

# The CULTURAL POLITICS of FISH and HUMANS

A More-Than-Human Habitus of Consumption

---

*Elsbeth Probyn*

**Abstract** This article reframes fisheries sustainability as a matter of production *and* consumption. It argues that only a more-than-human approach that takes seriously the entanglement of all oceanic entities—fish, fishers, water—can tackle the sustainability of fish. In order to bring this to fruition, an affective oceanic habitus needs to be mobilized. Drawing on cultural references to the entanglement of humans and oceans, this article attempts to model what such affective habitus might entail.

**Keywords** more-than-human; oceanic; affective habitus; practices of sustainable consumption

Alone, alone, all, all alone,  
Alone on a wide wide sea!  
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

## *Lines in the Sea*

In public and academic debate, the cultural politics of food continues to be a powerful if conflicting site where forms of state policy, as well as economic, cultural, and affective investment, all compete. Individual, regional, and global concerns are also at play within this fraught sphere. It is certainly not a new area, and the debate about how we are to feed humanity, and with what, has been ongoing for decades, if not millennia. Throughout

Elspeth Probyn

history, there have been diverse groups and cultures, informed by religious and moral dictates, who have reflected deeply on the relationship between eating and human-animal being in the world. These concerns, however, are now becoming mainstream. For middle-class populations of the Western world, and for an increasingly large number (though, overall, a still small percentage) of consumers in some Asian countries, happy chickens and free-range eggs are now widely accepted as a desired norm and are even promoted by multinational food retail and fast-food chains such as Walmart and McDonald's. This not unremarkable feat has been brought about by a combination of grassroots activism, high-profile media chefs, and social-media mobs, as well as the gradual realization by big retail that a happier chicken may mean a happier consumer.

In this article, I am going to turn away from the terrestrial and look at the ways in which these questions are articulated differently when we look at the sea as a site of more-than-human food production and consumption. The concern about the well-being of the entities that become our food has been overwhelmingly focused on terrestrial animal protein. Is this simply because it's easier to care about a cow than a lobster? Classic animal-rights texts such as Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* hesitated about where to draw the line. In the 1990 edition, Singer notes that "with creatures like oysters, doubts about a capacity for pain are considerable; and in the first edition of this book I suggested that somewhere between shrimp and an oyster seems as good a place to draw the line as any" (1990: 174). For many, pescetarianism makes sense, although reasons vary: for some, the decision involves the ethics of not hurting something that could cry out to human ears; for some, the

driving question is how to feed the planet equitably and efficiently (and, of course, land-based animals are not efficient as a means of producing protein); and for some, it's easier to care for some species more than others simply because some have the good luck to be more anthropomorphically cute than others—it's hard, though not impossible, to cuddle a fish.<sup>1</sup>

In moving out of the realm of arbitrary hierarchies of what is good/not good to eat, can we engender a more wide-ranging cultural politics of sustainable food production and consumption? As marine biologist Carlos Duarte asks: "Will the oceans help feed humanity?" (Duarte et al. 2009). To which it needs to be added: Is it too late? Have we already trashed the oceans, in our appetites for fish, mining, and global transport? It could be that, in the words of Australian yachtsman Ivan Macfadyen, "the ocean is broken." Macfadyen sailed from Australia to California in early 2013, two years after the Japanese earthquake and tsunami. He describes how "only silence and desolation surrounded his boat, Funnel Web, as it sped across the surface of a haunted ocean" (quoted in Ray 2013).

In between the two extremes of an ever-bountiful ocean (as T. H. Huxley proudly stated in 1883, "the . . . great sea fisheries are inexhaustible"<sup>2</sup>) and one that is on its last legs, how might we formulate a cultural politics that could encompass the vast challenge of sustaining fish-human-ocean relations? There is little consensus about what action to take, or even which aspect to focus on. I will briefly discuss four recent representations, each of which foregrounds a different scenario about the current state of fish and fishing. My argument in this article looks to the forms of affect that may or may not be mobilized within a cultural politics of oceanic connection.

These documentaries certainly try to mobilize heightened feelings about fishing and the sea. To take the most influential one first, the documentary *The End of the Line* (2009), with the telling subtitle *Imagine a World without Fish*, is a grim and gripping account of the interconnections that imperil fisheries and oceans worldwide. Based on the British journalist Charles Clover's book of the same name, it is narrated by Ted Danson and has the high production values more common to an Attenborough blue-chip nature documentary (see Richards 2013) than the genre of animal-rights activist film. It features renowned fish scientists, such as the University of British Columbia's Daniel Pauly, who is a charismatic scholar. Pauly looks directly at the camera and states, in his lightly French-accented voice: "All the fish are gone. Where are they? We have eaten them." I get goose bumps.

