

# 16

## BRAIDING, A FLUID DRAMATURGY

Carol Brown

### Introduction

When the whirlwind's gusts are wheeling, Ours it is the dance to braid.  
(Walter Scott, *The Bridal of Triermain*, 1813)

This chapter explores braiding as a choreographic strategy for bringing together different elementary forces, times, places and histories through site-responsive performance in a time of climate change. I describe braiding as a choreo-spatial method employed in the making of *Flood*, presented at the Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space 2015, that contributed to a fluid dramaturgy that interlaced stories from different parts of the world – Aotearoa, Australia and the Czech Republic – through tributaries of movement and gestural refrains.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes the verb 'braid' as an action of crossing and recrossing, to 'thread the mazes' of a dance. It is also an adjective for rivers that wend through lands as multiple tributaries blend and separate such as the mighty Waitaki, the Rangitata, and the Rakaia in Te Wai Pounamu near where I grew up in Aotearoa New Zealand. Like a dance that coheres across the shifting intensities of bodies, braiding occurs where slipstreams of water shape a fluvial geography. *Flood*, in exploring themes of water, inundation and the transmigration of movements and memories between hemispheres, enacted a sense of alarm at the incontrovertible evidence of climate change, rising sea levels and environmental catastrophes. It was performed by an intergenerational cast of performers from Aotearoa: Moana Nepia, Kelly Nash, Nancy Wijohn, Christina Houghton, Carolin Fleissner and Cassidy Scoones. As choreographer, I co-created this work in collaboration with performance designer Dorita Hannah, composer Russell Scoones, dramaturg Fiona Graham and the dancers.

*Flood* was a perambulatory site-responsive event as part of the New Zealand National Exhibition, Ahua o te Rangī.<sup>1</sup> In response to the Quadrennial theme of Weather & Politics, *Flood* drew upon tributaries of material from past works in the performance cycle *Tongues of Stone* (2009–2015) whilst integrating new stimuli including the poem of the same name by sixteenth century Prague poet Elizabeth Jane Weston (1581–1602). These tributaries included the story of Procne and Philomel from Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, retold by Ted Hughes, and the whakapapa (genealogical stories) of performers Moana Nepia (Mapman/Tangaroa), Cassidy Scoones (child), Nancy Wijohn (Hine) and Kelly Nash (Bride).

The performance, in moving from the Old City of Prague to the edge of the Vltava River to the island Strelecký Ostrov, crossed times, spaces and cultures, intending to make connections with water, that most mutable of substances. As a liquid dramaturgy between distant places, we proposed water as a carrier of memories and an unpredictable force in our lives, and geo-physical histories. Our event charted a journey that moved between Māori, New Zealand Pakehā and European histories and narratives of place through a choreo-cartography of braiding.

In this chapter, I address how this choreo-cartography evolved through story maps (MacFarlane 2008) processes that considered not *just* the flexible agency of the dancer's corporeality, in travelling from Tāmaki Makarau (Auckland) to Prague to perform it, but also their reciprocal relations with contexts, including spatial histories and the 'other' of sexual difference. I use the term 'choreo-spatial matrix' to describe the movement, born out of reciprocal relations between patterns that are embodied and spaces that are made, coalescing into a continuous braided dance. Evoked through multiple streams of enquiry, I narrate this work of braiding through recalibrating flows of movement, water and language.

### River Folds

The other who ... courses through me – just as I do through her.

Astrida Neimanis (2012)

In her writing on hydrofeminism, Neimanis invites cultivating the ethical and political potential of acknowledging the way water is threaded through our lives. We learn the living map of a city and the fluvial geography of a river through embodying it. When we follow a river – walk perpendicular to it, float, swim or paddle its reaches, or speed in a motorised boat – we are moving either with or against its flows, flows that are part of a planetary system of tides and gravitational forces.

The Vltava River (Moldau in Germany) in the Czech Republic has its source in the Šumava National Park, the Bohemian Forest on the German–Czech border. It flows for 435 km northwards, passing through Prague before joining the River Elbe from where it empties into the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Its winding course, built up over centuries through reinforced banks, protective embankments, dams and dykes, as well as mobile walls, passes through the centre of Prague, a city with a rich architectural heritage extending back more than 1,000 years.

