

*A Third Wave of Remembering
The Mediterranean Sea as a Septic Tank*

VICTOR J. VITANZA

How to cite

Vitanza, V. J. (2018). A Third Wave of Remembering. The Mediterranean Sea as a Septic Tank. *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge-JMK*, 3(1), 81-86. DOI: 10.26409/2018JMK3.1.05

Retrieved from

<http://www.mediterraneanknowledge.org/publications/index.php/journal/issue/archive>

1. Author's information

Clemson University, USA

2. Author's contact

sophist@clemson.edu

Article first published online: June 2018



- Peer Reviewed Journal

INDEXED IN
DOAJ

Additional information about [Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge-JMK](#)
can be found at: [About the Journal-Board-On line submission](#)

A Third Wave of Remembering The Mediterranean Sea as a Septic Tank

VICTOR J. VITANZA
Clemson University, USA

Abstract:

The argument focuses on the differences in methods of historiographies as put forth by David Abulafia and Fernand Braudel. Their object-of-study is the Mediterranean Sea. Abulafia focuses primarily on *human beings making history*, while Braudel focuses on the Sea making itself, not primarily, as Abulafia insists in his title "A Human History." Their vocabulary, as assumed, focuses on *latitudes* and *longitudes*. In a radical turn, Kenneth Burke focuses on the third as *attitudes* toward history and on *casuistic stretchings*. Gregory Ulmer, following-rethinking Burke, develops para-methodologies in the entitlement of "MEMorial," that also combines *both horizontal-vertical histories*. Ulmer's thoughts piggy-back on Burke allowing also for *the excluded third* by way of the reality, as well as the metaphor, of the Mediterranean Sea, as a Septic Tank, with the casuistic stretching of the Sea, as a Skeptic Tank. Hence, *the writing is better performed* than a writing of exposition, which the latter would only be a performative contradiction!

Keywords: Mediterranean, Septic-skeptic, Latitudes-longitudes, Yet attitudes.

A quick dis-orientation: What I will present desires to be the makings of a full-blown book and an others. I will, however, *in a lecture style in print*, from orality to literacy, focus on the sections of *that desire to link*, paralink, *whatever wants to be said*. In third waves. As Kenneth Burke reminds us: A Way of SEAing is a way of Not SEAing (1984, p. 70). Therefore, I will write as presenting to an audience before me at sea.

To Begin, let us take a *Gestural Examination of Selected Titles of Books* about the Mediterranean Sea:

The Making of the Middle Sea
The Great Sea
The Middle Sea

The Corrupting Sea

Plague and Contagion in the Islamic Mediterranean

Memory and the Mediterranean

Rethinking the Mediterranean

Mediterranean by Cruise Ship: The Complete Guide to Mediterranean Cruising

And so, what do you make of these titles and their suggested entitlements! For me, they are a *Heraclitian crazy salad*. Inviting me to jump into the crazy waves. Let's look a little closer by way of a Synopsis:

My interests lie - and I disengage in an extra-moral sense (like Nietzsche) - in the differences in methods of historiographies as put forth, say, by David Abulafia (2013) and Fernand Braudel (1998).

In respect to his own book in comparison, dialectically, Abulafia (2011, p. xxvi) says: "At the heart of Braudel's approach was his assumption that 'man is imprisoned in a destiny in which he himself has little hand.' [...] [Abulafia continues] Whereas Braudel offers what might be called a *horizontal history* of the Mediterranean, seeking to capture its characteristics through the examination of a particular era, this book [i.e., Abulafia's] attempts to provide a *vertical history* of the Mediterranean, emphasizing change over time" .

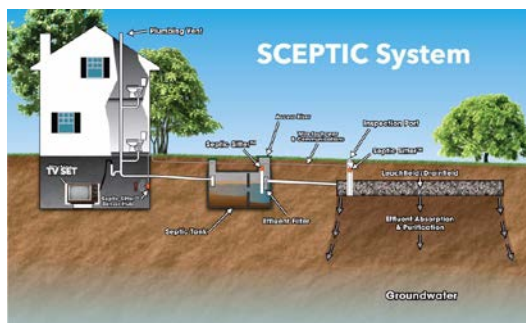
Put more simply: Abulafia focuses primarily on human beings making history, while Braudel (1998, p. 3) in his book focuses on the Sea itself, not primarily, as Abulafia insists in his title "A Human History." Braudel writes: "Should we care that the Inland Sea is immeasurably older than the oldest of the human histories it has cradled? Yes, we should: the sea can only be fully understood if we view it in the long perspective of its geological history".