*The End of the Line* spawned several important social-media campaigns. It also kick-started a filmic trend that includes a TV documentary narrated and promoted by Sir Richard Branson and Virgin called *Mission: Save the Ocean* (2013). Much of the documentary is shot in thriller mode and combines glorious shots of Branson's Necker Island with edgy "noir" scenes as we follow a young woman delivering samples to a "cutting-edge forensic science lab." The stars are the big three of ocean/fish sustainability programs: Greenpeace, the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). One presumes that Sir Richard really does care; he is an Ocean Elder—a rather diverse collection of high-profile people concerned with ocean awareness (a group that also includes Ted Turner, Prince Albert II of Monaco, and Jackson Browne). Branson's message squarely focuses on the power of the entrepreneur and of the consumer:

"I'm an entrepreneur and entrepreneurship is about new ideas and making a difference. We can all make a difference. Your choices in everyday life can actually make things better for the ocean" (*Mission* 2013).<sup>3</sup>

My next example is a 2010 Dutch documentary *Sea the Truth*, funded by the Netherland's Party for the Animals and the Nicolaas G. Pierson Foundation. It followed an earlier documentary called *Meat the Truth*, which encouraged people to give up eating meat for a day, a week, or a lifetime. *Sea the Truth* is narrated by the leader of the Party for the Animals, Marianne Thieme, and centers on Dos Winkel, an activist, scuba diver, and photographer. Although Winkel's art is spectacular, much of the documentary focuses on his talking head. One of the main concerns about overfishing is that forage fish (what are sometimes called trash fish) are made into fish meal and fish oil (what's called the "fish-reduction industry") to feed other fish and humans. This issue is represented in cartoon form, and it does capture the lunacy of turning fish into fishmeal, as well as the more complicated issue of the production and consumption of fish-oil capsules. Thieme speaks of how the ocean was "as an inexhaustible horn of plenty for humans." In her conclusion, however, there is but one culprit: "The fishing industry is responsible for the disappearance of species and the destruction of valuable ecosystems and that is also true for so-called sustainable fisheries. The entire industry runs off billions of government subsidies. Every citizen is paying for the destruction of the seas and oceans" (*Sea the Truth* 2010). Like Branson, she argues for the actions of consumers to resolve the situation: "Our forks are mighty weapons. Use them for a sustainable future."

The final example I will mention here is

Elsbeth Probyn

the Australia-based documentary *Drawing the Line* (2013). The title is a direct, if unspoken, riposte to both Clover's book and the documentary *The End of the Line*. The tagline is: "What if you lost everything you loved because someone else wanted to protect it?" The lines being drawn refer to the boundaries for marine protected areas (MPAs) that are now being regulated around the world. Australia, of course an island nation, has in progress marine parks that will constitute some 30 percent or more of the world's MPAs. The documentary is unabashedly partisan—it is funded by, and stars, Australian fishers, as well as some of Australia's top fisheries scientists, including Colin Buxton and Caleb Gardner from the University of Tasmania's Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies. Marine parks are particularly complicated in Australia, as the Commonwealth and the States and Territories have different areas of jurisdiction and management control. Marine reserves in commonwealth waters start three nautical miles (5.5 kilometers) from shore,<sup>4</sup> which means that the all-important recreational fishing sector is mostly spared by Commonwealth measures but not by State-regulated parks. This sector has been very politically savvy, with campaigns such as "I fish, I vote." They seem to have the current prime minister, Tony Abbott, completely on their side. He appears in numerous photo ops looking Putin-esque, a macho political leader, complete with fishing gear. The power of the recreational fishing lobby is reflected in the opening statement of the Western Australian government's information site about its marine parks: "One in three Western Australians wets a line at least once a year, and there are plenty of opportunities to do just that in the State's marine parks and reserves" (Department of Fisheries, Western Australia 2014).

There is little concern for commercial

fishers. In fact, such is the concern about the public's perception of the fishing industry that many now call themselves "professional fishers" to distinguish themselves from the idea widely propagated in the media that they are pillaging the seas for immense profits. The message of *Drawing the Line* is that MPAs eliminate fishing but do not affect other sources of damage such as agricultural runoff, pollution, oil spills, ocean acidification, sea warming, and plastics. The film relies on several Australian fishing families to convey how deeply those who live on the ocean feel about "the industry that is part of the family." The take-home message is that Australian fisheries are the most highly regulated and managed in the world, a message with which many fisheries scientists would concur. By and large, Australian fishers have come to grips with the quota system.<sup>5</sup> However, the government turn to MPAs as the preferred measure for regulation is deeply upsetting to the fishers, since it effectively closes off large segments of their previous fishing grounds. Even before the marine parks are instituted, this is dealing an economic blow to the small communities like Port Lincoln in South Australia that rely not only on fishing but also processing, gear and tackle sales, and tourism. The fishers portrayed in the documentary are, like many in Australia, part of multigenerational family businesses who regard themselves as long-term custodians of the resource by which they live.

