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Moby-Dick, Novelising the Grey Architectural Enunciation of the *Maritorium*

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Whereas to dwell on land we created architecture, to dwell in the sea we had to invent seamanship, not shipbuilding. There is a factual impossibility of equating the two forms of life—those anchored to land with the marine epigenesis—whose descriptions are excited by their contraposition in *Moby-Dick* without the need for explicit comparison. Like Ishmael, my aim here is simply *to design a systematization of indeterminacy* in the space of life within the body of water. Meville sought to understand it by cetology, however I, by maritorium. We both uttered the phrase "I am the architect, not the builder." From a hermeneutical point of view, you don't make houses any more than you make boats. What is made, from the inversion of the processual conventionalism of creation, is architecture.

The maritorium is a dynamic and multifaceted space that includes maritime and coastal areas, characterized by its changing morphology, the indefiniteness of its borders and the fluidity of its laws.[1] A maritorium is not static, but is in a continuous process of transformation due to ecosystem dynamics, as well as anthropogenic processes and climate change. Moreover, its geographical and legal boundaries are inherently fuzzy, reflecting complex and often conflicting claims to sovereignty,

[1] For more information and the origin of the concept, see Ricardo Álvarez, Francisco Ther-Ríos, Juan Carlos Skewes, Carlos Hidalgo, Diego Carabias, and Christian García, "Reflexiones Sobre el Concepto de Maritorio y su Relevancia para los Estudios de Chiloé Contemporáneo", *Revista Austral de Ciencias Sociales* no. 36 (2019): 115–26.

jurisdiction and use of maritime resources.[2] In the maritorium, the relationship between coastal communities and the marine environment is fluid and evolving, influenced by public policy, cultural and economic practices, and international law, which often needs to adapt to these changing realities. The management of the maritorium must be flexible and adaptive, incorporating resilient and sustainable approaches that consider both the conservation of marine ecosystems and the well-being of the communities that inhabit and co-evolve with these spaces, within a regulatory framework that can be ambiguous and subject to reinterpretation.

It is obvious that it is not possible to say that a maritorium is the same as a territory, but located on the sea. It is simply not possible to transpose the one to the other. Nor are we interested in confusing maritorium with what C.L.R. James proposed as a Universal Republic exemplified by the diversity of the whaler's inhabitants.[3] What is important is what is revealed by an intelligence that would bring *deterritorialization* to the territory itself and that is already placed in Melville's novel on a plane of interpretation that has been little explored. To accept it would imply a catharsis like that other, very hard but illusionary one, to which Ishmael submits himself when he embarks on the *Pequod*. For decades, interpretations of the changes in the directional structure of dialogue in the novel's chapters have been the subject of controversial debate. The need to add an epilogue after the first edition, to say that the narrator has to save himself to tell the tale, the addition of appendices such as lexicographical appendices to understand what a terrestrial being would not understand from experience alone, here the thought-voice of the protagonist, there the thought-voice of Ahab, taking centre stage in different chapters, articulates a mental space in the narrator subject commensurate with the complexity of a maritorium.

Many have interpreted Melville's novel as a mental space. Howard P. Vincent, in his study *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick*, argues that *Moby-Dick* is a novel that transcends mere narrative and delves into the creation of a complex mental universe.[4] He underlines how Melville uses symbols, images and metaphors to build a world that reflects both personal obsession and the human condition in general. Charles Olson, in *Call Me Ishmael*, offers a reading that focuses on the human condition, on the

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[2] Johana Herrera Arango and Carlos Tapia Martín, *La 'Dialéctica Del Monstruo' En Las Pesquerías Olvidadas Del Caribe: Desafíos Culturales de La Agenda 2030,* in *Agenda 2030, Derechos Humanos y Territorios,* ed. Jesús Delgado Baena and Juan de Dios García Serrano (Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch, 2023), 223–38.
[3] C. L. R. James, Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways: The Story of Herman Melville and the World We Live In (Dartmouth College, 2001).
[4] Howard P. Vincent, *The Trying-Out of Moby-Dick* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949).

symbolic depth and mental richness of the work.[5] Olson sees the novel not just as a whaling story, but as an exploration of the human mind and spirit, emphasizing symbolism and imagery as vehicles for an inner journey. Richard Chase, in *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*, takes the view that the novel is an act of the visionary imagination.[6] According to Chase, Melville uses narrative not so much to tell a story, but to explore philosophical and existential themes, creating a series of mental images that invite the reader to reflect beyond the events narrated. For his part, in his introduction to the Norton edition, Bezanson discusses how the novel can be seen as a series of mental and symbolic fragments, as a complex mental construction to confront grand metaphysical themes.[7]

