

Cultures & Écologies | Kulturen & Ökologien | Cultures & Ecologies
Collection dirigée par Corinne Fournier Kiss, Thierry Roger & Patrick Suter

Cultures de l'eau Wasserkulturen Water Cultures

Édité par Charlotte Ladevèze, Davide Martino,
Eva Rothenberger

Avec la collaboration de Corinne Fournier Kiss



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Cultures de l'eau
Wasserkulturen
Water Cultures

Les crises écologiques occupent de plus en plus de place dans les discours et suscitent les inquiétudes les plus vives. Un « tournant écologique » est en cours dans le domaine de la pensée, mais il peine à se traduire en actes. Le système économique dominant reste basé sur la croissance infinie, les émissions de gaz à effet de serre augmentent, l'état de la planète continue à se dégrader. Et il n'est pas sûr que les espoirs placés dans une révolution techno-scientifique pour résoudre ces contradictions soient justifiés.

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Corinne Fournier Kiss

Thierry Roger

Patrick Suter

Vol. 2

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Wasserkulturen
Water Cultures

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*On ne sait plus que j'existe. Seul un mince trait
bleu, sur les cartes humaines dessinant la région,
indique ma présence invisible à l'oeil nu. [...] Je
coule au robinet. M'épands dans les chasses d'eau.
On m'a ainsi domptée, étiolant ma vigueur,
salissant ma clarté autrefois cristalline. Mais mes
forces anciennes au printemps se ravivent [...].
Goutte à goutte je ruisselle. Je reprends du terrain.*

(Wendy Delorme, *Le Chant de la rivière*, 2024)

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Streams and Floods, Ripples and Flows

L. Sasha Gora

ABSTRACT: When you look for water, where do your eyes turn to? To seas and lakes? To ice and sweat? To poems and laws? This essay begins its search by considering the practice of artist Hiroshi Sugimoto and his ongoing black and white photography series *Seascapes*. After reviewing the role that colour plays in imaginations of water and its plethora of forms, the essay unfolds in two parts. The first reflects on how I approach water as a cultural historian working at the intersection between food studies and the environmental humanities. The second then provides an entry point for studying water and wetness by surveying the emerging discipline of the blue humanities.

KEYWORDS: Seascapes, Hiroshi Sugimoto, blue humanities, planetary water, wetness, photography.

RÉSUMÉ : Lorsque vous cherchez de l'eau, où se porte votre regard ? Vers les mers et les lacs ? Vers la glace et la sueur ? Vers les poèmes et les lois ? Cet essai commence sa recherche en considérant la pratique de l'artiste Hiroshi Sugimoto et sa série de photographies en noir et blanc, *Seascapes*. Après avoir examiné le rôle que joue la couleur dans l'imaginaire de l'eau et de ses multiples formes, l'essai se déploie en deux parties. La première rend compte de notre manière d'aborder l'eau en tant qu'historienne de la culture travaillant à l'intersection des études alimentaires et des sciences humaines environnementales. La seconde offre un point d'entrée pour étudier l'eau et l'humidité en explorant la discipline émergente des "blue humanities".

MOTS CLÉS : Paysages marins, Hiroshi Sugimoto, humanités bleues, eau planétaire, humidité, photographie.

The lighting was low. A series of photographs of water and waves that looked more like screenshots of a film rather than portraits of a landscape snaked through the basement galleries of Munich's Museum Brandhorst. It was my second time encountering the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto. Although the New York and Tokyo-based artist courts other media, photography has become shorthand for his practice at large. My first encounter was at the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, a 2008 stop on his traveling European exhibition titled simply *Retrospective*. There, his *Seascapes* had stretched across the walls, but I don't recall them winning my

attention. Five years later, the title of his Bavarian solo show also started with the letter “R”, but a livelier, peppier one—an “R” that looks more to the future rather than to the past: *Revolution*. Here some of his *Seascapes* hung again, but this time I not only remember them; I now consider their black and white ripples and crests an answer to the two-prong question of what water is and how I study it.

