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# Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene

## The Oceanic Turn

We are witnessing an interdisciplinary transition to what might be called “critical ocean studies” that reflects an important shift from a long-term concern with mobility across transoceanic surfaces to theorizing oceanic submersion, thus rendering vast oceanic space into ontological place. This has much to do with a new oceanic imaginary emerging in the wake of the knowledge of anthropogenic climate change and sea-level rise. This turn to ontologies of the sea and its multispecies engagements are the focus of this paper, particularly their implications for temporality and aesthetics in the Anthropocene.

The oceanic turn of the twentieth century issued from geopolitics as well as new interdisciplinary groupings in the humanities and social sciences. It can be traced to the 1945 Truman Proclamation—the most significant, and yet largely unremarked, twentieth-century remapping of the globe—which extended U.S. territory to include a two-hundred nautical mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (see DeLoughrey, *Routes*). This created a scramble for the oceans, catalyzing EEZ declarations by nations all over the world and a U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea that effectively remapped seventy percent of the planet. Although largely unnoticed by new disciplinary groupings such as the “Blue Humanities” (Mentz), Cold War geopolitics had a decisive influence in configuring a new understanding of the terraqueous globe.

The second catalyst for the rise of critical ocean studies was the post-1970s “spatial turn,” which led to the emergence of globalization and diaspora studies. Marxist geography was integral to defining the post-Fordist era of global capitalism and relations of labor to space. This loosening of nationally-bounded modes of thinking about capital and space led to an unprecedented number of transoceanic studies, notably the work of Marcus Rediker, which helped to inspire Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic*, a text that inaugurated a new generation of thinking about race in transoceanic ways.<sup>1</sup> While the scramble for the seas largely figured the ocean

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<sup>1</sup> There was ample black Atlantic scholarship before Gilroy; his work brought forward its oceanic contours, even if the ocean for him was not a material place. For the Pacific and Indian Ocean contexts, see Epele Hau’ofa’s *We Are the Ocean* and Gaurav Desai’s *Commerce with the Universe* (2013).

and its resources as subject to the exploitation of discrete national territories, a kind of *aqua extractio*, the work of geographers, historians, and cultural studies scholars configured the ocean as a historical space of transnational capital, empire, and slavery—often based on an unmarked masculinity that we might term *aqua homo*.

The spatial turn away from the nation state towards the seas was also influenced by the post-independence melancholia of the 1990s, in which disappointments with the postcolonial state as a structure for governing the human subject led to a turn to the ocean as a site of “flows” and “fluidity” seemingly outside the territorial and legislative limitations of the state (see Benítez-Rojo). This was particularly vibrant in Caribbean literature and theory. Following Gilroy and others, the ethnically exclusive and hierarchical model of national belonging might be imaginatively transcended by turning to spaces of fluidity and creolization. As such, the ocean became a space for theorizing the materiality of history, yet it rarely figured as a material in itself (DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots* 22; Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* 245). With some exceptions, these narratives largely represent a *transoceanic* imaginary, positioning the sea as a stage for human history; a narrative of flat surfaces rather than immersions. Until recently, the oceanic has not been truly fathomed as a cultural or multispecies ecology.

This short essay sketches the rise of a new oceanic imaginary for the twenty-first century, an imaginary catalyzed and informed by a global sea level rise that is our visible sign of climate change, and places it in relation to the work of Caribbean writers and artists who have long theorized the ocean in terms of the violent convergence of environment and history (for instance, DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley). While multispecies ethnographies and scholarship on the ontological turn open the way for a new engagement with our submarine others, in Caribbean literature the ocean has long been understood as a material entity; it is an ecology for “subtle and submarine” poetics in the words of Derek Walcott (“The Sea Is History” 138). The discourse of oceanic submersion in the Caribbean articulates a submarine temporality in which linear models of time are distorted and ruptured. This engagement with temporality is the product of the violence of transoceanic colonial history as well as immersion in the materiality of the ocean itself. Unlike terrestrial space—where one might memorialize a space into place—the perpetual circulation of ocean currents means that the sea dissolves phenomenological experience and diffracts the accumulation of narrative. As we look towards an oceanic future caused by a rising sea, these questions of temporality become vital to understanding the epoch termed the Anthropocene. The challenges of representing the more-than-human temporalities of the ocean, what I refer to as “sea ontologies,” are addressed by British artist Jason deCaires Taylor, whose submarine Caribbean sculptures he describes as “moments in passing” (*The Underwater Museum* 8), subject to the erosion and transformation caused by maritime currents and multispecies relations with fish, algae, sponges, hydrozoans, and coral.

