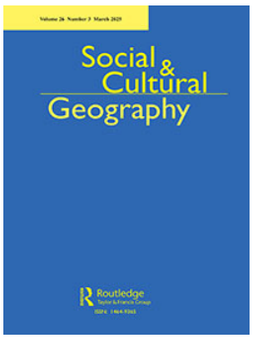

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Thinking from multiple oceans: historical and elemental lineages and futures of ocean geography(s)

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ABSTRACT

This article considers how a tension in critical ocean geography between thinking *with* and thinking *from* the ocean can be elucidated through an engagement with a number of Black scholars asking related questions. Focusing on Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and its interpretation by C.L.R. James and Paul Gilroy, as well as other scholars in the critical ocean geography/critical ocean studies and Black studies traditions, I suggest that a pervasive challenge to oceanic thinking is the need to balance, on the one hand, the tendency to think with the ocean's perceived exceptionality as a scaffold for non-normative thinking with, on the other hand, the desire to think from the encounters that occur in ocean-space and that historically have played a crucial role in constructing identities and futures of peoples who bear the experience of the ocean's watery depths and turbulence. I conclude by arguing for an approach that is both *historical* and *elemental*, in order to construct narratives that point to the ocean not simply as a repository of meaning or as a site for projecting dreams, but as a lively space where thoughts, understandings, and narrations emerge from the entanglements of water and life, forcings and histories, memories and forgettings, that occur within.

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Penser par le biais de plusieurs oceans : Lignées historiques et élémentaires et l'avenir de la géographie des océans

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la manière dont une tension dans la géographie critique des océans entre le fait de penser *avec* et de penser *par le biais de* l'océan peut être élucidée en engageant un certain nombre de chercheurs noirs qui ont posé des questions connexes. En s'appuyant sur Moby-Dick d'Herman Melville et son interprétation par C.L.R. James et Paul Gilroy, ainsi que d'autres chercheurs dans les traditions de la géographie critique des océans et des études noires, je suggère qu'un défi omniprésent de la pensée océanique est la nécessité d'équilibrer, d'une part, la tendance à penser avec l'exceptionnalité perçue de l'océan comme un support de pensée

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non normative et, d'autre part, le désir de penser avec l'exceptionnalité perçue de l'océan, et d'autre part, le désir de penser à partir des rencontres qui ont lieu dans l'espace océanique et qui, historiquement, ont joué un rôle essentiel dans la conception des identités et de l'avenir des peuples qui font l'expérience des profondeurs et des turbulences de l'océan. Je conclus en soutenant une approche à la fois historique et élémentaire, afin de construire des récits qui montrent l'océan non pas simplement comme un dépôt de sens ou un site de projection de rêves, mais comme un espace vivant où les pensées, les compréhensions et les récits émergent de l'intrication de l'eau et de la vie, des pressions et des histoires, des souvenirs et des oublis, qui se produisent à l'intérieur.

Pensar desde múltiples océanos: Líneas históricas y elementales y futuros de la(s) geografía(s) oceánica(s)

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza cómo se puede dilucidar una tensión en la geografía oceánica crítica entre pensar *con* y pensar *desde* el océano a través de un diálogo con varios académicos negros que plantean preguntas relacionadas. Centrándome en Moby-Dick de Herman Melville y su interpretación por parte de C.L.R. James y Paul Gilroy, así como otros académicos de la geografía oceánica crítica/estudios oceánicos críticos y tradiciones de estudios negros, sugiero que un desafío generalizado al pensamiento oceánico es la necesidad de equilibrar, por un lado, la tendencia a pensar con la excepcionalidad percibida del océano como un andamiaje para el pensamiento no normativo y, por otro lado, el deseo de pensar a partir de los encuentros que ocurren en el espacio oceánico y que históricamente han desempeñado un papel crucial en la construcción de identidades y futuros de pueblos que soportan la experiencia de las profundidades acuosas y la turbulencia del océano. Concluyo abogando por un enfoque que sea a la vez *histórico* y *elemental*, con el fin de construir narrativas que apunten al océano no simplemente como un depósito de significado o como un sitio para proyectar sueños, sino como un espacio vivo donde los pensamientos, los entendimientos y las narraciones emergen de los enredos del agua y la vida, las fuerzas y las historias, los recuerdos y los olvidos que ocurren en su interior.

Setting the stage: looking down at the ocean

How does one tell a sea story? Or, to restate the question: How does one put the sea in the centre of a story without fetishizing it in its alterity, or reducing it to a metaphor, or diminishing it to an environment that provides resources, or bypassing it as an intervening space in the middle? How does one bring the ocean to the foreground without elevating its materiality and its affordances – its opacity, its fluidity, its repetitive churn, its dangerous unpredictability, its emotive power, its embedded memories – into something that they are not? How does one tell a story *with the sea* – as a space that, in its difference from the normative space of land that has 'grounded' much of social theory, can

challenge understandings of the temporalities that are assumed to characterize relations between humans and their more-than-human environments – while also honouring histories that emerge *from the sea*, through encounters between marine subjects that generate traumas, hopes, and relational identities?

I often reflect on these questions when I'm flying in an airplane over the ocean, squeezed into an economy seat, trying to work on my laptop without spilling a drink on the individual who has had the misfortune of being seated next to me. I'm tempted to close the window shade; the sun casts a glare on my screen. But, I resist the urge: I had requested a window seat for a reason. As someone who writes about the ocean and who writes about how others write about the ocean, I want to cherish this rare opportunity to experience the ocean in all its enormity: as nothing but a vast expanse of water.

As I stare at the seascape, though, it occurs to me that I have no idea how to concentrate my vision. First my eyes, and then my mind, start wandering. I try to focus on something more tangible than the uninterrupted, feature-free surface presented below. I find myself looking for ships, wind towers, navigational aids, coastlines … anything to break up the ocean's monotony. I search for discrete objects that I can then recombine to tell *my* story of the sea.

I am hardly the first to face this dilemma. Just weeks after completing his epic poem *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge embarked on a ferry from Yarmouth to Hamburg and found himself, for the first time in his life, beyond sight of land. Reflecting on the 'feeling of immensity' that he had ascribed to the ocean in his recently completed allegory, Coleridge now was 'exceedingly disappointed … at the narrowness and nearness, as it were, of the horizon [and] that round objectless desert of water' (as cited in Raban, 2023, p. 94). Flailing for a narrative that he could construct from this 'objectless' space, Coleridge was left to concentrate on the only object he could recognize: 'a single solitary wild duck'.

