volume of water, with the effect that the excess would 'over top'
27 possibly leading to a breach (COL, 2013). If this water combined
28 with the floodwater, there would be potential risk to life and
29 property downstream. The large number of visitors to the Heath, it
30 was argued, exacerbates this risk in summer, with the ground's
31 consequent compaction and inability to absorb water. The report's
32 conclusion was that the Probable Maximum Flood (PMF) - as it
33 was called- under the conditions produced by a very large storm
34 could thus lead to a catastrophe causing loss of life and damage
35 to property downstream. The probability of such an event was
36 recorded as 1 in 400,000, and though like many engineering
37 models operating with uncertainties which 'represent an abstract
38 and idealized version of the mathematical properties of a target'
39 (Murphy et al, 2011).
40
41

42 The precision of the figure denoting possible risk (if essentially
43 impossible to define accurately) became the red rag to a bull for
44 those in opposition who emphasised the absurdity of the need for
45 intervention (Mike, Superintendent of Hampstead Heath,
46 interview). In another study where the idea of flood risk played
47 Whatmore (2013, p.39) refers to those 'moments of ontological
48 disturbance in which the things on which we rely as unexamined
49 parts of the material fabric of our everyday lives become molten.
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Such situations, matters or forces render expert knowledge
4 claims, and the technologies through which these become
5 hardwired into the working practices of commerce and
6 government, the subject of intense political interrogation'. These
7 ponds for many years which had represented the 'material fabric'
8 of the heath, where people swam, fished, sat in contemplation,
9 were suddenly rendered a space of danger to be addressed. In
10 this sense the notion of risk represented the rationale for the
11 intervention and the political opposition that ensued. Once the
12 figure entered the public sphere it became a key signifier and
13 actor – a non human force- in the events that followed assembling
14 voices of dissent resting like many other similar analyses on
15 predictions which lay themselves open to contestation as
16 effectively impossible to prove prior to the catastrophic event's
17 occurrence. As Ritvo (2009,p.177) argued in her history of
18 Thirlmere reservoir in Cumbria: *All modern environmental*
19 *arguments rest on predictions- usually (although not always)*
20 *about benefit to some people or about harm to landscape, flora,*
21 *fauna, and other people. Like all predictions, they are, by*
22 *definition, unprovable - at least at the time.*
23
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 A subsequent detailed study was commissioned from another
31 engineering company- Atkins, using computer-modeled results to
32 assess the largest probably maximum flood (the PMF) that the
33 dams could face and their ability to withstand it (CoL, 2013).
34 Though this report estimated flood peaks at 30% to 50% lower
35 than Haycock it similarly concluded that there were potential risks
36 to life and property downstream and that reparations were
37 needed to ensure the PMF safety level. Atkins then considered
38 the different feasible engineering options on each pond chain
39 alongside the environmental mitigation and compensation. Two
40 further reports are of relevance to the story. AECOM engineering
41 was hired by Camden to peer review the Atkins report that
42 similarly endorsed the need for the works. An independent
43 Strategic Landscape Architect was appointed to act as a liaison
44 between the Ponds Project Stakeholder Group and the Design
45 Team and to act as a champion for the landscape and to
46 challenge, if necessary, the design.
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 On 28th November 2014 the case was adjudicated at the High
54 Court where the judgment ruled in favour of the works, and the
55 Hampstead and Highgate Society were refused permission to
56 Appeal. The final episode in the story took place in 15
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 January 2015 at Camden Town Hall when Camden Planning
4 Committee made its decision to go ahead with the project, based
5 on the AECOM report, in the face of almost unanimous opposition
6 from the multiple publics present in the committee room. As one
7 local campaigner wrote: *“now the public has been asked by
8 Camden whether they are prepared to sacrifice this treasured
9 historic landscape to these extreme measures for the sake of a
10 risk that may never happen; their answer has been a resounding
11 “no”. But they are ignored, dealing a lethal blow not just to the
12 Heath landscape but to democracy itself (Marcus, 2015).*
13
14
15
16

17 Thus, at the heart of the rationale for the intervention lay
18 discourses of risk. From the Corporation of London’s point of view
19 they were responsible for the reservoirs and, as a ‘risk averse
20 organisation’ (Jane, Information Officer, C of L, Interview), were
21 required to act. What is interesting here, as in other public
22 spaces, is that the articulation of a risk identifying a danger which
23 may have been present for many years and invisible, makes
24 action seemingly inevitable, since however unlikely its possible
25 occurrence, responsibility for failure to act would be clearly
26 attributable. Even though the risk was low, the consequences
27 were considered to be immense. According to Mike, the
28 superintendent: *‘Many of the properties downstream have
29 basements. If the dam collapsed and if there were a cascade
30 effect- it would be catastrophic – the predicted loss of life is 1000
31 people. It might happen once in 400,000 years – but if it did
32 happen it would be terrible.’* Like many of the protagonists in
33 favour of the intervention, the superintendent exemplified Vogel’s
34 (2012) precautionary principle which *“in essence enables,
35 encourages, or requires policy makers to “err on the side of
36 caution” by adopting relatively stringent regulations- even if the
37 available scientific evidence of the risks posed by a particular
38 business practice or product to public health, safety or
39 environmental quality are unclear, inconclusive, ambiguous or
40 uncertain... it enables policy makers to impose regulations on the
41 basis of a potential or reasonable likelihood of harm, especially
42 when there is a possibility that the harms stemming from a failure
43 to regulate may prove serious or irreversible’.*
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52

53 A rather different intervention by the C of L further mobilized the
54 swimming publics, connections and alliances on the Heath. In
55 June 2015 the City of London Corporation initiated talks with the
56 sports and leisure company Fusion Lifestyle to consider their
57
58
59
60

possible management of the space. Fusion's reputation was poor following their management of another Lido in an adjoining borough (Park Road in Haringey), which, according to a local swimmer had been shambolic (Banks, 2015). The concern expressed by the swimmers was that the pool would be closed during the winter months when fewer users render the pool less profitable. In the context of a drive to find new ways to raise income as the Corporation faces a 10% cut to its Open Spaces budget, this was considered as one option. At the time of writing no decision had been made.

