

6

RESTLESS REMAINS AND UNTIMELY RETURNS

On Walking and Wading

Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton

~ Preambles and preludes¹

Cape of Good Hope. The tormented landmark rounded by colonial seafarers as they circumnavigated the continent. *Cabo das Tormentas*, Cape of Storms. And a little way to the east, on the other side of the rocky promontory, Cape Point. The dramatic view from the lighthouse at its summit, Da Gama Peak, a prime tourist attraction. Between the two capes, Dias Beach. Next to the towering waypoint beacons in the style of Portuguese stone *padrões*, weather-beaten signboards memorialise late-fifteenth-century ‘voyages of discovery’.

Here, on this headland at the continent’s symbolic terminal point,² I began purposely walking the coast in 2015. Early mornings and in inclement weather, well clear of popular visiting times to the national park. Following precipitous edges. Respectfully, unsteadily. The ocean below stirred up. Frothy. Along exposed rocky and sandy Atlantic shores to Table Bay on the west and the length of False Bay, with its more temperate waters, on the eastern side. Shores marked by intertwined human and more-than-human histories not dissimilar to those that haunt the stretches of coast that would later shape my work.

A few months earlier, raging wildfires had enveloped the southern Cape Peninsula. Unlike the flames, most animals in protected areas could not jump the fences. Crabwalking the briny edges of these ashen landscapes, I startle displaced and malnourished terrestrial creatures scavenging along the drift lines. Among toxic entanglements, discarded overspill left in the wake of receding tides.

What appears to be a landfallen whale, is a giant purse-sein ghost net. Strangely alive, this tight-meshed nylon fibre spectre. Alternately submerged, buried, uncovered. I dig it up, drag it out, carry it with me. In pieces and parts; day after



FIGURE 6.1 Near Olifantsbos, Atlantic Ocean (2015). Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

day. To be washed and sorted with my other hauls of deadly polymer snarls. Teased apart. The filaments re-woven, re-placed.

While my current work focuses on intra-oceanic³ past-present-futures, this chapter t(h)reads⁴ with the littoral. Unsettled liminal spaces – from the Latin *limen* (threshold) – margins and entryways, stretching forth and pulling back. Ingresses into a multitude of waterlogged stories and possibilities. Inviting amphibious ways of learning and making; itinerant, associative words and still (moving) images. Re/search that is digressive and faltering, rather than articulate and authoritative. Risks being drenched, engulfed. Disoriented. Undone.

I draw on aspects of *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019) and *Water/Log*, a new ongoing project comprising site-responsive creative praxis and archival inquiry.⁵ *Salt-Water-Bodies* is a response through photomedia(tions)⁶ and live art to material-affective encounters along the shores of the Atlantic Ocean on the South African West Coast and adjacent islands. Earthly expanses of loss and exchange – haunted by violent legacies, unchecked environmental exploitation and indifference. Shadow places where histories of indiscriminate, increasingly systematic killing and ecological destruction are inseparable from colonial exploration and plunder, empire and state control, racial segregation and land dispossession, forced and coercive labour practices, militarisation and industrialisation.



FIGURE 6.2 From *Water/Log* (2021 ongoing). Former Waaygat whaling station, Stony Point, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

Val Plumwood’s concept of *shadow* or *denied* places – unrecognised, “disregarded places of economic and ecological support” which are “likely to elude our knowledge and responsibility” (2008, p. 139) – is a cogent evocation of the making invisible and distant of oceanic ecocide across multiple registers. Further south, then, all too often means farther out of sight. *Water/Log* takes this work further south⁷ as I trace terraqueous multispecies histories in the enduring aftermaths of imperialism, capitalism, extractivism and military-industrial expansion. From the mainland shores and islands along the southern African coast, to the South Atlantic, Indian and Southern oceans, the sub-Antarctic islands and, finally, to the frozen ‘end/s of the earth’: Antarctica.

~ Walking (following, gathering and carrying)

My praxis has been shaped by years of walking and gathering along shores that bear witness to long, yet habitually under-acknowledged, Indigenous histories of these very practices.⁸ The privilege of choosing to travel somewhere in order to walk. In a country where mobility and access remain vastly unequal, and the compelled walking of many bodies disregarded (see van Eeden-Wharton, 2019). Coastal regions where entire communities were separated from the ocean through colonial incursion and dispossession, forced removals and segregated beaches. Marked by continuing socio-economic inequality and lingering spatial segregation.

