The Hydrocene

Eco-Aesthetics in the Age of Water

BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS

ROUTLEDGE ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES

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"With the all-pervasive hydrosphere guiding its organising structure, an ethos nurtured through feminist relations of care and attention attuned to the most critical of materialities subtending life – *The Hydrocene: Eco-Aesthetics in the Age of Water* offers significant insights into the approaches that artists and curators are making to reimagine and practice relations with the planet's myriad watery formations. It does this while addressing the social and ethical implications and responsibilities of creative engagements beyond anthropocentric and extractive modalities. It positions its principal concept of the Hydrocene as being continually suffused by embodied connections between human and non-human forms and forces. In the Hydrocene being, thinking and practising are always done in profound intra-relationship *with*. This timely book offers new ways to learn from, think through and practice hydrologically in the context of rapid planetary change and offers a range of innovative methods for contending with the climate crisis."

Bianca Hester, *Associate Professor, Co-Director of Research and Engagement, University of New South Wales, Australia*

"This impressive survey of aqueous artwork reminds us of the urgency of creative practice as a bold research method in a time of climate catastrophe. Diffracted through water, both predicament and possibility become strangely clearer."

Astrida Neimanis, *Canada Research Chair in Feminist Environmental Humanities, The University of British Columbia, Canada*

"Harnessing the transformative qualities of water, hydro-artistic practices from Scandinavia to Australia are proposing more empathic forms of engagement with the natural world. In demonstrating how artists are re-framing human relationships with water, this timely book challenges conventional perceptions of environmental art and articulates new approaches to curatorial care-taking."

Felicity Fenner, *Associate Professor, University of New South Wales, Australia*

"Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris' book is a timely overview and analysis of an emerging field of artistic and curatorial practices relating to water – not only as a theme or topic of interest but as an ontological starting point, methodology and collaborator. Bailey-Charteris' way of linking practices operating in the Nordic and Oceanic regions is indicative of the far-reaching scope of the matters at hand: water, and the manifold challenges connected to it in the face of the climate catastrophe, is a planetary issue. It is also a cultural question: what stories are called for in the age of ecological collapse and how should they be told in order to make a difference? The excellent examples discussed in this book show how art can contribute to the

understanding of the climate crisis as embodied and relational. This is an urgent and much-needed contribution to the fields of artistic and curatorial practice, as well as to the wider sphere of ecological thinking."

Lisa Rosendahl, *Independent Curator and Associate Professor of Exhibition Studies, Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway*

"This book elevates the important topic of water as a key component of the climate change crisis. Having coined the term *Hydrocene* during the development of this book, she has framed a consolidating voice for the vital role that water plays as the ecosystem that covers most of the planet. How we often overlook water while living right next to it, with major cities populating estuaries and coastal regions, is researched as a life force we cannot only live without, but one which the work of creative practitioners has recognised and made visible for millennia. In the first book to do so, Bailey-Charteris draws these practices together through a curatorial lens that calls on us to learn and respect the very element on which life itself depends."

Marie Sierra, *Professor and Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, University of Melbourne, Australia*

"In this lucid and passionate book, Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris proposes a new name for our current epoch, one that acknowledges the centrality of water to climate change: the Hydrocene. She deftly weaves together artistic and curatorial practice with ecofeminism to show how art can shift our collective imaginations regarding the devastating planetary climate crisis in which we are all embedded."

Tara McDowell, *Associate Professor and Director, Curatorial Practice Monash University Art Design and Architecture, Australia*

"The concept of the Hydrocene displaces the anodyne generality of the Anthropocene by putting water right where it should be: everywhere. Bailey-Charteris shows that water's many forms – as bodies, rivers, swamps, oceans, fog and ice – are pluralities that flow into the singularity of the hydrological cycle. *The Hydrocene* is a bold, original and evocative demonstration that attention should be paid to the efforts of contemporary artists to picture the watery worlds in which we live, their beauty, endangerment and resilience. An active curator, she draws on her direct experience of exhibitions of work by artists from two of the earth's regions: Scandinavia and Australia. These may be far apart geographically, but Bailey-Charteris reveals the contrasting challenges and watery resonances that flow between them and everywhere else on our wounded planet."

Terry Smith, *Andrew W. Mellon Emeritus Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, University of Pittsburgh, USA*

THE HYDROCENE

This book challenges conventional notions of the Anthropocene and champions the Hydrocene: the Age of Water. It presents the Hydrocene as a disruptive, conceptual epoch and curatorial theory, emphasising water's pivotal role in the climate crisis and contemporary art.

The Hydrocene is a wet ontological shift in eco-aesthetics which redefines our approach to water, transcending anthropocentric, neo-colonial and environmentally destructive ways of relating to water. As the most fundamental of elements, water has become increasingly politicised, threatened and challenged by the climate crisis. In response, *The Hydrocene* articulates and embodies the distinctive ways contemporary artists relate and engage with water, offering valuable lessons towards climate action. Through five compelling case studies across swamp, river, ocean, fog and ice, this book binds feminist environmental humanities theories with the practices of eco-visionary artists. Focusing on Nordic and Oceanic water-based artworks, it demonstrates how art can disrupt established human–water dynamics. By engaging hydrofeminist, care-based and planetary thinking, *The Hydrocene* learns from the knowledge and agency of water itself within the tide of art going into the blue.

The Hydrocene urgently highlights the transformative power of eco-visionary artists in reshaping human–water relations. At the confluence of contemporary art, curatorial theory, climate concerns and environmental humanities, this book is essential reading for researchers, curators, artists, students and those seeking to reconsider their connection with water and advocate for climate justice amid the ongoing natural-cultural water crisis.

Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris (PhD) is an Australian and Swedish curator, writer and academic with expertise in the politics and poetics of eco-aesthetics. Based in the Blue Mountains, Australia, she lives within the *Ngurra* (Country) of the Dharug and Gundungurra peoples. Bronwyn is a sessional academic of curatorial theory and practice at Stockholm University, the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales where she was also awarded her doctoral degree with distinction. Bronwyn maintains an independent curatorial practice, having curated multiple exhibitions in Stockholm, Sydney, Melbourne and Madrid, alongside regular international publications and presentations on water and eco-aesthetics in the Nordic and Oceanic regions. She is currently the Curator of the Climate Aware Creative Practices Network and her academic work is committed to meeting the challenges posed to creative practice and pedagogy by the climate crisis.

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THE HYDROCENE

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Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris

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This book is dedicated to Svea and Oskar. You and your generation are facing a terrible ecological inheritance and for this I am truly sorry. This dedication is my promise to always face the monstrous task of climate justice and climate action head on, in all areas of my life and work. For you, I promise not to dwell in inaction but instead keep fighting for the hydrosphere. To do this I will be listening and supporting the leadership of First Nations folk as well as gathering brilliant artistic, scientific and curatorial collaborators around me. Together we will: restore the kelp forests, clean the swamps, liaise with coral and clouds, and en masse we will work to build artistically rich, collective futures where you and your generation, and the generations beyond yours, can find solace in nurturing, multiplicitous watery worlds.

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INTRODUCTION

Reimagining the hydrological and hydrosocial cycle in the Hydrocene

Think of yourself on a beach on a grey and cloudy day: you notice the incessant waves landing steadily on the shore; you feel a chill in the air from the low clouds on the horizon; perhaps a foggy sea mist rolls in; wet imprints on the shells of scattering crabs. You take a deep breath of the salty air. This is the hydrological cycle in process. The element of water passing through multiple bodies of water simultaneously, transforming and sustaining. And yet this image of the hydrological cycle, as an eternal dance between bodies of water, is threatened by the current climate crisis.

The impacts to the hydrological cycle, caused by the burning of fossil fuels and colonial-capital industrialisation, are seen in extreme shifts in the atmosphere. With the acceleration of the climate crisis, water has now become a central material and metaphor for the times. When viewed through the prism of water, the climate crisis is a story of extreme loss and transformation: melting glaciers, rising seas, erratic rainfall, extreme flooding, severe droughts and on it goes. In 2023, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[1] delivered yet another more severe and alarming report that the climate crisis has arrived. Alarms are sounding. This is Code Red,[2] or, given the centrality of water, Code Blue.

In response, art is going into the blue. While water is one of the most important materials of our time, ways of considering the poetic and political intentions and possibilities of water are still dominated by the idea of water as a resource and capital. There is an urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of the hydrological cycle, one that reflects on the bodily entanglements and relational qualities of bodies of water and acknowledges the hydrological cycle as embodied.

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This reimagining must work on the scale of the planetary as well as the local and can be enabled and enacted by artistic practice, theory and the expanded blue humanities.

The aim of this book is to develop a curatorial theory that meets the needs of eco-aesthetics created in response to the planetary climate crisis. More explicitly, it asks: how does art relate to and engage with water in the climate crisis? And in which ways and to what ends does the curatorial engage with, address and relate with water in this crisis? As a result of this questioning, I present the theory of the Hydrocene.

I developed the theory of the Hydrocene in order to argue for artists in the climate crisis, and their importance as cultural leaders. There is such deep and fruitful value in learning from these hydro-artistic methods that 'think with water'[3] towards climate justice. The field of hydro-artistic practice is a hot-bed of cultural leadership and expansive human-water relations that is unique in art today. Throughout the book, I define, map and share the tide of 'eco-visionary'[4] artists working in the expanded field of eco-aesthetics to reformulate human–water relations. These artistic approaches are built on thinking with water and acknowledge water's own agency and knowledge systems. The artists and artworks are finding ways to relate with swamps as family, to move with the tides, to engage an eco-sensibility and engender inquisitive and non-destructive water–human relations.

As artist Favianna Rodriguez writes, 'culture is power' and what is needed is a cultural strategy for the climate crisis.[5] This book forms one such cultural strategy that tackles the complications of devastating ecological demise and learns from the relationship between art and water as a strategy towards liveable, just and collective futures. I ask how can art transform the limited narrative of the hydrological cycle within the climate crisis: how can audiences and participants in these artworks see the water cycle as culturally significant, as part of embodied selves, and in dialogue with the planetary in the tumultuous climate crisis? In understanding these questions as part of the complex intersection of art and water in the climate crisis, I set to form a curatorial theory that meets the needs of eco-aesthetics created in response to the climate crisis – meet the Hydrocene. This book is a guide to the Hydrocene, a map towards decentring anthropocentric water relations and a stream to learning from eco-visionary artists as we move towards climate justice.

The Hydrocene as part of my expanded curatorial practice

Water has been my curatorial companion for the last decade.[6] My focus as an active curator is on processes of watery thinking in contemporary art, ecology as social metaphor and feminist methodologies of curatorial practice. Across practical learning platforms, publications and exhibitions, my curatorial work looks at the possibilities of art made in dialogue with the climate crisis, with a particular focus on water. I have been fortunate to curate exhibitions in floating bathhouses,

commission permanent works for ponds, use swimming as a research method, and collaborated on watery artistic networks and gathering including initiating the Swedish Hydrofeminist Network *Vattenkompiser*.

FIGURE 0.1 Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris, still from exhibition-film, *Penelope and Lucinda*, 2016. Photo: Vanja Sandell Billström and Lucia Pagano.

FIGURE 0.2 Rosana Antolí, installation view of solo exhibition *A Golden Age: Pulse, Throb, Drift,* 2020. CenrtroCentro Madrid, Spain. Curator: Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris. Photo: Lukasz Michalak. Courtesy of the artist.

My curatorial work linking water directly to the climate crisis emerged in 2018 when I was living and working in Stockholm, Sweden. I was Curator at art space Index Foundation and made the exhibition *And Tomorrow And*, which included watery works *Water Makes Us Wet* by Annie Sprinkle and Beth Stephens, The Otolith Group's *Hydra Decapita* and Fabrizio Terranova's documentary *Donna Haraway: Stories for Earthly Survival*. The exhibition presented a demanding cacophony of voices questioning collective futures. It contemplated ecological disaster, inter-species collaboration and cyborgian manifestations, and from these new and altered states considered differing formulations of futures. Rather than being a static presentation, the exhibition was an attempt to articulate competing, collective and vibrant voices on the concept of futures. Working with artist Emmeli Person, we facilitated an intensive course for young artists which preceded the exhibition. The course asked: *How do young people make futures?* Over ten days, we attempted to collectively dissolve the boundaries of artist-curator, nature-culture, and hope-grief through artistic experiments. The model drew on the philosopher Isabelle Stengers' offering of 'reciprocal capture'[7] which presents knowledge exchange as a state of reciprocity, a process of encounter and transformation to find ways of coming together.

When we met on the first day of the summer course, 1 August 2018, Sweden was on fire. The forests in the Arctic Circle were burning and Sweden was experiencing the hottest summer in 262 years.[8] On this first day, we gathered and spoke about the fires for a long time. The young people had mixed emotions about the drought and the fires, but what I remember vividly was the anger. One young person worked a summer job in an elderly care home, and she said that as she pushed the patients around in their wheelchairs she was fuming inside, thinking *this is your fault*. This anger was palpable and physical; simultaneously, the drought was experienced emotionally, politically and artistically by many of us on the course. Without the rain, the group had a collectively heightened awareness of the unfolding climate crisis and their physical connection to it. The crisis was embodied as a lack of water.

The Swedish wildfires of 2018 set in motion a set of thought processes and actions. It was these same fires and Sweden's hottest summer on record which also inspired teenage activist Greta Thunberg to strike. A short walk from the gallery, down by the water, I would occasionally see her on my commute to the gallery outside the Swedish parliament with her handmade sign which read '*Skolstrejk för klimatet*' [School Strike for the Climate], alone at first and then followed by millions.[9]

For myself, the embodied experiences of sensing the climate crisis in an embodied and collective artistic gathering had set in motion a purposeful practice to link art, artists, theory and the climate crisis together through curatorial strategies. My time working with artists in Sweden, as well as joining the weekly protests led by Thunberg outside the parliament in Stockholm, deeply influenced my curatorial process. The drought led me back to the water, back towards a watery collective – a place where it might be possible to engage planetary curatorial care towards more liveable futures.[10]

In light of my experiences I sought out a way to enact what Barad calls 'theories as living and breathing reconfigurings of the world.'[11] Working in the field as a curator, I developed and tested curatorial strategies for elevating and mediating the work of exceptional artists. It is this first-hand fieldwork which first allowed me to comprehend the need for a wider curatorial theory of art made during the climate crisis. This is practice-led research, where I draw on my real-world experiences to formulate the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene and actively calibrate my perspectives as a practising curator alongside my academic and theoretical offerings. Like two streams meeting to form a river, the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene draws on my knowledge as a practising curator, and my work as an academic, lecturer and writer whose role is to delve into the theoretical understandings of the field. These two streams flow together to form the Hydrocene.

Entangled methodologies: practice and theory

In the Hydrocene, I employ a methodology inspired by the 'entangled, enfleshed, transcorporeal' research by feminist environmental humanities scholars Cecilia Åsberg, Janna Holmstedt and Marietta Radomska, specifically in their hydrological essay 'Methodologies of Kelp.'[12] Here, they propose 'tangled methodologies' for developing feminist multi-species ethics. In designing the research methodology of the Hydrocene, I take inspiration from these 'tangled' methods and engage this thinking towards recognising the hydrological agency of water.

A key theoretical term and concept in the curatorial framework of the Hydrocene is that of 'hydro-artistic methods', which are developed, used and performed by the tide of artists working with water in the climate crisis, that is, art as it goes into the blue. These artistic methods are understood as 'water based'; thus, they need a water lens, both theoretically and materially, to see the curatorial value in these works, as a post-humanist engagement with the non-human world, especially the hydrological cycle. Rather than seeing water as a theme or a material to work with, these artists have developed these water-based methodologies for entering into artistic relations *with* water. These hydro-artistic methods draw on the principles established by feminist phenomenologist and leading 'watery thinker' Astrida Neimanis in her writing on water, knowledge and the hydrological.[13] Neimanis' important contributions are in dialogue with the expansive field of the blue humanities and the preceding critical ocean studies of cultural theory.

The research has a particular focus on Neimanis' concept of hydrofeminism[14] and the ways water provides a key to learn with and from hydrologics, both metaphorically and materially.[15] In Neimanis' work, water is a substance that is in constant transformation, difference and relation between bodies. Writing about Neimanis' work in the frame of the blue humanities, cultural theorist Steve Mentz states that Neimanis is emblematic of the 'embodied water-scholarship' which is at the forefront of blue humanities scholarship in the 2020s.[16]

In addition to Neimanis, the Hydrocene also draws upon astute theories from the blue humanities and the turn of watery thinking. According to Jonathon Howard, the blue humanities encompasses the oceanic turn of the humanities with the emergence of what Hester Blum has called "oceanic studies" or what Steve Mentz has alternatively termed the "blue humanities."'[17] This oceanic turn, or 'new Thalassology'[18] combines a socio-political and aesthetic understanding of water across the fields of literature and cultural studies. The turn of art into the blue that the Hydrocene proposes, confirms and enacts what Mentz defines as the blue humanities, 'a singular collective: the blue humanities combines water with human ideas.'[19] The blue humanities are further defined by environmental humanities scholar Serpil Oppermann who draws on oceanography and limnology together with social sciences to define the blue humanities as a field which 'critically examines the planet's troubled seas and distressed freshwaters from various socio-cultural, literary, historical, aesthetic, ethical, and theoretical perspectives.'[20] In service of this expansive turn of the blue humanities, hydro-scholars and artists Justyna Gorowska and Ewelina Jarosz created the *Blue Humanities Archive* (BhA) in 2022 as a transdisciplinary digital archive merging environmental humanities and digital art.

As part of this expanded blue humanities, the Hydrocene also draws upon the co-edited anthology *Thinking with Water,*[21] as well as the work of Elizabeth DeLoughrey's 'Oceanic futures' epistemologies,[22] Christina Sharpe's book *In the Wake*[23] and Stacy Alaimo's dissolving theories of the Anthropocene sea.[24] Each of these theorists call for water-based ways of thinking and being, which have been influential to the development of the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene.

In this book, I address how water is culturally defined and part of a planetary circulation in the tumultuous times of the climate crisis. Within the interlocking chapters, I define the hydro-artistic methods of archiving, cleaning, incubating, infusing, misting, resisting, submerging, swamping, tiding, unfreezing and waving, which the artists themselves have developed in their unique relationships with water. These are not an exhaustive or comprehensive list of all possible or existing hydro-artistic methods. Instead, I provide here examples from artists whose work opens up the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene and potentially put it to use. There may be many others in use or yet to be developed and my theory is open and welcoming of such developments.

The entangled methodology of the Hydrocene means that this theory springs from art and artists as much as the artists make use of existing theory. This dialogical and entwined approach means that this is not a case of creating a theory and then applying it to examples in art, instead the art and theory emerge and exist together. While I share the context and theoretical introduction to the Hydrocene in the opening chapters, the theory is deepened and experienced in the artist-focused and watery case-study chapters.

Thinking *with* water acts as a core method within the book of the Hydrocene. As Stacy Alaimo writes, 'Thinking with elements is a strange practice,' in which one attempts to 'extend the human mind to something *in* and *of* itself.'[25] As the authors of the book *Thinking with Water* Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis explain, thinking *of* or *about* water repeats the modernist assumption and categorisation of water as resource. In the logic of water as resource, it is relegated to a passive anthropocentric logic of 'efficiency, profit and progress.'[26] To move beyond these ideological assumptions of water as a material that can be contained, contaminated and commodified at the will of capitalist structures, the authors argue for thinking *with* water as an active alternative. In the present book, I transport and apply the theory of thinking *with* water from the blue humanities to contemporary artistic practices and the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene.

Watery case studies: River, Swamp, Ocean, Fog and Ice

The watery case studies are designed to re-interpret traditional understandings of the hydrological cycle. Each case study is grouped around different states or behaviours of water and the artists whom engage with water in each of these states. The chapters of River, Swamp, Ocean, Fog and Ice, move through five watery states – beginning with the flowing and damming of the river, into liminal swamp zones, out into the warming and acidic ocean, in turn evaporating into ephemeral mist and finally condensing, freezing and unfreezing as ice. The grouping of the case study is based on the way that water behaves in each of these situations; for example, the Swamp chapter engages with artists' relationships and activities with swamps, bogs, wetlands, quagmires, marshland and other tidal or inland liminal spaces where water exists in the murky space between water and land, here 'Swamp' becomes the collective noun for water continually interrupted by a relationship with land. This retelling of the hydrological cycle as research design is part of the hydrologics of the book. The case studies each seek to build a glossary of hydro-artistic methods within eco-aesthetics of the twenty-first century, or, to put it another way, this multi-case design argues for how water actively participates in art during the current climate crisis. These inter-connected case studies are a starting point for the definition, deepening and assertion of the field of critical water-based practices that make up the Hydrocene. The watery case studies are investigations and examinations not an exhaustive investigation into all water-based art. This is not a comprehensive survey, instead I have selected art and artists that elucidate and are elucidated by the wider curatorial theory. In this way, the methods and concepts of the Hydrocene can be expanded and applied to other art and artists, and other forms and states of water.

Regional focus of the Nordic and Oceanic

While the Hydrocene operates on a planetary scale, the book is focused on the art of the two specific regions of Nordic/European and Australian/Oceanian. These two regional contexts are the regions where I myself have been living and working with art since early the 2000s and thus these are the regional 'home base' for most of the artists presented in the book. I research and write about these regions because I know them intimately, and the comparison of the regions allows a drawing out of difference and similarity. The two regions are a lens through which I present my theory, which then has the potential to be expanded and applied in other places, times and contexts. The Hydrocene, like the hydrological cycle it works with, embraces and is entangled with the entire planet and its international network of artistic practices. The theory presented here can expand through those entanglements, reaching out to other regions and practices and welcoming them as it grows.

The Nordic and Australia/Oceania regions are geographically situated at opposite poles yet share (in parts) economic prosperity and privilege, with English a predominant language across both regions. From my work in these regions I have recognised, especially in a tide that began in the early 2000s, a particular focus on water: Oceania mainly through the ocean and river system, and in the Nordic through ice, swamps and river systems. Despite these similarities, the two regions have not previously been researched in dialogue, specifically regarding water and eco-aesthetics. In this book, I demonstrate the connection between Nordic and Oceanic artistic practices with water and show how artists operating at vast distances from each other share common interests and eco-sensibilities by engaging aquatic companionship with the hydrological cycle.

Defining the Hydrocene as disruptive, conceptual and embodied epoch

The three central themes of the book – and by extension the theory of the Hydrocene as epoch, curatorial theory and a diverse body of artistic practices – are:

The Hydrocene as conceptual epoch recognises water as the central material and figure of the current times

The Hydrocene recognised water as one of the key materials and figures of our times. As the UN Water agency states, water *is* the central way to experience the realities of climate change.[27] Due to the centrality of water for the current climate crisis, water must be recognised in the naming *of* these times. To name and highlight the importance of water in these times offers a conceptual alternative to the Anthropocene, one that pointedly thinks materially and metaphorically with water and elevates an understanding of water as a deeply significant natural-cultural phenomenon and essential to all living ecologies on the planet.

The Hydrocene expands upon existing critical water theory and connects theory to practice in the climate crisis

The Hydrocene extends existing water theory and connects watery theorists with watery makers. It builds on the existing conceptually expansive and generous water theories in the expanded field of feminist environmental humanities and blue humanities. These scholars include but are not limited to the above-mentioned Astrida Neimanis as well as Stacy Alaimo,[28] Elizabeth DeLoughrey,[29] Jaimey Hamilton Faris,[30] Léuli Eshrāghi, Cecilia Åsberg,[31] Rita Wong,[32] Christina Sharpe,[33] Steve Mentz,[34] Serpil Oppermann,[35] Hester Blum[36] and Veronica Strang.[37] These scholars' important work will be expanded upon in Chapter 2 as part of the research framework. With sincere appreciation for the intensive and generous academic work these watery theorists have forged, my research hopes to be read in vibrant correspondence to their theories, which centre post-human–water relations as one of the most pressing matters of our age.

The Hydrocene as conceptual epoch works to further the substantial contribution to water theories by the work of feminist scholarship within the environmental humanities by connecting them with the cultural zeitgeist of artists thinking with water; that is, the turn of 'art going into the blue' as seen in the work of artists such as Signe Johannessen, Latai Taumoepeau, Badger Bates, Robertina Š. Šebjanič,[38] Gabriella Hirst, Megan Cope and Bonita Ely. There are also artist-curators, artist-theorists and curator-theorists who cross over these two fields of inquiry such as Léuli Eshrāghi[39] and Stefanie Hessler[40] whose poignant work across theory and practice demonstrates the fluidity and centrality of water within the epoch of the Hydrocene.

The Hydrocene argues for the role of artists as cultural leaders in the climate crisis and in application theorises the hydro-artistic methods artists perform

The Hydrocene argues for the vital role of artists as cultural leaders and names the natural-cultural zeitgeist of art going into the blue and the surge of critical water practices in art today. The Hydrocene champions the water-based hydro-artistic methods that this tide of artists developed for collaborating with water. These artistic strategies are attempts to radically change environmentally destructive anthropocentric relationships with water through building companionable relationships with water while respecting the power and agency of water in its own right.

Finally, it is necessary to have planetary strategies that can operate in an ontological figuring of the planetary climate crisis. By focusing on the hydrological cycle of water that moves through all bodies of water, the Hydrocene centres the vital role of eco-visionary artists in the climate crisis and their ability to sense the climate crisis as embodied and relational. The artists of the Hydrocene create unique hydro-artistic methods for sensing the climate crisis as embodied, and think *with* water as a material and metaphorical companion and collaborator. This artistic

and curatorial expansion of form and method can be understood as directly linked to a greater understanding – culturally, socially and politically – of the growing urgency for climate justice.

Notes

1 *IPCC, 2023: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report*. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 2023.
2 A Guterres, 'Secretary-General Calls Latest IPCC Climate Report "Code Red for Humanity", Stressing "Irrefutable" Evidence of Human Influence', *United Nations,* 2021.
3 C Chen, J MacLeod & A Neimanis (eds), *Thinking with Water*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.
4 I share this term 'eco-visionary' with the exhibition of the same name that toured Europe during 2019–2021 and featured artists proposing more sustainable attitudes towards the place of human beings on this earth. The project was a collaboration between Fundação EDP/MAAT (Lisbon, Portugal), Bildmuseet (Umeå, Sweden), HeK (Basel, Switzerland) and LABoral (Gijón, Spain), in collaboration with the Royal Academy of Arts. For more on this touring exhibition, see *Eco-Visionaries: Art, Architecture, and New Media after the Anthropocene*, P Gadanho et al. (eds), Berlin, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2018.
5 See AE Johnson & KK Wilkinson (eds), *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage, & Solutions for the Climate Crisis*, New York, One World, 2020.
6 Recent curatorial work I have undertaken with water as a central thematic include the exhibition *High Tide Fine Line* at Art Lab Gnesta (2022), the *Soil Symposium* at Accelerator at Stockholm University (2021), solo exhibition of Spanish/British artist Rosana Antolí, *A Golden Age: Pulse, Throb, Drift* at Centro Centro, Madrid (2020) and exhibition *Penelope and Lucinda* (2016) at Galleri Mejan, Stockholm.
7 I Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
8 J Watts, 'Wildfires Rage in Arctic Circle as Sweden Calls for Help', *The Guardian*, 18 July 2018.
9 B Bowman, 'Fridays for Future: How the Young Climate Movement Has Grown since Greta Thunberg's Lone Protest', *The Conversation*, 2020.
10 For more on the pedagogical process of working with young people in Sweden on art and climate, see 2019 peer-reviewed paper, B Bailey-Charteris, 'Precipitational Learning in the Hydrocene', *ACUADS* 2019, from which this section of text was previously published.
11 K Barad, 'On Touching – The Inhuman that Therefore I Am', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 23, 2012, 206–236.
12 C Åsberg, J Holmstedt & M Radomska, 'Methodologies of Kelp: On Feminist Posthumanities, Transversal Knowledge Production and Multispecies Ethics in an Age of Entanglement' in *The Kelp Congress*, H Mehti, N Cahoon & A Wolfsberger (eds) Svolvær, NNKS Press, 2020, pp. 11–23.
13 See A Neimanis, 'Water and Knowledge' in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, D Christian & R Wong (eds), Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017, pp. 51–68.
14 A Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water' in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, H Gunkel, C Nigianni & F Söderbäck (eds), New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 96–115, for more see Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
15 A Neimanis, 'Water and Knowledge' in *Downstream: Reimagining Water*, D Christian & R Wong (eds), Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017, pp. 51–68.
16 See S Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. New York, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024, p. 11 and 'Blue Humanities' in *Posthuman Glossary*. London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, pp. 69–72.

17 J Howard, 'Swim Your Ground: Towards a Black and Blue Humanities', *Atlantic Studies,* Global Currents, vol. 20, no. 2, 2018, 308–330.
18 P Horden & N Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the New Thalassology"', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 111, no. 3, 2006, 722–740.
19 S Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. New York, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024, p. 2.
20 S Oppermann, *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023.
21 C Chen, J MacLeod & A Neimanis (eds), *Thinking with Water*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013.
22 See DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene* and, 'Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene', *English Language Notes*, vol. 57, 2019, pp. 21–36 and 'Mining the Seas: Speculative Fictions and Futures', *Laws of the Sea: Interdisciplinary Currents.* Abingdon, Oxon, Routledge, 2022, pp. 144–163.
23 CE Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2016.
24 S Alaimo, 'The Anthropocene at Sea: Temporality, Paradox, Compression' in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, London, Routledge, 2017.
25 S Alaimo, 'Elemental Love in the Anthropocene' in J Cohen & L Duckert (eds), *Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire: Elemental Ecocriticism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2015, pp. 298–309; 'The Anthropocene at Sea: Temporality, Paradox, Compression', in *U Heise, J Christensen, M Niemann (eds)*, The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities, London, Routledge, 2017, pp 151–163.
26 Chen, MacLeod & Neimanis, p. 1.
27 UN Water, 'Water and Climate Change'.
28 Alaimo's extensive work on the theories of water and the Anthropocene, including in Alaimo, *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2016 and in her work on elemental love in the Anthropocene, when she argues for an elemental reckoning toward the arrogance of the concept of the Anthropocene. See Alaimo, 'Elemental Love in the Anthropocene' in J Cohen & L Duckert (eds), *Thinking with Earth, Air, Water, and Fire, Elemental Ecocriticism*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2015, pp. 298–309.
29 E DeLoughrey, *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2019.
30 J Hamilton-Faris, 'Sisters of Ocean and Ice', *Shima*, vol. 13, 2019, 76–99.
31 C Åsberg, 'A Sea Change in the Environmental Humanities', *Ecocene Cappadocia Journal of Environmental Humanities*, vol. 1, 2020, 108–122.
32 R Wong & C Mochizuki, *Undercurrent*, Gibsons, BC, Nightwood Editions, 2015.
33 C Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2016.
34 S Mentz, *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*. New York, London, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2024.
35 S Oppermann, *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023.
36 H Blum, 'Introduction: Oceanic Studies', *Atlantic Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2013, 151–155.
37 V Strang, *Water: Nature and Culture*.
38 Here, I also recognise the work of artist Robertina Š Šebjanič who coined the term 'Aquatocene' in 2021 as part of her artistic practice with underwater sonic pollution. Her sound compositions use hydrophones to re-mix anthropological soundscapes in the subaquatic. While Šebjanič's aqueous practice offers plenty of insight into artistic potential for mutli-species sonic experimentation, her practice of the 'Aquatocene' has a different intention to the Hydrocene; that is, the 'Aquatocene' is formulated as an artistic practice, differing from the Hydrocene which is theoretical. See more of the artist's proposal for the 'Aquatocene' as part of her extensive artistic practice here: *Aquatocene:*

A Subaquatic Quest for Serenity in Reilchle Ingeborg (ed.), *Plastic Ocean: Art and Science Responses to Marine Pollution*, De Gruyter, 2021, pp. 136–155.

39 See Eshrāghi's *Indigenous Aesthetics and Knowledges for Great Ocean Renaissances*, Common Room, 2023, as well as their website for a full list of interdisciplinary critique and writing, including *The Clam's Kiss*.

40 S Hessler, *Tidalectics: Imagining an Oceanic Worldview through Art and Science*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2018.

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1

THE HYDROCENE AS DISRUPTIVE, EMBODIED, CONCEPTUAL EPOCH

Soaking in the Hydrocene

Welcome to the leaky, circulatory, aqueous Hydrocene: the Age of Water. A conceptual and embodied epoch among many, this is the wet season. Disruptive, porous and unruly, the Age of Water circulates in the pipes of late capitalism, redistributing aquatic memories of ancient water through contemporary showers of thought and contested states of watery becoming.

Starting with the idea of the planetary as research context and the centrality of water within the climate crisis, in this chapter, I propose and survey the theory of the Hydrocene as disruptive, conceptual and embodied epoch. Drawing on the work of cultural theorist Amitav Ghosh and multispecies feminist theorist Donna J. Haraway, I propose the lens of the 'natural-cultural water crisis', I then elaborate on the central pillars of the natural-cultural water crisis and the social-cultural foundations of colonial-capital logics of seeing water as resource, drawing on the work of feminist cultural theorists Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis in their co-edited collected anthology *Thinking with Water*. I debunk the anthropocentric logics that delegate 'water as modern,' 'water as resource' and 'water as (only) weather.' With this understanding of the natural-cultural water crisis, I propose the Hydrocene as a disruption to the terrestrial dominance of the Anthropocene. Following the academic and artistic call to arms for dismantling the hegemony of the Anthropocene, in this chapter, I recognise the pre-existing research on creating alternatives to the Anthropocene; for example, the feminist collective initiative to 'Hack the Anthropocene'[1] or geographer and geo-philosopher Kathyrn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*.[2] I share why this is a curatorial undertaking, a process of naming that which is hidden – a curatorial task of naming and defining natural-cultural turns. Finally, I introduce the aims of the Hydrocene as conceptual

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epoch, which range from highlighting the centrality of water within the climate crisis and correspondingly within eco-aesthetics, as well as how artists are cultural leaders within the water crisis. The Hydrocene expands on existing critical water theory from the blue humanities[3] and blue eco-criticism[4] and connects these theories to practice in the lens of contemporary art.

My work in proposing the Hydrocene as a conceptual epoch is part of an artistic and academic impetus for cultural makers to redefine the language of this current age. It is my imperative to clearly state that I propose the Hydrocene as a conceptual epoch, not a geologic epoch. The framing of a geologic epoch and the extensive work of scientists to prove the existence of the Anthropocene is based on the findings of stratigraphic evidence. With respect to the geological methods of epoch defining, the Hydrocene is foremost a conceptual framework for aligning the natural-cultural water crisis in an embodied and affective register with the turn of contemporary art and critical thinkers.

Planetary as research context

The planetary, as opposed to the idea of 'global' or 'international,' is a term from literary theorist and feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, who writes, 'The planetary is the difference, distance, and duration with, within, and against which it might be possible to think differently about being human and becoming collective.'[5] It is the possibility of thinking of environmental relation in terms of difference and scale that is important in using the planetary as the context in which to elaborate the Hydrocene. In seeing this state of planetary as the research parameters for this book, I choose to focus not on art and the curatorial in a void, but instead to link art and the curatorial as part of a planetary concern. As a curatorial theorist, I propose this theory of the Hydrocene as a bridge-building exercise between the planetary and the curatorial. I draw on my experience of the curatorial to garner attention towards radical artistic practices that consider the planetary as their research context.

Using the planetary as a framework, I focus on one essential 'figure' of the planetary: water. Water is one of the most pressing and urgent aspects of continuing life on earth, and yet water systems are in trouble. According to the United Nations Water Agency, the earth is already in a water crisis that will continue to increase in scale and severity.[6] Not only is water the primary medium through which the effects of climate change are felt, but access to water is also becoming increasingly unstable and unequal. More frequent, extreme water-based events such as flooding, hurricanes and melting glaciers are all part of the ecological 'feedback loops' of the rapidly advancing climate crisis.

For decades, the link between water and the encroaching climate crisis has been documented and reported upon.[7] In 2008, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reported on the crucial link between the climate crisis and water, stating there was evidence of a global water crisis, 'Changes in water quantity and quality due to climate change are expected to affect food availability,

stability, access and utilisation.'[8] Further, the report states, 'Observational records and climate projections provide abundant evidence that freshwater resources are vulnerable and have the potential to be strongly impacted by climate change, with wide-ranging consequences for human societies and ecosystems.'[9] This unflinching scientific language describes how the water crisis threatens the capacity of all ecosystems on this planet to function and thrive. In April 2022, the IPCC released another damning report on the state of water as it accelerates towards further instability.[10] The feedback loops of the crisis make water systems vulnerable and unstable. Warming and acidifying oceans are intensifying the effects of drought; subsequently, drought intensifies the effects of algae blooms, which deoxygenate oceans, leading to further warming of the oceans.

Further to this, the accumulated effects of the climate crisis are uneven, with water insecurity a burden distributed along lines of gender, race and power. For example, the rising sea waters inundating the Pacific Island of Tuvalu[11], and the expansion of the Kallak mine on Indigenous Sámi land in Northern Sweden[12] are both examples of the climate crisis intersecting with colonialism. The findings of the IPCC resonate with science-fiction writer William Gibson's statement, 'The future is already here – it's just not evenly distributed,' which curator Stephanie Rosenthal used as the title of the 20th Biennale of Sydney in 2017. This uneven distribution of water and water scarcity is paramount when considering the implications of the water crisis.

Natural-cultural water crisis

In Amitav Ghosh's book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, he stipulates that the climate crisis is not only a crisis of ecologies but 'also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination.'[13] This crisis of the collective imagination is what Ghosh posits to be one of the greatest challenges ever to haunt human culture in the broadest sense. He says that the cultural climate crisis is a failure of the existing narratives to navigate the wild impossibilities of the world as it now stands, in the midst of ecological destruction. He sees the failures of existing artistic methods and forms to adequately and competently negotiate the climate crisis as context and subject, as a failure not of the artists themselves, but as part of a broader 'imaginative and cultural failure that lies at the heart of the climate crisis.'[14] This crisis of imagination is part of the limiting narratives of late capitalism and the economic myth of 'eternal growth.' In the words of fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin:

> We live in capitalism, its power seems inescapable – but then, so did the divine right of kings. Any human power can be resisted and changed by human beings. Resistance and change often begin in art. Very often in our art, the art of words.[15]

As Ghosh and Le Guin suggest, the power to expand the collective imagination is a chance to imagine truly sustainable and liveable worlds in multiple temporalities and ecosystems.

I draw on Ghosh's illumination of the cultural climate crisis and expand on his theory in two ways. Firstly, I turn to respected feminist scholar Donna J. Haraway's use of the term 'nature-culture'[16] to replace the term 'culture.' In replacing the 'culture' of the cultural climate crisis with the 'natural-cultural' climate crisis, I re-imagine the outdated binary of nature as separate from culture and instead embrace the feminist environmental humanities scholarship of 'natural-cultural' as entwined social and ecological sensibilities. In this way, the climate crisis becomes a planetary natural-cultural crisis of imagination.

Secondly, I further Ghosh's theory by stipulating that the crisis is specifically a crisis of water – both socially and ecologically – that is to say, the planet is currently experiencing a natural-cultural water crisis. This water crisis is both material/ecological and at the same time metaphorical/social. This complex intersection of water in crisis sees water as a substance in crisis and the human–water relations in crisis. The planetary natural-cultural water crisis is a state where the crisis of water is both within the fields of the imagination and culture, and within the ecological domains of water. The crisis concerns all inhabitants of the planet, and like most effects of the rapidly changing climate, the effects of the water crisis are not evenly distributed.

Throughout the book, I draw on the substantial theoretical and practical offerings of feminist phenomenologist and gender theorist Astrida Neimanis. Neimanis' work is hugely influential to this research and to the broader community of water theorists and artists.[17] Her work as a cultural theorist is at the cutting edge of water, intersectional feminism and environmental change, and she is a key theoretical thinker in this book and for the theory of the Hydrocene. In *Bodies of Water*, Neimanis re-imagines embodiment along feminist and post-human trajectories:

> We live at the site of exponential material meaning where embodiment meets water. Given the various interconnected and anthropogenically exacerbated water crises that our planet currently faces – from drought and freshwater shortage to wild weather, floods, and chronic contamination – this meaningful mattering of our bodies is also an urgent question of worldly survival.[18]

Her expansive and generative theory and practice span notions of water and gender, power and embodiment, and include her formation of the generative term 'hydrofeminism.'[19] This term can be broadly understood as a form of intersectional feminism enacted with and through waters. The Nordic-based curatorial collective Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology, explains it in this way: 'Hydrofeminism is about solidarity across watery selves, across bodies of water… Water flows through bodies, species and materialities, connecting them for better or worse. Today, planetary thinking is feminist thinking.'[20]

Further into the book, I also draw on Neimanis' concept of 'hydrologics' as articulated in her essay *Water and Knowledge*.[21] In this work, Neimanis defines and encodes modes of water as 'hydrologics' as a way to name the lived logic and

knowledge that bodies of water articulate, perform and transform. Derived from close phenomenological description, hydrologics are never an immaterial metaphor for Neimanis, who gently reminds the reader that hydrologics are '*lived* by us'[22] as they seep through the choreography of the hydrological cycle and are always experienced materially and metaphorically. She also distinguishes that water is 'of me yet beyond me'[23] and that water possesses a deep unknowability that exceeds the bounds of epistemological registers. She explains the limits of a water-based epistemology when she states: 'The water that we are is first of all planetary. We are its curious custodians rather than its masters.'[24] I embrace Neimanis' argument to be curious custodians and to pay close attention to hydrologics as a way to respect and attend to the various water bodies in which 'we are immersed, and *as* which we ourselves exist.'[25] I expand upon Neimanis' influential work with hydrologics in Chapter 2, when I specifically relate hydrologics to an artistic framework in what I call 'hydro-artistic methods,' the methods performed by the tide of artists building unique human–water relationships in the natural-cultural milieu.

I also draw on the term 'hydro-social'[26] cycle in the case studies, as it is another relevant term conceptually complementary to hydrologics. Geography theorists Jamie Linton and Jessica Budds propose the hydro-social cycle as an analytical tool for investigating watery social relations and as a broader framework for undertaking critical political ecologies of water. This cycle is a process of 'co-constitution' in the material circulation of water between and through people and social structures, in particular, the co-constitution of water and power as part of global capital accumulation. As social geographers, Budds and Linton do not directly investigate eco-aesthetics; however, their offering of the analytical tool of the hydro-social is useful in defining the turn towards thinking with water and redefinition of human–water relations.[27] Throughout this book, I extended this concept towards eco-aesthetics. This is particularly relevant in Chapter 3, in terms of the geo-political underpinnings of the rights of the river.

