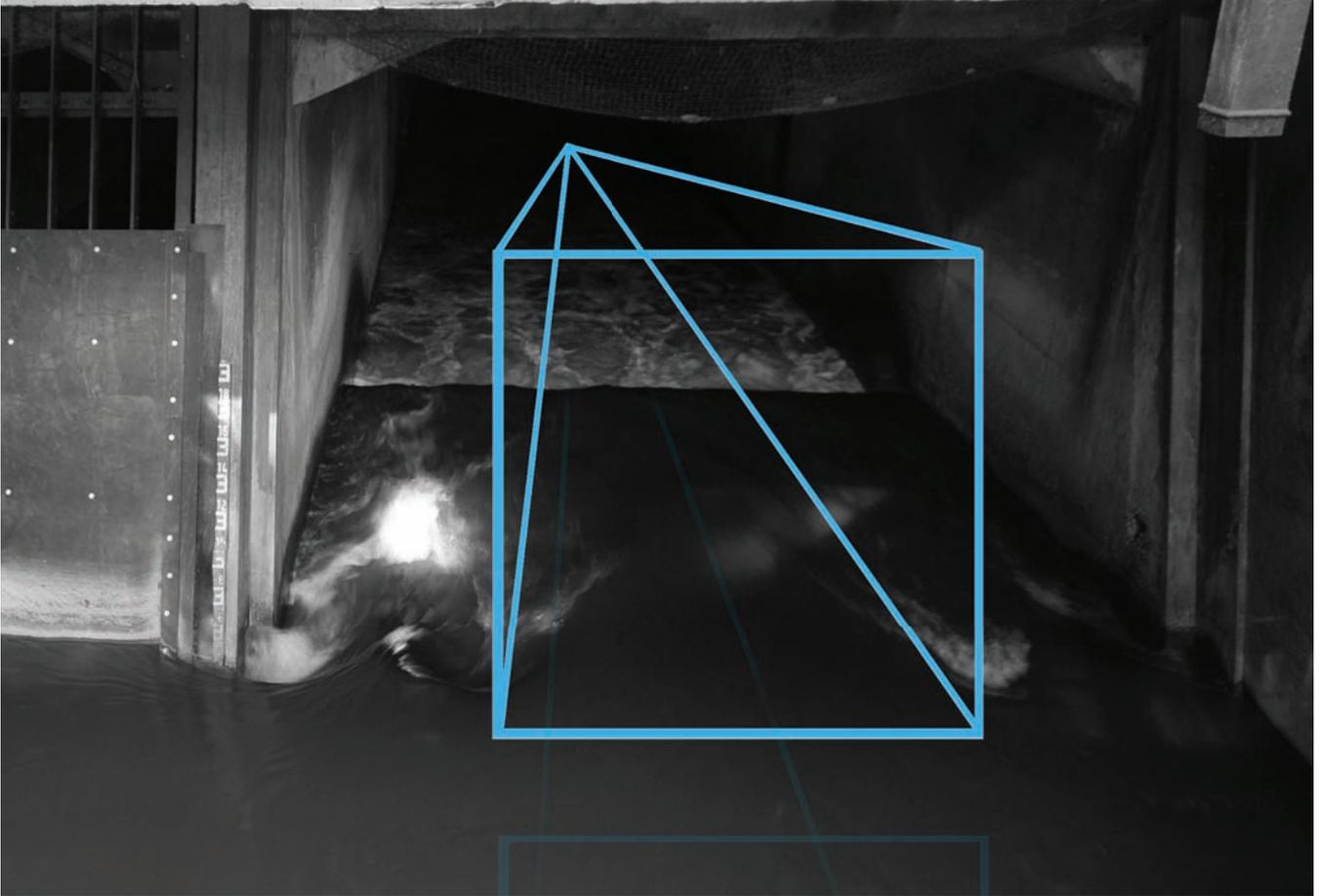
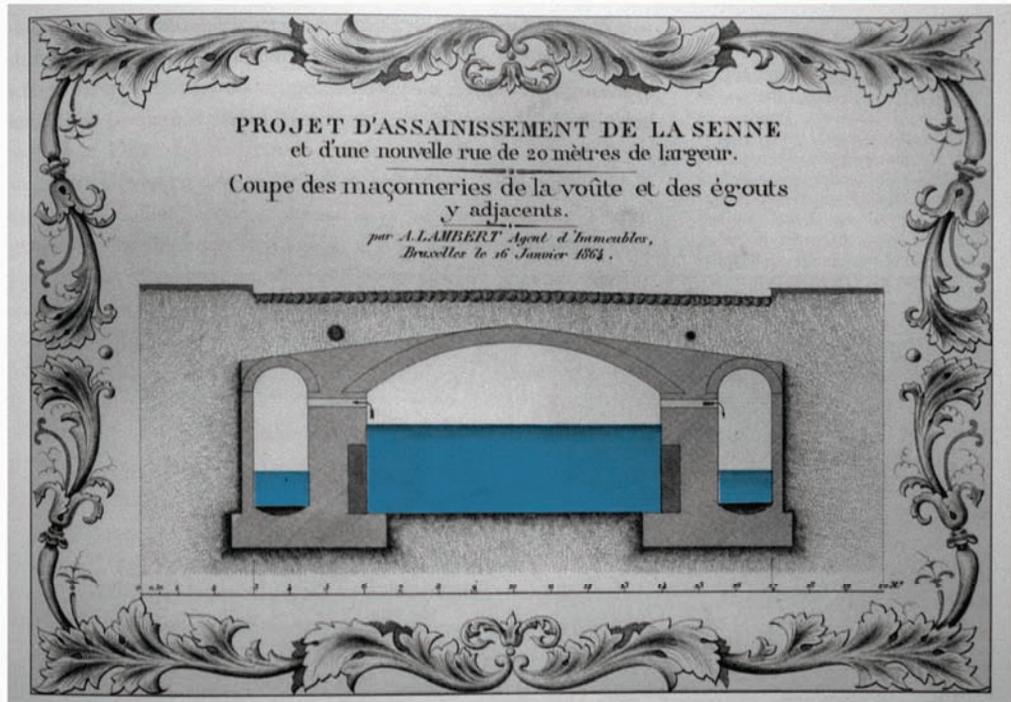
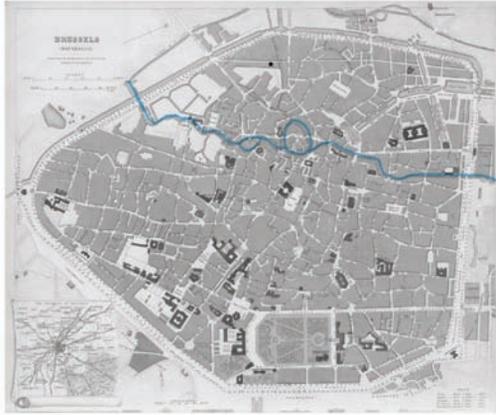


