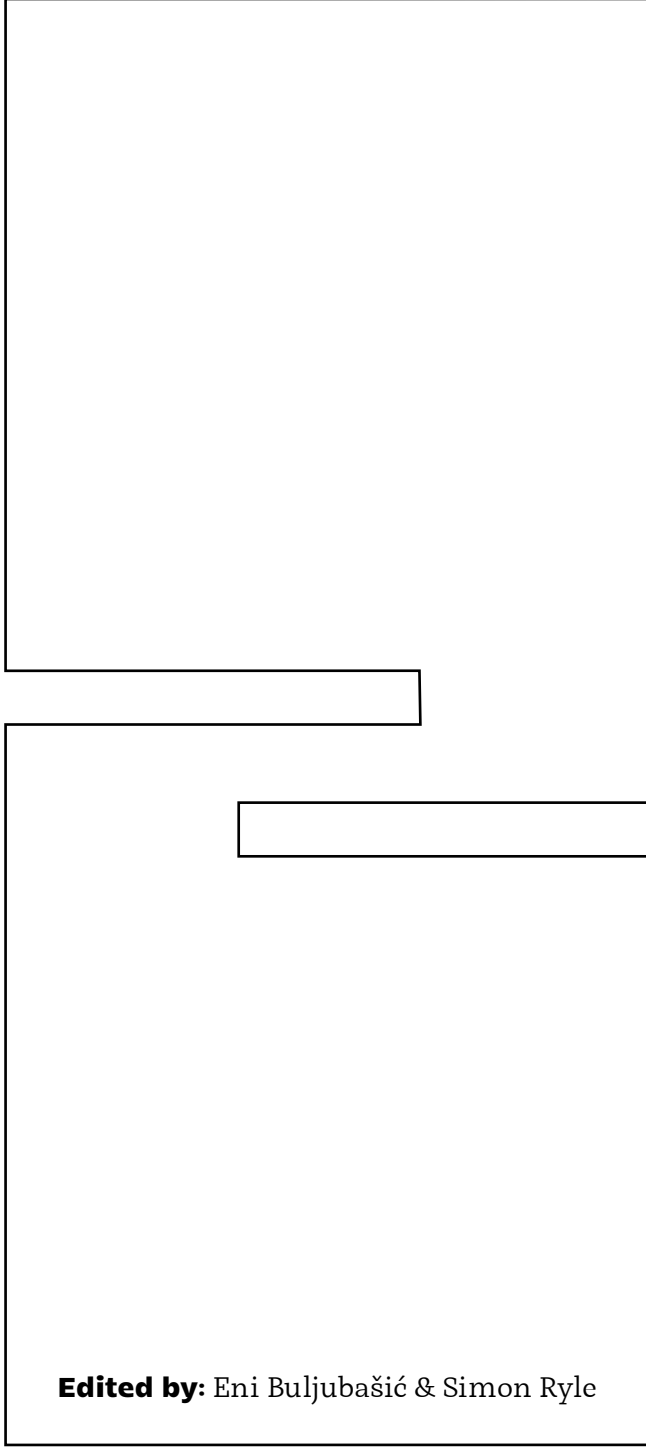


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Wavescapes in the Anthropocene

(explorations in Blue Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities)

Introduction:

Wavescapes in the Anthropocene

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All sea voyages have several beginnings and several ends;
they are never completed.

– Predrag Matvejević

I spoke to the river,
And the river spoke back to me.
And it said, “you look so lonely,
You look full of misery,
And if you can’t find your baby,
Come make your home with me.”

– Percy Mayfield

Water proliferates throughout the cosmos. It accounts for 10% of interstellar matter, mostly as ice and gaseous matter (Armstrong, 44). Geochemical evidence suggests early in planetary history water was delivered to Earth by collisions with asteroids and planetesimals (Peslier et al., 743–810). Yet the liquid state of water on Earth is cosmically rare and precious. Water as a universal solvent is implicated in the first origin of life (Armstrong 44). However, in recent times water’s biospheres have been destabilized. If business-as-usual is not disrupted, it’s predicted that by 2050, there will be more plastic in the world’s oceans than fish (World Economic Forum 2016). Ocean acidification, due to increased carbon absorption, threatens to eliminate the world’s corals and sponges, each playing a vital role in complex marine bio-systems (Earth Journal Network 2016). Due to unprecedented patterns of offshore warming, the 2018 Atlantic hurricane season was the most destructive on record. Water is rendered eerie or uncanny by these ecological shifts (Morton). From the difficulty

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many people have in obtaining potable water, to the deadly threat of rising sea levels precipitated by global warming, the Anthropocene has refigured water as both a source of uncertainty and a fearsome threat. Our era has constructed massive infrastructures with calamitous effects on the life giving powers of water, such as the pesticide run-offs of modern farming, the pollution of mass tourism, deep sea drilling for oil, or declining fish stocks caused by industrial fishing. At the same time, Anthropocene transfigurations have hastened the sheer numbers of the displaced, whose migrations have often sought to transverse oceans and seas in the quest for a new life. Between January 2016 and December 2017 nearly 10,000 refugees lost their lives while crossing the Mediterranean (UNHCR 2019).

