



**Poroi**  
An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis  
and Invention  
ISSN 2151-2957

Volume 15  
Issue 1 *Special Issue on Resilience Rhetorics*

DOI: 10.13008/2151-2957.1302  
Article 3

January 2020

## "It's just a cycle": Resilience, poetics, and intimate disruptions

Bridie McGreavy  
*University of Maine Main*, [bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu](mailto:bridie.mcgreavy@maine.edu)

---

### Recommended Citation

McGreavy, Bridie. "'It's just a cycle': Resilience, poetics, and intimate disruptions." *Poroi* 15, Iss. 1 (2018): Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.13008/2151-2957.1302>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](https://iowa-research-online.org/)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Poroi* by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).

# “It’s Just a Cycle:”

## *Resilience, Poetics, and Intimate Disruptions*

**Bridie McGreavy**

*University of Maine  
Orono, ME*



*Poroi* 15,1 (January 2020)

**Abstract:** The phrase “It’s just a cycle” is commonly articulated in coastal resilience efforts and also shapes broader public debates about climate change. Identifying the structure of arguments around cycles is a useful starting point for defining differences in perspective, but there is more to competing claims about cycles. It is this *more* that this essay aims to explore, starting with an opening example from an engaged rhetorical ethnographic project with Maine’s clam fishery. The example helps set up a methodological orientation to working with cycles within resilience-focused collaborations that draws from aesthetics and poetics. This approach aims to show how cycles shape world making and how attending to cycles as a trope can create a space for critical, intimate, and poetic disruptions of colonial patterns in resilience discourse.

**Keywords:** Cycles, mundane aesthetic, *metalepsis*, resilience, disruption

## **Starting with Cycles**

Everywhere I turn, I encounter cycles. To give a sense of how cycles circulate and shape coastal resilience work, I begin with an extended example to set up the main argument, namely that attending to cycles as a trope can produce intimate disruptions in how we collectively *cope* with change, our resilience. From this opening example, I then weave in related fragments from a visit to the Ocean Hall at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum in 2018 and describe observations from attending to cycles across contexts to try to make sense of what they do. This fragmentary, intertextual weaving is consistent with Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s (2005) approach where fragments allow ethnographers to “immerse themselves in the contests and engagements of the present” (p. 271). Working with fragments, I aim to show how

cycles offer a way to attune to shared histories and rhythms where commitments resistance, persistence, and normalcy are recognized as colonial impulses in resilience discourse (McGreavy, 2016) and where attuning to cycles can help remember colonial histories in ways that move us, collectively, into different realities.

Over the last several years working with coastal communities in resilience-focused collaborations, cycles have emerged as a recurrent trope in arguments about problems in coastal fisheries, and especially in Maine’s clam fishery, to craft scientific, managerial, and technical solutions to these problems. One object in particular (Figure 1) gathers force in this setting and helps demonstrates how cycles shape arguments. The data in this figure show clam landings over time, or the weight of clams brought to market and sold every year. These data come up at nearly every meeting I attend and are a site for (re)negotiating disagreements in the clam fishery. In these negotiations, some focus on the most recent data point where in 2018 clam landings were close to their lowest value since people started keeping market records. Others home in on an earlier dip in the 1950s to then trace the subsequent rise in clam landings as evidence that clam populations are cyclical, meaning these changes are unpredictable and part of ongoing, natural fluctuations that humans do not ultimately control.

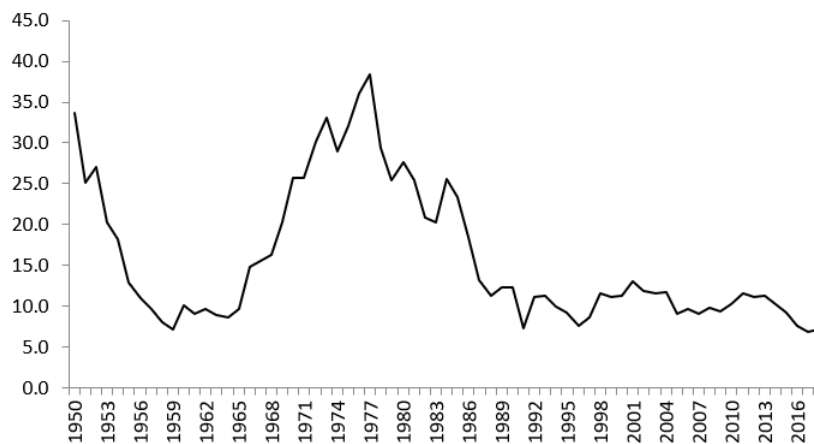


Figure 1. Line graph showing changes in clam landings, the weight of clams in millions of pounds, brought to market and sold by year (Maine Department of Marine Resources, 2019). Versions of this line graph are frequently used to explain changes in clam populations and have become a site for negotiating meaning about the health of clam populations, as well as what cycles are and how they function.

The gridlock that occurs in deliberations about cycles in the clam fishery is akin to what Lynda Walsh (2017) characterizes as “the

moment that two wrestlers would lock each other up in a stance that neither could easily break; *stasis* thus came in the context of public deliberation to indicate a ‘sticking point’ or a question that must be wrestled over” (p. 4). In public deliberations about complex social-environmental issues, Walsh argues that a five-point *stasis* doctrine can help identify layered sticking points in argumentation, focusing the analysis on matters of fact, definition, cause/effect, value, and action. In the clam landings example, there is general agreement that landings are *in fact* changing over time; the sticking point is around definitions of cycles and how cycles articulate change. This particular argument also relies on an enthymeme set up by the claim that clam landings and clam populations are in decline. A related unstated premise is that clam landings serve as a proxy for clam populations, meaning the number of clams brought to market and sold is directly related to the size of clam populations along the coast. As Walsh describes, unstated premises such as these can easily become “flashpoints for conflict when two different communities come together to try to solve a problem—such as the problem of climate change” (2017, p. 3). In cases where people seek to work across difference and address problems together, attending to the structure of arguments like those focused on cycles may provide ways to work through the sticking points, which in this case could mean coming up with a shared definition of cycles.