Walking Sixteen Mile Beach – a shelterless sandy expanse on the West Coast, south of Saldanha Bay – I learned to keep company with and mourn the dead. And for years, I’ve continued following multispecies death assemblages. A fluid reinterpretation of what archaeologists and palaeontologists would call thanatocoenosis: the remains of beings brought together *post mortem*, after death. From former sites of the ‘harvesting’ and ‘processing’ of whales, seals, seabirds and guano to contemporary places of disposal. Requesting access to off-limits islands; restricted sections of marine protected areas and national parks; privately owned nature reserves and farmland; military bases and training areas; ever-expanding stretches of shoreline closed off by mining companies; coastal landfills and wastewater treatment works. Sobering intimations of the entanglement of conservation with extractive, boundary- and waste-making practices.⁹

Walk. A deceptively straightforward English word whose origins suggest anything but a straight-line, unincumbered forward motion.¹⁰ It invites veering and digressing, getting lost and circling back. Wayward, errant itineraries and detours.¹¹ The undisciplined dis-remembering and re-finding of fugue walks, hinging on the turning of tides and folding of waves as counterpoints.¹² Not rushing from one end to the other to arrive at a destination, a conclusion. Nor completing sections in a linear trajectory from start to finish, like the way one imagines books ought to be read. Instead, “to begin by re-turning”, as Barad (2014) writes of diffraction,



FIGURE 6.3 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Malgas Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

“turning it over and over again” (p. 168).¹³ A slow and observant, piecemeal and iterative praxis of re-walking and re-reading, re-visiting and re-searching.

Wayfaring (wayfinding), Tim Ingold suggests, is about negotiating, improvising, attuning – learning *alongly*, as you go along (see 2007, 2010, 2011). With its atmospheric, sonic and somatic resonances, attunement gestures to immersion and co-responding movement.¹⁴ To adapt to the cadenced reverberations of waves, tides. To become an apprentice to palpable, unsettled weather-worlds and spatiotemporal littoral relations.¹⁵ And, as Vinciane Despret so poignantly writes, an *embodied empathy*, a *making available* or *becoming-with* (2013, pp. 69–71); a *with-ness* in which “bodies and worlds articulate each other” (2004, p. 131), “undo and redo each other, reciprocally though not symmetrically” (2013, p. 61). To risk and learn to attend.¹⁶ To touch and be touched. To move and be moved (along). To put one foot in front of the other.

Beachcombing. An inefficient zigzagging along highwater marks, in wrack zones. Places of wreckage and remnants. And unlooked-for ecological richness. Trailing, straggling. An uncanny contemporaneity of straying and fixation – sifting with your eyes, your hands. Fossicking, picking over discarded remains.¹⁷ Bits and pieces. Broken and scattered. Storm-tossed, wind-battered. Carried by water and air from a multitude of elsewhere. Con-currently gathered and dispersed, reassembled in strange and unexpected ways with every ebb and flood. An excess of things. Neglected things, leftover things. Lost things. Cast-off and disposed-of



FIGURE 6.4 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Sixteen Mile Beach, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

things. Last things, unlike things and those that do not add up. The dirty, slow work of re-collecting and re-remembering.

In the place of narratives of human mastery – poisonous, killer stories – Ursula Le Guin (1996) proposes a generative *carrier bag* theory of fiction. “I came lugging this great heavy sack of stuff” she writes of her own storytelling practice, “full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations” (p.153). My carrier bag is a ghost net. Overfull, leaking. Snarled around dolphins and whales, seabirds and seals. Fishes, turtles, seahorses and eels. Lobsters, crabs and shrimps. Octopuses and squids, cuttlefish and jellyfish. Corals, starfish, anemones and urchins. Rays and sharks and mermaids’ purses. Dragging fishing tackle, ship ropes and buoys, lobster traps and octopus pots. Flare guns and glowsticks, safety hats, crates and oil drums. Sweet wrappers, balloons, gift ribbons. Plastic bottles, caps and rings. Lighters, cigarette butts, snuff box lids. Polystyrene cups and takeaway trays, throw-away cutlery and drinking straws. Plastic bags, tubs and clingwrap. Lollypop and earbud sticks. Beverage cans and six-pack yokes. Bread tags, ballpoint pens. Condom wrappers, laundry pegs, unmatched shoes. Pandemic-time facemasks, gloves and handwipes. Countless tiny mermaids’ tears, clutched in my cramping hands.

Bracha Ettinger offers a moving summation of *carriage* (care-carrying): “We are here, hence we have been carried. Each one of us” (Ettinger in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 106). Expanding on the salience of this sense of support, bearing and *co-response-ability* beyond the human(e), she gestures to our interdependence on “what silently carries us: the ocean, the forest, the night” (p. 123). As aqueous carriers, Astrida Neimanis (2017) suggests, we are entangled in “complex relations of gift, theft, and debt with all other watery life” (p. 3). Marine animals who carry precarious past-present-futures with/in them; oceans “forced to carry too much plastic, too little oxygen” (p. 50). Could we consider acts of gathering and holding, care and grieving, as a carrying-with that opens possibilities of more wake-full re-imaginings, re-storyings?

Stories told in pieces, in parts. With small words like *salt* and *water* and *bodies*. Spewed onto the shore in foamy outbursts. Or swallowed up in breathless gasps, drowned. At times no more than a susurrations – a low murmur, an ancient drawn-out guttural sigh. A faint grey echo, barely there.

