

Ocean Views

An investigation into human-ocean
relations

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of philosophy of
Murdoch University

2007

Declaration of originality

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates some conceptions of oceans in modern Western societies that are highly influential in shaping human-ocean relations. My main aim in this dissertation is to demonstrate that the Western discourses of law, science and the aesthetic of the sublime illuminate characteristics of human-ocean relations in Western societies. I argue that the conceptions developed and perpetuated in the discourses of law, aesthetics and science unnecessarily constrain the possibilities for human-ocean relations and undermine just existences of oceans. A further aim of this dissertation is to set out an ethical political approach that is inclusive of a diversity of ocean views that facilitate improved knowledge about the oceans and transform dominant human-ocean relations into more just relations.

In approaching my critique of Western discourses of law, aesthetics and science I canvas a range of philosophical, social and political theories, but make most use of the insights of feminist and ecological feminist thinkers into forms of oppression and environmental justice. I also move beyond critique to set out an approach for structuring ocean policy debates and outcomes with a form of political epistemology that de-centres influential Western conceptions of oceans and is inclusive of a diversity of perspectives.

In carrying out this dissertation's investigation I find that particular conceptions of oceans in the discourses of law, aesthetics and science narrowly define how Western human subjects think, feel and interact with oceans. These discourses provide a dominant position for Western subjects over those of other people and the oceans. This is how, in basic terms, I suggest that Western discourses undermine just existences for oceans. A common feature in the discourses that frame the conceptions of oceans that I discuss is the exclusion of a diversity of human-ocean relations from consideration. To counter the exclusionary practices of Western discourses I find that robust democratic processes are essential for just ocean existences. The importance of democratic processes is not only that they constitute ethical processes, and should be valued highly for that reason, but also because of a capacity to produce and deliver improved knowledge about the oceans and transform

human-ocean relations. I advocate in particular the approach to political epistemology of Bruno Latour as one way to work toward just ocean existences. In the approach I advocate, oceans participate in democratic processes as agents, not as mere objects awaiting human benevolence or exploitation.

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Acknowledgements

In writing this dissertation I have been most fortunate to be supervised by Dr. Laura Stocker and, until recently, Dr. Patsy Hallen, who have provided me with the benefit of their own knowledge, experience and deep feelings for oceans. I thank Laura in particular for her keen, heartfelt interest in my dissertation and her many excellent challenges, leads and suggestions. I thank Patsy for ongoing encouragement to me in my project as well as her generous and critical feedback on drafts.

I am indebted to Dr. Herb Thompson and Dr. Jane Hutchison for facilitating some formative thinking about social and environmental justice and political ecology. My ideas in this dissertation owe much to the work of ecological feminist scholars who visited Murdoch University as a part of the Ecofeminist Visiting Scholars Programme. I extend my gratitude to Patsy, the Ecofeminist Visiting Scholars Programme and the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy for the opportunities the Programme presented to me.

As this dissertation has evolved over many more years than I could have imagined, family, friends and colleagues have encouraged me. I owe special mention to Aidan Davison, Jane Hutchison and Julia Hobson, whose own Doctoral journeys have inspired me. I am grateful to Kathryn Harban and Cathy Bennett for advice that made all the difference to my completion. I thank Bev, Kevin and Rebecca Kennedy for making time (and food) in their busy schedules so that I could write. I am especially thankful to William Litchfield Kennedy for simply being the joy that he is, for all his love and thoughtfulness on this journey.

Of course, John Litchfield deserves a million thanks for the many hours of discussing ideas and commenting on drafts, particularly in relation to technical details of native title law and practice. But more than this, I am grateful for his unconditional support, patience, curiosity and humour — in short, an incredible generosity of spirit throughout my writing this dissertation that has meant the world to me.