The water crisis is exacerbated by the current dominant anthropocentric worldview of 'water as resource' – a late-capitalist belief that water is controlled, diverted, extracted and generally used for human needs rather than seeing water as a being with agency and power. This anthropocentric understanding of water as a resource contributes to the social and political inequalities of water access and distribution. The intersection of racism with poor water management is understood as a form of environmental racism.

Cultural theorists Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod and Astrida Neimanis explain the phenomena of water as resource in their co-edited book *Thinking with Water*, where they write collectively, 'When dominant cultures are undergirded by anthropocentric logics of efficiency, profit, and progress, waters are all too often made nearly invisible, relegated to a passive role as a "resource", and subjected to containment, commodification and instrumentalisation.'[28] This book is another key

theoretical text for the Hydrocene. The edited compilation offers a wide ranging and deeply considered set of offerings around the concept of thinking 'with' water, rather than thinking 'about' water. The theory of the Hydrocene prioritises the visions of artists who think 'with' water, proposing alternative water worlds.

It is not only these anthropocentric views of water as a resource that define the current crisis; it is also the material of water itself that is in crisis. Water is one of the primary figures of the current climate crisis, and if you follow the water, you'll find the crisis. From the dry river beds of the Darling Barka that artist and activist Badger Bates[29] fights for in his practice to the dying kelp forests of Norway that artist Signe Johannessen mourns in hers, water is the connector between many of the symptoms of the rapidly changing climate. Bates and Johannessen are both key artists of the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, and their important work with bodies of water is addressed in the River and Swamp chapters, respectively.

According to scientists, we are currently in the midst of the sixth mass extinction, which 'may be the most serious environmental threat to the persistence of civilization, because it is irreversible.'[30] Also known as the 'Holocene Extinction,' this irreversible event is destroying cultures and communities, both human and non-human.[31] Water is a central figure within this mass extinction, and these extinctions extend to the death of bodies of water such as the irreplaceable loss of glaciers in Iceland, including the first glacier to die, 'Okjokull.' Together, artists and scientists memorialised the glacier in 2019 with a funeral and small plaque that reads:

> A letter to the future… In the next 200 years all our glaciers are expected to follow the same path. This monument is to acknowledge that we know what is happening and what needs to be done. Only you know if we did it.[32]

This artistic gesture of the glacier funeral recognises the significance of this contemporary moment, and the possibilities for action, if only climate justice[33] is prioritised and enacted.

Pillars of the natural-cultural water crisis

To give a greater context to the current natural-cultural water crisis, I have developed three 'pillars' or socio-cultural belief systems that have contributed to the crisis' development. These pillars in combination form the natural-cultural water crisis. They are:

Water as modern
Water as resource
Water as (only) weather

Water as modern

Sophisticated hydrological tools have been developed and utilised as technology for millennia; for example, in the form of the fish traps at Brewarrina in New South Wales, known to the local Ngemba Wayilwan people as *Baiame's Ngunnhu*. This Indigenous hydrology site manages fish populations and practises sustainable fishing, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of the interconnected ecologies of fish, river and humans. In contrast to these sustainable fishing practices is the idea of *water as modern*. Theorist Veronica Strang writes about the process of 'domesticating water' that took place as part of the expansion of European cities during the period of industrialisation.[34] During this time, the power to control water access and sanitation was keenly interlinked with the power of the church and state. Strang argues that the move into industrialisation in Europe led to a vision of water as something that had to be 'denatured' and re-produced by human actions. This notion of domesticated water or 'modern water' marks a shift in the collective understanding of water within cultural and social arrangements and leads directly into the next pillar of the water crisis: water as resource.

The concept of water as modern also resonates with the work of curator and writer Jay Arthur, whose work highlights the way that the imported European English has mislabelled Australian bodies of water. Arthur writes that terms such as 'lake' and 'river' are terms that suit the hydrological environs of Europe, not Australia, and as she writes, these terms 'reflect the discrepancy in the settler understanding of this place.'[35] This focus on language, and the narratives of naming, is poignant in the context of bodies of water in the climate crisis. The practice of importing European naming practices for bodies of water is another colonial tool that misses the substantial situated realities of the turbulent and fluctuating bodies of water.

Water as resource

In the world view of *water as resource*, operating in the era of late capitalism, water is subject to capitalistic hierarchies that value drinking water as higher in value than brackish or toxic water. These capitalist hierarchies reinforce anthropocentric interests of controlling water for profit. The dominant idea of water as resource and commodity to be bought, sold, traded and distributed for profit only furthers the idea of water as unknowable and unembodied, and reinforces the natural-cultural water crisis as something foreign or other.

Returning to the definitions offered by Chen, MacLeod and Neimanis in *Thinking with Water*, 'water as resource' is another anthropocentric logic of thinking 'about' water, rather than thinking 'with' water. The authors oppose the logic of water as resource which enables water to be used, piped, drained, moved, extracted, diverted and contaminated by those in power. The authors hope to move beyond water as resource in eco-political concerns by thinking with water as a

collaborative activity that develops a lively, ethical relationality between humans and water. They write about how through water the otherwise invisible phenomena of climate change become 'immediately tangible' and that 'at the slower but epochal scale of acidifying oceans, changed currents, wet-land encroachment, and desertification, we are also part of watery transformations.'[36] By re-considering water as resource and moving towards water as relational, in difference and situated, *Thinking with Water* demonstrates the inescapable entanglement of bodies of water and moves beyond the limited capital-colonial logic of water as resource.

Water as (only) weather

Similar to the notion of water as resource, *water as (only) weather* is an anthropocentric misunderstanding of water as localised 'weather' rather than water as part of the planetary hydrological cycle and a natural-cultural phenomenon.

Video artist and theorist Hito Steyerl explains water as weather in her video work *Liquidity Inc* (2014). In the work, a masked television weather reporter appears to deliver the evening weather report with a twist. Rather than meteorological predictions, the masked figure aggressively states, 'Weather is money. Weather is terror. Time is money.'[37] This merging of the weather report with an antagonistic message suggests that the weather is a political sphere. While the reporter points intimidatingly at the audience, the words 'Weather is water with an attitude' appear on the screen in bold capitals. The artist merges meteorological terms with geopolitics to suggest that weather patterns connect to political, social and emotional states. In doing so, Steyerl points to the limitations of thinking of water as 'only' weather.

Water as more than weather also forms part of the eco-feminist transdisciplinary framework of 'Weathering'[38] as developed by artists and scholars Jennifer Mae Hamilton, Astrida Neimanis and Tessa Zettel. 'Weathering' is defined as a theoretical lens for understanding and responding to climate change in terms of the embodied and durational experience of the weather. As such, the concept is useful for an explicitly feminist response to the climate crisis because it focuses attention on three feminist preoccupations: 'embodiment, everyday life and difference.'[39] As the scholars of weathering explain, 'As a feminist figuration, weathering attunes us to human embodiment and difference in a time of climate change, where "weather" is not only meteorological, but the total atmospheres that bodies are made to bear.'[40] This engagement of 'total atmospheres' is critical in attuning and redirecting human–water relations in the water crisis. Echoing the concept of weathering, in the Hydrocene, the weather disconnects from the paradigm of being 'natural' and is instead seen as anthropocentrically dominated nature-culture. In thinking of water as more than weather, and instead water as part of a weathering practice, there is the potential to reconsider definitions and relations of changing weather in the climate crisis as a culturally constructed phenomenon.

In opposition to the notion of 'water as weather,' scholar of English literature and Black Studies, Christina Sharpe argues that weather is always part of what she terms the 'total climate,' a climate of anti-Blackness and colonialism.[41] For Sharpe, the weather is never separate from the political and social understandings of it: 'In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive as climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies.'[42]

Water as only weather also ignores the ongoing 'slow violence'[43] of water and the hydrological cycle in the climate crisis. As Rob Nixon theorises, the unfurling realities of the climate crisis happen at a pace unfamiliar to the late-capitalist era, and the realities of climate chaos; for example, the destruction of the ice caps happens within a time frame too slow to capture the imagination of collective understandings. Since Nixon first wrote about slow violence in 2011, the collective cultural understandings of the climate crisis have become further mainstream, as seen in the work of Swedish teen activist Greta Thunberg and the school climate movement she is part of. However, even with some minor recalibrations to the collective imagination of the climate crisis, Nixon's term still garners attention as he names the inherent conflict of time and duration when addressing the climate crisis in late capitalism.

The concept of water as only weather also ignores the more extensive hydrological system that all waters are part of, and all bodies of water are implicated within. The water as weather thematic reinforces a localised, disembodied vision of water as a disruption to human lives, rather than water as an embodied matter circulating on a planetary scale.

Naming the Hydrocene as disruptive theory in the blue humanities

As we face a planetary crisis, there needs to be a planetary response. To put it another way, the scale of the water crisis is vast, and thus, any theory wanting to address the crisis must also operate in vast terms. The planetary water crisis deserves a planetary approach. Any attempt to think with water, as separate from the planetary circulations to which all water operates, only siphons and limits understanding of the hydrological as embodied and relational.[44]

The invitation for culture makers to contribute alternative titles to the Anthropocene is part of what distinguishes feminist scholar Donna J. Haraway describes when she writes:

> Our job is to make the Anthropocene as short/thin as possible and to cultivate with each other in every way imaginable epochs to come that can replenish refuge. Right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge.[45]

The Hydrocene is a way of building a small post-human refuge towards counteracting the dominant anthropocentric understandings of water, which I have laid out as foundational to the natural-cultural water crisis.

Based on my findings as a curator, I hypothesise this neologism as a curatorial act of establishing an alternative name and definition to the current epoch, most commonly known as the Anthropocene. Rather than a strict geological era or linear time-based matter, the Hydrocene is proposed as a conceptual tool and as one of many alternative names for the current epoch and aims to disrupt the supremacy and land-based logic of the Anthropocene. As is commonly understood, the Anthropocene as a term is made from the combination of two Greek words for human ('anthropo') and new ('cene'), and it was first coined in the 1980s and popularised in 2000 by atmospheric chemist Paul J Crutzen and researcher Eugene F Stoermer. The term has been a controversial title for the current epoch and aims to highlight the disastrous impact of humans on all systems of the earth.[46]

The Hydrocene employs the curatorial as an act of 'disturbance'[47] or 'disruption,' bringing multiplicity and agitation to the naming of the current epoch. This disruption to the Anthropocene is a curatorial act of changing the language and by extension the dominant narratives of the climate crisis. In naming the Hydrocene, I follow theorists who critique the Anthropocene as a limiting paradigm including Kathyrn Yusoff's *A Billion Black Anthropocene's or None.*[48] I respond to the call from visual anthropologist TJ Demos in his book *Against the Anthropocene* where he appeals for an expansion of the names of this planetary age: 'we need many names to account for the sheer complexity and multiple dimensions of this geo-politico-economic formation, as well as to identify effective sources of resistance and inspire emergent cultures of survival.'[49] Demos' instructive book outlines the alternatives to the Anthropocene proposed by other theorists, including the Capitalocene, the Chthulucene, the Pyrocene, the Plantationocene and the Plasticene. Demos argues that these terms are urgently needed, they are 'conceptual tools to think, rethink, and theoretically challenge the Anthropocene thesis.'[50] The Hydrocene aims to be one of the many slippery names proposed for this current age and to act as a conceptual tool and strategy for understanding and elevating water, art and culture in the current times.

I also respond to the call to 'hack' the Anthropocene, from Neimanis and her collaborators in the feminist, anti-racist and queer project *Hacking the Anthropocene,*[51] founded in 2016. The project describes the Anthropocene as a term for the emerging geological era in which humans are 'centralised as the dominant planetary force.' The authors outline how the Anthropocene draws on settler colonial discourse while also 'problematically homogenises all humans as planet destroyers and implies that we are locked into these petrifying ways of being.' Naming the Hydrocene as a watery alternative to the awkward Anthropocene is one version of 'hacking the Anthropocene' – where hacking implies to manipulate or reformulate. At the 2016 Australian conference for *Hacking the Anthropocene*, Swedish post-humanist gender theorist Cecilia Åsberg delivered the keynote address and implored for a destabilising of the Anthropocene; she suggested that it is necessary is to 'hack a thousand tiny Anthropocenes; and even so, we have to live with the fact that we might not get out of this geological or biotic or climatological situation alive.'[52] The feminist project of *Hacking the Anthropocene* specifically calls on

'artists, writers, activists, scientists and beings of all kinds to decompose, reform, infiltrate, eject, co-opt or differently (re)configure the notion of *Homo destroyer* such that our shared-but-different futures might be configured.' This is a call to action to expand the possibilities of the Anthropocene towards thinking with the curatorial on the planetary scale.

The neologism of the Hydrocene is necessary at this time as water is central to our lived experiences of the climate crisis – materially and metaphorically. As Haraway, Demos, Neimanis, Yusoff and others insist, the naming of this current age is a powerful act that builds collective understanding and meaning making. This water-based conceptual epoch aims to develop a collective understanding of the centrality of water as matter and metaphor in the current climate crisis. In naming and acknowledging the Hydrocene as a slippery, conceptual tool, I offer an alternative to the terminology of the Anthropocene and contribute to the collective understanding of the naming of our current age.

With these incitements to rethink the Anthropocene as a term, I utilise the curatorial as a bridge-building and way-finding device within art and academia to propose the Hydrocene as a conceptual epoch. The act of naming and defining the Hydrocene is a curatorial act of caretaking, returning to the origins of curating.

As a curator, I look to artists who actively 'stay with the trouble'[53] as Haraway insists and are not simply presenting work 'about,' for example, melting glaciers or plastics in the ocean, but instead these artists are thinking and making 'with' water, in embodied and critical manners. These artists are diving in deeply and working actively towards an intersectional approach to human–water relations. Part of the call to 'stay with the trouble' is the centrality of the idea that those seeking to act on the climate crisis are not doing so with a utopian attitude or idealisation of the problems of the climate crisis. With the sixth mass extinction underway, the impact of the climate crisis is being felt and the call to 'stay with the trouble' from Haraway is a way to continue to build meaningful relations with the 'more-than-human'[54] world while actively acknowledging the grief and other difficult emotions of the losses from the crisis. In this book, the artists 'stay with the trouble' as a counterargument to ignoring the crisis or wishing it away with utopian idealism. As a curator, I look to research and support artists that are doing the same.

Here, curating – both as curatorial practice and curatorial theory – allows for the lifting of individual artistic practices to be seen in constellation with one another and their differing socio-political contexts. The curatorial, which is defined in more detail in Chapter 2, is a way to understand the power and beauty of these practices in context, both locally and on a planetary level. The curatorial is a way to digest art for audience, to build bridges of connection between audience and art, highlighting difference, context and intent. In this way, naming the Hydrocene is an act of curatorial agency that utilises the ability of the curatorial to name and define, to build conceptual bridges and ultimately to position artists as vital leaders in the natural-cultural water crisis.[55]

In defining the Hydrocene as a conceptual framework, I place the term within the blue humanities and posthumanities, an expansive field that continues to enrich the conceptual work of critical ocean studies. The blue humanities highlight

the emergence of 'oceanic studies' as defined by Hester Blum,[56] 'new Thalassology'[57] defined by Purcell and Horden, and has been defined by Steve Mentz as, 'the blue humanities combines water with human ideas.'[58] Environmental humanities scholar Serpil Oppermann also defines the blue humanities as a field that 'critically examines the planet's troubled seas and distressed freshwaters from various socio-cultural, literary, historical, aesthetic, ethical, and theoretical perspectives.'[59] The Hydrocene works to contribute to this expansive field of blue humanities.[60]

In defining the Hydrocene, I recognise that the Hydrocene theory has many possible applications. Other applications include considering the Hydrocene in governance, where a water-centred approach has the potential to affect policy makers' understanding of the water crisis. Similarly, the Hydrocene can be understood in the frame of activism, especially regarding First Nations leaders claims for water rights and the important work of water defenders who aim to transform destructive colonial water practices. Within the humanities, the Hydrocene has the potential to engage affect theory and to be performed as action research. Within fields such as architecture and design, the Hydrocene offers practitioners a new framework and lens to recognise and connect critical water practices in the field.

While the Hydrocene has diverse applications, this book applies the theory of the Hydrocene as conceptual and embodied epoch into eco-aesthetics as curatorial theory. The curatorial theory of the Hydrocene is concerned with deciphering, mapping, connecting, sharing and critiquing the hydro-artistic methods of embodiment and radical imagination with water that the artists of the Hydrocene present. In the next chapter, I share the theoretical framework for the Hydrocene in application, as curatorial theory within eco-aesthetics.

Notes

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2

THE HYDROCENE IN ECO-AESTHETICS

Art into the blue

Water is a central figure of the current climate crisis: through sea-level risings, acidified oceans, extreme droughts and floods, polluted waterways and a lack of drinking water, the planet faces more and more extreme climate chaos dominated by water-related problems.[1] Simultaneously a new wave of artistic water work has begun reconfiguring imagination where nature and culture inescapably meet and mingle; art is going into the blue. Ways of relating to water in non-anthropocentric modes are being remembered, realised and reinvented by this new wave of water-based artistic practices. With this rise of water in contemporary art, there is a need for a different model for examining these works, a model that considers the contemporary context of the climate crisis in eco-aesthetics. With the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, this tide of artistic practices is shared and celebrated, and by thinking through the curatorial, recognised as a potential means of planetary caretaking.

In the previous chapter, I presented the Hydrocene as conceptual rather than geologic epoch, and outlined how the Hydrocene has potentially diverse applications. Now, I apply the theory of the Hydrocene to eco-aesthetics as curatorial theory, by defining eco-aesthetics and examining the unique lens of water within eco-aesthetics. From this, I introduce the Hydrocene as curatorial theory. I propose the neologism of the Hydrocene as a curatorial act of care, one that establishes an alternative conceptual framework to the current epoch, most commonly known as the Anthropocene. Following this, I look to the lens of water and introduce water as unique to the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, and briefly share the radical potential in learning from water within eco-aesthetics. This section ends with a brief introduction of 'hydro-artistic methods' which, when viewed together through the

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curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, propose changes to current anthropocentric environmentally destructive ways of relating to water.

Eco-aesthetics in the climate crisis

Eco-aesthetics names the expansive field of artistic practices that bring together an understanding of ecology and aesthetics. This draws from the work of theorists TJ Demos,[2] Ruth Wallen,[3] Rasheed Araeen[4] and in particular Malcolm Miles,[5] whose book *Eco-Aesthetics: Art, Literature and Architecture in a Period of Climate Change* offers an instructional model for my use of the term.[6] Miles uses both terms, ecology and aesthetics, in the expanded sense and focuses on them in relation to society and politics, rather than biology. I prefer eco-aesthetics as an inclusive and expansive term for art made during the climate crisis, finding it more suitable than 'land art,' 'environmental art' or 'eco-art' as these terms do not reflect the complexities of artists making work now during the climate crisis. The use of 'aesthetics' rather than 'art' also points to an expanded definition of art to include architecture, design and other interdisciplinary practices in the Hydrocene.

Over the last twenty years, artistic practices of eco-aesthetics have substantially and fundamentally altered due to the acceleration of the climate crisis. Both the production and reception of art have changed in this time; as Ghosh stipulates, the climate crisis is not only an ecological crisis but also one of the imagination.[7] Current curatorial theories and practices are ill equipped to meet these new complexities of art produced from within the climate crisis. The eco-aesthetics field must find relevant and complex ways of understanding art made during the planetary natural-cultural water crisis. To do this, a new curatorial theory is needed, one that meets the complex needs of curating, mediating and sharing water-based artistic practices as hydrological methodologies for constructing eco-critical water relations. It is time for the curatorial to recognise that it is already implicated and entangled in the natural-cultural crisis, and, as a result, for this crisis of both climate and imagination, material and metaphor, to come forward as a central context for curatorial practice. The context of all contemporary artistic practices must now be seen within the framework of the current climate crisis, and the unsustainable practices of extractionism, colonialism and imperialism that uphold the status quo of most curatorial practice as it stands today.

The increasing immediacy of the climate crisis has created a need to rethink the possibilities and realities of the curatorial. There is an urgent need for new ways of relating to and understanding eco-aesthetics produced during the climate crisis, as the existing model for understanding the expansive field of climate-focused art practices are now outdated. How can audiences move beyond appreciating eco-aesthetics to actively learn from these artists' work in the fight for climate action? Further, how can the artistic field see beyond capitalistic individualisation of artists and recognise the artistic realignment of human–water relations as zeitgeist, a turn towards thinking with water in contemporary art? How can art that thinks

'with' water, rather than 'about' water, contribute positively to the fight for climate justice? To answer these critical propositions, what is needed is a new curatorial theory of eco-aesthetics made during the climate crisis – a theory that meets the complex needs of curating, mediating, and sharing critical artistic practices to empower participants to sense the climate crisis as embodied and relational.

The Hydrocene in application, as curatorial theory in eco-aesthetics, is one such theory that attempts to meet the needs of eco-aesthetics produced during the climate crisis. The theory demands that the curatorial see itself as part of, not separate to, the climate crisis. Here, the curatorial becomes a form of planetary caretaking with a responsibility towards artists, audiences and the planet, to make ecologically sound and responsible artistic relations. The curatorial theory is not merely a prompt towards action on climate change, and it is a recalibration of imagination itself, which, as Ghosh describes, has found itself in crisis. Here, Haraway's prompt to 'stay with the trouble' is understood within the theory of the Hydrocene as a way to 'stay with the water'; rather than build a bridge over troubled waters, the Hydrocene dives in.

Planetary circulations, wet ontologies

Water is the guide that materially and metaphorically leads the Hydrocene as curatorial theory through the entangled nature-culture of the water crisis. In theory the Hydrocene relies conceptually on water when it maps, argues for and emphasises artistic and curatorial practices that relate to the planetary climate crisis through the hydrological cycle. As outlined in the previous section, it is necessary to radically reposition existing curatorial theories in alignment with the current climate crisis, and to do this, we can learn with and from the very materials that artists work with – in this case, water. Through the unique lens of water, the theory of the Hydrocene enacted in eco-aesthetics calls for the necessary transformation of curatorial thinking into climate thinking.

As outlined in Chapter 1, water is one of the most significant material and metaphorical figures of the climate crisis, specifically in the natural-cultural water crisis. For this reason, water is also central to a tide of artists, art institutions and exhibitions which are 'going into the blue.' These artists, or 'watery makers' as I call them, sense and relate to water in embodied, critical, dialogical and curious manners. These artists think 'with' water and work with water as a common partner in their work. They are engaging with water in ways that decentre anthropocentric worldviews and usher in sustainable ways of relating to water.

Rather than seeing water as a theme or a material to work with, these artists developed water-based methodologies, which I call hydro-artistic methods, for entering artistic relations with water during the climate crisis. These hydro-artistic methods draw on the principles established by Neimanis in her writing on the hydrological.[8] By actively thinking with water in their practices, these artists produce striking relational, social, time-based works. They each demonstrate how, by

developing less anthropocentric relationships to water, art can build our capacity for practising planetary caretaking.

In the Hydrocene, these artists are responding to the challenge of staying relevant and buoyant in the turbulent seas of a dying planet. As such, these artists have a vital role as cultural leaders in rethinking and reimagining the possibilities within the natural-cultural crisis of climate change.

High tide of the Hydrocene as curatorial theory in eco-aesthetics

Water is circulating in the zeitgeist of international contemporary art. From water-themed biennales such as Biennale of Sydney *rīvus* in 2022 and Shanghai Biennial *Bodies of Water* in 2020, and to dedicated water and art spaces such as *Ocean Space* in Venice, to publications about art and water such as *Curating the Sea* and *Let the River Flow* also published in 2020, there has been a swell of critical water practices happening in art during this period.

The uptake of the thematic of water in exhibition making has been noted by art writers Celina Lei and Erik Morse. Lei outlines that the connection to water is a primal instinct[9] whereas art critic Erik Morse stipulates that curators are drawn to water in what he labels a new 'drowning mindset' as part of 'impending climatological crisis.'[10] Both these writers draw correlations between the climate crisis and a renewed interest in water, with Morse going into further detail drawing correlations between the field of critical ocean studies including the work of French-Caribbean theorist and poet Édouard Glissant and artworks from the University of Queensland Art Museum's extensive watery program, *Blue Assembly*. I gently disagree with both critics, and instead see this shift within eco-aesthetics towards watery making as part of a broader cultural shift towards thinking *with* water. That is to say, water is not only on the minds of artists but it is also central to a suite of academics, writers and theorists, those who I call watery thinkers.

Beginning with the major group exhibitions of Australia that have been water-focused, the 2022 edition of the Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, was the largest exhibition to date to focus on water and art in the Oceanic region. *Rīvus* took rivers and waterways as the central theme of this extensive and compelling biennale. The curatorium wrote, 'Rivers are the sediment of culture'[11] and developed their exhibition program as 'conceptual wetlands' situated along waterways of the Gadigal, Burramattagal and Cabrogal peoples. *Rīvus* was an extensive biennale of exhibitions, integrated public programs and water-based learning opportunities. The biennale showed the importance of water in critical contemporary art and is further evidence of the international tide of new critical water practices happening in art today.

Before *rīvus*, several university galleries in Australia have had a recurring interest in art, water and climate. These exhibitions included an extensive three-part project in Sydney at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Galleries in 2016, under

the title *Troubled Waters* curated by Felicity Fenner. Across the three exhibitions, artists included John Akomfrah, Andrew Belletty, Nici Cumpston, Tamara Dean, Bonita Ely, Janet Laurence and a collaboration with scientists from UNSW Centre for Ecosystem Science. In the interdisciplinary project and exhibition *River Journey*, Australian artists scrutinised water management and the ecosystem of the Murray–Darling Basin, from a range of positions such as an Indigenous Australian perspective in the work of artist Nici Cumpston, who has familial connections to the Country of the Murray–Darling. Also at UNSW Galleries, with 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art and Sydney Festival, *Wansolwara: One Salt Water* was a series of exhibitions, performances and events from across the Pacific and throughout the Great Ocean held in 2020. The program included the exhibition *O le ūa na fua mai Manu'a* curated by artist, curator and scholar Léuli Eshrāghi, which addressed Indigenous concepts of 'relational space-time, kinships and responsibilities spanning the Great Ocean.'[12]

In Naarm/Melbourne at RMIT Galleries, curator Linda Williams opened the exhibition *Ocean Imaginaries* with artists including Alejandro Durán, Lynne Roberts-Goodwin, Lynette Wallworth and Josh Wodak. The exhibition focused on the contradictions and conflicts of the ocean as a physical and imagined site. Williams' exhibition was part of *Climarte: Art+Climate=Change*, a reoccurring festival of climate-related cultural events.

The University of Queensland Art Museum in Meanjin/Brisbane opened the exhibition *Oceanic Thinking* to begin their five-year art project, *Blue Assembly*, including the watery publication *The Clam's Kiss | Sogi a le faisua* edited by Eshrāghi and curator Peta Rake.[13] Staying in Meanjin/Brisbane, one of the most comprehensive exhibitions to date, in terms of scale and media attention for the water thematic, was the directly named *Water* exhibition at QAGOMA, in 2019–2020. Curator Geraldine Kirrihi Barlow brought together a blockbuster-style exhibition with international artists such as Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson's interactive *Riverbed* alongside local artists such as Quandamooka woman Megan Cope with her powerful installation *RE FORMATION* evoking pre-colonial middens of Minjerribah, Cope's traditional Country.

Across the great ocean in Aotearoa New Zealand, the 2022 exhibition *Declaration: A Pacific Feminist Agenda* was a powerful offering of twelve contemporary Pacific feminist artists responding to climate change and resilience, sovereignty, activism and social justice. Similarly, in Hawaii, curator and theorist Jaimey Hamilton Faris curated the exhibition in 2020, *Inundation: Art and Climate Change in the Pacific*. Faris invited artists from the Pacific, including Australian-based Angela Tiatia, to present works that presented the climate crisis 'not just as a dramatic new reality, but also as the accumulation of long-term colonial, extractive and development forces that have made their communities especially vulnerable.'[14] These exhibitions present bold and critical perspectives on the climate crisis in the Pacific, highlighting the role of artists as cultural leaders in the field of climate justice.

In the Nordic region, water has been a circulating thematic in many art institutions. One such example is the important exhibition in the history of Nordic water relations *Let the River Flow. The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness*, curated by Katya García-Antón from the Office of Contemporary Art Norway. This exhibition charted the Sámi-led activism against the damming of the Áltá River in Norway. Sámi artists played an important role in leading the campaign to defend the river in what is known as the Áltá-Guovdageaidnu Action (1978–1982). Several group exhibitions relating to art and climate change in the Nordic region have had a substantial water presence. These include *Rethink* as part of the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2015 and *Acclimatize* in Stockholm in 2016. *Acclimatize* was arranged by Moderna Museet as an open access exhibition and think tank on the juncture of art and the climate crisis.

Smaller in scale than the abovementioned exhibitions, there were two curatorial actions directly inspired by Neimanis and her theory of hydrofeminism. *Hydra ~ Watery Worldings* curated by the Copenhagen-based curatorial collective Laboratory for Aesthetics and Ecology (LAE) and the Norwegian curator Vibeke Hermanrud's hydrofeminist-inspired exhibition *Submerged Portal*. Both *Hydra* and the *Submerged Portal* are examples of hydrofeminism in action in art, and are exhibitions that highlight the embodied and relational qualities of the Hydrocene.

Looking beyond the Nordic and Oceanic regions, there were many group exhibitions on water and art including *Aquatopia: The Imaginary of the Ocean Deep* in London, 2013 and *Water After All*, in Chicago in 2020, as well as *Territorial Agency: Oceans in Transformation,* Ocean Space in Venice in 2020 and *Tidalectics* in 2017 shown at TBA21 exhibition space in Vienna. In *Tidalectics*, curator Stefanie Hessler interprets Barbadian poet and historian Kamau Brathwaite's term Tidalectics, which is a sea-based, tidal and rhythmical worldview, 'like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding ('reading') from the island(s) into the perhaps creative chaos of the(ir) future.'[15] Since the exhibition *Tidalectics*, the Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary has opened their ocean-focused art space, aptly named Ocean Space, in Venice. A home for interdisciplinary perspectives on the ocean as a site for ecological, political and societal change, the art space is a first of its kind, with a refreshingly climate-focused agenda, as a place where art, oceans and the current climate crisis can be understood. Ocean Space is a world first in art, water and climate research: as a dedicated venue for water and art, it is influential and deeply connected to the ideas of the Hydrocene. The space has a pedagogical focus which they maintain through a fellowship program, podcasts, Ocean Uni and open access Ocean Archive.

Biennales have also been going into the blue, with many editions considering the meeting of natural-cultural water and art critically. With four biennales having a strong water thematic between 2019 and 2021 including Lyon, Taipai, Venice and Lofoten, water relations are becoming more pronounced on the international art stage. The 2019 edition of the Venice Biennale had many hydrocenic moments,

both in the main exhibition and the national pavilions. Among the standouts for watery thinking was the misty *This is the Future* by Hito Steyerl in the main exhibition curated by Ralph Rugoff, which used fog to immerse the audience in a pulsating set of video works that moved between plant and human realities. In the French pavilion, artist Laure Prouvost made an entrancing installation based on the intelligence of the octopus, *The Deep Blue Sea Surrounding You*, and also the Canadian pavilion with the Inuit video artist collective Isuma, led by Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, shared icy video works about Inuit–ice relations.

Within the same edition of the biennale, the Lithuanian pavilion, curated by Lucia Pietroiusti, staged the climate opera-performance *Sun & Sea* by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė; the performance-based work was instantly arresting and won the prestigious Golden Lion award for best pavilion. The strength of *Sun & Sea* is in the artificial beach where kids and adults laze about on beach towels, shifting in the synthetic heat, singing laments for the sudden ordinariness of climate losses.

In the Nordic context, water was most pronounced as a theme in the biennale festival of Lofoten, known as LIAF. This biennale is held in northern Norway in the sparkling archipelago waters of Lofoten and the 2019 edition prioritised thinking with the intertidal zone of the islands, as a way to strike dialogue and conversation with ebbs and flows of the tidal surroundings. Through residencies, site-specific works and an intensive public program, the invited artists worked materially and metaphorically with water and their relations.

Moving further south, the Lyon Biennale had two editions with water as a central focus: firstly, the 14th edition of the biennale titled *Floating Worlds*, with artistic director Thierry Raspail and guest curator Emma Lavigne in 2017/18 and then followed by the 15th edition titled *Where Water Comes Together With Other Water* in 2019/20. This title comes from a Raymond Carver poem and was conceived by artistic director Isabelle Bertolotti, joined by guest curators from Paris's Palais de Tokyo. Both editions of the biennale drew on the rivers of Lyon, a city where two rivers, the Rhône and Saône, meet, and were informed curatorially by water relations in the city of Lyon and beyond.

The 13th Shanghai Biennale, *Bodies of Water* curated by Andrés Jaque drew on Neimanis' book on water relations, which lent its title to the biennale. This edition of the biennale was deeply invested in the same priorities of the Hydrocene–water relations, thinking beyond the anthropocentric, and understanding how bodies of water connect and circulate.

Long-term projects that engage with the temporality of the climate crisis as a planetary disaster are especially relevant to the theory of the Hydrocene. For artists and institutions, long-term projects offer a dedicated and adaptable model for working with water beyond exhibition cycles. Many artists in this field often work with long-term projects in tandem with interdisciplinary collaborators in the form of performance, social practice or pedagogical projects with the support of institutions.

One of the first artist-led initiatives investigating the convergence of art, climate and water is the UK-based Cape Farewell, which was started in 2000 by artist David Buckland in response to the challenges of climate change. Collaboratively with scientists, Cape Farewell takes expeditions to the Arctic and urban environments as a form of conceptual expeditions into the climate crisis. Since 2003, they have undertaken eight boat-based expeditions to places such as the Arctic, Greenland, Peru and the Marshall Islands. Artists are at the centre of these endeavours and throughout their twenty-year history, over 100 artists and writers have collaborated with Cape Farewell including established artists such as Laurie Anderson, Jarvis Cocker, Ian McEwan, artist collective HeHe and Mel Chin, alongside younger artists such as Amy Balkin and Melanie Gilligan among many others.

This is a small sample of the international tide of art going into the blue. I do not claim nor aim to write about every artist working with water, instead I have selected from this tide of eco-visionary artworks in the case studies in order to highlight and expand the key aspects of the Hydrocene, which acts as the expanded context and discursive setting of the tide of art going into the blue.

The proliferation of watery thinking and watery making within contemporary art assures us of the poignancy and urgency of thinking with water right now, where water has become a central facet of eco-aesthetics produced today. This is why it becomes urgent to have a curatorial theory of water, one that engages with and conceptualises the ways in which artists work and think with water, but at the same time, itself thinks with water, and sees water as a partner and artistic associate, rather than as a mute material or colonial-capital resource.

What's ~~love~~ curatorial theory got to do with it?

The curatorial enacts meaning and possibility between art and audience, and it strengthens the possibility for artistic methods to reach audiences and gain impact on a broader level. The Hydrocene as curatorial theory offers ways for mediating these watery works to offer nuanced, relational and embodied methods of sensing the water crisis. As theorist and physicist Karen Barad writes 'Theories are living and breathing reconfigurings of the world.'[16], Taking Barad's definition I turn to the burgeoning field of curatorial theory for the possibilities it offers to rethink ideas of planetary relations in art, and for the academic inquiry into the curatorial. Unlike the more established fields of art theory and art history, curatorial theory entered the academic discipline more recently and is still developing codes, methods and a shared grammar of what curatorial theory is and does. Unlike traditional art theory, curatorial theory specifically looks beyond the artwork to the context that the work is presented within, and to the broader curatorial concerns that include reception of the work and potential impact on the audience.

While there is no singular definition of the curatorial, the term was first championed by Swedish curator Maria Lind in 2009 in *ArtForum* when she wrote:

> Is there something we could call the curatorial? A way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space? An endeavour that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it? I believe so, and I imagine this mode of curating to operate like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions – owing much to site-specific and context-sensitive practices and even more to various traditions of institutional critique.[17]

This definition of the curatorial from Lind iterates the curatorial as an 'active catalyst'; rather than thinking of the curatorial as another version of curating, producing or managing; the curatorial for Lind instead acts as a rupture to traditional ways of doing and thinking with contemporary practices of art.[18]

The Hydrocene as a curatorial theory is deeply informed by the multitude of new and innovative methods of curatorial practice and curatorial theory that are developing internationally. The curatorial theoretical framework for this research develops out of Maura Reilly's book *Curatorial Activism,*[19] which articulates a call for the curatorial to resist and reverse inequalities in the art world. The present book aims to extend upon curator Reilly's proposition of curatorial activism, and place it squarely within the cultural and ecological climate crises, and to show that the strategies that 'resist, confront and challenge' that Reilly proposes are also currently taking place in the art of the Hydrocene. It also draws on the curatorial proposals of artists who curate, including the work of Raqs Media Collective, and theories of the curatorial from the collected essays in *The Curatorial*[20] edited by Jean-Paul Martinon in 2013, and Claire Bishop's work in *Artificial Hells*[21] as many of the artists of the Hydrocene are working in ways that highlight temporal, relational, performance-based and social practices of art making.

I use the term 'curatorial' after Lind and Reilly in order to create the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene; and here, the curatorial is understood as a form of caretaking. Linking back to the etymological Latin roots of the curator as caretaker, the curatorial has the capacity to act as an agent of art-based planetary caretaking, specifically with and through water. Drawing on Haraway's term of cultivating 'response-ability,'[22] this critical term is extended into an art context by claiming that the curatorial now operates in the midst of a global natural-cultural climate crisis, and therefore must operate on a global or planetary scale. The Hydrocene as a curatorial theory aims to develop 'response-ability'[23] to the artists and their work, and the audience of these works, and simultaneously to the climate crisis and the dying planet. The Hydrocene as curatorial theory is a planetary agent of care, a state of being and a methodology for participating in the world right now. Again, this is not a utopian method of participation; I reinforce this reading of participation based on Haraway's concept of 'staying with the trouble,' being attuned to the losses and challenges of the climate crisis, while working towards an expansive imagination of climate justice.

To develop this curatorial theory, I draw on my expertise as a practising curator and as a university lecturer in curatorial practice. I speak from my position 'within' the curatorial, and to share my unique understanding of this field. It is not that I am a curator and therefore the method I employ is the position of the curator; instead I draw on the theoretical field that is identified as the curatorial to undertake this research. I employ the curatorial to explicitly draw out the unique understanding of eco-aesthetics that this positionality offers.

It is important to outline the critical difference between the terms 'curating' and the 'curatorial' and disassociating the curatorial from curating.[24] The term 'curating' relates to the professional practice that a curator undertakes in their work – the management, logistics, production, collaboration and display methods that a curator works with daily. The 'curatorial' is different in that it does not relate to the production of art events or the curator's identity and career. Instead, the curatorial can be understood as a framework and field of thought.

Art historian and curatorial theorist Terry Smith has written extensively about curatorial practice and thinking, and he posits that curatorial practice 'is embroiled in time, but not bound by it; entangled with periodising urges, but not enslaved to them; committed to space, but of many kinds, actual and virtual; anxious about place, yet thrilled by dispersion's roller-coaster ride.'[25] This dynamic interplay of curatorial thinking and practice as a set of interplaying realities, both conceptual and actual, speaks to the diversity of methods and approaches available within the curatorial.

Theorists and educators Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff, who co-developed the first PhD program in curatorial knowledge at Goldsmiths in 2006, write that 'the curatorial is a disturbance, an utterance, a narrative,' which is a shift from thinking about the 'staging of the event, to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatisation and performance.'[26] This definition of the curatorial is expansive in the way that it moves beyond the discreet actions of the curator, to viewing the art event as a whole – a state of entangled interconnection, where art no longer serves to simply interpret internalised knowledge, instead art is about reflection and knowing the world in another way. Instead of being reactive, art precipitates and facilitates a new reflection of the world, and it this art that is in dialogue with the curatorial.

In the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, I employ a similar research design by utilising case studies to analyse the tide of critical water practices happening in art today. I argue that because of the interrelation of nature and culture, and because the climate crisis is also one of the imagination, the curatorial discipline must now see itself as part *of* the crisis, not separate or removed from it. In this way, the Hydrocene is a form of curatorial theory activism, sharing Reilly's important call for curatorial activism beyond the actions of curators into the act of curatorial theory making.

There is a pattern in the explanations of the curatorial that reoccurs throughout the essays that form the book *The Curatorial*, edited by Martinon. This pattern

shows a link between performativity and the curatorial, for example, in the idea of the curatorial as a choreographic mode of operation (Je Yun Moon), or the curatorial as diagrammatic and staged (Bridget Crone), or becoming-curator as a performative action (Suzana Milevska) or the curatorial as an 'actualisation of potentialities' (Joshua Simon). In the same collection of essays, theorist and educator Sarah Pierce enhances the understanding of the curatorial as related to performance when she articulates, after Hannah Arendt, that the curatorial is necessarily connected to publicness and unpredictability. She writes that 'We are in the middle of the curatorial'[27] and defines the curatorial as a 'simple operator for a beginning'; these time-based metaphors actualise a performance-based reading of the curatorial. I am drawn to this bond between the curatorial and performance, as performance and liveness is an essential aspect of the Hydrocene and the practices of the artists featured. I emphasise this pattern of connection between performance and curatorial thinking within the Hydrocene as a way to enact the curatorial as a lively research method.

'Curatorial responsibility'[28] is a core theme with an acknowledgement that activism cannot begin without a profound awareness and education of the systemic and structural problems of the current art economy. Utilising the curatorial as part of the theoretical framework draws from and expands curator and theorist Maura Reilly's articulation of 'Curatorial Activism'[29] where she aims to propel an ethics of curating. In her book of the same name from 2018, Reilly outlines a curator's toolbox of practical methods for performing curatorial activism, which focuses on 'strategies of resistance' such as revisionist and relational curating. After presenting a set of case studies of significant international exhibitions that have battled sexist, racist and homophobic art worlds, Reilly finishes the book with a manifesto of sorts, a 'call to arms' with exhibition-based strategies that curators can employ to perform curatorial activism. While Reilly's text focuses more on the practice of curating, rather than the curatorial, I see a correlation in the way Reilly asks curators to work together for change, and to build on the historiography of ground-breaking curatorial practices that have merged pressing political and artistic questions.