Who are the culprits? It looks like the fishers, although they vary widely in their practices around the world and can't be blamed for all the pollution or, indeed, for ocean warming and acidification. There are a lot of them. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), there are 54 million fishers worldwide. Add in the flow on effects, and

there are 660 to 820 million people today who are directly or indirectly economically dependent upon fisheries.<sup>6</sup>

Does it need to come down to an either/or framing of fish, oceans, or people? Formulating a cultural politics to sustain fish, fishers, and oceans is undoubtedly complex and downright hard. The conflicting messages in the documentaries demonstrate this complexity. The message and the imagery of *The End of the Line* are seductive. For some, the simple and simplistic politics of *Sea the Truth* would also seduce: just say no to fish. But, of course, in so doing, we say no to millions of fishers and to the economic and social flow on effects of fisheries. And while I am sympathetic to the Australian fishers behind *Drawing the Line*, I find it hard to wholeheartedly support their somewhat parochial view, which threatens to render insular the questions of fishing sustainability.

### ***Affecting an Oceanic Habitus***

How we care, or don't, for the organisms we eat, the environments in which they live, and the humans that catch them is very much a question of "habitus."<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu's conception of the habitus frames it as the embodiment of the social and cultural. More precisely: "A product of history produces individual and collective practices—more history—in accordance with the schemes generated by history. . . . [The habitus] ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices. . . . more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (1990: 54). How our habitus inflects or orientates what and how we eat is, at one level, the stuff of common sense. From the learned acquisition of "manners"—of how to handle knives

and forks or chopsticks, or with which hand to eat—to the "acquired" tastes we learn to like (or learn that we shouldn't like), these are practices that are, as Bourdieu writes, "something *that one is*" (1990: 73).

Bourdieu's longtime collaborator Loïc Wacquant draws attention to habitus as "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (2004: 316). This attention to dispositions is crucial to my argument—these are bodily orientations, ingrained ways of embodying the world, which, while they may change, are truly our history forged in flesh, taste, and memory. As I have argued elsewhere, we need to foreground the role of emotion to frame an affective habitus (Probyn 2004a). This is to turn Bourdieu's attention to the bodily imbrication of societal structures and extend it to the forms of affect and emotion that the body registers in the incorporation of the social. As I've put it elsewhere, the body eats into the social as our bodies are simultaneously eaten by practices that are the instantiation of class, gender, ethnicity, and so forth (2000). While, of course, Bourdieu's work continually elaborated on the body as "hinge" between the objective and the subjective, I want to give this more bite, so to speak. How and why we care about things, people, and places is a continual process whereby "caring" can hurt or reassure or be joyous as new knowledges, new ideas, different practices intersect with the primary habitus. This could be called a "coming to care." In Bev Skeggs's work, for instance, the yearning for "respectability" deeply informs what the abstract "working class" may mean for some women. For Skeggs, "practices such as respectability, assumed to be middle-class,

Elsbeth Probyn

are significantly reworked and revalued when lived by the working class: a complete ethical re-evaluation" (2004: 88). In this argument, Skeggs reworks the rather static nature of Bourdieu's habitus to allow for change, incorporation, and repudiation. In terms of what I am calling an affective habitus, this allows a window of opportunity to consider how people might, or might not, incorporate forms of care as something transactional, as something that is ingested and digested—a reworking and an opening out of the self.

To return to one of my earlier questions: How do we embody care for the sea and its dependents? We humans are seemingly out of our element when it comes to the seas and oceans. Many argue (and from very different theoretical perspectives) that humans evolved from the sea. But we—the nonseafarers—are, by and large, lost in the waters of what we call Earth, which is, in fact, three-quarters seawater. One way to imagine this is through Romain Rolland's notion of "oceanic feeling," which Freud paraphrased in *Civilization and Its Discontents*: "It is a feeling which he would like to call a sensation of 'eternity,' a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic' . . . it is a feeling of an indissoluble bond, of being one with the external world as a whole" (Freud [1929] 2002: 1–2). For Rolland, the oceanic captures the feelings inspired through various forms of Eastern mysticism. For Freud, it summoned early childhood, freed from the imposed boundaries that will later begin to be bounded in the constitution of subjectivity. I use it here to invoke the mystery and the majesty of the ocean. From within, floating with or looking toward it, the vision of the sea pulls. It offers an oblique entry into what might be an affective habitus of the more-than-human, of the oceanic

as an inspiration for new forms of being. With this in mind, I turn to the question of how we might mine the forms of representation, and the affective qualities of these forms, to better render the ocean, its fish, and its workers more "care-able" in public discourse. Here I gather together images of oceanic affects so as to unsettle common distinctions between land and sea, human and divine, fish and man, mind and body. This is, in part, a quest for the possibility of the oceanic (and the oceanic as possibility).

