Market stall: maritime commerce in the collections of European maritime museums

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The visitor perusing the collections of the M / S Maritime Museum of Denmark in Elsinore might be tempted to partake in the museum's interactive game 'Tea time – the first globalisation'. Among exhibits related to eighteenth-century global trade, visitors can play the role of a merchant, buying goods in a European port, before selling them and buying new ones in India and the Americas. Using a digital logbook, players can get a sense of the century's longing for 'voyages, adventures and fortunes made in a world simultaneously far away and close by'.

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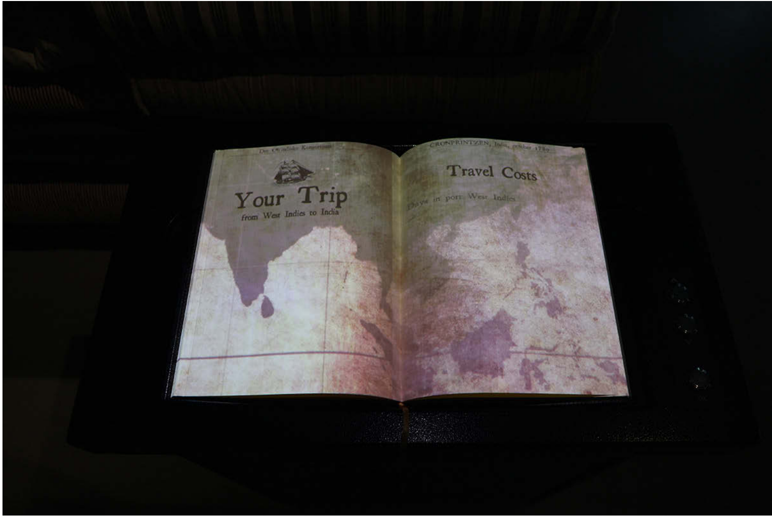
Fig. 1: 'Tea time – the first globalisation', M / S Maritime Museum, Denmark, photo: Gabriel N. Gee



Maritime museums, which are typically to be found in port cities, are the repository on land of activities performed at sea. A museum's collection presents different types of past and present maritime activities, commerce – very often but not always – being one of them. The sum and balance of these activities defines the identity of the museum. The representation of maritime trade in Europe depicts a history of connected networks bringing different peoples and cultures into contact with each other throughout the Mediterranean and the Baltic, across the Atlantic frontier, and along their routes by water or horse to the continental hinterlands, before the age of the great sea voyages repositioned Europe at the heart of global circulations. The demand for spices, sugar, and tea and the competition to secure markets fuelled the global expansion of the early modern period.

This increase of commercial circulation was accompanied by political and military confrontations. The story of trade, in particular maritime trade from the sixteenth century onwards, is also a story of alienation, extermination, and spectres. 'Remember thee! Ay thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat in this distracted globe. Remember thee!' the dead King Hamlet entreats his son on the castle's walls in Elsinore. So too the museums, guardians of our society's memories, play a significant role in the representation

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of the past in all its layers, fortunes, and misfortunes. How, then, are trade and commercial networks, their history and geography, their men and their tools, their goods and their outcome represented in European maritime museums? In the 2010 documentary *The forgotten space*, by Allan Sekula and Noël Burch, children are shown playing in the maritime museum in Rotterdam within a micro-model of a container port terminal that links the container ships to lorries and trains to feed the 'greedy hinterland'. The film is an investigation into the moral and ethical nature of contemporary maritime commerce within our integrated capitalist global economy. Museums display our society's heritage; they are also strategically immersed in pedagogical missions that shape our perception and understanding of the past and present, and our future agency. Maritime museums tend to operate as an interface between the 'self' and the 'other', the community within and the worlds beyond. Furthermore, being located on land, they mirror the position of port cities as nexus between the sea beyond and the hinterland within; their collections and narratives give order to the history and geographies of maritime fluxes as they have come to shape the earthly territories where their visitors are based. This is particularly true of the representation of European trade, long associated with the importation and accumulation of wealth *within* the hinterland. In looking at the representation of trade in the cultural discourse of European maritime museums through objects, images, and narrative displays, we can gain an understanding of past and present European identities and cosmologies, as well as tackling some of the issues attached to the specific agency of commerce. We witness a confrontation of the parallel contemporary narratives of 'the wealth of nations', as captured by maritime merchants and networks, and the 'dark side of Western modernity', highlighting the destructive impact of European expansions. Collections of European maritime museums and their presentation thus also point to the manner through which this contested heritage is negotiated on European shores, just as it keeps informing the present, positively, negatively, and critically.

