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On Narrative, Affect and Threatened Ecologies of Tidal Landscapes

Owain Jones and Katherine Jones

All stories are true. I know that now.
Unwritten memories and bodies
Subside like pit villages.
But they leave small spaces
Where poppies and dandelions grow
Amongst resurgent grass

Poem extract from *Burials* by Adam Horovitz (2013/2011)

This is a story about tides, about tides in Bristol, about two characters that we found in the mud of the Severn Estuary – Peri and Proxi. It is also a story about telling stories as a method for the creative accounting of eco-social histories, presents and futures, and material and non-material entanglements of such through space-time. And it is a story about loss - of ecologies – of ecocide, of getting lost, and of finding a way through stories.

As so much of life is, this is an experimental mixing. Tides mix things –fresh and salt water, land and sea. In unsettling boundaries and definitions they invite a focus on inter-relationships, and on flux and change. Intertidal landscapes are in constant motion, change and cycles, denying fixity and stasis. As such they unsettle both linear thinking and linear understanding that, in spite of movements to break away from, continue to shape historical and geographical accounts in many areas of thinking.

This chapter is tidal in its approach, ecological. It tells stories of stories through the tides, an ebbing and waning, from solid to fluid and back again with all that comes in between. It embraces the constant motion of life and understanding, and attempts to bring this into a textual representation. In short it is a story of an ecological approach to eco-social storytelling.

Narrative #1: the power of stories

There has been a veritable burgeoning of what we term “literary geography” in the last few years. This is geography where the process of research and its reporting becomes re-worked and all wrapped up in the process of making and ‘telling a story’ and ‘telling a story well’. Often the aims are avowedly literary, with the quality of writing (language-structure-delivery) very much to the fore in methodological and ontological terms. This, for example, is exemplified in Fraser MacDonald’s paper “The ruins of Erskine Beveridge” (2015), the opening line of which is:

This is a narrative essay, the animating purpose of which is stylistic as much as analytic. It is a story; and, unusually for academic geography, the story is primary. (2014: 477).

This we think reflects a wider ‘narrative turn’ in the social sciences and art and humanities. And the point and potential of this turn is to create narratives which can capture – or better – channel – the elusive subtleties of everyday becoming with all its affective richness. Here, more or less, we are interested in stories, in *ecologies of stories*, and how to seed new threads of narratives into that ecology which *carry demands to know and live differently*.

Harari (2015), in his recent history of humanity, makes story telling the human characteristic which has shaped the last 2000,000 years and developed science, culture and politics as we know them.

Over the years, people have woven an incredibly complex network of stories. Within this network, fictions [] not only exist but also accumulate immense power. (2015: 31)

Since large-scale human cooperation is based on myth, the way people cooperate can be altered by changing the myths- by telling different stories. Under the right circumstances myths can change rapidly (Harari 2015: 32),

But...

Telling effective stories is not easy. The difficulty lies not in telling the story, but in convincing everyone else to believe it. Much of history revolves around this question: how does one convince millions of people to believe particular stories about gods, or nations, or limited liability companies? (Harari 2015: 31).

Tides #1: the tides: I, tide

I (OJ) have been researching and writing about tides for some years now. (Because) I love tides - I grew up with them (and saw the destruction of tidal lands). Tides – the grand movements of the earth’s oceans and seas due to the intersecting forces of interplanetary gravity and the spin of the earth – cannot be stopped, or even fractionally altered, by ‘man’, but the ecologies of tides can and are being degraded in many ways, as so much of our biosphere is.

The Lamby was an area of inter-tidal grassland used for summer grazing of livestock on the east side of the city of Cardiff, where the river Rhymney runs into the Severn Estuary, close by the once great docks of the city. A farming family, we drove cattle and sheep there each spring for summer grazing, attended to them each week at high tides, and then returned them to the farmstead in autumn. This was a beautiful and wild area of the city with birds (bird watchers) and boats and walkers and horse riders and youth on scrambler bikes and people harvesting driftwood. It was destroyed by building new seawalls along the seaward margin of the land and using it for a huge landfill and refuse reprocessing site.

The Taff Estuary, on the other side of the city – where the river Taff made a large tidal estuary as it opened out onto the yet larger Severn Estuary, was an equally ecologically and culturally rich wild area in the city – with birdlife – and nature reserve status. This was drowned by building a barrage across the mouth of the estuary, thus creating an area of permanent high fresh water. This was not for power generation. Just for real estate value generation. This was, and is, claimed to be a great example of urban development with large areas of gleaming, high value residential and commercial premises created along a new – non-muddy - water front.

