

# Riverwork

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They decided to give up their studios. They no longer wanted enclosures for their work, saturated as they were with the bitter nourishment of isolation. Instead, they dreamed of dispersing themselves, of interfacing conditions beyond those furnished by their terms, decried before as untenable. They no longer wanted to step outside of time, but to meet its most direct expressions. They had grown weary of who was looking at their work and of how it was being canonised. They were nauseated by the unending, accumulative appellations: 'debut', 'duo', 'solo', 'group', 'project', 'screening', 'biennial', 'prize', 'public programme', 'performance', etc. They declined to send work to be shown elsewhere, or anywhere else any longer, vouching to rather show in one place for the rest of their waking lives – the river.

Every day they would go to the river, and devote themselves to showing their work. They immersed their work in the waters and then let go. Whorling within the river, works became part of the river's morphology, comprised not just of flowing water, but of solid materials carried downstream. Silt, leaves, pebbles, and debris muddy with works, rolling along and licking the banks, adrift on the whims of the current, dropped in – and washing out of – time. For some this surrender was difficult. Wishing to retrieve their work, they set a net at the end of the stretch of the river near the overpass. Some works became anchored en route, or were held in solution at quieter pools, eluding salvage. Others stood at the edges of the river for months on end, pondering where best to insert pieces, in which season, at what time of day, casting proxies to fathom how fierce the pull. Patience became materiality, waiting a form of production. Some had yet to let go. Others still, less patient, attempted to intervene, directing works with rods and mechanical claws, plunging into the shallows themselves. Some envisaged works as hosts to future biomes, coaxing tadpoles to nestle in their recesses, crabs to invigilate

surfaces, feathered bodies to periscope audiences, peppering passages with the dashes and hyphenations of old earbuds, choreographing transspecies schools.

They came to the river for its wildness, a quality determined not merely as natural. Indeed, the river's span meandered and gathered the land, eroding its own contours in reasserting itself, flooding formlessly and flushing forward only to be swallowed in refrain, but this wholesome chronicle was barely metonymic of that fullness fluttering from its mouth. The river was commuting through the city, a resident, hostage and exile alike, fashioned and twisted by intention's bucketing flow. The river was a class divide, a baptism, the air worms breathed. The river forked out nomenclature. A planetary spring driven underground, its tunnels, cannels, reinforcements, cemented waterfalls, all cut, bypass, drop, elongate, shore up, slacken and train naturalised cycles. The river, though measured, zoned, charted, managed, forsaken and owned, was irreducible to its parts. The river was an artefact of desire reckoning with time, their works libations to a chemistry they could neither intuit nor replicate. The river was truly the opposite of a desk.

In time, several factions emerged from debates on the ideal protocols for viewing works. Benders advocated for contextual distance, surveying beyond the riverbank, the entire vista necessary for positioning work. Serendipitous confluences were elevated to the status of art, a simultaneity of vision extending the river's own entanglements. Washing baking on a rock, a picnic packed up, a child piddling alongside their father, dipping dogs, a ceremony opaque under covers, a haze of cyclists, shrapnel of plastics, consortiums of spiders rationing dragonflies, inverted plants, settlements being exhumed, prospecting sprees, mantras of lightning, were all temporal elements principal, not subsidiary, to work. Crossers sought to distil the mobility of the river. Viewing required support, literalised in stationary architectures and dehydrated infrastructures. Pavilions extended from subterranean vaults, with thickened glass panels incising the riverbed. Here, sunken works or those mushing in the undercurrent could be contemplated perpendicularly. Occasionally a work would even brush against the glass, peering in. Crossers built bridges with apertures underfoot as well as ahead, framing selected scenes in anticipation. Rapids rejected such stasis and measured proximity. Apprehending themselves as already implicated within the river, they mandated access to immersion. Proponents of the close-up, Dry Rapids deployed telescopic and aerial technologies remotely, whereas Amphibian Rapids were more extreme, rafting in the wake of works, diving overboard to glimpse them within reach, aided by submersible gear. Some Amphibians wanted to subject themselves to the exact circumstances of works, yielding to the exertions of the water they stopped swimming, briefly subsumed in a transcendent transference, bipedal limits eclipsed. Finally, Spewers did not concern themselves with the machinations of the river, but only with its aftereffects. They unearthed works on flood plains, and at the river mouth, analysing deposition as link to other processes. Spewers wanted to bookend the river, and sequester degradation, through viewership. None of these modalities could altogether encompass the river.

So they kept returning to the river as they did not know how to look at it. Even their approaches seemed misdirected, the river sharing umpteen entrances. They were ungroomed to the river's ways, their hitherto aesthetic languages no longer utterable, collapsing in transposition. Yet like shadows to a sundial, they kept moving with the radiance of the river. The river was a sensorium of estrangement, compelling new interpretations, other forms, experimental sociality. Some of them hoped that in sojourning on the banks, bathing and drinking from the thickness of the streams, they would be able to rehabilitate their making. As their constancy welcomed a surge in their numbers, it also provoked contestation and resentment from those who still adhered to desiccated practice. Koppies would convene nocturnal reclamation delegations, covertly hauling works to Arids who toiled to restore pre-fluvial forms. Together with bequests from Spewers, these would repopulate dwindling cultural centres with antecedent orientations. Riverworkers were not troubled by such operations. The river remained a wishing well in vortex. Although enduring any advances, the river's conditions – its unrelenting instabilities of filtering, temperature, and pressure, of sweep and swell, forever browning and refracting, its steady dissolutions a congruence impartial to former functions – all meant that over time work mutated in concert with its bearer, past terrestrial recuperation. If the river was to be a body of work, it could only be one in flux, a collection in overhaul, a museum of falling. But falling only signalled a longer contiguity and gestation, another repertoire of remembrance, ghosts in the valences of particles, slippery chronologies. At the threshold of wetness, fresh and felt, absorption could not be compromised.