However, in contexts with seemingly limitless difference in perspectives, the ability to arrive at a singular, stable, and shared sense of meaning may be chimeric. The following contrasting quotes, drawn from a rhetorical ethnographic research project described elsewhere (McGreavy, 2018) begin to show how coming together around a shared meaning may be difficult if not impossible to achieve. In the first quote, a shellfish warden leading numerous climate adaptation projects begins to describe how cycles shape these efforts: “I’m concerned because there are a lot of people who believe in cycles, me being one of those people.” He is referring to the argument that clam populations are cyclical in how they experience patterns of fluctuation--up and down but ultimately a return to a previous and preferred state. He goes on “But the problem is the cycles are different now than they were the past 50 years...They’ve been uncontrollable; uncontrollable cycles of stuff that you just have no – you’re at the mercy of Mother Nature.” For him, the line graph shows a turning point, where in the past the fluctuation was unpredictable and a return to preferred states was still possible. However, now cycles have shifted, their uncertainty has intensified, and endless returns are no longer assured. In

contrast, the following quotes are drawn from a short article written by leaders of a prominent clam advocacy organization. The clam advocates confront what they see as a misperception about cycles which they define as “something that is predictable, like tides, sunrise and sunset, and other astronomical phenomenon [sic]. Clam landings are not cyclical because we cannot predict with much confidence or certainty what landings will be in three or five years. [Cycle] is commonly used by climate change deniers and fishermen who are hoping for the best and a return to ‘normal’ climate.” These quotes demonstrate competing meanings for how cycle is defined and unstated assumptions about what clam landings can tell us about clam populations. These quotes also begin to give a sense of the agonism inherent in these deliberations and complicate the possibility of achieving consensus or finding common ground across epistemological divides.

Cycles matter, in part because argumentation about what cycles *mean* intensifies differences and polarization among those who are, by necessity, part of this coastal ecology and already enmeshed in contaminated collaborations (Tsing, 2005). Yet because cycles contribute to escalating conflict, simply advocating for one meaning of cycle versus another runs the risk of “[deliberating] dangerously by avoiding engagements through difference” (Walker, 2017, p. 177). Drawing from Walsh and Casey Boyle’s (2017) post-critical orientation, Christa Teston (2017) points a way forward for working with a concept like cycles as a boundary object and “topological tactic” for joint decision making and to “collaboratively navigate uncertainty and contingency, particularly when human lives are at stake” (p. 222). Her practice-based approach requires “tacking back and forth” across difference (Star, 2010; Teston, 2017). Organized sets of practices, such as the ways in which cycles are visualized through the clam landings graph, do more than characterize change: they enact distinct realities such that working together to understand what is going on with clams or with anything is no longer a simple matter of seeking mutual understanding and cultivating a shared system of beliefs. The search for meaning becomes a search for ways of crossing, or tacking back and forth, between modes of habitation that may figure reality fundamentally differently (Graham, 2015; Star, 2010; Teston, 2017). This move is in line with how Keeling and colleagues (this issue) approach the role of *function* in scientific collaborations, emphasizing the practical use of function to order space and time as distinct from describing meanings of the term in scientific discourse. Building from Anne Marie Mol’s (2002) ethnographic study of medical practices, S. Scott Graham (2015) takes a similar approach,

advancing a method of ontological calibration which “requires a primary focus on practices” to move “beyond the plurality of perspectivalism into multiplicity” (p. 83). This, then, is more than a search for what cycles mean. Instead, this is an attempt to trace tropic movements to cultivate an “imaginary [that] does not bear with it the coercive requirements of idea” (Glissant, 1997, p. 192) such as advocating for one perspective versus another or achieving consensus.

Cycles help set up a collaborative space that is not about “consensus making but rather an opening for productive confusion” (Tsing, 2005, p. 247). How do cycles create a space for inhabiting confusion? In the remainder of this essay, I address this question by connecting with the mundane aesthetic, a space where I first started following cycles (McGreavy, Fox, Disney, Petersen, & Lindenfeld, 2018), to then introduce transoceanic poetics as a way to strengthen capacities to attune to the dynamic forces of tides and oceanic water, as well as modes of coloniality that have long intersected with intertidal edges (Hessler, 2018). As transoceanic poetics, both Édouard Glissant’s (1997) poetics of relation and Kamau Brathwaite’s tidalectics (Brathwaite & Mackey, 1991; Hessler, 2018; Povinelli, 2018) extend the ability to locate an

aesthetics of disruption and intrusion...Imagining the idea of love of the earth—so ridiculously inadequate or else frequently the basis for such sectarian intolerance—with all the strength of charcoal fires and sweet syrup. Aesthetics of rupture and connection. Because that is the crux of it, and almost everything is said in pointing out that under no circumstances could it ever be a question of transforming land into territory again. (Glissant, 1997, p. 151)

This poetic orientation creates spaces of action where disruption and love come together in intentionally disorienting and confusing ways. For Glissant, such disorientation disrupts relations to land as territory and modes of colonial conquest. His focus on disruption and love also challenges us to reconsider what is produced when resilience is figured as a singular mode of opposition or resistance to change.<sup>1</sup> Consider, as he does, how

---

<sup>1</sup> I’m referring to practices that follow rules to shape what things become, what Foucault (1970) names as discourse. Consistent with post-critical approaches (Walsh & Boyle, 2017), treating discourse as practices is an ontological orientation. This is an important distinction because I

For more than two centuries whole populations have had to assert their identity in opposition to the processes of identification or annihilation triggered by these invaders. Whereas the Western nation is first of all an ‘opposite’\*\* for colonized peoples’ identity will be primarily ‘opposed to’—that is, a limitation from the beginning. Decolonization will have done its real work when it goes beyond this limit. (Glissant, 1997, p. 17)

Connecting this orientation with resilience’s ontology, I argue that singular modes of opposition and resistance to change (re)instantiate logics of domination and colonialism. Cycles as a singular commitment to endless returns can do this too. So after setting up the aesthetic orientation, I then turn to cycles to work through how cycles function as a complex metaphor that can move in multiple ontological directions in ways that open different possibilities for enacting resilience. This essay intends a theoretical argument about cycles and resilience, as opposed to a critical analysis of either concept, and throughout I work with fragments (Tsing, 2005) from encounters with cycles to help ground the argument. To close, I take up additional fragments and come back to the guiding question above to show what becomes possible as resilience in the confusing, disorienting space of cycles.

