Non-Linearity in the Ocean Documentary

Philip E. Steinberg

Fiction and Fact in an Emergent Ocean

Few topics in international relations are as in need of exposure through the documentary genre as the ocean, a space that is rarely understood for the complex, but essential role that it plays in global political, economic and ecological systems. Basic principles of public international law, including the fundamental notion of territorial state sovereignty, derive from Hugo Grotius' work on the law of the sea, and the sea remains an important arena for the development of institutions to regulate cross-border resources and environmental problems. Ninety-five percent of international trade travels by sea. The ocean plays a crucial role in amplifying and bringing to bear the destabilizing effects of climate change. In fact, even in its antithetical designation as a space *beyond* state territories and competencies, the ocean plays a central role in discursively reproducing modernity's foundational socio-political formation: the land-based, sovereign, territorial state (Steinberg 2001, 2009).

In short, the ocean binds the world together, it buttresses notions of territory and sovereignty, and it generates relations of both cooperation and conflict. Yet it

presents specific challenges as the subject of a cinematic documentary. In part, this is because of the ocean's relative inaccessibility. Particularly in its light-deprived depths, the ocean is a difficult place to inhabit for any length of time and an exceptionally difficult place to film. Depictions of the ocean are also limited by the blinding suppositions that are all too often adopted by scholars, journalists and artists (including filmmakers) who accept its political-legal construction as a fundamentally non-territorial space that exists simply to be crossed, or to be entered solely for the purposes of extracting resources that can be brought to the territory of a developable society-state on land. This political-legal perspective, in turn, is buttressed by capital's idealization of the ocean as a friction-free, dematerialized surface whose space can be expressed simply as distance, and which then can (and should) be progressively annihilated by technologies that relentlessly accelerate the circuits of capital.

Perhaps the fundamental barrier, however, arises from the ocean's mobile, dynamic nature. As a space that is continually being reconstituted by molecules, biota, ships and ideas (ranging from those of freedom to nostalgia to effortless military projection), the ocean – quite literally a space of fluid dynamics – does not stand still long enough to be described. The ocean is always emergent, and thus fundamentally beyond representation (Anderson 2012; Peters 2012; Steinberg 2009, 2011, 2013b).

Deleuze and Guattari, in their conceptualization of the world as divided into 'smooth' spaces of affect and emergence and 'striated' spaces of order, hierarchy and representation, call the ocean the 'smooth space *par excellence*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 479).

The ocean is thus, on the one hand, a space that *needs* to be represented in international relations pedagogy, while on the other hand being a space that *defies* representation, at least by means of straightforward, linear narratives (Steinberg 2008). For this reason, most documentaries that attempt to represent the ocean miss their mark. To be clear, even relatively 'traditional' ocean documentaries take on a variety of forms. From the utterly conventional *The End of the Line* (Murray 2009), in which narrator Ted Danson leads the viewer through a series of interviews and encounters with fishermen, scientists and enforcement officials to document the global fisheries crisis, to the more innovative *The Cove* (Psihoyos 2009), a suspense-filled piece of investigative reporting that follows a team of activist-detectives as they discover the secret dolphin slaughters that regularly occur in a remote Japanese village, most ocean documentaries focus on how the over-extraction (or inhumane extraction) of marine resources is facilitated by lax regulation, corporate greed and the structural problems of resource management in a global commons. In these

documentaries, the ocean itself merely forms the setting within which social and environmental issues unfold. In its liquidity, its wetness, its depth and its rhythms; in its affective properties that alternately spur ideas of danger, escape, turmoil and boredom; and also in the way that it is perpetually being remade through connections across its borders, the material ocean escapes the camera's eye. If any of these dynamics behind the social and geophysical construction of the ocean are incorporated into the narrative, they are typically reduced to metaphor or nostalgia (Steinberg 2013b).

The challenge for an ocean documentary is, then, to depict how the ocean's role in global political and economic systems is enabled by the paradoxical way in which it is simultaneously perceived as *both* a featureless surface beyond nature and society *and* a mysterious, complex and dynamic geophysical-human-animal ecological assemblage of material and emotive encounters and memories that is perpetually in formation. Traditional, linear documentaries are not up to this task. To that end, this chapter examines two films that use non-conventional narrative devices to explore the global space of the ocean: *The Forgotten Space* and *Leviathan*.

Place, Space, Time, and the Non-Linear Documentary

The philosopher Edward Casey expresses a prevalent, if often implicit theme in modern thought when he declares that the fundamental co-requisite of human existence is *place*: 'the limit and condition of all that exists' (Casey 2009: 15). Places, Casey writes, are the points on the earth's surface where humans both transform nature (which is the material condition of human existence) and experience things (which is the phenomenological condition of human existence). A broad range of social theories ground themselves (literally) in this fundamental understanding of place. For instance, John Locke's (1690) understanding of social and political institutions begins by envisioning a world of points on the earth's surface. Over time, as humans cluster at these points and transform the nature around them, not only places but also social institutions develop. Eventually, these institutions evolve into states that, through the drawing of boundaries, gather points into territories. As Stuart Elden (2005) has noted, the modern notion of territory (and the territorial state) that is fundamental to international relations theory is dependent on an underlying conception of the world as consisting of a series of places. Because these places all have their origins in substantively formless *points*, they are deemed fundamentally equivalent. Hence the places that emerge at these points are understood as calculable

in their difference, and this establishes a basis for the hierarchical ordering of the world's space.

