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## Back to the Future or Forward to the Past: Ocean Voyaging and Slow Travel

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## Back to the Future or Forward to the Past: Ocean Voyaging and Slow Travel

### Abstract

Going back to previous modes of travel, such as walking or sailing, to ensure a future, is currently being engaged by everyone from ambling environmentalists to scientists and technologists. In Germany and in Sweden, scientists are working to develop large cargo sailing ships. These ships of the future hearken back to the past of ocean voyaging. They dovetail with contemporary literary reflections on ocean voyaging and slow travels, such as Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Never Set Foot On and Never Will* (2009). Weaving together an analysis of Schalansky's atlas with environmental humanities discourses on deep time, this article puts forward a model of ocean voyaging as slow travel, thereby expanding the modes of travel that are included in slow travel. Additionally, it considers the place of climate refugee migrations in the concept of slow travel in light of Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Going, Gone, Went* (2015).

### Keywords

Environmental Humanities, Comparative Literature, German Literature, Sustainability

Back to the Future or Forward to the Past:  
Ocean Voyaging and Slow Travel

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Amidst the unfolding uptick in effects related to global warming and the climate crisis, travel has been reconfigured. Since air and car travel are some of the main sources of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions, modes of travel with lower emissions, such as walking or bicycling, have become more common. Of course, the literature on walking and strolling has a long history, from the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft to those by Walter Benjamin, Franz Hessel, and W.G. Sebald. It has been written about from scholars such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to authors like Rebecca Solnit.

This shift to slow travel takes place in tandem with considerations related to time in the environmental humanities. For example, the notion of deep time considers time on a geological scale, either calculated moving backwards to conceive of the geologic span of fossil fuel production or moving forwards to posit the Anthropocene as an epoch that one day will have left its traces in the geologic record.<sup>1</sup> These temporal shifts have been discussed in scholarship by Dipesh Chakrabarty and Bruno Latour, by Anna Tsing and Kathryn Yusoff.

Going back to previous modes of travel, such as walking or sailing, to ensure a future, is currently being engaged by everyone from (r)ambling environmentalists to scientists and technologists. Over the past decades scientists, engineers, and boat-builders have been working together to develop long distance large cargo sailing ships. These ships of the future harken back to the past of ocean voyaging and transporting via large sailing ships with two or more masts before the use of steam and fossil fuels, such as diesel. They dovetail with contemporary literary reflections on ocean voyaging and slow travels, such as Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Never Set Foot On and Never Will*. In this essay, I weave together an analysis of Schalansky's atlas with environmental humanities discourses on deep time, to put forward a model of ocean voyaging as slow travel, thereby expanding the models of travel that are included in slow travel.<sup>2</sup> In a flipside narrative, via Jenny Erpenbeck's

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<sup>1</sup> The term "slow travel" is, of course, ambiguous and, like anything, relative to the context. I am focusing on walking and sailing. Of course "faster" forms of travels can become slow. Cars may be faster than bicycles but when used for a road trip may be slower than destination motivated air travel. As Godard famously showed in his tracking shot in *Weekend*, cars can also get stuck and become not merely slow but immobile as commuters in urban environments know all too well.

<sup>2</sup> The term "Environmental Humanities" describes the broad range of humanities texts engaged in this essay. They span beyond literary ones. In what follows, I engage philosophy, film, and art.

novel *Go, Went, Gone*, I consider a different form of slow travel that also relates to climate change but this time focuses on (climate) refugees and their migrations.

### Slow Travel in the Environmental Humanities

From Humboldt to Herzog, figures in German history, philosophy, literature, and film have voyaged via what I am here calling “slow travel.” Whether motivated by the then common forms of voyaging via two to four master sailing ships to explore regions only hitherto known via fantastical maps populated with sea monsters, such as medieval *mappa mundi* or the sixteenth century *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (Van Duzer, Nigg), or via walking, conducive to meditative effects and popular with philosophers and Buddhists alike, slow travel has a long history. Already in the eighteenth century, naturalist Georg Foster joined explorer James Cook on the latter’s second voyage to the Pacific (1772-1775). During what wound up being a three-year trip, they voyaged south down the Atlantic Ocean past the Cape of Good Hope and the Cape of Agulhas around to the Indian Ocean. Then, they headed south to the Antarctic Ocean. Traveling north, they crisscrossed the South Pacific, proving that Australia was in fact an island. Afterward, they headed east, passed the southern tip of South America, Terra del Fuego, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and sailed home (Foster, *A Voyage Round the World*). Foster was a botanist and zoologist. He also became an accomplished geographer and cartographer. Foster influenced Alexander von Humboldt. In 1790, the two went on a three-month journey of England, France, the Netherlands and the Lower Rhine region (Foster, *Ansichten vom Niederrhein*). Humboldt, too, was a botanist and a geographer, and also interested in zoology, mineralogy, and geology. From 1799 to 1804, Humboldt led an expedition to South America, after securing permission from the Spanish crown and financing it by an inheritance from his mother. On the expedition Humboldt explored South America, traveled up to Mexico and through the Caribbean, alighting in Cuba, and then traveled on to D.C. and to Philadelphia and back across the Atlantic to Europe (Von Humboldt, *Journey to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*; Von Humboldt, *View of Nature*; Wulf).

