

watered:

the topography
of opaque currents

watered: the topography of
opaque streams

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we creopolitan : our
c/hanging & relations ,
our senses of bodying
„ whispers, humming to know flesh
sensate taste salt weather cane
/ humidity woven through /

dis/placed, to be anyw-
here, all possible futures
undo logics of land/ed

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Aquaduction

Water is in everything and everyone. It /diagonally/ cuts athwart experiences and theory, intersects resource-making and ecology, and metaphorically permeates social and political spaces. Amidst dehydration, introducing its theoretical framework opens new avenues of thinking, relating, and imagining. However, such an exercise constantly carries the danger of personifying water through our always-already human perspective. Much like before, we may and can become tempted to predispose water to a specific set of figures of speech. At least, that was the case for me. I used to have this need to play a game called *Contact*. I would imagine a gathering of familiar strangers. Within the confines of the game, one of us would have to think of a word, silently of course. That is when the search began in each player. After a few rounds, suddenly, the mind would be illuminated in a flash—*contact* would be made. Jitterly, we would stand face to face with each other and begin counting down from ten to one, to say the word we had simultaneously guessed. That would be that—*contact*. Craving connection and a search for collectivity, where unity and differentiation co-mingle, led me to water too.

Engendered by political and economic crises, such times call for a lighthouse, a pier, and, so, the structure of society returns to heteronormative conservatism. The 2024, 25, and, and, and ~~~~~ recessions and their indicators. From all sides, we are inundated with the idea of needing a refuge. A non-existent utopia calls. But water cannot hold those who have been shored up to the margins. To place sacredness onto water and then put ourselves within it sets both the subject and the object up for a slippery slope, as we have never been pure or sacred, nor has water. We cannot produce a purified future in the waterworld¹, which will harbour social, political, state or cultural continuities. This reproduction cannot exist as it preemptively excludes and

¹ see p. 42

washes us out from this world. Water is as opaque as we are. It osmosises through us just as we muddle ourselves with other humans and non-humans. As such, H₂O can be a framework to feel through and criticise the present, filled with acid rains, varying levels of precipitation, pipes of sewage, seas, rivers, and, and, and, and~~~~~ Impure water, further exacerbated by climate change, is always as muddy as our multilayered reality. Seeing it is as difficult as distinguishing the dribbling waterbeds within us that are of water, but not only.

This publication, like water, shimmers on the surface and fogs up in its depths. Water is in constant alteration, and so are we. It is opaque because as it approaches a subject, its understanding cannot ever be clear and true, neither in the riverbed nor outside of it. This is where the tension between abstraction and groundedness (or waterness?) emerges. For years, in fiction and non-fiction, water and land have been divided into culture and nature and adorned with corresponding functions or metaphors. Land was civilised, settled and bound, while water was untamed, turbulent and infinite—that which must be studied and returned. Now, amidst critiques of romanticisation and its underlying coloniality, attention shifts to the chemical and physical dimensions of water: H₂O². With their layered abstractions, metaphors return to the environment, accumulate as sediment, and wash over like waves that carry away and bring back the substance for being.

The topography of the riverbeds within us, a bilingual map, is on the verge of abstraction and specificity and, first, writes about us, watery subjects, rather than some uninhabited water. When talking about political ecology and its affective function, a bleak shade that follows environmental studies, this tension is constantly present. To distance themselves, some often emphasise that this or that issue has a much richer history of political economy beyond its environmental character. A similar question was raised while writing this introduction. And

2 just add water.

the texts clearly show: these two directions coexist. Both as intimate and coalescing as water itself—intersecting diagonally, athwart. We are watery bodies in composition, genealogically, and geographically, despite the fact that we have danced out of the sea, from the sea to the land, in a hypersea³. We weave a web of human and non-human beings and matter. So, water operates at many scales, be they molecular, personal, interpersonal, collective, state, regional or globalised. And, in so doing, shapes physical, cultural, historical, political (from top and bottom), and economic imaginaries. Through it, international solidarity can be written in different languages as a flotilla wavers towards Gaza. But, at the same time, in deep waters, our lungs fill and we drown.

To remove state-imposed borders and build networks of international solidarity across water, this publication is bilingual and attempts to translate knowledge produced in Georgia into a language understandable by more people.⁴ In these deep waters, this watered publication addresses and pushes against claustrophobia by translating, mediating, or inventing words for a new grammar.

The starting point for such streams of thought was hydrofeminism, articulated through the texts of Astrida Neimanis that develop a physical-material and socio-political theory of water. The framework gives form to ideas, thoughts, and feelings that may have been familiar, but yet-to-be named, whilst also bringing closer concepts that may have been unfamiliar. Concepts borrowed from her, and steeped in posthumanism and ecology, such as Tuana's viscous membranes⁵

3 McMenamin, Mark A. S. 1996. *Hypersea: Life on Land*. New York: Columbia University Press.

4 Unfortunately, or fortunately, English remains as such a language.

5 Tuana, Nancy. 2008. "Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina." In *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman, 188–214. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

and Alaimo's transcorporeality⁶, train the eye to digressing dimensions of reality and allow us to imagine differently, to perceive the present already imbued in us. When bodies are watered down to performativity, gender and sexuality, our murky streams change direction, turn and circle directly and, at times, invisibly. This became obvious in our meetings, writing exercises, and discussions about texts that we collectively read; later, translated into articles, sometimes as unnamed, yet clearly there, unexplained in the introduction. The ecotone grows in diameter, neither uniquely this nor uniquely that.

elisabed gedevanishvili

6 Alaimo, Stacy. 2008. "Trans-Corporeal Feminisms and the Ethical Space of Nature." In *Material Feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman, 237-264. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Tsklovaneba

In hydrology, Tsklovaneba is the amount of water that flows through a river during a given period of time. It can be described as the capacity of a body of water to carry water. According to this lexicon, however, Tsklovaneba implies a state of direct attunement and shared experience with water, a focus on its physical properties and its presence. Alternatively, it can be understood not only as a characteristic of the water body itself, but also as a measure of the observer's permeability: how much the subject allows the environment to act through them. In the case of high Tsklovaneba, the observer is overcome with the feeling that they are part of the body of water.





urchi 0431

Deep One Encirculation



*"Nothing is ever really lost". For the Movement
to Save the Rioni Valley², and the Rioni Valley itself.*

*I am looking at
Your waves crash into me as if, I am turning into a stone.
enforming {us}.
How you collided into me today, with rogue waves,
the lock of my heart, smashed in*

¹ "Nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost," – begins Walt Whitman in his poem "Continuities" (from his collection of poems *Leaves of Grass*). The poem is mainly about circularity and the idea of endless renewal, refusing to succumb to concepts of continuous loss and destruction.

² The Movement to Save the Rioni Valley is a self-organized movement, formed in October 2020 in opposition to the construction of the Namakhvani HPP cascade.

I cry	whenever	I create
I cry	whenever	I destroy
when	I cannot utter	a word
		outpouring as tears
	/The hurt/	

***They've taken away my voice
spun out***

only vowels and consonants are left with the furless evolution of my body, the shell has been taken away

3 Marble - old. Greek μάρμαρος [marmaros] - "crystalline rock". Signifies recrystallisation of limestone into thin, mid-sized or large crystals and metamorphic rock, mainly consisting of calcite (calcium carbonate, CaCO₃). It is worth mentioning that limestone metamorphoses into marble. Usually, limestone accumulates in seas, and rarely in lagoons.

4 "Near East"/ "Middle East" - a term originated in the 1850s in the British India Office. It was later popularised by an American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, in reference to the region between Arabia and India.

*broke. Shards of marble³
humidity snuck in,
this wetness
incoming.
dropped by the crevice of sadness, mine.
The salinity gets to my mouth, and I admit.
I am crying. Again. All the time.*

How did this salty liquid—poured out as resentment—get in me?
Rolled into a wave as a summer heat from Mesopotamia; or what time is it?

From “Middle East”^m.
How did the acidic rains traverse the three-dimensional
atmosphere?

Atmospheric precipitation on the surface of the Earth, come in liquid or solid state of Water.
Cause of itself

Fluid rain—a drizzle, arranged whole, my tear.

\approx I am \approx the encirculation of atmospheric precipitation \approx sadness and joy

A tear _ a small tributary

the voice, which they liquidated
poured out
my pain evaporated as rain and it thunderstorms over Khvami⁵,
lightly showers in Kolkheti⁶
I am speaking with
listen.
I transformed into hail at night,
roaring in forests,
I fell into the jungles of Amazon last night,
can't make it to Africa,
into dust I became,
then I go to the Aegean,
going to sweep up
every

5 Khvami - "west of Rioni, underneath a mountain is a Khomi massif, quite tall" (The Georgian Chronicles). A limestone massif in Georgia, on the border of the Tsageri and Tskaltubo municipalities. According to antique sources, Khvami is the mystical place of the Argonauts and Heracles.

6 Kolkheti - a historical region and state on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, contemporary west Georgia. In Greek mythology, Kolkheti is known as the homeland for Aetia and Medea and the destination for the Argonauts. Kolkheti was also considered as one of the dwelling places for Amazons.

/Global South/

The voice is the power,
of my species. /what I have are words, to explain, to make you understand in your language, with mine
I cry with the jungles of Amazon
the sorrow of all, in me, with your name.

I cry on Waiʻaleʻale/Hawaii in Cherrapunji/India/
in a large part of Europe, North America and Central Africa.

Every year.

It showers.

I am dense precipitation and go to Africa every year,
I rain in large parts of Asia as a downpour of 500 mm,
and a little less, 250 mm, on the Arabian Peninsula and the north-east of Mongolia,
the central part of Australia and the south-west
in Africa.

In total, I cry 2500 mm precipitation on the coasts of Africa, India and Myanmar,
On the latitudes of the North and South Americas

"Split and burst down, the sky"—I think when I cry

warm mass
breezes winds
and let them out
towards
the Black Sea
to Mtrala's National Park⁷
I wait for you

Come.

⁷ Mtrala mountain is between the Black Sea and Adjara's mountain range, on the border of Chakvistskali and Korolistkali rivers. Mtrala mountain is from mid-Euxenic, so called, Naghwarevi chain of volcanic rocks. It traps the humid air of the sea and defines Adjara's (region in Georgia) extremely humid climate. Mtrala witnesses approximately 4520 mm precipitation every year, making it the country's wettest place. Its toponym translates into something or someone that often cries and is used to symbolise the heaviness of the rainfall on the mountain.

Guli Nu Gamitskalet

The heart should be hearted, not watered. The atria of a watered heart pump water, not blood, to other organs. A watered-hearted person stands out as pale, apathetic, generally upset, and lacking energy. The water of the heart works on sorrow; the sorrow accumulates in the atria and ventricles, covers the whole body, and makes it function accordingly. Some people say that if a watered-hearted person no longer feels sorrow, they will melt and turn into a pond.

Condensation

The condition of floating negative gases in which they hit each other, thicken and stick to a solid surface, expressing themselves as liquid drops; they become non-transparent. (Translate all this to interpersonal relationships).

Diffuse

Unhurried love. From the main factors of attraction, the attention shifts to the less attractive factors, making us fall in love with a spread-out subject's/object's every area and particle. *Diffusion takes a much longer time in water than in gas. You can draw your own conclusions.

Tskaltskvetili

An event in which, for reasons still unknown, the river starts to dry up point by point. After some time, water returns to its shape and form; it gushes or burbles out again.

Tskaltoloba

A rare event, during which a body of water is neither swollen nor diminished; when no outer factors affect its structure or character, and the water has the only effect on itself.

elene duduchava

Channels and Bridges, Bridges Over Troubled Water

Dedicated to K and G. Experts of above-water language.

Monitoring, supervising, observing, verifying, restraining, restricting, imposing control, self-control – The digital laboratory of Georgian language is very limited and imprecise. I cannot find and match the word that I have been searching in every possible crack for previous months. I get close and it slips through my fingers like a handful of water, leaving only wetness on my palm. I am trying to name this feeling that predominates in me. As if by naming, it will dilute, cool down a bit. But the terrestrial dictionaries seem useless, as if this word has not yet been invented here.

Governance, authority, norm-setting, regulation, regime. This is the incomplete list of words that water dilutes, the chronology of their letters, characters seem to matter only on the land. Water swallows as much as is needed to regulate their acidity: from acids to alkalines and vice versa. Watered is the only condition, which can dissolve the weight of above-mentioned synonyms and can leave us with nothing but the state of our matter.

You cannot enter water with objects; you cannot enter with equipment or excess. You must adapt yourself to water. You enter with nothing, and in the water, you become whatever was forgotten on land. In the water, you remember that you were once a cloud, a puddle, someone's urine, the stream of a village. You enter water emptied of everything, stripped of terrestrial processes.

Control and self-control work only on land; they lose their meaning in water. A condition concerned solely with taking and giving cannot contain anything hierarchical, anything higher,

that even in its core would think to resist this logic of matter. My inner waters are tempestuous. On land, they flood me from within. Only in water do I remember that I am water too, and that my outlines and patterns are conventional. Control ceases to exist, just as the “self” stops.