In each of these interventions, the vibrant matter of water runs through, shapes and flows across human and non human bodies, where the agency that emerges, as Bennett (2010) suggests is the effect of unplanned and random configurations of human and nonhuman forces.

Mobilising Passions

The extent to which water mobilized passions, attachment and a sense of belonging formed a key theme explored in the interviews, following Strang's research which highlighted this aspect of water's capacities. Gillian, chair of the Parliament Hill Lido Users Group (PHLUG) eloquently explained:

When I'm not here, when I'm travelling with work, I miss it. You can't recreate it, ... I think a lot of us or many of us found the lido at a time when we needed to find it. I certainly did and I know a lot of people who have come when relationships have broken up, when work has been bad.. ... And I always talk about the healing waters of the lido because I think they are in a way and I know ... it sounds so hippy but it has absorbed so much negative energy from me over the years, I always leave there feeling a million dollars. I might go in feeling like shit, I might have had a terrible time, I might be hung-over but it will always make me feel better. So for that reason it is personal so when somebody says we want to do something to the lido or there's anything that they might want to change.., then I react because I want to save it, because ...I know that it saved me and I know that it has saved a lot of other people as well. I think anybody that you speak to I think you would get the same opinion, that it has a kind of almost mythical quality that just makes you feel better and has improved my quality of life enormously.

1
2
3 Gillian's description of how the water makes her feel better the
4 intensity of this description vividly reveals strong connections
5 between water and wellbeing, a theme that has been explored in
6 different non urban contexts also (Andrews, Chen and Myers,
7 2014; Coleman, and Kearns, 2015). This quote also reinforces
8 Strang's (2005c,p.21) argument that water is always encoded
9 with powerful themes of meaning, and associated with the notion
10 of being a healing substance with particular energies, and often
11 also gendered (ibid,p.32). If an argument in the defense of public
12 space from privatization is that it offers a space of respite from the
13 stresses and strains of late capitalist urban life, then water's
14 capacity to provide solace, a sense of well being, and spiritual
15 connection needs recognition.
16
17
18
19

20
21 Gillian and Barbara- the Chair of the Kenwood Ladies Association
22 - also give a sense of how water creates a space for some kind of
23 memory to form, either of a fantasy or a real moment, which
24 remains with the person as they travel on through their daily lives,
25 giving them a feeling of calm and relaxation which survives the
26 embodied and physical experience of immersion in the water. As
27 Barbara put it:
28
29
30

31 *Swimming I just kept a diary every day of what was happening*
32 *and it was just brilliant. And it's all that thing about how you relate*
33 *to water, what sort of ... I mean I remember one day coming back*
34 *and thinking about being a mermaid. What is it that, the*
35 *relationship between you as a human and the water and this myth*
36 *of a mermaid. '*
37
38
39

40 These comments confirm the idea of water as a space of
41 immersion where water enacts new forms of being human, and
42 where the figure of the mermaid stands in for water/human
43 hybridity. Such sentiments were echoed in many of the interviews
44 with pond and lido swimmers:
45
46

47 *'That moment when a kingfisher flies over my head stays with me*
48 *later on the sweaty Northern line. I hesitate to say it's spiritual but*
49 *there is something magical and peaceful about being here'*
50 (Woman, 40s).
51
52

53
54 Through the interviews and observations what emerged was the
55 power of water as a space of redemption (being born again) and
56 immersion away from the messiness and tensions of the
57 everyday, and as a space of connection with the sublime and with
58
59
60

1
2
3 tranquility. This also has something to do with the specificity of
4 embodiment in water, where water and skin collide and connect,
5 with few barriers or protection in the form of clothes to disrupt the
6 assemblage. This was particularly evident at the women's pond,
7 where many women lie on the grass banks with no covering
8 across the top half of their bodies, and where respondents
9 described how freeing they found the green space at the water
10 side, and the fresh water of the pond fed by a river, where
11 chemicals are absent, made them feel more connected to 'nature'
12 than when swimming in man made pools.
13

14
15
16 Unlike Foley's outdoor swimmers, who found it difficult to
17 verbalise their swimming experience (2014, p. 224), the all-year
18 swimmers, particularly those who go in the early morning, were
19 particularly vociferous in articulating their passion for the ponds
20 and the Lido. But this passion is also prevalent amongst people
21 who confine their swimming to summer months, who represent a
22 multiplicity of publics particularly at the ponds, where women and
23 men of all ages, ethnicities and sexualities congregate on the
24 banks of the men's and women's ponds on hot days. While
25 observing and listening to conversations, I heard countless
26 expressions of delight and excitement. At the women's pond (and
27 no doubt at the men's pond too where I was unable to enter) the
28 water itself as a fluid and inclusive substance allows women to
29 swim together around the pond chatting as they go, to relax
30 holding on to one of the life saving rings, to laugh as women
31 stand on the edge hesitating before throwing themselves into the
32 cold water, teasing each other for their hesitation. This is more
33 than a public space of mutual co-existence, rather, water
34 constitutes the bodies within it as intermingled and connected.
35 Women from minority communities, such as Hasidic and Muslim,
36 where the display of bodies in front of men apart from their
37 husbands is forbidden, swim in the pond which represents a rare
38 opportunity to swim in an open air space, constitute a regular
39 group at the women's pond.
40