Like voyaging, walks of various durations were common forms of slow travel, particularly among philosophers. At the shorter end, Immanuel Kant is known for his daily walks in Königsberg, as is Friedrich Nietzsche for his mountainside hikes and Martin Heidegger for his hikes in the steep Hochschwarzwald region, which almost encircles Heidelberg. In Heidelberg the Philosopher’s Walk, associated with the German poets Josef von Eichendorff and Friedrich Hölderlin. Writing about Kant and Nietzsche in *A Philosophy of*

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While I mainly focus on Schalansky’s *Atlas of Remote Islands* in this section, her atlas, too, is at once literary and cartographic.

*Walking*, Frédéric Gros writes: “But their styles differed absolutely, Nietzsche was a great, indefatigable walker, whose hikes were long and sometimes steep . . . Kant by contrast . . . looked after himself during his daily walk which was always very brief, a bit perfunctory” (154). Moreover, “[Kant] always took the same route, so consistently that his itinerary through the park later came to be called ‘The Philosopher’s Walk’” (Gros 156).

In literature, too, walking has a long history. In the 19th century Friedrich Gerstäcker traveled throughout the United States on foot or by steamboat. Gerstäcker published two novels about his voyages in the U.S., which were well-received in Germany: *Die Regulatoren in Arkansas* (‘The Regulators of Arkansas,’ 1845) and *Die Flußpiraten des Mississippi* (‘The River Pirates of the Mississippi,’ 1848). Accounts of twentieth-century literature on the subject often start with a mention of Swiss writer Robert Walser’s novella “The Walk” (1917). The scholarship on *flâneurs* took off with analyses of Benjamin’s writings on the subject. Benjamin wrote about strolls through Berlin in *Berlin Childhood around 1900* and about *flâneurs* (strollers) in Paris in *Charles Baudelaire and The Arcades Project*. In Marcel Proust’s writings, *flâneuses* (female strollers) appeared more often than *flâneurs* (male strollers). Franz Hessel, who together with Benjamin translated Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*) from the original French into German in the 1920s, wrote about *flâneurs* in Berlin in *Walking in Berlin*. More recently, in *Rings of Saturn: An English Pilgrimage*, Sebald wrote about his walk through the British countryside. In a review, the *New York Times* called it “a hybrid of a book—fiction, travel, biography, myth and memoir” (Silman). Sebald’s writing not only wanders generically, that is, among genres, but also temporally, among past, present, and future and narratologically, blurring narrative vantage points. Sebald’s works, like so many of the texts mentioned in this essay, present walking as an act of crossing borders, not only geographic, physical, psychological, spiritual and more but also textual, be they defined generically or disciplinarily. This very act of rambling, physically and intellectually, forms part of the appeal of walking and of the literature about it.

Perambulation is not limited to figures from the German canon, as Rebecca Solnit documented in *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*. A relationship exists, she writes, between walking and thinking in figures from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to William Wordsworth, and between walking and politics as evidenced by Henry David Thoreau’s essay “Walking”, which laid the foundation for *Walden*, and John Muir’s thousand mile walk from Kentucky to Florida. In Mary Wollstonecraft’s novel *Mary* (1788), the protagonist takes solitary walks, which together with her study of philosophical texts, travels, and friendships with other women form nodes of her feminist philosophy. Mary Oliver’s poetry is steeped in walks she took in the woods near her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. In a

*New York Times* interview, she referred to herself as “the kind of old-fashioned poet who walks the woods most days, accompanied by dog and notepad” (Jennings). She began walking as a child, to escape her father’s sexual abuse.

Even cinema has not escaped the influence of “slow travel.” Late one winter, in 1974, when the German-French film critic, film curator, and film historian Lotte Eisner fell gravely ill, Werner Herzog famously set out from Munich to Paris on a pilgrimage, which would eventually take three weeks, in order to visit and save her. Herzog documented the journey through frozen landscapes, snowstorms, and the cold in *Of Walking in Ice*. Also in the vein of slow travel, but with a decidedly different twist, Herzog’s *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) tells the tale of a man determined to build an opera in a South American jungle and a hair-brained plan to fund the opera house by tapping rubber in the Amazon and hauling a 320-ton steamship over a hillside as a “short cut” to reach the region rich in rubber. Herzog, perhaps not surprisingly, insisted on having the actors actually carry such a ship over a hillside. Or one could think of the slow river travel in Herzog’s *Aguirre, the Wrath of God*

More recently, Schalansky’s award-winning and best-selling *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Never Set Foot On and Never Will* tells of her experience growing up in the German Democratic Republic and gazing at atlases, marveling over far away islands. Schalansky’s atlas weaves together history and colonization, geography and cartography, travel narratives and short fictional essays, to put forward a volume of slow travel. In closing this section, I discuss how Schalansky’s atlas puts forward a new model of slow travel in this era of climate crisis. Vital as a framing for this text and an analysis of it is a consideration of fossil fuels, the Anthropocene, and deep time.