Water reflects and distorts. It chills and connects. It holds and it hides. I am interested in water’s many forms, in its ability to freeze, to boil, to melt, to evaporate, to refract, and to reveal. Moving beyond its chemical biography, water represents a physical need as well as a leisurely pleasure. It is both metaphor and material. Yes, “the sea is not a metaphor”, as the literary scholar Hester Blum asserts in “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies”—a text that is one part scholarly manifesto¹. Blum rallies her fellow oceanic-minded academics to be more literal “in the face of the sea’s abyss of representation”². To further consider the materiality of water. Its weight and its textures and tastes. Water is embodied. It expands and contracts. So what do you glean about a culture by studying its relationship to water³? And when you search for water, where do you look? In seas and lakes? In ice and sweat? In clouds and tears? In cubes and glasses? In artworks and photographs? In poems and laws? With these questions in mind, this essay reaches toward two aims. The first—its fleshiest part—is to reflect on how I, a cultural historian working at the intersection between food studies and the environmental humanities, study water, which I preview in my close reading of Sugimoto’s *Seascapes*. The second is to situate this reading in dialogue with the emerging discipline of the blue humanities, which is to say to provide context and perspective, an entry point to studying wetness and why.

A Sea, A Scape

For decades, Sugimoto’s ongoing series has mapped waters around the world—salt water and fresh. The format is always the same: each “seascape” is divided in half horizontally—a composition that sky and surface share. But this takes on a distinct texture in each portrait. The light disrupts an even 50/50 split.

¹ Hester BLUM, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies”, *PMLA*, vol. 125, n° 3, May 2010, p. 670.

² *Ibid.*, p. 670.

³ This essay draws from a course I taught in 2018 at LMU Munich, *Half Empty, Half Full. A Cultural History of Water in Canada and the United States*, which cast water as a starring actor for studying day-to-day issues and how they are mediated through culture. It mapped the diverse roles that water plays: beverage, ritual, labour, recreation, danger, endangered, commodity, and right. My thinking then developed further thanks to generous conversations with colleagues in Augsburg at the 2023 workshop “Water Cultures / Cultures de l’Eau”.

The formula is simple and yet taken together the series is disorienting. *Seascapes* are of water, but without their titles the images alone refuse to tell you their where. Moreover, these black-and-white-only photographs deny colour the chance to provide any further hints. There is no blue to suggest the Mediterranean Sea's range of cerulean and cobalt, or how Caribbean waters like to paint with turquoise.

What happens when you take away water's colour? When water is untethered from the dominance of the colour blue and its kin? Water is not and has not always been blue. Mimicking a prism, water absorbs light to then project and scatter it. Homer, for example, called the sea "wine-dark" in his native ancient Greek⁴. The poet Mahmoud Darwish disagrees that water is without colour or flavour or smell. "Water does have a color that reveals itself in the unfolding of thirst", he proposes. "Water has the color of bird sounds, that of sparrows in particular"⁵. Fleeting and mobile, light carries colour. *Seascape* draws only from a palette of black and white and the countless greys that separate that two. Each is unique. You cannot mistake one photograph for another and yet my vocabulary feels too thin to index how one differs from the next.

Last year I encountered *Seascapes* again when I pilgrimaged to the Enoura Observatory, a multidisciplinary cultural complex Sugimoto built in Japan and named after the town that hosts it: the Odawara Art Foundation. He intends for it to be his "legacy"⁶. The *New York Times* calls his "complex for the end of time" his "most ambitious project"⁷. "Rather than designing architecture that looks its best new", reports the newspaper, "he seeks to create buildings that will "still look nice after civilization is gone"⁸. Architecture that predicts a building's future

⁴ Melody JUE, *Wild Blue Media. Thinking Through Seawater*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2020, p. x. I review this in more detail in L. Sasha GORA, "What's Blue Got to Do With It?", in Raúl ACOSTA, Matthew GANDY, Maan BARUA, Joseph Adeniran ADEDEJI & Kara SCHLICHTING (eds), "Is There an Urban Nature?", *Global Environment. A Journal of Transdisciplinary History*, vol. 16, n° 2, 6/2023, p. 183-191.

⁵ Mahmoud DARWISH, *Memory for Forgetfulness. August, Beirut, 1982*, transl. from Arabic by Ibrahim Muhawi, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1995, p. 22.