Against this expansive openness, the opening epigraph, taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1834), brings forth a very different disposition. "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" Here, it is man damned in his isolation from the sea, cursed for his act of violence and treachery toward the birds of the sea. The mariner kills an albatross, violating a well-known superstition among seafarers that killing a seabird will bring bad fortune, because the birds are thought to be the lost souls wandering the sea. Many read the poem as example of the eighteenth-century romanticist's "awe of nature" and an indication of an increasing "consideration of animals as sentient beings" (Dwyer 2005: 14). However, the lines I chose to cite portray the stillness of solitude and man's isolation in and on the ocean. The mariner is temporally and physically stranded in and on an indifferent sea. He is, of course, damned for his deed, and even after he returns to land, he is condemned to tell his tale again and again with no resolution. He and the Wedding Guest are locked within the telling, the latter unable to physically escape, just as the former cannot be freed from his burden. It is, if you like, a Sisyphean enactment where the end augurs the beginning.

*Strange Seas*

I'll take these two dispositions—on the one hand, the expansive unboundedness as possibility; on the other, the claustrophobia of isolation—as a springboard to other possible ways of incorporating the sea. Philip Steinberg's historical geography of the ocean gives depth to our current understandings of marine space. He takes inspiration from the thoughts of Strabo, the Greek geographer. Writing some two thousand years ago, Strabo saw in the ocean a space of comingling with human beings: "We are in a certain sense amphibious, not exclusively connected with the land but with the sea as well" (cited in Steinberg 1999b: 368; Helmreich 2010). Steinberg focuses on the flows of capital across time and space, and he identifies how the maritime became associated with fixity and with stasis. From the mid-eighteenth century on, with the focus on terrestrial industrial development, "the ocean became discursively constructed as removed from society and the terrestrial places of progress, civilisation and development" (1999a: 409). Tracing the emergence of modern forms of regulation—quite surprisingly recent when one considers that UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) wasn't ratified in international law until 1994—Steinberg argues that the dominant understanding of the ocean is as "annihilated space," "a site of alterity," and the domain over which capital is projected in its search for resources. Of course, mercantile marine commerce and transport is still a constant, and as Kimberly Peters reminds us, "ninety-five percent of trade is still by ship" (2010: 1260). It is strange to think how slow the progress in hydrodynamics is. Steinberg writes that cargo ships still travel at the same speed as they did at the end of World War I (years ago, as I waited for my belongings to come by sea

from Quebec to Australia, I did ponder that it took that ship about the same amount of time to cross the ocean as it did the ship on which my great uncle worked taking wounded soldiers from England home to Australia in 1915).

Steinberg is particularly damning of the nostalgic representation of the maritime featured in countless harbor reconstructions around the world, which have been formulated for tourist tastes and not for the working boats and men, who are now treated as objects of tourism. Tourism is again and again touted as the solution to closed fisheries, as if a fisherman can happily transfer his habitus to land. Steinberg is also concerned that any fledgling discourse on the sustainability of the oceans is stymied by Hollywood "images of the ocean as devoid of nature, or as something to move through" (1999a: 406). His research was done prior to the phenomenal success of the film *Finding Nemo*, one outcome of which was to temporarily stop kids from eating fish sticks. Peters, less pessimistic than Steinberg, cites Lambert, Martins, and Ogborn (2006) that "maritime worlds open up new experimental dimensions and forms of representation" (Peters 2010: 1262). Of course, Paul Gilroy's brilliant book *The Black Atlantic* broke new ground in refiguring routes of human slave trade, as well as the movement of black literary representation across the Atlantic, reminding us that "ships are living, micro-cultural, micro political systems" (1993: 15). To this we can add Sandro Mezzandra and Brett Neilson's argument, which, following Anna Tsing's work, looks to the "life and labor in these [marine] sites, where the boundaries between legal and illegal, licit and illicit, are often blurred and the nested scales of local, national, regional, and global no longer hold tight" (Mezzandra and Neilson 2013: 236; Tsing 2005). In Michel Foucault's words,

Elspeth Probyn

“in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up” (1986: 27).

The Icelandic anthropologist Gisli Pálsson uses the term “entangled resources” to focus on “the intimate relations of porous bodies and molecular environments” and to ask, “how should human-environmental relations be conceptualised and refashioned?” (Pálsson et al. 2013). Here the ocean provides us with a powerful horizon—and I use *horizon* both in the commonsense understanding as the line formed between sky and earth and in the more specialized one provided by the philosopher of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer. For Gadamer, the identification of horizon is integral to the processes of describing and interpreting: “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. . . . A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, ‘to have an horizon’ means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it” (1997: 302). Gadamer’s central point is that we need to be reflexive about what constitutes the horizon at any given moment. In this sense, much of contemporary cultural thought has, consciously or not, related to the ground beneath our feet. Looking to the ocean as horizon promises to reorient our ideas. Of course, the ocean has long been a source of fascination for humans, but this has been, in part, because it seems so sublimely indifferent to our wishes. As Gaston Bachelard recognized: “Water is truly the transitory element. It is the essential ontological metamorphosis between heaven and earth.” But, equally, the sea “is inhuman water, in that it fails in the first duty of every revered element, which is to serve man directly” (1983; cited in Connery 1996: 291). I think this supreme