The lower tidal reaches of the Taff river no longer flow, but form a ribbon lake running back up into the city. A river that does not flow anymore – with all the culture and ecological implications of that. My memories are haunted by the loss of these places (See Jones 2005, 2015). Through the weaving of my personal history with that of the tide, my sense of loss becomes a mourning for an ecology that was. The destruction of this ecology - this mixing of waters, of creatures, of the cyclical social rhythms of season and tide and human activity - is felt as a deeply personal loss, even as I am but

one of the many things and people affected by it. I am now concerned for other particular tidal landscapes I know, and for them more widely. As so much of nature, they are falling under the march of “ecocide”¹ through the process of modern ‘development’. (OJ end)

Most recently, tides have flowed into our arts and humanities based project “Towards Hydrocitizenship” (UK) and its Bristol case study – WaterCityBristol.²

Ecology#1: ecology and narrative

Ecology is fundamentally about the *radical* interconnectedness of things – the interrelations which make up the ongoing practice of life. Life is not in objects or individuals, it is in the interactions between them.

This is ecology taken in a broad rather than narrow sense of ‘pure biology’. The nature-culture divide does not exist within this wider sense of ecology, nor the other dualisms that have beset modernity e.g. subject-object. As Latour (1993) famously said, these divides are the corrosive tools of oppression within modernity, that are wreaking terrible harm on us as individuals, our communities, our beautiful biosphere home.

In contrast with those who believe they may live detached from nature, environmentalists recognize that they are part of a community made of multiple relationships-both biotic and abiotic. This is an ecological concept: ecology explains that all organisms are connected in a network which makes what is called an ecosystem. Interconnection is a touchstone of ecology; everything that occurs in any given part of an ecosystem will affect the rest, many times in unexpected ways. According to the environmentalist and physicist Barry Commoner, *the principle that ‘everything is connected to everything else’ must be considered the first basic law of ecology*. While it might be more intuitive to trace those connections at the local scale, they are not less strong and real at the global level. (Armiero and Sedrez 2014; 1).

And this is a radical principle. Or should be;

The really subversive element of Ecology rests not on any of its more sophisticated concepts, but on its most basic premise: inter-relatedness. But the genuinely radical nature of that proposition is not generally perceived, even, I think, by ecologists. To the

¹ Ecocide is a term used by Felix Guattari in his landmark book *The Three Ecologies* (first published in French in 1989). Guattari argues that the three interconnecting ecologies that make up the fabric of flourishing life, biodiversity, cultural diversity, individual psychic diversity are all falling to ecocide drive by a toxic combination of globalised capitalism, state power and oppressive ideologies

²<http://www.watercitybristol.org/>

western mind, *inter-related* implies a causal connection [] but what is actually involved is a genuine *intermingling* of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities. (Evernden 1996; 93 emphasis as original).

Complexity is more or less about the density of interaction and non-linear connections within systems. In one sense the more complex a system is, the ‘easier’ it is to move from one point to another in terms of connection. But finding one’s way is the challenge – it is easy to get...

Lost... and found...

The brilliant, ground-breaking writer, W G Sebald said it was a revelation when he realized that ‘everything is connected across space and time’ (2013: vii). Thus to approach any subject one can pick a random starting point and then try to find one’s way to your subject. Or one could start somewhere – anywhere – and soon be someplace else. No thing/no place is without interest, implications, possibilities - politics. The world is a hyper-complex and a fluid set of on-going entangling non-linear processes. This is more or less what Ingold (2012) terms the ‘meshwork’ of life. The meshwork is an expression of ecology. And as Tim Morton (2010) says, the ecological crisis lets us see that ‘everything is interconnected. This is the ecological thought’ (1).

Reading Sebald can be a somewhat disorientating experience of momentarily wondering where you are, where you are going and why? The experience of that echoes the process of his method (see below). Yes it’s all ecological – yes everything is connected - but this is not immediately – or even after a period of contemplation - graspable. Much is hidden - elusive maybe even illusive. Thus to be active in the world in this way is often to feel – to be – lost. This is one challenge of affective theory/method – which seeks to wander into the realm of lived complexity. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) say, more or less, of affective based approaches to research, if you are not experiencing some feeling of lostness and disorientation you might not be doing it right!

