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Becoming-Ocean: Posthumanism, the Blue Humanities, and Disability

Introduction

What may we learn about ourselves by turning to the ocean? The simplicity of the question belies its complexities. Who are "we?" What is meant by "ocean"—the materiality of water itself, or an assemblage of living and non-living elements? The current shift towards including "critical ocean studies," or what Steve Mentz labels the "blue humanities," within the environmental humanities has provided a platform from which to explore such questions ("Submarine Futures" 32; Gillis). Much recent scholarship has taken cues from posthumanism and new materialism to describe the ocean as a space of flows, flux, and "multispecies engagements" ("Submarine Futures" 32). However, this field has not yet been specifically examined from the lens of Rosi Braidotti's "*zoe*-centered approach" (111). Further, while some blue humanities scholarship has considered the body as a site for marine-oriented criticism, almost no research attends to disability. Taking inspiration from Elizabeth DeLoughrey's work with underwater sculptures, this essay will expand upon her analysis of Jason deCaires Taylor's sea art, building it in a posthumanist and disability studies direction. This essay will utilize Braidotti's posthumanist philosophy to examine the underwater world as a place for changing, relational subjectivities, arguing for a generative, affirmative vision of "becoming-ocean."

The Blue Humanities and Posthumanism

The blue turn within literary and media studies provides a robust base of scholarship from which attention to a "critical" blue humanities has emerged ("Critical Ocean Studies" 22). Within this wave of critical blue humanities, scholars such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Stacy Alaimo, and Melody Jue have identified the ocean as a "deeply material place" from which to explore "multispecies others," transformation, and relationality (DeLoughrey and Flores 133; "Critical Ocean Studies" 22; "States of Suspension" 477-479). DeLoughrey combines these concepts into what she terms "sea ontologies," which asserts the materiality of water alongside the "more-than-human temporalities of the ocean" ("Submarine Futures" 33). Subjectivity also plays an important role in these scholars' work, appearing as Alaimo's "trans-corporeality" and DeLoughrey's "*aqua homo*" ("States of Suspension" 476; "Submarine Futures" 33). While Alaimo's concept traces permeability and "networks" rooted in materialist posthumanism, DeLoughrey uses "*aqua homo*" as a negative term to characterize an "oceanic turn to the Humanist 'Man'" and uses underwater sculptures and "sea ontologies" to frame her work ("States of Suspension" 476; "Submarine Futures" 33). "*Aqua homo*," then, identifies an anti-humanist assumption within DeLoughrey's work that aligns it with Rosi Braidotti's assertion that "[a]nti-humanism is…an important source for posthuman thought" (25). Seen as a stand-in for the Humanist "ideal" Vitruvian Man, "*aqua homo*" provides historical situation for the importance of undermining narrow visions of human subjectivity in aqueous contexts (Braidotti 13). Braidotti offers the alternative in her vision of "*zoe*," which she defines as "the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself," which "stands for generative vitality" (60). Applying "*zoe*" to an oceanic context as well provides an opportunity to solidify the blue humanities as a space for distinctly posthuman thought.

Taking her cue from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Braidotti also entangles "*zoe*" with the notion of "becoming," emphasizing her concept's post-anthropocentrism through "becoming-animal," "becoming-earth," and "becoming-machine" (66-104). Braidotti's "becoming" places focus on processes and encompasses "vital materialism" (66). Combining "*zoe*" with "becoming" imagines a universe of "relationality," where matters shift and change, creating a fluid subjectivity that aligns well with current critical conceptions of oceanic materiality (Braidotti 86).[1] As such, this essay offers "becoming-ocean" as an alternative to "*aqua homo*," in which an implicit "*zoe*," with all its post-anthropocentric materialist relationality, replaces "*homo*" to complicate, rather than prescribe, subjectivities. "Becoming-ocean" subsumes DeLoughrey's "sea ontologies" through its focus on process over being, and vitalist "*zoe*" over undifferentiated materialism.

