



OCEANIC THINKING

Swimming into the Blue Humanities Seminar

Tuesday 29 October 2019 | 4.00 – 5.30PM

Seminar Room 650, Level 6,
Social Sciences Building, Science Rd

Oceanic Thinking Workshop

Wednesday 30 October 2019

CCANESA Boardroom, Level 4
Madsen Building, University of Sydney



Swimming into the Blue Humanities

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*Join SEI in welcoming visiting scholar Professor Steve Mentz for his keynote lecture, *Swimming Into the Blue Humanities*.*

Ocean swimming can serve as embodied ecological meditation for the Anthropocene. In touching the great waters, we feel something. Immersion works through feeling – both the ‘feel for the water’ emphasised by swim coaches and the ‘oceanic feeling’ rhapsodised by poets and psychologists. That feel and that feeling lure us into the water, and sometimes frighten us away.

Swimming is only a semi-natural practice for terrestrial humans. At best, we engage the water slowly, awkwardly, and at considerable personal risk. Western literary culture confines swimming to super-heroes such as Beowulf or Odysseus, whose exceptional prowess emphasises the inability of most humans to survive in water. The rise of ocean swimming as popular recreation in the second half of the twentieth century changes the relationship between human and ocean. In plunging our bodies into an inhospitable environment, we encounter an alien presence, soothing and dangerous at the same time.

The ‘blue humanities’ names an effort by academics and others to engage the oceanic blue of our planet’s living surface. Swimming occupies a key node in this network, as a place of intimate contact and risk. The long human history of swimming from the so-called ‘aquatic ape’ to Diana Nyad and Michael Phelps tells a story of love and practice. A little-known but essential text for Anglophone swimmers is Everard Digby’s illustrated 1587 how-to-swim manual that pictures humans swimming like dogs, frogs, ships, and dolphins. Literary depictions of swimming range from Homer and Shakespeare to contemporary swim-memoirs by Leanne Shapton and Diana Nyad.

From the shipwrecked swims of Odysseus and Robinson Crusoe to the immersive poetry of Byron and Whitman, swimming captures the human experience of environmental alienation. The swimmer’s entrance into the great waters embraces ecological uncertainty. The ocean swimmer captures environmental risk and human vulnerability in to the Anthropocene.

*This event will be followed by a performance from *Baptism and Networking Drinks in the Courtyard Bar of Holme Building*.*

Keynote

Steve Mentz is a Professor of English at St John’s University, New York. He has directly engaged with port and harbour studies in New York and Bristol, and has authored numerous publications including *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization 1550-1719*, (2015) and *At the Bottom of Shakespeare’s Ocean* (2009). A forthcoming book in the Bloomsbury’s Object Lessons series is titled *Ocean*.

Speakers

David Schlosberg (Introduction) is Professor of Environmental Politics in the Department of Government and International Relations, Payne-Scott Professor, and Director of the Sydney

Environment Institute at the University of Sydney. He is known internationally for his work in environmental politics, environmental movements, and political theory – in particular the intersection of the three with his work on environmental justice.

Ann Elias (Q&A Moderator) completed a PhD in art history at the University of Auckland. In 1990 she was appointed lecturer in art theory at Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney, teaching students training to be artists. In 2017 she was appointed to a position in the Department of Art History at the University of Sydney. Current teaching and research address the history and theory of art and visual culture, and themes in contemporary art.

Performers

Baptism, a collaboration between Charlie Sundborn and Solomon Frank, mythologises the ocean to construct ritualistic performances. Both Solomon and Charlie use their wind instruments as conduits for the environmental force of the ocean; performing within it and developing a musical language where the instruments are submerged. Baptism is a fantastical enigma that has attracted the curiosity of Sydney's experimental music scene through their surrealist public performances at beaches and waterways around Sydney on the solstices.