Vanishing Point  
(Drawing Appearance):  
Zenne(Senne) River Project

James Geurts





## How *life* shows up as *things* disappear

Dr Julie Louise Bacon

Imagining now the mindset of those back then who decided to cover over the once-vital, become-polluted river Zenne, it seems to me that the river must have appeared a thing to them. Only things can be (apparently) done away with in such a manner, made to conform to a plan or design. The approach to life that motivates the act of entombing a river is emblematic of a greater dynamic through which human consciousness unfolds, that which leads the human-animal to objectify life, including therefore himself.

Some objectification is beautiful : seeing one's skin or a river as a poem. Some is tragic, treating the river or one's body as a tool. Perhaps all objectifications are united – whether beauty, tragedy or another – through the common sense of pathos that they may arouse. Pathos in the sense of a compassion for our own human condition of tending to see the world as things, in the knowledge that whilst this may facilitate our lives, and whilst it is at times a necessity, life is always more than this.

I read somewhere that the economy is the objectification of cosmology. The economy is, then, nothing more than an ultimate form of objectification of life, just as the ultimate sense of life's unboundedness occurs when we project ourselves into the vast reaches of space. The act of seeing a living force, like a river, as a thing, and treating it accordingly, is set against the backdrop of an intransigent framework of value, in other words a highly-conditioned form of perception. That conditioning is economic, where life is framed in terms of use-value ; a river is useful to a city and when it outlives its use because, in fact, of the brutishness of seeing life as something to use (pollution signals this mindset), it is covered over.

