

Choreographing Worlding: Planetary Praxis, Care and Resistance in Flatfoot Dance Company's Bodies of Water¹

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Abstract

This article explores Flatfoot Dance Company's *Bodies of Water* (2025) as a choreographic articulation of planetary praxis and worlding. Drawing on hydrofeminist, ecofeminist, posthumanist, decolonial, and speculative feminist frameworks, the article positions the work as a refusal of extractivist temporality and a reclamation of embodied, situated knowledges. Through the lenses of planetarity, geontopower, epistemologies of the South, and speculative feminism, the choreography is read as a political and aesthetic intervention that enacts permeability, grief, care, and futurity. Central to this analysis is the concept of worlding, understood as an embodied practice of creating and sustaining multiple, relational worlds. The article argues that *Bodies of Water* demonstrates how dance functions as ecological activism and knowledge production, offering a pluriversal, embodied politics of resistance and survival.

Keywords

planetary praxis; worlding; hydrofeminism; geontopower; decolonial aestheSis; pluriverse; speculative feminism; Flatfoot Dance Company; ecological performance; epistemologies of the South

Introduction: Choreographing Planetary Praxis

To speak of water is to speak of multiplicity, entanglement, and survival. As Astrida Neimanis reminds us, "we are all bodies of water" (2017: ix), composed of, sustained by, and indebted to watery flows that exceed individual human life.

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Water resists abstraction: it is both finite *and* inexhaustible, the same and continually different, holding within it a planetary history of “3.9 billion years” (Neimanis, 2017: 66). This doubleness — sameness and difference, connection, and separation — offers a generative frame for considering Flatfoot Dance Company’s *Bodies of Water* (2025), a work that mobilises choreography to meditate on ecological precarity and collective survival.

Founded in Durban in 1994, Flatfoot Dance Company has long positioned itself at the intersection of art and activism, engaging themes of HIV/AIDS education, anti-Gender-Based Violence, and post-apartheid community-building. *Bodies of Water* continues this trajectory, situating itself within urgent ecological struggles in South Africa and beyond. Performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre, the production immerses dancers and audiences in a planetary imaginary. Projected ocean waves envelop the cyclorama, saturating the space with a tidal presence that exceeds human scale. Live musicians — including Refiloe Olifant and Mandla Matsha, with dancer Sifiso Khumalo on vocals — generate a soundscape of ambient resonance, ritual rhythms, and ruptural silences. These elements function not as backdrop but as co-performers, intra-acting with movement to dissolve boundaries between body, environment, and medium (following Moraru, 2015). The performance invites a mode of *watery thinking*² — fluid, porous, and relational — that resists containment and embraces entanglement.

The urgency of this work is inseparable from the uneven geographies of water access in South Africa, shaped by apartheid dispossession and exacerbated by climate change. KwaZulu-Natal has faced devastating floods, water shortages, and infrastructural collapse (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022). These crises foreground the racialised and gendered dimensions of water labour, particularly for women in rural and peri-urban contexts. At the same time, the global climate emergency renders water a planetary site of precarity (following Mies and Shiva, 1993; Neimanis, 2017). To choreograph water in this context is to enter a terrain of survival, dispossession, and resistance.

This article argues that *Bodies of Water* is not merely representational but enacts *planetary praxis*: an embodied rehearsal of alternative relationalities, temporalities,

² See Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), where she proposes that watery embodiment invites a mode of thinking that is “porous, leaky, viscous, and tidal” — a phenomenology that resists the boundedness of the individual subject and instead foregrounds relationality, permeability, and co-constitution. This “watery thinking” unsettles the notion of discrete bodies and selves, offering instead a fluid ontology attuned to ecological entanglement and posthuman ethics.

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and futures. Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (2003) articulation of *planetaryity* — an ethic of alterity and responsibility distinct from the abstract homogeneity of the globe — and Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, I frame the choreography as a mode of world-making grounded in difference, opacity, and entangled survival.

Arturo Escobar's notion of the *pluriverse* further deepens this frame, affirming that the world is not one but many — “*a world where many worlds fit*” (2018: 16, italics in the original). Planetary praxis, in this sense, entails the labour of sustaining relational worlds that are situated, multiple, and resistant to colonial totalisation. Through sound, gesture, and collective movement, *Bodies of Water* does not simply depict crisis or survival — it actively *rehearses* them. Here, *rehearsal* is not preparation for a final performance, but a mode of speculative enactment: a way of dwelling in possibility, of testing and sustaining alternative ways of being. The choreography rehearses futures not yet realised, relationalities not yet stabilised, and ecologies not yet secured. It is through this recursive, embodied practice — of emergence, dissolution, and return — that *Bodies of Water* performs its politics of worlding.

The analysis unfolds across four interlocking theoretical movements, each reading *Bodies of Water* through a distinct lens:

- **Movement I: Planetaryity and Relational Imaginaries** explores how the choreography enacts porous embodiment, tidal temporality, and situated relationality (Spivak, 2003; Glissant, 1997; Elias and Moraru, 2015; Moraru, 2015; Neimanis, 2017).
- **Movement II: Geontopower and Grievability** examines how the work engages with stillness, collapse, and animacy to resist extractivist ontologies and foreground mourning as political praxis (Braidotti, 2013; Povinelli, 2016; Butler, 2004; Sharpe, 2016).
- **Movement III: Pluriversality and Decolonial AestheSis** situates the choreography within South African water struggles, reading gestures of labour and care as epistemologies born in struggle (Escobar, 2008 & 2018; Mignolo and Vázquez, 2013; Santos, 2014).
- **Movement IV: Speculative Feminism and Futurity** considers how the performance rehearses futures otherwise through queer horizons, poethical entanglement, and hydro-speculative intimacy (Hartman, 2008; Muñoz, 2009; Haraway, 2016; Ferreira da Silva, 2017; Gumbs, 2020).