Oceanic thinking Workshop

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CCANESA Boardroom | Level 4, Madsen Building
Eastern Avenue | University of Sydney

Guest Wifi Details

Username:

Password:

9.00 – 9.15	COFFEE/TEA ON ARRIVAL
9.15– 9.30	Welcome – Associate Professor Ann Elias, Department of Art History
9.30 – 11.00	<u>Session 1: Ocean Encounters</u> Dr Felicity Picken, University of Western Sydney Dr Mariko Smith, Australian Museum Associate Professor Kate Fullagar, Macquarie University Dr Astrida Neimanis, Department of Gender and Cultural Studies Associate Professor Tanya Evans, Macquarie University Discussant: Professor Emeritus Iain McCalman, Department of History
11.00 – 11.30	MORNING TEA
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11.30 –12.30	<u>Session 2: Urban Immersions</u> Professor Steve Mentz, St John's University
12.30 – 1.15	LUNCH
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1.15– 2.45	<u>Session 3: Shifting Sands</u> Associate Professor Ann Elias, Department of Art History Associate Professor Will Figueira, School of Life and Environmental Sciences Dr Brigitte Sommer, School of Life and Environmental Sciences Dr Josh Wodak, University of New South Wales Discussant: Professor Maria Byrne, School of Medical Sciences

2.45 – 3.15

AFTERNOON TEA

3.15 – 4.45

Session 4: Aquatic Imaginings

Clare Britton, Sydney College of the Arts
Dr Anita Callaway, Department of Art History
Dr Killian Quigley, Sydney Environment Institute
Dr Léa Vuong, School of Languages and Cultures
Robyn Backen, Sydney College of the Arts

Discussant: Ann Elias, Department of Art History

5.00pm

Close

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Project Descriptions and Biographies (in order of appearance)

Dr Felicity Picken, University of Western Sydney

Felicity's presentation will outline some of the ways in which pleasurable encounters are transforming our relations with oceanic worlds and why these encounters (can) matter in the process of coming to terms with a life that is shared with a blue planet.

Felicity Picken's work contributes towards the broader scholarship concerned with changing relations between humans and nature in the strange living out of the Anthropocene. She follows the emergence of the 'blue planet' as a significant social actor by exploring how relations with oceanic environments are evolving through pleasurable encounters including art, tourism and leisure. So far she has examined the worlds of free and scuba diving, aquaria and undersea art museums, often with more than a spoonful of strife directed at human-centric ontologies, in the pursuit of a more symmetrical understanding of life.

Dr Mariko Smith, Australian Museum

Mariko will present on her PhD research which focused on the Aboriginal tied-bark canoe, traditionally made and used along the south-eastern coastline of Australia. She is interested in contemporary engagements with this Indigenous watercraft in Aboriginal communities within this highly colonised and urbanised region.

Mariko Smith is a Koori woman (Yuin Nation). She undertakes an interdisciplinary practice, which involves theoretical engagements within the fields of museology, contemporary art theory and practice, visual sociology, research methodology, epistemology, and history. Mariko works with Aboriginal cultural heritage collections and exhibitions through the museum sector and in academia.

Associate Professor Kate Fullager, Macquarie University

This paper will be about the unlikely links between Australia's historic ocean pools, the rise of scientific coaching, and national excellence in elite championship swimming.

Kate Fullagar is an associate professor in Modern History at Macquarie University. She is the author of *The Savage Visit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), and editor of *The Atlantic World in the Antipodes: Effects and Transformations since the Eighteenth Century* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012). In 2018 she published with Michael McDonnell an edited collection called *Facing Empire: Indigenous Experiences in a Revolutionary Age* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Oct. 2018). In 2019 she publishes her second monograph, *The Warrior, the Voyager, and the Artist*, with Yale University Press about the unlikely eighteenth-century story of a Cherokee warrior called Ostenaco, a Ra'iatean voyager called Mai, and the British artist, Joshua Reynolds, who painted them both. She also has an interest in the history of swimming; see her personal website at katefullagar.com.

Dr Astrida Neimanis, University of Sydney

The Feeling of Water. What does water remember, and what does it forget? My current book project, tentatively called *The Feeling of Water*, asks what it would mean to have to account for these archives, their affects, and their afterlives. Each of its chapters stories specific kinds of waters and situated place-times: the Baltic Sea's chemical weapons dumps, a postindustrial wetland on Lake Ontario, Australia's mining-impacted aquifers, and the deep and breathless sea. Combining poetics, aesthetics, history, science, autoethnography, and speculative non-fiction, I examine our relations to waters as shaped by colonialism, extraction, militarism, and industrialisation, and as always flowing through questions of sex, species, queerness, and racialized forms of privilege and harm.

