Introduction: maritime introspections

Gabriel N. Gee and Caroline Wiedmer

Janus, the two-headed God, looks out and looks in. Down the Palatine hill in Rome, next to the church of San Giorgio in Velabro, not far from where Romulus and Remus were said to have been found by the she-wolf, stands the Arch of Janus Quadrifrons. It was erected in the early fourth century under the reign of Constantine, at the northeastern tip of the Forum Boarium, the cattle market of ancient Rome. Sixteen metres high and twelve metres wide, with an archway on each of its four sides, this arch of Janus served as a monument and a gateway to the commercial centre of the Roman capital. The Forum Boarium dates back to the time of the Republic and is strategically located between the Palatine, Capitoline and Aventine hills, and the Tiber River. Janus, the God of passageways, of going in and out, was venerated in Rome from time immemorial. In the Forum Romanum, the temple of Janus geminus had been consecrated by Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, in the seventh century BCE. Its door remained open in times of war, and closed, if only very rarely, in times of peace. The God with two faces, one looking outwards, the other looking inwards, presided over the fortunes of a growing territorial and commercial empire. As it was required to channel increasing amounts of goods to feed the capital, the Portus Tiberinus, built under Servius Tullius in the sixth century next to the Forum Boarium, became congested. The seven hills are situated some twenty miles inland from the sea. In the first century BCE, the fortress at Ostia on the coast was further developed into a city. The need for a deep harbour port remained, and under the reign of Claudius digging eventually commenced.[1] The Portus,

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1 Jason Urbanus, 'Rome's Imperial Port', *Archaeology* March/April 2015, accessed 2 June 2019, https://www.archaeology.org/issues/168-1503/features/2971-rome-portus-rise-of-empire#art_page6.

Rome's harbour, was developed just north of Ostia. Two gigantic moles were built into the sea to protect the inner basin. Trajan, in the second century CE, added an artificial hexagonal basin that could accommodate another two hundred vessels. A canal connected the port to the Tiber and to the inner city. In the Vatican, a sixteenth-century fresco depicts the imperial harbour from above, with its geometric complex of palaces and warehouses surrounding the hexagonal core and the spherical outreach onto the sea. The Portus was a strategic infrastructural feat, as well as a symbol of Roman might for all visitors. On an artificial island between the two moles, a lighthouse signalled the entrance to the harbour. Out, into the imperial routes and networks; in, to the hinterland and the million-strong inhabitants of its capital.

With the fall of Rome in the fifth-century the Portus was progressively abandoned. The figure of Janus, however, has remained a looming presence on European coastlines. The voyages launched in the fifteenth century to circumvent the African continent and cross the Atlantic Ocean in search of Indian markets metaphorically revived the divinity's double gaze. European port cities grew as privileged gateways to foreign wealth and inner splendour. No longer confined to coastal navigation, Spanish caravels and Dutch fluyt roamed the oceans in search of spices, gold and slaves. With the development of lens technology, the lighthouses that were built at the thresholds of port cities – from the seventy-six-metre lanterna di Genoa to the Gothic brick tower of Bremerhaven, from the Brandaris lighthouse perched on Tersehlling island in Friesland to the Bellem lighthouse at the mouth of the Tagus – have endorsed the role of Janus beaming in and out to safely bring sailors to and fro. Industrialisation in the nineteenth century furthered the European hold on global markets, as the lighthouse shone stronger than ever before, thanks to the adoption of the Fresnel lens.[2]

In the past fifty years, however, European port cities have experienced considerable changes to their morphologies and identities. The introduction of the standardised container in the 1960s contributed to the acceleration of global interconnectedness, while simultaneously introducing a caesura within port cities as container terminals were developed out of the urban

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2   Theresa Levitt, *A short bright flash: Augustin Fresnel and the birth of the modern lighthouse* (New York, London: Norton, 2013).

core to accommodate new transportation vessels.[3] In Europe, the shift took place in parallel with the global decentralisation of major maritime industrial assets, bringing economic downturn and social hardship to many harbour cities. Nevertheless, these metamorphoses can also be seen as having opened a path to emancipation from a formerly narcissistic relation to the sea and the world beyond: European port cities could gain a capacity to see the Other within themselves, thereby potentially undermining the self-centred perspective that had nurtured colonial expansionism.[4] Artistic practices engaging with maritime heritage have been noteworthy for articulating such an alternate set of aspirations, and for creating a multipolar identity for the European port city of the twenty-first century. If the seventeenth and eighteenth-century seascapes could capture and represent so strikingly the changing networks of European trade and political outreach, the late twentieth century witnessed a diversification of aesthetic perspectives on ports and the sea, exploring a range of critical and poetic interventions through various media. The present collection of essays explores facets of this introspective turn.