Lost is good, that is part of the process. In sympathy with Sebald’s claim that creativity can only come through deliberately embracing chance and serendipity, the writer Duncan Fallowell asserts:

Unless you are prepared to get lost you can never discover anything new or grow, and that is true as an individual or indeed of whole societies (2015; radio broadcast)

Rebecca Solnit (2006) wrote a whole lovely book about the importance and affordances of being lost. Modern knowledge dislikes lostness, seeks to avoid and eradicate it. But embracing it and leaning to move differently means you are more open to the world and more likely to know it. Referring to Walter Benjamin, Solnit suggests ‘to be lost is to be fully present, and to be fully present is to be capable being in uncertainty and mystery’ (6).

So here is Sebald on all this - please excuse the length of quote but we do feel this is worth sharing. This is Sebald in conversation with Joseph Cuomo in front of a live audience (2007):

[On the writing of *The Rings of Saturn* and the “research methods” used] I had this idea of writing a few short pieces for the feuilletons of the German papers in order to pay for this extravagance of a fortnight’s rambling tour. That was the plan. But then as you walk along, you find things. I think that’s the advantage of walking. It’s just one of the reasons why I do that a lot. You find things by the wayside or you buy a brochure written by a local historian, which is in a tiny little museum somewhere, which you would never find in London. And in that you find odd details which lead you somewhere else, and so it’s a form of unsystematic searching, which of course for an academic is far from orthodoxy, because we’re meant to do things systematically.

But I never liked doing things systematically. Not even my Ph.D. research was done systematically. It was always done in a random, haphazard fashion. And the more I got on, the more I felt that, really, one can find something only in that way, i.e., in the same way in which, say, a dog runs through a field. If you look at a dog following the advice of his nose, he traverses a patch of land in a completely unplotable manner. And he invariably finds what he’s looking for. I think that, as I’ve always had dogs, I’ve learned from them how to do this. [Audience laughter.] And so you then have a small amount of material, and you accumulate things, and it grows; one thing takes you to another, and you make something out of these haphazardly assembled. And, as they have been assembled in this random fashion, you have to strain your imagination in order to create a connection between the two things. If you look for things that are like the things that you have looked for before, then, obviously, they’ll connect up. But they’ll only connect up in an obvious sort of way, which actually isn’t, in terms of writing something new, very productive. So you have to take heterogeneous materials in order to get your mind to do something that it hasn’t done before. That’s how I thought about it.

Then, of course, curiosity gets the better of you. For instance, this whole business about this atrocious Chinese civil war in the nineteenth century, which we know so little about in the West - I knew nothing about it - I’d found that remark in a tiny little booklet written, I think, in 1948, which was still there for sale, that this little local train which ran around there [over the River Blyth in England] had been destined originally for the court of the emperor of China, which was a very bizarre, erratic fact. And then

of course you wonder which emperor, and you go to the Encyclopedia Britannica from 1911 and you rummage ; around there, and it goes on like this. Which is the most pleasurable part of the work, as you uncover these things and move from one astonishing thing to the other. The actual writing, of course, is a different story. That's far from a pleasant occupation. [Audience laughter] (Sebald 2007; 94-95).

Narratives created in such a way are 'alive' to the ecology of the world, are flexible enough to get into all that complexity and follow, *and make* paths through it. We are all on individual paths through the ecological matrix of unfolding life. As we proceed we encounter, and react, and influence and move on. As every single thing does. Ecocide gets into the meshwork, kills bits of it, cuts it up, colonizes – parasitizes - the webs of connection, controls what it needs, degrades or removes what it does not.

The great thing about narrative as method is *complete freedom* in terms of space and time. The famous cowboy story cliché “meanwhile back at the ranch” is a simple example of how a narrative can arbitrarily and instantly jump to any place and any time at the insertion of the simplest link, in the manner of a wormhole. Even if there was no (apparent) link between the two elements – the narrative link connects them ecologically. All stories are true. Or, as Picasso said ‘everything you imagine is real’.³

Of course the challenge is to have the imagination to make ‘good wormholes’, to tell stories compelling enough to get listeners to follow in imaginative, emotional and affective terms down the wormhole – or to use one of the most brilliant examples from literature – down the rabbit hole.

