

Off shore – Gudrun Filipiska.

I am travelling across the Atlantic, whether over or under I am not sure (the former I hope) – sometimes when I am walking around my home, or running or dog walking, I think about where my avatar is now – somewhere out at sea, lonely/floating/flailing/adrift but slowly moving, on trajectories plotted for it by gnomonic projections and fuelled by my footsteps.¹

I often spend time looking at maps of the North Atlantic – floating just above the surface of the ocean as close as the satellite imagery will let me without turning to blur and pixilation. I track ships as they move between Europe and Canada, different colour dots representing different ships – container, dry bulk, gas carriers, ocean liners, passenger ships – I watch youtube videos of container ships, oil rigs, crashes and wrecks. I look at other peoples photographs.

Sometimes the thought of another version of myself out at sea, causes me to stop – arrested by a sense almost like vertigo – because I am scared of the water, the depths. I imagine in moments the possibility that myself and my avatar could swap places – that I could find my self at sea, adrift, scared of whats below and of the big ships, the *real* me replaced by a grey cursor hovering around my life.

I know what I suffer from is called *Thalassophobia*, an intense fear of deep bodies of water, especially the ocean. I am not scared of water itself, the element, but the deepness, the vastness and the unconceptualisable idea of this underneath. This combines very particularly with *Megalophobia*, a fear of large things, particularly for me, ships, tidal waves and underwater unknowns. A recurring nightmare I have had since a child involves being stuck inside a colossal submarine. In the dream the sea is much like space – particularly the moment in the film *Event Horizon* after they fold time – an all pervasive and terrifying atmosphere – not quite tangible.

Gastón Gordillo touches on this vast strangeness. He sites the search for the missing Malaysian Airlines plane in 2014. Satellites, aircrafts, and ships had meticulously searched for the plane's debris, for weeks without avail – surveillance technology in all its precision failed to locate the plane in the vast mass of water which was always moving, enfolding, flowing. Gordillo describes the game of cat and mouse which ensued through the temporal and proximal discrepancies between the objects being spotted by satellites and their disappearance by the time boats and helicopters reached the pinpointed locations. They would disappear, sometimes for good, sometimes re-appearing hundreds of kilometres away. The sea complicit in one of the greatest aviation mysteries of all time.

*'This is liquid matter that...lets the force of gravity pull those objects down toward a dark abyss that the naked human body confronts as a physical environment devoid of solid ground and breathable air: the oceanic void.'*²

Humans cannot live in the sea, the sea kills us, it is not our place. Gordillo further points to a *'generalized ungrounding we call drowning.'*³

But water of course also *feels*. The allegory of our upbringing tells us that once water has

¹ 'S' is a collaborative project between Gudrun Filipiska in the UK and the Canadian artist Carly Butler. It involves a combination of real and virtual walking, various documented mapping processes, a series of photographs, prints and performance works and an archive of postal communiques. Tracked by pedometers, our steps, taken around our respective domestic locations are translated to a digital map where our 'avatars' walk carefully designed routes between UK and Canada. The title of our project references the first transatlantic wireless signal sent from Cornwall to Newfoundland in 1901. The message was simply the morse code signal for the letter 'S'. [View map here.](#)

² <http://spaceandpolitics.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-oceanic-void.html>

³ Ibid

touched you it can tell you about far away places, and they about you – it can transmit something of you. Dip your toe in the Ocean at the same time as your lover on a distant shore and you are *touching*, or so when we are lonely we like to believe.

Masuro Emoto (often debunked pseudoscientist – look him up) claimed that water changed its molecular structure according to human feeling and that 'polluted' water could be cleansed through visualisation and calm thought. What does the water around a drowning person look like according to this logic – can the Ocean feel the distress of a plane crash, a boat sunk...? How does the molecular structure of water shape itself as it coalesces around the dying...?

The birth of modern navigation disciplined the feeling-sea with increasingly rigid striation⁴ across its smooth wilds. Meridian lines, longitudes, latitudes, circle routes, parallels – distances measures, lines on maps drawn. (We know that the entrance of women into this newly striated world was considered incredible bad luck – unless of course they were bearing breasts to the waves and strapped to the helm).