To consider “Wavescapes in the Anthropocene,” as does this special edition, is to attend to the uniqueness of water as it informs and intersects with human cultural life – but also ways that late modern ecological degradations impact upon the source of planetary life. Proposed in 2000 by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, the Anthropocene describes how modern human systems now intervene in planetary processes at a geological level. To consider “Wavescapes in the Anthropocene” is to face up to the uncanny incursions that late capitalism is making into the processes and flows of life’s liquid bases. In part this involves taking a different perspective on the firm ground that we make our home. For Steve Mentz, to be properly ecological, our thinking must become oceanic – capable of flowing between conventionally stratified categories, eras and bodies (xxi). Likewise, for Rachel Armstrong, to think with water is to take a critical perspective on the solidity that dominates many western assumptions:

Liquids are non-bodies, as they are constantly changing and therefore possess no formal boundaries. Possessing their own logic these protean structures assert their identity through their environmental context. They are pluripotent, not amorphous, being forged by oscillations and iterations of material expressions. Arising from interfaces, they persist through local connections and networks, which have the capacity to internalise other bodies as manifolds within their substance. Such multiple entanglements invoke marginal relations between multiple agencies that exceed the classical logic of objects, being capable of many acts of transformation. (69)

Thinking of life as a liquid flux means positioning living beings not as individual objects, but rather inextricable, infinite and mutually dependent symbiotic entanglements. Sea voyages, as Matvejević states, are never completed.

Along these lines, in advocating for a more culturally and

conceptually pronounced “marine trans-corporeality,” and therein for our kinship with “vast liquid habitats,” Stacey Alaimo warns that

the persistent (and convenient) conception of the ocean as so vast and powerful that anything dumped into it will be dispersed into oblivion makes it particularly difficult to capture, map and publicize the flow of toxins across terrestrial, oceanic, and human habitats. Moreover, many marine habitats, such as those in the benthic and pelagic zones, are not only relatively unknown to scientists, but are often depicted as “alien” worlds, completely independent from human activities. (187-188)

Trans-corporeal liquid habitats are both vulnerable to Anthropocene modernity – indivisibly interconnected to human economic decisions – and resistant to our knowledge.

The vital and uncanny forms and intersections taken by Anthropocene and other wavescapes, and the alien impenetrability of watery zones, are one reason why art and literature often invoke fascination with water. In Charles Sprawson’s classic study of literary liquidity, *The Haunts of the Black Masseur*, water is a realm of poetic and athletic heroism. At the same time, the voluptuous fluidity of water exerts an irresistible pull for the writer and the swimmer alike: “remote and divorced from everyday life, devoted to a mode of exercise where most of the body remains submerged and self-absorbed” (5). As a young man, Sprawson worked for several years teaching classical culture in an Arabic university. As he recounts, “The heat, the parched atmosphere and the non-existence of pools made me acutely sensitive to the slightest trace of water, any passing reference to swimming” (7-8). In these arid circumstances, Sprawson began compiling eccentric lists of water’s recurrent centrality to literature. In his thirsting regard, endless wavescapes rippled through the cannon, exerting an unerring pull on poetics: “Novels and poetry seemed to revolve around water and swimming, in a way that was quite out of proportion to the author’s intentions” (8).