This essay will track becoming-ocean primarily through Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater sculptures. However, keeping to Braidotti's "*zoe*" also means rejecting "the reactive bond of vulnerability" for an "[a]ffirmative ethics…based on the praxis of constructing positivity" that radically decenters the subject for "[t]he self…[as] differential and constituted through embedded and embodied sets of interrelations" (50, 129, 137-138). Braidotti simplifies this as "sustainability," which indicates a schism between her work and that of others in the critical blue humanities (138). Themes of "shared vulnerability" and a focus on destruction come up often in this field: Jan Jagodzinksi portrays the ocean as a toxic space; Serpil Oppermann calls attention to "contaminated fish consumption, plastic pollution, and radioactive waste," as well as "overexploitation and destruction of marine life"; Alaimo's work focuses on toxicity and Ulrich Beck's "risk society," as she argues that "there...is no safe place to stand" (Braidotti 190; 111-

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[1] Braidotti's concept of the "nomadic subject" emphasizes the relationality of becoming, however I find it cumbersome in the context of my argument (87).

113; 446; "States of Suspension" 486-490). These issues underscore the urgency and importance

of the environmental and blue humanities as disciplines rush to fathom the Anthropocene. In her

book *The Sixth Extinction*, Elizabeth Kolbert's prophecy of the current human release of excess

carbon dioxide into the atmosphere creating dead, overly acidified seas startles away any notion

of benign ocean epistemologies. She describes creatures captured from the acidic volcanic waters

around the island Castello Aragonese with foreboding:

> In the chilly lab, the destructive effect of the vents is plain. *Osilinus turbinatus* is
>
> a common Mediterranean snail with a shell of alternating black and white
>
> splotches arranged in a snakeskin-like pattern. The *Osilinus turbinatus* in the tank
>
> has no pattern; the ridged outer layer of its shell has been eaten away, exposing
>
> the smooth, all-white layer underneath. The limpet *Patella caerulea*
>
> [specimens]…look as if they have been dunked in acid, which in a manner of
>
> speaking they have. (Kolbert 115-116)

Kolbert argues that a future of disintegration and struggle awaits us all if we ignore the will to

act. Clearly risk has an important place in Anthropocene oceanic studies of all kinds, but

Braidotti's philosophy critiques dwelling upon such gloom without creating a plan to move

beyond it.

　　　　The word Anthropocene: therein lies the problem. The "*anthropos*" in this now-

ubiquitous term throws attention back to humans as both destruction and salvation (Braidotti 60).

Braidotti's skepticism towards this focus leads her to a "[*z*]*oe*-centered egalitarianism" that

attempts to throw away the "*anthropos*" vestiges of Humanism and capitalism, replacing the

traces with an affirmative, generative ethics (60).[2] DeLoughrey's work with Caribbean culture runs close to Braidotti's ideas in terms of racial and gender boundaries, but this essay suggests disability studies as another discipline to plumb within the blue humanities. In the spirit of Braidotti's aim, this essay will consider becoming-ocean in the context of disability, using the term not only to undermine human subjectivity, but also to reach towards a place of affirmation and social justice.

Becoming-Ocean

If "*aqua homo*" is anything like the Humanist "Man," then he—adamantly *he*—relies upon "others" and "otherness" to exist in dialectical hierarchy (Braidotti 26-30). A cultural "othering" of the ocean accomplishes this task through depictions of underwater ecosystems as "'alien' worlds, completely separate from human activities" on the one hand, and an "'aqua nullius,' or blank space across which diasporic masculinity might be forged" on the other ("States of Suspension" 477; "Critical Ocean Studies" 22). Thus, the ocean from surface to seafloor becomes the domain of "*aqua homo*," a place to probe and conquer. The common quip that "[m]ore is known about the dark side of the moon than is known about the depths of the oceans" encapsulates both Humanistic Man's desire to explore and conquer—the moon and the sea—and the enduring "otherness" of the ocean (Helvarg qtd. in Gillis). Steve Mentz notes that this concept extends to the early modern period, with William Shakespeare utilizing the sea in his work as a metaphorical space of "oceanic depths," even "connect[ing] the alien geographies

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[2] Donna Haraway addresses this problem in her paper "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin" by proposing alternative terminology. Braidotti, however, criticizes this approach as "epistemic accelerationism" ("On Posthumanism" 21:20).

of the moon and sea-bottom" (386). Something different emerges, however, when considering

Ariel's famous song in *The Tempest*:

> Full fathom five thy father lies:
>
> Of his bones are coral made;
>
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
>
> Nothing of him that doth fade,
>
> But doth suffer a sea-change
>
> Into something rich and strange. (Shakespeare 1.2.395-400)