The people of the Marshall Islands consider the ocean a continuation of the navigator’s body. They follow the dynamics of water and use it as a sensory map—there is no boundary between water and body.

Placing all the bets on the land – on one hand, seeing land as a space that creates culture, economy, politics and borders, and, on the other hand, marking waters as unknown, empty, unstable, and uncanny have distanced us from its substance and taught us to perceive water only as a resource or part of nature. The romanticisation of nature brings hierarchical perception, it separates water and land bodies even more. Other than that, romanticising water vanishes our participation and responsibility in processes, and marks nature only as mystical, healing, something far away from humanity. In this relation, colonial gaze, power asymmetry and personal interests of dominant systems can easily leak in.

“Ihab Saleh, a squash and cucumber farmer living in Ein al-Beida, a Palestinian village of about 1,600 people located in the northern part of the West Bank, is one of hundreds of thousands of people whose lives and livelihoods have been destroyed by Israeli water restrictions. Over the past 25 years he has seen the local spring gradually dry up after the Israeli company ‘Mekorot’ drilled two wells near the neighbouring Palestinian community of Bardala, to serve Mehola, an Israeli settlement.”

Bodies of water are spaces not yet fully domesticated by humans, yet they are and will remain as areas to be desired and

1 Amnesty International. 2017. “The Occupation of Water.” November 29.
<https://shorturl.at/Bh40T>

conquered. The greedy eye and hand will try to dominate them, to impose control, and, of course, will seek to reinforce the idea that water is separate, that water is the other.

The understanding of land as the primary habitat and territory for humans will always place us in contradiction, where land and water form an oppositional pair—where humanity is imagined as existing only on dry land, and where maintenance, steadiness, and constancy are what we are told to seek, what should make us feel safe, and what defines “us.”

One of the logics of water is to contain—to hold what has overflowed from our sharply cut bodies. The logic of receiving and giving means that water has the ability to keep and to take, to remember and to forget, to contain and to wash ashore. You can tell your nightmare to water, and it will thin out into the flow of other people’s dreams. At the same time, seashells, garbage, dead bodies, pearls, and other stories born in water will be carried to the shore.

This framework of water, and its ability to wash away controlling mechanisms, only increases the desire to tame it. When did the domination of water begin — and was it ever successful? Perhaps we are merely caught in a whirlpool of illusions, just floating on the surface.

“Bodies need water, but water also needs a body. Water is always sometime, someplace, somewhere”.²

“The State Electric System has published a list of hydroelectric power plants scheduled to be built over the next ten years. In total, the state plans to double the capacity of Georgia’s energy system by 2034. Specifically, according to the ten-year plan for the development of transmission lines, installed capacity should increase to 10,336

2 Neimanis, Astrida. 2012. “Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water.” In *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, edited by H. Gunkel, C. Nigianni, and F. Söderbäck, 96–115. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

megawatts within ten years, of which more than 7,000 megawatts are to come from hydropower plants. The construction of more than 200 hydroelectric power plants is planned.”³

Water carries away phantom control; yet, at times, it cannot escape it. We must admit that some of its branches, some of its tributaries, are bounded by others. Water’s unity, its oneness, and also its ability to pour into different vessels, reveal the other side of the coin: where bodies of water come to bear imaginary names and borders.

Tekhuri River,
Ninoskhevi Waterfall,
Black Sea,
Spree and Mtkvari.

And still, what do we mean when we talk about (self)control—what tightens my organs, why does my skin burn?

The classical dichotomies, which I would unite under the name of the water-land binary, generate other opposed categories that lead to mechanisms of (self)control. These tools are so deeply embedded in us that we rarely even ask how they came, from where? We can only feel them in our bodies, as an anchor, an unexplainable heaviness, or, on the contrary, a groundlessness and turbulence, the sense that something is not in order. The navigation map is lost. We observe our surroundings, we regulate, we absorb information like sponges; we detect noises, vibrations, scents. Nothing should be missed, no potential danger overlooked. And just like that, you fill your reservoir; just like that, you sink your ship.

“There is always a risk of flooding.”⁴

3 Varadashvili, Mariam. 2024. “The government plans to double the capacity of the energy system in ten years.” *BM.GE*, November 13. <https://shorturl.at/lifrP>

4 Neimanis, Astrida. 2012. “Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water.”

Outer control has penetrated so deeply inside me that I cannot even name the anxiety it causes. It seems as though this word has not yet been created here. Since water is one, it should be easy to communicate with its different physical and chemical states. Yet this language of communication or its absence erases self-control like words written in sand on the shore. My terrestrial body is at home, and it knows that some things lie beyond its control. Surrendering to this knowledge lightens it and makes it float.

"Though the government handed over the natural monument to a private company for 40 years, the locals only found out three months ago when, on a hot July day, some youngsters were swimming in the river at Balda Canyon and were thrown out".⁵

The language I once knew, I have forgotten; now I navigate by the system of ship signals and codes. In these waters, bridges are needed to let the passing ships through, to regulate their movement. Troubled waters must be given a channel, and still, what a relief it is to blame water for our affects. Terrestrial language will be swallowed by speed; it is far too slow, too clumsy. Once we get out of the water, we will no longer understand one another. From me, only a loud signal will be heard: Watch out, fire on board!

J
Juliet



"I am on fire and have dangerous cargo on board: keep well clear of me."

D
Delta



"Keep clear of me; I am maneuvering with difficulty."

F
Foxtrot



"I am disabled; communicate with me."

⁵ Simonia, Salome, and Davit Tamazashvili. 2023. "'The government has also handed over the unique Balda Canyon for 40 years to individuals connected with Russia.'" *Mtis Ambebi*, 15 October. <https://shorturl.at/mg1pD>

“The riverbed is moderately winding and mostly unbranched. Near the village of Doberazeni, it splits into two or three branches, creating low, unstable islands with pebbly-sandy surfaces. The riverbed is characterised by bends and rapids that, on average, occur every 30–50 meters.”⁶

I wonder what my own riverbed is like, gushing, rocky, full of carvings, or branched out across the plains, wide and murmuring? I wonder if they will build a hydroelectric plant in my riverbed, too?!

⁶ Wikipedia, “Tekhuri”, last edited on 28 October 2023, <https://shorturl.at/1QWB0>

Tskalmomoragebuli/Well-watered

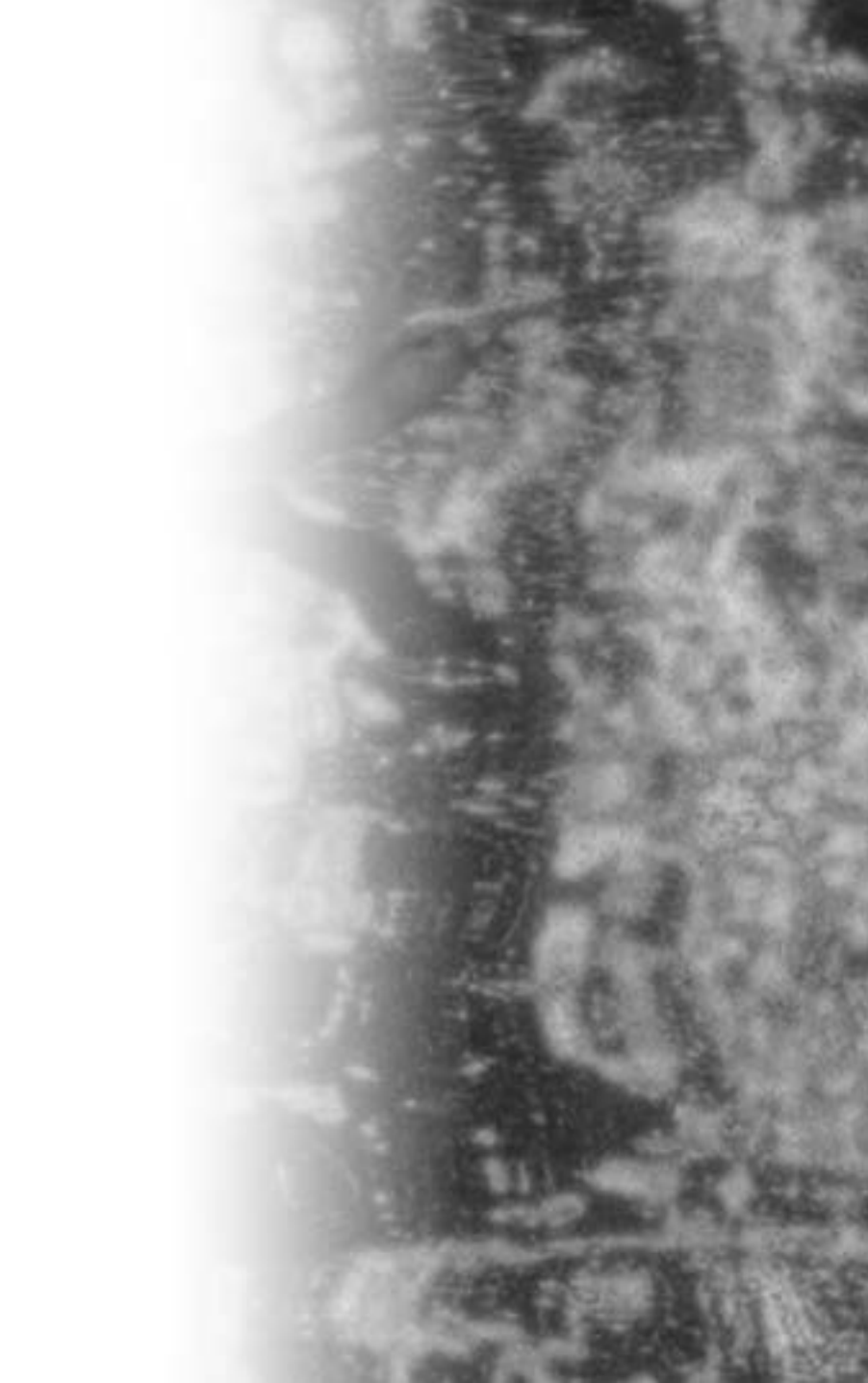
A prudent, far-sighted person who is ready for anything. For them, all the expected steps are determined in advance. We all appreciate a moderately well-watered person. However, the question is, if life were kinder to us, would being well-watered be a necessary trait at all?

Mkerdsavse/Full-chested

Clogged, cramped, and tightly squeezed. We are in a very full-chested situation. Shouldn't everything have a limit? A limit beyond which you can't go, you can't hold more, and the only way out is to tear a hole in it, force it to empty itself. Why haven't we been able to escape this particular full-chested situation for so long?

Leakage

The slow, imperceptible flowing out of a substance (material or immaterial). Figuratively, the intentional disclosure of secret information, publicly, amongst a wider circle of people. The cycle is as follows: if the emptying does not occur in time, sooner or later something will leak out.





mariam kakhniashvili

Domesticated Water: Communal Infrastructure and Us

The message about scheduled repair works comes an hour before the water is cut off. The basins, bottles and all other containers that can hold water, specially kept for this occasion, are immediately filled up. Whether they were planning to bathe or not, everyone tries to squeeze in a quick shower straight away, stocking up on the feeling of cleanliness. And this is the best-case scenario.

At other times, when no one warns us until the last second, it's difficult to hold onto the pretence that we're in charge of our own lives, our time. At moments like these, we realise that we too are domesticated. We base our hopes and plans on having unlimited access to everyday comfort and basic needs that communal infrastructure provides. Having our access to water limited serves as a wakeup call. It shows us that if you think you are your own master behind a locked door, you are sorely mistaken. A harsh invasion, a breakthrough into the usual daily proceedings of life. Reality and time begin to revolve around the return of access.

Overheard:

"Sorry, I can't show up for work today. The water hasn't come on yet."

"Nowhere in the contract does it say that you can use not being able to shower as an excuse for not showing up."

The traffic on the Georgian Water and Power (GWP)'s¹ website is skyrocketing; first we check the scheduled works, then the urgent ones. If the water has gone out before 8 am, we can't see anything on the website except the previous day's information. We refresh, wait, refresh, wait, and so on, until the employee responsible for posting information on the company's website shows up at his post, turns on his computer, and updates the schedule of water supply or non-supply for the given day.

The expected time for water access to be restored has passed. To find solace and comfort, we go to the water company's Facebook page, write private messages, curse them in the comments, try to explain that no, there is no way they can justify cutting off water for ten days in the summer².

When at other times I have no idea what my neighbours (people whose domestic, intimate lives are only a few walls away from me) are doing, at such moments I know for sure that we are all in the same boat. We are all worried about the same thing. We are dependent on one or more fatally tangled pipes. Whether you like it or not, at such times, a strange feeling of solidarity arises. It turns out, that to alleviate anxiety, sometimes it is enough to know that all your neighbours' peace has been disturbed, and their plans ruined. Essentially, everyone's day, like yours, follows the rhythm of water-use and without exception, everyone, including you, at least in their hearts (if not out aloud), is swearing at GWP.