disinterest of the ocean in human life—perhaps evolved from human awe of the oceanic domain—is what Roland Barthes is getting at when in a cryptic footnote in *Mythologies* he writes: “Here I am, before the sea; it is true that it bears no message” (1984: 112n2). Against the man-made significance of *la plage*, the ocean itself seems so unworldly, so foreign to us landlubbers that we cannot turn it into facile meaning. In his exploration of the oceanic, Christopher Connery counters Barthes’s denial of signification to the sea: “Yet signify it does, although in a manner beyond resolve. Is it the void that activates the terrestrial symbolic system? Is it the real beneath the floating discontinuousness of land; a symbolic system?” (1996: 290). In a fascinating account of the role of the sea in early modern English literature, Steven Mentz argues that, in the early modern European understanding, “the sea [is] pure alterity” (2009: 1001). With air travel, and indeed space exploration, our connections with the oceans have diminished. And, moreover, our domestication of marine littoral spaces has, he says, “turned the sea from a vision of chaos into a playground [and] the modern world has lost part of its cultural history” (1998). In Mentz’s presentation of early modern views, we have a sense of early imaginings of “oceanic freedom,” of “ceaseless change and instability,” which are contrasted with the orderly realm of land (1001). This “bifurcation” goes deep into privileged roots of Western thinking. Mentz cites Plato in the *Laws*: “The sea, which agreeable, is a dangerous companion and a highway of strange morals and manners as well as of commerce” (quoted in Mentz 2009: 998).

### *Seasick*

If the ocean can, and has, provided a powerful horizon in reflecting on human

alterity to our marine environment, there are associated affects that may provide new crucial methodological directions for more-than-human research. As I have touched on above, the ocean summons up diffuse affects, for which we do not always have the right words. Gisli Pálsson's use of the Icelandic understanding of seasickness points to the physical and connotative upheavals that being on the sea can occasion. He writes: "Icelanders implicitly recognize the relationship between knowledge and practice, and the unity of emotion and cognition, body and mind. For them, 'seasickness' (*sjoveiki*) not only recalls the bodily state of nausea sometimes caused by the lack of practical knowledge, the unexpected rocking movements of the world, but it is also used as a metaphor for learning in the company of others" (1994: 901). This moment of fundamental queasiness in the world—he himself experienced seasickness on ship while conducting his research—provides an embodied lens through which we can consider the different layers of ontological disordering of any posited distinct and separate entity: emotion and cognition, body and mind, human and fish. As we all know, affect is embodied—to be alive is to be embodied in the world and thus open to be being affected and affecting others. But there are many forms of affect and many different ways to be embodied. While not an obvious affect, being seasick alerts us to the viscosity of being embodied and entangled in the swaying human and nonhuman nets of materiality and meaning (Probyn 2014). All are caught in the prism of the rocking boat and the moving horizon: the sea and its movements; *techne*, as learned within the pressures of the folds of human technology—the type of boat, the fishing gear; the tacit levels through which the past is reproduced in present practices.

This scene is also one where we learn with the elements that awaken us to our sheer lack of mastery before the might of the ocean. The form this learning takes is what Pálsson calls *enskilment*, "a necessarily collective enterprise—involving whole persons, social relations, and communities of practice." For those who work on the sea as fishers, *enskilment* is learned in the presence of others, both human and, most importantly, nonhuman. This is embodied learning within the folds of the ocean, which brings together various forms of knowledge—past, present, cellular, felt, smelled, moved with, and so on. To give this ensemble of modes of learning its proper name, this is the realm of the tacit. This knowledge is unsaid; it is the undidactic, the learning from feeling. It is affect as embodied disposition. Perhaps it is not surprising that Pálsson also sees "enskilment in fieldwork, [which] inevitably involves psychosomatic processes, if not veritable 'gut reactions'" (Pálsson 1994: 902; Probyn 2004b).

### ***More-Than-Human Caring***

Recognizing fishers' incorporation of the oceanic is important on several registers. For a start, as Kay Milton argues, "if people can identify with aspects of their ecological environment as being 'like' themselves . . . they are more likely to treat that environment as they might themselves or another person" (Milton 2002; cited in Nightingale 2012: 138). While this claim would be greeted in some quarters as yet more "human exceptionalism" (see Plumwood 2007),<sup>8</sup> the quest to formulate the more-than-human needs to acknowledge—as it pushes at—the limitations of human imagination. In other words, if we want to generate care for the ocean and for her inhabitants, we need to work with the deep entanglement that

Elsbeth Probyn

fish, fishers, and ocean have forged over the millennia. Andrea Nightingale's work on the subjectivity of fishers furthers this line of inquiry into the embodied subjectivity, or habitus, of fishers. Her research looks particularly at the embodied divide between those who fish and those who regulate fishing. At heart, this is an argument about whose knowledge counts, which Nightingale approaches via the ways in which subjectivities emerge. As she succinctly puts it, "fishing produces particular kinds of subjects and bodies" (2012: 138). She elaborates: "It is the embodied act of working on wet, smelly, cold and dangerous boats that is important in creating a boundary between the subject of the 'fisherman,' 'community,' and the 'sea.' . . . The sea is the defining feature of their lives. . . . A sense of self is shaped by the sea" (142). Not only are fishers shaped by the sea, they are increasingly squeezed between different frames, which position them as "the exploiter of the sea" (143), as the problem, as the "destroyer of eco systems" (*Sea the Truth* 2010).