Though Ariel merely teases Ferdinand here to convince him of his father's death, the

song implies something strangely posthuman. Melody Jue emphasizes how Shakespeare

animates "[s]eawater" into a substance that "does not change, but is itself the transformative and

creative element that reconfigures sunken objects" ("Proteus" 246). Within this change, however,

lies the implication of a *commensurate* change. While Shakespeare uses the ocean to enhance

dualisms—death in the sea vs. life on land, falsity vs. reality—he also gives rise to a being made

of the sea, a part of the "other" in a material sense. Bones become coral and eyes transition to

pearls, but this "sea-change" doesn't bury the immanent nature of the man: he does not "fade"

but becomes a creature of the sea, "something rich and strange." Ariel does mislead here, the

word "rich" betrays undertones of conquest that run throughout the play, and "strange" plays into

the notion of an alien ocean. Yet, the man Shakespeare describes cannot fit with "*aqua homo*."

Instead, this passage creates a striking image of becoming-ocean, entering aqueous modes of

relationality by focusing upon the "monistic," post-anthropocentric "*zoe*" where the nonhuman—

coral, pearls—may be exchanged through "nothing" but "a sea-change" (Braidotti 56). The

idiomatic use of "sea-change" to represent immense transformation may then only indicate

remnants of a dualistic, non-commensurate mode of Humanistic thinking.

To further illustrate the tensions between becoming-ocean and lingering Humanism, it

will be useful to take a brief detour back to land. Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *The Seasons* (1563)

paintings display similar imagery to that which Ariel recalls in *The Tempest*, with "natural

objects"—fruit, fungi, vegetables—replacing human body parts like noses, ears, and eyes

("Giuseppe Arcimboldo" 122-123; see fig. 1). These grotesque visions connect, as also in

Shakespeare's play, humor with histories of power, conquest, and scientific exploration across

oceans ("Giuseppe Arcimboldo" 122-123). Arcimboldo's paintings, just as visualizing Ariel's

description, engender connotations of monstrosity and uncanniness. One may imagine coral

bones and pearl eyes represented in the style of his paintings, creating an ocean grotesque of

commensurate materialism. This comparison shows how Arcimboldo's paintings, like

Shakespeare's play, may be interpreted as triumphant Humanism—"Man" in everything—or

represent early echoes of posthumanist thought.

Figure 1: *Summer* (1563) by Giuseppe Arcimboldo.
Source: commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arcimboldo_Summer_1563.jpg

The concept of "pareidolia," as Emily Cock and Patricia Skinner connect with Arcimboldo's art, helps to further break down this division. As Cock and Skinner write, "visual pareidolia" describes how "[h]umans see faces everywhere…[as] an illusory sensory perception that creates familiar patterns (in this case faces) out of everything from electrical sockets to burn marks in toast" (104). Arcimboldo and Shakespeare capitalize on pareidolia to create images of "nature" in which we can see ourselves. Pareidolia ostensibly represents an extension of the Humanist "Man" into the natural world, but posthumanism offers an alternative interpretation. Reorienting pareidolia from a mirror-like projection of self to a connected relationality where we see ourselves in other matter shifts the focus to a "post-anthropocentric vitalism" based on "*zoe*-centered egalitarianism" (Braidotti 141). From this perspective, our ability to see a face without the requisite "human" parts in Shakespeare's coral and pearls and Arcimboldo's plants and fungi shows that human subjectivity may rest *not* in aspects essential to people, but in the flows and forces that interconnect all matter: "*zoe*." More, pareidolia may also represent a desire for life (or any substance) to seek out connection in other "selves." Thus, "*aqua homo*" turns into "becoming-ocean," defamiliarizing human subjectivity without resorting to strict anti-humanist erasure, which is a stance that Braidotti rejects (102-104).

Now we may dive back into the ocean to look at a contemporary interpretation of pareidolia, commensurate materialism, and becoming-ocean in Jason deCaires Taylor's underwater sculptures. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey has already conducted excellent analysis of Taylor's Caribbean project *Vicissitudes*, accounting for gender, race, and Atlantic histories, this essay will focus on a still from Taylor's project *Silent Evolution* (see fig. 2) and photos depicting the evolution of his sculpture *Holy Man* (see fig. 3). *Silent Evolution* and *Holy Man*, both located off the shores of Mexico, represent a small part of Taylor's underwater sculptural work, which

aims to place "permanent life-size sculptures" on sea floors ("M.U.S.A"). One of Taylor's goals

for his work is to provide aquatic tourist destinations that pull people away from "natural

reef[s]…providing significant rest for natural overstressed areas" ("M.U.S.A"). At the same

time, Taylor's sculptures themselves "are made from long-lasting pH neutral cement that

provides a stable and permanent platform to encourage coral growth" and "are positioned

downstream from natural reefs so after spawning there are areas for coral to settle"

("M.U.S.A."). Taylor also aims to bring attention to the Anthropocene and the loss that

accompanies human-caused environmental degradation ("M.U.S.A").

