

the memory of water

(or: cape town's linear, unsustainable water metabolism and the lack of anticipatory planning which led to crisis)

Paul K Currie

August 2014

rain falls on the slopes of the berg river catchment
drops coalesce into streams
that meet the theewaterskloof dam
steady. waiting. evaporating

a pump pumps
(with lightning tamed from broken atoms 50 kilometres away)
with grav assist
water moves through harsh environs
of chlorine and lyme.
cleansed

in darkness enters the city and
split and split and split again
till bright light opens it upon
hands and dishes – in toilet bowls – from showerheads
sprayed across flowering plants and gleaming mercs
from running taps down muddy roads past informal homes
in boilers and engines and cooling contraptions
reshaped and shifted. evapotranspired

condensed. absorbed -
the lucky become clouds
free float and fly
or sink underground
to feed green crop
or recharge the aquifer.
depleting.

while the rest, suds and all
reenter the pipes
darkens conveys through solids extraction
anaerobic and aerobic trauma
and absorbed by salty surrounds of ocean water
where nutrients bloom
and biodiversity
disappears

ecoli wash past blue flag beaches
touching bathing tourists
city patrons who come to cape town
for natures beauty
and may not feel
the memory of water.

poem first presented at ISIE-ISSST Conference on June 29 2017 | www.umama-africa.com



Complex
Systems in
Transition



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

March 2017

No rain has fallen on the slopes of the theewaterskloof
and the city –
surprised by events it predicted in 20 oh 6
– calls for all:
reduce your use

so highway signs count down to the
end of water
ignored by urbanites who imagine
water comes only from taps
120 days left
110
100
no thought of the panic elicited
when a disgruntled public
see only
20 days left
so the signs much change
pipe pressure is dropped
and government states plainly its policy:
lets pray for precipitation

meanwhile the gardens die
cars lie conscientiously dirty
while the city's gone from
green to beige
and blame is passed
from citizens to city
from rich to poor
to fire helicopters dumping dam water on an intense fire season
(predicted in 20 oh 6)

poem first presented at ISIE-ISSST Conference on June 29 2017 | www.umama-africa.com



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

June 2016

no rain has fallen on the slopes of the theewaterskloof
though drizzles tickle eyes of
longing capetonians
looking for rain
a perhaps psychological balm to signal the end
of crisis
hopefully not ending the
3 daily toilet flush – the 2 minute shower – the limited laundry
all part of the 100 litre goal per person.
too bad drizzle isn't drinkable

when the rain arrives
the waves arise
a storm of note
floods the city but
the dam levels rise
just
1
percent

this crisis will last
reduce your use
says the mayor
unveils a new planned portfolio
on sustainable views
of how the city will change
and so ensues
that resource efficiency is finally
on the agenda

poem first presented at ISIE-ISSST Conference on June 29 2017 | www.umama-africa.com



Complex
Systems in
Transition



UNIVERSITEIT
STELLENBOSCH
UNIVERSITY

August 2030?

rain falls on the slopes of the theewaterskloof
flows through pipes to the city
meeting water that's
familiar
with the system it moves through
supports. hydrates

now toilet wash holds value
fueling gardens (indigenous)
and busses (electric)
no highway signs needed
as society's conceded:
reduce your use – we're water scarce!

our water adventures in circular fashion
now city's caught-on
that's a good pattern
expanding its works
water treatment reverts
to send back grey black blue
for an extra purpose

and throughout the system
pipes are lined with messages to keep
the crisis of cape town
in the memory of water

poem first presented at ISIE-ISSST Conference on June 29 2017 | www.umama-africa.com