These movements do not operate in isolation but in tidal rhythm — converging, overlapping, and reconfiguring one another. Just as the performance cycles through emergence, dissolution, and return, the theoretical analysis unfolds as a recursive process that resists linear closure.

To analyse *Bodies of Water* as planetary praxis — as a choreography that rehearses relational futures through embodied world-making — requires a methodological approach attuned to movement as epistemology. This is not a reading of dance as metaphor or illustration, but as a site of knowledge production in its own right. The performance's recursive structure, its tidal rhythms of emergence and dissolution, and its refusal of closure demand an analytic framework that can accommodate multiplicity, porosity, and situatedness. In what follows, I outline a methodological orientation grounded in decolonial, Southern, and worlding epistemologies — one that treats choreography as a mode of knowing, grieving, and speculating through embodied practice. This framework enables a reading of *Bodies of Water* not only as performance, but as a pluriversal rehearsal of ecological, political, and aesthetic survival.

Methodological Framework: Decolonial, Southern and Worlding Epistemologies

This article approaches *Bodies of Water* not simply as cultural text but as worlding practice — a performance that enacts relational, ecological, and speculative modes of being. To analyse it requires a methodology that does not reduce choreography to representation or metaphor but recognises it as a site of knowledge-making. In other words, this article proceeds from the claim that choreography is epistemology: a way of producing, transmitting, and contesting knowledge through embodied, relational practice.

To support this reading, I draw together four interwoven methodological orientations:

1. Decolonial epistemologies of the South
2. Worlding as both critique and praxis
3. Choreography as embodied knowledge
4. Relational methods of analysis attuned to porosity, situatedness, and non-linearity

Decolonial Epistemologies of the South

Boaventura de Sousa Santos insists that epistemologies of the South are the “knowledges born in struggle” (2014: viii). This formulation unsettles the dominance of Eurocentric epistemologies, foregrounding instead the validity of knowledge practices forged in contexts of dispossession, marginalisation, and survival. Analysing *Bodies of Water* through this lens demands attention to the histories of water labour, ecological struggle, and cultural resistance in South Africa. Choreography is not treated as secondary reflection on these struggles, but as a mode of epistemic production in its own right.

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For Santos, an *ecology of knowledges* (2014: 71, italics in the original) is essential: epistemologies must be understood in relation, without assuming a universal hierarchy of value. This article embraces such an ecology, placing theoretical concepts from posthumanist and feminist philosophy alongside the embodied knowledge of dance, ritual gesture, and collective practice. In so doing, it resists what Santos (2014) terms “epistemicide” — the erasure of non-Western knowledges — and insists on choreography and its embodiments as valid contributions to planetary thinking.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1984) warning against false and dangerous unities is equally vital. As she argues, “it is only by understanding the *contradictions* [...] that effective political action and challenges can be devised” (1984: 346, italics in the original). Methodology cannot collapse difference under the banner of the “global South” or “planetary” without risking erasure. Instead, my analysis attends to the situated particularities of KwaZulu-Natal’s water crises, women’s water labour, and post-apartheid disposessions, while also situating these within planetary flows of climate precarity. Gestures of carrying, cradling, and offering are thus read as worlding gestures — practices of survival and relation that produce knowledge without aspiring to universality.

Worlding: From Critique to Praxis

The concept of worlding provides my second methodological anchor. In its earliest postcolonial usage, worlding describes the imposition of colonial epistemes onto colonised territories. As Gayatri Spivak argues, the colonised subject is “worlded” by the West, inserted into a hegemonic order that renders them legible only through colonial categories (Spivak, 1990). Similarly, postcolonial critics note that colonial mapping, representation, and discourse transformed territories into “worlds” for the coloniser (Postcolonial.net, 2025).

More recent appropriations have reactivated worlding as a decolonial and speculative practice: not the imposition of singular order, but the ongoing, dynamic process of “making and unmaking worlds” (Common Worlds Collective, 2025). Worlding in this sense is not metaphorical but practical — a way communities create alternative ontologies, sustain relational lifeways, and resist colonial modernity.

This dual genealogy — critique and praxis — informs my methodological approach. On the one hand, it remains essential to acknowledge how worlding has historically functioned as a colonial technology of epistemic violence. On the other, it is necessary to foreground how performance practices such as *Bodies of Water* can enact worlding otherwise: as praxis of relationality, care, and pluriversal survival. In this reading, choreography is not simply “about” water or

ecology, but a worlding epistemology — a practice through which multiple, contested, and interdependent worlds are enacted in embodied form.

Choreography as Embodied Knowledge

This article treats choreography as epistemology, not illustration. Karen Barad's "agential realism" (2007: 26) insists that boundaries do not sit still; rather, they are enacted. Barad (2007: 26) proposes agential realism as an "epistemological-ontological-ethical framework" that rethinks fundamental concepts — "matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space, and time" — beyond binary thinking.

Flatfoot's choreography precisely enacts such shifting boundaries: between human and nonhuman, self and other, body, and environment. To read dance as epistemology is to recognise that it does not simply depict concepts, but produces knowledge through movement, relation, and sensation. This approach aligns with Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez's (2013) notion of *decolonial aestheSis*, which they describe as a movement that "challenges and subverts the hegemony of modern/colonial aestheSis" (2013: 4). Western concert dance often privileges linear narrative, transparency of meaning, and the heroic individual/soloist performer. *Bodies of Water* refuses these conventions, centring collective formations, African contemporary vocabularies, ritual gestures, and porous relations with sound and projection. These are not merely aesthetic choices, but epistemological ones — ways of sensing and knowing otherwise.