## Deep Time

Deep Time refers to measurements of geological time. Developed since the mid-eighteenth century, these measurements radically transcend human life spans (Lyell, *Principles of Geology*). They can include Antarctic ice cores that are millions of years old. Notions of deep time become pivotal in the era of the Anthropocene as humans have become a geological force and geologists seek a marker in the geological record of this human impact. Deep time includes the span of fossil fuels, their very name referencing and derived from the decomposition of buried dead organisms, created through photosynthesis millions of years ago (Gee, *Deep Time*). Fossil fuels, such as coal, petroleum, and natural gas, created through these deep time spans, constitute the energy sources that at once power our current lifestyles and also are responsible for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and climate change. Every trip we take, every amazon order delivered, de facto relies on a dig deep into time going backwards and going forwards foreshortens our

future, on a planet that it is no longer as stable as it has been for the past centuries and as we (but not the children among us) have known it to be. Deep time. Backwards. And forwards. As we (or the goods we consume) travel through space, we travel through time. Geologically. While this story could focus on fossil fuels and their life span, deep time also opens up onto other non-anthropocentric time frames. It involves the long temporal life spans of trees, measured in centuries not decades.<sup>3</sup> The half-life of radioactive matter.<sup>4</sup> Deep time demands a new historical framework.

Early on, philosophers such as Nietzsche and Benjamin had put forward models of history that were more cyclical than linear in “On the Use and Disadvantages of History for Life” and “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” respectively. More recently, Manuel De Landa has written a nonlinear history. Science fiction, too, has featured alternate models of narrating history, for example, H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine*. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty has grappled substantively with writing history in light of the Anthropocene. “Our usual historical practices,” Chakrabarty writes, “for visualizing times, past and future, times inaccessible to us personally—the exercise of historical understanding—are thrown into a deep contradiction and confusion” (197). Chakrabarty highlights how Fernand Braudel revised the traditional focus in the discipline of history: it was clear that he rebelled mainly against historians who treated the environment simply as a silent and passive backdrop to their historical narratives, something dealt with in the introductory chapter but forgotten thereafter, as if, as Braudel put it, “the flowers did not come back every spring, the flocks of sheep migrate every year, or the ships sail on a real sea that changes with the seasons.” In composing *The Mediterranean*, Braudel wanted to write a history in which the seasons—“a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles”—and other recurrences in nature played an active role in molding human actions. The environment, in that sense, had an agentive presence in Braudel’s pages (204-5).

For all of Braudel’s innovative intervention in bringing attention to how human history and natural history have been rent asunder, in foregrounding nature or at bare minimum in including it, Braudel’s notion of nature nonetheless tracked it as a steady unchanging cyclical pattern—“a history of constant repetition, ever-recurring cycles” (204). Yet nature is now unsteady. Moreover, humans are the

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<sup>3</sup> C.f. Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*, trans. Jane Billingham (New York: Greystone, 2016). While much of the book focused on the different being of trees and on their relationships to one another and non-human entities, it also considers the life-spans of trees vs. other beings, human and beyond.

<sup>4</sup> The HBO historical drama television mini-series *Chernobyl* (2019) has recently renewed interest in nuclear disasters and nuclear afterlife.

geological force radically changing it. These two factors necessitate new narratives.

Deep history provides an historical narrative that decenters humans, viewing them as one species among others.<sup>5</sup> While human history spans four to ten thousand years—that is, four thousand since the invention of agriculture and ten thousand since record keeping began—deep history has a much longer span. “The task of placing, historically, the crisis of climate change,” Chakrabarty continues, “thus requires us to bring together intellectual formations that are somewhat in tension with each other: the planetary and the global; deep and recorded histories; species thinking and critique of capital” (213). Chakrabarty’s essay calls for an interdisciplinary approach. As he puts it, “Explaining this catastrophe calls for a conversation between disciplines and between recorded and deep histories of human beings” (219). The environmental humanities put forward such narratives connecting fields and disciplines in the humanities with ones in the natural and social sciences and beyond.<sup>6</sup> Since his 2009 essay, the field of environmental humanities has witnessed intense growth.<sup>7</sup> Given that human influence on the geologic record marks the current era, Chakrabarty argues that it is human histories of modernity that should narrate this unique event.

How will we narrate deep time? How are these stories of a more expansive temporal framework and thinking (to be) told?<sup>8</sup> What formal strategies (will) tell this story of deep time? Time-lapse photography? Slow motion? Or montage? We are shaped by what came before. Long before. We are shaping what will come after. Long after. How do and will we narrate impacts of a longer and more diffuse temporal span? Since deep time implicitly focuses on human and non-

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<sup>5</sup> C.f. Thom van Dooren, Eben Kirksey and Ursula Münster, “Multispecies Studies: Cultivating Arts of Attentiveness,” *Environmental Humanities* 8.1 (2016): 1-23; and Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Chakrabarty highlights the limits of thinking nature as rent asunder from democracy, citing Bruno Latour’s *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999). This book “calls into question,” Chakrabarty writes, “the entire tradition of organizing the idea of politics around the assumption of a separate realm of nature and points to the problems that this assumption poses for contemporary questions of democracy.” Chakrabarty also references Timothy Mitchell’s *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil* (New York: Verso, 2011), which presents how “fossil fuels created both the possibilities for and limits of democracy in the twentieth century.”

