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Oceans: The Space of Future Thinking

ABSTRACT Thomas More's *Utopia* is located at the beginning of what Henri Lefebvre calls "historical space" in which the ocean had unparalleled significance for imperial expansion. Whether as "free domain" in Hugo Grotius's terms, or as a space of imagined utopias, or as promise of the coming network of global capitalism, the sea was a powerful space for thinking of the future. Islands, those territories found between the "Old World" and the "New" that were immensely useful in the imperial object of "territorializing the unterritorializable," became the focus of postcolonial transformation through the agency of the utopian hope. Two regions in particular, Oceania and the Caribbean, stand as the most vibrant and powerful examples of such transformation. The sea, that had seemed to offer free rein to imperial capitalism, became the site of a reimagined future, the open space of the utopian imagination the lies at the core of postcolonial resistance.

KEYWORDS utopia, islands, Caribbean, Oceania, postcolonial transformation

Utopias

An enduring paradox in the relationship between imperialism and the people of former empires is that both are motivated by a vision of the future, however vastly different in their conception. And for both the sea provides the consummate image of this vision.[1] To imperial powers the sea offered the prospect of expansion and global control. To the colonized it offered a space of renewal, freedom and transformation. Both are driven by a distinctly utopian energy. For Ernst Bloch (1986) utopian hope is so fundamental to human life that it characterizes every aspect of social thinking. Grasping the spirit of utopia in human consciousness is

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fundamental to understanding human society. The paradox of imperial utopianism is that its vision of change works entirely to sustain the present state of imperial power, which is the function of ideology (Mannheim [1936] 1966, 173), the very opposite of utopianism. Yet for Bloch ideologies also incorporate the image of a world beyond alienation, and without the utopian function operating even within ideology, no spiritual surplus, no idea of a better world would be possible. So, the ideology of national expansion that underlies imperialism establishes a precursor of the utopian energy that drives the postcolonial conception of the ocean as a space of future thinking.

Thomas More's *Utopia* is located at the beginning of what Henri Lefebvre (1991) calls "historical space" in which the ocean began to achieve unparalleled significance for imperial expansion. Whether as "free domain" in Hugo Grotius's ([1609] 1916) terms, or as a space of imagined utopias, or as promise of the coming network of global capitalism, the sea was a powerful geographical and metaphorical space for thinking of the future. But as with so many aspects of imperial expansion, colonial resistance turned the utopian element of imperial ideology on its head. Islands, those territories found between the "Old World" and the "New," were immensely useful in the strategy of imperial expansion but they also became the focus of postcolonial transformation through the agency of future thinking. There are many ways of reading postcolonial oceans and important work has been done on the Black Atlantic and the Indian Ocean. But two regions in particular, Oceania and the Caribbean, though very different in colonial experience, population, and territory, demonstrate a capacity for oceanic and archipelagic thinking that establishes them as two of the most vibrant and powerful examples of such transformation. The sea, which had seemed to offer free rein to the imperial adventure, and subsequently to capitalist expansion, became to the colonized the site of a reimagined future, the open space of the utopian imagination that lies at the core of postcolonial resistance.

The location of More's *Utopia* (1516) on an island balances the tension between utopia as a place and utopianism as the spirit of hope. While utopias are a blueprint, a perhaps unobtainable blueprint of the ideal society, being located at a distance, the ocean makes them a constant, if unobtainable object of desire. In the imperial mind this morphed into various visions of island paradises. Arguably, as distant and ambivalently historicized spaces, islands are by their very nature objects of desire, and although not all utopias are located on islands, their distance coincides with the imperial spread of European influence. At the very moment capitalism was producing historical space, with islands as nodes

for territorializing the sea, a flood of imaginary utopias, mostly located on islands, began to emerge in the eighteenth century when imperialism was simultaneously accelerating. As Nigel Leask explains, "James Burgh's *Cessares* (1764), Thomas Spence's *Crusonia* (1782), Carl Wadstrom's *Sierra Leone* (1787), Wolfe Tone's *Hawaii* (1790), Thomas Northmore's *Makar* (1795), and Robert Southey's *Caermadoc* (1799)" (2000, 348) were all utopias established in isolated regions of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, or the Pacific, with a blissful absence of moral qualms about setting up a colonial utopia on someone else's land.