Recently, Sloterdijk has written about the essence of philosophy and recovers Nietzsche, who anticipately circumnavigates in Melville's mind.[8] He refers specifically to the idea of the transvaluation of all values (*Umwertung der Werte*) that Nietzsche develops in *The Antichrist* (from 1888 but not published until 1895). In this context, Sloterdijk suggests that Melville, through his work and his focus on the sea, addresses an inversion of extremes without diminishing the existing high tension. It is this idea that underlies our hypothesis: a procedural inversion whereby the understanding of the indeterminable of the sea could be brought to land. And dwell in that place on the assumption that it has not bowed to the enlightened prerogatives of Modernity. Only, as the author of Karlsruhe also states, white (of the Leviathan) is no longer the colour that our time would interpret as a symptom of contemporaneity: it is grey. That diffuse color does not offer an outline, but an indeterminacy, a zone that is not burdened with the sharp vertical vector of determination, but with multiple circumstantial vital impulses. The polymath Lewis Mumford, reading *Moby-Dick*, has a memorable phrase for it:

> in the final issue of life and death, science is impotent: it can but tell where the ship is on the planet, but not where one drop of water or one grain of sand will be tomorrow noon (1929, 173).[9]

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[5] Charles Olson, *Call Me Ishmael* (Valmy Publishing, 2018).
[6] Richard Volney Chase. 1949. *Herman Melville: A Critical Study*. New York: Macmillan Co. Richard Volney Chase, *Herman Melville: A Critical Study* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949).
[7] Walter E. Bezanson, "Introduction to Moby-Dick," in Moby-Dick, ed. Hershel Parker and Harrison Hayford (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002).
[8] Peter Sloterdijk, *Gris: El Color de La Contemporaneidad* (Madrid: Siruela, 2024).
[9] Lewis Mumford, *Herman Melville* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929).

It is the grey that predominates in the eyes and mood of a shipwrecked person who talks to and about himself in the hours of despair, clinging to a log. The mind, at that moment, uses various defence mechanisms, such as dissociation (mentally separating itself from reality), fantasy (creating imaginary scenarios) and rationalisation (finding logical explanations for the situation). And this is observed in the novel, interweaving taxonomic-scientific descriptions with thoughts, with examinations of conscience or daydreams. As Mumford (1929, 188) has said, while Ishmael is aboard ship, Sir John Paxton is changing the experience of land-dwelling, with his hothouse of modern dreams. It is the year 1851 of which Sloterdijk has spoken so much with his theories of mental spherology.

A castaway's mental time is spent reflecting on his life, his mistakes, his relationships and the meaning of his existence. This is an introspective process that can provide solace or increase despair, depending on the individual's mental fortitude. Personality splitting, or dissociation, can occur in extreme situations, such as in a shipwreck, due to intense psychological and emotional pressure. In the context of a shipwrecked person adrift, this dissociation may manifest as a sense of being detached from one's own body or mind, or experiencing the situation as if one were an outside observer. In extreme cases, some castaways may develop alternative identities—hybrid, multiple, impersonated, etc.—as a way of coping with unbearable stress. These identities may take responsibility for survival or provide emotional comfort. It is in this space—mental and liquid—that we understand Ishmael.

Despite some critical objections, Michael Jonik's book, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman*, provides theoretical insights that resonate with Melville's.[10] His characters metamorphose into hybrid forms of the human and the inhuman, linked to singular material and affective relations that transcend the realm of cognitive consciousness. These characters become invisible within the landscapes, implying that, even symbolically or representationally, the boundaries between them and their environments are blurred and unclear. It is the opposite of rootedness, of territorialization. In this sense, the maritorium can be understood in terms of *deterritorialization* by recognizing its dynamic nature, the indefiniteness of its boundaries and the constant interaction between natural and human forces.

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[10] Michael Jonik, *Herman Melville and the Politics of the Inhuman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Critics have noted that while Jonik's analysis is thorough and inventive, it can sometimes feel overly exhaustive, particularly in chapters where the argument seems to catalog every possible instance of "inhumanity" in Melville's work. This exhaustive approach, according to some, may dilute the conceptual clarity of what Jonik defines as the "inhuman" by encompassing a broad and sometimes overwhelming range of examples.