Expanding from the work of philosopher Rosi Braidotti, curatorial theorist Beatrice von Bismarck calls for a 'curatorial transposition,' which offers a complementary conceptual framework to Reilly's call for curatorial activism. For von Bismarck, curatorial transposition is defined as the connection of creative and cognitive processes and procedures as part of the entanglement of human and nonhuman participants. She allies the transpositional within a curatorial context as 'a kind of close, inseparable entanglement of human and nonhuman actors.'[30] This way of considering the non-human and human entanglement echoes Neimanis' theory of hydrologics, which forms the basis for the embodied and relational hydro-artistic methods of the Hydrocene.

Australian-based curatorial theorist Tara McDowell has claimed the potential for the curatorial to be used as methodology in her text *Falling in love (Or is the curatorial a methodology?)*.[31] McDowell, like Martinon, Rogoff and Pierce,

writes from the standpoint of being an educator within the curatorial field; she is the founder of the PhD program in Curatorial Practice at Monash University, Melbourne. After neatly outlining the terms of the curatorial in opposition to curating and articulating the link between the proliferation of postgraduate curating programs and the way the curatorial defines itself in academia, McDowell makes a substantial claim about the curatorial and the present time. She writes that 'We now need to chart the philosophical, ecological, and infrastructural terrain of a curatorial ethics for a warming planet.'[32] Citing the planet in crisis, with the sixth mass extinction currently underway, McDowell claims that the curatorial has a responsibility to act and think with a duty of care, or as she names it, lifting from political philosopher Hannah Arendt, '*amor mundi*, or love for the world.'[33] Here, there is a conceptual link back to love for the world as a form of planetary caretaking. In demanding the curatorial consider the ethical implications of participating in the world right now, McDowell calls for a questioning and articulation of a 'code of conduct' for art workers during the current climate crisis. Making an important theoretical link between the warming planet and the potential for the curatorial to contribute. This linking of the curatorial as a methodology to the climate crisis is highly valuable for the Hydrocene, and activates the potential impact of the curatorial as an active ethical standpoint.

Australian curator Felicity Fenner extends upon McDowell's point and answers a related proposition in her book *Curating in a Time of Ecological Crisis: Biennales as Agents of Change*,[34] which investigates how the impact of the climate crisis has influenced curatorial practice within recent high-profile international biennales. Fenner highlights successful approaches, such as the 2020 Taipei Biennale and the 2020 Biennale of Sydney, and proposes that in order to remain relevant and maximise their impact, outdated curatorial models of biennales can be replaced in ways that meet the complexities of the current climate crisis. Reilly, McDowell and Fenner each offer differing yet complementary 'calls to arms' that curatorial practice must face urgent social and political issues, and that, by extension, the curatorial as method must act towards change.

The Hydrocene as curatorial theory builds upon the work of a small number of dedicated curators who are already working critically with water. For example, artist, curator and scholar Léuli Eshrāghi is working continually with water, as curator of water-themed biennales and exhibitions[35] and as curatorial researcher in residence at the University of Queensland's *Blue Assembly* project. Stefanie Hessler is another influential curator calling for changes to curatorial practice and exhibition making now in this era of colonial capitalism and ecological disaster. In an international context, Hessler has worked with the ocean and watery matters including her work with artists Joan Jonas and Armin Linke at Ocean Space, Venice. In her essay 'Tidalectic Curating,' she argues that curators are now obligated to rethink ways of working: 'Curatorial practice is increasingly assessed not only by its ability to create a convincing argument, support artists, or revisit art history, but also by the way it addresses and responds to the structures in which it is embedded.'[36]

Hessler's curatorial practice, as well as her theoretical offerings on water-based curating, inform my own curatorial research and defining the Hydrocene. Alongside Hessler, international curators Chus Martínez, Barbara Casavecchia and Daniela Zyman have also been curators for water-based exhibitions at Ocean Space, Venice and have made important contributions to the field of art and water.[37]

Historically, there are important exhibition precedents to draw from in developing a curatorial theory fit for art made from within the climate crisis. These include *Fragile Ecologies* curated by Barbara C. Matilsky (1992), Lucy Lippard's *Weather Report* (2007), *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969–2009* (2009) curated by Francesco Manacorda and in the same year *Earth: Art for a Changing World* at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. These exhibitions were closely followed by *Rethink* (2009) in Copenhagen and *In the Balance: Art for a Changing World* at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney (2010).[38] However, the rapid and unprecedented changes of the climate crisis mean that exhibitions made in 2010 compared to exhibitions made now are facing new and different challenges as the climate crisis rapidly escalates. It is necessary for new curatorial theories, methods and strategies to emerge, to deal with the complexities of the curatorial in relation to art practices now. The Hydrocene in application, as curatorial theory in eco-aesthetics, should be understood as the necessary transformation of curatorial thinking into climate thinking through the unique lens of water.

In the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene, I embrace these curatorial propositions and develop them further by demanding that the curatorial as an entangled theoretical framework sees itself as materially and metaphorically part of the substance of this climate crisis, through water. The curatorial discipline should 'stay with the trouble' and act as part *of* the climate crisis, never above or separate to it. Eco-aesthetics can no longer participate in the world without a full awareness that the context of the climate crisis is the planetary context for all art making today, and the curatorial must centre the crisis accordingly.

The entangled methodology of the Hydrocene was discussed in the Introduction in relation to water in terms of the hydrological cycle, yet as a curatorial theory, the Hydrocene must also show how this more general logic of water manifests and functions in artistic terms, practices and contexts. The main conceptual tool that I use for this is that of hydro-artistic methods, to which I now turn.

Hydro-artistic methods of the Hydrocene

Water moves through bodies internally and also links bodies to the planetary circulations through the hydrological cycle. In this way, water is ingested and visceral: it is both internal and external to bodies.[39] This duality of water as internally and externally sensed is one of the double-sided paradigms which means that water is also both a physical and metaphorical connector within this new wave of water-based arts practices. Water is the guide, the archive and the mediator for art to contribute

to the cultural discourse on the climate crisis. For this reason, water cannot only be a theme or topic in this research; instead, water itself must play a role in the research methodology, just as it does in the artistic practices it examines.

The Hydrocene as curatorial theory utilises an entangled research methodology that attempts to collaborate with water to find water-based methods for understanding the relationships between art and water. This understanding of the logic of water as 'hydrologics' by Neimanis in her essay 'Water and Knowledge' builds generative aquatic scholarship and acknowledges the sea of watery thinkers, including Gaston Bachelard and Janine MacLeod, to argue for the powerful logic and knowledge of water. She writes, 'Water has other manners of being and becoming, other movements and ways of organizing bodies, from which we might also learn.'[40] These modes of watery relations are what she terms 'hydrologics,' and she examines them in terms of the knowledge that bodies of water articulate, as well as the patterning that bodies of water perform in transforming and exchanging with other bodies of water. Neimanis lists possible hydrologics and the list reads like transferrable skills on a curriculum vitae: communicator, conduit, memory-keeper, sculptor, differentiator, lover, scribe, alibi, genealogist and saboteur. In the Hydrocene, I embrace Neimanis' argument to pay close attention to hydrologics as a way to respect and attend to the various water bodies in which 'we are immersed, and *as* which we ourselves exist.'[41]

In choosing to utilise hydrologics as a research method, I acknowledge my own privileged body and its lived experience as a body of water in connection with all other bodies of water. As a body of water, I meet other bodies of water in the tide of contemporary critical water practice with knowledge of water's own agency and pools of knowledge in water's own right. This is an attempt to understand and redirect the phenomenological origins of Neimanis' influential work with hydrologics into the realm of contemporary artistic practice, and to engage hydrologics as the conceptual origins of the hydro-artistic methods.

Inspired by the artists and Neimanis, the Hydrocene aims to build a 'water-based' way of understanding and elevating these works into a watery constellation. I identify hydro-artistic methods as the ways that water itself acts as an agent within the identified artworks of the Hydrocene. This is a way of naming and describing the watery ways, such as 'tiding' or 'unfreezing' that water performs in contemporary art. Hydro-artistic methods are slippery, water-based ways of thinking with water to make art in common. In this setting, water is not a mute material engaged by artists; it is a vibrant and active agent, which through art engages with the planetary circulations of the hydrological and hydro-social cycle. My work here is to describe, name and correlate the hydro-artistic methods performed by the tide of artists building unique human–water relationships in the natural-cultural milieu. For example, many of the artworks in the Ice case study deal with melting, which in the context of the Hydrocene is developed as a hydro-artistic method of 'unfreezing.' In the Hydrocene book, 'unfreezing' becomes a way to conceptualise the works of the Ice chapter. This research methodology utilises approaches gleaned from feminist environmental humanities, and the aqueous field of the blue humanities.

The hydro-artistic methods of the Hydrocene include archiving, cleaning, incubating, infusing, misting, resisting, submerging, swamping, tiding, unfreezing and waving which the artists have developed in their unique relationships with water. It is important to reiterate here that these hydro-artistic methods are not a definitive or exhaustive list. Rather, these are examples of hydro-artistic methods found in certain artists' practices; there are many other possible and existing hydro-artistic methods to which the theory of the Hydrocene can pertain.

In the case studies, I emphasise a water-based understanding, or hydrological reading where water is an active participant in the artwork. I highlight the double-sided paradigm of water as physical connector and metaphorical connector in this new wave of water-based arts practices. Across all of these hydro-artistic methods, I re-imagine the hydrological cycle as part of artistic, embodied selves and communities. In the case studies, I show evidence that these artists enter curious and meaningful relations with water and, when seen together as part of a watery zeitgeist, the theoretical framework of the Hydrocene offers strategies for realigning human–water relations and contributing to climate justice.

In expanding hydrologics into hydro-artistic methods, I build on existing water-based research methods, many of which recognise that water has agency and is a vital material with its own power. This way of thinking of water as a vibrant and living material is integral to many First Nations scholarships and cosmologies; for example, the Sto:Loh nation poet and writer Lee Maracle reminds us 'The water owns itself.'[42] In considering water-based methodologies for this research, the Hydrocene as a curatorial theory acknowledges and aims to debunk the myth of 'water as modern' and the colonial logics of water relations. I endeavour to practice situated knowledge production[43] and, while the art of the Hydrocene can be mapped internationally across artistic practices, I also acknowledge that all waters are situated and relational,[44] and that the effects of the climate crisis are unequally distributed, especially in relation to access to water.[45] In this way, the Hydrocene as theory utilises a research methodology that aims to think with water, recognise water's agency and maintain situated water relations. The theory emphasises a water-based understanding, or hydrological reading, where water is the physical connector and metaphorical connector in this new wave of water-based arts practices.

Hydrocene as a generative disruption

Rather than a timeline or strict geological era, the Hydrocene is a curatorial act of disruption and is a generative, pluralistic conceptual premise that aims to dismantle the conceptual supremacy of the Anthropocene. The naming of the Hydrocene is based on my findings as a curator, where I have witnessed that culture can have a constructive effect on climate action, with artists' practices being emblematic of ways of relating to water differently, not as resource, capital or only weather, but as the very substance of our beings. And as such, in situated difference, these artists

are undertaking human–water relations based around practices of care which are paramount for those working towards climate justice.

Water, this most vital of materials, is the central figure of the climate crisis and it is no surprise that this has produced a zeitgeist of ground-breaking artists who cultivate critical and collaborative methods of relating with water, from which we can learn. The act of naming and defining this tide as the Hydrocene is a curatorial act of caretaking, linking back to the roots of curating as a practice of care; and to contemporary feminist theories of care, including political theorist Joan Tronto who claims that care, rather than economics, should be the central concern of politics.[46] This is not a theoretical concern, rather, in light of the climate crisis curatorial theory and practice must adjust their practices towards a care-based relationality rather than colonial-capitalism at the centre of our doings.

The artists to whom the Hydrocene is most pertinent are those that focus on relational, collaborative and ethical methods for centring water as a being with agency within their artistic practices. Not all artists working with water are working critically with water or thinking *with* water. Many artists still treat water as simply a resource, backdrop or prop in their art making. The difference lies in the artistic approach of thinking 'with' or even collaborating with water. The artists examined in the Hydrocene often utilise practices gleaned from critical ocean studies[47] and the blue humanities[48] such as hydrofeminism,[49] and other water-based thinking[50] and making methods. These innovative artists cultivate a range of unique, critical and collaborative methods for relating with the hydrosphere.

The book understands these artworks in constellation with each other, and considers how these artists and their watery relationalities deepen an ecological sensibility towards climate action. When viewed individually these artists are re-examining water relations, yet thinking curatorially, and by expanding these singular pieces into an entangled (watery) diagrammatic thinking of the curatorial as a planetary force, we then see that these artists form a zeitgeist in contemporary art practice. This is a powerful tide in art, working in constellation and dialogue with the expanded blue humanities.

Bubbling in this watery zeitgeist are artists who re-imagine the hydrological cycle in terms of relationality and in companionship with hydro-artistic methods. In the forthcoming aqueous chapters I move through an aesthetic study of bodies of water and the powerful artists who form intimate relations with them. As a curator and water theorist, I aim to provide an urgent and timely perspective on the power and potential of eco-visionary artists to transform human–water relations.

Notes

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13 See 'The Clam's Kiss | Sogi a le faisua' in UQ Art Museum.
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18 Lind expands on the curatorial in her edited anthology *Performing the Curatorial: Within and beyond Art*, M Lind (ed), Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2012.
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21 C Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, Verso Books, 2012.
22 Haraway, 'Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene'.
23 The term 'response-ability' is championed by Donna J. Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble* as a form of collective knowing and doing. For more on this term, see legal scholar Marie-Catherine Petersmann's article, *Response-abilities of care in more-than-human worlds*, where she details the multiplicities of response-abilities as inherently joined with the question of differentiated ability.
24 See N Möntmann, 'The Curatorial and Its Mediation', *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, vol. 6, 2017, 242–253; Martinon, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*; Lind.
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38 For a detailed account of the recent history of climate-focused exhibitions, see Fenner.
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40 Neimanis, 'Water and Knowledge', p. 53.
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3

RIVER

> We start in the river. Consistently inconsistent the river is a zone for resistance, never settled, even when dominated, even when rerouted, diverted, swollen, or sinking, the river holds its own. Bubbling underground or billowing out from its source, the river moves as melted materials. The river makes its own route.

Force for wet and dry collective resistance

In the introductory chapters, I situated the Hydrocene within the climate crisis and as a curatorial theory for bridging-building between the blue humanities and curatorial theory. The River chapter re-imagines the hydrological[1] and hydro-social[2] cycles through critical artistic practice and reformulates Neimanis' hydrologics into hydro-artistic methods of resisting, rerouting and infusing. Within these contemporary artistic practices, the river becomes a site of collective resistance and power, showcasing geo-political conflict, legal precedents for nature's rights and themes of absence, loss and power.

While the character of a river may be defined by movement, temporality and the changing of seasons, a river can also be defined by the absence of water, as Wiradjuri poet and artist Jazz Money articulates in her poem 'Bila, A River Cycle':

> but a river is always a river ey even when submerged
> even dispelled even poisoned or damned
> cos spirits walk this land and ancestors placed *bila* (river)
> just so with cause of course[3]

As Money stipulates, even in loss, a river is always a river. Never static, rivers in the Hydrocene are a place of flux and rebellion, as well as watery geo-political

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sites of competing ideologies. The artistic and curatorial works in this chapter each recognise the river as a site for creative collaboration, sometimes in the absence of water itself. Moving away from the imagery of the river as 'running' or 'flowing,' the artists working with rivers in the Hydrocene are more concerned with the way the river reroutes and diverts, blocks and resists, reconfigures and escapes. These artists find ways to care for and think with rivers: as vibrant sites of cultural knowledge, as memory holders and as instigators for the urgent re-negotiation of human–river relations in the face of the climate crisis.

In this chapter, artists find alignment with defiant rivers in highly contested geo-political contexts, where rivers are controlled by decisions made further upstream. These complex zones are where the pressures of rapidly changing ecologies intersect with matters of water rights and settler colonialism alongside First Nations knowledge systems. In these zones, rivers continue to defy the confinement placed upon them through the logic of capital-colonial water management.

The rivers of the Nordic region are never only rivers – they incorporate lakes, creeks, springs, marshland and melting glaciers. They are seasonal and move between hydro-cyclical states of ice, melt and mist. These rivers are restless navigators of the land that cooperate or conflict with the elements around them, seek out pathways, moving stone and forest as needed. The rivers of the Nordic region include sacred Sámi sites, where the rivers are cultural knowledge holders and distributors.[4]

Similarly, the rivers of the Oceania, specifically the Australian region are expansive and interconnected bodies of water, which are also important sites for First Nations cultural knowledge.[5] These rivers are also directly influenced by the conditions of the climate crisis through repeating cycles of drought and flooding, both of which have been increasing in frequency and force as part of the changing climate.

In both regions, the river is also a site of loss. Through hydroelectricity systems, water-heavy industrial farming and water mismanagement, the river has become a site of sickliness, where the symptoms of the water crisis are visible. In an Australian context, the major river systems and basins are under extreme stress. For example, the critical state of the Murray and the Darling Barka has been reported by Margaret Simons in 'Cry Me a River: The Tragedy of the Murray–Darling Basin' where she writes, 'If politics is how human societies decide on the sharing of resources, wealth and power, then in a dry country water is indubitably, essentially and unavoidably political.'[6] Her extended essay explains that through drastic mismanagement the river system and entire basin, which stretches more than a million square kilometres, is in severe crisis, witnessed in mass fish death and the extinction of local river-based creatures, such as the native river turtles.

At the other end of the world, in the Nordic context, many of the wild rivers of the north have been re-routed into dams and power plants for hydroelectricity. These power plants are promoted as 'green' energy and yet have a high cost to local Indigenous communities, as well as to local plants and creatures that rely on the river. This complex interplay of the river as a source of power and resources

means that the exploitation of the power of the river has been swift. In this way, the river is commonly a site of loss, as it has been dammed, used or diverted to suit anthropocentric and capital-driven systems.

From the Nordic region, this chapter focuses on artists Kati Roover, Anja Örn and Hanna Ljungh, alongside the exhibition *Let the River Flow*, including artist collective *Sámi Artists' Group*. From the Oceanic region, the chapter focuses on how the river is investigated artistically by artists including Badger Bates, Cass Lynch, Deborah Cheetham, Gabriella Hirst, Bonita Ely and Julie Gough. These artistic proposals for engaging with the river in terms of the Hydrocene argue for ethical and co-relating river relations.

The artists of the river chapter have, in the Hydrocene, each developed unique hydro-artistic methods for engaging the river on its own terms. I understand these artists' methods as informed by and led by the water of the river, and I draw on and extend Neimanis' rich concept of 'hydrologics' to see these as hydro-artistic methods. Each method is materially informed by and metaphorically led by water. In hydro-artistic methods water is considered an empowered agent, with its own sources of knowledge; further, water becomes a potential artistic collaborator. The hydro-artistic methods the artists of the river chapter enact in their work are resisting, rerouting and infusing.

Resisting is a hydro-artistic method that highlights the way water builds friction and resistance to containment, such as when water is dammed and continues to mount pressure and force on the embankment. Author Toni Morrison names the phenomena of water's resistance to containment when she writes about the Mississippi River flooding; she disputes the idea that the river is flooding, instead seeing it as the water returning to the land the water remembers: 'All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.'[7] The hydro-artistic method of resisting is found in the curatorial realm in both the Nordic and the Australian context where exhibition making becomes an act of collective resistance in the exhibition *Let the River Flow* which features Sámi-led artistic and activist resistance to Nordic colonial control of Indigenous river systems in Norway. In an Australian context, Noongar artist and writer Cass Lynch and Yorta Yorta soprano, composer and academic Deborah Cheetham, both working in Naarm/Melbourne, use sound and water in their work to perform a form of resistance to the domination of colonial control over language.

In the Nordic region, silencing of waterfalls for hydroelectricity leads Sweden-based artist Anja Örn to also employ the hydro-artistic method of resisting as a way of memorialising and memory-making for the lost waterfalls. Fellow Swedish artist Hanna Ljungh also enacts a form of resisting with waterfalls when she uses humour to subvert and redirect the 'greenwashing' narratives of the benefits of hydroelectricity. In her work, Ljungh shouts at the waterfall about the economic benefits of hydroelectricity all while the unflinching waterfall powers on. In the Hydrocene, resisting is a water-based method for subverting dominant capitalistic narratives and practices imposed on the river, unsustainable ways of relating to the river that threaten to silence these powerful bodies of water forever.

Rerouting is a hydro-artistic method of diverting and changing direction, speed and pace. It is a powerful tactic employed by water to move through and beyond systems of containment. Rerouting as a hydro-artistic method is identified within the work of Barkandji artist and activist Badger Bates and German-based Australian-born artist Gabriella Hirst, who are each working to reroute the cultural narratives of the corrupted Darling Barka River system.

Lastly, infusing is the hydro-artistic method of different sources coming together, infusing materials and meanings, such as in the 23rd Biennale of Sydney *rīvus* or in the work of Australia-based artist Bonita Ely, who infuses meaning with the polluted waters of the Murray River in her multi-decade performance *Murray River Punch*. Likewise, Finland-based artist Kati Roover brews together and infuses the river of her childhood with personal memories and a hydrofeminist sense of gestational bodies in her film, *Do rivers really ever end?*

The hydro-artistic methods of resisting, rerouting and infusing are ways of re-negotiating human–river relations towards a planetary system of care. Through their work, these artists are proposing a caring relationality between art and river, one that asserts the river's agency, sorrow and strength and the ability of art to recognise and share these unique ways of relating to the river with audiences.

Shouting at waterfalls, resisting Nordic hydroelectricity with artists Hanna Ljungh and Anja Örn

A young woman dressed as a bureaucrat in a sensible black suit stands at the base of a magnificent and noisy waterfall. With a wild look in her eyes and wet hair, she yells at the waterfall, 'Haven't you understood a single thing, or don't you care?

FIGURE 3.1 Hanna Ljungh, still from film *How to Civilize a Waterfall,* 2010. Courtesy of the artist.

We could make 14.2 gigawatts per hour here. But you just don't give a damn. You fucking selfish cascade!'[8] Slipping on the wet rocks, she aggressively challenges the waterfall, pleading for economic rationalism, attempting to persuade the waterfall of the benefits of turning into a hydroelectric power plant. The artist is Sweden-based Hanna Ljungh who performs in her short video work *How to Civilize a Waterfall*. As the artist slips and falls in the rushing waters, she comically fails to convince the powerful waterfall to change. This paradoxical encounter with the waterfall exemplifies how the art of the Hydrocene can use humour to encounter water as a being with agency. Her lively performance breaks through the rhetoric of hydroelectricity as a 'green' power source in the Nordic nations and reflects critically on the role of waterfalls in the building of the nation state of Sweden. The video is part of the artist's broader body of work about the borderland of human and non-human forms of existence and how they relate.

Waterfalls have played an important role in the work of other Nordic artists such as Ruri and Olafur Eliasson. Ruri has been working with eco-aesthetic matters since the 1980s and developed a long-term artistic relationship with waterfalls as part of her photographic and sculptural practice. Her work from 2006, *Elimination II*, is a series of photographs that document the lost waterfalls of an Icelandic damming project. These photos exist as 'memento mori' of the lost waterfalls and the diverted and contained energetic flows of these waterfalls that have been drastically changed by anthropocentric desires and flows of capitalism. The still photographs work to memorialise the lost waterfalls but do not engage with the agency of the waterfalls themselves.

Similarly, Eliasson also has a long and impressive career within environmental art, and his work with waterfalls has been directed around creating spectacular and technologically complex waterfalls in public places. While Eliasson has contributed generously to the expansion of eco-aesthetics into a broader context, especially with his works in public space, the waterfall works veer towards a spectacle of water, rather than a hydrologically based thinking 'with' water. The artist's waterfall series most notably feature feats of complicated water engineering when the artist and his team installed 'waterfall' fountains in a series of prominent locations including New York in 2008, Palace of Versailles in France in 2016 and outside the Tate Modern in 2019. These waterfalls bring the audience in close contact with an engineered fountain, and subtly pay homage to waterfalls in general, yet they do little to reformulate destructive capitalistic relationships with waterfalls in relation to the climate crisis. In the context of the Hydrocene, these works reinforce the notion of water as resource and mute material, rather than elevating the water's agency, and the ideas of care and response-ability that the Hydrocene highlights.

Returning to the body and performance as a starting point to relate to waterfalls, Swedish artist Anja Örn asks the question 'Where does the river begin and end?' in her video work and associated sculptural pieces entitled *In memory of a river*, first shown at the Luleå Biennial in 2018. Luleå is a small town in the north of Sweden

FIGURE 3.2 Anja Örn, still from film *Till minnet av en älv* (*In memory of a river*), commissioned by the Luleå Biennal, 2018–2020. Courtesy of the artist.

in the region of Norrbotten, which straddles the invisible line of the Arctic Circle. Örn is an artist who lives and works in the region, and whose interest in watery thinking emerges in the zone of the politically charged management of waterfalls of the River Lulu. *In memory of a river* takes a personal narrative through the archives of the lost waterfalls of the region, which have now been diverted for hydroelectricity. In a symbolic exchange, the water in the north is used to make electricity, which is mostly sent south to be used in the major cities and centres of power.[9] In Sweden, the north powers the south through unequal hydro-exchanges.[10]

In her video essay, which reads as a considered art documentary, the artist asks poignantly, 'Who remembers the river?' In one scene, the camera sits still, looking out at dry boulders. The river is missing. The artist walks through the still shot as she traverses the absence of the river, climbing over the dried-out rocks that sit alone. This absence is human-made, resulting from the River Lulu and its rapids and waterfalls being diverted into hydroelectricity. Örn shows photographs of a vast concrete dam and a large steel power station, which both seem to cut into the landscape, an intrusion of megalithic scale.

Örn works with the waterfall as a dynamic being; even in the water's absence, she finds a way to collaborate with it. The artist employs a mixed collage technique, where sounds of the river are presented over still images of absent waterfalls, highlighting the missing waterfalls through the disjunction of sound and site. The audience sees images of the waterfalls' previous flow in photographs from

the Swedish National Museum's archives, which were taken in the early twentieth century by amateur photographer Lotten von Düben while visiting the north with her scientist husband.

Örn accentuates von Düben's passion for the waterfall, and gently rewrites the narrative of 'the scientist's wife' to the 'visiting artist.' The artist announces in the voiceover of the video work, 'The collective memories (of rivers) are represented and managed by many men'; as a counterbalance to this, Örn highlights the work of von Düben in her video work as a form of hydrofeminist restorative art history. The video work takes the contributions of an overlooked artist seriously and reinserts this narrative of women's artistic practice into the recent absence of the river. As well as the photographs of the waterfalls, Örn uses a recurring visual motif of romantic paintings of waterfalls and rivers from the Swedish National Museum's collection. Both the photographs and paintings in the national museum's archive point to the symbolic power of the waterfall in developing the iconography of modern Swedish nationhood.

Örn ends her film with the words of Swedish scientist Olav Svenonious, who predicted in 1899 that Sweden would become rich and powerful from the great waterfalls of the north. The artist points to the contemporary condition in Sweden where the unequal balance of hydro-political power is tipped from the north to the south. In this instance, the power of the waterfalls is damned, drained and delivered to elsewhere in the country. Örn's body of work with the waterfalls of the River Lulu, even in their absence, shares an eco-critical approach to water and to the lost waterfalls as a site of resistance to anthropocentric and colonial models of water relations.

For Ljungh and Örn, their works act as artistic guides to considering waterfalls beyond the destructive modes of hydroelectricity. These artists will shout at waterfalls until their throats are dry, and they will not let sleeping waterfalls be forgotten or our relationship with them be neglected.

Collective resistance and exhibition world-making in *Let the River Flow*

With *Let the River Flow,* exhibition making became an act of collective resistance. In contrast to Ljungh and Örn's personal quests with the river, the 2018 exhibition entitled *Let the River Flow: The Sovereign Will and the Making of a New Worldliness* was developed by the Office for Contemporary Art Norway and shared the work of Sámi artists and activists and Indigenous-led resistance to the damming of Álttáeatnu (River Áltá) in Sápmi, Northern Norway. Curated by Katya Garcia-Anton, with guidance of an Advisory Council consisting of Sámi scholars Harald Gaski and Gunvor Guttorm, the exhibition and publication worked in a far broader scope about the context of the Sámi-led resistance to the damming of the River Áltá on Sámi land in Norway. The exhibition looked at the intersection of mining, hydroelectricity and damming impacts of the River Áltá on both Indigenous Sámi

communities and non-Indigenous communities, as well as the land, waters and biodiversity of the region. Presenting posters, photographs, archival pieces and contemporary works from artists in solidarity with the protests, the exhibition also included artistic commissions that consider the legacy of the protests for the River Áltá. The artworks and archives shared in the *Let the River Flow* exhibition were an example of a curatorial practice that highlighted the complex political struggle of the Sámi nationhood through its engagement with artistic practices. The exhibition revealed how the River Áltá itself was the site for collaborative actions between Sámi and non-Sámi people, to gather, protest and strike for the rights of water, as deeply connected to the rights of the Sámi people. The resistance was organised between the years 1978 and 1982 and the exhibition brought together the work of artists and craft makers in the movement, alongside documentation of the resistance to the dam. The artistic and activist strategies that were developed during this sustained action were shared in the exhibition.

Through the lens of the Hydrocene, this resistance to the Norwegian dam is understood as part of the hydro-artistic method of resisting. This method of resisting was evident in a number of the works presented in the exhibition including the posters of artist Arvid Sveen such as *Sámi Future* (1980) and *Emancipation* (1981). Printed in the red, yellow and blue of the Norwegian Sámi flag, the posters depict powerful anti-colonial messages, where the Sámi figures depicted break free of the suffocating Norwegian flag symbols that are being forced upon then. The exhibition also included the embroideries of Berit Marit Hætta and the *duodji* (Sámi art and craft practices) of pioneering artist Iver Jåks along with some early works by the collective Sámi Artist Group, who were based in a village close to the River Áltá and were active politically and artistically during the years of the protests.

In the case of River Áltá, Finnish Sámi writer Matti Aikio writes about the case as part of a Nordic context of colonial damming projects as part of complex civil rights and burgeoning environmental movements. Aiko writes:

> Constructing man-made lakes and hydro-power plants was a continuation of the colonial use of northern regions… the hydro-electric developments are just one very visible detail of the wide range of destructive ways in which our industrial world blindly believes in technological supremacy and its endless capacity to solve all environmental problems.[11]

The colonial attitudes and actions that insisted on the containment of waters, through damming, are not confined to the Nordic region. These acts of treating water as resource are repeated internationally in the confinement of rivers into hydroelectricity. As author Arundhati Roy writes:

> Big dams are to a nation's "development" what nuclear bombs are to its military arsenal. They're both weapons of mass destruction… they represent the severing of the link, not just the link – the understanding – between human beings and the planet they live on.[12]

In this way, damming rivers can be read as a colonial and imperial effort to manage and maintain water as a resource, and to sever the bonds between First Nations people and their waterways.

The River Áltá conflict and the exhibition *Let the River Flow* is emblematic of the curatorial push in the Nordic region into thinking from the perspective of the river, and the river as a site that gathers artistic and political power. The hydro-artistic method of resisting is enacted here as a form of evasion, where the waters that form the river are slippery and shifting, looking for ways to break the containers that hold them. As Neimanis writes on leakiness and dams in hydrofeminist terms:

> Water is a connector, a differentiator, a facilitator, a communicator. It brings all kinds of bodies into intimate contact, despite and because of our differences. It respects membranes and containers, but it knows that eventually every dam breaks, every bag leaks.[13]

The multiple ways dams break and bags leak, be it metaphorically or physically, are the escapist water logics at play in the case of the River Áltá. Through the exhibition *Let the River Flow*, the River Áltá is understood as a highly politicised body of water, and one that that consistently attempts to disavow the restrictions proposed onto it.

Hydrofeminism and the gestational bodies of rivers with artist Kati Roover

Finland-based artist Kati Roover has investigated rivers through an emotional and geographical lens, enacting a form of infusing as a hydro-artistic method. After years of researching seven different rivers, her resulting film is entitled *Do rivers really ever end* An opening scene of the film shows the Võhandu River in Estonia running over the artist's feet. In a whispered tone, she tells the camera that this is the river her mother visited when she was pregnant: it flows through her and

FIGURE 3.3 Kati Roover, still from film *Do Rivers Really Ever End* 2017–2020. Courtesy of the artist.

the baby in the artist's womb. The river cycles through generations. The opening scenes of the film pulse with a sense of embodied hydrofeminism,[14] a form of intergenerational relationality and solidarity through water. There is a sense of watery beings, reaching through time, with permeable skins. This intergenerational connection to the river and mothering with rivers sets the tone for the film. This personal narrative of the artist, her mother, her pregnancy and the river is central to the film. The artist explains in whispered tones that her mother secretly ate the clay of this river when she was pregnant to gather the necessary minerals for the pregnancy. The link between the river and the artist's own pregnancy is cyclical, with Roover stating, 'After having my baby I have an even stronger relationship with water, it feels as reality to me that all life comes from water and stays alive with vibrant healthy waters.'[15]

The concept of gestation is a returning area of interest within Neimanis' concept of hydrofeminism, as she writes, 'Water as body; water as communicator between bodies; water as facilitating bodies into being. Entity, medium, transformative and gestational milieu. All of this enfolding in, seeping from, sustaining and saturating, our bodies of water.'[16] This 'gestational milieu' is not confined to biological readings of the gestational only occurring in the mothering body; instead, it expands towards a more wholistic concept of the 'gestationality,' as articulated by Mielle Chandler and Astrida Neimanis in their essay 'Water and Gestationality: What Flows Beneath Ethics.' Gestationality in their articulation constitutes that 'As beings each of us – within this more-than-human community of watery bodies – carry this capacity for facilitative responsivity, for nourishing another, for proliferating life in the plural, in our own aqueous flesh.'[17] With this non-gendered multi-species reading of gestationality, Roover's film artistically imagines and embodies the river as a gestational body of water.

With a background in painting, Roover works with painterly techniques of collage, layering and colouring in her film works. In this work, she layers washed-out images of beating lungs, circulating over the surface of the running river. Combining her painterly techniques onto the film, along with her hushed voiceover, the artist explains how the river where she played as a child is now partly a golf course, that the animals who once lived by the river no longer inhabit the area and the river's source now sits on private land. Roover highlights the complexity of building meaningful human–water relations where privatisation of land and pollution infringe on the river in dramatic ways.

Roover articulates how water infuses and influences the making of her work and plays a role as a type of collaborator in her practice, especially in the making of *Do Rivers Ever Really End* When I interviewed her about the work she said,

> Water helps my work to stay nonlinear, cyclical and poetic. I like how it makes everything more connected and reflects so many layers of knowledge. I have been very interested in how we as humans learn and unlearn… I can see how the human mind is more like a watery system, cyclical and definitely sometimes like open waters.[18]

In this way, the logic of water as non-linear and poetic is directly mimicked in the artistic choices Roover makes in her film. She deftly weaves together collage, autobiography and a fragmentary documentary style to work in a non-linear narrative, as an enactment of the hydro-artistic method of infusing. In viewing the film work of Roover, the audience sees an embodied and hydrofeminist-inspired artistic relation with rivers, which seeks to disrupt and dispute physical and metaphorical borders imposed upon the river.

Deep listening to sonic waters with artists Cass Lynch and Deborah Cheetham

The river enacting resistance and rerouting is echoed in the audio work of artist Cass Lynch, a First Nations artist who is a descendant of the Noongar people of Western Australia. Entitled *Watershed*, the audio work describes how the local Melbourne Boonwurrung people are 'survivors of climate catastrophe twice over,' by living through this current climate crisis and through the last ice age, and how they built climate-change resilient technologies.[19] This is an important cultural acknowledgement of the changing climate over the last 50,000-plus years and that the Boonwurrung people have been the caretakers of the land around Melbourne and the river. By acknowledging this history, the artwork seeks to see human–water relations at a scale far deeper and richer than the 200 years of European settler colonial history on this site. In this work, Lynch presents the counterargument to the idea of water as modern, reminding the audience that water is ancient and that, as demonstrated by the ongoing water relations of the Boonwurrung people, human–water relations are built and rebuilt in relation to changing climates. The artist acknowledges that the river water must be treated with care and respect as, 'Water lives in the spirit of place, a force for creation and nourishment, but also devastation and catastrophe if not treated with respect.'[20]

Watershed is an audible experience that deals with the performativity of language, most critically the colonial naming of the river known as the Yarra which flows through current day central Naarm/Melbourne. As a soft voiceover tells the audience: 'It is written on maps as the Yarra River, a word meaning moving water, the Boonwurrung language flowing onto the English tongue – diverted streams that find their way.' This forced merging of a First Nation language interweaving with a colonial language is explained by the artist as 'diverted streams' – these streams are both water-based material streams and physical semiotic streams, that play out in reciting the name of the river as the 'Yarra.' The 'diverted stream' here is also a metaphorical diversion, another river of loss and absence. This diverted stream acts as an imposed settler language logic upon water and culture, as part of the colonial legacy. Here, we witness the interweaving nature of the hydro-artistic methods, where this diverted stream also becomes an act of rerouting.

Watershed portrays the way that rivers are slippery, in the way they transport and dilute language, and other things, along with them. With a water-based reading of the naming of the Yarra, this slipperiness means that a singular meaning is

elusive. This tension between colonial and First Nations place names reoccurs in the sound work, and forms the final passage, where the voiceover reads that the settler's name for this place 'Melbourne' is placed all over the city, on signs and buildings, while the First Nations name of the city is in the waters of this place, bubbling below the pavements, and in this way, the city swells with Indigenous hydro-knowledges.

Across the waters in the context of Lutruwita/Tasmania, respected Trawlwoolway artist Julie Gough also describes the ways language and water participate in meaning making in the violence of settler colonial Australia. Her written piece *Absorption,* which is published in the *rīvus* publication *Glossary of Water*, complements her sculptural and video work in the biennale. Gough writes,

> The waterways of Lutruwita/Tasmania flow, they absorb and carry and redistribute. They swell and break their banks. They dry and capture at their edges imprints of birds and wallabies, cows and sheep, kayakers and anglers. The original names of these arteries of Country are little known and hardly spoken. Some are lost in time. These waters await new names in First language by their Aboriginal people, words that respect their past and purpose and alliterate their flow since invasion, since colonisation. Survivors. Kin.[21]

With striking artistic affinity to Lynch, Gough articulates the need for new names for the interconnecting ancestral rivers and tributaries. These are the same rivers that Gough kayaked along, alone, as part of the performance-based elements of her *rīvus* work entitled *p/re-occupied*. This physically and mentally enduring act of solo kayaking the length of these ancestral rivers is a process which she calls an 'un/return.'

Another mode of listening to the river comes in the form of the commissioned sound piece and collectively made work *The Rivers Sing*, made by Deborah Cheetham Fraillon, Yorta Yorta woman, soprano, composer and educator with sound artists Byron J Scullin and Thomas Supple, along with singers from the local music community. Jointly created for the inaugural 'Rising' festival in Melbourne and 2021 edition of the Tarrawarra Biennale of Contemporary Art, which was titled *Slow Moving Waters*, the audio work was performed and crafted over a six-week live performance schedule at seven locations along two major rivers that pass-through Melbourne – the Birrarung/Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers. At each location another voice would be added to the chorus and timed with dusk and dawn, the sound piece of *The Rivers Sing* was enacted and formed as it snaked its way towards the city. Cheetham Fraillon describes how:

> The rivers have called to me all of my life, took me a long time to hear them, but once I did hear their song I was so much richer for having heard it, and I could never want to unhear those songs.[22]

The work is a richly woven audio composition that begins with Cheetham's own connection to these waterways, merged with cultural knowledge and language granted by Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung Elders. Sound artist Byron J Scullin reflects on co-creating the work and says in an interview, 'the work seeks to embody ideas found in the ongoing connection between water, Country and people.'[23] In this way, the sound work presents more than the layering of recorded sounds; it is a merging with the river, an attempt to practise deep listening with these two rivers and the rich cultural fabric of the rivers themselves. Cheetham, when discussing the creation of *The Rivers Sing*, explains how during the artistic process her river visits became 'like a ritual.' Similar to artist Signe Johannessen, featured in the Swamp Chapter, whose weekly visits to the swamp deeply inform her artistic practice, Cheetham describes that what she learnt from the river she has poured into her performance and further to this, that what the river taught her was a rich and deep understanding of self.

To link this to the curatorial considerations of the work, one can see a pattern of the choices for the audience to interact with the sound piece 'in situ,' on location along the river. This positioning of the audience in direct relation to the rivers themselves, as active participants, is why Cheetham describes the work as 'not a passive arrangement.'[24] In the double meaning of arrangement here – both musically and curatorially, the work asks the audience to reconsider their own relations to the river, and by extension their own river rituals.

By centring the conceptual framework of the artwork around Cheetham, and by centring her voice in the listening experience of the work, *The Rivers Sing* has a form of a guide or chaperone, which grounds the work as connected to the rivers and the landscape, culturally and artistically. Without this chaperone, the work would have been a gesture towards the rivers, yet with her presence, both vocally in performance and behind the scenes in the production of the work, there is a richness and situated sense of presence to the audio. In *The Rivers Sing*, the river is temporal and in flux, and yet the work attempts to harmonise human voices, at times operatic in tone, with the river. The sound work as an artistic form is a fitting choice for communicating with the river, as sound waves have similar qualities to the river – that is, always in motion and time-based.

The Rivers Sing was performed at dusk and dawn, in thirty different iterations, in seven locations along the two rivers, on its way towards final performances as part of the Rising festival in Melbourne. In this way, the work acts with a hydrological articulation, each performance of the work different, depending on the day and the location, and yet there is repetition in the layers, and in this way, the looping performance can be understood as watery, repeating and yet different depending on the context or container. The sound work is returning, the way waters return, never the same and yet vibrating with repeating frequencies at each location. This rerouting develops a relational and situated practice of engaging with, even collaborating with, specific bodies of water in the city, there is a possibility for knowing water differently; in this case, the river known as the Birrarung or Yarra, through the musical and artistic leadership of Cheetham in *The Rivers Sing*.