1 Georgian Water and Power does not have an official Georgian name. I don't know what's more awkward – having to twist Georgian words around them every time the company's name is pronounced or pronouncing the name with an English accent. And why not “Georgian Water and Energy”? Why Power? For all of this, the company will henceforth be referred to in the article as GWP.

2 I hope you don't consider this an exaggeration. To the residents of Vake-Saburtalo and Gldani and other Tbilisi-dwelling mortals, I would like to remind you of our collective sorrow of the previous year. 2024 turned out to be a cosmically dark year for Georgia. On June 16, when the doomed elections were still looming in the future and the European Football Championship had awakened a collective political-social-economic amnesia, damage to the central water supply pipeline near the village of Tsitsamuri left 50,000 families without water supply for a dozen days. During these days, if you were lucky, water would be supplied on a 3-hour schedule.

Ironically, as I begin to write about all of this, I have no access to water at home – from 1:00 PM to 1:00 AM.

~~~

In our family, we often recall the time when water was supplied on a schedule. We used to collect water in tanks when daily schedule was organized around periodic access. Although, honestly, now, for the majority of the capital's residents, having access to water is no longer even considered a luxury. In our geographical area, at this stage of urban development, it is quite normalised for water to flow freely from several sources in your home, on demand. You may bathe, wash your hands, wash your clothes, flush the toilet as you wish. What is washed or flushed at home is only your business.

The entire system that sustains this urban environment creates an illusion of inevitability, continuity, and permanence. It is so present that it is often invisible. Until something breaks. And sewage and water supply systems, by their very fundamental nature, often break down. They often shatter fabricated views that the comforts of a city are not created by a fragile and ever-changing interplay of specific systems, companies, stakeholders, and circumstances.

The appearance of the infrastructure also directly contributes to this disillusionment. With a few exceptions, utility pipes run underground like veins through the city. Let us recall the rehabilitation of Chavchavadze and Tsereteli Avenues in the recent past, when, among other reasons subject to speculation, the replacement of pipes, their connection, incorrect laying, re-laying, pouring, removal, and re-pouring of cement, seemed to indefinitely prolong the rehabilitation. It was worth doing this for something – if only so that the urban, city government could display its care for the population among its notable achievements. At the same time, the procedures for covering and repairing the infrastructure also served to give the city a modern, civilized and developed appearance.

This logic of covering and hiding out of sight often extends to the inside of residential walls. For example, modern standards of Euro-renovation, (Euroremont) which have been widely popular since the 2000s, dictate that in a civilised household, any pipe must be hidden by a wall or a special enclosure.

As pretentious as it may sound, sometimes the most grounded I feel is when I look at sewage pipes, once hidden and now exposed for all to see, deep in a pit dug in the pavement. I am reminded that everything is matter. I am reminded that the camouflaged vein of a city's smooth functioning has specific coordinates and a history of existence.

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Urban water has not always been domesticated, obscured by its accessibility, and alienated from its users. Neither water nor sewage systems were created out of thin air. Their predecessors originate from Mesopotamia. Leaving that aside, in Georgia (in Uplistsikhe, Vardzia, Gonio Fortress, etc.) there are still remnants of water supply systems built of clay - pipes that clearly occupied space and did not allow you to forget that the raw materials flowing through them originated somewhere<sup>3</sup>.

In the nineteenth century, before the establishment of a central water supply system in 1887, Tbilisi had tunnels leading to the Mtkvari River and the Tsavkisi River, which were specifically created to allow transportation of water. In addition, there were ponds in various districts, where water flowed from springs through clay pipes. Also, an important role in the life of the city was played by the *metulukhche*, or water carriers. They drew water from the Mtkvari River, from twelve places designated for this purpose by the city authorities. Until the 1880s, the price of

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3 Patsia, Lali. 2018. "How was Tbilisi supplied with water, who was responsible for this work, and what kind of water did the locals drink centuries ago?" *Ambebi.ge*, July 11. <https://www.ambebi.ge/article/225580-rogor-maragdeboda-tbilisi-cqlit-vis-ebara-es-sakme-da-ra-cqals-svamdnen-adgilobrivebi-saukuneebis-cin/>

water was determined by the distance from the Mtkvari River to the population - or how far the water carrier would have to travel from the source to get water to its user.

When talking about modern sewage systems, it is also understandable that most of us are largely unaware of the logic of how utility networks work. This is another layer of mystery. Without going into technical details, to explain it in the simplest way, sewage pipes are usually laid at a certain angle so that gravity can help move substances through them. Where force of gravity is insufficient, so-called boosters (pumps) are installed. As a rule, in the case of sewage, waste is collected at wastewater treatment plants, where it is filtered. The filtered water is then discharged into rivers, the sea, special areas, or irrigation systems.

Water enters the water supply system from natural sources (in the case of Tbilisi, in the nineteenth century - from the Mtkvari River, and now mostly from the Aragvi River), then is filtered and supplied to the consumer.<sup>4</sup>

Outside the central system, especially in municipalities that are not yet served by a planned water supply system, there are makeshift systems. Where or from where their water and waste flow is beyond the statistics.

One such alternative system is the sulfuric water supply. Near Delisi Metro Station, even when the entire Saburtalo water supply is cut off, hot sulfuric waters somehow flow through the pipes in my aunt's apartment.

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Georgian Water and Power apologises to customers for the inconvenience. And if an apology is not enough, what should the customer do?

⁴ Water Supply, "Georgian Water and Power", <https://www.gwp.ge/ka/about-us/water-supply>

Formerly known as Tbilisi Water, GWP supplies water to Tbilisi, Rustavi, Mtskheta and the surrounding areas. The company was privatised in 2008. Its current owner is Georgian Global Utilities, an offshore company registered in the British Virgin Islands. Both shareholders of the owner company are, according to 2014 reports, fictitious offshore companies⁵.

What seems counterintuitive about all this is that the provider of public services in a state is not the government. In the crowded and disease-ridden European and North American industrial cities of the nineteenth century, the creation of an entire choreographed, techno-social system of water supply was made possible precisely by centralised and strategic municipal planning. The development of infrastructure in nineteenth-century European cities contributed to the formation of the image of a civilised, urban government unified under modern governance. It was under these conditions that democratic forms of centralized urban governance developed and claims to a dignified life and civil rights emerged. In short and generalised terms, centralised governance became the structure that was entrusted with the organisation of urban life and the acquisition and distribution of communal resources⁶. Of course, from the very beginning, maintaining the infrastructure system also served private interests; however, it was clear that the government was required to respond when maintenance was needed or something broke down.

Since the 1990s, the commodification of water and other utility infrastructures can be seen as a continuation of the initial trends of capitalist urbanisation. Municipalities have begun to focus on capital needs on a large scale and privatise public assets

5 Dabrundashvili, Ana. 2014. "Water from Offshores: Who Owns 'Georgian Water and Power'?" *Transparency International - Georgia*, May 22. <https://transparency.ge/ge/blog/tsqali-opshorebidan-vin-plobs-georgian-water-and-power>

6 Gandy, Matthew. 2004. "Rethinking Urban Metabolism: Water, Space and the Modern City." *City* 8 (3): 363-379. P.364.

(for example, water supply systems). While previously, the main responsibility for infrastructure lay with the government, today the network of influences also includes various corporate entities. The relatively stable, centralised, and state-dominated structure is being replaced by a very different set of political and economic dynamics. Stakeholder satisfaction is becoming one of the priorities of water supply⁷.

While the first phase of infrastructure privatisation bolsters state finances with the proceeds from the sale, it also points to the general move towards governments seeking to evade fiscal and political responsibility in the long run. The transformation of water from a public good into a commodity for sale has wider implications, with water no longer being seen as a part of modern civil rights⁸. As hinted by the “power” embedded in GWP’s name, water is indeed an instrument of power today. It has the potential to both create unprecedented unity in urban society and fuel inequality.

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If you look up my street, you’ll notice a tapestry of overlapping concrete patches laid at various times. The neighbourhood, which was formed in the Soviet Union in the 1960s, houses utility systems dating back to that time. The infrastructure of cables, pipes and wires is ageing, damaged, and in constant need of maintenance.

The sewer pipe burst for the tenth time in three weeks. I want to avoid thinking of this as a metaphor, I want to avoid automatically drawing parallels between this event and the recent direction that my life has taken.

The first few times, I did my civic duty. I called the hotline and politely reported that the damage had returned. Yes, yes, the repair team arrived yesterday. Yes, yes, it burst again. Then,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 370 - 371.

inertly, I entrusted other fellow citizens to call and pass on the message. Naturally, responsibility must be shared. I can't be the only one that's bothered by all this.

At its exit point, the sewage flow bursting from the pipe is partially blocked by a round metal plate with the word "Tbilisi" engraved on it.

I follow this river of dirt downhill. A mixture that we think we leave behind closed doors. In the so-called civilised society, we are so used to hiding it, it's difficult to even mention its existence, its materiality.

Fortunately, it mostly looks like water from a distance, if you hold your breath and ignore the half-disintegrated toilet paper in it.

Whose fault is it that it got clogged? Who flushed what and when? Was it my upstairs or downstairs neighbour who flushes their dinner down the toilet too often? Or maybe it was the one whose secretly smoked cigarettes often waft up to me through the drainpipe?

Why didn't they think of us, their fellow residents, when they were flushing something that shouldn't have gone down the pipe?

Or, to think collectively, maybe we all, one by one, contributed to the overflowing of the old pipe? If it's everyone's fault, maybe it's no one's fault?

It cascades down the stairs like a waterfall, then goes down the entire five-hundred-meter descent, and finally, on a plateau, it flows into a drain intended for rainwater.

Perhaps in a utopian world, we all always remember the pipes that connect us to our unfamiliar neighbours.

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In a broader historical context, our current relationship with water use is unusual and perhaps even temporary.

The seemingly inherent infrastructural order of the modern city allows us to create a sense of individual isolation in the city, alienating ourselves from the environment and our fellow citizens. We forget the connections between ourselves and those around us, as well as the entire structure that gives us the luxury of living comfortably in the common space of the city. And the cyclical moments of decay, rupture, repair wake us up, return us to communality, remind us of the invisible dynamics that stretch between us.

Today, water policy is more fragmented than ever. We see a decline in government investment in urban infrastructure and a dominance of the interests of shareholders over those of the population. As a result, questions arise about the sustainability of the water supply and consumption structures that have been embedded in the fabric of our urban society for over a century. If the industrial structure of water supply has shaped us into the kind of people we are today, in what ways and at what speed will the structural changes that lie ahead re-shape us?

Tskalmkaro/Waterworld

Refers to the totality of water spaces. Water can either separate or unite groups and societies. The territorial definition of water changes according to historical periods and societies. Water is a total social phenomenon intertwined with the daily existence of humans. People often view natural elements as a social or cultural phenomenon and treat them accordingly. Water and conversations about it are part of religious, moral, legal, ecological, and economic discourse. In other words, the world is completely infused with water, turning it into a Waterworld.

As an element, water is a continuous and homogeneous substance. Water is inside humans, yet humans place it within a cultural framework, defining how much they care for it, how much they consume, how they think about it, and so on. It's part of our daily rituals, in our showers, gels, drinks, pipes, and constructions. Water is a system that unites various spheres of human life, whether biological, cultural, social, or industrial. Terms like "water management," "water control," and "water conservation" show how it is often materialised and externalised as a resource. Its physical attributes determine how humans relate to it and define its use in the environment.