Stories that are out of place and out of time. Displaced and untimely. Drift, out of reach. Or, submerged, sink – slowly, like “long snowfall” (Carson, 1951, p. 80). Sedimented, silty stories churned up from the depths of forgotten seabeds. Suspended. Sometimes surfacing unexpectedly, briefly. Awaiting evaporations and condensations. Stories that wash away, wash up, or are left behind. Are transported across oceans, against their will. And those that end up there accidentally. Stranded. A casting of bones. Out of joint, disarticulated.¹⁸

On the shore, illusions of certainty, fixity and orderly, calculable time and space are wrecked. Shattered by heterogenous physical, chemical, geological and atmospheric forces. Changeable, ambivalent. Undecided, unsteady. Not seemly

Academic words. But fitting for the amplified exposure and felt intensity at the indeterminate edge/s of the sea.

The littoral is not an “infinitely thin slice of time” (Barad, 2017a, p. 25). It isn’t amenable to *chronos*, to clock time – the regimented, forward-marching linear timeline of History and Progress, “attuned to a succession of discrete moments” (Barad, 2017b, p. 60). Rather, the “complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land” is better served by what Kamau Brathwaite calls *tidalectics*, a “tidal dialectic” (DeLoughrey, 2007, p. 2). And while tidal arrivals and departures are indeed rhythmic and cyclical,¹⁹ the unremitting negotiations and pulsating exchanges of the littoral signal spacetimematterings that are unpredictably and simultaneously surging and eddying, expanding and contracting. A permeable *thick present* (Haraway, 2016) or *thick-now* (Barad, 2017a, 2017b). A place of always-unfinished business. Of restless remains and untimely returns.

Near the northern end of Sixteen Mile Beach a fence runs down into the sea, separating the national park from a privately-owned reserve. On the adjacent Vondeling Island, where seals were butchered for their skins and fat until the island’s population had all but disappeared, the abandoned guano-era buildings are now inhabited by a large colony.

Piles of uprooted kelp, like corpses lined up on the beach. The wounds on decomposing seal bodies, weeping. And the desiccated remains of the pups, tiny and broken, all but indistinguishable from pieces of withered kelp. Hidden by

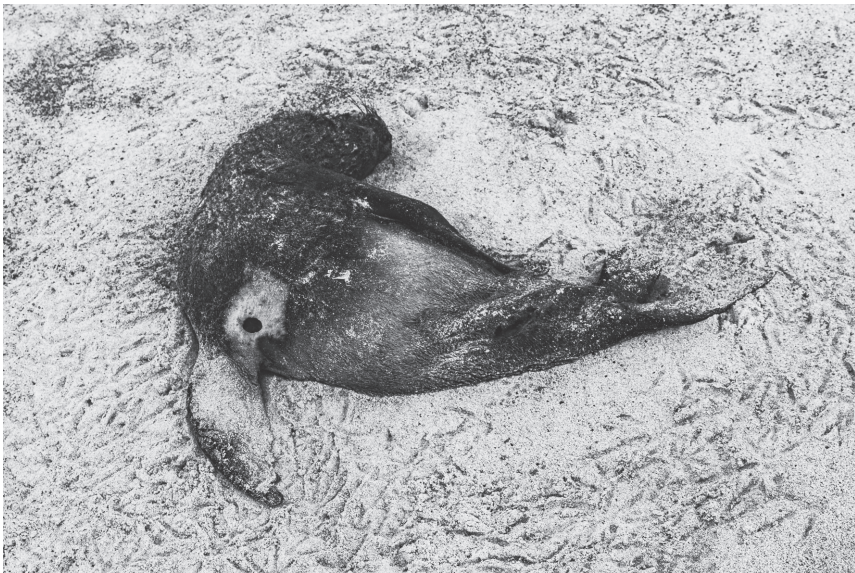


FIGURE 6.5 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Sixteen Mile Beach, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.



FIGURE 6.6 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Sixteen Mile Beach, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

the wind and tides, almost-imperceptible stains betraying their presence under the sand. Seabirds, sometimes only recognisable by a partial feathered outline. Or the frictional trail left by the weight of one body being dragged by another. Lives and deaths beyond the narrow scope of considerability and grievability.²⁰

Landfallen humpback whales. Tossed and turned in the breakers, carried alongshore. Shapeshifting to deep-oranges and pallid-greys as scavengers compete over their decomposing flesh. Bloating and oozing, melting blubber seeping into the sand. Bodies heaved onto the shore in pieces, in parts. Until only a few giant rib bones and vertebrae remain. Waxen and too heavy to lift. Dead weight.

I return to them. I sit with them, am touched by them. I circle their still (moving) bodies. Their now-familiar smells cling to me, travel with me. I taste the salty, oily residue on my skin.

~ Wading (endless greys, seeping)

Twilight greys, evening shadows and argent night shores. The sweeping lighthouse strokes and disquiet dreams that break my sleep. Hyper-aware, I learn to listen to the cumulative, fugue-like variations and contrapuntal minor melodies. Let myself be guided by the water's edge, feel the temperature and texture changes under my bare feet.

