

Pacific Circle Newsletter

4,9 (1 January 2024)

Book Reviews

Christina Gerhardt. *Sea Change: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean*. Oakland,

CA: University of California Press, 2023. Illustrations, maps. x + 310 pp.

US\$34.95 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-520-30482-6; \$34.95 (e-book), ISBN 978-0-520-97321-3.

Reviewed by Alessandro Antonello (Flinders University)

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Commissioned by Yan Gao

It is a commonplace in the politics and scholarship of climate change that small island nations have contributed least to the greenhouse gas emissions precipitating global warming but will suffer most in our hotter future. Islands and island states are existentially threatened by rising seas. Some will disappear completely, with some communities already having been displaced, and many others planning for their future displacement. Many will struggle to maintain freshwater supplies or to continually rebuild and respond to the likely more frequent and more severe weather events that beset them. What more to say, to know, to see, to sense, to feel on this subject?

Sea Change: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean is an attempt to bring these suffering islands into focus through the venerable and protean form of the atlas. Predominantly composed of text by Christina Gerhardt, a German studies and environmental humanities scholar, with accompanying maps drawn by Molly Roy, this atlas focuses on forty-nine islands or island nations across the globe. Each entry presents some basic geographic and demographic data about the individual island or island nation; a short historical timeline of key events; and a multipage text by Gerhardt describing some

aspects of the island's history, society, economy, and climate impacts that have already befallen these islands and are likely to affect them in the future. The maps, generally quite plain and simply presented, do not all have precisely the same elements (and some entries do not even have a map), although most depict coastlines of 2020, 2050, and 2100 (all or some combination) and other major geographical features. In the introduction, Gerhardt notes the politics of data underpinning any mapping exercise: a rich country can afford to continually map and survey its territory at high resolution, while poor countries often make do with old and low-quality data. Many of the entries have additional texts by locals--activists, poets, and scholars, among others--to center these voices. This atlas has a "polyvocal approach" (p. 285).

Most of the islands examined are in the Pacific Ocean or Caribbean Sea, but islands are featured from the poles and the Atlantic and Indian Oceans too. The opening and closing entries--of Greenland and Pine Island Glacier, Antarctica, respectively--emphasize a major source of the sea-level rise that will inundate islands: melting polar ice. Gerhardt, however, does not make the connection between Antarctica's Pine Island Glacier and the ultimate origin of that name: Pine Island in western Florida, namesake of a US Navy ship that voyaged to Antarctica in the late 1940s, and surely an island facing substantial climate impacts too.

There is much similarity across the islands. Many have experienced, and will continue to experience--likely in greater number and severity--hurricanes, cyclones, and typhoons. Many have scarce and fragile freshwater supplies, which are under great pressure. Most have been subjected to historic colonization, and many remain in the web of the contemporary military empire of the United States: this is a prominent theme of the book. Other themes emerge from only one or a small handful of the entries. The importance of mangroves, reefs, and seagrasses is the focus of several entries. Some entries, notably of the Maldives, also focus on geoengineering, island building, and land reclamation.

Sea Change opens with an essay by Gerhardt reflecting on a range of matters, including the historical place of the island in the Western imagination, the inspirations and opportunities for island or archipelagic thinking today, and the decisions involved in making this atlas. A notable aspect of this opening essay is Gerhardt's counterposing of continents and islands (and their respective inhabitants) in big, metageographical terms, and her assertion that

"many on continents are not even aware of where these islands are located, what their names are, or how climate change impacts them" (p. 1). Later in the introduction, it seems that her imagined audience is residents of the continental United States--her own home is Hawai'i. Encountering this sentiment in the introduction rather put me--an Australian academic--off my reviewing task almost immediately. Do we really live in an age so ignorant of islands? Does this book have an audience apart from continent-dwelling, island-blind residents of the United States? Have other atlases opened with such a strident tone?

It is difficult to review an atlas. What is clear is that the atlas form still has some purchase today. Gerhardt's effort can be considered alongside a range of other efforts. A recent atlas that immediately came to mind as I agreed to review Gerhardt's book is Judith Schalansky's *Atlas of Remote Islands: Fifty Islands I Have Not Visited and Never Will* of 2010, originally published in German in 2009. Schalansky's approach was to narrate and excavate moments from the fifty islands' histories, the fragments adding up to a curious tour of the world. I was surprised not to see it mentioned in Gerhardt's atlas, especially after it became apparent to me that *Sea Change* seems to use near identical typographic elements in its map design. Another recent atlas of climate change is *The Atlas of Disappearing Places* (2021), created by the climate change planner and educator Marina Psaros and the artist and writer Christina Conklin. Psaros and Conklin "chose an atlas format because, with their delightful combination of maps, stories, data, and definitions, atlases offer multiple ways to engage with information and explore ideas." [1] A wonderful element of their atlas is that Conklin has used dried leaves of "sea lettuce," the widespread *Ulva* alga genus, to make the maps. [2] This made for an arresting presentation of data and images. What is notable in each of these recent iterations of the atlas genre is the strength of the author's voice and vision and their reflections on the genre itself. Gerhardt's voice and vision is less clear in *Sea Change*, although her emphasis on polyvocality, giving a platform for a range of voices, takes the place of the strong individual author. Taking polyvocality on its own terms, I found many of the textual excerpts from local writers in the atlas rather disembodied and lacking force, since the authors and their writings are barely contextualized and unpacked. While some--like the verse conversation of a Greenlandic and a Marshallese poet--do not need any scaffolding, others do.