Otherness

What aspects of water permeate its aesthetic treatment? Firstly, we note how frequently in art, literature, and film water invokes otherness. This may have a political dimension. In Carl Schmitt’s writing, the sea remains the space of the infinite unknown of Renaissance Europe, and the colonial conquest of the New World indicates a fundamental geopolitical transition (2009). This fascination is in evidence in all manner of dialectical uses of the sea across the history of the cinema, from the Lumière

brothers short film at the very birth of the cinema, *La Mer* (1895), to the haunting seascape horror sci-fi of Lucile Hadzihalilovic's *Évolution* (2015). It is this otherness that Christina Heflin in this special edition locates in Jean Painlevé's undersea surrealism. If the infinite timelessness of the sea's waves is comically mirrored by the endless procession of divers from the short jetty in the Lumieres' early images of the cinematic seaside, the evolutionary otherness of watery transformation is rather emphasized by Hadzihalilovic. Another dialectical pairing concerns surface and depth. One of the most eerie and alluring moments from the Studio Era of American cinema is a dreamlike sequence from Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), in which two children, John (Billy Chapin) and Pearl (Sally Jane Bruce), escape from the ill-intentioned Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) in a stolen rowing *boat*. As Laughton's camera picks out a spider web, a bankside toad, and pollen floating in the moonlight, the children float languidly beneath the starry sky upon the moonlit river, at once held protected upon the surface of brilliant luminescence, and threatened by depths of an incomprehensible surrounding darkness. If the placid and luminescent sheen of the river's surface contrasts with Powell's mendacity, it also echoes the screen's radiance.

Alert to this relation, the cinema has commonly contrasted the surface and depth of water. As with many films, the plots of Luc Besson's *The Big Blue* (1988) and James Cameron's *The Abyss* (1989) centre on the deathly allure of the ocean depths, while Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975) brings the fearful unknown of the nefarious subaqueous shark monster to the Martha's Vineyard beach setting by deploying the horror technique of the "dolly zoom." Pioneered by Alfred Hitchcock's cinematographer Irmin Robert for *Vertigo* (1958), the vertiginous effect of the dolly zoom is achieved by zooming the camera lens in order to adjust the field of view, while the camera dollies away at precisely the rate that keeps the foreground the same size in the frame throughout. This means the field of view is stretched out in a disorienting manner, the background seeming to drop away whilst the foreground remains unchanging – thus contravening all the visual hints that the cinema spectator conventionally uses to maintain spatial orientation concerning the diegesis. If the shark serves as eponymous and largely unscreened and unseen centre of *Jaws* – whose brooding menace and absence from the representation is neatly caught in John Williams's innovative minimalist theme, the dolly zoom brings the abyssal otherness of the ocean depths to cinematic mimesis. While witnessing a horrific shark attack, police chief Brody (Roy Scheider) is suddenly made aware in the most dramatic manner of his culpability in mistakenly allowing the Amity Island beaches to reopen; as he sees in gory technicolour, a maleficent shark was responsible after all, Spielberg's

dolly zoom brings to the mimetic surface this sudden horrific and isolating surge of awareness.

Spielberg's cinematography speaks to the unknown otherness of the oceanic depths. However, as Rupert Medd's article in this special edition demonstrates, the predominant horror troubling our oceans is not *Carcharodon carcharias*, the Great White of Spielberg's screenplay, but rather the monstrous 50-100 million tonnes of plastic that humans have in the last half century dumped into the oceans. Rebecca Giggs writes of a beached whale found in the Almería region of Spain, an entire greenhouse in its stomach, and well as other plastic items: parts of a dishwashing machine, a mattress, fishing gear, several coathangers, an ice cream tub. Giggs warns that, due to longevity of whales, and the way their blubber attracts fat-soluble toxicants, whales absorb "heavy metals and inorganic compounds that comprise pesticides, fertilisers, and other pollutants that have come to powder the modern sea" (10). If the whale's vast capacity to swallow objects recalls to Giggs tales of voyagers such as Jonah swallowed whole and finding undersea refuge inside the enormous creature, the contemporary plight of the oceans also warns of the uncannily changed status of contemporary human objects. The mythological alterity accorded to the oceans, as sites of both monsters and strange refuge, has shifted in the Anthropocene. In the age of industrial modernity, mass extinction ravages marine biosystems, and banal household detrita are transformed into terrifying agents of death that pollute the most unknown, unexplored regions of the ocean depths. "Would we know it, the moment when it became too late," Giggs asks, "when the oceans ceased to be infinite?" (16).