The water grows thicker, the seaward undertow threatens to knock over my out-of-phase body. Like vertigo and the uncontrollable nausea of seasickness. The visceral retort of a body of water at once doubled up and turned inside-out; an unwell, out-of-breath ocean.

I learn to tarry. Not only to delay, but to linger. To take my time. To stay until being here is enough. Or my trembling body grows numb in the frigid waters. To hesitate as I stumble over boulders, lose my footing on algae-covered rocks. To hold back judgement like I would hold my breath underwater, gasping for air as I surface. My eyes stinging – burning from the saltwater – and vision blurry. Flooded, as with tears. Saturated, drenched, soaked.

Thick terraqueous contact zones and elemental ecotones.²¹ Spaces of proximity and encounter; intersection and intensity; asymmetrical reciprocities and frictional relating. All-too-often what Rose (2013) calls *death zones* – thresholds “where the living and the dying encounter each other in the presence of that which cannot be averted” (pp. 3–4). Demanding of us a slow and engaged “ethics of proximity and responsibility” (p. 4); dwelling in the midst of aftermaths, catastrophes. The muddy, ecotonal aesthetics of amphibious translations; wading through heavy sands and dark waters.²²

For our praxis to become sea-worthy it, too, must become amphibious.²³ Waterlogged (footnotes). Like earth that is ceaselessly washed by the sea as it makes and unmakes, cuts together-apart.²⁴ Living and dying; pasts, presents and futures. Leaving and remaining; fleeing and abiding. Giving and taking back; finding and losing. Smashing against each other during storm swells, surges and flash floods. Or warily to-ing and fro-ing, only just touching. Seeping together at saltwater edges. Between liquid and solid, like melting sea ice.

Seeping, Steve Mentz (2017) writes, “troubles boundaries but does not dispense with them entirely”; it implies “mutual contamination” and “accumulated exchange” (pp. 282–283), contact and infiltration. Like the pervious membranes and “complex phenomena in dynamic relationality” of Nancy Tuana’s *viscous porosity* (2008, p. 191). And Stacy Alaimo’s framework of *trans-corporeality* which posits our permeable, fleshy bodies as “inter-meshed with the more-than-human world” (2010, p. 2). Both Tuana and Alaimo underscore movements across bodies, temporalities, sites and categories – notably exposure to toxicity. Differential precarity, temporal inscription and always-unequal subjection to potentially destructive forces. To be unprotected, at risk. Acts of deliberate bodily exposure (“dwelling in the dissolve”), Alaimo suggests, remind us that we are “materially interconnected to planetary processes as they emerge in particular places” (2016, p. 94). Such material-affective encounters and ethico-political engagements encourage empathy and coming to grips with “particular entanglements of vulnerability and complicity” (p. 5).

Seep is a word for the longue durée of unnoticed, creeping devastation that Rob Nixon (2011) calls *slow violence*. Incremental, accretive violences of “delayed destruction”, “dispersed across time and space” (p. 2). Attritional toxicities, impossible to contain. Trickles, leaks, spills. Disregarded and discarded



FIGURE 6.7 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Malgas Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

casualties (p. 13); “long dyings” (p. 2) and the many, unspectacular, forms of *letting die*. Protracted injustices, compelling slow, unsettled and exposed practices of witnessing. Like the situated and implicated witnessing of Haraway’s *modest witness*: “seeing; attesting; standing publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to, one’s visions and representations” (1997, p. 267). And Ettinger’s concept of *aesthetic wit(h)nessing* (witnessing-together) – a relational “dwelling with your subject-matter”, “remaining with it, in your body” (Ettinger in Kaiser & Thiele, 2018, p. 105).

Grey. The unremarked colour of seeping violence. Of shadows and out-of-sight shadow places. An anonymous, backgrounded colour that doesn’t seem to matter. The turbid hues of effluent and sludge. Agricultural runoff, toxic industrial and cooling water discharge. Contaminated municipal wastewater and sewage. Smokestack plumes from refineries and chemical plants. Heavy metal dust, ship exhaust gas emissions. Bunkering and refuelling oil, ballast water and dredged sediments.

The colour of the residual. Too little water – of drought along the already arid, windswept West Coast. Not enough rain-bearing storms making landfall in the years preceding the predicted ‘Day Zero’ when taps in the Cape Town metropolitan would run dry. Too much water – of rivers bursting their banks after yet another bout of violent rainstorms in KwaZulu-Natal; of deadly flash floods and landslides. Deluges of stormwater and debris rushing into the sea. And as cyclone swells



FIGURE 6.8 From *Water/Log* (2021 ongoing). Former Union Whaling Company station, Bluff Military Support Base, Indian Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

churn up tepid Indian Ocean waters, the shores are awash with detritus and grey-brown silt.