Importantly, as the writer Emily Woof tells of her own ‘method’ of similar haphazard wanderings through possible nodes, scenes and connections in the construction of narrative, we need to ‘trust our subconscious’ to make good and creative decisions about what we do and where we go in narrative construction (2015 – online). More or less that is what we are doing here.

Stories are the key fabric by which we construct the world individually and collectively. We will keep on with these three themes that make up this story about tides, about the ability of stories to creatively capture the complex ecology of the unfolded (history and unfolding

³ This quote is attributed to Picasso on many websites and blogs but the original source is not obvious.

world). If we were good enough story tellers we could say one story and these threads would emerge through the skill of telling. It is hard to throw off the academic habit.

Narrative #2: ecology and ecocide

We live in a crowded, chaotic ecology of narratives. These are all the stories we gather and inflect – media, social media, family, work, communities and ones we make ourselves (of ourselves) in all these settings, and share with ourselves and each other. Our senses of self, senses of place, nation and so on, are essentially narrative constructions as the eminent neurobiologist Antonio Damasio (2000) shows - based in and upon memory within culture, but always on the move.

At present this ecology of narratives, which essentially is the living tissue of culture, has some particularly pernicious ‘invasive species’ in it – basically the narratives (and resultant) practices of industrial globalized capitalism and the enlightenment/modernist ideologies theologies and sciences it is in league (as the devil) with.

As the Invisible Committee put it, ‘two centuries of capitalism and market nihilism have bought us to the most extreme alienations – from ourselves, from others, from worlds. [] It’s with an entire anthropology that we are at war. The very idea of man.’ (2009: 16)

A quick example – NIKE, the footwear, sportswear/clothing, accessories multinational corporation spends a *\$100 a second* globally on what they term “demand creation” (Forester 2014 – online). And one only needs to imagine that multiplied by all the capitalist agents operating globally, and all the state and theocratic powers, to think of the *narrative noise* we all, to varying extents, live in, the *narrative oppression we live under*. “Brands” are forms of lifestyle/identity narratives seeking to capture peoples’ narratives of themselves, and the corporations, the theologies, the states, the media are continuously pumping their narratives of self and lifestyle into the ecologies of narrative we live within. It is a common observation now that modern politics is all about narrative.

This is not the Enlightenment (as we are so often told) – this is a new form of Dark Age, precisely because ecocide is well under way. The World Wildlife Fund’s 2014 report which

states that 52% of the world's biodiversity has been lost between 1970 and 2010 is the starkest testament to that (WWF, 2014).

Ecocide is also bound up with the 'death of affect' itself as predicted by J G Ballard as the potency and force of human life is colonised by fabricated commodified emotions of, say, 'reality TV'. In 1989 Guattari stressed that this far mainstream politics has entirely failed to address the issue of ecocide, which is, quite literally killing us and an ecological collective.

Political groupings and executive authorities appear to be totally incapable of understanding the full implications of these issues. Despite having recently initiated a partial realization of the most obvious dangers that threaten the natural environment of our societies, they are generally content to simply tackle industrial pollution and then from a purely technocratic perspective, whereas only an ethico-political articulation - which I call *ecosophy* between the three ecological registers [the environment, social relations and human subjectivity] would be likely to clarify these questions (17)

Twenty five years on this situation has, if anything, worsened.

Tides #2: telling the tides

Tides have been called – 'the pulse of the earth'. We don't actually think the analogy bares too much scrutiny - but it is eloquent of the earth as a living system, which clearly it is; as Lovelock has shown in the Gaia hypothesis.

Tides are the fundamental physical process of the waters of the earth's oceans rhythmically, vastly moving in response to the cosmic forces of interplanetary gravity (earth, moon, sun) and the spin of the earth itself. Like in any complex body, the rhythms are also complex with

So how to 'represent' these, and the richness associated with them and the risks they face. We need compelling narratives. One obvious example is the work of Rachel Carson – who – as well as writing the epoch defining *Silent Spring* (1962) also wrote about the oceans and the tides.

In a great new article on storytelling/narrative as a (feminist) method of inquiry Stone-Mediatoire (2016) turns to Rachel Carson as an example of an academic and scientist who made such an impact (but which still has very far to go) because she was a great storyteller.