<sup>7</sup> C.f. Emily O’Gorman, et al. “Teaching the Environmental Humanities: International Perspectives and Practices.” *Environmental Humanities* 11.2 (2019): 426-60, <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-7754545>; Lydia Tang, “Against Smallness: How Successful Language Programs Reimagine the Humanities,” *The Profession*, Fall 2019. <https://profession.mla.org/against-smallness-how-successful-language-programs-reimagine-the-humanities/>

<sup>8</sup> C.f. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Our Broad Present: Time and Contemporary Culture* (Columbia UP, 2014).



human species, how will we narrate this temporal framework with a broader conceptualization of the species to be considered and engaged? One possible mode of narration perhaps not of deep time and deep history but of a longer and slower time span is put forward in Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands* and rests on slow travel. After discussing alternative modes of slow travel developed in the twenty-first century, I will discuss Schalansky's atlas.

### Back to the Future: Slow Travel in the Twenty-First Century

Since air travel is one of the main sources of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission, *flygskam* (flight shame) has taken off in Europe since 2018, led by climate activists in Sweden. In tandem with Greta Thunberg's Fridays For Future school strikes to bring about action for climate change, "flight shaming" aims to encourage people to become aware of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and to act in response, by actively and consistently seeking out other less CO<sub>2</sub> intensive modes of transportation and by encouraging others to do the same. On January 10, 2020, Sweden announced that it had seen a four percent dip in air travel as a result of flight shaming ("City Sees Rare Fall in Air Passengers"). More recently, as a result of COVID 19, air travel has witnessed a 90% drop in passengers (Wainwright and Homer, BBC). To be sure, "flight shame" is not only a grass roots, ground up movement: in June 2019, the French government announced a green tax on airline tickets (Deutsche Welle). Domestic tickets will be charged €1.50 (\$1.62) for travel within Europe and a €3.00 (\$3.25) for travel outside of Europe. Business class tickets will be charged €9.00 (\$9.75) for travel within Europe and €18.00 (\$19.49) for travel outside of Europe. The tax will affect only departing flights and will come into effect in 2020.

Relatedly, on July 28, 2019, Markus Söder, minister president of Christian Social Union (CSU) in Bavaria (the state's sister party of the nation-wide Christian Democratic Union, CDU), made national headlines when he demanded the climate crisis be addressed (Bauchmüller). He called for train tickets to be freed from the value added tax (VAT or *Mehrwertsteuer* in German), which currently rests at 19%, so that people board a train rather than a plane. (Others are calling for ticket prices to be reduced radically and for cheap airlines to be reined in.) Söder suggested coal to be phased out by 2020, not 2038 as originally called for by Chancellor Merkel earlier in the year. He proposed Bavarian government employees should use more electric powered vehicles, such as electric scooters. On January 2, 2020, long distance rail prices dropped in Germany for the first time in seventeen years as these measures, freeing the train tickets from VAT, took effect (Oltermann). Public buildings are to become energy efficient. Windmills are to be built on public lands. He also proposed climate protection be

introduced into Bavaria's *Grundgesetz* 'constitution', which means a legal mandate would exist to address it. This proposal could also sow the seeds for its introduction into the national constitution. The fact that the CDU/CSU lost landslide votes to the Green Party in the most recent elections was widely cited as a reason for the shift in his position but also as an opportunity. Söder is moving the CSU out of a defensive and to an offensive position. In fact, a recent article on the topic in the newspaper the *Sueddeutsche Zeitung* argued that all political parties aim to shift in this regard. After years of standstill in climate politics, the author stated, the brakes have now been released, and instead, a race for the best solutions is on.

Environmentalists have also been demanding an end to the exemption of kerosene from taxes. Airplanes use a special type of fuel, often referred to as aviation fuel or jet fuel. This fuel is blended to avoid freezing at extremely low temperatures or igniting at very high ones. Moreover, it is blended to ensure the maximum fuel efficiency and thus lowest costs for both commercial airlines and military planes. Kerosene is a key ingredient in the many jet fuels. It is exempt from taxation under the 1944 Chicago Convention on Civil Aviation, which put forward the guidelines for global aviation that hold to this very day. Historically, at the end of World War II many structures were implemented globally that put forward a new global order, politically and economically. These structures include institutions as varied as the United Nations and the Bretton Woods system, which encompasses the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, today part of the World Bank.<sup>9</sup> The 1944 Chicago Convention on Civil Aviation is often also referred to as the Five Freedoms Agreement, as it put forward the five principles governing flying across national borders. But given that these structures informed the Cold War era, perhaps after seventy years, in the new era of climate crisis, new laws and systems of taxation are needed? While diesel, oil, and gas are taxed, kerosene has been exempt. Environmentalists argue that the kerosene tax exemption needs to be revisited. Like with other fossil fuels, such as coal and oil, they demand an end to the subsidies, which give it preferential treatment by bolstering it economically.