At the ruins of the whaling station near the port of Durban, the air is heavy. Stifling. A humid mist blankets the Bluff, dissipating as the sun grows harsher. Everything is still soggy after the latest storm, the smells heightened. I follow the partially-obscured, corroded trainline that transported baleen and sperm whale bodies on flatbed carriages. Like cargo. From the harbour slipway, past the original factory premises (now a wastewater treatment plant), to be winched onto the concrete flensing platform and butchered. In pieces, in parts. Conveyed to underground pressure cookers; boilers, separators and decanters; mincers and driers; packaging and freezing chambers; storerooms and tanks. Disseminated as clarified oils, frozen and canned meat, meat extract, petfood, bone meal and meat meal.

I scamper down the creeping dunes to where the spent cooling water discharge was pumped back into the ocean. Look up. Overwhelmed, wordless. Struggling to fathom²⁵ the scale and complexity, I wade through mud pools and rubble, piecemeal accounts in musty, overfull archive boxes. Water seeps from the walls of the dank, crumbling buildings – riddled with bullet holes from decades of serving as a military base after the closure of the factory. Overgrown by lush vegetation. The gunfire from the shooting range interspersed with the calls of monkeys and birds.



FIGURE 6.9 From *Water/Log* (2021 ongoing). Former Union Whaling Company station, Bluff Military Support Base, Indian Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

As I trace whaling histories spanning the South Atlantic, Indian and Southern oceans, I map the former sites of shore-based stations and the routes of pelagic factory ships and catchers. The African seaports that served as gateways to the southern high latitude regions; the sprawling networks of capital, control and coerced labour that enabled the industrial-scale slaughter of cetaceans – inseparable from European colonial occupation. In most cases, remnants of the whaling operations are all but gone. Now rebranded as whale-watching spots.²⁶

I sit next to the former whaling station's slipway at Stony Point, not far from Cape Hangklip. It's early-morning; windy, raining. If the weather clears up, tourists will flock to see the African penguins nesting among artificial concrete burrows and makeshift shelters. One of only two mainland colonies, the other at Boulders Beach on the opposite end of False Bay. The route between the two signposted with 'whale coast' boards, unintended waymarks to the bay's blood-and-oil-soaked histories.

The shore-based stations at the Bluff and Donkergat both operated seasonal Antarctic whaling fleets during the austral summers. And, in a twist on the implication of the whaling industry in twentieth-century warfare, the Donkergat premises and adjacent former factory site at Salamander, too, were incorporated into a seaborne special forces training area. Haltingly, I follow the edges of this small peninsula on the West Coast. Step by step. Over the wreckage, into the water. Try to picture the pools of thick, lukewarm blood seeping across the lagoon.



FIGURE 6.10 From *Water/Log* (2021 ongoing). Former Waaygat whaling station, Stony Point, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

A suitable combination of currents and wind churns up a putrid smell from the bottom of the bay. Decades-old whale offal, they surmise. But the origin is irrelevant. We ought to know that spectres conjure up powerful sensory displays.

Grey is the “polychrome hue of the in-between and the uncertain” (Cohen, 2013, p. 272), camouflage and melange. Of imbrication and negotiation. Between geo and hydro, terra and aqua. A fluctuant hinge, knitting-together while stretching-apart as the ocean exhales and inhales, pushes and pulls, gives and takes. The glaucous cast of the sea on contrastless days – all-enveloping greenish-blueish-greys, sombre and shimmering. The colour of evaporation, condensation and precipitation.²⁷ A permeating briny smell, fresh and slightly putrid. Inclement weather, muggy summer thunderclouds and violent winter rainstorms. Darkened horizons and indistinct interfaces. Sea fog. Equally concealing islands and continental coastlands.

Navigating the islands in Saldanha Bay, I track the fishing trawlers and bulk carriers passing between the North and South Head lighthouses. Malgas Island, closest to the naval base; Jutten Island, across from the military training area. Battleship grey, gunmetal grey. Marcus Island, joined to the mainland by a causeway built to protect the port’s iron-ore terminal from the powerful Atlantic Ocean swells. Harbour grey, concrete grey. Breakwaters and seawalls, underwater blasting and port dredging; pursuits of cut-and-dried coastlines and shorelines, landfalls and departures.²⁸ Altering wave energy and longshore currents, tidal flows and nutrient circulation; disrupting ancient rhythms of eroding and depositing;



FIGURE 6.11 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Schaapen Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

destroying intertidal habitats and the fragile ecologies of estuaries, lagoons, saltmarshes and coastal wetlands.²⁹

The muted tones of decomposition and sedimentation, excretion and accumulation. The fecund murkiness of pulsing nutrient-rich oceanic upwellings – stimulating phytoplankton blooms and, in turn, complex food webs that allowed whales, seals and seabirds to flourish. Increasingly threatened by commercial overfishing, coastal and offshore mining, seismic oil and gas exploration, shipping traffic, oil spills and myriad residual toxicities. Islands stripped bare; the metres-thick guano accretions from fish-eating seabirds ‘harvested’ as fertiliser for exhausted agricultural soils.³⁰ Leaving these avian communities without adequate nesting materials and precluding essential nutrients from seeping back into the ocean via runoff.