If Coleridge had spent longer at sea, he might have changed his view. If he were on a multi-day voyage, ploughing the ocean's waves and feeling its swell, he might have had a greater sense of the ocean's differentiation, its rhythms, the way it dynamically moves in both space and time. But even then, I'm not sure that he would really know how to put the ocean and, crucially, its temporalities, and the meanings that adhere to those temporalities, into the foreground. As Peters and Brown (2017) write, there is a tension between *thinking with* and *thinking from* the sea. When one thinks *with* the sea, the distanced, 'God's eye' observer turns to the sea as an epistemological crutch, focusing on the ocean's geophysical properties (e.g. flow, volume and turbulence), but also the visual impression of vast, blue nothingness. Thinking with the sea allows the romantic to develop new perspectives on the world, beyond the (apparent) fixed boundaries and linear temporalities of land. When thinking with the sea, the ocean is mobilized as a scaffold that masculinsed, distanced intellectuals can stand on to exercise their mental powers. This is the perspective that left Coleridge, confronted by the reality of the 'objectless' ocean, with no option but to draw narrative from a duck.

Furthermore, thinking with the sea as a space of difference can result in obscuring the significant differences in how various humans (and other species), with their differentiated and entangled histories and levels of power, encounter ocean space. At its extreme, as Elizabeth Povinelli (2020) warns, thinking with the ocean can bury political critique and historic experience beneath an 'absorptive, relations-erasing universalism' (p. 2). The

alternative is to think *from* the sea, engaging its waters as an encountered, inhabited, felt, and sensed space of more-than-human livelihoods. Thinking *from* the sea, it is a space where histories are made and remembered. It is less a space for romantic imagination than for confronting the spatio-temporalities that bind pasts with futures.

Like most conceptual binaries, this one begins to collapse when encountered in practice. To give just one example, waves, which are often mobilized by scholars thinking with the sea to illustrate its 'difference', themselves reflect and impart temporalities of encounter, including the political valences of different ocean knowledge systems and the politics of modern wave science (Helmreich, 2023). Indeed, Peters and Brown demonstrate through a conversation between the co-authors that productive dialogue is possible. However, the divide persists in different starting points: between those who work from the ocean as an encountered space (i.e. in the histories and present-day livelihoods of coastal peoples, islanders, and trans-oceanic diasporas for whom the ocean has a special place in cultural practices, memories, and identities) and those who use it as a geographic scaffold for thinking (i.e. artists and scholars who use the ocean's 'difference' from land – its geophysical dynamism, position outside state boundaries, persistence as a global commons, etc. – to destabilize normative categories). As critical scholars, it behoves us to keep this tension in mind as we interrogate the 'work' that oceanic writing can (and cannot) do in revealing dynamics of intersectionality, memory, and global interconnectivity as well as the hierarchies, traumas, and hopes that prevail within.

The position of positionality

At root, this is an essay about positionality: the possibilities that are opened and closed when one assumes a position of thinking with the ocean versus thinking from the ocean; when one looks on the ocean from above, as from an airplane, versus when one submerges oneself in its historical, spatial, inhabited depths. Although selection of one position or another (or an intermediate position) is made strategically to support an argument, it is not *just* strategic. One's position also reflects where one comes from: one's cultural heritage, one's academic training, one's scholarly networks, as well as the history of doors that have been opened and closed over the course of one's personal and professional development. Therefore, a discussion about critical positionalities is inevitably immersed in questions about the position of the individual initiating that discussion, as well as questions about that individual's authority to do so.

In my case, I am a white, male, heterosexual geographer trained in a social science tradition that, very broadly, links aspects of political economy with an attentiveness to the materiality of environments. Although my academic training is as a social scientist, and specifically as a geographer, I recognize a commonality with many scholars in the 'blue humanities' (e.g. Mentz, 2023) and I frequently draw on and contribute to this literature. Crucially, it is this heritage and training as a scholar of the social sciences and humanities, and the research questions that emerge from this heritage, that originally motivated my turn to the sea. This contrasts with others who have been inspired by, for instance, their embodied encounters with the ocean, or the tangible place of the ocean in their everyday practices, or the references to the ocean made by their ancestors to transmit memories and knowledges through generations. My heritage, inevitably, continues to shape my perspective on the ocean, even as I am aware of its limits.

Here, as I work from my position as an ocean geographer to think through tensions inherent in thinking with and from the ocean, I engage with a select sample of perspectives emanating from a Black critical tradition, a tradition that looks to the ocean as a historically specific space of memory, meaning, and transcontinental connections animated, most starkly, by the Middle Passage and the long shadow that it has left in its wake. To be clear, my aim is not to build a 'bridge' between the two traditions. As someone located on one 'side' of the bridge – in terms of identity, experience, and academic training – it is not my place to unilaterally propose that a bridge should be built. Furthermore, much 'bridging' has already been done by Black geographers who, to varying degrees, turn to the ocean or, more broadly, 'aquatic space'[1] to elaborate on the geography of the Black experience (for just a few examples that speak directly from or to the discipline of geography, see Hawthorne, 2023; T.L. King, 2019; McKittrick, 2006; Noxolo, 2016; Proglio et al., 2021; R. Walcott, 2021; Winston, 2021; Wright, 2020). A call to build a 'bridge' would not only be arrogant; it also would reify the idea that there are two (and just two) delimited and homogenous 'critical ocean geographies' out there: a 'white' one and a 'Black' one. This is, of course, an oversimplification. And yet, there are strikingly few references shared between, on the one hand, scholars who have found their way to the ocean from an appreciation of its role in capitalism or empire-building, or in its unique geophysical, ecological, or affective properties and, on the other hand, scholars whose starting point has been the role of the ocean (and, more broadly, 'aquatic space') in Black lives and livelihoods, including Black histories and Black futures.[2]

Rather than seeking to build a bridge between these literatures, this article is rooted in a different bridging: between the perspectives of *thinking with* and *thinking from* the ocean. In the process, though, the Black critical tradition, including, although not limited to that of Black perspectives on the ocean, looms large, as this tradition has long turned to the ocean as both a space of lived history and one of imagined futures. In the article that follows, I respectfully engage this literature to enhance my own critical thinking, not as an act of appropriation (for I am not claiming it as *my* subjective analysis) but as a moment of learning. I would hope that with an appropriate level of humility and respect we can all gain insights into our inevitably entangled histories, even as we encounter those histories through distinct subjectivities. Indeed, that, in large part, is what this article is about.