⁶ Hiroshi SUGIMOTO, "A Complex for the End of Time. Planning a Site of Ruins that Speaks to Future Civilizations", *The New York Times*, December 7, 2021, [online], URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/07/special-series/stone-gardens-japan-architecture.html>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

⁷ *Ibid.* *T Magazine*, "Hiroshi Sugimoto's Most Ambitious Project", *The New York Times*, April 3, 2017, [online], URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2017/04/03/t-magazine/hiroshi-sugimotos-most-ambitious-project.html?searchResultPosition=7>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

⁸ *Ibid.*

traces. Sugimoto's museum shakes up time, seeing it from the perspective of, say, a rock rather than a person. Geological, rather than human, time. It throws past, present, and future into a glass globe, spins it upside down, and then watches its snow fall, blanketing different temporalities in the same gentle flakes. His approach was to design a ruin, to lean into and recognize the inevitability of dust and decay rather than to uphold the myth of (architectural) immortality.

In a museum that speaks to a time other than our own, I walked through a corridor of *Seascapes*. One side is made from stone, where the photographs hang, and the other from glass. It ends with a terrace outfitted with a view of the ocean that I can best describe as timeless. In other words, here the *Seascapes* end with a sea view. A trick easy enough to perform in a country where water is as present as land. From left to right, starting with the number of 7 and counting down to 1, there is: *Sea of Japan, Oki* (1987); *Tyrrhenian Sea, Conca* (1994); *Aegean Sea, Pilion* (1990); *Boden Sea, Uttwil* (1993); *Lake Superior, Cascade River* (1995); *Ligurian Sea, Saviore* (1993); and, *Caribbean Sea, Jamaica* (1980). Five seas, one lake, and another that answers to the German word "See", which, confusingly, can mean lake as well as sea. The reflection of the glass frames made it nearly impossible to photograph anything other than my own shifting silhouette.

In *Boden Sea, Uttwil* (1993) the water's colour lightens in its middle, breaking the pattern of uniform ripples. Two years its senior, *Lake Superior, Cascade River* is a seascape with no black, no dark grey. Everything is a gentle whisper of the lightest of greys (or perhaps the darkest of whites). Fog is its own colour. Its own filter. Another 1993 addition to the series is *Ligurian Sea, Saviore*. Beyond the black that frames the bottom of the photograph, it is barely in focus. The hazy sky—a flurry of light and medium shades of grey—swallows any clear line that separates air from water, sky from sea. The water, an ombre that fades from dark black to barely grey, ripples, gently suggesting a left-to-right sway. The oldest of the bunch is *Caribbean Sea, Jamaica* (1980). The sky, a uniform pale grey, claims as much space as the sea. The water doesn't skip, jump, or crash, but its texture is rough, like sandpaper or waffled fabric, or the kind of graph paper used to solve mathematical equations, hinting to its movement even though it looks so well behaved.

Seascapes demand, even force, you to look at water without colour. To consider and confront it on Sugimoto's terms. To exaggerate how it may anchor boats and islands and dreams but water itself is never anchored. Its coordinates are impossible to know. "Water and air. So very commonplace are these substances", writes the artist, "they hardly attract attention—and yet they vouchsafe our very

existence”⁹. With water and air Sugimoto reviews how myth shades the beginnings of life: “Mystery of mysteries, water and air are right there before us in the sea. Every time I view the sea, I feel a calming sense of security, as if visiting my ancestral home; I embark on a voyage of seeing”¹⁰. The distance from see, the verb, to sea, the noun, is short.

More than a decade earlier, at Museum Brandhorst, Sugimoto displayed his “suite of works” *Revolution* for the first time for the public¹¹. The meaning he and his fifteen large-format photographs attribute to the word returns to its origins: revolution “in the sense of a ‘suspension’ or ‘overturning’ of previously accepted laws or practices through new insights or methods” rather than its contemporary convergence with social or political unrest¹². These are photographs, but they have more in common with conceptual art or even paintings than they do with my smart phone’s camera roll. By this I mean that they are about perceptions and perspective. About representation rather than replication.

Revolution complements *Seascapes* to, one, offer a nocturnal waterscape and, two, a radical reframing. “A 90° clockwise rotation turns the horizons into vertical lines”, guides the press release, “dissipating the Romantic image of the night. Without changing the pictures’ material substance or subject, any obvious connotations are masked, their certainties denied by the transformation. At the same time, highly original abstract configurations emerge in their place”¹³. The horizon becomes vertical, a portrait rather than a landscape. The sun a falling star—one parallel to the waters its illuminates, as opposed to hovering over it and ruling it from above. The formula is simple and yet there is something disorienting and dynamic about viewing a familiar picture in a radically different way. And I argue that the same is true about water, about the blue humanities.