Perhaps most interesting is the coincidence of More's vision of Utopia and the coeval emergence of imperialism and capitalism. Hegel's famous statement in *The Philosophy of Right* (1820) marries the dense connections between capitalism and the ocean to a range of concomitant concepts, on which capitalism depends—risk, industry, flux, danger, destruction, and communication:

> The sea is the greatest means of communication, and trade by sea creates commercial connections between distant countries and so relations involving contractual rights. At the same time, commerce of this kind is the most potent instrument of culture, and through it trade acquires its significance in the history of the world. ([1820] 1942, 151)

While the sea could not be owned, the routes devised to traverse it could be policed. Hugo Grotius's ([1609] 1916) argument that a "law of the seas" could be established to guarantee the possibility of every (powerful) state to traverse the ocean as "free domain." But the fundamentally deterritorialized quality of the ocean was far too threatening for the law. To be contained, it had to be conceptualized as territory. According to Steinberg (2001, 91) this was a matter to be performed by capitalism itself, so adept in the constant dynamic of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Islands "were the 'territories' that could achieve the improbable feat of territorializing the unterritorializable" (Llenín-Figueroa 2012, 179).

While imperialism brings the world into history (which by conception and description is always European) and constructs that world space as a mercantile network, islands have the profound function of identifying the pivotal point between the imperial utopia of emergent global capitalism and the insurgent oceanic utopias of postcolonial societies. This is true of both the geographical island and its imaginative conception. Islands in general, and utopia as an island, reveal the supreme importance of the sea in conceiving a future possibility. But one can see this process in practical terms in contemporary times. What strikes the traveller about islands,

whether in the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, or in the Pacific, is the prevalence of vessels and particularly vehicular ferries. In the extension of the road system across the archipelago by means of these ferries, we see an example of capitalism attempting to territorialize the unterritorializable by extending the mercantile network. But by the same token they enhance the habit of travel, the interweaving network of routes that characterize the dynamic of connection in a postcolonial ocean.

Islands have a significant place in the human imagination. According to Deleuze, "[h]umans cannot live, nor live in security, unless they assume that the active struggle between earth and water is over, or at least contained" (2002, 9). This is, of course, why islands are and continue to be so important for utopian thinking. They are not only "insular" or "contained" but in some respects, beyond—before or after—humankind. "Humans find themselves separated from the world when on an island" (10) but, more importantly, "it is humans who create the world anew from the island and on the waters" (10). "An island does not stop being deserted [to the European imagination] simply because it is inhabited [...] humans do not put an end to desertedness, they make it sacred" (10). "The essence of the deserted island is imaginary and not actual, mythological and not geographical. At the same time, its destiny is subject to those human conditions that make mythology possible" (11). Desert islands may be sacred, but they are philosophically uninhabitable, the "other" of the continent. This is perhaps why there are so many desert island cartoons—the absurdity of ordinary life on them is the source of their humour.

While islands seemed to allow imperial states to circumvent the doctrine of freedom of the seas and achieve the improbable feat of territorializing the unterritorializable, they resist their function as nodes for territorializing global capital because they are open in ways that the continent cannot be. As Édouard Glissant says, the "island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea" (1989, 139). Apart from being well-bounded spaces, islands are also the ideal location of utopia because they automatically imply travel. "Every living thing on an island has been a traveller," says Greg Dening; "every species of tree, plant and animal on an island has crossed the beach" (1980, 24). But at the same time, islands fulfil a mythic need: both islands and utopias occupy the horizon of desire, the glistening but unobtainable goal at the end of the journey.