Judith Butler's reflections on grievability are also methodologically significant. Butler argues that "some lives are grievable, and others are not" (2004: xiv), with grievability functioning as a political frame that determines whose loss is recognised and whose is naturalised as expendable. Reading choreography as epistemology enables us to see how *Bodies of Water* stages grief not as representation, but as knowledge (in) practice — a way of reconstituting community through mourning and care. To analyse these gestures is to take seriously that embodied movement can itself function as political and philosophical argument.

Relational Choreographic Analysis

Finally, this article adopts a relational method of choreographic analysis. Rather than isolating movement motifs as discrete symbolic units, the analysis attends to the intra-actions between dancers, sound, projection, audience, and environment (Barad, 2007). Agency is understood as distributed and circulating, not as the property of individual bodies. For example, when dancers collapse under the projection of surging waves, the stillness is not simply a human motif but an intra-action with elemental forces — a worlding gesture that stages temporal

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suspension. Similarly, ensemble dispersals and convergences are read as enactments of relationality, staging Édouard Glissant's (1997: 131) notion that:

The repercussions of cultures, whether in symbiosis or in conflict – in a polka, we might say, or in a laghia – in domination or liberation, opening before us an unknown forever both near and deferred, their lines of force occasionally divided, only to vanish instantly. Leaving us to imagine their interaction and shape it at the same time: to dream or to act.

This emphasis on relationality recognises that the choreography's meaning emerges not in isolated motifs, but in the resonances and tensions between forces, bodies, and histories. Relational analysis, in this sense, is itself a method of worlding — tracing how choreography makes worlds through opacity, resonance, and collectivity, rather than through legibility or closure.

Structurally, this relational approach is mirrored in the article's organisation into four "Movements." Each movement reads *Bodies of Water* through a distinct theoretical lens, though the movements overlap and return cyclically as they resist linear closure. This tidal form is itself a methodological commitment to worlding: it treats analysis as recursive, porous, and unfinished, enacting the very temporalities the performance stages.

Movement I

Relational Imaginaries: Thinking Planetary Through Worlding

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's formulation of *planetary* in *Death of a Discipline* (2003) provides a generative point of departure for reading *Bodies of Water*. Spivak distinguishes between the globe and the planet: "The globe is on our computers. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (Spivak, 2003: 72). The globe is associated with abstraction, homogenisation, and control — a flattened surface mapped for commerce, data, and extractivist logic. By contrast, the planet signals alterity, relationality, and humility. It resists total comprehension and demands co-inhabitation without mastery. To orient toward planetary, Spivak argues, is to cultivate an "experience of the impossible" (2003: 101): relation without appropriation, co-existence without possession.

This distinction is critical for *Bodies of Water*, which does not map the "globe" onto the stage but enacts the planet — porous, relational, and tidal. Projected ocean waves spill across the cyclorama and onto the dancers' bodies, dissolving the line between human form and watery environment. Sweat, sound, and light leak across mediums, producing a choreography that resists the sealed boundaries of the individual body and foregrounds intercorporeal exchange. Collective unisons

emerge and dissolve almost as soon as they coalesce, staging Édouard Glissant's (1997) notion of relation as the interaction of differences. Relation here is not unity or synchrony but fleeting co-inhabitation — a choreography of multiplicity.

The work's tidal temporality further enacts this planetary logic. Gestures and formations return cyclically but never identically, evoking what Astrida Neimanis (2017: 66) calls water's doubleness — "the same and always becoming different, too." This recursive rhythm interrupts linear progression, offering a choreography that, like the ocean, ebbs, flows, and renews without resolution. In this way, *Bodies of Water* materialises planetarity through porous embodiment, ensemble dispersal, and tidal time³. It does not illustrate ecological interconnection; it makes it felt.

Flatfoot's refusal of centralised structure — no singular figure anchors the action — resists the flattening logic of globalisation. Bodies drift and converge like currents, sometimes aligning in collective surges before dispersing again. This decentralisation echoes Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru's critique of globalisation theory's "overall failure to come to terms with issues of political control [...] in a developing world monoculture in which fewer and fewer are at home" (2015: xvi). Instead, *Bodies of Water* enacts what Elias and Moraru call a shift from "globe as financial-technocratic system toward planet as world-ecology" (2015: xvi). The choreography thus produces a stage-world that is not abstracted or homogenised but relational, porous, and ecological — a planetary praxis where difference is preserved within connection. To think *Bodies of Water* as planetary is not to universalise but to situate. The concept of *worlding* clarifies this. In postcolonial critique, *worlding* describes how colonial powers "world" territories by imposing epistemic and aesthetic frameworks, rendering colonised spaces legible to the West (Spivak, 1990; Postcolonial.net, 2025). To world otherwise is to interrupt this hegemony and enact alternative ontologies. As the Common Worlds Collective notes: "Worlding is the ongoing, dynamic, and situated practices through which worlds are made and unmade" (2025).

³ The concept of tidal time draws on Astrida Neimanis's articulation of watery temporality, which resists linear progression and instead embraces cyclical, recursive rhythms of ebb and flow — "the same and always becoming different, too" (Neimanis, 2017: 66). This temporality aligns with Édouard Glissant's poetics of relation (1997), which foregrounds emergence and dissolution as modes of relational becoming, and with Karen Barad's "agential realism" (2007), which understands time as intra-active and non-linear. In the context of *Bodies of Water*, tidal time becomes a choreographic logic: a way of staging planetary praxis through repetition-with-difference, porous return, and embodied renewal.

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Flatfoot's choreography is precisely such a situated practice. Gestures of carrying and offering, familiar in South African contexts of water labour, are re-situated within planetary imaginaries of fluidity and care. These are not abstract metaphors but embodied epistemologies: local water struggles made present through movement, even as they ripple into planetary flows of survival. In this way, the choreography performs what Spivak describes as the task of educating ourselves into a planetary mindset, in which "alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away" (Spivak, 2003: 73). What is staged is thus an experience of alterity without appropriation.