Thinking with and from the ocean

To begin to answer the question raised at the beginning of this article, there are a number of ways that one can tell a sea story. One route is to critically evaluate the rhetorics and rules applied by a society as it constructs the ocean as an ordered space in the middle: as a space to be crossed, to be utilized for its resource potential, to absorb the externalized costs of capitalism. Working from this perspective, one can go on to explore how the ocean serves as a pathway for influences, and out of such stories one can begin to understand the forces that underpin attempts at engineering the ocean as a space seemingly external, but actually quite internal, to society. This is the approach frequently taken in ocean–region studies, as well as in global ocean studies that seek to reveal the ocean's central role in the spatiality of capitalism (e.g. Campling & Colás, 2021; Steinberg, 2001).

This approach, however, has some limits. A story about how the ocean is socially constructed presupposes, in the first instance, an ontological separation between land and sea, where explanation emanates from land and the social forces that prevail there. In retrospect, it is telling that I titled my first book *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Steinberg, 2001) and not *The Oceanic Construction of the Social*. Likewise, it is telling that Liam Campling and Alejandro Colás titled their 2021 book *Capitalism and the Sea*, which assumes two distinct subjects, rather than *Capitalism in the Sea*.

Also, the ocean is a vast and varied space, and different regions are encountered in different ways, leading to different stories. If one focuses on the coast, the power of the imaginary of a vast watery world can get lost amidst a dense web of land–sea interactions, near-shore fisheries and resource extraction opportunities, marine hazards, and the place of the ocean in coastal people's livelihoods and cultural systems. Space, in all its richness, not just as points of encounter but as a field of dreams, futures, and traumas, risks becoming subsumed in the anthropology of coastal livelihoods. By contrast, if one focuses on the deep sea, the *longue durée*, real and imagined, takes over. As the ocean's presence emerges as a repository of historic episodes, traumas, and aspirations, one risks losing site of the ways in which most coastal people actually *experience* the sea: in the moment, in their livelihoods, as inter-species, dynamic spaces of life and death, forces and objects.

Just as there are ways to bridge the gap between thinking with and thinking from the sea, there are numerous ways to tell stories of the sea that challenge the dichotomy that divides an inhabited coastal region of societies and encounters from an abstracted deep sea of embedded histories and projected dreams. Some human livelihoods persist in distant, deep waters. Merchant mariners, offshore oil rig workers, and deep-sea fishers, for instance, all spend significant time away from the coast. Time at sea can have a devastating impact on migrants and enslaved persons crossing oceanic divides. For all these individuals, the sea, even distant from the coast, is a space of human habitation and, to varying degrees, carcerality and dehumanization (Khalili, 2021). And yet, all too often, ship-based life is idealized as occurring *in spite* of the ocean. After all, the whole point of navigation (at least in Western navigation) is to transcend the ocean's geophysical properties so that the ocean simply becomes a platform for the ship on which social life (including mobility) occurs. That is: the ocean exists to be ignored. The result is that stories of 'life at sea' become those of 'life on ship', as the sea recedes into the background (Mack, 2011). There are stories that deviate from this dichotomy – from science fiction that brings the ocean's rhythms into the daily lives of marine colonizers (e.g. Slonczewski, 1986) to research on the ways in which the ocean's materiality becomes a presence against the will of those who would wish it away (e.g. Peters, 2012) to the stories of migrants whose boats, tragically, become one with the water (e.g. Heller & Pezzani, n.d..) – but this scholarship is the exception.

Another alternative is to start from the ocean's geophysical properties: its 'wet ontology' (Steinberg & Peters, 2015). This approach seeks to take the ocean seriously as a geophysical space with its own mobilities, dimensions, and temporalities. In my work with Kimberley Peters (Steinberg & Peters, 2015), we have suggested that when one adopts a perspective that places the ocean's geophysicality at its centre, one is led to rework some of the foundational concepts typically employed to understand society – such as place, solidity, permanence,

repetition, temporality, surface, and volume. A further iteration of this approach suggests that when one begins from the ocean's geophysical properties one necessarily extends analysis well beyond the blue space depicted on a map as 'ocean', because the ocean's materiality and its meaning is so deeply imbricated in the forcings of the earth system (Peters & Steinberg, 2019).

Thinking with the ocean to the point that it exceeds its geographic boundaries and material wetness can be highly productive for generating new modes of geographic reasoning that rework, and ultimately undermine, prevailing binaries that distinguish land from sea and, within the sea, coastal from distant regions. However, it can also direct us away from the livelihoods of those – human and non-human – who engage with the sea on a daily basis and from honouring the meanings that they attribute to and derive from oceanic spaces (Povinelli, 2020; Reid, 2020). A contrasting approach begins by examining the ways in which livelihoods are entangled with the sea – its meanings, its forces, its flows, its creatures, as well as, as Peters and Steinberg (2019) would have it, its 'extensions'. This perspective reveals that the ocean is neither a fecund environment of resources nor an empty surface to be traversed. Rather, it is a space of *different* ontological understandings, *different* legal systems, *different* conceptualizations of the relationship between land and water, humans and non-humans. This approach requires not just a *critique* of the Western, temperate, continentalist, masculinist tradition; it also requires that one go *beyond* that tradition to listen to the understandings of those who experience water – whether near-shore or distant; proximate, historical, or aspirational; as a tactile moment or as a historical memory – as saturated by the flows and currents that churn traumas, toxins, migrants, and ideas, as well as, of course, water itself and the countless biota that turn it into a multi-species habitus.

This, in turn, begins to move scholarship from a perspective of 'thinking with' to 'thinking from', or that, perhaps, uses 'thinking from' to 'think with' better. It directs us, for instance, to the 'seascape epistemology' of Karin Amimoto Ingersoll (2016), whose understanding of the role of the ocean's various mobilities in the historic (and ongoing) imperial and military conquest of the Pacific islands and its peoples is inseparable from her practice of surfing, that, as a Native Hawai'ian, connects her with the ocean's movements through space and time. The ocean, for Amimoto Ingersoll, is thus both a source of specific knowledge that shapes and reflects her identity and environment *and* a disruptive space that one can productively think with to undermine masculine, land-centred, statist norms. Similarly, Kamau Brathwaite's (1981) concept of 'tidalectics' 'foregrounds not only the diverse temporalities of oceanic space [which can be used to reframe historiography] but also what he calls the "submerged mothers" that must be recuperated in regional history' (DeLoughrey & Flores, 2020, p. 134; see also DeLoughrey, 2007; Hessler, 2018). As DeLoughrey and Flores stress, the general analytic perspective that Brathwaite advocates for thinking with the sea is possible only due to his immersion in both oceanic time and oceanic space, as seen from his Afro-Caribbean vantage point. The traffic between 'thinking with' and 'thinking from' goes in the other direction as well. Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2020) enters the world of marine mammals to gain perspectives on survival, adaptation, and love that she deploys to interpret and nurture the persistence of an African diaspora that is connected to, but also exceeds, the strictly aquatic. If Amimoto Ingersoll and Brathwaite are thinking *from* the ocean in order to think *with* it better, then Gumbs is thinking *with* the ocean in order to think *from* it better.