The importance of the sea to imperialism is not simply the promise of economic expansion but the utopian object that underpinned it—the civilizing mission, the spread of European culture. We are reminded of Hegel's assertion that "commerce of this kind" (by which he meant trade

across the sea) "is the most potent instrument of culture" (quoted in Cohen 2004, 75). Commerce predicates culture even today in the abstract space of the digital world, but this was fundamental to the imperial imagination. Reverend Sydney Smith, for example, writes: "To introduce an European population, and consequently the arts and civilisation of Europe, into such an untrodden country as New Holland, is to confer a lasting and important benefit upon the world" (quoted in Gascoigne 2002, 7). But utopia must be created, usually at the expense of the indigenous people, and also, as Alfred Crosby (1986) explains, at the expense of indigenous flora and fauna. James Anthony Froude, in *Oceana—Or England and Her Colonies* (1886), envisaged a global commonwealth of English-speaking colonies in which the words of "Rule Britannia" would come true. Colonists would "become the progenitors of a people destined to exceed the glories of European civilization, as much as they have outstripped the wonders of ancient enterprise" (Froude [1886] 2010, 429).

So, for the British Empire utopia was foreseen in the beneficial spread of the British race throughout the world. This was all very well for the settler colonies, which seemed to be performing this task, but for the island nations of the Pacific the situation was very different. The *oceanic* dimensions of utopia first emerged with James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana*, a veiled reference to England (like More's *Utopia*), published in 1656 at the time of Cromwell's Commonwealth. Oceans and islands became the natural repository of the utopian and a vision of the South Seas emerged during the eighteenth century, as the region began to take form in the European imagination, most famously in the imaginations of Robert Louis Stevenson (1886) and Paul Gauguin (Bretell 1989).

Oceania

But the imaginative space of the island becomes the point at which the utopianism of empire is overtaken by the utopia of a postcolonial Pacific, the space of capitalist expansion becoming the space of postcolonial cultural assertion. Despite the imaginative openness of the island, Pacific islands were and are very small; and a vision of a Pacific cultural reality is required, which could only occur through the sea itself. Albert Wendt's article "Toward a New Oceania" claimed:

> I belong to Oceania—or, at least, I am rooted in a fertile part of it and it nourishes my spirit, helps to define me, and feeds my imagination. [...] So vast, so fabulously varied a scatter of islands, nations, cultures, mythologies

> and myths, so dazzling a creature, Oceania deserves more than an attempt at mundane fact; only the imagination in free flight can hope—if not to contain her—to grasp some of her shape, plumage, and pain. (1976, 49)

This was an important moment. For him Oceania was a vision created and nurtured above all by art and literature. "In their individual journeys into the Void, these artists, through their work, are explaining us to ourselves and creating a new Oceania" (1976, 60).

It is no surprise that Pacific writers have led the move towards an Oceanic consciousness because the agency of the literary imagination in particular has the scope and vision to conceptualize this utopia. Epeli Hauʻofa insists that Oceania does not refer to a political structure or a formal confederation, but it does appear to recognize the existence of a supra-national identity arising, among other things, from the cultural crosscurrents of the region, the interconnectedness of its literature, its histories, its mythologies. Hauʻofa first picked up Wendt's vision in 1993 in an essay entitled "Our Sea of Islands" (Hauʻofa 1993). The need for a utopian view of the future emerged from the bleak assessment of Pacific Island nations and territories as "much too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centres of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations" (1993, 88). Pacific Island nations had become what one commentator called MIRAB societies: dependent on "migration, remittance, aid and bureaucracy" (Bertram 1985, 497).

Hauʻofa reversed this bleak denigration of island nations by a simple change of perspective. Rather than "islands in a far sea" they could be regarded as "a sea of islands." Island nations may be tiny, but the history, myths, oral traditions, and cosmologies of the people of Oceania constituted a world that was anything but tiny—it was a vast space, a space of movement, migration, of immensity and ancestral history. The difference is reflected in the names "Pacific Islands" and "Oceania." One denotes small, scattered bits of land, the other "connotes a sea of islands with their inhabitants" (1993, 92), a world in which people moved and mingled unhindered by the boundaries of state, culture, or ethnicity. This moving world, which seems to have been confined, constricted, and striated by the various boundaries of modernity, is the world of Oceanic hope, the world of the future. The tendency of "Oceania" to dismantle the structures of nation, race, and ethnicity is seen when Hauʻofa asks "[who] or what is a Pacific Islander?": "The issue should not arise if we consider Oceania as comprising human beings with a common heritage and commitment,

rather than as members of diverse nationalities and races. Oceania refers to a world of people connected to each other" (1998, 36).