## **Intertidal Inhabitation: Mundane Aesthetics and Poetics**

Intertidal edges are potent spaces for subversive dreaming and inhabitation. The mundane aesthetic emerged as a methodology to shape how to belong in such spaces through an engaged rhetorical ethnographic project in downeast Maine (McGreavy et al., 2018). Over the course of a multi-year coastal resilience effort (2011-2014), collaborators needed a way to understand the distributed agencies

---

want to acknowledge and respect social justice activists’ and scholars’ stated commitments to opposition and resistance. I do not deny the power of resistance, as it is clear that social movements organized around the stated objective of resistance have challenged and transformed many types of inequities and continue to do so. Instead, I’m suggesting the stated objective of resistance is an epistemological orientation and that when we consider the practices that shape and sustain such movements through space and time, what we may find is not singular opposition but instead a series of disruptions that are as much about intimate attachments and love as they are about refusal. For me, this onto-epistemological distinction enriches the sense of possibilities for how we respond to change and continually strive for justice.

and contingencies involved in marine-based conservation action planning. Conservation action planning relies on a standardized set of practices and an open-source software called Miradi that guides the prioritization of conservation objectives (Margolius, Stem, Salafsky, & Brown, 2009). These objects shape the socio-technical space and modes of inscription (Latour, 1987) in which intertidal mudflats and working waterfronts emerged as a central focus for our efforts. The choices for relative priorities then connect with a host of other activities, including finding and fixing water pollution to open mudflats closed to clamming (McGreavy et al., 2018).

Tsing's (2005) notion of collaboration helps attend to the "frictions of articulation" evident in this description in ways that "can help us describe the effectiveness, and the fragility, of emergent capitalist—and globalist—forms. In this shifting heterogeneity there are new sources of hope, and, of course, new nightmares" (p. 77). To this latter point, opening closed clam flats increases access to an increasingly restricted space for clambers who struggle to make a living in economically impoverished areas. At the same time, closed clam flats likely provide a refugia for a host of species, supporting the biodiversity of coasts and the reproductive spawning capacity for clams. Further, clamming is colonial in its displacement of Wabanaki people and continued conflict over sustenance fishing rights. And though clams are, like matsutake mushrooms, a humble commodity, they are also powerful actors as they circulate and strengthen neoliberal markets and capitalist modes of production (Tsing, 2015). Approaching these tensions as mundane seeks to recognize myriad frictions inherent in collaborations and coastal resilience initiatives.

### *Rhetoric, poetics, and transoceanic imaginaries*

Rhetoricians interested in aesthetic approaches have identified similar tensions in rhetoric as art and practice. For Steve Whitson and John Poulakos (1993), Friedrich Nietzsche's aesthetic philosophy allows a suspension of belief that enables crossing into a world "better than the one with which they [sic] are familiar, all too familiar. That is why the rhetorical art asks not for dialectically secured truths but for linguistic images that satisfy the perceptual appetites or aesthetic cravings of audiences" (p. 138). Robert Hariman (1998) similarly sees value and tension in an aesthetic orientation where rhetoric as practical art is "likely to include the aesthetic sense that registers how the world is both mundane and sublime, a world of both economy and awe, technique and terror" (p. 16). Recognizing these dynamic oppositions, the mundane



aesthetic names how the day-to-day activities of working in collaboration are often tedious, frustrating, and banal at the same time that they are exhilarating, motivating, and infused with love. How does one dwell with tensions such as these? As an initial response, the mundane aesthetic seeks to cultivate an active recognition of the vibrant matter that shapes rhetorical capacities (Bennett, 2010), critical attention to working with objects in ongoing articulations for world making (Whatmore, 2006), and etho-ecological trust in what we become from what we do (Stengers, 2011).

The mundane aesthetic is a useful starting point for commitments to world making through rhetorical fieldwork. In addition to providing a way to make sense of the messiness of resilience-focused collaborations, it is an approach that was shaped within the material histories of downeast Maine. This mundane, messy, muddy, worldly belonging traces the layered rhythms and sedimented histories (Glissant, 1997). However, over time and as new patterns revealed themselves I increasingly recognized the need to connect with concepts cultivated with/in oceanic and tidal assemblages and crafted with attention to patterns of colonialism that shape life at these edges. As transoceanic imaginaries, both tidalectics (Brathwaite & Mackey, 1991; DeLoughrey, 2018; Povinelli, 2018) and poetics of relation (Glissant, 1997) help attune to “‘riddims’ that are deeply rooted in (post-)colonial anger and hope” and patterns that take the “shape of an unresolved cycle rather than a forward-directed argument or progression” (Hessler, 2018, p. 33). So attuned, we can begin to feel, in Gaston Bachelard’s (1983) terms, the heaviness of water as “the element which remembers the dead” (p. 56). Thinking with water, and in this case the watery phenomenon of tidal cycles, weighs on dominant modes of thought such as logics that maintain separation, control, and exclusion to make collective imaginaries more porous and open to remembering forgotten histories.