Astrida Neimanis is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney, on Gadigal land. Often in collaboration with other artists, writers, and makers, her work examines water, weather, and bodies, from intersectional feminist perspectives. She is co-editor of *Thinking with Water* (MQUP 2013) and author of *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (Bloomsbury 2017). She is also a Key Researcher with the *Sydney Environment Institute*, Associate Editor of *Environmental Humanities* and with Jennifer Mae Hamilton, co-organiser of the *COMPOSTING feminisms and environmental humanities* reading and research group.

Associate Professor Tanya Evans, Macquarie University

Swimming with the Spit. At the launch of *Swimming with the Spit: 100 Years of the Spit Amateur Swimming Club* at Balmoral Beach in late 2016 the ABC's Geraldine Doogue said that it looks like it's just a book about swimming but it's actually 'a guide on how to be a good citizen'. The book was a community authored, funded and supported book, published by a university press. In my talk I will show how it was written to encourage readers and swimmers, young and old, to think about their ambles down to the beach, their invigorating morning swims and refreshing afternoon dips on sultry Sydney-summer days, with an eye on their history. Passion for a sport in the present can overshadow its fascinating past. Our team of historians — Ian Hoskins, Nancy Cushing, Iain McCalman, Kate Fullagar and Leigh Boucher — plus volunteer research assistants, students and Spit club members, hoped to persuade readers to don their cossies, dive into the ocean and involve themselves with dynamic community organizations such as this one.

Associate Professor Tanya Evans teaches history at Macquarie University where she directs the Centre for Applied History. Her publications include: (ed) *Swimming with the Spit: 100 years of the Spit Amateur Swimming Club* (New South, 2016); *Fractured Families: Life On The Margins in Colonial New South Wales* (2015); with Pat Thane, *Sinners, Scroungers, Saints: Unmarried Motherhood in Modern England* (2012). She also works as a consultant for the television series *Who do you think you are?*

DISCUSSANT: Professor Emeritus Iain McCalman, University of Sydney

Iain McCalman, an Emeritus Professor at the University of Sydney, and former Co-Director of the Sydney Environment Institute, has established a national and international reputation as an historian of science, culture and the environment whose work has influenced university scholars and students, government policy makers and broad general publics around the world. In addition to his considerable achievements as an undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate teacher he has published fourteen scholarly books with leading academic and trade presses, and dozens of peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. In 2007 Iain was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia for Services to History and the Humanities. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Professor Steve Mentz, St John's University (New York)

Urban Immersions. Do we love oceans and cities for the same reason – because they contain us? In an effort to explore the relationship between immersing one's body in the sea and in the culture of mega-cities, I will draw on Peter Sloterdijk's "sphereologie"; the world-altering innovation of containerized port systems in Newark, NJ, in the 1950s; contemporary oceanic poetry; and the works of New York-based "water artists" including Mary Mattingly, Elizabeth Albert, Marina Zurkow, and Nancy Nowacek. Both cities and oceans invite and reward immersion; both environments corrode borders; and both encourage experimental ventures. As human societies become increasingly urban and face increasing risk from environmental instability and sea level rise, the ocean-city interface becomes an essential front-line for living in the Anthropocene.

Steve Mentz is a Professor of English at St John's University, New York. He has directly engaged with port and harbour studies in New York and Bristol, and has authored numerous publications including *Shipwreck Modernity: Ecologies of Globalization 1550-1719*, (2015) and *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean* (2009). A forthcoming book in the Bloomsbury's Object Lessons series is titled *Ocean*.

Associate Professor Ann Elias, University of Sydney

How a man standing in water looks to a fish. "Watching a fish swimming in a lake who has not wondered if the fish can see him, and if it can, what he looks like to the fish". In 1913 there was public interest in the question of interspecies encounters in watery environments and how a fish might visualize a human body. This presentation looks at two newspaper illustrations that propose how a man standing in water appears to a fish and how reflection and refraction reconfigure the human body as incoherent, fragmented and monstrous.