Globally, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA), most CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2016 were created through the production of electricity and heat, accounting for 42% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, followed by the transportation sector, which is responsible for about 25% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions ("CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions in

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<sup>9</sup> The Bretton Woods system was established by the eponymous conference held in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire from July 1 to 22, 1944. Attended by over 700 delegates from 44 countries, Bretton Woods established the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on December 27, 1945; and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which today is part of the World Bank. See Jeffrey Frieden, "Bretton Woods System in Action," *Global Capitalism: Its Rise and Fall in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 1997) 278-300.

2018”). According to the IEA, for transportation the level “in 2016 ... [is] 71% higher than what was seen in 1990” (“CO2 Emissions in 2018”). North and South America together have historically had the highest emissions from transportation. Asia and Europe were once in the middle range, with most of Africa and Oceania producing minimal CO2 emissions. Since 1990, Asia’s CO2 emissions have increased dramatically such that they now equal or exceed those of the Americas. Most of the increase in CO2 emissions in the transportation sector results from road transport, which has increased more dramatically than air or water transport.

The aforementioned trains offer one alternative to flying but they are obviously not a solution for travel across oceans. Scientists have been working to design long distance boats with two to four masts powered by wind. These boats are intended to transport either goods or humans. Fairtransport, based in the Netherlands, designed the world’s first emissions-free long distance cargo shipping company in 2007. Since 2013, the company Timbercoast Cargo Under Sail, based in Germany, has transported cargo across the Atlantic and the Pacific via a wind-powered two-master sailing boat. Lastly, the company Sail Cargo, based in Costa Rica but registered in Canada, is currently also building sailing cargo vessels that will cross the Atlantic powered by wind and solar energy. Aside from these innovations in the shipping industry, trans-oceanic travel via larger sailboats, especially across the Atlantic, has also been under consideration. Since they rely on the wind, the conditions for travel tend to be optimal in April and in October and more unpredictable at other times of year. Additionally, one must avoid the hurricane season, which runs from June to September. In short, working with the elements is key.

The aforementioned sixteen-year old climate activist Greta Thunberg does not fly. She made global headlines in the summer of 2019 when she announced that she would attend both the UN climate action summit taking place on September 23, 2019 in New York and the COP 25 climate negotiations originally scheduled to take place December 2-13, 2019 in San Tiago, Chile and then moved to Madrid, Spain (Henley). “Taking a boat to North America is basically impossible,” she said. “I have had countless people helping me, trying to contact different boats.” Then, she was offered a ride across the Atlantic on a sixty-foot long high-speed racing yacht. Clearly, however, such modes of transportation leave much to be desired in terms of their accessibility, both in terms of how regularly and how affordably such voyages are offered, and in terms of who can afford to take off work for such a stretch of time. In some ways, the design of these boats and the demand for travel via them for long haul journeys harkens back to earlier modes of travel while suggesting a technologically enhanced variation for the future.

### Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands* and Slow Travel

Schalansky had already focused on this wind-powered sea voyaging in her *Atlas of Remote Islands*. Her book presents islands worldwide, with a recto page featuring a map of the island and a verso page featuring a short essay of creative nonfiction about it. Schalansky's atlas proposes new models of slow travel in this era of climate crisis. Firstly, her atlas does not advocate travel and instead offers the opportunity for armchair travel. Secondly, her atlas predominantly depicts slow travel focusing, as it does, on ocean voyages via two to four master boats powered by wind.

The politics of East and West German unification provide a framework for her atlas. In the introduction, Schalansky shares her experience growing up in the German Democratic Republic and gazing at atlases, marveling over faraway islands. In the very opening sentences, Schalansky tells the reader that she had never traveled: "I grew up with an atlas. And as a child of the atlas, I had never traveled" (7). She also discusses her growing awareness, particularly after unification, of the politics of mapping. She shares that the East German atlas with which she grew up, *Atlas für jedermann* ('Atlas for Everyone') by Hermann Haack, carefully distributed East and West Germany across two separate pages, not including any depiction of the dividing wall but using the book's dividing center or fold, in order to separate the two nations. West German atlases, she discovered after unification, refused to dignify East Germany by calling it by its proper name, opting instead to label it SBZ (*Sowjetische Besatzungszone* or Soviet-Occupied Zone). Then, as Schalansky puts it, "a year later everything else changed: when it suddenly became possible to travel the world, and the country I was born in disappeared from the map" (8). Schalansky's commitment to atlases, however, endured, because, "by then I had already grown used to travelling through the atlas by fingers" (8).