Mohanty's (1984) critique of universalising moves in feminist discourse is equally vital. She argues that Western feminist writings often "discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'Third World Woman'" (Mohanty, 1984: 334). *Bodies of Water* resists such false and dangerous unities. It does not collapse South African struggles into universal symbols of "the human condition." Instead, it foregrounds their specificity — apartheid-era dispossession, climate precarity in KwaZulu-Natal, women's water labour — and situates them in planetary relation. This methodological commitment ensures that worlding remains pluriversal: many worlds coexisting, rather than one global abstraction.

Astrida Neimanis insists that "water can only serve as a connector because it expresses or facilitates difference" (2017: 67). *Bodies of Water* stages this principle through its movement vocabulary: dancers entangle, torsos ripple as if caught in currents, unisons dissolve into variation. Each movement leaks into the next, enacting permeability without homogenisation. Neimanis elaborates elsewhere that "reimagining oneself as a 'body of water' opens possibilities for a posthumanist feminism that specifically addresses the need to cultivate more ecologically responsible relations to water" (Neimanis, 2013: 24). Flatfoot's choreography materialises this ethic: bodies do not merely signify water but *become watery* — entangled with sound, image, atmosphere, and with histories, presences, and futures⁴ that are multiple, relational, and in flux.

⁴ The pluralisation of temporal and ontological categories — *histories, presences, and futures* — reflects a posthumanist and hydrofeminist commitment to multiplicity and non-linearity. As Neimanis (2017) argues, watery embodiment resists singularity and closure, offering instead a mode of being that is recursive, entangled, and always becoming. This resonates with Karen Barad's "agential realism" (2007), which understands time and matter as intra-active and co-constitutive, and with Glissant's poetics of relation (1997), which affirms opacity and difference as conditions of co-existence. In *Bodies of Water*, these plural temporalities are choreographed through

Stacy Alaimo's notion of *viscous porosity* sharpens this reading:

Viscous porosity, then, with its emphasis on mediating membranes, which may be biological, social, and political, is a powerful model for understanding material interactions in scientific/ethical/political terms and epitomizes the transcorporeality that I advocate throughout *Bodily Natures*. (Alaimo, 2010: 15)

The projection of ocean waves dissolves distinctions between dancer, sound, water, and image. Sweat, breath, and muscular strain mark bodies as hydrological sites. Boundaries are never fixed but continually enacted and undone — attuned to Barad's (2007) "agential realism." Moreover, Alaimo reminds us that "matters of environmental concern and wonder are always 'here,' as well as 'there,' simultaneously local and global, personal and political, practical and philosophical" (2010: 15). This echoes Ursula Heise's insistence that ecological consciousness today requires not only a "sense of place" but also a "sense of planet" — a recognition that "what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is arguably not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet" (Heise, 2008: 56). *Bodies of Water* stages this simultaneity: while grounded in the specificity of KwaZulu-Natal's water crises, it resonates with planetary currents of survival and precarity. The choreography enacts worlding not as abstraction but as porous relationality, where gestures of labour index local histories even as they ripple into planetary imaginaries of care.

Flatfoot's decentralised ensemble structures further articulate choreography as worlding. Collective unisons emerge briefly but fracture into asynchronous constellations. This resists both the valiant soloist of Eurocentric concert dance and the homogenising drive of the "global." Instead, agency circulates across the group, aligning with Braidotti's claim that posthuman subjectivity is "constituted in and by multiplicity" (2013: 49). Live musicians amplify this worlding. At times, Matsha's percussion merges with dancers' footfalls; at others, it fractures rhythms, producing new relational fields. Refiloe Olifant's violin threads through these textures with a tonal palette that oscillates between neo-classical lyricism and South African sonic idioms — a melodic line that both anchors and unsettles, weaving affective resonance into the choreography's porous structure. Escobar insists that pluriversal praxis depends on "radical interdependence" (2018: 20). In *Bodies of Water*, sound, and movement intra-act to create emergent worlds, exceeding either medium.

tidal repetition, porous gesture, and ensemble dispersal — staging time not as linear progression but as relational unfolding.

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Choreographic worlding is not only aesthetic but historical. Gestures of stooping, carrying, and offering evoke apartheid-era dispossession and ongoing water labour. These are epistemologies of survival — what Santos calls “knowledges born in struggle” (2014: viii). Judith Butler’s politics of grievability adds further resonance. To deny grief, Butler argues, is to deny full humanity: “Some lives are grievable, and others are not” (2004: xiv). These gestures testify that water injustice is not an abstract statistic but lived precarity, carried in bodies. To witness this choreography is to be implicated in its ethical demand: to grieve and to act.

In this way, *Bodies of Water* resists the abstraction of “planetary crisis” as global metaphor. It worlds the planetary through situated histories, producing a relational imaginary accountable to both local struggle and global interdependence.

Movement II

Geontopower, Nonlife, and the Politics of Grievability as Worlding

Elizabeth Povinelli’s concept of *geontopower* reframes Michel Foucault’s biopolitics⁵ by shifting attention from the governance of life to the regulation of what counts as *Life* versus *Nonlife*. Povinelli defines geontopower as “a set of discourse, affects and tactics used in late liberalism to maintain or shape the coming relationship of the distinction between Life and Nonlife” (2016: 4). This distinction is not neutral; it underpins extractivist regimes in which water, minerals, and land are treated as inert backdrops for human life, while certain communities — often Indigenous, racialised, or impoverished — are positioned closer to the category of Nonlife, their suffering naturalised as inevitable.

