

Wet and wild

Description

In a recent experiment into green landscapes and their *salutogenic* (health giving) potential (led by colleague Jenny Roe), we presented people with a range of images of urban and green space – dry images deliberately selected without “blue space” (i.e. water).

Such is *homo sapiens*’ powerful affinity with life-giving water, we thought its presence would be a significant factor in the environment. After all, people pay a lot of



In an interesting book entitled *Thinking with Water*,

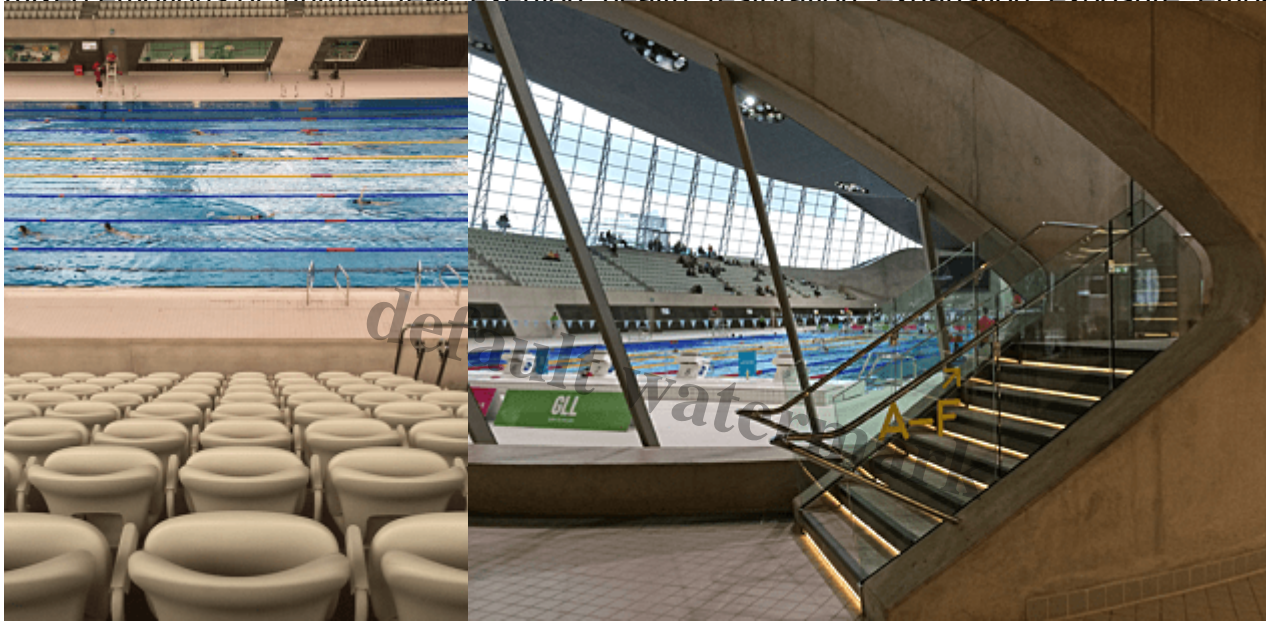
Cecilia Chen, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis indicate the prominence of watery images in people’s emotional landscapes. They identify the “sensual charisma” of rivers, ponds, rain, coasts and puddles. Water holds and transmits stories, identities and memories.

Water’s presence, absence and transformations also impinge on the political landscape. For example, they identify how climate change is “immediately tangible through the volatility of weather patterns and the intensity of floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, and droughts.” They think that at the

scale of acidifying oceans, changed currents, wetland encroachment, and desertification, we are also part of watery transformations.

ve observed that even when contained, partitioned, standardised, purified, and turned into a measured and consistent medium with chemicals added and controlled temperature, water's power as a medium for the emotions trickles through.

Stripped of many of water's signifying dimensions, an olympic standard swimming pool evokes mixed emotions of triumph, fear, exertion, health, restoration, exhaustion, exposure, embarrassment



Wetaphors

The authors of *Thinking with Water* emphasise our dependence on watery metaphors. They argue eloquently that:

Many fundamental concepts and ideas would be unthinkable without a language of flow, circulation, and depth. In everyday speech, emotions flood, bubble up, and surge; a dry text is one that lacks feeling and passion. We freeze up with stage fright, join or diverge from mainstream populations. Money circulates; commodities flood the market. The past is a depth and time evaporates. Neither is the realm of theory immune to inspiration from the liquid world: aqueous dynamics of flux and flow characterize qualities of indeterminacy and continuous change within many contemporary epistemologies, while feminist concepts of leakiness and seepage have been mobilized to identify crucial porosities in bodies and theories alike.

This is thinking with water: Just as water animates our bodies and economies, so it also permeates the ways we think. No wonder it affects our responses to landscapes.



References

- Chen, Cecilia, Janine MacLeod, and Astrida Neimanis. 2013. Introduction: Toward a hydrological turn. In C. Chen, J. MacLeod, and A. Neimanis (eds.), *Thinking with Water*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press. (available via [Google Books](#), though without page numbers)
- Roe, Jenny J., Peter A. Aspinall, Panagiotis Mavros, and Richard Coyne. 2013. Engaging the brain: The impact of natural versus urban scenes using novel EEG methods in an experimental setting. *Environmental Sciences*, (1) 2, 93-104. <http://www.m-hikari.com/es/es2013/es1-4-2013/roeES1-4-2013.pdf>
- Whyte, M., A. Smith, K. Humphryes, S. Pahl, D. Snelling, and M. Depledge. 2010. Blue space: The importance of water for preference, affect, and restorativeness ratings of natural and built scenes. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, (30)482-493.

Notes

- Also see [Melancholy urbanism](#), [The sublime indifference of waves](#), and [Enchanted places](#).
- Also see [Thought transfer](#) on the idea of the *conduit metaphor* of language, which also relates to watery flow, and [Wellbeing and geometry](#), that relates to ancient concepts of bodily fluids (humours).



Category

1. Architecture

Tags

1. emotion
2. flow
3. mood
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Date Created

March 8, 2014

Author

rcoyne99

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