On the Beach
Precariousness, Risk, Forms of Life, Affinity, and Play at the Edge of the World

BABEL Working Group + Literature & the Mind
ON THE BEACH
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PRECARIOUSNESS, RISK, FORMS OF LIFE, AFFINITY & PLAY AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

BABEL Working Group +
Literature & the Mind Center, UCSB

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This is the conference program for the 3rd Biennial Meeting of the BABEL Working Group + the Annual Meeting of the Literature & the Mind Center, UCSB, held at the University of California, Santa Barbara from 16-18 October 2014. Remember to keep your head down when the surf is up. And try not to lose your balance.

First published in 2014 by Dead Letter Office

an imprint of punctum books
Brooklyn, New York
http://punctumbooks.com


punctum books is an open-access independent publisher dedicated to radically creative modes of intellectual inquiry and writing across a whimsical para-humanities assemblage. punctum indicates thought that pierces and disturbs the wednesdayish, business-as-usual protocols of both the generic university studium and its individual cells or holding tanks.

Images of surfers in program from Joni Sternbach, SurfLand (http://www.jonisternbach.com/gallery_surfers.html).
Someone is living on this beach.

~David Markson, *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*

Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people’s hats off—then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can.

~Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*
BIODIVERSITY IS THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY.
PREAMBLE I: GRATITUDE

The BABEL Working Group and the Literature & the Mind Center, Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) would first like to thank the following groups, listed in alphabetical order, for their generous financial support of this joint conference:

Center for Modernism, Materialism & Aesthetics, UCSB; College of Creative Studies, UCSB; College of Letters and Science, UCSB; Comparative Literature Program, UCSB; Department of Art, UCSB; Department of English, UCSB; Department of French & Italian, UCSB; Department of History, UCSB; Department of Spanish & Portuguese, UCSB; Early Modern Center, UCSB; Film & Media Studies, UCSB; Germanic, Slavic and Semitic Studies, UCSB; Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB; Literature & Environment Center, UCSB; Literature &
Mind Center, UCSB; Medieval and Early Modern Studies Institute, The George Washington University; Medieval Literature Center, UCSB; Medieval Studies, UCSB; Mellon Sawyer Seminar, UCSB; punctum books; Punctum Records; Palgrave Macmillan; School of Engineering, UCSB; School of Humanities & Social Sciences, College of Charleston; and Transcriptions Center, UCSB.

Second, we would like to extend a very special note of gratitude to the following individuals for their technical, managerial, organizational, fundraising, advisory, spiritual, and other assistance in the planning and execution of this conference:

Heather Blurton (English, UCSB), Jen Boyle (English, Coastal Carolina University), Julie Carlson (English, UCSB), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Medieval & Early Modern Studies Institute, The George Washington University), Jon Cook (Campus Design and Facilities, UCSB), Susan Derwin (Director, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB), Lara Farina (English, West Virginia University), Linda Flegal (Administrative Support Center, UCSB), Bishnu Ghosh (Chair, Dept. of English, UCSB), Shay Hopkins (English, UCSB), Emily Houlik-Ritchey (English, UCSB), Sparkles Joy (Director of Marketing, punctum books), Rachel Levinson-Emley (English, UCSB), James Kearney (English, UCSB), Paul Megna (English, UCSB), Nedda Mehdizadeh (Writing Programs, UCLA), Fatima Mendez (Manager, University Center Conference Services, UCSB), Christine Neufeld (English, Eastern Michigan Uni-
versity), Melvin Oliver (Executive Dean, College of Letters & Science, UCSB), Megan Palmer-Browne (English, UCSB), Constance Penley (Assoc. Director, Carsey-Wolf Center, UCSB), Dan Rudmann (Director, Punctum Records), Cecilia Schneider (Administrative Support Center, UCSB), Myra Seaman (English, College of Charleston), Amy Shackleton (Palgrave Macmillan), Dana Spoonerow (Administrative Support Center, UCSB), Maggie Williams (Art History, William Paterson University), and Emily Zinn (Assoc. Director, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB).

The gratitude is getting crazy in here. Next, we want to say “if you need to burn some books to keep warm, Ayn Rand paperbacks come in handy,” and “never forget a boy raccoon named Martha,” to the BABEL crew who gathered for a week in (a somewhat chilly) Martha’s Vineyard in June 2013 to help with the initial planning of the conference: Liza Blake (Univ. of Toronto), Jen Boyle (Coastal Carolina Univ.), Lowell Duckert (West Virginia Univ.), Laurie Finke (Kenyon College), Jonathan Hsy (The
George Washington Univ.), Kathleen Kelly (North-eastern Univ.), Otis Kelly (Cairn Terrier Extraordinaire), Karen Overbey (Tufts Univ.), Daniel Remein (Univ. of Massachusetts, Boston), Myra Seaman (College of Charleston), and Maggie Williams (William Paterson Univ.).

A singular debt of gratitude is reserved for Aranye Fradenburg (Literature & the Mind Center, UCSB) for extending the invitation to BABEL to come to Santa Barbara to “think and play on the beach” (alongside her students and colleagues), and for also serving as our chief fundraiser extraordinaire as well as gracious patron of our arts.

An almost final chops is thrown out to Kristen McCants (English, UCSB) for generously (and maybe foolishly) hosting the Saturday night Punctum Records jam at her residence.

And finally, the rank of BABEL Leftenant is conferred upon Jonathan Forbes (English, UCSB) for extraordinary service in assisting Eileen Joy with attending to each and every small detail associated with the local planning of the conference. He cannot be thanked enough, but we have invented and named a special Manhattan cocktail after him,¹ and we will also drop off and fetch his drycleaning for the rest of his life.

¹ The Jonathan: 1 part Templeton Small Batch Rye Whiskey, one part Rosé Lillet, and ½-part Cherry Heering. Shaken over ice, never stirred. Garnish with brandied cherry.
The BABEL Working Group is a global alliance of scholars, researchers, artists, and others situated in institutional and para-academic spaces who are interested in creative risk-taking, unconventional co-disciplinary collaboration, and the cultivation of productively dissensual conversations about Big Questions—the future of the university, the public role of the humanities, the open commons and the creation of new publics, the forms and precariousness of life, the impact of technology upon social life, the relations between the arts and sciences, etc.—with a special interest in holding the past and present in continual productive tension, provocation, and critical relation. Through its biennial meeting (among other ventures), BABEL works to develop new co-disciplinary, nomadic, and convivial confraternities between the humanities, sciences, social sciences, and the fine arts (both within and beyond the academy) in order to formulate and practice new
critical humanisms as well as build shelters for humanist and post/humanist vagabonds.

BABEL’s 3rd Biennial Meeting, held in conjunction with the Annual Meeting of the Literature & the Mind Center, UCSB, situates itself along the fractal shoreline of the Pacific Ocean in Santa Barbara, a town named after the patron saint of miners, artillerymen, explosives, and lightning. In the spirit of such rogueish and transitory confraternities of pirates, smugglers, saints, pyro-artists, rebels, and surfers, and following in the spectral footsteps of the after-party stragglers and wastrels of Fellini’s *La Dolce Vita* stumbling into the early morning light of a bleached-out seascape, where they are caught by the gaze of a dead stingray snared in a fishing net, we will gather on the beach to explore together the question of what it means to be stranded and how the beach itself (writ large as Beach) might serve as a new Academy of Thought, where thinking would emerge from lively (if also messy and uneasy) collaborations between whales, surfers, clouds, waves, starfish, grains of sand, swimmers, lagoons, saints, coral, marshes, divers, dunes, skiffs, snowy plovers, flotsam, ports, sharks, etc.

Our aim will not be to find a site of clear demarcation between water and earth, shore and sea, sand and sun, inside and outside, sky and cloud, human and nonhuman, past and future, University and Real World, work-time and play-time. Rather, we will seek to cohabit a turbulent site of entangled encounter, of weathering and advancing into the weather: a place of “formal inexhaustibility” where, following the thought of Stacy Alaimo, trans-cor-
poreal bodies flow into and collide with each other, caught within and moving along eddies of emergence, erosion, and what Vicki Kirby calls “life at large” (“there is no outside of Nature”). At the same time, we will note that we are outside and we will ask what it means to be outside, exposed to the elements and the elemental, to think but also to feel a beachy Outside.

“On the beach” marks the place where life first emerged and may emerge again (the beginning), where Alfred Russel Wallace gathered his specimens (in the Malay archipelago) and Darwin counted his finches, iguanas, and tortoises (in the Galapagos Islands)—thus we seek to think the beach as site of natality, life, and biological diversity. But “on the beach” also marks the place where Nevil Shute set his 1957 post-apocalyptic novel of the same name, and thus denotes where we all gather after the end. And thus we aim to think the beach as the site of evolutionary becomings and the post-catastrophe (monsoons, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, floods, mushroom clouds, oil spills, napalm strikes, sewage runoff, and other in/human and enviro-disasters). “On the beach” will thus designate for us a precarious oikos (an originary home, a shelter, but also a site of exposure), where we can glimpse beginnings and ends, as well as hetero-chronic temporalities meeting in lightning strikes of inventive, destructive, and evolutionary eventfulness. The beach shows the world and its beings in constant turning, where we experience the viro (“to turn”) of environment-in-motion, and recognize our fragile positions in these shifting, and drifting, sands of an oce-
anic past-present-future. On the beach: to be always-intermediate and also trans-mediate, to turn and to be turned. Between terra and hydro.

As oceans and beaches have also marked the spaces of exploration, pilgrimage, migration, mission, invasion, and occupation, as well as where one holds the line against intrusions of various kinds, we want to consider the ways in which being on the beach involves overlapping histories of territorialization and de-territorialization, of aggressive incursions and displacements and reclamations, of continual embassies and cross-cultural traffic, exchange and clash, of bunkers and signal fires, of war rallies but also shore leave, of the menacing flotilla as well as the lonely skiff lost at sea. What contests are staged on beaches and who or what determines who or what owns the beach and the oceanic waterways? What are the “goods” and “resources” of oceans and beaches, who lays claim to them, and how are these claims contested over time? What does it mean to wash up on the beach, as saint, humanist, missionary, explorer, ambassador, conquistador, or debris (or any combination thereof)? What happens when one lands on the beach by accidental misfortune, where the beach becomes the scene of the missing and the stranded? What does it mean to be abandoned on the beach, to be the shipwrecked castaway cut off from everyone and everything with no way home, where the beach itself, as well as the ocean, becomes (or appears through the human-centric lens as) a site of a-social inhospitality?

To be on the beach is also to engage in active (and willfully passive) acts of rest and play and rev-
elry, of taking off, getting and hiding away, shoring up and soaking it up, idling and lolling and lying down, blankets and bonfires and surfboards: a fugitive and sun-bleached holiday inter-zone that resists the workaday and the so-called real world in favor of vacating, of not doing, not thinking, and instead, becoming-laze, becoming-haze. This beach is where you go to lose your mind and to reorient your senses, re-timing them to the pulse of waves and rolling skylines; it’s where you get horizontal and temporarily leave verticality behind, allowing yourself to sink into the sand and engage in salt-and-brine devolvings. This is a place of longing (for going somewhere else, for new horizons, but also for the blankness of oblivion), which is also the site of “ruinous inward passions” (Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*), the magic of Circe, the lotus-eaters, and the southerly sirocco that carries with it the red dust of disturbing dreams and delusions. But all of this also raises the questions: who gets to enjoy or get lost or go mad on this beach, and who is cordoned off from these scenes and modes of idling and vacating? Who is unable to participate, or is sequestered at a short distance in order to help maintain these beaches in the low-wage zones of leisure service industries? What are the darker costs of beachy tourism?

And thus we propose to comb the beach—not to straighten out, nor even to mine, but to entangle while also pondering. To “ponder”: this word captures the “weight” (from *pondus*) of the earth-water encounter: to ponder is to go ponding and fall into lagoons/lacunae where all the cities are sinking together. So you find yourself in (or is it on?) one of
several strands, a word that defines the beach as both a place and a process, as well as the zone of the tangent and the outlier, a shoreline of navigable routes and an unfurling network that creates new threads and lines to follow—threads and lines, moreover, that are not, in the words of Tim Ingold, “connections” nor “relations between one thing and another. Rather, they are lines along which things continually come into being . . . . not a network of connections but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement.”

On the beach, the site of beginnings and ends, of distinct forms of indistinctness, where the ground is always moving under our feet and the horizon is always vanishing, is where we propose to turn to certain questions, problems, opportunities, and dangers that cycle around the ecological and the institutional, and all the ways in which the two are entangled. Responding to recent concerns over both ecological catastrophe (e.g., Timothy Morton’s *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* and Elizabeth Kolbert’s *The Sixth Extinction*) and the future of public higher education (e.g., Christopher Newfield’s *Unmaking the Public University* and Andrew McGettigan’s *The Great University Gamble*), “On the Beach” aims to work through some of the questions, problems, and opportunities that circle around both environmental and institutional “ecologies,” and the ways in which the two are importantly entangled.

The campus at UCSB offers a propitious landscape for the theme of entanglement, especially as it includes important sites of mixture—lagoon, shore-
line, slough—that defeat neat categorization and signify co-minglings between disparate elements. The lagoon, especially, is a space that refuses neat epistemological and ontological lines, and that welcomes enmeshment between disparate things. The Santa Barbara lagoon is a “new world” representative of European colonization—a new (sinking) Venice—but it is also a force of deterritorialization. How might being on the beach cause us to be more mindful of these always mobile and ever shifting enmeshments as well as of our shared (precarious and vulnerable) creatureliness with land, water, weather, other animate beings, and the atmosphere-writ-large (which could be global warming, the shrinking job market, the de-funding of the humanities)? How to move forward, even if that means, as Steve Mentz has urged (*At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean*), cultivating shipwrecks instead of gardens?
“Nearer to you than the sea”—it’s with these words that L.O. Aranye Fradenburg ends the final sentence of a paragraph mid-stream in the argument of her final chapter in *Staying Alive: A Survival Manual for the Liberal Arts*, “Life’s Reach: Territory, Display, Ekphrasis.” In itself and in context the paragraph is

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1 **Note from Eileen Joy:** Michael Munro practices philosophy in its absence in Edmonds, Washington and is the author of *What Is Philosophy?* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2012); *Of Learned Ignorance* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013); and *The Communism of Thought* (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2014). Because he was not able to attend our gathering, he has sent this missive in his stead, as his contribution to the conference.

unremarkable—which is to say, exemplary: from biology to neuroscience, from psychoanalysis to developmental psychology, to ethology, art, and ecology, the range of scholarship cited and discussed in a single paragraph is par for the course, as is the artfulness with which it is arranged. Nor is the sentence itself remarkable. A typical final sentence of a body paragraph, it offers a paraphrase of the foregoing and an example. What one might call a throwaway sentence. Almost. I’d like to attempt to situate that sentence—”I am, in part, where I am—at a certain angle to the sun, nearer to you than the sea”—and to demonstrate its reach today, here, where the sea could not be nearer.

In a 1917 letter to Gershom Scholem, Benjamin writes,

Knowledge becomes transmittable only for the person who has understood his knowledge as something that has been transmitted. He becomes free in an unprecedented way. The metaphysical origin of a Talmudic witticism comes to mind here. Theory is like a surging sea, but the only thing that matters to the wave (understood as a metaphor for the person) is to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks. This enormous freedom of the breaking wave is education in its actual sense: instruc-

tion—tradition becoming visible and free, tradition emerging precipitously like a wave from living abundance.³

A series of questions, like a wave, here suddenly breaks: That knowledge is not transmittable but becomes so (“Knowledge becomes transmittable” are the passage’s opening words, and although perhaps a salutary assertion, it is no less astonishing for that)—what precipitates that becoming, and under what conditions does it (might it) obtain? When and after what fashion can one be said to have understood one’s knowledge “as something that has been transmitted”? Can that be an object of knowledge? Or is it only then, in transmission, that it’s first given to be “understood”? What frees knowledge for transmission, and in what manner (“unprecedented,” Benjamin writes) does one who has so under-

³ Walter Benjamin, quoted in Zahid Chaudhary, *Afterimage of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 193–194. I could have saved face after a fashion—one to be interrogated in the following text—and quoted this passage from the volume of the correspondence in which it appears. But I let the citation stand, not simply for the sake of honesty, nor to mark a humdrum scholarly debt. It marks an additional—and fortunate—debt: I had the great privilege and pleasure to study with Professor Chaudhary when I was an undergraduate at his first teaching post, the University of Washington, Seattle. I dedicate this to him fondly and in thanks, and to Eileen Joy without whom—and this is the very least indication, the most proximal (the nearest!)—this would not have been written.
stood it become “free”? If it has been transmitted—and is so understood—is it truly without precedent? How freely does the “unprecedented” come to take precedence, here? And from where? Is it “metaphysical” that “a Talmudic witticism” comes to mind here, or is only its “origin” metaphysical? Can that be known, and transmitted—and so known as transmitted—as it is here, where it comes to mind, in a letter? And what precedent does (might) that set?

Must it have come over one like the surging of the sea? Or is that only a metaphor?

That theory “is like a surging sea” makes the (attempted) pivot away from it all the more conspicuous, if less understandable: What is one to make of the syntax of that sentence, of the sudden ebb that stems the flow? “Theory is like a surging sea, but”—but, yet, however—Benjamin goes on to write of “the only thing that matters to the wave”? How is one to theorize that transition? How is one to understand the manner in which that transmission breaks?

(And what hinges on that parenthetical insertion, “understood as a metaphor for the person”? What comes to pass here, very much in passing?)

And what is one to make of the swirling breakwater of figurative language here? How does the mention of metaphor, one staging the wave as the person, the person as wave, named and “understood as a metaphor,” complicate the use of simile (“Theory is like a surging sea”) employed but a few words earlier in the same sentence? And what is the relationship between these two figures? Synecdoche? How is that, in turn, to be understood?
Is this where “theory” comes into the picture? Is this what it is “to surrender itself”—oneself, one’s self, one self or other, “like a wave”—”to its motion”? What’s to be made of that motion so as to crest and break (“to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks”)?

Is that something like freedom (“This enormous freedom of the breaking wave …”)?

Or is it something like education (“… is education in its actual sense”)? What would it be to be one for whom there is no longer—knowledge having become transmittable—a difference between freedom and education, and for whom that is “the only thing that matters”?

Would that “in its actual sense” be “instruction”? Is this where becoming transmittable transpires, instructively, knowledge becoming transmittable where tradition becomes “visible”? To what “visibility,” consequent to what education, might tradition become as if luminous? For how “precipitously” from “living abundance” would tradition have to emerge like a wave for it, in its instruction, to free? (As if into the air, into the light, at a certain angle to the sun …)

An emergence “like a wave”? Or, perhaps, like a person—”the wave (understood as […] the person)”—a certain person?

It is living abundance that Fradenburg (and her companions) bring “nearer to you,” to us, today, remarkably, “than the sea.”
THINGS TO KNOW
REGISTRATION / INFORMATION

will be located in the University Center Main Lobby (next to UCSB Bookstore)

Thursday, October 16
8:30-9:30am & 11:30am-4:30pm

Friday, October 17
8:30-9:30am & 11:30am-4:30pm

Saturday, October 18
9:00-9:30am & 11:30am-2:00pm

ON-CAMPUS PARKING

Parking Structure 22 is the best place to park on campus. There will be signs directing you to Structure 22 from both the east and west entrances to the university, and there will also be signs directing you from Structure 22, Lot 3 (Saturday shuttle drop-off and pick-up), and the Bus Loop to the University Center. You can buy a permit at the marked dispensers located in the parking structure and display it on your windshield. Dispensers accept cash and credit cards. If you want to use Google Maps or GPS to plot your course to the parking structure, use this address: 22 Parking Structure, Isla Vista, CA 93117.