Clearly, seen in these terms, Oceania occupies what Deleuze referred to as "smooth space" existing in, around, and between the "striated space" of states, governments, and political formations of various kinds (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 528). Indeed, the sea might be the ultimate example of smooth space. It is above all, and has always been, a space of movement, the journeys of trade and migration, a movement that has been interrupted but not destroyed by the post-imperial emergence of independent states. The smooth space of Oceania is an unstructured but interconnected, criss-crossing and interweaving fabric of cultural movement and exchange.

The concept of Oceania as it was conceived by Wendt and Hauʻofa is a vibrant demonstration of the capacity of postcolonial oceans to stimulate a hope for the future, a hope for freedom. But this concept of Oceania reaches back into the cultural memory of a sea marked by movement and human flow. Oceanic identity is characterized not by the static identification with place, but the circulatory and migratory movements that historically criss-crossed the ocean. It is thus in the very significance of movement and mobility that the embedding of the future in the past takes form.

> Before the advent of Europeans into the Pacific, our cultures were truly oceanic, in the sense that the sea barrier shielded us for millennia from the great cultural influences that raged through continental land-masses and adjacent islands. This prolonged period of isolation allowed for the emergence of distinctive oceanic cultures with the only non-oceanic influences being the original cultures that the earliest settlers brought with them when they entered the vast, uninhabited region. (Hauʻofa 1998, 38)

Oceania is the largest "continent" in the world, with the smallest landmass, and it is completely vulnerable to the depredations of larger populations, through colonialism, fishing, mining, and capital expansion. Nevertheless, while many Pacific urban populations have been alienated from their cultural histories, the Ocean still forms the context of historical, social, and cultural being. For the Caribbean, as Derek Walcott puts it, "the sea is history." This is the sea of the Middle Passage, slavery, and exile, a sea across which there is no return—a very different sea from the Pacific. But Oceania is no less historical, traversed as it is by journeys, migrations, and the myths and legends such crossings produced. Hauʻofa sees this

realization as "the beginning of a very important chapter in our history. We could open it as we enter the third millennium" (1998, 39).

As history, it is also the hope of the future. As a space of being, it is the antithesis of place with its histories of disputes:

> [A]s the sea is an open and ever flowing reality, so should our oceanic identity transcend all forms of insularity, to become one that is openly searching, inventive, and welcoming. In a metaphorical sense the ocean that has been our waterway to each other should also be our route to the rest of the world. (1998, 40)

So it is the sea rather than the land that defines the identity of the Pacific Islander and this has remarkable consequences, at least potentially, for the nature of Oceanic subjectivity. For it is not linked to place as a hereditary site, national boundary, or even cultural location, but to a space of movement, a space situated in ecological time, a space in which the cycle of the future spins on the axis of the past. Ultimately Oceania is, like all utopias, situated in the region of the poetic as Hau'ofa expresses it: "Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous. Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania in us. We are the sea, we are the ocean" (1998, 98).

The Caribbean Archipelago

The Pacific, while continuously inhabited, has always been a space of movement and migration and this movement has provided the cultural energy behind the oceanic vision. But what turns Caribbean islands from their imputed strategic function of territorializing of the sea, what makes them "open," "horizontal," a source of renewal, is their location in an archipelago. Archipelagos are not simply the "other" of continents, they challenge the polarity of "Old World" and "New World," of sea and land, of island and continent, and, indeed, go so far as to challenge binary thinking itself. The concept of the archipelago has become prominent in cultural geography. Of the three sets of topological relations in island studies, land and water, island and continent/mainland, and island and island, the last is greatly under-theorized (Stratford et al. 2011, 115). The significance of this is that such relations affect cultural discourse.

Pugh suggests that "Western culture not only thinks about islands, it thinks with them" (Pugh 2013, 9). He then asks, "how can thinking with the archipelago change how we think about the world and our place in

it?" (10). "Thinking with the archipelago" implies a number of particular ways of thinking: a rejection of the binarism of island and mainland; an awareness of the collectivity and interconnectivity of other islands in the archipelago (and hence other subjects in society), which become the nodes of constant movement and exchange, both geographically and culturally. This leads ultimately to a perception that culture is always a surplus to the nation, that culture, like the sea itself, is a smooth space around the striations of the state. In the archipelago, space becomes more than the backdrop of political action and postcolonial resistance, it is the site of constant creative interaction.