For a long time, Sugimoto narrates, it was his “job to stand on cliffs and gaze at the sea, the horizon where it touches the sky”¹⁴. Rather than “a straight line”, he sees the horizon as “a segment of a great arc”¹⁵. Then one day the horizon encircled him, knocking him with “a distinct sensation of the earth as a watery globe, a clear

⁹ Hiroshi SUGIMOTO, *Seascapes*, [online], URL: <https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/seascapes-1>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Museum BRANDHORST, “Hiroshi Sugimoto. Revolution”, [online], URL: <https://www.museum-brandhorst.de/en/exhibitions/hiroshi-sugimoto-revolution/>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Hiroshi SUGIMOTO, *Revolution*, [online], URL: <https://www.sugimotohiroshi.com/new-page-80>, accessed on 18 April 2024.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

vision of the horizon not as an endless expanse but the edge of an oceanic sphere”¹⁶. In *Caribbean Sea, Yukatan* (1990), the sun becomes a rocket, a shooting star on track to meet the horizon. In *Arctic Ocean, Nord Kapp* (1990), it is nowhere to be seen. And in *N. Pacific Ocean, Obkurosaki* (2002) it beams bright in the middle of the photograph. Its bright rays dimming as it spreads its arms out wide. The effect of rotation seems too obvious, too cheap of a trick and yet it’s true: turn the world around and everything changes.

Seascapes previews how my academic training began in art history, rooting itself in thick readings of the myriad of materials and movements that gather under the category of contemporary art. When I started my doctoral studies, the word cultural replaced the art before history and so my work stretched beyond museums and galleries to amass culture at large, especially culinary culture, swooping up restaurant menus and recipes. A firm believer in what Donna Haraway calls “natureculture” and the inability to break this compound into two separate parts¹⁷, my scholarship studies the intimate yet often peculiar relationship between eating and ecology. More specifically I study what is in the water, and how it is fished out, which is to say that I study fish and the worlds they story. Just as Sugimoto reframes the horizon and the light that illuminates it, rendering the familiar foreign, my research also spotlights the everyday, the taken-for-granted, the what is food and what is feed, and for whom.

As I have been drafting this text, the question that sparked it continues to stare me in the eye: How do I study water? The question won’t blink. I repeat it for myself and essay to answer it. Do I study what moves—flora and fauna, ships and stories, people and politics—and how such characters tread across wet expanses, bobbing up and down, braving deeper dives, and then retreating vertically to skim the surface? Is water the stage, the background? Is it the context, the net, that gathers and shelters fish and shellfish? Is water what holds everything together? Is it what holds the world together? Menus often list “sea food”, but not land or earth food, suggesting the sea has fruits of its own. But I don’t study fish per se—that I leave up to marine biologists and fishery scientists—instead, I study how fish appear on plates and in tins, on packed ice in markets and in plastic bags in freezers, on paper and on menus, in songs and in art. So where and how does water come into this?

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Donna J. HARAWAY, *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*, Chicago, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003, p. 12.

A Wetter Humanities

Sugimoto's black and white photographs also gesture toward another question I now turn to: what colour are the humanities? Or, perhaps, it is better to rephrase this question to highlight the possibilities of the plural rather than the absolutism of the singular. So, to try again, what colours are the humanities? The emergence of the blue humanities suggests that colour matters, but blue, as I have shown, only captures certain imaginations of water. What happens if you replace colour with wetness? How slippery are the humanities? How damp and how humid? And why are more and more scholars splashing and submerging their research and following a so-called watery turn?

The study of water has spilled across geographies and disciplines alike. Thinking with water, and thinking about rivers, historian, writer, and artist Jennifer Price zooms in on Los Angeles's "forgotten river". She fixes her focus on the urban because, as she argues, "a Nature Out There says powerfully little about the ways people *use* nature every day"¹⁸. To counter this, she looks for encounters of nature in "unexpected places", in shopping malls, on buses, and in the concrete straitjacket that keeps the Los Angeles River in its place¹⁹. While pursuing answers to how the city could have lost track of an entire river, she argues that "the stories we tell about nature are the most basic stories we can tell"²⁰. Following her lead, I argue that the stories we tell about water—about canals and rivers, about streams and floods, about ripples and flows—are the most basic stories we can tell, which is part of water's appeal.

Ever since the earth was photographed from space in 1972, the blue planet has become an eco-cliché. Literary scholar Steven Mentz is responsible for why some scholars have been coding their research blue. To challenge the dominance of green in ecological imaginations, Mentz calls on the colour blue²¹. As the title of his 2009 article "Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime, Culture, and Early Modern English Literature"²² gives away, he coined a term that he expanded into the "blue humanities" in his 2015 book *Shipwreck Modernity*.