Within the Hydrocene, the sound work and entwined live performances of *The Rivers Sing* and *Watershed* are examples of the way the river holds stories, and is an active agent, the river is a storyteller and maker. The curatorial work of the Hydrocene attempts to remember or find new ways to hear those stories. Understanding these artworks in the framework of the hydro-artistic method of resisting and rerouting is one way to recognise these pieces as part of a planetary shift towards listening to rivers, where the river becomes both storyteller and story receiver, and the river continues to sing.

Infusing watery participation at *rīvus*

Continuing to consider how artistic or curatorial choices can listen to the river, the water-focused 2022 edition of the Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, was led by a curatorium who made the unique curatorial choice to include rivers as participants in the biennale. This expansive curatorial thinking with bodies of water featured specific rivers including the Birrarung Yarra River and Martuwarra River. At the entrance to each biennale venue, a short video played in which the river 'spoke' through a local river defender or cultural river spokesperson. Here, the curatorial intention of Jose Roca and the curatorium came into direct thematic and material connection with the waterscape around them.

FIGURE 3.4 Documentation of The Waterhouse, for 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022. Photo: Four Minutes Till Midnight. Courtesy of the photographer and Biennale of Sydney.

Taking the rivers as participants in the biennale was a new curatorial initiative that blurred the lines between the human and non-human engagement in the themes of the biennale. This move by the curatorium was an extension of their research and interest in the idea of rivers having personhood in different legal challenges internationally. For example, the sacred river Whanganui in Aotearoa/New Zealand is one of the first bodies of water to gain legal status with personhood. The case was fought and won by Māori activists over seven years and the historic case led to similar legal challenges for the rights of water bodies to be recognised with personhood.

As cultural anthropologist, Veronica Strang outlines in her detailed account of the Māori-led River Whanganui legal precedent,

> a willingness to consider rivers as persons is more than an intellectual exercise. Enshrining non-human rights in law is fundamentally a statement of values, and – as relationships between beliefs and values and actions are recursive – a pragmatic view might be that to establish legal rights for rivers in the first place will initiate a relational shift.[25]

While Strang recognises the potential in the 'rights of nature' legal proceedings to bring 'a relational shift,' she also underlines the pragmatic difficulties and limits of this kind of legal action. Strang discusses how lead negotiator for the Whanganui was Māori leader Gerrard Albert, who describes the process of fighting for personhood for the river in this way:

> We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as an indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.[26]

In this way, the river acts as a site of Indigenous-led resistance to colonial structures and dominance. Here there is an important link to climate justice, as led by Indigenous and First Nations leaders and activists. While climate justice is not the sole focus of this research, climate justice and First Nations leadership in caring for Country is a priority within the theory of the Hydrocene. There is no meaningful way to contribute to action on the climate crisis without considering the intersection of the climate crisis, settler colonialism and environmental racism.[27]

Water law and policy specialist Erin O'Donnell researches the trend towards legal personhood for rivers internationally including in Aotearoa New Zealand, India, Bangladesh and Colombia, and her work reveals the conflict of legal recognition of rivers as legal persons and/or living entities whilst also denying the rivers the right to flow.[28] O'Donnell highlights the counterintuitive phenomenon where

in some cases the new legal status can actually inhibit the ability to prevent rivers' degradation as they do not have the legal right to flow, only exist. She proposes a pluralist approach to recognising the rights of the river.

In 'Yoongoorrookoo: The emergence of ancestral personhood,' a paper co-edited in part by O'Donnell, this proposition is taken further and more directly intersects with First Nations cultural water leadership in the case of the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council (Martuwarra Council), which was established in 2018 in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The council was formed by six independent Indigenous nations 'to preserve, promote and protect their ancestral River from ongoing destructive "development."'[29] The paper outlines the way the Council proposes the river to be recognised with the pre-existing and continuing legal authority of Indigenous law, or 'First Law.' The co-edited paper is credited as being written by the river itself, 'Martuwarra RiverofLife,' alongside the human authors Alessandro Pelizzon, Anne Poelina, Afshin Akhtar-Khavari, Cristy Clark, Sarah Laborde, Elizabeth Macpherson, Katie O'Bryan, Erin O'Donnell and John Page. This example of academic co-authorship with the non-human is similar to the curatorial proposition to include the rivers themselves as participants in *rīvus*, the 2022 Biennale of Sydney. Similarly, it points to the idea that humans have rivers inside themselves already, as written about by First Nations poet Cass Lynch when she describes the body as containing watersheds with branching rivers of air and water.[30]

The premise of having rivers as participants in *rīvus* was further enacted in the expansive public program, The Waterhouse. This was a part of *rīvus* which actively enacted the theory and practices of the Hydrocene. The program explicitly sought to share knowledge and power with audiences, including the non-human and water itself. Led by Lleah Smith, Curator of Programs and Learning, as a dedicated hub to learning with the audiences of the biennale, the program became a centre for watery knowledge production. It aimed to empower audiences to gently shift their relationality with water through their experience of the program.

As Neimanis writes, 'Water extends embodiment in time – body, to body, to body. Water in this sense is facilitative and directed towards the becoming of other bodies.'[31] This facilitative skill of water is here present in The Waterhouse as a home as a aquatic knowledge-sharing through discursive events.

With over 400 events, the program was physically and conceptually driven from a dedicated gathering space called The Waterhouse at the Cutaway on Barangaroo peninsula, which was the central meeting place for experimental performances, gatherings, and discursive events. Extending from the curatorial proposition of the biennale based on the rights of waterways and rivers, The Waterhouse expanded this 'theme' into an active proposition to enact a set of diverse and generative curatorial activities.

Curatorially, The Waterhouse centred ideas of learning with water as essential to the biennale and was designed by the learning team to be an active knowledge-sharing platform. It was described by the curators as 'a tangible entity, it lives, and it

breathes. Envisioned as a wetland, its edges are porous, like liquid – holding space for mystery, growth and symbiotic relationships. The Waterhouse asks to be experienced – with consciousness and care.' Events included the two-day 'School of Water' where artists, architects, scientists and other participants together built a conceptual 'watering hole' and asked, 'How can we collectively heal the urban watering hole?' This conceptual proposition led to a set of distinct responses from the participants who imagined the new watering hole as a place of nourishment, connection and co-dependence. The School of Water culminated in a shared drive towards caring for urban waterways and enacting nine 'water lessons' which the group co-devised. This attempt towards a collective reckoning and healing of the connection between humans and water is here understood as an activation of an intersectional hydrofeminist sensibility, where Neimanis describes that to be a body of water 'is to generate meaning from relation.'[32] As she writes, all bodies of water need to be in 'some kind of membrane… To be in the world, water needs a body, and bodies require some kind of containment – however ephemeral, porous, temporary – to be a body, capable of affecting and being affected by others.'[33] This sense of watery relationality is enacted by the proposal for caring for and thinking with real and imagined bodies of water. Again, this is connected to the care of the curatorial within the theory of the Hydrocene where the curatorial necessarily becomes a force for planetary care and ethical water relations. The Waterhouse aimed to learn from practitioners and water itself, and the Hydrocene as a theory sees these discursive programs as a significant pedagogical shift evident within the turn of art going into the blue. In the Hydrocene we seek to learn from these practices, and share a model of relational curatorial care towards climate justice.

The Waterhouse and other discursive, watery artistic-pedagogical settings such as Ocean Uni run out of Ocean Space, Venice or the international Anthropocene Campus intensives developed by Haus der Kulturen de Welt, Germany are examples of a renewed interest in a more-than-human pedagogy within contemporary art that often has water as a central thematic. These pedagogical offerings enact what curatorial theorist Beatrice von Bismarck calls a 'curatorial transposition.' Expanding from the work of philosopher Rosi Braidotti's which posits transposition as new or unexpected forms of knowledge production, von Bismarck defines 'curatorial transposition' as the connection of creative and cognitive processes in entanglement with human and non-human participants. As von Bismarck describes it, from a theoretical standpoint which she names 'curatorality,' there is an inseparable curatorial entanglement between the human and non-human. In the case of The Waterhouse this curatorality is key to the program as an offering to gather on and *with* water, to practise deep listening to the hydrological cyle, and to acknowledge the significance of the water beyond limited notions of economic colonial-capital. This curatorial entanglement is also understood as relating to hydrologics, and the movement of water through bodies; this entanglement offers participants the opportunity to listen to water in an embodied and attentive manner.

This embodied way of knowing water is in dialogue with Neimanis' writing, when she distinguishes that water is 'of me yet beyond me' and that water possesses a deep unknowability that exceeds the bounds of epistemological registers. She explains the limits of a water-based epistemology when she states: 'We are its custodians rather than its masters. Intimacy is not mastery. We are always becoming water, but water is also always beyond us.'[34] There is a conceptual link here between the articulation of water's 'beyondness' from the human that is central to understanding the curatorial composition of The Waterhouse. In the program there is a curatorial logic that centres the knowledge of others, including water, that operates as a kind of infusion of meaning, where connections and activations of the program come together to form a new substance. To think of the program also as a process of the hydro-artistic method of infusing is to see the program as a way to engage audiences as active participants in the biennale and to awaken an ecological sensibility towards water being 'of me yet beyond me.' Through participation in the program, there is exposure to an ecological sensibility which can gently alter preconceived notions of water as resource in the natural-cultural water crisis.

Here, the Hydrocene as a curatorial theory offers a way to consider the curatorial choices of *rīvus* as based within the hydrological cycle and as an embodied manner of watery curatorial thinking. As outlined in Chapter 1, the pillars of the water crisis are identified as Water as Modern, Water as Resource and Water as (only) Weather, and these pillars are upheld within art by curatorial practice and methods that prioritise colonial-capitalistic readings of water. In the programming of *rīvus* as an exhibition but also a meeting space to learn with and from water, offered a way to re-imagine the hydrological cycle within contemporary art. When viewed as part of the turn towards thinking with water internationally, this biennale becomes highly significant and is emblematic of the shift towards social and relational elements in eco-aesthetics confronting the climate crisis.

Defending River Country with artist Badger Bates

A prominent participant of *rīvus* was Barkandji Elder, artist and activist Badger Bates. Bates is not only an artist but also a key figure of Murray–Darling Basin activism. His work, both as an artist and activist, is central to the collective understandings of the situation with the Darling Barka River. Bates explains the connection between the river and his people: 'our duty as Barkandji people is to fight for this river… we are connected.'[35] Within *rīvus* Bates' black and white wallpaper and delicate lino prints were shown in the entrance to the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) wrapping the foyer and entrance to the Grand Courts in his portrayal of the illness of the Darling Barka River. Bates was the voice for the Darling Barka in the video which stood at the entrance to AGNSW. He speaks on behalf of the Darling Barka and passionately pleas that 'everybody should stand together to fight for the water.'[36] In the video Bates tells the Ngatyi creation story of the river and how his people came from the Barka itself.

On the walls of the grand master galleries, a large black and white wallpaper holds a selection of Bates' lino cut prints. Entitled *Barka the forgotten river and the desecration of the Menindee Lakes*, the pieces feature images of fish life in abundance in the river and lake, and yet interspersed are depictions of mass fish killings and the skeletons of creatures that have been eliminated by the destruction of the river. On the *rīvus* website, Bates asks: 'How can I teach culture when they're taking our beloved Baaka away? There's nothing to teach if there's no river. The river is everything. It's my life, my culture. You take the water away from us, we've got nothing.'[37] Further to the prints, Bates was also represented at the Cutaway in Barangaroo, a headland of Sydney Harbour, an immense underground cave-like room that *rīvus* used as an exhibition hall. Bates' steel sculpture of 'Ngatji' sat at the entrance to the Cutaway, entitled *Save our Ngatji (Rainbow Serpents), creators of spiritual rivers connecting water, sky, and land*; the work highlights the creation of the Darling Barka and acts as a monument to the significant connection Indigenous Australians have to waterways on Country, and 'that any collective vision of the future must have Aboriginal people and the survival of their lands and culture at its centre.'[38]

Bates' important contribution to the field of art and water extends beyond the biennale and includes many other exhibitions and collaborations. His 2021 exhibition entitled *Barka: The Forgotten River* at the regional Maitland Art Gallery saw him make new work in collaboration with artist Justine Muller. The exhibition revolved around an installation of a sandy riverbed, with materials such as glass, rocks and twigs collected from the dry riverbed as it stands in Wilcannia in rural New South Wales, aiming to draw attention to the water crisis in the town.[39] In an interview with the artist, he stated that his art making is a protest and attempt to draw attention to the severe water crisis in the Darling Barka River system, and:

> I can go and row with the government anytime but if I do that, then I am just a Black troublemaker… With my artwork, I can put a point across and make it kind to everyone and let the exhibition speak for itself.[40]

Through decades of activism and teaching, Bates has advanced his artistic practice through carving, printmaking and sculpture that articulate his connection to River Country and portray his Barkandji designs.

Bates often collaborates with craftspeople and other artists, including his collaboration with French artist JR, who uses large-scale photography as a tool to gather local participation in his works. For the National Gallery of Victoria's Triennale in 2020, JR made the collaborative work *Homily to Country*, as a response to the dying ecosystem of the Darling Barka River. In the work, which was shared as video documentation, JR had photographed local participants and then enlarged the portraits to enormous proportions, around the size of a small house. He then asked local participants to carry the portraits together through the dry riverbed. Filmed from above, portraits of local farmers and local First Nations activists, including

FIGURE 3.5 Badger Bates, *Barka The Forgotten River and the desecration of the Menindee Lakes*, 2021–2022 (detail). Presentation at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney (2022) was made possible with generous support from the Australia Council for the Arts. Courtesy the artist and the Biennale of Sydney. Installation view, 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022, Art Gallery of New South Wales. Photo: Document Photography.

Bates, were carried down the dry riverbeds of the lower basin. With drone video footage, the gigantic photographs shrunk to a kind of human sized ceremonial funeral procession. Culminating in a speech that he wrote and delivered, Bates' contribution elevates the performance installation from a slightly gimmicky play on scale, into a poignant and complex understanding of the river as life, and that even in absence, the river itself exists and resists the colonial paradigm of water as resource.

In the documentation of the work, Bates explains, in gentle tones, the water-based way of life he grew up with along the river, the abundant river life such as turtles and mussels, and the way water mismanagement upstream has led to the death of the Darling Barka. In the filmed documentation of the performance, Bates is wearing his black signature 'Save the Darling Barka' t-shirt and speaks to the gathering of locals about what drives him to work for the river and his commitment to see it flow again in his lifetime. As an artist, activist and Indigenous Elder, Bates' voice is an important beacon for understanding the river as a living system that nourishes all who take part in it. He says, 'The Baaka is ours. We are the Baaka. We must make changes to save it, we must throw off the chains of corporatisation to save us all.' At this point in the documentation, Bates ends his speech, and is

visibly moved. Bates' speech in *Homily to Country* elevates the entire work beyond spectacle and instead engages a culturally significant and hydrological perspective. Bates, speaking on Country in relation to the absent river, speaks with a quiet authority, asking for a radical shift in the current exploitative methods of relating to the river. Bates' words in *Homily to Country* are enacting what cultural anthropologist Veronica Strang calls for when she writes, 'It is time to re-imagine the river.'[41]

Bates uses his significant and exemplary practice as artist and activist to defend the river, even in the absence of water, and to use his practice as a collaborative and social tool to amplify the essential needs of the Darling Barka. With the way Bates practises deep listening and resistance to the colonial mismanagement of water in the Murray–Darling Basin, his work makes an outstanding contribution to understanding and engaging with our age in terms of the theoretical structures, practical embodied thinking with water, and potential for caretaking and climate justice that characterise what I call the Hydrocene as set out in Chapter 2.

Bates shares his deep cultural connection to the river, as understood materially and metaphorically, as a way of coming closer to experiencing the water crisis as a shared, collective reality, which requires shared, collective responses. Bates shows us that this is a process that should be steered by First Nations leaders and practices of caring for Country, and enacted by all.

Painting as a confined body of water with artist Gabriella Hirst

Australian artist Gabriella Hirst's work *Darling Darling* unveils a world where landscapes, confinement and the Darling Barka River intertwine. In a captivating two-screen video installation, Hirst reflects on the confluence of landscape, water and painting with a critical eye on the colonial role of painting as a tool of captivity. On one screen, we witness the contemporary state of the river – a parched, withered bed, gasping for life amid drought and decay. On the other screen is the careful restoration of a resplendent oil painting from 1895 by WC Piguenit springs to life, showcasing the river in majestic flood. These two contrasting depictions expose opposing ideologies of care for the river.

Hirst's collaboration with Badger Bates, a revered cultural leader, artist and Barkandji Elder, guided her to select the most telling sites along the Darling Barka. Bates shared his cultural knowledge to expose the signs of upstream water mismanagement. In a poignant frame, mussels lie on the bare riverbed, their masses an alarming testament to the river's desolation. This catastrophic sight signifies a river dry beyond the bounds of natural ebb and flow. The absence of water resonates through classically composed images, where trees, sand and riverbanks stand firm, while the water itself remains elusive.

Hirst delves deeper, unravelling the entanglement of landscape painting, colonial narratives and the confinement they impose. In her earlier work, *Force Majeure*, she playfully mocks the feeble attempts to contain the grandeur and tumult of the landscape within the narrow confines of European painting.

Drawing from history, Hirst exposes the insidious role of landscape painting in the colonial settler project. European painters, sent alongside explorers, played a part in perpetuating the myth of 'terra nullius,' erasing the vibrant lives and cultures of First Nations people from their canvas. This confinement echoes the concept of 'aqua nullius,'[42] the structural denial of Indigenous water rights and interests – a sinister omission that exacerbates the challenges of contemporary water management.

Further to this, there are calls from First Nations leaders for 'cultural flows'[43] in river systems. Cultural flows are part of the 'entitlements and rights' of First Nations peoples' to enact their connection and care of the river. As a Wiradjuri Nyemba woman, practising lawyer and legal scholar Virginia Marshall writes, aqua nullius is the structural omission of Indigenous people's water rights and interests.[44] This has led to the exclusion of First Nations water knowledge and cultural water management and intensified the problems with water management as it stands today, the evidence of which is seen in Hirst's film.

Hirst refuses to let the river be contained. Through her work, she champions leakiness as a feminist strategy – a defiance against boundaries. In *Darling Darling*, the dual-screen spectacle clashes with a single soundtrack – a mesmerising chorus of shrieking birds and chattering melodies. This audial symphony seeps beyond the exhibition's walls, permeating the very essence of the space. It symbolises the river's unyielding resistance, its refusal to conform to artificial limits.

Within Hirst's artistic realm, rivers cease to be mere bodies of water, confined within the strokes of a brush. Drawing from curator and writer Jay Arthur, and her book *Dislocating the Frontier*, Hirst highlights the Darling Barka's subjugation

FIGURE 3.6 Gabriella Hirst, still from film *Darling Darling*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist.

to containment by European cultural systems. Arthur's work emphasises the mislabelling of Australian bodies of water, calling for precise terms that honour their dynamic nature. By adopting an artistic methodology that respects water, we can contribute to more accurate linguistic offerings for bodies of water, like the Darling Barka, in Australia.[45]

Amidst the climate crisis, Hirst's artistry opens doors to new possibilities – a collaborative engagement with water and an exploration of ethical human–water relations. Her work transcends confinement, urging us to reroute and re-imagine our connection to the environment and embrace alternative models of care. In the realm of the Hydrocene, artists like Hirst pave the way for a redefinition of the confinement of water, materially and symbolically.

Punching the river with Bonita Ely

First performed in the 1980s, including in the pedestrian Rundle Street Mall, Tarndanya/Adelaide, as part of a residency at the Experimental Art Foundation in 1981, Australian artist Bonita Ely's performance work *Murray River Punch* plays an important role in defining art that thinks with rivers in an Australian context. With humour and gumption, the artist assembles unlikely ingredients to mix an undrinkable 'punch,' a classic party drink that is made to be shared between guests. The double meaning of punch, as violence and as collective drink, highlights the violence of the damage that was already being imposed on the river when this work was first made. The artist writes,

> Back in 1977 the Murray River was already showing signs of stress. Amongst other problems, the rising water table, caused by irrigation and the depletion of red river gum forests, resulted in higher than average levels of salt in the water. The performance, *Murray River Punch*, highlighted this drift towards environmental degradation.[46]

The power of the work continues, as does the artist's deep investigation of the river. In 2014, she enacted a new version of the work in Melbourne, called *Murray River Punch: The Soup.* The ingredients for this unappetising soup include eight litres of Murray River water, mixed with acid sulphate, a crushed Coke can, one cup blue-green algae and horse dung. Once boiled, the instructions call for careful removal of 'all bottles and bongs with tongs'[47] and the addition of a garnish of dried crushed gum leaves.

The performances of Ely in the 1980s and then again in 2014 speak to the river as a site of conflict and similar to the way the Swamp case study outlines the swamp as an archive of human misdemeanours in the Hydrocene; the river is also understood here as an archive of the mismanagement of the rivers, and the pollutants that infect them. Ely's performance remains critically alarming in the contemporary climate crisis. When she carefully constructs the punch, it is as a signifier of

FIGURE 3.7 Bonita Ely, live performance, Murray River Punch, 1981. Melbourne University Student Union Building for the George Paton and Ewing Gallery's Women at Work festival of women's performance art. Photo: Noelene Lucas. Courtesy of the artist.

the illness of the Murray River. Speaking about the visiting the river in the 1980s when she first performed this work, Ely says,

> The river was just so beautiful. The gum trees, some of them were hollow and you could go inside them. And the birds, the animals, and there were canoe trees. It was an inspiring place and a place full of history.[48]

Interest in Ely's cutting-edge performances has recently resurfaced with an exhibition of Ely's work held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia, in 2022. Reflecting on the implications of her *Murray River Punch* more than forty years since it was originally performed, she says, 'I guess the issues that *Murray River Punch* was addressing are still so fresh; you know, the Murray, the Darling River is maybe a thousand times worse than they were back in the seventies.'[49]

Ely's interest in the river spans beyond performance and includes photography and sculptural interventions on the river that she has created over forty years of visiting and attempting artistic collaborations with it. For example, in 2022, the artist made a large-scale painted floor map of the Great Artesian Basin which creatively documents the flows and movement of the basin. Her photographic series from 2009 also includes distressing images of dead, dried fish, eyeless on a

parched riverbed. The photographs document the river from when she started the project, the artist writes on her website: 'Thirty years on, after years of severe drought, the Murray River is beset with blue-green algae, turbidity, acid sulphate contamination, salination, torpidity, dried up lakes and red river gum dieback.'[50] Her photographs are empty of people, and yet the signs of industry, horses and rusting jetties allude to the practices that are poisoning the river. The acceleration of the climate crisis during the period of this artistic investigation only heightens the relevance and astute predictions of Ely's original photographs from 1977 and her performance in 1981 and then again in 2014. Ely's body of work with the river lives on, and the river's punch is both drunk and felt.

In the artistic work of Ely, Bates and Hirst, there is a witnessing and scrutinising of the mismanagement of the enormous water basin that winds its way across three states, that provides nourishment, physically and culturally, to many in the population of Australia. In her long-form Quarterly Essay, *Cry Me a River*, on the water crisis in the Murray–Darling, journalist Margaret Simons gives a detailed account of the strategies for containment, economics and attempts to manage the immense river system, across governments and industry between the 1980s and 2020. Simons astutely accounts for the reasons that the basin is a complex and loaded geo-political zone:

> The Murray–Darling Basin Plan is at once a water management plan, an ecologically driven document, and a political compact, all embedded in narratives of land and water… At the heart of the narrative is the collision between the realities of the landscape – the intimate details, the banks and tributaries, the complexities of community and society – and macro policy, the affairs of the nation.[51]

As a journalist, Simons' work focuses on researching the 'Murray–Darling Basin Plan' as a politically charged and complex set of interweaving bureaucratic needs, desires and determinants that play out like a tennis match between the states and federal government, intersecting with the activism of local Indigenous populations and the push of the agricultural sector. As Australia's most important agricultural region, producing around a third of all the national food needs, Simons outlines the forthcoming death of the river system and the basin, as evidenced by the symptoms of algae blooms, mass fish deaths, the mouth of the river closing and increasing salinity.

From within the Hydrocene, Simons' writing provides an important historical overview of the political games that have led to the complicated contemporary water relations in the river. Complementing Simons' detailed journalistic approach to the state of the waterway, the artistic methods of finding ways to think with the river, and finding artistic collaborative methodologies with the basin, are envisioned by Bates, Hirst and Ely.

Wet and dry defiance in the hydro-artistic methods of the river

Wirlomin Noongar writer and researcher Cass Lynch wrote in her piece *Watershed*, 'The body contains watersheds, capillaries branching from veins, branching from arteries. There are branching rivers of air in the lungs, the breath. The branch and drain, the push and pull.'[52] In this way, Lynch describes the rivers in the body, naming the body as a watershed that requires planetary care. Correspondingly, in the Hydrocene, rivers are also understood as sites for careful reformulating of colonial-capitalist human–water relations, through the hydro-artistic methods of resisting, rerouting and infusing. This chapter has used the theoretical curatorial framework of the Hydrocene to show how the hydro-artistic methods of resisting, rerouting and infusing offer audiences engaging ways to connect to rivers and their agency. From the Nordic region, this chapter focused on artists Kati Roover, Hanna Ljungh and Anja Örn, alongside the exhibition *Let the River Flow*. From the Oceania/Australian perspective, the river was investigated artistically by artists Cass Lynch, Badger Bates, Deborah Cheetham, Gabriella Hirst and Bonita Ely, and considered curatorially in the public program of *rīvus*. These artworks engage with specific rivers to demonstrate the possibilities for building planetary systems of caretaking for the rivers and their tributaries.

The artistic and curatorial practices shared in the River Chapter establish the possibility for art to initiate a heightened awareness of the river systems which flow (or do not flow) into the watersheds that the participants and audience to these works rely on. This heightened sensibility towards the river, and the role of healthy rivers[53] in the hydrological system, is enacted through sense-based and embodied encounters with the river.

Beyond spectacle, these encounters are facilitated by the artists' sensibilities and aesthetic preoccupations. Often the artworks encourage a subtle submission to the scale and breadth of the river and its tributaries, for example in the huge painted floor map of the Great Artesian Basin made by artist Bonita Ely, or to call for urgent action and change to the devastating mismanagement of rivers, for example in the linocuts and body of work of artist, activist, cultural leader and Elder Badger Bates.

Connecting Oceania and the Nordic rivers are the First Nations led resistance to river damming and regulation as a colonial commodity rather than sacred being. Both the Whanganui in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the fight to stop damming in the Álttáeatnu (Álttá river) in Sápmi Northern Norway which was the focus of the abovementioned exhibition *Let the River Flow*, are powerful examples of the intersection of water, climate activism and First Nations led resistance towards climate justice.

Curatorially, the River chapter focuses on three unique hydro-artistic methods of resisting, rerouting and infusing with artists across the Nordic and Oceanic (mainly Australia in this chapter) regions who have enacted these hydro-artistic methods as the coming together of watery thinking and watery making in art. Considering Reilly's call for curatorial activism, the River chapter establishes the

possibility for curatorial practice, such as The Waterhouse program at the 23rd Biennale of Sydney, to create rich and potent spaces for gathering and collectively recognising the trouble that water is in. Further, these can be curatorial sites for developing response-ability and as Haraway calls for, 'to stay with the trouble.' This process of infusing, as water does, mixing together to form new entangled potions, repeated in the aurally engaging sound and video works presented above, celebrates encounters with the river that heighten an awareness of the river as agent with an expansive hydrological cycle, a vital organ, part ancient aquifer, part passing cloud.

To learn from the critical river practices presented in this chapter is to see the river as the intersectional meeting place of competing ideologies; for example, as Hirst shows in her video work, the river is part colonial fantasy painted in oils and also distressingly dry river beds on Country, both at once. In the climate crisis, these complexities of the river as intersectional meeting place are becoming more severe; as scientist Jim Best writes, river systems are no longer able to accommodate the extremities of the changing and unstable climate.

Art has the ability to illuminate parts of society and of bodies that have been hidden. As outlined in the opening chapters, when defining the Hydrocene, ecovisionary artists are cultural leaders in the climate crisis, from whom audiences can learn. Like water finding its way downstream, art directs and diverts attention. Art can reimagine human–river relations, artwork by artwork; in the Hydrocene, these pieces remake river relations by revealing a range of emotions, memories, misgivings and mismanagements, that the river carries.

Notes

1 Neimanis, 'Water and Knowledge'.
2 For more on the hydrosocial cycle, see J Linton, 'Modern Water and Its Discontents: A History of Hydrosocial Renewal', *WIREs Water*, vol. 1, 2014, 111–120.
3 Money is quoted from her poem in the book, *RĪVUS: A Glossary of Water*, published by the Biennale of Sydney, edited by Roca & Salazar, p. 420.
4 I discuss this in further detail later in the chapter, in relation to the exhibition *Let the river flow*. For reference, see the associated publication: K García-Antón, H Gaski & G Guttorm, *Let the River Flow: An Indigenous Uprising and Its Legacy in Art, Ecology and Politics*, Amsterdam, Valiz, 2020.
5 V Marshall, 'Aqua Nullius: Why Do Aboriginal Peoples Continue to Fight for Rights to Protect Country?' in *RĪVUS: A Glossary of Water*, edited by Roca & Salazar, published by the Biennale of Sydney, 2022, p. 31.
6 M Simons, 'Cry Me a River: The Tragedy of the Murray–Darling Basin', *Quarterly Essay*, vol. 77, 2020.
7 Quoted from Toni Morrison's essay, 'The Site of Memory', *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, 1995, New York, Houghton Mifflin. pp. 83–102.
8 H Ljungh, 'How to Civilize a Waterfall', *Filmform*, 2010.
9 Being aware of the critique of hydroelectricity as a so-called 'green' power, I recognise this as an important area of research; however, it lies beyond the scope of this book. For more on the historical and contemporary uses of hydroelectricity in Sweden, see

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10 It is also important to note that much of the north of Sweden is Sapmi land, i.e., traditional land of the First Nation Sámi people. While the link between colonialism and climate crisis is not the focus of this research, it must be understood that in Norrbotten the intersection between colonialism, nationhood and the sovereign rights of the Sámi people intersect with the rights of the river. For more on this, see García-Antón, Gaski & Guttorm, *Let the river flow*.
11 García-Antón, Gaski and Guttorm, p. 103.
12 Strang, *Water: Nature and Culture*.
13 Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water'.
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35 Bates is quoted in Simons, *Cry Me a River*, 2020.

36 'Baaka/Darling River', in *23rd Biennale of Sydney*, 2022.
37 'Badger Bates', in *23rd Biennale of Sydney*, 2022.
38 Ibid.
39 Here, there is a comparison to Eliasson's riverbed which has been staged internationally, including at QAGOMA as part of the exhibition, Water. In contrast to Eliasson's faux riverbed which focused more on the illusion and manipulation of water into a river, Bates is concerned with the health of a specific river, the Darling Barka, and his exhibition used pieces from Country brought to the gallery space to represent the river, rather than creating an anonymous, fictious river scene as portrayed by Eliasson. It is this difference of intention and site-specific understanding of the river as not only metaphor or illusion, but as a living and situated being, that is critical to seeing Bates' body of work as embodied, and theoretically in line with the Hydrocene.
40 J Quinn-Bates, 'Uncle Badger Bates Expresses Fight for Sacred River in Art', SBS NITV, 2021.
41 V Strang, 'The Rights of the River: Water, Culture and Ecological Justice'.
42 Hirst explained this process in her artist talk with VCA (2021) Faculty of Fine Arts and Music (University of Melbourne), see 'Gabriella Hirst: VCA Art Forum', 2021.
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44 See also V Marshall, 'Deconstructing Aqua Nullius: Reclaiming Aboriginal Water Rights and Communal Identity in Australia', in *Australian National University. School of Regulation and Global Governance*, 2016.
45 See J Arthur, 'Water as collaborator' in *Dislocating the Frontier: Essaying the Mystique of the Outback*, DB Rose & R Davis (eds), Canberra, ANU Press, 2005, pp. 85–89.
46 See Bonita Ely, 'The Murray River Project, 2009' on the artists' website.
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51 Simons.
52 Lynch.
53 The idea of healthy rivers links to a broader call to enact climate justice within river systems affected by colonial and capitalistic logic, often displacing Indigenous and First Nations folks.

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4

SWAMP

We follow the river into the swamp and give into instability. Billabongs forming, lakes persisting, slow moving waterlogged land. From the river as resistance, we sink into the boggy swamp, bodies of water that settle as liminal and brackish zones for unstable hydro-relations. Wetlands of sedimentation and filtration, the swamp is a place of terra infirma, of liminality, an echo of deep time.

Liminality of the swamp

Swamps have the misplaced reputation of being unproductive, particularly in the era of hyper-capitalist acceleration, where wetlands are viewed with suspicion. Literary theorist Anthony Wilson argues that swamps are often seen as symbols of moral dissipation or waywardness in humanity, with traditional depictions in art and literature associating them with danger and death.[1] However, in reality, swamps are anything but unproductive; they are teeming with multi-species ecologies and serve as fertile and formative ecosystems that move and process toxins, eco-skeletons, and stories into thick, conjoining time.

This chapter uses the term 'swamp' as a collective name for the soft edges between land and water, with fresh, salt, and brackish waters. While not a scientifically correct term, 'swamp' names the ontological entanglement between humans, non-humans and the great and varied ecosystems of wetlands. It encompasses areas where water and land co-exist, such as forest, bush and coastal zones. The boundaries of the swamp are in constant flux, and its indefinability defines it. Cultural attitudes toward swamp spaces provide a clear index of attitudes towards the natural world writ large, and this attitude of suspicion underpins dominant projections toward swamps.

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To further this understanding of swamps and to adopt a decolonising perspective, environmental and cultural historian Emily O'Gorman highlights the history and contestation of the term 'wetlands,' which grew out of the 1970s conservation movement. O'Gorman emphasises the inherent tension in categorising and classifying ephemeral and changing wetlands and the misguided belief that wetlands are 'natural,' when in fact, many Australian wetlands have been carefully cultivated by First Nations people over eons of time.[2] Many of the artists in this chapter also gravitate toward the term 'swamp' for precious watery places they interact with, which could also be called bog, billabong, wetland, coastal swamp, peatland, marsh or mire. Together, they name this collection of liminal watery zones the swamp of the Hydrocene.

In contrast to the flowing and unflowing river, the swamp presents a differing set of qualities and ways of embodying and regarding water. We can learn from these liminal beings in the climate crisis, through an engagement with the art of the swamp, and the eco-visionary artists who call to the swamp through the mist of our times. This chapter explores significant artistic practices that think with the liminal swamp as a zone of rich co-operation through the hydro-artistic methods of archiving, incubating and cleaning. The chapter presents vital and unique artists and curators who collaborate with swamps with a special focus on artist Signe Johannessen whose embodied relationship with her local swamp is a site for intimate ritual and bog-based collaboration. The chapter then looks to curatorial wetlands and swamp pedagogy in the *Swamp Pavilion* and the *Swamp Biennale*, as well as the work of artists Madeleine Andersson and Yasmin Smith, who both perform methods for developing care-based relations with swampy bodies of water. Similarly, the chapter looks to the work of artist duo Gideonsson/Londré who see the peat bogs of northern Sweden as a zone for durational interspecies performance, based on crossing the swamp as an act of time-based material entanglement. By thinking with the more-than-human swampy water, these hydro-artistic methods of archiving, incubating and cleaning, dispel and disrupt anthropocentric logics of water in art, moving beyond water as a simple prop or backdrop and instead seeing water as an active agent in the artwork.

Here, in the Hydrocene, the swamp is defined as: a place of *terra infirma*, of liminality; a river that has lost its way, a lake cut off from its source, a steady billabong, a patient marshland, a receding or flooding tidal zone, a sturdy bog, a meeting of fresh and salt waters. All these places and more are evoked when I use the name swamp as a generative and expansive term for watery zones that are not only river, nor defined ocean, and instead assemble in sets of entangled, sometimes toxic, relations and relationalities as complex bodies of water. These liminal beings are ones we can learn from in the climate crisis, through an engagement with the art of the swamp, and the eco-visionary artists who call to the swamp through the mist of the times.

Archiving swamps, sinking horses and traversing artists

In the Hydrocene, the act of archiving is no longer confined to the sterile, white-gloved world of art and other collections, but instead finds new life in the fragile, muddy and brackish archive of swamp ecology. The hydro-artistic method of archiving recognises the capacity of the swamp to hold and reveal hidden stories and meanings. Through its capacity to distil and combine sediments in a process that preserves and archives its unique ecosystem, the swamp is always archiving.

In the work of Sweden-based artist Signe Johannessen, this collaboration with the swamp is grounded in an attitude of care and respect that sees the swamp not as a mere site, but as a companion and artistic advisor. Her work recalls the sinking of the horse Artax into the 'Swamps of Despair' in the 1984 classic children's film *The Neverending Story*. In the memorable scene, the horse stands steadfastly in the swamp while his human companion, Atrayu, yells at the horse to move – a rallying cry that goes unheeded. Atrayu cries out, 'Don't let the sadness of the swamps get to you. You have to try. You have to care. You're my friend. I love you.' The horse sinks. The moment serves as a poignant metaphor for the relationship between humans, animals and swamps and is echoed in Johannessen's film work *Thank You for Carrying*, in which the artist reflects on her bond with her childhood horse and the role of horses in human life. Johannessen's actions in the film, include laying the cured skin of a dead horse to sink in a swamp on the island of Öland, Sweden. The act of caring for the body of the dead horse is a gesture of respect and recognition of the shared journeys between humans and horses.

FIGURE 4.1 Signe Johannessen, still from film *Thank You for Carrying*, 2016. Photo: Helge Olsèn. Courtesy of the artist.

Johannessen's research on the site of the swamp on Öland reveals its history as a place where sacrificial activities, including those involving horses, have taken place. In her film work, the sinking of the horse's skin becomes a poignant moment of reflection on the state of the swamp as an archive.

This concept of the swamp as an archive extends beyond contemporary artistic practice and finds its roots in archaeological history, particularly in the finding of 'bog bodies.' These well-preserved human bodies, mummified by the layers of mud in swamps, offer valuable keys to understanding past times, and have been used to connect humans to deep or cyclical time scales. Swedish archaeologist Christina Fredengren writes about the phenomena of these 'bog bodies' and the possibility for what she calls moments of 'enchantment' with these offerings from swamps.[3] For Fredengren, 'enchantment' is a tool for connecting to other timescales, such as 'deep time'[4] or cyclical time, and she recognises the bog bodies as portals for encounters and relations with deep (wet) time.

Here, the watery connections between swamp and humans extend beyond the narrowness of the Anthropocene as a time event, and disrupt the Anthropocene as part of a linear, colonial-capitalised time. Instead, as Fredengren shares, in the swamp, water connects materially to deep time, escaping the water as modern narrative. In the Hydrocene, understanding the swamp as an archive to be cared for points to non-destructive and nourishing relationships between humans and swamps.

Through the act of laying the horse's face into the living archive of the Öland swamp, Johannessen adds another layer of material history to the site, one that honours the deep and cyclical time scales of the swamp's ecosystem. The swamp becomes the archive of human and non-human activities and a site of potential enchantment. This gesture invites us to consider our relationship with the natural world, and to recognise the importance of non-destructive, caring relationships that allow us to collaborate with, learn from, and preserve the rich histories and stories of the more-than-humans with whom we share these ecosystems.

Johannessen's collaboration with the swamp goes beyond the creation of a single artwork. It is a consistent aspect of her practice, as she works collaboratively with, through, and in the swamp. Her entanglement with the swamp began around 2015 with *Marksjon*, the swamp closest to her home. Understanding her connection to the swamp is to witness the entwining of nature and culture, and the expansion of the curatorial field. Despite its centrality to her artistic practice, the swamp rarely enters the white cube; instead, it is a private space for the artist to grow and think with her practice. The swamp is her artistic confidant.

Trained in sculpture at the art academies of Oslo and Stockholm, Johannessen's solo work does not always relate to the swamp directly. Instead, her work is process based and often developed through collaboration with the swamp. The artist first began working with bodies of water after a traumatic experience in her youth when she was staying in India during a deadly cyclone. The town where

she stayed was demolished by raging waters, leaving behind a brackish, hellish landscape littered with human remains. For Johannessen, this moment marked a break from her 'land-based' self. Throughout her career, she has returned to work with bodies of water, including the sea of Bengal and the sea around the north of Norway, where her Norwegian Sámi ancestors worked with fishing and whaling.

In her work, Johannessen employs a set of recurring choreographic scores or 'bodily experiments' that she carries out with the swamp. These exercises have been performed alone and with others. In one practice, which she has never displayed publicly, Johannessen visits the swamp every week on foot. She must walk over the moist ground before reaching the jet-black water of the swamp. She slowly lowers herself down, plunging with a slow determination into the waters. In the video documentation, she wears her mother's warm winter coat, lies on her stomach and pushes herself into and under the water. When she re-emerges, it is in a kind of baptismal mode, a new dawning and a quiet procession out of the mud begins. The artist's imprint fading from the skin of the swamp creates an eerie silence.

In a second practice, Johannessen learned to free-dive, diving without equipment, just the breath held and released. She has led overnight expeditions to the swamp to perform night-time free-diving in the dark waters, in a collective and immersive experience of thinking with the swamp. In a kind of echo, Johannessen and her students seem to answer the question posed by Astrida Neimanis in her text on Hydrofeminism, 'What might becoming a body of water – ebbing, fluvial, dripping, coursing, traversing time and space, pooling as both matter and meaning – give to feminism, its theories, and its practices?'[5] In the artist's shared practice with the swamp she attempts a form of this 'becoming' a body of water, by attempting to know the swamp intimately; as a hydrofeminist collaborator, the artist approaches her relationship with the swamp as a matter of familiarity and urgency.