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Sketching a maritime museum typology

Before considering specific modes through which trade is represented in maritime museums, we begin with a brief typology of such museums as they are found in Europe. The mission statement of the Hellenic Maritime museum, founded in 1949, offers a revealing insight into a significant aspect of the historical formation of European maritime museums.[1] Its aims were stated thus: 'to collect all types of heirlooms relating to the nation's naval struggles', 'to gather, preserve and safeguard all types of collected heirlooms … which are worthy of research in the context of Hellenic naval history', 'to establish, organise, supervise and enrich a maritime museum in Piraeus', 'to rekindle the national fighting spirit, to keep undimmed the lustrous trophies of our forefathers' naval struggles', and 'to foster the love of coming generations for the sea, as a source of national glory'. The creation of the Hellenic Maritime museum was grounded in the affirmation of the nation state, in tones that convey the military build-up of national identity, from the 1820s war of independence, to the more recent and traumatic experience of Nazi occupation during the Second World War.[2] Many museums share these military origins, such as the French national navy museums, the *Musée national de la marine*, in Toulon, Brest, Port Louis, Rochefort, and Paris; the *Museu de Marinha* in Lisbon, also under the administration of the navy, 'without being exclusively dedicated to military ships, but rather to all different aspects of human activities related to the sea';[3] and the British National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, which opened in 1937 next to the former Royal Hospital for Seamen, and whose elegant opening mission statement reads: 'to

1 Anastasia Anagnostopoulou-Paloubi, 'The hellenic maritime museum: a brief history', in *Hellenic maritime museum*, (Pireus, Vaporia, 2005), 7-16.

2 The prime mover in the inception of the Hellenic Maritime Museum was the minister of the navy, Gerasimos Vasileiadis, and its first president the shipowner George Stringos.

3 Museu de Marinha website, 'homepage' accessed 1 June 2019, https://web.archive.org/web/20070716035511/http://museu.marinha.pt/Museu/Site/PT/SobreMuseu/Missao. 'Organismo Cultural da Marinha de Guerra Portuguesa, ao Museu de Marinha foi atribuída a missão de salvaguarda e divulgação do passado marítimo português, não se dedicando em exclusivo aos assuntos militares navais, mas sim a tudo o que se relaciona com os mais diversos aspectos e actividades humanas ligadas ao mar.' The collection was built up under royal patronage in the second half of the nineteenth century. The museum opened in 1909 under the administration of the Portuguese navy; it was relocated, in 1962, to the historic monastery of Geronimos in Belem.

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enrich people's understanding of the sea, the exploration of space, and Britain's role in world history'.[4]

Space, time, people; geography, history, anthropology; three fields connected through the sea, or rather their relation(s) to the sea, which each maritime museum explores through its own specific identity. This identity is historically defined by the collection of the museum, itself informed by its location, and the specific community, city, region, or nation whose history it preserves and represents. Localisation is thus often represented through the topographical situation of the museum's native port city, for instance the natural defensive quality of the bay of Toulon famously marvelled at by Napoléon Bonaparte; through its urban body, the object of an eighteenth-century panoramic panel in the London Gallery at Greenwich; and through historic developments in urban infrastructure, meticulously documented in digital form at Titanic Belfast, to show the dramatic physical transformation of the mouth of the Logan river during the phase of accelerated industrialisation in Belfast in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Technique is also a common object of display, focusing in particular on the ships. What were the materials, tools, and skills needed to build them? The ships can be seen in the display of numerous models, when not in the vessels themselves, such as in the expansive Pavilhaos das Galeotas in Lisbon. Life on land and life at sea can be combined with such technical considerations, for instance in the glass panels of the Altonaer Museum in Hamburg showing traditional Elbe river boats and various uses of fishnets, or in the focus of the Maritime Museum of Ilhavo, commonly known as the museum of baccalau, whose exhibits relate to its mission of 'preserving the memory of work at sea, to showcase the maritime culture and identity of the Portuguese', and in particular of Portugal's coastal communities.[5] When turned towards the vastness of the seas, maritime museums introduce their publics to the art of navigation through tools, charts, maps, and the hardships of living at sea, and to its joys, such as in the collection of nineteenth and early twenti-

