

INTRODUCTION

Lindsay Bremner is an architect and scholar who began her academic career in Johannesburg South Africa, where she published, lectured and exhibited widely on the transformation of Johannesburg after apartheid. She was head of architecture departments at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and at Temple University in Philadelphia before taking up her current post as Professor of Architecture at the University of Westminster. Her work positions architectural research within wider geospatial and socio-material systems. This has included 'Folded Ocean,' a project that investigated the transformation of the Indian Ocean world and 'Geoarchitecture,' an exploration into intersections between architecture, geology and politics. She is currently the PI of Monsoon Assemblages, European Research Council Grant no. 679873.

Monsoon [+ other] Waters is the second of three publications arising out of symposia convened by Monsoon Assemblages (MONASS) at the University of Westminster between 2017 and 2019. The first, *Monsoon [+ other] Airs* was published in 2017 (Bremner and Trower, 2017), this edition in 2019 and *Monsoon [+ other] Grounds* will follow in 2020. The symposia and publications are part of MONASS' agenda to foster interdisciplinary conversations between the environmental humanities (anthropology, environmental studies, political ecology, cultural geography and philosophy), the natural sciences (meteorology, climatology and climate science) and spatial design (architecture, landscape architecture, planning, urban design). They bring together researchers, designers and practitioners from diverse traditions, who use different tools and methods and refer to different literatures to stage what Amelia Barakin (2012: 01), in her discussion of the work of artist Pierre Huyghe calls 'moments of elegant irresolution.' As the monsoon does not fit the frames in which it is made to appear, the aim of these events is to cut across partitions and geographies, open up hermetic places and systems of thought, generate friction and debate and experiment with new ways of thinking, drawing, living and designing with the monsoon.

We live in a world where political geography and spatial planning are based on the separation of land, sea and air and the knowledge systems that produce them. Land is understood as solid, stable, divisible and the basis of human habitation; the sea is understood as liquid, mobile, indivisible, and hostile to human settlement; air is understood as gaseous, mobile, invisible and indispensable to human life. The monsoon cuts across these divisions. It inundates lived environments every year, connecting sky with land with sea. It is a spatial practice that reorganises air, water, land, settlements, cities, buildings and bodies through heat, wind, rain, inundation, flow and flood. It unites science with politics and policy with affect. Today climate change is disrupting its cycles. Explosive economic growth and rapid urbanisation are increasing the uncanniness of its behaviour. The frequency and severity of its impacts on human and non-human life is accelerating. In contrast with those who

propose 'climate-proofing' as response to these situations, we propose to explore the monsoon as a template for thinking with and to reorientate the environmental humanities and spatial design around its rhythms and cycles.

Monsoon [+ other] Waters took place at the University of Westminster on 12-13 April 2018. The first keynote address was given by landscape architects Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha. They posed the question of whether India is a 'landscape of rivers' or an 'ocean of rain,' suggesting that the two are very different grounds for habitation and design. A river landscape is a surface drained of water in flows between two lines to make land the undisputed staging ground of settlement. An ocean of rain on the other hand, is a ubiquitous wetness that does not flow as water does, but rather soaks, spreads, blows, seeps, osmotes and transpires in nonlinear ways. They asked whether, at a time when the separation of land and water is threatened by climate change, rising seas and increasing incidents of flood, India (and the world at large) is better served by being thought of as an ocean of rain rather than a landscape of rivers, and what this might mean for spatial design practice. Environmental anthropologist Kirsten Blinkenberg Hastrup's keynote address the following day spoke to similar questions through the idea of 'water literacy' i.e. ways of understanding and acting upon water, practically and academically, as a way of facing the challenges of living with the 'troubled waters' of climate change. Using an ethnographic case from the High Arctic, she explored how the unruliness of water, wetness and seasonality had resulted in social upheaval and the need for new spatial practices.