If our era involves a sea change in ecological consciousness, might watery aesthetics help us keep our bearings as we encounter and traverse disarming and uncanny new Anthropocene wavescapes? Certainly across literary history, texts have drawn repeatedly from the alterity of water. The archetype (and the fear of) watery depths, can be traced back to early cultures and literatures of Western civilization in shape of primordial water gods and monsters. The Sumerian *Enuma Elish*'s serpent-like monster Tiamat represents the sea, and is progenitor of gods. The Babylonian and Ugarit cosmogonic myths are also determined by the (thunder) god's victory over just such a sea monster, standing for the primordial chaos and the unwieldy sea. The creation of cosmos-order was thus gained through the (masculinist) taming of the water element, while things watery (and slippery) gained the negative connotations of chaos, alterity, danger and mystery (cf. Levanat Peričić; Eliade 1958). Within this symbolic field of fearsome, mysterious watery creatures, more widely known are the Leviathan, which entered the Western imagination via Hebrew mythology, the Talmud and the Old Testament, and the Greek and medieval

cyborgs¹ and monsters such as mermaids, sirens, and the metonymical Scylla and Charybdis. To mention one more example of this rich imagological reservoir, an island-whale story is an intercultural Mediterranean narrative found across languages and genres. In different versions, this story is found in the Talmud, *The Thousand and One Nights*, medieval genres (bestiaries, *summae*), folk literature (Croatian, Italian) and in works by the authors as diverse as Ariosto, Milton, Rabelais, Melville, and Verne (cf. Miličević Bradač). The story narrates of a fishing trip, where the group, after being in a storm or a dense fog, embark on a small island, where they proceed to cook their lunch. Then, the island starts shaking and plummets into the water, for it was not an island but a whale's back they were cooking on. In medieval genres, the fishing group is sunk by this "demonic" creature, and their "fall into the abyss" is compared with falling into sin. On a wider scale, malevolent, benevolent, or indeed resistant to such binary determination, the "aquatic seducers" of both genders are found globally, from the Latin America (cf. Adamson 2018 on *yakaruna* stories and Amazonian cosmologies), African continent (e.g. Mami Wata) and, as first discussed, the West. These archetypes, images and polysemy are found in contemporary cultural production too, e.g. in the del Toro's film *The Shape of Water* (2017), where a magical watery creature brings forth the liminal qualities of the familiar and the chaotic, the mundane and the enchanted, identity and alterity.

In both genre and literary modern fiction, wavescapes connote alterity, but also open up possibilities for weaving the ties of kinship beyond the human-animal divide. As this collection explores, modernist and Surrealist artists explore both the archetypal and scientific dimensions of water and sea life, as well as its non-human alterity and mystery. In this collection, Monika Bregović explores aesthetics and ethics of fish in Virginia Woolf's fiction and essays, while Christy Heflin discusses the portrayal of non-ocular modes of sensing in Jean Painlevé's films. Both papers, in different ways, account for the otherworldly beauty and beautiful otherness of marine beings, also opening opportunities for cross-species kinship-making. One might consider in this context Joan Slonczewski's ground-breaking feminist SF novel *A Door into Ocean* (1986), which represents an all-female, egalitarian and pacifist society, the Sharers, who live on a water cover moon, Shora. The continual strangeness of Slonczewski's vision emphasizes the anarchic ecofeminist mutualism of the Sharer society, which harnesses giant squid to power their chariots, harvests the limbs of seamonsters, and whose lesbian eroticism reflects the fluid otherness of their watery planet.

1 According to Haraway's famous "Cyborg Manifesto," a cyborg appears in myth precisely there where a boundary is crossed. She refers to the animal/human boundary, but, in this context, it might be expanded towards those of chaos and cosmos, or familiarity and mystery.

By contrast, William Golding's *Pincher Martin* (1956) uses the hostile otherness of the ocean to dissect humanist pretensions – and perhaps goes so far as to suggest how resistance to wavescape alterity and flux lies at the heart of Anthropocene alienation. Stranded alone on a rock in the middle of the Atlantic, Golding's protagonist Martin presents a malformed détournement of Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. In Golding's retelling of shipwreck, the dominating western Enlightenment individualist is flung upon an atoll so small and desperate the sea spray flies constantly in his face, no peace is possible, and madness looms terribly. Like Crusoe, Martin forces himself to think, to be practical, to use the intelligence that sets him apart from the rest of the creation: to collect water, harvest limpets and muscles, construct an SOS sign for passing aeroplanes from seaweed. But as his body weakens, injured from the hardships of the exposed rock, his ordeal in the sea, the stale water he must drink, madness seizes his thoughts. The rock becomes his image of his own sanity, and the sea that surrounds and dominates the feeble rock with its vast ungovernable loneliness, is the radical otherness of madness:

I am alone on a rock in the middle of the Atlantic. There are vast distances of swinging water round me. But the rock is solid. It goes down and joins the floor of the sea and that is joined to the floors I have known, to the coasts and cities. I must remember that the rock is solid and immovable. If the rock were to move then I should be mad (163).