Continental epiphanies: the inward gaze of Narcissus

European port cities developed long-distance networks in the ill-named 'Age of Discoveries'. From Lisbon and Cadiz, Amsterdam, London and Stockholm, vessels sailed to the Americas and the South China Sea. In parallel, the Renaissance saw the adoption of a new pictorial construction based on a mathematical system throughout Europe. The window onto the world, however, tended to serve as the projection of an inner vision, which commanded a powerful normative framing of the world. The encounter with the Other beyond the seas was thus largely undermined by a self-belief that could work

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3 Martin Stopford, *Maritime economics* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3d ed.; Marc Levinson, *The box: how the shipping container made the world smaller and the world economy bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Brian Hoyle, 'Global and local change on the port city waterfront', *Geographical Review* Vol. 90, no. 3 (July 2000), 395-417.

4 For a developed discussion of narcissism and the port city, see 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-70s and their Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

against an understanding and appreciation of difference and dissimilar viewpoints. This infatuation was broken in the 1960s, in the opening of a 'Beyond Narcissus'.[5] The normative gaze of modernity came into question, as did the binary separation of nature and culture it had promoted.[6] In Ovid's tale of Narcissus, the boy who fell in love with his own reflection, there comes a moment, right before he drowns, when Narcissus realises his mistake. He sees suddenly that it is himself he has been looking at with adoring eyes. The cosmological crisis that engulfed Europe in the aftermath of World War II prompted an inward turn, a questioning of identity that implied a critical enquiry into national self-beliefs. The introspective gaze that emerged in European politics, philosophy and aesthetics at the turn of the 1960s was accompanied by a psychological retreat from the seas. For one thing, deco-lonialising movements shifted Europeans' gaze from overseas to their own shores, where generations of migration and exchange had been shaping increasingly hybrid societies. Secondly, if the standardisation of shipping containers begun in the 1960s obeyed the logic of maritime efficiency, it also shifted the attention of port cities away from the seas to the hinterlands. The gaze of Narcissus turned from the water below, and his own reflection, to the earth beneath his feet.[7]

Three sites command the iconological regime of this introspective Narcissus: the coast, the port city and the hinterland. Coasts have long been inhabited by humans; coastal communities were among the first human settlements, benefiting from a combination of fishing and shell picking in the sea, and silvan and agrarian cultivation on land.[8] In the twentieth century, human populations throughout the world have converged on coastal areas

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5   Gabriel N. Gee, 'Beyond Narcissus: the metamorphosis of the port city in the 20th century', in Gabriel N. Gee & Alison Vogelaar, *Changing Representations of Nature and the City: The 1960s-70s and their Legacies* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 25-39.

6   Among major studies that have explored this rupture, see Bruno Latour, *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes: essai d'anthropologie symmétrique* (Paris: La découverte, 2006); Philippe Descola, *Par-delà nature et culture* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005).

7   Our attention to the inner territories was triggered by Paolo Perulli, who suggested considering an inversion of the Narcissus gaze at a TETI 2014 workshop on changing representations of nature and the city, and prompted a further reflection with artists on this inward-looking continental Narcissus.

8   John R. Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 33-35.

in unprecedented numbers.[9] The pleasures of a leisured life spent on the seaside had emerged already in the nineteenth century, alongside intensifying industrialisation. The beach, a desert unfavoured by our coastal ancestors, was discovered by increasingly urban societies looking for a connection to 'nature'. Gustave Courbet tipping his hat to the sea in *Le bord de mer* à *Palavas* (1854) emblematically captured this new sentiment. In the late twentieth century, access to the seaside was democratised. Where Courbet's painting portrays a solitary figure facing the mighty elements, the photographs in Martin Parr's book of photographs, *Life is a beach*, depict congested shorelines with bodies crammed next to one another in 'Vina del mar' and 'Cartagena, Chile' (2007), large-scale ice cream cones and tourist trucks on the sand in 'Mablethorpe' (2008), and everywhere the microcosms of home adapted to the outdoors: chairs, magazines, coolers, blinds, barbecues, musicians, even a television, all installed on the new frontier. The densification of coastal areas has also led to the erection of housing walls on many shores. Christine Nicolas' watercolour panorama *trait de c*ôte (2013), displays on film, in a 24.57-minute travelling sequence, the built-up façade of the French Mediterranean coast near Marseille. Such walls, seen from the sea, depict a layered inhabited depth on land. The series of photographs entitled *Bord de mer*, taken by Gabriele Basilico on the Northwestern French coast as part of a DATAR commission in 1984-85, show the strata of coastal occupation, from the waves breaking on the sand and the huts on the seaside to the roads following the coastal relief, the car parks and the residential districts stretching far into the land, as well as the cranes and industrial infrastructures that are as much part of the coastal landscape. The coast is a border, which is more than a mere line drawn into the sea but is also a layered assemblage of structures, functions and people oscillating on the shoreline.