41
42 Finally, the opposition to the introduction of mentioned earlier led
43 to a compromise between the swimmers and the Corporation of
44 London in the material form of the introduction of a fee paying
45 machine which resembles a parking meter, where women can
46 voluntarily pay for their swim. With the exception of those who are
47 new to the pond, and tourists in particular, swimmers described
48 taking pleasure in their daily act of resistance as they walk past
49 the meter ignoring its silent exhortation to pay. Free access to the
50 ponds is part of the charm that enchants those that swim there,
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 articulated through a discourse of water should be free to
4 everyone and not a commodity for profit.
5
6

7 Passion for the water sites on the Heath is not restricted to the
8 swimmers. Anglers, walkers, people in wheel chairs, and non-
9 humans (dogs are particularly expressive in their love of water,
10 and a specific pond is designated for their use) also spoke
11 enthusiastically of their attachment to the Heath ponds, and were
12 fierce in their defense of these spaces from the inception of the
13 dam project, as we see shortly. Anglers, all male and
14 predominantly, white working class, emphasized the peace and
15 serenity of the ponds, their sense of wildness, particularly at night,
16 which had enticed them time and time again over the years (one
17 man interviewed had been fishing there for 40 years).
18
19
20
21

22 *Enrolling bodies: connections and socialities* 23

24
25 I turn now to water's capacity not simply to attach humans to itself
26 and to place, but also to its capacity to enroll people in new social
27 connections. The Lido attracts a diversity of people, in class, age
28 and ethnic terms, during the summer months when families come
29 with children to spend all day at the side of the pool, mimicking a
30 beach culture in the city. Interviews and participant observation at
31 the Lido revealed strong social networks, particularly (but by no
32 means exclusively) amongst the early morning swimmers and
33 those who swam throughout the year between 7 and 9 am. The
34 early morning queue is characterized by gossip, banter and
35 laughter, which continue at the side of the pool and the showers
36 afterwards. Women shout from cubicle to cubicle, sharing news
37 and information, teasing and joking with one another.
38
39
40
41

42 Deborah: *And we're always laughing. Actually there was one*
43 *time, we didn't mean to do it but we ended up doing a little*
44 *experiment because Sue turned up without her swimsuit one day*
45 *and she said: 'Oh crap'.*
46
47

48 *And I said, 'Just borrow one'*
49

50
51 *And she said, 'Oh I'm not putting on someone else's swimsuit and*
52 *she got very upset and I said, 'Well what are you going to do?'*
53 *And she said, 'I'm going to do an experiment. I'm not going to*
54 *have a swim, I'm just going to have a shower and then hang out*
55 *with you guys and get changed and I'm going to see what the*
56 *effect is.'*
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 *And actually she said that the effect was the same, with or without*
4 *the swim. It was just the social collective thing, having a laugh.*
5
6

7 The fact that these women swam together every day, sharing the
8 water, where they swam along chatting with one another, or
9 shouted from the sides, and took showers together afterwards
10 naked in an open space which houses six showers including one
11 for women with disabilities, even carried over to a moment when
12 Sue wasn't swimming. Male respondents, reported similar levels
13 of jocularly.
14
15

16
17 Richard, who swims at the Lido in the winter and the men's pond
18 in the summer, put it this way:
19

20
21 *At the lido there's a lot of banter which goes on and a complete*
22 *disrespect for age, character, etc., whereas at the pondsit's*
23 *much quieter, even though it's a bigger space and in some ways*
24 *it's the enclosure where we get changed is more open, it's much*
25 *quieter and you talk within your groups, it's not often that you'll*
26 *call across to somebody else who is 10 metres away from you on*
27 *the other side of the enclosure. So if there's 2 or 3 of you*
28 *together then you might be talking but unlike at the lido you would*
29 *call across to different cubicles and whatever and answer this*
30 *voice that's called out and shouted something at you.*
31
32
33
34

35 When someone is ill or in trouble, news travels fast and support is
36 provided. As Mary, a woman in her 50s explained:
37
38

39 *And I think it's also because when you swim at the lido,*
40 *particularly in the winter, you look out for one another. There's*
41 *that kind of ... It's an unspoken rule but you're ... You are on the*
42 *lookout for checking that people are OK. So when old Sarah,*
43 *Doctor Sarah we're talking about, when she used to swim or*
44 *when Isabel, you know who arrives in the wheelchair, when*
45 *they're swimming you just keep a weather eye on them just to*
46 *make sure that they're OK and you know that there are people*
47 *there that, if any of us got into trouble, there would be someone*
48 *there to look after you.*
49
50
51
52

53 Such are the social connections amongst the morning swimmers,
54 who span differences in age and class, that Peter, a 64 year old
55 local (others come from as far as Croydon to swim each morning),
56 organized what he jokingly referred to as a 'works outing' during
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 the summer, restricted to the year round swimmers. 20 or so men
4 and women set off from Waterloo by train to Lymington and the
5 Isle of Wight to swim in the lido and beaches there, and share a
6 couple of meals in local pubs. Talk of the event filled the air during
7 the summer months.
8
9