Implicit in this place-based construction of space is a linear sense of time, exemplified in Yi-Fu Tuan's (1977: 138) definition of place as a 'pause in movement'. For Tuan, as individuals interrupt their movements through both space and time, they embed themselves in place, giving meaning to those places which, in turn, become repositories of their experiences. In the process, humans, through being in place, realize both their individual and social humanity. Thus, the development of a place and its people is associated with the forward progression of time.

This foundationalist understanding of place and its alignment with a linear sense of time impacts on how we understand the world, in a number of ways. First, because places are equated with temporal progress, and because geographical difference becomes re-scripted as temporal difference (i.e. difference in levels of development), alternative trajectories based on more open-ended conceptualizations of space are deferred (Massey 2005). Secondly, the equation of bounded territories with the societies in which 'place' happens supports the inside/outside distinction that is central to modern notions of sovereignty and international relations (Agnew 1994; Bartleson 1995; Walker 1993). Thirdly, and a corollary of the second point, the

identification of 'society' with bounded, sovereign territories and with the points (or places) that constitute territories' 'insides' leads one to dismiss the extraterritorial ocean as necessarily beyond the (place-based) social and socio-natural processes that constitute modern political life (Steinberg 2001, 2009).

As I argue below, the films considered here challenge these presumptions by presenting alternatives to the linear construction of time that provides the rhythm for modernity. While non-linear temporal sequencing has a long history in feature films, most documentaries eschew non-linearity. After all, if social life occurs in places which, after Tuan, are 'pauses,' then it would seem that temporal linearity would be necessary to give definition to these 'pauses.' Put another way, if the role of the documentary is to provide access to reality or truth, and if these social phenomena, like all such phenomena, occur in places, then it would seem that a clear delineation of the place and its contextualization within a historical trajectory would be necessary to ground a documentary's claims to authenticity. Indeed, linearity would seem to be particularly important for a documentary with an activist agenda: if a documentary seeks to inspire viewers to become involved after the film ends, then a temporal trajectory should assist viewers in connecting the 'past' and 'present' of the film with the 'future' that (hopefully) will result from their post-cinematic involvement.

'Truths' about the sea require a different approach, however, because the sea defies linear time. Neither life at sea nor the sea itself has 'pauses': the rhythms and perpetual re-formations of the sea never stop, or, to quote the poet Mary Oliver (1986: 66), 'The sea isn't a place but a fact, and a mystery / under its green and black cobbled coat that never stops moving.' This does not mean that there are *no* 'truths' to be told about the sea: Roland Barthes (1972: 112) overstates the case when he calls the ocean 'a non-signifying field [that] bears no message.' In fact, the ocean signifies loudly, but it does not signify through linear narrative. The sea needs to be narrated not as an object to be read or analyzed, but as an assemblage that is continually being remade through its geophysical recomposition, as well as through the actions of the human and non-human beings that accrue within, and overflow, its borders (Anderson 2012; Peters 2012; Steinberg 2013b). In other words, although the sea, like anywhere else, occurs in time, it has its own temporality and its own rhythm. The sea thus requires a form of story-telling that reflects and reproduces its existence as a dynamic, ever-emergent space *and* as a space that, through a certain constant functionality, serves to bind the world together. The sea is simultaneously *in* time, *beyond* time, and in its *own* time, and this puts a burden on those would seek to tell stories of the sea.

To achieve a truth-telling in ocean-time, the directors of both films discussed here employ elements of the non-linear realist documentary genre pioneered by Soviet filmmaker Dziga Vertov. Arguably one of the founders of modern documentary cinema (Hicks 2007), Vertov was, in one sense, entirely conventional in that his films and writings squarely address all four of Michael Renov's (1993: 22) criteria for a documentary: 'to record, reveal or preserve; to persuade or promote; to analyze or interrogate; and to express.' Indeed, Vertov, a committed Marxist, had particular disdain for films that simply sought to provide bourgeois diversion. However, following Marx's admonition that understanding requires one to uncover hidden social relations, Vertov held that, for a film to tell the truth, it would have to do much more than simply record the observations of daily life. For Vertov (as for Marx), common-sense observations that reproduce linear notions of time and point-based notions of place *obscure* the truth because they reflect hegemonic ideologies. Temporal linearity obscures the truth because it leads one to focus on the end-product (e.g. the commodity) rather than the process behind it (e.g. the alienated labour). Similarly, point-based notions of place obscure the truth because they discourage understanding of how elements of life are connected across space (e.g.

how the consumption of a commodity in the city is dependent on exploitative labour relations in the countryside).