The resistant fluidity of water is here absolute unthinking otherness, but its infinite flux also exposes the solidity of his desperately held identity as an alternative insanity. Refracted by endless water, western individualism becomes pathology. Pincher's thoughts drift loose on terrible ocean flux, his sense of self retreats inwards. His tiny exposed rock becomes the centre of the insane humanist Enlightenment identity as it grips the body, holds it firm from the endless flux of water:

The centre cried out.

"I'm so alone! Christ! I'm so alone!"

The centre told itself to pretend and keep on pretending.

[...]

The mouth had its own wisdom.

"There is always madness, a refuge like a crevice in the rock. A man who has no more defence can always creep into madness like one of those armoured things that scuttle..." (181-86)

Memory and speculative futures

Another recurrent aesthetic topos is the ability of wavescapes to absorb, manifest and redirect trauma. Ariel's song of the sea, from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, describes the transformative force of water:

Full fathom five thy father lies;
 Of his bones are coral made;
 Those are pearls that were his eyes:
 Nothing of him that doth fade,
 But doth suffer a sea-change
 Into something rich and strange. (2. 1. 397-403)

Vitally, this transmutational power arises from the sea's status as repository of death. The strangeness Ariel describes is a function of the transformative integration of death by water. If the ebb and shift of the sea embodies endless flux – the sea's timeless flows as washing over irrecoverable loss. The memorial motif of water as traumatic repository is to be found in contemporary cultural forms as diverse as Disney animation and J-horror. Chris Buck and Jennifer Lee's 3D computer animated musical fantasy *Frozen II* (2019), for example, turns on the conceit that water memorializes the past. Travelling to the glacier Ahtohallan, which is said to record traces of the past, Elsa learns of the mendacious colonialist machinations of her own country's history. A different version of this conceit is to be found in Hideo Nakata's 2002 *Dark Water*, in which the eerie water supply of a rundown Tokyo apartment becomes haunted by the traumatized spirit of violent death. A divorced mother, Yoshimi Matsubara, moves into an apartment with her daughter, Ikuko, and experiences supernatural occurrences including a mysterious water leak from the floor above. It is gradually revealed that a year earlier a girl from an apartment one floor above, Mitsuko, fell into the water tank on the building's roof and drowned. Mitsuko's restless ghost haunts the building's water, seeking to drown Ikuko, and ultimately to claim Matsubara as her own mother.

An attention to Anthropocene wavescapes reveals the occluded eco-poetics that runs through these texts of late modern popular culture. In Jason W. Moore's account of the Capitalocene, the networked extraction and redistribution of global resources by European colonialism in the development of the commodity form kick-started European capitalism by accelerating the globe's ecological metabolism. Theories of capitalism

and ecology have positioned the Atlantic slave trade and early modern colonialism as initiating a new phase of the dialectical relation between capital and the web of life (Moore and Patel). A focus on cross-oceanic extractionism draws together research on the links between the plantation as a system of resource exploitation employed in Ireland by England and colonization in Africa, Asia and the New World by various European powers with the revolutionary conception of exchange value, and the new globally networked ocean economics therein accelerated. Early modern capitalism accelerated the extraction of wealth by transporting increasing amounts of matter and increasing numbers of beings across the seas: settling, exploiting, civilizing, displacing and putting to work indigenous peoples, fauna, flora and landscapes.² Remaking existent ecologies, colonialism, slavery, livestock and international networks of oceanic trade stimulated the production of wealth and accelerated the hold of capital over Europe, setting in motion “Capitalocene” modernity (cf. Malm; Moore).

In this context, popular cinema’s reconstruction of traumatized water centres on the haunting foreclosures of late modernity’s global capitalism. Mark Fisher’s use of “hauntology” repurposes Derrida’s concept to describe the haunting remnants of the utopian futures lost to neoliberalism. Disappointingly, *Frozen II* does not draw explicit links between its own climate narrative and the situation of contemporary glacier loss (nor resolve Elsa’s gender fluid sexuality). However, the film’s conceit of the water as memorializing and haunted by colonialist violence offers a succinct and subtle diagnosis of extractive modernity as remaking the very fluidity of the world. Likewise, *Dark Water* suggests an occluded hauntology of ecological degradation by eerily reframing the originary element of life as dirtied, polluted and traumatized by a spectrality that forever forecloses future life.