The examples of Amimoto Ingersoll, Brathwaite, and Gumbs, and those of countless others writing from positions as islanders, coastal dwellers, members of Indigenous nations, or descendants of transoceanic slavery, often also informed by feminist, decolonial, posthuman, or queer thinking, impart the message that simply bringing the ocean into our narratives is not enough. It is all too easy to integrate the ocean into our stories much as we view it from the airplane: as a scaffold for thinking. But the ocean, as a space, is not just imagined, or thought *with*; the ocean (like every space) is *practiced*, and practicing the ocean involves deriving meaning from and assigning meaning to its forces. It involves acknowledging and advancing the histories that emerge from the entanglement of human and more-than-human life forms in its volume and across its expansive borders.

The elided ocean in *Moby-Dick*

To dive further into questions of positionality and epistemology in oceanic thinking, I turn to the mid-19th century American novelist Herman Melville and, in particular, his classic ocean novel, *Moby-Dick*. This might seem like an odd focus for an article on positionality in critical ocean geography, but Melville, and in particular *Moby-Dick*, is selected here because the novel is in some senses the literally equivalent of the view from the airplane: thinking with but not from the ocean. And yet, as I suggest below, by engaging with some of the ways that Black literary scholars have encountered Melville, we can gain insights that might assist critical ocean geographers, and others who think with the sea, to combine their thinking with perspectives *from* the sea, developing a perspective on the ocean that is both *more historical* and *more elemental*.

The ocean permeates *Moby-Dick*. Almost the entire novel takes place at sea, on board the *Pequod*. Even in the chapters set on land the focus is on individuals who are somehow connected to the sea, whether as a source of their livelihoods (e.g. the proprietor of the Spouter Inn, frequented by whaler crews) or their dreams (e.g. land-bound Manhattanites gazing to sea from the shoreline). That said, in *Moby-Dick* the ocean, or, more broadly, the maritime world, is not a *space* in the sense that the term is understood in contemporary geographic thought, where geographic differentiation is integrated with temporal change and encountered in ongoing processes of co-constitution and becoming (see, e.g. Elden, 2004; Massey, 2004). Rather, in *Moby-Dick*, the ocean is *context*, an inert environmental platform (or container) that hosts meaning-laden events, objects, and creatures.

Although Melville provides detailed descriptions of whales, the analysis is more anatomical and behavioural than ecological. The water is background, not just for the whaling ship but for the whale. The ocean establishes a metric of distance and difference, a platform on which the microcosmic civilization of the ship is floated, and an environment for staging the agonistic struggles between order, passion, progress, and nature that permeate the novel. However, Melville's depiction of the ocean fails to capture the underlying processes and dynamisms that give it its unique character as the fulcrum of a biogeophysical hydrospherical system whose elemental properties – wetness, churn, repetition, unpredictability, volume, depth, invisibility – generate specific material states, geophysical phenomena, and affective responses.

When Melville does describe the ocean's water it is depicted as featureless and timeless, valuable for its function as a reliable host for specific creatures, metaphors, and movements, but not particularly present as a thing in itself. Foreshadowing the statement made 100 years later by Carl Schmitt (1950/2003) that 'the sea has no *character* [. . .] on the waves there is nothing but waves' (pp. 42–43, emphasis in original), Melville (1851/1922) writes in Chapter 13 ('Wheelbarrow') that 'the magnanimity of the sea [. . .] will permit no records' (p. 52), and this attitude is reiterated by several of the novel's characters. In Chapter 16 ('The Ship'), when Ishmael applies to ship out on the *Pequod*, he tells Peleg that he wants to see the world, to which Peleg, pointing at the water, responds that the only 'world' that he will see when whaling is what he sees before him, and if that is the case, then he might as well stay put since all water looks the same. *Contra* Derek Walcott (1986), for Melville the sea is *not* history.

A similar depiction of the ocean appears in the very last line of the book (before the epilogue): 'The great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago' (Melville 1851/1922, p. 491; see also Chapter 111 ['The Pacific']). For Melville's characters, the waters of the sea are timeless. They also are apparently featureless. Although the novel includes a brief discussion of marine microorganisms and their role in revealing and obscuring the presence of larger creatures (Chapter 58 ['Brit']), little attention is paid to how these microorganisms actually move in, or are moved by, the ocean's water. Likewise, although the ship has a log line that can be used to generate knowledge of the ocean's depths and, more broadly, the volumetric characteristics of the oceanic environment, we learn in Chapter 125 ('The Log and Line') that the instrument largely goes unused. When the ocean's depth *is* described, it is mobilized (in Chapter 93 ['The Castaway']) as a metaphor for unknowability: a pathway into the mysterious unknowns into which Pip's soul has sunken, not as an actual volume of water (Publicover, 2018).

Mid-19th century Western sailors were largely ignorant of the sea's geophysics (Rozwadowski, 2019), and so, in one sense, the omission of oceanographic curiosity among Ahab and his crew is understandable. Indeed, Ishmael notes in Chapter 41 ('Moby Dick') that 'the secrets of the currents in the seas have never yet been divulged' (Melville, 1851/1922, pp. 156–157).[3] However, sailors certainly were cognizant of the weather. And yet, for a novel suffused with an abundance (some would say an overabundance) of scientific digressions, the weather, including the oceanic component of earth-ocean-atmosphere relations, is described in only the broadest terms. Richard King elaborates on this absence:

> What's perhaps most notable about the way that Melville crafted his heavy weather events in this novel is that he did so with so little of the meteorological detail or grand frothy-plumed descriptions that most twenty-first-century readers expect in a sea story. Melville described no gruelling, sublime, lengthy scenes of crashing around Cape Horn or heeling through hurricanes [. . .] Ishmael barely warns of portentous calms or any approaching meteorological signs that foretell this bad weather. Ishmael never describes a specific wave height or wind speed. He does not mention changes in barometric pressure or air temperature. He does not discuss strategies for steering or sail plans. In his storms in *Moby-Dick*, which include Father Mapple's multi-layered storm sermon on Jonah and the squall in 'Forecastle — Midnight', Ishmael does not describe the characteristics of clouds. He barely describes the sound of storms, beyond a few words of roaring and thunder and cracking lightning. (R.J. King, 2019, pp. 271–273)