The prominence of the archipelagic space is one reason why region dominates nation in the Caribbean imagination. According to Édouard Glissant, Caribbeanness is an ontological position that looks beyond nation towards multiplicity.

> Caribbeanness, an intellectual dream, lived at the same time in an unconscious way by our peoples, tears us free from the intolerable alternative of the need for nationalism and introduces us to the cross-cultural process that modifies but does not undermine the latter. What is the Caribbean in fact? A multiple series of relations. We all feel it, we express it in all kinds of hidden or twisted ways, or we fiercely deny it. But we sense that this sea exists within us with its weight of now revealed islands. [...] [I]n the Caribbean each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining. A Caribbean imagination liberates us from being smothered. (1989, 139)

The idea of the Caribbean as a "multiple series of relations" is a perfect description of its archipelagic consciousness and holds true for its various dimensions of cultural reality. While such an idea is familiar to postmodern critics for whom all identity is relational, it is particularly significant for the complex web of relations out of which Caribbean identities emerge. But such relationality also generates a unique concept of travel, and the archipelago develops a very different understanding of exploration from the imperial traversal of the world. According to Benítez-Rojo, "[t]he Antilleans' insularity does not impel them toward isolation, but on the contrary toward travel, toward exploration, toward the search for fluvial and marine routes" (1996, 25).

The openness of the archipelago envisages the future through a constant dynamic of change and renewal as inheritances of all kinds, both from colonial culture and from other islands are appropriated and transformed. Seen in this light, "thinking with the archipelago" offers us a clue

to the Caribbean capacity for fluidity, multiplicity, and transformation in everything from language and literature to history and myth, including effects such as carnival, politics, religion, folklore, and food. Thus, while the dominant utopian strategy in African literatures comes from the resurgence of cultural memory, something from which the Caribbean subject is historically cut off, the strategy of the archipelago is inevitably transformative, exogenous, and creative, confirming both the hope for the future and the capacity of that imagined future to critique the present. When we see how writers such as Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, Martin Carter, and Édouard Glissant think with the archipelago, we see how the processes of creolization and its cultural effects come into being.

In his 1992 Nobel lecture Derek Walcott turns to the poignant image of a broken vase to visualize the "African and Asiatic fragments" strewn across the Caribbean (Walcott [1992] 1997, 36). While the glue accentuates more vividly the "white scars" of the reassembled vase, so that the whole is never quite a seamless reintegration of its broken parts, the love that reassembles the fragments through art and poetry is stronger than "that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole." Poetry transforms and renews these remnants of different pasts. Poetry is "excavation and self-discovery," but although the archipelago seems to be made up of scattered shards of Africa and Asia, poetry by its very nature creates newness, as "for every poet it is always morning in the world":

> There is a force of exultation, a celebration of luck, when a writer finds himself a witness to the early morning of a culture that is defining itself, branch by branch, leaf by leaf, in that self-defining dawn, which is why, especially at the edge of the sea, it is good to make a ritual of the sunrise. ([1992] 1997, 37)

Islands lend themselves readily to the metaphors of renewal, and Walcott detects here that the utopian direction of Caribbean literature, with its innovative transformations of language, history, geography, and race, is entirely identified by the constant possibility of the new. But an archipelago gives a new shape to the idea of renewal; it takes us beyond the binary of land and sea into a constellation of possibilities.

Here we approach the character of postcolonial writing as a whole, and a particularly powerful example is Walcott's poem "The Schooner *Flight*" (1979), in which Shabine traverses the archipelago searching for utopia. Although he loves his wife, his children, his home "as poets love the poetry / that kills them" (Walcott [1979] 1992, 347), nevertheless he gives them up for the image of perfection embodied in Maria Concepcion: "Her beauty

had fallen on me like a sword / cleaving me from my children, flesh of my flesh!" (349). Shabine's journey hinges on the utopian hope for a zone of liberation and freedom, beyond the stalemates of history. Such a journey is not merely religious or personal, but a statement of the possibility of *Heimat*, Ernst Bloch's term for the home we have all sensed but not yet reached, a possibility lying not at the end of a linear journey but within the process of travel itself. While Shabine may be considered a shamanic figure (see Coyle 2011), since he is a visionary, he is also a figure of the artist and writer. Indeed, the name Shabine is a patois nickname (347). But being an outsider—truly ex-centric—allows him to step outside the idea of nation into the complexity of the archipelago. Recalling his recovery from the bends, he declares that "I had no nation now but the imagination" (350), reflecting the fact that in postcolonial utopian discourse, *Heimat* is beyond the nation, even anti-nation. At the end of the poem Shabine achieves a vision of unity and harmony of the archipelago.