Carson was an eminent biologist and ecological conservation pioneer, whose first love was for the oceans, their shores and their tides. She filled her stories with scientific facts, personal observations and the observations of lay people. The titles of her trilogy of books about these subjects capture that love. *Under the Sea Wind*, 1941; *The Sea Around Us*, 1951; *The Edge of the Sea*, 1955 (Figure 1). It is the last of the trilogy that focuses on the tides most fully, not least as tides come into their own – and are most obvious in some senses at least - in coastal margins, even if they affect all the oceans.

Figure 1. The Rachel Carson “Sea Trilogy”. [three book cover images]

Carson was a public scientist (not without her enemies in the ranks of the ecocide – well, pesticide – merchants) and this was confirmed by her portrait being on a US postage stamp of great Americans in 1981 (figure 2).

Figure 2. Rachel Carson USA postage stamp, Great Americans series, 1981 [one stamp image]

Of tides, Carson famously said ‘there is no drop of water in the ocean, not even in the deepest part of the abyss, that does not know and respond to the mysterious forces that create the tide.’ (1989; 149). And through the effects tides have on all ocean waters, the ecologies of the oceans and intertidal areas are shaped by tides in terms of the habits of creatures and plants in terms of cycles of life, relationships, migrations and so forth.

Sea creatures are highly attuned to rhythm, current, pressure, sound, the movement of material through water, and so the tides are of general and often particular significance to them. Clearly these life forms heed the patterns and rhythms in the water but also, it seems, can somehow sense the varying gravitational pull of the moon itself. As Lyall Watson, in his somewhat strange book *Supernature* states, ‘every living marine animal and plant is made aware of the rhythm [of the tides].’ (1973: 22)

Watson then goes on to offer some examples of this. He reports on experiments conducted by Carson on *Convoluta* (a very small marine flat-worm) in a laboratory far from the sea, where the worms still cycled through rising from mud and back into mud in tune with the absent tides. Watson also reports on the work of the US biologist Frank Brown, who, in experiments starting in 1954, took oysters to labs far from where they were collected to observe their behaviours and rhythms. For two weeks, after a journey of 1000 miles from Long Island Sound to a suburb of Chicago on Lake Michigan, the oysters opened to feed at what would have been the time of high tide at the home. But after that, their rhythms slowly changed to a pattern that would have suited tidal rise and fall in their new location.

Ecology #2: towards ecologies of narrative and ecological citizenship

Here is a very important point about the ecological citizenship 'movement'. It is not the case that the various thinkers from Leopold and Naess onwards want to make modern humans ecological citizens. *Humans are always and inevitably ecological*. Of course we are - through the food, energy, water we consume, through the waste we produce, the atmospheric gases we inhale and exhale, in how we are always embedded bodily in the environment, in how our bodies are more an assemblage of organisms and heterogeneous DNA than in any way pure and unified.

So the challenge of the ecological self is not to become ecological – we are ecological. It is to recognise this ecological basis of our being that has been hidden from us, denied to us, by a range of ideological trajectories. It is also to recognize the connections/processes we are embedded in utterly and always, and – as far as possible - the demands and consequences those connections bring – for us and others.

Unfortunately that means, at present (trying to) looking into the knowledgeabyss that separates culture (modern humans) from nature, and the consequences therein. This throws up a number of significant challenges, but these can be divided up as follows: *Firstly*, the unknowability of the (modern) ecological self. The nature of modern life – globalised, consumption based, highly complex technologically and economically, means that the networks we are in – ecologically – are extraordinarily opaque, complex, long and entangled.

It is almost impossible to genuinely confront this. The mobile phone, for example, contains such a complicated ‘footprint’ of rare metals and other resources that the understanding of that and how these are derived and processed is daunting. The same applies to all complex products and everyday activities such as shopping in a modern supermarket. Movements such as ‘Follow the Thing’ and ‘Fair Trade’ are worthy interventions in this kind of challenge in which the consequences of at least some forms of consumption actions are traced. But as modern citizens living lives based upon very high levels of very complexly produced consumption, it is very hard to engage with the full implications of one’s ecological footprint.

Secondly, the other equally challenging thing is that at present – the modern human’s ecological ‘footprint’ is – collectively - simply devastating. Even if one’s own ecological footprint is unknowable, it is not hard to get some sense of collective consequences. The ecological crisis is ‘so obvious now’ (Morton 2010), yet almost totally ignored by mainstream politics and culture.

We feel a sense of this can be felt with just some effort of imaginal groundwork. For example – go to a large supermarket – walk down the tinned fish aisle – and then imagine all the other supermarkets and shops in the entire world, and the huge infrastructures delivering this – and the consequences. Linking this to some knowledge of the overfishing of the seas and ecological consequences thereof obviously helps.

