

# DETERRITORIALIZING PREFACE

Ocean moistens our shared ground. The great waters open up a dynamic environment, fluid, saline, moving, and moved. Our bodies and imaginations register the shift from familiar *terra* to alien *oceanus*. Watery transformation deterritorializes. Radical French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari describe *deterritorialization* as a form of self-emancipation, “the movement by which ‘one’ leave[s] the territory.” Moving offshore reshapes our vocabulary. The ocean needs new words. What happens to “grounded” metaphors when everything solid becomes liquid? Let’s start by swapping out the old terrestrial language for saltwater terms.

To move offshore I offer seven words.

**Word 1. Current (formerly field):** For a long time thinking has happened in fields, areas of expertise imagined to be as stable and reliable as pastures. What if instead we redescribe the adventures of thinking

as currents, as rates of flow and change? Why not emphasize movements and connections between or through differences? Fields produce harvests but can lie fallow. Currents flow. We need flow to know Ocean.

**Word 2. Water (formerly ground):** The thinking that goes by the name “blue humanities” replaces ground, land, and earth as dominant metaphors. Instead we remember that the surface of Earth is mostly Ocean. Our metaphors must float on water rather than resting on ground. In an aqueous environment, nothing stays on the surface forever.

**Word 3. Flow (formerly progress):** Rethinking movement as flows and circuits rather than progress or retreat can revivify intellectual communities. Thinking in terms of cyclical flows rather than linear progress makes historical narratives messier, more confusing, and less familiar. These are good things.

**Word 4. Ship (formerly state):** The dissolving force of oceanic history works against nationalism, though at times it may also tend in the directions of global or even imperial totality. Ships, as historians, philosophers, and Hollywood movies have long shown, are symbolic unities, heterotopias, and polyglot fantasy-spaces. Perhaps it is time to imagine politics through ship-to-ship encounters—trading, fighting, hailing, sighting—rather than through the grounded metaphors of the state?

**Word 5. Seascape (formerly landscape):** This shift seems simple enough as part of the offshore trajectory. But is the “scape” still a problem? Is our language too visual? Underwater creatures seldom rely very much on sight.

**Word 6. Distortion (formerly clarity):** A basic feature of any aqueous environments is visual distortion. Water bends light. Water-thinking makes distortion a baseline condition. Water’s tri-dimensionality sometimes orients us on the buoyant top and at other times closer to the irresistible bottom.

**Word 7. Horizon (formerly horizon):** Sailors and oceanic historians spend a lot of time thinking about horizons, seamarks, and landmarks. Early modern European sailors heading into the Atlantic spent days looking out for the unmistakable silhouette of Tenerife’s volcano, which signaled impending arrival at the Canary Islands, first stop on the transatlantic route. Can horizon be a metaphor for futurity that spans green pastures and blue seas? I imagine horizons as sites of transition, like beaches or coastlines, and also as places where perspectives merge. Horizons of ocean, horizons of currents. These are places from which new things become visible.

This seven-pack of deterritorializing terms can help us think about the blue humanities and break up the Anthropocene.

The blue humanities name an ocean-infused way to reframe our shared cultural history. Breaking up the Anthropocene means reimagining the anthropogenic signatures of today's climactic disasters as a dynamic openings as well as catastrophic ruptures.

These terms make a start. Use them, and we'll change the ocean.

I almost said, "Change the world." But then I changed my words.