This complicated Cartography of the North Atlantic. Lines of possession – routes sailed by French and British explorers in the 1500s and now by giant cargo ships carrying toys, fruit and gas – you can board them as a passenger should you so wish and travel all the way from the UK to Halifax, Canada – a journey of three weeks – pioneering fantasy and commerce merging with the contemporary internet networks which connect us instantly through cables running deep under the Ocean. Wires splayed across seabeds, emerging as arterial fronds on vastly different but interconnected beaches – you can see the points at which they emerge in Eva Roth's [Red Lines](#) project.

As JR Carpenter tells us, the history of the north Atlantic is a history of ghosts not only in a literal but an ontological sense. Telegraphy has always been associated with otherworldly realms. If intelligent speech and 'consciousness' could be transmitted independent of the body's direct *voice* then surely the dead could also speak to the living though these same electromagnetic means...Carpenter suggests the medium has always been haunted – morse code clicks through static, cables laid under the ocean carrying voices, messages distorted by distance, misheard, delayed. She plays with these ideas in [Whisper Wire](#), a work about sending and receiving through electromagnetic medium, disjointed and disembodied messages appearing as poetry through a javascript generator.

The first wireless transmission was sent from Cornwall to Newfoundland in 1901 (three dots – clicks – for the letter S) the message breaking through the radio hum across the vast ocean – easy to misinterpret, or mishear perhaps, there is still some dispute over whether the first S was ever really even heard at all – perhaps it was the wind, radio interference or some disembodied message from elsewhere.

Amanda Lagerqvist suggests there may be different types of ghost, analogue and digital – different locations of disembodiment according to the era in which the subject died. These presences shift from the back and forth of telegraphy and wireless radio to the transcendental realm of the internet which is always awake, always transmitting.⁵ The sea is awash with ghosts, analogue and otherwise.

The history of seafaring is intimately tied to that of technology, before the advent of radio or digital navigation systems there are accounts of sailors feeling their bodies merging with their vessels – a true afloat-ness which meant, movement and body/boat became one. Jake Phelan states;

'At sea the body is no longer central to perception. The combination of wind and waves

⁴ *The Smooth and the Striated* in Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, London: Athlone Books. 1988

⁵ *The Internet is Always Awake: Sensations, Sounds and Silences of the Digital Grave* in *Digital Existence: Ontology, Ethics and Transcendence in Digital Culture*. Edited by Amanda Lagerkvist. Routledge 2018.

*takes effect not on the body but on the boat; size, depth and distance, position and direction, become relative to the boat, no longer relative to the person. The lived body still perceives, but this experience of the world is mediated through technology'*⁶

He sites an account of a sailor who when feverish with illness saw himself as part of his vessel;

*"Had the feeling that the rattling of the ship's engine was myself; felt the motions of the ship as my own; it was I who was bumping against the waves and cutting through them. Was not seasick. Landed feeling broken"*⁷

Women have seldom in the past had the opportunity to enter into this merging – becoming boat, becoming navigator, they are delegated to the metaphorical world of under-sea, a landless place of death and birth. Because of course (feminist theory tells us) they carry the sea *inside* them.

Yet as pointed out by Astrid Neimanis, boundaries and demarkations are essential as part of this dialogue on aqueous becomings, membranes are crucial, (metaphorical and real) to mediate between our own fluids and the outside. These membranes are about protection as well as connection and porosity, there are thresholds which may hold warning of danger as-well as the promise of safety and *merging*. Such possible membranes are listed by Neimanis as;

*'Gravitational threshold, a weather front, a line on a map, equinox, a winter coat, death'*⁸

I would also list skin, and the ability to hold ones breath.

The sea exemplifies the historical marking of territory as a performed concept through the opportunity for new metaphorical membrane/boundary making.⁹ And brings into relief the gendered practices which move between land and sea; the charting and map making, the esoteric codes and languages and the demarcated realms of 'at sea', 'in port' 'at home'.

Men had the opportunity to make mistakes, to set out and try dying on for size. Donald Crowhurst et al – these are stories of aloneness and endurance.