GETTING TO CAMPUS: BUS & SHUTTLE SERVICE

The main mode of transportation for the conference for those without cars who are staying in downtown Santa Barbara and also at the Courtyard Marriott in Goleta, on Thursday and Friday, will be the 11, 15x, 24x, and 27 lines of the Santa Barbara city bus system (for all those
who need them, 10-ride bus passes can be picked up at Registration). Buses run frequently.

FROM THE FRANCISCAN INN >

go to corner of Castillo and Montecito (2-1/2 blocks)

take 15x bus towards Isla Vista/UCSB (approx. 35 minutes)

get off at UCSB: North Hall Bus Loop & follow signs to University Center

FROM HOTEL SANTA BARBARA >

go to Transit Center on Chapala Street, between W. Figueroa and W. Carrillo (5-1/2 blocks)

take 11 bus towards State/Hollister/UCSB (approx. 50 minutes) or the faster 24x bus towards UCSB/Camino Real Market (approx. 20 minutes)

get off at UCSB: North Hall Bus Loop & follow signs to University Center

FROM COURTYARD MARRIOTT GOLETA >

there is a bus stop just outside the hotel at the corner of Storke & Phelps

take the 11, 15x, 24x, or 27 bus (approx. 15 minutes)

get off at UCSB: North Hall Bus Loop & follow signs to University Center
ON SATURDAY, in addition to city bus service (schedules: http://www.sbmtd.gov/maps-and-schedules/), we will also be providing a shuttle service via Santa Barbara Airbus, which will run continuously from 8:00am to 6:00pm, with pick-ups and stops at The Franciscan Inn, Hotel Santa Barbara, Courtyard Marriott in Goleta, and Lot 3 at UCSB. We will also have a shuttle service on Saturday evening from 9:00pm to midnight with service between The Franciscan Inn, Hotel Santa Barbara, Courtyard Marriott in Goleta, and the private residence of Kristy McCants (7742 Jenna Drive / Goleta 93117), who will be hosting our closing party, along with Punctum Records, on Saturday night.

SESSIONS

All regular sessions take place in the University Center (Harbor Room, State Street Room, and Flying A Room) + the McCune Conference Room in the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center in the Humanities and Social Sciences Building (HSSB), 6th Floor (Room 6020); all plenary sessions take place in the Loma Pelona Center—all three of these sites are within 5-10 minutes walking distance of each other. See Campus Map on opposite pages (arrows indicate primary sites relative to our meeting).

Special Note: The HSSB is architecturally intricate (i.e., confusing). Look for the highest tower-like point on the triangular-shaped building, with the red designs around the roof. You cross through a courtyard to enter this tower. This is the only part of the building that has 6 floors, and the McCune Conference Room is located on the 6th floor (#6020).

On Friday, Oct. 17, the Flying A room (University Center) will serve as a media/exhibits space from 11:00am-5:00pm, as well as the site of the Material Collective’s flash exhibition from 2:00-4:30pm.
SCHEDULE OF EVENTS
LANDSCAPE ART INSTALLATION: FLOTSAM

by Samuel Ray Jacobson

Designed as a corollary to Session 12. Idiorrhythm: Mining the Fantasy of Roland Barthes’ How to Live Together, FLOTSAM constitutes a narrow (10’) linear zone connecting the eastern-most boundary of UC-Santa Barbara at the start of Goleta Beach to Coal Oil Point, 2.3 miles west, installed in advance of the conference and visible/traversable throughout the conference. This zone will be rendered in crushed limestone, and its fragments will appear along its course on paved surfaces and packed dirt, within university property. Spanning several discrete territories—the main campus, Isla Vista, the Pacific Ocean, and the Coal Oil Point nature reserve—the installation makes present an ostensibly arbitrary but nonetheless historically and politically complex geography, dematerializing UCSB’s complicated relationships with geography and ecology, its student body and cultural locality, and the State of California. California State Route 217 and the boundary of the County park at Goleta Beach, Storke Plaza, the Isla Vista Bank of America site, and Sands Beach Snowy Plover habitat are some of several crucial nodes in the vector which, to the extent that it flattens UCSB’s histories into a traversable space, seeks to operate in a disjunctive temporal interval simultaneously both entirely of its own imagination and sublimated in a viewer’s negotiation of the project a whole. The linear territory that will emerge is a relic of its own design. Direct but bro-
ken, and comprehensive but fragmented, the circumstantial result seeks to build on Barthes’ suggestion of utopic space as a methodological, rather than heroic, result. To the extent that experience and imagination are required to imaginatively reconcile the dispersed and fragmentary whole, the installation also seeks to explore the abstract possibility of “flotsam” as a paradigm of Barthesian non-design, while simultaneously affirming his ideas of making distance and giving space as fundamental precepts to utopian spatial form. These aspects are amplified and challenged by the shifts in land use pattern across the project’s lateral scope, as the landscape and patterns of private ownership cause discrete variations on the phenomenological distance between fragmentary intervals. As a mineralological by-product, crushed limestone speaks to the crucial theme of “mining,” as proposed for the panel. Concatenating between this quality, the historical and contextual flattening involved, the spatial ambiguity of the fragmented linear territory created, and Barthes’ dictums of space and distance in elucidating his conception of utopia as a real/imaginary category, “mining the fantasy” delineates precisely the conceptual and pragmatic dictates of the project. “Flotsam” is a real and imagined thing, produced through excavations literal and figural, which while oriented in relation to the integral figuration of its landscape also operates with its own, irrevocable, autonomous rhythm. In this regard, the inherent fragility of the project (made, as it is, of dust) serves as something of a theoretical amplifier.
DAY 1: PRECARIOUSNESS, RISK, STORM, WRECK

16 October
9:30-11:00am
Plenary Session I
Loma Pelona Center 1108

Opening Remarks: Constance Penley, University of California, Santa Barbara

1) BENJAMIN H. BRATTON, University of California, San Diego (introduction by Jeremy Douglass, University of California, Santa Barbara)

DESIGNING ON BEHALF OF EMERGENCIES: INTEGRAL ACCIDENTS OF PLANETARY-SCALE COMPUTING

In this talk, we’ll map The Stack we have and sketch The Stack-to-come. Each layer of the whole works on different machines and users at different scales,
and each provides specific challenges for design. Each also generates accidents and emergencies. In fact, the accidents may prove to be much more interesting and useful than deliberate intentions. From NSA surveillance to Jihadist social media and the Sino-Google Wars, computation has become more than a type of machine—it is a global infrastructure that is changing not only how governments govern, but what government even is in the first place. We need to take a step back and see a big picture that is different from what was predicted. A new kind of political geography is emerging before our eyes. We should view smart grids, cloud computing, mobile software and smart cities, universal addressing systems, ubiquitous computing and robotics not as unrelated genres of computation but as forming a larger and coherent whole. Together they constitute an accidental mega-structure called The Stack. This is not only a planetary-scale computing system, it is also a new architecture for how we divide up the world into sovereign spaces. The Nation-State isn’t going away but it is evolving into a Cloud platform (and perhaps vice versa). This poses extraordinary challenges for design and geopolitics. By seeing the whole we stand a better chance of designing a system we will want to inhabit.

Benjamin H. Bratton is a theorist whose work spans Philosophy, Art and Design. He is Associate Professor of Visual Arts and Director of D:GP, The Center for Design and Geopolitics at the University of California, San Diego. Since Summer 2014, he is also on the faculty of the European Graduate
School. His research is situated at the intersections of contemporary social and political theory, computational media & infrastructure, and architectural & urban design. Current work focuses on the political geography of cloud computing, massively-granular universal addressing systems, and alternate models of ecological governance. His next book, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, is forthcoming. He is beginning a book project on robotics.

2) **ROBIN CLARKE + JOSH ZELESNICK, University of Pittsburgh (introduction by Daniel C. Remein, University of Massachusetts-Boston)**

**CREATING A LAND WORTH SAILING TO**

This talk will begin by conjuring two fateful voyages—Medea on the Argos and Pip on the Pequod—to register the particular abjection of adjunct faculty nationally, with an emphasis on the specific catastrophes among faculty at the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University. Indefinitely impoverished, without health insurance, employed for a few months at a time, ever expendable: to what does the adjunct sail? The adjunct is hanging on by a log in a university driven solely by the profit motive and the logic of “what the market will bear.” The “market” becomes the inanimate entity to place blame onto, so the actual atrocity of creating a precarious workforce is nobody’s fault. Therefore, the edifice that invents the adjunct (or any worker) as a disposable worker needs restructuring. Adjuncts
can recognize that they are the faculty majority on most college campuses and together, by taking control over the conditions of their workplaces, they can create a land worth sailing to. The second part of this talk will focus on how to go beyond the recognition of catastrophic exploitation, in order to interrupt and change the system. Specific examples from Duquesne University and Point Park University about how to start a union for adjunct faculty will be presented. For instance, how did we start a union and how did we succeed? And, why does it make sense to connect with community organizations and align ourselves with other broader worker struggles? Finally, how can we build a sense of solidarity that will last—a land that will last within an unjust system?

ROBIN CLARKE is a poet, activist and teacher in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she has lived most of her life. She is a non-tenure-track faculty member at the University of Pittsburgh and a member of the Volunteer Organizing Committee of the Adjunct Faculty Association of the United Steelworkers. She is the author of Lines The Quarry (Omnidawn, 2013), winner of the Omnidawn 1st/2nd book prize for poetry. With the poet Sten Carlson, she co-authored a chapbook of poems entitled Lives of the Czars (nonpolygon, 2011).

JOSH ZELESNICK is a writer, teacher, and activist living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He’s on the Volunteer Organizing Committee for the Adjunct Faculty Association of the United Steelworkers, which
seeks to organize part-time faculty within the Pittsburgh metro region. His poems and essays can be found in *The New People, Whiskey and Fox, apt, Mid-American Poetry Review, Labor Notes,* and other journals. He teaches writing at the University of Pittsburgh.

3) LOWELL DUCKERT, West Virginia University + STEVE MENTZ, St. John’s University, New York (introduction by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, The George Washington University)

**LACUNA (Duckert)**

*water reaches my thighs, pulls at my legs, I turn to face the wall and stretch my arms wide*

Denise Giardina, *The Unquiet Earth*

This talk delves deeply into the conference location’s shallow waters: *lagoons,* fresh- or saltwater lakes separated from the sea or a nearby larger lake or river. “Lagoon” derives from the Latin word for “pool,” *lacūna,* which comes from *lakus* (“lake”). “Lacuna”—an unfilled space or interval, a gap—comes from *lacūna* as well, but in the additional sense of “a hole, pit.” Although lagoons are often associated with desire (the 1980 film *The Blue Lagoon*), recreation (UCSB’s walking tour), and health (Iceland’s famous geothermal spa), they also contain environmental refugees (Carteret Islanders) and indicate communities at risk (Venice). By emphasiz-
ing the ecological and etymological interrelationship between “lacuna” and “lagoon,” I suggest that lagoons are precarious hydrological sites that allow us to address, at once, the political-economic lacunae (gaps) of class and the material lacunae (lakes) of place in order to promote more non/human modes of social justice. Since the early twentieth century, a “lagoon” has described an artificial shallow pool used in the treatment and concentration of sewage and slurry. Coal by-product pools are common in Appalachia, for example, and their breaches have been devastating: the Buffalo Creek Flood of 1972 drowned over a hundred West Virginians in one hundred and thirty million gallons of black water (an event Giardina’s character Dillon, above, narrates). Considering historical and fictional events of lagoonal immersion as examples of what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence” done against poorer “unimagined communities,” I question why these chemical spaces are literally filled yet seldom seen, redressed, or remembered; and I investigate how writer-activists can bring these fraught nonhuman and human submergence zones to the surface.

LOWELL DUCKERT is Assistant Professor of English at West Virginia University. His research interests include early modern drama and travel literature, environmental criticism, and actor-network theory. With Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, he has edited a special issue of the journal *postmedieval* on “Ecomaterialism” as well as an edited collection *Elemental Eco-criticism* (for University of Minnesota Press), and has articles (published and forthcoming) that trav-
verse such topics as glaciers, polar bears, rain, swamps, Walter Ralegh, and the color maroon. He is currently working on a book project on early modern waterscapes.

**BODYSURFING (Mentz)**

Treating Jane Bennet’s notion of “strategic anthropomorphism” as an enabling provocation transforms the sport of wave-riding into a physical and intellectual engagement with the substance of the ocean. Dispensing with surfboards entirely, this talk and the immersive practicum that precedes it examines three key moments in a bodysurfer’s ride: swimming into the wave, the instant of “the catch,” and many possible white-water aftermaths. Treating this three-part cycle as symbolic template and physical experience, the talk imagines the knowledge a wave-rider gains through immersion: swimming creates antithetical movements, the catch temporarily unifies those forces, and disorderly aftermaths cast them up on shore. Bodysurfing becomes, in a repeatable instant, a form of physical and intellectual sympathy with a post-equilibrium environment.

**Steve Mentz** is Professor of English at St John’s University in New York City. His writing explores oceanic ecologies in premodern and contemporary culture. Published works include two books, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* (Continuum, 2009) and *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* (Ashgate, 2006), numerous articles and chapters,
Thursday :: 16 October


[30-MINUTE BREAK: 11:00-11:30AM]
Session 1. Intertidal Zones  
Organizer: Kate Koppelman, Seattle University  
University Center: State Street Room  
11:30am-12:30pm

This session provides meditations on the place, precariousness, and hardiness of literary studies as it currently exists or might eventually exist in/on the ever-shifting sands of the university. These meditations will take on the metaphor (or reality) of the intertidal zone: the space between the shore and the sea; a space of extremity and a changing marker of the periphery; a space exposed to the baking sun and the sweeping waves; a space open to predators from the land, the air and the sea itself; a space subject to the whim of the predictable yet inconsistent tide (regular in its arrival and departure, yet unpredictable in what it will bring and carry away). Creatures that exist in the intertidal zone are varied and are often considered “simple,” yet they all share an ability to withstand this extreme and severe environment. The intertidal zone supports the barnacle, an hermaphroditic filter feeder capable of completely closing itself off during hot, dry low tides. It supports the periwinkle snail, a creature that clusters together for protection at the edge of the spray zone—capable of staying out of the water entirely for up to 2-3 months at a time. It supports limpets—grazers, like the snail, but with less flashy shells. As
one moves closer to the sea (towards the mid-tide and low-tide zones), creatures become predatory (the sea-star) and far more aggressive (the anemone). All of these creatures must be able to survive dessication, to various degrees. Though many are mobile, most must stay if not secured to a single site, at least restricted by the borders of their environment. All must negotiate predation from fellow intertidal creatures, but also from birds and small mammals. All are susceptible to complete destruction at the hands (and feet) of those who come to the intertidal zone to “explore”: humans.

- David Neel (Seattle University): Novel Ero- sions: Probability and Representation
- J. Allan Mitchell (University of Victoria): Betide, or Pooling and Periodic History in Medieval Assemblage
- Susan Nakley (St. Joseph’s College, NY): Sovereignty on the Rocks: Negotiating the Impossible in Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale
- Quincy J. Lehr (St. Joseph’s College, NY): Academia, Inequality, and the Liberal Arts
- Jim Kearney (University of California, Santa Barbara): “Upon the beached verge of the salt flood”: Intertidal Timon and the Misanthropocene

Session 2. Teaching at the End of the World
Organizer: Christopher Schaberg, Loyola University, New Orleans
Flâneurs: Robin Clarke + Josh Zelesnick
The literature faculty at Loyola University New Orleans—precariously perched at the edge of the world, where the porousness of our boundaries which on a geological level lack even the obvious liminal/transitional space of a beach, in favor of those oh so oxymoronic “wetlands” that defy clean separation—have recently developed a new sophomore-level literature sequence called “Reading Historically.” This two-course sequence substitutes careful study of a small number of anchor texts for the traditional bits-and-pieces survey. But how can we teach with “anchor” texts in a depthless sea? Or, to put it another way, how can we rely on so-called foundational texts when we know that all foundations are subject to decay and crumbling, especially in a moment when the humanities are on/under fire? And how do we justify the study of historical literature at the edge of the world and at the end of time? Panelists involved in the development and teaching of these courses at Loyola will offer a workshop with discussion on teaching historical literature on the margins and shifting tides of time and place. Individual panelists will present five-minute meditations on their engagement with issues of temporality, ecology/environment, disciplinarity/post-disciplinarity, technology, and activism in the literature survey before engaging conferees in an open discussion about teaching at the end of the world.
Thursday :: 16 October

Discussants:

- Sarah Allison
- Hillary Eklund
- Christopher Schaberg
- John Sebastian
- Tim Welsh

LUNCH BREAK
12:30-2:00pm
Both fish and fowl, denizens of earth, sea and sky, sirens embody entanglements not only of species, but of environments. The siren lures us to entanglements we might not survive, her hybridity appearing to us as a promise, rather than a warning about the precariousness of the in-between. The sirens’ cultural legacy is rife with paradoxes: the song of knowledge they offer the Classical hero has by the Middle Ages become the seductive power of the voice as antirational; and yet our portrayals of their sensual irresistibility must focus on their visual rather than aural charms; and even then the fascinating beauty that makes the mermaid a mainstay of popular cryptozoology results only in the hideous concoctions of circus sideshows. The siren, it seems, is always somehow out of her element: a marvel collected for our delectation, whose song we prefer to listen to, like Ulysses, without risk. This panel proposes the figure of the siren in art history, literature, and popular culture as a muse to contemplate the kinds of risks she poses for those willing to listen to her song.
Thursday :: 16 October

- Kat Lecky (Arkansas State University): Hibernia’s Siren Lure in English Renaissance Maps
- Susan C. Frye (University of Wyoming): Mermaid in the Marketplace: The Mary Stuart Placard and Emblematic Misogyny
- Laurie Finke (Kenyon College) + Susan Aronstein (University of Wyoming): Sirens under Glass: Veronica Whall’s Lady in the Lake
- Beth Currans (Eastern Michigan University): Seduction, Play, and Constraint: Mermaids in Contemporary U.S. Culture

Session 4. Towards a Tidal-Seismic Poetics

MEDIA/ART
HSSB: McCune Conference Room (6020)
2:00-3:00pm

1) Jamie “Skye” Bianco, New York University

#clusterMucks of #trashNtoxicity (a nonhuman ecological water weirding in two acts)

Act 1 // #bottlesNbones: the Intimate and the Alien

This is a project that investigates the New York City inlet known as Dead Horse Bay. Dead Horse Bay was the site of New York City’s horse rendering and bottling factories and the primary waste disposal zone from the 1880s through the 1930s. Some decades later the trash was “capped” underwater in the
On the Beach@UCSB

bay. Years later this cap exploded, throwing 100-year-old garbage, mostly bottles and horse bones, onto the beach. Further, Dead Horse Bay sits directly across from The Rockaways, a fully inhabited barrier island that constitutes the southern boundary of Jamaica Bay. Human infrastructure on The Rockaways was catastrophically damaged by Hurricane Sandy and by the severe nor’easter storm that followed one week later. The debris from The Rockaways landed on the beach of Dead Horse Bay, now making it a contemporary and historical waste disposal site. The beach bears the debris of human consumption practices and bygone industrial forms of labor. This place is a strange and unbeautiful beach where broken glass cracks underfoot and where feet step on the leg bones of horses that were once the primary source of transportation for the City of New York. Now Dead Horse Bay collects in its strange inventory the debris of a recent catastrophe, Hurricane Sandy. Once a historical site of industrial waste production, management, and recycling, Dead Horse Bay now collects remains of contemporary disaster capitalism and the unnatural disasters of global warming. Adding to the uncanny and the effects of global warming, on Christmas Day, 2012, a 40-ton, endangered, and emaciated finback whale mis-navigated and beached on the shore of Breezy Point, directly across from Dead Horse Bay where scores of horses became the corpses of dead transportation. Dead Horse Bay offers alluring and affective object orientations. It is an object fulcrum for the waste and byproducts of industrial and informatic capitalism for the last 130 years.
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Act 2 // #saltNsea: just another postnatural cluster-muck and paradise

Have a seat. I offer fish, foul, organic produce and the promise of water in this beautiful Sonoran desert and its expansive, once-mountain fed #saltNsea. Ignore the smells caused by decades of annual botulism death: endangered sea birds seeking wetlands, Mozambique tilapia stocked for a long-gone speculative desert riviera, and rotting remains other desert denizens, even the occasional anthropod in the off-El Nino year. Think of this as postnatural composting. I apologize for other smells: salinity, geothermal sulphides surfacing, pesticides and petrochemical food production. We’ve gone green #now: harvesting geothermal and wind energy and farming produce organically. Hopefully the 120-degree temperatures in summer will cook bad molecules away and not just the water. If we diverted just a bit more of the Colorado River (with all those floods, they have extra, right?) to the #saltNsea, then farmers might not siphon without filtration and the airborne alkalis that are blown by the Santa Ana winds towards Los Angeles would stay in the water. They might simply biodegrade. Are petrochemicals, pesticides, sulphides and alkalis biological? . . . Not able to make a trip to this paradisiacal post-natural cluster-muck, where climate change, agro-biz, California/US lack-of-water politics, necro-ecological management, speculative failures, endangered sea birds, and strange clusters of hominids come together (in a segregated sort of way) to inhabit the uninhabitable? Don’t worry! I’ll come to you and bring pictures,
videos, souvenirs and a few thoughts (mine, others and maybe jostled up by the computer) and show the wonders of this second site in my tour of toxic landscapes that postnaturally resist detox and rehab.