### *Tidal capacities and ecologies of heavy water*

Transoceanic imaginaries set up two primary contributions to the mundane aesthetic, which I knit together below. First, rhetorical capacities emerge ecologically; yet ecology also transcends a politics of sensibility in how material power manifests beyond the horizon of what can be seen and felt. Though new materialist scholarship has been motivated by an interest in attending to vibrant matter (e.g. Bennett, 2010), the relational quality of ecology, and not the force of materiality *per se*, is of central importance in an aesthetic

orientation. The transoceanic imaginary directs awareness to water and tides as relational, ontological forces. Second, commitments to ecology and the radical influence of the world extend to the ecology of the concepts rhetoricians bring into the field. As Susanne K. Langer (1953) argues “[The] power of words is really astounding...This rhythm of language is a mysterious trait that probably bespeaks biological unities of thought and feeling which are entirely unexplored as yet” (p. 258). Attending to the histories and ecologies that articulate the concepts we use is important in all scholarship and may be particularly crucial in engaged rhetorical fieldwork that seeks invention from within (Hess, 2011).

Transoceanic imaginaries attune to the power and capacitating forces of tides as a distinct form of water. What water *is* in an oceanic tidal environment is a different kind of thing than water flowing in a river, moving through our bodies, falling as rain, visualized through science, kept behind dams, poured into a glass, frozen as ice at the earth’s poles and so on. Jamie Linton (2010) addresses the diverse qualities of water, and also how water has been simplified as a modern abstraction, when he takes up this very question: what is water? Using a genealogical approach, he traces how water became a modern abstraction which contributed to the erasure of water’s “polythetic materiality” (Stormer, 2016, p. 308). Characterizing water as a molecule comprised of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom (H<sub>2</sub>O) shapes water’s episteme in ways that enable related abstractions of water’s movements in singular and simplified terms (Foucault, 1970). These simplifications were inscribed as linear pathways and defined as “cycle” as a way to name repeated returns (Linton, 2010).

The chemical compound H<sub>2</sub>O and linear depictions of cycle have become potent universals that constitute modern scientific knowledge about water. The diffractive photo shown in Figure 2 is a recognizable image of the consolidation of water’s multiple possible meanings to an abstract quantification in the percentages of freshwater in various reservoirs and in the lines that trace circular closed loop patterns. This photo came from an exhibit in the Ocean Hall at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in May, 2018. This visualization of the hydrologic cycle is common in public outreach materials, hydrology textbooks, and environmental education programs designed to teach the water cycle (Linton, 2010). Scientific visualizations of the water cycle routinely reduce water’s dynamic movements to simple diagrams, many of which depict, in various forms, a closed-loop circle. Treating this image as a discursive object, Michel Foucault (1980) would suggest that

there are “elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution we must reconstruct, with the things said and concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that [discourse] comprises” (p. 100). In this image, aside from a few scattered trees and a pale patina of grass, living organisms are absent. By leaving out living organisms, the image obscures the intimate and fraught relationships between water, human, and nonhuman life and conceals water’s identity as a life force.

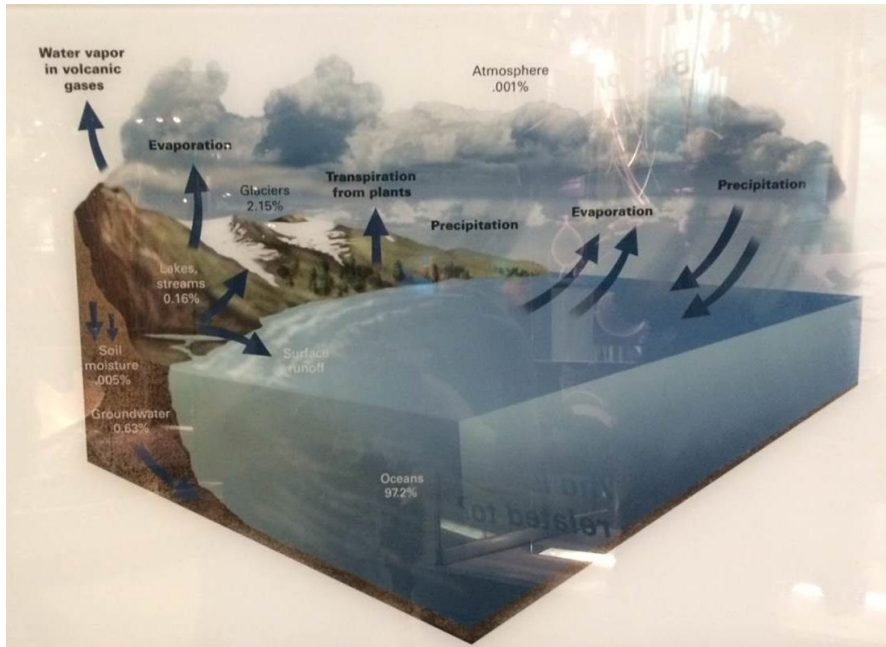


Figure 2. *Diffractive photo of the hydrological cycle at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum exhibit on oceans taken May 20, 2018.*

Yet the consequences of this type of image go beyond how we study and understand water scientifically. As Linton (2010) argues, “This consolidation of water’s identity is particular to a certain kind of society, namely one in which people subscribe to the ideas of technological advancement, economic development, and centralization of social power (i.e. the state)” (p. 10). Reducing water to a universal substance and predictable pattern of movement also limits the horizon of possibility in how we become ourselves in relation to this entity and its patterns of movement. Water and cycles are articulated in scientific discourse in ways that consolidate how living, breathing, watery bodies move, setting up singular paths of closed loops, endless returns, and commitments to control. Returning to the quotes introduced above where the shellfish warden and clam advocates had different and contrasting perspectives about cycles, one can begin to see the influence of the tides on cycles as a trope and also how organized sets of rule-bound

practices, such as those that shape clamming and shellfish science, create different ways of tracing and relating to these rhythms.