For Vertov, therefore, the task of the documentarist is to use the filmic perspective – the *kino-eye* – to rearrange space beyond points and to rearrange time beyond linear narratives. Through these manipulations, the documentary film can reveal connections that would otherwise remain unseen:

> Kino-eye is the documentary cinematic decoding of both the visible world and that which is invisible to the naked eye.
>
> Kino-eye means the conquest of space, the visual linkage of people throughout the entire world based on the continuous exchange of visible fact, of film documents as opposed to the exchange of cinematic or theatrical presentations.
>
> Kino-eye means the conquest of time (the visual linkage of phenomena separated in time). Kino-eye is the possibility of seeing life processes in any temporal order or at any speed inaccessible to the human eye.
>
> Kino-eye makes use of every possible kind of shooting technique: acceleration, microscopy, reverse action, animation, camera movement, the use

> of the most unexpected foreshortenings – all these we consider to be not trick effects but normal methods to be fully used.
>
> Kino-eye uses every possible means in montage, comparing and linking all points of the universe in any temporal order, breaking, when necessary, all the laws and conventions of film construction.
>
> Kino-eye plunges into the seeming chaos of life to find in life itself the response to an assigned theme. To find the resultant force amongst the million phenomena related to the given theme. To edit; to wrest, through the camera, whatever is most typical, most useful, from life; to organize the film pieces wrested from life into a meaningful rhythmic visual order, a meaningful visual phrase, an essence of 'I see.' (Vertov 1984: 87-88)

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore how these techniques are utilized in very different ways by two sets of directors to reveal an ocean that is all too often written out of the sphere of international relations or, when it is considered, is relegated to the historic past. Both films, I suggest, use non-linear techniques to think *with* the ocean. That is, they mimic the cyclical reconfigurations, complex networks and

intricate ecologies of ocean-time in order to lead the viewer to Vertov's 'essence of "I see".'

The Forgotten Space[1]

The Forgotten Space (Sekula and Burch 2010) is a film that revolves around the sea, but it is not a film *about* the sea. Indeed, by the end of the film it is not even clear what 'the forgotten space' is: is it the sea, the ship, the port, the shipping container, the networks of mobility that power the maritime world economy, or the interstices that are passed by between the webs of these networks? Although the film focuses on all of these elements – and many more – as they link the world together in networks of production, trade and consumption, relatively little attention is given to the sea that lies at the centre of these networks.

To the extent that the film has a spatial focal point, it is not the sea but the port city. Lengthy segments on four port cities (Rotterdam, Los Angeles/Long Beach, Hong Kong and Bilbao), plus an epilogue on the village of Doel which sits adjacent to the Port of Antwerp, are separated by interludes aboard the container ship *Hanjin Budapest.* Taken together, the *Hanjin Budapest* scenes account for just twelve of the

[1] Parts of this section are derived from Steinberg (2013a).

film's 113 minutes, and even in those twelve minutes the sea is barely a presence. The ship always floats on smooth waters; the crew is oblivious to the ocean's depth, its geophysical movement or its biota, except as these are mediated through computer monitors; the weather is consistently calm and pleasant; and the power of the sea is alluded to only once, indirectly, when a crew member speaks of the never-ending battle against rust.

Although each port city episode includes shots of that city's harbour, the viewer is instructed right at the beginning of the film that ports are as much entryways to land ('the hinterland, the greedy continent') as they are connected with the sea ('other ports, great harbour cities, oceans, 100,00 invisible ships, 1.5 million invisible seafarers'). Thus, during each of the port city segments, the film journeys away from the port to spaces that seem, at first glance, far removed from maritime trade: a California tent city for homeless men and women; a Dutch orchard employing Polish apple-pickers; an appliance factory in China that employs upwardly mobile young women from rural villages; and the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, which is decried as a misguided monument to a romanticized maritime past and a forgotten maritime present. Because the maritime economy takes place on land as well as at sea,

we are all reproducing it and being reproduced by it, and this will continue whether or not we 'remember' its unifying element: the ocean.

Of course, Allan Sekula and Noël Burch, the directors of *The Forgotten Space*, want viewers to 'remember' the ocean. More specifically, they want viewers to become cognizant of the ocean's role in their lives and in the social relations of capitalism. This is a project that Sekula has been pursuing through essays, photography exhibits and films for the past two decades (e.g. Sekula 1995, 2006), although the specific aspect of the ocean in capitalism that is highlighted varies from project to project. In *The Forgotten Space*, the focus is specifically on the role of the ocean in binding the world together, as the central surface for transportation (and thus integration) in what is essentially a *maritime* world economy.

In taking on this task, however, Sekula and Burch are faced with a challenge: how can one make a film about the maritime world economy that highlights the significance of the ocean but that is not *about* the ocean. A film *about* the ocean would run the risk of fetishizing the sea as an object that exists apart from the social relations and technologies that permeate our lives and political-economic institutions, and such a film would run counter to Sekula and Burch's ideological project. Like Vertov, Sekula and Burch understand that a film about a specific object, or that tells a

specific linear story about a phenomenon or place, is as likely to obscure as to reveal underlying structural forces, leading the viewer *away* from the processes that extend beyond that space to the networks of connectivity and power that are the essence of society.

Thus, for Sekula and Burch, the authority of the documentary as a source for revealing hidden truths lies in it *not* telling a single, linear narrative about a single place or phenomenon. Instead, Sekula and Burch, like Vertov, turn to montage, the juxtaposition of images and vignettes that are discontinuous in time and space. Although the montage in *The Forgotten Space* is less frenetic than it is in, say, Vertov's films, it serves a similar purpose: to construct a non-linear, place-transcending story where the whole (in this case, the global maritime economy) is much larger and all-encompassing than the sum of the parts (the various labourers, ships, containers, gantry cranes, etc. that enable shipment across the ocean's surface).