Bodies of Water unsettles this binary by staging choreography as worlding practice. Dancers collapse into stillness under the projection of surging ocean waves. At first glance, these bodies appear inert, suspended, or drowned. Yet their apparent

⁵ Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics refers to the governance of populations through the management of life itself — a shift from sovereign power over death to regulatory power over biological processes such as birth, health, and reproduction. Biopolitics operates relationally by producing distinctions between lives deemed valuable and those rendered expendable, often along racialised, gendered, and geopolitical lines. As Povinelli (2016) argues, geontopower extends this logic by interrogating the ontological boundary between *Life* and *Nonlife*, revealing how late liberalism sustains extractivist regimes through the differential distribution of vitality, animacy, and grievability.

Nonlife is not absence but charged presence — what Povinelli names the *Desert*⁶, which “stands for all things perceived and conceived as denuded of life — and, by implication, all things that could, with the correct deployment of technological expertise or proper stewardship, be (re)made hospitable to life” (2016: 16). The Desert is bound to the *Carbon Imaginary*, which “lodges the superiority of Life into Being” by fusing biological processes with ontological concepts like event and finitude (Povinelli, 2016: 16). Flatfoot’s choreography re-worlds stillness, remaking erasure into resistance. The dancers’ suspended, waterlogged movements demand that audiences confront the violence of extractivist logics while attending to the generative potentials of Nonlife.

The strategic use of stillness troubles the neoliberal demand for perpetual productivity and vitality. In one extended passage, dancers rise and lift bodies above their heads as they sink gradually to the floor, their bodies arranged in tidal formations that evoke tidal movement not only spatially but temporally, suggesting suspension, return, and recursive flow. Breath becomes audible, amplified by silence. The projected ocean continues its relentless motion, indicating that the world exceeds human vitality. Rosi Braidotti (2013) critiques the reduction of vitality to an endless resource for capital accumulation. In contrast, Flatfoot resists the kinetic virtuosity of Eurocentric concert dance, generating alternative temporal worldings. Stillness here is not absence but a way of inhabiting time otherwise — cyclical suspension, tidal ebb, and recursive return.

André Lepecki’s theorisation of stillness as a choreopolitical strategy offers further insight into Flatfoot’s refusal of extractivist temporality. In *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, Lepecki argues that stillness is not a lack of movement but a critical interruption of the neoliberal imperative to move, produce, and perform endlessly (Lepecki, 2006). In *Bodies of Water*, stillness becomes a choreopolitical gesture — a suspension that resists extractivist time and opens space for mourning, care, and elemental relation. The dancers’ waterlogged collapses do not signify passivity but enact a politics of presence, attuned to what Lepecki (2006: 128) describes as a temporality that “does not cast [dance] as always doomed to disappearing.” Rather than choosing between forgetting and

⁶ In *Geontologies* (2016), Povinelli introduces the figures of the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus to illustrate how late liberalism manages the boundary between Life and Nonlife. The Desert represents spaces deemed lifeless yet extractable; the Animist signals alternative ontologies that attribute agency to nonhuman entities; and the Virus embodies the disruptive potential of unseen forces. These figures expose how geontopower sustains colonial and capitalist logics by regulating what is considered animate, valuable, and grievable.

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remembering, Lepecki (2006: 128) proposes a mode of choreographic thinking that “fuses the affective with the theoretical, the political with the choreographic,” enabling other possibilities for experiencing and thinking dance’s temporalities. In this light, Flatfoot’s choreography does not mourn disappearance but reconfigures it — detaching stillness from melancholy and reimagining it as a site of speculative resistance. Donna Haraway’s call to “stay with the trouble” (2016: 2) resonates with this practice. She urges us to cultivate “response-ability” (Haraway, 2016: 2) in the messy entanglements of planetary survival. Flatfoot’s choreography embodies this ethic through collapse and suspension — a refusal of resolution and an insistence on dwelling in precarity. These rhythms enact ecological time: slow, tidal, and interdependent.

Stillness in *Bodies of Water* is inseparable from grief. Dancers cradle, carry, and release one another in gestures of mourning and care. These movements recall Christina Sharpe’s notion of *wake work*: “In the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present” (Sharpe, 2016: 6). Sharpe describes wake work as an ongoing practice of attending to loss in the aftermath of slavery, colonialism, and systemic violence. Flatfoot’s choreography resonates with this ethic, staging mourning not as closure but as continuous responsibility. Judith Butler deepens this reading in *Precarious Life*, arguing that “some lives are grievable, and others are not” (2004: xiv). To be denied grief is to be denied recognition as fully human. *Bodies of Water* challenges this exclusion by staging grief as collective worlding. Through acts of carrying, cradling, and releasing, the performance insists on the grievability of lives otherwise excluded from recognition — particularly those affected by South Africa’s ongoing water crises, where rural and peri-urban communities face shortages, contamination, and infrastructural neglect (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022).

Butler further argues that mourning can transform social bonds: “Perhaps mourning has to do with agreeing to undergo a transformation” (2004: 21) — the transformation of the social bonds that tie us to others. Flatfoot enacts this transformation. The choreography binds dancers and audiences into relations of care, demonstrating grief as world-making: a practice of reconstituting community through shared vulnerability. This resonates with Neimanis’s hydrofeminist observation that water embodies difference-in-connection: “Just as our bodies find a thread of commonality and connection in and through this seemingly ‘closed’ system of water, we are constantly confronted by difference” (Neimanis, 2017: 67). Here, grief becomes watery — flowing across bodies, connecting through loss, and generating new collective imaginaries.

The choreography also challenges geontopower’s relegation of elements to inert Nonlife by treating water as co-performer. Dancers ripple their torsos in tidal undulations, arms extend like currents, costumes billow as if saturated.

Projections of waves engulf the stage, not as backdrop but as collaborator. As Neimanis writes, “I am interested in the swampy saturated ecologies that our bodies inescapably are; I want to think more about the sea inside, bodily tides, and human plumbing” (2017: 67). Flatfoot makes this “sea inside” visible: sweat, breath, and muscular strain merge with projected waves and live soundscapes, reminding us that our bodies are not only *of* water but *with* water (following Neimanis, 2013 & 2017).