To return to my opening questions: What forms of care are most effective in changing our behavior? How do we come to care? And which types of care have the desired effects? Trying to connect between the more cultural and the more empirical dimensions, I have attempted to model the entanglement that could be "sustainable fishing." If, as I have argued previously, eating is always a visceral engagement, Michael Goodman reminds me "how absolutely viscerally entangled food is in the landscapes of contemporary capitalistic political economies" (2008: 5). In this sense, it is salutary to remember Branson's claim that consumers can make a difference. Of course we can, and the many campaigns are having a partial, uneven, and gradual impact on what people choose in the supermarket. We also need to qualify

which consumers we are talking about. As a middle-class woman living close to decent supermarkets and within walking distance of the third largest fish market in the world, I can make choices because there *are* things to choose from, and I have the money to be able to buy what I deem beneficial to the fishers, fish stocks, and oceans. Even then, I spend a lot of time peering at the labels on tinned fish, asking fishmongers questions. While in the best of all possible worlds, we would all have the resources to do this, we simply don't. A mother with kids who don't like to eat fish, and who cannot afford either the money or the time to try to consider all the options, often does not have those resources. The onus on consumer choice is often a construction of neoliberal fantasy, and the idea that forks can be "mighty weapons," as Thieme claims, is very one-dimensional (2010). I don't want to use a fork or a knife against the millions of fishers and their communities that coexist with the ocean.

In these scenarios, more-than-human caring becomes a zero-sum game. Ethics becomes moralistic black and white. Instead of such thinking, we need to conjugate the relations between and among ocean, fish, and people. As Mezzandra and Neilson write, this implies "a process that simultaneously folds and unfolds spaces . . . [revealing] new regional, continental, and transcontinental routes of connection [that] further contribute to this uncanny stretching and overlapping of geographies" (2013: 212). While for some an individual choice may be to just say no to fish, there is evidence that doing so lessens people's attachment to commonly held goods. This is definitely not to replay Garrett Hardin's (1968) "tragedy of the commons"—to imply, that is, that it is only under socialism or free enterprise that the commons can be saved. My point is less about self-interest and more about

the complicated attachments we form to those that procure and prepare what we eat. Those entanglements are simultaneously economic and geographic, and they are also allowed for and colored by our affective habitus. To return to Nightingale's research on Scottish inshore fishermen: She describes how they "see themselves as 'part' of the sea." They are "attached to the sea . . . and attached to a sense of treating the sea well" (2012: 142, 144). They are strongly opposed to the large trawlers, not, seemingly, because they are competition, but because they are "a business as opposed to a way of living" (145). These fine distinctions are crucial and they are allowed by an oceanic habitus.

As I have sketched out here, the ability to care in nuanced ways comes from a habitus imbued with the oceanic. But perhaps even more important than caring are the entanglements that our actions engender with others, both human and nonhuman. Coming to care, we become attached with others and imbricated with the movements of the ocean. A cultural politics of the more-than-human must, I think, smell of the sea and be open to the rocking relationships of people, fish, and ocean.

### Notes

1. For other takes on this, see my argument (Probyn 2011) about eating "roo," as well as Emma Roe's article (2006) about "things that become edible."
2. T. H. Huxley (1883): "I believe that the cod fishery, the herring fishery, the pilchard fisher, the mackerel fishery and probably all great sea fisheries are inexhaustible: that is to say that nothing we do seriously affects the numbers of fish. And any attempt to regulate these fisheries seems consequently from the nature of the case to be useless."
3. For Branson (2013), 2013 was the year of the ocean. It is a bit incongruous to read Virgin's web page, where, along with saving the ocean, you can top up your mobile or book a flight.
4. For activities allowed within the marine reserves, see Australian Government, Department of the Environment (2014).
5. The introduction of the Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system in Australia in the 1980s furthered the consolidation of the fishing industry into fewer hands. This is a formula whereby each fishery is given a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) each year set by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) based on scientific evaluations that include previous catch numbers as well as the measurement of spawning biomass. Fishery owners are allowed to catch the amount stipulated by their ITQ percentage. The idea behind the system is that it cuts direct competition or what was called "the race to fish."
6. For information on the economic relationship between human societies and fishing, see World Ocean Review (2014).
7. The question of caring within what I'd call a more-than-human realm complicates the status, as well as the relationship, between the object and subject of care. As Maria Puig de la Bellacasa notes, we also need to think about "what sort" of care (2010: 152). Annemarie Mol, in her project "The Eating Body," brings her previous work on care within health practices (2008) into the realm of eating (see Yates-Doerr 2012). Mara Miele has done much, both at a conceptual level and in policy, to foster a wider sense of what caring for what we eat would mean. Through her involvement in the European Union study for better guidelines about the welfare of farmed animals, Miele has written about how to understand "the happiness of chickens" (Miele 2011) and, with her colleague Adrian Evans, contemplates the wide dimensions of an "ethics and responsibility in care-*full* practices of consumption" (Miele and Evans 2010).
8. In her review of Raymond Gaita's *The Philosopher's Dog* (2002), Val Plumwood (2007) takes issue with Gaita's assertion that "I cannot, and I know of no one else who can feel the same about animal killing as about human killing." Plumwood replies: "I have to say that I personally *feel* the same outrage at the mass murder and machine gunning of seal colonies and dolphin pods as I do about similar mass killings of humans." I have to say that such arguments leave me conflicted. On one level, if indeed she feels *the same* outrage, then I can side with her.