¹⁸ Jennifer PRICE, *Flight Maps. Adventures with Nature in Modern America*, New York, Basic Books, 1999, p. 163.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ I mention the dominance of the colour green, and the blind spots this yields, in "What's Blue Got to Do With It?", p. 185 (see note 4).

²² Steven MENTZ, "Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime, Culture, and Early Modern English Literature", *Literature Compass*, vol. 6, n° 5, 2009, p. 997.

*Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1719*²³. Mentz charts how the maritime world became less present in Western culture during the second half of the twentieth century. But this then changed due to four major factors in 21st-century academic discourses, globalization, environmentalism, technology studies, and postcolonialism, each of which, he argues, connects directly to the world's oceans²⁴. But more importantly, “Looking closely at the sea, rather than just the land”, posits Mentz, “challenges established habits of thought”²⁵. In addition to stories about water capturing core cultural beliefs—a distilled notation—they can unmoor ontologies, especially ones rooted in land.

Mentz casts his words to pay tribute to what historian John R. Gillis calls “the blue hole in environmental history”. Gillis writes, “History has been traditionally understood to begin and end on land”, which flattens and simplifies the ocean, reducing it to a surface to cross as opposed to a three-dimensional space with rich lives of its own²⁶. To challenge history's status as a landlocked discipline, filling this blue hole is about the “rethinking of concepts of land and water, as well as the relationship between them”²⁷. To take a wet approach is thus to not only challenge the dominance of land and the subservience of water, but also to question the very binary that segregates one from the other. And it is to resist the ocean-as-void imaginary.

Looking at the Atlantic as a body of water that some human bodies have crossed only for others to be sentenced to sink and drown in, Black studies scholar Christina Sharpe sees the sea itself as history. “The transverse waves of the wake of Atlantic slave ships”, she writes in *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, is “an archive of imperial violence, an unmarked grave”²⁸. In turn, she advocates for living “in the wake”, which “is to recall the tracks of oceanic and human damage and to bear witness”²⁹. The ocean is a site of loss, but also one of memory, of connection, and of reconnection. It is a medium with which to challenge historical narratives, to sprinkle them with salt and test how well they float in contemporary

²³ Referenced in Steve MENTZ, “Ice/Water/Vapor”, in Jeffrey COHEN & Stephanie FOOTE (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Environmental Humanities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 193. For the book itself, see: Steve MENTZ, *Shipwreck Modernity. Ecologies of Globalization, 1550–1719*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2015.

²⁴ MENTZ, “Toward a Blue Cultural Studies”, p. 1000.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 997.

²⁶ John R. GILLIS, “Filling the Blue Hole in Environmental History”, *RCC Perspectives*, n° 3, 2011, p. 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

²⁸ Christina SHARPE, *In the Wake. On Blackness and Being*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2016, p. 57.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

debates. This previews how scholars approach water as a “theory machine”, with which to “model, reflect, organize, intervene into, and think through relations”³⁰. This refers both to “relations mediated by water, and relations to water itself”³¹. Water as host and home, network and web. Water as history and future.

Water, of course, also takes countless forms. It is restless, constantly transforming, transitioning from liquid water to gaseous vapor and solid ice. Evaporating, condensing, precipitating, local waters connect to global ones, refracting issues from elsewhere. And as the ecofeminist Astrida Neimanis asserts, human bodies connect to other bodies of water. They spill and leak into each other. Keeping up with this, recent scholarship has focused its attention away from oceans alone to water more broadly, from salt water to fresh and the many brackish bodies in between³². Mentz calls this a “poetics of planetary water”—an “inclusive blue humanities” that speaks across histories, geographies, and disciplines to respond to “today’s eco-catastrophic times”³³. Similar to Price’s point that a nature, or in this case a water, “out there” says very little about day-to-day relationships to environments, planetary water encompasses wetness and its plethora of forms.

Planetary water also recognizes hybridity and all that falls between binaries, splashing and shaking a category’s ability to stay still. Geoarchaeologist Elnaz Rashidian, for example, builds upon the distinction between rivers as “natural” and canals as “anthropogenic” by introducing a third category that better represents many current watercourses: “Nahr”³⁴. In Persian, Arabic, Hebrew, Urdu, and Hindi, “nahr” is a term for rivulets that translates as “running water”³⁵. Water runs, making it an actor of its own.