In a manner reminiscent of actor-network theory (Latour 2005), the maritime world economy is presented in *The Forgotten Space* as neither a grand entity with its own logic, nor as a series of actions undertaken by intentional individuals. Rather the maritime world economy is continually re-enacted amidst the interactions and reconstructions performed by human and non-human actors as they shape a world

that is perpetually in process. While these interactions occur at sea and in ports, they also occur at a range of settings that are far removed from the sea but that would not exist as they do were it not for the maritime world economy.

Thus, Sekula and Burch's 'truth' is constructed not only with reference to the ship, shipping infrastructure and maritime labour, but to a cascading universe of people, places, objects and technologies, including the homeless Californian whose job has moved overseas due to containerization and the makeshift community centre beneath a Hong Kong office tower where Filipino workers gather on Sundays. Small items have magnified impacts amidst the system's complex interrelations. We learn that a pile of rusted chain heaped on an empty pier in Bilbao is crucial to the interlocking processes of the economy: 'These chains are not antiques. Without them, ships would never anchor and there would be no world trade.'

The intersection of systemic understanding (the workings of the network) with the everyday encounters between humans and technology is epitomized in the final of the five *Hanjin Budapest* interludes. In this scene, a series of shots of workers labouring on the ship's deck at night accompanies a ninety-second lecture by the narrator (Sekula) on how late capitalism is characterized by rising debt, falling profit margins and impending crisis. The passage concludes by provisionally materializing

the structural contradictions of capitalism in the central icon of the maritime world economy: the shipping container: 'Does the container, like capitalism in general, sow the seeds of its own destruction by allowing industry to take flight – a Trojan horse that turns on its inventors?'

Sekula and Burch's narrative is powerful and focused, but in their desire to tell a decentred story of the maritime world economy, the directors relegate the actual, material ocean to the background. This was noted indirectly by David Harvey at a 2011 forum on the film:

> I know Allan [Sekula]'s been very interested in the oceans and the seas, but the thing that really struck me here is how passive the sea had become. […] It is imagined that you can just ride across the surface in an unruffled way and that you can just bring the world together in a unity of production and consumption. (Harvey 2011)

Although Harvey does not elaborate on this point, by decentring the ocean from their narrative, Sekula and Burch dismiss its materiality and its actorness. In reducing the ocean to a surface, they deny the ocean's existence as a *space* in the sense that

Lefebvre (1991) uses the term: as a convergence of experience, power, resistance and planning, and not *just* as an arena for interaction.

Sekula and Burch's decision to devote so little of their film to the sea itself is undoubtedly strategic: their point, after all, is to demonstrate that, while the ocean is a necessary component of the maritime world economy, that economy's essence lies not in any space but in the contradictory logic of capitalism. For Sekula and Burch, the *space* of capitalism, to borrow a term used by Marxist urban sociologists, is merely 'contingent' (Saunders 1985; Sayer 1985).

Sekula and Burch thus successfully steer clear of what Lefebvre calls 'spatial fetishism,' the error of analysis that occurs when, 'instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in space,…we fall into the trap of treating space as space "in itself"… and so fetishize space in a manner reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities' (Lefebvre 1991: 90). However, in the process of making this point, the filmmakers inadvertently reproduce capitalism's idealization of the ocean as a flat surface in which space is devoid of geophysical matter, an abstract quantity of distance that can be annihilated by technologies that enable the compression (or, better yet, the transcendence) of space-time. Although the ocean that was previously 'forgotten' is now 'remembered' by Sekula and Burch, it

remains an ocean that is absent of any character. The historic 'sea of exploit and adventure' (itself a problematic romanticization) has been transformed 'into a lake of invisible drudgery'. For Sekula and Burch, containerization has turned the maritime heterotopia once applauded by Foucault (1986) into a neoliberal dystopia, a 'civilization without boats, in which dreams have dried up, espionage has taken the place of adventure, and the police have taken the place of pirates' (adapted from Foucault 1986: 27).

This literally and figuratively 'flat' portrayal of the ocean in *The Forgotten Space* is surprising, given that greater attention is given to the ocean's complex and contradictory dynamics in Sekula's other works, including *Fish Story* (Sekula 1995), the photographic exhibition/catalogue that formed the initial inspiration for *The Forgotten Space*, as well as *The Lottery of the Sea* (Sekula 2006), a documentary that explores the ocean as a site of risk. *Fish Story*, for instance, begins with a meditation on the 'crude materiality' of the sea (Sekula 1995: 12), and Sekula reminds the reader throughout the book that the ocean's materiality persists despite the best intentions of capital to wish it away. Thus, for instance, we learn in *Fish Story* that 'large-scale material flows remain intractable. Acceleration is not absolute: the hydrodynamics of large-capacity hulls and the power output of diesel engines set a limit to the speed of

cargo ships not far beyond that of the first quarter of [the twentieth] century' (Sekula 1995: 50). In *Fish Story*, the ocean is a space of *contradictions* and an actant in its own right. In *The Forgotten Space*, by contrast, it is merely a contextual, contingent surface.