Ghostly winds. Guano dust sticks to everything. Pale. Pungent. The lively cacophonies on Malgas Island belie the growing number of empty nests around the shrinking gannet colony. Marking the absences of those who did *not* return. More and more and more decaying bodies. Heads tucked as if resting, wings spread as if in flight. Fading into the accretions as the living build their nests on top of the bones of the dead in untold ongoing burials. The desaturated colours of empty cormorant nests, also on Jutten and other islands, abandoned too early in the breeding season. Fractured, wind-strewn remains. Malnourished coastal seabirds – at risk of disease and predation; their breeding sites imperiled by intensifying storm surges, flooding



FIGURE 6.12 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Malgas Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.



FIGURE 6.13 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Jutten Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.



FIGURE 6.14 From *Salt-Water-Bodies: From an Atlas of Loss* (2015–2019). Malgas Island, Atlantic Ocean. Photo: Adrienne van Eeden-Wharton.

and rising sea levels. Here, at the tenuous divide between the living and the dead, I learn to move cautiously. My presence moot. Teetering, I walk the concrete wall around the periphery of Dassen Island. Treading lightly on the uneven ground where the once-thriving penguin colony was raided for eggs. Vestiges of countless burrows. Now, all but bare.

Burnt bones and cinereous, ashen remains. The eddying greys of aftermaths and afterlives, aftereffects and afterimages.³¹ Shifting, dissolving. Somewhere between remembering and forgetting. Of aftershocks and infinitesimal minor tremors. Disorienting underwater noise. Echoes, murmurations, reverberations, quivers. Hushed conversations and tentative considerations. Of ongoingness and survivance. The shadowy greys of accumulated life-death as birds find refuge among the rafters and bunkbeds of derelict buildings, previously the cramped accommodation of guano labourers. Of new multispecies communities making their homes at the remnants of whaling stations. The muddied tones of slow, messy work in times of urgency and acceleration. The wake-full hues of mourning and falling in love with damaged, seep-stained ecologies.³²

~ Coda

Mid-2022. Cape Agulhas. A seaspray-green plaque, unveiled by an apartheid-era president, marks the southernmost tip of the continent and the official divide

between the Atlantic and Indian oceans.³³ Facing the water, looking south; open seas between here and the frozen ‘ends of the earth’. Barefoot, I make my way across the rocks. Pick up a handful of crushed shells, let them slip through my fingers. Slowly. Deliberately. I close my eyes, embraced by the turbulent meeting of these two bodies of water. An infinitely spectral, fathom grey.

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Notes

- 1 Preamble, from the Latin *praeambulus* (walking before); *prae-* (in front of, before in time or place) and *ambulare* (walk around, go about). Prelude, from the Latin *praeludere* (play beforehand, practice or test); *prae-* and *ludere* (play). A precursory action or introductory movement, like a short piece preceding a fugue. (I draw on several dictionaries and thesauruses for word associations, synonyms and etymologies. For ease of reading, these are listed under references only.)
- 2 Geographically, Cape Agulhas is the southernmost point of mainland Africa and aligns with the designated meeting of the cold Benguela and warm Agulhas currents. Cape of Good Hope, however, was a pivotal landmark in colonial trade routes traversing the Atlantic and Indian oceans between Europe and Asia, the Clipper Route from Europe through the Southern Ocean, and in controlling the passage of ships during times of war. Its enduring importance to global maritime shipping routes a stark reminder that today’s sprawling international trade networks rely primarily on sea-freight and are implicated with other off-shore industries in extraction and exploitation; destruction and contamination; forced or coercive transoceanic labour; involuntary migration and trafficking.
- 3 See Karen Barad’s neologism *intra-action* (Barad, 2007). My use of *intra-oceanic* gestures to the interconnected world ocean as well as the commonly defined major oceans, seas and currents – geopolitical and ecological *spacetime-matterings* (Barad, 2007, 2014) of distinct yet intermingling, situated yet planetary bodies of water.
- 4 A simultaneous treading-with, following and weaving of material-conceptual threads (see Price & van Eeden-Wharton, 2023).
- 5 *Salt-Water-Bodies* was originally a practice-as-research PhD (Stellenbosch University), supervised by Elizabeth Gunter; see van Eeden-Wharton (2020). *Water/Log* expands this into a larger body of creative-critical work.
- 6 Joanna Zylinska (2016) proposes *photomeditations* as a processual, dynamic and relational understanding of photomedia as complex light-based phenomena (pp. 11–12). I use the modified punctuation, *photomedia(tions)*, to evoke the affective and