In participating in complex systems like that of rivers, relationships are reoriented between people, nature, and ideas, opening us to experiences of both displacement and belonging (Bateson 2016). Rivers course over landscapes, their waters diverge and converge, folding into the turbulence of currents, surging and spilling over banks; crossing them we steel ourselves from being dragged away or released into their velocities to ride their rapids. As an ambulatory performance event, *Flood* considered these manifold possibilities for going with the turbulence of a river system in choreographing a somatic braiding between city and body. As a sensual, hybrid performance, it drew into this choreographic system the words of a long dead woman poet and a Pacific worldview incarnated in the performers' histories.<sup>2</sup>

### Elizabeth Jane Weston (1852–1612)

In her poem *On the flooding of Prague after continual rains*, Weston described the ability of a 1596 extreme weather event to upturn the order of things: the river Moldau (ancient name of the Vltava River) becomes a milieu of the city, connecting human lives to other scales of life; houses

'swim', a man and a bed are taken by the current, a fish is tossed onto the altar of the church, a boat scuds across the city square. As ecological catastrophe, floods involve inundations, deluges and overflows that disrupt the nature/culture binary, turning things out of place. They overwhelm, wash away and dissolve terra firma. As Weston's poem relates, sudden and intense floods sweep objects and bodies into a saturated maelstrom and are followed by waterlogged and muddy habitats and exhaustion. In *Flood*, the city of Prague is imagined as a place of thresholds and folds, a permeable, uncontainable, leaky place in alignment with this image of violent and impetuous weather.<sup>3</sup>

The discovery of Weston's poem during the artistic process provided watery images of inundation to work with in the choreography whilst also stimulating curiosity about her life. In a context of climate chaos more than 400 years later, Weston's poem is a portentous reminder of the destructive powers of turbulent weather. But it also reminds us that stories of women from the past are often overlooked, lost and washed away within a history that has favoured men and their pursuits.

Dramaturg Fiona Graham proposed that we use Weston's poem, and her life story, to 're-frame the work in Prague' (personal email). Quoting writing on Weston back to me, she asked: 'Is it also about a female occupation of a male world? As experienced by Weston in Prague at that time?' Citing Weston she asked: 'Are you Angle or angelic? Or simply an angel? Well, if your sex rules out the last, your spirit is an angel' (Weston 2000).<sup>4</sup> Building on previous works in the cycle where women's stories are foregrounded through mytho-poetic scores, we reconceived the dramaturgy through the offers of Weston's poem and life story. As visitors to Prague, Weston became our virtual guide for the choreographic path.

As a choreographic tactic for braiding, the quest to know Weston's story through retracing pathways, she once walked in Prague, joined with mapping and marking the city through mirroring, juxtaposing and duet doublework. Bringing the past into the present in this way, braiding demanded a complex interlacing of elements – design, movement, sound and costumes – within an environment that was subject to changing weather conditions. Like a river, the choreography created fluid connections between these different elements within an environment in flux.

### Story Map

The dramaturgical currents that informed *Flood* drew on past performances proposed in relation to other bodies of water in the *Tongues of Stone* cycle: the Swan River in Perth (*Tongues of Stone* 2011), a disappeared stream in Western Park, *Tuna Mau* (Oceanic Performance Biennial 2013) and the Waitemata Harbour in *1000 Lovers* (2013). Embodied memories of these places provided a creative foundation underscoring our event in Prague (see Brown 2011). Through *Tongues of Stone*, we built a performance dramaturgy that resonated with the histories of Perth and Auckland, respectively, as settler cities whilst acknowledging Indigenous ontologies (Aboriginal and Māori) of place and the unspoken trauma of ecological imperialism.<sup>5</sup> In transposing our dramaturgical method to Prague with the Vltava River as locus, we shifted from the so-called New World to the Old World, from Southern to Northern Hemisphere and from 'periphery' to 'centre'. Continuing the model of a fluid dramaturgy, we added the figure of Elizabeth Jane Weston and her poem to our reservoir of materials. In moving from one city in the world to another, rather than replacing one story with another, we sought to create dialogical exchanges between reference materials. Riffing on gestural assemblages that combined Hine, Tuna, Procne, Philomel and Elizabeth, we worked with a kinaesthetic milieu of differential forces (Rothfield 2022). This involved a strategy

of palimpsest, overlaying materials developed in one part of the world to another, braiding narratives with a trickle-down effect.