Human frictions on the sea likewise feature in *Fish Story*: militant seafarers, longshoremen and mutineers all make appearances in the text. In contrast, these individuals receive scant attention in *The Forgotten Space,* and much of the attention that they do receive is about their failings. A relatively hopeful account of union organizing in Los Angeles is paired with a story of labour's defeat in the face of automation in Rotterdam and that of a faded movement in Hong Kong, where the union hall has become a social club for retirees and their widows.

In sum, by turning away from the frictions encountered at sea, Sekula and Burch end up tacitly reproducing the very 'forgetting' of the sea promoted by capital as it subscribes to an ideology of limitless mobility. The dialectics of the ocean, which flow like an undertow beneath the surface in *Fish Story*, are missing from *The Forgotten Space.* Instead, for Sekula and Burch, *all* that remains (or that soon will remain) of the ocean is the shipping container and the various channels of infrastructure across which it moves: the world has been successfully striated and the sea tamed. The capitalist fantasy of an annihilated (or forgotten) ocean has now

become a reality. Although their investigation of capitalist mobilities may have recovered the significance of the long-forgotten ocean, the ocean they have found is merely a dead background for capitalism, a striated grid of GPS coordinates and adjoining lines. It is an ocean that is hardly worth remembering.

And yet, for Deleuze and Guattari (1988), no space is completely striated. To understand the space of global capitalism, one needs to see not just the striated space of ordered, hierarchical production and exchange, but also the smooth space of chaotic dynamism that makes the ocean so much more than just a surface of lines that connect points. Although the ocean entices with promises of its own transcendence, it is simultaneously a world of chaos and depth that *limits* human conquest. As Deleuze and Guattari write, the distant, optical perspective – exemplified in *The Forgotten Space* by Sekula's omniscient narration and by a sea so distant that it is rarely captured by the camera's lens – is well suited for the depiction of striated spaces. To represent smooth spaces, however, a different sensory perspective is needed, one that relies less on distant vision and optics and more on proximate interaction and haptics. This alternative view of the ocean is provided by the second documentary considered here: *Leviathan*.

Leviathan

In many ways, *Leviathan* (Castaing-Taylor and Paravel 2012) is the polar opposite of *The Forgotten Space*. At the most obvious level *The Forgotten Space* is about shipping, while *Leviathan* is about fishing. However, the differences extend well beyond their focus on different ocean activities. Where *The Forgotten Space* features extensive narration, not a single word is spoken in *Leviathan*. Where *The Forgotten Space* produces a highly contextualized narrative – an optical 'view from above' that looks down on its subject matter to situate the sea within the striated space of the capitalist maritime economy – *Leviathan* presents an immersive, haptic view that is so close-up, so decontextualized, that the encounter, although still primarily visual, is reduced to raw experience in what one might call a 'view from nowhere'. Where *The Forgotten Space* sees the ocean as a horizontal, flat and stable surface across which commodities seamlessly and laterally move, *Leviathan*'s perspective is profoundly vertical, as fishermen live in a world of ship, sea and air, all buffeted by the up and down motion of the ocean's undulating wave action and dramatically variable weather. The two films even represent opposite sides of the spectrum in reference to this chapter: *The Forgotten Space* is about global connections and power, but is only marginally about

the sea; *Leviathan*, conversely, is most certainly about the sea, but – at least when the film is viewed in isolation – it is only marginally about international relations.

Leviathan, shot entirely on a New Bedford, Massachusetts-based fishing boat in the Gulf of Maine, is a profoundly *ecological* film. By 'ecological', I do not mean that it is an environmentalist film. Certainly the footage of gutted fish and bloodied bycatch befouling the ocean could lead one to attach an environmentalist message to the documentary, but, as its directors have stated in several interviews, their intention was not to impart any specific message but simply to portray the North Atlantic fishery in all its visceral complexity. And it is in this respect that the film is ecological, portraying the fishery ecosystem as an integrated set of processes that – much like the maritime world economy portrayed by Sekula and Burch – cannot be broken down into its constituent parts. Fish, birds, water, waves, bubbles, foam, ships, bait, rust and men (there are no women) are all portrayed in the same disorientingly intimate style by a dozen tiny cameras that are attached to structures on the ship, fishermen's helmets and the ends of sixteen-foot poles dangled over the ship's sides.

Leviathan is thus a profoundly sensory film, which perhaps is not surprising, given that its directors, Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel, are both associated with Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab. Favouring the haptic

over the optic, Castaing-Taylor explicitly distances their approach from that of directors like Sekula and Burch, who rely on the distancing representational analytics of language:

> Most documentaries' representation of the real is so attenuated and so discourse-based and language-based. We lie and we mystify ourselves with words. Words can only take us so far. I think we want to get to a much more embodied, a much more corporeal representation of reality that's almost a presentation of reality. Reality that transcends our representation, so it's not reducible to a set of statements of what commercial fishing's about. (quoted in Juzwiak 2013)