Writing is another way Johannessen shares her bodily experiments with the muddy, spongey and visceral swamp. In a love letter to the swamp, she writes of the cycle of dragonfly larvae that 'feed' the swamp and the future dragonflies. She speaks of being sucked down into the swamp's black waters, she writes, 'Ever since you enveloped me for the first time…Small gills, like the ones on perch, seemed to grow behind my ears and my body trembled from enjoyment when I sank even deeper.'[6] Through her bodily practices of visiting, diving and writing with the swamp, Johannessen exemplifies the serious entanglement of the swamp and the artist. She situates her practice in the folds of a watery ecology, highlighting the complex and ongoing relations of bodies of water in flux.

I draw on Swedish curator Maria Lind's description of art as a 'seismograph and sniffer dog, often detecting changes and other things before the rest of society.'[7] Lind's image of art, and potentially artists, as sniffer dogs and seismographs strikes a chord with the ability for art to capture and reflect, to sense what is present even

when it may not be overtly obvious, or sensed by those around them. Lind continues, describing how art can be a 'kind of visionary knowledge and practice … be it ambiguous and conflictual, perspectives on how art engages with what lies ahead of us.'[8] This means that art has the ability to capture and reflect what is present, even when it is not obvious to those around it.

Johannessen's relationship with the swamp exemplifies Lind's proposition. The artist raises an ecological sensibility through her interactions with the more-than-human swamp. Their relationship is not simple; it is enmeshed in the complexities of the current climate crisis. Johannessen acts as both a sniffer dog and a seismograph, sensing the ecological emotions of her co-existence with the swamp, and also the great, trembling change to the environment because of the climate crisis.

Johannessen relates to the swamp with care, attention and even love, performing a redesigned water relation as a possible way forward, in sensing the climate crisis differently. Her hydro-artistic method of archiving models strategies for sensing vulnerability, strength and emotion in the rapidly destabilising climate. In the Hydrocene, Johannessen's work serves as an example of engaging with the emotions of the crisis through art making and sharing.

The hydro-artistic method of archiving takes on a new dimension in the work of Gideonsson/Londré, a collaborative artist duo who explore the cyclical nature of time through durational peat bog walks. Their art practice revolves around performance and time, and in their one-year durational work titled *En Myrcirckle* (A Mire Circuit), they traversed the mass peat swamps of central Sweden in all seasons, wearing shoes made of peat from the same swamp. The shoes become a symbol of the cyclical nature of the swamp, the way it rejuvenates itself, moving through

FIGURE 4.2 Gideonsson/Londré, documentation of performance installation *En myrcykel*, 2017–2018, Gunders Mosse, Jämtland, Sweden. Courtesy of the artists.

states and seasons; the journey over the swamp and its act of entanglement with nature-culture serves as an archive of the cyclical nature of deep-time peat production.

Gideonsson/Londré's work presents a Mobius loop of ecological thinking, in which the shoes are made 'of' the swamp, and the swamp is made 'of' the shoes. The humans who wear the shoes and build the tracks back and forth through the swamp become implicit in this environment's ongoing ecological movements and destruction. The artists engage with the swamp as a site of wetness and instability through walking. The performer becomes destabilised by the shoes themselves, which materially and philosophically continue the cycle of the swamp and water itself.

In past works, Gideonsson/Londré explored how swamps have often been mythologised as a site of unproductivity and unpleasantness. They looked at the lingering idea of the swamp producing ill health and even 'bad air' that supposedly led to many diseases. In *En Myrcirckle*, the artists offer a new perspective on the swamp, acknowledging its value as an archive brimming with cyclical and enmeshed timescales and imprints. The journey with peat shoes proposes a way of archiving landscapes and mindscapes that can seem far off, remote or redundant.

As the peat shoes return to the swamp, the artists enact a form of archiving the swamp, finding a fluid circulatory in their conceptual and material engagement with the swamp. This sense of archiving the swamp with the materials of the swamp empowers an understanding of the swamp as a zone that rejuvenates itself, moving through states and seasons. This sense of rejuvenation and an appreciation of the cyclical time becomes a tool in facing the limitations of imagination in the climate crisis.

In contrast to artists Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson's film *Swamp* (1971), where the swamp presents as a reed-filled obstacle to the artists' journey, Gideonsson/Londré's journey with the swamp becomes a constant negotiation of destruction, archive and imprint by the artists and their peat shoes. Their carefully considered performance departs from an interplay of bodies and questioning of time. In this work, the swamp becomes a third performer. In this entanglement between swamp and artists operating in their carefully considered set of parameters, the artists offer a quiet meditation on the interlinking of swamps and humans.

In the face of the environmental crisis, the artists' engagement with the swamp challenges the notion of linear time and uproots anthropocentric understandings of *terra infirma*. The peat shoes' return to the swamp's murky depths serves as a potent symbol of the cyclical nature of life and the passage of time. As they immerse themselves in the swamp, the artists employ the materials of the swamp to create a fluid circulatory that transforms it into a living, breathing archive. This archive empowers us to see the swamp not as a static entity but as a dynamic force that renews and regenerates itself through the passage of seasons. By embracing the concept of swamp time, Gideonsson/Londré offers a powerful tool for confronting the limitations of imagination in the face of the climate crisis.

Incubating swampy curatorial practice and pedagogy with the Swamp Biennial and Swamp Pavilion

To continue to reconsider time in the swamp, and the possibilities of learning from the swamp with art, I turn to the words of exceptional artist-curators Raqs Media Collective, who describe curation as a process of incubation when they write, 'Curation distributes and disturbs the sites of discursive production, as well as forms of collegiality. In critical moments it becomes an incubator for uncertain images, ideas and sensations.'[9] This idea of the curation as incubation relates in a watery way to the swamp as also incubator, a zone which performs a kind of incubation of the minerals, matter and critters that live within the waterlogged depths of the swamp. Thinking into deep time, the primordial swamps were the liminal zones where life originated, and through a process of incubation the swamp fostered and fosters life. In this way, curating with the swamp is also learning from the swamps themselves, acknowledging the swamps' knowledge and agency as incubators of meaning. Learning from the interplay of dependents and dependencies and rolling into the submerged knowledge of the swamp, it is this incubation of uncertainty that the curatorial and the swamp together form. As part of material watery thinking, the incubation of the swamp and the incubation of curatorial theory are understood in symbiosis to form the hydro-artistic method of incubation. In the following pages, I unfurl the mechanism of the hydro-artistic method of incubating in the swamp in the expanded exhibitions of the Swamp Biennial and the Swamp Pavilion.

Signe Johannessen's practice of thinking with the swamp is not limited to her solo practice, instead she extends into the hydro-artistic method of incubating in the form of swampy curatorial practice and pedagogy in her collaborative work creating the Swamp Biennial. As part of her work with the experimental art platform Art Lab Gnesta, the artist has invited scientists, children, local politicians, divers, students and artists to the site. With her long-time collaborator, curator and writer Caroline Malmström, and their colleagues at Art Lab Gnesta, they started the international residency Swamp Storytelling with Indian scientist network Earth CoLab and the Swedish Institute. As per Art Lab Gnesta's website: 'Swamp Storytelling is a communal investigation of the swamp and its biological and mythological functions.'[10] In bringing together scientists and artists, they aimed to utilise art's ability to function as a communicator of research. After the intensive international residencies, they mounted a local showing of artistic and scientific swamp research. They created the Swamp Biennial which was held in 2016 and 2018 and is described by Art Lab Gnesta as a bringing together of scientific reality with an artistic understanding of the swamp: 'we see (the swamp) as both a symbol of the prevailing climate policy, necessary transformation processes and life's cradle: what then will await us in the damp mud, among deep roots and disintegration?'[11] In this way, the aims of the Swamp Biennial connect curatorially with the aims of the theory of the Hydrocene. For both the biennial and the Hydrocene, the swamp becomes a central material and figure of the current times, a body of water to learn from and with.

The Swamp Biennial inauguration took place in 2016 and was a meeting point for the swampy artistic research practices to pool together. During the two editions, the Swamp Biennial hosted artists, researchers and local students, allowing them to meet and think with the swamp. The artistic 'outcomes' of these meetings include works of art in public spaces, exhibitions, collaborative workshops, talks, events such as the 'Holiday of the Swamp,' a festival-type celebration of swamp co-existence by artist collective Hagerstens Tradgard. One work shown in the 2016 edition was the video work *Flowing Place*, by Helsinki-based artist Kati Roover.

In the slow and meditative video, Roover films and colours scenes of quiet beauty from coastal tidal swamps in a painterly manner. The mangroves become protagonists, as we watch tidal waters rise and retreat through their roots, the written words espouse, 'These are the beings that are holding the earth, water and air together.' In Roover's film, the mangroves enact the symbol of entangled ecologies, but also as beings with agency within the swampy milieu. Painting the mangroves in a vibrant other-worldly lilac, she hints at science fiction, proposing an uncanny inspection for the non-human. The swamp of Roover's film becomes a site for experiencing the integrated nature-culture of the swamp zone, and points to propositions of care and response-ability for these bodies of waters that sit at the centre of both the theory of Hydrocene and the Swamp Biennial.

As part of the biennial, Malmström and Johannessen led walks to the swamp and sat together with local students, dipping their feet and reading the words of a text from 1942 by Swedish-Finnish author Eva Wichman, which shares the swamp as a living, radical presence. Wichman writes about the swamp in first person as an active powerful subject. As the swamp, she writes:

FIGURE 4.3 Kati Roover, still from film *Flowing Place*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

> I am a wide marsh standing still, I cannot stand anything except a raging speed. Not a single part of me, not a drop of bitter water is asleep – I live in an uninterrupted movement – living all the way to the boundaries.[12]

Wichman's text was a great inspiration for the Swamp Biennial and was used as an instigator of curatorial thinking. The text was read out loud to the swamp by the curators and students, as an offering to the swamp. In the publication titled *Wetlands and Experiments* by independent art publishers OEI,[13] curator Caroline Malmström names this kind of artistic relationality 'Swamp Pedagogy,' with inspiration from Wichman and the swamp as an artistic collaborator. Malmström outlines how the swamp itself becomes a teacher of the archive of human and non-human relations and the cultural significance of the swamp as archive.

Simultaneously, further south in Europe, the swamp as a curatorial strategy was also adapted by architect-curators Gediminas and Nomeda Urbonas when they curated the Lithuanian pavilion at the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2018. Taking the quote from writer Henry David Thoreau 'Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps'[14] as a departure point, the artists curated an extensive public program and swamp school. Not only did the Swamp Pavilion consist of an exhibition, but this large-scale swamp project also consisted of lectures, performances, workshops and manuals, and the ongoing pedagogical processes of the Swamp School. Departing from similar ground to the Swamp Biennial, the Swamp Pavilion took a polyvocal approach to thinking with the swamp. Artists such as Rasa

FIGURE 4.4 Documentation of Swamp Storytelling workshop as part of the Swamp Biennial, 2016, in collaboration with Indian research network Earth CoLab and the Swedish Institute at Art Lab Gnesta, Sweden, 2016. Courtesy of Art Lab Gnesta.

Smite and Raitis Smits with their artist project Swamp Radio responded to the Venetian swamp as both contextual and philosophical, and as a political and social experiment. The pavilion also enacted a form of Swamp Pedagogy, including a lecture and text by Matteo Canetta and Letizia Mari, who speak of the pedagogy of the drift. This ambitious and multi-directional research station prioritised questions of the sound of the swamp, broadcasting a Swamp Radio, alongside questions of commoning the swamp and futurity of the swamp. As part of the Architecture Biennale, the Swamp Pavilion existed in the axis of design, architecture, social practice and pedagogy.

Swedish curator Lars Bang Larsen continued the theme of the swamp as pedagogical and artistic frameworks in his presentation, which began with:

> Because it has a life around and about life itself, the lesson that the swamp teaches us is a cosmological one. It is both a vanishing point and what is more, a deep origin without foundation – an origin of origins.[15]

Bang Larsen discusses the swamp as a site of 'ecosystemic' experiments and psychedelia, and uses the artwork Mud Muse from 1967 to 1971 by Robert Rauschenberg as an example of this. In Rauschenberg's installation, a set of mechanical vibrations and noise is played into a rectangular, clinical box filled with artificial mud made from water, clay and volcanic ash. Bang Larsen identifies Mud Muse as an artistic example of an artificial swamp that conjoins the swamp with technology. Read from the contemporary moment, he suggests the work summons 'an Anthropocene wasteland,' a possible future where the swamps are synthetic and managed hybrids of technology, waste and the non-human.

This hybridity of the techno-swamp has also been proposed by philosopher Kristupas Sabolius, who thinks of the swamp as a 'sympoietic' milieu – a place where meaning and matter transform each other. Sabolius uses Venice as a case study of anthropocentric logics of extreme water management and the swamp as a milieu of transformation. This highly entangled way of thinking with the swamp dismisses capitalistic ways of swamp as resource or as simply a place to be 'fixed' or 'drained' in a similar way to which the ideas of the Hydrocene confront and critique the pillar of water as resource in the natural-cultural water crisis. For example, in the theory of the Hydrocene, the swamp is never a stable or mute site; instead the swamp swarms with hydrologics, and the associated artists of this chapter enact diverse swampy hydro-artistic methods that show us how to strengthen human–swamp relations beyond capitalistic models. Learning from the 'sympoietic' swamp that constantly transforms meaning and matter is a characteristic of the ability for art to engage with its audience, and also transform meaning and matter.

The swamp in the political and social realm was extended in the presentation *The Swamp Modernity*,[16] given by scholar Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, who proposes that the swamp is a strongly contested political metaphor that has reoccurred throughout history. She writes:

> It is not difficult to understand why the communists, Mussolini, Putin and Trump have turned to the swamp to campaign against something they do not understand but wish to be away: the swamp is antithetical to the linear, mechanistic mind. It defies communication enabled by clear waterways, resists agriculture, and questions human mastery of both territory and living matter.

Rindzevičiūtė argues the importance of the swamp as material and metaphor within political propaganda and outlines the intertwining of the swamp with modernist agendas of colonialism and capitalism. She draws on the definition of modernism from scholar Bruno Latour, that 'modernity' is best defined as an ambivalent project, characterised by both 'translation' and 'purification.' Latour describes these practices in this way: 'translation' creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, 'purification,' creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: 'that of human beings, on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other.'[17] In her work, Rindzevičiūtė extends Latour's definition of modernism into the realm of the swamp as politicalised agent.

In relation to the Hydrocene, these pillars of modernism that the theorists draw on – 'translation' and 'purification' – are also understood as methods for thinking with the swamp. Translation and purification are watery hydrological methods that the water of the swamp enacts, and which the artists and theorists who participate in the Swamp Pavilion also take part in through their metaphorical and theoretical propositions for the Venetian lagoon. While Rindzevičiūtė's work looks more to the political system and the swamp, her findings about the hydro-methods of swamp thinking are relevant and core to the swamp of the Hydrocene.

With the Swamp Pavilion in Venice, the lagoon itself was used as an instigator of curatorial practice – a test site for a polyvocal reckoning with unstable ground. Interestingly, beyond the pavilion itself, Venice as a city on water presents itself as a swamp in constant alteration, constantly being redrawn by the artists and curators who infiltrate the swamp-turned-island, as part of the cultural tourism of the Venice Biennale – in art, architecture, dance and film. By taking Venice as a case study in swamp thinking, the curatorial strategy of the Swamp Pavilion offers a strong mapping of the swamp as a way of thinking, both as a physical site and as an ontological offering. For the theory of the Hydrocene, the Swamp Pavilion offers a practical curatorial model for working in a dedicated and sustained way with the swamp as a practice of caretaking; for example, in the way the swamp of Venice becomes the site for both material and conceptual exploration and shared understanding.

In both the biennial and the pavilion, the swamp acts as a curatorial instigator and teacher. Mimicking the ways in which the waters of swamps are the incubating homes to many small insects and microbes, the hydro-artistic method of incubating sees the swamp as far more than a metaphor: instead, the swamp materially offers curatorial routes into experiencing multi-species entanglement and incubation. Swamp pedagogy repeats in both exhibitions, including the swamp as a site for continuous cartography in the Swamp Pavilion and as a site for understanding the

impact of accelerated destruction of wetland areas in the local region of the Swamp Biennial. These expanded exhibitions work to unsettle the logic of the swamp as 'dangerous,' and instead see the swamp as a form of curatorial incubator. Harking back to the deep time of the primordial swamp, the hydro-artistic method of incubating as curatorial practice sees the swamp as a fertile zone for the incubation of ideas, artist practices and the curatorial at large during the climate crisis.

Cleaning the swamp as a hydrofeminist act with artists Madeleine Andersson and Yasmin Smith

Swedish artist Madeleine Andersson graduated from art school in 2018. Her final work for the graduation exhibition was part of the series of somewhat feverish and humorous reflections on her view of the climate crisis. She embraces the critique of her position as a privileged young white woman by making bedroom confession-style videos, filming herself in a self-conscious way. The video work titled *we're all motherfuckers* begins with the possibly ironic and passionate demand to the audience: 'I need to find myself before the ice caps melt.' The artist capitalises on the stereotype of a self-involved millennial in a long speech about how she is searching for herself and how time is running out as the world melts and the sea rises.

Andersson performs the hydro-artistic method of cleaning in one of her short in-situ performances for camera. Looking out over a bare swampy area with a long wooden plank cutting through it, the kind used as a makeshift pathway for hikers in this wet terrain, Andersson enters the scene, bends down and begins to mop up the swamp with a kitchen towel. The paper towel begins to soak up the liquid,

FIGURE 4.5 Madeleine Andersson, still from video installation *we're all motherfuckers*, 2018.

and she carefully pats it dry, using the roll of paper to the end; she finally picks up the wet paper towel and exits. Through the seemingly simple act of 'cleaning up,' Andersson's action links the swamp to the greater body of work by feminist performance makers, in mopping up and the role of women as the ever-reliable cleaners of the planet. This links her work to eco-feminism and notable examples of feminist artists cleaning such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles' *Manifesto for Maintenance Art* (1969), the kitchen films of Martha Rosler *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1971) and the performances of Bonita Ely's *Murray River Punch* as discussed in the previous chapter. By linking the kitchen to the swamp through the performative action of 'mopping up' with kitchen towel, Anderson brings the current climate debates into the sphere of feminist discourse and performance.

In her humorous work, Andersson adjusts the tropes of the 1960s and 1970s feminist performance works into the contemporary climate debate, and she does this by bringing the swamp into the performance as a form of collaborator with a conceptual nod towards hydrofeminism. Neimanis describes hydrofeminism as a form of watery embodiment in a recent interview, when she writes, 'connection happens via the traversal of water across or through only partially permeable membranes… We take in the world selectively and then send it flooding back out again.'[18] In the way Neimanis aptly describes, Andersson performs this kind of watery embodiment through membranes, the body of the swamp and the body of the artist in close contact with humour and emotion.

Another way of cleaning as a hydro-artistic method comes from Australia-based artist Yasmin Smith, whose work with ceramics and bodies of water examines different watersheds' chemical and social history. Smith has a meticulous artistic practice where she collects plant materials from different bodies of water and through a process of casting, burning and glazing she charts the toxic and chemical traces of the bodies of water. The artist speaks about working with the watershed as a collaboration, where the work is made with the body of water directly. She says, 'It's more like a collaboration with the world, than it is trying to put the world into a box that you want to see it through.'[19] The artist makes the ceramic pieces from and with the swampy riverine ecology to narrate the chemical journeys and entanglements of the human and non-human.

Smith worked site specifically on Cockatoo Island as part of the 2018 Biennale of Sydney in her piece *Drowned River Valley*, where she had a *plein air* studio for collecting, replicating, transforming, burning and glazing specimens of both the mangroves growing in the swampy shallows around the island and the turpentine wooden planks from a broken-down jetty also on the island. Her slip-cast ceramic replicas of the mangroves and planks draw out this contested liminal zone's ecological and industrial records. The colours of the glazes she produced on the island speak to the chemical histories of the island, such as the brown of the turpentine ash glaze which is partly chromium oxide reacting with zinc. Through her research, Smith discovers that the zinc is present due to the use of anti-corrosive boat paint. In the biennale, Smith worked to transform the swampy zones of the island into a

FIGURE 4.6 Yasmin Smith, *Drowned River Valley*, 2016–2018, salt harvesting vessels (Sydney Harbour salt glaze and Barangaroo sandstone clay on steel), ceramic branches (midfire slip with Parramatta River Mangrove wood-ash glaze) and ceramic sleepers (midfire slip with Cockatoo Island Turpentine wood-ash glaze), dimensions variable to site. Copyright of the artist. Image courtesy The Commercial, Sydney. Photo: Alex Kiers/The Commercial.

working laboratory that exposes the chemical narratives of the water. In her unique artistic method of collecting, burning and glazing, Smith performs the hydro-artistic method of cleaning the swampy liminal zone, a cleaning that manifests as a material memory-making through ceramics.

Strategies for shifting human–swamp relations in waterlogged zones

The swamp of the Hydrocene is never a singular or standard being; instead, through artistic engagement, the swamp becomes a zone that echoes with deep time. The sites themselves waver and resist classification, in permanent dialogue and exchange with bodies of algae, toxins, pollutants and plastics, as well as memories, borders and laws. The waters in the swamp are situated and relational and are a vibrant meeting place for creatures and cultures, existing on radically different time scales simultaneously. Rather than being something fixed, the swamp can emerge within disaster zones or disappear, swallowed by building development or drought.

As shown in the work of Signe Johannessen, Gideonsson/Londré, Madeleine Anderson and Yasmin Smith, the artists of the Swamp chapter offer unique and

compelling hydro-artistic methods for encountering the natural-cultural water crisis. These artists ask what it means to carry the swamp inside ourselves, and further, how can we be caretakers for the swamp, and how is the swamp already a caretaker for our own bodies of water? Through archiving, incubating and cleaning, these artists engage with the entanglement of nature-culture in a materially complex zone. The swamp offers the artists and their audiences a deeper understanding of the complex web of 'intra-related'[20] matters – be they fish, soil, microplastics, land rights, feminism – that are reliant on each other and impact each other within the swamp, and through the greater hydrological cycle on a planetary scale. In the Hydrocene, the swamp is a liminal and complex zone where watery methods of collaboration are paramount. By engaging with the swamp in less anthropocentric and destructive manners, the artists of the Swamp chapter present exemplary ways for thinking with swamps differently and redirecting towards a liveable future and just relations with the hydrological system and the hydrosphere at large.

Notes

1 A Wilson, *Swamp: Nature and Culture*, Earth Series, Reaktion Books, 2017, p. 149.
2 Roca & Salazar, p. 534.
3 C Fredengren, 'Unexpected Encounters with Deep Time Enchantment. Bog Bodies, Crannogs and "Otherworldly" Sites. The Materializing Powers of Disjunctures in Time', *World Archaeology*, vol. 48, 2016, 482–499.
4 The term deep time refers to the time scale of geologic events. This time scale moves beyond anthropocentric time as measured by human lives and generations. I have worked curatorially with the concept of deep time as part of a curatorial research duo with Nina Stromqvist, including interviewing Christina Fredengren and curating exhibitions in Australia and Sweden. For more on this, see the project website, Within Deep Time.
5 See Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water', pp. 96–115.
6 S Johannessen, 'Letters to a Swamp' in Cm Malmström & S Johannessen (eds.) *Trophy*, Ystad Konstmuseum, Sweden, 2021, p. 49.
7 Maria Lind, 'Introduction to The Eighth Climate (What Does Art Do?)', 2016.
8 Ibid.
9 Raqs Media Collective, 'Three and a Half Conversations with an Eccentric Planet', *Third Text*, vol. 27, 2013, 108–114.
10 Quoted from Art Lab Gnesta website.
11 Ibid.
12 For more on Eva Wichman, see Nordic Women's Literature, 2012, Wichman quoted here from the Art Lab Gnesta Swamp Biennale program.
13 See *OEI* journal, issue 84–85: Våtmarker & experiment (Wetlands and Experiments), 2019, editors Jonas Magnusson & Cecilia Grönberg.
14 See 'The Swamp Pavilion', in *The Swamp Pavilion: La Biennale di Venezia Architettura*, 2018.
15 LB Larsen, 'Auto Sym Allo: Poiesis of the Mud Muse (video)', in *The Swamp Pavilion*, 2018.
16 E Rindzevičiūtė, 'The Swamp Modernity' in *Swamps and the New Imagination: On the Future of Immaterial Materiality in Art, Architecture and Philosophy*, London, Sternberg Press, 2019, pp. 1–11.

17 Ibid., Latour quoted from Rindzevičiūtė.
18 S Bezan & A Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism on the Coastline: An Interview with Astrida Neimanis', 2022.
19 Y Smith, 'From Ash to Glaze: Yasmin Smith (video)', in *Museum of Contemporary Art*, 2021.
20 See definition of intra-acting from physicist KM Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2007.

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5

OCEAN

The swamp gives way to the ocean. Gently the hydrological cycle moves from the unstable swamp as liminal and littoral space to the vast ocean as a place for collaborative and collective strategies of salty relationality and storying.

In the previous chapter on the swamp, I shared the hydro-artistic methods of archiving, cleaning and incubating and the ways eco-visionary artists are finding ways to connect with and consider swamps and liminal waterlogged zones as intimate and embodied waterways in the natural-cultural water crisis. In this chapter, I move from the *terra infirma* of the swamp to the expansive ocean, singular and look to Nordic artists Pontus Pettersson, Signe Johannessen, Sissel M. Bergh alongside Oceania artists Angela Tiatia, Clare Milledge, Talia Smith and Latai Taumoepeau. These leading artists are developing hydro-artistic methods of tiding, waving and submerging to form oceanic relations steeped in ethical embodiment of the hydrological cycle and move towards a shared commonality between the ocean, humans and more-than-humans. The practice of these hydro-artistic methods can enable a caring and convivial hydro-human relationship, rather than a colonial and extractive one. This is important as we search for new and remembered strategies for untangling the climate crisis.

Ocean singular

In the Hydrocene, the ocean is one ocean: a singular ocean. As a singular body of water, the ocean becomes a planetary figure in the Hydrocene, and embodies the concept of all water passing through the hydrological cycle as a singular and relational body of water. To extend this beyond the singular ocean, it is possible

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to consider all bodies of water, such as puddles, waterfalls, clouds and aquifers, as well as tears, termites and humans, as part of the hydrological cycle and therefore as part of a singular expansive body of water. To consider the hydrological cycle as operating on the planetary scale, affected by the planetary water crisis, is to be expansive in conceptualising how, who and what is implicated in the water crisis and by extension, how solutions for climate justice can be sourced from a collective understanding of the planetary and embodied water crisis. In this chapter, the artists presented each share their unique hydro-artistic methods for encountering and collaborating with the ocean as a powerful force in the hydrological cycle from which we may learn.

This definition of the ocean as singular is in line with eco-critical theorist Sidney Dobrin who writes, 'The "bodies" of saltwater that cover the planet are connected, or, more accurately, are a singular aquatic body divided only by human cartography and discourse.'[1] It is equally informed by the influential scholarship of the Tongan and Fijian writer and anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa and his prominent essay 'Our Sea of Islands,'[2] in which he reclaims the ocean as singular, along with the definition of Oceania. Hau'ofa refuses the belittlement and minimisation of his homelands of Oceania seen through a colonial lens as a series of 'islands in a far sea.' Hau'ofa instead emphasises that Oceania is a 'sea of islands' defined not by the measurements of land, but by the richness of transoceanic cultures. Hau'ofa's significant work corresponds to other Great Ocean/Pacific scholars such as theorist and curator Jaimey Hamilton Faris[3] who is a key reference in this chapter, alongside Léuli Eshrāghi, Craig Santos Perez, Albert Wendt, Alice Te Punga Somerville and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui who each reinforce culturally significant 'oceanic genealogies, geographies, connections, mobilities, migrations, bodies, and imaginations.'[4] The naming of seas and oceans as separate entities only heightens the imperialist and anthropocentric ideas of ownership over bodies of water. In Hau'ofa's words, 'Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding…We are the sea, we are the ocean.'[5] This definition of the expansive singular yet complex ocean leads to new ways of reading the ocean as a symbiotic socio-cultural body of water.

Curatorially, the expansive project *Wansolwara: One Salt Water* held in Sydney at UNSW Galleries and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in 2020 is significant in defining the ocean as a singular body of water. Across multiple sites, the program brought together more than thirty artists, writers, performers and filmmakers connected by a shared understanding of the singular ocean. The title of the multi-site project is a term from the Solomon Islands, where the 'wansolwara' denotes the concept of 'one ocean, one people.'[6] Thinking of the singular ocean as planetary also allows for the discussion of context – that is, locality, time and place – to become explicitly entangled as nature-culture. The exhibition brought together artists from across the Great Ocean/Pacific who all considered the complexities and diversity of artistic practices that share a connected waterscape. According to the curatorial text, the exhibition offered 'a framework for assembling different creative projects that elucidate the complex and multifaceted practices

and knowledge systems of First Nations communities globally.'[7] The program included the exhibition, *O le ūa na fua mai Manu'a* curated by artist, curator, researcher Léuli Eshrāghi, and forms a key reference for defining the singular Ocean in the Hydrocene. Eshrāghi's impressive body of curatorial and theoretical work expands understandings of complex Indigenous knowledge systems in the Oceanic region is especially powerful and pertinent in thinking with water in Oceanic eco-aesthetics.[8]

Thinking of the singular ocean also corresponds with the Gaian idea which sees the planet not as 'spaceship Earth' but instead as 'a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating climate and chemistry.'[9] The Gaia theory, originally developed by scientist James Lovelock and further written about by philosopher Bruno Latour,[10] is a theory that the planet is a single physiological self-regulating system that operates through climactic feedback systems; this is a holistic understanding of the planet, of which the singular ocean is a key element.[11] As I describe in Chapter 1, this planetary approach to thinking with a singular ocean is useful for considering how the artists of the Hydrocene connect with the ocean as part of a single salty body of water that envelops the planet.

Within this singular ocean, water is the matter that connects and strengthens the links between diverse fields and forms an interdisciplinary point of connection to discover shared interests in water and art in the natural-cultural water crisis. To make these interdisciplinary points of connection, I draw on the work of theorist Hester Blum and her work on 'Oceanic Studies' as a new epistemology or a new dimension for thinking about surfaces, depths, planetary resources and relations. In defining 'oceanic studies,' Blum takes an eco-critical approach to the ocean and sees 'the ocean both as a topical focus and as a methodological model for nonlinear or nonplanar thought.'[12] This way of thinking about the 'ocean as a method' relates to the hydro-artistic methods of the Hydrocene, which describe and name specific techniques and methods that the artists of the Hydrocene have developed and deliver in their collaboration with water, and that have the potential to deliver new methods for relating with water in ethical and collaborative ways.

Influential to Blum's construction of oceanic studies is the work of renowned American scientist and writer Rachel Carson from the mid-twentieth century.[13] Carson also conjures the ocean as a single body of water when she describes the formation of the original ocean in her trailblazing book from 1951, *The Sea Around Us.*[14] With her lyrical scientific prose, Carson unites the disparate 'oceans' and 'seas' into one planetary ocean when she describes the world as 'a water world, a planet dominated by its covering mantle of ocean, in which the continents are but transient intrusions of land above the surface of the all-encircling sea.'[15] In Carson's account of the making of the planet, she describes the deep-time process of rain moving minerals from the bare earth to the gradually filling ocean, which in turn produced the conditions for the beginning of life. In Carson's own title of her book, *The Sea Around Us*, she highlights the term 'around us' to describe the encircling movement of the one magnificent salty body of water that is the singular ocean.

In the Hydrocene, I adopt these concepts of the ocean as a singular from Carson, Blum, Hau'ofa, Eshrāghi and Dobrin as a counterpoint to the dominant imagination of multiple seas and oceans aligned to various national territories. This dominant conceptualisation of multiple seas and oceans is discussed ironically in the opera-performance *Sun & Sea*, by Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė which, after the premiere of the work at the Venice Biennale in 2019, was staged four times in the Nordic region – Malmo Konsthall, Sweden, Copenhagen Contemporary, Denmark, Boralius Bergen, Norway and at KIASMA in Finland. For this work to be staged four times in three years shows its impactful resonance in the Nordic context. The work was also staged at the Sydney Festival, Australia, in 2023 where audiences viewed the live performance from the high seats of the Sydney Town Hall, peering down at the artificial familiarity and uncanny staged beach scene below. The actors lay on the gallery floor, now unrecognisable covered in sand and heated lights, and the opera plays out across a singing chorus and solos that each deliver, poignant and personal sagas relating to the climate crisis. One of the characters, a middle-aged woman in a neat black swimsuit and large glasses, with the character title 'Wealthy Mommy,' sings in elegant operatic tones about all the oceans and seas that her young son has already swum in. She ticks off the separate bodies of water like a shopping list when she sings:

> My boy is eight and a half
> And he has been swimming in
> The Black
> The Yellow
> The White
> The Red
> The Mediterranean
> Aegean seas…
> He has already visited two of the world's great oceans,
> And we'll visit the remaining ones this year[16]

The performer repeats her operatic list throughout the performance, and it becomes a recurring musical phrase that reflects the current thinking of oceans and seas as separate commodities and resources, ready to be consumed by wealthy tourists. Later in Wealthy Mommy's song she admits, 'What a relief that the Great Barrier Reef has a restaurant and hotel!' in an ironic nod to the hyper-touristic and colonial-capitalistic relationship to the ocean. In opposition to the Wealthy Mommy mentality, in the Hydrocene, the ocean is not divided by borders. The ocean in the Hydrocene is not able to be listed, categorised and conquered as in *Sun & Sea*. Instead, drawing on theorists such as Carson, Blum, Hau'ofa, Eshrāghi and Dobrin, the ocean of the Hydrocene is considered as a single body of water that is situated, local, knowable and intimate. This is because the singular ocean of the Hydrocene is a planetary being that sits as part of the hydrological cycle. Furthermore,

FIGURE 5.1 Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė, Vaiva Grainytė and Lina Lapelytė, *Sun & Sea (Marina)*. Opera-performance. Performance view, the 58th International Venice Biennale, Venice, 2019. Photo: Andrej Vasilenko. Courtesy of the artists.

the agency of the singular ocean is paramount in many of the artworks presented, and when read together the works in this chapter form a panoramic view of artistic practices from the Nordic/European and Australian/Oceanian contexts where human–ocean relations are not based on dominant ideas of water as resource, modern phenomena or (only) weather, but instead are based on the agency of water itself.

From darkened deep-sea realities to warm coral retreats, to surface reflections and the movement of waves and storms, the ocean provides rich conceptual and physical nutrients for artistic matters. The ocean of the Hydrocene is a place where artists draw deep conceptual and material substance to enact meaningful collaborations in the current climate crisis. While their practices employ very different strategies for thinking with the ocean, there is a thread of connection between the artists and the ocean speaking in chorus. In its vastness, the ocean risks seeming unfathomable or ungraspable as a partner in thinking with water. Instead of foreclosing on the ocean as 'unknowable,' the artists shared here instead offer material and metaphorical hydro-artistic methods for knowing the ocean and collaborating with it as a vast and salty body of water that supports, defines and encircles the entire planet. These are the situated, embodied and relational hydro-artistic methods of tiding, submerging and waving.

The ocean plays an important role within the hydrological cycle, and as such is subject to the vast effects of the climate crisis, according to the IPCC, the world's oceans are in a state of crisis.[17] The ocean is rapidly forming deoxygenated 'dead

zones,' experiencing warming and acidification, infiltration of plastics, mass extinction of fish and corals, sea-level rise and coastal instability, along with higher frequency and extremities of ocean hurricanes, tsunamis, storms and other extreme weather events.[18] This horrifying list summarises the symptoms of the dying oceans as the consequences of the climate crisis. The health of the ocean is directly related to the health of the ecologies and possibility of sustaining life on this planet; for example, as scientist Alanna Mitchell describes in her book *Sea Sick*,[19] every second breath of oxygen taken by humans is facilitated by the oceans, namely by plankton that oxygenate the oceans and by extension the air humans breathe. As well as providing life-giving air, the oceans stabilise the climate and provide nutrients to almost every living being on the planet, both human and more-than-human. Without living oceans, human and more-than-human ecologies will be breathless and suffocated.[20] There is a need to rapidly challenge anthropocentric destructive and extractive relationships with the ocean. The artists of the Ocean chapter each propose hydro-artistic methods of thinking with the ocean in caring and nourishing relations.

In her 1937 essay 'Undersea,' Rachel Carson asks 'Who has known the ocean?'[21] Here, I choose to redirect this question to the contemporary water crisis, and specifically as part of the Hydrocene in the triangulation of art, water and the climate crisis. The question of who has known the ocean in the context of the Hydrocene, asks which artists work with the ocean as a place of generative collaboration and as a place for hydrofeminist exchange. The artists in this Ocean chapter each demonstrate ways of sensing, tasting or journeying with the ocean in their practice that offer a unique contribution and counterpoint to current destructive human–ocean relations.

In answer to her own question, Carson suggests that the ocean is a place of paradoxes, and that to sense the ocean one must 'shed our human perceptions of length and breadth and time and place, and enter vicariously into a universe of all-pervading water.'[22] This shifting of tempo-spatial logics that Carson suggests is here taken quite seriously as a suggestion of moving beyond anthropocentric land-based logics. It links to the contemporary writing of Melody Jue in her book *Wild Blue Media,*[23] where she insists on a wet ontological shift into knowing the ocean from a horizontal methodology, of floating, of diving, of swimming, rather than the dominant bi-pedal land-based ways of knowledge production. Further to Jue's work in decentralising land-locked knowledge systems, theorist Elizabeth DeLoughrey has developed critical ocean studies,[24] which focuses on the materiality of the ocean and the more-than-human inhabitants. DeLoughrey's critical ocean studies enquiries subvert dominant land-based knowledge in favour of the ocean as a site for multi-species studies. In her book *Allegories of the Anthropocene*, she argues for a necessary change in 'the conversation from land-based imaginaries, discourses that root the human in soil and earth/Earth, toward the oceanic.'[25] This move of imaginations into the oceanic, and away from earth, is a cornerstone of the Ocean chapter in the Hydrocene as curatorial theory. By decentring the terrestrial

and focusing on the imaginaries of the oceanic, there is a further disruption to the notions of the Anthropocene and by extension resistance to the anthropocentric pillars of the climate crisis which I outlined in Chapter 1.

DeLoughrey, Carson and Jue all speak of knowing the ocean by changing the behaviours and imaginations of land-based bodies. These changes involve the act of shedding or rotating away from the land and into the aquatic depths of the ocean. It is important to note that these body-based changes are here understood as 'performative acts of change,' and that I draw on the definition of performativity in art as offered by art historian Dorothea Von Hantelmann[26] and her claims on the societal efficacy of art in her book *How to do things with art: what performativity means in art*. Van Hantelmann argues that the model of performativity that an artwork activates lies in its ability to 'act' in context and to actively produce meaning in dialogue with that context. She writes that the meaning production of an artwork is co-produced with the conventions of 'art production, presentation, and historical persistence.'[27] This definition informs the Hydrocene, as a key aspect of artworks and hydro-artistic methods most pertinent the works written about here. Performativity can be enacted in the way artworks enact or relate to bodies, liveness, social relations or performance. The enactment of performativity within the Ocean chapter of the Hydrocene is another way to know the ocean and to sense the ocean as a part of the interconnected and embodied hydrosphere.

Tiding as movement-based process towards generous and collaborative human–ocean relations with artists Angela Tiatia, Clare Milledge and Megan Cope

Returning to Carson's now slightly altered question of *Who has known the ocean in the Hydrocene?*, this section examines the hydro-artistic method of tiding. Tiding is one of the oceanic methods of the Hydrocene and refers to the way that these artists cultivate a relationship with the tide to know the ocean in intimate ways. It engages artistically with the rhythmical push and pull of the ocean as a site that produces energy, movement and new choreographies. I examine this hydro-artistic method of tiding as it is performed by artists Angela Tiatia, Clare Milledge and Megan Cope. These practitioners engage with the energetic tides and tidal zones of the ocean as an enactment of 'tiding' towards generous and collaborative human–ocean relations.

Tiding is used in this context as a related yet different method to the processes of 'tidalectic curating,' as theorised by curator Steffanie Hessler. Hessler's work in the field, both in practice and theory, is influential in the binding of curatorial theory and watery thinking. Her body of curatorial work calls for changes to curatorial practice and exhibition making in this era of colonial capitalism and ecological disaster.[28] In her essay 'Tidalectic Curating,' she argues that curators are now obliged to rethink ways of working: 'Curatorial practice is increasingly assessed not only by its ability to create a convincing argument, support artists, or revisit

art history, but also by the way it addresses and responds to the structures in which it is embedded.'[29] Her work builds on the historian and poet Kamau Brathwaite's term 'tidalectics,' which 'denotes a worldview that eschews static land and evolves alongside water and flux.'[30] Hessler's curatorial practice and theory is a wet methodology that derives from Brathwaite's conceptualisation of tides and other watery ways. It serves as a conceptual link to think through current ecological, societal and epistemological shifts. In relation to, yet different from 'tidalectic curating,' tiding is here conceptualised as a specifically hydro-artistic method that the artists themselves develop and employ in their artistic practices.

In the artistic practices of the oceanic Hydrocene, tiding is a way to collaborate artistically with tides in a socially engaged manner that places the tides themselves as actors or agents within the works and as central to the meaning of the work. By reading these eco-visionary artists in dialogue with each other and the hydrological cycle in the theory of the Hydrocene, these artists who practice tiding offer artistic solutions to thinking differently about tides and the water. With the expanded curatorial framework of the Hydrocene, I argue we can learn from these methods to build ways of practising planetary care and working collectively towards climate justice by fostering different relations with water that are horizontal.

In considering the tides, and tiding specifically as a hydro-artistic method, there comes another rupture to the seemingly strict categorisation between the chapters of this book. To think of the chapters of River, Swamp, Ocean, Fog and Ice, as separate, discreet zones misses the material entanglement and wet porosity that exists in the liminal zones and moves through the hydrological cycles between and through each of these. The practice of tiding is one such hydro-artistic method that actively pushes between many of the supposedly discreet chapters; tiding is a movement-based process that oscillates into the river, swamp and ocean. In this way, tiding is a process that is never satisfied to remain contained in one singularly defined container, vessel or chapter.