### FLOOD (Vltava River)

Meet at Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace to download soundscape and move across Charles Bridge. Join us for an early morning Performance Walk, FLOOD. Experience Prague before the deluge of tourists, immersed in a soundscape and following a series of mytho-poetic figures alongside the Vltava River towards the island of Strelecky Ostrov. Starts 6:45 am at the Colloredo-Mansfeld Palace: 20th, 21st and 22nd June. Free soundscape download: [soundcloud.com/russellscoones/FLOOD](https://soundcloud.com/russellscoones/FLOOD).<sup>6</sup>

### Opening

The performance began at 6:45 a.m. under the arch that led onto the historic Charles Bridge. Kelly Nash (Bride) and Nancy Wijohn (Hine) initiated a Māori *karanga* or call, clearing a pathway for the performance to begin. Moana Nepia (Tangaroa/Mapman) followed with a greeting also in Te Reo Māori, acknowledging the ancestors of Prague residents and his own *whakapapa* or genealogy in Aotearoa New Zealand. Six-year-old Cassidy Scoones, my son, joined the welcome holding a clear plastic bag carrying five live fish; it was his role to return these to the river. The initiating call and the challenge of safe return to the water for the fish proposed that something was at stake in crossing the bridge. Audience members were invited to join the walk towards an unknown destination, to become complicit with the performers, not just follow, but also witness. The costumes of the performers – all with shiny black hoodies pulled over their heads, the women in long dresses (Kelly in a layered tulle wedding dress and Nancy in a long red silk gown) that dragged on the ground, and the boy and man in black trousers – suggested they are part of the same tribe. As they turned to leave, the gathered audience followed, forming a quiet procession as they listened on headphones to the accompanying soundscape.

### Storying Place

As they progressed across the bridge, the man paused with the boy, pointing out a feature on one of the statues, passing on knowledge to the child. The bride leaned into a statue pouring her weight across its inscribed base; she felt the grooves of ancient inscriptions with her fingers. The woman dressed in red broke into a run halfway across the bridge and was transformed as she disappeared into a rippling, swelling swathe of voluminous red silk.

### Mirroring

Looking across from the bridge, the audience could see a duet between two doppelgangers, a second woman in a white dress, Christina Houghton, and another, Carolina Fleissner, in a long red dress, moving together on the edge of a small sliver of an island, Strelecky Ostrov, in the middle of the Vltava River. This parallel duet signalled the destination for the performance walk and aligned the bridge with the island. By the end of the performance, 40 minutes or so later, the audience would be standing where the two women had been, looking back at the bridge, where they came from, seeing the same red dress being lowered and suspended in the air above the green muddy river water to conclude the performance.

### Marking

The mapping of this performance drew on the specificities of a number of key Prague sites (and attractions); Charles Bridge, Kampa Island and Strelecky Ostrov, places we imagined that Elizabeth Jane Weston would have known. The audience encountered these places by following the performers who led the way and opened up the sight lines of the work by positioning themselves in places of legibility, marking performative moments of significance *en route*. The route taken however was imagined through an overlay of Pacific and Māori thought about space and time. There were elements of a Māori *Powhiri* (welcome) in how the audience encountered the performance. Moana, as a *kaumatua* (respected elder) for the child, Cassidy, led the way and encouraged him to learn about the environment as they travelled (*aratika*); Kelly lay down a challenge (*wero*) to Moana through a *wiri* (quivering of hands) at the entrance to Kampa Park and cleared a path for her travels, performing with *mau raukau* (Māori martial art using a long stick). Nancy continued to metamorphose through the performance, eventually shedding the long red silk dress for a tangle of red net that she tossed and extruded from the ground before adorning her body with it as a cloak. Moana's *moteatea*, or chanting, along the way, kept the performance focused on a sense of passing into thresholds of awareness, of other spaces, times and cosmologies.

### Juxtaposing

Cassidy arrived at the river's edge to release the fish into the river; Christina, the distant figure in white, was now up close to the audience; and Carolin, the second dancer in a long red dress, could be seen in the distance, back on the bridge where the performance began, unravelling her dress over its edge. The dramaturgical mapping of shifting proximities between dancers generated a sense of the city as an altered place. Exaggerated choreographic actions meant their bodies flared with vibrant colour as they moved between different performance loci. Taking up highly visible positions, the performers marked their relation to the city and its architecture as portentous, fateful and desiring.

