Response to "Dizzy Rhythms: perspectival ethnography through oceanic becomings"
Current Anthropology
Aaron Parkhurst, University College London (UCL)

Herrera's paper presents an extraordinary response to the conventions of ethnography that objectify deeply visceral body experiences as ethnographic targets. As Herrera suggests, such work within the discipline often relies on other readers' visceral experiences for intellectual sympathy or resonance. Herrera lays his bare, and its effect on the reader should be taken seriously. I read this manuscript in my flat in London, in the late night silence of my living room, reclined on my sofa. There was no wind, no undulating waves, no smell of fish guts, no arrhythmias of gravity. However, rather curiously, as I read the graphic context of Herrera's fieldwork, my sofa begins to sway. It was subtle, but real. I sat upright, put my feet on the floor, the phantom waves under the sofa dispersed, and the faint dizziness dissipated. It was exciting, rather than unnerving, to experience that form of vestibular empathy.

I work in the context of outer space training, medicine, and life science research. Herrera writes that "Adapting or learning to cope with nausea is a painstaking process. Withstanding it attests to your capacity to be at sea and your commitment to the crew, the boat and the sea… the process transforms you in fundamental ways". So it is as well in the space industry. I have conducted fieldwork in many nauseagenic environments - most saliently on parabolic flight campaigns with the European Space Agency, aboard what is often fondly referred to as the 'vomit comet'. Like the rhythms of the sea, researchers on the parabolic flight must attune themselves to the drastic rising and plunging of the plane, the balance between zero-G and 2-G phases, and the general turbulence and vibrations of the air. There is complex research on the neuroscientific and medical causes of nausea in this context and others, and Herrera discusses it well in his article. Some experienced flyers explain the nausea on the parabolic flights also as a consequence of its infamy - the more one discusses it beforehand, flyers come to expect it, helping to inform the nauseous response. In any case, nausea is as unpleasant in zero-G as it is elsewhere, but like the actors in 'Dizzy Rhythms', I've not met anyone in my time in this fieldwork who, as miserable as they might feel at times, would not jump back in a flight suit when the opportunity arises. The memory of nausea is overshadowed by the camaraderie among the researchers in extreme environments, the existential joys of microgravity, and the value of scientific research.

In many of the contexts in which I've worked (including a research facility with experiments specifically designed to make people nauseous to study mitigations against 'space sickness'), there are stories of iron stomachs. One colleague, a seasoned veteran of human centrifuge and gyroscope experiments, likes to recount with some awe of the 'one' individual who, despite all my colleague' efforts, would never become sick. Why this is the case is likely complex. Enskillment - the type that Herrera and Palsson describe in the context of the North Sea- no doubt plays a role, as does biology. Anthropology offers frameworks as well - theories of habitus, embodiment and biosocial 'becoming' - and empathy, which is deeply social. I do not wish to attenuate the gut pain that some people go through in these contexts. Like Herrera recounts in his own experience, there are moments when my colleagues, hunched over, question all their life choices. What I find, however, is that nausea, or at least the dizziness and disorientations otherwise, are productive and generative

of social relations in ways one might not expect. This begs one of many questions I have in response to Dizzy Rhythms. What might be lost without this experience?

In the first instance, as 'Dizzy Rhythms' acknowledges, an Amerindian approach shows how many shamans in ritual tradition actively pursue nauseogenic conditions to achieve perspectival exchanges. The processes of transformation at sea or in space, though in many ways far removed from shamanic practice, bear some synonymy in experience. But nausea might be productive in other ways as well. There is a small percentage of people who will read Dizzy Rhythms, and will become nauseous themselves while digesting the author's experiences. Rather than pass this off as a neurophysiological inconvenience, it is something that should give the reader pause. This form of empathic response is deeply human, and in some regards even perhaps ethical - an embodied way to 'know' the world of a friend, an ethnography, or the hardships of a stranger for that matter. As my anthropology colleagues have reminded me, their students often evoke the language of disgust to interpret, say, the global news each morning - of the injustice of politics and war, of the wantonness of capitalism and the accumulation of wealth at the expense of the desperate poor, of racial and gender inequality. They say "It makes me sick to my stomach". The language and embodiment of nausea does many things here. It is an allied response to an ethical position, and it is a very logical embodied reaction to articulate a world when discursive acts of communication cannot do justice.

So, if 'Dizzy Rhythms' makes the reader dizzy, perhaps embrace it, even if just for a moment. As Herrera writes, "Nausea constitutes an ex-incorporating experience, whereby the superposition of rhythms leads to a collapse and transformation of the person, a perspectival exchange, becoming part of another world, another community of being and perception." I suggest nausea (or dizziness more benign) is generative of many forms of worlding. As I write elsewhere, that is not to say that nausea shouldn't be dealt with in training, or adapted for, or prevented, even with good pharmacological intervention. It is difficult to argue to a person when they are in the midst of motion sickness of the positive effects on generating perspectival changes. I simply respond by asking, what might be lost without it?