### Oceanic Futures

The ocean drives our global climate, and due to sea-level rise our planetary future is becoming more oceanic. Scientific discourse has positioned the ocean as an evolutionary origin for life on earth and, given the imminent threat of rising sea

levels, our anticipated destiny. Sea level rise is perhaps the most powerful sign of planetary change, connecting the activity of the earth's poles with the rest of the terrestrial world and producing a new sense of planetary scale and interconnectedness through the rising of a world ocean. The Anthropocene has catalyzed a new oceanic imaginary in which, due to the visibility of sea level rise, the largest space on earth is suddenly not so external and alien to human experience. The increase in extreme weather events is correlated to the cinematic visuality of flooding and tsunamis, in which footage of a king tide in Tuvalu can come to stand in for the world's rising ocean. This new oceanic imaginary has inspired an increase in a body of literature, art, film, and scholarship concerned with our watery futures. There are sensationalist accounts of an active, threatening ocean in films like Roland Emmerich's *2012*, as well as in books like Brian Fagan's *The Attacking Ocean*. There are new documentaries that figure the ocean as a threat, particularly against islanders—for example, *Rising Waters* (Torrice) and *Time and Tide* (Bayer and Salzmann). No longer relegated to *aqua nullius*, the ocean is now understood in terms of its agency, its anthropogenic pollution and acidity, and its interspecies ontologies—all of which suggest that climate change is shaping new oceanic imaginaries.

There are geopolitical, biopolitical, environmental, and ontological dimensions to this oceanic turn. Some texts figure the ocean as a space for evolutionary, religious, and ontological origins and destiny. These tend to relate the radical interiority of the sea to the human species. For instance, Jacques Cousteau explains “our flesh is composed of myriads of cells, each one of which contains a miniature ocean . . . comprising all the salts of the sea, probably the built-in heritage of our distant ancestry” (“The Perils and Potentials of a Watery Planet” 13). Elisabeth Mann Borgese, one of the founding members of the Club of Rome and the first Convention on the Sea (1970), writes that “every human . . . is a good bit of planet ocean: 71 per cent of his substance consists of salty water, just as 71 per cent of the earth is covered by the oceans” (*The Oceanic Circle* 258). Other narratives are less naturalizing and document a new era of empire and territorialism evident in the collapse of fisheries, the transnational corporate scramble for minerals and microbiota in the thermal vents of the Pacific Ocean, and the competing state territorialisms now visible in the Arctic as the ice begins to melt. Stefan Helmreich refers to this simultaneous rendering of the sea as frontier and endless natural resource as “blue-green capitalism” (*Alien Ocean* 26). The general lack of attention to these territorial developments might be attributed to the ocean being figured as “capital's favored myth-element” (Connery, “The Oceanic Feeling” 289), thus creating a lacuna precisely where we should be able to trace the intersections of capital and empire, as well as their impacts on human and nonhuman sovereignty.

### Sea Ontologies

Caribbean aesthetics articulate what I am calling “sea ontologies,” a concept that builds on attempts by Philip Steinberg and others to “develop an epistemology that views the ocean as continually being reconstituted by . . . the non-human and the human, the biological and the geophysical, the historic and the contemporary” (“Of Other Seas” 157). While Steinberg has argued persuasively for reading the ocean as a dynamic force rather than a place, for “decentered ontologies of con-

nection" (161), in the Caribbean the enormity of the transoceanic history of slavery and indenture has created an aesthetics that imaginatively populates the sea in an act of regional historiography and ancestral memory. The Atlantic in this regard is understood as an unmarked grave site, and memorializing the loss of the millions who crossed its expanse has particular material challenges, given that, first, the mobility of ocean currents means that we cannot localize its waters as a phenomenologically experienced place, and, second, there are no accurate recordings of where exactly slaves leapt or were thrown overboard. As such, this is an oceanic archive that lacks the place-based narrative and rituals for memorialization.

