
Lifting the Creek: A Call to Arms in the Valley of the Wild

Grant Corbishley

We have lost our creek. A creek used to flow from the northern end of our Valley (which is situated on the southern coastal edge of Wellington City, New Zealand) down to the local beach and from there into the Southern Pacific Ocean.



Fig. 1 Location of the Valley of the Wild (area coloured red)

In the 1940s, the Wellington City Council decided to create a landfill (domestic and industrial rubbish dump) in the Valley. [1] The creek was piped and buried beneath five to thirty meters of domestic and industrial waste. There, inside the pipe, it has continued to flow for sixty or so years, long enough to be forgotten except by a few elderly people.

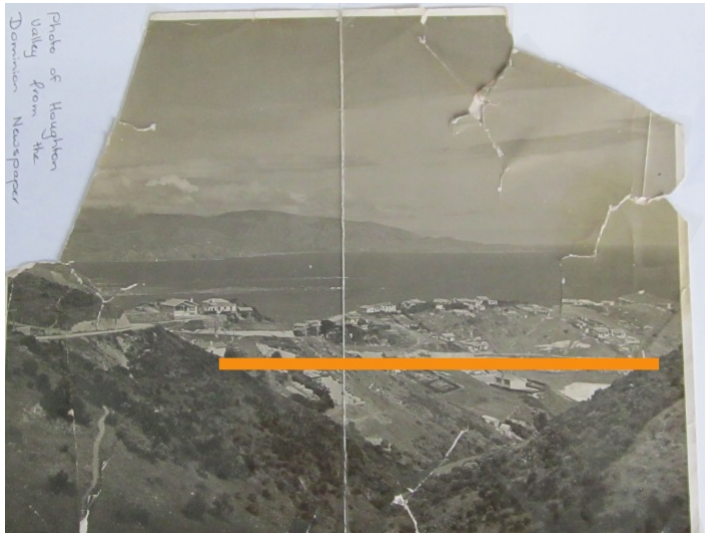


Fig. 2 Photograph of the upper valley, taken in the early 1930s. The orange line shows how high the valley was filled by domestic and industrial waste (Dominion Newspaper from R. Sinclair, private collection).

In 2012, however, the creek 'seeped' back into the local consciousness. The locals now want to lift it back up to the surface - quietly, poetically, affectively. [2] Both the burying of the creek and the desire to lift it back up to the surface are the story of the demise and the recent reinvigoration of the community that inhabits, and in effect is, the Valley of the Wild.

In January 2011, I drove Mildred, an elderly local, around the Valley (she was ninety so too old to walk up and down the Valley). At one point she asked me to stop next to the flat park which is the top of the landfill and said, "A creek used to be under there" (Pfeffer, personal communication, November 20, 2010). But no visible trace could be seen. I had never considered that a creek existed at the bottom of this deep valley. It was as if the filling and flattening of the valley obliterated all potential thoughts about the creek itself.

Locals sometimes wonder who came up with the idea to lift it to the surface; perhaps it was the creek itself. The creek offered no resistance to its demise, yet it carries a force that has ensured its return. That force is manifested, for example, every time there is heavy rain, when locals have noticed torrents of water streaming down the valley and have wondered where it came from; or, when crossing a small bridge in a steep gully, they have heard the faint

Grant Corbishley. "Lifting the Creek: A Call to Arms in the Valley of the Wild." 12 *Inflexions* 9, "F(r)ictions" (May 2016). 11-20. www.inflexions.org

gurgling as spring water trickles below before disappearing into the pipe. The presence and absence of the creek together with its wildness is what is most affective for locals of the Valley of the Wild. In the Valley, affect is a force existing prior to, and bringing into existence relations between both human and non-human entities which arise out of the play of forces.