Standing at the junction of the sea and the hinterland, the port city also serves as a gateway between the outside and the inside, between the world beyond and the world within. A city, particularly a port city, may be inclined to revel in its own scintillation. Hubert Damisch in *Skyline. La ville Narcisse* queried the possibility of an urban Narcissus: 'What of a Narcissus of the city? What would be his difference with a Narcissus of the meadows or the woods and sources? To which forms, to which modalities of narcissism, which are

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9 See for instance statistics for inhabitation on the European coastlines: https://ec.europa. eu/eurostat/statistics.

bound to influence his visions of the city, is the urban dweller reduced?'[10]
The city, with and through the mediation of its inhabitants, can become
engulfed in its own image. The port city, rooted in the sea rather than in the
land, historically faced an expanse from which its identity and its desires
were channelled and in which they were mirrored. With the estrangement of
port terminals from core living areas in the 1960s and 70s, European harbour
cities have re-centred on de-maritimised urban nuclei, connected to the sea
through marinas and regenerated docklands. There, cultural institutions
have come to occupy former warehouses and quays, from the Tate Liverpool
(1988) to the Guggenheim in Bilbao (1997), while the erection of new cultural
landmarks, such as the Elbphilarmonie in the HafenCity in Hamburg (2018)
or the Mucem in Marseille (2013), attest to the growing importance of the
cultural economy in the European harbour city. Simultaneously, the break
with the imperial past brought on by the reorganisation of global maritime
economics in this period opened a path towards self-enlightenment, as port
cities were able to gain a better understanding of their own hybrid textures,
manifest in the historical transnational circulation of people, habitus and
networks. This opening paved the way for a critical reappraisal of the past,
particularly regarding colonial legacies, as exemplified by such works as
Fiona Tan's re-reading of the travels of Venetian merchant Marco Polo in the
video installation *Disorient* (2009), which engages with the tensions inher-
ent in global trading, or in the series of exhibits and events co-organised in
Liverpool, Bristol and Hull by Keith Piper in 1992 entitled *Trophies of Empire*,
which addresses the dark heritage of Colombus' first transatlantic voyage,
whose quincentennial was celebrated that year.[11] Such critical aesthetic
enquiries into the port city's maritime past and present could, through an
inner turn, paradoxically liberate a maritime gaze blinded by its own desires.
This revelation has been a characteristic of the development of European
consciousness in the late twentieth century – albeit a contested one.

　　Narcissus, emancipated, looks inside himself; in true Janus fashion, he
can see beyond and within, where corridors lead to the European hinterland.

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10 Hubert Damisch, *Skyline. La ville Narcisse* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001). *'Qu'en serait-il d'un
    Narcisse des villes, dans sa différence d'avec le Narcisse des champs ou celui des bois et des sources?
    A quelles formes, à quelles modalités de narcissisme, qui n'iront pas sans retentir sur la vision qu'il
    peut avoir de la ville, le citadin est-il réduit?'*.

11 *Trophies of Empire* (Liverpool: Bluecoat and Liverpool John Moores University, 1994).

In economic geography, the hinterland designates a space within which a transportation terminal sells its services.[12] The natural hinterland is the area that is technically serviceable by the transportation terminal. The 'fundamental' hinterland describes the area within which access and proximity guarantee a monopolistic relation to the terminal, while the 'competitive' hinterland points to the areas where various terminal outreaches overlap. In Europe, different spheres of service structure commercial transportation networks, with major sea-land terminals in Hamburg, Antwerp, Rotterdam and le Havre commanding continental routes, and Athens, Algeciras, Lisbon, Varna, Dublin, Hull and Copenhagen-Malmo servicing interconnected regional hubs. In the opening sequence of Allan Sekula and Noel Burch's 2010 documentary *The Forgotten Space*, the camera floats in the mouth of the Meuse while the narrator evokes the land behind us, 'a greedy continent'. Global trade is a key force in the strategic organisation of current territorial infrastructure. Simultaneously, however, the logics of capitalistic production and consumption, as they have reached out further to the East with the fall of the Berlin wall, have been punctuated by an anxious reflection on their 'collateral' consequences in the planetary age. From the photographs of earthrise taken by the crew of the 1968 NASA Apollo 8 mission, to the emergence of the term 'anthropocene' in the first decade of the twentieth century to describe the impact of human activities on the planet, a question mark has grown over the world's insatiable search for surplus-value.[13] The metabolic processes whereby nature and materials are extracted, transformed and redistributed are handled on tectonic scales. The representation of these processes, their anticipation as well as their negation, constantly feeds back into the fabric of territories, altering their course and destination.[14] The internal gaze of Narcissus, overlooking the European arteries that connect the Atlantic to the Alps, the Mediterranean to the German woodlands, the North Sea to Central Europe, implies a localisation critique: the overlapping of boundaries and the fragmentation of scalar anchorage generates pressure on

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12 Jean-Paul Rodrigue, *The Geography of Transport Systems* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

13 Heather Davis & Etienne Turpin, 'Art & death: lives between the fifth assessment and the sixth extinction', in *Art in the Anthropocene. Encounters Among Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies*, eds. Heather Davis & Etienne Turpin (London: Open Humanities Press, 2015), 3-30.