4 The Royal Museums Greenwich website, 'homepage', accessed 1 June 2019, https://www.rmg.co.uk/work-services/what-we-do/mission. An opening mission statement shared by the four organs of the Royal Museums in Greenwich: Cutty Sark, the Queen's house, the Royal observatory, and the National Maritime Museum.

5 Museu Maritimo Ilhavo website, 'homepage', accessed 1 June 2019, http://www.museumaritimo.cm-ilhavo.pt. 'A sua missao consiste em preservar a memòria do trabalho no mar, promover a cultura e a identitade maritima dos portugueses.'

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eth-century cruise posters at Hamburg's International Maritime Museum. It is when they touch on maritime routes, on the reasons for putting to sea, that maritime museum exhibits consider trade.

Fig. 2: The Geronimos Monastery, Belem; the Museu de Marinha is located in the monastery, photo: Gabriel N. Gee

As an epigraph by Sir Walter Raleigh in the introductory glass panels on the topic of trade in the National Maritime Museum in London reminds the visitor, where trade is concerned, politics cannot be far behind: 'For whosoever commands the sea commands the trade, whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world; and consequently the world itself.' Power politics is not the only perspective on trade to be found in maritime museums, but it is certainly an important one, conducive to the writing of history in which the museum partakes.

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Objects: identity and difference

Objects adorn museums, providing the visitor with a sense of a society's past and present mode of living, industry, leisure, progress, and taste.[6] Port cities, functioning as gateways between the inner self of the city, its connected roots in the hinterland, and the external maritime realm leading to the world beyond, serve as crossroads for commercial goods. Maritime museums exhibit objects characteristic of maritime and urban trade, of import and export circulation, as a testimony of economic and cultural exchanges and human industry. The Greenwich introductory glass panel on trade[7] features: a Roman republican coin with an image of Neptune, and another commemorating the battle of Naulochus in 36 BCE, at which Agrippa defeated Sextus Pompey; a hand-painted Delftware bowl depicting the launch of a Royal navy vessel (1752), and another with the inscription 'success to the herring fishery' (eighteenth century), the linchpin of a major British trading venture with the Mediterranean; a Swedish medal commemorating the protection of sea trade (Gustav Ljungberger, 1779, silver); a Hudson Bay company token (1857), commemorating the exploitation of extensive territories in what is now Canada, and a manila token (brass, c. 1843), said to be used in Africa as trade currency; a Kiel canal medal (G. Loos 1895), with Neptune seated between the two ends of the canal, symbolising the bridging of the North and Baltic Seas; a lustreware bowl depicting the paddle steamer *Trident* of the General Steam Navigation Company, a pioneer in commercial steam shipping (1842); a ship model of the *Silver Fir,* a tramp vessel selling and buying as fortunes permitted. Each of these objects conveys a dimension of maritime trade. Neptune and the Roman coinage evoke the Roman empire and the birth of the 'économie-monde' in the Mediterranean;[8] the Swedish medal reminds visitors of the political rise of the Kingdom of Sweden in the seventeeth century; the Hudson Bay and African tokens of the expansion of global maritime commercial networks from the sixteenth century onwards; the steam ship brings us into the era of industrialisation, while

6 In that the status of objects can be historical, ethnographic, and aesthetic. Mieke Bal, 'The discourse of the Museum', in *Thinking about exhibitions*, eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, Sandy Nairne (London, New York, Routledge, 1996), 206.

7 Besides 'trade', the introductory topics which introduce the visitor to the museum's collection are 'science', 'work', 'leisure', 'ceremony', 'conflict', and 'memory'.