> There are so many islands!
> As many islands as the stars of the night
> on that branched tree from which meteors are shaken
> like falling fruit around the schooner *Flight*.
> But things must fall, and so it always was,
> on one hand Venus, on the other Mars;
> fall, and are one, just as this earth is one
> island in the archipelago of stars. (Walcott [1979] 1992, 361)

The scattered shards of the archipelago now seem to form a whole that not only lies in harmony with the earth, but also offers the possibility of a different creole future.

As in the Pacific, creativity (particularly poetic and musical creativity) is a key factor in Walcott's "self-defining dawn" of Caribbean culture, and the metaphor of connection, as well as the many interconnected origins from which such creativity evolves, suggests a way of conceiving the future to which Kamau Brathwaite has given much thought and energy. In his Neustadt lecture he says:

> [t]he constant i wd even say consistent fabric & praxis of my work has been to connect broken islands, cracked, broken words, worlds, friendships, ancestories & I have seen the sea outside our yard bring grain by gentle grain out of its granary, coast upon coast, & then in one long sweep of light or night, take all away again A poem tree of tidalectics. A strange 12-branching history of it which I leave you wit. (Brathwaite 1994, 653)

The fracturing and disruption of language here is not only a rebellion against standard English but an "archipelagic" transformation of the language; archipelagic in the way the fractured islands of language constitute a new whole. For Brathwaite, much more than Walcott, it is language itself that epitomizes the hope for a transformed future, but as for Walcott, the vision of transformation begins in the space of the archipelago. "The very concept of writing has alter, and it's as if I'm gone back to the Middle Ages, in a way [...] To release the pen from the fist of my broeken hand and begin what I call my video style in which I tr(y) make the words themselves live off—away from—the page" (1999, 166).

This use of a varied script, coupled with his term for an appropriated creolized English—"nation language"—are examples of the belief in the possibility of a transformed future because they show so clearly how language itself can be transformed, thus demonstrating the agency of language users. The utopian consciousness in the Caribbean is indicated most powerfully in the ebullient and transformative elasticity of the creole appropriation and transformation of English.

This reconfigured language is not simply reflective of a decolonized reality, it is indicative of a new ontology prompted by the archipelago, one based on movement—on becoming rather than being. No longer do we observe

> a simple gathering of islands, but an emphasis upon how islands act in concert, through constellations, so that the framing of an island archipelago draws attention to fluid cultural processes, sites of abstract and material relations of movement and rest, dependent upon changing conditions of articulation or connection. (Pugh 2013, 2)

Tidalectics

One resonant example of the utopian difference of postcolonial oceans is Brathwaite's concept of tidalectics, a term designed to contest the Hegelian idea of the dialectical progress of history with the concept of ebb and flow (1999, 226). This demonstrates the unlikely effect of oceanic movement on philosophy. The term emerges from the puzzle of the Caribbean itself: "this archipelago, these beautiful islands—yes—which are contrasted in their beauty with extreme poverty and a sense,—a memory—of catastrophe" (1999, 28). Brathwaite finds an answer to this balance of contradictions in the vision of an old woman sweeping her yard in an impoverished region of Jamaica (29). The poet, who was staying in a house nearby, is

deeply intrigued—indeed, he is "tirelessly tryin to" understand this image, repeated every morning, of the woman sweeping the sand which will inevitably return. But watching the woman he gets the answer to his question: "it seems as if her feet, which all along I thought were walking on the sand [...] were really [...] walking on the water [...] and she was travelling across the middle passage, constantly coming from where she had come from—in her case Africa—to this spot in North Coast Jamaica where she now lives" (33).