10
11 The sociality at the ponds is legendary and takes different forms
12 at different times of day and during different seasons. At the
13 men's pond there are men who have swum there all of the lives,
14 many of whom are local actors, lawyers and members of a dying
15 community of Bohemian residents, gradually being displaced as
16 property prices escalate through overseas and city investment
17 (Webber and Burrows, 2015). At certain times of the day, and
18 particularly during the summer, the men's pond is a popular
19 meeting place for gay men from across London. According to one
20 swimmer at the pond: *It changes as the day goes on, so when I*
21 *go there now it will be predominantly gay but certainly in the*
22 *morning there's one or two but they're there for the swim, they're*
23 *not there to display themselves or flirt or court or whatever,*
24 *they're there because that's what they do.*
25
26
27
28
29

30 *Photo 2 The Women's pond.*
31

32
33 Social interaction at the women's pond is palpable and has a long
34 history (Griswold, 1998). On hot days women come from across
35 London to sit on the banks with friends chatting, sharing picnics
36 and reading, and to swim through the secluded waters shared
37 with ducks and moorhens. The particular presence of the water in
38 this gendered space constitutes the surrounding grassy banks as
39 a place where women can live their naked bodies (no tops are
40 required) and display mutual affection openly without being
41 subject to the male gaze. When the pond was under threat from
42 the dam project, women came together to knit a scarf long
43 enough to encircle the pond, which subsequently was transported
44 to span the meridian at Greenwich- reflecting an interest by some
45 of the swimmers in alternative – and often feminized- spirituality.
46 Others are involved in the women's pond choir, which on
47 September 10th 2016 participated at a Water Aid event on the
48 South bank of the Thames. On New Year's Day swimmers flock
49 to the pond for a celebratory swim and lunch. And as in many
50 public and institutional spaces, in the last year the transgender
51 has emerged as an issue when women confronted a transgender
52 woman who arrived at the pond asserting that this was an only
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 woman space. The issue remains under discussion, with
4 dissenting views expressed in the changing rooms, and has been
5 taken seriously by the Corporation, who have arranged for the life
6 guards at the ponds and the Lido to attend transgender training.
7
8

9
10 For anglers, water enacts a different form of sociality, where the
11 materiality of the equipment – the rod, the bait, the lines, the
12 tents- all very precise and highly prized objects, and the fish to co-
13 produce the (hu)man as angler. Here men who were taught by
14 their fathers to fish from an early age, reported finding peace and
15 tranquility amongst a group of men, whose solitary status finds
16 companionship on the water's edge, sometimes sharing a
17 Kentucky Fried chicken takeaway as they settle down for night
18 fishing- sometimes as many as 30 men sleep in their tents
19 overnight. Conversations with the anglers suggested a nostalgic
20 return to a sense of the 'wild' and a 'freedom' in childhood that
21 had been lost.
22
23
24

25
26 As one angler said: *I'd rather sit here and relax and forget about*
27 *life!*
28

29
30 Like the swimmers, there is an assumption of mutual support –
31 during one of the interviews a duck got caught in one of the
32 fisherman's hook, and my respondent ran to help.
33

34
35 Charlie: *Yeah, you always keep an eye out, I mean at the end of*
36 *the day they're sitting here doing the same thing you're doing.*
37

38
39 There is a sense here of a masculine (sometimes misogynist)
40 culture (Hatty, 2000). Some of these men described broken
41 marriages, or a choice to live alone:
42
43

44
45 Peter: *There's more fishermen divorced in the world than*
46 *anything else....Because everybody likes fishing and the wife*
47 *don't like it.... Yeah, and it's men who want to get away from the*
48 *women folk. ... Yeah, and look at this, it's peaceful, isn't it, you*
49 *haven't got somebody going, 'Wah, wah, wah, do this, do that!'*
50
51

52
53 Tensions appeared to be non –existent, and when asked about
54 the ethnic mix one angler mentioned the Eastern Europeans who
55 wanted to take the carp home to eat, to whom he had explained
56 that this was not permitted under the terms of the fishing license.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Much of the sociality I have described so far is informal and
4 serendipitous. However, when the water is perceived to be under
5 threat, these more alliances and connections translate into
6 political practices.
7

8 9 Water politics

10
11 So far we have seen how water in place invokes passions,
12 attachments, encounters and connections thus shifting debates
13 (Sennett,2010, Watson,2006, Young,1990) where public space is
14 predominantly de-materialised. Urbanists have only recently been
15 attentive to the liveliness of objects and matter in co-constituting
16 public space, and the people who inhabit it. In this section, I
17 consider how water on Hampstead Heath has constituted an
18 active politics and produced lively networks, assembling not only
19 those directly involved with water in an embodied sense, but also
20 those who simply love the Heath and its water sites, as walkers
21 and local residents. The first moment in our story where water
22 mobilized a political response, was the Corporation of London's
23 attempt to restrict winter swimming in 2004. This was articulated
24 as necessary to limit the risks associated with cold-water
25 swimming. Simultaneously the introduction of entrance fees was
26 proposed as a revenue-generating device. Both strategies met
27 intense opposition as the long established and well-organized
28 swimmers drew on their professional expertise to resist the
29 initiative, foreshadowing the even greater resistance to the
30 construction more than a decade later. Unlike struggles to
31 maintain municipal baths in low-income areas, these events
32 assembled groups of well-educated and predominantly middle
33 class locals who had the time, resources and skills to act as
34 powerful advocates and mobilise strong resistance.
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44