8 Fernand Braudel, *La dynamique du capitalisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1977).

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the tramp *Silver Fir* reminds us that before the rise of nineteenth-century cable technology merchants could not always prearrange their cargos, and often played it by ear, just as the game in Elsinore conveys to visitors. Each of these objects unfolds a narrative of commercial enterprise, sustained by the large wording of the sign TRADE on the glass panel, as well as informative legends pointing to each object's relation to commercial activity. At first glance, the objects on display either point to an inner realm – Britain – or to an external one, whose significance is suggested by way of synecdoche.

The balance between the local and the beyond is characteristic of maritime museums' collections. In the Hellenic Maritime Museum in Athens, while considerable attention is paid to ancient and modern Greek shipbuilding and to the struggle for independence, a gallery is also devoted to commercial travels in the Byzantine period, depicting the commercial sea routes to Constantinople at the crossroad between eastern and western worlds, to the control of international trade and the rising competition of Venetian merchants.[9] The maritime routes which furthered and then took over the silk road fed the European demand for eastern spices in particular.[10] Hence the presence of food samples in many galleries, an importance encapsulated by the Speicherstadtmuseum in Hamburg, where a reconstruction of a typical warehouse interior of the spice district in the city's former free trade zone guides the visitor through bulk bags of coffee from the new American plantations, jars of nutmeg, saffron, and turmeric. Aside from much sought-after bulk cargoes of pepper and tea, European merchants brought back curiosities, objects that triggered the imagination of European populations.[11] In Gothenburg's history museum, located in the former headquarters of the Swedish East India Company, a striking glass panel showcases a variety of such objects, including a flute made of silver and ivory, a Chinese glass painting from the eighteenth century depicting the Chinese merchant Poankeyqua, who was rumoured to have visited Sweden in the 1770s, a pagoda of soap stone after a tower in Nanking, East India porcelain, and two clay

9 There was also a gallery on the Greek mercantile marine in the nineteenth century. *Hellenic Maritime Museum*, 115-124.

10 Lizzie Collingham, *The Hungry Empire: How Britain's Quest for Food Shaped the Modern World* (London: Random House, 2017), XV-XVII.

11 Vanessa Alayrac Fielding, ed., *Rêver la Chine: chinoiseries et regards croisés entre la Chine et l'Europe au 17e et 18e si*ècles (Lille: Invenit, 2017).

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likenesses of Chinese mandarins. These objects are found on one side of the glass display, under the 'global' sign. On the other side, another selection of objects, comprising ceramics, metal work, and caskets, makes up the 'local' production. In his study on the history of ethnographic museums and displays entitled *Le goût des autres*, Benoît de L'Estoile points to the distinction between the '*musée de soi*' and the '*musée des autres*'.[12] Museums of the Self represent a community: a village, a town, a city, a region, a nation, and revolve around the question: 'who are we?'. Museums of the Other look at that which is different or strange, and are typically linked to the development of anthropology as a discipline in the nineteenth century. Such museums investigate the question: 'Who are the others?' The great majority of maritime museums in Europe fall between these lines: dedicated to the identity of a community, while incorporating more or less consciously the part of a self shaped by an encounter with the other, that part of a self which is irremediably different.

Images: marine and cosmology

A range of images is to be found in maritime museums: paintings, posters, photographs, maps, and cartoons, as well as films and interactive digital screens. What is the function and meaning of these images? On the one hand they have a documentary character, while on the other they exhibit an aesthetic quality. Maritime museums often have a dedicated painting gallery. They also repeatedly use mixed displays, combining objects with images and text. Maritime museums, in other words, are not fine art museums, although they almost invariably showcase artistic work and represent aesthetic sentiment. Images, artistic or not, enable museums to lead visitors into envisioning the past, to see a place as it once was, a mode of living now forgotten, a manner of looking at the world and thus of being in the world.[13] The sea and the maritime world serve as a rallying ground, as the introductory words to the picture gallery in the museum of Ilhavo underline: 'The presence of a maritime

12 Benoît de l'Estoile, *Le gout des autres. De l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers* (Paris: Flammarion, 2007) 'Musée de soi' and 'musée des autres'. The study takes as a starting point the historical transfer of collections from the Musée de l'homme to the Musée du quai Branly, questioning the capacity of ethnographic museums to tell the truth about the world, 17-22.