Figure 2: Detail of *Silent Evolution* (2009) by Jason deCaires Taylor.
Source: www.underwatersculpture.com/works/underwater/

Initially, then, Taylor's sculptures seem at odds with Braidotti's affirmative, positive "*zoe*" and this essay's assertion of becoming-ocean. Taylor's work creates spaces for "multispecies collaborations," as DeLoughrey notes, but the focus remains trained upon humans (40). Going back to the concept of pareidolia from a posthumanist standpoint, however, shows how these sculptures work over time to decenter the human. When first plunged into the water, Taylor's art works as simple representation; we identify the material form as a "body," but there is nothing radical in this vision. As the sculptures sit under the water, they work their way towards the grotesque commensurate materialism of Shakespeare and Arcimboldo. Sea life clings onto faces and bodies, sprouting out in odd shapes. Creatures encrust and cling, and colors bloom. In the *Silent Evolution* detail, what appears to be a child sits on the seafloor covered in purple, orange, yellow, and brown splotches, the face concealed and transformed into a nursery for life. A sea star grips the figure's left side, pulling both into the underwater ecosystem. Here, the distance between sculpture and sea blurs, enacting a "sea-change," yet we still recognize it as a body. What we see changes radically, yet we still understand the "human" within the transition. The fact that pareidolia retains its power shows a shift in subjectivity to relationality, the common "*zoe*" of matter: becoming-ocean.

Figure 3: Evolution of *Holy Man* by Jason deCaires Taylor.
Source: www.underwatersculpture.com/works/underwater/

Holy Man works the same way, as corals transform an austere sculpture in a riot of protuberances, building the body outwards. Here, the diminishing of "*aqua homo*" for becoming-ocean is clear. The sculpture starts with neutral characteristics that already make placing gender or age impossible. Corals fill the body's holes, rendering the permeability of the ocean environment highly visible. Water washes through and inside the body, recalling a common thread of marine embodiment in the blue humanities through the emphasis of human bodies as salty, watery beings who have "the sea…in our very blood" (Mentz 383; Oppermann 445-446; "States of Suspension" 477). Multispecies ecologies flourish on a macro scale—all the creatures that colonize both sculptures—and on a micro scale through coral. As DeLoughrey notes, "[l]ike humans, coral are multispecies creatures," surviving through symbiosis and mutualism ("Submarine Futures" 40). The words "like humans" bring becoming-ocean around to relate the connections of all life and the notion of an encompassing sea that floods beyond obvious boundaries. We still see bodies throughout the fluxes and flows of these changes, but ones in the process of becoming-ocean, both recognizable and bizarre, posthuman allies for decentering anthropocentrism. In these sculptures, the ocean clearly shows the relationality of being, a process where "*zo*e" egalitarianism makes sense and "*aqua homo*" seems strange.

Taylor's sculptures, then, show unique, vibrant ecosystems that shift Humanist conceptions of individual subjectivity. But if becoming-ocean means dissolving strict boundaries between subject-object-environment, then attending to the entire ocean landscape is equally important. For one, the sculptures show how the ocean incorporates foreign objects, as planted substrate allows sea life to flourish on and within these bodies. Also, as Jue points out, "[s]eawater itself chemically and vivaciously changes submerged macro scale objects," creating "change over time through…immersion in seawater" ("Proteus" 248). Humans may change the

sea, creating an acidic, polluted ocean, but the material presence of ocean water also retains the ability to act, move, and transform. This viewpoint places seawater as a subject and actor just as much as humans, fitting well into Braidotti's post-anthropocentric, anti-apocalyptic theory. Becoming-ocean shifts meanings in both directions: subjects becoming ocean, and ocean becoming other subjects. In water, things float and sink, lose direction and find their way. Within this world, "fluid dynamics" allows us to "understand the ocean not as a space of discrete points…but rather as a dynamic environment of flows and continual recomposition" (Steinberg and Peters 257). The very material characteristics of the ocean make clear that individuals cannot exist as stable subjects, but as beings defined by relations and change. With this vision of becoming-ocean in mind, we may turn to a subject that offers a fresh perspective for examining becoming-ocean in an ethical, affirmative manner: disability.