45 Central to the dam project, as discussed earlier, were discourses
46 of risk. From the dam's inception, water's capacity to enrol fierce
47 attachments and passion was evident in the strength of
48 opposition from protesters who mobilized professional
49 connections and networks, and press coverage. Three packed
50 public meetings held in Hampstead, in January 2012, in Belsize
51 Park in November 2013, and in Highgate in February 2014,
52 overwhelmingly condemned the proposals. By the end of that
53 year nearly 13,000 had signed a petition against the works, and
54 905 people had written with detailed objections to the Planning
55 Application. The local papers- the Ham & High, the Camden New
56
57
58
59
60

Journal and the Village Voice had published over 70 articles and letters against the project with headlines like: 'Beautiful Hampstead Heath is about to be mutilated to satisfy corporate greed' (Marcus, 2015) 'Hampstead Heath ponds project is a dam "fiasco"' (Banks, 2015) and 'Warning shot sent to City of London over Hampstead Heath ponds project' (Marshall, 2014). What we see here in this eruption of widespread opposition is 'how environmental disturbances, like flooding or earthquakes, might 'force thought' among the people affected by them and, thereby, occasion new political associations and opportunities.' (Whatmore, 2013, p.34).

Several groups and blogs were established to fight the proposals including members of the Hampstead and Highgate society and 'Damn Nonsense', and national campaigns like 38 degrees mobilized to support the protest. Multiple publics, with unlikely alliances, were constituted through the process, including walkers, swimmers and fishermen, and interested local residents, inflected with the particular socio-cultural mix of Hampstead - artists, intellectuals, lawyers, 'bohemians', and the more recent influx of rich new home owners employed in the media, finance and multinational company sectors. The Chair of the Kenwood Ladies Pond Association described the forceful demands that they had made to ensure that the reconstruction of the old changing rooms and swimming area was done in accordance with the association's wishes with the result that:

It now looks fabulous... gorgeous.. The water quality's great, the buildings are nice ... when you go into the changing room bit and you walk through into the shower, the showers are at the far end. It's a beautiful big room, a lovely big space, big window there. (Jan interview).

Unlike open spaces in the constituency of South London that Mike, the superintendent, had encountered in his former job as the director, where he described receiving only 4 letters in the course of a river restoration project on Surrey Commons, this was a vocal, passionate and confident public. The objections were of several kinds. First, there was a concern that the concentration of power to affect the decision lay in the hands of one civil engineer-who was considered to be already partisan in that he was operating under contract from the City, and was acting according to a document - 'Floods and Reservoir Safety'- published by the

1
2
3 Institution of Civil Engineers to which he belonged. As articulated
4 in the Camden New Journal: 'The engineers who implement the
5 "guidance" in Floods and Reservoir Safety and profit from works
6 arising out of it, are the same engineers and their employers who
7 drafted the guidance'. Many saw this as corruption. Their second
8 point was that the dams in their current form were very unlikely to
9 fail; here the prediction that the storm that would cause the dams
10 to flood might only occur once in 400,000 years was repeatedly
11 mobilized. The third set of concerns was that the works would
12 destroy the natural beauty of the heath with the insertion of
13 material artifacts such as large concrete dam walls jutting into the
14 landscape (Mike, interview), which, despite their replacement in
15 the final designs by less ugly material, remained fixed in the
16 minds of the public and a point of contention.

17
18
19
20
21
22
23 Once the work began, the local newspapers – particularly the
24 Village Voice referred to the devastation being reeked on the
25 heath's natural beauty, a point consistently recorded in my field
26 notes from conversations or overheard comments during the
27 period, with little apparent understanding that nature is always the
28 product of earlier interventions - 'an artificial world, even in most
29 areas of the countryside (Mukerji, 1997,p.36). Jane (information
30 officer) articulated the irony of their position very clearly: *Our
31 reservoirs look like ponds but they are reservoirs. They were built
32 as such. But most people think of them as ponds. As natural. But
33 the whole heath is managed to make it look natural - a huge
34 amount of work goes into creating that effect- if it was not
35 managed it would be scrubby and brambly woodlands.*

36
37
38
39
40
41 As the project has unfolded (at the time of writing the works had
42 been going for 18 months), the opposition diminished for a
43 number of reasons. Many had come to be persuaded of the need
44 for the works to be undertaken, either through reading the reports
45 or attending stakeholders meetings; others were resigned to the
46 fact that the battle had been lost, while others were appreciative
47 of what they saw as considerate construction protocols of BAM-
48 the company on site - and the 'soft engineering' practices they
49 had been required to adopt, or had had their negative
50 preconceptions overturned once work was in progress. Jane:

51
52
53
54
55 *A lot of people have assumed the worst- imagining loads of*
56 *concrete everywhere. ..they haven't taken time to look at the*
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 *plans some of them want to see the worst- a lot of them are*
4 *pleasantly surprised.*
5
6

7 On the site walks in late 2015, only three or four people made
8 negative (if humorous) comments about the ludicrous and
9 unnecessary nature of the works, who were referred to as ‘the flat
10 - earthers’ by the Chair of a local residents association. The
11 Village Voice has continued to run its campaign on a fortnightly
12 basis with provocative headlines and front covers like the
13 November 2015 issue whose cover displayed a photograph of the
14 site workers and a caption: ‘With a contract worth £17 million do
15 we really give a dam?’
16
17
18