When we locals drew a life size map of the creek on the surface of the park/landfill (above where it lies inside a pipe now) in February 2012 it slowly awakened a deep keening; a strange new but also old feeling emerged of a collective wanting to cradle the creek in our arms and gently lift it to the surface. A “call to arms” coming from the creek itself. It was as if, in the space between one moment and the next, something was born; rhizomatic thoughts and feelings emerged and transversally connected with others' thoughts and feelings via some kind of unexpressed acknowledgement of a deeper keening about loss. Until then, no one had thought about the creek or even cared. The life-size drawing of the creek traced on the surface of the ground was in some ways a map because it was representative of a pre-existing creek, but in other ways it was a diagram because it summoned forth new kinds of spaces filled with a new audience, and a community yet to come.

The creek without a name. It bisects the Valley but does so in a “minor” nameless mode, from something once of useful value as an essential water supply to being of no further use and buried inside a pipe under the landfill in the 1940s. In using the idea of the minor here, I refer to the way in which the creek itself has come to defy a “proper” name in the same sense that Deleuze and Guattari suggest that a “minor literature” is a “deterritorializing sound” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 21). The creek is felt rather than named. We locals are in close proximity to the buried piped creek with no proper name, and are edging closer. In the process of becoming creek, we have come to sense listening and noticing as having an affective value, and via this have hoped to bring the unseen creek closer, to summon it, even lift it to the surface, return it to daylight and rediscover its name. We had been waiting patiently for the creek itself to make a gesture of some type, a sound that might suggest something onomatopoeically, or via a physical re-appearance, a

trickling through a small crack in the ground, or that it might give some type of sign that it was in some way responding to us.

That has not happened as such. Deploying such a method seems to have had no effect, as the creek itself has not physically changed. It remains buried beneath the landfill. After some time, however, the humans have experienced an intensive transformation instead, noticing that they are collectively becoming creek. It is their extensive separation from the creek, their constitution as separated forms and matters, that is coming undone in this becoming: “[A]ll forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 13). This transformation - from expecting the creek to raise itself up to us to a becoming creek - presents an affective opening up of a new possibility, new space and movement between human and creek, summoning forth becomings of molecular intensities. Becoming is an affectual process that unfolds as a feeling, thinking and doing process. Locals have entered into an emergent affectual relationship with the creek that is felt. It is not an equal or unequal relationship, but an unfolding intensity (rather than extensivity or territory) of the senses and of thinking. [3]

New space, where human/non-human encounters intensify, becomes possible when things are slowed down by listening, noticing and expressing actions that would potentiate a speaking back process for both corporeal and incorporeal things. Slow thoughts are acknowledged as “[B]ecoming part of the collective adventure” (Stengers 2002: 252-253). [4] We locals have understood that when things slow down to a certain point a rhythmic interplay emerges (similar to a vibration) where amplification of the sensed but unheard or unseen—for example, the trickle of the creek itself—becomes audible differently. This audibility no longer occurs in the creek or in the locals’ ears but rather across creek and humans and their criss-crossings within moments that, slowed down, are stretched to reveal new space in the gaps.

These “slow-down” techniques have disrupted locals' individual experiences of the Valley by opening up fields of collective attunements of an emerging affectual ecology; what Deleuze and Guattari call “material-forces” as opposed to “matter-form” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 95). Examples are: walking the bush tracks that criss-cross the valleys; grazing knuckles on rocks; tripping over tree roots and sliding down steep paths; being head-butted by a low branch; scraping/patting and digging in the community garden; tasting the food grown by our own hands; carrying chooks back to their coop; slowing down to listen to the nightly calling of the Ruru as a sentinel, as a reterritorializing refrain. [5][6] All these create a sense of place, operate to neutralize the habits of representation, and reposition the collective subjectivity of locals. Patrick Curry writes:

Nature is not mute. It is eloquent: discursively structured and therefore meaningful throughout, saturated with messages and stories, and without any stuff (energy), so far as we shall ever know, that is unpatterned - all of which includes, but vastly exceeds, both us and our language, the latter itself a subset of our own discursivity. (Curry 2008: 59)

Becoming Creek

Locals of the Valley of the Wild are “becoming creek.” The notion of the individuated local is being replaced by a much more complex situation where immersion in multiple sets of asubjective assemblages that interconnect and overlap and where a minor intrinsic language is emerging.