Disability and Becoming-Ocean

As noted earlier, the connection between disability studies and the blue humanities remains limited and "largely underexplored" (Ojrzyńska 270). Katarzyna Ojrzyńska has considered what she terms "blue cultural disability studies" through representations of water in disabled narratives, arguing that such "stories…challenge traditional terrestrial and ablecentric binary categories…and suggest their unfixedness and fluidity" (268, 281). This section will build upon this interdisciplinary start by beginning from the posthuman concept of becoming-ocean and examining how it may work with disability studies. Through this, it will work towards Braidotti's goal of a "posthuman ethics" decidedly not "indifferent to the humans, or…de-humanized," but focused upon "an enlarged sense of community" without the "negative or

reactive grounds of shared vulnerability" (190). To begin, however, we must take a step back from egalitarianism.

Understanding disability requires situating oneself within history, politics, and power, according to the "social model" ("Social Model" 196). In this model, mental and physical "impairment" remains separate from "disability," which is defined as the societal reaction to such impairment ("Social Model" 197). From this perspective, the othering of disabled bodies represents a situated reaction to impairment rather than an essential truth. Lennard J. Davis also places disabled othering in contrast to a bodily "norm" that emerged from 19th-century statistics and carried through eugenics, resulting in the modern conception of disabled subjectivity as "abnormal" ("Introduction" 1-14). According to this view, the historical origin of "disability" follows the path that Braidotti traces of Humanistic "rationality" and the creation of "sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others, who are reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies" (15). Posthumanism, then, provides a theoretical lens from which to critique disability and undermine its accompanying rigid ideas of subjectivity. As Braidotti notes, however, "critical theorists need to strike a rigorous and coherent note of resistance against the neutralization of difference" (88). Simply washing away differences with sweeping claims of relationality and becoming erases important subjectivities that provide an anchor from which to begin analysis.

The ocean offers a unique landscape from which to view disability, as it has already been cast as an "othered" space, an "alien" world that conjures thalassophobia ("States of Suspension" 477). Already this suggests a cultural affinity between the ocean and disability as areas in which to explore alterity. Within the waters, however, an even more conspicuous "other" lurks: the sea monster. The trope of the sea monster takes many forms, including attacking giant squids, the

"mythical kraken," the Loch Ness Monster, and mermaids ("Sea Monsters"). Sea monsters play

on our imagination of the ocean as a forbidden place, representing a distinct form of othering that

forms both subjects and objects. This extends too, as Serpil Oppermann notes, to more mundane

ocean creatures, especially "some deep-sea species [that] are depicted as 'alien'" (447-448).

Taylor's sculptures bring a human bodily element to this theme, acting as palimpsests for the

living, changing ocean. In the detail from *Silent Evolution*, blotchy, bright-colored skin, algae

"hair," crusts, and a sea star companion make for a figure reminiscent of those in ancient Greek

myth. The corals on *Holy Man* reach out like tumors, and frills of algae and seaweed stand for

skin, the penetration of sea life creating an uncanny humanoid. DeLoughrey notes, too, that the

encrusted faces of Taylor's sculptures, decorated by "creatures inhabiting the face, eyes, mouth,

or other facial features," create "terrifying multispecies being[s] akin to the futurity of science

fiction" ("Submarine Futures" 41). The combination of animal-human, material-living, and

normal-disfigured makes Taylor's figures not out of place within the sea monster pantheon. They

lurk underwater, shadowy, their elements unfixable, a dream of our worst fears for what lives

below the surface.

This sense of unease and uncanniness also reveals a larger cultural phenomenon where

monsters work as "convenient projection[s] of our anxieties," in which "we recognise an element

of ourselves" (Richardson and Locks 54). As Niall Richardson and Adam Locks note, the human

bodily category of "monster" also largely shifted to "disabled" in the 19th and 20th centuries, both

referring to "bodies which did not conform to the norm" (63). Sea monsters, then, also represent

our fears of being othered and cast into the oppressed, objectified category of disability. Taylor's

underwater bodies stray from the Humanist ideal, embodying a monstrous form of materiality

that reveals the porosity of social categories of normalcy. Pareidolia comes back into play here,

as we recognize ourselves in these underwater assemblages, a recognition that is not necessarily

positive, as it reinforces stereotypes. In this sense, the connections between sea monsters and

disabled bodies create a negative form of identification. The fact that Taylor's sculptures are

lauded also adds a strange tension in which visibility towards otherness increases, but also keeps

the monster at distance as a member of the "alien" ocean. Posthuman pareidolia, however, offers

a way to place this negative or equivocal self-identification within an affirmative context.