The earth-based sacralization of place is generally rendered by the ritualized placement of bodies, bones, and stone monuments. In order to localize an event that can never be truly historically localized, Caribbean writers have peopled the seabed with human bones, imaginatively figured in the limestone structures of coral reefs. Thus, what would be archeology in a terrestrial context becomes submarine diving for an oceanic archive, for the remnants of imperial debris and ancestral origins. For instance, the sailor of Walcott's "The Schooner *Flight*" observes a "Caribbean so choke with the dead" that only by melting in the water can he see

... them corals: brain, fire, sea fans,  
dead-men's-fingers, and then, the dead men.  
I saw that the powdery sand was their bones  
ground white from Senegal to San Salvador.  
(*Collected Poems* 349)

In contrast to tourist narratives of azure seas that are subject to the visitor's desires (*aqua nullius*), Walcott's seas are "choked" with the visible remnants of living history. This is a living graveyard in which the submarine ruptures narrative articulation, breath. The process of anthropomorphizing the corals, from brain corals to dead men's fingers, leads to a visual poetics ("I saw them") of the submarine debris of human history. Figuring nonhuman life forms as human bones enables the visibility of a submarine human history that resides outside (and below) the official archive.

Walcott's poem suggests that "subtle and submarine" human histories must be actively engaged, particularly in the fluid space of nonhuman alterity. His poem renders not an active recuperation of the ancestral human, but its constitutive remnants: "powdery sand" that is, like earthly soil, constitutive and grounding, yet also signifying more-than-human history. Laura Ann Stoler has read Walcott's work through the lens of Walter Benjamin, arguing for a reading of ruins as "petrified life," traces that mark the fragility of power and the forces of destruction. She focuses on artifacts and the "dead matter" of imperial history ("Imperial Debris" 196). Yet Walcott's poetics have long engaged *living* matter as a site for more-than-human history, depicting multispecies engagements with plants, fish, corals, and other creatures of the tropical coast and sea to pose alternative narratives for history making.

Walcott's submerged narrator invokes "sea ontologies," a term I'm using to expand on Elizabeth A. Povinelli's theorization of "geontologies" (see also DeLoughrey, "Ordinary Futures"), a mutually constitutive relationship between biography and geology, drawn from Indigenous contexts that destabilize Western binaries between figures of life and nonlife (Povinelli). Because Povinelli focuses on the



deep time of Indigenous knowledges in Australia, the term “sea ontologies” might characterize the connection between ancestry, history, and non-Western knowledge systems in submarine aesthetics. While its focus has tended to be more anthropocentric, Caribbean cultural production has also figured the ocean as an evolutionary and cultural origin in the wake of the brutal loss of ancestral memory. This is why it was not surprising that, when Jason deCaires Taylor began sinking life-sized human sculptures under the Caribbean Sea, the majority of viewers assumed it was an act of memorializing the lost lives of the middle passage. Yet the sculptures are more temporally complex, suggesting that the ocean as medium can symbolize the simultaneity or even collapse of linear time, reflecting lost lives of the past and memorializing—as an act of anticipatory mourning—the multispecies lives of the future of the Anthropocene.

### Vicissitudes

With a series of eco-art cement sculptures sunken off the coasts of Mexico and Grenada, deCaires Taylor has been levying a submarine critique of the lack of political response to anthropogenic climate change. “The Bankers” (2011) shows a group of men in suits with their heads in the sand (<http://www.underwater-sculpture.com/sculptures/banker/>). Other sculptures also critique the capitalist consumption that led to the Anthropocene (see, for example, <http://www.underwatersculpture.com/sculptures/inertia/>). The sculptures are largely allegorical commentaries on the disorienting effects of temporality in the Anthropocene. As deCaires Taylor notes, “our generation has encountered rapid change: technologically, culturally and geographically. This has left us with an underlying sense of loss. My work tries to record some of those moments” (<http://www.underwater-sculpture.com/about/overview/>). This produces an affect of mourning and, for this particular body of work, stillness amidst the tremendous pressure and mobility of seawater. Connery has written that the technologies of globalization contribute to “the dematerialization” of the sea; (“Oceanic Feeling” 296); deCaires Taylor’s response to the globalizing “disembedding” from time and space (Giddens 188) is to *rematerialize* the ocean and, by life-casting local people for submersion, to enable sea ontologies, rendering uninhabitable space into anthropomorphized place.