19
20 The third space of conflict around water, as indicated earlier, was
21 the proposed privatization of the Lido. Gillian (Chair of PHLUG
22 and a strong outspoken Scottish medic) explained how the users
23 group had been virtually moribund for years, and largely ignored
24 by other swimming campaigners on the Heath. In the spring of
25 2016, the recognition that the Lido was a precious resource that
26 needed protection mobilized swimmers to vote in a stronger
27 spokesperson to represent the Lido at the Corporation of
28 London’s Swim Forum. Since the renaissance of the group, there
29 has been a vibrant politics, where marketing sub-group have set
30 up Twitter accounts, Facebook pages, Instagram and a new
31 website, produced their own t shirts and sweatshirts with the Lido
32 emblazoned on the front, held meetings – alongside informal
33 chats in the showers- and ran social events, all with the objective
34 of raising funds and the profile of the Lido, and defending it as a
35 public space. To date, £2,000 has been raised. The Lido has
36 also been registered as a community asset, which means no
37 decision can be made without proper consultation. New visions
38 for the Lido now include making use of the surrounding buildings
39 for a yoga center, a sauna, and a gym to join the café already in
40 place.
41
42
43
44
45
46
47

48 Conclusion

49

50
51 This article set out to explore the practices and engagements with
52 water in a large urban public space with the objective of
53 considering how the specific materiality of water generates
54 particular passions, attachments and a sense of belonging, and
55 which enrolls bodies in new connections, socialities, alliances and
56 politics in unpredictable ways. It did so by elucidating the
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 experiences of water itself and its active participation in the
4 spaces and events that unfolded. Like other studies, this research
5 revealed that water had the capacity to enhance a sense of well
6 being in those that swam in it. Water in its very substance was
7 revealed as soft and sublime, as redemptive and spiritual, as
8 connecting and enabling, as wild and cleansing. The comments of
9 those interviewed suggested that immersion in water made
10 people feel at one with the world and care free, which I suggest
11 derives from the its very fluidity 'boundary-less-ness', vibrancy
12 and transparency. These attributes mobilise a very particular
13 sense of embodiment that gives this particular form of public
14 space its distinctiveness that engenders passionate attachments.
15 Water's capacity to involve and include different bodies within its
16 mass, representing a space where people can share their sense
17 of embodiment, also is significant in constituting new forms of
18 sociality and connections amongst diverse groups. As such it acts
19 as a democratic leveler where differences are submerged or
20 arguably made fluid.
21
22
23
24
25
26

27
28 The significance of water for the making of vibrant public space
29 has been little recognized by urban theorists or urban policy
30 makers. To the contrary, initiatives to provide public swimming
31 pools have been cut as pressures on public expenditure have
32 forced local governments to sell off facilities to private companies,
33 whose involvement is primarily motivated by profit. However,
34 there is growing recognition of the importance of water for public
35 space as city governments install new water features, such as the
36 Bradford mirror pool as a device for urban regeneration, and
37 fountains are now often located in new urban developments
38 enhancing social interaction. As the assistant director of
39 Environmental Enhancement of the Corporation of London
40 (interview), put it:
41
42
43
44

45
46 *The power of water - it is so much about the basics of human life.*
47 *When it is there and it is in your environment I think there is an*
48 *immediate and instinctive reaction to it- and it doesn't really*
49 *matter what form it is. ...I think it makes you feel like you are*
50 *safe... it is all about the emotions you can create in your*
51 *audience....you can change the feeling of something... my*
52 *favourite time is on completion of a water project going on an*
53 *ordinary day to see how ordinary people react to it- it is like it has*
54 *always been there ...you can change a space and make it*
55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 *experienced very differently with water and make interaction*
4 *between people different.*
5
6

7 The research on the ponds in Hampstead Heath also revealed
8 water's capacity to be constituted as dangerous and risky matter,
9 which has the – often imagined- power to cause floods and
10 destruction. Once the ponds had been subjected to the 'expert
11 knowledges' of the hydraulic engineers, however, uncertain and
12 conditional these might have been, they were defined in terms of
13 a risk which was difficult for those in opposition to refute, however
14 spurious or not the evidence base of the argument was revealed
15 to be. As in Whatmore's study, where water is conceived as a
16 potential hazard it has the capacity to 'force thought' in those
17 affected by it, leading to an 'associative politics' which reveals
18 'the capacity of citizens to band together and act in concert .. in
19 the manner of a 'swarm', rather than in consequence of some
20 prefigured category of political interest (e.g. stakeholders) or
21 class' (Whatmore, 2013, p.40). It was this capacity of water to be
22 seen as dangerous which underpinned much of the political
23 action and which mobilized diverse publics.
24
25
26
27
28
29

30 In summary, water matters in public space as a vital actor without
31 which a diversity of democratic and diverse socialities would not
32 take place. The very substance of water, its softness, fluidity,
33 transparency and capacities to evoke a sense of attachment and
34 belonging, which generate new connections and politics, matters.
35 As such, city governments and local municipalities need to value
36 and defend water sites that exist in the locality, resisting their take
37 over by private interests as spaces for the generation of profit, or
38 their curtailment or closure through the dominance of discourses
39 of risk. Instead, what is needed is investment in new water sites
40 as a device for enhancing vibrant public cultures and spaces.
41 Finally, this article has also contributed to a wider debate that
42 emphasizes the liveliness of urban infrastructures, objects and
43 matter, and their capacities to co-produce animated public life.
44
45
46
47
48