Practices of scientific visualization that constitute cycles as linear, predictable, and endless returns influence how the tropic differences in cycles are then cultivated (Linton, 2010). A critical orientation to water recognizes that what water is depends on the ecology within which water is encountered, which includes its discourse and also extends to its material rhythms. Practices of science are an important part of this ecology and intersect with other material forces as well, including what water carries along with it. For some, tides articulate with cycles and with knowledge gained from within the body to follow tidal oscillations into worlds of fundamental uncertainty, where one never knows what the next tide might bring in. For others, tides articulate cycles with knowledge sedimented through practices of science, including scientific visualizations such as the water cycle. These scientific observations then extend far outside immediate sense impressions such that tides and cycles are both configured as certain, traceable, and ultimately knowable. Tides turn in multiple directions, and in doing so they disorient the sense of simple singularities. As a movement of heavy water, tides also express a destabilizing power that troubles commonsense commitments to problems, solutions, and resilient returns to so-called normalcy, as I now explore.

### *Heavy water and remembering erasures*

In coastal environments, water is shaped within a complex constellation of forces to cohere into a recognizable rhythm where salt laden masses transform the space where land and ocean meet on a twice-daily basis. As this heavy water washes in, it carries millions of microorganisms that become food for myriad creatures who burrow and cling to the muddy surface which then become food for winged and legged organisms that traipse into this habitat in search of concentrated protein. These creatures dig below the surface in search of “continuous fecundity” where it is “the substantial marriage of earth and water realized in the [intertidal] that determines an anonymous, short, lush, abundant [molluscan] power” (Bachelard, 1983, p. 110). Wanting to see how this unique intertidal ecology figured in the Ocean Hall exhibit, I went looking in search of tides, starting with the depiction of the water cycle above (Figure 2). In this image, the land drops away directly into the depths of sub-tidal ocean. Curiously, the intertidal does not exist in this water cycle. Turning from the image towards other exhibits in the Ocean Hall, I noticed tides were absent everywhere.

There were artifacts and multi-media installations on ocean currents, the Gulf Stream, wind and waves, but no tides. The absence of tides from an exhibit on oceans and water is worth some further exploration.

The focus on oceanic water inevitably, and often rather quickly, turns to ocean plastics as a central matter of concern. Where tides were absent, plastics were very much present in this exhibit. Entering the space, I immediately encountered “Turtle Ocean,” a sculpture by Angela Haseltine Pozzi (2019) that recomposes plastic fragments and ocean waste into the swimming form of an endangered hawksbill turtle (for a photo of this sculpture, visit this website: <https://washedashore.org/photos/the-sculptures/>). Drawn in by the vibrant colors and the playful arrangement of the turtle in what at first appears as its natural environment, there is a moment of disorientation as the viewer realizes the colors and energetic forms are lethal to the oceanic inhabitants they compose. The plastic fragments suspended in imagined water lodges in the body. It’s affective.

Turning from this scene, the wall behind the installation showed an interactive display with urgent messages about the problem of ocean pollution, our individual complicity, and a range of behavior change solutions (Figure 3). These messages cohere in a clear expression of neoliberal ideology where the problem of plastic pollution is individualized and thus behavior change is figured as the penultimate solution as opposed to, for example, naming corporate responsibility, seeking to challenge consumerist culture, or disrupting logics of domination and control to change how humans relate to oceans.

Swirling masses of plastic, synoptically referred to as the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch,” have captivated concern about the health of the oceans. The response to this particular manifestation of neoliberal and capitalist form of waste raises the question: How have ocean plastics become immediately recognizable as a pressing problem? The care for this issue may, in part, be linked to the affective weight of plastic floating on ocean currents, making its way into turtle bodies (Rivers, 2018), fish bodies (Probyn, 2016), albatross and human bodies (Propen, 2018). Plastic floating in water and ingested by aquatic organisms becomes watery body burdens that cultivate an affective resonance and ethic of care about this issue.

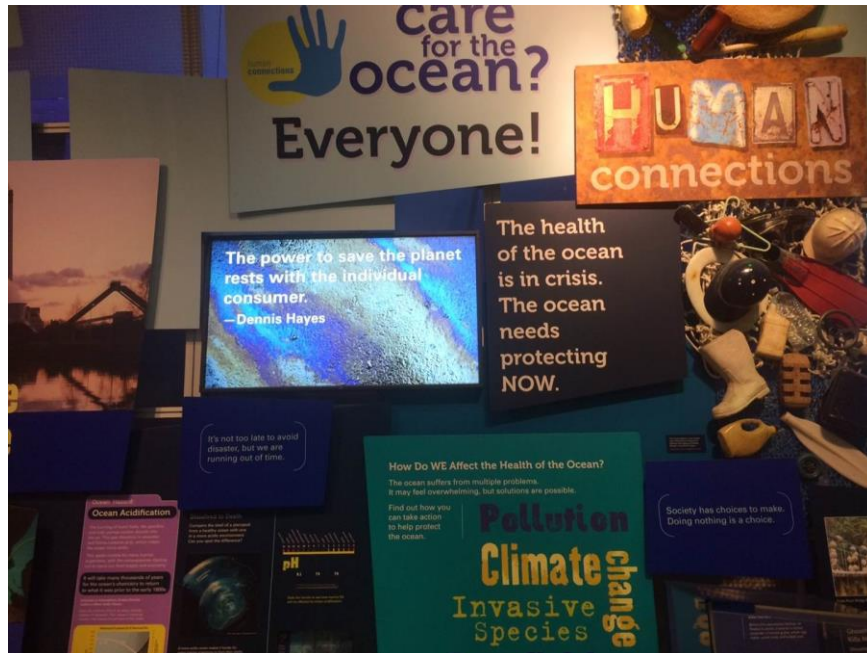


Figure 3. Photo that demonstrates a neoliberal belief in the responsibility of the individual consumer to care about the ocean to save it.

