John Urry (2014) *Offshoring*. Cambridge: Polity. 200 pp. £50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0745664859.

In *Offshoring*, John Urry examines both the phantasmatic logic and multiple exemplars of 'offshoring', a concept which includes within itself a kind of economic, geographical, and poetic ambiguity that is an intrinsic aspect of the empirical offshoring phenomenon itself. What is the 'off' and what is the 'on'? What type of boundary is a 'shore' and how many shores shimmer like mirages in the sunlight or hide in darkness somewhere in a distance that is far away but is also just around the corner? How dense is the network required between the 'on' and the 'off' in order for offshoring to be productive and not just cast aside as a wasteland somewhere off the grid? Each of the fascinating examples that Urry lays out responds to these questions, which, in other registers, have also been addressed by a range of social theorists from Simmel through Baudrillard and Bauman.

Offshoring provides great assistance in helping us to more fully understand the *dynamic operations* of contemporary globalization with its migrations (forced and otherwise), its speculative financialization whose 'value' far outstrips global GDP, its multiple mobilities and inequities, and its liquidity of all the categories of value, both economic and moral. Urry gives us a number of detailed examples – replete with enticing bibliographies – of how offshoring operates in the organization of work (who is building, cleaning, and trading?); taxation (who pays and who hides what where?); leisure (where are the elite holiday resorts, gated communities, and the enormous ships where people live?); energy (where is it produced and how does it travel?); waste (where does the garbage go?); security (who is watching whom how and when?); the oceans (outlaws and pirates); and the globalized dynamics of Dubai, a representative city of offshoring that sprang out of the sand as if by a magic buoyed by oil and cash.

Let me give just two instances of Urry's examples: money and waste. Money is not, of course, a stable substance with a stable definition. Currencies float and the material heft of money has been, for many, digitally vaporized. The function and form of money has varied over time and place, but Urry is focused on the way capitalism has shifted from an 'organized' period to a 'disorganized' period, roughly from Bretton Woods to the 1970s and from the 1970s to our own time of an ascendant neoliberalism. It is 'disorganized' in that it is far less regulated by the nation-state than it was after WWII, but it is, nonetheless, still organized for the good of the lucky few.

"Capital within the contemporary world does not follow to where it is more 'productive'," Urry reminds us, "let alone most socially useful [... it] moves to where it is most secret, gets the lowest tax rates, can evade as many regulations and laws as possible, and travels the world finding ever laxer regulatory forms" (pp. 71-72). Money protects, hides, and produces itself as the whirligig of capital moves its electronic password-protected hoards to any one of around seventy offshore 'havens' in order to escape the jurisdiction of the tax man.

Waste, with its many connections to money, is another indicative example of how offshoring operates. It is the "classic offshore problem. The waste is binned, whether literally in smart plastic bins in a Western society or more metaphorically onto a tip in a developing society. [...] Across the globe most goes into landfill sites normally located out of sight, on the wrong

side of the tracks, while much of the rest is placed in incinerators. [...] Across the world there are at least 15 million people scavenging waste" (p. 124). Those 15 million do not have tax havens or secret accounts stashed away for the rainy day that may never come. They subsist hand to mouth.

Guiyu, just up the coast of the South China Sea from Hong Kong, is where by far the largest bulk of cast-off electronic parts end up. "Guiyu's entire economy is centered on the 'dis-assembling' industry, initially generated by the disposal of computers in the rich North but also now from China and the rest of developing world" (p. 129). Those sleek phones and laptops end up in a massive toxic waste-dump being mined for gold, lead, and copper. Guiyu is in my neighborhood, but not in my backyard. Out of sight and out of mind. It is close at hand but far away.

This quasi-invisibility is a necessary modality of the logic of offshoring. "Secrets are all about closure and exposure, hiding and revealing, the covert and the overt. Implicated in security are multiple worlds moving in and out of visibility, including those of states, corporations, violent and peaceful oppositional groups, researchers, journalists, and soon [...] involved multiple efforts to keep secret from 'enemies' and to win over 'friends'" (p. 135). And this form of far-awayness depends, in both literal and metaphorical ways, on the vastness of the oceans. In this sense, to move "offshore means to go out of view from land, over the horizon, beyond observation [...] these watery worlds over the horizon are central for what occurs back on land. It is necessary to avoid terrestrial-centrism" (pp. 156-157). There is an entire topography of meaning at work here, with deep historical roots that simultaneously bind to and sever from one another the land and the sea, with all of their swarming multitudes of associations.

Urry is not, however, offering simply a description of the practices of offshoring, as fascinating as they are. Instead, he is laying the groundwork for a political intervention that will once again re-organize capital into a new form, which will also require the reorganization of politics and the distribution of power. "Contemporary offshoring," he points out, "involves the most sustained of attacks upon [democratic] governance orchestrated through national states and especially upon efforts to regulate and legislate on the basis of democratic control" (p. 173). Reshoring will "stem from all the forcefulness of a 'low carbon civil society' made up of tens of thousands of experiments, networks, prototypes, laboratories, cities, universities, designed and activists around the world" (p. 196). Understanding that effort, though, is for another book, another day. (I hope he is working on it.)

"Offshore, we might say," following Urry, "is everywhere. One company's onshore is another's offshore. And this is a powerful world which is, in a way, located nowhere as such, its power stemming from its ethereal character" (p. 71). The markers of a phantasmatic logic are in place: The everywhere is a nowhere, power mysteriously emerges from the ephemeral. The 'as such' is replaced by the 'as if'. But this quality of the 'nowhere' also always includes within itself the whisper of a utopian possibility founded on the opening of the 'as if'. Things can change.

Urry's *Offshoring* provides us with an index of the status of globalization in the time of violence, inequity, and mobility. But time is money and time is up. I need to head back to my expat flat to make an account of my tax bills to both the US and Hong Kong, the latter of

which I can pay electronically out of my HSBC checking account. (Hong Kong, by the way, ranks second on the 'Financial Secrecy Index' of the Tax Justice Network, just behind Switzerland and just ahead of the US.) Before I head into the virtual world, however, to exchange digital signals in place of cash, I will, once more, pick up Defoe's odd tale of the castaway and Melville's *Encantadas*. Offshoring is first of all an act of the imaginary, and for all such acts we can always learn from fiction.

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