14 Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika, Eric Swyngedouw, eds., *In the Nature of Cities. Urban Political Ecology and the Politics of Urban Metabolism* (London, New York: Routledge, 2006).

self-identities, urban, rural, regional, national, transnational. Poetic investigation combines a critical perspective necessary to identify the pressure points of the present, as they are rooted in historical determinations, with a lyrical imagination that can formulate novel collective forms of anchorage for the future. The iconology of this European hinterland, in correlation with expanding planetary navigations, will have to focus on the new hybrids of an anxious but enlightened self; the urbanised mountain,[15] the botanic building sites,[16] the rural industries;[17] a maritime poetics will consider, in particular, the juxtaposition of the continental land and the sea, or the land as sea with its currents, its winds, its routes, its islands, its regal companies and its pirates. This internal charting can guide the new mappings of the critical European soul.

Stories of metabolic pressure

Stories are crucial to these new mappings. From the ancient world and its enthralling myths to the age of discoveries and colonial quests; from the industrial awakening to the shockwaves of the murderous twentieth century, and into our own bourgeoning century of vast progress, unmoored elements, mass movements, viral threats, tumultuous political shifts and deep ensuing uncertainties, stories have served as conduits for the multiple changes that increased globalised connections and competition have brought to our societies. Port cities, which tend to function as a continent's canaries, have often sensed those transformations first. We can thus read the fundamental implications of their direct physical and symbolic involvement in world trade, their extraordinary geographic exposure to the elements, and their crucial function as a relay station of pressures that pulsate both out to sea and into the hinterlands, as changes in metabolic pressure, which often manifest as changes in narrative tensions.

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15 Christian Schmid, 'Travelling Warrior and Complete Urbanization in Switzerland. Landscape as lived space', in *Implosions / Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, ed. Neil Brenner (Berlin: Jovis, 2014), 90-102.

16 See Baustelle und Botanik, a TETI group project led by Anne-Laure Franchette and Gabriel N. Gee.

17 See for instance the research of the Dalvazza group in Switzerland, or workshops such as Whitechapel's June 2019 'The rural assembly: contemporary art and spaces of connection'.

At no time in history has narrative not been fundamental to culture; there has never been a culture in which competitive stories were not both anchors of stasis and drivers of transformation, constituting norms and imagining the new. As Anthony Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner put it, stories 'are deeply concerned with legitimacy, they are about threats to normatively valued states of affairs, and what it takes to overcome these threats'.[18] By exploring threats to the everyday, by imagining what might happen if norms were broken, stories also help us understand not only what is, but what could be; not only where we have been, but where we wish to go.[19] They help us imagine foreign continents on the scent of a spice, a silken touch, the glitter of gold, and the titillating notion of the savage; they re-structure societies around clattering trains and smoke-belching factories; they issue warnings of impending war, even as they send soldiers to the battlefield with glorious tales of what it means to be a hero; they project environmental dystopias that find their way into policy papers and international accords; they track deadly pandemics while tracing the social fracture lines left in their wake. There is no getting away from stories. To speak with Roland Barthes, 'narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself'.[20] But while the act of story-telling is universal and transhistorical, each individual story is embedded in its own time and place, and equipped with extraordinary sensors for drama, and change. Stories, like port cities, are so good at portraying and grappling with impending upheaval because one of their most elemental functions is to make and break norms, and to establish new equilibria. This is also why many cultural changes first show up in the urban tissue of port cities and then proceed to act as bulwarks to change in other realms.

Narrative is at once pre-generic and pan-generic; it animates all forms of expression: architecture, logistics, art, maps, images – both moving and still – objects, sounds and, yes, literature. And the stuff of narrative is broad. It stacks the elements of plot, time, reversal, crisis, place and human suffering in a myriad of forms: in fiction, fact, or myth; in photography and film; in

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18 Anthony G. Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner, *Minding the Law* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 121.