### Fluid Dramaturgy

As touched on above, the dramaturgy for *Flood* evolved through collaborative discussions with dramaturg Fiona Graham, designer Dorita Hannah, composer Russell Scoones, performer and artist Moana Nepia and myself as choreographer. Our collaborative method catalysed compositional choices and, given a history of making together in previous works, developed upon established working relationships. Dorita, Russell and I initiated the performance cycle *Tongues of Stone* in Perth with STRUT Dance in 2009; Fiona and Moana had come on board for the Auckland version of this work as *1000 Lovers* (Brown 2013).

As site work, the choreographic dramaturgy proposed not so much one place after another (Kwon 2002) but one place entangled within another through a braided structure. Seeing the ancient European city of Prague through practices of performing place, dramaturgy developed in one part of the world was interfaced with another, entangling times and places, cutting across the present with the unfamiliar, even strange.

### Long Time

The performance route developed through a chain of choreographed actions that zoomed in and out between the bridge and the island, proximity and distance, suggesting continuity and (dis)connection. Opening the experience of 'dancing-place' (Gotman 2013) to the co-presence of multiple

temporal dimensions, we moved beyond the linear arrow of modernist progress and proposed alternative temporalities that allowed for different conceptions of time, including the deep time of Indigenous ways of knowing. For Māori, the past is folded into the present and it is what directs the future. Rehearsal footage of the performance in the process revealed the busyness of the sites we performed in during the day as they were flooded with tourists. The time of the performance, however, before the tourist buses arrived, created an alternative offer for passers-by and the knowing audience to slow down, to enter a sense of long-distance time open to mythical, ancestral and historical layers of place. Although audiences may not have been familiar with the sources of our interventions, they noted the experience as being close to a sense of 'ritual', a ceremony where the community who participated gathered for a collective event.

*Flood* explored a cross-cultural and cross-historical sense of time as an event of spacing, loosening hegemonic constructions of the past and Prague as a tourist destination. Though this performance event occurred only for a short duration during the Prague Quadrennial, it carried with it a relation to the instantiating gestures, designs and music of the project first initiated in Perth in 2009 with STRUT Dance. An expanded conception of dance as 'work' that carries the traces of other works and other bodies with it through restagings, recreations and choreographic developments augments understanding of how creative labour is distributed through both the corporeal and incorporeal dimensions of making and repertory. A dragnet of materials is thus held in the movement of dramaturgical processes through circuits of exchange, development and transformation. Dramaturgy in this sense can be understood as movement itself, 'a process that does not stand still' (Graham 2017: 11).

### Cross-Rhythms

The contrapuntal rhythm of repetition set up patterns of refrain within the dramaturgical structure. A 'spatio-temporal thickness' was created, intensifying the experience of space and time in relation to Prague's history (McCormack 2013a). In music, refrains are melodies or tunes that are repeated often at the end of a work. Choreographically, refrains can be thought of as the composting of gestures across bodies, places and times, embedding movement memories in the present through repetition. In drawing together chains of material from different cities – Perth, Auckland and Prague – and repeating these, we created 'spacetime matters' (Barad 2007) – entanglements of space, time and matter – as choreographic refrains that marked similarities and differences between places in the cycle.

How do movements generated by one person show up in another and how do these reverberations create pathways that the eye can trace? Phrases of dance material generate networks of visual activity between bodies, layering and coalescing across time to create a somatic terrain. This process generated a certain expressive consistency within the work of *Flood* as the character or identity of the performance cycle was carried not just in costumes, soundworld and choreographed gestures but also in its dramaturgical underbelly as a durational mattering of relation, a circuit. Relational and processual, these refrains became affective circuits offering a radically open means for the choreography to propose wandering beyond the familiar (McCormack 2013). From an eco-feminist perspective, we can think of this as an invitation to contemplate an ecology braided with histories and temporalities. One that breathes-with the vital gesture of performance.

The insertion of a contemporary collaborative performance from Aotearoa into the heart of the Old City of Prague opened the audience to the possibility of the unknowable and *unmappable*. We did not belong in the city of Prague, and yet, through performance, we became part of the scene/seen. An open practice of kinaesthetic tuning through both re-siting choreography and music made

in other places, and movement improvisation in situ, opened a potential space for the initiation of something new. In working with the specificities of this place – its atmospheres, rhythms, textures, and characteristics – new possibilities were generated at the site of exchange.