In this dialectical exchange, I experience the eternal return of the word "memory" in Braudel's book title. There are many historians working/playing with memory: For example, Jacques Le Goff (2006), Paul Ricoeur (1996), and Geoffrey Cubitt (2006). As for myself, an academic, I am drawn to memory because it is one of the canons of rhetoric. I am drawn furthermore to memory for its *material* memorials of all kinds: gravestones, memorial plaques, war memorials, as well as for its *virtual* memorials.

As an example of the *virtual*, I turn to Gregory Ulmer's para-

methodologies and his work towards what he refers to as “MEMorial,” that combines *both horizontal-vertical* histories but more so all that traditional philosophy refers to as *the law of excluded third*. Specifically, I would bring forth Kenneth Burke and Ulmer’s notions of *casuistic stretchings*, allowing for *excluded thirds* by way (or waves) of realities, as well as the metaphor, of the Mediterranean Sea, etc., *as a Septic Tank*.¹ Hence, my presentation of writings is better performed than explained, and yet, I myself would be dis-informed by a performative contradiction!

Now *towards* the outrageous! We will ride the excluded third waves. Our primary image, additionally, will have become more so the Septic, yet Sceptic, tank. Gregory Ulmer, on *Facebook*, April 23, 2017. Theory Hobby (DIY *Electracy*) ... Presented an image of a “SCEPTIC System” ... The image:



Ulmer writes:

The image is found and modified, following basic dada photomontage poetics. It is a diagram illustrating septic tank function, ‘septic’ puncepted into ‘sceptic’-- tv set replacing washing machine in the original. Modifications make it ok for fair use. It is part of ‘theory hobby’ practice, discussed in a couple of the essays in our book, *Electracy*. You are welcome to use it, of course!

Thrusting third turds. Keep that mix of tropes in your mind, for we are working toward Kenneth Burke. And let’s keep in mind that Hayden White (1978) in his *Tropics of Discourse* calls on Burke’s master tropes (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony), while we cannot but focus on *perspectives of incongruity* toward the excluded middle (or rather third-turd). *Kenneth Burke, Attitudes Towards History*

Without hesitations, let us turn towards Burke's *Attitudes Towards History*. ATTITUDES! not *Latitudes* nor *longitudes*! But again, towards thirds. The excluded turds. KB is infamous with his scatological approaches at times, focusing on septic, yet sceptic, attitudes which refer to his "perspective by incongruity." It is all best summed up in his "The Thinking of the Body" (1966, pp. 308-43). And let us not forget: Burke develops the notion of "the *Demontic Trinity*: 'excrement, blood and flowers' as 'three essential oils' of the human plight" (1966, p. 251). Hence, when reading-thinking Burke, let us accept, his *Grammar of Motives*, where he says: we human beings are perpetually "Making peace with [our] feces" (1969, p. 23). You read, study, KB, then, you and others study Burke's *Scatology*¹.

Let's also, so briefly, turn ever again to Burke's *Counter-Statement* as he mixes streams of aesthetics into his discussion bringing about "a conflict of attitudes" that, in turn, brings forth a "liquidity" (1968, p. 20). Burke takes on streams of aesthetics in his discussion of flow and flux, recalling Heraclitus' "everything flows" bringing forth a "vocabulary of flux" (1968, p. 15).

Gregory Ulmer, Electronic Monuments

To the points, remaining time, not tic-tocs, but the spaces left far between Toc . . . Tic: Ulmer (2005, p. 43) explains: the oddity of subjects and objects. Those who are recognized for serving a good cause and those who are not read as serving anyone. Ulmer writes: "What memorials are to ideals, Memorials are to objects". We move in this instance from subjects, objects, in the Mediterranean to objects, those thrown out of the major cultures of the nightmare of endless violence. The issue here, I'm bringing to the discussion, is that of the refuges, those fleeing the hell of Syria, etc. By way of the Mediterranean Sea. This is an endless topic. But for this moment in time the question is how to acknowledge and remember them. What would a Memorial be in the Sea itself for the thousands? The Objects?