Becoming-ocean recognizes the monster's differences as important but not essential. Relational

"*zoe*" shows the monstrous as a fluid identity that includes all matter and possibilities. We see

ourselves in the sculptures, but this identification changes from fear to a celebration of

multiplicities and boundless life.

Braidotti's "*zoe*" represents a positive way to ally matter, difference, and "others" into a

relational, horizontal subjectivity. Rather than rally through "shared vulnerability," either as a

recognition of the monster within ourselves or in the planetary predicament of the Anthropocene,

becoming-ocean shows a way forward by removing "*aqua homo*" from the top of the hierarchy,

in turn removing the hierarchy itself. Because disability relies upon a Humanist ideal of "Man,"

if we replace "*aqua homo*" with becoming-ocean we may support disability activism by

recognizing a disabled subjectivity that accepts differences without essentializing. Embracing

this viewpoint reduces the sea monster to a fellow member of the "*zoe*"-chain of relationality.[3]

Taylor's sculptures show that we may become monsters, but they also show just as much that the

monsters may become us, muting the need for such a category. Disability also then becomes

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[3] While Braidotti's focus on a monistic "*zoe*" may seem counterproductive within the context of a disability studies
that largely rejects the notion of wholeness as ableist, she recognizes "holism" as potentially "problematic" in its
common alliance with a "social constructivist dualistic method," thus not necessitating the concept of the "whole"
within her philosophy (*Enforcing Normalcy* 126-157; 84).

mere difference rather than something to fear or avoid. Curiosity replaces fear with a desire to

pursue connections and find, to bring in Donna Haraway's posthumanist vision in *When Species*

Meet, companions.[4]

Becoming-ocean, however, requires looking at the entirety of the sculptures' landscapes

and the materiality of seawater. As mentioned earlier, the figures cannot be isolated from the

ocean in which they sit. Water flows and changes, reacts and penetrates, folding all substances

into it. Addressing the medium of the ocean in the context of disability brings up additional

points. First, many blue humanities scholars note the unique sensory experience of being

underwater. Melody Jue, for example, writes of the strangeness of being underwater, where

differences in "pressure, three-dimensional movement, light refraction and magnification" and

"sound" directionality force us to reconsider "perception" (*Wild Blue Media* 2). DeLoughrey and

Flores also note that the mixed media materiality of "seawater…absorbs high-frequency

colors…so that lower frequency colors such as blue and green predominate" (162). The colors on

Taylor's sculptures, then, would likely look different on land. Being underwater means being

"impaired" in many ways—the human body cannot conform to the "norm" underwater.

Becoming-ocean means reinterpreting given bodily functions and senses.

As well, Jue describes the "technical mediation" required to scuba dive, drawing attention

to the human body's inability to withstand undersea conditions without the creation of a

"prosthetically augmented body" (*Wild Blue Media* 3). Even the most "normal" body requires

help when diving into the ocean, and technological aids blur the notion of clearly delineated

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[4] A disabled view of becoming-ocean, particularly in the context of Taylor's sculptural work, offers parallels to
Lennard J. Davis' discussion of the "disabled Venus" statues in *Enforcing Normalcy* (140). As well, Mikhail
Bakhtin's celebratory, materialist, and carnivalesque "grotesque body" provides a compelling lens from which to
connect Taylor's figures, Arcimboldo's paintings, Ariel's description in *The Tempest*, and disability (26). These
points are, however, outside the scope of this paper.

subjectivities. No one, however, considers scuba divers disabled or even impaired, though any prosthetic augmentations on land lead many to such labels. This dissonance provides another example of how disability works as a social process, carving out artificial boundaries, exclusion zones where only certain bodies may enter safely. The combination of universal underwater "impairment" and the need for prosthetics to stay underwater highlights how thinking through becoming-ocean helps to break barriers of Humanist dualisms. Like the "monstrous" sculptures, attention to underwater experience opens up the way for exploration of how disabled bodies may experience the world in different ways without relying upon constricting moral binaries.