Artist Angela Tiatia is an artist who puts her body on the line in her practice, often using her own body as an intimate site for meaning making and the performing of climate realities. In *Holding On* she lies in the tidal zone of the islands of Tuvalu, where lived realities of rising sea levels are a current, extreme threat. Laying on her back on a concrete platform in the ocean, becoming submerged as the tide washes in, her grip onto the platform destabilises, the tide pulling and pushing at her defiant performance. When interviewed about the work, she said: 'It's a direct reflection of the people of the Pacific holding onto their lands.'[31] Similarly, in the work *Lick* (2015), which is also a single camera video performance work, Tiatia is again partially submerged in aquamarine water and she attempts to keep her grip on the seabed while the tide again pushes and pulls her away from her foothold on the seafloor. In the performance, the artist resists the strength of the tides until she is overwhelmed and dislodged by the strength of the ocean and she floats out of view. Tiatia's practice draws on her embodiment and performative actions of her relationship with the ocean. She enacts and performs the push and pull of her cultural,

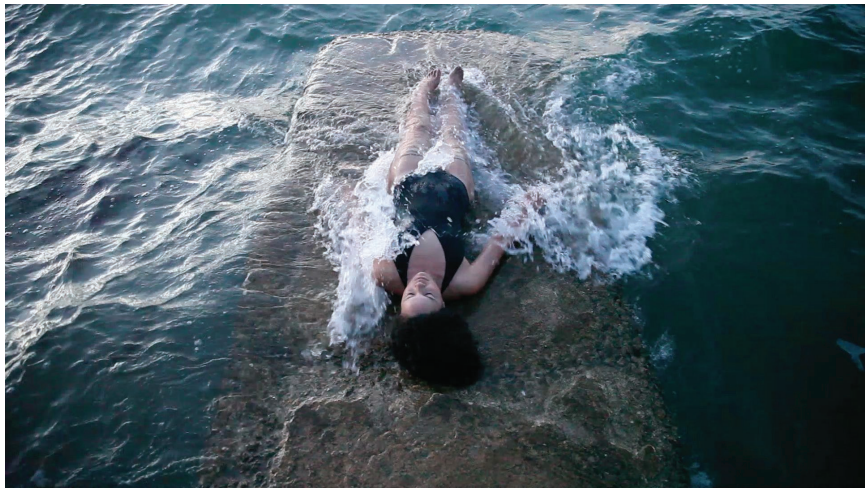

FIGURE 5.2 Angela Tiatia, still from film *Holding On*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf.

poetic and social relationality with water. In both performance-for-video pieces Tiatia performs the hydro-artistic method of tiding, sharing her way of engaging the tide as a powerful force in relation to her own body and the myriad of cultural and social meanings that the strong tidal water embodies.

Theorist and curator Jaimey Hamilton Faris offers an excellent theorisation of the layered meanings of Tiatia's performance in *Lick* in her essay 'Gestures of Survivance: Angela Tiatia's *Lick* and Feminist Environmental Performance Art in Oceania.' Hamilton Faris does not define Tiatia's work directly in relation to the tides or tidal movement of the water as I do with tiding as a hydro-artistic method, but she does see the work as a *collaboration* with water in the performer's abstracted movements, rhythms and gestures.[32] Looking carefully at Tiatia's gestures, Hamilton Faris emphasises the artist's kinship with the Great Ocean/Pacific and the way the artist performs within a cultural genealogy that connects with the ocean's ancestral role 'in sustaining life by gestating fish, conveying canoes, bringing rains, and providing guidance.'[33] Hamilton Faris looks at the way Tiatia's hydro-movement with the ocean is a way for the artist to stay 'centered-in-movement.' This play on the balancing act Tiatia performs in *Lick* can be extended to her endurance performance of resisting the tides in *Holding On.* Hamilton Faris approaches Tiatia's performance as a form of hydro-choreography that acts as a gesture of 'survivance.' She describes 'survivance,' a term from Métis anthropologist Zoe Todd, as an Indigenous framework that emphasises Indigenous-led and controlled action on climate change, especially rising sea levels. She writes:

> To consider Tiatia's choreographies as gestures of survivance is to think about the importance of recalibrating water/body relations – to reclaim water as the

> source of both inspiration and of life outside of a damaging colonial framework, with its extractive and development-based economies that have brought on the most negative effects of climate change.[34]

Drawing on Indigenous studies theorists Melanie Yazzy and Cutcha Risling Baldy, Hamilton Faris emphasises 'survivance through the language of feminist relationality with water.'[35] This relationality with water is witnessed by Hamilton Faris when she describes Tiatia in *Lick* standing in the water with power and certainty. Hamilton Faris draws attention to the presence of Tiatia's 'malu' tattoo as a culturally significant tattoo specific to Sāmoan women, and to the intimate relationality that Tiatia enacts with the ocean water: 'Her body expresses a comfortability and ongoing sustaining relationship with the water that feeds her.'[36] The artistic practice of Tiatia, especially within the durational performance *Lick*, as theorised by Hamilton Faris, enacts the power of survivance in Tiatia's gestural and powerful performance.

Hamilton Faris describes 'survivance' as an important tool in climate crisis leadership in Oceania, as it goes beyond 'mere survival and anti-colonial critique' to actively foreground the decolonial practice of 'futuring,' and the sharing, creating and carrying forward of cultural knowledge. Here survivance is not a tool to only solve the complex problems of the natural-cultural water crisis; more than this, survivance becomes a way of appreciating Indigenous knowledge and leadership, while also restructuring unequal colonial human–water relations. Correspondingly in the theory of the Hydrocene, notions of planetary care and climate justice, while also learning from Indigenous-led climate justice, are central in learning from the artists and the water itself.

FIGURE 5.3 Angela Tiatia, still from film *Lick,* 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf.

Australian-based artist Clare Milledge is another artist whose rich artistic practice incorporates a hydro-artistic method of tiding. Her 2022 work *Imbás: A Well at the Bottom of the Sea*[37] was a large-scale installation of sound, silk, cauldrons, poetry and glass painting commissioned for the 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*. The work was set around a freestanding enclosure or tent made with softly sweeping blue silk curtains along with hand painted glass, hanging cauldrons and scribbled poetry and notes. The immersive piece thematically draws on an old Irish myth, specifically the story of the forming of the River Sinnan/Shannon. In the story, a poet named Sinnan seeks inspiration by journeying to a well at the bottom of the sea, where she finds magical hazelnut trees surrounded by sage salmon. Through clever ingenuity, she eventually shares the inspiration or 'imbas' from the well with her greater community, and this 'imbas' forms the River Sinnan.

The work was housed at Pier 2/3 on Sydney's foreshore, which was previously a working harbour pier but is now a contemporary cultural venue. Directly over the water of the harbour, the pier is made of heavily scratched and uneven wooden floorboards. For audiences to *rīvus* at Pier 2/3, there was a potential to intimately link the works they were experiencing inside the pier with the expanse of water below that makes up the harbour.

Clare Milledge's intimate installation was the only work within the pier to respond directly to the intimacy of the tides and the movement of water right below the venue. The artist collaborated with Félicia Atkinson to make the soundtrack for the installation, appropriately titled *Entre les marées* (Between the tides.) The soundtrack also included the voices of other artists and academics including Tess Allas and Snack Syndicate. The sound was overlaid with fieldwork recordings that were triggered by the tidal depth of the waters below the pier.[38] Syncing the sound with the tides below meant that as the tides advanced, the sound pieces became louder, and as the tide retreated the sound would correspondingly retreat and ebb away. In this way, the soundscape and the installation were composed in connection with the impatient tides.

In an essay on the sonic resonances of *Imbás: A Well at the Bottom of the Sea*, curator and critic Anabelle Lacroix responds to the work by describing how Milledge has engaged with folklore, oral histories and the myth of the inspired artist in relation to the climate crisis. Lacroix writes, 'The invisible forces in her work connect to contemporary issues of ecocide and everyday technologies of enchantment.'[39] This urgency of contemporary ecocide and the destruction of intertwined ecologies sits at the centre of *Imbás,* and while the installation evokes a story of Sinnan, it is the sonic relationship to the water itself which I find most tangibly and explicitly connects Milledge's composition to the situated waterscape of Sydney Harbour and the direct link to changing water conditions brought on from the rapidly changing climate and ecocide. As such, Milledge's work here also enacts a form of tiding, which links her practice to the situated realities of the pier and the ecologies, both real and mythologised, that she draws upon and forms relations with throughout her artistic practice.

FIGURE 5.4 Clare Milledge, *Imbás: a well at the bottom of the sea,* 2022. Installation view. 23rd Biennale of Sydney, *rīvus*, 2022. Photo: Jessica Maurer. Courtesy of the artist.

The sculptural installation *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba* which means 'place of oyster rocks' in Jandai and Gowar language, made by Quandamooka artist Megan Cope, offers another approach to tiding, one that offers a more culturally connected and nuanced approach to the body of water where the work is situated. Cope is an artist whose work examines the connection between culture and Country and actively 'resists prescribed notions of Aboriginality.'[40] Through

material-based encounters the artist challenges settler colonial narratives of so-called Australia.

Kinyingarra Guwinyanba is part of a body of work that connects with Aboriginal middens and oyster reefs, and specifically looks at the devastation caused to these middens and reefs on her ancestral Quandamooka Sea Country. The reefs and middens were destroyed by the lime burning industry of early colonial settlement and her work aims to build a new generation of sea gardens as a way of healing Country. The artist describes the process of returning the oysters to Country in this way: '*Kinyingarra Guwinyanba* is a living, generative land and sea artwork that demonstrates how art can physically heal country that has been colonised through the practice of ecologically restorative and ancestral processes.'[41] The work exists in the intertidal zone, and these living sculptures are placed in the intertidal zone and understood by the artist as a work that 'builds on the legacy of our ancestors, interrupted by colonisation, the legacy that we are now seeking to continue.'[42] By attaching *Kinyinyarra* (Sydney Rock Oyster) shells to long straight sticks of *Burogari* (Cyprus Pine), and erecting these into the circles and semi-circles in the sandy flats, the artist works to materially and culturally heal Sea Country.

The artist has created installation versions of the work that can be shown in gallery spaces; for example, as part of the Busan Biennale, she showed a version of the work *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba (Off Country)* (2022), and at the IMA Brisbane, she recreated the work with eucalyptus as part of the exhibition *This language that is every stone* (2022). While these versions of the piece make the work more accessible for audiences, curatorially and when read through the lens of the Hydrocene, the work is most powerful when shown on Country as part of an evolving seascape as the connection to the healing and caring of the oysters and the water itself is paramount to the installation. Cope demonstrates the hydro-artistic method of tiding as a way to enact a physical evidence of the ongoing cultural significance of the waterway and the leadership of Indigenous Australians in caring for Country.

In concluding this section on the hydro-artistic-method of tiding, I return to one of modernism's watery thinkers, Virginia Woolf, who wrote in *Mrs Dalloway*, 'There are tides in the body.'[43] Taking this proposition from Woolf into the Hydrocene, I see that by connecting with the tides in the body, there is a chance to connect with the tides as a planetary movement and a form of hydro-choreography. The tides when understood as embodied and vibrant matters[44] ebb and flow with the passing of time and the movement of the earth in relation to the moon. The artworks presented here enact tiding as a hydro-artistic method which offer an awakening of an ecological sensibility in their audiences.

In this way, tiding becomes an attempt to know the ocean, to think with it, to sense it as a hydrofeminist force. These forceful artists, Tiatia, Milledge and Cope, have cultivated gentle and situated practices of tiding that have the potential to activate a heightened ecological awareness.

FIGURE 5.5 Megan Cope, documentation of *Kinyingarra Guwinyanba*, 2022, site-specific living sculpture (Burogari/Cyprus Pine and Kinyinyarra/Native Rock Oyster), at the tidal seas near Myora, Queensland. Photo: Cian Sanders. Courtesy of the artist.

Waving as a hydro-choreographic material with artists Pontus Pettersson and Talia Smith

Waves are entities that move through the ocean as forces from wind and underwater disruptions,[45] but they also offer an entry point into conceptualising and sensing the ocean differently. Waves are at their essence creatures of movement and thus offer an ontological entry point into the choreographic offerings of the ocean in the Hydrocene.[46]

In the previous section, I looked at the hydro-artistic method of tiding; here, I explore not the tidal pull of the moon, but the rhythm and sets of waves and

waving as a hydro-artistic method. What is it to know the ocean through waves and by extension to practise the hydro-artistic method of waving? In this section, I look at the distinct waving hydro-artistic methods of artist-curator Talia Smith and artist-choreographer Pontus Pettersson, and how each contributes to a way of sensing the ocean in the climate crisis as an embodied and singular being. Further, I look to the wave as a hydro-choreographic offering in the Hydrocene and point to the potentiality of the wave as a queer and disruptive force in contemporary eco-critical performance practices.

To begin an investigation of waving as a hydro-artistic method, I start with Australian-based artist and curator Talia Smith and her video work *The Ocean is a Place* (2019). The video work was part of an ocean themed special issue of online Australian art journal *Runway* edited by artist Athena Thebus. Focused on investigating the legacies of colonialism and the ocean in an Oceania context, the issue took the ocean as a site of contested colonial histories and narratives. The issue forms an archive of artistic contributions on this theme, where artists consider the ocean as a place that holds the intersectional collision of climate crisis induced socio-political realities.

Smith's film can be seen as an example of the hydro-artistic method of waving when it disrupts assumptions of waves as a 'natural' phenomenon of the ocean. She examines the fallout of nuclear testing in the Great Ocean/Pacific and the creation of charged 'techno' waves through nuclear testing. In Smith's body of work, she often deals with personal and political oceanic archives and in both her artistic and curatorial body of work, her work with water forms an understanding of the ocean as 'a place' that is situated and relational; the ocean holds and incorporates overlapping living cultural legacies.

Smith's *The Ocean is a Place* is wave-based in imagery, tempo and narrative and enacts a distinctive form of waving as a hydro-artistic method. Smith relates to waving in this multi-directional way that enacts a form of thinking with waves as part of considering the legacy of colonialism in connection to the climate crisis. With cultural heritage from Samoa, Cook Islands and New Zealand European, Smith emphasises the legacy of the inherited trauma of colonialism present in the ocean, specifically in her presentation of waves and waving.

The rhythm of the video is edited with a wave-like cadence where images appear, fade and return, which feels much like waves lapping at a shore. Smith interlaces footage of waves passing back and forth, with a poetic text that runs along the bottom of the screen. In one scene, she lingers on the image of a shadow of a coconut tree that lands on the surface of murky grey green waters with the small waves diffracting the shadow of the tree. The shadow can be read as a foreshadowing of the next set of images in the film collage, black and white footage of nuclear bomb testing zones in the Great Ocean/Pacific. The footage is repurposed by the artist from an archive of pro–nuclear energy advertisements. In the footage, young islander men watch the explosions with faces full of performed wonder while older white men conduct the 'experiments' and look on with serious expressions. The text under the images reads: 'Tell me, will you think of me when the world ends?'[47]

Smith replays the massive waves from the bombs, cutting the footage so that the explosions and the waves replay in repeating highs and lows. Her repetition of the bomb-induced waves is another expression of the artist's use of waving as hydro-artistic method.

The bomb-induced waves that Smith focuses on in her work cause ongoing destruction to the nature-culture of their surroundings and are part of the United States imperialist interests in the Great Ocean/Pacific. In her essay *Toward a Critical Ocean Studies for the Anthropocene*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey delivers her own 'hydro-criticism' of the bombings, and identifies US nuclear testing in the Great Ocean/Pacific as part of the broader militaristic move for the United States to hold power in 'transoceanic hydro-politics.' Here, there is an echoing and correspondence with Smith's video work. While DeLoughrey highlights the imperialistic motives of the United States in undertaking Great Ocean/Pacific nuclear testing, artist Smith uses the visual archives of the waves of the nuclear tests to visualise and engage with these same motives. In Smith's work, the nuclear tests are not an event to be theorised, instead the artist enacts a form of embodied hydro-politics that includes her lived perspective of inherited oceanic traumas from her family. This is a hydro-politics that is passed on through generations and as Smith demonstrates in her video work, links to the contemporary climate crisis in the Great Ocean/Pacific.

Later in the essay on critical ocean studies, DeLoughrey speaks about the language of the emerging blue humanities field and posits that in the shift towards thinking with water in critical ocean studies 'fluidity, flow, routes and mobility' have been over-emphasised compared to the ocean as a 'site for militaristic purposes.'[48] She outlines that the grammar and lexicon that highlight the imperialistic terms of the ocean such as 'blue water navies, mobile offshore bases, high-seas exclusion zones, sea lanes of communication and maritime choke points' is often missing from blue humanities scholarship.

In her video work, Smith uses neither the dominant lexicon of the blue humanities that preferences the language of 'flow and fluidity' nor the cold militaristic oceanic terms that DeLoughrey highlights. Instead, the artist uses a highly intimate style of writing that holds the audience in close council by speaking directly to both the audience and the ocean with some painful, personal details. For example, she writes, 'I want to cry… I want to bleed… I want to bury myself in the dirt and ask my ancestors to take care of me.'[49] By juxtaposing these intimate desires with the militaristic desires of the nuclear tests, the artist weaves the grammar of imperialism and personal history together. She also draws these histories into the present by collating these tests with the present-day reality of sea-level rise in the Great Ocean/Pacific. She does this through the text that accompanies the imagery in the work. With a soundtrack of deep, throbbing bass, the text reads, 'I want you to swallow me whole;' she laments, 'Everyday there is a new report that tells me the world is drowning slowly. The islands where my grandparents were raised will go first.'[50] These personal phrases offer a sense of intimacy to the work, which allows room for audiences to consider inherited traumas of the ocean differently.

FIGURE 5.6 Talia Smith, still from film The Ocean is a Place, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

As part of the larger *Runway* issue on Oceans, Smith's contribution is a gently haunting portrayal of the ocean as 'a place' for militaristic forces and for powerful cultural narratives. Seen in terms of the Hydrocene, Smith's video work *The Ocean is a Place* is an example of the hydro-artistic method of waving, in the way that the work links the violence of nuclear testing with the violence of sea-level rise in the Great Ocean/Pacific, thus conjoining colonialism and the climate crisis as two sides of the same problem.

Swedish artist-choreographer Pontus Pettersson offers a different approach to waving and working with the ocean that resonates beyond a single artistic, curatorial, or choreographic offering. Under the title *All Departures Are Waves*, the artist-choreographer aims to bring to the fore the ecological and performative qualities that water entails and unleashes.[51] Within *All Departures Are Waves*, Pettersson creates a set of artistic and choreographic practices that circulate around and through an embodied waving. There is an echo of Pettersson's work with waves in the way that Virginia Woolf describes the movement of waves when she writes, 'One after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually.'[52] Pettersson uses this perpetual and pursuing force of waves as the eddying current of his practice, returning to waves both metaphorically and materially throughout his water-based body of work, which demonstrates the hydro-artistic method of waving. He approaches his expansive and dedicated practice with the same stamina and playfulness of waves, looking to continually reshape relations and authorship.

In his work, Pettersson merges the boundaries between artist and curator, dancer and choreographer, to initiate a Nordic-based practice that transcends a singular reading. Pettersson's work with water is deeply informed by the critical framework presented by the hydrofeminism of Neimanis. The durational performance work *Bodies of Water*, named after Neimanis' book, sees a fluctuating number of dancers who over three hours collectively move between states – the calm of a still morning ocean, the fiery whiplash of an ocean storm, gentle mist and rains. The pace is mediative, with the dancers riffing off each other and the installation, each configuring a different water-based state. In the Hydrocene, I perceive that Pettersson, as an artist and choreographer, enables a certain embodied hydrofeminism in action

FIGURE 5.7 Pontus Pettersson, documentation of choreographic installation *Bodies of Water*, 2020. Wanås Konst, Sweden. Photo: Alex Fisher. Courtesy of the artist.

through his choreographic offerings of becoming bodies of water. This is a form of hydrofeminism in practice, a testing ground, where the weight of theoretical offerings is lifted by the bodies in motion, and in turn passed onto the audiences of the work. There is an effort to think with hydrofeminism where the performers, audience and hydro-atmosphere are all brought into an entangled and tentacular body of water and within this constellation political and social realities are reimagined.

Originally conceived for galleries, Pettersson later choreographed the work for an outside setting, staging the work on top of a small, grassy mountain in Stockholm in 2021. In the outdoor setting, the durational performance took on another level of circularity with the immediate environment and weather. For example, in the Stockholm presentation of the work, the piece was performed outside with big skies hanging over the heads of the dancers and heavy, grey clouds rolling by. When I saw the performance, there was rain in the air which to me acted as a gentle reminder of the way water circulates between the dancing bodies and the bodies of mountain, grass and visiting bird life. While this was perhaps not the artist's intention, when I saw the work performed, occasional piercing rays of evening sun landed on the bodies of the dancers like spotlights, highlighting the dancers' relationship with the scene around them. The performers moved through the scripted score of 'eddying, pooling, navigating, submerging, and rolling' in direct relation with the hydrological cycle and the weather around them, ingesting the weather as they performed, circulating the watery matters of air, rain, sweat, wet grass and other dancing bodies between each other.

Pettersson's practice advances a queering of watery relations. Borrowing from theorist Sara Ahmed's argument for a queer phenomenology that 'disrupts and reorders' spatial relations towards a 'politics of disorientation,' Pettersson's work uniquely consolidates the links between a queering of choreographic-based artistic practice and the watery ways of hydrofeminism.[53] The artist 'disrupts and reorders' by emphasising the 'always departing' nature of waves, bringing a queer temporality to the oceanic, specifically with the activation of waving as a hydro-artistic method.

It is with this queer waving that Pettersson's work elaborates and demonstrates the theory of waves offered by theorist Stefan Helmreich in his journal article 'The Gender of Waves.' In the text, Helmreich proposes that 'Waves, like genders, are malleable things,'[54] and identifies that wave symbolism and wave metaphors have constructed narratives of social history, allying with Stacy Alaimo's term 'Anthropocene feminism.'[55] Helmreich analyses waves as 'material-formal entities whose descriptions have been shaped and reshaped by rhetorics of gender.'[56] Through a detailed account of mostly Western wave-based symbolism – including waves as symbols for sex, death and power – Helmreich argues that in many of these mythologies, the waves are gendered as female. Pausing on Old Norse mythology, Helmreich describes the nine daughters of Aegir, the God of the Sea, as well as Ran, the Goddess of the Drowned, who are all described as ocean waves. The nine daughters are each composed of a different type of wave form, and are described in detail in the Icelandic saga from the 1200s, *Prose Edda*. Each wave daughter is individually described in the saga by their personified wave-based movements or qualities such as Udr the 'frothing wave,' Blodughadda the 'bloody hair,' Bara the 'foam fleck,' Hefring the 'riser' and Hrönn the 'welling wave.' The fear around 'wave maidens' as beasts that lure and trap unsuspecting sailors, typifies the fearful attitude towards 'women-as-waves.' As theorist Barbara Ehrenreich writes, personified feminised waves from Norse mythology manifest a type of masculine fear of 'a nameless (feminine) force that seeks to engulf – described over and over as "a flood," "a tide," a threat that comes in "waves."'[57] This threat of the wave, or of waves of feminism, or waves of social change, continues in a contemporary setting. For example, the language of migration is often heavy with metaphors of 'waves' and in this way the fear of waves, when personified as untrustworthy and undesirable, cycles onwards.

As Pettersson's work is situated in a Nordic context, one can link back to Norse mythologies that Helmreich refers to, and the contemporary, recurring symbolics of waves as feminised and by extension distrustful. Pettersson upsets this 'wave-as-feminine' and 'wave-as-threat' force through his work as a queer artist and choreographer, and he redefines an artistic relationship to waves that move beyond static gender binaries and instead performs the fluidity of waving across intersectional, critical queer thinking and making.[58]

The hydro-artistic method of waving relates less to the wave as something experienced in the ocean, and instead as a metaphorical offering for thinking with

water at a distance. For Smith, waving acknowledges inherited colonial nuclear hydro-politics that link to the contemporary climate crisis in the Great Ocean/Pacific. For Pettersson, there is a unique choreographic offering to waving as a practice that disturbs and disrupts the dominant ontological understandings of waves as feminine and troublesome, as described by Helmreich. In the Hydrocene, these artist-choreographers perform waving as an embodied, rolling set. Like the way waves arrive on the beach in sets, waving as a hydro-artistic method is performed in repetition, bodies move through repeating sets to sense the ocean differently. Each of these artists enact a unique form of waving as a hydro-artistic method and that they each offer ways of considering human–wave relations differently, as something that can be sensed as fraught and intimate.

Submerging as knowing the ocean from the inside out with artists Latai Taumoepeau, Signe Johannessen and Sissel M. Bergh

In the previous two sections, I looked at the hydro-artistic methods of tiding and waving; here, I leave the surface of the ocean, moving away from rhythm and time, to instead enter the ocean in the hydro-artistic method of submerging. In contrast to the surface-based forces of tiding and waving, submerging is a method for knowing the ocean from the inside out. These artists perform this submergence in a set of diverse ways, each artist enacting submerging differently while prioritising embodied and social relationalities with the ocean.

The artists discussed in this section are Sissel M. Bergh and Signe Johannessen, who perform submerging in the Nordic region, while in Oceania, Latai Taumoepeau enacts a form of submerging in her own stylistic approach. This section also revisits the work Melody Jue and her book *Wild Blue Media* where she developed swimming and scuba-diving as interpretive methodologies for environmental humanities. In her book, Jue takes the ocean, and specifically salty seawater, as a milieu and environment for thinking 'through' rather than thinking 'about.' Jue contends that dominant land-based ways of knowing the ocean should be reoriented towards ways of thinking and knowing that come from 'within the cold buoyancy of saltwater.'[59] Jue's work extends from feminist science studies, with specific influence from Donna J. Haraway's theory of 'situated knowledge.'[60] She works to highlight the terrestrial bias of existing oceanic research. These influential methods for thinking 'through' salty seawater lay the conceptual groundwork for submerging in the Hydrocene.

Starting in the Nordic region, Sissel M. Bergh is a Sámi artist and filmmaker based in Norway who performs a kind of 'submerging' in her video work *Tjaetsie (knowhowknow)* from 2018. The film is a journey underwater into the Froan Sea to meet the Sámi goddess of the ocean *Gorrijh gujne*. The Froan Sea has been a source of nourishment and provided for Sámi people for thousands of years. The work shares the otherwise invisible world of the underwater Sámi mythologies of the ocean and offers audiences a chance to listen to the ocean through *Gorrijh gujne* and to practise a form of deep listening to her warnings.

Bergh's artistic practice often investigates the differing approaches between colonial and First Nation knowledge systems and in her video work *Tjaetsie (knowhowknow)*, the artist investigates the human–ocean relationship as caught up within the colonial and industrial paradigm. The work departs from an understanding of the ocean as a place with hybrid and entangled sets of cultural meanings. When the work was shown as part of the 2019 Biennale of Sydney, curated by artist Brook Andrew, Bergh wrote an impassioned plea for audiences to listen to the ocean and to listen to the old protectors of the ocean. She writes as a Sámi coastal person:

> We have lived with and off the sea for thousands of years – how is this relationship changing? Contemporary ways of human living have far-reaching consequences for other forms of life. Violence is at the core of our economic relationship with fish, animals and plants and is widely acknowledged as unavoidable and unproblematic. The old protector, the goddess of our ocean *Gorrijh gujne*, the spawning lady, is watching. We have forgotten to listen. *Birredh birredh dallah*: Please come now to our rescue.[61]

Bergh highlights the violence that sustains current human–ocean relationships, in particular the violence of industrial fishing and the emptying of the oceans.

The title of the work, *Tjaetsie*, comes from the artist's own South Sámi language and translates to 'water.' Recorded underwater and on the coast of Norway, the work unfolds around the central protagonist of the mythical figure *Gorrijh gujne*. This figure is portrayed as lingering on shoreline, where she seems to watch over the fishing village where the film is set. Images of the goddess are interspersed with footage of industrial fishing in process with beeping computer screens locating fish

FIGURE 5.8 Sissel M. Bergh, still from video *#Tjaetsie (knowhowknow)*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

populations. Grainy black and white archive photos of traditional fishing practices are also overlaid in the film. Across this collaged time travel, the figure of *Gorrijh gujne* eventually leaves the shoreline and we see her slowly entering and gently submerging herself into the ocean.

This act of the immersing goddess is central to the work, as underwater *Gorrijh gujne* becomes more visually entangled with the cod fish who are being caught in fishing traps. Between images of the goddess and images of the fish, there is a violent and loud final scene where the cod fish and the goddess are eerily spliced together to form a flash of a human-mythical creature in the face of a swimming cod. This transformation takes place to the soundtrack designed by composer Maja Solveig Kjelstrup Ratkje whose hydrophone recordings are taken from 200 metres below the surface of the Froan Sea. This visual and auditory submerging creates an opportunity for the audience to recalibrate ideas of how Sámi water relations play out in the contemporary context. This is a contemporary visualisation of a Sámi mythology of the ocean goddess in the times of industrialised fishing practices.

Through the performance of *Gorrijh gujne* submerging in the ocean, the artist draws attention to the practices of oceanic 'resource management' in the region and how the ocean is quickly meeting its ecological limit. This is the warning that the goddess sounds. The artist gently draws attention to the over-fishing of the ocean and by association contributing to the climate crisis by degrading the ocean's eco-system.[62] Bergh's film shines light upon the competing realities of the ocean as a place of cultural significance, mythology and exploited resource.

Continuing to think of the Nordic oceanic zone as a culturally complex environment, Norwegian artist Signe Johannessen also performs an act of submerging in her video work *Hic Sunt Dracones* which translates to *Here Are Dragons*. The title is a play on the language used in old European maps of the ocean that covered water territories that were not yet 'explored' or 'conquered.' In these maps, known as 'mappa mundi,' the so-called 'uncharted' ocean was cartographically conceived of as a dangerous zone full of deep sea-monsters, mythical creatures, demons and dragons and that would potentially sink ships.

To counterbalance the 'danger' of the unknown ocean, artist Johannessen instead embraces the possibility to know the ocean by submerging herself. In her video work, she investigates her family history and its connection to Norwegian whaling, and she places herself as a conduit between the knowledge that is shared between the watery mammals of the whale and the human. Intermingled with archival footage of whaling in Norway from the 1940s, in the film, the artist performs underwater free-diving with large white bone-like sculptures in bright blue waters. The sculptures were produced as free-diving tools to help Johannessen move swiftly through the ocean. They are based on real whale bones that the artist dug up from a relative's garden in northern Norway. Here, Johannessen's hydro-artistic method of submerging refuses the imagery of the ocean as 'dangerous' and 'uncharted'; instead, she embodies the link between the mammals of humans and whales, who share a watery origin story.

FIGURE 5.9 Signe Johannessen, still from film *Hic Sunt Dracones*, 2016. As part of the work *The Beast and the Eye of the Cyclone*, 2017. Photo: Tasneem Khan. Courtesy of the artist.

In the critical commentary of the work, there was no analysis of the way the artist works with the ocean itself as a medium to think through. Instead, critics were drawn to the way the artist used archival footage of whaling and the performance of masculinity in whaling. Critic J Engqvist mentions the link to the artist's autobiographical elements of the work as relating to the artist's familial connection to the subject matter.[63] The work *Hic Sunt Dracones* was bought by the Swedish Arts Council[64] who describe the piece as being 'a multi-layered work that raises questions about man's constant need to master nature and extract its power.'[65] However, there is no analysis of how Johannessen performs free-diving as a subversive act of collaboration with the ocean. Here, I relate Johannessen's diving as a method to Melody Jue's water-based methods of scuba-diving and snorkelling as methods for knowing the ocean from an oceanic perspective. Reading the work through the theoretical framework of the Hydrocene, it can be seen how Johannessen performs her hydro-artistic method of submerging to reconnect with and form a performance-based bond between the watery origins and shared futures of whales and humans.

Sensing, knowing and caring for the ocean through submerging can also be found in the work of Tongan-Australian artist Latai Taumoepeau, who reoccurs throughout the chapters and the hydro-artistic methods of the Hydrocene. In many of her works, including *i-Land X-isle* and *Repatriate,* she uses her own body as a site for sensing, disrupting and embodying the climate crisis as a natural-cultural crisis, one

that is relational and embodied through the hydrological cycle. Her work exemplifies artistic methods for thinking with water in innovative and distinct ways. Recent artworks have focused specifically on climate change induced catastrophes such as the erasure of low-lying islands and by consequence cultures in the Great Ocean/Pacific.[66] Describing herself as 'punake,' a Tongan word meaning revered composer and performer,[67] her work with water and climate includes *The Last Resort* as part of *Nirin*, the 2020 edition of Biennale of Sydney curated by artist Brook Andrew, and *Mass Movement* in 2021, which was a collective sound walk and performance 'following the coordinates of saltwater, freshwater and civic water.'[68] In the work, audiences were invited to experience the 'climate emergency distress call from the Pacific Island Nations of Oceania.' *Mass Movement* was part of the artist-led project *Refuge*, housed in ArtsHouse Melbourne, which brought together artists, emergency experts, scientists and communities to collectively consider, plan for and strategise for the consequences and impacts of climate change.[69] Her live performance *i-Land X-isle* from 2012 is one of the primary artworks of the Ice chapter, where I argue for the ways in which Taumoepeau performs and collaborates with ice in the performance, and how the work *i-Land X-isle* engages with rising sea levels in the Great Ocean/Pacific as a form of watery embodiment. In this chapter, I look specifically at her performance work *Repatriate* as a way of enacting the hydro-artistic method of submerging.

The performance work *Repatriate* (2015–) has had several iterations. Originally performed live at Carriageworks, Sydney, in 2015,[70] the artist then collaborated

FIGURE 5.10 Latai Taumoepeau, documentation of live performance *Repatriate*, 2015. Presented by Performance Space at *Liveworks,* 2015, Carriageworks, Sydney. Photo: Alex Davies. Courtesy of the artist and photographer.

with filmmaker Elias Nohra to make a film version[71] of the performance in 2019, and in 2022, the work was staged live at Toi o Tāmaki (Auckland Art Gallery) as part of the exhibition *Declaration: A Pacific Feminist Agenda* curated by Ane Tonga. The performance sees the artist dressed in a swimming costume, with yellow floatation devices and donning a long black wig. She is sealed snugly inside a large, transparent glass tank that is slightly taller than her. The performance begins with Taumoepeau dancing through a collective vocabulary that she has learnt from various Great Ocean/Pacific Island nations. While she moves through the poses and gestures of the dance, the tank slowly fills with water. For over an hour, the water in the tank rises. As the water rises the body of the artist begins to become affected, the water disturbs her choreographed dance and distorts the movements as parts of her body become buoyant from the flotation devices while other parts sink. The artist continues to dance despite the difficulties that the rising waters present to her. The performance ends when the artist is fully submerged in the tank.

Analysis and descriptions of the work have at times focused on the performance as an analogy for the rising sea levels in the Great Ocean/Pacific as part of the climate crisis. When the work was staged live on the forecourt of Toi o Tāmaki in Auckland, it was described by the curator as a powerful performance that 'demonstrates the dire impacts of climate change on Pacific nations.'[72] The endurance aspect of the work shares an artistic familiarity with Taumoepeau's earlier work, *i-Land X-isle*, which sees the artist tied to a large block of ice and enduring a kind

FIGURE 5.11 Latai Taumoepeau, documentation of live performance *Repatriate*, 2015. Presented by Performance Space at *Liveworks,* 2015, Carriageworks, Sydney. Photo: Alex Davies. Courtesy of the artist and photographer.

of water torture as an analogy for the rising sea levels and sinking islands of the Great Ocean/Pacific. Both works can be described as analogies of the devastating impact of the climate crisis for low-lying island nations.

Performance theorist Peta Tait also analyses *Repatriate* as connected to the drowning of cultures. In her article 'Site-specific Ecological Loss'[73] Tait specifically investigates how site-specific performance can relate to an environment that is no longer accessible or habitable. She elucidates how Taumoepeau's dance in the rising water of *Repatriate* is a direct performance-based validation of Great Ocean/Pacific performance culture that has taken place on the islands for millennia. Tait analyses *Repatriate* in this way:

> This performance, the bodily patterns of dance movement habituated to specific localities, was part of an ongoing practice of identity survival. The changing climate removes the possibility of remaining on the site in which the culture survived and belongs. The culture itself is drowning.[74]

This poignant and tragic situation clearly shows the intersection of nature and culture in the climate crisis. In concluding the article, Tait looks to the way that performances such as Taumoepeau's *Repatriate* contribute to the politics of the climate crisis, by allowing audiences the possibility to experience unique sensory, phenomenological and affective emotional responses.

In contrast to the critical responses and curatorial descriptions of *Repatriate* being a story of (only) drowning, submerging and sinking islands, Great Ocean/Pacific studies theorist Talei Luscia Mangioni addresses the narrative, value and significance of Taumoepeau's body of work very differently. In her essay, 'Confronting Australian Apathy: Latai Taumoepeau and the Politics of Performance in Pacific Climate Stewardship,'[75] Mangioni highlights how the discourse of the demise of tropical islands as 'a tragic metaphor for the fate of the world' due to the climate crisis is a colonial trope that reinstates the idea of Oceanians as 'passive victims' who are experiencing the climate crisis as one of global forces arriving to their islands, in a process that is out of their control. Further to this, the 'passive victims' of the natural-cultural crisis are erased from the narrative of the islands' inundation. In this case, the focus becomes solely on the natural and physical impact of the crisis on these nations, and the narrative of the passive victims on the sinking islands becomes an example of the drowning and minimising of the cultural at work.

Mangioni counters this perception of passive victims by highlighting the largely untold stories of political, legal and cultural forms of resistance that have been enacted by Oceanians in response to the climate crisis, with a specific focus on what she names the 'activist art-story' of artist Latai Taumoepeau. This is an important redirection of the narrative of the artist (and islands) sinking and submitting to the power of the ocean. Instead, Mangioni articulates the ways in which Taumoepeau has consistently used her performance practice to 'confront the apathy

of Australia's leadership and settler public and to highlight the importance of Indigenous Pacific environmental stewardship and leadership in addressing these issues.'[76] For Tait and Mangioni, *Repatriate* becomes a vehicle for Australian audiences to come closer to the issues of the climate crisis in the neighbouring Great Ocean/Pacific through Taumoepeau's fierce performance of grief, loss and resistance. As Mangioni concludes when theorising about *Repatriate*, Taumoepeau refuses to perform the 'apocalyptic' scenario that paints Oceanians as helpless. Refuting this climate narrative, Taumoepeau here confronts the climate crisis with her own performance-based language and empowered resistance.

In dialogue with Tait and Mangioni's readings of *Repatriate*, it is also important to examine the ways in which Taumoepeau describes her own practice in terms of and affirmation that she and her Oceanic collaborators are able to perform a 'voice of our ocean.'[77] In a roundtable discussion with fellow oceanic climate art-activists Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Rosanna Raymond entitled 'In the ha: Cultural activism in the Pacific,' Taumoepeau describes the way that artists from the region are leading climate actions because artists have a way of:

> approaching discomfort, disadvantage, hard times that's forged in creativity – that actually enables something more. I feel like that's the importance of working, collaborating, and having conversations and being face-to-face with other artists. It's that ability to see beyond the hardship and find ways of doing things.[78]

She continues to highlight the artistic ability to tell urgent ocean stories because of the way that activism in her and her collaborators' work is performed from within their art and from within the culture that she, Jetñil-Kijiner and Raymond exist in. She highlights that as Great Ocean/Pacific artists, they are the 'voice of our region, the voice of our ocean. The important thing is that it happens in so many ways right now, because time is running out.'[79] In this way, Taumoepeau herself articulates the value and deep importance of cultural activism and climate justice within climate crisis discourse being led by and defined by Oceanic practitioners who are able to perform as a 'voice of our ocean.'[80]

With Tait and Mangioni's readings of *Repatriate* and with Taumoepeau's own definition of Great Ocean/Pacific artists who perform as a 'voice for their ocean,' this work is an example of the hydro-artistic method of submerging. As a performer, she becomes a body of water, that connects the water in the tank to the ocean water, and she shares the water as a space of familial, cultural and social home. *Repatriate* is a distinctive alarm bell for impending sea-level rise and simultaneously a performance that demonstrates the embodied connection of the artist and the ocean. The work is an outstanding example of submerging as a hydro-artistic method as the rising water acts as the agitator to Taumoepeau's dance, and in this way her collaboration with the water, as oceanic connector, enlivens the artwork as a balancing act of grief, loss and resistance.

Each of the artists presented here perform the hydro-artistic method of submerging in unique and diverse ways. No two artists approach the method with the same style or form, instead they bring their artistic expertise to my recurring question of *Who has known the ocean in the Hydrocene?* There is a social relationality with the singular ocean that each artist performs, at times through embodied performance such as in the work of Latai Taumoepeau and Signe Johannessen, or for others such as Sissel M. Bergh that engage the use of artistic materials like canvas or costume, to find ways of thinking with the ocean through submerging. In the works presented in this section, submerging as a hydro-artistic method has the potential for audiences to reconsider the state of human–ocean relations in the climate crisis, not as something to be viewed with land-based bias, but to be experienced from the inside out.

Renavigating human–ocean relations in the Hydrocene

In this chapter, I departed from and adapted the question initially proposed by Rachel Carson, *Who has known the ocean in the Hydrocene?* I draw together artistic and theoretical approaches for knowing the ocean, including Melody Jue who speaks about the possibility for imagining the ocean differently to the current dominant narratives that see the ocean as a dumping ground and inexhaustible resource for human consumption. Jue proposes that there is potential in imagining the ocean differently, and in telling 'refreshing' ocean stories to facilitate care for the ocean that sustains life on Earth.

While Jue does not directly mention artists as those who can enact this form of imagination, I, as a curatorial theorist, know that this is what artists do. Artists are world builders, who think and imagine differently, sharing their unique imaginations with audiences through the presentation and construction of their work. Here, I am reminded of Amitav Ghosh's proposition that I draw on in Chapter 1, where he insists that the climate crisis is a not only ecological crisis but also a crisis of collective imagination. Ghosh and Jue call for a crucial transformation of imagination to address the climate crisis. In the Hydrocene, these imaginative transformations are devised, developed and delivered by artists who think with water to delve into new imaginaries of care-based and planetary thinking. The Ocean chapter has laid out the importance and potential of learning from the hydro-artistic methods of the ocean – tiding, waving, submerging – that the vital artists of the Hydrocene propose and deliver, and through which they seek to re-imagine human–ocean relations.