As in Vertov's films, representational techniques of narration (whether verbal or pictorial) are eschewed in favour of a mode of presentation in which elements of the 'story' being told are presented in a disjointed manner that enables the viewer to construct a whole that exceeds the limits of the frame, as well as the bounds of her or his cognitive capacities. The effect is immersive, but also disorienting. Over the course of the 87-minute film, there are many points at which it is unclear what is going on; in

a sense, the viewer experiences the confusion of the fish that suddenly finds itself on deck, the wave that suddenly finds its path cut by a ship, or the fisherman who is trying to stay awake after working a gruelling shift. In all cases, the elements of the marine-fishery ecosystem adapt, and the ecosystem as a whole is reproduced. But each actor's knowledge of that system is partial, and each actor remains vulnerable. In addition, there is an underlying destructive element within the various actors' efforts at adaptation. One senses that the fishermen, the boat, the ocean and the fishery are all being pushed to the limit, and that the overstimulating, mind-numbing confluence of elements is as tiring for the fisherman (and the fish) as it is for the viewer. Although this point is never made explicitly in the film, this bird's-eye (and fish's-eye, and fisherman's-eye) view of desperate adaptation amid chaos mirrors the state of North Atlantic fisheries and New England fishing communities, which are frequently understood as being on the brink of collapse. Explicit contextual references, however, are pointedly avoided by the filmmakers. Just as Sekula and Burch steer their narrative away from the sea in order to keep the focus on the globe-spanning processes of the maritime world economy, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel studiously avoid any references to contextual factors that cannot be captured by their cameras so

as to ensure that nothing interferes with the viewer's sensual immersion in the human and non-human experiences and rhythms of the North Atlantic fishery.

The one contextual reference that *is* sustained throughout the film is to the concept of Leviathan. This is, in fact, a triple reference, as there are three noted expositions on the concept: the Bible (specifically, the Book of Job), Thomas Hobbes' (1651) *Leviathan* and Herman Melville's (1851) *Moby Dick*. The biblical reference is the most explicit, as the film begins with an epigraph from Job 41:

> Can you pull in Leviathan with a fishhook
> Or tie down its tongue with a rope?
> Can you put a cord through its nose
> Or pierce its jaw with a hook?

In Job, Leviathan is a fearsome creature that, in its awesome, totalising force, defies representational description (as well as physical capture). Although Leviathan is a sea creature, it is also an ecology that incorporates those who attempt its capture. This is a theme developed further in Hobbes' book, where Leviathan is an integrated body held together not by any underlying moral imperative, but by relations of desperate,

agonistic interdependence and mutual suspicion, tinged with respect for the power of the Other. Leviathan is thus a force that encompasses life but that is also larger than life, the most profound form of Gothic terror.

While Job is directly referenced in the film and there are clear links with Hobbes' *Leviathan*, it was Melville's *Moby Dick* that provided the film's direct inspiration. Castaing-Taylor and Paravel's original project was to use a portrayal of the New Bedford fishing community to reflect on *Moby Dick*, the opening scenes of which are set in New Bedford. Subsequently, as they began filming in New Bedford, interaction with fishers and an invitation to document a locally based fishing vessel at sea led them to reorient the project. Even on the ship, however, Castaing-Taylor and Paravel spent their leisure time reading selections from *Moby Dick* out loud to each other (Lim 2012).

As C.L.R. James (1978) elaborates in his analysis of *Moby Dick*, Melville's Leviathan is not just the whale, but also the society aboard the *Pequod* and, more apocalyptically, the fate of modern civilization. Of particular relevance for our understanding of the film is James' observation that the submission of the individual to the whole that occurs in Melville's (and Hobbes') Leviathan is inseparable from a submission of humanity to nature:

> This is modern man, one with Nature, master of technology, all personal individuality freely subordinated to the excitement of achieving a common goal. They have reached it at last by the complete integration of the ship and the wind and the sea and their own activity. (James 1978: 74)

James goes on to describe this integration less as a stable coherence than as a terror-filled relationship of mutual dependence and attempted adaptation amidst a sensory immersion that defies representation:

> [In Melville,] the sense of fear is annihilated in the unutterable sights that fill all the eye, and the sounds that fill all the ear. You become identified with the tempest; your insignificance is lost in the riot of the stormy universe around… Nature is not a background to men's activity or something to be conquered and used. It is a part of man, at every turn physically, intellectually and emotionally, and man is a part of it. And if man does not integrate his daily life with his natural surroundings and his technical achievements, they will turn on him and destroy him. (James 1978: 100-101)

It is difficult to imagine a view of the ocean-society relationship more different than that proffered by Sekula and Burch. In *Leviathan*, the nature of the sea, rather than being transcended, subsumes all the ocean's elements, including any humans who dare to cross it. Taming the sea is not an option. Therefore the appropriate way to approach understanding of the sea is not through distanced linguistic discourse that assumes a (false) position of omniscient, objective observation – the equivalent of the stylized whale drawings derided by Melville at the beginning of *Moby Dick* – but through sensual immersion.

And yet, for all their differences, *The Forgotten Space* and *Leviathan* share a critique of the mainstream, linear ocean documentary. This is perhaps most evident in how the two films incorporate the concept of *place.* At first glance, this would appear to be another area of difference between the films. *Leviathan* appears to be about a single place – the fishing boat – and indeed the entire film was shot there, in contrast with *The Forgotten Space*, which is pointedly *not* about the ocean. However, it would be a mistake to consider the fishing boat in *Leviathan* as a 'place' in the sense raised by Tuan or Casey. That is, the fishing boat bears little resemblance to a human 'pause' where the known and experienced is contrasted with an external, unexperienced context. Rather, as in *The Forgotten Space*, the world of *Leviathan* is an unstable

maritime network where elements from beyond the screen continually enter, make their presence known and exit, bringing about a bit of drama that stresses, but does not truly challenge, the system. In both films, the notion of 'place' is replaced with a notion of the dynamic, open-ended, multi-actor network.