Rosi Braidotti (2013) extends this insight by insisting that nonhuman forces — organic, technological, planetary — must be recognised as part of our collective becoming. *Bodies of Water* stages this recognition vividly. Animacy circulates across dancers, water, sound, fabric, and projection, producing a pluriversal ecology where human and more-than-human intra-act. This elemental collaboration also resonates with Indigenous epistemologies that understand water as ancestor, kin, and teacher. While Flatfoot is not explicitly an Indigenous company, their situating of water as agent and co-performer aligns with Santos’s call for an “ecology of knowledges” (2008: xx) — where epistemologies grounded in struggle and relation coexist.

One of the most striking aspects of *Bodies of Water* is how it reclaims Nonlife not as lack but as resource for critique. For Povinelli (2016), the Desert, the Animist, and the Virus are figures through which late liberalism manages the Life/Nonlife divide. Flatfoot’s watery embodiments echo this ambiguity, especially in moments of collapse and release: are the dancers drowned, resting, resisting? Their refusal to signify univocally unsettles the extraction of meaning. This ambiguity resists the commodification of vitality, staging Nonlife as political presence. Butler’s (2004) grievability adds to this: by insisting that all bodies are worthy of grief, Flatfoot resists neoliberal erasures that naturalise certain deaths as inevitable. Instead, Nonlife becomes a site of ethical worlding — a way of being with precarity that generates responsibility.

Movement III

The Pluriverse as Worlding Praxis

If geontopower exposes the violent management of the Life/Nonlife distinction, then the pluriverse offers a framework for imagining otherwise. Arturo Escobar (2018) insists that the world is not one but many. Against the globalised logics of modernity that reduce being to a single ontological register, pluriversality affirms radical interdependence without erasing difference. Worlding here is not metaphorical but material: it is the enactment of multiple ontologies and lifeways in co-presence — the continual making and unmaking of relational worlds.

In *Bodies of Water*, Flatfoot Dance Company stages such pluriversal worldings. Rather than offering a single narrative arc, the performance layers sonic rhythms,

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immersive projections of ocean waves, ritualised gestures, and dispersed ensemble patterns. Each element carries its own worldliness, and yet these worlds resonate in tension and relation. As Maturana and Varela (1987: 241 in Escobar, 2008: 295) remind us, “the whole mechanism of generating ourselves as describers and observers tells us that our world, as the world which we bring forth in our coexistence with others, will always have precisely the mixture of regularity and mutability” . Flatfoot’s choreography enacts this immersion in relational becoming — not synthesis into singular meaning, but the maintenance of multiplicity and opacity (following Glissant, 1997).

Walter Mignolo and Rolando Vázquez (2013) describe *decolonial aestheSis* as an effort to unhinge the “modern/colonial aesthetic apparatus” and to open space for sensing and relating otherwise (2013: 4). For them, aestheSis is not simply an aesthetic category but a worlding process: a reconfiguration of perception, embodiment, and relation beyond colonial frames. *Bodies of Water* enacts this refusal through its formal strategies. Instead of privileging individual virtuosity or linear narrative resolution — hallmarks of Eurocentric concert dance — Flatfoot foregrounds collective and communal formations, African contemporary vocabularies, and ritualised gestures. Dancers stoop, lift, carry, and offer, enacting movements deeply rooted in South African social and ecological contexts.

These are not decorative representations of “local culture,” but what Mignolo and Vázquez call “practices of re-existence” (2013: 4) — aesthetic and political re-worldings that persist despite ongoing colonial erasures. Flatfoot’s choreography does not dissolve difference into homogeneity; rather, it stages the interaction of divergent vocabularies, histories, and rhythms. This is worlding otherwise: a pluriversal aestheSis where multiple ways of sensing and knowing co-exist without violent assimilation.

Pluriversal worlding cannot remain abstract; it must be grounded in the materiality of struggle. Dylan McGarry (in Shefer, Bozalek and Romano [eds.], 2024: 24) asserts: “life cannot exist without water.” Yet in South Africa, access to water is profoundly uneven, shaped by apartheid-era dispossession, racialised geographies, and contemporary climate precarity. In KwaZulu-Natal, where Flatfoot is based, droughts and floods intersect with infrastructural neglect (South African Human Rights Commission, 2022), rendering water both a daily survival labour and a site of political contestation.

Bodies of Water choreographs these struggles through embodied epistemologies. Gestures of contracting, yielding, lifting, and carrying evoke women’s water labour in rural and peri-urban communities. These gestures make visible what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls “knowledges born in struggle” (2014: viii). They are not symbols but testimonies — worlding gestures that insist on remembering histories of dispossession and ongoing labour. By situating these gestures within

planetary imaginaries of water, Flatfoot implements situated pluriversality: acknowledging that while water flows across the planet, it is always lived through specific histories of inequality and care. The choreography also extends Judith Butler's politics of grievability (2004). If certain lives are denied recognition as lives — and therefore as grievable — then the invisibilised labour of women carrying water risks becoming ungrievable labour. By re-staging these gestures in a collective choreographic context, Flatfoot reclaims them as world-making acts. The dancers' bodies testify that these labours matter — that they form part of the archive of planetary survival.

Pluriversality is not only thematic but also structural in *Bodies of Water*. The ensemble formations foreground radical interdependence. Dancers support collapsing bodies, ripple and disperse into tidal swells. At times, they form collective unisons, only to fracture into asynchronous choreography. This refusal of hierarchy resists both the heroic soloist of Western dance and the homogenising logic of the global. Escobar (2018) insists that autonomy is only possible through interdependence. Flatfoot's choreography embodies this principle. Agency circulates across the ensemble, between dancers and musicians, projections, and audiences. Karen Barad's (2007) agential realism illuminates this: boundaries do not sit still — they are enacted. In *Bodies of Water*, boundaries between dancer and environment, body and wave, collapse and reconfigure continuously. Live musicians amplify this intra-action: Matsha's percussion merges with dancers' footfalls or fractures rhythm to produce new relational fields. Refiloe Olifant's violin threads through these textures with a tonal palette that oscillates between neo-classical lyricism and South African sonic idioms — a melodic line that both anchors and unsettles, weaving affective resonance into the choreography's porous structure. These dynamics exemplify Barad's description of worlding as "ongoing reconfiguring of the world" (2007: 170).