It was only in the eighteenth century that “water was first expressed as the chemical formula H_2O ” and in the nineteenth that it became “recognized as a substance that animates the hydrological cycle”, which is the point at which “we became able to conceive of it as abstracted from bodies and environments”³⁶. This

³⁰ Hugo REINERT, “On the Shore. Thinking Water at a Prospective Mining Site in Northern Norway”, *Society & Natural Resources*, vol. 29, n° 6, 2016, p. 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² Steve MENTZ, “A Poetics of Planetary Water. The Blue Humanities after John Gillis”, *Coastal Studies & Society* vol. 2, n° 1, 3/2023, p. 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁴ Elnaz RASHIDIAN, “Rivers in the Making. The Definition of ‘Nahr’ as a Hybrid Watercourse Based on Geoarchaeological Evidence from Southwestern Iran”, *Water History*, vol. 13, 2021, p. 235.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁶ Astrida NEIMANIS, *Bodies of Water. Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 19-20.

is what geographer Jamie Linton calls “modern” or “global” water and what Neimanis terms “Anthropocene water”³⁷. A resource-focused perspective fuels “modern water” and has become the dominant lens through which to see it³⁸. In contrast, Neimanis asserts that we are all bodies of water. She’s interested in “the sea inside, bodily tides, and human plumbing”³⁹. Because humans, too, are wet, dripping watery beings, she argues that our “watery relations [...] present a challenge to anthropocentrism”⁴⁰. Water is one medium through which we grapple with climate change, how humans—and their appetites—have changed the earth. Floods and droughts, too much water in some places and too little elsewhere. Exhausted rivers and polluted streams. Depleted aquifers. Acidifying oceans. Bodies caught up in one another’s currents.

What does it mean to think with water, like water? And to pair this with a question central to my own work, what does it mean to think with fish, like fish? Anne Salmond, Dan Hikuroa, and Natalie Robertson attempt this in “Think like a Fish: New Oceanic Histories”, writing: “Rather than Earth, our planet might more accurately be called Sea—and instead of ‘New Earth Histories’, we might speak of ‘New Ocean Histories’, a shift away from terrestrial framings and anthropocentric visions”⁴¹. Historian Tamara Fernando further models how employing a multispecies approach aids scholars in “seeing like the sea”⁴². Water is infinite. It constantly flows and evaporates, freezes and melts, making it difficult to ever know. And perhaps this is another ingredient in the recipe for its allure, precisely that humans can never truly know it, let alone dominate it. Scholars—artists and activists too—are thinking with water as a means to rethink the world and how humans share it with others.

³⁷ Jamie LINTON, *What is Water? The History of a Modern Abstraction*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2010; Astrida NEIMANIS, *Bodies of Water. Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, London, Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 4.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19-20.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴¹ Anne SALMOND, Dan HIKUROA & Natalie ROBERTSON, “Think like a Fish. New Oceanic Histories”, in Alison BASHFORD, Emily M. KERN & Adam BOBBETTE (eds.), *New Earth Histories. Geo Cosmologies and the Making of the Modern World*, Chicago-London, The University of Chicago Press, 2023, p. 70-71.

⁴² Tamara FERNANDO, “Seeing Like the Sea. A Multispecies History of the Ceylon Pearl Fishery 1800–1925”, *Past & Present*, vol. 254, n° 1, 2022, p.127-160.

Futures and Other Conclusions

Streams and floods, ripples and flows—these words all double as nouns and verbs. A stream is a narrow river, or a continuous flow of air or liquid or gas. But it is also the tears that pool down your face or the video you watch online. A flood overwhelms, overflows, but is also the act of submergence. A ripple is a small wave or series of waves. It is also how water folds above and below itself. Waves overlap, spilling into each other. The closer you get, the harder it is to separate one from another, to determine beginnings and endings. Waves are multiple, continuous. While researching *A Book of Waves*, anthropologist Stefan Helmreich came “to understand waves as objects through which people seek to apprehend time, to foretell futures: ecological, scientific, political, local, planetary”⁴³. He writes: “Waves are [...] carriers of change, sometimes regular and periodic, sometimes abrupt and irreversible”⁴⁴. Waves are both material and metaphor. And, finally, to flow is to move steadily, a flow is a continuous stream.