The Capitalocene’s past and future threads are imagined and explored in the numerous dystopian, apocalyptic and speculative novels and films. Water figures strongly in works thematising inundation and submergence (J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*), a new ice age (M. Gee’s *The Ice People*, Bong Joon-ho’s *Snowpiercer*, together with the scientifically misleading blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*), flood (M. Gee’s *The Flood*, or, the denouement of Kingsolver’s *The Flight Behaviour*) (cf. Goodbody and Johns-Putra). On the other hand, allegorical and realist narrative modes are apt for the exploration of (neo)colonialist privatisation, as in Bollaín’s *Even the Rain*, and pollution, as Haynes’ *Dark Waters* (2019). Much of contemporary cli-fi, indicatively, paints wavespaces of sea-level rise and lost grounds as well as the gradual loss of wavespaces to droughts and contamination. Paolo Bacigalupi’s (*The Windup Girl*, *Water Knife*) and Kim

2 On this topic see Williams 1994; Canny, 2001; and Nibert 2013.

Stanley Robinson's novels (*Science in the Capital* trilogy, *New York 2140*) are famous examples of speculative climate fiction that interrogate life in Capitalocene's wavescapes of the first kind. While Robinson's relentless optimism displays far from utopian yet salvaged/-able society in which the semi-inundated New Yorkers live in co-ops and play submarine judo, Bacigalupi's visions are more violent, less optimistic, and equally cautionary. E. Itāranata's poetic and more personal novel *Memory of Water*, on the other hand portrays a world of fewer, contaminated continents and militarized waterscapes, as the government controls freshwater in the future Scandinavian Union. The presumably Asian protagonist preserves the ancient art of tea ceremonies, but more importantly, the alternative philosophical outlook by learning *from* water and its memory about its deep entwinement with humans' lives, deaths, and bodies.

This collection continues in this exploration of the intersections of aesthetic knowledge and watery realms. The confluence of art, activism and criticism in environmental/blue humanities is needed in negotiating plastic as a phenomenon at the crux of material, economic, ecological and biopolitical networks. In this collection, Rupert Medd aims at such synthetic exploration of plastics in "Conversations with Planet Ocean." Transversing literature, visual arts, natural sciences and humanities, as well as relaying personal experience of swimming, diving and sailing, Medd offers a study of marine plastics' influence on our environment, and on our cultural and environmental thinking. Alaimo's ecomaterialist notion of trans-corporeality is again here relevant for suggesting the inseparability of all sentient beings and things in the more-than-human-world. The borders of any being are porous, ever-exchanging substances with its environment, affecting it and being affected by it simultaneously. Plastic pollution of land, seas, and freshwater, microplastics in human and animal bodies, and toxic runoffs are solid examples of marine trans-corporeality which show the urgency of its ethical considerations. In this context, Medd examines the issues of indifference of our political institutions to marine plastic pollution, industrial fishing, eco-linguistics and eco-theory, carrying the concept of the ocean as common heritage of humankind and common responsibility.

Rhythm

"The sea is history," writes Derek Walcott (74). It guides us, and shapes us. It records our behaviours, receives our pollutions. Its tides and surges echo the rhythm of history. Penny Woolcock's experimental documentary *From the Sea to the Land Beyond* (2012) employs archival footage to revisit the tragic wrecks and idiosyncratic cultural forms that have arisen

at the British shoreline. Woolcock's mesmeric editing foregrounds the endless ebb and flow of the sea, using recurrent shots of waves breaking upon the shore and plumes of sea spray to punctuate and rhythmically intimate the uncannily tangled passage of history. Often this rhythm is violent. The multiple temporalities of contemporary planetary ecological entanglement, Mentz terms "shipwreck modernity." For Mentz, shipwreck modernity involves four concurrent factors that blend in a wild free-jazz amalgam:

- 1.) The Anthropocene – which refers to human degradations of the planetary systems;
- 2.) The Homogenocene – the cross-planetary entanglements and homogenizations of modernity, whereby lifeforms are carried across oceans to colonize new habitats and mix with indigenous species;
- 3.) The Thalassocene – the role of oceanic conquest in western imperialism and subsequent "wet globalizations," and the parallel poetic fascination with water. As Mentz notes, "Even today, the vast majority of mercantile goods travel by sea" (xxi);
- 4.) The Naufragocene – the swirling loss of direction, the violent encounter with disorder: shipwreck, and sea loss (xii).