However, the heaviness of ocean plastics is more than a felt kinship among sentient beings. The concept “Great Pacific Garbage Patch” matters as a way to name this global problem. Michelle Huang (2017) examines meanings that haunt this concept through a “synthetic reading practice that draws upon other Asian American texts and cultural representations” to examine how this concept contributes to “the racialization of plastic” (p. 99). Ocean plastics and the related discursive formulation of the garbage patch become “sticky” because plastic as an object articulates racialized meanings in stereotypical and discernable ways (Chen, 2012; Huang, 2017). It is necessary to examine complex interconnections between what we come to see as a problem and the racist ideologies that cling to concepts and shape responses (Huang, 2017, p. 113). Mel Chen (2012) extends this point in their analysis of racialized discourses of lead and mercury contamination and how these “particles are critically mobile and their status *as toxins* derives from their potential threat to valued human integrities” (p. 159, emphasis added). Naming the association between Great Pacific Garbage Patch and the racist meanings that make this concept *make sense* in particular ways aims to “minimally register the gendered, laboring, and chronically toxically exposed bodies of globalized capital, which systematically bear less frequent mentions in narratives of toxicity...With this registration, lead’s spectacle remains connected to the possible forging of justice” (Chen, 2012, p. 188). Recognizing the Great Pacific Garbage Patch as a racist

formation opens a space to remember the problem of plastics in ways that attend to erasures.

The heaviness of oceanic water does work here too, as the weight of water itself may help remember erasures, such as racist meanings that articulate the problem of plastics. DeLoughrey (2010) draws from Bachelard (1983) to explain:

Since the ocean is in perpetual movement and cannot be easily localized, representations of heavy water problematize movement and render space into place as a way to memorialize histories of violence and to rupture notions of progress. These narratives merge the human subject of the past and the present, establishing an intimacy Bachelard associates with the dissolving qualities of the ocean and a process in which one might salvage the metaphysical waste of human history. (p. 704)

The interplay of the ocean's movement and the ways in which human lives have continuously intersected with oceanic bodies make it a potent space for remembering layered histories. The plastic turtle suspended in a present yet absent ocean remembers ecological, corporeal connections. The imagined Ocean in which the Turtle swims presses on consciousness. The sculpture's articulation with the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and the racist meanings that haunt this concept fold memory practices in ways that narrow the sense of the "problem" and what becomes possible as solution: just say no to straws. Tides, as a disruptive rhythm of heavy oceanic water, push on these reductive, colonial, and neoliberal narratives.

Returning then to the absence of the tides in this exhibit: as a material rhythm tides trouble singular and stable patterns of order and easy solutions to complex problems. As Brathwaite's tidalectic orientation intends, tides disrupt such dialectics (Hessler, 2018; Brathwaite & Mackey, 1991). Tides, as dynamic movements of heavy water, remember cycles differently as well. In the following section, I aim to explore this more by examining how cycles' capacity for ontological oscillations, for tacking back and forth (Star, 2010; Teston, 2017), is intensified by attunements to shared material histories, rhythms, and dependencies.

## Inhabiting Cycles and Crossing Worlds

The examples woven into this piece give a sense of how cycles are a complex and confusing trope, turning from knowledge accumulated through embodied observation to that accreted from scientific measurement; from repeated, rhythmic returns to endless forms of variation; from predictable, ordered worlds to inherent uncertainty and dynamic change. Quintilian (1920) in *Institutio Oratoria*, defines such tropes as *metalepsis* or *transumptio*:

a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition. It is a trope with which to claim acquaintance, rather than one which we are ever likely to require to use. (p. 323)

In contemporary interpretations that have partially recuperated Quintilian's dismissal of this trope, Nathan Stormer (2015) points to de Certeau's (1997) treatment of *metalepsis* to describe it as "the means by which tropes that work conjointly, a reversal and a substitution in this case, create a passageway from one place to another even though the conceptual distance may seem far" (p. 88). As a form of symbolic action, *metalepsis* names how tropes create unexpected oscillations between one reality and another (Ackerman, 2018; Stewart, 2007), the moment where a metaphor is stretched to the point of breaking (Cummings, 2007). The trembling intensity when a trope is stretched to its limits opens a space for movement across ontological planes. Cycles attune to these intensities through specific practices that articulate matter, discourse, bodies, and ecologies and shape tropic movement, where knowledge within the body is transformed to knowledge outside the body in one confusing move (Stormer, 2015).

The tides are, of course, a conditioning force for cycles' ontological crossings. But transmutations need moments of intensification to push through to new orderings. Henri Lefebvre (2004) describes such moments from the "microscopic to the astronomical, from molecules to galaxies, passing through the beatings of the heart, the blinking of the eyelids and breathing" (p. 84). Beginning with heartbeats and electrical rhythms that organize organic life, feeling the regular pulse of inhalations and exhalations from lungs, remembering the aching desire for water after a long hot day in the sun is to remember cycles as that place as "near to 'rock bottom' as human thought could take us" (Burke, 1954, p.



261). This locus is, for Kenneth Burke (1954), biological metaphor. I argue that it is the interplay of cycles as a metaleptic trope and biological metaphor that serves as the conditioning force for transmutation.

Returning to the hint that Langer (1953) gives above about the unexplored possibilities in “biological unities of thought and feeling” (p. 258) we can consider how cycles trace patterned virtual experiences: heartbeat, breath, thirst. Langer (1953) argues that as “organisms, all our actions develop in organic fashion, and our feelings as well as our physical acts have an essentially metabolic pattern. Systole, diastole; making, unmaking; crescendo, diminuendo. Sustaining, sometimes, but never for indefinite lengths; life, death” (p. 241). Biological metaphors create ways of relating to the world shaped by these rhythms that temporarily sustain patterns. These forms interrelate with our sense perceptions through which we can begin to make contingent choices about how to tack back and forth (Star, 2010; Teston, 2017). Though Langer’s description may at first articulate practices of tacking as attuning to pulses of electricity that organize organic experience, Glissant (1997) proposes an alternative, and one that articulates more closely with tidal ecosystems:

We no longer reveal the totality within ourselves by lightning flashes. We approach it through the accumulation of sediments...Lightning flashes are the shivers of one who desires or dreams a totality that is impossible or yet to come; duration urges on those who attempt to live this totality, when dawn shows through the linked histories of peoples. (p. 33)

Sediments, duration, and Dawnland set up the tack into the final closing section, turning back to cycle to begin to trace interconnected colonial relations for intimate disruptions.