To Schalansky, atlases and cartography constitute literature. As Schalansky puts it: "It is high time for cartography to take its place among the arts, and for the atlas to be recognized as literature" (13). Schalansky's essays, each a paragraph long, blend fact and fiction. As Schalansky puts it in her preface, "[w]hat is unique about these tales is that fact and fiction can no longer be separated: fact is fictionalized and fiction is turned to fact. That's why the question whether these stories are 'true' is misleading. All the texts in the book are based on extensive research and every detail stems from factual sources. I have not invented anything" (20). Yet Schalansky admits that she has transformed the texts: "I was the discoverer of the sources, researching them through ancient and rare books and I have transformed the texts and appropriated them as sailors appropriate the lands they discover" (20).

Schalansky's atlas offers a bridge to that earlier moment of thinking the humanities and the natural sciences together, an earlier moment of wind-powered ocean voyaging referenced at the outset: the travels and interdisciplinary writings of Humboldt and of Forster. Her essays tell of nineteenth-century expeditions across vast oceans via boat to explore, to set up telescopes and to observe the planets and stars, or to study and to measure flora and fauna. They are typically based on a colonizer's narrative vantage point. Some stories depict the penal colonies set up on the islands, for example, on St. Helena.

In certain ways, her atlas discourages long-distance travel. She has never visited these islands and, as the very subtitle of her atlas states, she never will. Her tales are as much about the remote islands as they are about the humans who travel to them. About colonizers, she is rather disparaging. "There is no untouched garden of Eden laying at the edges of this never-ending globe," Schalansky concludes, "instead, human beings travelling far and wide have turned into the very monsters they chased off the maps" (19), referencing the aforementioned monsters that used to adorn the outer edges of medieval *mappa mundi* 'world map' in the sixteenth-century *Theatrum orbis terrarum* 'theatre of the orb of the world.' Human beings traveling far and wide have also turned the very planet they have crisscrossed into a monster in the man-made era of climate change, that is, the Anthropocene. Here, her atlas offers an innovative twist. "Consulting maps," Schalansky writes, "can diminish the wanderlust that they awaken, as the act of looking at them can replace the act of travel" (23). Her atlas suggests an environmental critique in line with the current *flygskam* movement in its upfront anti-travel tenor of not drawing on or advocating travel, which in this era, if to a remote island, would predominantly take place via air.

### The Flipside: Slow Violence

If walking and ocean-voyaging is a laudable way to reduce CO2 emissions with attendant philosophical, literary, and political benefits, it functions very differently when viewed from another vantage point. Since 2011, the majority of refugees arriving in Europe have been seeking to escape the ongoing civil war in Syria.<sup>10</sup> They are followed by refugees seeking to escape the U.S.-led or supported wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen, often doing so on foot. Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*, drawing on Anna Tsing's "Feral Biologies," suggests that perhaps the Anthropocene might be characterized as lacking *refugia* 'refuge' or places of reconstitution (Haraway 178). In 2015 and 2016, after the perilous voyage across the Mediterranean by boat, many refugees

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<sup>10</sup> "Asylum Statistics," European Commission, Eurostat. March 16, 2018. <[http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/Asylum\\_statistics#Citizenship\\_of\\_first-time\\_applicants:\\_most\\_from\\_Syria\\_and\\_Iraq](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statisticsexplained/index.php/Asylum_statistics#Citizenship_of_first-time_applicants:_most_from_Syria_and_Iraq)> Last accessed July 29, 2018.

would walk north from the Greek port city of Thessaloniki to Idomeni at the Greek-Macedonia border. They would hike along the railroad tracks, heading on from the border to Skopje, Macedonia. From there, they would try to continue through Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia, to Austria and Germany. Eventually, this path was shut down, as camps were erected in Greece and the border between Greece and Macedonia sealed off. In this section, I consider slow travel focusing on (climate) refugees and their migrations.

In the introduction to *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* Rob Nixon writes about non-event-based violence, that is, violence that is protracted (1-44). “By slow violence,” Nixon writes, “I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Violence is customarily conceived as an event or action that is immediate in time, explosive and spectacular in space, and as erupting into instant sensational visibility” (2). A focus on event-based violence eclipses from view precisely the kind of slow violence that takes place due to climate change. “We need,” Nixon writes, “to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. In so doing, we also need to engage the representational, narrative, and strategic challenges posed by the relative invisibility of slow violence. Climate change, [...] and a host of other slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes present formidable representational obstacles” (2). Nixon’s concern with a slower temporality could be added to notions of deep time arising from the Anthropocene.

Nixon is, however, interested less in decentering the human and interested more in considering the humans who tend to be overlooked and disproportionately impacted by climate change. “The long dyings—the staggered and staggeringly discounted casualties, both human and ecological that result from war’s toxic aftermaths or climate change—are underrepresented in strategic planning as well as in human memory,” Nixon writes (2-3). The media, he argues, tends to focus on event-based stories. But what about the slow violence that has no image but rather is constituted by a thousand cuts? He contrasts the invasion of a country in Africa using weapons of mass destruction with slow motion toxicity. One can think of volcanoes exploding versus a lifetime build up of polluted air leading to asthma, of glaciers calving versus sea levels rising. While the concept of slow violence is pivotal for narratives about climate change, Nixon underscores that it is also key for “a variety of social afflictions” (3). He mentions the temporal dispersion of domestic abuse. One could also consider a lifetime of poverty, racism, and/or sexism. How to narrate their effects? “A major challenge,” Nixon writes, “is representational: how to devise arresting stories, images, and symbols adequate to the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects.