The “first underwater sculpture park” (2006) is in Molinere Bay, Grenada, established by the Grenadian government and tourist board; it includes sixty-five sculptures that have been called by National Geographic one of the “Wonders of the World.” The second, the Museo Subacuático de Arte (MUSA), in The National Marine Park of Cancun, Mexico, was established in 2009. At both sites deCaires Taylor worked with local artists, students, and ecologists, spending months making plaster and silicon casts of individuals and then rendering them in a pH-neutral, marine-grade cement that is twenty times stronger than its terrestrial counterpart. The sculptures are built to withstand the tremendous pressure of ocean currents and are constructed of inert materials to encourage multispecies “colonization.” Because the installations are intended to become artificial reefs, the locations are shallow and chosen in consultation with marine biologists to be strategically positioned for the “seeding” of coral from one reef to another. The sculptures are

inordinately heavy and are anchored to the seabed; gravity and weight thus become constitutive elements in ensuring the futurity of submarine multispecies ecologies.

To the visitor these are permanent “swim through” exhibits, viewed while floating above and through the installation. This experience, unlike that of a terrestrial gallery, depends on weather and currents; impressions are informed by light, the viscosity of the water, the age of the sculptures, and the presence of marine species. While the exhibits are “permanent,” the sculptures are not; they change every day based on their occupation by bacteria, algae, and, eventually, coral. Environmental or earth art is known for its ephemerality, its locatedness, its participatory expectations, and its pedagogical intents. It also reflects an entanglement with nonhuman forces and a commitment to ecological regeneration ([http://greenmuseum.org/what\\_is\\_ea.php](http://greenmuseum.org/what_is_ea.php)). While wind and rain may be the major elemental forces in transforming artworks on land, submarine aesthetics are subject to an “alien” environment: transformed by salt, currents, pressure, and the rapid occupation by multispecies ecologies.

The submarine and material aspects of deCaires Taylor’s eco-art are vital to its interpretation, particularly the ways in which water as a medium distorts time and alters knowledge production. After working for decades on the Law of the Sea, Elisabeth Mann Borgese observed: “the ocean is a medium different from the earth . . . it forces us to think differently. The medium itself, where everything flows and everything is interconnected, forces us to “unfocus,” to shed our old concepts and paradigms, to “refocus” on a new paradigm” (*The Oceanic Circle* 258). This sense of newness, a critical engagement with an extraterrestrial space, raises questions about disciplinarity, epistemology, and (sea) ontologies. While critical ocean studies reflects an interdisciplinary approach to theorizing the largest space on earth, only recently has there been a discourse about how *submersion* may produce alternative knowledges and ontologies. Having worked as a diving instructor, deCaires Taylor observes:

The experience of being underwater is vastly different from that of being on land. Objects appear twenty-five percent larger underwater [and closer]. Colours alter as light is absorbed and reflected at different rates, with the depth of the water affecting this further. The light . . . produces kaleidoscopic effects governed by water movement, currents and turbulence. Water is a malleable medium in which to travel enabling the viewer to become active in their engagement with the work. (qtd. in Patel)

Visitors to the sites describe their experiences of the sculptures as “creepy,” “spooky,” and “awesome,” conveying the shock of seeing specific human forms in the depths of a space deemed outside of human experience and temporality (qtd. in Patel). Casting all of the sculptures in human scale adds a sense of both their diminutive size in relation to the vast ocean and their particularity. It’s this uncanniness, the engagements with human forms that appear distorted, larger, closer, and essentially “matter out of place,” to borrow from Mary Douglas (*Purity and Danger* 36), that makes them *unheimlich*, both familiar and radically defamiliarizing.