## **Conclusion: Cycles, Poetry, and Passage**

In Maine and elsewhere, the impact of rising seas and intensifying coastal storms are changing ways of life that have persisted for millennia, with disproportionate impacts on those who may be the least able to adapt (Rush, 2018). Seeking resilience to coastal change, an interdisciplinary group of researchers recently turned their attention to shell middens, piles of shells along the coast that serve as a rich source of ecological, geological, and archaeological information that are eroding due to coastal change (Carpenter,

2017; Spiess, 2017). At the same time that a scientific endeavor formed to preserve and document middens, and in a synergy that resonates with Glissant's (1997) discussion of sediment, duration, and linked histories, a book of poetry written by Julia Bouwsma (2018) entitled *Midden* also emerged. Though this collection of poems focuses on shell middens, Bouwsma turns to these piles of shells, bones, and other fragments to tell a different story. The poems in this volume are about Malaga Island, which is located in Maine's Casco Bay and was once home to an interracial community of about 45 people who were forcibly removed in 1912. In these poems, Julia Bouwsma addresses the ghosts of those erased from this place. She asks "How do you remember your island?" and responds "As stone fingers spread an octave into the sea/As salt brands ankles and red-mud heels callous to clay" (p. 12). She follows this question with "How did you leave?" and says "Our houses became our bodies—we lashed/ourselves to rafts. Our bodies became boats...carrying our hearts in our fists" (p. 13). In this remembering, the ghosts of colonial invasion and displacements turn fingers to stone and salt and mud back into the body in modes of duration that articulate tidal cycles, the rhythmic layering of shell in sea water and on land, and the transformation of bodies into boats carried away on the water.

Glissant (1997) begins his *Poetics of Relation* with the figure of a boat too, possibly similar to that which carried residents of Malaga Island to incarcerate them in the Maine School for the Feeble-Minded (Bouwsma, 2018). Glissant's "Open Boat" describes the movement of slaves across a three dimensional abyss: a space that tears when one is wrenched from one's homeland; a space that opens over the ocean where the boat is a womb waiting to expel bodies it contains and yet is also one that is shared with many others; and the space of arrival at the shore of a new land, at once recognizable and profoundly foreign where those who survived walk off to meet "the first inhabitants, who had also been deported by permanent havoc" (p. 8). After situating this abyss, he urges: "This is why we stay with poetry...We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone" (Glissant, 1997, p. 9). Heavy water and the objects water circulates—in this essay plastic, cycles, boats, and bodies—begin to show the limits of articulating resilience as a return to a "normal," stable state and as resistance to change.

This ending intends both intimacy and disruption: intense oscillations in spatial-temporal location, emotion, confusion, and

uneasy connections. To end with intimacy and disruption, I return to the museum one last time and the installation (Figure 3) that implores: “The power to save the planet rests with the individual consumer.” A logical extension of this argument is to stop using disposable plastic, thereby reducing our impact. At a material level, through this singular act of refusal, less plastic enters the ocean. But the push back against plastic is stabilizing for how it (re)establishes and affirms the original surface of emergence (Stormer & McGreavy, 2017). This is akin to Glissant’s (1997) critique of opposition above and also to Foucault’s (1980) repressive hypothesis where, in both, power is conceptualized as a singular and linear form of dominance in which the horizon for possible action is delimited by the dominant formation. When resilience is discursively produced as a singular mode of resistance, i.e. refusal and push back, we enter into such a formation. This simultaneously obscures how power functions as a “multiplicity of force relations imminent in the sphere in which they operate” (Foucault, 1980, p. 92). Though Foucault then argues, “Where there is power, there is resistance” he offers a modification to resistance as a singular response of refusal and push back: “Instead, there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case” (p. 96). In this plurality, we might (re)conceptualize the refusal of plastic, and a whole suite of activities commonly understood as resistance, as non-localized forms of intimacy that disrupt relations of dominance (DeLoughrey, 2010).

As aesthetic responses, intimacy and disruption create ontological conditions where resistance and push back may instead become actualized as working with/in a multiplicity of force relations to find moments of intensification to push through to new orderings. Cycles as a metaleptic trope are one space for such intensification, relying on myriad intimacies as biological metaphor and disruptive in how they create ontological crossings. Returning to the coastal resilience case that inspired the guiding question: what do cycles offer a space of action in resilience-seeking collaborations? I argue that cycles create a productive confusion that articulates necessary links between what is felt through the body and what extends beyond in space and time where it is possible to remember shared rhythms and histories so we may navigate these passages in uneasy, disruptive and yet still poetic relations.

Copyright © 2020 Bridie McGreavy

## Reference List

- Ackerman, J. (2018). Walking in the city: The arrival of the rhetorical subject. In B. McGreavy, J. Wells, G. McHendry, & S. Senda-Cook (Eds.), *Tracing rhetoric and material life: Ecological approaches* (pp. 117-140). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bachelard, G. (1983). *Water and dreams: An essay on the imagination of water*. Dallas, TX: The Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant matter: A political ecology of things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bouwsma, J. (2018). *Midden*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- Brathwaite, E. K., & Mackey, N. (1991). An interview with Edward Kamau Brathwaite. *Hambone*, (9), 42-59.
- Burke, K. (1954). *Permanence and change: An anatomy of purpose*. London, UK: University of California Press.
- Carpenter, M. (2017). Native American secrets lie buried in huge shell mounds. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/19/science/native-americans-shell-middens-maine.html>
- Chen, M. (2012). *Animacies: Biopolitics, racial mattering, and queer affect*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Cummings, B. (2007). *Metalepsis: the boundaries of metaphor*. In S. Adamson, G. Alexander, & K. Ettenhuber (Eds.), *Renaissance figures of speech* (pp. 217-234). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1997). *The capture of speech and other political writings* (T. Conley, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1968)
- DeLoughrey, E. (2010). Heavy waters: Waste and Atlantic modernity. *PMLA*, 125(3), 703-712.