2) Christina McPhee, Independent Artist-Theorist

Seismic Aquifer

*Seismic Aquifer* is a new work in drawing and video. A ‘seismic testing’ of site produces a fluid archive, a seismic aquifer. The context is marine climate change and coastal impacts; the program is directed toward cradling/sheltering of life against the shockwaves of rapid environmental change. I live on the central coast of California, where last year, proposed coastal seismic testing threatened a massive kill of marine life from small krill to whales. This crisis, temporarily averted, recalls the tenuous hold of life in waters where a major fault underlies a nuclear power plant at Diablo Canyon. I model structures for sheltering life at the coast during sea rise in architectural drawings, then montage using extensive files of photographic stills from documentary footage shot the marine edge. At sea in the Gulf of Mexico after the BP spill (2010), I filmed biologists bringing up animals from the deep ocean and counting them, examining them, looking for signs of stress. Taking this documentary data into abstraction, I layered animations from graphics of climate change data from *Nature: Climate Change* for my recent collaboration with Pamela Z, “Carbon Song Cycle” (2013).
Remote performances in the landscape, acts of documentation, montage/collage of these images of both landscape and the performance map the internal and external ecologies of our minds and spirits within a nature that exceeds the human. Can we hold life, tenderly, in a kind of resource-cache of nuanced intelligence—human and non-human?

[30-MINUTE BREAK: 3:00-3:30PM]
This session is a search and rescue.

What, or who—we ask—has been cast away or lost at sea? As we sail Critique through time, we call fresh theories to deck to plot our courses through cultural waters, and plumb their depths for erudition. In the course of the many critical “turns” we’ve taken over the last few decades, however, itineraries have been left unexplored, and certain individuals abandoned in foreign ports. So, what happened to those alternative routes and those who advocated for them? And what about the captains we mutinied against? Where are they now? And what about us, here, now? Are we all accounted for? The wager of this session is that some of the theories and methods we’ve tossed overboard may still be useful, though perhaps not as they were once intended. Think: humanism, folklore, philology, D.W. Robertson, grands récits, Hegel, antiquarianism, semiotics, narratology, formalism, historicism, et cetera. What else has grown shaggy and unkempt, marooned on isolated shores? Whose critical flares have gone unnoticed
and unanswered until now? Might some of these paradigms and figures still be desirable? Might they want rescuing? If we unstop our ears can we hear a call to safe harbor—or a siren’s song? Further, we wonder, are all hands on deck and able-bodied? Of theory-wrights queer, feminist, ecocritical; postmodern, postcolonial, posthuman, post*—has anyone been washed overboard who we thought was still beside us on deck? Have any been marooned on the atolls of the (micro)epochs they were charged to chart? Or are any present but haggard—unable to spot the new memes that develop between generations of Life? This session will feature four performances of acts of rediscovery, rescue, repurposing, and/or reclaiming.

- Molly Lewis (George Washington University): Race*
- Jennifer Borland (Oklahoma State University) + Louise Siddons (Oklahoma State University): Formative
- Arthur Bahr (M.I.T.): Old English, Wrong Answers, and Compulsory Figures
- Maura Nolan (University of California, Berkeley): Meter and Embodiment

Session 6. Composing with the Shore
MEDIA/PERFORMANCE
Co-Organizers: Christien Garcia, McMaster University + Jean-Thomas Tremblay, University of Chicago
Flâneur: Jamie “Skye” Bianco
If “beach reading” has solidified into a genre that articulates its own economy of leisure, pleasure, and abandonment in relation to an elaborate configuration of gender, race, and class, “beach writing” remains underexplored. This session aims to tackle the notion of writing at the beach or, more accurately, of writing with the beach; as such, it contemplates modes of multimedia and post-disciplinary composition that engage with the affective atmospheres engendered by “the beach,” “the harbor,” “the shore,” and—more broadly—”water.” We are interested in occupying the tensions that the coast and the edge presuppose—the simultaneity of their being as barrier and opening, or as termination and infinity, for instance. Some of the questions we pose include: What potentialities, soothing or anxiety-inducing, are triggered by a horizon that carries the double promise of absolute substance and absolute emptiness? How do the continuities and fissures of the beach penetrate the realms of the visual and the sonic in representational and non-representational ways? Finally, how do the shape, texture, shadows, and smell of the shore attune themselves to form in processes of composition (see Kathleen Stewart, “Atmospheric Attunements”). “Composing with the Shore” is, then, an inquiry into how multimedia composition deals with the beach and the shore but also into how the beach and the shore inhabit multimedia composition to make themselves felt.

Our session is a hybrid object: it comprehends
two interrelated pieces (20 minutes each) followed by an open discussion revolving around the theoretical issues raised by the encapsulation, through various media, of the materiality and immateriality of the beach and the shore. While both pieces are conceived as case studies or experiments in “composing with the shore,” the discussion, not a Q&A but a collaborative exchange, is intended as a meta-reflection on the creative and descriptive processes deployed through such modes of composition.

1) Jean-Thomas Tremblay (University of Chicago)

Anxiety/Toxicity

Jean-Thomas Tremblay’s piece is a critical mapping of the discourses on blue-green algae, or cyanobacteria, in the Hamilton harbor, in Ontario, Canada. Tremblay’s project centers on anxiety and toxicity, two affective configurations which, he argues, enable a nonlinear account of the temporality of everyday life, in addition to inducing a fluid understanding of materiality and immateriality. His theoretical frame implies two gestures: first, the extension of toxicity into the social (which evokes tropes such as “toxic [social] environment” and “toxic relationship”), and second, the extension of anxiety into the realm of biota and inanimate objects. Anxiety, in Tremblay’s frame, designates the inability of matter at large (including assemblages such as ecosystems) to project itself into a blurry future due to the instability of its toxic present (see Sianne Ngai, Ugly Feelings). While anxiety destabilizes the “projective de-
vices” that sequentially organize past, present, and future, toxicity annihilates the distinction between contaminator and contaminated, polluter and polluted, active and passive (see Mel Y. Chen, Animacies). The core component of Tremblay’s presentation is a video installation that conveys the logic of disrupted projections that characterizes an anxious and toxic ecosystem as well as the posthuman modes of sociality thereby prompted.

2) Christien Garcia (McMaster University)

Still

In the narrative of the family trip to the sea, it is customary, especially for the child, to take something of the landscape home. A vial of sand, a collection of stones, a pearly shell—little souvenirs that are for keeping but also for losing, so that among the debris of the passing years they might, perhaps suddenly, be found and the beach and that vacation taken many years ago remembered. As this little script suggests, the beach is an important discursive site for the distances negotiated by vacation and home, memory and present, desire and materiality. The beach is as much as anything an experience of being away from the beach. As Adam Phillips says in Intimacies, “we live our lives forward but we desire backwards” and the lore of the beach is indebted to that returning impulse. In “Still,” Christien Garcia frames the beach as having to do not only with the recollection or desired repetition of past experi-
ence, but also with the concomitant struggle of having something or nothing to say in the present. A collection of stills from a family home video (once lost, now found and newly digitized) depicting his first trip to the sea as a six-year-old is presented alongside orated excerpts from the scripts of two “old Hollywood” films that use the littoral landscape as the threshold for romances about to begin and about to end (Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing, 1955; and The Postman Always Rings Twice, 1946). These films lend drama to the tedium of a long, plotless home video but more importantly they help absolve it of a predetermined narrative. They help Garcia to think in the present the capacity to disrupt and remake—to think memory as a kind of starting rooted in stillness.

[30-MINUTE BREAK: 4:30-5:00PM]
In Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Franklin’s Tale*, Dorigen sets Aurelius the seemingly impossible task of removing “alle the rokkes, stoon by stoon” from the coast of the British isle. Her motives for doing so are explicitly anthropocentric, motivated by her anxiety that her husband, Arveragus, might sail across the sea only for his ship to hit a rock and sink within sight of home. Of course, Dorigen’s command that Aurelius make “the coost so clene / Of rokkes that ther nys no stoon ysene” presupposes that human concerns (i.e., her love for her husband) trump any ethical commitment to preserve the natural environment. The question of whether or not Chaucer himself espouses such anthropocentric views, however, is quite certainly open for review. In another Canterbury tale, the *Man of Law’s Tale*, the Sultan of Syria’s wicked mother places Custance on a rudderless ship and casts her out to sea, hoping she will perish there, although she eventually washes up on the shores of Northumbria. Although the Man of Law initially attributes the agency that causes Custance to wash up on the Northumbrian beach to the
sea’s waves, shortly thereafter, he tells us that the “[t]he wyl of Crist” moored her on a sand dune until the turn of the tide. If Dorigen advocates the alteration of the landscape for the sake of anthropocentric ends, the Man of Law suggests that the coast shapes itself through anthropocentric means—the will of Christ. Once again, the question of whether Chaucer’s poetry participates in such latent anthropocentricism or satirizes it is open for debate. If Chaucer wasn’t exactly an ecocritic, he was certainly concerned about man’s effect on the environment. Although the poet did not share our concern that increased carbon levels equate to higher sea levels, the Miller’s Tale clearly indicates that Chaucer and his contemporaries at least acknowledged the possibility that human behavior can engulf the entire world in a watery grave. This panel explores the manner in which Chaucer’s various depictions of coastal regions assess the interdependence of cultural fantasy and ecological reality. How do Chaucer’s characters construct the beach? How does the beach act as a liminal space in Chaucer’s poetry? How does Chaucer’s theological worldview effect his conceptualization of the beach? Do Chaucer’s fantasies regarding the beach anticipate our own; or do they demonstrate our departure from the premodern past?

- Brantley Bryant (Sonoma State University): Ceyx on the Beach: The Vanishing Shore of the Book of the Duchess
- Emily Houlik-Ritchey (University of California, Santa Barbara): Dorigen’s Rocky Coast: An Eco-critical Reading
On the Beach@UCSB

- Kristi Janelle Castleberry (University of Rochester): “And in the sond hir ship stiked so faste”: Littoral Readings of Chaucer’s Man of Law’s Tale
- Paul Megna (University of California, Santa Barbara): Response

Session 8. The Nature of the Beast/Beasts of Nature: Monstrous Environments
Co-Organizers: Thea Cervone, University of Southern California + Asa Mittman, California State University, Chico
University Center: State Street Room
5:00-6:00pm

As BABEL heads to the beach, a liminal zone where elements and environments alternately crash together violently and gently lap at one another’s edges, we want to see what would happen if we were to collide monster theory with ecocriticism, letting them wash over one another and grind each other down, just a bit. These talks discuss monstrosity and its relation to the various slippages invoked by “the beach,” and “beaching,” not as slashed binaries but as hyphenated hybrids: nature-culture, monster-human, eco-monster, medieval-modern and us-them.

- Alan S. Montroso (The George Washington University): Ocean is the New East:
Contemporary Representations of Sea Life and Mandeville’s Monstrous Ecosystems

- Megan Palmer Browne (University of California, Santa Barbara): Great Fishes and Monstrous Men
- Erin Vander Wall (The George Washington University): Quickening Sand

RECEPTION
6:00-7:00pm
Upper Balcony, University Center
(facing lagoon/ocean)

*city buses (11, 15x & 24x) leave Bus Loop to downtown every 15-20 minutes between 7:00-9:30pm
AFTER-DINNER GATHERING

SANTA BARBARA BREWING COMPANY

10:00pm onward

501 State Street

downtown Santa Barbara
DAY 2: FORMS OF LIFE, MATERIALS & MATTERING, AESTHETICS

17 October
9:30-11:00am
Plenary Session II
Loma Pelona Center 1108

1) MORTEZA GHRIB, Gharib Research Group, California Institute of Technology (introduction by Aranye Fradenburg, University of California, Santa Barbara)

BIO-INSPIRED DESIGN: BIG LESSONS FROM TINY ZEBRAFISH HEARTS TO GECKO TOES

Jet planes crossing oceans do not mimic the flapping of birds. In the same spirit, bio-inspired engineering views nature’s devices by understanding how nature manufactures them rather than by mimicking its final products. Inside the embryonic heart of a Zebrafish we follow the dynamic dances of a few cells to witness how nature constructs a physiological pumping
machine in just a few days based on the same physical principle that sound waves obey when reflecting off walls inside a music hall. The result is a valveless heart that would act as an imprint for the development of sophisticated valvular adult hearts. One can apply similar principles to learn from nature how the toes of Geckos function across meso, micro, and nano scales, using Van der Waals’ forces to adhere even on molecularly smooth hydrophobic surfaces or to be completely repelled from them. Such bio-inspired approaches have resulted in the development of carbon-based nanotechnologies for better solar power generation and de-salination applications. In this talk, I will share my work in bio-inspired engineering in order to show some of the creative ways in which nature, science, technology, and also art inform each other in valuable ways.

MORTEZA GHARIB is Hans W. Liepmann Professor of Aeronautics and Professor of Bio-Inspired Engineering, as well as a Vice Provost with a special focus on research, at Caltech. Professor Gharib has made contributions to a wide array of research topics ranging from the fundamental analysis of biological flows, to the development of bio-inspired medical devices, to advanced flow visualization techniques. One of his more unusual studies was his work with a student several years ago where they raised a 30000-pound obelisk into place using a single kite and speculated that the ancient Egyptians may have moved the massive stones from which the pyramids were built and raised obelisks by flying them into place. Gharib is also a Fellow of the Inter-
national Academy of Medical and Biological Engineering.

2) MARCOS NOVAK, University of California, Santa Barbara (introduction by Eileen Joy, BABEL Working Group)

A SURE-TO-BE-AMAZING TALK FOR WHICH WE DON’T YET HAVE THE PARTICULARS

MARCOS NOVAK is Professor, and Vice-Chair, of the Media Arts & Technology graduate program, and Director of the transLAB, at University of California, Santa Barbara. Novak is an architect, composer, artist and theorist who is a pioneer in the field of virtual architecture. In the mid 1990s, his contribution to International architectural discourse was further expanded by the coining and definition of the term “Transarchitectures.” His approach: “we conceive algorithmically (morphogenesis); we model numerically (rapid prototyping); we build robotically (new tectonics); we inhabit interactively (intelligent space); we telecommunicate instantly (panopticon); we are informed immersively (liquid architectures); we socialise nonlocally (nonlocal public domain); we evert virtuality (transarchitectures).” He has also posited a new “Soft Babylon,” a theoretical stance which posits that our digitized architectural palette is causing us to create a wired Situationist city, while we struggle with some of the massive paradigm shifts that our era will and must face. Whilst articulating highly fluent theory, he has prac-
ticed, producing beautiful ethereal architectures that flux and shimmer as his algorithms run their designed logics. He has published, lectured, and exhibited his work internationally.

3) Stacy Alaimo, University of Texas at Arlington (introduction by Karl Steel, Brooklyn College, CUNY)

**YOUR SHELL ON ACID: MATERIAL IMMERSION, ANTHROPOCENE DISSOLVES**

Who is the “anthro” of the “anthropocene?” Is it possible to inhabit this prefix or think from such a perspective? While the term anthropocene would seem to hail us into a massive, disorienting expanse of epochal species identity, many accounts of the anthropocene reinstall rather familiar versions of “man” and the human, which fail to embody a new species identity that the epoch would seem to require. Feminist theory, long critical of “man,” the disembodied, rational subject, and material feminisms, which stress inter- or intra- actions between humans and the wider physical world, provide alternatives to accounts that reiterate man as a bound-ed being endowed with unilateral agency. Meanwhile as some formulations of the anthropocene focus on geology, depicting stark histories of man and rock in which other life forms and biological processes are strangely absent, the acidifying seas, the liquid index of the anthropocene, are disregarded, even as billions of tiny shelled creatures will
meet their end in a catastrophic dissolve that will reverberate through the food webs of the entire ocean. Thinking with these creatures, thinking of your shell on acid, provokes an “ecodelic,” scale-shifting, dis/identification, that insists whatever the “anthro” of the anthropocene was, is, or will be, the anthropocene must be thought with the multitude of creatures that will not be reconstituted, will not be safely ensconced, but will, instead, dissolve.