49 Acknowledgements

50 With thanks to the participants for their time and to the
51 anonymous referees for their very helpful comments.
52
53

54 Bibliography

55
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Amin, A. (2014). Lively Infrastructure *Theory, Culture & Society*
4 31, 137-161

5 Anderson, J. (2013) Cathedrals of the surf zone: regulating
6 access to a space of spirituality *Social and Cultural Geography* 14
7 (8), 954-972
8
9

10
11
12 Anderson, J and Peters K, eds 2014 *Water Worlds: Human*
13 *Geographies of the Ocean* , Farnham: Ashgate
14

15
16 Anderson, K. & Smith, S. 2001, 'Editorial: Emotional
17 Geographies', *Transactions of the Institute of British*
18 *Geographers*, N. S 26(1), 7-10.
19

20
21 Andrews,G.,Chen,S.,Myers,S. (2014). The 'taking place' of health
22 and well being: towards non- representational theory. *Social*
23 *Science and Medicine* 108, 211-222
24

25
26 Atkinson, P. and Delamont, S. (eds.) (2010). *Sage Qualitative*
27 *Research Methods* London: Sage.
28

29
30 Back, L. (2015). Why Everyday Life Matters: Class, Community
31 and Making Life Livable *Sociology*, 49(5), 820-836.
32

33
34 Banks, E. (2015). Hampstead Heath ponds project is a dam
35 "fiasco" *Ham and High August*.
36

37
38 Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society* London: Sage.
39

40
41 Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.
42 North Carolina: Duke University Press
43

44
45 Booth, D. (2001). *Australian beach cultures: the history of sun,*
46 *sand, and surf*. London, United Kingdom: F. Cass.
47

48
49 Carter, S., Dodsworth, F., Ruppert, E., Watson, S. (2011)
50 *Thinking Cities through Objects*. CRESC working paper 96
51 (CRESC, Manchester).
52

53
54 Corporation of London (COL), (2103). *Hampstead Heath Ponds*
55 *Project Assessment of Design Flood Summary* March 2013
56 Corporation of London.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Coleman, T. and Kearns, R. (2015) The Role of Blue Spaces in
4 experiencing place, aging and wellbeing: Insights from Waiheke
5 Island, New Zealand. *Health and Place* 35, 206–217
6
7

8 Coles, A. and Wallace, T (eds.) *Gender Water and Development*
9 Oxford and New York: Berg.
10

11 Fiske, J., Turner, G., and Hodge, B. (1987). *Myths of Oz: reading*
12 *Australian popular culture*. Sydney, New South Wales: Allen and
13 Unwin.
14
15

16
17 Foley, R. and Kistemann, T. (2015) Blue Space Geographies:
18 enabling health in place. *Health and Place* 35, 157-165
19

20
21 Game, A. (1990). Nation and Identity: Bondi. *New Formations* 11,
22 105–120
23

24
25 Game, A. and Metcalfe, A. (2011). My corner of the world:
26 Bachelard and Bondi Beach *Emotion, Space and Society* 4, 42-50
27

28
29 Gandy, M. (2002) *Concrete and clay: reworking nature in New*
30 *York City*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
31

32
33 Gandy, M. (2004). Rethinking urban metabolism: water, space
34 and the modern city, *City*, 8, 3, 363-379.
35

36
37 Griswold, A. (1998) *Kenwood Ladies Bathing Pond* Hampstead:
38 KLBA
39

40
41 Hatty, S. (2000). *Masculinities, Violence and Culture* London:
42 Sage.
43

44
45 Jackson, H. (undated). *Hampstead Heath: A History of*
46 *Struggle* London Gardens Trust.
47

48
49 Kaika, M. (2005). *City of Flows: Modernity, Nature, and the City*.
50 London: Routledge.
51

52
53 Kinder, K. (2015). *The Politics of Urban Water: Changing*
54 *Waterscapes in Amsterdam*. Athens and London: The University
55 of Georgia Press.
56
57
58
59
60

1
2
3 Lobo, M. (2014). Affective Energies: Sensory Bodies on the
4 Beach in Darwin, Australia *Emotion, Space and Society*, 12, 101-
5 109
6

7
8
9
10 Marcus, H. (2015.) Big business will be flooded with cash while
11 the heath is mutilated. *Camden New Journal* Feb 5 2015.
12

13 McFarlane, C., Desai, R., and Graham, S. (2014). Informal Urban
14 Sanitation: Everyday Life, Comparison and Poverty *Annals of the*
15 *Association of American Geographers* 104, 989-1011.
16

17
18
19 Marshall, T. (2014). Warning shot sent to City of London over
20 Hampstead Heath ponds project *Camden New Journal* June
21 2014.
22

23
24 Molotch, H. (2010). Objects in the City in G. Bridge and S.
25 Watson (eds) *The New Blackwell Companion to the City*,
26 Blackwell, Oxford.
27

28
29 Molotch, H., and Noren L. (eds.) (2010). *Toilet: Public Restrooms*
30 *and the Politics of Sharing* (NYU Series in Social & Cultural
31 Analysis).
32

33
34 Mukerji, C. (1997). *Territorial Ambitions and the gardens of*
35 *Versailles* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
36