Ann Elias is Associate Professor and Chair of Department in Art History at the University of Sydney. Research interests include: camouflage; whiteness; the cultural history of flowers; early modern coral reef imagery; representations of the underwater realm. Books include *Camouflage Australia: art, nature, science and war* (2011), *Useless Beauty: flowers and Australian art* (2015), and *Coral Empire* (2019). She is a Key Researcher with the Sydney Environment Institute, a serving member of the International Committee of the College Art Association of America, and International Liaison for the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand.

Associate Professor William Figueira, University of Sydney

Complexity in the seas. The structural complexity of marine habitats is a major driver of biodiversity and productivity. In this talk I will highlight my groups application of novel 3D mapping techniques to better understand the consequences of lost complexity in the oceans and how we can best go about restoring it.

Associate Professor William Figueira's general interests lie in the area of fish population ecology and his research has focused on the behaviour and demographics of individual fish populations as well as the large scale connectivity between these populations. The small scale studies are typically conducted on SCUBA or snorkel and employ tools such as tagging, mapping and standard underwater census and behavioural observation techniques. These studies have been conducted in a variety of locations including the Florida Keys (USA), Lee Stocking Island (Bahamas), and One Tree Island (Australia). His interest in the larger scale dynamics of reef fish involves understanding the mechanisms and consequences of meta-population, and specifically source-sink, dynamics in these systems.

Dr Brigitte Sommer, University of Sydney

Subtropical reefs – An Ecosystem in Transition. The waters of along the New South Wales coastline are warming and the marine plants and animals that inhabit them are being reshuffled as species are changing their geographical distributions. Brigitte examines ecological dynamics along the subtropical-to-temperate transition zone in eastern Australia, where corals occur at the southern limits of their distribution.

Brigitte Sommer is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the School of Life and Environmental Sciences and the Sydney Environment Institute at The University of Sydney. Her research combines field ecology and statistical modelling to understand the ecology of marine species living at biogeographic transition zones and how they will be affected by climate change. She is particularly interested in the ecology of corals at their pole-ward range limits in New South Wales and Japan. She investigates how these marginal reefs differ from tropical coral reefs, how they function and how they may be altered by climate change.

Dr Josh Wodak, University of New South Wales

Rapture, Rupture, & Eruption is an immersion into technoscientific conservation, through artificial coral reefs. The project explores raptuous immersion within one of the largest and longest-running of such reefs, in Indonesia, within the context of aperiodic ruptures of the earth and eruptions of a nearby volcano.

Dr Josh Wodak's research concerns the ethics and efficacy of technoscientific conservation in the Anthropocene. His work critically appraises the fields of Synthetic Biology, Assisted

Evolution, and Climate Engineering, drawing on the Environmental Humanities and Science & Technology Studies. He is currently a Chief Investigator on the ARC Discovery Project Understanding Australia in The Age of Humans: Localising the Anthropocene; a member of the Andrew Mellon Australia-Pacific Observatory in Environmental Humanities, Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney; and a Lecturer at UNSW Art & Design.

DISCUSSANT: Professor Maria Byrne, School of Medical Sciences

Maria Byrne is Professor of Marine and Developmental Biology at the University of Sydney. For 12 years she was the director of One Tree Island Research Station, the University's facility on the Great Barrier Reef. Over the years this iconic, fully protected reef system has provided a major platform for Prof Byrne's research on the biology and ecology of marine invertebrates that has largely involved echinoderms as model organisms. Her work on comparative evolutionary developmental biology and marine climate change has been funded by the Australian Research Council and other agencies for over 20 years. In recent years Prof Byrne's work has involved the quantification of the impacts of climate change stressors, ocean warming and ocean acidification on fundamental biological processes including growth, physiology, development and calcification. This work investigates the responses of marine invertebrates across life stages to climate change and has involved species from the tropics to the poles. Most importantly the labile nature of development and possibility of an in-built redundancy and adaptive capacity of developmental processes in a climate change world will be crucial to the resilience of some marine species. Her current research investigates potential for climate adaptation merging here two main areas of research, evo-devo and global change.

Clare Britton, University of Sydney

Clare will present a series of images that follow Sydney's Cooks River from Graf Park, Yagoona to Botany Bay and the Pacific Ocean.