- æsthetical praxes of creating and engaging with still (moving) images. Elsewhere, Erin Price and I (as the Æ Collective) use the ligature spellings Æffect and Æsthetical to signal the knotting-together of affect and effect, aesthetic and ethical matter(s). See Price & van Eeden-Wharton (2023).
- 7 Meg Samuelson and Charne Lavery (2019) propose approaching the global South from the vantage point of the Southern Ocean which “opens up possibilities for tracking the intersecting currents and itineraries that compose the oceanic South” (p. 38). I am indebted to their conceptualisation of an *oceanic South* in orienting my approach to the material and geopolitical flows connecting seemingly disparate places and times.
 - 8 Patric Tariq Mellet (2020) underscores the complex histories of the many San and Khoe (Khoi) communities, as well as the over 195 roots of origin of Africans of Camissa heritage. Mellet points to the indiscriminate and dismissive introduction by the seventeenth-century Dutch East India Company commander of the designation ‘Strandlopers’ (beach walkers, beachcombers) – initially referring to the ||Ammaqua traders, thereafter to Sonqua line-fishers. ‘Strandloper’, Mellet argues, was not only a term of racial othering, but also served to justify colonial occupation by denying Indigenous claims to land.
 - 9 See Barad (2007) on *material-discursive* boundary-making practices and attending to the distinctions, categories and exclusions they enact. Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2019) suggests that the “material, social, and ethical construction of waste” (p. 102) is intrinsic to the violence of empire, capitalism and neoliberal globalisation – characterised by invisibilised *wasted lives*, both human and more-than-human.
 - 10 Walk, from the Old English *wealcan* (move around, toss) and *wealcian* (roll, curl), shares roots with the Old Norse *valka* (drag) and the Old German *walchan* (knead).
 - 11 The double meanings in Old French of *errant* and *errer* – traveling, wandering, losing one’s way, making a mistake, transgressing – are from the Latin *iterare* (journey) and *errare* (go astray, be in error).
 - 12 Drawing-in the historical pathologising of bewildered wandering and dissociative states, Iain Sinclair (2003) describes his walks – through London’s edgelands and along the verges of the highway encircling the city – as fugues. Sinclair borrows the French term *fugueur* (runaway) for “fugue walkers, long-distance amnesiacs” (pp. 146–147, 339). Fugue walking is unreasonable, excessive. It’s extravagant. From the Latin *extravagari* (wander outside or beyond); *extra* (in addition to, beyond the scope of) and *vagari* (roam, wander). The fugue is also a contrapuntal, polyphonic musical composition that relies on repetition, layering and transposition. It shares the Latin roots *fuga* and *fugere* (to take flight, flee; to be unknown or escape notice; fleeing) with fugitive.
 - 13 See Donna Haraway’s influential conceptualisation of diffraction as a practice of producing “interference patterns” (1997, p. 16), “difference patterns in the world” (p. 268). In Barad’s methodological approach, diffraction requires “reading insights through one another in attending to and responding to the details and specificities of relations of difference and how they matter” (2007, p. 71).
 - 14 Correspond, from the Latin *correspondere* (to reciprocate, harmonise); *com-* (together, with one another) and *respondere* (promise in return, answer to). Ingold conceptualises *co-responsence* as a mutual responsiveness – “neither between nor within but along, not lateral but longitudinal” (2022, p. 6); “not additive but contrapuntal” (2016, p. 14), like an “accompaniment or refrain” (2018, p. 25).
 - 15 Ingold (2010, 2011) uses *weather-world* to emphasise vital atmospheric agencies and felt relations. Astrida Neimanis and Rachel Walker (2014), too, propose a radical inversion of the distanced abstraction of climate change narratives. If we recognise our own and other porous bodies as *weathering*, as “co-emerging in the making of these weather-times”, they write, we may “attune ourselves to the pasts that are contracted in changing temperatures, rising sea levels, increasingly desiccated earths” (p. 573).