STACY ALAIMO is Professor of English and Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Arlington. She has published many essays in the environmental humanities, science studies, and feminist theory, including pieces on transcorporeality at the bottom of the sea, new materialism in the abyss, gelatinous posthumanism, and queer animals. Her publications include Undomesticated Ground: Recasting Nature as Feminist Space; Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self; and the collection, edited with Susan J. Hekman, Material Feminisms. Her current projects include, Sea Creatures and the Limits of Animal Studies: Science, Aesthetics, Ethics; and Protest and Pleasure: The Strange Agencies of Bodies and Places.
Horizons intersect and connect the edges of worlds. Bisecting the vertical, invocations of the horizontal idealistically distribute egalitarian contingencies. This panel explores the concept and experience of horizontality: As a purely pictoral image, the horizon exists as a juxtaposition of hues. Given context, knowledge, and progress, it has come to not only symbolize but actually be a point beyond which we as humans cannot transfer through. In both forward and upward directions, it shows us that by being on earth, we are actually in the meeting point between the ‘heavens and earth.’ It is only when we view a horizon with clear definitive characteristics that this is allowed into our consciousness. In reality, we are living nearly every moment within this transitory and turbulent meeting point: the point where weather as we know it is created and brought to its climax. It is not a point or a long line, but rather endless spherical segments or loops that make up the image of the globe. Nothing above us is solid besides the passing meteorite or planet. It is daunting and most likely terrifying when truly explored.
For our abiding Ptolemaic phenomenology, the moon does rise and the sun does set into the sea. Political horizontality is no less elemental, whether in the uncompromising imaginations of anarchic syndicalism or in Deleuzian rhizomatic networks that demand a subsidiarity of function and form. Art-historically, while with iconography the third dimension had been constituted by the vanishing-point of the viewer, the pictorial centrality of the horizon marks the advent of a post-Giotto perspective that privileges spatial mimesis. It becomes the ambiguous curvature of futural nostalgia—the chronotope of chronotopes—beyond which the adventure-hero must ride. Horizons symbolize the limit and limitlessness of vision, the utmost extent to which theory can aspire to dilate its critical gaze. Horizontality names an unattainable, ever-receding aim and meridian—the space of thought. Some related questions include: What hazards and reductions accompany the bracketing of the vertical & transcendent? On what theoretical meridians can new interdisciplinary projects align? How do natural states (solid, liquid, gas) meet cultural realities (earth, water, sky)? Does horizontality necessarily imply curvilinear purity, or vanishing infinity? Does the ineluctable horizon between past and present suggest that we’re always already on a temporal beach strewn with the flotsam of selective memory and periodizing methodologies? Should we organize a clean-up?

- Will Rhodes (University of Virginia): Leveling
Friday :: 17 October

- Emily Smith (Independent Scholar): Meridians and Media
- Laura Yoder (New York University) + Daniel Remein (University of Massachusetts, Boston): wall / paper / book / house
- Cathy Ellis (University of California, Santa Barbara): Postcards from the Apocalypse [art installation]
- Patrick Gilbert (University of California, Santa Barbara): Permagrade [art installation]

Session 10. Sand to Land
Organizer: Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco, Columbia University
University Center: State Street Room
11:30am-12:30pm

This roundtable session will explore how legal thought wants to leave its imprint on the sand by legislating it, by turning sand into land. Legislating, in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period means, very often, redefining the concept of persona—that is, considering which human beings, animals, objects, can become involved in a juridical procedure (Yan Thomas). During the Middle Ages and the first years of the “invention of America,” there were some passages from Roman Law that were debated time and again. In them, the legislators mentioned that it was rather infrequent that a new island appeared in the middle of the sea, but not so rare that a new island appeared in the middle
of a river. Whether the island emerges in the middle of the sea (like the wandering islands on the Catalan Atlas of 1375, by Jewish Majorcan cartographers Jafudà Cresques and Cresques Abraham), or in the middle of the river (think of Bartolo’s *De Insulis*), the questions raised are equally important: Who is their owner? What is their legal status? What are the legal fictions that govern legal thought about them? How did that erase the traces of men who used to practice the space of those particular beaches, only to be replaced with new ones? How does naming/renaming the island contribute to this erasure and re-inscription? How does legal thought articulate theoretical languages, concepts, ideas of the common, about those emerging lands? What is the place of fertility in this legal questioning?

- Simone Pinet (Cornell University): Ex(île) and the I
- Seth Kimmel (Columbia University): Islands of Criticism
- Bruno Bosteels (Cornell University): Theoretical Islands
- Jesús Rodríguez-Velasco (Columbia University): Wandering Islands

Session 11. Beachcombing
Organizer: Lara Farina, West Virginia University
Contributing Artist: Erik Benjamins
HSSB: McCune Conference Room (6020)
11:30am-12:30pm
When we walk the shore, “combing” the beach, we sift through wreckage lovingly, sensually, caught by the sparkle of broken glass, the smoothness of driftwood, the salty stink of seaweed, the clicking of shells tossed together. The beachcomber’s peculiar combination of distracted wandering and intense focus guides her through a shore/archive of fragments, enabling the collection of an idiosyncratic treasure. As a metaphor, beachcombing captures the work of medievalists: we pick through chance survivals resurfaced in new contexts. This session, however, will attempt to invoke not just the idea of beachcombing but also the beachcomber’s affective and phenomenological experience as it might be practiced in relation to fragments of the medieval past. To do this, we have assembled, with a high degree of randomness, a “shore” collection of textual passages, images of artifacts, and musical excerpts. We are not looking for explanations of the items via their historical contexts, but rather, want to reflect on their own processes of composing and curating the treasure they find in the collection, considering questions such as: How does chance facilitate or erode the charisma of certain fragments? What types of sorting and arranging are most satisfying? Do certain pieces have a toxic effect on the collection? How might we consider the “worth” of idiosyncratic collecting? How can we share the care of/for treasures?

Beachcombers:

• Lisa Weston (California State University,
Fresno)
• Jennifer Drouin (University of Alabama)
• Helen Burgess (North Carolina State University)
• Kathleen Coyne Kelly (Northeastern University)
• Brianna Jewell (University of Texas at Austin)
• Marian Bleeke (Cleveland State University)
• Wendy Farina (independent artist)

LUNCH BREAK
12:30-2:00pm

*those who want to join The Material Collective on their beach-walk [see Session 15/16 below] should
meet the MC @12:30 pm on the lawn facing the lagoon, just off the patio behind the University Center

Sessions 12-14
2:00-3:00pm

Session 12. Idiorrhythm: Mining the Fantasy of *How to Live Together*
Organizer: Roland Betancourt, University of California, Irvine
University Center: Harbor Room
2:00-3:00pm

*From my window, I see a mother pushing an empty stroller, holding her child by the hand. She walks at her own pace, imperturbably; the child, meanwhile, is being pulled, dragged along, is forced to keep running, like an animal, or one of Sade’s victim’s being whipped. She walks at her own pace, unaware of the fact that her son’s rhythm is different. And she’s his mother!*

Roland Barthes (December 1, 1976)

The scene that Roland Barthes observed from his window late in 1976 would reemerge in his first lecture course at the Collège de France in 1977. His course, *How to Live Together*, centers around the notion of isolation and cohabitation, forms and techniques of temporal belonging that construct spaces of human existence. In Barthes’s own words, the goal of the course is to explore a specific fantasy:
“not all forms of ‘living together’ (societies, phalansteries, families, couples) but primarily the ‘living together’ of very small groups, where cohabitation does not preclude individual freedom.” Barthes’s fantasy for this course first took form upon a chance reading of Jacques Lacarrière’s *L’Été Grec* (1976), where he encountered the notion of *idiorrhythm*. This concept describes the processes by which certain monks on Mount Athos in Greece mediate between their idiosyncratic, personal rhythms and the rhythms of their larger monastic communities. This Byzantine concept allowed Barthes the ability “to mine the fantasy,” that is to begin to do research across medieval monastic texts and contemporary literary examples. Considering a variety of novels, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Magic Mountain*, Barthes explored (paradoxically) moments of ‘living-alone’ in figures such as the castaway, the hermit, and the monk, which create spaces of their own driven by their particular idiosyncratic rhythms. In the end, the course does not explore the utopic space of living-together, yet explores moments where its tensions emerge. Building on recent investigations on temporality and playing on the themes of institutionality, thriving, dissent, and friendship, this panel asks participants to take Barthes’s lecture notes for *How to Live Together* and seize them precisely as they were intended—as a cue for speech. The panel incites presenters to generate their own investigations from this material, which for a medievalist is riddled with many homologies and affinities, yet nevertheless beats to a different drum. Structured as a roundtable discussion, panelists are encouraged to
approach the subject from both a historical and historiographic perspective through short 5-10 minute position papers that *mine the fantasy* of rhythm and the creation of communal space, particularly focusing on art, visual culture, architecture, and music. The lecture notes for Barthes’s course will then serve as a template for the discussion as an informal script *per se* that will be mined.

- Roland Betancourt (University of California, Irvine): Mining the Fantasy
- Elizabeth Freeman (University of California, Davis): Rhythm
- Cheryl Jaworski (University of California, Santa Barbara): Bodily Regulation
- Brendan Sullivan (New York University): Working Together
- Samuel Ray Jacobson (Independent Scholar): Utopia*

*see description of Jacobson’s landscape installation on the campus of UCSB and environs, *FLOTSAM* (pp. 29-30 of this conference program), designed especially as a companion artwork to this session and to the conference as a whole.

Session 13. Transatlantic/Transtemporal
Co-Organizers: Donna Beth Ellard, University of Denver + Melissa Gniadek, Rice University
University Center: State Street Room
2:00-3:00pm
A movement in two acts.

This session explores movements across and between land and sea in relation to movements across and between various temporalities. Specifically, it engages objects and ideas that board ships and travel across the Atlantic and, in their transoceanic passage, reorient both tercentric worldviews and period-centric scholarship. As a recent special issue of *Atlantic Studies* claims, the emerging field of oceanic studies serves as a methodological model for nonlinear or nonplanar thought. This session enacts this methodology, conceiving of the Atlantic Ocean as a watery, nonlinear, and nonplanar space that joins together distant lands and distant time zones. For example, one presenter discusses the exportation of trade goods from North American peoples to European consumers during the sixteenth century, shipments that yoke the early modern consumption of new worlds to ideas about new world encounters that persist today. Another presenter examines the passage of intellectual ideas to nineteenth-century America in books about the Anglo-Saxons that are imported from Britain. The ideas within such books inflect American narratives about the indigenous histories of North America and the relationship of those histories to the young American Republic. In each of these instances, historicist concerns regarding the movements of a material object or an intellectual idea point towards the influence of the ocean as an active participant rather than a mute surface upon things that travel across it. Consequently, transatlantic histories provide new, unique oppor-
opportunities for trans-period encounters. As a panel made up of scholars of Anglo-Saxon, Early Modern, and nineteenth-century American studies, we seek to radically disrupt conventional boundaries of periodization, showing how the mobility of an oceanic or aquatic framework facilitates the trans-temporal conversations that, we argue, will allow each of our fields to remain co-relevant. We envision our session not as comprised of discrete papers but as one fluid presentation that moves back and forth between ideas, prompting conversations between our objects and periods of study.

Prelude: “Trans”: Across, Over, Beyond

Act I
Scene 1: Medieval Art Objects
Scene 2: Aztec Feathers

Entr’acte: Ocean Travel / Time Travel

Act II
Scene 1: Aztec Feathers in Europe
Scene 2: Medieval Art in America

Postlude: On Transatlantic and Transtemporal Collaboration

Participants:

- Jennifer Borland (Oklahoma State University)
The 1290 Expulsion of England’s Jewish population is unique not only as the first of its kind in medieval history, but also in its relationship to the sea and aquatic currents. While subsequent exiles tended to enforce a migration over land toward Eastern Europe, expulsion in England by and large took the form of compelling Jews to travel from their homes to the coastal borders of Britain and then journey from those shores elsewhere. The most notorious of such watery migrations is that of a ship that traveled from the Thames in London to its opening onto the North Sea at Queenborough. There, taking advantage of the estuary ebb tide, Captain Henry Adrian lied to his passengers that they had been grounded and encouraged them to stretch their legs on the exposed wet sand. As the Jews found themselves overcome by the returning waters of the Thames,
Adrian taunted them to seek from God the same parting of the waters enjoyed by Moses. In part, the fate of the Jews, all of whom drowned, on the coastline of Queenborough epitomizes the unstable relationship to place suffered by Jews in diaspora. A rabbinic tall tale might also be said to treat such questions metaphorically: land-hungry passengers disembark from a boat onto what they think is an island but is in fact a moss and dust-covered fish. Making themselves comfortable, the Jews start a fire to cook meals, but when the fish felt the heat of the blaze it turned over, tossing all of the occupants in the sea. In both the tall tale and the historical episode, watery tides, marine flows and oceanic engulfment speak to the startling and lethal uncertainties of diaspora, as well as the failure of identificatory relations between groups. Yet as work on diaspora by Édouard Glissant and other postcolonial theorists of the Caribbean demonstrates, aquatic currents, waves and fluidities can be marshalled as an empowering means of conceiving of a mobile and interconnected network of such identificatory relations. Seizing upon both meanings immanent in aquatic fluidities—e.g., the tragic and the productive—this roundtable brings together a diverse array of critics and poets to consider how different styles of memory enable our understanding of medieval cultures caught in the ebb and flow of fluid contact.

- Steven Kruger (The Graduate Center, CUNY), “These Waves of Dying Friends”: Paul of Burgos Reflects on the Massacres of 1391 and on His Conversion
• Eleni Stecopoulos (Poet & Independent Scholar): Cellular Memory Theater
• Asa Mittman (California State University, Chico): “In number they are like the sand on the seashore”: Fears of an Eschatological Jewish Threat Past, Present and Future
• Lisa Lampert-Weissig (University of California, San Diego): “With reverted look”: Expulsion, Memory, and Agency
• Hannah Johnson (University of Pittsburgh): Traces in the Sand

SPECIAL DOUBLE SESSION+

Session 15/16. Walk on the Beach (a material ecology) + Things from the Sea (a flash exhibition)
Organizer: The Material Collective
Flâneur: Christina McPhee
University Center: Flying A Room
2:00-4:30pm

This session+ is an exploration of things and our relationships to them, as well as a collaborative meditation on chance, discovery, subjectivity, beauty, and ecology. The session+ is in three parts: a beachwalk and a flash-exhibition (held during the conference), and an online seminar in the summer before. The walk and exhibition will be open to all conference attendees. Walk on the Beach takes place at low tide on Friday, October 17, during the conference lunch break: we will walk together on Goleta Beach, take photographs, and collect objects from
the beach. Those who want to join The Material Collective on their beach-walk should meet the MC @12:30 pm on the lawn facing the lagoon, just off the patio behind the University Center. Following the walk, the seminar group (see below) will gather for a discussion of what we’ve found, and plan for our exhibition. The exhibition, *Things from the Sea*, will be held in the Flying A Room (University Center) from 2:00-4:30pm. This flash-exhibition will display our collective material, and will be collaboratively curated by the seminar participants. Together, we may choose to organize the exhibition around a few key terms or issues; we may choose to manipulate, photograph, or otherwise interpret our beachcombed bounty. We may be inspired by cabinets of curiosities, scientific taxonomies, art galleries, exploded diagrams, ethnographic museums, archives, pilgrimage shrines, ex-votos. During the flash-exhibition, curator/participants will engage each other and visitors in conversations, short monologues, performances, and inquiries through and around the sea-thing collections. Please feel free to drop in at any point during the 2-1/2-hour flash exhibition.

The Summer Seminar constituted an online discussion in which our group of 10-20 beachwalkers/curators shared and explored inspirations, issues, and ideas to inform our collective project. We are inspired and provoked by so many things: oil spills off the California coast; the performance-walks of Richard Long; scuba diving; medieval whalebone objects and maritime trade; childhood vacations. Our discussions (online and on-site) and
the resulting exhibition ponder: How are things from the sea entangled in our land-based ecology? What is a “useful” object? What is a “beautiful” object? Are things from the sea unlimited? If so, how? How do we categorize objects? What makes an object an art-object? a scientific specimen? An anthropological artifact? What is collecting/collection, in both a personal and an institutional context? How might the conference “keywords” such as Drift/Shift, Flotsam/Detritus, Flow/Scape, Submerge/Emerge, and Theft/Reclamation help shape our encounter?

Material Collectivists:

- Jamie “Skye” Bianco
- Sakina Bryant
- Jeffrey Jerome Cohen
- Maura Coughlin
- Ellen Donnelly
- Emily Gephart
- Elliott Ihm
- Anna Klosowska
- Kate Koppelman
- Steve Mentz
- Asa Mittman
- Karen Overbey
- Emily Russell
- Alicia Walker
- Maggie Williams
- Lora Webb
In contributing to this roundtable, we collectively produce a natural history, in its capacious premodern sense, for seven creatures inhabiting coastal regions: cultural amphibians (translators and/or bicultural people), fenlanders, “petermen” boating on the
Thames, beached sea monsters, sails, saints, and sonnets. We aim not only to describe the naturecultures of these creatures (lineaments, customs, lore, and laws), but also to theorize what it means, in terms of embodiment and temporality, to be “coastal,” or a creature of the coast. In an effort to foster a common theoretical vocabulary for the roundtable, we’ll read Julia Reinhard Lupton’s “Creature Caliban” (2000), as well as short excerpts from Brian Ogilvie’s *Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe* (2006) and Elizabeth Jane Bellamy’s *Dire Straits: The Perils of Writing the Early Modern Coastline from Leland to Milton* (2013). We’ll frame our remarks with these materials. We do so in the generous spirit of dialogue: to explore, elaborate, reconfigure, and reimagine the parameters of the roundtable’s key words.

- Joshua Calhoun (University of Wisconsin, Madison): Sails
- Sarah Crover (University of British Columbia): Petermen
- Stephen Guy-Bray (University of British Columbia): Sonnet
- Jonathan Hsy (The George Washington University): Cultural Amphibians
- Louisa McKenzie (University of Washington): Manfish
- Louise Noble (University of New England, Australia): Fenlanders
- Cord Whitaker (Wellesley College): Saint
Before the mystic writing pad, before the page, there was sand. From Foucault’s announcement that “Man will be erased like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” to Hoffman’s story “The Sandman,” from which Freud takes inspiration in his essay on “The Uncanny,” sand is a material that has entered the cultural imaginary on many levels: at once solid and impermanent, playfully mobile and yet capable of being transformed into brittle glass, it is associated *inter alia* with the passing of time, infinity, memory, uncertain foundations (the foolish man’s house built on sand), sleep, castration, the end of mankind (*On the Beach*), first pages (writing in the sand), irritation (sand in uncomfortable places), composition (sandcastles), critical decisions (lines in the sand), the granular, the littoral, and the glassy. This panel will explore the various ways that sand blows through our language.