The ocean, like the “figure of woman-as-mother-as-vagina” (*Death of a Discipline* 74) that Spivak reads in Freud’s theory of the *unheimlich*, is also a figure for an uncanny originary home. Of the vagina Freud writes, “This *unheimlich* place . . . is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning” (qtd. in *Death* 74). In a similar vein, deCaires Taylor has explained that “for many years I’ve had incredible dreams about being underwater. My first instructor once told me [of underwater caves] that it felt like being back in his mother’s womb. I can relate. You have a



Figure 1. Jason deCaires Taylor, *Vicissitudes* 005. Used by permission.

much more detached consciousness underwater—like a form of meditation” (qtd. in Patel). Although largely overlooked by ocean studies, the material of the ocean is usually gendered: as the origins of earthly life, *mer* or mother, or as the presumably chaotic agency of feminized “fluidity” and nature (see DeLoughrey, *Routes*; and Neimanis).

Issues of temporality, place, multispecies life, and sea ontologies are brought together in one of deCaires Taylor’s first sculptures, “*Vicissitudes*” (2007; see figure 1), a circular structure of twenty-six children holding hands that invokes a cyclical model of time that will be transformed through multispecies occupations (<http://www.underwatersculpture.com/sculptures/vicissitudes/>). From the Latin *viciis*, to turn or change, “*Vicissitudes*” reflects the engagement with an uncanny oceanic temporality and mutability. While the process of locating the sites, casting human forms, and submerging them into the sea takes months, deCaires Taylor points out that as soon as the sculptures are placed in the sea, time seems to speed up as they are rapidly covered with algae, one of the first steps in building a coral reef. He observes that “The sculpture proposes growth, change, and natural transformation . . . how time and environment impact on and shape the physical body” ([http://www.askmen.com/fine\\_living/travel/moilinere-bay-sculpture-park.html](http://www.askmen.com/fine_living/travel/moilinere-bay-sculpture-park.html)).

In “*Vicissitudes*” we see a ring of children facing outwards, holding hands, as they unite to face some kind of external force or event. The details of the children’s contemporary clothing are precise, as are their facial features. Standing barefoot in the white sand, surrounded by blue water, the boys and girls seem both

at home in this environment and “creepy,” as if responding to some threat that the viewer does not perceive. They are outside of our viewing time, responding to something that positions our own temporality as belated. On a closer look, we see that their eyes are closed, suggesting some kind of group concentration and communication and positioning the viewer as someone interrupting an intimate moment or prayer. As they are generally viewed from online (or by a swimmer who is slightly above), the ring shape is the predominant figure. A closer look also reveals that they are the same two children, alternating back and forth—an uncanny doubling.

When photos of “Vicissitudes” were released, people immediately interpreted it as a monument to the lost lives of transatlantic slavery. In the words of Édouard Glissant,

Whenever a fleet of ships gave chase to slave ships, it was easiest just to lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard, weighing it down with balls and chains . . . These underwater signposts mark the course [across the Atlantic]. Navigating the green splendor of the sea . . . still brings to mind, coming to light like seaweed, these lowest depths, these deeps, with their punctuation of scarcely corroded balls and chains. . . . The abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, makes one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green. (*Poetics of Relation* 226)

An obsolete definition of “vicissitudes” is reciprocity and return. Given the circular structure of the sculpture, mirrored by the ring of reinforced cement behind the children’s hands that some have taken to be manacles, online speculation about its memorialization to slaves led the artist to deny any intentional connection to the middle passage, while later acknowledging that in working with the tourist board he was forced to make compromises (see Patel).

The Caribbean Sea has long been understood as a cultural and material space, a graveyard for the ancestors, a wound, an abyss or rupture in cultural continuity. While this shared experience, Glissant suggests, created an “original victim floating toward the sea’s abysses, an exception, it became something shared. . . . Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange” (*Poetics of Relation* 226). It is not merely the peopling of the sea here that invokes the losses of the middle passage, but rather the “shared knowledge” symbolized by the ring of children that suggests a submarine experience that we cannot share, an experience of an ethereal otherworld of history, continuous with our own and yet simultaneously discontinuous, a submarine *unheimlich* both reflecting the mutually constitutive relationship between the ocean and the biography of the peoples of this place and foregrounding the ocean as an uncanny medium that distorts our terrestrial-bound understanding of figures, time, and space.