But not only water flows. Language does too. And so does capital. A reminder of the many liquid metaphors in English. These are all wet words, which is to return to the question: Why a wetter humanities instead of a blue one? Although Western cultures have imagined land and sea as opposites, others, including many Indigenous nations, do not. Instead, water and land are parts of an ecological continuum. Similarly, in Sugimoto’s *Seascapes* sea and sky melt into each other. The Inuit term Nunangat, for example, includes land, water, and ice. It does not splice them into separates. So what happens if I tell this story instead? Another word for world, I argue, is water⁴⁵. And another word for world is future, which gifts further urgency to the humanities that take water and wetness as their focal point.

⁴³ Stefan HELMREICH, *A Book of Waves*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2023, p. xvii.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

⁴⁵ Here I pay tribute to Ursula K. LE GUIN’s 1972 science fiction novella *The Word for World is Forest*. It was first released as part of the *Again, Dangerous Visions* anthology and then as a book of its own in 1976. But by writing another, I avoid the definite the. The singular the. And instead I opt for plurality, for the power in more than one word. For the slipperiness of synonyms.

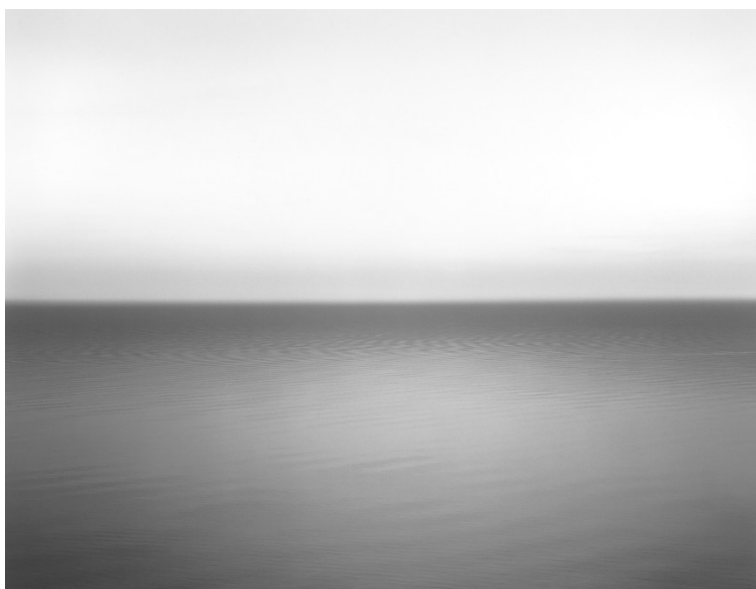
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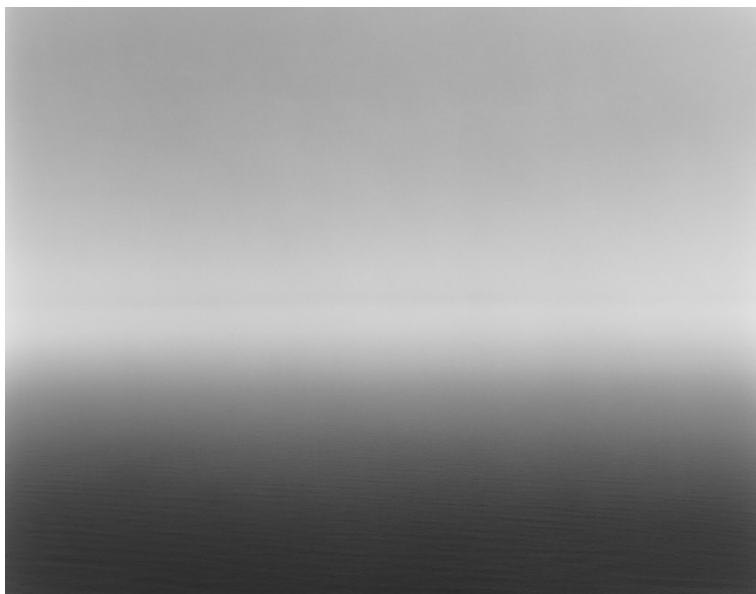
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1. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Caribbean Sea, Jamaica*, 1980, Gelatin silver print, #301
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2. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Boden Sea, Uttwil*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, #389
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3. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Ligurian Sea, Savio*, 1993, Gelatin silver print, #390
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4. Hiroshi Sugimoto, *Lake Superior, Cascade River*, 1995, Gelatin silver print, #426
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