19 Amsterdam and Bruner, *Minding the Law*, 124.

20 Roland Barthes, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives', *Music, Image, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 79.

song, urban design and other forms of expression. Stories can, for instance, animate the gossip we share with a neighbour, the graphs that show us the fate of humankind, buildings that soar into the skies, and government pronouncements on war and peace. Narratives also cling to objects: in this volume, we encounter plastic pellets and sand kernels, lenses and lighthouses, ships and a dead polar bear, all of which are saturated with their own stories, even as they forge new ones within this collection. In the port city, stories help pick apart the strands of the social, the economic, the spatial, the biological and the ecological to reveal their interconnectedness in the urban texture, and their function in the metabolic pressures that are continuously at work.[21]

Many of the stories we hear, and believe, and tell without thinking twice, are pre-structured by stock narratives – narratives that have been handed down through the ages and that pattern our thinking – and many of those narratives, in turn, are iterations of myths from ancient times. These stock stories hold archetypal characters and cultural truths, such as the idea of 'the soldier' that we associate with ideas of 'heroism', 'bravery' and 'sacrifice'. These notions are continuously tested and help determine our actions and shape our cultures. Janus, the two-headed god, and Narcissus, the love-besotted boy, looking inwards and outwards, and deep into a pool of water, are each part of a roster of such archetypal figures that get tailored, through the centuries, to what matters to a given culture, to a given time, and to a given place. In *Maritime Poetics*, Janus and Narcissus help to forge a corridor into the images, objects and stories offered up by the artists, curators and academics assembled here. Their work, and the stories about their work, coalesce around the sea, the shore, the coastal city and the hinterland, and give individual interpretations on how these sites are connected and why they matter to us today. The collection places particular emphasis on the European continent and its histories, as seen from the maritime front. The European conquering narrative that stretched its muscles out into faraway lands and seas from the time of the ill-named 'discoveries' of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was superseded in the twentieth century by a shift in perspective under postcolonialism. On the one hand, this has led to an ontological uncertainty as its hitherto centred perception gave way to

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21 Nik Heynen, Maria Kaika & Erik Swyngedouw, *In the Nature of Cities – Urban Political Ecology and The Politics of Urban Metabolism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 12.

mobile shifting grounds, and the margins moved inwards. On the other, it has opened new philosophical and political possibilities in Europe to rethink the world's narratives – and indeed those of the twenty-first century, and the planet's – at a time when globalised exchange is perceived as all-encompassing, enlightening in the cultural reorientation it fosters, and destructive in its adherence to the problematic logic of economic accumulation coupled with toxic, essentialist and introverted narratives.

The pertinence of critical approaches stemming from European lands and intellectual traditions has itself been the object of competing diagnoses. Walter Mignolo, in a series of de-colonialising reflections focussing on 'the dark side of Western modernity', calls for 'breaking the Western code' that has nurtured, since the Renaissance, a colonial matrix of power with tragic and sombre consequences for humans, nature and planet alike.[22] Assessment of the role of economic narratives is here crucial, akin to Marshall Berman's twentieth-century revisiting of Karl Marx's famous phrase, 'all that is solid melts into air',[23] pointing to the capitalist economic system's cycles of creative destruction, which Neil Brenner queried in the early twenty-first century through a series of collective investigations into current forms of 'implosions-explosions'.[24] The capacity of Western modernity to develop critical discourses parallel with the implementation of forms of blind materialism has been powerfully queried by Dipesh Chakrabarthy in a study significantly entitled 'Provincializing Europe'.[25] Here, the author aims to balance the usefulness of critical tools inherited from the European traditions dating back to the Enlightenment, with their bruising historicising perspective, which systematically brushes aside narratives and points of view that do not abide by its conventions; tellingly, Western thought is described by Chakrabarthy as both 'indispensable and inadequate'. Much here resides in the identification of the narratives at play in history, and their value and agency in the present. In his 2019 study *L'héritage des lumières. Ambivalences de la modernité*,

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

23 Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London, New York: Verso, 1982).

24 Neil Brenner ed., *Implosions / Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization* (Berlin: Jovis, 2014).

25 Dipesh Chakrabarthy, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Antoine Lilti suggests that, while postcolonial critique in the second half of the twentieth century has been instrumental in unveiling the troubled legacies of European thought, attention to the inception of eighteenth-century philosophical, economic and political discourses reveals a much more nuanced picture than that of a complicit and generative matrix.[26] In particular, scrutiny of debates and discourses of the Enlightenment reveals an array of interrogations, uncertainties and critical investigations rather than a uniform doctrine, and as such can inform a decentralised interactionist cultural construction of the present.

Switzerland itself, home to many of the contributors to this volume, possessed no colonies; its past and present economic entanglements, developmental strategies, politics of neutrality and national narratives have therefore often flown below the radar of postcolonial scrutiny. With their postcolonial approach, Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk, editors of a 2012 volume entitled *Postkoloniale Schweiz: Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*, offer an important scholarly corrective to the complex imbrications of cultural, economic and political practices that have shaped Swiss society and identities for over a century.[27] They have also shifted the perspective on colonialism and its legacies to the margins of empire, to Switzerland as one of the mediators and accomplices of colonialism, to use Shalini Randeria's terms in the introduction to the volume: to one of the nations that was centrally involved in connecting the actors of the colonial project, while the traces and consequences of this intermediary position remained largely shrouded or misunderstood for much of the last century.[28] By applying concepts from postcolonial theory, such as transnational entanglement, everyday racism and the spectacle of the exotic, to Swiss cultural practices, the volume lays bare these traces and provides the background to many of the contributions in our own volume.