Ultimately, for all his interest in the ocean's *creatures*, Melville has little interest in the ocean (or the hydrosphere) as an actual *space*. Indeed, in Chapter 45 ('The Affidavit'), when Chace recounts his night floating alone at sea after the *Essex* was wrecked by a whale, he explicitly disparages those who would see the ocean's water or its forces as sources of danger: 'The dark ocean and swelling waters were nothing; the fears of being swallowed up by some dreadful tempest, or dashed upon hidden rocks, with all the other ordinary subjects of fearful contemplation, seem scarcely entitled to a moment's thought; the dismal-looking wreck and *the horrid aspect and revenge of the whale*, wholly engrossed my reflections until day again made its appearance' (Melville, 1851/1922, p. 179, emphasis in original).

In fact, to the extent that the novel features characters' struggle against a central element that element is not water but fire. C.L.R. James elaborates on this in one of his first reflections on *Moby-Dick* in *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*:

> Ahab, a true son of nineteenth-century America, worshipped fire but he was struck by it (probably lightning) and was marked from head to foot.
>
> Living all his life away from civilization, hunting whales in remotest seas, looking up at stars at night, and thinking his own thoughts, he gradually began to discard the ideas of his times and to think independently. This is what he arrived at.
>
> Fire, power, the civilization of material progress, was a mighty creative force. But its creativity was mechanical. Mechanical is a word he will use many times. It is this which is destroying his life as a human being. And he will fight it [. . .] with the thunder and lightning of a frightful storm [. . .] flashing around his ship and magnetic lights are burning on the masts. (James, 1953/1978, p. 16)

At another point in *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*, James makes reference to analogous literary anti-heroes to elaborate on this image of the solitary Ahab consumed by fire even as he is surrounded by water:

> When Ahab defies the spirit of fire, he is way out in distant seas, thousands of miles away from civilization, standing on the deck of the *Pequod*, with the meanest mariners, renegades and castaways around him. When Prometheus defies Zeus, he is chained to a rock on a wild expanse of land at the very ends of the earth [. . .] When [King] Lear defies the thunder and the lightning, the most powerful manifestations of the forces of Nature, he is also on an open heath [. . .] Zeus hurls Prometheus and his followers into the lower regions with the thunderbolts and lightning of a great storm. Lear is driven mad by the thunder and lightning [. . .] Ahab escapes the lightning and the thunder and the corpusants only to fall victim to his own madness. At times the three characters use almost the same words. These similarities cannot possibly be accidental. (James, 1953/1978, p. 124)

Two things are notable in these passages. First, the environment in which Ahab, Lear, and Prometheus undergo their tests is characterized by its distance from 'civilization'. It is that very distance, that sense of being beyond, that allows for the construction of an environment in which personal struggles – against nature, against social institutions and expectations and against oneself – can be played out. Indeed, it is the very externality of these spaces to human society – as alter-natures – that allows them to be interchangeable as sites of agonistic struggle: Ahab's ocean, Lear's heath, and Prometheus' wasteland all present essentially the same challenge, and it is a challenge facilitated by distance and difference, rather than by any specific

elementality. That is, the environment is characterized by what it is not (solid, civilized territory) and by the way that it broadly facilitates the sublime, rather than by any geophysical properties that are directly encountered, resisted, and incorporated into one's world view.[4]

Secondly, and relatedly, these are not fundamentally stories, or spaces, of navigation. Of course, there are scenes of Ahab literally navigating, poring over his charts and the like, but this is presented as an unproblematic activity, one of the few moments in *Moby-Dick* where science and rationality unquestionably triumph over passions of the human soul. Missing is the idea of navigation as an *encounter*, where the mobile protagonist ascribes meaning to places, engaging in a series of processes that would, to varying degrees, reaffirm, question, or co-opt the ocean's otherness through a territorializing dialectic that alternately reduces the ocean to an undifferentiated surface to be crossed (deterritorialization) and reclaims it as a space with nature, character, and differentiation (reterritorialization).[5] When Ahab (and Lear and Prometheus) find themselves in an uncomfortably 'wild' environment, they do not try to tame it and territorialize it. Rather, the environment's affect goes straight to the protagonist's soul, leading to angst-ridden cycles of internalization and repulsion. As James writes:

> 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 [. . .]
>
> [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, 1953/1978, pp. 74, 100–101)

As James elaborates so well, this drama between the characters and their hostile, but increasingly regularized environment is mobilized to signal the modern subject's struggle with the social institutions and norms that, in the mid-19th century, were coming to characterize white, male, bourgeois civilization (see also, Casarino, 2002) and, within which, through appeals to the romanticism of technology and transcendence of the rational self, James identifies gathering storm clouds of fascism.[6] The ocean here is not so much reduced to metaphor as it is elevated to allegory (see also, Blum, 2010; DeLoughrey, 2019a; Steinberg, 2013). However, as the oceanic encounter is endowed with a surfeit of meaning, the ocean itself – the ocean that is key to this transformation of modernity – remains undertheorized.[7]

Although not directly engaging James' work, psychoanalytic scholar Sarah Ackerman (2017) develops a complementary line of argument in her reading of *Moby-Dick*. Ackerman argues that the novel can be read as a 'treatise'[8] on Sigmund Freud's concept of the 'oceanic feeling', a condition where one finds oneself in an environment without the bearings that one normally uses to locate one's ego:

> The ocean is hypnotic, according to Ishmael, and draws men to it in a spontaneous, instinctual way. Like Narcissus, we see our unreachable selves in the water. Looking out before setting sail, Ishmael observes that 'the prospect was unlimited, but exceedingly monotonous

> and forbidding; not the slightest variety that I could see'. This monotony invites men to lose themselves in the vastness of the water. (Ackerman, 2017, p. 12)

Ishmael 'loses himself' by taking on a studied indifference. The ocean becomes an arena for a historic drama from which he detaches himself as an observer. Ahab, by contrast, 'loses himself' by projecting his (angry) ego onto specific environmental elements: the storm, the lightning, and, of course, the whale, descending into a nihilistic rage that is both predatory and suicidal.