Humans relate to Waterworld through five key definitions:

1. Value: Individuals consider water in a positive or negative context, listening to their sensory experience of it to form a personal or social relationship.
2. Equality: This concerns how water is distributed across the world. It includes areas like justice, politics,

economics, and how class and ethnic groups interact with water. This relationship creates barriers and divides territories based on water as a resource.

3. Governance / Water Regimes: Organisations and rules are created to distribute water to specific areas where it needs to be collected. The formation of irrigation systems is also part of this relationship, as in, it is an attempt to turn water into an externalised resource.

4. Water Politics: This involves analytical discussions, debates, and conflicts over water.

5. Knowledge: This encompasses the formation of Water Sciences as a field dedicated to the study of water.¹

Water is spatially everywhere—inside people, in their entire bodies, and outside of them, in every part of a space. At the same time, it includes every sphere of human life: culture, economics, knowledge, politics, and emotional relationships.

¹ Orlove, Ben, and Steven C. Caton. 2010. "Water Sustainability: Anthropological Approaches and Prospects." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (1): 401-415.

The Transience and Poetics of Waterworld¹

– Or the Impossibility of Stepping into the Same Water Twice and the Romance, Restlessness, and Instantaneous Change of a Fleeting Moment

Water is turbulent, constantly circulating, but at the same time dynamic, fragmented, and elusive. Despite the fact that, as a given substance, the sea exists continuously, its uninterrupted nature and ever-changing tempo create ambivalent feelings. It seems that collective memory is less inclined to settle on and embrace the identity of a flowing space. For example, the Black Sea can be considered a meeting place for the centres of Eastern and Western civilisations. However, due to its multicultural nature and diverse ethnic distribution—as varied as the sea itself—it fails to be a genetic framework or a cultural marker of a specific people, but remains rather a field of chaos, change, and historical dichotomy.

According to Hegel, the sea and the river bring people closer. Water is a unifying space that gives rise to relationships. Everything that is static can be less trustworthy than a constantly changing, unstoppable substance. Its poetics lie in the fact that people from different eras and origins can emotionally reflect upon it, pinning their own emotional attributes onto its turmoil. A mirror-like analogy can be drawn between the sea, as a dynamic process, and a human, not as an *Übermensch* but as a grounded individual stitched together from emotional threads.

1 Khalvashi, Tamta and Martin Demant Frederiksen, eds. 2023. *A Sea of Transience: Poetics, Politics and Aesthetics along the Black Sea Coast*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Agency of Natural Elements

The manifestation of movement, creativity, and vitality. Natural elements are engaged in the endless circle of life. For humans, it is often difficult to notice the qualities of natural elements that can be attributed to them as distinct beings. However, even Darwin, with his philosophy, introduced an absolutely human, egoistic nihilism by suggesting that everything is a coincidence and nothing is unique. Darwin led people to consider that human existence, its qualities, and evolution are simply a matter of chance and that there is nothing supernaturally purposeful about this species. Consequently, the existence and specific skills that are considered to be exclusively human attributes are simply a given determined by happenstance, which could exist in other species as well.

This view is reinforced by the fact that in terms of outcomes, other natural elements can also have the same or even stronger influence on the environment. The swelling of a river (the babbling of water) and the melting of a glacier are both manifestations of agency. However, agency is revealed not only in destructive actions but also in ordinary circumstances, for example, in the movement of the sea.

2075. The Rioni River Has Gone.

*The place I cannot live without, yet the one that never
fully takes me into its own.*

2025. August.

Begi. That's what they call the place where the people of Ghebi, a village high in the mountains of Racha, dump their garbage. The raised hill holds the daily refuse of a hundred souls, its edges suddenly spilling into the Rioni, feeding the river with residents' leftovers. At the most southern edge of this natural dump, on the Rioni's floodplains, a barefooted woman stands, her eyes squinting against the sun. She watches the things that have tumbled from a tipped-over wheelbarrow on the hill: crumpled beer cans, large plastic cups, wet napkins, torn scraps of fabric, 12-page notebooks, cigarette packs, and jars of peanuts spilling ashen cigarette butts. Perhaps, some child came to throw out the trash, dutifully performed their chore, and then went off to swim in a quiet pool of the river. The wheelbarrow remains, a gaping metal mouth, lying on its side, waiting for its owner to return, their heart full from the water's cool embrace.

Ghebi is my village. It's been years since I've moved to the city, only coming back to Ghebi in the summertime, for just two or three days at a time, to burrow away in the village house or a tent, far from civilization. But this year, my purpose is different. I need to gather ethnographic material for my research. Because the village is riddled with ecological cataclysms I chose it last year as my study area. Now I see everything through the eyes of an outside observer. This place is a field site for my research, and I am trying to cast off the love and fear that the water brings me. I am trying to forget the many times I came to Begi alone as a child and listened to the Rioni until its voice became so familiar that my fear vanished completely.

Before me, a slender woman in a black ankle-reaching dress lifts the hem to her knees with one hand and dips her feet into the river. With her other hand, she pulls something from her pocket and clenches it tightly in her fist. She hoists the dress even higher, tucks it between her legs and presses her knees together to keep it from slipping. Her hand, now free from the dress, opens, revealing the things she had held so tightly in her palm.

The woman dangles plastic bags in the river. She looks down at the water flowing over her feet and, one by one, releases the Rioni held captive inside them – first the green bag, then the pink, and finally the black – freeing the dammed river back into itself.

This image captured my attention so completely that I knew she had to be my first interviewee. The woman turned out to be a mediator between water and plastic. In the past, I would have delighted in this act as if it were a performance. But today, since Racha is a research field and not a place of summer adventures, only terms spin in my head – **filtration** – that is what I will title the process to which this woman devotes herself. The woman is washing Rioni.

The first entry from beneath the shores of Rioni:

All the questions flew out of my head. The researcher and the person moved by love for this familiar place coexist within me. Water, nature, anxiety, plastic, the river. I start with the most banal and simple question:

- Hello, are you a permanent resident of the village of Ghebi?

-Unfortunately, yes, my dear – she replies, – May you be blessed. – *I know exactly why she uses the word 'unfortunately', but I can't let her feel that I understand. I can't tell her that I, myself, moved to the city out of fear of natural disasters.*

- Why unfortunately? – *I ask her, addressing her as a research participant, not as a confidant of my own anxieties. Perhaps I knew her before, but the years have changed both us and this place.*

-Why, my dear? The mountains and valleys are in chaos. Last year, there was such a flood... We wrote a letter to the government, saying that the water was coming and that they needed to take care of it or else we would be washed away. A week hadn't passed before it took our fields. It took two enormous pine trees and Antonovka apple trees. It practically destroyed us; it took everything. My beans were growing so beautifully in my garden... I thought, 'it will pass, it will miss us,' but it took the entire field, the apples, that huge walnut tree... **And if the river comes rushing again, what will I do, my dear?! How can I save this mad Rioni, how can I part with my apple trees?!**

N., 53 years old.

I try to follow the current of her storytelling, where feelings and concepts clash. I am a tree, casting aside sensations, trapped in a perpetual wheel of understanding. Instead of thinking of the woman as a character with all her complexity, I ponder about anxiety, memory, collective trauma and ecology. I remember a thought I read in a beloved book:

*****The mind is a kind of mediation between knowledge, facts, and subjective sensations; that is, it serves as a kind of connector and filter.¹ Ecological anxiety, natural cataclysms, the river as a source of fear** – these thoughts permeate my journey through Racha. As I forget the river that has always existed in my life, I try to recall when the water first appeared in my mind.

1 Schacter, Daniel L. 1996. *Searching for Memory: The Brain, the Mind, and the Past*. New York: BasicBooks.

The body. And the Body of Water.

- Look, tilt your hand, boy; throw it sideways and it will slide.
- Boy, have you bribed this river or what?!
- Becha!² You fool! You're clumsy and you're blaming the river. You have to choose thin, flat stones.

A twelve - or thirteen-year-old boy, visiting Racha for the summer, is learning the art of skipping stones on the water from a local resident, a boy younger than he is. A small section of the vast river has been walled off with the help of a tractor. They have made a swimming hole for the children with gravel, boulders, and wooden logs.

The children are supervised by a young woman. Her headscarf is tied low, and she sits on the stones, smiling as she watches the boys at play. With hands beyond her years, roughened by labour, she tucks a stray wisp of hair from her temple back into her scarf.

The angered boy approaches the dammed river and slowly dips a skinny foot into the water. Standing on one leg, he loses his balance and stumbles. The tendons behind his knee, already swollen, tighten even more. He flails his arms in the air and begins hopping on one foot to keep from falling.

- Mom, look, he fell with a great crash into the river! - his friend teases. Turns out the woman in the headscarf is this boy's mother.

The boy, standing like a heron, slaps his hands against the dammed Rioni, as if beating the river. The gravel and water churn together and yet cannot mix. The black particles float on the surface.

"That has happened to me, too" - is my first thought. And I remember

² This is a cry that the people of Racha use to express emotion, most often used when one is surprised, angry, or has lost control over a situation.

*the fear – the fear of touching the water. I, too, have jumped into Rioni. I, too, have caught my breath and swallowed water. I used to wonder how many fish were in the river, and with my childish mind, I would imagine fish roe getting into my stomach. **Perhaps that was the first time I was afraid of water, when Rioni took away my breath.** Now I stand on the riverbank in my sneakers, and I don't know if I will ever touch it again. I am afraid to reach out my hand; I am afraid that upon touching it, emotions will overwhelm me and the floodgates of artistic thought will break open. I am afraid of floating on the water. But unwillingly, I hear it – I hear the words, the sorrow, and the worries of the mountain. I hear and I understand and I feel with Rioni.*

As told by a flood of waters:

Once again, I feel it, something unseen drawing me closer. I know a dialogue will happen. I know Rioni will bring us together again, this time as an interviewer and interviewee. When standing around the river we understand each other's worries. Sorrows are translated into academic terms, written in an ethnographic diary, and converted into a clutter of articles:

- Good afternoon! Are you from Ghebi?
- What do I look like, a city person?
- Are those your children?
- This one, yes, and the one swimming is my sister-in-law's. They come for the summer, so I brought the children out to swim.
- Did you dam this water? – *I've dammed it myself during childhood. Scenarios race through my mind. I won't remember them now. I won't follow these thoughts. I will only listen. I will listen as an observer.*
- Well, you know... We dammed it, of course. What else are we supposed to do to entertain the children all day? Look, the tractors come, supposedly to reinforce the embankments. They stand there all day, roaring, **as if Rioni is going to ask their permission.** A dam has been built now, but how sturdy it is, I can't tell you. If it really bursts and overflows now, there is danger. If it

swells, **I don't know if the embankment will protect us...** Before, the embankment they used to build would just fail in a month or two. Two years ago, the ground was slipping from right under our feet. We used to live right there, – she said, pointing toward a place about a hundred meters behind the riverbank, where only ruined houses stand.

- So, it's still dangerous, then? – *I ask, and as I do, I think that I know her. I think I have been along these ruined houses before. I remember that I have seen it, too – I have seen Rioni carry away the land. I say nothing. It still frightens me – the earth and the water, together and apart.*

- Dangerous? Of course, it's dangerous. **If the river swells and goes mad..., can you stop it?** It could break into the house tomorrow. Now they're doing bank protection, **pouring concrete**, but what will come of it, who knows. In winter, when there's heavy snowfall, we're even afraid to walk along Rioni. There are days when we don't even have electricity, when the snow covers everything, when you can't see the territory at all. **The only thing that shines through is the sound of the river...**

What am I to do? If it rushes down, let it rush down. Who does a river listen to?