The flows, counter-flows and breaches, the reflections and lucid depths of the Vltava River provided a physical and metaphorical place for conceiving and developing the logic of expression in *Flood*. To think and move choreographically through the image of a river is to conceive of multiple ribbons of movement that bend, swirl, crossweave, pool, spread, flood and braid. Thinking choreographically in this way is akin to a corporeal story map, in which event and place are part of the same material. This fluid dramaturgy resonates with an Indigenous world view where, as historian Ann Salmond describes it, an ‘order of relations’ reverberates with the generative force of memories, affects, sensations, ideas and dreams (Salmond 2012). Such a dancing-place might include an interweaving, a reconciling and a complicating of the past with the present, the distant and the near, the antipodean and the European.

### Between Two

In choreographing between hemispheres, duet forms become quintessential mechanisms to set up situations of attention; intensively pooling actions to the spaces between performers and their dialogues of difference. With very little time to make new material for *Flood* in situ, I relied on the reservoir of choreographed material that had emerged through early iterations of the project with different dancers. This material involved group, chorus-based ensemble dancing, solos and duets for up to 12 performers.

Kelly Nash and Nancy Wijohn adapted a duet that was originally made with Katherine Piué and Hayley Schmidt, as part of *Tongues of Stone* Perth and remade for *1000 Lovers* with Georgie Goater and Sophie Williams on the Auckland Waterfront. The memory of this duet, held in video files, photographs, movement memories and kinesthetic perceptions, is inter-corporeal and distributed, yet it holds core motif material that can be recombined. Whilst the three couples brought different nuances to this movement material, in thinking through its multiple incarnations in different cities around the world, these became braided into a collective gesture, the same but different. Different instantiations of the material are generated through the incarnation of place and variations in costume. One dancer (Philomena) wears a tattered wedding dress and the other dancer (Procne) a red silk strapless dress with a 30 m long train. In Perth, Philomena had a veil over her face. The dancers are in bare feet. In its first iteration, the duet took place in front of the Ernst and Young building in Perth; in Auckland, they meet on a long former railway track on the harbour front of Wynyard Quarter. In Prague, they meet on the grass below the double-sided stone steps leading down to Strelecky Ostrov Island. Each of these contexts reconvenes the scene of their relation, its trickle-down effect, yet what persists is a sense of becoming folded into and through each other, a tangled encounter, a quivering tension that vibrates in-between. Three sets of dancers became entangled in relation to these different sites and the situations of the performance in Perth, Auckland and Prague, yet the principles of the score remained the same:

Distant sighting/siting  
Approaching  
Differentiating  
Face to face  
Touching  
Entwining

Holding  
Pushing  
Lunging  
Counter-balancing  
Dropping  
Resisting  
Separating  
(Brown, *Flood* Duet Score (choreographer’s notes) 2015)

### Queer Loops

Drawing on Yvonne Meier’s concept of scores as words that activate images and can be combined in different ways through psycho-physical energetic states of coincidence, I built the choreography of this duet through refolding relations between dancer, word and place.<sup>7</sup> Although the words exist as singular triggers for movement, they are developed through a process of extraction from an originary text, Ted Hughes’ account of Philomena and Procne from his retelling of the tale of Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* (Hughes 1997). The duet emerged from our extraction of a moment from this story, in which the two sisters reconnect following the former’s disappearance following her rape and mutilation (her tongue is cut out) by the latter’s husband, King Tereus. We were drawn to reimagine this story through a technique of critical mythologising, taking moments of its telling to signal the effects of ecological imperialism in Perth, Australia, and the possibility of escape from violence (Brown 2011). In adapting the original duet for *Flood*, the movements took on new meanings, particularly in relation to the disruptive violence of a flood and the portrait of Elizabeth Jane Weston.

In front of the façade of a baroque building, dancers’ arms extended, reaching towards each other, tentative touch becomes fierce embrace as they entwine and interlace. The actions of meeting face to face, tracing the outline and contour of the other dancer through touch, holding and embracing, pushing against and resisting her and finally going on together, carried a sense of narrative that could be read as romantic, especially given the dancers’ costumes. But as two women who crossed the ground, meet, embrace and carry on together, their duet also queers this notion of quest through its corporeal uncanniness. Vehement kinetic interactions call up images of dangerous femininity, transfiguring the scene through an erotics of connectivity.