There has never been a more urgent time to readjust human–ocean relations: the climate crisis is here, waters are rising and there is an urgent need to imagine and care for the ocean differently. What would it be to practise and experiment with the hydro-artistic methods presented here, those of tiding, waving and submerging as convivial relations? In what ways can we know the ocean differently by enacting forms of artistic collaboration with the singular ocean? The artists of the Ocean

chapter Pontus Pettersson, Signe Johannessen, Sissel M. Bergh, Angela Tiatia, Clare Milledge, Talia Smith, Latai Taumoepeau and Megan Cope, each perform these methods to imagine the ocean differently and tell refreshing ocean stories as a site of shared realities, origins and futures. Through knowing the ocean intimately, there is a possibility to change the anthropocentric logics of domination and utility that underpin most human–ocean relations, and to move towards more caring and ethical modes of operating.

Notes

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6

FOG

From the immense singular ocean, the hydrological cycle moves upwards, outwards and downwards through the looping process of evaporation and precipitation. Here we enter the drifting world of water as vapour and fog.

In the previous chapter, the ocean was considered as a singular body of water that provided artistic and curatorial nourishment to the artists and curators who engaged in thinking with it. In this chapter, under the collective title of fog, I move from the deep ocean to the vaporous state of water as fog. I propose the hydro-artistic method of misting and how this method relates to cloudy bodies of water that form inconclusive edges and parameters. In the theory of the Hydrocene, artists use fog to sense water as vapour and develop an awareness of the climate crisis as internalised through embodied misty encounters and social formations.

Artistic relationality between vaporous bodies of water

In this chapter, I propose and investigate the hydro-artistic method of misting as an artistic relationality between vaporous bodies of water and participation-based artistic actions.[1] In understanding misting as a hydro-artistic method, I draw on the writing of theorist Ifor Duncan's concept of 'Occult Meteorology.'[2] Duncan's work sees mist as an embodied material that carries imprints of the technological and toxic age of the climate crisis and considers mist as a matter that not only disorientates through reduced visibility, but is also a tool for 'reorientation.'

A prominent example of this reorientation by fog comes from interdisciplinary design studio Diller Scofidio + Renfro's work *Blur Building* which set a precedent for designing an experiential art and architectural structure with mist.

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The piece was conceived and built for the Swiss Expo 2001 and the makers describe it as 'an architecture of atmosphere – a fog mass resulting from natural and manmade forces.'[3] The damp building sat atop Lake Neuchâtel from which water was pumped, filtered and then released as a fine mist through 35,000 high-pressure nozzles surrounding the whole building. Controlled by a weather sensing system which regulated water pressure according to the immediate weather conditions, the building appeared and disappeared according to the levels of humidity and other environmental factors. This sensitivity to the local environment uses misty water as the key for art and architecture to recalibrate in the environment. Through a deep collaboration with mist, the pavilion disarms art's apparent distance from the environment that contains it, and, through thinking with water, perform the interconnectedness of nature-culture on which Haraway elaborates.

Blur Building takes the concept of embodied architecture to a new level, where the filtered lake water can also be consumed by the audience who take part in the spectacle of entering the foggy mass. The architects observe, 'Water is not only the site and primary material of the building; it is also a culinary pleasure. The public can drink the building.'[4] This image is an example of the sort of embodied practice and way of relating to the climate crisis that the Hydrocene understands in terms of hydro-artistic methods. In this architectural experience, drinking occurs in two

FIGURE 6.1 Diller Scofidio & Renfro, *Blur Building*, Swiss Expo 2002. Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland. Photo: Norbert Aepli. Shared through the Creative Commons Attribution 2.5 Generic license, © Norbert Aepli.

ways simultaneously: the audience drink in the building, and the building drinks in the public. Through precipitation and evaporation, on a micro-scale, those who visit this foggy site become materially enmeshed with the atmosphere they inhabited, and there is a mutual cross-contamination of vapours and waters, or what Leslie calls, the atmospheres 'we and it'[5] co-produce.

The makers of the pavilion describe the way 'visual and acoustic references are erased'[6] in the building, explaining that *Blur Building* strives towards a non-visual experience in this circumstance: 'Blur is decidedly low-definition. In this exposition pavilion there is nothing to see but our dependence on vision itself. It is an experiment in de-emphasis on an environmental scale.'[7] This attempt to 'de-emphasise' is a watery understanding of the possibilities of fog specifically. Fog is able to de-emphasise as the water vapour emerges, envelops and lingers in the eye of the audience, itself a watery body that can also be described as misty.

This de-emphasis is part of the hydro-artistic method of misting, which is the focus of this chapter. Misting as a hydro-artistic method is a way of using fog to reorient and redirect the audience in their experience and to experience the hydrological cycle as an embodied material cycle. The way that *Blur Building* works to de-emphasise the vision of the audience who experience it, relates to the way eco-philosopher Timothy Morton describes the climate crisis as a 'wicked problem,' and a 'hyperobject.'[8] Morton describes the climate crisis as a situation beyond human cognition, a hyperobject that 'massively out scales us.'[9] This can be understood metaphorically as the blurring of climate realities. In understanding the climate crisis as a hyperobject, Morton uses the watery example of a metaphorical iceberg, of which only the tip can be viewed while the rest is hidden from sight. In this way, the full extent of the crisis is unseeable as a singular problem with causality; it is dynamic and shifting in temporalities and relations, in the same way that *Blur Building* is hidden from sight by the presence of the dampening mist.

In the Hydrocene, the hydro-artistic method of misting is centrally defined by the work of distinguished Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya. I specifically focus on her Australia-based works across two editions of the Biennale of Sydney and her permanent installation at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra which is a reiteration of her original piece for the 1976 Biennale of Sydney. Alongside Nakaya's prominent body of work with mist, I also look to Australian artist Emily Parsons-Lord's misty installation *Things fall apart* (2017) and Janet Laurence's site-specific public work *In the Shadows* (2000) as examples of misting as a hydro-artistic method. Alongside these Australian-based presentations, I look to the field of art and architecture with Olafur Eliasson's outdoor and museum-based works that engage fog as material. The focus of misting as a hydro-artistic method is the experience of 'reorientation' from within fog, where fog becomes a portal towards embodied and performative encounters.

Across the chapter, I focus on the compelling experience these artists create to think with water vapour in the act of misting and the possibilities for reorientation towards a heightened ecological sensitivity for the audience of these works. Each

of these examples of the hydro-artistic method of misting demonstrates artistic formulations for thinking with water vapour as a vibrant and sometimes elusive matter that has the potential to 'reorient' those who experience it. Here, the impetus to reorient differs from an obfuscation through exposure to fog. Instead of finding the fog, an obscuring force that encompasses and diverts direction, for Duncan the fog becomes a force of reorientation, a redirection enacted through fog. Here, there is a conceptual link back to the previously mentioned 'politics of disorientation,' which theorist Sara Ahmed argues for when considering a queer phenomenology that 'disrupts and reorders' relations.[10]

In the Hydrocene, there is an attempt for misting to challenge audiences towards 'reorientation'[11] and further to see 'weather as medium.'[12] Artist and theorist Janine Randerson proposed the term 'weather as medium' in her book of the same title, where she analysed a series of meteorological art projects that use weather or atmosphere as the main medium. Randerson's theory of weather as medium links contemporary pieces to older works including the live works from Fluxus. Her research into the art of weather as medium serves as a conceptual tool for the theory of the Hydrocene, as she proposes that meteorological art refers not only to artworks but extends also to social encounters with live weather. She describes that 'weather is a co-performer in my art making, and writing, along with meteorological scientists, activists and Indigenous stakeholders.'[13] In this holistic post-anthropocentric reading of the weather as co-performer in her work, I utilise Randerson's work as an entry point into the hydro-artistic method of misting with fog as an active co-performer in the works outlined in this case study.

Through the hydro-artistic methods of misting there is potential for audiences to experience mist as an embodied and performative material and a medium that reorients audiences to recognise themselves within the hydrological cycle. Misting as method elevates the idea that the water of the weather has its own material agency within the hydrological cycle, as evidenced by the nature of the medium itself. Finally, misting works to dismantle the notion of 'water as (only) weather' which I highlight as one of the pillars of the natural-cultural water crisis in Chapter 1.

Immersive misting towards ecological sensitivity with Fujiko Nakaya, Emily Parsons-Lord, Olafur Eliasson and Janet Laurence

The artists of the Fog chapter in the Hydrocene engage in a relationship with water vapours to create specific environments as places of transformation and immersive ecological sensitivity. Within the hydrological cycle, water as vapour presents the remarkable transformation through evaporation, transpiration, condensation and precipitation processes. These vapour-based states of water are challenging to define and can be elusive in containing or ordering. Similar to the states that the vapour-based water moves through, the artists of the Hydrocene who make work with mist also tend to move through states of evaporation, transpiration, condensation and precipitation and their work enacts transformation and registers the toxicity of the climate crisis.

Here, I draw on the work of political aesthetics theorist Esther Leslie who advises that,

> We have to learn to negotiate in the fog, to separate the froth from the substance, to turn foam to protection, not suffocating. We have to find accords with matter, new metaphorical echoes in what is so unsubstantial but so fatal.[14]

She calls for different lenses to sense the fog and by extension mist, to feel 'what atmospheres we – and it – are producing.'[15] In her call to think with mist as dually atmosphere and political context, she articulates the need for a reorientation towards materially engaged practices. Here, the artists of the fog chapter in the Hydrocene offer these models for learning to 'negotiate' in the mist through their development of the vital and engaging hydro-artistic method of misting.

In the hydro-artistic method of misting, the artists Fujiko Nakaya, Emily Parsons-Lord, Olafur Eliasson and Janet Laurence use artificially constructed water-based mists to create intimate environments where audiences experience their environment as altered. Within the mist, there is a possibility for transformation and what Ifor Duncan calls 'reorientation.' These artists do not make work 'about' mist or fog in a specific setting; instead they engage in a relationship with the material quality of water as vapour and create environments and installations where the mist performs as a central protagonist in their works. Some artists, such as Fujiko Nakaya and Janet Laurence, have developed works in public spaces, where the artificial mist creates micro-climates and readjusts local water cycles as a flow-on effect of the introduced mist. For others, like Emily Parsons-Lord and Olafur Eliasson, the artificial mist is introduced to a specific site for a short period to build immersive and experiential encounters with mist.

In the context of misting as a hydro-artistic method, the permanent site-specific work *In the Shadow* (2000) by Australian multi-disciplinary artist Janet Laurence is a prime example. Laurence is an artist who has contributed significantly to the development of eco-aesthetics in an Australian context. The public work is mist-based and sees the installation of artificial mist and regenerative planting of casuarina trees and bullrushes along 100 metres of creek. It includes a filtration system for the previously toxic creek water and installing stainless steel 'wands' that release a fog that envelopes the area of the creek and transforms the environment through cooling. The work was commissioned for Olympic Park, part of Homebush Bay in Sydney, and installed along a section of creek crossed by three bridges.

In the Shadow responds to the site's transformation from a contaminated industrial zone site to a new 'green' zone. According to the artist, the work highlights the importance of water in urban regeneration. On her website, she writes about how the work aimed to create a poetic alchemical zone as a metaphor for the actual transformation of Homebush Bay.[16] The work is also discussed on the *Curating Cities* database of eco-critical public art; here, author Lucy Ainsworth writes that Laurence wanted to create an 'anti-monument' for the Olympic site, and to create

an alchemical transformation as an organic, living zone that sat in opposition to the highly constructed and controlled architecture of the Olympic site.[17] Over the years since the work was first installed, the area of the creek has flourished with the casuarinas and bulrushes growing and native water-hens returning to the site. Laurence's work with *In the Shadow* acts as a misty 'anti-monument' in that it does not only cater to an anthropocentric experience or gaze: instead the work adjusts and develops a micro-climate within the Homebush creek which feeds into the local ecology.

Curator Rachel Kent has written extensively about Laurence's career, which dates back to the 1980s. Kent charts the development of Laurence's body of work that engages with the living world and the creeping realities of the climate crisis as it took shape simultaneously alongside the artist's practice and interests. According to Kent,

> Empathy lies at the core of Laurence's multi-dimensional practice, expressed in her concern for, and nurture of, the fragile objects and creatures within the works … her work speaks to essential questions around reciprocity, understanding and co-existence: the fundamentals of survival and growth in a perilous age.[18]

Kent highlights these artistic themes and the ways that the artist practises modes of care through her multi-sensorial pieces. This notion of care that comes with the expanded curatorial framework that Kent explicated around Laurence's work resonates with the notion of the curatorial as caretaking that is an important element of the curatorial theory of the Hydrocene. Through its focus of water, the Hydrocene

FIGURE 6.2 Janet Laurence, *In the Shadow*, 2000. Olympic Park, Sydney. Photo: Patrick Bingham Hall. Courtesy of the artist.

also deepens this connection: working with the material agency of water in the hydro-artistic method of misting Laurence materially cares for the damaged environment of Homebush through the action of the artwork.

While Kent does not directly discuss the misty work *In the Shadow*, she does posit that public projects and site-specific commissions, such as her public pieces *Four Pillars* (1992) for the Australian War Memorial and *Edge of the Trees* (1995) commissioned for the opening of the Museum of Sydney, became a 'highly significant aspect of Laurence's practice through the 1990s and 2000s.' This redirection away from the dominant museum and gallery-focused art world is exemplified in the misty *In the Shadow*. Instead of performatively enacting an ecological sensibility in a museum setting, the work is situated within the creek itself as a fog-based ephemeral performance of transformation. Over time, as the trees have grown, the creek has become a place of watery rejuvenation. Through the hydro-artistic method of misting, Laurence redirects the audience towards the possibility of art to act as a healing and restorative force in the face of damaged ecologies.

Alongside Laurence, the work of fellow Australian artist, Emily Parsons-Lord is another example of the hydro-artistic method of misting. Parsons-Lord's body of work deals with environmental concerns, often focusing on air as a surface that collects 'invisible monuments of our anthropogenic climate crisis.'[19] Like Laurence, Parsons-Lord works to include plants as agents in her work. These invisible monuments often involve water, for example, in her video work *Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever* (2021),[20] which is included in the Ice chapter of this book. Her work is a kind of alchemy and material engagement with the climate crisis as part of the contemporary times.

In the work *Things Fall Apart* (2017) staged in the former train sheds at Carriageworks, Sydney, Parsons-Lord takes full advantage of the immense factory-style space to install a twelve-metre-high waterfall of mist laced with *methyl jasmonate,* a pheromone released by plants in distress. At the base of the mist, waterfall was an eight-metre-wide shallow pool with a wooden platform designed for a single audience member to walk out and experience the mist alone. In breathing in the vaporous-vegetal mist, the audience member also chemically inhales the plant's distress call. In this work, the artist employs misting as a kind of trojan horse or with a slippery intention. She enables the audience to experience a potentially awe-inspiring moment, sensing themselves beneath the waterfall, and simultaneously inhaling the alarm bell.

Both Parsons-Lord and Laurence have committed their artistic practice to the pursuit of reorientation to the dominant discourses of the climate crisis. As Parsons-Lord states, 'My practice addresses the urgency of human agency through the materials of the climate crisis'[21] and it is through this materially attuned practice, and specifically the material and material agency of water, that these artists enact 'misting' as a hydro-artistic method. In these exemplary pieces, both Parsons-Lord and Laurence seek to build transformative experiential environments for the audience, and to develop the potential to expose new ways of understanding the hydrological cycle from within the climate crisis.

FIGURE 6.3 Emily Parsons-Lord, *Things Fall Apart*, Installation view, 2017. Part of *Liveworks*, Carriageworks, Sydney, 2017. Photo: Lucy Parakhina. Courtesy of the artist.

As with Janet Laurence, Japanese artist Fujiko Nakaya has also dedicated her entire artistic practice to eco-aesthetics, specifically studies of fog. Nakaya's significant contribution began in the early 1970s when she first engineered her now signature experiential water vapour installations.[22] Within the Hydrocene, Nakaya's work plays a vital role in Australian imaginaries of fog in art. Her first major commission of her fog installations was for the 1976 Biennale of Sydney where Artistic Director Thomas G. McCullough invited her to produce an immersive installation with fog in public space. With ingenuity, she transformed the parkland of Sydney Domain into a clouded landscape. In reviews, this iteration of the work, entitled *Fog Sculpture #94768: Earth Talk,* dominates the reception of the 1976 biennale.[23] The work elaborated upon and extended the capacity of both conceptual art and environmental art of the day. By manipulating water in this way, Nakaya covered the Domain gardens, between the stately Art Gallery of New South Wales and the encroaching CBD, with a gentle portal of experiential mist as art. In contrast to the more traditional methods of dealing with water in public space – think highly controlled fountains and sculptured waterways – Nakaya's ephemeral work was intimately connected and subject to the environment in which it was shown. In Nakaya's body of work with mist, the artwork is part of the environment, rather than something placed in addition to it. Her work at the 1976 Biennale of Sydney is an important artistic precursor for the theory of the Hydrocene, where water acts with agency, and is sometimes considered an artistic collaborator in the work.[24]

Following on from the biennale, the work *Fog Sculpture #94768: Earth Talk* was commissioned to be part of the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, where it was staged as a permanent addition to the outdoor sculpture garden. Under the new title *Foggy Wake in a Desert: An Ecosphere* the work remains installed today. The artist describes the work as

> an interactive sculpture created in response to the meteorological and topographical conditions of its environment. Moulded by the atmosphere and sculpted by wind from moment to moment, its ever-changing form is a probe in real time of the place where it is created.[25]

Since its installation in 1982, the piece has created a micro-climate in the arid gardens of Canberra, and within the installation moisture-seeking ecologies of plants and creatures thrive. In this way, the artist collaborates with water vapour to create

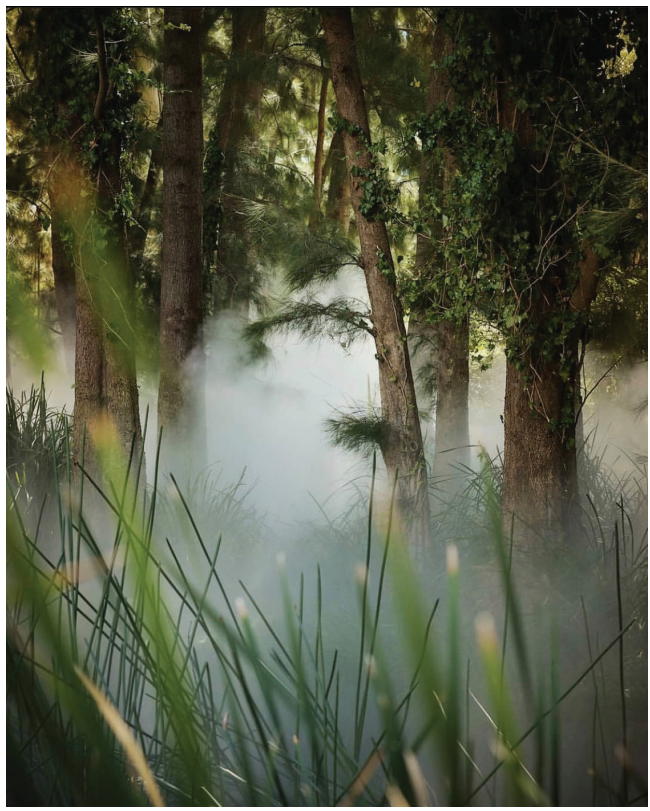

FIGURE 6.4 Fujiko Nakaya, *Foggy wake in a desert: An ecosphere* also known as *Fog sculpture #94925*, 1982. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Photo: Richie Southerton. Courtesy of the photographer.

a kind of portal or condensed time. Inside this misty portal, the senses of the audience and the environment are both transformed by the presence of mist. In both *Fog Sculpture #94768: Earth Talk* and *Foggy Wake in a Desert: An Ecosphere*, the experience has the potential to move audiences from looking to feeling. The dominance of visuality is replaced by the enveloping artificially formed mist, sensed through taste, smell and touch and characterised by a lack of vision.

At the invitation of the 2012 Biennale of Sydney, Nakaya returned to stage a new edition of her now signature fog works on Cockatoo Island. In this iteration, using SUS fog lines with 1000 nozzles, Nakaya's fog this time encompassed the striking cliff wall, a small walkway and the entrance to the main exhibition building. Entitled *Living Chasm – Cockatoo Island* (2012), this new edition of Nakaya's fog installation reinforces a watery feminist materialist reading of the work, where fog acts as a cyclical, material archive, carrying and changing the environment it inhabits, and at the same time carrying and changing the audience who experience the work, by directly engulfing them within it.

The returning quality of water, especially mist, is mimicked here in the returning of Nakaya to the Biennale of Sydney in 2012. The 2012 presentation of her misty installation is understood as water perpetually reforming itself in relation to the situated ecology in which the mist both takes part and forms itself. This ephemeral sensitivity offers the audience an embodied experience of watery thinking. In this deployment of mist as material archive, which is another form of the hydro-artistic method of archiving, Nakaya is the formative artist who has developed the original misty methodology for thinking with water, art and climate in eco-aesthetics. Her artistic influence is felt strongly in contemporary practice of mist in art and architecture.

There is substantial literature researching and analysing the artistic impact of Nakaya's grand body of work with mist since 1970. The most pertinent readings of her work include aforementioned theorist and artist Janine Randerson and her analysis of Nakaya's 'dematerialised environmental art'[26] in relation to the work of Mieko Shiomi's performance event *Wind Music* (1963), Yoko Ono's *Sky TV* (1966) and the score *Cloud Music* (1974–1979) by Fluxus artists Robert Watts, David Behrman and Bob Diamond. In *Sensing the Weather,* Randerson looks at how these artists activate human–technology–nature relations. According to Randerson, these artists move beyond restrictive disciplinary boundaries to redirect water vapour technology including vapour piping, video analysers and circuitry towards artistic uses. Drawing from chemistry, physics, cybernetics and information theory, these artists have presented radical reworkings of mist, and from her analysis of these works Randerson identifies 'an emergent ecopolitics' where artists and audiences co-exist in constant exchange with the weather through an engagement with the senses. In Randerson's reading of Fujiko's permanent fog-garden in Canberra, she highlights the pioneering quality of her development of artificial water-based mist in the 1970s and the familial link to her physicist father, Dr Ukichiro Nakaya, whose influential work developed

artificial snow crystals thirty years prior to his daughter's work on another ephemeral weather phenomenon. Randerson's critical reading of Nakaya's fog work links to her larger book on meteorological art and the idea of 'weather as medium' in Nakaya and others' work.

Correspondingly, media theorist Yuji Sone writes convincingly about Nakaya's body of work with fog to accentuate 'the embodied experience of the spectator, giving rise to a new form of participation and ecological awareness.'[27] For Sone, the artificially produced mist in Nakaya's work leads paradoxically to a reflective moment in the audience, who encounter the transience of the 'natural-cultural' mist environments. In her work, Sone argues for the uniqueness of Nakaya's artistic philosophy and specifically the importance of Japanese post-minimalism and process art in her body of work.[28] Sone carefully describes how Nakaya's body of work does not fit within established eco-aesthetic definitions; for example, she writes that Nakaya's work should not be classed as only post-minimalist in the vein of earthworks of the 1960s, nor as an eco-activism. Instead, she correlates to the 'ephemeral' and subtle work of artists Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy and Michael Singer who, like Nakaya, create site-specific arrangements that enhance sensory awareness. For Sone, Nakaya's body of work transports the audience towards a possibility for immersive and embodied experiences of the environment, even in the artificial construction.

Another reading of Nakaya's body of work with fog comes in the work of scholars Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan and Edward Scheer who propose Nakaya's fog art as sculptural pieces that bring together visual arts, architecture and performance as a form of 'new media dramaturgy.'[29] For these scholars, Nakaya's works invite a sense of the uncanny in their audience as the works are 'constantly dispersing.'[30] The authors reference an interview with the artist from 1978 with Billy Klüver when Nakaya said, 'Fog is very responsive to its environment and nature collaborates in creating the work of art … Fog responds constantly to its own surroundings, revealing and concealing the features of the environment.'[31] In this quote, Nakaya herself names the relationship to fog as a form of collaboration, and it is in this collaborative working with water that I draw the relationship between Nakaya's work to the Hydrocene and the hydro-artistic method of misting.

The artist reiterates this notion of her collaboration with the elements in an interview in *ArtForum* from 2014 when she discusses a piece conceived for an island in the Swedish archipelago in 1974. She talks about the way the fog installations interacted with the forces and features of the island, explaining the presence of the fog as key to revealing the island, rather than hiding the island in fog; the fog exposes and reveals the elements that are already in place:

> My fog sculpture is, in a sense, negative sculpture – a negative of the atmosphere. The atmosphere itself gives the fog its shape, movement, and volume. The fog disappears if the conditions or air currents change. It's a collaboration with the air.[32]

My reading of the work differs from the previously mentioned scholarship into Nakaya's work in that I see her work as an example of the hydro-artistic method of misting. In the Hydrocene, the fog acts as a kind of experiential portal or temporary zone, where, through the hydro-artistic method of misting, the audience has the chance to sense the hydrological cycle as embodied. This is especially relevant during the water crisis where dominant understandings of 'water as resource' must be radically reconfigured. Nakaya's significant body of work with fog is a pioneer and precursor of the Hydrocene. Her use of the hydro-artistic method of misting is one of the most striking examples of thinking with water within art, and highlights the relationality between art and water. In Nakaya's prolific fog installations, she forms uncanny environments and offers potentially transportive experiences for the audience within the artificial fog of nature-culture. The artist performs a watery alchemy towards the transformation of the audience and the environment in which the work is shown. This sense of circularity where fog returns and through the hydrological cycle material waters reconnect over eons of time is performed in the poetic gesture of the artist's misting installations.

Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson has used fog as a material to expose his audiences to in multiple works across his career, including in his site-specific *Yellow Fog* (1998) installed outside a building in Vienna where a yellow fog emerges at dusk, and the metal sculpture *Fog assembly* (2016), which sees a circular metal

FIGURE 6.5 Olafur Eliasson, *Fog assembly*, 2016. Steel, water, nozzles, pump system, 4.5 m, ø 29 m, Installation view, Palace of Versailles, 2016. Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles © 2016 Olafur Eliasson Photo: Anders Sune Berg.

sculpture emit a hazy water vapour. In both these works, the fog gives a sculptural, aesthetic dimension to the outdoor works, with the fog being a materially lively and unpredictable architectural element.

Eliasson also utilises fog as a more directly embodied material in two experiential works, *Der blinde passager* (2010) and *Feelings are facts* (2010). In both these works, Eliasson has created architectural settings where the audience moves through restricted spaces filled with artificial fog. In these works, Eliasson enacts the hydro-artistic method of misting as he engages fog as a tool of reorientation towards other senses for the audience. By moving his work inside the museum, the agency of the fog is more pronounced, as it actively reorients and redirects audience members. The title of the work *Der blinde passager* adds another watery dimension as the title is the Danish term for a 'stowaway,' hinting towards the foggy experience as a way to navigate the feeling of being out of place, the figure of the nautical stowaway hiding or escaping in the mist.

In *Der blinde passager* and *Feelings are facts*, the audience has the opportunity to experience what theorist Randerson calls 'weather as medium.' Speaking about Eliasson's Tate Turbine Hall installation *The Weather Project* (2003), she writes, 'Eliasson's practice also has intrinsic value as a meditation on the perceptual effects of light and the interconnected nature of the weather and ourselves. The artwork's politics might be understood as working internally through the body.'[33] This sense of politics working internally names the embodied nature of *The Weather Project* and his later works *Der blinde passager* and *Feelings are facts,* which offer the audience a conceptual and experiential entry point into the hydrological cycle.

Returning to Duncan, who sees mist as an embodied weather material carrying imprints of the technological and toxic age of the climate crisis, we encounter his suggestion to read the Venetian fog, known in the Venetian dialect as 'caigo,' as a case study for reorientation. He writes of the embodied experiences of passing through water vapours as ways of 'awakening to the occult of climate catastrophe.'[34] Duncan understands the Venetian 'caigo' as an example of the 'meteorological occult,' a term he proposes to underline the way mist is 'embodied and requires reorientation to the meaning of what is sensed in the fog of things, an occult awakening to the embodied continuities of climate degradation.' In terms of the Hydrocene, this forced 'reorientation' within mist is an encounter with the hydrological cycle. While Duncan draws on literature and cinema for most of his misty reference points, in the Hydrocene theory, I focus on misting as a hydro-artistic method developed by contemporary art practitioners such as in the work of Nakaya and Laurence, for whom fog is a kind of sensing device, one that is embodied and embodying. The experience of these artworks can act as a reorientation within the water crisis, with the potential to internalise the water crisis through these artistic and embodied encounters.

The reorientation of fog

In the video work *Cloud Studies* (2019), the collective Forensic Architecture extrapolate the multiple ways that today's clouds are 'both environmental and political' and insist that 'we, the inhabitants of toxic clouds, must find new ways of resistance.'[35] The film opens with a story of a man whose home has been bombed, who recalls breathing in the dust of his home, his life inhaled as a toxic cloud. This theme of the toxicity of fog is an important and reoccuring element within the chapter. While the artists of the Fog chapter offer their audience a chance to experience misty installations, and to sense the water cycle as embodied, there is no denying that from within the climate crisis, and specifically the natural-cultural water crisis, to experience mist is to experience the ways toxicity, pollution and their unequal effects across lines of oppression are carried, repeated and reinforced through the hydrological cycle. In this age of the Hydrocene, where all waters are implicated into the current crisis, there is no way to experience precipitation, evaporation or other vaporous aqueous modes as neutral or unaffected by the compounding inequalities of the crisis.

In this way, the hydro-artistic method of misting can be misrepresented as a gentle or soft experiential process, where the audience can sink into the blinding mist as a form of escapism or release. However, in the context of the climate crisis, I argue that even if that was the original fascination or intention of the artists, for example Fujiko Nakaya, at this point the urgency of the natural-cultural water crisis is such that the reading of mist and the experiencing of micro-climates has fundamentally shifted. This reflects a greater shift within eco-aesthetics that has moved from purely aesthetic interventions in the landscape under the terrestrially based title of 'land art' to the more complex term eco-aesthetics which encompasses art made in collaboration with water, air, pollutants and other agents.

To think with fog and enact misting as a hydro-artistic method is to centre on water as transformation. There is no stagnant mist: it is always in dialogue with the elements around it, including the movement of toxins and pollutants. Mimicking the cyclical nature of water as always returning, misting is a process of transformation. In the Fog, artists engage with vaporous bodies of water to form experiential and embodied situations such as in Parson-Lords' foggy waterfall or Eliasson's architecturally trapped fogs. Semi-controlled misty environments such as Scofidio + Renfro's blurry pavilion or Laurence's misty creek bed form micro-climates that allow the hydrological cycle, including toxicity, to be made visible. In the hydro-artistic method of misting, the audience has the possibility to consume and be consumed by the fog.

The ability for fog to de-emphasise and reorient are key tools that can be utilised in climate justice, as ways of moving in, through and towards the hydrological cycle as companion, rather than resource. In the broader scale of the Hydrocene as disruptive, conceptual epoch, misting becomes a tool of the curatorial that disrupts and reorients towards the hydrological cycle in an embodied manner.

Notes

1 With acknowledgement that a section of this 'misting' method is also reproduced in a special issue of anthropology journal, Oceania, edited by Linda Connor, Sally Babidge and Ute Eickelkamp, 'Water Futures in Australia', 2023.
2 I Duncan, 'The Meteorological Occult: Submergences in the Venetian Fog', *Lagoonscapes*, vol. 1, 2021.
3 E Diller & R Scofidio, 'Blur Building', in *Blur Building Swiss Expo,* 2002.
4 Diller & Scofidio.
5 E Leslie, 'Fog, Froth and Foam: Insubstantial Matters in Substantive Atmospheres' in *Electric Brine*, Berlin, Archive Press, 2021, pp. 86–113.
6 Diller & Scofidio.
7 Diller & Scofidio.
8 T Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
9 Ibid., Morton.
10 S Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2006.
11 Duncan.
12 J Randerson, *Weather as Medium: Toward a Meteorological Art*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2018.
13 Ibid., p. xvi.
14 Leslie.
15 Ibid., p. 113.
16 See artist website, J Laurence, 2020.
17 L Ainsworth, 'In the Shadow – Janet Laurence Sydney, Australia', in *Curating Cities*, 2000.
18 R Kent, 'After Nature: Janet Laurence', in *Museum of Contemporary Art Australia*, 2019.
19 Ibid.
20 See artist website, E Parsons-Lord, 'Emily Parsons-Lord', 2021.
21 Ibid.
22 Y Sone, 'Fujiko Nakaya's Fog Performance and Embodied "Nature"', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol. 39, 2019, 165–176.
23 L Ward, 'Where Earth Meets Sky, Find Fujiko Nakaya', in *National Gallery of Australia*, 2019.
24 See P Eckersall, H Grehan & E Scheer, *New Media Dramaturgy: Performance, Media and New-Materialism*, New Dramaturgies, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. In this text, the authors expand the idea of new material thinking within dramaturgy and suggest non-human collaboration as part of this movement.
25 Ward.
26 Randerson.
27 Sone.
28 Ibid.
29 Eckersall, Grehan & Scheer.
30 Ibid.
31 Artist quoted from Eckersall, Grehan & Scheer.
32 M Kuo & J Rose, 'Atmospheric Disturbance', *Art Forum International*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2014, 131–132.
33 Randerson, p. 93.
34 Duncan.
35 E Weizman, 'Cloud Studies', in *Forensic Architecture*, 2020.

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7

ICE

> Leaving the misty movement of fog, here we enter ice where the frozen dominates, as the hydrological cycle freezes and thaws as a deep-time process. In ice, the accelerated melting cryosphere becomes embodied and redefines itself within the hydro-social cycle of the swiftly warming planet.

Acts of embodiment in a melting world

In the video essay *Subatlantic* (2015) made by the Swiss artist and theorist Ursula Biemann, the science of geology mixes with climatology in a science fiction story of human history. The work is set in the 'Subatlantic' period, that is, the latest climatic phase of the Holocene. In the video, a scientist makes observations of melting glaciers, while the footage shows inverted icescapes. Writing about the video essay, Biemann concludes that

> Global warming, with its undisciplined disturbance, interpolates us to engage artistic and scientific paradigms in a conversation and let it infiltrate our imagination and practice. To think with and through art can unravel the role it might play in this process.[1]

This chapter follows Biemann's call for art that can dramatically and deeply 'infiltrate our imagination' of the climate crisis. It charts the work of eco-visionary artists thinking with ice in the Hydrocene and the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing. Rather than making work 'about' ice, these artists actively co-produce or collaborate with ice to form intimate art encounters. These artists are thinking with ice as a rich material for coming closer to the climate crisis and expanding the discourse of climate realities and imaginaries. This expansion of the material and conceptual

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FIGURE 7.1 Ursula Biemann, still from film *Subatlantic*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist.

engagement with ice in the Hydrocene seeks to recognise water's agency and centrality in the climate crisis.

Unfreezing is the central hydro-artistic method of the Ice Chapter and tells the story of artists who use the act of melting ice to transpose materially focused climate narratives that deal with time, temporality and the severe alteration of environments. Unfreezing differs from melting, as unfreezing hints more at the 'unnatural' melting taking place due to the warming planet. Melting suggests a process of seasonal change, whereas unfreezing aims to highlight how the rapidly melting glaciers and ice are part of the climate crisis.

From an Oceania context, the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing is seen in a materially focused way in both the kinetic ice installations of Quandamooka artist Megan Cope entitled *Currents III* (2021) and in the video work *Every Essence of Your Beloved One is Captured Forever* (2021) from artist Emily Parsons-Lord. Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen's performance *Washing River* staged in 2014 in nipaluna/Hobart is another example of unfreezing as a hydro-artistic method in the Australian context where the audience is integral in their active engagement with the 'unfreezing' as a hydro-artistic method. Finally, artist Latai Taumoepeau returns in this chapter, where I deliver an in-depth analysis of her performance with ice *i-Land X-isle* (2012) and critique of the work as an example of performance that engages with a watery embodiment as a form of unfreezing and resisting as hydro-artistic methods.

Artists in the Nordic region have used ice as a collaborative partner in thinking with the climate crisis in the intimate ice relationalities in artist Katja Aglert's score-based performance *Winter Event – antifreeze* (2009), in the icy mountain side work of art duo Bigert & Bergström and in the *Ice Watch* installation by artists Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing. These works enact the hydro-artistic method

of unfreezing in contrasting modes, highlighting differing vulnerabilities and narratives of human–ice relations. American artist Roni Horn's installation of ancient glacial water samples in Iceland entitled *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* (2007) is also examined alongside Aotearoa New Zealand artist Janine Randerson's video work *Waiho, Retreat* (2017) which shows glacial meltwater retreating from the River Waiho as 'a sensitive barometer of climatic shifts in a warming world.'[2] These works were made at the antipodes of each other, Iceland and Aotearoa New Zealand, and yet both work with unfreezing glaciers as a way to 'infiltrate our imagination'[3] of the narratives of the climate crisis. These works are an an urgent reminder that water collectively connects and disrupts on the warming planet. In this final watery chapter, eco-visionary artists engage with ice in intimate and transformative ways to bring the climate crisis closer, to sense the crisis as embodied and the planetary as part of the everyday through the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing.

The archive of ice

Ice has often been used in art in the form of constructing ice sculptures and allowing them to melt. For example, Francis Alÿs's *Paradox of Praxis 1*, David Buckland's projections onto icebergs in the *Burning Ice* series (2004) and Lita Albuquerque's arctic installations in *Stellar Axis Constellation* (2006). While these works include ice as a core material, they are not examples of the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing as in these work ice still performs for the gaze of the artist and audience, rather than acting as an artistic agent or collaborator. For example, in David Buckland's projections of words onto icebergs, the ice performs the role of a metaphorically rich background rather than acting with agency. Similarly, in Lita Albuquerque's large-scale photographs which document vast Arctic scenes dotted with colourful yet sparse installations, the ice is a muted landscape, rather than a material being actively with a sense of agency in the work.

Scholar Natalie S. Loveless gives an excellent account of these kinds of works with ice as an aesthetic abstraction that seeks to use ice to speak 'about' ideas of time, human agency or endurance rather than ice itself performing these questions.[4] Loveless is interested in how ice does not *represent* ideas about time and transformation, instead she argues the ice itself tells these stories and has the potential to reorient the audience to different ecological accountability. Loveless focuses on the durational performance works of American-based artist Marilyn Arsem, specifically her work with ice *Oceans Rising* (2008) and *Evaporation* (2008). In the work *Ocean Rising*, Arsem sat blindfolded for around five hours in an outdoor performance, holding a disk of solid ice in her bare hands. Over the duration of the performance, the ice melted onto the ground and when the ice had fully transformed the work ended. For *Evaporation*, Arsem again sits without movement for around eight hours, this time staring at an evaporating bowl of water. The works are reminiscent of Fluxus-style performance scores that revolved around bearing witness to the elements, often water.

Loveless alludes to the way these two performances invite reflection on the relationship between time and ice. She writes:

> Water is the *sine qua non* of life. The life we know requires water. Ice is, of course, frozen water. Unlike nearly every other element, however, when water gets cold and turns into ice, because of the way it crystallizes, it takes up more space rather than less. And, as it takes up space, it takes up time. Ice is an archive: Organisms that are living (for example, bacteria) can be frozen; Antarctican ice is an archive of life on Antarctica when Antarctica was not where and how it now is. Ice time tells the story of multiple times simultaneously. When ice unfreezes these organisms come to life and tell the story of a time–space long past and far away. As does water.[5]

Loveless' description of ice as an archive, storyteller and taking up more space than liquid water, and by extension more time, is a generative starting point for thinking of ice in the Hydrocene. Here, Loveless also uses the term 'unfreezes,' which I read as a linguistic distinction of unfreezing as a less 'natural' occurrence than the familiar terms of melt or thaw. While Loveless focuses on ice and time, I draw inspiration from her work in thinking through the possibilities of ice as a storyteller in art. This kind of transformational work with ice is exemplary of the Ice chapter of the Hydrocene, and it is this kind of embodied and relational process with ice, such as that which Arsem undertakes, that defines the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing. Like Arsem, the critical artists who practise unfreezing in the Hydrocene actively find ways to collaborate with ice as a material that metaphorically and materially archives, connecting audiences to the climate crisis in an embroiled interplay between icy worlds and art.

Katja Aglert and the unfreezing of Fluxus

An exemplary artist of the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing is Swedish-based artist and transdisciplinary researcher Katja Aglert whose body of work engages performative acts, video, installation, sound and writing. Concerning Aglert's score-like performance works, I look to her substantial body of work entitled *Winter Event – antifreeze,* which she developed as performances, exhibitions, installations and a book between 2009 and 2015 with curator Stefanie Hessler.[6] This extensive project navigated between a redirection of the score by Fluxus artist George Brecht's *Winter Event*, as Aglert chose to reperform Brecht's score when she underwent a residency in the Arctic. Brecht's original score instructed the performer to hold ice in bare hands until the pieces of ice melted.

However, in Aglert's feminist re-working of the score, she attempts to perform the score in the Arctic and consistently fails at the task. The video of the attempts to hold the ice is dominated by failure. The scratchy noise of wind on the microphone accompanies the visuals of a lone figure, the artist, in an oversized puffy

FIGURE 7.2 Katja Aglert, still from film *Winter Event – antifreeze*, 2009–2009. Courtesy of the artist.

FIGURE 7.3 Katja Aglert, still from film *Winter Event – antifreeze*, 2009. Courtesy of the artist.

winter coat and pants, pushing against wind and ice. As each short shot builds upon the next, the artist herself is introduced through a series of comic false starts. In most scenes the staging is wrong. The camera woman shouts directions with an American accent, 'Just stand there! Remember to keep your head up! Let's do it one more time! Don't make faces!' The short clips are reminiscent of a blooper reel, complete with breakdowns for laughter, the boredom of finding the correct

shot, the monotony of making something seem spontaneous and 'natural' on film. As the attempts continue, Aglert's sparse lines of dialogue interrupt with 'I need to find ice' and then 'Oh I looked into the camera' and 'Are there any drips?' The staccato dialogue and poor-quality audio accompany an icy landscape inhospitable to the camera, the performer and the audience. The audio captures the sound of the large puffy snow clothes shuffling, the crunch of fresh snow upon compacted ice underneath heavy boots, and the background of people speaking about other things, including the rare sighting of a walrus which disrupts the performance yet again. The audio of the performance is a soundscape of collaboration, distraction and motivations gone awry. Instead of the anticipated smooth performance of the Fluxus score, Aglert leans into the comedy of the scene, and the artificial nature and absurdity of the performance.