To this constant and coastal back and forth movement—a repetition of the "coming out" of Africa and of the "arrival" on this "set of islands," Brathwaite attributes the quality of a tidalectics.

> And so my poem startle to ask the question, What is the origin of the Caribbean? How do we come from? Where do we come from? And why are we as we are? Why are we so leaderless, so fragmented, so perpetually caught up with the notion of hope and still at the same time Sisyphean? Why is our psychology not dialectical—successfully dialectical in the way that Western philosophy has assumed people's lives should be, but tidalectic, like our grandmother's—our nana's—action, like the movement of the ocean she's walking on, coming from one continent/continuum, touching another, and then receding ("reading") from the island(s) into perhaps the creative chaos of the(ir) future. (1999, 34)

Life in the archipelago does not proceed in an ordered way with the contest of thesis and antithesis resulting in historical synthesis, for this supposes a progression that is antipathetic to the tidal currents of Caribbean life. If anything, the creole reality is all three at once, the constant ebb and flow between apparently opposing forces, including the constant syncopation, or even simultaneity, of belonging and not belonging, shifting entanglement of sea and land, exile and renewal. In other words, Brathwaite puts a name to Walcott's argument with history. "Tidalectics engage what Brathwaite calls an 'alter/native' historiography to linear models of colonial progress. This 'tidal dialectic' resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic by drawing from a cyclical model, invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean" (DeLoughrey 2007, 2). The concept captures the sense of identification that the sea gives to the Caribbean people. Benítez-Rojo, in *The Repeating Island*, concludes: "the culture of the Caribbean [...] is not terrestrial but aquatic [...] the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity" (1996, 11).

The ontological and historical transformation embodied in the term "tidalectics" is the confident assertion of a different way of being, a becoming that will lead into different kinds of future. The problems of the

Caribbean remain—poverty, wholesale emigration—problems that arise out of the colonial wreckage of the sugar industry, but the concept of a different place, a different way of understanding time offers a different and independent way of perceiving the future. By dispensing with ideas of exile, displacement, and the nostalgia of return, tidalectics names the process by which racial memory transforms the future. In this way the Caribbean is the most vibrant model of postcolonial discourse, which emerges from the devastation of colonialism with a vision of possibility conceived by its creative artists. The fascinating feature of tidalectics is that the movement of the tides is not exactly cyclical, but ebbing and flowing. The woman on the sandy coast engaged in the Sisyphean task of sweeping sand is an image of hope rather than futility by virtue of her apparent stance upon the water between two continents. What this means for a theory of history and culture is the rearrangement of time and space in terms of imagination, myth, and metaphor.

Tidalectics also serves to explain the relationship between colony and empire. This is more complex than a simple antithesis, and just as Walcott states that "mimicry is not the force of the current," tidalectics goes beyond hybridity, which might demonstrate a dialectical synthesis. Brathwaite gestures to the complex and more "tidalectical" relationship with Europe, which he explains in the trilogy *X/self*:

> I begin to conceive of this encounter with Europe as a weird unexpected
> echo of the "encounter" with my Father [...] with all the love doubts
> ambiguities + in this case of course the need for complex liberation.
> and i
> older now
> more torn and tattered than my pride
> cd stand
> stretch out my love to you across the water
> but cannot reach your hand. (1999, 111–2)

This comparison with his father is a poignant one, and the struggle to find the right words for his relationship with an absent father reveals the tidalectical way in which a different kind of poetry emerges.

The utopian function of Caribbean writing, as for all postcolonial writing, lies not in the perception of a utopia but in its very determination that the world could be different, that change is possible. Such literature refuses a paradise, but rather speaks to the present from the position of Nowhere, which for Paul Ricoeur (1986, 17) is critical to our capacity to rethink the nature of our social life because it is the only place that lies outside ideology. Utopianism is social dreaming and, as Ernst Bloch insists, the dream

is the ultimate function of art and literature. The archipelagic dream of a creole cosmos or of a new Oceania reaches far beyond colonialism and its catastrophic history. What remains significant for the Caribbean and for the Pacific is that an "archipelagic consciousness" provides the setting and the dynamic for future thinking. But the ocean itself will always offer a vision of possibility in the shimmering distance.

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