Flatfoot's pluriversal worldings also align with Glissant's insistence on the right to opacity. He writes: "Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics. To understand this is to accept not being able to understand all, and yet to go on living with this" (1997: 190). The choreography embraces opacity. Gestures of water labour are recognisable but never reduced to transparent meaning; projections of ocean waves envelop dancers without clarifying whether they signify threat, abundance, or both. Audiences are not asked to decode fixed messages but to inhabit a fabric of opacity, where multiple meanings coexist without assimilation. This is worlding as opacity: a pluriversal practice that honours difference without demanding legibility.

Movement IV

Speculative Feminism and Worlding Otherwise

To speculate is to reach — not away from the present, but deeper into its folds. In *Bodies of Water*, Flatfoot Dance Company does not merely reflect ecological grief or rehearse resistance; it gestures toward futures already stirring within the tidal rhythms of the now. The choreography does not resolve crisis, nor does it offer utopian escape. Instead, it performs what José Esteban Muñoz (2009: 1) calls “a horizon” — a not-yet-here that animates the present with possibility. This horizontality is not linear but cyclical, not distant but intimate. It is carried in the dancers’ gestures of extension, dissolution, and return — movements that ripple outward and reconstitute, never identically, always becoming.

Donna Haraway’s provocation to “stay with the trouble” (2016: 1) resonates in these choreographic logics. The work refuses resolution, instead inhabiting complexity through recursive movement: dissolving formations, emergent unisons, and tidal dispersals that echo water’s onto-logic. As Astrida Neimanis (2017: 68) elaborates,

Water is articulated as always both ‘being’ and a process of ‘becoming’ – gathering water from certain bodies and flowing back into others in return. According to this onto-logic, water is also both body and milieu; water is what comprises bodies but also that which bathes bodies into being. Being and becoming are also proliferations of the different, and the new.

This amniotic logic materialises in Flatfoot’s choreography, where movement repeats but always differently — a rhythm that Neimanis links to Gilles Deleuze’s work on difference and repetition, noting that “water, in its amniotic onto-logic, materializes this movement: it repeats, but always differently” (Neimanis, 2017: 68). These rhythms enact a speculative temporality, one that resists extractivist linearity and rehearses futures through embodied cycles of renewal. In this refusal of closure, Flatfoot cultivates what Haraway calls “response-ability” — an ethic of entangled survival, choreographed through porous relation (Haraway, 2016: 2).

Entanglement, in turn, is not only thematic but methodological. Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “poethics” (2014) — a fusion of *poiesis* and ethics — insists on undoing the colonial grammar of separability that sustains binaries such as self/other, human/nonhuman, life/nonlife. Rather than treating entities as discrete, “poethics” (Ferreira da Silva, 2014) insists on entanglement as the condition of existence and the horizon of possibility. It is speculative, oriented toward imagining otherwise: to “release thinking from the grip of certainty and embrace the imagination’s power to create with unclear and confused, or uncertain impressions” (Ferreira da Silva, 2016: 59), recognising that “each existant’s singularity is contingent upon its becoming one possible expression of all the other existants, with which it is entangled beyond space and time” (Ferreira da

Silva, 2016: 59). In *Bodies of Water*, grief, care, resistance, and futurity are never isolated but layered, inseparable. Dancers cradle and carry one another, gestures of mourning folding into gestures of emergence. Sound and projection blur ancestral rhythms with speculative tones, collapsing past and future into a shared present. This is poethical choreography: a speculative worlding that refuses binaries and rehearses relational co-presence.

Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation further clarifies this practice. As she explains,

The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to imagine what cannot be verified, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death—social and corporeal death—and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance. It is an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said [...] it is a history written with and against the archive. (Hartman, 2008: 12)

Flatfoot's choreography does not reconstruct historical narratives of water labour or apartheid-era dispossession; instead, it reconfigures their embodied traces into speculative gestures. The act of carrying — once an index of scarcity and burden — becomes a rehearsal of abundance, of shared sustenance. These gestures do not erase histories of violence but transform them into grounds for futurity. The choreography fabulates with the archive, insisting that survival is not only reactive but generative.

This speculative reworlding is also queer in its temporal orientation. Muñoz's framing of queerness as "not-yet-here" (2009: 12) — as a horizon — is palpable in the dancers' suspended gestures, their refusal to settle into completion. The choreography resists the heteropatriarchal temporality of reproductive futurism — the linear promise that the future belongs to the child — and instead, rehearses futures in the present tense of movement. These are utopian openings, not as fixed ideals but as embodied possibilities, danced into being through gestures of care and renewal. Alexis Pauline Gumbs's hydro-speculative writing deepens this intimacy. For Gumbs, water is not only archive and teacher but lover — a relational mode that collapses scientific detachment into affective entanglement. She reminds us that "nothing is objective [...] scientists [...] cannot be unmoved. They are clearly obsessed, and most likely, like me [Gumbs], in love" (2020: 1). Her writing moves deliberately "from a clinical tone to a profoundly intimate tone," insisting that "the words 'I love you' appear more than any other phrase in [her] book" (2020: 1). This shift from the cadence of scientific detachment to the vulnerability of love is Gumbs's speculative intervention: an expansion of identification beyond naming and categorisation toward empathy, porousness, and more-than-human intimacies.