- Maggie M. Williams (William Paterson University): Sand/Stone
- Jonathan Forbes (University of California, Santa Barbara): Enclosed in Dirt and Sand: *The Anchoress* in Thatcher’s England
On the Beach@UCSB

- Bridget Whearty (Stanford University): “I Wrote Her Name Upon the Strand”: Permanence, Transformation, and Medieval Manuscripts in the Digital Sea
- Valerie Allen (John Jay College of Justice, CUNY): The Sand Reckoner
- Brian Rotman (Ohio State University): Comments in Absentia
- Ruth Evans (Saint Louis University): Response

Session 19. Wave.Particle.Duality
THEORY/PERFORMANCE
Organizer: Angela Bennett Segler, New York University
Flâneur: Stacy Alaimo
HSSB: McCune Conference Room (6020)
3:30-4:30pm

A critical performance detailing the results of a collaborative digital and (meta)physical experiment on the nature of matter and meaning across quantum physics and the humanities. This non-traditional panel will take up the central paradox of the physical universe, that of matter’s inherent duality as always simultaneously both particle and wave, and formulate a vocabulary from the group’s collective engagement with the New Materialism of Karen Barad (agential realism) that allows us to discuss the fundamental entanglement of the material and discursive in knowledge production.
• Ada Smailbegovic (New York University): Wave
• Karl Steel (Brooklyn College, CUNY): Particle
• Brandon Jones (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign): Duality
• Sandra Danilovic (University of Toronto): Apparatus of Subjectivity *by video link
• Ashby Kinch (University of Montana): Scale of the Subject *by video link

[30-MINUTE BREAK: 4:30-5:00PM]
This session will examine the multiple meanings of the word SCALE, but will focus especially on why the very small and the vast are so difficult to apprehend—as well as why during escalating ecological crisis they must be relentlessly and critically examined. Terms to be contemplated as part of the project might include the epoch, spontaneous generation, the anthropocene, post-sustainability, secularism, elementality, the abiotic, Big Data, the parasite, musicality, ichthyology, sliding scales, justice, leprosy, close reading, miniaturization, diagramming as a creative art, metrics, intimacy and performance. Questions to be asked include: at what size do things start mattering (in the dual sense of that word, relative to materiality and meaning)? At what size do they stop? Is there a subatomic ethics? A theory of enmeshment that can do justice to the Milky Way, the light year, the Permian extinction, and the overwhelming vastness of the microbiological?

- Karl Steel (Brooklyn College, CUNY): Subatomic
- Mary Kate Hurley (Ohio University): Cosmic
Friday :: 17 October

- Steve Mentz (St. John’s University, New York): Ocean
- Ben Tilghman (Lawrence University) + Asa Mittman (California State University, Chico): Sand
- James Tanton (Mathematical Association of America): Square?
- Anna Klosowska (Miami University, Ohio): Relativity
- Eileen Joy (BABEL Working Group): Intimate
- Jonathan Hsy (The George Washington University): Foot
- Lindy Elkins-Tanton (Arizona State University): Flash
- Stacy Alaimo (University of Texas at Arlington): Abyss
- Dan Vitkus (University of California, San Diego): Global
- Sharon O’Dair (University of Alabama): Fear
ROOFTOP PARTY
7:00-11:00pm

The Canary Hotel
6th Floor “Perch”
31 West Carrillo Street
(downtown Santa Barbara)

featuring music by SHELTER
DAY 3: PLAY, ENJOYMENT, AFFINITY, HOPE
18 October
9:30-11:00am
Plenary Session IV
Loma Pelona Center 1108

1) LAURIE FINKE, Kenyon College + MARTIN B. SHICHTMAN, Eastern Michigan University (introduction by Eileen Joy, BABEL Working Group)

BEFORE THE FLOOD: ARCHIVES OF STONE, OR HOW THE MASONS SAVED CIVILIZATION

The 2005 Constitution and Regulations of the Regular Grand Lodge of England opens with a “History of Freemasons,” a universal history that traces the fraternity back nearly to the beginning of the world. Without citation, this charter includes a paraphrase of the so-called “Old Charges,” perhaps best represented by the Cooke MS (BL Additional MS 23,198), a fifteenth-century manuscript that offers—among other things—the apocryphal story of the children of Lamech, who not only invent the arts and sciences and “All the Crafts of the World,” but also man-
age to preserve their hard work from an angry Deity determined to destroy the larger portion of humanity either by fire or by flood. We open with a reading of this narrative of antediluvian mythology to ponder how and why a modern fraternity would locate its origin in a medieval tale of ingenium, a narrative about a family of artists and inventors who cleverly outwit God by placing all human knowledge on two massive pillars, one designed to withstand flames, the other crafted to resist water. We are interested in how and why this tale has provided a foundation for nearly 500 years of Masons to imagine both their work and their play within a narrative of recovery and salvation. Did the Masons, an organization whose principles adhere firmly to the philosophies of the English Enlightenment, look to the Middle Ages for the esoteric secrets that sheltered wisdom from a watery catastrophe?

Laurie Finke is Professor of Women’s and Gender Studies at Kenyon College. She is the author of Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing (1992) and Women’s Writing in English: The Middle Ages (1999), and, with Martin Shichtman, of Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film (Johns Hopkins, 2009) and King Arthur and the Myth of History (Florida, 2004). She is an editor of the Norton Anthology of Criticism and Theory and co-editor with Shichtman of Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers (Cornell, 1987). She has also authored numerous articles on medieval literature, medievalism, literary theory, feminist theory, and film.
MARTIN B. SHICHTMAN is Director of Jewish Studies and Professor of English Language and Literature at Eastern Michigan University. With Laurie Finke, he has written *Cinematic Illuminations: The Middle Ages on Film* (Johns Hopkins, 2009) and *King Arthur and the Myth of History* (Florida, 2004). He is co-editor, with James P. Carley, of *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend* (SUNY, 1994) and, with Finke, of *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (Cornell, 1987). He has also authored numerous articles on medieval literature, contemporary literary theory, music, and film.

Together, Finke and Shichtman are like a warm Bahamian breeze that blows through the igloo of medieval studies. They helped to make medieval studies badass before it knew it was badass.

2) TERESA SHEWRY, University of California, Santa Barbara (introduction by Lowell Duckert, West Virginia University)

**POSSIBLE ECOLOGIES: LOSS AND HOPE IN PACIFIC LITERATURES**

Literary writers have long envisioned alternative worlds in relation to the malleable imaginative spaces of the sea. The Pacific, or the peaceful sea, was often framed by early, visiting writers as a site of aspirational life ways, deeply wild nature, and isolated islands. The literary history of the sea is dotted with utopias, including the first utopia, Thomas
More’s *Utopia*, as well as Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*. This talk asks how literary and other artists evoke ocean futures more recently, in contexts of severe environmental upheaval including myriad forms of loss. It looks at contemporary poetry, short stories, art, and journalistic writings from settler and Indigenous writers, exploring their imaginative accounts of present life and futures in varied Pacific sites where people live closely with environmental loss, including with rivers that no longer reach the sea and with dwindling animals such as sharks.

**Teresa Shewry** is Assistant Professor of English and Director of Literature and the Environment at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Her research focuses on Pacific and Pacific Rim cultures, environmental studies, theories of hope and utopia, and water and the ocean. She is the author of *Possible Ecologies: Literature, Nature, and Hope in the Pacific* (Duke, 2008) and a co-editor, with Ken Hiltner and Stephanie LeMenager, of *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2011). She is currently co-organizing a Mellon Sawyer Seminar called “Sea Change.”


**Dear Climate**

A yoga for the Post-Catastrophe, “Dear Climate”
generates agitational images, cryptic texts, and meditative recordings to be used to meet, befriend, and become climate change. Prescriptions for mindful evolution, treatments for weather anxiety, and mystical modifications of inner climate: all packaged as a DIY kit for the coming Environment-in-Motion.

UNA CHAUDHURI is Professor of English, Drama, and Environmental Studies at New York University. She is the author of *No Man’s Stage: A Semiotic Study of Jean Genet’s Plays* and *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*, as well as numerous articles on theatre, performance, literature and the environment, and animal studies. She is the editor of *Rachel’s Brain and Other Storms*, a book of scripts by performance artist Rachel Rosenthal, and co-editor, with Elinor Fuchs, of the award-winning critical anthology *Land/Scape/Theater*. She was guest editor of a special issue of *Yale Theater* on “Theater and Ecology,” and of special issue of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* on “Animals and Performance.” Her book *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*, co-edited with Holly Hughes, will be published later this year, as will her book *Ecocide: A Research Theatre Casebook*, co-authored with Shonni Enelow.

Crossing multiple disciplines with her practice, MARINA ZURKOW builds animations and participatory environments that are centered on humans and their relationship to animals, plants and the weather. Using film and video, sculpture, print graphics and public interventions, Zurkow’s work is by turns
humorous and contemplative. Zurkow’s recent series “Friends and Enemies” mines the intersection of bias, inclusion, and kinship in our relations with other species. “Necrocracy” reconstructs the role of hydrocarbons in contemporary landscape and questions the inherited Romantic-era division between the natural and the human. “Crossing the Waters” focuses on climate change and considers catastrophe, picturing ways to imagine nature within us, and nature without us. She recently published The Petroleum Manga (punctum, 2014), which compiles a curious array of imaginative-philosophical texts by a variety of poets, fiction writers, and theorists illuminating, illustrating, fabulating, and riffing upon a wide range of petrochemical-based objects illustrated by Zurkow.
Session 20. Writing the Unreadable Text
Co-Organizers: David Hadbawnik, University at Buffalo, SUNY + Chris Piuma, University of Toronto
University Center: Harbor Room
11:30am-12:30pm

Some texts defy standard models of reading and writing. Brisona, in the romance *Frondino e Brisona*, sends a letter to her lover “scrit sus neyr papier / ab color de blau fi” (“written on black paper in deep blue ink”), a nearly illegible color combination. The scribe Adam Pinkhurst notes at the bottom of “The Cook’s Tale” in the Hengwrt manuscript (*The Canterbury Tales*), “Of this Cokes tale maked Chaucer na moore,” one of several lacunae in the manuscript that signal its having been received, according to Ralph Hanna, “in an incomplete form.” There are Iberian altarpieces that depict documents written in a deliberately fake Hebrew; there are poems overrun with neologisms; there are hopelessly corrupted textual traditions; there are lost and destroyed texts. These all represent various kinds of unreadability with which scribes, editors, and early readers had to contend. Critical editions of such texts often aim to make these illegibilities legible. Any modern edition, as Elizabeth Scala notes in her book *Absent Narratives*, represents “that hypostasized historical Real that remains the ultimate ground of ‘history’ and
one of our deepest fantasies. For it is, of course, the ‘corrupted’ scribal copy—and not a modern edited version—to which medieval readers had access.” But even medieval scribes might make things legible; Catherine Léglu notes that, although the unique manuscript of Frondino e Brisona replicates the text of Brisona’s letter, it does not reproduce its illegible blue ink on black paper. How do we, we who love to read, read these “unreadable” texts? How can we, we who write within and around disciplinary structures, write with these texts so as to not merely write about them, but to take up the challenges of their “unwriterly” writing practices? This panel will explore both medieval and modern responses to the “unreadable” and the “unwriterly.”

- Tom Comitta (Poet): nuyvypzq
- Heather Bamford (The George Washington University): De fuera s(o) rayda
- Thomas Prendergast (College of Wooster): Semiotic Ghosts
- [various]: An Anthology of Unreadable Texts
- Michael Johnson (Central Washington University): François Villon’s Brief Language
- Ruth Evans (Saint Louis University): Queer Translations: Writing the Unreadable Lesbian
- David Abel (Poet): nuyvypzq
In “Our Aesthetic Categories,” Sianne Ngai cites Hannah Arendt on the “modern enchantment with ‘small things’ . . . the art of being happy between dog and cat and flowerpot.” This modern “enchantment,” we would like to suggest, is bound up with the imperfect *dismantlements* brought about by secularization. The bejeweled reliquaries, aromatic censers, bittersweet aqua vitae, and velvet vestments of medieval Christianity, as well as the Virgin Mary’s breast milk, the sweet baby Jesus’s foreskin, and the adorable softness of little lambs manifested a cult of cute only partly translated into the modern commodity fetish and the autonomous work of art. Our papers explore the coy and tacky, sumptuous and frivolous remnants of political theology as they toddle, blush, flirt, and purr towards their commodified and demystified futures. To what extent is Shakespearean drama an incubator and curator for the haptic and hand-held aspects of cuteness in relation to secularization and its remainders? What role do sex, age, and housekeeping play in Shakespeare’s distillations and domestications of cute? How does religion, especially Catholicism, come to appear cute (sticky and stinky, infantile and overwrought) in the
rational nostalgia of secularism, and what does that post-production affect both capture and belittle in Shakespeare’s fairy toys and baseless fabrics? These questions are the starting point of our panel.

- Julia Reinhard Lupton (University of California, Irvine): Cute Shakespeare
- Luke Wilson (Ohio State University): Cute Shylock
- CJ Gordon (University of California, Irvine): Cute Cleopatra
- Tommy Anderson (Mississippi State University): Cute Coriolanus

Session 22. Otium to the Grindstone
Co-Organizers: Sharon O’Dair + Alexandra Cook, University of Alabama
Flâneur: Benjamin Bratton
HSSB: McCune Conference Room (6020)
11:30am-12:30pm

One sign that the valuation of the contemplative life has declined is that scholars now compete with men of action in a kind of precipitate pleasure, so that they seem to value this kind of pleasure more highly than they do that to which they are really entitled and which is in fact much more pleasurable. Scholars are ashamed of otium. But there is something noble about leisure and idleness. If idleness really is the beginning of all vice, then it is at any rate in the closest proximity to all virtue; the idle man is always a better man than the active. But when I speak of lei-
sure and idleness, you do not think I am alluding to you, do you, you sluggards?

Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

[T]he fear of idleness in Europe up to the eighteenth century was so strong that otium could only be accepted if strongly qualified as honestum, a leisure which yielded ‘fruits’ in works of literature, poetry, philosophy or history. . . .Leisure as a valid state in itself, something that the citizen had earned, and was free to dispose of as he choose, hardly existed before 1700.


Leisure, idleness—otium—has had a rough go of it. Perhaps especially if Nietzsche and Vickers are at all ball-parky in their datings—can we imagine otium’s apotheosis between 1700 and 1900? Probably not. Perhaps we could divine some rolling movement in norms, a wave that crested, improbably and without notice, and then receded. But unevenly. Unevenly. For scholars, perhaps, the wave broke sometime around 1971, when, if you can imagine yourself riding with Hunter S. Thompson, or landed with him “on a steep hill in Las Vegas,” you could “look west and with the right kind of eyes you [could] almost see the high-water mark—that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.” We will be in Santa Barbara, not looking west from Vegas, and what do we see? Do we have the right kind of eyes? The right
focus? Do we see scholars who, a century and more after Nietszche, relish even more the active man’s “precipitate pleasure” rather than the pleasure of *otium*, that which edges them toward vice and thereby virtue? Do we see academic millionaires and adjuncts in precarity? Or do we, with straight face, pose *otium* as corrective to neo-liberal intellectual regimes, to speed-up and the ante-up, to MOOCs and managers? *Otium* is a vice for the Romans; a sin for the Christians; and not to be countenanced by the capitalists. This panel is not ashamed of *otium*, and seeks to unlearn the lessons that put the University in ruins. Let’s edge toward vice—squatting, partying, playing, smuggling—or toward virtue—humility, contentment, retreat, peace. Let’s ponder how to achieve what Agamben, in *The Open*, calls “the supreme and unsavable figure of life”—*otium*—”a human nature rendered perfectly inoperative,” workless, but not worthless.

- Matthew Kozusko (Ursinus College): Spirited Reprobates
- Givanni Idlefonso (City University of New York): Finding Genius in Otium
- Julian D. Yates (University of Delaware): Otium for Sheep?
- Sharon O’Dair (University of Alabama): Love, to Melt
- Vin Nardizzi (University of British Columbia): Sitting Shepherds
LUNCH BREAK
12:30-2:00pm

Sessions 23-25
2:00-3:00pm

Session 23. Temporal Estrangements
Co-Organizers: Elizabeth Allen & Rebecca Davis, University of California, Irvine + Seeta Chaganti, University of California, Davis
University Center: Harbor Room
2:00-3:00pm

This working group deploys non-medieval texts to cast into relief the skewing of time within medieval texts, aiming to read medieval works through the heuristic lens of other literary and cultural mo-
ments. Our projects involve the juxtaposition of medieval texts with contemporary art; the identification of virtual space in medieval spectacle; the delineation of psychic topographies in Old English elegy; the articulation of alternative *translatios* in medieval representations of Arabic heritage; and the temporal reversal of source study models, using an early modern text to read a medieval one. We are particularly interested in textual or artistic settings framed by the sea, a spatial zone that both organizes and disrupts time. Narratives at sea move in and out of different “temporal spaces,” as it were, suggesting different ways of inhabiting space and time even in the midst of continuous action. Through readings in this vein, we hope to ask: how do temporal disjunctions between texts illuminate the uses of temporality within medieval texts?

- Seeta Chaganti (University of California, Davis): Chaucer’s Spiral Jetty
- Rebecca Davis (University of California, Irvine): Aeolian Time
- Ben Garceau (Indiana University): *Fleotendra ferhþþ*: Temporal Disjunction in “The Wanderer”
- Shirin Khanmohamadi (San Francisco State University): Time and the Saracen
- Elizabeth Allen (University of California, Irvine): Shakespeare, the Seven Sleepers, and the Shores of Time
Cute cues: infancy, youth, helplessness, vulnerability, harmlessness, play, enjoyment, awkwardness, needs, intimacy, homeliness, and simplicity. At other times, cuteness is cheapness, manipulation, delay, repetition, hierarchy, immaturity, frivolity, refusal, tantrum, and dependence. Cuteness is a threshold: “too cute” is a backhanded compliment. Or, cuteness is a beach where forces congregate. A dolphin breaching in the ocean may be cute, but not a beached one. And more than the pop cultural *kawaii* (literally, “acceptable love”), “cute”—the aphetic form of “acute”—also carries the sense of “clever, keen-witted, sharp.” The Latin in *acutus* embraces the sharpened, the pointed, the nimble, the discriminating, and the piercing. To be cute is to be in pain. Cuteness is therefore a figure of Roland Barthes’s *punctum* or Georges Bataille’s point of ecstasy. As we gather at the Pacific Rim, let us, à la Takashi Murakami, recast the premodern in cuteness. The OED cites the first reference to “cute” in the sense of “attractive, pretty, charming” as 1834. Sianne Ngai, in 2005, offered a critical study of the cuteness of the twentieth-century avant-garde. But was there ever a medieval or early modern history or
historiography of cuteness? Is it possible to conceive of a Hello Kitty Middle Ages, or a Tickle Me Elmo Renaissance? Has the humanities, or the university, ever been cute? Cuteness is the cheap bastard child of beauty: what’s beautiful may not be cute, but what’s ugly and monstrous may be. This panel will feature curated materials (images, videos, texts, essays, sound bytes, trinkets, texts, objects and artifacts from the premodern and present) as a pre-session, submitted 2 to 3 months in advance of the conference and made available online (http://premoderncuteness.academic.wlu.edu/); and a 40-minute dialogue during the conference, preceded by 5-minute “flash talk” show-and-tells where participants re-introduce their curated pieces. Pre-session curated materials will also be part of a media exhibit space associated with the conference (on Friday, Oct. 17, in University Center: Flying A Room). We plan to cover a diverse range of approaches (including but not limited to): aesthetics, material culture, affect, gender, queerness, childhood, youth, disability, camp, Sado-Cute, and Superflat.