Just as *Leviathan*, like *The Forgotten Space*, complicates notions of place so as to better depict the complex instability and irreducibility of the maritime world, the two films share a commitment to working outside the notion of linear time. *Leviathan*'s non-linear temporality is described in a *CinemaScope* cover story on the film:

> [In *Leviathan*,] all the narrative we normally hang on to [is] torn away, leaving us with only our senses to follow in the dark. It's that lack of narrative that makes it seem ridiculous to call this something like 'a documentary on commercial fishing in the North Atlantic off the coast of New Bedford.' Rather, *Leviathan* takes on the shape of the system it describes, a circular flow, choppy like those cold waves, that moves neither forward nor backward but simply works and accumulates (fish, footage) without ever linking to a history, an endgame…

> [In *Leviathan*,] sensual time has replaced historical time. This is ultimately a more profound dislocation from narrative than the absence of characters or dialogue, and the base on which it builds this world [is] removed from the mechanics of the market, the great historical marker of our young century. It would make no sense to follow these fishermen back to the sale of their haul, because at no point does the film acknowledge the sort of time that renders an event complete. Sensual time links actions into an ongoing stream: rays are caught; they are butchered; the undesirable parts are tossed overboard; blood flows into the sea; gulls are attracted to the floating carcasses; they dive into the waves to eat; the waves rock the boat; men shower amidst the rocking; they return to work…. And so it goes. (Coldiron 2012)

The structuring of space to achieve non-linearity is accomplished in a completely different way in *Leviathan* than in *The Forgotten Space*. Whereas *The Forgotten Space* wanders almost aimlessly to the 'forgotten' interstices of the maritime world economy as it seeks comprehensive analysis, *Leviathan* maintains an obsessive focus on a corner of the maritime world economy that is so small that,

although sense is enhanced, analysis is impossible. Nonetheless, the effect is much the same: through a refusal to portray the ocean in a grammar inherited from land, the viewer is led to think differently not just about the sea, but also about the ways in which time, space and connections across distances, species and forms of matter are constructed.

It is in these respects that *Leviathan*, like *The Forgotten Space*, uses a maritime perspective to challenge mainstream international relations thinking. Both films use the ocean – a space that has always held an awkward position within the fixed territories of the state system – to question the global ontology that underpins, among other things, state-centrism. States are not insignificant in either narrative. In *The Forgotten Space*, states invest in port infrastructure to support both economic development and homeland security (although Sekula and Burch question whether these investments can ever achieve their stated goals). In *Leviathan*, there are (despite, perhaps, the title) no direct references to the state, but clearly the fishing vessel is supported by a land-based network, which includes state-imposed safety regulations, marketing networks, etc. For both films, however, the *essence* of the maritime ecology/economy being presented is not the state but the connections and processes that occur in and across the seas. These connections involve humans and

their institutions, but they also involve non-human objects and forces, from fish and water molecules to gantry cranes and corrugated steel boxes. Thus, both films, though in very different ways, use the ocean to encourage a reconceptualization of both the space and substance of international relations. When the two films are taken together, the starting point for international relations is the smooth space of chaotic natures, immanent objects, emergent mobilities and circuits of connection without beginning or end, not the striated space of bounded territories, stable places and bureaucratized social institutions.

Conclusion

Modern narratives of the ocean tend to emphasize one of two perspectives, both of which construct the ocean as beyond society. Either the ocean is seen as an empty transportation surface which ships need to cross with as few distractions as possible in order to get to the other side, or it is seen as a nature-rich space into which ships venture in order to gather resources that can be brought back home to enhance the development of land-based societies. In either case, the apparent implication for international relations scholars is that the ocean can and should be rationally

managed by the community of states, whether to preserve its functionality as a transport surface or to steward and allocate its resources efficiently (or equitably).

At a superficial level, *The Forgotten Space* appears to reproduce the first of these imaginaries, while *Leviathan* reproduces the second. However, as I have shown throughout this chapter, both sets of directors utilize a Vertovian approach to go beyond these simplistic understandings, turning away from linear and place-based narratives to depict the ocean as a complex space that is continually being remade by the social and ecological processes that overflow its borders.

Each film certainly has its gaps. Because it fails to account for the materiality of the ocean, *The Forgotten Space* presents an excessively stable perspective on the 'striated' space of the maritime capitalist economy, notwithstanding the film's emphasis on the dialectical nature of capitalism. Conversely, *Leviathan*, by eschewing any reference to context, fails to appreciate how the 'smooth' marine ecosystem of the present around which the film revolves is connected to larger human (and non-human) economies, ecologies and histories.