There is truth in noting that the most fundamental of experiences can seem distant precisely because of the habit of objectification, of living on the surface of thingness. There is truth also in the acknowledgement that language is well suited to describing the thingness of the world, and that it must reach hard for the life that we feel through things and yet which always lies beyond them. Site-specific and research-based art have a particular capacity to open up the fabric of space-time relations from which perception is formed, and displace the framing of the world and ourselves as things.

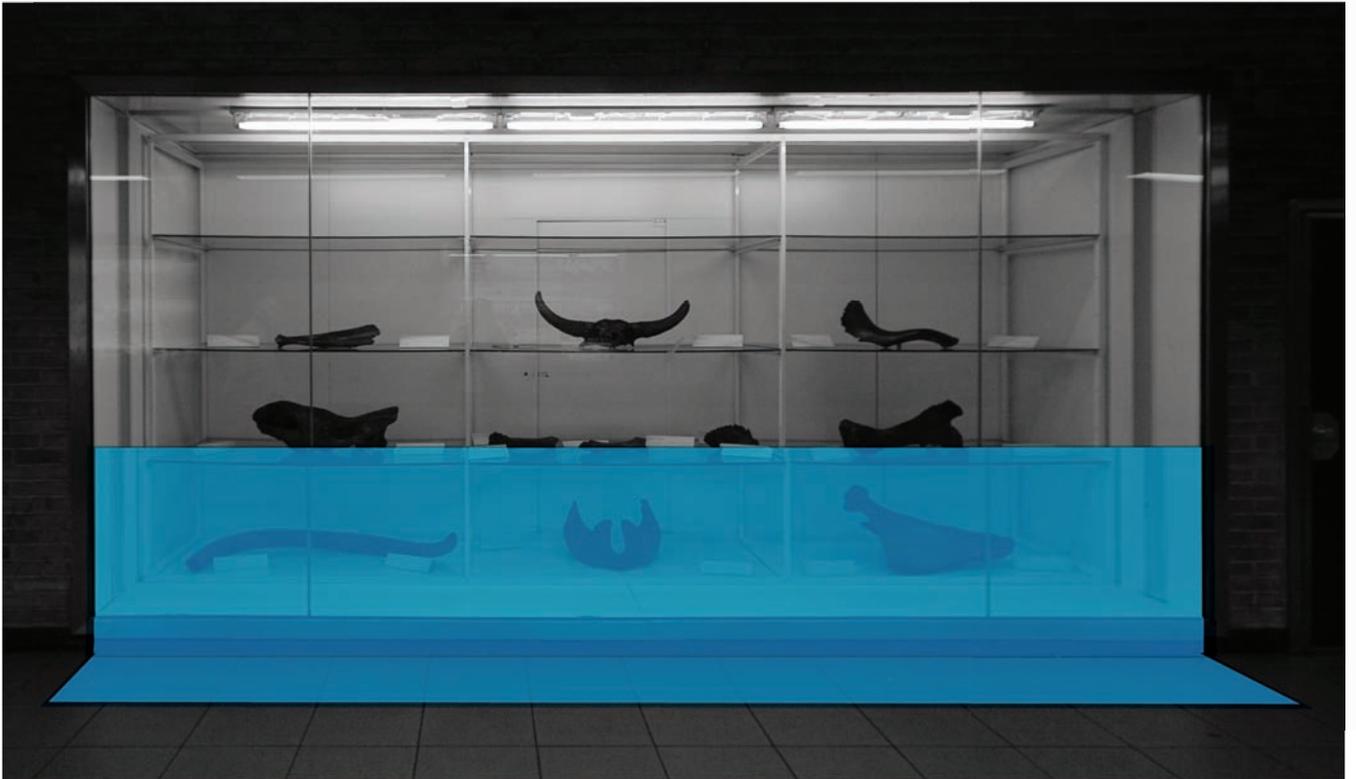
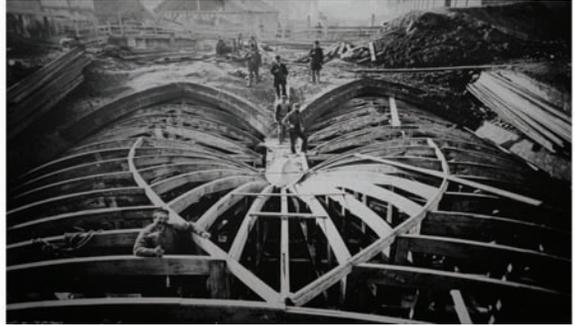
A concern to create movement beyond objectification was evident in James Geurts' approach to exploring the Zenne river's history, and more significantly its life in his Nadine research residency Vanishing Point (Drawing Appearance). By choosing to align his study of the river with an exploration of the nature of perception itself he takes us to the heart of the matter, as I see it, which is as follows : our capacity to go beyond the reach of certain perceptual frameworks is indicative of the depth of our capacity to relate to our surroundings fully, not only as bodies in the world but as part of the fabric of the world.