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26 Antoine Lilti, *L'héritage des lumières. Ambivalences de la modernit*é (Paris: EHESS, Gallimard, 2019).

27 Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi, Francesca Falk, eds., *Die Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012). See also Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tinté, eds., *Colonial Switzerland: Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

28 Shalini Randeria, 'Verflochtene Schweiz: Herausforderungen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien', in *Die Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2012), 10.

The panorama two decades into the twenty-first century appears complex. This volume aims to explore the complexity of globally interwoven narratives as they coalesce on European shores, as well as their maritime heritage, through the lenses of aesthetics and artistic practices. The particular nature of aesthetic thought, what the art historian Pierre Francastel has termed 'la pensée plastique',[29] offers, if used appropriately, a privileged channel through which to revisit, reposition, displace, translate, and rephrase the world. Therefore, each of the texts in this volume, placing particular emphasis on artists' voices, proposes representational strategies that link up politically and aesthetically with these planetary issues as perceived through their maritime corridors. In particular, by giving space to visual artists' voices and narratives, the collection explores the manner through which poetics, here more specifically anchored in the tradition of the visual arts, can contribute to the unpacking, but also, crucially, to the re-visualisation, and to the re-orchestration, of our interconnected stories.

From coast to hinterland

Maritime Poetics is structured in four parts, each featuring a critical analytical chapter followed by a series of artistic reflections stemming from individual practices, and offering up a distinct story about the work of each artist. The volume's narrative arc is spatial, beginning with the sea and how it interweaves with the port city in terms of urban transformation, commerce and ecosystems; then proceeding inwards into the hinterlands via intricate tributaries of commerce, mobilities, and dreams; before ending, submerged, in a return to the sound universe of the deep blue sea.

Part I of *Maritime Poetics*, entitled 'Work and leisure in the port city', focusses on the balance of work and leisure in relation to maritime economies and exchange. It assembles contributions that consider the cultural and political shifts in port cities that have occurred in the second half of the last century and continue to inform our present age. These writings unfold against the historical backdrop of urban, social and geographic dislocations of port terminals – Hamburg and Altona in the North, Naples and Genoa in the South – which have come under pressure from the massive re-organisa-

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29 Pierre Francastel, *Sociologie de l'art* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).

tion of global maritime economies. Along with these shifts, many traditional professions associated with the seaport, such as sailing and navigation, the loading and unloading of cargoes, their storage and distribution, came to an end or were deeply transformed. In terms of the urban fabric, this 'retreat of the sea' left numerous vacant spaces, both physically and mentally, that prompted regeneration strategies based on cultural economics related to trans-industrial changes in the late twentieth century. These, in turn, also affected the identities of waterfronts and city-centres, with the transformation of former commercial docks and buildings into condos and shopping malls. The contributions in this section explore the ambiguous nature of these transformations.

The opening chapter in this section, by Vanessa Hirsch, curator at the Altonaer Museum, traces the history of Altona, once an independent city, now a district of Hamburg, and its relationship to the Elbe river, which connects the city to the North Sea. As Europe's first free port, Altona holds the distinction of releasing its manufacturers from the yoke of a guild, thus enabling mass production of goods; moreover and perhaps most importantly, the status of free port guaranteed freedom of faith, a feature which always set it apart from Hamburg, its larger competitor only a few miles down the Elbe. Hirsch describes three distinct aspects of Altona through the lens of recent exhibitions at the Altonaer Museum that emblematise the institution's distinctive remit for the area between the North Sea and the hinterland, in particular that of northern Germany and the federal state of Schleswig-Holstein. She evokes the importance of the Elbe for the founding and development of Altona as a port city, before looking at a photographic history of stereotypic images of Northern Germany that derive from the artistic visions in nineteenth-century painting. Finally, Hirsch introduces the museum's interdisciplinary tour through 130 years of urban development and citizen movements.

Johanna Bruckner's piece, 'The future of work: scaffolds and agencies', takes us to the present day, to a brand-new multi-use redevelopment project in HafenCity in Hamburg, just a few miles down the road from Altona, to reflect on the effects of the redevelopment on workers and inhabitants alike within the framework of late capitalism. Her narrative focus is on the various forms the replacement of labour economy through automation might take, and on her artistic activism, which carves out politically organised scenarios of action. In films, performance scripts and writing, she investigates

the possibilities of the so-called robot tax – a tax to lessen the social costs of the replacement – or the impact of the Universal Basic Dividend, that would distribute to all citizens dividends sourced in a public trust from shares in companies. Her work not only serves as a support system to the workers of HafenCity, but also produces narratives in which she adapts the archetype of 'the worker' and the modernist space of the docks into story elements fit for the twenty-first century.