What is knowable is that, collectively, modernity is the bringer of ‘ecocide’ as defined by Guattari. Although it is difficult to trace out – and act upon the particular connections we are bound into, the aggregate results of modern society are only too clear. Climate change and the crashing of terrestrial and marine biodiversity are the BIG STORIES of our age. So to become self-aware in terms of ecological self is to put oneself in a very ethical and emotionally challenging position. Of course, one can live as ‘greenly’ as possible, but as citizens or subjects (tax payers) we are bound into the capitalist, militarized nation state systems, which are very hard to step outside of.

Thirdly, to become ecologically self-aware, as far as is possible, and to confront the challenge of this, should sit with a commitment to try to adjust one’s life to a more ecologically benign/creative footing. If one has to have political and spiritual ‘foundations’, these are good reasons why this should be it. This is not a new claim. It is akin to a point of the Deep

Ecology platform item Eight. “Those who subscribe to the foregoing points [the previous 7 points of the platform]⁴ have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes” [changes in the fundamental vision and practice of humans in nature particularly the abandoning of notions of human exceptionalism] and (eco)feminism’s profound assertion that “the personal is the political”. In other words there is no private and public in politics and flows of power and responsibility stream between the body and the body politic.

Becoming more ecologically aware (which is what ecological citizenship/self rests upon in the first instance), might put a strain on personal happiness and relationships. We are lucky enough to have a pretty good (separate) community and family lives. But taking part in our communities puts us into many positions where we are witnessing people, who we respect and have affection for – who are not – at present – concerned with their ecological embeddedness. They are interesting in their social, cultural and consumption embeddedness in society – e.g. their lifestyle, their cars, their holidays, their homes. Of course, we are interested in all that too – it seems unavoidable in the way we live now. But at present many of those we witness are practicing liberal capitalist consumption based self-becoming. Many are very kind and thoughtful – but like most enlightenment souls, the ecological basis of becoming and its consequences is pretty closed off to them.

We need a new canon of stories, or a shift in the centre of gravity of the ecologies of stories with live in and by, to change how modern people see themselves in the world. Stories are being seized upon for social justice purposes, for example:

Social justice activists, artists and project leaders all over the world [] are insisting on the power that stories have to generate hope and engagement, personal dignity and active citizenship, the pride of identity, and the humility of human connectedness. [] The beginning of the twenty-first century is an historical moment in which narrative is more broadly recognised than ever as a significant, simple, crucial vehicle for reawakening, disseminating and sustaining social justice impulses (Solonger, Fox and Irani 2008:1)

We need to tell ecological stories – of tides - and everything else. From the above book - about a river and a community - comes this story. It is a sad one. Ecocide.

⁴ To see the 8 points of the Deep Ecology Platform go to <http://www.deepecology.org/platform.htm>

Sadness lays hard on the land. Commodification and diversion of a most sacrosanct element, Water, the Zuni River, is not only an assault on the ecosystem and the people, but on the ability of our distinct culture to continue to grow and flourish, and of the Earth to regenerate and sustain us. Our lands are being plundered and our resources exploited for profit, with impunity, Precious watershed that give birth to our lakes, springs, and streams. (Wemytewa and Peters 2008:22)

Tides #3: affecting a story of tides

On March 22nd 2015 the highest tide in 20 years was predicted at the Port of Avonmouth (Bristol) which stands at the mouth of the River Avon on the great Severn Estuary (SW UK). The old city port of Bristol stands some 8 miles upstream - where the boats of conquest and empire once floated up and down on the high tide. Bristol is (was) a lunar city not a solar city following Lefebvre's elucidation of the rhythms of tidal cities (Lefebvre 2004: 91).

In Lefebvre's eyes the 'feel' and 'character' of oceanic cities locates on the Atlantic (macro-tides) and the Mediterranean (micro-tides) was different, feel and character as transmitted in their material arrangements, their habits and, particularly, their rhythms. And all that together is more or less what affect is – the feel of a place – or to be more precise all the interactions between bodies in place and bodies and place that make up it what it is.

In more detail again Thrift (2004) suggests

Cities may be seen as broiling maelstroms of affect. Particular affects such as anger, fear, happiness and joy are continually on the boil, rising here, subsiding there, and these affects continually manifest themselves in events which can take place either at a grand scale or simply as a part of continuing everyday life (2004: 57).