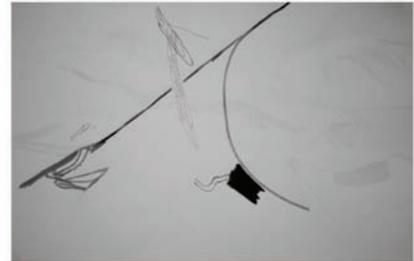
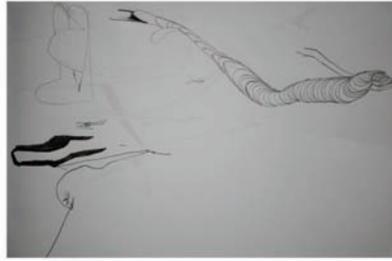
It is no accident that Geurts should align the body of the river with the body of sight. The river is both a metaphor that symbolizes the workings of our (sub)consciousness, and a force that literally sustains physical and social life (human conglomerations tending to form around them). As such the river appears as a force through which to apprehend the relationship between inner and outer worlds.

Vanishing Point (Drawing Appearance) proposes that by moving through perceptual states into fuller states of sensory being (beyond the grid of perception, including that of use-value), we sense the alignment of the river and the human-animal body, and that the course of their life is interwoven. Some of the methods employed to take us across the threshold of socialized perception and instrumentalised views of the river/cityspace, into fuller states of engagement, are simple. Geurts' long walks along the original path of the Zenne, exploring the waterway through drawing as he went, formed the basis of his exploration of perception, the body and the river. This involved feeling scale in line with the innate space-time of the body's capacity to transform its surroundings through the simple enchantment of walking ; allowing oneself to be guided by sensory experience of structures and space, and a heightened awareness to the movement of light. Such methods signal the psychogeographic approach to space with which he identifies his practice : a folding of reasoning into intuition ; a seeking out of liminal states. This took him through wasteland, into the underground metro passageways that now inhabit the original river bed, past the vitrines of river relics that they house. Continuing onwards the river moves through the heart of the city, crossing the inner sanctum of a convent, before progressing northwards and back out into wasteland.

On the basis of his walks, Geurts applied the various means of his 'expanded drawing practice' to convey a sense of a latent field of psychic/material forces and their interplay in the world, from which perception is formed, on which cities are built, and which the river echoes. On-site drawing works and videoing processes were accompanied by experimentation with sculptural installation and projection works in the exhibition space, to create a series of works that takes us through the body of the research, the currents of the river.