M., 45 years old.

*I imagine the concrete mixing with the river, and I look at the tractor standing in Rioni, as if it is there by force. I watch the children play in the water and I observe the embankment. I imagine the river overcoming the embankment, how it leaps over its head. This kind of a mental game throws me into an **abyss of anxiety**. I take out my notebook and sit even closer to Rioni. I add entries to my ethnographic diary.*

There are several ways we relate to water. Often, people perceive it as a source of life or an object of anxiety. On the one hand, water is shared; it is a source of communication and a

core of group identity. **A river is a public good**, geographically extending between communities and connecting them. People that live around water perceive themselves as part of a single world and often tie their identity to specific waters and their qualities. Water is a part of their daily life, an element of their group identity. Although it can be fenced in and placed in artificial boundaries; it remains **elusive**.

On the other hand, water has its own agency, which it can express through destructive actions. It is often assigned human qualities, and from a human perspective, it represents a body that is mobile and result-oriented. Accordingly, it can either mislead someone or clear a path for them. **Water is life, water is death; water is birth. Water is the space itself, and space is defined by it. “We are part of its tributaries.”**³

Alterlife Waterworld⁴ – “violence on the land is violence on our bodies” – or the truncated waterworld

I am afraid of hydropower plants. I know that space is infinite, and everything coexists side by side, but I cannot comprehend water bound by these structures. I am afraid of Rioni, who's current I have followed more than once. I hear every opinion around me; many are happy about the material benefits of the hydropower plants, but many grieve. A sorrow for the river and an escape from industrialisation. Are there any boundaries? A planet and a river system of hydropower plants, constructions, pipes, concrete, and plastic. The river, nature, or a world of concrete? I am anxious. In my mind, I imagine a planet where no structures stand.

The rustle of a plastic bag wakes me. My first interviewee continues to speak:

³ Murphy, Michelle. 2017. “Alterlife and Decolonial Chemical Relations.” *Cultural Anthropology* 32(4): 494–503.

⁴ Ibid.

- **Gesi⁵ (the hydropower plant) has destroyed everything.** So many trees were cut down; they caused landslides everywhere, - the woman rages, stuffing the washed plastic bags back into her pocket. She uses both hands to pull her dress, which is tucked between her knees, even higher, so it does not get wet. She slowly emerges from water, drying her feet on the stones, and gazes out at Begi.

- When you tear apart cliffs, who knows when it will betray the village?! **Chveshuri⁶ will dry up, what else do you expect? It's bad for nature; everything is bad. Water is our main artery, our livelihood;** we bring hay from there, and firewood, and water, yes... We have to take care of it. In two, three, or five years, when this cement has exhausted the land, there will be no harvest here. How is 'Gesi' useful? In the fields, we work in dust and gravel. How is that effective?! **Everything, everything is already soaked with this pollution.** The heat comes from space and doesn't return. It's so polluted with methane and horrible gases, yes. So much garbage is lying around. Plastic messes everything up. They ask me why I wash these plastic bags. I don't need these bags for anything. What am I supposed to do? I want to use them a second time, a third time... The air is already polluted, and they're still building these 'Gesis'; do you hear me?!

I sink into my thoughts again, thinking about boundaries once more. I want to take the woman's hand and lead her to a planet where natural resources are untouched. Can the world return to its original form? I imagine that alternative reality where there are no mixtures, where nature is free from our hands.

5 In Ghebi, the hydroelectric power station is often referred to by the shortened name - "Gesi."

6 A River in Racha.

- I take care of nature, my dear. I've brought garbage from Tevresho⁷, carried it all the way here, and dumped it at the landfill. Yes... and in these bags are breadcrumbs, my dear. I bring them to Rioni, I wash them here, and then **the river will swallow these breadcrumbs, carry them over there, - she says, pointing with her hand - and the fish will eat them. Well, that's how the ecosystem works.**

I can no longer tell where my thoughts end, and the interlocutor's voice begins. We have gotten lost in different ecosystems. My worries have become diluted, and the whirlwind of my thoughts has turned into purified, distilled water, cleansed of all dust particles.

Meanwhile, we started silently toward the village. On the floodplains, the plastic bags rustle and bathe in the river's roar.

Every morning in Ghebi, I start by observing Shodakedela⁸. This enormous glacier holds the point zero on my coordinate plane. My interviewee and I are gazing at it now. I imagine the melted glaciers, how they reach the Rioni River, and how everything is submerged in water. I remind myself that I need to get drinking water from the spring. My interlocutor continues to speak:

- These floods will increase even more - she says. - The water is dropping; this situation is inevitable. Everything will dry up and then come all at once. The Earth is in a shared plight. The waters and people are facing extinction... **The river will come over the bridge and straight into the house.** And they want more 'Gesis' for this? Do they have to drive the river completely mad, just because people made a little bit of money? **You go out into nature, and everything is cemented over.** Can you contain a river that vast?! What pipe can withstand it? **How can you put Rioni - the Rioni! - into a pipe...? If**

7 The outskirts of Ghebi, about five kilometers away; were once referred to as a village.

8 Southern branch of the Racha-Lechkhumi Caucasus Main Range.

you don't take care of nature, nature won't take care of you! It will punish us, I'm telling you, the river will punish us!

Still N., 53 Years old.

The same feeling returns to me, and I imagine maddened rivers. I watch how the sun beats down on Shodakedela. I am afraid that the snow will turn to water, mix with fragments of rock, and a giant mass will swallow the village. I am waiting for the punishment. I remember how I clung to a mossy stone when the river was carrying me away. I do not want to cling to pipes instead of mossy stones when I am swimming. I want to comfort her, but I know the voice of Rioni will be stronger than my words. I do not want to think of the river as a resource.

I think of two perspectives: water as a destructive element that causes fear and water vis a vis its resource-making and the benefits which thrill the children of the industrial age. Where is the boundary between the water's pollution and its original nature? From how many meters can I approach it without doing any harm? The water should purify me. The sorrow for it should dissolve in the polluted, resource-ified water.

August 2075: Zruni⁹ – The Story of How the People of Ghebi Mourned the Rioni River.

The name is all that remains, as *chaleebi*¹⁰ (previously referred to as floodplains) refers to a place where the Rioni River once flowed. Once, several families permanently lived on its floodplains. Today, the area has been turned into a desert.

Tractors, their dismantled engines, a mass of concrete laid in the riverbed, cut trees, and plastic.

9 The mourning ritual (datireba) in Racha, which is performed only by women. On the day of the funeral, they spontaneously compose and sing a lament.

10 This refers to a neighborhood within the village of Ghebi, the area of the floodplains adjacent to the Rioni River.

A middle-aged man who has come for the summer tries to skip a stone on the concrete. The cemented mass opens its mouth and swallows flat stones.

- I couldn't save it, my dear, - the woman with the black headscarf says, turning to me. She purses her lips, ready to weep. One hand rests on a stick, the other clutches a bundle of colourful plastic bags.

Twelve middle-aged women have gathered in a circle on the floodplains, their hands clasped over their hearts.

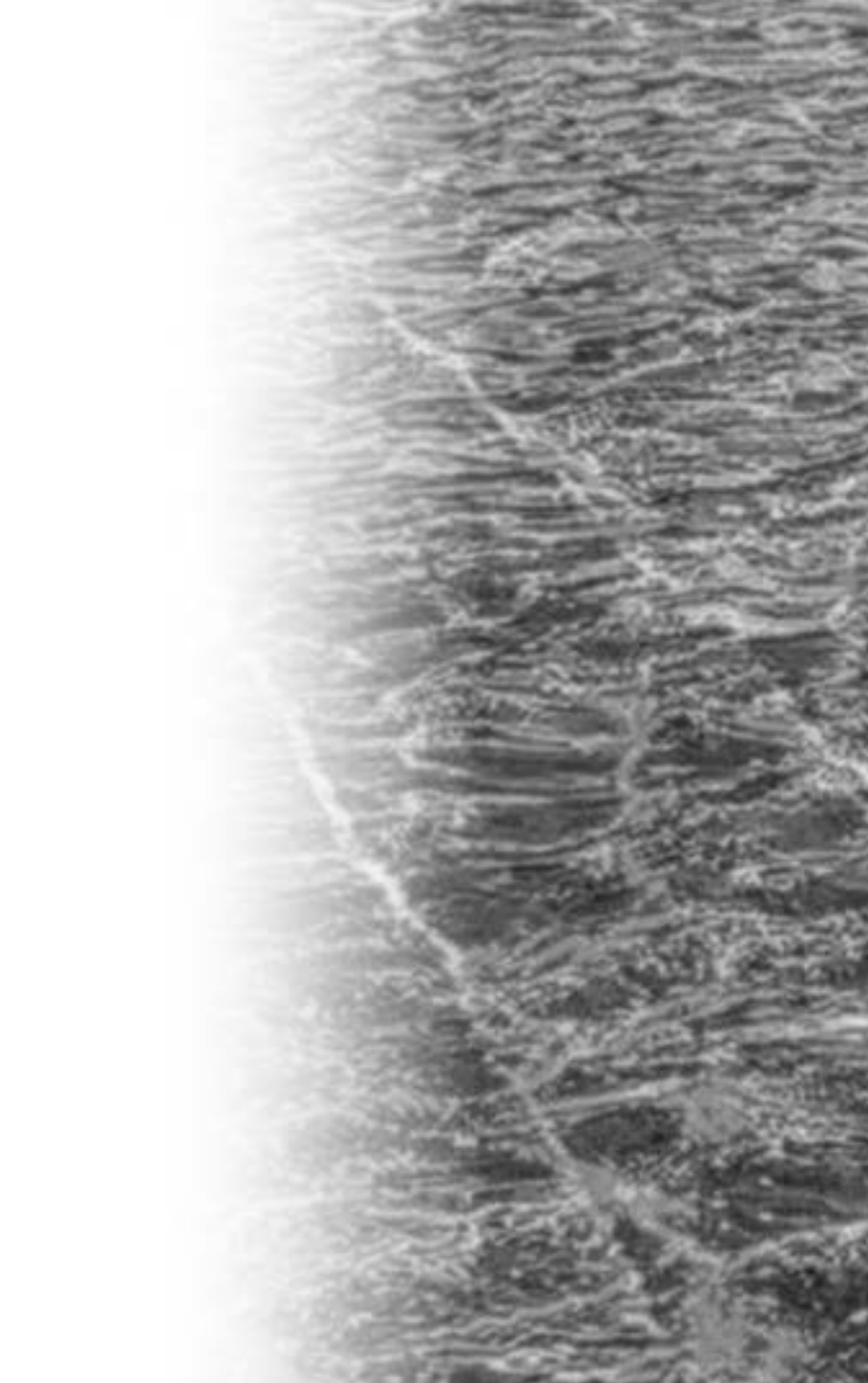
- Woooah - one of them cries out, looking at the woman standing across from her.
- Woooah - everyone repeats.
- Woooah-o-woooo-rera - the first one sings again.
- O-wooo-odera-reraaa - the chorus echoes.
- Woooah - they all collectively look down at the cemented river.

Voi vorero rera daaa... voi vaaa... voi daaa... voooo-vooo-vooo... voi, voi vooo. Oi rerooo oooi daaa... vooo vo voooooo, vooooi, voi, voi-daaa... ovoo... oii... oi oii... My poor water... water... vooooi... vooooorerooo reraaa... voi voo oo... oi daaa... you were supposed to be saved... vooi, ovoo reraaa.

Kvelaperi Tskalshia/The Watery Place

Refers to a state where everything is in water, a floating space. Water and space alternate in their significance and location. Water, as the generative mechanism of life, becomes infused with space and its elements.

As the defining, active, and generative force, water takes precedence. This primacy is reflected in the use of the postposition “in” when referring to water. Thus, water becomes a space in itself—a space in water rather than just water in space.





mariam songhulashvili

Surface Notes

To the reflective, film-like surface of water, simultaneously capable of smoothing and gnawing, fragmenting whichever does not share its properties.

The surface, darkened, eroded, scraped, and gnawed in places, resembles the makeup used to create damaged skin in a low-budget 1980s horror film. In certain spots, it reflects light and glistens, as if an inflammatory process is still ongoing. The surrounding area is covered with scabs. In places, it is darkened, like clotted blood. This is the body of a sculpture, covered with holes like a wasp's nest, as if something is about to crawl out from inside. Standing in an open, uncovered space, a wasp, a bee or some other similar insect really does fly around. Rain or wind pose no threat anymore, compared to the hundreds of years it spent underwater, earthly sediment can no longer do it any harm.

[This refers to statues found on a shipwreck near the island of Antikythera.]

It is as if a sponge was dipped in ink and selectively used to paint the surface. The transition from dark gray to brown gives way, in the bulging, rounded sections, to its natural, untainted colour - a creamy, ivory-like hue. The translucent, durable surface of the marble is covered by a halo of light scattered and reflected beneath it. The uneven surface of the sculptures that have been underwater disarms the marble of its allure, placing it not in the strict order of museum halls and corridors, but beside you, in the outside world. Whatever had to be protected and preserved is already lost in them. They are not even depicted in the museum catalogue or brochure.

[Referring to the National Archaeological Museum of Greece]

and its yard, where, along with plants, water-damaged statues stand to rest the gaze.]

The water has disfigured about twenty statues so significantly, that now, in the courtyard of the building—which also serves as a café—you can freely wrap these statues in a haze of nicotine smoke. No one will feel as if you are touching a priceless part of culture or identity.

The fact is that after visiting the archaeological museum, what remained most vividly in my memory were these damaged, incomplete, rejected figures, and even more so, their texture. Especially striking was their contrast with the smooth, uniform mass of water, which was also the creator of the faceless marble. Given that my everyday life involves the generation and manipulation of digital images, while observing these surfaces, I involuntarily wondered how their digital analogue could be created, whether it would be possible for both the damaged and its damaging agent, i.e. water, to be created from the same base, like a mould with a copy cast in it.

[Once you try to replicate something, it becomes a habit, a daily exercise in your mind of how and by what means you would depict an arbitrary form or structure.]

[When the goal is to depict the irregularities of a surface, that is, its texture, achieving this generatively (meaning, without using a texture captured by a camera) is possible through a single technique: using different types of digital noise, which employ mathematical randomness or other functions to resemble organic forms as closely as possible.]

¹ It may be Perlin noise, which, based on the principle of randomness, maps selected variables around a midpoint, creating more correlation between successive numbers; or Voronoi texture, which defines neighborhoods by the shortest distances between randomly distributed points, forming adjacent but never intersecting spaces. Numbers generated by such tamed randomness correspond visually to a grayscale representation, where 0 is black, 1 is white, and variables in between fall within shades of gray. Unlike true randomness, or “white noise,” the resulting image, thanks to certain causal relationships, resembles organic structures.

How do you describe something in order to get its analogue? What qualities will be lost in the process? And why do you imitate at all? Are you trying to be stylistically realistic, or does that not really matter? Based on the previous question, are you guided by memory or observation? Or maybe both? The imitation of organicity, its simulation, urges you to observe the behaviour of what is to be captured, in different states.

[On the one hand, in the case of water, hydrodynamics² has been studying it for a long time and is capable of representing water through specific formulas.

The implementation of the relations highlighted by hydrodynamics for computer graphics depended on the appropriate development of technology. Now, fluid simulation is no longer an insurmountable task; with sufficiently powerful hardware, it is possible to do it on a personal computer: to run scenarios, to set up various obstacles for the water, to create and define its flow, path, and boundaries.]