Elsbeth Probyn

## References

- Australian Government, Department of the Environment. 2014. "Commonwealth Marine Reserves—Allowed Activities," [www.environment.gov.au/topics/marine/marine-reserves/overview/allowed-activities](http://www.environment.gov.au/topics/marine/marine-reserves/overview/allowed-activities). Accessed March 17, 2014.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1983. *Water and Dreams: An Essay On the Imagination of Matter*. Translated by Edith R. Farrell. Dallas: Pegasus Foundation.
- Barthes, Roland. 1972. *Mythologies*. Translated by Annette Lavers. London: Paladin.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Branson, Richard. 2013. "2013 Will Be the Year of the Ocean." Virgin website, [www.virgin.com/richard-branson/2013-will-be-the-year-of-the-ocean](http://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/2013-will-be-the-year-of-the-ocean). Accessed March 17, 2014.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. 1834. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173253>. Accessed March 14, 2014.
- Connery, Christopher L. 1996. "The Oceanic Feeling and Regional Imaginary." In *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, edited by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, 284–311. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Department of Fisheries, Western Australia. 2014. "Marine Protected Areas," [www.fish.wa.gov.au/sustainability-and-environment/aquatic-biodiversity/marine-protected-areas/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/sustainability-and-environment/aquatic-biodiversity/marine-protected-areas/Pages/default.aspx).
- Duarte, Carlos Marianne Holmner, Yngvar Olsen, Doris Soto, Núria Marba, Joana Guiu, Kenny Black, and Ioannis Karakassis. 2009. "Will the Oceans Help Feed Humanity?" *BioScience* 59 (11): 967–78.
- Dwyer, June. 2005. "Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and the Evolution of the Shipwreck Narrative." *Modern Language Studies* 35 (2): 9–21.
- Foucault, Michel. 1986. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16: 22–27.
- Freud, Sigmund. (1929) 2002. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. London: Penguin.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1997. *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum.
- Gaita, Raimond. 2002. *The Philosopher's Dog*. Melbourne: Text.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Goodman, Michael K. 2008. "Towards Visceral Entanglements: Knowing and Growing Economic Geographies of Food." Environment, Politics, and Development Working Paper Series, Kings College, London, 79.125.112.176/sspp/departments/geography/research/epd/GoodmanWP5.pdf.
- Goodman, Michael K., Damian Maye, and Lewis Holloway. 2010. "Ethical Foodscapes? Premises, Promises, and Possibilities." *Environment and Planning A* 42 (8): 1782–96.
- Hardin, Garrett. 1968. "The Tragedy of the Commons." *Science* 162 (3859): 1243–48.
- Helmreich, Stefan. 2010. "Human Nature at Sea." *Anthropology Now* 2 (3): 49–60.
- Huxley, T. H. 1883. "Inaugural Address." Fisheries Exhibition, London, [aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/SM5/fish.html](http://aleph0.clarku.edu/huxley/SM5/fish.html). Accessed March 29, 2014.
- Lambert, David, Luciana Martins, and Miles Ogborn. 2006. "Currents, Visions, and Voyages: Historical Geographies of the Sea." *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (3): 4790–93.
- Mentz, Steven. 2009. "Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature." *Literature Compass* 6 (5): 997–1013.
- Mezzandra, Sandro, and Brett Neilson. 2013. *Border as Method; or, the Multiplication of Labor*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Miele, Mara. 2011. "The Taste of Happiness: Free Range Chicken." In "The New Borders of Consumption," special issue, *Environment and Planning A* 43 (9): 2076–90.
- Miele, Mara, and Adrian Evans. 2010. "When Foods Become Animals: Ruminations on Ethics and Responsibility in Care-full Practices of Consumption." *Ethics, Place, and Environment* 13 (2): 171–90.
- Milton, Kay. 2002. *Loving Nature: Towards an Ecology of Emotion*. London: Routledge.
- Mol, Annemarie. 2008. *The Logic of Care: Health and the Problem of Patient Choice*. London: Routledge.
- Nightingale, Andrea J. 2013. "Fishing for Nature: The Politics of Subjectivity and Emotion in Scottish In-Shore Fisheries Management." *Environment and Planning A* 45 (10): 2363–78.
- Pálsson, Gisli. 1994. "Enskilment at Sea." *Man* 29 (4): 901–27.
- Pálsson, Gisli, Bronislaw Szerszynski, Sverker Sörlin, John Marks, Bernard Avril, Carole Crumley, Heide Hackmann, Poul Holm, John Ingram, Alan Kirman, Mercedes Pardo Buendía, and Rifka Weehuizen.

