

oceanic tauromachy

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Abstract

oceanic tauromachy conceives of the new ocean beyond the tropes of catastrophe and disaster, as an evocative 'zone' of evolution, transformation, and unforgiving change, beyond the ontology of despair. The ecological turn has transformed the oceans into complex zones. It has become an apophenic abstraction stitching together other abstractions—an abcanmy zone of aberrating non-meaningfulness, of clandestine unbeing, of fractal unbecoming. oceanic tauromachy is *musica universalis* of residual divinity in toxicity, of lingering sanctity in erosion. Here I invoke the froth that has been gurgling out of the spasms of the sea. The new ocean has become a breeding haven for chthonic deception which has been accommodating the holy havoc of bioprospecting exploitation. The sea bed exhibits the paralysis of our unhinged telos. The ocean has lost its topos. oceanic tauromachy is a will to recover; a preamble to invite and engage a diagnostic planetarity in praxis.

oceanic tauromachy¹

the 'queer'² ecology of the benthic zone is an anomalous fold

where polythene bags, petrochemical pipelines, submarine cables, and carbonate saturation entangle

in a strange complicity—I have submerged my head underwater

held my breath in the new acid to see them flutter and wave

in a curious mystery—twist, turn, and twine with each other in a divine coitus

like the flowing gown-tail of a freshwater *betta*³ dancing uncannily

to the faint instrumentals of a drowned William Basinski⁴

a Barthesian *atopos*, the subaquatic froth is ineffable

it is a fractal multiplicity of fractal⁵ multiplicities stirred violently into gurgling foam

deferring everything, every perception, and every perspective into the unrest of the froth

Thalassa⁶ is a hole-y space, infested with burrows, cracks, fissures, and forlorn wrecks where venomous creatures discreetly camouflage themselves

shape and fold themselves according to the oblique design of the froth-scape—an imperceptible disguise to hide from each other.

1. Tauromachy is another word for bullfighting. I am inspired by Michel Leiris's book titled *Mirror of Tauromachy* and his 1993 article titled "The Bullfight as Mirror". For Leiris, the bullfight, with its mythological and cultural significance, is a sacred-erotic confrontation, like a ritual sacrifice, and a means to immerse oneself into the world of tragedy and commune with death. It is a radical affirmation of the vitality of life even in death.
2. I have used the word 'queer' at my own discretion and not explicitly and definitively in the current context of Queer Studies within which it is being familiarised. However, without disregarding the context of queer ecologies, blue ecologies, etc., I have borrowed and extended the idea into the current predicament of the changing ocean, without blatantly ontologising despair and nihilistic tendencies of thought, and without ontologising a nonsensical romantic desire of some magical return. Rather, I have located and used the word in respect to labour and change, crucial in the context of here and now.
3. Siamese fighting fish, or *betta splendens*, is a freshwater ray-finned fish native to Southeast Asia. Initially bred for blood sport, the *betta splendens* has become the national aquatic animal of Thailand and has also gained popularity in the global aquarium market. They are known for their vibrant appearances, their long fins, and their tolerance of low oxygen levels owing to their unique physiology.
4. William James Basinski is an American composer who is widely known for his album *The Disintegration Loops* (2002-2003) constructed from old decaying tape-loops, and his spectral otherworldly music.
5. For an insightful analysis on fractal ontology, please refer to A. T. Kingsmith's "An Introduction to Fractal Ontology" (2017) published in the 3:AM Magazine.
6. In classical mythology, Thalassa is the primordial goddess and a literal embodiment of the sea.

“. . . they stared across at the event site. You were never sure what you were looking at.”

—M. John Harrison, *Nova Swing* (2006)

“What’s there to understand? . . . It’s the zone.”

—Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic* (1972)

“The Zone is a very complex maze of traps.”

—Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979)

“The intermediate zone means simply a confused condition or passage in which one is getting out of the personal consciousness and opening into the cosmic . . . without having yet transcended the human mind levels . . . It is a zone of formations, mental, vital, subtle physical, and whatever one forms or is formed by the forces of these worlds in us becomes for the sadhak for a time the truth—unless he is guided and listens to his guide. Afterwards if he gets through [sic] he discovers what it was and passes on into the subtle truth of things. It is a borderland where all the worlds meet, mental, vital, subtle physical, pseudo-spiritual—but there is no order or firm foothold—a passage between the physical and the true spiritual realms.”

—Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Yoga, Part Two and Three* (1972)

“The *atopia* of Socrates is linked to Eros (Socrates is courted by Alcibiades) and to the numbfish (Socrates electrifies and benumbs Meno). The other whom I love and who fascinates me is *atopos*. I cannot classify the other, for the other is, precisely Unique, the singular Image which has miraculously come to correspond to the specialty of my desire. The other is the figure of my truth . . . I am obliged to make myself a lover, like everyone else: to be jealous, neglected, frustrated, like everyone else. But when the relation is original, then the stereotype is shaken, transcended, evacuated, and jealousy, for instance, has no more room in this relation without a site, without *topos*—without what in French we call, colloquially, ‘*topo*’—without discourse.”

—Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (1977)

“To become imperceptible oneself, to have dismantled love in order to become capable of loving. To have dismantled one’s self in order finally to be alone and meet the true double at the other end of the line. A clandestine passenger on a motionless voyage.”

—Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980)

“They have no chance of succeeding unless they mix the alloy from which they will compose the foil of their mirror (their spectacle, erotic mise-en-scène, poem, work of art) with an element apt to cause to appear through the most rigorous or most tender beauty something lost, wretched, irrecoverable, and irremediably tainted. A touch of venom, without which no alcohol would be conceivable, for drunkenness—however euphoric—can never be other than a more or less close-up picture of our future communion with the world of death.”

—Michel Leiris, *The Bullfight as Mirror* (1938)

“A script from the absolute unknown, how do you even begin to think about that? ‘Meaning’ is a diversion. It evokes too much empathy. You have to ask, instead, what is a message? In the abstract? What’s the content, at the deepest, most reliable level, when you strip away all the presuppositions that you can? The basics are this. You’ve been reached by a transmission. That’s the irreducible thing. Something has been received. [And] to get in, it had to be there, already inside, waiting. Don’t you see? The process of trying to work it out—what I had thought was the way, eventually, to grasp it—to unlock the secret, it wasn’t like that. That was all wrong. It was unlocking me.”

—Nick Land, *Chasm* (2015)

“When I started, I didn’t know if I was composing or not. But I was painting with sound, making something out of nothing.”

—William Basinski (as cited in Blagburn, 2016)

“You were hearing actual particle showers coming down from space in between the stations ... All that sparky, static-y sound that’s in *The River*, that stuff is coming from other worlds.”

—William Basinski (as cited in Blagburn, 2016)

“[M]y ‘music of the spheres.’”

—William Basinski, referring to his work *The River* (as cited in Blagburn, 2016)

“It’s fun, it’s not commenting on the world, I mean, God, how can you comment on this crazy bullshit? *The Disintegration Loops* said it all. So, it’s about loving and dancing and lounging.”

—William Basinski (as cited in Blagburn, 2016)

The ocean is a phantom in pain and my piece is a lover's discourse on the changing ocean, embracing the imperceptible dismantling of the desperate thalassic womb, like the mother embracing death during the birth of her child, without lament. oceanic tauromachy is a voluntary sinking into the crude peripheries of marine dust. It is a conscious refusal to resurface; a will to drown yet not die. But to grow back the gills we have lost. It is an apology, a pilgrimage, a meditation upon ocean-back, amidst the decay, scavenging for barbed wreckage in the hope of relieving the pain—like Androcles pulling out the thorn from the lion's paw and becoming a *sadhak*⁷, someone who cares. oceanic tauromachy is Thalassa in a coma. And here we are in a pilgrimage, matadors voyaging into the coma—into the *terra nullius*⁸, into the yawning maw of cessation, like Ahab riding into the religiosity of Moby Dick, into drunkenness, into the nucleus of a religious pause where rapture is held in suspension and disbelief. oceanic tauromachy is the ripple of a lover's appeal, an invitation to non-knowledge.

It is not a poem. I do not know what it is nor do I feel the obligation to classify it. I derived the 'zone' trope from Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979). Despite its brilliance, I became dissatisfied with the lack of spiritual sincerity for which I resort to Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of yogic practice⁹. Deeply inspired by Basinski's *Disintegration Loops* (2002-2003), Aurobindo's thought, Indian mythology, and Barthes's *Lover's Discourse* (2001), my piece is not about the ontologisation of depravity and ecological disaster, but neither explicitly about healing or wistful lamentations. It is a submarine invitation, apologetic and conscientious—to drift through the damage we have caused, to diagnose the chances of repair, and engage with it in praxis—a praxis without cause, without expectation, without duty, but an ability to respond, to apologise, and to dismantle the self; a gentle push towards kindness, a little step into compassion, its meditative trials into empathy for other worlds. My piece is not an expression of mere grief, but of care simply for caring, love simply for loving—a tender ritual in the face of corrosion. oceanic tauromachy radiates with an urgency to care—a care without any need of philosophical precedence, without intellectual exhaustion, without any reason to care. oceanic tauromachy is *drsti*¹⁰ beyond damage, beyond destruction, beyond demise,