The second point in the connection between ocean materiality and disability regards water's propensity for flow and osmosis. *Holy Man* illustrates this property of the ocean well, as water and coral polyps wash through the body, seeding new colonies. Stacy Alaimo addresses this aspect with her term "trans-corporeality," which attends to the permeability of the body and how "the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world" (*Bodily Natures* 2). Alaimo often connects her concept, however, to toxicity and "global networks of consumption, waste, and pollution," including "[i]ndustrial fishing, overfishing…[d]eep sea mining and drilling…[and] microplastic pollution" (*Exposed* 113, 111). She also specifically notes that "trans-corporeality" relates to "activist frameworks" and the idea of "risk" ("Contact Zone" 114). Alaimo's perspective, then, aligns permeability with a negative view towards illness and impairment. This runs counter to becoming-ocean and Braidotti's call to move away from negative "shared vulnerability" and towards affirmation and generation. Alaimo's activism is certainly necessary and important, and she addresses disability and ableism often, but becoming-ocean leaves room for an alternative view of permeability, exemplified by the continuance and generation of life in *Holy Man*. If the disabled body calls attention to the permeability of living in

a relational world, then we may look at both illness, impairment, and "trans-corporeality" in light of the possibility for connection and empathy that they bring. Seeing how seawater transforms in ways that increase diversity and beauty allows permeability to exist as a process, neither good nor bad, that generates interchange. The ability of water to move in and through allows Taylor's sculptures to assume the form of complex, multispecies ecologies that remind us of the potential in a posthuman future, rather than of the death of the Humanist past.

Conclusion

What may we learn about ourselves by turning to the ocean? After considering becoming-ocean, this question gains indeterminacy. In the ocean, who "we" are diffuses, taking up seawater, sea creatures, and the complexity of relations. "We" become aware of the Anthropocene and its detriments, but "we" also start to look to our non-human neighbors and the importance of alliance. Becoming-ocean does not propose ignoring the problems of pollution, ocean acidification, and climate change. Becoming-ocean also does not advocate throwing away difference for a flat version of egalitarianism. Rather, becoming-ocean allows one to move between states and suspensions, overturning binaries and leaving room for questions without answer. History and suffering remain, but they gain new importance as opportunities to look at our surroundings and see ourselves in everything, and everything in ourselves, understanding this not as a special characteristic of "Man," but as a consequence of endless relations.

This essay has attempted to take seriously Braidotti's insistence on using "critical theory…for us to come to terms with the present in new, fundamental ways," and to "experiment together with alternative forms of posthuman subjectivity" (187). Becoming-ocean provides a way to bring the blue humanities into this vision of posthumanism, where the material properties

of water and the diversity of life in the ocean show us a way towards understanding the "*zoe*"

that binds us all together and displaces an exclusionary form of humanity. By applying

becoming-ocean to disability, this essay has also tried to show how threads of interpretive

posthuman thought may provide affirmation and dispel the myth of the "other." Because of this,

becoming-ocean lies waiting to be applied to various forms of oceanic critique, building upon

work by scholars such as DeLoughrey and Alaimo, who also find the sea a proper landscape in

which to explore race, gender, sexuality, and varying intersubjectivities. Defamiliarizing "*aqua*

homo" allows becoming-ocean to take over as a hopeful view of the Anthropocene, at the very

least offering an alternative to the hegemony of Humanism.

   This essay will now turn to Adrienne Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" which, for all

its allegory, evokes a pelagic world rich with life and the alternate sensations of breathing

underwater:

> [A]mong so many who have always
>
> lived here
>
> swaying their crenellated fans
>
> between the reefs
>
> and besides
>
> you breathe differently down here. (5.3-8)

One may imagine all of the oceanic others swimming among fish and coral, finding a place

neither redeeming nor degrading: becoming-ocean. Rich's allegory of otherness as a deep-sea

wreck shows again the ocean as a place for what goes unnoticed, misinterpreted, and

unappreciated by a Humanist world that accepts some subjects and rejects others by jettisoning

them into the depths. But those waters may represent a point from which to transform. In

becoming-ocean, one may learn to move towards a posthuman awareness, finding affinity with other creatures swimming, floating, and diving, perhaps becoming a sea monster, but one that bears life, turning away from the too-harsh sun and into the shifting waters instead.

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