- 16 Attend, from the Old French *attendre* (to wait for, pay attention, expect) and the Latin *attendere* (to stretch toward, give heed to); *ad* (toward) and *tendere* (stretch). Unlike an objectifying *of-ness*, relational attentionality is the *with-ness* of being pulled into “correspondence *with* this world” (Ingold, 2018, p. 30; see also 2016). Deborah Bird Rose (2011), building on Emil Fackenheim’s “turning toward” (*Tikkun*), suggests an “ethics of motion toward encounter, a willingness to situate one’s self so as to be available to the call of others” (p. 5). While acknowledging the impossibility of undoing or unmaking histories of violence, suffering and destruction, a relational turning toward seeks what Haraway (2016) calls “partial recuperation”.
- 17 I first came across ‘fossicking’ – a term used mainly in Australia, particularly for prospecting abandoned mine workings – in Brewster (2009). I find resonance also with Walter Benjamin’s figuration, in the texts posthumously published as *Das Passagen-Werk* (*The Arcades Project*), of the materialist historian as collector (see Wohlfarth, 2006). A peripatetic ragpicker, gathering and reassembling what Benjamin (2002) calls the “refuse of history” (p. 461). Slowly, skilfully. “I needn’t *say* anything. Merely show” Benjamin writes of his method of literary montage; to allow the “the rags, the refuse”, *refused* by the master narratives of the archive proper, “to come into their own” (p. 460).
- 18 Using “the time is out of joint” from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as a refrain, Derrida (1994) writes of a “disjointed or disadjusted now” (p. 3). This is a “time without *certain* joining or determinable conjunction” – “*disarticulated*, dislocated, dislodged” and “off course, beside itself” (p. 18). Articulate, from the Latin *articulare* (separated into joints, to say clearly). A well-formulated argument. Expression that is fluent and eloquent, lucid and capable. But I find myself at a loss for words; only halting, wavering utterings to offer.
- 19 Tide, from the Old English *tīd* (portion of time). Rising and falling tides are long-period waves responding to the gravitational pulls of the moon and sun. High (flood) tide is the crest of this tidal wave; low (ebb) tide the trough.
- 20 Grievability, Judith Butler (2009) poignantly summarises, “is a presupposition for the life that matters” (p. 14). See Haraway (2008) on *making killable* and Irus Braverman (2015) on the hierarchies enacted by endangered species lists and conservation strategies. In many respects, African penguins have become conservation flagship species while other seabirds – even endangered species like Bank cormorants, Cape cormorants and Cape gannets – do not enjoy the same privileged status. Cape fur seals, especially, have been vilified as threats to both commercial fishing and vulnerable seabird populations. In late-2021, as unprecedented numbers of emaciated dead and dying seals washed up on more frequented shores around the Western Cape, their precarious existences finally elicited more public attention.
- 21 From the Greek *oikos* (home) and *tonos* (stretching, tightening), ecotone shares the Proto-Indo-European root **ten-* (to stretch) with tension. Defined by ecologists as a “transition between two or more diverse communities”, a “junction zone or tension belt” (Odum, 1971, p. 157), feminist scholars have expanded the concept to consider “contest, change, and co-construction” (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2004, p. 48). Here, I think-with contact zones (see Pratt, 2008) not only in relation to postcolonial studies of the shore, but also Haraway’s generative (re)conceptualisation thereof as multispecies *naturalcultural* encounters, dynamic and fraught “mortal world-making entanglements” (2008, p. 4).
- 22 Translate, from the Latin *translatus* (carried or borne across).
- 23 See also Melody Jue (2020) on *amphibious scholarship* where, submerged, our terrestrial biases are exposed to “pressure, salinity, and coldness” (p. 5).
- 24 Whereas fixed, Cartesian cuts take ontological distinction and distance as inherent and foundational, the *agential* cuts enacted by intra-actions cut “together-apart” (Barad, 2014).
- 25 To seek to understand, to measure depth or take soundings. From the Old English *fæðm* (length of outstretched arms) and *fæðmian* (embrace, envelop, surround).

- 26 The Bluff (KwaZulu-Natal) and Algoa Bay (Eastern Cape) are both Whale Heritage Sites; the Cape Coast Whale Route stretches from Cape Town to Cape Agulhas and includes the annual Hermanus Whale Festival in Walker Bay. As conservation icons and ecotourism attractions, the image of whales as charismatic megafauna is often based on what Arne Kalland (2009) calls a generic “superwhale”, combining traits from different species.
- 27 In proposing a *more-than-wet ontology*, Kimberley Peters and Philip Steinberg (2019) retain the importance of “thinking *through* and *from* the ocean’s liquid materiality” but stress that the ocean is never “simply wet”, a “basin of salt water” (pp. 294–295). Rather, it is always in excess – embedded in the expansive hydrosphere, coursing through bodies and saturating “stories, dreams and imaginings” (p. 294).
- 28 Here, Isabel Hofmeyr’s conceptual framework of *hydrocolonialism* – spanning colonisation “by way of water”, “of water”, “through water” and “of the idea of water” (2022, pp. 15–16) – is invaluable. See Paul Carter (2009) on how the Enlightenment logic of representing the coast as a stable outline, a thin “continuous line that differentiates a mass of land from water”, served as “indispensable prerequisite of [imperial] territorial expansion” (p. 8).
- 29 Oceanic examples of diffraction are particularly relevant to the South African coast with its few natural harbours, violent storms and enduring legacies of shoreline hardening, land reclamation and coastal mining. The Latin root of diffract – *diffringere* (to break apart) – evokes the new interference patterns emerging from the many forms of artificial break/water(s).
- 30 The nineteenth-century international guano trade epitomises ecological imperialism and capitalist commodification. Capitalism, Jason Moore (2015) argues, is an *ecological regime* where Nature (singular, capitalised) – as external and separate – becomes “something to be mapped, rationalized, quantified, and above all, *controlled*” (p. 70).
- 31 See Griselda Pollock’s neologism *after-affects*, evoking the “temporal displacement of trauma” (2013, p. xxx) and impact of aesthetic encounters with “traces or residues of what could not be immediately represented” (p. 27). See van Eeden-Wharton (2023) on thinking-with expanded notions of *after*.
- 32 See Mentz (2017) on *seep-stained* and *seep ecology*.
- 33 Ever-moving and intermingling, ocean currents are of course not amenable to clearcut directives or boundaries. Perhaps it is more helpful to think of the confluence of the cold Benguela and the warm Agulhas currents as a shifting ecotone.

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