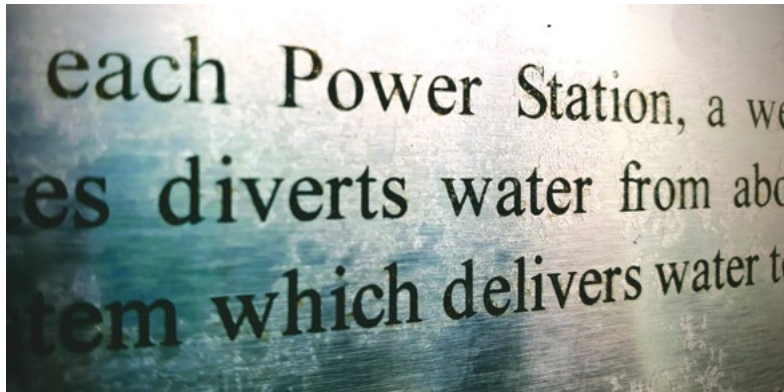


Textural celebrating and containing of rivers

Kathryn A Burnett



*Figure 1. Knowing and Communicating a
Hydropower Landscape, Scotland.
Images: Burnett, 2024.*

LILA 2024 has encouraged me to explore and communicate ideas of ‘placing context’.

Raymond Williams (1975) speaks of communication as “a verb of action”. Elsewhere he draws our attention to cultural materialism: an approach that centres on the “co-production” of shared meanings and directions including what is done through our education and media forms. Drawing on William’s seminal text *Keywords* I worked with communication, community and communion as tools for exploration to engage and respond to Scotland’s hydropower landscape as informed also by Lila’s wider taskscape.

Our human and non-human ecology is bound together by the presence and processes of water flowing and contained across our planet’s macro and micro worlds. The harnessing of rivers, mountains and glens as a source of flow, communication and energy predates modern histories but become industrially significant across the twentieth century – and revalorized recently in our net zero “green transition” – generating complex and impactful social, cultural and ecological landscapes and legacies.

Figure 2: Community, communion and co-knowing in our Living in the Landscape taskscape, Porttipahda Reservoir, Lapland. Image: Burnett, 2024



My making process developed ideas of water as an energy source that is both sacred and profane. The vessel was crafted from paper mâché derived from pulped newspapers: a comment on the ordinary, ubiquitous yet impactful media production as a 'flow' and containment terrain for reimagining and repurposing our relationship with nature.

Knowing and Communicating a Hydropower Landscape

Researching past and current media discourse of hydropower in Scotland and elsewhere - such as Lapland - I discovered further the interdisciplinary interface with narratives of nature and landscape. I explored material and symbolic texts. Each communicated different kinds of knowing, (and - as with our sharing of experience in Lila - also a co-knowing) - communicating experiences and values as celebrated, as well as denied and diminished, across time and space.

Raymond Williams invites us to examine words more closely as meanings 'offered, felt for, tested, confirmed, asserted, qualified, changed'. Moran (2021) writing on keywords as method, expands:

"Crucially, then, as well as uncovering and tracing the changing and conflicting meanings behind the 'nominal continuity' of the word, the whole force of Williams's cultural materialist orientation is to urge us to look, too, to the context for their use [...]."

Moran (2021, p.1025)

The base materials of the vessel are both literally and symbolic of media. Taking pulped and reworked newspaper with collected river water from hydro sites I formed the materials into a simple paper mâché chalice or bowl form. Early inspiration for

this artwork came from researching the hydro power infrastructure of Fort Augustus Abbey, Loch Ness, Scotland. Religious orders and the communities they served imposed and responded to their landscape celebrating and harnessing the power of rivers and water sources more generally to underpin both profane and sacred activity and articulation. Today we continue to both pollute and sanctify our river and mountain landscapes.

The paper mâché once formed - dried and re-

Figure 3: Working with paper, plants and reservoir materials to consider Hydropower as connecting and fragmenting community. Image: Burnett, 2024.



treated – has edges and fissures; reminders of the flow of hydropower in our Scottish landscape as raw, fractured, ‘ripped’ yet cemented, but also formed and designed. From the high mountains, to moors, lochs and sea each small stream and tributary flows to an inevitable edge as either communing with other bodies of water or fracturing into other forms.