We know that the histories of men sailing are the same histories of the women and children left behind --- tides of thought and heaving sighs, men *dreaming sea*, the sons of sons of sons, performing their afloatness to the point of – breaking. Towards the tingling excitements of *unknowns* that became '*exotics*' – that became *ethnocides*.

(and then the convenient forgetting of spectator travel).

The idea of being adrift is disturbing in multiple ways.

To mark my avatars crossing the Ocean, [I drop knots](#) in my village to mark distance.

⁶ *Seascapes: tides of thought and being in Western perceptions of the sea*. 2007. Jake Plelan.

⁷ Malinowski, B. (1966 [1922]) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagos of Micronesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge as cited by Jake Plelan in *Seascapes: tides of thought and being in Western Perceptions of the Sea*. 2007. Jake Phelan.

⁸ *Hydrofeminism: Or on Becoming a Body of Water* Astrida Neiminas in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilising Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice* Palgrave Macmillan 2012.

⁹ For more on how space is constructed, ordered and controlled at sea in relation to politics and human mobility see *Lines in the ocean: thinking with the sea about territory and international law* in *London Review of International Law*, Volume 4, Issue 2, July 2016 Henry Jones.

Historically the word 'knot' as a measure of distance comes from sailors counting the number of knots tied equidistant on a rope passing through a spool within a certain time frame, a knot being 1.5 miles per hour.--- I think about the person I am travelling so far to meet, [Carly Butler](#) who comes from a line of Mariners and makes work about sea cultures, sailing and meteorological knowledges.

Her work has taught me that the codes of the sea are many, and complicated to an outsider, but that a lack of practical knowledge can be fatal (discipline is important as her work *1000 knots* illustrates). For the metaphorical flows of hydro-feminism (*In me everything is already flowing* ¹⁰) mean less when you are cast adrift with out ability to navigate or tie a decent Bowline.

Myths of porosity, hybridity and the hydro-kinship of the *Écriture Féminine* mean nothing if adriftness proves you can't conjure water from salt.

The sea cares little for your ability to hold water.

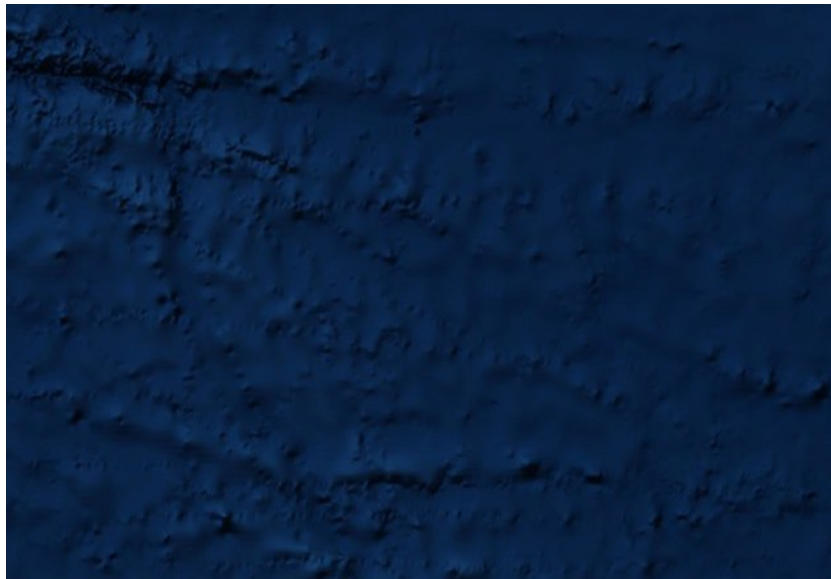


Image from 'S Project' Map , above the Atlantic near Newfoundland.
(arcgis maps – Carly Butler, Gudrun Filipska 2019)

[Click here to view off-shore images.](#)

10 Quote from *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* Luce Irigaray and sited in *Hydrofeminism: Or on Becoming a Body of Water* Astrida Neiminas in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilising Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice* Palgrave Macmillan 2012.