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7. In Indian religious philosophies and as well as in Buddhism, *sādhaka* has a wide range of meanings with respect to a variety of subjects ranging from dramaturgy, philosophy, architecture, medical science, history, grammar, esotericism, and so on. In general, *sādhaka* is a mystic spiritual aspirant and a practitioner of spiritual realisation, generosity, tolerance, and peace. In yogic practice, the *sādhaka* affirms and activates the liberation of body and spirit, their sense and perception through deep focus and practices that require complex psychological techniques.
 8. Land belonging to nobody.
 9. Yogic practice and the modern westernisation of yoga practice are completely different. Yogic practices are not merely exercises. Rather, they involve complex physical and psychological techniques of attainment and liberation.
 10. *Drsti* means seeing by means of yogic practice. It is as much looking inward as it is looking outward and beyond. Although having a lot of different meanings in Indian philosophy, astrology, and science, *drsti*, in general, is the processual praxis of focus and concentration, of opening up the sight, looking beyond the superficiality and deceptions laid by the trivialities of myopic existence. *Drsti*, thus, is the spiritual embodiment of vision beyond excess. It is an exercise of seeing with mind's eye—an insight into the interdependent intensities of the vast ecology of otherworlds that encompass us. *Drsti* is the overcoming of sight made intelligible by a heterogen[er]ous unfolding of the eye that is able to discern the multiplicity of life.

into a silent and forgiving divinity. It speaks about the tragedy of the seas and locates the ocean as the site for the *sadhak*—a priest, a saint, a pilgrim, a musician, a *khyapa*¹¹, a *Gautama*, a *Siddhartha*¹², a dancing matador, like *Krsna* upon *Kaliya*¹³, in the midst of a corrida, upon raging bulls, whose task is not to kill, but to calm—calm the waves, calm the violent gurgling of the froth, calm the seizures, calm the undercurrent, calm the bruise, calm the abrasion, calm the hurt—calm the froth. oceanic tauromachy is a divine abstract of meditation carrying the massive weight of the seas and a Basinski with wings made of polythene bags lounging under the ocean like Buddha upon the aquatic spine, composing the cosmic hum of our spirit.

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11. In general, *khyapa* means a lunatic. However, in Baul music and poetry, *khyapa* is a common mystical expression signifying one who is wise and understands the ways of life, and has been liberated from the trivialities of everyday existence that bind our spirit. They carry a wild and ecstatic madness in their love for the divinity in life and nature.
 12. Although commonly used as an epithet for Buddha, *Siddhārtha* (*siddha* + *artha*) is one who has attained *siddhi*, or perfected spiritual enlightenment.
 13. The episode of Krishna and Kaliya, or the *Kāliya Nāga Mardan*, is narrated in the sixteenth chapter of the *Bhagavata Purana*. The event is often referred to as *Kāliya Daman*. Kaliya is a half-serpent, half-human semi-divine venomous *Nāga* with 101 heads who resided in the Yamuna River and poisoned its water. The contaminated river exuded a toxic miasma that polluted the air with poison. The episode speaks of a hostile confrontation between Krishna and Kaliya in the Yamuna River in Vrindaban. According to the legend, Krishna, after expanding his form, sprang onto the serpent's head with the weight of the universe and danced on its head to subdue the creature, and restrain it from further polluting the river. However, Kaliya was not killed by Krishna. Instead, Krishna freed the creature from the disillusionment of fear, envy, ignorance, and anger without wiping out the vital force and functions of the serpent. Later, Kaliya worshipped Krishna and left Yamuna, restoring her.

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Conflicts of Interest

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About the Author

Subham lives in Brandenburg with his beloved and their heads filled with dreams. He writes to escape the droning of masculinist-fascist worlds, and fruitlessly daydreams of becoming a musician-cum-bartender-cum-empath 'extraordinaire' who would one day get the chance to swim with whales, hoping if the whales could breach a better 'world' out of him. Music stirs a profound sense of apology in his heart. He apologises to all.