In this artwork I sought also to revisit the novel *Highland River* (1937), the work of Scottish author Neil Gunn (1991). See here a brief comment by Gifford (1973) on the elemental river journey to eternal source:

“All though the novel we move from the sea it joins, to the populated places around its mouth, to the crofting country higher up its banks, to the lonelier Pict and pagan haunted places close to the moors, and finally onto the bare eternally desolate moors in which the river has its source.”

Gifford (1973, p. 102)

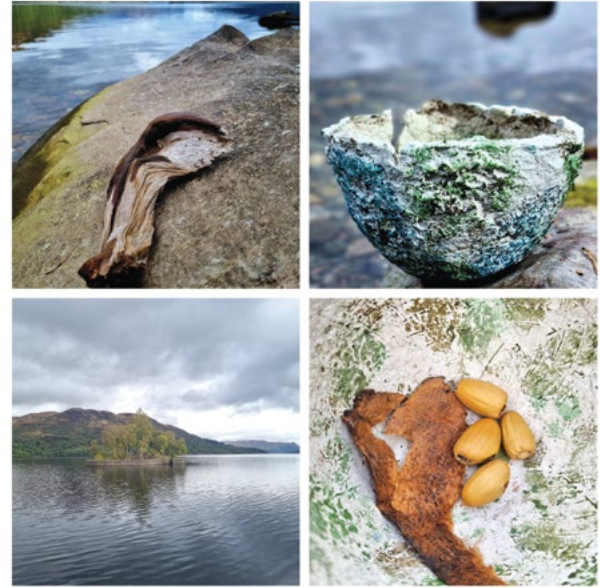
In making this *Communion - Vessel* artwork I explored knowledge of Scotland and Lapland’s hydro-power landscapes. Lila 2024 offered a further learning of ecologies and communities that have each been variously defined, represented and repurposed over time in response to hydro energy and industry demands and opportunities. The simple practices I have worked with in making *Communion - Vessel* (2024) expresses my gratitude for the opportunities of Lila taskscape working - finding communion together and apart with nature. I have ‘worked between’ the wisdom and oral testimony of communities formed and coalesced around water and river landscapes as life giving and sustaining resource. Working with Lila and the fieldwork trips and contributions, offered me a co-knowing of cur-

rent narratives of ‘informed co-operation’ and the discourses of community, natural resources and ‘hydro’ assets, as well as loss and an eclipsing of place from elsewhere to Scotland.

I am grateful to my fellow Lila travellers. I am especially thankful to Lundstedt (2023) and her own work, for introducing me to Hållander’s work (2015), asserting the importance of practice and making with hands: “I make to learn something I did not know before I did it” (Hållander 2015, p.42).

Placing Context: Marking, Printing, Texturing, Gifting

Drawing on the legacy of Raymond Williams and his interrogation and valorisation of culture and society as ‘ordinary’ I looked to emphasise the everyday aspects of accessing our water assets. Our cultural symbolism of places as special and mythological is attractive and expressive. Our burns (small streams), rivers, lochs, and reservoirs are sites of production, energy flow, communication and materiality that can feel alluring, awesome and energising but also saturating, drowning and gloomy. The object is worked and marked – printed using watercolour and plant ink - with alder and hazel; wrapped in ripped hand-crafted salmon skin fish leather. I found making these elements texturally interesting, and challenging, (sourcing alder, hazel and salmon drew me further into sustainability concerns, for example). The vessel rests and is supported by the consciously borrowed ‘drowned’ wood from the Lila taskscape of the trauma of the Porttipahta Reservoir that nonetheless offered a sense of considerable “gifting” (and to where I hope it can be returned someday)



*Figure 4 & 5: Our Water, Our Land? Gifted Materials and Assets, Loch Katrine shore, Scotland.
Images: Burnett, 2024*

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