So – in practice – in relation to tides in a city how might that work? In one of the most famous adventure novels ever written – R L Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, the ship of the story – the Admiral Benbo – once the crew of characters both noble and nefarious have been assembled - is prepared for sail on the next high tide in the heart of Bristol with stores being purchased and rushed aboard. All the drama, excitement and nervousness of a hasty departure for an adventure is set out. But as the next high tide for sailing happens to be early morning,

the port and its stores – and pubs – and dock hands were all action right through the night. A lunar city.

Bristol and the wider Severn Estuary have some of the highest tides in the world. The sea-level will rise as much as 14 meters in the space of six hours. The sea itself rising up. Think of that. The implications are profound for the coast, the cities and all human and non-human life that live in the hinterlands of such tides. The wider projects seek to creatively explore and develop ecological understandings of water in Bristol and how it connects people to each other, and people to nature, and the past, present and future of this including the roles of the tide.

At this spring equinox (2015), the tide was exceptionally high – because, in all the regular Newtonian business of the heavenly bodies in motion that create the tides, there are subtle irregularities. The orbit of the moon around the earth, and that of the earth around the sun are not completely regular – so, on occasions, distances – forces ‘conspire’ to give an extra tweak to the more regularly rhythmic pulls that makes high tides.

At the autumn equinox there was a “Blood Moon” to boot. Another very high tide and a moon that glows a dull red in a full lunar eclipse - eclipses – famous moments of mysterious affect. The Hydrocitizens project we are involved with, working with a number of partners, staged public performances to co-incide with both these extra high tide. The latter called “Blood Moon” and held in Bristol’s Planetarium. Telling the city stories of the tides – which for various reasons – including the port moving downstream - are less affectively, and ecologically, potent in the city than they were historically. This story, or set of stories, in essence, revolves around two characters, Peri and Proxi, who are the tides made flesh as old sea dogs, created out of Severn Estuary mud and sent to Bristol by an ancient pagan deity *Sabrina* to re-awaken the city to its tidal heritage.⁵

⁵ Personifications of the tides were co-developed with artists, a youth enterprise NGO, a film maker and a very skilled and experienced Bristol based Street Theatre Company, The Desperate Men, who subsequently played the parts and wrote their dialogue..

In the tides strands of our water research in Bristol, we have sought to create performative narratives to seed into the city's imagination through a series of events held as part of Bristol being 2015 Green Capital of Europe. Based upon the two characters Peri and Proxi –we co-generated a series of events in which the characters performed in locations around the city's waterways, in schools and other public events. Each event, and the wider gathering narrative of these characters, sought to generate affective narratives and atmospheres created by the performers *and* the settings. The content included (which is watchable on the videos); oaths of allegiance to the river and tides and hydro-poetics; rituals (dipping hands into buckets of river mud); mud painting on walls; shared singing and walking and boat trips.

Through the experience and skill of the performers, humour, wit and audience interaction all play a large part in these 'eco-entertainments'. The ongoing narrative of the anthropomorphized tides and their adventures are aimed at awakening stirrings of ecological senses of self and place in relation to the tides, the city and its hydrosphere. Their story invites interest, sympathy and combined with the embodied experiences, creates empathy. Films of other episodes of these characters' tidal adventures in Bristol can be found on-line.⁶ The characters Proxi and Peri (after the proxigean and perigean tides) were co-created by an assemblage of community organisers, artists, and academics. The performances and interactions spurred new forms of expression, stories, of which one is included here.

Writing a short script for the characters Proxi and Peri is a way of finding new and imaginative ways to tell stories. It is made possible by the affective and emotional experiences contained in the performances, and in personal histories. The performances and characters become a new nodal point from which other stories can ripple outwards, reaching perhaps towards a place of 'ecological citizenship' through engaging the senses and sensibilities.

A key missing episode from Peri and Proxi's Bristol journey⁷

⁶ Coming Into Town on a High Tide Link to come
Peri and Proxi; The Bristol Syzygy Oath; high tide - Bristol, 22 03 2015
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u79gnQD39x8>
Extracts from Tidal Turnings: The Continued (Bristol) Adventures of Peri and Proxi
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HunglU2KcXM>

⁷ The various scripts for the characters Peri and Proxi have been written by the Desperate Men Theatre Company with input from others. This last episode is written by Owain.