Sea Change is a curious text. Keeping the existential challenges, especially the ethical challenges, of climate change front and center remains a vital task. Respecting and conveying the many voices of all those affected, especially marginalized voices, is a crucial part of it. Since atlases are so often "reference" texts--books sitting on the shelf, sometimes taken down to confirm knowledge, and sometimes idly flicked through to spark a new path of thinking and creating--I can envisage a place for this book in a larger library of climate change texts to be drawn on by students, activists, and scholars alike.

Notes

[1]. Christina Conklin and Marina Psaros, *The Atlas of Disappearing Places: Our Coasts and Oceans in the Climate Crisis* (New York: The New Press, 2021), xi.

[2]. Conklin and Psaros, *Atlas of Disappearing Places*, xii.

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New and Forthcoming Articles

Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand

Special issue: New Zealand and Antarctica in a changing climate

[Climate change profiles of New Zealanders over time: a one-year latent transition analysis of climate change beliefs and concern](#) |  OPEN ACCESS

Taciano L. Milfont, Ariana E. Athy & Chris G. Sibley

Pages: 1-17 | DOI: 10.1080/03036758.2023.2272842

Conferences and Meetings

CFP: Paper proposals on Oceans HSTM for the 2025 ICHST in Ōtepoti Dunedin, New Zealand: “Peoples, Places, Exchanges, and Circulation”

The [International Commission for the History of Oceanography](https://www.ichst2025.org/) (ICHO) is seeking paper proposals to join its sessions at the 2025 International Congress of History of Science and Technology to be held 29 June - 5 July 2025 in Ōtepoti Dunedin, New Zealand (for details, see: <https://www.ichst2025.org/>).

Hybrid sessions permitting remote participation will be possible.

Proposals should address some aspect of the history of ocean science and/or technology (broadly construed) in conversation with the conference theme Peoples, Places, Exchanges, and Circulation, explained below.

Please submit proposed abstracts by Friday, March 1, 2024 via [this form](#). Questions? Contact Penelope Hardy ([phardy@uwlax.edu](mailto:p Hardy@uwlax.edu)).

Conference theme: Peoples, Places, Exchanges, and Circulation.

One of the most important trends in the field of the history of science, technology, and medicine has been a move towards more integrated, expansive, and connected histories that seek to include the participation of the entire world. Our Congress theme strives to further this development and to link different disciplines and perspectives. We also want to provide an opportunity for Indigenous voices, particularly those of Māori, to be heard.

The Congress theme emphasizes the importance of situating local knowledge and practices in specific contexts as well as local or regional history of science, technology, and medicine in a global context. What difference does a global perspective make for local, national, and regional studies in the history of science, technology, and medicine? How are local and global contexts related? How do local histories change if they are analyzed using a different scale of analysis, for example a regional or global framework?

The theme, however, also stresses the importance of circulation or back-and-forth movement across borders involving encounters and exchanges. We seek contributions that explore movement or flow between regions, cultures, or societies, specifically the circulation, exchange, and transit of knowledge, techniques, texts, peoples, and material objects. How has this interaction resulted in new configurations in the history of science, technology, and medicine? Nevertheless, circulation does not mean that flows are always smooth.

Exchange and circulation involve local actors, who, in some cases have played an important role as go-betweens or mediators between different knowledge systems, but also as mediators between producers and consumers around the world.

We particularly welcome contributions that explore the historical role of Indigenous peoples in the history of science, technology, and medicine.

Overall, our theme stresses inclusive histories exploring peoples, places, exchanges, and circulation in the history of science, technology, and medicine from around the world.

Contact Information

Questions? Contact Penelope Hardy (phardy@uwlax.edu).

[DHST] 27th ICHST 2025

The organizing committee invites you to submit a Symposia to be considered for presentation at the conference in Ōtepoti Dunedin, 29 June - 5 July 2025.

We invite Symposia submissions on any topic in the history of science, technology and medicine, but we especially encourage proposals that address aspects of the conference theme, across all periods, and from a variety of methodological and historiographical approaches.

Symposia proposal submissions will close on Monday 1 April 2024.

The theme of the 27th ICHST is “*Peoples, Places, Exchanges, and Circulation*.”

For more information and to download your symposia proposal template, please visit the *conference website.*

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KEY DATES

Call for submission of symposia proposals Now open

Deadline for submission of symposia proposals 1 April 2024

Call for stand-alone papers opens 1 April 2024

Registration opens 11 July 2024

Deadline for submission of stand-alone paper proposals From 1 October 2024

Deadline for submission of paper abstracts within symposia From 1 November 2024

Early bird registration closes 3 April 2025
Program released online From 1 May 2025
Final date for registration 1 May 2025
Congress opens 29 June 2025

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