The power of the films is fully realised when they are paired together, taking to another level Vertov's call for the juxtaposition of asynchronous elements and perspectives so as to reveal underlying connections and contradictions. Viewed

together, the films successfully reveal the dynamic and multidimensional constructions of what appear at first to be coherent 'smooth' ocean ecologies and 'striated' maritime economies. The paired films reveal that no space is truly 'smooth' or 'striated,' but rather that the smooth and the striated exist in a (dis-) unity of ongoing tension and re-formulation. Although employing radically different techniques and aesthetic sensibilities, the films use their maritime perspectives to reveal the limits of mainstream international relations thinking in which fixed territories ('nations') are understood to 'relate' to each other across empty, intervening fields of distance. Instead, *The Forgotten Space* and *Leviathan* harness the destabilizing nature of the ocean to foster an understanding of how global spaces, ecological systems, labour relations and social norms are continually reconstituted amidst the fluxes and flows of international political economy.

References

Agnew, John (1994) 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1 (1), 53-80.

Anderson, Jon (2012) 'Relational Places: The Surfed Wave as Assemblage and

Convergence', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space*, 30 (4), 570-587.

Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*, edited and translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill & Wang.

Bartleson, Jens (1995) *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Casey, Edward S. (2009) *Getting Back into Place,* 2nd edn. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Castaing-Taylor, Lucien and Véréna Paravel (2012) *Leviathan*. New York: The Cinema Guild, 87 min.

Coldiron, Phil (2012) 'Blood and Thunder: Enter the Leviathan', *CinemaScope* 52. Available online at http://cinema-scope.com/features/blood-and-thunder-enter-the-leviathan/.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guatarri (1988) *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Athlone.

Elden, Stuart (2005) 'Missing the Point: Globalization, Deterritorialization, and the Space of the World', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30 (1), 8–19.

Foucault, Michel (1986) 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16 (1), 22-27.

Harvey, David (2011) 'Remarks at "Forgotten Spaces" Symposium', Cooper Union, New York, 15 May. Available online at http://vimeo.com/24394711.

Hicks, Jeremy (2007) *Dziga Vertov: Defining Documentary Film*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Hobbes, Thomas (1651) *Leviathan* [numerous reprint editions].

James, C.L.R. (1978) *Mariners, Renegades & Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In,* 2nd edn. Detroit: Bewick.

Juzwiak, Rich (2013) '*Leviathan*: A Documentary Made by People Who Hate Documentaries', *Gawker*, 1 March. Available online at http://gawker.com/5987966/leviathan-a-documentary-made-by-people-who-hate-documentaries.

Latour, Bruno (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lefebvre, Henri (1991) *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lim, Dennis (2012) 'The Merger of Academia and Art House: Harvard Filmmakers' Messy World', *The New York Times*, 31 August. Available online at http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/02/movies/harvard-filmmakers-messy-world.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all.

Locke, John (1690) *Second Treatise on Government* [numerous reprint editions].

Massey, Doreen (2005) *For Space.* London: Sage.

Melville, Herman (1851) *Moby Dick; or, the Whale* [numerous reprint editions].

Murray, Rupert (2009) *The End of the Line*. London: Arcane / London: Calm / London: Dartmouth, 85 min.

Oliver, Mary (1986) 'The Waves', in *Dream Work*, by Mary Oliver. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 66-67.

Peters, Kimberley (2012) 'Manipulating Material Hydro-Worlds: Rethinking Human and More-Than-Human Relationality Through Offshore Radio Piracy', *Environment and Planning A*, 44 (5), 1241-1254.

Psihoyos, Louie (2009) *The Cove.* Boulder, CO: Oceanic Preservation Society / London: Quickfire, 92 min.

Renov, Michael (1993) 'Toward a Poetics of Documentary', in Renov (ed.) *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge, pp. 12-36.

Saunders, Peter (1985) 'Space, the City and Urban Sociology', in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds) *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*. London: Macmillan, pp. 67-89.

Sayer, Andrew (1985) 'The Difference that Space Makes', in D. Gregory and J. Urry (eds) *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*. London: Macmillan, pp. 49-66.

Sekula, Allan (1995) *Fish Story*. Düsseldorf: Richter.

Sekula, Allan (2006) *The Lottery of the Sea*. Los Angeles: Allan Sekula, 179 min.

Sekula, Allan and Noël Burch (2010) *The Forgotten Space*. Amsterdam: Doc.Eye / Vienna: Wildart, 113 min.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2001) *The Social Construction of the Ocean*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2008) 'It's So Easy Being Green: Overuse, Underexposure, and the Marine Environmentalist Consensus', *Geography Compass*, 2 (6), 2080-2096.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2009) 'Sovereignty, Territory, and the Mapping of Mobility: A View from the Outside', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 99 (3), 467-495.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2011) 'Free Sea', in S. Legg (ed.) *Sovereignty, Spatiality, and Carl Schmitt: Geographies of the Nomos*. London: Routledge, pp. 268-275.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2013a) 'Film Review: Allan Sekula and Noël Burch, *The Forgotten Space*', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space*. Available online at http://societyandspace.com/reviews/film-reviews/sekula/.

Steinberg, Philip E. (2013b), 'Of Other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions', *Atlantic Studies*, 10 (2), 156-169.

Tuan, Yi-Fu (1977) *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Vertov, Dziga (1984) *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, edited by Annette Michelson, translated by Kevin O'Brien. London: Pluto.

Walker, R.B.J. (1993) *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.