

Dissolving oceans
or, tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote¹
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Hello. I'm texting you from
the middle of the ocean.

Not quite land, not quite sea, it stands like an island rooted in the ocean floor. Flotation occasionally determines its subsistence. Sometimes it goes by the name of semi-submersible mobile offshore drilling unit or drilling rig, or offshore platform. It is most commonly referred to as an oil platform.

No one came!!! Can you
believe it?

It is a growing creature whose life still depends on its mother's body. An oil platform absorbs nutrients from submerged sources of oil and gas. It is also self-sufficient in its energy requirements, so that its continuity and permanence are granted. Far from everybody's view, not noticeably affecting anybody's life, the oceanic platform simply exists, like a poisonous shrub in a tropical forest, or like a minuscule drop of water in a supercell thunderstorm.

*Down it drops, slicing through the glistening skin at the surface of the sea.
Down further, through dimming shafts of refracted sunlight.
Through stiff migratory currents descending into pressure intense
enough to crush the life out of any human.
Finally, at 2,896 metres (9,500 feet) below the surface,
the anchor settles onto the seabed.²*

The world's deepest, or tallest, oil and gas production platform resides in the same Gulf as the second tallest hub, named Perdido – lost. Offshore hubs silently inhabit the oceanic floor of the Gulf, scattered across its radius, operating in isolation, physically displaced but politically cardinal.

A haven for inanimate and unimaginable life forms, the bottom of the Gulf is, like many other virtually unnamed oceanic expanses, a Wild Blue Yonder³ of impossibility, the ideal home for abandoned forms of exploitation built by human imagination. When an oil platform is not directly erected on the seafloor, it is fastened to it by a mooring system, which consists of a rope or chain, an anchor and connectors. Hydrocarbons, the substance extracted by offshore units, are decomposed organic matter providing large amounts of carbon and hydrogen that, when bonded, can form seemingly limitless chains.

They are Earth's data, emerging from beneath the planet's subsurface, and perpetually flowing in liquid form. Just like data, there is an endless quality to them. And every so often they also seem to escape human authority and containment.
Can you truly possess an ocean in its ubiquity?

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How can you deal with that infinite distance, and with the obscurity of its depth?
Do you calculate its value by its duration or by the space it occupies?

If you stand still within its
motion, you slowly become
part of its mass. If you move too
quickly, you sink. Oh wait
that's actually what happens
with quicksand right?⁴

Solid matter loses its strength and it becomes unable to support weight. This particular ratio of sand to water generates a substance that is twice as dense as the human body, and that is the reason why one could partially sink, but never truly drown, in a non-Newtonian fluid. It is the nearby tidal currents that, with their rise and fall, either reveal or submerge.

Anthropocentrism still
seems to be hot

Trolls, rangers, writers and pipers all crowd the view on the shore.⁵ There was an explosion at Deepwater Horizon,⁶ they say. The spill can be contained, someone reassures us; but it will eventually break its seal and leak beyond the site where the accident originally occurred, somebody else notes. Leakage is inevitable. But perhaps it is the act of seeping, the idea of a seepage as a critical event, that becomes the condition for forms of truth to appear.

Are you there[^]

After all, our reality also depends upon subterranean molten rock, layers of gas that constitute what we call sky, and unfathomably large bodies of water. But how exactly does one breach the surface of what is known? How to unpack those pressure points, to unravel the abyssal clusters of cables linking phenomena to information? Observe that perfect shade of blue, and promise not to cut any wire.

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, "Chapter 1: Loomings" (London: Penguin, 2013 [1851]).

² This is how Shell describes its new Stones oil and gas field in the Gulf of Mexico.

³ Werner Herzog's homonymous film interweaves documentary footage with fictional chronicles and first person narration. The imaginary interaction between submarine and space sequences is at the core of the film's structure.

⁴ Quicksand is sand saturated with water. When a shock or stress occurs, its viscosity decreases, and liquefaction begins.

⁵ Some of the names given to oceanic oil extraction platforms are Troll A, Ocean Ranger, Petronius, and Piper Alpha.

⁶ The explosion took place on April 20 2010, in the Macondo Prospect oil field, in the Gulf of Mexico. The Deepwater Horizon semi-submersible Mobile Offshore Drilling Unit caught fire and then sank, leading to 11 deaths among aits workers, and causing an enormous off shore oil spill.

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