13 This they share with art history as a discipline. Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention: On the Historical Explanations of Picture* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1985).

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element in the paintings and sculptures exhibited was the first selection criteria of the artworks. The exhibits selected from the pictorial collection of the museum, a vast ensemble of varying quality, deals in part with the naturalist and late-naturalist genre, and in part with telluric representations of the sea.'[14] Coastal scenes with typical *moliceiro* fishing boats, such as *Costa nova* by Carlos Fragoso (1921), alternate with depictions of traditional folk life and type, such as *Gente de Barra e Ria de Aveiro* by Arlindo Vicente (1928). Such documentation of traditional communities is also particularly well represented in the photographic collections of the Altonaer Museum, which under the guidance of its first director, Otto Lehmann, initiated in the second half of the nineteenth century a programme of visual anthropology capturing the life of fishing and farming communities on the Elbe river and the Schleswig Holstein hinterland.

Fig. 3: Glass panels with traditional fishing techniques from the Elbe on display, 'Fang mit Baumkurre mit Besahnewer MARIANNE S.B. 25 und Norderneyer Schaluppe, M 1:25', @ Historische Museen Hamburg, Altonaer Museum, inventory number AB01162, photo: Michaela Hegenbarth

14 'A presença de maritimismos na pintura e escultura exposta foi o primeiro critério de seleção dos obras. A exposição versa, assim, a coleção de pintura marítima do Museu, conjunto muito vasto e de qualidade variável, onde releva o registo naturalística e tardo-naturalista e onde persistem as representações telúricas do mar. Tendencia comum a toda a pintura marítima portuguesa, que so a espaços traçou o mar romântico, nos seus confrontos trágicos com a natureza humana.'

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In Northern Europe, a genre of painting well represented in maritime museums is that of the *marine*, a seascape that originated in the low countries in the late sixteenth century.[15] The International Maritime Museum in Hamburg, housed in a grand former warehouse in neo-gothic style in the heart of the city's former harbour, boasts an impressive painting collection, including Dutch marines. *Frigates in a choppy sea* (early seventeenth century), by the seascape master Jan Porcellis, depicts a busy day on the North Sea, with two light boats in the foreground, the outline of the coast on the right-hand side, numerous masts on the typically low horizon, and, in the middle ground, two large men-of-war flying the United Provinces' flag. The emergence of landscape and seascape painting in the Netherlands accompanied the affirmation of the protestant provinces' identity, which had recently gained independence from their former Spanish overlords. The marine itself, with its many different variations from picturing fishing and sailing to the observation of nature, was, however, first developed by painters such as Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom in direct correlation to the genre of history painting. A famous example, now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, is *The return to Amsterdam of the second expedition to the East Indies on 19th July 1599*. Hence in Porcellis' quiet depiction, the men-of-war signal the political space that the seas represented for the dominant maritime force of the seventeenth century. The monopolistic *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, the Dutch East India Company, furthered the commercial interests of the Netherlands along the new maritime routes opened by the Portuguese in the late fifteenth century. The marine, which, significantly, was further developed by the British as they came to govern the seas in the eighteenth century, revealed not only European societies' profound connection to maritime environments, but also the material value represented by ocean traffic for the rising power of European nations.

Such economic and political growth was closely linked to navigation and geographic knowledge. While it may be abrupt to reduce all geographical data exhibited in European maritime museums to commercial endeavours, the thirst for spices, textiles, sugar, coffee, and the financial rewards of global trade was instrumental in fuelling technological progress and changing representations of an interconnected planet. The cartographic images that abound in maritime museums encapsulate this convergence of skills and interests. In

15 Margarita Russell, *Visions of the Sea. Hendrick C. Vroom and the Origins of Dutch Marine Painting* (Leyden: Brill, 1983).