Other contributors to Monsoon [+ other] Waters responded to provocations put out in the call for abstracts for the symposium. The first, following Mathur and da Cunha (2017) dealt with wetness in the air, on the earth, under the earth, as an ontological condition (Peters and Steinberg, 2015) and the sensory, environmental, political and urban consequences that follow from this. Essays that explore this theme in this publication, albeit from very different perspectives, are those by Ifor Duncan, Megnaa Mehtta, Pedro Pombo, Laura Denning and Beth Cullen.

Ifor Duncan's essay questions the land/water divide in western knowledge systems through an examination of the double disappearance of over 600 people over the construction of the Hidroituango Dam in Columbia. He argues that the recovery of the bodily remains from the river is threatened by the dam and its potential failure, reproducing the very logics that drove the original violent acts. Megnaa Mehtta's essay draws from long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Sundarbans Delta of West Bengal. She focuses on the embankments surrounding inhabited islands and the politics of life surrounding them, arguing for closer relations between participant observation and design. Pedro

Pombo's contribution unfolds the dissolution of water and land by tidal and monsoonal cycles along India's west coast: on the island of Diu, in Cambay Bay and along Goa's coast, through a cartographic practice not anchored on land, but moving with the tides. Artist Laura Denning's essay draws from her practice based PhD's engagement with fog on the Somerset Levels. Based on a short film screened at the symposium, she considers water as vapour, beyond liquidity, as a significant aspect of wetland ecosystems, and as a disorienting yet sensuous phenomenon. Beth Cullen's essay approaches the landscape of Chennai in Tamil Nadu as haunted by the water tanks that have been destroyed in the process of urban expansion. Drawing on the ghost as an important analytical tool, she examines the tanks as spectral material presences that continue to make themselves known in the city.

The second provocation, to which number of essays in this publication respond, had to do with attitudes towards and practices of managing or exploiting water in South Asia and beyond since the mid 1980's. These include two on the tank system in Tamil Nadu, one by Ranees Vadamuthu and R.K. Rukkumany, the other by Avantika Bhaskar and Jayshree Vencatesan, and those by Matthäus Rest and David Whyte.

Ranees Vadamuthu and R. H. Rukkumany provide a useful survey of the tank systems of Tamil Nadu as a way of managing monsoon cycles of wetness and dryness. Echoing Beth Cullen's essay, they analyse the consequences of tanks being perceived as wasteland and filled in for development. Avantika Bhaskar and Jayshree Vencatesan's essay examines challenges in Ramanathapuram, a water-scarce district in a drought prone region on the coast of Tamil Nadu. They stress the revival of indigenous water wisdom to address water stresses brought about by the decline of the tank system, the elimination of seasonal cultivation and the invasion of the plant species *Prosopis juliflora*. Matthäus Rest's essay draws from his work on energy generation in Nepal, asking what happens when the fluid conditions and seasonal variability of the monsoon are denied and it is reconceptualised as a steady stream to be capitalised for hydropower. David Whyte offers a brief photographic snapshot of his ethnographic work with surfers on the technologically manufactured wave pools at Surf Snowdonia and the saline dynamism of the near-shore in north Wales.

The third provocation put out by MONASS for the Monsoon [+ other] Waters symposium asked for contributions that dealt with the monsoon from the perspective of climate change and its relations with culture, politics and socio-economic policies and practices. A number of contributions in this publication respond to these themes. These include essays on floods and flooding by Mary Gearey, Theresa Zimmermann and Laura Verdelli, Nikole Bouchard's photographic essay on Bangladesh, Olusegun Stephen Titus' discussion of oil extraction in the Niger Delta

as well as Kirsten Blinkenberg Hastrup's contribution discussed above.