Recognizing the nihilism inherent in the oceanic feeling, Freud advised against pursuing it in psychoanalytic practice for fear that it could nourish suicidal tendencies (Ackerman, 2017). In contrast, Fred Moten (2013) and Jackie Wang (n.d.) have suggested that, in the context of intergenerational traumas that have denied Black subjectivity, an embrace of the oceanic can provide a means for reorientating and relocating Black livelihoods (see also, Gumbs, 2020; Sharpe, 2016). For Melville's characters, though, the ocean provides only *dis*location, as the ocean is reduced to a scaffold for something else: the directionless dreams of a disengaged sailor or the angry outbursts of a captain's tortured soul. This is not a space to think *with*; it is a space to think *without*, and thus it is certainly not a space to think *from*. That is why, for both characters, the ocean's defining geographic characteristic – its water – is interchangeable with other, equally unattainable elements – immersive fire that rains down from the heavens, for Ahab; endless, undulating expanses of farmland, for Ishmael – just as the struggles of Ahab, Prometheus, and King Lear are interchangeable despite the very different demons that they seek to conquer.

From what ocean do we think, when we think from the ocean?

To summarize, as Melville reduces the ocean's nature to a signifying environment that hosts emotive elements and psychological dramas, he distracts the reader from the ocean's practiced meanings in the maritime world of the 19th century, even as he seeks, more broadly, to engage that world. Paul Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic* (1993), takes a somewhat different tack, as he mobilizes the ocean less as an arena for psychological reckonings than for spatial imaginings. Gilroy essentially uses the term 'Black Atlantic' as shorthand for the Atlantic world that is constructed by the African diaspora and symbolized by the Middle Passage and subsequent acts of crossing. In the process, as he focuses on various Middle Passages, he largely bypasses the liquid, voluminous materiality of the Atlantic Ocean, as well as the work of writers such as Walcott and Brathwaite whose writings on the Atlantic (and the Caribbean) directly engage the ocean's materiality.

There is an ongoing debate regarding whether Gilroy's use of the Atlantic Ocean as a touchstone for a broader Atlantic region of peoples, memories, objects, and maritime passages is an elision of the ocean's geographic presence or an extension of it; whether it is a rejection of the turbulent, felt space of flows that underpins the Atlantic world or a thoughtful reimagining of it; whether Gilroy is missing an opportunity to place the ocean's liquidity at the heart of his imagination of Black post-nationalism or whether he is constructing a Black Atlantic geography that persists 'in excess' of that liquidity.[9] For Katherine McKittrick (2006), '*The Black Atlantic* works to loosen the

naturalization of (black) identities and place, arguing for the ways in which a different sense of place, and different geographic landmarks, might fit into our historically present spatial organization' (p. 13). Drawing on relational concepts of space proffered by thinkers like Édouard Glissant (1997) and Sylvia Wynter (McKittrick, 2015), for McKittrick, Gilroy's oceanic explodes the space of the African diaspora into a fractal of places, objects, and memories that exist across temporal and spatial scales. Such a project, for McKittrick, gets to the essence of geography through a Black reconfiguration of space. By contrast, Joan Dayan (1996) has suggested that in reducing the ocean, its artefacts, and encounters from materiality to metaphor Gilroy have produced an a-geographic text. According to this critique, the *space* of the ocean – the liquid, churning, dynamic, fluid, four-dimensional space of incessant movement and recomposition that is simultaneously both transparent and opaque, and that is encountered by those who voluntarily or involuntarily encounter its depths – fades from view, as geography is replaced by a displaced historical referent (see also, DeLoughrey, 2007; Steinberg, 2013). Entering into this debate, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley (2008) takes an intermediate position when she writes with reference to Gilroy and others who point to the Atlantic as a metaphor to animate Black thinking: 'My point is never that we should strip theory of watery metaphors but that we should return to the materiality of water to make its metaphors mean more complexly, shaking off setting into frozen figures' (p. 212).

From one perspective, this debate can be seen as an iteration of the debate between the relative primacy of thinking *with* versus thinking *from* the ocean. McKittrick sees Gilroy's oceanic thinking as establishing a geography that one can think *with*, expanding one's viewpoint to a world that exceeds the strictly oceanic. For Dayan, by contrast, Gilroy's failure to think *from* material oceanic practices and spaces leads him to abrogate the potential for the ocean to be a space to think *with*. To (over)simplify, McKittrick places primacy on thinking *with* conceptualized oceanic geographies so that one can then think *from* the places of Black experience; Dayan places primacy on thinking *from* the encountered, material ocean so that one can think *with* the oceanic to understand diasporic experiences and identities.

From another perspective, though, this heuristic binary between thinking with and thinking from reveals that the two sides are not that far apart. Both sides are attempting to engage the ocean's materiality and the moments of present and historical encounter *and* the ways in which the ocean, as a social construction, can spur reimaginings of space. The challenge, to refer back to Tinsley, is to do this in a way that retains the ocean's provocative alterity *and* the historical contingency (and even the phenomenology) of oceanic encounters.

To address this challenge further, it is useful to return to Gilroy. Some 20 years after publishing *The Black Atlantic*, when asked to address 'geographies of the Anthropocene', Gilroy used the opportunity to criticize the post-humanist turn that characterizes much of social, and, in particular, geographic, thought. Gilroy's argument is that any understanding of the African experience has always, necessarily, required a consideration of the more-than-human. In part, this is because objects have always been enrolled in efforts to oppress Africans, but also, perhaps more profoundly, it is because that oppression has always involved the association of Africans with an 'infrahuman' nature. Thus, Gilroy writes:

> Before the steady rise of object ontologies reached its apogee, nobody who has been party to the urgent conversations that have reproduced and extended the 'black radical tradition' needed to be re-acquainted with the manifold problems arising from the social life of objects or the complexities of interacting with things and nature. The slaves from many parts of Africa who were exchanged for rum, cloth, guns, salt-cod and other commodities recoiled from their own brutal reification as labour, as capital and as brute. (Gilroy, 2018, pp. 4–5)

Crucial for Gilroy is that these historic processes that have rescripted Africans as infrahuman objects – reworking relations between natural forces, non-human objects, and sentient humans – have engaged the seemingly external space of the ocean, the extraterritorial space of the ship, and the liminal spaces of the coast and the shipwreck to rework (and reproduce) received human-nature dichotomies. To make this case, Gilroy turns to Melville (*Benito Cereno* as well as *Moby-Dick*) and, in particular, to James' reading of Melville. Gilroy writes approvingly of:

> Herman Melville's passionate planetary ontology of labouring humans, marine life, weather, capital and objects which, against the expectations of many scholastic guardians of his work, secretes in its poetics an argument about the elemental significance of racism and modern racial orders [. . .] Slavery's pelagic theatre of power reveals its hidden character in a grey, watery confrontation between the properly human and the supposedly infrahuman. (Gilroy, 2018, pp. 5–6)