For many the gaze has been turned—the preoccupation with “what’s over there” has shifted to a noticing of the ground under our feet, as well as corporeal and incorporeal species of things and things-in-process. These include: the air, animals, flora and fauna, archaeology, geology, geography, traffic and weather. This shift is a new type of nomadic and distributed movement for this community without reference to any known map or previously systematized mode of doing things. The process of becoming creek began in an area of moistness in the Valley, forming as a drip then a trickle

that wound its way down gullies, over stones and slopes, to join up with other trickles that accumulated to become a small creek.

The becoming creek involves both the actual lost creek that sits under the landfill in the Valley and the locals. The becoming creek signals the formation over four or so years of their process of collective expression.

No two locals experience the same collective becomings. William James talks about experience as a stream:

A process in time, whereby innumerable particular terms lapse and are superseded by others that follow upon them by transitions which, whether disjunctive or conjunctive in content, are themselves experiences, and must in general be accounted at least as real as the terms which they relate. (James 1912: 57)

One cannot be really sure of anything, even that the process of becoming is occurring explicitly, or if one is the only person experiencing it. But a contemporary anxiety we have acquired to always dissect, separate and isolate has been disturbed by a constancy that is the subtle humming of the collective feeling/doing process of becoming. Among locals there is an insistent sense of process, of something going on: an always in motion, meandering (nomadic) movement, flowing where the land will let it, pushed by the downward force of its own unfolding. This movement is an unstoppable downward streaming, pooling, swirling, gurgling, murmuring. It is experienced across all the projects and potential encounters that occur and are spoken about in meetings and in daily conversation. [7]

From major to minor conditions. Becoming creek requires a movement/gesture from major to minor, from molar to molecular combinations, and from unity to complexity. It is a deterritorialization of those territories in which a subject or local no longer experiences dislocation or dis-memberment, but instead becomes entangled in assemblages with other human and non-human beings or intensities. Deterritorialization is always accompanied by reterritorialization (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 508-9). Therefore, it is a question of how to generate conditions for

reterritorialization to take place, allowing the minor to emerge. These conditions, created via minor practices, must then be understood as always in process, always becoming – as generating new forms through working on those already in place.

The creation of conditions for a minor to emerge resides between humans and rocks, the young tree and the chickens - the internal variability created in the relational in-between. This variability is an on-going process of aesthetic co-composition. Necessitating more than just human participation, requiring instead the collective expression of intensities generated by corporeal and non-corporeal things. In conversation with Andrew Murphie, he said, “everyone has a lost creek. The experience of a creek being buried under rubbish or concrete” (2015). In order to break through the “rubbish/concrete,” it seems that all we need to do, is to generate minor conditions. One way we do this is by engaging in collective speculation and generating propositions about the creek. From time to time during these encounters it feels as though the creek makes itself felt collectively, through, between and around us. When this occurs a threshold is crossed, and a new type of space appears and with it a new type of relation to both the creek and each other.

We have been mourning the loss of our creek, but recently it revealed to us that there is no point to this, as it was never lost (it’s just having a difficult time). So instead of mourning, we choose to adorn the creek, celebrate its aliveness, to bring it alive in the minds of locals. On January 22nd, locals performed a celebration that brought the creek and bodies in close proximity. Using our bodies we mapped the creek on top of the landfill, playing a game in order to add flow of the creek towards the sea, and leaving an affective trace long after the ripple of bodies is gone.