Depicting the surface of water is nothing new for figurative art. The transparent, silky reflectivity of watercolour, the depth achieved through multiple layers of oil, or the dynamics of the flow carved through engraving. Today, simulating physical characteristics that make up reality is the main task of computer graphics. We encounter replications of scattered light, texture, gravitational pull, inertia, gases, volumetric and liquid bodies on a daily basis.

[Since the appearance of generative abstract, linear graphics in the opening titles of Vertigo in the 1950s, for decades, attempts

² Hydrodynamics is the study of the motion of fluids and their interactions with solids. The methods of hydromechanics allow us to determine the velocity, pressure, friction, and other physical characteristics of motion at any point in a fluid at any time. There are two main approaches to analyzing fluid motion: Lagrangian and Eulerian. The Eulerian approach focuses on a single fixed point in space and observes how the properties of the fluid (such as velocity, pressure, etc.) change over time as particles pass through that point. In contrast, the Lagrangian approach focuses on individual, moving particles of the fluid and observes their changes over time.

to digitally represent reality resembled nightmarish imagery, precisely because they had nothing in common with how a surface actually reacts to light or physical interaction. Now, even the most stylised animated films replicate the physical properties to the same degree as computer graphics that are seamlessly woven into camera-shot footage.]

In the early stages of digital technology, one of the main challenges was the digital replication of fluid bodies—especially water. But before tackling its restless, ever-moving form, everything, once again, begins with the surface.

[It began the same way in computer graphics. One of the first instances of digitally rendered water appears in the 1979 thirty-second short 'Complete Angler' (short, experimental visuals like this were made to test rapidly evolving technologies and demonstrate their new capabilities). Less than five seconds are dedicated to the mirror-like water surface, and it can only be identified by the circular, wave-like patterns formed by a particle falling onto the flat plane.

The main focus of 1981's 'Carla's Island' is precisely a large body of water and its interaction with shifting lighting. The water surface is made up of horizontal 'hills' It rhythmically repeats the shape of a trigonometric function, creating the effect of continuous motion.

Bodies of water first appear in full form in the 1989 film 'The Abyss' and 1991's 'Terminator 2'. In both cases, with the alien presence in 'The Abyss' and the fluid body of Liquid T-1000, what defines them above all is the reflectiveness of their surfaces.]

A reflective, mirror-like, yet transparent, dispersive, slightly agitated, constantly moving plane. Depending on its flow and the time of day, it outlines different textures for you: elongated, rounded, foamy. Each one resembles the last, but never repeats it. It catches your gaze and dictates your mood, the rhythm of

your body, into its own taste; it can calm you, or unsettle you. Light scattered beneath the surface pulls you in, calls you into its depth, yet the plane, sealed like a membrane, holds your attention firmly. The dust scattered on it clings to floating bodies, leaving some on the surface, swallowing others.

Since computer graphics became capable not only of depicting the surface of reality but simulating the underlying physical cause-and-effect, it could be said that the water's surface has, to some extent, lost its expressive appeal. The idea of the mass of water and the buoyant force within it has become more interesting and fascinating.

[However, simulating its movement took decades, and it was first successfully achieved in an animated film, in the flooding scene of 'Antz' (1998). After that, water becomes interesting as a source of uncontrolled force.]

This is where computer graphics went wrong, when they focused on the behaviour of water as a unified mass, on its motion, rather than on its surface, a single still frame of which can overwhelm you, call to you, or consume you.]

As in the primary space of representation of reality - in art - the practice of interpretation, of defining depth, and imbuing meaning has erased the significance of the form and its superficial characteristics. It seems that the allure of the water's surface has also disappeared.

[According to Susan Sontag, the intellect takes revenge on art when, through interpretation, it leads us to the impoverishment and exhaustion of the world. Interpretation is the same as the process of explaining, of making sense. It serves to create a shadowy world of perceptible, explainable meanings. On the contrary, Sontag envisions a surface whose impulse is so

direct that it can simply be what it is.³ The surface of water is precisely such a surface. Just as the gnawed surface of marble proved more mesmerizing than the marble's perfect forms, when thinking about water, I am similarly captivated by its radiance, which keeps me from diving into its deep waters.]

["In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of __".]⁴

3 Sontag speaks of a work of art and its surface, for her too, this surface is not merely the literal plane of a painted canvas. Her understanding of it is as broad as, for example, the form of a film - its surface (which, after all, does not exist by itself and incorporates all the expressive means that create a film).

4 Sontag, Susan. 1966. *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Describes life/being that has been significantly altered by historical, chemical, and economic forces, shaped by capitalism, colonialism, industrial exploitation, and their ecological legacies. It refers to bodies and environmental conditions that are gradually damaged, yet continue to live – in a reduced state but keeping an imitation of clean life. Life here is no longer life in its fullness¹, because various forces have artificially created conditions in which resources, opportunities, or the scope for exercising rights are deliberately and systematically reduced. The extreme manifestation of this state is not the natural trajectory of life or of sequential change itself, but constant decline, abbreviation. A condemned coexistence with toxicity, systemic, gradual erasure, and the normalisation of it. The author of the original term: Michelle Murphy.

¹ 'Fullness of life or quality life' in this context does not refer to a specific historical period, geographical location, or empirically defined situation; it expresses the political and cultural idea that is presented to society as a 'full-fledged', 'empowered' and 'ecologically healthy environment' and is formed within the framework of values perceived by the democratic electorate, acting as a kind of normative illusion rather than a real, materially achievable or ever-achieved state.

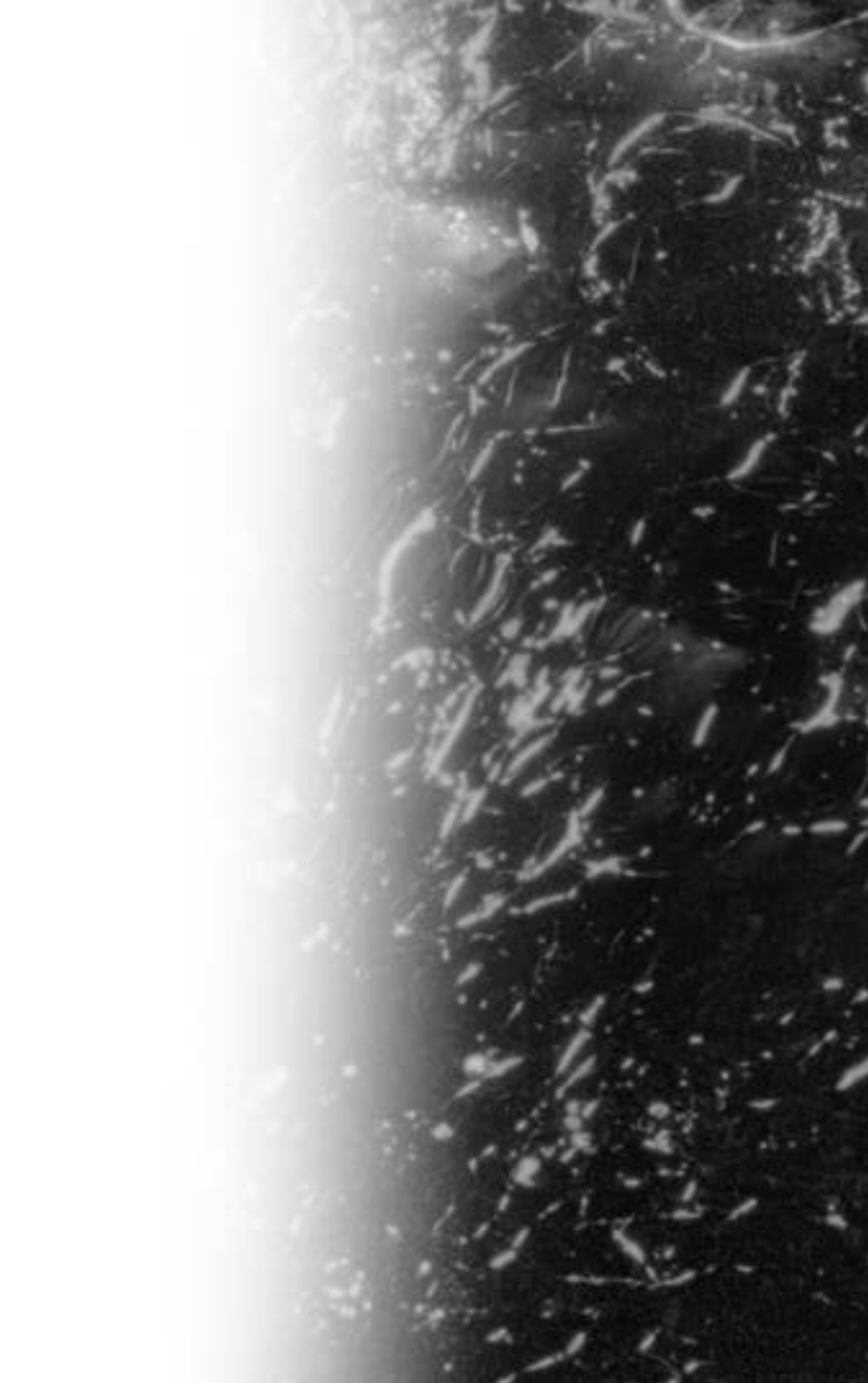
Tskaldauleveli

A person who should have drunk a glass of cold water before making a decision, because one expected that the circumstances would be against them, but did not. Slowing down, pausing, and drinking a glass of cold water beforehand would have brought a slight relief to the subject, a feeling of cooling to their dried-up body longing for water. This action would have given one the *power of water*¹ to overcome those who were apathetic to their essence or goals. However, they turned out to be tskaldauleveli and, most likely, that is why they failed to act. The habit of drinking cold water during emotional overheating comes from folk beliefs, specifically, in the Javakh dictionary we read: “If you are very angry, drink cold water” or “If you are offended, let him drink cold water”. The term tskaldauleveli can be thought of as a continuation of this belief and an attempt to adapt it to a specific context.

¹ Reference to 'May God give you the power of water' - a Georgian idiom /blessing, treating water, essential to life, with reverence and respect.

Tskalmartuloba

A state in which the living body is connected to water in the same way that sea tides are moved by the gravitational forces of the moon. Since more than half of the human body is made up of water, as it shapes, nourishes, protects, transports, expels, invigorates, restores, balances and thickens, even mild dehydration can cause fatigue, loss of concentration or headaches in our bodies and gradually lead the entire system to collapse. It is through these liquefactions that a state of joint hydrodynamics is created between us and water, where our own body, consciousness and trajectories of action are directed by the dynamic circulation of fluids – streams, gurgles, lymphatic movement, expelled waters.





Mucilage Starts to Spread Into the Black Sea, or Petrochemical Sticky Futures

I am sitting by a slow river. Its channel resembles a swamp in color, a devout water, tinged with a greenish-gray hue. It reminds me that when I gaze at water, I seem to first recognize its anthropogenic pollution, its stagnant and inactive character, in which slime is most likely to appear. This corruption is not simply an object of aesthetic observation; it tells us stories about the metaphysical state of the river and our relations* with polluted¹ water*s.

Coexistence in a polluted world requires a fundamental rethinking of relationality. How do we keep living intoxicated rather than simply with toxicity? How do we pour into each other wholly rather than hygienically? How do we acknowledge damaged, altered, and synthetic forms of life? The presence of microplastics in human and non-human bodies – in various geographies, positions, or forms – points to the terrifying intimacy of petrochemical capitalism². Just as microplastics are absorbed into our cells imperceptibly, silently, from the inside or the outside, from swimming in the sea or from wearing plastic

1 Pollution can be grasped as the structural misplacement of matter – an incessant reallocation of the substances that already constitute and surround us: fire, metal, plastic, the human body itself. Such materials, far from inert, are subjected to continuous manipulations, whether machinic, geological, or anthropogenic, unfolding across heterogeneous temporalities – from the immediacy of combustion to the longue durée of sedimentation. What is named “pollution” is therefore less a discrete event than a mode of redistribution, a metabolic reordering of matter that unsettles the boundaries between nature, industry, and organism.

2 A form of capital accumulation; an economic system based on the extraction, distribution, and consumption of petroleum products, including plastics. Petrochemical capitalism also refers to a geopolitical set-up in which control over oil resources and their distribution is paramount.

flip-flops, so does the inescapable contact of a new time, a new material, reach our consciousness. The body absorbs a pervasive form of pollution that refuses to be excluded and defined as 'other'. The petrochemical now is not limited to the spatial envelope of the environment but transcends the immediate boundaries of organicity and syntheticity.

If our bodies have long since become part of a post-material synthetic landscape³, then the question arises: how do we live when our bodies themselves are gradually transformed into the material that eventually absorbs and dissolves them, when the nearby waters are healing us while simultaneously poisoning us? How do we live where the body is an organism in silent agreement with petrochemicals? How do we live as we have never lived before?

In her 2016 book *Against Purity, Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Canadian philosopher Alexis Shotwell tells us that the politics of purity creates an antagonizing political grid which excludes everything that is deemed 'polluted'. These discourses on purity also seem to periodically reappear in discourses on climate justice and decoloniality⁴. They stay afloat through the romanticising of time when we were not in touch with capitalism and colonialism (if such a time ever existed). As a result, we more easily reject the present material conditions – and therefore, simultaneously erase our intoxicated pasts and futures. I will not deny that the days pass in such a way that I am more in contact with cellophane than with any other material. There is no state that we can restore, no pre-toxic body that I can aspire to with sufficient detoxification. However, coexistence does not mean normalisation.

3 It is important to note that belonging to nature has never been a pure state, because it is an ideological fantasy that was shaped by industrialisation, colonial expansion, and their aesthetic fruit – Romanticism.

4 In certain worldbuilding visions.

Often, when interacting with polluted bodies⁵, we are thrown into an acute eschatological⁶ consciousness, which seems to give us the right to surrender to it; the aforementioned pollution of the river turns its body into a taboo, perceived as corrupt. At the same time, our relationship to it is entrenched in a mixture of feelings, mostly apathy, shame, and disgust, which disrupts the sense of unity and, ultimately, causes us to lose relatability. Against this background, the deterioration of the river's condition is happening at an even faster pace, as if care should be continuously given only to what is still salvable. So, we are hindered in action. The loss of our desire to care and the denial of that need diminish bodies, caught up in the twilight zone⁷, which, despite the unspoken common agreement to exclude them, retain life. And everything contains life, when together⁸.

5 In this case, polluted bodies include both the understanding of ecological and physical pollution, as well as the idea of trans and queer bodies, as dirt-y - manifested and perpetuated in many different narratives of social, political, cultural and technological pollution.

Further reading: Shah, Nishant. 2023. "I Spy, With My Little AI: How Queer Bodies Are Made Dirty for Digital Technologies to Claim Cleanness." In *Queer Reflections on AI: Uncertain Intelligences*, edited by Michael Klippfahn-Karge, Ann-Kathrin Koster, and Sara Morais dos Santos Bruns, 57-72. London: Routledge.

6 Eschatology (Greek: ἔσχατος, eschatos - the last; logos - doctrine, or teaching) is an apocalyptic worldview; a doctrine about the last events of humanity, the end of civilisation.

7 Contaminated bodies coexist on the peripheries of society, in what sociologist Myra Hird describes as "a twilight zone where no clear, 'natural' definition of [it] can be given, within wide margins of uncertainty and variation. This is true in cultural, symbolic, and material senses. Waste is an inherently ambiguous linguistic signifier: anything and everything can become waste, and things can simultaneously be and not be waste, depending on the perceiver. Definition of [it] can be given, within wide margins of uncertainty and variation".