- DeLoughrey, E. (2018). Revisiting tidalectics: Irma/Jose/Maria 2017. In S. Hessler (Ed.), *Tidalectics: Imagining an oceanic worldview through art and science* (pp. 93-102). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Foucault, M. (1970). *The order of things: An archaeology of the human sciences*. New York, NY: Random House, Inc.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *The history of sexuality, Volume I: An introduction*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Glissant, É. (1997). *Poetics of relation* (B. Wing, Trans.). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Graham, S. S. (2015). *The politics of pain medicine: A rhetorical-ontological inquiry*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Hariman, R. (1998). Terrible beauty and mundane detail: Aesthetic knowledge in the practice of everyday life. *Argumentation & Advocacy*, 35(1), 10-18.
- Hess, A. (2011). Critical-rhetorical ethnography: Rethinking the place and process of rhetoric. *Communication Studies*, 62(2), 127-152.
- Hessler, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Tidalectics: Imagining an oceanic worldview through art and science*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Huang, M. N. (2017). Ecologies of entanglement in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. *Journal of Asian American Studies*, 20(1), 95-117.
- Keeling, D., Garza, P., Nartey, C. M., & Carvunia, A. R. (2019). Recalcitrance and resilience of scientific function. *POROI*, 15(1). Retrieved from <https://ir.uiowa.edu/poroi/>
- Langer, S. K. (1953). *Feeling and form: A theory of art developed from a philosophy in a new key*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Latour, B. (1987). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Lefebvre, H. (2004). *Rhythmanalysis: Space, time and everyday life*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Linton, J. (2010). *What is water? The history of a modern abstraction*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Maine Department of Marine Resources. (2019). Historical Maine fisheries landings data. Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/dmr/commercial-fishing/landings/historical-data.html>
- Margolius, R., Stem, C., Salafksy, N., & Brown, M. (2009). Using conceptual models as a planning and evaluation tool in conservation. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 32, 138–47. doi: 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2008.09.007
- McGreavy, B. (2016). Resilience as discourse. *Environmental Communication*, 10(1), 104-121. doi: 10.1080/17524032.2015.1014390
- McGreavy, B. (2018). Intertidal poetry: Making our way through change. In B. McGreavy, J. Wells, G. McHendry, & S. Senda-Cook (Eds.), *Tracing rhetoric and material life: Ecological approaches* (pp. 87-115). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McGreavy, B., Fox, E., Disney, J., Petersen, C., & Lindenfeld, L. (2018). Belonging to the world: Rhetorical fieldwork as mundane aesthetic. In C. Rai & C. G. Druschke (Eds.), *Field rhetoric: Ethnography, ecology, and engagement in the places of persuasion* (pp. 148-170). Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.
- Mol, A. (2002). *The body multiple: Ontology in medical practice*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2018). The kinship of tides. In S. Hessler (Ed.), *Tidalectics: Imagining an oceanic worldview through art and science* (pp. 165–176). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Probyn, E. (2016). *Eating the ocean*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Propen, A. D. (2018). *Visualizing posthuman conservation in the age of the Anthropocene*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press.

- Pozzi, A. H. (2019). The sculptures: Turtle ocean. Retrieved from <https://washedashore.org/photos/the-sculptures/>
- Quintilian. (1920). *The Institutio Oratoria* of Quintilian: Book VIII (H. E. Butler, Trans.). New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons. (Original work published c. 95 CE)
- Rivers, N. (2018). Better footprints. In B. McGreavy, J. Wells, G. McHendry, & S. Senda-Cook (Eds.), *Tracing rhetoric and material life: Ecological approaches* (pp. 169-196). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rush, E. A. (2018). *Rising: Dispatches from the new American shore*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions.
- Spiess, A. E. (2017). People of the clam: Shellfish and diet in coastal Maine Late Archaic and Ceramic period sites, *Journal of the North Atlantic*, 10(10), 105-112.
- Star, S. L. (2010). This is not a boundary object: Reflections on the origin of a concept. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 35(5), 601-617.
- Stengers, I. (2011). *Thinking with Whitehead: A free and wild creation of concepts* (M. Chase, Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. (Original work published 2002)
- Stewart, K. (2007). *Ordinary affects*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Stormer, N. (2015). *Sign of pathology: U.S. medical rhetoric on abortion, 1800s-1960*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Stormer, N. (2016). Rhetoric's diverse materiality: Polythetic ontology and genealogy. *Review of Communication*, 16(4), 299-316.
- Stormer, N., & McGreavy, B. (2017). Thinking ecologically about rhetoric's ontology: Capacity, vulnerability, and resilience. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 50(1), 1-25.
- Teston, C. (2017). Enthymematic elasticity in the biomedical backstage. In L. Walsh & C. Boyle (Eds.), *Topologies as techniques for a post-*

*critical rhetoric* (pp. 219-241). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tsing, A. L. (2005). *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world: On the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Walker, K. (2017). A year of deliberating danger(ously): A network topology of the loaded climate dice metaphor. In L. Walsh & C. Boyle (Eds.), *Topologies as techniques for a post-critical rhetoric* (pp. 175-196). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Walsh, L. (2017). Understanding the rhetoric of climate science debates. *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 8(3), e452.

Walsh, L. & Boyle, C. (2017). From intervention to invention: Introducing topological techniques. In L. Walsh & C. Boyle (Eds.), *Topologies as techniques for a post-critical rhetoric* (pp. 1-16). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

Whatmore, S. (2006). Materialist returns: Practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies*, 13(4), 600-609. doi:10.1191/1474474006cgj3770a

Whitson, S., & Poulakos, J. (1993). Nietzsche and the aesthetics of rhetoric. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 79(2), 131-145. doi:10.1080/00335639309384025