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Hamburg, the historical importance of being able to visually recognise the topographic profile of port cities or the rivers leading to them in the hinterland is seen in compilations such as Pierre Mortier's atlas *Der Fransche Neptunus* (1693). In the Galata museum in Genoa, portolan charts, for which cartographers such as Niccolo Caveri became famous, testify to the Genovese's increasing command of the once mysterious maritime expanse, a point further illustrated by a magnificent wooden astrolabe reconstructed by captain Alberto Albertis in the nineteenth century. In Lisbon, in the maritime museum located in the monastery of Geronimos in Belem, whence the Portuguese caravels departed on their way to Africa and India, an armillary sphere similarly embodies this dual nature: used for astronomical calculations and cosmological meditation, it was also the personal symbol of King Manuel, and conveyed 'both the earthly and spiritual roles of the expansionist project of the king'.

Fig. 4: Armillary sphere, Museu de Marinha, Lisbon, inventory n.º MM.01896, photo: Gabriel N. Gee

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European maritime museums are appropriately filled with the visions and instruments of European imperial expansion, of 'nature as a globe within which everything resides'.[16] Crucially for the present, while European dominance over the seas has unravelled, the principles of global trade have on the contrary pursued the weaving of their all-encompassing web. In the arrangement of their collections, maritime museums present their reading of such historical rhythms.

European maritime narratives: discovering, ruling, abating?

Objects and images contain narratives. Their arrangement in space, sequence, and framing within informative panels or audio guides articulate additional narratives.

Fig. 5: Internationales Maritimes Museum, Hamburg, photo: Gabriel N. Gee

16 Bruno Latour, reading the second volume of *Spheres* by Peter Sloterdijk, in "Onus orbis terrarium: about a possible shift in the definition of sovereignty", *Millenium, Journal of International Studies* Vol. 44 (3) (2016), 305-20.

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The rhetoric at play in the museum involves both the curatorial discourse and the experience of visitors immersed within those curatorial strategies: 'The reading itself, then, becomes part of the meaning it yields. And this seems an important insight, for what is a museum for if not for visitors?'[17] In the introductory glass panel on 'trade' at Greenwich, different objects evoke different times in history when commercial exchange blossomed. Hung slightly above the objects, there is also a painting, *Shipping at Depford*, by Robert Cleveley, which represents the royal dockyards on the Thames in the late eighteenth century. The site of Greenwich maritime museum carries significant historical associations. The grounds, as Daniel Defoe reminds his reader in the 1720s, 'is the same on which formerly stood the royal palace of our kings. Here Henry VIII held his royal feasts with jousts and tournaments, and the ground which was called the tilt-yard, is the spot on which the easternmost wing of the hospital is built; the park…was enlarged, walled out, and planted with beautiful rows, or walks of trees by King Charles II soon after the Restoration, and the design of plan of a royal palace was then layed out.' Furthermore, the museum is located just east of the Depford dockyards, past the Depford creek. Defoe pointed to the infrastructural development just a little further down the river, at Woolwich. There, 'when the business of the Royal Navy increased, and Queen Elizabeth built larger and greater ships of war than were employed before, new docks, and launches were erected, and places prepared for the building and repairing ships of the largest size; because, as here was a greater depth of water and a freer channel, than at Depford (where the chief yard in the river of Thames was before) so there was less hazard in the great ships going up and down'.[18] Greenwich museum can be reached from central London by the docklands light railway (DLR), which goes through Canary Wharf, past the nineteenth-century East India and West India docks. Woolwich faces the Royal Victoria docks and Royal Albert docks, where London city airport is now located. These large docks were built for the same reasons Defoe noted, to accommodate the bigger and larger ships that brought back goods from overseas commerce as well as colonies of the British empire. Equally, when they became too small, they were abandoned, before being regenerated in a singular historical twist in their

17 Mieke Bal, 'The Discourse of the Museum', 208.

18 Daniel Defoe, *A tour through the whole isles of Great Britain, 1724-27* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1991), 44.

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present form as part of 'London city': a major global centre of British financial might. What Cleveley's *Shipping at Depford* suggests within the trade glass panel is that references to the Pax Romana, to fruitful commerce in the North and Baltic Seas under the auspices of the Swedish crown, to the gold and silver to be made in expanding commercial horizons, concur with Britain's understanding of itself and its presence across the seas. In the royal docks of Depford lies the industrious foundational origin of this new Roman titan whose watchword was *Rule Britannia*.