37
38 Murphy, C Gardoni, P and. Harris. C. (2011). Classification and
39 Moral Evaluation of Uncertainties in Engineering Modeling.
40 *Science and Engineering Ethics*. 17,3,533-570.
41

42
43 Obrador-Pons, P. (2007) A haptic geography of the beach: naked
44 bodies, vision and touch *Social and Cultural Geography* 8, 1,
45 123-141
46

47
48 Poynting, S. (2006), 'What caused the Cronulla Riot?' in *Race &*
49 *Class* 48, 1, 185–92.
50

51
52 Rhys-Taylor, A. (2013) The essences of multicultural: a sensory
53 exploration of an inner-city street market *Identities* 20 (4).
54

55
56 Ritvo, H. (2009). *The Dawn of Green: Manchester's Thirlmere and*
57 *Modern Environmentalism* University of Chicago Press.
58
59
60

1
2
3
4 Seamon, D. (2015). *A Geography of the Lifeworld: Movement, Rest and Encounter* London and New York: Routledge revivals
5
6
7

8 Seamon, D. and Mugerauer, R. (eds).(1985) *Dwelling, Place and Environment: Toward a Phenomenology of Person and World*
9
10 Florida: Krieger Publishing, 2000 originally published by Kluwer,
11
12 1985
13

14 Sennett, R. (1990). *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities*, New York: Norton.
15
16
17

18 Sennett, R. (2010). The Public Realm in Bridge, G and
19
20 Watson, S. (eds.) *The Blackwell City Reader*, 2nd edition, Oxford:
21
22 Blackwell.
23

24 Strang, V. (2006). Substantial Connections: Water and
25
26 Identity in an English Cultural Landscape *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*, 10 ,2, 155 – 177.
27
28

29 Strang, V. (2004). *The Meaning of Water*. Oxford, New York:
30
31 Berg.
32

33 Strang, V. (2005a). "Taking the Waters: cosmology and
34
35 material culture in the appropriation of water resources" in A.
36
37 Coles and T. Wallace (eds.),. 21-38.
38

39 Strang, V. (2005b). Common Senses: Water, Sensory
40
41 Experience and the Generation of Meaning. *Journal of Material Culture* 10,1, 93-121.
42

43 Strang, V. (2005c). Taking the Waters: Cosmology, Gender
44
45 and Material Culture in the appropriation of water resources in A.
46
47 Coles and T. Wallace (eds.), 21-39.
48

49 Strang, V. (2006). Substantial connections: water and identity in
50
51 an English cultural landscape' .10,2 *Worldviews*
52

53 Strang, V. (2009). *Gardening the World: agency, identity, and the ownership of water*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn
54
55
56
57
58
59
60 Publishers.

1
2
3 Strang, V. (2011). Diverting Water: Cultural Plurality and
4 Public Water Features in an Urban Environment in B.R. Johnston
5 Hiwasaki, L., Klaver, I.J., Ramos Castillo, A., Strang, V. (ed)
6 *Water, Cultural Diversity, and Global Environmental Change:
7 Emerging Trends and Sustainable Futures*. UNESCO, 97-116
8 Dordrecht Heidelberg London New York
9
10

11
12 Swyngedouw, E. and Kaika, M. (2002). Urban Water: A political-
13 ecology perspective. *Built Environment* 28,2, 124--137.
14

15
16
17 Swyngedouw, E. (2004). *Social Power and the Urbanisation
18 of Water* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
19

20
21 Thrift, N. (2007). *Non-Representational Theory: Space,
22 Politics, Affect* London: Routledge
23

24
25 Vogel, D. (2012). *The Politics of Precaution* Princeton
26 University Press. Watson, S. (2006). *City Publics: the (dis)
27 enchantments of Urban Encounters*. London: Routledge.
28

29
30 Volker, S. and Kistemann, T. (2011). The impact of blue
31 space on human health and well-being – Salutogenetic health
32 effects of inland surface waters: A review *International Journal of
33 Hygiene and Environmental Health* 214, 449– 460
34
35

36
37 Völker, S. and Kistemann, T. (2013). "I'm always entirely
38 happy when I'm here!" Urban blue enhancing human health and
39 well-being in Cologne and Düsseldorf, Germany *Social Science &
40 Medicine*, 78, 113-124
41

42
43 Völker, S. and Kistemann, T. (2015) Developing the Urban
44 Blue: Comparative health responses to blue and green urban
45 open spaces in Germany *Health and Place*, 35, 196–205
46
47

48
49 Watson, S. (2015). Mundane objects in the city: Laundry
50 practices and the making remaking of public/private sociality and
51 space in London and New York. *Urban Studies* 52, 876- 890.
52

53
54 Webber, R. and Burrows, R. (2015). Life in an Alpha
55 Territory: Discontinuity and conflict in an elite London 'village'
56 *Urban Studies* 1-16 DOI: 10.1177/0042098015612983.
57
58
59
60

1
2
3
4
5 Whatmore, S. (2013). Earthly Powers and Affective
6 Environments: An Ontological Politics of Flood Risk *Theory,*
7 *Culture and Society* 30,7/8, 33–50
8
9

10 Young, I. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference,*
11 Princeton: Princeton University Press.
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

For Peer Review Only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Photo 1 Parliament Hill Lido

592x331mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Review Only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Hampstead Women's Pond

162x101mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Review Only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



Anglers' Pond

1151x863mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Preview Only

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60



The Dam Project

1151x863mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Preview Only