Hird, Myra J. 2012. "Knowing Waste: Towards an Inhuman Epistemology." *Social Epistemology*, 26(3-4): 453-469.

8 Currently, most scientists believe that the emergence of life is a long process that occurred on Earth, in distant geological epochs, as a result of appropriate conditions (temperature, chemical composition of the Earth's gas, liquid and solid shells, radiation regime, etc.). Based on this theory, the creation of the conditions necessary for life is contingent on collective efforts.

I am separated from water – I am suffering from the absence of external waters, from un-seeing, un-touching them. My organism experiences something much like dehydration. I feel my body mirroring the state of the waters I interact with. Swallowing becomes difficult. I feel a dryness prolonged in time, the type that does not kill, but disintegrates you like a spreading erosion. It seems to have appeared on its own, but it still causes a feeling that something is off in my body.

I am exchanging all my watery fluids into mucus. This transition can be named as micronecrosis – the gradual death of my fluids. The once attractive properties of water – its antioxidant, cleansing, flushing tides – are being drained from my body. Maybe I would want to learn how to move intermittently, leaving a slimy trail. Maybe my dehydration will reach the threshold of complete dehydration, the liquid will turn into mucus, and the microplastics in my blood will harden, eventually becoming fossilised material, and, finally, drying out so much that what once was my blood might even transform into synthetic stone. Maybe I would want to promptly turn into a conglomerate of petrochemical particles.

In December 2024, two Russian oil tankers, Volgoneft 212 and Volgoneft 239, sunk in the Black Sea, specifically in the Kerch Strait⁹. The oil spill of their fuel into the sea is considered one of the most terrible ecological disasters of the 21st century. Technically, when the oil spills into water, it either reaches the edges of the sea and stubbornly clings to the bottom or chooses to remain on the surface. If the oil decides to cling to the edge, it will poison everything around it when sinking. If it stays on the surface, it will drag down birds and animals with it to the fringes, slowly suffocating and intoxicating them. Such disasters become even more severe during the summer, as hot weather activates remaining oil, causing it to release toxic gases. Members of the

9 4,300 tons of fuel oil and possibly other petroleum products spilled into the waters of the Kerch Strait because of the collision of two tankers during a storm (other journalistic investigations and sources report a spill of 9,000 tons of fuel oil).

Greenpeace Ukraine. 2024. "Russian Militarisation of the Black Sea and Azov Threatens with New Environmental Catastrophe." December 15. <https://shorturl.at/jBv7t>

rescue team sent to clean up the spill on the local beaches of Anapa¹⁰ (that is, Russian twelfth graders who were misled into volunteering and denied gloves or other protective equipment¹¹) were transferred to the hospital with chemical burns, nausea, headaches, difficulty breathing, and the lingering taste of oil in their mouths. As of July 6, 2025, while I am in the process of writing, oil pollution has reached the coast of Abkhazia, 350 kilometers from the epicenter of the disaster. Birds soaked in fuel oil have also been spotted on the coast of Georgia. We still don't know exactly how much oil has been spilled into the Black Sea.

Since the twentieth century, the Black Sea has gone through a lot. Currently, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues; underwater explosions occur. Russia uses the sea to train its military or extract natural resources. Climate change, overfishing, and fish wanderers from other seas¹² have dramatically reduced the salinity of the Black Sea. On June 6, 2023, when Russia blew up the Kakhovka dam in Ukraine, researchers noticed alarming levels of toxicity on the shores. Along with the pollution on the Black Sea coast, there has also been a certain recovery and return of marine life, caused by the absence of tourism.

10 Anapa is a seaside city and climatic-peloid-balneological resort in the Krasnodar Territory of the Russian Federation.

11 The Insider. 2025. "Mother of deceased teenager reveals students were sent to clean up oil in exchange for 'help with exams'", February 4. <https://theins.ru/en/news/278508>

12 A dangerous invasive species, the silver-bellied toad (*Lagocephalus sceleratus*), has been spotted in the Black Sea for the second time. Experts are urging residents to be careful.

I am an immigrant. I am a terrible fish called the pink-bellied, cheeked toadfish, which, with the neurotoxic poison in my ovaries and my accidental release into the Black Sea from the Suez Canal, is causing great damage to the economy. I eat and displace your local fish, mollusks, crabs, steal your jobs and homes. Not only do I eat you and steal your space, but with my powerful jaws, I can even break fishermen's gear and tear their nets. No one can beat me, that's why I am the most terrible fish.

If I am becoming slime, so is the sea¹³ – the sea has become overloaded with polyphonic pollution; the waves have not been able to wash it away. As a result, a gelatinous mixture of in*organic material spreads and multiplies for kilometers. Sea slime is seen as a symptom of an ecological crisis, but it is also a feedback mechanism: a visible manifestation of the currents of industrial agriculture, petrochemical runoff, and other anthropocene*ic illnesses that the sea has metabolised into a surface condition. These currents are not separate from us – they are us. I mirror the sea slime, and the sea reflects mine. The slime suffocates life, suffocates oxygen, and leaves a suffocating landscape built on excess. This landscape already echoes the logic of the swamp, a space of boiling, coexistence, and the transformation of bodies spread over decades. The sea, the swamp, and my body – circulating, simmering, absorbing, these three types of waters show us different rhythms to how we maintain an organism overwhelmed by excess.

„ახავანი, გუშო“¹⁴

Why do they go mad when they see me? I am stretched out right on the seashore, between land and water. As I emerge from the sea, I shed my parts, with my disintegrated skin scattering all over the shore. I was born amidst the chaotic, petrochemical water. In water that, on the one hand, seems distant, but is actually quite close. In the waterworld that surrounds the Earth. I have never seen anyone like me with my own eyes. My amorphous body is wrapped in gas bubbles of a fuel oil swamp. Sometimes I look like a shapeless lump of humus, sometimes like a half-

13 Batumelebi. 2025. “The marine slime coating, which has been present on the surface of the Sea of Marmara for several years, has also appeared in the Black Sea.” May 30. <https://batumelebi.netgazeti.ge/news/413711/>

14 “A Mingrelian man (Abkhazian too) sighs, thereby revealing the sorrow buried in his heart. At this time, it is very dangerous for the spirit of the swamp to take this sigh and not to drag down, not to drown, not to throw the man who has succumbed to the sigh into a hopeless situation.”

Kobalia, Nona. 2023. *Moon Mosaic*. Publishing House Intellect.

living bird smeared in oil, soaring in the sky, bitumen¹⁵ droplets falling from its wings. It depends on what one's eyes can see.

For centuries, wetlands have been seen as useless, uninhabited disease-ridden spaces, to be drained, destroyed, and abandoned. But we tend to forget, overlook, and take their steadfastness for granted. Wetlands are some of the most diverse self-sustaining systems on Earth, transforming and nurturing hybrid life forms that thrive in liquidity, darkness, and decay. The remains of decayed animals and plants glow phosphorescently. When exposed to groundwater, they produce gases that shoot up into a sharp flame, reaching human height¹⁶. Unlike industrial systems focused on permeability and pure filtration, wetlands keep organic and synthetic impurities for a long time and retain their strength. A wetland does not purify, it metabolises.

Even in death, new bodies awaken; what awakens in a dying sea?

If the polluted Black Sea suggests a collapse of the fantasy of sacred nature, swamps remind us that we can continue finding ourselves caught up in opaque, obscure, and decaying structures. Here we encounter the *politics of stickiness*, through which sea slime is perceived as a logic of the post-industrial swamp or ecology, one that simultaneously expresses trauma of the petrochemical era while also exposing wet connections from its processes of *dying/swamping*. It is both a waste compost of the capitalist era and a place for wet and sticky speculation. Either way, it requires a reconsideration of our framework, opening to a consciousness that does not erase the toxicity so intimately present *with and in us*.

15 An extremely viscous component of petroleum. Depending on its exact composition, it can be a sticky, black liquid, or a seemingly solid mass that behaves like a liquid for a very long time.

16 Ignis fatuus, a ghostly light phenomenon seen in swamps. Scientists believe it is caused by the oxidation of phosphine (PH₃), diphosphane (P₂H₄), and methane (CH₄) in the atmosphere. As a result of organic decomposition, mixtures of phosphine and diphosphane spontaneously form a ball of flame when exposed to oxygen in the air.

In bodies swamped by petrochemicals, a spring sometimes bursts, water that someone might drink. In this way, the dying Black Sea sends a signal to its alter ego, to its primacy and even to its corporeality, which is difficult to notice against the background of the suffocating petrochemical slime that we often look at but do not see. We listen or try to listen. It too, as is the custom of all *altered* waters, is discontentedly silent. If our bodies are, to some extent, plasticised, then perhaps we can only begin to think *from* this common contamination. Coexistence in this context does not mean finding a clean solution, but learning to accept existence in a strange, synthetic present that we have already inherited. Can our plasticisation, an involuntary communion, produce a consciousness built on a commitment and longing for life on the land? What relationships can be forged in these polluted commons? The swamps have taught us that life continues in constant digestion and transformation, through the extension/growth of/from bodies. Now, the sea slime reminds us too that it bears the marks of sticky futures that we cannot yet clearly name.

Walking together, slowly... with pauses, where bodies absorb each other's pace.

Not letting go. Staying. Flowing.

**I dedicate this to all the people who are trying to restore broken threads, tell us stories that help us see our own and collective consciousness. To Keren, who introduced me to Nona Kobalia; to the chosen family that both nourishes and heals me.*

In the text, I kleptoparasitically use the works of Nona Kobalia and offer my own interpretation of them.

Halocline

A layer of water in which salinity increases suddenly, at a speed higher than that of layers above or below it. In everyday speech, haloclinity signifies someone's character, marked by directness and roughness around the edges. Seeing, accepting, and going along with haloclinity requires one to practice porosity and be resilient.

Ats-momavali/Nw-fure

A future enacted and prefigured in the present. Comes from Georgian, now it is the future – ats-momavali, atsi momavalia.

Gamozghvavebuli

Something physical, emotional or social that the waves of the sea have shored up.





Shored up nw-fure Seas

To everyone in Greece, labouring (0431).

Something is visible on a gleaming horizon. Uncomfortably, bodyguards grab onto their binoculars. They're looking. Unable to distinguish much more than the contours of a floating object, they send a boat to investigate. The newly awoken boat aimlessly cuts through the waves. In a few, a distant voice is heard through a nearby walkie-talkie:

It's a wooden log, not a human.

've been there.

Sitting by the sea and looking out to it, to the horizon like a log that gleams. Yearning for a future; longing for a different sea. However, this future exists neither beyond nor before this water. It does not exist and you are nothing. If in the West, non-being is a conduit for colonial expansion beyond the horizon¹, in the post-Soviet space, nothingness builds onto an identity frozen in liminality and builds on failure that underlies quotidian life and overshadows being. You long for another, on the other side of water, because you are—none. A failed. To those of us close to the sea, the Black Sea plays a specific role. It is a figure spread out. Opened out in three directions², standing on its coasts, beyond the horizon, we are facing the West. What do we make of this? If we look westward, is it inevitable to gaze in that direction? Is it inevitable for water to soak in abstract ideas? And in so doing, simultaneously cross and solidify individual, interpersonal, state, and regional borders?

Some time ago, or not so far in the past, I was standing on the

1 Virilio, Paul. 2008. *Negative Horizon: An Essay in Dromoscopy*. Continuum.

2 Frederiksen, Martin Demant. 2014. 'To Russia with Love'. *Focaal* 2014(70): 26-36.

beach equipped with floaties, frozen, and mid-tantrum. The wave of emotions that washed over me crashed onto the coast as cries. In front of this vast water, I was searching for shelter with my voice, but could find it nowhere, not on a single unit, of all the hundred kilometres of coast that follow Georgia³. Its passport holders, on a state level, have sought refuge in Eastern Europe, a distanced construct, much like the future, over there, over the Black Sea, where the West starts. It is not that these constructs do not exist at all, but to what extent do they exist in Georgia and to what extent do we belong to them? Promises are elsewhere, we—else-where. However, the affective dimension of being else-where depends on the negation of the temporal present and the complimentary spatial condition. As if the ‘non’ in non-being does not exist. But we carry the ‘non’ with our post-Soviet corporeality. From independence to today, the physical realities of Georgia are those of a conductive corridor. With this we carry different promises that take hold in geopolitical, cultural, social, political (non)imagination. On water, and on land too, the corridor translates into transit circulation⁴. Sprouted in the field of transmission, we carry futures with imagination, especially when we gaze out to the sea.