- Kelly Lloyd (School of the Art Institute of Chicago): Katie Sokoler—Your Construction Paper Tears Can’t Hide Your Yayoi Kusama Grade Neurotic Underbelly
- Michael O’Rourke (Independent Colleges Dublin): Cuturity
- Triphti Pallai (Coastal Carolina University): ‘Itemizing’ Violence in Marlowe and Bollywood
When Justin visited Cairo for the first time, in May of 2013, the sidewalks around Tahrir Square had turned into a beach. The paving stones were pulled up and thrown during the 2011 revolution that toppled President Hosni Mubarak, and sand had blown in and filled the space between the curbs. The slogan “Sous les pavés, la plage!”—”Under the pavement, the beach!”—emerged from the May 1968 uprising in Paris. Hard, still stone would give way to soft, shifting sand, discovering a better, freer, more playful and less ordered world just beneath the certainties of life as it is. This spirit can be found in many modern protest movements—from the Wisconsin Capitol to Zuccotti Park to the streets of Athens and
Tunis—that occupied public spaces during the heady year 2011. That year saw Tahrir transformed from a traffic circle into a vibrant democratic assembly. For 18 days, the pavement gave way to a beach, with all of the possibility and vulnerability that attend life on the edge of the world. On June 30, 2013, huge demonstrations were followed by a coup that removed the elected Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated president and installed a military-led government. On 14 August, over 600 people died as police and soldiers attacked protest camps organized by the Muslim Brotherhood. Over 3000 Egyptians have died in political violence since June 30. Tahrir is now a prettied-up space under heavy guard, with new steel gates that can be swung into place to seal the square. The pavement is back in place. This panel will consider the pavement and the beach, the stone and the sand. Is the beach a space of freedom and play, or is it a place of chaos and vulnerability? Can *la plage* endure? Are such democratic, protean spaces always temporary, or can they be preserved? What is it like to feel the ecstasy of stone giving way to sand, and what are the dangers of that rapture? What commonwealth can be built on these sands? Once the paving stones come up, are we on holiday or cast away?

- Kristen McCants (University of California, Santa Barbara): Thetis’ Birth-Child: Marina as the Beach in Shakespeare’s *Pericles*
- Victor Lenthe (University of Wisconsin, Madison): Shepherds at the Public Beach:
Misunderstanding and Spenserian Political Poetics in 1579 and 2014

- François-Xavier Plasse-Couture (University of Hawaii): Surfing as an Embodied Art of Existence and the Materiality of Pelagic Spaces
- Jamie Staples (New York University): Seductive Seashores: St. Aethelthryth and the Transformative Promise of Seduction
- Justin Kolb (American University in Cairo): Amphibians: Neither Fish nor Fowl on (Early) Modern Sea

[30-MINUTE BREAK: 3:00-3:30PM]
What happens to the Western Middle Ages when it crosses into diversely concurrent times, languages, culture, and media? How does “medievalism” take shape in multiple spaces across the planet—including cultural habitats where the Western Middle Ages are no longer the “zero point” of orientation (to reroute a phrase from Sara Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*)? What cultural work do “the Middle Ages” perform as they infuse modern-day modes of global media and cultural production—textual, visual, digital, performative, cinematic? Our session is inspired by our work on the “Global Chaucers” project, a utopian scholarly endeavor that seeks to gather, back-translate, and analyze all non-English translations and adaptations of Chaucer’s work. Our scheming with scholars around the world has so far revealed Chaucerian adaptations in places as far-flung and interconnected as Latin America (Bolivia), East Asia (China, Japan, Korea), Europe (Denmark, Flanders, Spain, Hungary), the Middle East (Israel, Iran), and Africa (Nigeria), as well as works in in-
vented languages (Esperanto). For this session we have gathered together people working on various aspects of medieval appropriation and transformation in “global” contemporary culture (however conceived). How might plurilingual, transoceanic, and intercultural orientations provoke new modes of engaging with the past? How can we create a dynamic, multi-site community of cross-temporal scholars and enthusiasts, a fluid collective that thrives across disciplines and borders?

- Raúl Ariza-Barile (University of Texas at Austin): Chaucer’s Spanish Accent: Impossible Poetry?
- Shyama Rajendran (The George Washington University): The Impossibility of Locating The Ramayana
- Carol Robinson (Kent State University, Trumbull): Expressing Loathly Ladies—Explicitly Noncompliant
- Elaine Treharne (Stanford University): Text Technological Transformations: the Inexactitude of a Medieval Unreality

Session 27. A Mythopoieic Maritime Wandering
GAME/PERFORMANCE
Co-Organizers: Jeremy G. Gordon + Jennifer Heusel + Martin Law, Indiana University
University Center: State Street Room
3:30-4:30pm
And so castles made of sand melt into the sea, eventually.

Jimi Hendrix, *Axis Bold As Love*

The *Odyssey* begins with a petition to sing of “the man of twists and turns driven . . . off course,” a seafaring figure in Calypso’s aquatic embrace, one who is on the verge of winds, whirlpools, Siren songs, and “sea-wolves, raiding at will.” Like heroic odysseys, board games are cultural products that tell tall tales of adversity and difference in waves of competition and domination. The crests of the *sensus communis* of the board-game-as-heroic-epic—a Herculean contouring surveyed by Giambattista Vico and early Atlantic colonial capitalism deemed divine in the image of Bacon’s demi-god conqueror of the many-headed hydra—foster a scholarship of brutal, Kraken-slaying heroism. “To cite the myth [of Hercules] was not simply to employ a figure of speech,” writes Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, but “to impose a curse and a death sentence” on motley crews of hydratic rogues and commoners, anyone off the map. Setting out on stranger tides, The Society of Rogue Studies leads session attendees in the initial play of a board game that engages the poetic logics of shared precariousness and how *mythopoietic* crafts and crafting keep us afloat as hydratic communities on waves of contingency. We play to drench Herculean cartographies of board games and scholarship to embrace the possibilities of an oceanic *oikos*. Our game steers clear of final dockings and spearing victories, asking crews to respond to the
unfamiliar, the strange, and the contingent by favoring Steve Mentz’s “magical lens of the sea.” In an enlivened and enchanting mythopoieic seaway, our game floats an embodied odyssey of seafaring saying, singing, sniffing, salting, hearing, holding (breath), tying, and tasting, all toward a bodily collective playing in the waves of Mentz’s “new thalassology,” a swelling of the sea’s cultural presence. Those on (the) board rely on mythic detritus and remnants to lash together a rickety vessel on which we make our board’s thalassology as we sail. Improvisational mythic unmastery of the sea, swirling in mythic currents without a pre-ordained map, unsettle stable shores and inventively imperil land-locked wisdom and Hercules’ footprints. Our collective mythōkeanos is buoyed to nautical commonplace, but we get salty in our pelagic play. As we give over to communal drifting, swaying to error in interpretation, augury amiss that takes us far from victory, we catch wind of our game’s ethic: to play for as long as possible before dropping anchor. Rather than epics ends, our odyssey sings of twists and turns off course. Such might be the pagan piracy At World’s End, where Jack Sparrow follows a compass unhinged from Peters Projection, sea-ing that Sparrow sees fading in the eye of a beached Kraken. Following Sparrow, our motley crew drifts from the presumed absence of the Kraken, summoning monstrous mythoi for a swelling mythōkeanos, all the while belting, as the shanty goes, “give sailors their grog and there’s nothin’ goes wrong, so merry, so merry, so merry are we . . . no matter who’s laughin’ at sailors at sea.”
Rogue Studies Crew Mates:

- Miles Coleman (University of Washington)
- Jeremy G. Gordon (Indiana University)
- Jennifer Heusel (Indiana University)
- Gwen Law (Indiana University)
- Martin Law (Indiana University)
- Juliane Mora (University of Utah)

Session 28. Sea Changes
Co-Organizers: Jody Enders, University of California, Santa Barbara + Ellen McKay, Indiana University
HSSB: McCune Conference Room (6020)
3:30-4:30pm

In short polemical interventions, panelists ponder what it takes to effect a variety of sea changes in the work of medieval and early modern studies. We seek to understand and facilitate paradigm-shifts in the intellectual and disciplinary work of our fields.

- Jody Enders (University of California, Santa Barbara): Drowning in *Caritas*
- Noah Guynn (University of California, Davis): Women on Top? Try Bossy Bottoms!
- Ellen Mackay (Indiana University): On Being At Sea: Unthinking Early Modern Spectatorship
- Steve Mentz (St. John’s University, New York): Salty Language
• P.A. Skantze (Roehampton University, UK): Lyric Theory
• Ayanna Thompson (The George Washington University): A Sea Change for Race and Reception

[30-MINUTE BREAK: 4:30-5:00pm]
Plenary Session V. Waves of Mutilation: Wounding and Healing in Surf Studies
Co-Organizers: Michael Ursell, ACLS Public Fellow, Zócalo Public Square + Trey Highton, University of California, Santa Cruz
Loma Pelona Center 1108
5:00-6:00pm

you’ll think I’m dead, but I sail away /
on a wave of mutilation

The Pixies, “Wave of Mutilation”

Him so transfixed she before her bore
Beyond his croupe, the length of all her launce,
Till sadly soucing on the sandie shore,
He tumbled on an heape, and wallowd in his gore.

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, 3.4.16

According to an allegorical tradition with touchstones in the medieval and early modern periods, the surf heals but it is also the place of wounding. In the passage from *The Faerie Queene* quoted above, the knight Marinell, son of a sea nymph, patrolling a shore, is run through with a spear and then taken to the equivalent of an underwater hospital where the wound is healed. Before Spenser, Dante placed himself on the shores of purgatory where psalm-singing human souls land on a beach and are led by an angel toward spiritual purification. In the 21st century, the surf offers what some might call a deep karmic
scrub, but it is also a place where humans and non-humans are wounded. The surf and surfing encourage both healing work and fantasies of cataclysm. In the present day, Wounded Warrior programs introduce surfing to veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (modern-day Marinells) as a way to work through trauma. Similar programs, such as Ride a Wave and Mauli Ola, work with special-needs children to make the waves—and the therapeutic properties of the surf, with roots in 18th-century European ocean bathing traditions—accessible to them. Surfing organizations in Indonesia were among the first responders to the 2004 tsunami. While healing humans at the shore, surf culture also tends to the vulnerable non-human elements found there; the Surfrider Foundation, for example, attempts to heal the human impact on shoreline ecosystems. This roundtable reimagines long-established representations of the surf by placing interpreters of literature, history, history of visual art, and film studies in the same room as surfer-activists. We bring together members of activist organizations and those who practice various forms of surf studies to collaborate with scholars of the “new thalassology” (trans-Atlantic, Pacific Rim, Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean Studies). The surf (and surfing) will transform in the anthropocene, and we look for new allegories of healing and wounding in the surf, in anticipation of always-evolving and ever-rising seas.

Discussants:

- Trey Highton (University of California,
Saturday :: 18 October

Santa Cruz) + Michael Ursell (ACLS Public Fellow, Zócalo Public Square)

- Shaun Tomson (Northeastern University + world champion surfer + ambassador for Surfrider Foundation)
- Lee Benjamin Huttner (Northwestern University)
- Peter Neushul (University of California, Santa Barbara) + Peter Westwick (University of Southern California) [authors of *The World in a Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing*]

Finis.
HOUSE PARTY

9:00pm - Midnight (and beyond)

hosted by Punctum Records

featuring: Feverbones, RF SHANNON, and Roger Sellers

@Chez Kristy McCants

7742 Jenna Drive / Goleta (93117)

There will be a shuttle bus service running continuously from 9:00pm - Midnight, picking up & dropping off at The Franciscan Inn, Hotel Santa Barbara, the Courtyard Marriott in Goleta and Jenna Drive.
punctum records is an experiment in bringing together cultural theorists, musicologists, sound artists, and musicians as lovers and fighters in the ruins of the arts and humanities at a moment when information-noise overload meets a flattening out of channels and platforms for the sustainable dissemination of music, sonic art, and theory.

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New Release:

Roger Sellers, PRIMITIVES
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http://punctumbooks.com

New Release:

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, ed., *Inhuman Nature*
1. Trust the tale, not the teller—but what if the identity of the teller is given in the articulation of the tale? What if there would be not only no tale without a teller, but no teller without a tale? What if tale and teller were bound up in an interdependence that is far more complex than hitherto supposed? The “narrative turn” in the humanities is born of an insistence that there are modes of experience that cannot be captured by a theory that would transcend the historicity of experience.¹ It calls for a new concretion, a new plunge into existence through the examination of the way in which experiences are meaningfully interconnected as elements in a sequence. In this sense, as David Carr argues in an admirable book, narrative is not a later imposition on pre-narrative experience but constitutes experience itself.² To posit the real as something that is experienced and only thereafter narrated is to misunderstand the way in which human behavior is directed toward the achievement of projected ends.

2. The turn in question might appear to strike a great blow for the freedom of human beings to determine their existence for themselves. Likewise, the
appeal to a new understanding of the role of narrativity seems to permit communities to redefine their place in the world. But communities themselves are vulnerable to powerful reactionary forces, and individuals, as narrativists show, are never to be considered in isolation from the communities that shape and inform their values. It is always possible for certain fundamentalist elements to invoke a hidden but originary orthodoxy, regulating the lives of “insiders” and governing their attitude to “outsiders.” But what is it that permits communities to, as it were, fold in upon themselves, submitting themselves to the enforcement of programmable, carefully regulated behavior?

3. No doubt the drive to unify, to relate everything back to a point of origin, is a liability inherent to all forms of narration. In this sense, it might be possible to invoke a grand narrative that unifies all other narratives, a broader, deeper story that always aims to perpetuate a reassuring order, regulating the relationship between members of a community and between that community and others. In The Postmodern Condition, Lyotard tells us that the age of the grand récit has passed, but perhaps the grandest tale of them all—the tale that is told in the elaboration of any tale—still exerts its dominion. In this way, the narrative turn risks granting dignity to a debilitating and demobilizing story of the dominance of hegemonies and elites. It becomes necessary, therefore, as part of this turn to rethink narration, treating it, as Linda Singer recommends of community, not as “a referential sign” but as “a call
or appeal” (125). The turn in question calls for provocative responses, for attempts to resist the prevailing determination of meaning and value.

4. Maurice Blanchot, I will suggest, shows us how we might respond to an appeal inherent in the desire to narrate that would permit us to articulate a different relationship to the dominating narratives of our time. In some of his most vehement and programmatic pages, he argues that there is a desire indissociable from Western civilization (indeed, it could be said to constitute civilization itself) to recount its history and its experience, recapturing and thereby determining its past. Blanchot retraces this desire to the monotheisms that inaugurate “the civilization of the book” (*Infinite* 425). As he argues, the exigencies that are realized by the Book are reaffirmed over the course of history through a certain determination of the humanitas of the human being, implying notions of subjectivity, community, and historicity.

5. In one sense, it is necessary for disciplines and genres, for philosophy, scientific discourse, and historiography, to reinforce a certain conception of the human being. But while the human being can be treated as a physiological specimen, as a collection of chemicals or as a physically extended body among other bodies, this does not mean that this is all the human being is. Anatomy presupposes a corpse, but are there practices that would allow us to attest to experience as it is shaped in human existence? Would literary narratives provide the model for the narrative structures that constitute our expe-
rience? It might seem the narrativist has a great deal to learn from literary criticism. As Lewis and Sandra Hinchman observe, the narrativists “have assimilated the idiom of literary criticism in which narrative has always played a very big part” (xiii). But as David Carr argues, literary critics often depend on a contrast between narration and the real that threatens to make literature merely a practice of representation. Narrative, he insists, does not simply attribute a structure to our experience after the fact, but has always already shaped that experience.

6. Thus, although the great novel might seem to represent the human being in the midst of the world, setting events back into their time and place, into the concreteness one might think the narrativist seeks, there is another kind of literary writing and another kind of literary criticism. Blanchot shows us that there is a drive in a certain literary practice to realize a non-representational work, a thing of pure language, an object that is made of language in the same way that the image on the painter’s canvas is made from colors. Moreover, Blanchot also shows that this drive is at work in the most worldly novel: even the novel, he argues, is linked to a certain writing that attests to another kind of narration. The writing he affirms challenges many of the preconceptions about language and the human being that other literary critics (and perhaps other thinkers associated with the narrative turn) maintain.

7. I will focus in this essay on one of his stagings of the play of writing in the Book that he ironically
recasts canonical accounts of self-determination.\textsuperscript{7} In his retelling of a section of Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} that opens \textit{Le Livre à venir}, Blanchot relates a story about the way literature bears witness to an experience of historicity, memory, and community that indicates another way we might relate ourselves to the Book. Homer relates the story of two half-bird and half-woman Sirens who sang so beautifully that they enticed sailors to wreck their ships on the rocky shores of their island. Ulysses wanted to hear their song and, on Circe’s advice, stopped the ears of his crew with wax and had himself lashed to the mast of his ship, bidding them to pay no heed to whatever he said as the ship drew near the Sirens’ island. In “The Sirens’ Song,” Blanchot collapses the figures of Ulysses and Homer into one, imagining that the \textit{Odyssey} was written by a Ulysses who had, after his long and risky journey, safely returned home. The composite figure Ulysses-Homer stands in for the novelist who merely confirms the conception of the human being that belongs to the Book. The composition of the \textit{Odyssey} becomes the figure for any act of recounting that confirms the underlying identity of the human being without taking into account an experience that Blanchot links to writing. For Blanchot, the novel can be counterposed with another literary form, the \textit{récit}.\textsuperscript{8} The Blanchotian novel is bound by the same covenant that binds our civilization to itself; the Blanchotian \textit{récit}, however, indicates the call that draws writing out of the Book. As I will explain, the latter is not to be regarded as a separate genre from the novel, but as an event that bestows
the possibility of narration even as it is dissimulated in its movement.

**Part I**

8. *Zoon logon echon*: for the Greeks, it is the ability to talk discursively, to speak, that marks out the human being as the human being. But for the human being, language is not a tool but a condition: one speaks not with a language but from it. We inhabit language—or rather language inhabits us. Language is not a tool that would offer itself to be used, but a field that opens through us and opens the world to us, determining what it is possible for us to say and not to say. But it is, for this reason, never the “object” of our awareness. It dissimulates itself, except at those moments when the capacity to express oneself comes to crisis. Language opens like the day itself, granting a world to the human being—but furled in this opening and opening with it is the dim awareness that something has come between the human being and the rest of nature.

9. As soon as Adam steps onto the scene, Blanchot claims in his retelling of the story of Genesis, everything is born again to the human being whose humanitas resides in his ability to speak. In Blanchot’s words, “God created living things, but man had to annihilate them. Not until then did they take on meaning for him, and he in turn created them out of the death into which they had disappeared” (*Work* 323). Adam, naming the animals, has first of all negated each of the animals in its particularity. The
animal cannot talk discursively; the human being, who is defined by this faculty, is granted thereby a mastery over the world. The world is named and thereby possessed, but this possession, which issues from the very humanitas of the human being as the animal that speaks, depends upon the distance that opens between real and ideal existence: between the thing named and the abstract generality of the name.

10. In this sense, language might be said to depend on a preliminary annihilation. Death is the condition of possibility of the human being as the animal who speaks. But this means in turn that there can be no return to life before language. As Blanchot writes, “man was condemned not to be able to approach anything or experience anything except through the meaning he had to create” (Fire 323). But this means that the animal that speaks bears an essential relation to negation, to death, since it is only through negation, through death, that language means. Language, in this sense, always alludes to the possibility of this destruction; without it, as he writes, “everything would sink into absurdity and nothingness” (Work 324).