Glissant has argued that the traumatic experience of crossing the ocean as a “womb abyss” (*Poetics of Relation* 226) produced a particular kind of “knowledge of the Whole, greater from having been at the abyss and freeing knowledge of Relation within the Whole” (226). He proposes a poetics of Relation that is represented in the “aesthetics of rupture and connection . . . of a variable continuum, an invariant discontinuum,” constituted by interdependencies and entanglement (226). A transoceanic originary is vital to the recognition of the poetics of Relation: “the unconscious memory of the abyss served as the alluvium for these metamorphoses” (226). Alluvium is sediment, a sand or soil from the Latin root “to

wash against.” It invokes the erosion and transformation of matter, both of which are a vital part of deCaires Taylor’s aesthetics.

Although Glissant’s work has been engaged in terms of Caribbean and postcolonial ecocriticism, it has not been theorized in relation to what Deborah Bird Rose calls “embodied knots of multispecies time” (“Multispecies Knots” 132). When asked about the visceral response to his submarine sculptures, deCaires Taylor replied that it has “something to do with the history of time and how we place ourselves in the evolutionary scale. . . . Underwater you are dealing with a completely different notion of time and it’s confusing but fascinating; even for me when I return after a month and the work looks completely different” (qtd. in Patel). As artificial reefs, these sculptures embody “growth, change, and natural transformation”—in short, vicissitudes—and that process is largely dependent on the multispecies collaborations of the reef.

### Relation: Reef Ecologies

One of the most visible indicators for the Anthropocene is the crisis in coral reefs across the global tropics. Largely understood as figures for biodiversity (“rainforests under the sea”), coral reefs occupy less than one percent of our oceans, yet are home to nearly one-third of known marine species. Coral is a eukaryotic multicellular animal. The reef is an ecology, a zoophytalite (animal-plant-mineral) form that grows so large that some can be seen from space. The hard coral of the tropics consists of a polyp surrounded by a limestone “cup” that it secretes, like the shell of a turtle. Like humans, coral are multispecies creatures; besides the symbiotic *zooxanthellae*, there is a bacterial community in coral mucus that surrounds and protects it, not to mention the fish, turtles, hydrozoans, sponges, sea urchins, star fish, and algae that are essential to its survival.

In addition to figuring a multispecies assemblage, coral signifies deep time. Its limestone structure means it layers growth like bone. Tubeworms, bacteria, and mollusks help build the infrastructure. It grows extremely slowly and its life span is undetermined. Some of the oldest tropical corals known are 500 years old, while some deep sea black coral is thought to be at least 4,000 years old. Scientists have speculated that the corals of the deep sea may be the ocean’s oldest living organisms; due to their skeleton-secreting habits they form a living continuity with their ancestors and multispecies community (<https://www.llnl.gov/news/deep-sea-corals-may-be-oldest-living-marine-organism>).

Ocean warming and acidification are causing a crisis in the symbiotic relations of a coral colonies, which leads to coral bleaching. Due to ocean temperatures and acidification, sewage and agricultural runoff, overfishing, and tourism, over fifty percent of Caribbean coral has been destroyed since the 1970s. “Coral is something to be read—for climate change, for potentially patentable genes, for representativeness” (Helmreich, *Sounding* 60). Helmreich has explained that early Western naturalists initially found coral to be “an assemblage of flesh and stone that generated speculation about the boundaries of the living and nonliving” (49). While the story of coral reefs has been anthropomorphized, like the concept of the Anthropocene, it has not been told with enough attention to the differences *between* the humans who contribute to environmental pollution. Threats to coral reefs are not evenly distributed: the predatory practices of transnational corporations and





Figure 2. Jason deCaires Taylor, *Vicissitudes* 026 (detail). Used by permission.

neoliberal regimes put far more pressure on resource extraction from postcolonial states of the tropics than from the Global North. Thus “reefs are not just climatic barometers but also serve as indicators of North-South inequality” (*Sounding* 57).