Gilroy concludes on a note of hope that the ocean, notwithstanding its central place in 'slavery's pelagic theatre of power', can be a site where that power is reworked. He proposes that at the oceanic point of encounter the agonistic struggle between humans and nature and between humans and the individuals who have been constructed as their 'infrahuman others', can be reconstructed around new dimensions that build a common humanity out of shared, if not necessarily identical, experiences, fears, and hopes. The ocean, Gilroy proposes, has particular purchase as a nature that suggests potential for a transcendent, 'offshore' humanism based on the reflection that comes from shared engagement with a hostile element, even if that sharing is not undertaken as equals. Gilroy suggests that if nature has been used to rationalize human hierarchies, perhaps a reengagement with nature in all its messiness (and, in particular, the exceptionally messy nature of the ocean) may be used to disentangle these hierarchies and build new solidarities.

From an ocean more elemental . . . and more historical

Gilroy's argument is compelling, and his work on 'offshore humanism' does much to 'return to the materiality of water to make its metaphors mean more complexly' (Tinsley, 2008, p. 212). And yet, even as Gilroy focuses on the power of the oceanic environment to rework new relationships between humans and nature (and between humans and humans), his focus on points of contact – the port, the coast, the beach, the ship, the shipwreck – leaves the underlying forces of the ocean – its geophysical and geopolitical *liveliness* — subsumed by the moment of the encounter and by the entities that they produce. My argument is not that we should turn away from points of oceanic encounter. Indeed, encounters provide crucial moments where one can achieve the goal of thinking both *from* and *with* the oceanic environment. Rather, echoing Tinsley's admonition with regard to the ocean metaphor, I want to propose that when we explore the encounter we

adopt a perspective that is both *more elemental* and *more historical*, thereby fusing Melville's attentiveness to the emotive properties of the marine environment as a site of agonistic struggle with Gilroy's focus on the ways in which that struggle shapes (and has the potential to reshape) human–human and human–nature hierarchies. Following McKittrick, this suggests a reorientation of geographies.

Turning first to the 'more elemental', while Melville focuses on specific objects at sea – the ship, the whale, the crew member, the captain, and the symbiotic relationship between them – I want to argue that this ecological understanding be extended to the ocean itself. This mandates a foregrounding of its geophysical forces. The result is not simply a world of waves, currents, depths, and continual re-formation. It is also one that necessarily exceeds its liquidity, as atmospheric and land forces are understood as constitutive of, and constituted by, the marine environment (Peters & Steinberg, 2019). Although an elemental perspective might seem to reduce the ocean to a different kind of abstraction – molecular objects that can be used only to think with – scholars have demonstrated than an attention to the ocean's elementality can, in fact, open up worlds of relationality (Anderson, 2019), complexity (Engelmann, 2019), and more-than-human agency (Bear, 2019). It also can draw attention to the properties that the ocean shares with other instances of 'aquatic space' (Oslender, 2016) as well as to social entanglements that span interrelated but oppositional substances, like the intertwined worlds of fire and water (Peters, 2024). Likewise, although a focus on the ocean as a spectral property, such as the colour blue that anchors the notion of a 'blue humanities', can depoliticize and dehistoricise analysis by reducing the ocean to an abstraction and to the lens through which it is viewed, conversely a focus on conditions and perceptions of 'blueness' can direct attention to the role of the ocean in valuing and devaluing humans and nature in projecting power over space (DeLoughrey, 2019b; Ferwerda, 2024; see also Alaimo, 2013).

Consider how, for example, when the ocean is understood as an arena of molecules – perpetually mobile in four dimensions – the very concept of 'place' as static and determinate is challenged. Is a 'place' in the ocean a latitude-longitude coordinate, a latitude-longitude-depth coordinate, or, perhaps, a molecule that retains its identity even as it moves around a three-dimensional plane? And what of that molecule when it evaporates into air or freezes into ice? Is it then, still, a 'place in the ocean'? In other words, do time or physical condition limit the continuity of 'place' in a marine context? Of course, these are not questions that can be definitively answered – although how one answers them does influence one's approach to modelling or managing the resources of ocean-space (Lehman, 2020; Peters, 2020; Steinberg et al., 2022). But even asking these questions forces us to revisit our understanding of various 'places' in the ocean – ships, shipping channels, ports, as well as individual geophysical features such as waves and ice floes – that are both constant and continually being re-formed, at one moment revealed and then at another reabsorbed within the ocean's incessant flow.

Since notions of place incorporate understandings of time (Massey, 2004; Tuan, 1977), and time makes possible the accrual of meaning (Nora, 1989), how we approach these questions – how we approach the ocean as a space, and how we think both *from* and *with* it – impacts the understandings that we take from our encounters with the ocean in our lives and in our histories, and in others' lives and histories as well. An attentiveness to both oceanic histories and oceanic materialities enables Christina Sharpe's (2016) suggestion that the fate of enslaved African people cast off ships should lead to a focus not only on

their burial ground at the bottom of the sea but also on how their bodies have decomposed, how they have been transformed and moved in space and time by organic and inorganic forces and processes, as molecules transported around the world, through the hydrosphere, entering the food chain, and ultimately becoming parts of our livelihoods and bodies, persisting, as Sharpe notes, in 'residence time'.

Reading Sharpe's discussion of 'residence time' through a perspective informed by Gilroy's 'offshore humanism', there is a point where we all, in a sense, become one with the Black Atlantic. To be clear, I am not proposing that we would all have the same subjectivities in this 'excessive' Black Atlantic world: the position of the descendant of enslaved persons whose racialization is reproduced through contemporary hierarchies is very different from that of the descendant of the enslaver, or from the person whose connections are solely through contemporary economic hierarchies (see also, Hartman, 2008). Indeed, I share Povinelli's (2020) concern about a 'critical ocean studies [. . .] which annihilates the specificity of how entanglements produce difference in order to erase the specific ancestral present' (p. 3). Rather, an attention to the oceanic, informed by the works of Black scholars thinking both *with* and *from* the ocean, can help to elucidate how the historical and contemporary oceanic entangles us all in the history of transcontinental trafficking in enslaved persons, and through its resonances in contemporary political economy and structures of racialized hierarchy, in different ways. The 'offshore humanism' of the Black Atlantic extends in time and space so that, in the end, no one is absolved of responsibility.