Genoa, with its intricate layers of history, stories, images and perspective, is the focus of Cora Piantoni's film, which she discusses in her piece entitled 'Genoa: the story of a port city and its hinterlands'. Interested primarily in radical movements of the 60s and 70s, Piantoni creates a palimpsest of stories she gathered about various social groupings that gave the city its special flavour: memories of the anti-fascist Radio GAP group that would hijack the airwaves in Genoa during commercials in the 70s to broadcast their own messages of protest, intersect with stories about the Campagnia Unica, an association that fought for worker's rights and essentially ran the port until it was privatised in the early 1990s; an encounter with the *Trallalero*, a group of performers of traditional regional songs, interacts with a glimpse into the Casa d'Albertis, the house of a former sea captain who assembled a cabinet of treasures brought back from his travels, including the statue of Genoa's most famous son, Columbus, looking out over the port.

Giuliano Sergio, an art historian, concludes this section with an essay entitled 'European seaport narratives: mirroring history in contemporary media', in which he trains our attention on the relationship of the ancient port city of Naples with forms of visual narration capable of resurrecting the city from ill-advised urban development. Specifically, Sergio recounts how the project of a multi-layered photographic narration of the city-scape commissioned in the 1980s was able to restore hope in a city whose urban fabric had been completely worn down, first by bombing during World War II, and then by a number of misguided real-estate deals in the post-war era that left the ancient core of the city hollowed out by the early 1980s. Together, the photographers and artists involved in the project not only constructed a new aesthetic, one that melded pictorial elements with documentary iconography and allowed for a more profound understanding of Naples as a port city but also proved the power of visual narrative to forge an artistic heritage of place.

The second section of *Maritime Poetics* is about commerce, the motor at the heart of all port cities whose routes have extended to gather products

from afar, from spices and tea to electronics and ready-to-wear garments, and to act as a relay station for transport into the continent. Transportation in parallel has searched inland for both offer and demand, from grain, cattle and fur to be exported, to consumption markets to be found and opened. With the advent of the standardised container, the movement from sea to land and vice versa has been extraordinarily smoothed, with considerable transformations in the practice of maritime commerce on sea (the huge container ships with small crews on board) and on land (the expansion of motorways for trucks, rail and canals). The growth of financial sector activities, and the crises that have engulfed them repeatedly since the 1970s, are also of relevance to the shaping of the merchant imaginaries of European port cities. In the arts, this commercial aspect has often been explored through its negative side, greedy exploitation and the rule of money at the expense of people and communities. The contributions to this section aim to explore the forms of such a critical aesthetic while considering the intrinsic historically commercial propensity of port cities.

The M/S Maritime Museum of Denmark in Elsinore is one of a string of European maritime museums dedicated to the representation of the trade and commerce that have formed the core of port cities over the centuries. Gabriel Gee's chapter, entitled 'Market stall: maritime commerce in the collections of European maritime museums', investigates how the representation of trade as the hinge between land and sea elucidates its transformative powers, for good and for ill, from the sixteenth century onwards. Reading a number of maritime museums, among them the Hellenic maritime museum in Athens, Gothenburg's history museum and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London, Gee shows how self and other, national identity and global reach interact differently from one location to the next, and how the narrative forms on offer in maritime museums – seascapes, maps, photographs, object, logs – shape our contemporary understanding of our discursive place in maritime economics, past and present.

If Gabriel Gee gives us an overview of collections typically held by maritime museums, the artist Cliona Harmey zooms in on one of the objects that made maritime history: the lighthouse, in particular the Fresnel lens. This lens, invented in the early 1820s, links both ancient and modern spaces and marks the transition to modern globalisation with corresponding systems of logistics and navigation. Her essay, 'From lighthouses to barcodes', tells the story of the Fresnel lens, its prototype in a lighthouse in Courdouan in

France in 1823, and a more advanced design installed in 1880 in the Poolberg lighthouse in Dublin against the backdrop of a significant increase in overseas trade. The lens, meanwhile, was symptomatic of a more pervasive urban transformation that mirrored the uptick in trade. It accompanied the modernisation of the city of Dublin with expanded retail and commercial spaces, and the building of banks and a railway station along with new technology that enabled ships to recognise the lighthouse according to its specific light sequence. Finally, it furnished at the time the blueprint for modern controlled spaces such as airports further inland, and in the future.