2013. "Reconceptualizing the 'Anthropos' in the Anthropocene: Integrating the Social Sciences and Humanities in Global Environmental Change Research." *Environmental Science and Policy* 28: 3–13.
- Peters, Kimberley. 2010. "Future Promises for Contemporary Social and Cultural Geographies of the Sea." *Geography Compass* 4 (9): 1260–72.
- Plumwood, Val. 2007. "Human Exceptionalism and the Limitations of Animals: A Review of Raimond Gaita's *The Philosopher's Dog*." *Australian Humanities Review*, no. 42, [www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-August-2007/EcoHumanities/Plumwood.html](http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-August-2007/EcoHumanities/Plumwood.html).
- Probyn, Elspeth. 2000. *Carnal Appetites: FoodSexIdentities*. London: Routledge.
- Probyn, Elspeth. 2004a. "Shame in the Habitus." In *Feminism after Bourdieu*, edited by Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs, 224–48. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Probyn, Elspeth. 2004b. "Thinking with Gut Feelings." In "Eating Things," special issue, *Public*, no. 30: 101–12.
- Probyn, Elspeth. 2011. "Moving Food: Of Roo." *New Formations*, no. 74: 33–45.
- Probyn, Elspeth. 2014. "Women Following Fish in a More-Than-Human World." *Gender, Place, and Culture* 21 (5): 589–603.
- Puig de la Bellacasa, Maria. 2010. "Ethical Doings in Naturecultures." *Ethics, Place, and Environment* 13 (2): 151–69.
- Ray, Greg. 2013. "The Ocean Is Broken." *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 19, [www.smh.com.au/environment/the-ocean-is-broken-20131018-2vs7v.html](http://www.smh.com.au/environment/the-ocean-is-broken-20131018-2vs7v.html).
- Roe, Emma. 2006. "Things Becoming Food and the Embodied, Material Practices of an Organic Food Consumer." *Sociologica Ruralia* 46 (2): 104–21.
- Richards, Morgan. 2013. "Global Nature, Global Brand: BBC Earth and the Reinvention of Wildlife Documentary." *Media International Australia*, no. 146: 143–54.
- Singer, Peter. 1990. *Animal Liberation*. 2nd ed. New York: New York Review/Random House.
- Skeggs, Beverley. 2004. "Exchange Value and Affect: Bourdieu and the Self." In *Feminism after Bourdieu*, edited by L. Adkins and B. Skeggs, 75–95. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Steinberg, Philip E. 1999a. "The Maritime Mystique: Sustainable Development, Capital Mobility, and Nostalgia in the World Ocean." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17 (4): 403–26.
- Steinberg, Philip E. 1999b. "Navigating to Multiple Horizons: Toward a Geography of Ocean-Space." *Professional Geographer* 51 (3): 366–75.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2005. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Yates-Doerr, Emily. 2012. "The Weight of the Self: Care and Compassion in Guatemalan Dietary Choices." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 26 (1): 136–58.
- Wacquant, Loic. 2004. "Habitus." In *International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology*, edited by Jens Beckert and Milan Zafirovski, 315–19. London: Routledge.
- World Ocean Review. 2014. "Fish and Folk," [worldoceanreview.com/en/wor-2/fish-and-folk/](http://worldoceanreview.com/en/wor-2/fish-and-folk/). Accessed March 18, 2014.

### Filmography

- Drawing the Line*. DVD. Directed by Matt Blyth and Alaneo Gloor. Sydney: Millstream, 2013, [drawingthelinemovie.com](http://drawingthelinemovie.com).
- The End of the Line*. DVD. Directed by Rupert Murray. London: Dogwoof Pictures, 2009.
- Mission: Save the Ocean*. London: United Postcode Lotteries, 2013, [www.virgin.com/richard-branson/mission-save-the-ocean](http://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/mission-save-the-ocean).
- Sea the Truth*. Online. Directed by Claudine Evereart. Amsterdam: Netherland's Party for the Animals and the Nicolaas G. Pierson Foundation, 2010, [www.seathetruth.nl/en/](http://www.seathetruth.nl/en/).

---

**Elspeth Probyn** is professor of gender and cultural studies at the University of Sydney and convener of MER (Mariculture Environmental Research) at the Sydney Environmental Institute. She is the author of several groundbreaking monographs, as well as over a hundred articles and chapters, and has long worked in the cultural study of food. Her current research (funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Project) focuses on the sustainable production and consumption of fish within the transglobal food system and will be published by Duke University Press as *Oceanic: Sustainability, Humans, Fish, and Sea*.