Fig. 3 Locals “living in the creek” (stills from a video)

Sensory blanket

We are becoming creek. We are becoming the this-ness and the thing-ness of the Valley of the Wild. We are in the middle of a collective adventure. This has been an imagining of all forms of individuation as processes of becoming. All corporeal and non-corporeal entities and the deterritorialized territory within the Valley of the Wild—these operate together as generators of evental minor conditions so that we can deploy durational practices, as a means of engaging urgent ecological issues across the three registers of environment, sociality and subjectivity. The collectively felt presence of evental minor conditions generates a collective feeling of hope and both a caring for, being cared for, and a being interwoven and connected together within the virtual wefts and weaves of what locals have termed a warm and soft “sensory blanket.”

The weaving of the strips/threads of the sensory blanket were initially ignited by the listening and expression encounters, which then led to the forming of new relations, in a newly inscribed space that has become known as the Valley of the Wild. As the relationality between all “things” grows a new fibre is added, generating new time and space. Deleuze and Guattari wrote:

A fibre stretches from a human to an animal, from a human or an animal to molecules, from molecules to particles, and so on to the imperceptible. Every fibre is a universe fibre. A fibre strung across border lines constitutes a line of flight or of deterritorialization. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 249)

Such a blanket does not “represent;” instead it is a virtual composite that arrays a complex combination of things, prehending the next instance from the imperceptible to the felt. The open-ended woven nature of the blanket fosters endless chains of possibility that provides a framework for becoming - without beginning or end, limit or single meaning. It opens individuated singularities up to a host of new and alternative possibilities out of which emerge, and re-emerge, de-subjectified entities. These are beyond verbal expression. They are instead sensed, felt, and are a presence that is constant. It will be there long after us. The aim, therefore, is to make the sensory blanket “real” or rather to actualize it, and then we will be able to pass the care of it on so that humans, the creek - all beings - will continue to co-habit the Valley of the Wild in entanglements acting on entanglements, fold upon fold.

Notes

[1] It was used as a source of water by early European settlers until local houses were connected to the town water supply in the 1920s. From that point on, it lost all significance to the community, except for the children who played in it, and caught small fish.

[2] See “Lifting the Creek” project: www.houghtonvalley.org.nz

[3] An intensity in this case are processes or feelings and events that occur that set conditions for events to unfold in the Valley of the Wild, for differentiating but not necessarily separating things. Extensivity refers to something that has been captured as a territory. It maps assemblages, making a territory out of them, as the majoritarian regimes such as the Wellington City Council does repeatedly.

[4] Revisiting Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of asubjective assemblages: “There isn’t a subject, there are only collective assemblages of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 18). Change as per previous comments This refers

to heterogeneous assemblages of corporeal and non-corporeal entities, in continuous transformation and becoming in the Valley of the Wild.

[5] Nancy Turner, an anthropologist who studies Native Americans from British Columbia, calls this a “Kincentric approach to nature”. She writes, “The ultimate message is that we have relatives all around us: the rocks, the mountains, the trees, the edible roots, the animals and birds and the fish ... all are our kin, all are related to us and to each other” (Turner 2005: 69).

[6] Native owl that has recently returned to the Valley after an absence of more than eighty years.

[7] Thirty projects have been generated by locals in the past five or so years. To view them, go to www.houghtonvalley.org.nz.

Works Cited

Curry, Patrick. “Nature Post-Nature.” *New Formations* 64 (2008): 51-64.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari. *One Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*. Trans. Brian Massumi. New York: The Athlone Press, 1988.

James, William. *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1912.

Murphie, Andrew. Personal Interview. 2015.

Stengers, Isabelle. *Thinking with Whitehead: A Free and Wild Creation of Concepts*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2011.

Turner, Nancy. *The Earth’s Blanket: Traditional Teachings for Sustainable Living*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.

Grant Corbishley. “Lifting the Creek: A Call to Arms in the Valley of the Wild.” 20 *Inflexions* 9, “F(r)ictions” (May 2016). 11-20. www.inflexions.org