In the closing moments of *Bodies of Water*, dancers move onto the apron of the stage, turning to face the cyclorama and its watery projection. Slowly sinking, they create a final image of collective witness — bodies watching with the ocean, rather than mastering it. The soundscape layers percussion, echoes of voice, and ambient resonance into an atmosphere that is both ancestral and futuristic. Dancers appear to listen — not only to the music but to each other, to the waves, to the land. This listening is intimate, a choreographic “I love you” directed toward more-than-human companions. Here, love is not sentiment but speculative method: a way of worlding otherwise, of inhabiting relation beyond separability (following Ferreira da Silve, 2016). This choreography of listening exemplifies Gumbs’s hydro-speculative praxis. Water is not only referenced but enacted as a relational mode: cyclical, connective and speculative. The formation does not resolve into closure but remains open-ended, a rehearsal of continuity without finality. In this sense, Flatfoot’s choreography stages hydro-speculative worldings: futures rehearsed through water’s logics of ebb and flow, futures grounded in planetary cycles of relation and sustained by a poetics of love as planetary intimacy.

A danger of speculative discourse is abstraction — the temptation to imagine futures without accountability to histories of struggle. *Bodies of Water* avoids this by grounding its speculative gestures in South African water politics. The speculative horizon of queer futurity, the poethics of entanglement, the fabulation of water labour — all remain accountable to the situated materiality of water precarity in KwaZulu-Natal. This grounding resonates with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’s call for an “*ecology of knowledges*” (2014: 71, italics in the original), where futures are not imagined from nowhere but emerge from epistemologies “born in struggle” (2014: viii). Flatfoot’s speculative worldings are therefore not escapist but rooted in struggle. They fabulate futures not by ignoring dispossession but by transforming its embodied archives into grounds for survival and possibility.

Through recursive temporality, entangled layering (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2016), fabulated archives (Hartman, 2008), queer horizons (Muñoz, 2009), and hydro-speculative (Gumbs, 2020) gestures, *Bodies of Water* stages speculative feminism as worlding otherwise. Haraway’s (2016) staying with the trouble, da Silva’s (2014) poethics, Hartman’s (2008) fabulation, Muñoz’s (2009) horizon, and Gumbs’s (2020) hydro-speculation converge in this choreography. Speculative worlding here is not the projection of fixed utopias but the rehearsal of possible futures in embodied practice. It is grounded in South African water struggles yet planetary in resonance. It honours grief but insists on generative possibility. It acknowledges dispossession but does not translate this into the neoliberal call for “resilience”; instead, it reworks dispossession into practices of endurance,

imagination, and collective world-making — a poethical insistence that other futures can still be rehearsed into being.

In this sense, *Bodies of Water* demonstrates that speculation is itself a worlding praxis. Futures are not deferred ideals but embodied rehearsals, performed and enacted through gestures of care, cycles of renewal and collective listening. The performance thus insists other worlds are not only imaginable but already being rehearsed, carried in the rhythms of water, sustained in the entanglements of dance, and made palpable through speculative feminist worldings.

Conclusion: Choreographies of Planetary Worlding, Care, and Resistance

Flatfoot Dance Company's *Bodies of Water* (2025) does not merely reflect ecological crisis; it performs worlding. Through tidal cycles of movement, immersive soundscapes, and enveloping projections, the work materialises relational, pluriversal, speculative worlds deeply situated in Southern struggles (Santos, 2014). To describe this choreography as planetary praxis is to recognise it as epistemology — a way of knowing, mourning, and imagining through embodied practice.

Across four movements, this article traced how *Bodies of Water* enacts worlding through distinct but entangled theoretical registers. Planetary foregrounds alterity and porous relation (Spivak, 2003; Glissant, 1997), geontopower reveals the politics of Life and Nonlife (Povinelli, 2016), pluriversality affirms radical interdependence and epistemologies of the South (Escobar, 2018; Santos, 2014), and speculative feminism gestures toward futures otherwise (Haraway, 2016; Muñoz, 2009; Hartman, 2008; Gumbs, 2020).

These frameworks do not operate in isolation. Like the choreography itself, they converge and reconfigure in tidal rhythm. Planetary is enacted through spatial dispersal and porous ensemble formations, resisting abstraction and grounding relation in South African water struggles. Geontopower is troubled through stillness and collapse, where Nonlife becomes presence, and grief becomes political force (Butler, 2004; Sharpe, 2016). Pluriversality emerges in the layering of ritual and abstraction, ancestral rhythm, and ambient resonance — a choreography of many worlds in co-presence (Escobar, 2018; Mignolo and Vázquez, 2013). Speculative feminism unfolds through gestures of extension, listening, and renewal, rehearsing futures not as utopias but as embodied horizons (Muñoz, 2009; da Silva, 2018; Gumbs, 2020).

What unites these movements is the practice of worlding. In *Bodies of Water*, dance is not metaphor for activism — it *is* activism. Choreography becomes method: of sensing, resisting, mourning, and imagining. Karen Barad's agential realism

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reminds us that boundaries do not sit still; they are enacted (2007). Flatfoot's choreography enacts and undoes boundaries — between human and nonhuman, life, and nonlife, past and future — staging porousness as politics.

This is a politics of care, of survival, of refusal. It is ecological, insisting on planetary entanglement. It is decolonial, grounding planetary imaginaries in situated histories. It is feminist, foregrounding grief and futurity as political gestures. It is pluriversal, affirming that the world is not one but many. It is speculative, rehearsing futures already in motion. In Flatfoot's choreography, worlding is tidal. It ebbs and flows, dissolves, and reforms. It is fragile and porous, but also resilient and interdependent. In the face of planetary crisis, *Bodies of Water* insists that survival is collective, grief is political, and futures are plural. It affirms that another world is not only possible — it is already being danced into being.

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