(The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner. (Coleridge))

(Setting: Bristol Green Capital 2015 shindig on the Bristol docks by the Severn Shed Restaurant; moonlit night; high tide – but only down river – the docks are always high water since the great engineering of the 1830s)

You going back inside?

No – let's have another fag.

So then what happens?

Well, Sabrina whispers.

Yes, But then, she is always whispering.

Of course. The true gods only ever whisper – even though sometimes it is a roar – of wind; of water; of ripping ice. But this whisper is different - in an unknown tongue - a spell, a magic incantation – in the tongue of men. Men, mark you, not women – (it is the men that need conjuring). A spell of creation. Audible to men-to-be-from-mud.

Men yet to be made?

Yes men yet to be made – or maid?

No I don't think so.

The worm-boiled mud stirs; a few wading birds take flight; the marsh grasses withdraw their roots... Just to be sure

Shore?

Sure

The tide is busy elsewhere – out –

And about?

Yes - It knows which side its bread is buttered on

The mud bulges – madly but slowly. Bubbles and then lumps, then smooths again.

The cars hum-rumbling across the great bridge hum-rumble on – blind to the genesis below them?

Yes. And the people in them. The to-be-men start to form – first like crime scene outlines; then 3D; then flex – in the flat - sliding in - then ON the mud. Then fold – up-

wards, elbow by elbow, knee by knee. Rise from the hip. Grey out of grey; clutching at each other.

No eyes yet?

Eyes - but sealed by mud

They lift head – and cock an ear to the near horizon of reeds and seawall. Sabrina whispers. Instructions.

Naked?

Sabrina? God no – the very thought – who could look on her, one would simply effervesce to nothing!!

No - the men

Oh! – No - their clothes drag out of the mud with them, like brown and grey melted cheese.

Cheese – the moon?

No; in this instance - just a coincidence.

They are new not-young men.

Well - what do new young men know?

Quite. They are new old men. Men of the sea, of the trade routes. Sea dogs. Men of the tides. With fish-tales –suitcases full of old letters, locks of hair – scrimshaw, Masefield men. Conrad men

Masefield?

Masefield – you know!

Ah yes – of course “I must...

(together) We all must ...

What about Marlowe?

That was another river. Another town. You can't blame the tides for what men float on them.

This town was bad enough - So then what?

They feel flesh and blood - their own – then each others' And then drag their suitcases....

Sea chests?

No - suitcases – bit odd - more like travelling salesmen – they drag them to the **seawall**.

They stop there - I'll be bound

Well, yes – but just to look - on this occasion. It is an old friend

Enemy - maybe

Enemy – but something to be leaned on – on a calm summer’s night
They stand and look downstream and upstream, across to the other side
To Wales,
To Wales
and then inland
At the catchment, the reens?
The reens. Where the eels once went with them
So many it made her silver in the moonlight
She was so pleased. She preened!!
I know
And the power stations and factories
And roads, AND houses
At risk of flooding?
At risk of flooding
And the railway?
The railway – and The Station no less.
(together) Severnbeach
That is one problem solved
One of many
And Shirley’s café?
Breakfast first. Full English Fry-up for two. As slippy as mud
And nourishing
If you say so
Well, Satisfying then
Satisfying
Then a slow branch-line trip to where the river is river – the Avon
Shirehampton
Yes - but they need tickets
What’s in the suitcases?
They need tickets
We will come to that
They need tickets
Well yes
The train guard – she’s a character – one of Sabrina’s

Oh right

And – as if by magic -

By magic you mean

Well yea ok but no one knows what magic even is these days. The train is full of characters

Sabrina's Characters

End of scene one Severnbeach railway station

Scene 2 Train ride Severn Beach to Shirehampton

((To be performed and filmed))

Scene 3 (partial)

Sabrina sleeps. Part curled on her side. Breathing.

Curled like a feather – like a crescent moon?

Not really - (sings) “just like a woman” – who said that?

Belly rising and falling with the moon's turns?

Yes but not the Breath of the Moon as the Beade said

No, but he was not that far off – a good stab I think

Yates?

He knew Sabrina and the white goddess were – well – acquainted

Sabrina dreams. Lying on her back, restless. Wild dreams of floods and cataracts, of when the world – the river – the tides were young.

When she was elsewhere. Under ice?

Under ice – or under water!!

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