Mary Gearey's essay focuses on the flow of a downland spring on its journey from Chanctonbury Ring to the River Adur in the South Downs in England that has been altered by changing land management practices and local government austerity measures. She examines how this has united residents to work towards returning it to its former path, generating new forms of cultural practice, community aesthetics and political solidarity. Theresa Zimmermann's essay is based on her work in Mumbai ten years after the monsoon floods of 2005, where she explored different meanings of the floods from a social constructivist perspective. Drawing on interviews with city officials, planners, researchers and activists and fieldwork in a suburb of Mumbai that experienced excessive flooding in 2005, she discusses how attitudes towards water, land, infrastructure and responsibilities in the city have altered since the floods. Laura Verdelli's contribution is a comparative study of how flooding is approached as a hazard in urban projects in cities in France and in Chennai in India. Her interest is in the integration of flood risk regulations into 'urbanism practice,' meaning the professions, tools and interests of spatial planning, rather being left to flood prevention and management professionals alone. Nikole Bouchard's photographic essay is a narrative of water related setbacks and resilient design responses to the inundation of the coastal areas by water in Bangladesh. The material was gathered while on a travel fellowship to research resilient design strategies at a range of scales across twelve countries. Olusegun Stephen Titus' discussion of the role of popular music in resistance to oil extraction in the Niger Delta opens the discussion of climate change to wider extractive and colonial histories. He argues that music provides a powerful medium for synergy between activists and the public in promoting environmental sustainability and reclaiming access to freshwater and farming.

The fourth problematic posed by the Monsoon [+ other] Waters call for abstracts centred on questions of representation - ways of describing, through visual or other means, the monsoon, its cycles and the landscapes it creates. Essays that explore these themes in this publication are by Pamila Gupta, David Kendall and Vrinda Seksaria and the interview with Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha by Sarah Bass, Charlotte Birch and Georgia Trower.

Pamila Gupta takes John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) as a starting point for looking for creative ways of reframing the monsoon. Extending her earlier essay 'Monsoon Fever' (Gupta, 2012), she discusses photographer Ritesh Uttamchandani's recent series 'Facing the Monsoon' and a lone photograph by Arko Datto to think monsoon wetness by way of its visual attunements. David Kendall and Vrinda Seksaria's contribution to the publication is a discussion with curator Carla de Utra Mendes of their photographs for the exhibition 'Charting the Invisible'

at the APT Gallery, London, UK in November 2017, a selection of which was shown at Monsoon [+ other] Waters. Their intention with this project was to reconfigure geopolitical and perceptual links between Mumbai and London through the exchange of images and techniques affected by the atmospheric, environmental and colonial residue of urban life across continents. The interview conducted with Anuradha Mathur and Dilip da Cunha by University of Westminster March students Sarah Bass, Charlotte Birch and Georgia Trower, addresses a range of questions about the methods used in their work to describe, represent and thereby reimagine wet landscapes, from archival research to drawing, mapping, photographing and writing.

In addition to the essays, the publication contains a number of graphic contributions by students and former students of Design Studio 18 at the University of Westminster. Design Studio 18 is an MArch design studio aligned with Monsoon Assemblages for three years to test ways of framing design research and what it means to design with the monsoon. The work included in this publication are experiments in representing fluidity using computational tools (RealFlow, Rhino and Grasshopper) and include work by Constantina Avraamides, Sarah Bass, Tom Benson, Charlotte Birch, Laura Nica and Georgia Trower.

Finally, I offer words of thanks to Harshavardhan Bhat, Anthony Powis and Zahra Saleh who took responsibility as prime organisers of the Monsoon [+ other] Waters symposium; to students of Design Studio 18 for their contribution and support; to the speakers, exhibitors and attendees of Monsoon [+ other] Waters for engaging with us in developing Monsoon Assemblages' agenda and contributing to this publication; and to the Monsoon Assemblages Advisory Board, in particular Pushpa Arabindoo, David Chandler, Dilip da Cunha, Pamila Gupta, Kirsten Blinkenberg Hastrup, Simon Joss, Anuradha Mathur and Johan Woltjer who participated in Monsoon [+ other] Waters and for their ongoing critical support for the project.

Videos of all the Monsoon [+ other] Waters symposium presentations are available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCamcCWHWwYL74xacO2f7nnQ>.

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