Deleuze and Guattari describe *deterritorialization* as a process of uprooting and transformation where fixed territories and identities are destabilized and reconstituted in new contexts. This concept also applies to flows and processes that escape rigid, territorial structures. "A Thousand Plateaus" unfolds the idea that *deterritorialization* implies a movement beyond established borders and the reconfiguration of normative and spatial structures. [11] These challenges fixed delimitations and promoted new forms of organization and regulation. The interplay between the natural and the social emphasizes the interdependence among different forces (social, economic, political) that destabilize and reconfigure territories, creating new realities out of these flows and tensions. Here is an example of my country perceived as a maritime territory by Melville himself:

> 'Spain—a great whale stranded on the shores of Europe.'
> *Edmund Burke*. (*somewhere*.)[12]

Geographical co-impertinences, amphibious identities, surprising indeterminacy, uprooted estrangement, alien pain, empathy in otherness, veiled critique, poetic sublime, compressed history, psychological diagnosis, legal judgment, projected desire, in an apothegm so ambiguously precise that one need not remember where it was written down: that is a maritorium. Like Queequeg's birthplace, which "It is not down in any map; true places never are" (1851, 100).

Some *Moby-Dick*-derived attempts to bring the maritorium ashore that have come to say intimately to me "call me Ishmael" have been "call me W.G." or "call me Philip" or "call me Allan" or "call me Charles," who, in turn, called each other, and who are—persons and characters—those Sebald, Hoare, Sekula, or Murdoch.[13]

Sebald's plot concatenations are of a Homeric epic that, taken to the coastal territory—which, through him, becomes maritorium—, are transmuted into watery dissolutions that only a *Cheever—style* swimmer has the audacity and inventiveness to map. Hoare is one of those swimmers who rub up against whales, literal and mental, in a dense, greyish sea of black bile, which is the Mare Lugubris to which one longs to return, even as an ancestral memory. And Iris Murdoch's Charles is another of those

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[11] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[12] Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: Famous Sea Stories by Herman Melville* (Dana Estes & Company, 1892), 11.
[13] W. G. Sebald and Michael Hulse, *The Rings of Saturn* (New Directions, 2016); Philip Hoare, *The Sea Inside* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014); Allan Sekula, *Fish Story,* vol. 202 (Düsseldorf: Richter Verlag, 1995); Iris Murdoch, *The Sea, the Sea* (London: Penguin, 2001).

othernesses, dissociated lives that seek each other in the inner space that by immunological overpressure keeps afloat a castaway who fears that a—snorting—*Snark* will emerge. Transvaluation of the values in all of them from which an architect is made for a procedure of very high potentiality.

In an interview that architect Barbara Probst Solomon did with an irascible Mumford in 1982, he did not admit to being a specialist or a technician, and warned her that just as a criminologist did not commit crimes, but investigated them, he could not have written his books on architecture if he had been one of them.[14] Mumford wrote the book on Melville's complete works in 1929. He had started reading the whole of his work eight years earlier. Solomon said of his interview that his mood brightened when the subject matter approached Melville and soured on everything else. In the book on Melville, Mumford goes so far as to propose the consequence of reading Moby Dick: "a young architect reads the book and leaves his drawing board to work as a merchant in the Marquesas, where he becomes a specialist in Polynesian dialects" (1929, 71).

We have already said that, interpretatively, what is done, from the inversion of the processual conventionalism of creation, is architecture. And its place of action is the maritoriums, whose greyness is traversed by returning again and again to *Moby-Dick*.

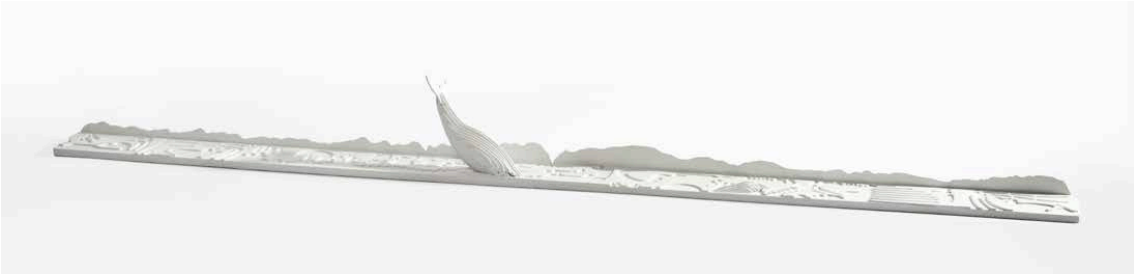

Fig. 1 "Bogotá". *1995. Gustavo Zalamea. Painted wood assembly.*

[14] Barbara Probst Solomon, "Encuentro Con Lewis Mumford y Herman Melville," *Arquitecturas Bis* vol. 19-20, (1983): 43.