Crucially, slow violence is often not just attritional but also exponential, operating as a major threat multiplier; it can fuel long-term, proliferating conflicts in situations where the conditions for sustaining life become increasingly but gradually degraded” (3). Slow violence is thus a term that grapples with temporal diffusion and spatially with locations where life is gradually deteriorating. Nixon argues that slow violence tends to affect disproportionately people who are poor. They have been called “disposable people,” Nixon writes. He focuses particularly but not exclusively on the literature and social movements of people in the so-called Global South. A recent German novel engages precisely these temporal and spatial concerns related to slow violence.

### Slow Violence and Slow Travel in Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen*

Jenny Erpenbeck’s 2015 novel *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* (*Go, Gone, Went*) weaves together a consideration of slow violence and slow travel. The protagonist, Richard, is a recently retired professor emeritus at Humboldt University. He moved from Silesia to East Berlin with his mother when he was a two-year old at the end of World War II. He was almost separated from his mother but a Russian soldier handed him to her through the window of a departing train. He lived in East Berlin until shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when he and his wife moved to the countryside, just outside of Berlin.

In an early chapter, a group of ten black men, described thusly in the novel, who speak various languages, including English, French, and Italian, carry out a protest in front of the *Rote Rathaus* ‘city hall’ in Berlin (Erpenbeck 18). They demand work. They want the right to remain in Germany. They refuse food. Then, water. The authorities ask them who they are. The protestors refuse to speak. A journalist seeks an event-based story: “Ist einer der Männer vielleicht schon zusammengebrochen” (Erpenbeck 20) ‘Has one of the men already collapsed,’ she asks. “Wurde schon einer zum Krankenhaus geliefert?” (Erpenbeck 20) ‘Has one already been taken to the hospital?,’ she continues. A police officer tells her he thinks one was taken to the hospital yesterday but before his shift. She asks which one but he tells her that he cannot reveal this information to her. “Aber dann krieg ich die Story nicht unter” (Erpenbeck 20) ‘But then I am not going to get the story,’ she replies. The police officer says he cannot help her with that matter. Through this opening action and its contrast with the reporter’s attempt to get an event-based angle (a hospitalization), slow violence frames the novel. Subsequent to this exchange, the narrative mainly focuses on Richard and his exchanges with asylum seekers.

The protagonist turns on the television and learns about the action on the evening news. His curiosity is piqued. Who are these men? Three days later, they are moved from the site. The protest ends. “Schade, denkt er. Die Idee, sichtbar zu

werden, indem man öffentlich nicht sagt, wer man ist, hatte ihm gefallen” (Erpenbeck 31) ‘What a shame, he thinks. He liked the idea of becoming visible by not saying publicly who one is.’

He reads the newspaper, which he had previously only skimmed, and learns that in the Mediterranean Sea, near the island of Lampedusa, sixty-four of three hundred twenty-nine refugees aboard a boat drowned (Erpenbeck 33). They were from Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Niger. He reads about a man from Nigeria who tried to escape as a stowaway on a plane but fell at a height of 3000 meters, and then about the occupation of a school and of Oranienplatz both in Kreuzberg, a borough of Berlin.

Richard’s interest grows. Where are these various countries located? What are their capitals? He looks them up. He recalls encountering people from Mozambique and Angola in the 1970s. They had emigrated to East Germany to study “Maschinenbau oder Landwirtschaft” (Erpenbeck 33) ‘mechanical engineering or agriculture’ during the era of socialist solidarity between East Germany and African and Asian nations. He travels to Kreuzberg to visit the occupied school and then Oranienplatz. Soon after, police clear the occupiers from Oranienplatz and the male asylum seekers are moved into what used to be a nursing home near his house.

Richard begins to walk to the home almost daily to conduct interviews. Slowly, he learns the names and nationalities of the asylum seekers. He hears how they have often fled wars or persecution in their home country, to seek out a better life in a new country, only to experience new atrocities and be forced to move again. Many of the men he talks to have lost family. Some have lost one parent, some the other, some both. Others do not know if their family members are alive or dead, if they are in Africa or in Europe.

The circuitous paths of slow travel described by the asylum seekers, sometimes in labyrinthine narrative in the interviews, create webs rather than a direct A to B line on a map. Structurally, their trajectories recall those in the exhibit “Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter” on display from October 1, 2016 to January 22, 2017 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It formed part of a series on Citizens and Borders that explored “histories of migration, territory and displacement” (“Citizens and Borders”). Previously, from April 9 to October 10, 2016 the series had displayed Bouchra Khalili’s *The Mapping Journey Project* (2008-2011), a video projected installation with accompanying interviews in which a migrant told of their journey, tracing it on a map. The eight persons interviewed traveled from the Middle East or North Africa to avoid political persecution or climate change related effects.