11. But the power that reaffirms the humanitas of the human being turns on the speaker. The capacity to speak depends on the annihilation of the speaker in the here and now; as Blanchot writes, “I say my name, and it is as though I were chanting my own dirge”; I can only speak by interrupting the order to which I belong as a human being. I say “I” and ne-
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gate the “I”; the impersonal presence of this word affirms itself in my place (Work 324). There remains only the ideal existence of a word that could exist without me. Language depends upon this trembling enunciation, upon the void that opens even as it appears possible for the human being to speak of everything. This means that the mastery of the human being comes at a price: Adam’s act of naming begins a more general idealization of everything that exists, but it simultaneously encloses the human being within a certain order of being. This enclosure permits the great acts of the literary imagination: the epic, the Bible, the medieval Summa, but finally, as I will show, the novel: books that would say everything. But the mastery over speech presumes a weakness or susceptibility. The human being remains receptive to another experience of language which no longer permits the opening of a field of power and possibility.

12. Blanchot figures this double experience of language in terms of Ulysses’ encounter with the Sirens. The Odyssey is the story of a homecoming, recounting Ulysses’ long journey home from Troy. Although he saw “many cities of men . . . and learned their minds” (I.4), Homer tells us, Ulysses was at all times “fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home” (I.6). Although Ulysses appears capable of everything (he is heroic and wily), his adventures are episodes on a journey home, they are contained within the broader story of a return. The Odyssey is a figure for a movement that is ultimately conservative, in which the heterogeneous experience is ulti-
mately determined by the law (nomos) of an underlying homogeneity. In this case, Ulysses can be said to be at home (oikos) insofar as he remains confident in his powers and is not challenged by a heterogeneity that might turn him from himself.

13. For Blanchot (but also for Levinas\textsuperscript{10}), the Ulysses of The Odyssey can be said to enjoy an economic existence insofar as okio-nomia is understood to refer to the ever-renewed attempt to secure his self-identity. Ulysses’ journey home stands in for the subject for whom everything that exists is opened and unfolded as to a unitary point of convergence, the ego. Like the Ulysses of The Odyssey, the task of the subject is to trace a circular itinerary through what is unknown, experiencing it, undergoing it, to what is known. The reaffirmation of the “I” as the “I” means that I can never encounter anything new—it is as if everything I meet came from me since the heterogeneity of the thing is always and already subordinated to language. There is no possibility of heterogeneity, of anything that could occur that would outstrip its circular journey. It is this self-identification that lies at the root of both the solitary subject and language itself.

14. Both representation and the determination of narrative are economic notions of this kind. So, too, is the conception of the novel that I indicated. But a certain literary writing attests to an aneconomic experience, an experience of a genuine heterogeneity. It refers to an interruption of the most human capacity of the animal who speaks, that is, the be-
stowal of meaning, nomination. Everyday language uses the name to identify the thing, idealizing it, taking it into the universal. But this is to lose the thing in its real existence. The living thing and its name are not identical; the word can only encounter the thing as an instance of a universal, as a particular that awaited idealization. The literary writing in question, by contrast, understands that the negation of the word gives the thing a new, ideal existence as a word. As Blanchot puts it, “it observes that the word ‘cat’ is not only the nonexistence of the cat but a nonexistence made word, that is, a completely determined and objective reality” (Work 325). This sort of literary language would become thing-like, transposing the singularity of the thing into language. It realizes that in listening to a single word, one can hear nothingness “struggling and toiling away, it digs tirelessly, doing its utmost to find a way out, nullifying what encloses it—it is infinite disquiet, formless and nameless vigilance” (Work 326). Thus the work of literature realizes something unreal and non-representational, letting non-existence exist as a kind of “primal absence,” not as the sign of absent things but as a thing itself, as an object made of words (Work 72).

15. In the literary work, language would thus exist in the manner of a thing, as something that has no meaning beyond its own opacity. It would rid language of everything it would name by allowing it to achieve a physicality of its own. Words emerge from the dictionary and from language, drawing attention to their own weight, the presence of what appeared
previously to be an absence, the being of what was once nothingness. To write, as Blanchot observes of Mallarmé, “is not to evoke a thing but an absence of thing . . . words vanish from the scene to make the thing enter, but since this thing is itself no more than an absence, that which is shown in the theater, it is an absence of words and an absence of thing, a simultaneous emptiness, nothing supported by nothing” (Work 49). And yet, words must mean if literature is to be readable. And indeed, the poem, made of language, cannot become a thing. The literary work must allow itself to become a cultural object, available and accessible. Likewise, the literary writer may always become a great writer whose work evidences a mastery of narrative modes, of incident and characterization, who is lauded because his or her work can reflect back the glories of the world. It is this tendency in the literary work that Blanchot captures when he invokes the novel. The work of literature becomes the novel when it fails to become an autonomous thing unto itself. In so doing, it becomes impure and non-absolute because it depends on the world it mirrors: “Willing to represent imaginary lives, a story or a society that it proposes to us as real, it depends on this reality of which it is the reproduction or equivalent”; it is always in collusion with a certain mimetologism (Work 191). In this sense, literature hovers at the crossroads of verisimilitude and the creation of an autonomous thing. It is never a pure thing nor a pure representation; it comprises both movements and cannot do without them. Literary language de-
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pends on a paradox, on an irresolvable contradiction.

16. Blanchot figures this contradiction by retelling Ulysses’ encounter with the Sirens, the secret search to join language with the language of the thing, to attend to nothingness digging in the word. One can detect the same insistence that literary language is joined to ordinary language in the claim that the Sirens’ song is neither extraordinary nor inhuman; it is simple and everyday; it possesses an extraordinary power, to be sure, but it is a power that lurks within ordinary singing (“Sirens’ Song” 443). Nevertheless, to be lured by the Sirens is to be attracted by that which is extraordinary in the most human of capacities. It is to discover another voice at the heart of the human one—a song that cannot be possessed by a singer. It is to find out that human singing is ultimately inhuman, that to sing is always to sing “with” the song of the Sirens—to join one’s voice to theirs, but in doing so, to relinquish one’s voice. From the first, the song is polyphonic; but this does not mean it is a duet—to sing, rather, is to be joined by an inhuman voice.

17. This is why the voice in question dissimulates itself. The ultimate object of literary aspiration is not one of which its author or its reader need be aware. What is “marvelous” about the song of the Sirens is that “it actually existed, it was ordinary and at the same time secret” (“Sirens’ Song” 443). The song was heard, and in such a way that it allowed more discerning hearers to heed a secret strangeness with-
in ordinary singing. It stands in for the literary text, which, like the encounter with the Sirens, belongs to "strange powers," to "the abyss" ("Sirens’ Song" 443). To hear the abyssal song of the Sirens is to realize that an abyss has opened in every utterance; and that any utterance, even the indexical “I,” is enough to entice those who heard it to disappear into an abyss. But just as the literary writer is unable to realize the impossible “object,” to allow the poem to become a thing, the sailor cannot reach the source of the song.

18. It is for this reason that the Sirens’ song can never be said to be never actually present. Rather, it only implies the direction of the true sources of the song; the song of the Sirens is “only a song still to come,” a song that would lead its listener toward “that space where the singing would really begin” ("Sirens’ Song" 443). The Sirens seduce because of the remoteness of their song; their song is only the attraction of a song to come. Likewise, the unattainable ideal of the literary “object” is seductive because of its very unattainability. Those sailors, who are led toward the source by the Sirens’ song, steer their ships onto the rocks that surround the Sirens’ isle; finding that in reaching the ostensible source of the song, there is nothing but death, they “disappear.” The negation that the literary author would address implicates the author, who is unable to undertake the task he or she sets himself or herself in the first person. Likewise, the sailors discover in this region that music itself is absent, that the goal is unattainable; there is no attainable literary “object,” no possi-
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bility of making the literary work into a thing. From this perspective, the writer is too early because the goal recedes, because the work is unrealizable, because she can never wait long enough. The sailor has always weighed anchor too soon; the source of the song is always infinitely distant; they die broken-hearted because they have failed not once but many times. But the writer is also too late; the goal has been overshot, the writer is originally unfaithful to his impossible goal.

19. Ultimately, the search for the “essence” of the song, its source and its wellspring, disappoints. And yet, though the Sirens’ song seems to promise a marvelous beyond to which it can never deliver us, we should not regard it as a lie. The song to come will never make itself present, yet it exists as the “hither side” of essentialization. And the search for the “object” of literature remains an admirable one. Blanchot unfolds this analysis through the example of Ulysses. But his Ulysses is not Homer’s. For Blanchot, Ulysses becomes Homer himself, becomes the writer of his own Odyssey: not only a traveler whose journey secretly figures an authorial itinerary, but a literary author himself, who has set out to write a novel.

Part II

20. Now it is true, Blanchot concedes, Ulysses did overcome the Sirens in a certain way. Indeed, he has himself bound to the mast, his wrists and ankles tied, in order to observe them, to pass through what
no other human being had endured. He endures the song; his crew, ears plugged, admire his mastery. Ulysses appears all the more impressive for the way his response to the song of Sirens allows him and the sailors he commands to regain a mastery that was challenged or had been lost: the mastery over song itself. Indeed, Ulysses’ apparent courage allows the sailors to regain their grip on the human activity of singing; they are no longer daunted by the inhumanity of the Sirens’ song. Moreover, Ulysses’ actions cause the Sirens, who figure for the lost, sought-after “object” of literature, to understand that the song is nothing special: it is merely a human song that sounds inhuman, and the Sirens are merely animals with the appearance of beautiful women. The Sirens can no longer delude themselves that they bear a privileged relationship with the song they thought was in their power. They recognize themselves in the sailors over whom they once had power, for they are fated to remain as far away from what they seek as the sailors. In an extraordinary turn, this knowledge turns the Sirens into real women; they become human because they belong, with the sailors, on the hither side of the origin they too would seek.12

21. It would appear, then, that the literary object is, in the end, just a special kind of language, an imitative echo of the song that men have always sung to themselves. The literary work that would strive to be something more than another cultural artifact, more than a novel that would reflect the world back to itself, must be content with this modest role. Just as
the Sirens become real women, the unattainable literary object becomes a mere goal among other goals; the literary writer is a human being like other human beings. Indeed, we might even condemn the writer for holding out such a ridiculous dream.

22. But the story is more complex. Blanchot suggests that although the author might appear to want to strike out and make a thing of words, the literary writer is held back by cowardice. Blanchot condemns Ulysses because he exposes the Sirens’ song for what it is without exposing himself to the risk of seeking its source. The apparent bravery of his self-exposure to the Sirens belies a certain cowardice, for Ulysses will not confront the greater mystery here: that of the relation between human and more-than-human that is at stake in singing itself. While the sailors might believe Ulysses is heroic, Blanchot knows that Ulysses does not want to succumb to the desire that would lead him toward the source of the Song. Ulysses is reluctant to “fall,” wanting to maintain his mastery. He cannot let himself “disappear,” but would endure and save for posterity the experience that is granted to him because of his uncanny “privilege.” The writer conceals a similar reluctance, simultaneously heeding the abyss in every utterance and refusing to heed it, refusing to hear what would cause him to disappear and would overcome his powers. Like Ulysses, who would endure the Sirens’ song without letting himself be seduced by it, the writer merely feigns adventurousness.

23. However, Ulysses’ cunning ploy to stop the ears
of his crew with wax and have himself bound to the mast of his ship cannot preserve him from the Sirens. The novelist, in the same way, cannot withhold himself from the effects of the language he employs. Unbeknownst to Ulysses, and, indeed, unbeknownst to the sailors who watch him grimace in ecstasy, he does indeed succumb to the enchantment of the Sirens. Ulysses is not free of the Sirens; his technical mastery does not prevent them from enticing him into the other voyage which is, he explains, the voyage of the récit—of a song that has been recounted and, for this reason, is made to seem harmless, “an ode which has turned into an episode” (“Sirens’ Song” 445). Ulysses’ ruses do not prevent his “fall.” Although it appears that Ulysses emerges from his encounter with the Sirens unscathed, returning to Ithaca to reclaim his wife, his son, and his domestic hearth, he drowns just as others have fallen before him. Ulysses is ensorcelled by the Sirens and “dies”; he has embarked on another voyage.

24. Likewise, the literary writer appears able to navigate successfully through the process of literary creation and is able to accomplish the literary work. Readers admire the fact that books are produced, that literature remains important, reading, perhaps, the biography of the writer who wrote the novels on their shelves, or of the vicissitudes of their composition. This is the novelist who has exhibited a mastery of language and whose language, upon closer examination, reveals what is extraordinary about all language. But the novelist is the virtuoso who re-invents our world and enriches our language. How-
ever, the novelist, unbeknownst to himself or herself, reveals a caesura at the heart of the process of literary creativity that is the condition of the possibility of literature. Blanchot writes of an experience whose inscription in the novel escapes author and reader, but that nevertheless makes the novel possible. He writes of a secret struggle at the heart of Ulysses’ encounter with the Sirens that is, he claims, the very struggle that marks the birth of the novel.

25. How might one explain this “other” voyage? Now Blanchot is not on the trail of a secret intention that, beneath the conscious will of the novelist, would lead the commentator toward a reserve that remains undiscovered by literary critics or psychologists. As he writes, “No one can sail away with the deliberate intention of reaching the Isle of Capri”; the other voyage is marked by “silence, discretion, forgetfulness” (“Sirens’ Song” 445-46). It cannot be undertaken as just another task to be accomplished. Silence, discretion, and forgetfulness dissimulate the voyage from the narrative of the novel—this is why, indeed, the author does not know of the fascination that rules over what he takes to be “his” creation.

26. Yes, Ulysses is a cowardly figure who seeks to preserve himself against his disappearance, but he really does “fall” or “disappear” nonetheless; the encounter with the Sirens overcomes his mastery. Although we can imagine Ulysses regaling Penelope and Telemachus with stories of his exploits, there is one tale he would be unable to recount. If Ulysses
were to begin one day on a book of reminiscences, if he were, as Blanchot suggests, to become Homer himself and tell the story of his exploits by narrating the first story, an entire dimension of the encounter with the Sirens would hold itself in reserve. But it is this encounter with the Sirens that allows the author to assume the power to write. Ulysses-Homer could not begin his book without having undertaken the journey as Ulysses.

27. It follows that for every Homer, every novelist, there is, for Blanchot, always and already a drowned Ulysses. The novelist will have already undertaken an Odyssey, albeit one whose memory conceals itself from him. In order to write an account of his adventures, Ulysses-Homer will draw on his memories of the real journey; but he will also, unbeknownst to him, have undertaken his encounter with the Sirens in another dimension. In asking us to entertain the notion that Ulysses and Homer were one and the same person, Blanchot separates out the moments of the composition of the novel in accordance with the two versions of the story of Ulysses’ encounter that he recounts.

28. One might imagine Ulysses-Homer sitting down in peace to begin his memoirs. Telemachus and Penelope are close by; he writes under the protection of his home, his Kingdom, and is confident in the powers that accrue to him as a novelist. But even as he picks up his pen to write, Ulysses-Homer undergoes a peculiar transformation: this novelist is no longer the real Ulysses who cleverly defeated the
Sirens, but the “other” Ulysses, one who is stirred by the dream that he could follow the song to its source. This Ulysses sets himself the impossible goal of laying bare the power of song itself, and as such, must be defeated in this aim, which demands, as its toll, that he, Ulysses, disappear as Ulysses. Likewise, no novelist as a novelist can endure this disappearance. The source of writing does not reveal itself to him. In refusing to allow itself to be measured by the wiliness and native cunning of Ulysses, the source envelops Ulysses himself, drowning him as it drowned the Sirens when they became real women. *The Odyssey*—and this name stands in for any novel—is the tombstone not only of the Sirens, but of Ulysses the sea-captain, the adventurer. The fact that the real Ulysses survived his encounter with the Sirens does not mean that the other Ulysses can secure his grasp upon the source, the power of writing itself. That power is denied him because he can never reach it as Ulysses. He falls, he must fall (and he even wants to fall) because he cannot seize upon that which he would seek.

29. There is thus another voice and another order of the event; there is a Ulysses who is the shadow of the first who does not return to Ithaca, completing the circle and thereafter settling down to write his memoirs. The novel that Ulysses-Homer writes likewise depends upon his drowned double, who lies at the bottom of the ocean. The human time in which Ulysses-Homer sets himself the task of writing the novel called *The Odyssey* and, indeed, accomplishes it, depends upon the other time—the
inordinate instant when he embarks on another journey. The birth of the novel cannot be understood without reference to the aneconomic movement of Ulysses. The psychologist of creativity will never grasp the relationship between the power of creativity and the other voyage to the end of the possible. Nor can the philosopher broach the question of the temporality of time without taking this inordinate instant into account. It is only the critical commentator who could attend to the hidden vicissitudes of the birth of the novel, who is privy to the instant that has secretly inscribed itself in the novel. Blanchot tells us that the novel tells another tale, one unbeknownst to its teller and to an entire industry of cultural reception. I will try to make sense of his claim that the composition of the novel implies a récit, with reference to Breton’s Nadja.

Part III

30. The récit, a history of French literature might tell us, names a literary form of which Breton’s Nadja, Duras’s The Malady of Death, and Blanchot’s own Death Sentence and When the Time Comes are examples: short, novella- or novelette-length fictions that are focused around some central occurrence. As Blanchot writes in “The Sirens’ Song,” although “the récit seems to fulfill its ordinary vocation as a narrative,” it nevertheless bears upon “one single episode” in a way that does not strive to narrate “what is believable and familiar” in the manner of the novelist (446).
31. In Breton’s récit, this episode is the series of meetings with the young woman who bears its name. In one sense, Breton is aware of the singularity of the récit. He insistently rejects conventional genres; Nadja, unlike the novel, is not keen to pass for fiction. It does not draw attention to its artifice, keen to present itself as a form of entertainment, as a diverting series of episodes. Breton’s récit narrates an encounter that is extraordinary not only because the young women its narrator meets is exceptional but also because this encounter transforms the world. For Clark, Nadja “enact[s] an unprecedented mode of writing whose provenance is a new experience of the streets as a space of inspiration and mediation to the unknown” (213). As Clark observes, it is neither simply a fictional work nor an autobiography; it does not relate anecdotes from afar, but indicates its own relation to the events: “the actual writing of the text is affirmed as part of the writer’s own exploration of the events he is living” (214). It does not merely imitate Breton’s experience but is part of the articulation of an event that escapes the measure of the experiencing “I.” The very narration of the encounter with Nadja transgresses the ordinary conceptions of the ego, consciousness, the will, and freedom. Breton is not, like the Blanchotian novelist, the creator-God who freely and sovereignly sustains his creation—a God for whom anything is possible in the field of his creation. His récit would interrupt both the assurance of the novelist who creates and preserves a world and also the assurance of the reader, for whom the world the novel imitates is the same world he or she inhabits.
32. Breton’s récit narrates an extraordinary event; but, for Blanchot, it also names the unattainable “object” of literary fascination, the source of the Sirens’ song. He insists that the récit does not recall or re-stage the event, but brings it about:

The récit is not the narration of an event, but that event itself, the approach to the place where that event is made to happen [le lieu où celui-ci est appelé à s’produire]--an event which is yet to come and through whose power of attraction the tale can hope to come into being, too. (“Sirens’ Song” 447)

33. How should we understand this apparently self-contradictory claim? It might appear that Breton seeks to write about his encounter with Nadja, but his récit hides another and more fundamental encounter, one that is the condition of possibility of any narration. The event that Breton would narrate is joined in his récit by another narration and another event: that of the interruption of his capacities as an author, the figure for which, in Blanchot, is the song of the Sirens. Breton, in short, has forgotten what he set out to remember; he has lost what he sought to find.