One of the most striking cultural manifestations of Mentz's shipwreck modernity is the black cultural diaspora that Paul Gilroy names "the Black Atlantic" (1993). Centrally, this is an issue of rhythm. For Gilroy, the reason so many Black thinkers were impelled to cross the Atlantic, just as DJs' rhythms mutate and hybridize by also jumping back-and-forth across The Atlantic, is because they recognised themselves as agents of modernity working with and into an alienated and future-oriented diasporic tradition. Rhythm presses onward, turning the solidified past into liquid becoming – the impulse common to diasporic black music that Kodwo Eshun terms "Futurhythmachine" (2018, 00 [-003]). For US writers, the otherness of the Atlantic countered institutional racism of post-war America. As James Baldwin puts it in a notable TV interview, "My years in Paris released me from a social terror... visible in the face of every cop, every boss, everybody" (88). This alienation is freeing and destabilising – future oriented: as Robert F. Harney would state, "once you crossed the Atlantic, you were never on the right side again" (Moten and Harney, 92-3).

At the heart of Gilroy's black Atlantic, and of all modernity, is slavery – which severed first American Black culture, and then European modernity (as well as planetary ecology) from tradition and ancient homeostatic forms. Slavery is a cut in the world that initiated Anthropocene modernity. The Black Atlantic as cultural movement is the response to alienated modern lives: a version of what Christina Sharpe calls "the

wake” (2016). As Sharpe describes, the transatlantic slave trade that eased this geopolitical transition (to plantation capitalism) exploited 15 million African victims, and whose institutionalized racism continues to suck lives into its wake. The wake is the tranche of disturbed ocean left by the passing of the loaded slave ship on its unspeakable Middle Passage, and the refusal of that ocean memory to still. Yet it is also a place of refuge, a site of patient recuperation. “We are the shipped,” state Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (95), in attempting to describe the Capitalocene logistics that reach between the hold of early modern slave ships to the late modern intermodal freight container that has, since the Vietnam war, enabled globalization by standardizing every facet of international shipping. To recognize our place in this vast oceanic infrastructure (as they draw from Frank B. Wilderson III) is to create the possibility for newly fluid entanglements with the future: “And so it is we remain in the hold, in the break, as if entering again and again the broken world, to trace the visionary company and join it” (Moten and Harney, 94). In the hold, the broken becomes the break-beat, and the oceanic a refuge. This is why Percy Mayfield’s “The River’s Invitation” (quoted in our epigraph) is an exemplary text: staying in the wake, or hold, means always following the infectious beat, always choosing liquidity even to the point of death over the death-in-life of slavery.

This hold-state of suspension, or “contrapunctal island,” Moten and Harney describe as “a musical moment... the feeling of a presence that is ungraspable in the way that it touches” (95). Why is music, such as Mayfield’s, central to this recuperation of logistics? As Gilroy remarks, because the terror of slavery, of the construction of the inhuman, is both deeply embodied and also “unsayable” (74). Moreover, because the Black condition was also repeatedly one which stressed death over bondage (ibid, 68) so that the Black slave experience is quintessentially modern, committed to not going back: impelled by the terrible brutal violence of slavery, and its subsequent refusal above all; choosing futurity, the motion of a music which moves but does not say – even when going forward means death. So that for Gilroy, the most pressing, vital Black thinkers have been those who have embraced mutant and hybridizing diasporic forms, choosing to move forward into this futurhythmachine. As James Baldwin puts it, “beat is the confession which recognizes, changes and conquers time” (quoted in Gilroy, 203). Musical rhythms are that which express the body without being reducible to the ethical or cognitive (ibid, 76). And diasporic black Atlantic beats from spirituals and field hollers to Kendrick Lamar’s “Swimming Pools,” and FKA twigs’s “Water Me” express a fluidity that won’t stay solid long enough to allow alienation to catch up.

Wavescapes

A confluence of otherness, memory, rhythm and speculative futures is to be found in the wavescapes explored in this collection.

In his wide-ranging, at once scholarly and conversational essay, Rupert Medd (with illustrations by H  l  ne Guyot) acquaints readers with marine plastic pollution and its ecological, ethical and cultural consequences. "Conversations with Planet Ocean: Plastic pollution and the common heritage of humankind" interdiscursively and multimodally discusses the concept of World Ocean, and the author suggests that marine plastic pollution should be conceptualized in reference to the world-system planetary boundaries that it breaches. Presenting specific data on plastic pollution and institutional activity or lack thereof, this paper examines and converses with key concepts in the blue humanities, eco-criticism and eco-linguistics, and - what distinguishes it from usual scholarly prose - it also comprises personal and anecdotal discourse, such as sailor Mirko's letter and the author's photographs of marine habitats. Speaking to UN classification of environmental risk, and planetary ecological boundaries, Medd's key suggestion is that plastic pollution be treated as "part of a Planetary Boundary within Novel entities' as it adversely affects the Earth's systems," arguing that this is actually "a debate involving a moral reassessment and appreciation of Planet Ocean."