In Hughes’ retelling of the myth, the two sisters seek to avenge Philomela’s rape and mutilation by killing Tereus and Procne’s son and feeding him to the King. The object of their quest is revenge upon the male perpetrator of violence and less emphasis is paid to their relationship. We did not want to propose a revenge quest of such violent denouement so departed from the story in our dramaturgy for *Flood* through the suggestion that the duet, as a meeting between two, is restorative of their relation rather than a precursor for revenge. The choreographic score that shapes this dramaturgy is a selective extracting of words that propose a meeting between women as a goal in itself rather than as a narrative stepping stone towards the murder of a male protagonist.

In drawing on the legacy of Weston the poet, we reimagined the dancers’ relation through a baroque excess. Dressed in long costumes that exaggerated their silhouettes in the landscape, their seductive and at times repulsive expressions of tenderness and sensuality unfurled through touch, enfolding corporeality and place. As they moved from this place together, their quest was to shed the Baroque excess of costumes that restrained them (in histories that were not their own), to discover a different morphology in folding actions with fibres, sculptural nets and biomorphs that facilitated their return to the river. Rather than a quest for revenge, they moved through corporeal questions, becoming uncanny bodies (Rothfield 2022).

In questing, we are searching the unknown. Quest narratives in literature are understood as journeys in which the subject advances not just physically, but also spiritually and psychically. The quester leaves the familiar for the unknown in their search for something, it may be for love, revenge, recovery, repair or self-discovery.

In contrast to the heteronormative linear narratives of quest narratives, in *Flood* queer desire looped through a series of figures in the urban landscape, creating a circuit. This story in the making, lapped in folds, like water, was devoid of the narrative tension of a woman being seduced or murdered to carry the story along. In this way, we proposed a choreographic structure through a heterogeneity of quest(ions). Moana and Cassidy as *tane* (man) and *tamariki* (child) tended to the safe passage of the fish who repopulated the river and along the way engaged in actions of way-finding, evoking ancestors through Indigenous ways of knowing place, and challenging strangers; Kelly and Nancy were playing sisters (and were also real-life partners) whose intimate relation undergirded their journey; Christina and Carolina were always seen in the distance, signalling. They opened the performance landscape to a long-distance view, becoming portents of dangers to come and, inspired by Elizabeth Jane Weston, hopeful guides proposing places we might reach in the future.

In 'dancing-place', I am in the middle of things (Gotman 2013). Without a stage or a theatre to orient movement in relation to the coordinates of perspectival vision, I am immersed in 360 degrees of atmosphere and air. Encounters that move with this sense of space are open on all sides. In staging relations in the open-air, I might however tether a sense of relation to the other to get my bearings and to shape a feeling for place through shifting moving encounters and (dis)orientations (Figure 16.1).



Figure 16.1 Moana Nepia in 'Flood', Prague Quadrenniale of Performance Design and Space 2015. Photograph by Carol Brown.

### Conclusion, Diffracted Universe

Rivers, as metaphors for fluid dramaturgies, propose the synthesising action of elemental forces and the work of braiding together different streams of knowledge and flows of information. Inter-connecting movement, space, time, writing, sound, light, media technologies, costume, scenography, music, audience participation and the socio-political context in which the work is situated, fluid dramaturgy has an important role in the toolbox of the contemporary site or place-based choreographer.

A fluid dramaturgy involves being responsive to unexpected and unforeseen events that can change the course of the process and even run it aground at times. Braiding, like a river, sets in motion different voices, energies, data flows and phenomena (including wind, light and atmosphere) that coalesce in the process of a dramaturgy comprising liquid networks.

How we make site-based performance undoubtedly matters. In *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007), Karen Barad explores how matter comes to matter through material-discursive practices and the intra-activity of becoming. Inspired by Barad, I conceive the corporeal-conceptual undergirding of this work as constitutive of its braiding. The Vltava River provided a physical and conceptual choreographic thread evoking uncertain boundaries and an inherent instability between nature and culture. Weston's poem and biography were a ribbon for surfacing submerged stories and memories. Subjecting ourselves to images of a volatile flooded river and rehearsals and performances in situ, we created space for a reimagining of place. As a choreographer, I think of this process as a worlding as it relies upon a conscious and intentional set of choices and adaptation of tools, tasks and source materials to inscribe choreographic agency. For dancers, working within a 'kinesthetic milieu' of movement (Rothfield 2022), is both a doing and undoing of learnt movement patterns and processes. If, as Barad describes it, knowing is 'a specific engagement of the world where part of the world becomes intelligible to another part of the world' (2007: 342), then situated choreographic practices such as these must also be revealing of our inheritances and worldviews whilst enabling us to imagine living otherwise.

