Hydroperformativity and the mirage of hydro-power

Hydroperformativity and the mirage of hydro-power: How water speaks

Ma?gorzata Owczarska

Original research article

Hydroperformativity and the mirage of hydro-power: How water speaks

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Małgorzata Owczarska[1]

Abstract
This article asks how water speaks and relates to Central European people, especially those who have experienced displacement, totalitarianism, droughts, or floods. Based on ethnographic research conducted within the framework of blue anthropology, it focuses on Pilchowice, a postindustrial village in Poland, introduces concepts such as hydroperformativity, water worlds, and water as a transsubstance, and challenges the mirage of hydro-power formed in human–water relations since the nineteenth century. It illustrates how such illusions lead to paradoxes, unconventional industrial landscapes, and eerie practices of dwelling degradation. Water in this context actively cocreates hydrosocial realities that consistently evade control and transcend time, allowing us to reflect on human dreams of prosperity and today's water permacrisis.

Keywords
Hydroperformativity, water worlds, blue anthropology, hydrosocial relations, environmental humanities, transsubstance, floods, droughts, water crises, hydro-power

Water usually does not speak to Europeans. In modern Western cultures, it is deprived of a voice. In fact, it might seem almost a form of madness to consider asking how water speaks in a postindustrial, postsocialist, and capitalist resettlement community in Poland. And yet I think it worthwhile—not as an inquiry into semiosis beyond human or the dynamics of intentional interaction (Kohn, 2013) but as an exploration of how agentive, transsubstantial water engages, performs, interrelates, and multimodally responds within local communities across time and space—and how, in doing so, it cocreates sociomaterial worlds, material memory, and contemporary human and nonhuman practices. I am particularly interested in the material, relational, and nonmetaphorical potential of (in)formation) exchange between humans and water, which I develop here as hydroperformativities (cf. Karen Barads' [2007, 2003] "performativity"). Do "we"—as much as the pronoun is problematic and its vague—as so-called Western people, enter into communication with water at all? If so, how? While it is evident that we have a relationship with it, the forms and nature that this relationship takes are not necessarily obvious

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Wydawnictwo: SAGE Publications [2]
Rok wydania: 2026
Tytu? ksi??ki / czasopisma: Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, online 27.02.2026
J?zyk orygina?u: angielski

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Odno?niki
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[2] http://doi.org/10.1177/02637758261426808