Internationally, conversations are sprouting about the Black Sea, firstly, through growing concerns around security after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine and, secondly, amid talks around the construction of an underwater cable. This region too exists in the future. It breaks through the present painfully, because of a war or, more locally, urban transformations of the coast. As a result, the present is displaced to the future tense in a longing that projects unfulfilled desires onto the everyday and promises an end to liminality. On the other hand, this temporal transmutation prepares us for failure as the fantasies of glory, Argonauts, and Medea, at the end of the day are myths that completely miss the logics and political economy of water-ridden projects—ports, hydro or tourist infrastructure—alike.

3 In Abkhazia, 210 km.

4 List of all the planned projects.

We escape to the beyond of the horizon, away from the failures of present or the before-present.

What does the Black Sea have to do with all this? When thinking of it, it is black, something to be swam across to a different future. Do we know what swims underneath or where the sea's name comes from? How does it connect us or what does it do in general or to us? Left momentarily unanswered, we long for water-specific outdated metaphors, archetypes like Medea, and we commit to swimming over them.

Material and physical dimensions feed sociality since they are always-already social. Following this current, the Black Sea is not one sea, but multiplicity of seas, with its many temporal, co-occurring and enacted scenarios and entanglements among varying ideologies, cultures, and humans and non-humans⁵. Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, and Russia gather around it. The Sea of Marmara and Azov. The rivers of Danube, Dnipro, and Dniester flow into it, along with the straits of Bosphorus and Kerch. On the one hand, the internal dynamics and logics of the sea leave us face to face with its materiality. The sea is here. If the region is non-existent, the sea itself constructs a region at different times and scales, with its material and social processes, even with momentary flows and outflows—entanglements, which Humphrey narrates through the relationalities of jellyfish, fish, and fishermen⁶. This year, the silver-bellied fish emerges, continues Humphrey's story and connects the Black to the Mediterranean Sea, the Suez Canal, and beyond, to the Indian and Pacific oceans. At last, forcing us to face the supply chain of the local fish markets.⁷ On the other hand, movements outside the margins of the sea that lies

5 Humphrey, Caroline, and Vera Skvirskaja. 2014. 'Introduction: The Black Sea as Region and Horizon'. *Focaal*.

6 Humphrey, Caroline. 2023. 'Fishers, Sea Snails and Dolphins: The Changing Context of Transient Inter-Species Relations in the Black Sea'. *A Sea of Transience*.

7 The Adjara Times. 2025. "A dangerous fish - Tetraodon - has been spotted in the Black Sea." June 30. <https://shorturl.at/B7WMI>

before us, still accumulate as nothingness; emotionally amount to none. This emptiness still leaves us stranded.

Water takes and brings information and facts about the Black Sea. It enters our affective dimension indirectly, leaving pale traces. It is transient. When the sea is turbulent, the wishes of a future beyond the horizon come into being. Turning around and standing in the stormed-over water is unending. On the surface it is black, but diving into the sea water and thinking about the chemical processes underneath, opening one's eyes is hard—it is hard.

And the etymology of its name, the Black Sea? Maybe it implies the colours that have corresponded with the cardinal directions—North/East/West/South. North is black, east is green or blue, and south, red. The sea could have taken on its coloured name depending on who named it, in what direction. Signs like these are so conditional. More than anything else, they signify the historical, cultural, and social moments. If we follow the second current of its naming, the waves of the Black Sea turn out to be black, as anoxic waters propagate its depths, close to Eastern Europe, fifty metres below surface. Hypoxemic waters fail to muddy up. The salinity slope is steep; it has a pronounced halocline. On the top, fresh, oxygen-rich, and less dense waters flow from the rivers, separately, in non-enmeshment with the saline water. The atmosphere, with its specific chemical compounds as building blocks, also supplies oxygen to the sea's surface. Salt water is trapped underneath. However, if we pay close attention to the sea's halocline and follow it to its depths, we will see that a solid border between fresh and salt water is non-existent. The circumstances slowly change, at first, they are diluted, then not-so-diluted. The sea is still one with all the chemical compounds and fleuves. Past, future, and present cannot exist separately there. They are woven into a web and, when followed, often turn away from a straight line. You've been there, in *nw-fure/ats-momavali*.

The blackness of the sea lives on in memory, without territory,

socially divorced from its physical and material layers, and vice versa. With its complications, it fails to unite as an entity. Amongst other seas, it is swept on the side⁸, “emerges as temporary or temporarily grounded and leaves a fleeting trace in their void”⁹. For those who facilitate transit, it is as transient as water. This un-territoriality and non-place are abstract, mythologised, and become a precondition of and an enamouement with the collective and imagination of else-where, the simultaneous existence and non-existence of a different time. It is gone, fleeting, and we chase after it. In this normativity, the state-making language freezes from the top and carries with it the political imagination from the bottom. Those that are by the Black Sea, are in the future and in the past, simultaneously—the two times in which we have frozen, and transferred over to the present, by cancelling the latter. We have failed. The fact that the sea is black, goes without saying. Just black.

We swim in it. Whatever borders may cross them, colours still leak in human and non-human processes. They shade when the Kakhovka dam is destroyed in Ukraine, when it covers Russian-controlled territory and brings sediments into the Black Sea. In 2023, salmonella will spread, and fishing will be prohibited near Odesa and Mykolaiv. These places will be marked harmful. On Georgia’s side, the condition of sea water is checked annually. That year too, the water turned out to be suitable for swimming, but some still got weary and abstained. At that moment, when the border between inside and out, between the body and the environment revealed itself to be far from solid, the region of the Black Sea became tangible. Turns out, corporeally or bodily, we can be close to a distant war. Chemicals metabolise and the sediment brought from Kakhovka irks, provokes anxieties when its bodily inflow becomes a possibility. We leak through membranes and because of it are this-worldly. The outflows and

8 Khalvashi, Tamta, and Martin Demant Frederiksen, eds. 2023. *A Sea of Transience: Poetics, Politics and Aesthetics along the Black Sea Coast*. New York: Berghahn Books.

9 Bjerregaard, Peter, Anders Emil Rasmussen, and Tim Flohr Sørensen, eds. 2016. *Materialities of Passing*, p. 19.

inflows are viscous—such is porosity¹⁰. At sea, the stickiness of salt eases floating. We absorb whatever cannot be internalised in the price of Kakhovka's destruction; in other words, we are oozed with the externalities overflowing from the dam¹¹. The environment, air, land, water, and non-human and human bodies take up overflows of the wars in Ukraine, genocide in Palestine, and the geographies entangled with them. In so doing, water connects torn off areas, no-wheres. We are troubled, muddled up.

When gazing at the horizon, I fretted over the no-where—a beyond this world—a place that could not exist. In search of the end of water, I, myself was pre-emptively excluded from this-worldliness, because water does not concede to thresholds. It leaks through grounds and humanmade borders. No-where ceases to exist for water. For example, I have accidentally swam over from Sarpi to Ureki¹². From there, some arm of the border patrol had lit up; “where has the water taken you?”, they shouted, demanded I come back, in a timely manner. (თორემ თქვენ წინააღმდეგ გამოყენებული იქნება კანონით გათვალისწინებული ღონისძიებები-ო).

Some refer to globalisation as oceanisation¹³, where mobility brushes up against state-defined borders, but is in their constant defiance. Liquids do not maintain a fixed, frozen form like solids do. They flow, change, adapt to the environment. Liquid modernity is a mirror of this condition, in which change is momentary and inevitable. Transient. It is because of such

10 Tuana, Nancy. 2008. ‘Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina’. In *Material Feminisms*, eds. Stacy Alaimo and Susan J. Hekman. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 188–214. pp. 199–200.

11 Guthman, Julie. 2015. ‘Binging and Purging: Agrofood Capitalism and the Body as Socioecological Fix’. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 47(12): 2522–36.

12 Georgia's coastline townships.

13 Helmreich, Stefan. 2011. ‘Nature/Culture/Seawater’. *American Anthropologist* 113(1): 132–44.

liquidity that accelerated mobility is graced with water's metaphors. It is because of globalisation that I found Agnes and through our friendship learned that apparently, Romania graces the other side of the Black Sea. What was on the other side of the Black Sea was less evident before I met her. An epistemological relationality followed, and revealed, somehow, similar physical realities, that echo throughout this text as well as within Agnes and me. Through play and endless walking, the future took root in the present, much like I had imagined it. Only later would I find out that Batumi and Constanta, in other words, Georgia and Romania, had also intersected before our encounter. Up until 2022, a boat crossed from one point to the other. A single ticket cost around 200 euros or dollars.

Movement accelerates, the measure for time is cut in one-two-three-four pieces and memory is emptied out. Regardless, we remember failure with our whole systems, centralised at first, and then scattered around the nerve-endings. I have not seen Agnes in a few years. Water may erase corporeal and state borders, or, better yet, may bring their viscous porosity to the forefront. But, when I am here and acknowledge my own transcorporeality, in flows a yearning of another, of some-where. At the end of the day, I am also of these post-Soviet waters. If the construction of an underwater cable entrenches the Black Sea region, so what? What for us? How will it engender the physical dimension and accumulate into perception?

A globalised Earth grows small. Archetypes of water and material *nows* rub against each other. The boundary is charged. How would I have known that, from my port in 2020, and from Batumi in 2013, a boat would leave under a Moldovan flag, and blow up in Beirut, and connect these three geographies, so often thought of as disparate. The explosion was a sign of internal, temporal and spatial transmutation. The connection would run its opposite course in my life. A relation would first end in ancient times, then begin in a more recent past, intorted. It sleeps now. Nothing could delete it. In this case, destruction followed globalisation. Material reality, brought on by water, fed internal

organs. It flipped the world—its spatiality on its head—and simultaneously exploded and accelerated transnational politics. In other words, is it possible for a flotilla to leave from Batumi and swim toward Gaza?¹⁴

We were defeated. Yes, these connections are transient, much like the Black Sea. After all, they have already cancelled the passenger ferry to Constanta and have left only the transit reality to simmer. But, by discovering these webs and enacting them, *nowhere* disappears and the present opens for play. Times and spaces are diluted. No longer do we peak beyond the horizon, towards the abstract, romanticised, non-existent. We stop grieving the past Medea into the future. “Though the poem is clearly about the present, it is a present that is now squarely the past and in its queer relationality promises a future”¹⁵. The future brought onto the horizon, not as a reproductive figure or function, but as a prefiguration of a not-fully-consciously not-yet-here. The ness of today is the node in which the future is shored up from the sea, sometimes.

Today, in the present, I count distance between Greece and Georgia with knots. I do not hurry, since material and physical realities, with their chemical complexities, feed into sociality, and vice versa. Concurrently, borders stand firm and, at the same time, are erased in emotional and affective registers. At the end, they stay as you and me. The enactment of this desire does not exist on the outskirts of the Black Sea and its bordering states. Quite the opposite. Without the history of these states, desire cannot exist, neither in the present, the future, nor the past. We cannot tell stories or chronologies of these states, be they political, economic, or otherwise, without analysing

14 Kosmatopoulos, Nikolas. 2019. ‘On the Shores of Politics: Sea, Solidarity and the Ships to Gaza’. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 37(4): 740–57.

15 Muñoz, Jose. JE. (2019). Introduction. In *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (10th Anniversary edition). New York university press, p.6.

how they marginalised desires to different temporalities and geographies¹⁶.

We swim in the new-fure sea, shored up in its time and space.

¹⁶ Gopinath, Gayatri. 2005. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Duke University Press.

Tskurvili/Thirst

An insatiable desire for something or someone; a yearning so deep, it amounts to complete dehydration. Direct naming of such a thirst requires a painful admission. Thirst accumulates at the bottom of and grows within solitude. It is partially caused by the alienation from one's surroundings as well as one's own self.