Ulmer's works-and-plays are in an exceptionally setless of flows; hence, his works are difficult to follow, for he thinks paralogically as much as Jacques Derrida and Helene Cixous and others have done so. About death

¹ Kenneth Burke adds: "By 'demonic trinity' I refer to a concept I first developed in my *Grammar of Motives*. It concerns the terministic fact that the three persons of the Trinity have been burlesqued analogues in terms of the fecal, diuretic, and genital respectively" (1966, p. 251).

not just for *self* but for *others*. Whom do we celebrate with a Memorial. For those who are in between and consequently abjects!

The pointless again is to bring back all that has been flushed out of what we see as someone's (but whose?) shit. *Merdre!* Certainly, no God! Not even Pagan gods! Ulmer following Derrida and others, in the name of *electracy*, brings forth the *traces* . . . droppings . . . drippings . . . of shit . . . that have, again, been flushed from us to a *septic tank*. In a word, Ulmer is focusing on a *sceptic tank* for the flowing of ideas and whatevers. But to the point here, Ulmer would think of ways to recognize the refuges today and for times to come. Why *sceptic tank* of the Mediterranean! Those who more so die at sea and those who survive, Ulmer might invite us to recognize that they die of "formless value" (2005, p. 49). How then, to acknowledge those left behind in the cruel sea?

And then, let us not forget, the *Corrupting Sea* ("a radically pluralistic space of flows"):

Of All that I've read-studied is Concannon and Maurek (2016) *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. Why? For the contributors, according to the editors and my readings, take *Post-Braudelian* to mean *Post-Modern approaches*. There is a section in their introduction named: "Looking Forward: A Postmodern Connectivity." They, of course, as I would arrange, to add to the post-historiographies of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013). The editors write: "Deleuze and Guattari's vision might prompt us to rethink the Mediterranean as a radically plural space of flows" (2016, p. 13). And as for maps of the Mediterranean, I would suggest a study of Guattari's *Schizoanalytic Cartographies* (2013).

And as far as temporalities, I Love All, including, the Septic-Sceptic Tank, where in the excluded turds are brought to the sea, the scene. How can I or you or anyone forget the refuges! And yet, there's more and more endless ways awaiting us to think of them, as us. Now I have researched, reclaimed the right to think through Henry Miller who writes:

I love everything that flows,' said the great blind Milton of our times [J. Joyce, yet way earlier by Heraclitus]. Yes, I said to myself, I too love *everything that flows*: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences. I love the amniotic fluid when it spills out of the bag. I love the kidney with its painful gall-stones, its gravel and what-not; I love the urine that pours out scalding and the clap that runs endlessly; I love the words of hysterics and

the sentences that flow on like dysentery and mirror all the sick images of the soul. . . . I love everything that flows, even the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund. I love scripts that flow, be they hieratic, esoteric, perverse, polymorph, or unilateral. . . . I love everything that flows . . . the violence of the prophets, the obscenity that is ecstasy, the wisdom of the fanatic, the priest with his rubber litany, the foul words of the whore, the spittle that floats away in the gutter, the milk of the breast and the bitter honey that pours from the womb, all that is fluid, melting, dissolute and dissolvent, all the pus and dirt that in flowing is purified, that loses its sense of origin, that makes the great circuit toward death and dissolution (1961, pp. 257-58).

References

- Abulafia, D. (2013). *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Braudel, F. (1998). *Memory and the Mediterranean*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Burke, K. (1966). "The Thinking of the Body" in *Language as Symbolic Action* (pp. 308-43). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1968). *Counter-Statement*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1984). *Permanence and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Concannon, C., & Mazurek, L. A. (eds.) (2016). *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. London: Routledge.
- Cubitt, G.. (2007). *History and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Deleuze, G. & Guattari F.. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Guattari, F. (2013). *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Le Goff, J. (1996). *History and Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Miller, H. (1961). *Tropic of Cancer*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Ricoeur, P. (2006). *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Saper, C., Ulmer, G.L. & Vitanza, V.J. (2015). *Electracy: Gregory L. Ulmer's Textshop Experiments*. Arden: The Davies Group.
- Ulmer, G. L. (2005). *Electronic Monuments*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- White, H. (1978). *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.