Water, as a connecting metaphor, flows through and across our differences. As watery we transmute. Reorienting our relation to the city through its watery edges, we are moved to affirm the rhythms of a watery embodiment in which alterity and connection coexist. Aqueous metaphors propose forms of corporeal knowledge that attend to ethical relations, acknowledging rather than effacing sunken histories. The movement of water, its ability to morph, shape-shift and facilitate the new, overflows any attempt at capture in static identities. In thinking with water, subjectivity is uncontained and becomings are not given in advance, even though they may be, like water, temporarily dammed by fixed representations.

Contemporary understandings of a performance landscape as a 'site' that is relatively static, as a backdrop to actions, a setting to be staged and looked at, performed upon and captured, streamed and filmed, are challenged by waterscapes and aqueous metaphors. What happens when we work with water as a force or medium within which we move and with which we sensitise our relations to place and each other? Watery *scapes* are dynamic and shifting, they sculpt and shape us; agitating our bodies, making us feel hard and soft, crystalline or dispersed, mobile as birds, slippery as eels, as well as ancient and enduring. When we choreograph with an understanding of natural cycles, of the dispersal, pooling and reconstitution of elements that exceed human lifetimes, we dance with distant strangers and processes but we also summon the violence of past and potential future catastrophes.

In shifting between cities, as well as hemispheres in the performance cycle *Tongues of Stone* of which *Flood* became its final iteration, we created an oscillation, a hinging movement that pulled

and pushed, attracted and repulsed around the fulcrum of corporeal embeddedness. Extending the thinking of an isometric mapping between limbs, torso, multiple joints and mobile core on a global scale, attention was directed towards how a gesture made in one part of the world was transmuted to a different place and time and remapped with new spatial and historical coordinates. Re-creating movements generated elsewhere, letting gestures become mapped to different landmarks, unfolds a dynamic experience of being-in-relation-in-the-world. As a heterogeneous encounter, such a practice, taking place in an urban context without the apparatus of the theatre, summons the audience to attend to simultaneous and co-present realities as a pluriverse.

Our journeying of the river city Prague in *Flood* generated a dragnet of stories in a place that was already heavily covered with inscriptions, heritage and history. By performing over, along and in the Vltava River, Prague as a city became a theatre beyond measure. The uncertain edge of Strelecky Ostrov Island met the shifting tide of the river that flows through multiple countries, finding its way to the Atlantic.

In our work we are less concerned with informing planning decisions and urban design than in foregrounding forgotten histories and ways of being that are largely lost or absent. As a form of revitalisation, our poetic, multisensory reimaginings of place are led by figurative personae who shape a dramaturgy of relations that are fluid but which pool in moments of intensity that incite the taking place of encounters, braiding the intentional and serendipitous.

In the current condition of climate chaos (see Chaudhuri 2003), as we witness the deterioration of natural environments and a decreased biodiversity, we search for forms of practice that are responsive to the urgent needs of the planet and our reciprocal relations with it.

#### Notes

- 1 <http://www.pq.cz/en/program/new-zealand>
- 2 Dramaturgically this was an evolution from the Perth iteration of the project, *Tongues of Stone*, where we worked with the poem of Audrey Fernandez, *Was There a River Here?* which drew attention to the lost wetlands of the Nyungah people's land.
- 3 The Vltava River has throughout centuries been subjected to events of flooding, extreme weather events that wreak havoc, washing away river banks, houses, bridges and lives and changing the city's boundaries. Most recently in 2002 and 2013 with the latter being declared the most destructive in its recorded history. Rising sea levels currently impact upon the Vltava River and its tributaries increasing the threat of flooding.
- 4 Graham, F. email communication with author 26/12/14.
- 5 The dramaturgy for *1000 Lovers* (Brown) was developed with Fiona Graham. See *Performing Dramaturgy*. Wellington: Playmarket, 2017.
- 6 Publicity for performances of *Flood* as part of Prague Quadrennial 2015.
- 7 I learnt about Yvonne Meier's work through a workshop with her and Jennifer Monson at Chisenhale Dance Space in London.

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Edited by Victoria Hunter and Cathy Turner