In the second half of the twentieth century, in the aftermath of decolonisation and the reorganisation of commercial fluxes and geopolitical forces, museums in the West to a large extent entered a process of self-questioning parallel to the interrogation pursued on European decentred territories. How do European maritime museums negotiate the changing perception of maritime history? To what extent do they contribute (or not) to a re-writing and decentering of history urged by postcolonial critical discourses? Are they able, to echo the studies of Walter Mignolo, to consider Europe's dark heritage?[19] In cities such as Bordeaux, Liverpool, or Amsterdam, can maritime museums revisit the heritage of the Enlightenment, torn between the curiosity for foreignness, the articulation of critical rational thought, and colonial encroachment?[20] And crucially, how is the history of trade, as it continues to animate the present, represented in the museum's display? In his reflection on the location of culture, Homi K. Bhabha urged the Western metropole 'to confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous native narrative internal to its national identity'.[21] Perhaps in recognising in their own identities the effective constitutive differences inherited from history, their own irremediable otherness, European entities might truthfully break through the world of shadows they long held as certainties.

At Greenwich, a subtle balance is best observed in galleries such as 'traders', devoted to the history of maritime trade with Asia. Visitors are intro-

19 Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

20 Vanessa Alayrac Fielding and Claire Dubois, eds., *The Foreignness of Foreigners: Cultural Representations of the Other in the British Isles (17th – 20th centuries)* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholar, 2015); Antoine Lilti, *L'héritage des lumières. Ambivalences de la modernité* (Paris: Seuil, 2019).

21 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1994), 9.

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duced to the display by a map featuring the monsoon seasonal orientation in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. The accompanying text states that Asia was 'the centre of fabulous wealth' that 'brought together different people, places and culture'. Such a cosmopolitan confluence is illustrated in a ship cabinet with models of a dow used by Arab merchants, a surf boat used on Indian coasts, and two Chinese junks. However, the others are seen and presented through the perspective of the confident inner lens (the self), namely the East India Company created in 1600 by royal decree. The gallery is organised in a series of nuclei, each pairing paintings with representative objects of trade and paratexts. The paintings are either marines, contributing to the envisioning of distant shores by the visitor, for instance *A Dutch settlement in Asia* (Ludolf Backhuysen, c. 1670), some with a historical touch, such as *The capture of Geriah* on India's West coast (Dominic Serres the Elder, late eighteenth century), and portraits, figures of importance in the history of the East India Company. The company's rise and demise provide the narrative of this encounter with Asia. At the outset, we find the conquering spirit of the pioneers who rose to dispute the dominance of 'the most successful European spice traders', the Dutch. The lure of Asian markets is mirrored by panels on the growing demand and changing habits of consumption in Britain, in particular the British infatuation with tea, the 'national drink'. Tainted heritage – in particular the opium smuggling at the heart of the China trade – is embedded in the display. When depicting the progressive take-over of the Indian subcontinent in the eighteenth century by way of military engagement, the company's 'aggressive expansion' that transformed it from a 'commercial society' to a 'territorial power' is said to have 'ultimately led to its downfall'. William Gladstone's scathing condemnation of the opium wars with China – 'a war most unjust in its origins, a war more calculated to cover this country with disgrace, I do not know and have not heard of' – aptly bows to the judgement of time and closes the narrative. It also corresponds, in the gallery's rhetoric, to the end of the company, guilty of the liberal's capital vice: monopolistic hubris (1833).

At the monastery of Geronimos in Belem the intertwining of national identity and global expansion leaves little room for alternate voices. The tombs of Vasco de Gama and Luís de Camões are in the St. Mary church next door, while the square and gardens facing the monastery are part of a redevelopment designed to host the *Exposição do mundo Português*, the Portuguese colonial exhibition of 1940. The antechamber to the museum greets