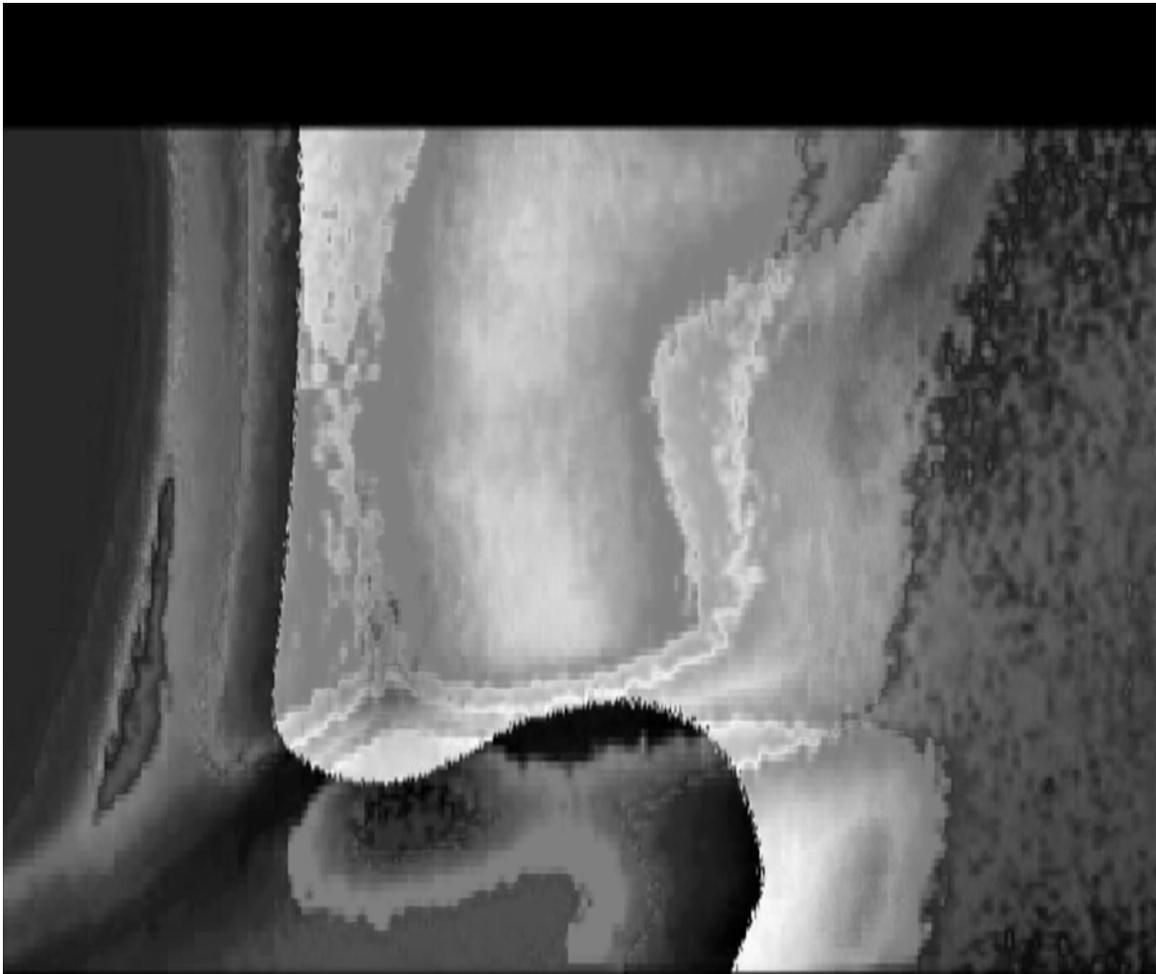
Archival research further coloured Geurts' field of inquiry, with two images striking a particular chord with the project, and what shows up through it, in terms of critique and poetics. In the first case, a photography of the entombing of the Zenne seems to speak beyond its very state of thingness (as a document of reality) to show up the truth about extreme objectification, that it is a deathly act, that its heart is sombre; workers look on from within the skeletal cage they are building for the river, seeming to signal the encasing of human life in the process. In the second, we see the engraved figure of a water diviner, documenting the human's embodied knowledge of water. This image seems to be evocative of Geurts' practice, in his seeking out of resonance, and points of dynamic convergence, signalling movement. This sense of resonance and flow can be seen in his intervention in the coursing of data in video circuit boards as he filmed the river. It shows up in his drawing on paper practice, reaching towards the opening of channels between the body, volume of space, surface and line.





There is a bodiliness to his drawings, amplified by his layering of a series of drawing works in a lopped video work. The project as a whole emphasizes the sensuality of materials, including the materiality of light, particularly in terms of its concordance with the qualities of water : dissolving, seeping, saturating, distilling... Ultimately his methods reach towards the threshold between concept and material, idea and structure, in a dynamic of making highly attuned to draw out the essential relationship between our imagination and all forms of organisation.

The history of the river Zenne is something like the story of how perception itself 'works' with its overground/underground reality analogous to consciousness/subconsciousness. James Geurts' emphasizes the point at which perspective falls away and distinctions of inner/outer, above/below disappear through his vanishing point structure ; vanishing points draw us in, announcing thresholds between states. Whilst addressing the Zenne's history and its contemporary reality, his work takes us beyond representation of the river's life. What might be said of Vanishing Point (Drawing Appearance) is that as the conditions of thingness – the river as object – disappears what shows up is the profound and dynamic relationship between inner and outer spaces. Ultimately, the river and the human-animal body come into alignment at the point at which we sense their essential and shared reality : flow.



NADINE

Brussel

<http://nadine.be>

James Geurts

Australia

<http://www.jamesgeurts.com>