Asking us to look more closely, to be captivated by watery lives, and to care, Monika Bregovi  c's article "Virginia Woolf's Fish: Animal Lives between Aesthetics and Ethics" investigates Woolf's fascination with fishes as found across her literary and non-literary works, especially the author's usage of fish as a polysemic presence and a metaphorical representation. Bregovi  c's analysis and discussion is well placed in the larger context of Modernist art and Modern science discourse. Woolf is shown pondering the morphological alterity of the fishes' bodies, appreciating their otherworldly beauty, as well as using its' anthropomorphised representation as a metaphorical simile for creative thought and writing. Bregovi  c also shows that in her fish writing' Woolf narrows the animal-human divide, however, the fishes' self-contained existence' in their habitat-world is considered something unreachable to humans (which brings to mind Agamben's thoughts on Jakob Johann von Uexk  lls concept of "Umwelt"). These and other issues, such as feminism, gender fluidity, women's writing (and Woolf's self-proclaimed enjoyment of fishing) are all investigated via reading some of Woolf's most famous writing, from *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, to "The Sun and the Fish", and "Professions for Women".

Finally, in “Jean Painlevé’s Surrealism, Marine Life & Non-Ocular Modes of Sensing,” Christina Heflin examines the idea that surrealist artists in general and Jean Painlevé in particular were “anti-ocularcentric.” This idea is discussed through the artist’s portrayal of marine animals like sea urchins and octopi, which navigate their environment without visual aids, often posited as primary in anthropocentric thinking. Heflin contextualises her topic in the wider art movement of Surrealism and in interwar scientific and technological developments. Noting that visual primacy is intrinsically linked with hegemonic notion of (Western) subjectivity and anthropocentrism, she argues that Painlevé demonstrates the desire and artistic-technological means to transcend it, thereby breaching the boundary between the human and the animal. Concentrating on Painlevé’s films, Heflin also interrogates the role camera technology (e.g. close-up, acceleration) played in scientific and art developments. The discussed examples open up questions of animal/human (dis)similarities in perspective, motion, and orientation and set a challenge to anthropocentrism.

What we think this collection ultimately demonstrates is that if the Anthropocene involves a violent new phase of world insurrection, perhaps the longstanding cultural recognition of the sea’s changeability means the Blue Humanities, New Thalassology, Ocean and Island Studies, and water ecocriticisms are uniquely well placed to organize the stories that we tell of water and its life-giving and transformative force. In discourse and media, waters, seas, and wavescapes become social spaces, but also topoi of the limits to knowledge. It is perhaps due to this liquid dialectic that water has also long suggested a rich source of both alterity and flux, from Homer’s Sirens to the black and queer politics configured in the fluid aesthetics of Barry Jenkins’ *Moonlight* (2016). As Nat Wolff states, “Jazz flows like water.” Element of ancient cosmologies, water has long served myth and philosophy as a mysterious or paradoxical mix of power and gentle transfiguration. As Lao Tzu observes, “Nothing is softer or more flexible than water, yet nothing can resist it.” Likewise, Ovid remarks, “Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence.” This ceaseless persuasion is why Božanić (2010) muses that dialectical thought was surely born next to water.

This essay collection explores water narratives (ecological, fictional, political) in the context of the changes that our rivers, seas, oceans, as well as other fluidities, are currently undergoing. It proposes, in various forms, that the stories we tell of water might also serve to guide us through the sea change of the Anthropocene – but also that such a recognition requires a more liquid flow of interdisciplinary discourse between water-focused political thinkers and activists, creative practitioners and scholars of the humanities, arts and social sciences. For Armstrong,

if we are to break away from the enduring habits that have scarred the surface of our planet, it is imperative that the stranglehold of the machine metaphor upon all aspects of life' must be broken... More than a mechanism, the agency of living matter squeezes through the gaps of our capacity to reduce' its nature into a set of simple causes and effects – declaring itself liquid' (58).

Seeking liquidity, this essay collection seeks to generate a platform for exchange concerning the crises and cultural heritages brought to the forefront by Anthropocene (or Capitalocene) transformations of water. For despite everything we remain intimately beholden to the wavescapes of the Earth. Water comprises roughly two-thirds of both the surface of the Earth and the human body alike. We live with and as water. Both our home and our being constitute modes of fluidity. As Isak Dinesen writes, with pain and hope, "I know of a cure for everything: salt water... Sweat, or tears, or the salt sea" (220).

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