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the visitors with imposing statues of the famous Portuguese navigators Gil Eanes (1395-1460), Diogo Comes (1420-1500), Diogo Cam (1452-1486) … The first and well-furnished main gallery is dedicated to the 'Portuguese discoveries', a description which is in itself problematic, without underestimating the extraordinary maritime achievements of the Portuguese navigators. It depicts the Portuguese as the knowing agent, who also holds the pen of history, encountering the unknown, which in being discovered enters history and a life of which it was formally unaware. Units similarly combining artefacts with paintings, original maps, and informative panels touch upon medieval commercial routes, the conquest of the Atlantic, the war at sea, astronomical navigation, and 'the cartography of the discoveries' 'which contributed to a systematic collection of new information and to the construction of a new perspective on the world, on a planetary scale'; on religion and the missionary work of the Jesuits, and the increase of 'global competition' in the sixteenth century to harvest those newly-found lands. What it hardly engages with, to mention the elephant in the room, is 'the black Atlantic',[22] the profitable slave trade on the African West coast which accompanied the development of the colonies in Brasil. As with other European nations, the contemporary Portuguese society has been shaped by its relation with Africa and the Americas. Yet the exhibits remain looking out, without acknowledging the differences nurtured from within.[23]

'Where am I? Where am I going?', these are not the musings of Paul Gauguin, but, tellingly: 'two questions that sailors through the ages have tried to answer during their voyages in the elements, in science and in belief'. The complex legacies of global maritime trade, as woven by European ships in the early modern age, are negotiated differently by different European maritime museums. The possible answers to those questions have taken on a new light with the demise of European colonial empires, in the calls to 'reset modernity'[24] and to translate and articulate the legacies of European

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22 Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

23 I have developed this question of 'inverse civilization' in Gabriel N. Gee, 'Beyond Narcissus: the metamorphosis of port cities in the 20th century', in Gabriel N. Gee & Alison Vogelaar, *Changing Representations of Nature and the City: The 1960s and 1970s and Their Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

24 Bruno Latour, 'Onus Orbis Terrarum'.

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thought, beyond their maritime empires' historical demise.[25] At the Danish maritime museum, where we started this journey through exhibits pertaining to trade, the dark heritage of the early globalisation doesn't go unnoticed, in a period when 'beautiful, tasty good and cruel destinies were transported between the corners of the earth'.[26] The museum, whose collections pay particular attention to life at sea together with the dreamscapes brought about by maritime worlds, includes in its section on the Danish Guinea insights into the tragic fate of enslaved Africans. It has also launched a new display on consumption in the age of the shipping container, 'The world in your shopping basket'. In representing the history of trade and its legacies in the present, maritime museums feature market stalls where visitors can pick memories from the past to consume, thus channelling themselves into society's perception of our planetary condition. The nature of the offer in the market is not anecdotal. The manner through which maritime museums represent not solely the self, but also the 'relation to the others that sets historicity at the heart of its questions' appears significant of these museums' critical awareness, and their role in activating relevant interrogations within their communities.[27] The photographer Allan Sekula, taking his clue from the itinerant museum *The Global Mariner*, a ship owned by a confederation of workers' unions, that raises awareness about conditions of seafarers' work on ships, registered on flags of convenience, had begun a project entitled Ships of Fools, a kind of dockers museum, a collection of objects and images serving as an anti-museum and non-hierarchical anti-archive.[28] Its topical collections responded to Sekula's critical questioning: 'in what sense is the "real economy" of the sea an antidote to the myth of limitless wealth accumulated through financial manipulation?' The *Hinterland* exhibition organised at Corner College in Zurich in summer 2018 furthered a critical interrogation into the weight and implications of the commercial destinies of our maritime economies. What is represented and what are the blind spots in our cultural narratives: *the eyes of the lighthouse*. What are the material transformations taking place and where are they taking our planetary metabolic body: *blood*

25 Peter Sloterdijk, *Si l'Europe s'éveille* (Paris: Mille et une nuit, 2003).

26 Maritime Museum of Denmark website.

27 Benoît de L'Estoile, *Le gout des autres. De l'exposition coloniale aux arts premiers*, 288.

28 Allan Sekula, *Ships of fools / The Dockers' museum*, Hilde van Gelder, ed. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2015).

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as a rover. Maritime museums phrase these metabolic processes, which have shaped and continue to shape the design and perception of the hinterlands, from which and to which commercial maritime routes depart and return.

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