34. How might one understand this claim? To recall: the sailors were too impatient and dropped anchor because they thought they had reached what they sought. But the only way to “find” the source of song was, Blanchot said, to undergo an involuntary “disappearance.” Just as it is impossible to endure
this disappearance in “human” or ordinate time, it would also be impossible for anyone or anything, the récit included, to endure the event. Ulysses is condemned only to approach the event until he “disappears.” Likewise, the author of a récit can do no more than approach until he too “disappears.” The very notion of a “patient” approach to the source of the song of the Sirens is that of a relinquishment of will; the author cannot simply choose to become “patient,” to “disappear,” or to “fall,” but passively undergoes “disappearance,” and in so doing is caught up in what happens as the récit.

35. In writing of Nadja, in attempting to re-experience his encounter with her at what appears to be one remove from the “real” event, Breton the writer undergoes a “disappearance.” Is this what Breton understands when he asks, in the last lines of his book, “Who goes here? Is it you, Nadja? . . . Is it only me? Is it myself?” (144). These lines, responding like an echo to the first words of Nadja, “Who am I?” mean for Blanchot “that the whole narrative is but the redoubling of the same question maintained in its spectral difference” (Infinite 420). Both questions put the authorial identity under question. Was it Breton who wrote Nadja, or did he vacate his position, allowing the encounter with Nadja to have, as it were, written itself?

36. In writing of Nadja, thereby granting her an ideal existence, Breton allows us to hear nothingness digging tirelessly in the name that is the name of his book. But who, then, is Breton the writer? For
Blanchot, Breton’s récit testifies in an extraordinary way to the encounter with the Sirens that redoubles his enigmatic encounter with Nadja. True, Breton met Nadja and was intrigued by her. He set out to write a book without genre, a work that related this encounter and this fascination. But in writing Nadja, in recasting his adventure on an ideal plane, apparently subordinating words and sentences in order to tell his tale, Breton removes himself yet further from her. Writing of Nadja, he loses her anew and has to make do with a papery Nadja, made of words. But the redoubled loss of Nadja demands another loss, for Breton yields himself up as a writer, that is, as the one who freely, sovereignly, would sign his name to the book that is ostensibly his. Breton does not do so voluntarily, nor, afterwards, is it given to him to remember, at least in a straightforward and unambiguous way, the vicissitudes of literary creation. Nevertheless, the attempt to write about a marvelous moment itself requires his “disappearance” as an author. It is as if the act of narrating set a trap for him. To take up writing, to narrate an encounter, is to give oneself up as a lure to the trap that threatens to snap shut. That the author escapes it, recovering in order to finish a work, is not a tribute to his ingenuity. To be sure, Breton finishes Nadja, but his narrative depends upon the other journey he was compelled to undertake as soon as he took up his pen. He is lost, as Blanchot writes, “in a preliminary Narrative,” in an event that begins when he starts to write (Infinite 414).

37. Homer’s Odyssey traces the journey of Ulysses to
his homeland, but it does not bear upon those intermittences and discontinuities that would expose the economy of the journey to a troubling event. The Ulysses of the novel is always safe; even when he risks himself, he does so assured of his survival. He is always the man who undergoes adventures without risking a profound self-alteration: his ruses allow him to accomplish deeds that appear brilliant, but are actually hollow. This Ulysses seems to have mastered the song itself, to have mastered this power and to be able to recall the vicissitudes of his encounter at leisure, writing safely beside Penelope and Telemachus. But the watery death of the other Ulysses, for whom *The Odyssey* is a tomb, is testament to the fact that the contrivance of Ulysses could never allow him to endure what he cannot endure in the first person.

38. The novelist believes, like Ulysses-Homer, that he is in command of that which he would narrate, but Blanchot argues otherwise. He is, on Blanchot’s account, like the wily Ulysses; he can only become a novelist by refusing to relinquish himself to the call that solicits him. If he is able to write books, it is only because he is cut off from the original source of his “inspiration” by his own ruses and machinations. But his work attests to an inhuman effort to heed what the novelist cannot endure: another narration, a récit. The Blanchotian récit marks the memory of the experience that the novel leaves behind in order to become a novel. The struggle at the birth of the novel is therefore the struggle to do away with the event to which the récit bears witness,
that is, to leave the “dead” or “disappeared” Ulysses in the water, to abandon death in favor of the deathless life of the whole, discontinuity in favor of absence, the absence of work for the work that gathers everything together. In leaving behind the récit, the novel also leaves the event itself behind. The novel is, for all its riches, only a narration of that which it has already lost. Yes, it dazzles; the novel reproduces the richness and detail of the world. The Blanchotian novelist dreams of Unity, where discontinuity would be merely a sign of the failure of the understanding, a mark of our finitude. In this way, the novel exerts, in advance, a grasp of the whole, of the time and space in which everything unfolds. The Blanchotian novel does not accomplish an absolute invention, creating something ungoverned by pre-existing rules. But in another sense, it is the Blanchotian récit that marks itself into the opening of the novel as the novel is marked as an inventive event. It is only the critical commentator who can attend to the happening of an event that itself reinvents the notion of invention and the inventor, for it no longer refers to the contrivance of an ingenious person. The novelty of this event is not that of a new art, instrument, or process. The invention that the récit “is” (beyond the intentions of the author of the novel) happens each time singularly and without precedent, cutting across what offers itself too readily to appropriation, identification, and subjectivation.

39. Blanchot’s account of the “other” voyage of Ulysses stages the joining of the inhuman voice of
the récit to that of the novelist. The journey of this Ulysses is not circular. The primordial relation through which he would constitute himself as a self-centered and hedonistic subject is interrupted by a call that contests his self-realization. The closed circuit of his interiority is opened; Ulysses no longer experiences himself as an “I can” who can pass unhindered through the finite order of being. The song of the Sirens is unintegratably foreign. Ulysses can only give himself over in response to this call and, thus summoned, is prevented from recoiling or turning back upon himself. The infinite resistance of the song to Ulysses’ powers cannot be understood in terms of a clash of contrary wills, because Ulysses is precisely no longer “there.” Ulysses cannot exist with, or alongside, the song. Ulysses’ “disappearance” means that he is henceforward unable to unfold his potentialities in a realm in which willed action is possible. No higher synthesis will allow him to mediate the song of the Sirens and integrate it into his own endeavors. Rather, he is co-constituted by the call; his selfhood is simultaneously economic and aneconomic. He is defined by the wiliness and the cleverness that attest to the auto-affirmative strength and vitality that permit his boundless curiosity; but he is also governed by a lethal susceptibility to the call of the Sirens. At once, Ulysses is driven toward what satisfies the circular demand that would permit his economic return to himself and toward the aneconomic “experience” that denies this return. It is precisely this irresolvable play of economy and aneconomy that allows Ulysses to stand in for both the writer of the novel and the récit. It is this play
that determines the relationship between novel and récit, preventing their resolution into a higher synthesis, that is, the incorporation of the récit as an episode in a novel. But the récit does not name a literary genre that is separable from the novel, just as the Blanchotian event would involve beings not separable from a certain order of civilization. Novel and récit are moments of the same movement of invention. The dissension between novel and récit in Blanchot’s writings can be found in any act. As such, all synthesizing, economic movements are provisional.

40. One can read “The Sirens’ Song” in terms of a struggle in a certain narrative recounting, concluding that the relationship between novel and récit bears upon a deeper struggle that has shaped our civilization, since the kind of narrative recounting one discovers in the novel is the sort of story—the story of stories, the narration that gathers up all other stories as such—that Western civilization has told to itself. There is no doubt that the narratorial voice of the novel is that of the Ulyssean subject who would recount episodes in a certain sequence. But the possibility of narration is predicated upon a recollection that is already determined by a certain conception of time. “The Sirens’ Song” bears upon the condition of possibility of narration.

41. What is it that permits this incredible recollection of an event that is said to escape all memory? How does Blanchot explain the relationship he describes between the “other” voyage, in which Ulysses
Iyer on Blanchot’s “The Sirens’ Song”

drowns and is lost, and the voyage of the novel, in which this drowned Ulysses is forgotten and the living Ulysses—the one who, miraculously, survives his own death (understood as his disappearance qua Ulysses)—sails back to his homeland, to his wife and his son, to the okios, the family hearth?

42. In order to address this question (the way in which I choose to present the question of the condition of possibility in Blanchot’s theoretical writings in general), I will supplement Blanchot’s story of the two voyages of Ulysses with my own story of a third Ulysses. This is the Ulysses-Blanchot who has followed the others and watched them rise from the bottom of the sea, and, furthermore, who still remembers his fall (and the fall of the Sirens). This Ulysses-Blanchot is the writer of the story at the beginning of Le Livre à Venir.

Part IV

43. In Blanchot’s retelling of the encounter with the Sirens, The Odyssey becomes a memoir: it is the story Ulysses tells of his return, of the completion of the circle. Ulysses not only undergoes his encounter with the Sirens, but he relates this encounter himself. Nothing happens to him that he cannot relate: his is the memory that can recall everything, lifting it out of oblivion and recounting it in turn. Ulysses becomes Homer, the virtuoso of memory, the adventurer who, after his adventures, can tell his own story to entertain others. Ulysses-Homer writes, in the narratorial voice, of his triumph and his return.
44. Yes, Ulysses returns to his family, to his kingdom, and sets right all wrongs. But the Ulysses who returns to Ithaca, to the family hearth, to settle down and write, is followed by another Ulysses. Blanchot, in the guise of a sea-traveler, has followed Ulysses on both his voyages, remembering what Ulysses does not and disclosing this gap in Ulysses-Homer’s memory in “The Sirens’ Song.” Who would recognize this worn and threadbare Ulysses who returns to his home in order to remember what outstrips the memory of his homeland? And yet it is this other, hypermnestic “memory” that will allow him to write of the journey at the heart of the novel and the récit. This Ulysses, ineluctably marked by death, has been vouchsafed a secret that cost him his intimate relationship with his and any homeland, rendering his Odyssey infinite. This Blanchotian Ulysses drowns; and at the same time, he is able to bring us, his readers, tidings of the voyages that the literary writer has undertaken.

45. It is this Blanchotian Ulysses who waits at the elbow of the Ulysses-Homer, composer of *The Odyssey*. This Blanchotian Ulysses remembers the other story, the exile or the wandering of Ulysses. As the critical commentator who follows Ulysses to lose and then rediscover him, Blanchot triumphs because he alone can retrace this journey. Blanchot is capable of remembering what Ulysses forgets; moreover, since he, too, has written récits and novels, he can also remember what he had to forget as a literary author. His is the power to bear witness to
the extraordinary happening of the récit but, as such, is a mastery of that which cannot be mastered-
-a tale of an event which will not allow itself to be recounted.

46. How are we to understand the adventures of this Blanchotian Ulysses? Blanchot is not the adept who has had an experience and would teach others about it; he does not keep a secret. Rather, he remains vigilant, on the look-out, waiting for the chance for his writing to be seized by an unknown current. He relinquishes his grip and allows his mastery to be taken from him, but this is what allows him to escape the trap, to recover himself from the preliminary récit. Blanchot is thus open to what the author of Nadja is not. He writes, with “The Sirens’ Song,” a récit of the récit, a text dense with beginnings, a text that belongs alongside every literary-critical essay he has written and every work of literature. This is why his writing is able to invent, why it says the true, why the accomplishment it would realize is much more decisive than the production of an aesthetics. For the récit of the récit would reveal the historicity of history in the shining out of events like the light that sparkles up from waves of water. Beginning and rebeginning, flashing up and into nothing, it is of the aleatory, of the event, of the instant without program and without project of which Blanchot would write. He shows us that Ithaca is traversed by waves, that there is no place of safety to which Ulysses, each of us, any of us, might return.
Notes

1. Lewis and Sandra Hinchman’s edited collection *Memory, Identity, Community* makes a convincing case for such a turn, showing how the human sciences are moving toward models of explanation of human behavior drawing on narrative models rather than nomological models.

2. Carr’s *Time, Narrative, and History* presents a powerful account of narrative as the temporal structure of human existence.

3. As Lewis and Sandra Hinchman argue, “a community’s stories offer members a set of canonical symbols, plots, and characters through which they can interpret reality and negotiate—or even create—their world. The culture ‘speaks to itself’ as members replicate these canonical forms in their own lives” (235). Likewise, Alistair Macintyre and Charles Taylor have argued that our understanding of the world as individuals depends upon an intelligibility granted by communal life.

4. As Georges Van Den Abbeele reminds us, “to the left’s investment in ‘community activism’ as a strategic retreat designed to reconstruct and build anew a base of popular support in the wake of severe electoral defeats by the right in England and the United States, corresponds the Thatcherite and Reaganite discourse on the return of juridical and managerial responsibilities to the level of ‘local communities,’ a cynical euphemism for the dismantling of the wel-
fare state at the hands of so-called private enterprise” (xi). The essays in the volume he introduces provide a valuable attempt from various perspectives to reinvest community with a new sense.

5. For example, he shows us how Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending* depends on the separability of the sense of the real and reality itself that Carr convincingly overturns (9). Likewise, he claims that Barthes demarcates art and life, depending once again on a model of representation as the imposition of a structure on the “real” world (9).

6. As Blanchot shows in *The Work of Fire*, it is not in order to represent the world that Lautréamont gave *The Chants of Maldoror* the body of a monumental thing, always pushing it toward impenetrability despite the coherence and the eloquence of his language. Maldoror strives to suffice to itself, to exist as a monad of words that reflects nothing but words. The sonority and rhythmic mobility of the poem is a sign of the attempt to render itself sovereign, to conquer its own space, literature’s space, and remain there. Literature, as Blanchot argues in dozens of essays, attends to an experience of language itself that escapes all kinds of narrativization (see *Work* 162-175).

7. See the retelling of Orpheus’ descent into Hades to rescue Eurydice in *The Space of Literature* (171-176) and the meetings between Theseus and the Sphinx in *The Infinite Conversation* (17-20) and Narcissus and Eurydice in *The Writing of the Disas-
ter (125-128). For a commentary on “Orpheus’s Gaze,” see my “The Paradoxes of Fidelity.” For a commentary on the passages on Theseus and the Sphinx, see my “The Sphinx’s Gaze.”

8. Timothy Clark has some marvellous pages on Blanchot’s notion of the récit in Derrida, Heidegger, Blanchot. Derrida has written at length on Blanchot’s notion of the récit in Parages.

9. Logos, as Heidegger remarks, means more than language simply understood as a collection of words: “it means the fundamental faculty of being able to talk discursively, and, accordingly, to speak” (305). The human being can use language in a way the animal cannot since, according to Heidegger, “the animal lacks the ability to apprehend as a being whatever it is open for” (306). It is the way in which the human being comports itself to beings that separates it from human beings.

10. In Totality and Infinity, Levinas argues that we are all—all of us, philosophers and non-philosophers—mediators or relays of a certain totality whether we assume, disavow, or transform its movement. Today, in the West, Levinas asks us to renew philosophy and with it to renew our civilization in response to a call that has gone unheard—the call of infinity, the infinite. This call resounds within the totality itself: we hear it, whether we know it or not—whether we respond to it or deny its unbridled force. Levinas asks us to overturn the “egology” or “economics” upon which what he calls totality is
predicated by hearkening to this call. Ulysses, the voyager of Homer’s _Odyssey_, is the authentic figure of this egology; his travels are, in turn, a perfect figure for an economic return upon the ego. As Levinas remarks: “the itinerary of philosophy remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island—a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the Other (48). See, for an examination of the relationship between Blanchot and Levinas, my “The Sphinx’s Gaze” and William Large’s “Impersonal Existence.”

11. On the other hand, there are authors for whom the novel must attain the status of an object sufficient unto itself. Can Sarraute’s _Tropisms_ or Beckett’s _The Unnameable_ be regarded as novels? It would be here that the novel unravels itself or approaches the condition of what Blanchot might call the “poem-thing.” One might admit that there are novels that are non-representational (Blanchot’s own _Thomas the Obscure_ would be an example, or indeed _The Chants of Maldoror_ [see note 6 above]), but the roman of “The Sirens’ Song” refers to the hegemonic notion of the novel. Furthermore, the novel cannot separate itself from the practice Blanchot calls writing. As I will make clear, roman and récit are bound up with one another in a complex economy.

12. Almost as soon as the Sirens become women, Blanchot tells us, they die. But Blanchot tells us nothing of the fabulous animals who are turned into women and undergo their own deaths (and perhaps
their own resurrection). He writes of Ulysses’ death and resurrection, but Blanchot does not consider the fate of the Sirens after their deaths. Does he, in this silence, speak for them, and, thereby in the place of the women who, when their secret is revealed, die at the bottom of the ocean? In a sense, they have died before they have even begun—before they have been given the chance to begin, before any such chance has been envisaged to explore the source of the song that resounds in the speech they would speak as human women. Crucially, the Sirens die as soon as they become human women, preventing them from uprooting themselves, journeying according to other imperatives and exploring their own form of existence. Deprived of autonomy, determination, or identity, these dead women are more comforting than women who are still alive because they can serve as the screen without depth onto which Ulysses-Blanchot can project his fantasies. Does he exclude the possibility of their return or resurrection, of the story that they might tell about their adventure or their death? “The Sirens’ Song” is, perhaps, more complex than this reading would allow since Ulysses, Blanchot tells us, recognizes himself in the Sirens just as the Sirens recognize themselves in the sailors. The non-human females become human and Ulysses recognizes that he, too, is in some sense non- or inhuman: he, too, is female or animal. Ulysses, part-Siren, is claimed by the feminine in a way that he does not realize, just as the Sirens are implicated in the masculine. There is a redistribution of the terms femininity and masculinity beyond a simple polarization of gender here. The scene of tute-
lage I invoked could be understood in terms of a hetero-affection, an affection that interrupts the economy of the masculine just as it disrupts the economy of the feminine. In this sense, “The Sirens’ Song” would attest to a certain feminization of the masculine that has always and already occurred—a feminization that does not happen from outside the masculine but is co-implicated with it, collaborating with and contaminating any notion of a pure masculininity—and, likewise, to a masculinization of the feminine that would co-determine and co-constitute what in the classical sense is taken to be the rigid opposite of masculinity. For a feminist interpretation of Blanchot’s writings, see Cixous’s *Readings*.

*Works Cited*

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Iyer on Blanchot’s “The Sirens’ Song”


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These letters are ri-
diculous, and no way
am I poring through
this program looking
up words that start
with these letters, so
you can just stuff it.

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S-Y
I just feel like I can’t
go through with this.
It’s so hard and the
sun is setting outside
and, hey, it’s martini
time!

Z
Zzzzzzzzzzzzz, 5
W. dreams, like Phaedrus, of an army of thinker-friends, thinker-lovers. He dreams of a thought-army, a thought-pack, which would storm the philosophical Houses of Parliament. He dreams of Tartars from the philosophical steppes, of thought-barbarians, thought-outsiders. What distance would shine in their eyes!

~Lars Iyer

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BORED?

TALK ABOUT THE WEATHER.
WADE

DOWN YOUR STREET.
None of this would have happened without a boy racoon named Martha.

Good night, Martha.