The reconfiguration of their slow travel is not only spatial but also temporal. As Erpenbeck puts it:



Und plötzlich weiß er, warum er heute zwei Stunden auf dem Oranienplatz gegessen hat. Er hat es auch schon gewußt, als er im August von den Hungerstreikenden gehört hat, und hatte es auch gewusst, als er gestern den Schulhof betrat, aber jetzt, in diesem Moment, weiß er es wirklich. Über das Sprechen was Zeit eigentlich ist, kann er wahrscheinlich am besten mit denen, die aus ihr hinausgefallen sind. Oder in sie hineingesperrt sind, wenn man so will. (51)

And suddenly, he knew why he sat on Oranienplatz today for two hours. He already knew it when he had heard about the hunger strikers in August and knew it when he stepped onto the schoolyard yesterday, but now, in this moment, he really knew it. He can probably discuss what time actually is best with those who have fallen outside of time. Or perhaps they are imprisoned in time, if one wants to put it that way.

The asylum seekers might have fallen out of time, in that the temporality of their concerns do not accord with the temporality of his concerns. They are, as the text puts it, locked into a different temporality.

Richard's relations to space and time as well as his priorities shift radically over the course of the novel. He dutifully begins to read books and to put together a questionnaire in preparation for interviews he plans to conduct with the asylum seekers. After his first meetings with a few of the asylum seekers, he realizes how off or irrelevant or uninformed his questions are. He asks them about their home countries, the flora and fauna, whether or not they went to school, studied at a university, or had pets, and what a favorite childhood song of theirs was. His interlocutors time and time again respond to his questions with confusion or surprise. Temporally, his questions do not engage their immediate and more looming concerns. Spatially, their answers often do not fit into his boxes, which means he is also becoming increasingly aware of how they will not fit into the boxes of their asylum applications. In response to "Where are you from?" (meaning, which country), one person responds "Aus der Wüste" (Erpenbeck 66), 'from the desert.' It is the desert with which the Tuareg identify, not the borders and nations created by colonization. "Zum ersten Mal kommt ihm der Gedanke, dass die von den Europäern gezogenen Grenzen die Afrikaner überhaupt nichts angehen" (Erpenbeck 66), 'for the first time, the thought comes to him that the borders drawn by Europeans do not actually concern the Africans at all.'

The slow travel of the asylum seekers that Richard meets reconfigures spaces and movement itself. As Erpenbeck writes:

Der emeritierte Professor, der hier an einem Tag so vieles zum ersten Mal hört, als sei er noch einmal ein Kind, begreift nun plötzlich, dass der

Oranienplatz nicht nur der Platz ist, den der berühmte Gartenbauarchitekt Lenné im 19. Jahrhundert konzipiert hat, nicht nur der Platz, an dem eine alte Frau täglich ihren Hund ausgeführt, oder ein Mädchen auf einer Parkbank zum ersten Mal ihren Freund geküsst hat. Für einen Jungen, der unter Nomaden aufgewachsen ist, ist der Oranienplatz, den er anderthalb Jahre bewohnt hat, nur eine Station auf einem langen Weg, ein vorläufiger Ort, der zum nächsten vorläufigen Ort führt. (70)

The Professor Emeritus, who heard so much here for the first time in one day, as if he were a child again, suddenly understands that the Oranienplatz is not only a place that a famous landscape gardener Lenné designed in the 19th century, not only the place where an old woman walks her dog daily, or where a girl sitting on a park bench kissed her boyfriend for the first time. For a boy who grew up with nomads, the Oranienplatz where he lived for one and a half years, is only one station on a long path, a preliminary place, which leads to the next preliminary place.’

Oranienplatz is not only a stationary place where one can trace historical development from its past design to its present use. It is also a place through which a nomadic asylum seeker moves, not knowing or seeing this history and carrying instead their own history.

Slow travel offers an opportunity to address the current climate crisis. But to read it solely in these terms would foreclose a reading of slow travel motivated by other factors, such as the migration of those fleeing wars and climate change induced migrations. While the development of forms of travel that reduce CO2 emissions, such as wind-powered ocean voyaging, are clearly beneficial to avert climate change, the very term “slow travel” should, from its very inception, be mindful of inclusion and exclusion. Who does the term explicitly and implicitly include? Or exclude? By whom is slow travel designed? For whom is it designed? That is, the term “slow travel” should consider from the outset the very different slow travel of immigrants fleeing Africa and the Middle East to Europe on foot or via the Mediterranean Sea. To be sure, a movement towards slow travel is key as a technological and scientific development and as a conceptual category for further study by fields such as (environmental) history, literature and ecocriticism, and the environmental humanities. Including ocean voyaging might expand the modes of movement slow travel encompasses. Equally as important is a notion of the term that includes various demographics.

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