Critical readings of the work come from curator Hessler, who describes how the work 'dissects clichés of romanticism and mysticism related to the Arctic.'[7] Rather than collaborating with ice, the ice forms more of a hindrance as Aglert deconstructs the trope of the 'heroic,' read masculine, performance artist and as stand-in for the Arctic colonial explorer. Similarly, scholar Lisa Bloom's influential book *Gender on Ice*[8] from 1993 also theoretically grounds Aglert's work as part of the critical responses to the colonisation of the Arctic. Bloom responded to Aglert's subversion of gender in the Arctic when she writes, 'Substitution and humour are central to Aglert's short performative work, especially as they relate to hidden assumptions about the Arctic.'[9] For Hessler and Bloom, the work presents a direct refutation of the normative assumptions of the male explorers of the Arctic and the link to colonialism and gender.

In contrast to Hessler and Bloom, I emphasise how Aglert's performance and associated installation highlight and critique anthropocentric relations to ice in the climate crisis. Aglert criticises the inbuilt assumption of domination of ice in the original Fluxus score. In the Hydrocene, Aglert's performance is understood as an act of subversion that performs the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing in a humorous and critical manner. The performance reflects on the effects of the climate crisis, and the mass melting of the Arctic, with devastating consequences. Aglert's unfreezing sees ice as her reluctant collaborator, and, with self-depreciating humour she highlights anthropocentric and unsustainable relations with ice that dominate contemporary culture.

Bigert & Bergström care for the unfreezing ice on Kebnekaise

Swedish artist duo Bigert & Bergström began working together in the mid-1980s and are leading eco-aesthetic artists within Sweden and the Nordic region. Their work often involves large-scale sculptures and site-specific installations, alongside performance and video works. While water as a material has not been central to their practice thus far, the artists are relevant to this study of the artistic turn to thinking with water in the climate crisis in their work with ice in the body of work *The Freeze* (2015).

FIGURE 7.4 Bigert & Bergström, documentation of performance, *Rescue Blanket for Kebnekaise*, 2015, Sweden. Photo: Studio Bigert & Bergström. Courtesy of the artists.

In *The Freeze*. the artists approached the subject matter of melting ice and snow, specifically on Kebnekaise, the highest mountain in Sweden. In what they call a 'geo-engineering performance,' the artists climbed the southern tip of the mountain to apply a five-hundred-square-metre golden climate-shade cloth to protect the snow. Inspired by attempts to reduce melting of the Rhône glacier in the Swiss Alps, the artists mimicked this method of preserving glacial ice over the summer. In the film of the performance, *Rescue Blanket for Kebnekaise*, the artists are dwarfed by the magnificent aerial view of the mountain range, and the contrast of the yellow rescue-blanket as it lays hopefully on the peak of the mountain. Part symbolic gesture, part conceptual offering and part scientific study, the ice on the mountain, both exposed and covered, became an important data set for understanding the transformation of ice in the warming climate. As the ice melts, the artists perform a kind of slowing of the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing; they hope to redirect the temporality of the swiftly melting ice. Through performance, the duo enact this slowing of the unfreezing time as a form of caregiving to the ice.

Megan Cope and Emily Parsons-Lord thawing works as material cartography

In contrast to the Nordic artists Aglert and Bigert & Bergström, the Australian-based artists who perform the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing do so not in relation to landscape, but instead create staged, manufactured, and constructed ice sculptures which subsequently melt, as an act of performative transformation. This move away from icy landscapes in the Nordic region to sculptural work with ice in the Australian context is a fundamental shift towards ice as material, rather than ice as landscape.

One such eco-visionary artist who uses ice as collaboratively and as material is Australian-based artist Megan Cope, a Quandamooka artist whose body of work includes site-specific sculptural installations, painting and video. Cope's influential work with oyster shells in and out of the museum setting is highlighted in the Ocean Chapter.

Cope's kinetic ice installations entitled *Currents III (freshwater studies)* (2020) are an example of unfreezing as gentle and intimate, signifying the material engagements of ice as a material to think with in the climate crisis. These sculptural pieces mark a significant change of form in the artist's practice and shift toward using ice as a mark-making tool. The piece was designed with marine biologist Roberta Johnson and is a series of three hanging woven forms reminiscent of crescent moons. The woven structures are encased in ice which drips onto hand-made paper below. The dripping ice is coloured with plant extracts including red cabbage, turmeric, blueberries and rose, forming deeply saturated 'paintings' on the paper below. The artist describes the work as 'Live pH painting' which connects 'local precolonial social economic histories as well as ocean acidification testing.'[10] In this collaboration of artist and scientist, Cope and Johnson consider material effects of the climate crisis on Country. Cope has said that the work reflects the value she has found in the convergence of Aboriginal systems of knowledge with Western science.

With a mix of dripping ruby red, magenta and yellow, the trio of ice sculptures, *Currents III (freshwater studies)*, was key to the TarraWarra Museum of Art Biennial 2021, *Slow Moving Waters*, curated by Nina Miall. Each week the ice was replaced as the constant transformation of the thawing sculptures imbued the paper below, which was hand-made from algal blooms. The crux of the work is the way the melting ice reveals the richly coloured plant extracts, acting as pH indicators, which through the process of 'unfreezing' stain and imbue the paper below, making the paper into a kind of makeshift pH tester. As critic Chi Tran wrote in her biennial review, 'The kinetics of this work is subtle, yet unambiguous in its gesturing (or staining) toward environmental crisis.'[11] Through the artist's engagement with ice, the staining of the algae paper has the potential to prompt gentle consideration of notions of time, movement and the staining of the earth as part of the current crisis. By materially connecting First Nation and Western knowledge systems through ice, Cope's work elicits a subtle gesture towards the complexity and impact of the climate crisis on the hydrological system.

Another returning artist in the Hydrocene, who also appears in the Fog Chapter, is Australian-based artist Emily Parsons-Lord. Here, her video work *Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever* (2021) performs the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing. Unlike Cope's kinetic ice sculptures that transform live in the gallery setting, Parsons-Lord instead built a sculpture piece that transforms in a studio setting where the unfreezing of dry ice is filmed. What connects Cope and Parsons-Lord is the way they interlace materials together within the ice, acting as a kind of environmental archive that in the process of thawing reveals a form of

FIGURE 7.5 Emily Parsons-Lord, still from film *Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

material cartography. Both artists show the interlocking hydro-artistic methods of archiving and unfreezing in a time twisting unison.

In *Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever*, the artist takes the carbon cycle as evidenced in the landscape of an area south of Sydney, Bundanon, as the starting point for the sculpture. The artist assembled carbon from the site in differing forms, such as carbon in coal-rich soil and charcoal from bushfire-affected

trees.[12] To these materials, she added artificially manufactured diamond, which helps to collapse the concept of geological time, or deep time, that the carbon cycle operates through. The synthetic diamond is not only symbolic of time but it is also made from her mother's ashes. In this way, Parsons-Lord materially weaves a personal narrative about grief and loss into the transformation of carbon and, through allusions to the bushfires, to the climate crisis. To this alchemical sculpture, the artist further collapses time by adding misty dry ice. As the ice smokes, drips and melts, what is left on the ground beneath the sculpture is both ancient and newly combined raw materials of loss. As the title *Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever* suggests, the artist weaves together notions of geological time with family, and envisions a way to consider carbon as a memory-holder. In this way, the work connects to the idea of the Hydrocene as a temporal disturbance to the logic and dominance of the Anthropocene. Connecting to the slow violence of the climate crisis, and the shifting of time scales in the crisis, this work enacts a material fusing of temporalities. In her work, Parsons-Lord collapses the distinctions between memory and geological history, attempting to monumentalise the climate crisis in raw and affecting ways.

Ice washing and watching with Yin Xiuzhen, Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing

Continuing to consider the alchemy-like transformation of unfreezing ice as related to eco-aesthetics produced in the climate crisis, it is useful to address Chinese artist Yin Xiuzhen's installation *Washing River* (2019), which was staged in nipaluna/Hobart, lutruwita/Tasmania, as part of the Dark Mofo festival. As with Cope and Parsons-Lord, the melting ice once again reveals material traces of environmental change and loss. Unlike Cope and Parsons-Lord who chose the materials that they build and intertwine within their ice sculpture works with, Xiuzhen instead works with existing pollutants and uses the ice to reveal these materials.

Washing River is a socially orientated performance first staged in Chengdu in China's Sichuan province in 1995. Since then, the work has been performed four times with the most recent staging in lutruwita/Tasmania. In the piece, the artist froze water from the local Derwent River and assembled 162 rectangular ice blocks on the harbourside. At this point, the artist invited the audience to metaphorically 'clean' the river. Armed with mops and brooms, this was a symbolic 'cleansing'[13] of the river, washing the ice with clean water, the artist, audience and water coming together.

Much like the work of Fujiko Nakaya in the previous Fog chapter, the meaning of this work has evolved as the climate crisis has worsened and intensified, thus the reading of water in eco-aesthetics has significantly changed. As with Nakaya's misty installations, so too with *Washing River*, over the years since it was first performed, the meaning of the work has shifted to include not only the river as an archive for pollutants, but to seeing the hydrological cycle itself in peril. The artist reflected on the different meaning of the work when it was first made: 'Back then

FIGURE 7.6 Yin Xiuzhen (尹秀珍), documentation of *Washing River*, 2014. Photo: MONA/Rémi Chauvin. Image courtesy of MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

people's concept of environmental protection was not like it is today… Now people are much more conscious of the problems but the problems are even bigger.'[14]

In the theory of the Hydrocene *Washing River* becomes more than a festival spectacle or artistic ritual; instead the work is an example of thinking with water as an active and caring mode of planetary citizenship. To clean the ice, even metaphorically, insists that water requires care and attention, and this sense of a shared purpose with the audience garners a meaningful collaborative moment of thinking with water. This ephemeral performance is an example of the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing, and at the same time part of the hydro-artistic method of cleaning, as featured in the Swamp chapter in the work of Madeline Anderson. *Washing River* epitomises the necessity for thinking with ice, rather than making ice perform for the audience, and so work towards collaborative and caring relations with ice.

Thinking with ice in public space to consider the climate crisis in the Nordic region is central to the work of artist Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing and their work *Ice Watch* . The work was first staged in Copenhagen in 2014 and subsequently restaged many times. The time-based installation consists of large pieces of ice in a clock-like formation in public space. The ice is not artificially manufactured, instead it is pieces of iceberg removed from a fjord that forms part of the Greenland ice sheet and placed in prominent public locations including in Paris on the occasion of the UN Climate Conference COP21 in 2018 and in front of Tate Modern, London, in 2019. According to the artist's website, the work aims to raise awareness of climate crisis by 'providing a direct and tangible experience of

FIGURE 7.7 Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing, *Ice Watch*, 2014. Twelve ice blocks. Place du Panthéon, Paris, 2015. Courtesy of the artist; neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles © 2014 Olafur Eliasson. Photo: Martin Argyroglo.

the reality of melting arctic ice.'[15] The work is a prominent example of an artistic unfreezing that offers the audience a chance to come closer to the ice itself and to witness the melting of Arctic ice in a scale and location of more immediate connection. As one of the most widely acclaimed examples of ice and climate change, the clock offers audiences the chance to have an embodied experience and visceral encounter with ice. While the work evokes aspects of ice as spectacle, this does not negate the possibility for embodied encounters. Operating at a prominent scale with vast audiences, the work is an affective, performative action towards broadening climate awareness.

Watery embodiment and porosity with artist Latai Taumoepeau

The exceptional body of work of Tongan-Australian artist and 'punake' (body-centred performance artist) Latai Taumoepeau embodies the Hydrocene for the way she thinks with water, performs watery embodiment and enacts the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing. Her work is central to this chapter and the Ocean chapter, as water and the climate crisis are reoccurring themes in her rich artistic practice. Recent artworks have explicitly focused on climate-induced catastrophes such as the erasure of low-lying islands in the Great Ocean/Pacific. Here, I argue for a hydrofeminist and watery reading of her 2012 live performance work *i-Land X-isle* and to see the work as an example of the hydro-artistic methods of unfreezing and

resisting. In the piece, Taumoepeau performs and collaborates with ice which I read as a figuring of transcorporeality[16] and watery embodiment.[17] The work *i-Land X-isle* dramatically and deeply 'infiltrates our imagination' around the climate crisis by designing a landscape where ice bodies are tied together with human bodies, displaying the interdependence of these two bodies of water. In Taumoepeau's rendering of a complex and planetary climate crisis, the artist returns to performance and the body.

The work *i-Land X-isle* was first undertaken as a live performance for the group exhibition *Local Positioning Systems* at the MCA Australia in Warrang/Sydney Harbour. In the live performance, the artist wears a fluorescent orange life vest and is tied up horizontally beneath a large block of ice. The body of the artist and the body of ice are tied to each other, and in this painful and precarious setting, the artist performed in one-hour sessions over three days.

In *i-Land X-isle*, Taumoepeau performs a version of the inundation of rising seas onto her own body where she becomes the island. The title of the work *i-Land X-isle* offers the first entry into the artist as island, where the 'I' is pulled apart from the rest of the word, creating a singular presence of the 'I.' Taumoepeau performs an 'embodied archive,'[18] a landscape where the body of the performer and the body of the ice are inextricably interwoven, a complex landscape.

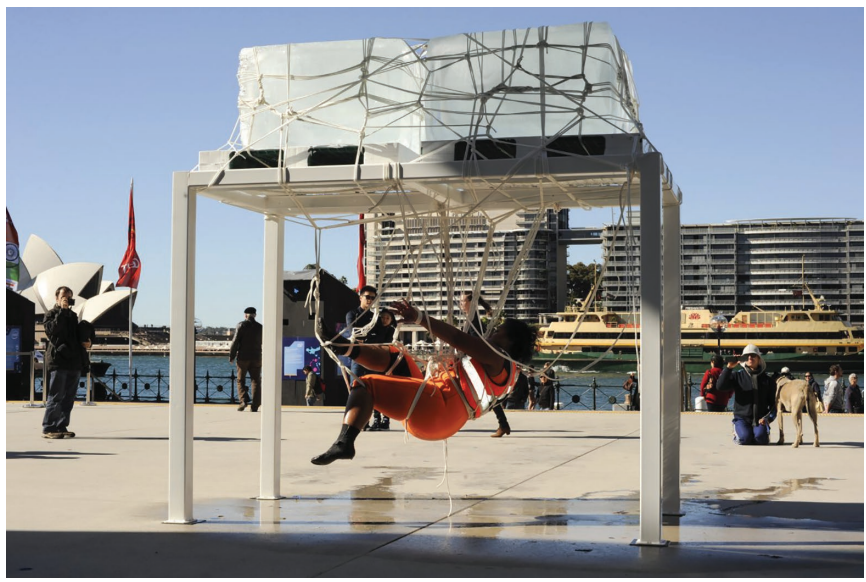

FIGURE 7.8 Latai Taumoepeau, *i-Land X-isle*, 2012, performance documentation, Local Positioning Systems curated by Performance Space and presented by the MCA Australia, 2012, image courtesy the artist and Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, © the artist, photograph: Heidrun Lohr.

In an interview with the artist,[19] she addresses the devastating sea levels rising and irrevocable destruction of homes, identity and culture in the Great Ocean/Pacific. When describing the process of making the work *i-Land X-isle*, she draws on her cultural heritage and her experiences of her own ancestral homelands of the Kingdom of Tonga. Tonga is an archipelago in the southwestern Great Ocean/Pacific where rapid sea levels rises caused by the warming planet, combined with extreme weather events are already impacting the island with dangerous watery influxes.[20] Taumoepeau also refers to her experiences visiting the Great Ocean/Pacific Islands for the United Nations Climate Change Conference as a delegate in 2007. Drawing on her lived experiences from the convention and her own island homelands, she brings her grief and frustration into the performance work. The strength of the live work is in its captivating quality of intimacy, where Taumoepeau awakens audiences to a visceral, abject and painful situation through the frame of performance. The potential for audiences to develop empathy for the performer, and possibly the situation of rising sea levels by extension, is part of the strength of this piece.

In this poetic torture the artist builds a physical intimacy with the audiences who gather around her. The sense of helplessness that the artist experienced after attending the UN conference was transported into the artwork. As echoed in the commissioned text by the artist's sister: 'Our peoples know what to do rituality with death and natural disasters, but long awaited human manufactured disasters … what to do?'[21] In taking her grief at the destruction of these island cultures into her own body and presenting her body as the island in the form of a durational performance work, Taumoepeau symbolically renders an ingestion of the climate crisis.

In *i-Land X-isle* Taumoepeau actively contradicts the dominant narratives of the reported climate crisis, which often seek to silence the voices of the directly affected Indigenous and First Nations people. Critical theorist Jaimey Hamilton Faris describes these processes in her essay about Marshallese poet Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Inuk poet Aka Niviâna from Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and the climate mitigation and adaptation discourses that they inhabit across oceans and islands. Hamilton Faris describes ice melting and sea levels rising as not only problems of water but problems of social and political structures.[22] She discusses how the problem is 'not (simply) inundation by or the melting water, but their respective communities' "submersion" (Gomez-Barris) and "invisibility" (Simmons, Tall Bear), in colonial-capital processes.' In an interview on her work, Taumoepeau talks about how Indigenous people are carrying the weight of climate change adaptation: 'It's vulnerable Indigenous communities – the frontline communities – doing all the heavy lifting around the transformation that needs to happen in order for our planet to survive.'[23] Here again, the knot of nature-culture and the role of pervasive colonialism is central to understanding art made during the climate crisis. In the Hydrocene, the work is viewed as a call for climate justice, which is a central facet of Taumoepeau's body of work, including the work *Repatriate* (2015) featured in the Ocean chapter of this book.

Taumoepeau performs a visceral and bodily objection to the invisibility that Hamilton Faris defines. The audience is faced with the radical visibility of an embodied protest. The artist and ice are bound and suspended together, locked into a violent counterbalance. The artist actively locates the 'island' as an interior and shares this powerful island with the audience. She forms an island of defiance. She demands visibility and shares the submersion as something to be collectively seen. This is an example of the hydro-artistic method of resisting, earlier discussed in terms of the river, but now performed by Taumoepeau and the ice together, actively resisting and redressing the dominant narratives of the climate crisis.

The intensity of the performance is enhanced by the physical duress. Through the performative set-up of seeing a body in pain and the limited difficult movements of the restrained figure, Taumoepeau enacts a type of 'slow violence,' which further draws the audience in as witness. 'Slow violence' is a term by Robert Nixon to describe climate change and refers to the impacts of climate change that happen in timescales that are incompatible with Western concepts of time.[24] It is a useful term here for framing one's thinking around the live performance as it introduces the differing timescales and differing temporalities of the climate crisis. In this work, Taumoepeau carefully constructs a reality where the 'slow violence' of ice caps melting and sea levels rising coalesces in one condensed time–space reality, in the liveness of the performance situation.

It is important to clarify that a fluid reading of the ice and the performer as two bodies of water does not mean that all bodies of water are the same. While the ice and artist are connected through water they do not form a simple 'one.' Neimanis marks this clearly when she says when thinking with hydrofeminism, 'We are the condition of each other's possibilities' and yet 'We are not all the same, nor are we all in this in the same way.'[25] In this way, we each experience the costs and realtities of rising sea levels differently. Further, Nancy Tuana's term 'viscous porosity'[26] is useful for seeing the connection between bodies of water not as something romantic or idealistic; Tuana reminds us that the watery connection between bodies operates through viscosity and she actively highlights sites of resistance and opposition within the concept of fluidity. In this reading of porosity and water, one can trace a watery connection between colonisation, wealth, race, melting ice caps and rising sea levels destroying cultures and homelands.

Recognising difference in the 'watery we' is also important when considering the curatorial as an agent for planetary care. Here, there is a need to acknowledge systemic privilege and systemic oppression, and that the opportunity for some people to perform planetary care – for example, for First Nations Australians to practise caring for Country – has been quelled by extractive and violent colonial powers. By focusing on artworks and practices that operate through bodies of water and their interactions, the theory of the Hydrocene hopes to highlight these inequalities and ongoing realities of settler colonialism within both the Australian and Nordic contexts, as part of the nature-culture water crisis.

In her artistic work, Taumoepeau performs a sustained moment of viscous porosity between her body and a body of ice. In the performance, she seeks resistance

to the melting water and enacts the hydro-artistic method of resisting to the inundation of salt water to the island homes. In *i-Land X-isle*, the two bodies of water, the artist and the ice, take the lead parts. Together they highlight the interconnection of bodies of water in unequal political systems. The performer exposes the porosity that connects and resists watery worlds in the climate crisis.

In 2016, Taumoepeau published a manifesto entitled *Saltwater Sovereignty*.[27] In it, she outlines how she stands for a list of actions and ways of thinking, including 'baptism of the frontline,' '1 degree of difference' and 'saltwater sovereignty.' *Saltwater Sovereignty* offers the audience a considered, poetic and politically charged understanding of the aims of her artistic practice at this time and the urgent topics she is responding to. It serves as a reminder that one of the work's larger political spheres is sovereignty, specifically sovereignty of the people who live in the saltwater islands and atolls of the Grand Ocean/Pacific. Most compelling for this reading of the work, she states that she stands for 'the embodied archive.'[28] This archive stands for the transference of substance and matter between beings. This substance can be bodily, and hydrological, such as tears or breath condensation, but it can also be the substance of geopolitics and ceremony. The embodied archive holds these ghosts and living presences as one.

Here, I return to hydrofeminism and a short list that Neimanis notes to describe watery embodiment and the selection of membranes that move between bodies of water. Neimanis writes about modes that 'choreograph our ways of being in relation: a gravitational hold, a weather front, a wall of grief, a line on a map, equinox, a winter coat, death.'[29] This list draws into focus a new reading of Taumoepeau's work; highlighting the term 'choreograph,' I read this list as a dancerly score. Like Taumoepeau's *Saltwater Sovereignty* manifesto, the work *i-Land X-isle* is an enactment of a 'stand-in' island body and is at once many of these things that Neimanis lists here. A 'gravitational hold' can be read as the pull of the performer's body and the ice above. Further to this, it can also reference the pull of the gravitational effects on water and ice caps melting and moving in planetary circulations. A 'weather front' can be read as the micro-climate that the artist builds in the installation; she literally constructs her own icy front. A 'wall of grief' can be read in the funeral feeling and the witnessing of living grief that the artist's sister pinpoints in her text. A 'line on a map' can be seen in the threading of meaning between the placement of the performance outside the MCA drawing a line on a map back to the islands in the Great Ocean/Pacific. 'Equinox' can be described as an equal moment, as two halves of the same coin; here, the ice body and the human body hang in a sort of deathly equinox. 'A winter coat' can be transcribed into the reading of the skin of the performer that usually protects and warms, and yet here the skin is undergoing the painful water torture, the winter coat is ripped away, she exposes her second skin. In the meeting of hydrofeminism and the embodied archive of *i-Land X-isle*, death is present and close. There is the death of the ice and ice caps, the death of the islands, death of our innocence in knowing these details of the climate crisis intimately, and finally the death of civilisation as we have come to know it, the acceleration of environmental destruction through a rapidly warming planet.

To embody something is to exist within it and as it. An embodied watery performance focuses on how water moves between and through different bodies of water to connect and carry substance – both materially and metaphorically. The bodies of water that continually connect through water – such as by sharing breath, clouds, weather fronts, tears – hold that water and become 'carrier bags'[30] transferring meaning and matter between each other. Feminist watery embodiment is a concept that is cited in Neimanis' text on hydrofeminism where she writes, 'The fluid body is not specific to women, but watery embodiment is still a feminist question; thinking as a watery body has the potential to bathe new feminist concepts into existence.'[31] It is also cited within the essay 'Sisters of Ocean and Ice' by Hamilton Faris, where she describes 'feminist embodied relationships with and through water.'[32] These watery relationships resonate deeply though *i-Land X-isle*, as such, Taumoepeau's work can be read within a discipline of feminist watery embodiment, while still holding to account the vast multiplicities of Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 'feminism without borders'[33] and Neimanis' differentiated 'we.'

Archiving glaciers across the antipodes with Roni Horn and Janine Randerson

American-based artist Roni Horn has had a long-term connection with the Nordic scene, especially Iceland, as evidenced in the extensive art project *VATNASAFN/ LIBRARY OF WATER* (2007–ongoing) which the artist conceived for the small Icelandic town Stykkishólmur. The work is research and process based, with Horn and her collaborators working to collect a 'library' of Icelandic glacial water samples. The final work is a 'library' which houses the water samples in twenty-four thin, transparent floor-to-ceiling columns that contain melted ice samples from twenty-four Icelandic glaciers. In some columns, the water is clear and in other samples, the water is murky, with sediment heavy water forming a brownish opacity. The water library is not only an installation but also operates as a community centre, with space for local organising including chess and yoga, plus a book library and writers' residency. The library was described by the artist as 'a lighthouse in which the viewer becomes the light.'[34] This conceptually rich work is emblematic of Horn's significant engagement with water across her career.[35]

In both installation and writing, Horn has returned to water as an artistic companion in many works, including her book *Dictionary of Water* (1995) and photographic series *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999).[36] Horn has written of water with poetic and hydrofeminist tendencies, elevating it in her work from a mere material to part of the hydrological system. She writes:

> This water exists in monolithic, indivisible continuity with all other waters. No water is separate from any other water. In the River Thames, in an arctic iceberg, in your drinking glass, in that drop of rain, on that frosty window pane, in your eyes and in every other microcosmic part of you, and me, all waters converge.[37]

FIGURE 7.9 Roni Horn, *VATNASAFN/LIBRARY OF WATER*, 2007. Commissioned and produced by Artangel, 2007 © Stefan Altenburger. Courtesy of Artangel.

Horn has significantly contributed to Nordic artistic engagement with ice, specifically thinking with glaciers. According to the website for the library, 'all the glaciers have receded since the ice was collected and one of them, *Ok*, has now disappeared.'[38] The glacier known as 'Ok' – Okjokull – was discussed in Chapter 1 as the site of the first glacier 'funeral' held by artists and scientists. This correlation between Horn's archive of the glacial water from Ok and the more recent funeral for Ok, is further evidence of the shift in eco-aesthetics towards confronting the climate crisis. Both these works, the library and the funeral, enact a respectful and caring relationship for the glaciers, even in their absence. This move of art into the blue highlights again that the redirection of human–water relations is a most pressing and urgent topic.

As befits Horn's extensive body of work with water, there are a number of critical responses to her work. Literary scholars Elizabeth D. Harvey and Mark A. Cheetham analyse *VATNASAFN/LIBRARY OF WATER* in relation to poet Anne Carson's work and the weaving of geological and poetic language that seeks to highlight an 'ecology of water.' For Harvey and Cheetham, the columns of glacial water are 'telluric and linguistic sediment of glaciers.'[39] Their work critically collates the joining of linguistics and water in Horn's practice. From a different perspective, critic Gill Perry recognises the significance of working with Icelandic glaciers as a precursor of the increasing effects of the climate crisis and how water

is the rich conceptual and visual 'material' that Horn relies on to tell her powerful artistic narratives.[40]

Compared to these readings of Horn's work, the theoretical apparatus of the Hydrocene emphasises the way she engages explicitly the hydro-artistic methods of unfreezing and archiving to heighten the possibility for the audience to engage with the rapidly disappearing glaciers and, by extension, the water crisis. In Horn's work, she cultivates a respectful relationship with the water, setting a precedent for aligning the loss of the glaciers as something that must be documented, maintained and 'curated' in the traditional sense of the word, as in to take care of the collection of the melting glaciers. The multi-disciplinary aspect of the work is also essential: it is not only an archive that sits dusty and tired; instead the work is part of an active community space, where the glacial water samples are encountered and preserved as part of the cultural ecosystem. In this way, the *Library of Water* actively enables the hydro-artistic method of archiving to highlight the distressing reality of the demise of Iceland's glaciers.

At the antipode of Iceland lies Aotearoa/New Zealand, and here too the water of dying glaciers is examined in an artistic work. Aotearoa/New Zealand based artist and scholar Janine Randerson whose theory of 'weather as medium' featured in the previous chapter, filmed the retreating glacier water of the Waiho River in her video work *Waiho, Retreat* (2017). In the piece, the artist films the dripping of the blue and white glacier, while performer Tru Paraha moves backwards through the disappearing icy landscape. The artist has incorporated live sound recordings from the glacier and plays on the idea of the river flowing forward yet also retreating backwards. This sense of retreat is most clearly seen in the movement of performer Paraha, whose body is seen moving slowly backwards through the glacier. This duality of time is part of Randerson's artistic investigation of water, weather and meteorology. She writes that the glacier is 'a sensitive barometer of climatic shifts in a warming world.'[41] While both Horn and Randerson's works were made at the antipodes of each other, Iceland and Aotearoa New Zealand, they each enact the hydro-artistic method of archiving with glaciers as a way to 'infiltrate our imagination'[42] of the climate crisis.

Unfreezing icy encounters in the cryosphere

This chapter shares works from Roni Horn, Latai Taumoepeau, Yin Xiuzhen, Emily Parsons-Lord, Bigert & Bergström, Megan Cope, Katja Aglert, Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing working across the Nordic and Oceanic contexts. These eco-visionary artists perform the hydro-artistic method of unfreezing, archiving and cleaning ways to draw attention to the collective grief of loosing ice *en masse*, and the ongoing disastrous effects of the melting cryosphere while developing caring climate narratives. Through their poignant work with ice, these artists see ice as an archive, an agent of storytelling, as a material that conceals and reveals. In the Ice chapter, the unnatural and rapid melting of the cryosphere as part of the

effects of the climate crisis is represented and performed by ice itself, at times in collaboration with the artists.

With a fitting circularity for the watery structure of this book, glaciers melt into rivers, and thus this chapter ends where the first began. The structure of these watery chapters performs a reimagined hydrological cycle, moving from River, to Swamp, to Ocean, to Fog, to Ice and then circles back again to River. In this way, the watery chapters are designed to be read in the looping, cyclical nature of water, as always returning and in radically embodied states of transformation. The reader can enter the cycle at any point and be directed towards the unique work of artists who think with water and enact forms of watery collaboration throughout the Hydrocene from which we can learn to be and think with water.

Notes

1 U Biemann, 'Late Subatlantic: Science Poetry in Times of Global Warming', 2015.
2 J Randerson, '*Waiho, Retreat* (video)', 2017.
3 Biemann.
4 NS Loveless, 'The Materiality of Duration: Between Ice Time and Water Time', *Performance Research*, vol. 18, 2013, 129–136.
5 Ibid.
6 Hessler, *'Winter Event – Antifreeze'*.
7 Ibid., Hessler.
8 See LE Bloom, *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993.
9 LE Bloom, 'When Ice Is Just Ice: Gender and the Everyday in the Arctic Work of Katja Aglert', 2015.
10 See M Cope artist website, *'Currents III (Freshwater Studies)'*, 2020.
11 C Tran, 'TarraWarra Biennial: Thoughts on Time and Space', *Ocula Magazine*, 2021.
12 For more on how the artist undertook this process, see the artist website, E Parsons-Lord, 'Every Essence of Your Beloved One Is Captured Forever', 2021.
13 S Ikin, 'Dark Mofo Festival: Chinese Artist Yin Xiuzhen Invites Tasmanians to "Cleanse" Derwent before Winter Feast', *ABC News*, 2014.
14 Ibid.
15 See O Eliasson artist website, 'Ice Watch, 2014–2019'.
16 Alaimo, *Bodily Natures; Science, Environment, and the Material Self*.
17 Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*.
18 Latai Taumoepeau, 'Saltwater Sovereignty', in *Lapping at Our Doors 02 Latai Taumoepeau* (podcast), 2016.
19 Artist quoted from Reich article on ABC News, 'Art Crucial to Tackling Climate Change, Coronavirus Says Tongan-Australian Artist Latai Taumoepeau'.
20 O Mulhern, 'Future Sea Level Rise – Tonga', 2020.
21 See S Taumoepeau, *i-Land X-isle,* response to the live performance by Latai Taumoepeau, in *Local Positioning Systems*, Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, 2012.
22 Hamilton Faris, 'Sisters of Ocean and Ice', *Shima*, vol. 13, 2019, 76–99.
23 Taumoepeau quoted from Reich article.
24 R Nixon, 'Slow Violence, Gender, and the Environmentalism of the Poor' in *Environment at the Margins: Literary and Environmental Studies in Africa*, B Caminero-Santangelo & G Myers (eds), Athens, Ohio University Press, 2011, pp. 257–286.
25 Neimanis, *Bodies of Water*.

26 N Tuana, 'Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina' in *Material Feminisms*, S Alaimo & SJ Hekman (eds), Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008, pp. 188–213.
27 Taumoepeau, *Saltwater Sovereignty*.
28 Ibid.
29 Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water'.
30 See UK Le Guin, 'The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction' in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*, New York, Grove Press, 1989, pp. 165–170.
31 Neimanis, 'Hydrofeminism: Or, on Becoming a Body of Water'.
32 Hamilton-Faris, 'Sisters of Ocean and Ice'.
33 CT Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham, Duke University Press.
34 R Horn, *Vatnasafn/Library of Water*, 2007.
35 ED Harvey & MA Cheetham, 'Tongues of Glaciers: Sedimenting Language in Roni Horn's *Vatnasafn/Library of Water* and Anne Carson's "Wildly Constant"', *Word & Image*, vol. 31, 2015, 19–27.
36 B Garrie, 'Roni Horn's Watery Surfaces: Identity, Excess and the Sublime', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 18, 2018, 193–205.
37 Ibid., Garrie.
38 Horn.
39 Harvey and Cheetham.
40 G Perry, 'Watery Weather by Artangel and Roni Horn: Reviews', *Art History*, vol. 32, 2009, 177–186.
41 Randerson.
42 Biemann.

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8

CONCLUSION

Water is one of the most important materials of our time; however, ways of considering the poetic and political intentions and possibilities of water are dominated by the idea of water as a resource. In this book, I have argued for the centrality of water within the current climate crisis and acknowledged that human–water relations are changing due to extreme transformations in the hydrological cycle caused by a warming planet. I defined how the planetary hydrological cycle is breaking and that, considering the climate crisis, it is urgent to garner new approaches for thinking with water and respecting its own forms of knowledge.

This book aims to demonstrate the critical role of artists as cultural leaders in the fight for climate justice. These fervent artists create unique hydro-artistic methods for collaborating curiously and respectfully with water, and advocating for water's agency in the natural-cultural water crisis. I have proposed new understandings of how to mediate and curate these critical water art practices; further, I theorised that this tide of critical water practices in art showcases and embodies strategies for combatting the natural-cultural water crisis by developing an ecological sensibility for thinking with water.

The Hydrocene is a disruptive, conceptual epoch within a planetary framework as part of the natural-culture water crisis. Expanding on the work of Ghosh, I examined the climate crisis as not only an ecological crisis but also one of the imagination, thus becoming a natural-cultural crisis. Following the work of Spivak, I took the planetary as a research framework and looked for a planetary-scale response to the climate crisis, that is, the Hydrocene, that works with the planetary hydrological cycle. This connection to time and the planetary is where the temporal and epochal element of our contemporary moment and the epoch known as the Anthropocene, becomes central to this theory. In naming and defining the Hydrocene, I aim to disrupt or 'hack' the status quo of anthropocentric thinking.

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In the introductory chapters, I examined how the hydrological cycle represents natural and cultural forces entwined as both material and metaphor and how water is a key figure of the current times. I shared the way water moves through both the ecological (natural) climate and the (cultural) imagination, shifting between states and bodies of water, and I defined how the hydrological enacts both the material agency of water and watery, porous ways of thinking. I challenged the dominant anthropocentric perspective on water management that prioritises control and commercialisation, thus failing to acknowledge water as a living entity endowed with agency, knowledge, and power. Further, I outlined three pillars or socio-cultural belief systems, that, in combination, have contributed to the development of the climate crisis. The pillars were: water as modern; water as a resource; and water as (only) weather. I showed how these pillars uphold outdated colonial-capital human–water relations and argued for the need to decentre these pillars.

Disruptive, conceptual epoch of the Hydrocene

When defining the Hydrocene as a conceptual epoch and as a disruption to the supremacy of the Anthropocene, there were three objectives that defined this neologism. They were:

1 Identify water as a central material and metaphor of the current climate crisis;
2 Expand and connect theory to practice, specifically the connection between watery thinkers and watery makers;
3 Recognise artists as vital cultural leaders in the climate crisis through their development and use of hydro-artistic methods.

The first objective is consolidated in Chapter 2, where I outline how art is going 'into the blue' and establish how water is the guide that materially and metaphorically bonds the Hydrocene as a curatorial theory to the entangled nature-culture of the water crisis. I show how water has become a central facet of current eco-aesthetics, and argue that we therefore need a curatorial theory of art and water. I frame a new curatorial theory that engages with and conceptualises the ways in which artists work and think with water but that also itself thinks with water and sees water as an artistic associate rather than as a mute material or colonial-capital resource.

The second objective of the Hydrocene, to connect theory and practice, is also introduced in Chapter 2 and demonstrated throughout the five case studies. I specifically engage the curatorial as a conceptual bridge-builder and connector between 'watery makers' and 'watery thinkers.' Using the hydrological cycle as the natural-cultural intertwine, I identify and establish the aqueous points of connection between contemporary art practice and environmental humanities theory. With a focus on embodied practice, thinking with water, and informed primarily by Neimanis' concepts of hydrologics and hydrofeminism, I displace the pillars of the

water crisis by exposing the watery connection between makers and thinkers, using the curatorial as both instigator and disruptor. In the work of these watery thinkers and makers, water is a conceptual associate or collaborator, and the thinkers and makers are thinking with and learning from water in their work. The third objective of the Hydrocene is the recognition of artists as cultural leaders in the climate crisis through their development and use of unique hydro-artistic methods. Across the five case studies, I have shown how these artists work with and advocate for water's agency. Hydro-artistic methods are numerous, each drawing on the knowledge of water itself and learning from the diverse ways water moves through the hydrological cycle. In working with water to confront crisis of imagination, these artists are cultural leaders, and their eco-visionary artistic practices offer solutions against climate inaction, moving beyond the outdated ideas of water as modern, resource and (only) weather.

Watery makers and thinkers connect in hydro-artistic methods

Across the case studies chapters, I define and discuss the hydro-artistic methods of archiving, cleaning, incubating, infusing, misting, resisting, submerging, swamping, tiding, unfreezing and waving, which the artists themselves have developed in their unique relationships with water. This list is not exhaustive or exclusive, and many artists feature in more than one chapter, working with multiple methods across multiple states of water. Similarly, there are many artists working with water in many different ways around the entire planet. By necessity, I have focused on artists in the Nordic and Oceania regions to elaborate the Hydrocene, but the theory flows out across the planet, embracing, connecting and welcoming all watery makers and thinkers, and all different and possible hydro-artistic methods.

Across all of these hydro-artistic methods, the artists show how the hydrological cycle is culturally significant and is part of embodied selves and communities. I argued these artists enter curious and meaningful relations with water from which we can learn. When seen together as part of a watery zeitgeist, these artworks offer strategies for changing human–water relations and contributing to climate justice. Through an engagement with water, these artists build embodied experiences for audiences to come closer to the climate crisis. I contextualise these artworks in the fields of curatorial and environmental humanities scholarship and argue for the importance of learning from these artists and their work.

While these individual artworks are significant in their own right, the importance of the tide of art going into the blue and the ability to have a collective resonance with these works is heightened and furthered by seeing these works in a constellation and in the context of the Hydrocene. As a curatorial theory, this book shared how to understand these artworks as they relate to each other and to cultural dialogues around climate justice. By expanding these singular pieces into the curatorial planetary force of the Hydrocene, we witness how these artists form a meaningful change in contemporary art practice and the societies who house them.

The book can be read as a guide to art and water-focused climate justice, illuminating ways to radically transform outdated and dangerous modes of relating to water. By rethinking curatorial measures, the Hydrocene as both a disruptive, conceptual epoch and curatorial theory is a confluence of the distinct waters of contemporary art and curatorial practice, ecological and climate concerns, environmental humanities and watery theory. The Hydrocene enriches all these disciplines and underpins the role of art in challenging dominant and destructive anthropocentric human–water relations.

Water as storyteller, final words on the Hydrocene

I believe that art can rise to the challenges of our times, and I believe in the power of art to tell other stories and help to build a just and liveable future for all.

For me, the journey towards putting the climate crisis at the centre of my work has also been a journey of meeting extraordinary people – artists, curators, theorists, academics, art workers and all the people who support the making of a rich cultural landscape and are dedicated to redirecting and reinventing art towards the climate crisis. No art on a dead planet, they might say. These folk have propelled me forward in this research and these artists and their cohorts have shown me how to think differently with water. In their unique and stalwart ways, these artists have moved beyond the tropes of art 'about' water, ecology and climate, to making work 'with' water, ecology and climate in all its poetic and political dimensions. The artists in my research do not shy away from complexity, instead they embrace the embodied experiences of human–water relations and through their art making offer an alternative to the dominant methods of relating to water as a resource and capital. These artists embrace the agency of water and meet water in respectful and curious manners.

In this journey of watery becoming, I have also met water. After many years of working with water, I thought I knew it, but I was wrong. I knew water was contradictory, playful, life giving and life taking. However, in the process of writing this book, my understanding of water as a material and metaphorical being with its own knowledge sources has shifted substantially. At my core, I moved from thinking about water, to thinking with water, that is, the way that water moves not only as a physical being but also how water moves as *story*.

Water is a storyteller. The stories water tells, move between people and places, much like the way cherished photographs or family recipes move between people and places. Stories of water and how it has been loved, perceived, ignored: these water stories also move between people and places. Our job is to listen.

The waves have much to say. As do the clouds, the rains, the tides, the tears, the puddles, the waterfalls and the runoff. Each of these intimate waterbodies is bursting with water stories. They plead to tell us the ocean is dying. The rivers are angry. The hydrological cycle is exhausted. We are losing light but there is still time to change direction, to recalibrate. There is still time to listen to the waves.

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