Clare Britton is interested in Australian landscapes, collaborative practice and creating images that are visceral and sensory. Clare's development as an artist has been practice-led- actively freelancing as a designer, dramaturg and director- including developing work as Co-Artistic Director of acclaimed performance collective My Darling Patricia for over a decade. Clare is a Sidney Myer Creative Fellow (2014) and holds a Masters of Studio Art (2016 SCA, Sydney Uni). Currently, Clare tutors in the School of Design at the University of Technology, Sydney and is a PhD candidate at Sydney College of the Arts completing the research project A Week on the Cooks River.

Dr Anita Callaway, University of Sydney

Sydneysiders blithely use the harbour as their playground. Yet, according to authors and illustrators who lived on its foreshores in the early twentieth century, beneath the surface of this apparently tamed ocean tributary lies a self-contained faerie realm that is a distorted mirror-image of human life above.

Anita Callaway is the Nelson Meers Foundation Lecturer in Australian Art in the Department of Art History at the University of Sydney. Her research interests include the role of non-elitist visual imagery in the cultural development of both peripheral and metropolitan societies.

Dr Killian Quigley, University of Sydney

How do eco-poetic theories—which consult what Isabel Sobral Campos calls language’s capacity to “reassemble the very conditions that determine our ecological realities”—relate to submarine contexts, where human languages operate strangely, if they can be said to operate at all? This presentation sketches findings from a site-specific inquiry into eco-poetics at and beyond the limits of human aspiration.

Killian Quigley is a postdoctoral researcher at the Sydney Environment Institute. His work has lately focused on poetic and aesthetic histories of the subaquatic. Recent works include *The Aesthetics of the Undersea*, co-edited with Margaret Cohen (Routledge Environmental Humanities, 2019); *The Myriad Sea: Poetics and the Submarine*, and “The Pastoral Submarine” (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 53.1, 2019).

Dr Léa Vuong, University of Sydney

The Bièvre river flowed through the city of Paris for centuries before being buried underground in a process that started at the time of Haussmann’s renovation plans. As it went under the surface, it sunk away artworks, literary texts, material objects and traces of cultural practices: my project uncovers this neglected corpus, looking at Paris through its absent river to understand what it was, could have been and what it plans to be.

Léa Vuong is Lecturer in French Studies at the University of Sydney. She joined the University in July 2018 from the UK, where she was Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Manchester. Her research is broadly focused on word/image relations: her first book is a study of contemporary French writer Pascal Quignard, exploring his collaborations with visual artists. She is preparing another monograph on French-American artist Louise Bourgeois’s writings and interactions between her art and the literary realm. Léa’s new research project looks at the Bièvre, Paris’s disappeared river, uncovering its traces through word and image.

Robyn Backen, University of Sydney

Diving into a watery past to unravel connections, enabling future works and thoughts that may stream within the pools of potential imagining. Introducing a flow of artworks, namely - Last Word, Archaeology of Bathing, Delicate Balance and Nomanslanding.

Robyn Backen is a Sydney based artist and an Australia Council Fellow. She has created complex, multi-disciplinary works that engage actively with the spaces they occupy. Backen’s recent body of work evolves from her research into the acoustics of ancient whispering architecture and their unique communication patterns of sending and receiving. The formal and conceptual elements of each work respond to that site, be it an art gallery, a landscape or part of the built environment. By making poetic use of sound, light, projections and sophisticated computer-generated systems, these artworks engage their audiences in innovative ways. Some of her major works to date include *Weeping Walls* at Sydney International Airport, 2001; *Delicate Balance*, Ballast Point Park for the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, 2009 and at present she is completing *Voices Within*, a commission for the UNO project facade, Green Square. In 2012, Backen completed a commissioned performance for the Bundanon Trust, *Last Word*, recently she was one of the four international artists invited to collaborate and develop the touring artwork *Nomanslanding*, Sydney and Germany and Scotland (2015-17). Currently, Backen is engaged in a three-year project curated by SPACE3, WA and ArtLAB, Sweden. In 2018 she was invited to be an artist in residence at the Red Gate Studio, Beijing, China.