This entanglement, as Glissant would have it, of the history of a submarine ecology like a coral reef with the human is brought to the foreground in deCaires Taylor’s “*Vicissitudes*,” where the two children whose features have been so precisely captured in sculpture are continually transformed into a more-than-human future. Looking over the changes in the children’s faces over the past few years, one can see that the very human component that allows the initial sculpture to speak to “sea ontologies,” the specificity of a “shared knowledge” of Relation between the children, has been reconfigured. The face in particular, which functions as the synecdoche for the human, is no longer recognizable, and the creatures inhabiting the face, eyes, mouth, or other facial features seem to signify a terrifying multispecies being akin to the futurity of science fiction.

Because the faces of the children are now covered with algae, encrusting sponges, and hydrozoans (see figure 2), the gender, race, and other social characteristics of the children are no longer recognizable. Through this transformation these faces are less accessible to human viewers, but more accessible to the multispecies bacteria and other creatures of the sea that establish coral reef ecologies. In her work on “embodied knots of multispecies time,” Rose speaks of a “generational time” that necessarily encapsulates a death that enables the existence of a new generation. As a result, generational time is not necessarily understood in terms of species progressions, but multispecies sequences. In the transformation of the children of “*Vicissitudes*,” we see this generational death, and, in Rose’s words, “we discern not [the] ‘face,’ but ‘interface’” (132).



There are (at least) three co-existing temporal strands that make up this “knot” in deCaires Taylor’s submarine sculpture. One might read “Vicissitudes” in terms of the living past: in the present participle, the middle passage lives at the bottom of the sea reflect “hauntological time consciousness” (Baucom 31), a “creepy” submarine visibility that signifies the historical abyss and “these balls and chains gone green.” We might also read the transformed children as a future species, *aqua homo* of a multispecies Anthropocene, having merged with the other residents of an increasingly oceanic and tropical planet. Finally, we might read this in terms of the present, of the representation of two children from Grenada facing an unspoken threat and a commentary on the contemporary environmental crisis in the Caribbean—one that is not anticipated but currently experienced, and the necessity for multispecies alliances in navigating through this crisis in the present.

In “Vicissitudes,” thinking with, interacting with—viewing, touching, and perhaps being touched with what Eva Hayward terms “fingeryeyes”—opens up new opportunities for multispecies submarine ontologies. This submersion brings about ethical transformations. As Nigel Clark has argued, “To be vulnerable to otherness, theorists of embodiment insist, is not just to be open to being unmade, but to being remade into something other than what we are . . . to being propelled in new and unforeseeable directions” (*Inhuman Nature* 249). These transformations, for the children of “Vicissitudes,” are truly unforeseeable, as their very eyes have been reconfigured by algae into other kinds of sensing mechanisms.

The transformations required by these new sea ontologies reflect uncomfortable mergers: violence, digestion and indigestion, a radical displacement from places, figurative and otherwise, that we may call home. While earlier scholarship figured the ocean as a blank space or *aqua nullius* that, in crossing, catalyzed an often masculine agency, the new work of critical ocean studies engages sea ontologies, figuring maritime space as a multispecies and embodied place in which the oceanic contours of the planet, including its submarine creatures, are no longer outside of the history of the human. This in itself requires a rethinking of the Anthropocene, which has been readily critiqued for its anthropocentric bias, as the only model for imagining our futures (see DeLoughrey, “Ordinary”). Donna Haraway has recently suggested that we put into play (at least) three different terms for figuring planetary futures: the Anthropocene, which helps to identify the human as (multi)species; the Capitalocene, which helps to locate the era in political, colonial, and economic time; and the Chthulucene. This last term, Haraway argues, refers to the “chthonic ones, the not yet finished, ongoing abyssal and dreadful ones that are generative and destructive.” These are the subaquatic, otherworldly others, because “it matters to destabilize worlds of thinking with other worlds of thinking, it matters to be less parochial. If ever there was a time to need to be worldly, it is surely now. And I think all of us lack many of the skills” (“Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene”). In the Anthropocene, these worlds are increasingly spaces of transformation, becoming more oceanic, more submarine, more multispecies, and perhaps unfathomable.

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