Descending from 35,000 feet

Thinking with (and, to varying degrees, from) the sea, (primarily white) critical ocean geographers and their allies in other areas of critical ocean theory have proposed that the ocean suggests a *different* spatio-temporality: one in which space and time are recomposed amidst continual turbulence and re-formation and in which movement takes on a different character because the background itself is not stable (e.g. Lehman et al., 2021). Critical Black scholars, looking out at the sea and considering its role in producing the history and contemporary condition of the African diaspora, have developed perspectives that bear some striking similarities (e.g. Brathwaite, 1981). Noting this co-incidence, it would be easy to suggest that the time is ripe for scholars from various backgrounds to join forces and consider, for instance, ways that the ocean can be mobilized to tell stories of racialization that incorporate the temporalities of the Black experience, in memories, hopes, rootings, and oceanic crossings, while also confronting modernist tropes that denigrate the ocean as an empty 'other' (e.g. Steinberg, 2022). It also would be easy to suggest that the time is ripe for engaging Black temporalities to shed light on the oceanic world that extends to all of our lives (e.g. Pugh, 2016).

While this article holds out hope for making translations across literatures, it also suggests that tensions remain, in all critical traditions, between the starting points of *thinking with* and *thinking from* the ocean. At the beginning of this article, I illustrated this with the extreme example of the 'God's eye' view from the airplane. Staring down from 35,000 feet, blankly surveying a flat field of water without any visible features, the ocean and the airplane both appear immobile. With an absence of reference points to map space to time, the journey is both brilliantly fast and agonizingly slow. The ocean is both

enticingly close and incalculably far away. Experiencing the 'oceanic feeling', the distant theorist, viewing from above, looks inward, leaning towards the ocean as a space to think *with*, to make sense of what one cannot really know, below.

But this is a caricature. Few scholars work from such distanced heights. Even the frustrated, aloof narrator at the beginning of this article was looking for a story, and even Melville found his, as the violence of the marine environment seeped its way into the livelihoods of the men on board the *Pequod*. Whether engaging historic narratives, scientific knowledges, cultural productions, everyday practices, embedded memories, or embodied encounters, most oceanic thought engages at least some aspect of thinking *from* as well as *with* the ocean.

The question, then, is *what* ocean one thinks from and *how*. This is arguably where the greatest potential lies for engagement between the critical ocean geography and Black studies traditions (and their various points of intersection), as theorists, regardless of their starting point, search for ways to conceive of the ocean as a space that is simultaneously one of experience, history, memorialization, theorizing, healing, life, death, dreams, and so much more. Nonetheless, challenges remain when thinking across traditions and positionalities. Gumbs' (2020) work here is instructive. On the one hand, as she notes (with reference to marine mammals as well as humans) we all breathe, we all find ways to survive, we all find love in oceanic darkness. On the other hand, as she also stresses, we all do so in different ways, so that the very definition of 'we' becomes associated less with group identification according to specific properties or experiences than with what she calls '*identification*' (italicized, p. 8): feelings of kinship and solidarity that emerge amidst adversity and struggle, an ocean of empathy that echoes Gilroy's appeal to an 'offshore humanism' even as, for Gumbs, it extends beyond the human.

In short, searching for ways to think both *with* and *from* the ocean may assist us in building dialogue between different lineages of ocean studies. Within our respective traditions we are doing this anyway, as we integrate the ocean into our analyses, as history, as matter, as space, as a scaffold for thinking. However, stories told through analogues, metaphors, histories, and encounters are inevitably partial, and thus the stories that we tell when thinking *from* the ocean will always be multiple, encouraging a further round of thinking *with* the ocean's affordances and meanings. The dialectic between thinking *with* and *from*, and the entanglements of different analytic lineages, productive as they may be, may never resolve. In the end, we may find that, indeed, we swim in different seas, even as they are connected in one world-ocean.

Notes

1. 'Aquatic space' is a term used by Ulrich Oslender (2016) to describe the watery environments that both characterize and rework Afro-Colombians' sense of place.
2. There are, of course, exceptions. Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic* and several works by Marcus Rediker (e.g. Rediker, 2007) are widely cited across genres, as are writings by key thinkers who have engaged with the ocean in postcolonial theory (e.g. Glissant, 1997; Hau'ofa, 2008). A simplified genealogy of 'white' and 'Black' ocean geographies also skips over those who have approached the ocean from perspectives informed by feminist theory (e.g. Neimanis, 2017) as well as a large body of work on perspectives of the ocean held by Indigenous peoples, coastal peoples, and islanders that, in some (but certainly not all) cases, resonate with Black oceanic experiences (e.g. DeLoughrey, 2007; Shilliam, 2015). It also

overlooks (white) geographers who have drawn on the Black ocean geography literature (and the broader corpus of Black oceanic theory) to aid in their conceptualization of the ocean as a space of memory and forgetting (e.g. Pugh & Chandler, 2023; Steinberg, 2022).

3. In fact, there was some intellectual traffic between mid-19th century ocean scientists and marine authors; for instance, Rozwadowski (2019)notes that Melville revised his chapter on The Chart (Chapter 44) after learning that Matthew Fontaine Maury was developing a global whale chart. Furthermore, as Rozwadowski also notes, this knowledge flowed in both directions, with oceanographers following in the wake of novelists and explorers as well as the other way around.
4. There are parallels here with Melville's depiction of the three main non-white characters in *Moby-Dick*: Queequeg, Tashtego, and Daggoo. While each, as Melville scholars have noted, contributes to a critique of prevailing norms of racial hierarchy (see e.g. Blum, 2022; Freeburg, 2012), each is also a 'noble savage' who, as a harpoonist, exhibits a closeness to the ocean and its different/distant nature and an essential distance from civilization, not shared by their white sailor colleagues (Steinberg, 2001).
5. Here, I build on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987 dialectical conceptualization of territorialization, which they develop with reference to oceanic navigation in Chapter 14 ('1440: The smooth and the striated').
6. James wrote *Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* as an appeal to the United States government, while he was being held in custody awaiting deportation as a suspected communist.
7. For a survey of alternate perspectives, where materialities that differ from the terrestrial norm are understood not as empty spaces wherein individuals establish *extra*-territories but rather as alternative spaces for the establishment of *different* territories, see Peters et al. (2018).
8. Since *Moby-Dick* was written before Freud's birth, Ackerman does not mean this literally. Rather, she argues that *Moby-Dick* can be read as an exploration of the same egoistic state that Freud later came to define as an 'oceanic feeling'.
9. For the concept of an 'ocean in excess', see Peters and Steinberg (2019).

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