Each of the next two essays, 'The European tour', by photographer Gregory Collavini and 'Bottleneck pressure: Port Said', by artist Jürgen Baumann, takes us on a trip: Collavini invites us along on the Amerigo Vespucci, a large container ship en route from Hamburg by way of Rotterdam and Antwerp to Le Havre before the ship veers left to set course for China, leaving Collavini behind in France. The short six-day Hamburg to Antwerp stretch is one of the most heavily trafficked routes on the planet. Collavini's essay is not so much focussed on trade itself as on the people and the ship without which trade is unthinkable; a conceptual contemplation in word and image on the micro-society of people who choose to live their lives on a ship, and in an environment where time and space are measured in nautical miles, knots and seaports. Baumann, meanwhile, journeys from Cairo about one hundred miles through the Nile Delta to Port Said, which sits at the entrance to the Suez Canal on the Mediterranean side. His work reads like a postcard home sharing his impressions of the lush delta, the city of Port Said and the amazing sights of huge cargo ships lumbering through the desert on the canal. The piece mingles the purposefully nonchalant tone of a tourist's journal, on a day trip to one of many sites of interest in the world, with the heavily laden history of the canal, which opened in 1869. It represents a direct route from Asia to European maritime traffic, was the object of military dispute in Egypt's quest for independence and is thus highly symbolic of colonial conflicts and post-colonial emancipations.

The third part of *Maritime Poetics* revolves around the socio-environmental processes that occur at the intersection of sea and land. This part is entitled 'Metabolic pressure'. Essentially, it looks at the impact humans and objects have on land when they arrive on a given shore, and how that impact loops back to shape them in turn. It pays attention both to social and natural environments in port cities against the backdrop of a surge in environmen-

tal issues and awareness, and to a period that has witnessed dramatic and often tragic human migration. The place where sea meets land is imagined here as a zone of crisis in the sense of the Greek root *krinein*, to decide, and the later concept of *krisis*, a separation, distinction, judgement or interpretation. These latter definitions speak to what we typically do when we need to decide an action after being confronted with an unknown: we separate and distinguish it from what we already know, we judge its merits based on existing norms, and we interpret it in gestures of storytelling, hoping that by enveloping the new in an already established story it will become part of it. In other words, we help transfer the foreign object into our own cosmologies via a narrative. In that respect, the essays and interventions privilege a reflection on movements stemming from the sea and the shores to the land, cities and territories located inland.

Caroline Wiedmer opens this section with a chapter entitled 'Tarnished gold: border regimes from the Mediterranean to Switzerland', in which she follows the routes forged by refugees in the recent mass migration from countries in the Middle East and Africa into the European continent through the lens of *Eldorado*, a 2018 film by Swiss filmmaker Markus Imhoof. Her investigation revolves around the ongoing scramble to strengthen European border regimes and erect new ones in form of physical barriers, political agreements and accords to seal off the continent and to navigate responses dictated by national narratives to stem what many have considered a crisis in the sense of a turning point: a critical onslaught warranting extraordinary measures. She analyses *Eldorado* both as an informative background to this investigation, and as a text that represents a version of the hybrid genre of docu-narratives, which tries to grapple with the 'crisis' of migration by separating, interpreting and judging the evolving concepts of belonging and citizenship surrounding mobile lives as they interact with both past and present exigencies.

Monica Ursina Jäger's artistic research takes us to Singapore, a major gateway of global maritime economic networks founded as a British colonial outpost in the early nineteenth century. Jäger's work engages with the sand mining, sand trading and land reclamation that form the bedrock of the island-state. Her essay, 'Liquid territory', captures the malleability of a natural element that has been used to create new promontories and hinterlands; in fact, fully one-quarter of Singapore is built with imported sand, much of it from Cambodia, using global political and regulatory strategies that are

part of Singapore's national identity. In the process of becoming new land, meanwhile, the sand is drained of its original cultural heritage and geological specificity, as it is turned into a uniform aggregate to expand the political territory of the island nation in an alchemy that turns nature into nation.

The next two pieces, 'They cleaned the beach before we arrived', by Anne-Laure Franchette, and 'Between the city and the deep sea: on the plastic nature of the Helsinki shoreline', by Tuula Närhinen, address ecological cycles at the sea's edge that manifest in detritus and flotsam such as seaweed, driftwood and plastic. Franchette describes a journey she made to the Greek Island of Amorgos, the easternmost island in the Cyclades. Patches of seaweed and driftwood on the beach as it awaited the tourist season moved her to learn more about the botanical and symbolic qualities of the local vegetation, and about what had happened to the trees on Amorgos, which had once been so numerous that the island's former name was Melania, the dark one. What she found in an interview with Vangelis Vassalos, a local plant expert, were tales of myth, ecology, sea-land cycles and mismanagement – stories about natural resources and their commodification that contour the cycle of nature and sea. Närhinen's reflection also considers drifting maritime creatures, albeit further down the evolutionary ladder. The location of Närhinen's studio, on a small island off the coast of Helsinki, allows her to study seashore ecology up close. She has been collecting flotsam composed of plastic waste, and her essay is a meditation on the origins and meaning of the plastic world that has engulfed our natural waters. The products of her intervention as an artist, both beautiful and terrifying, remind us that we have become both producers and onlookers in a cycle of human-made pollution that is out of control.

In the last story of this section, entitled 'No trophy', Michael Günzburger speaks of alchemy as well, but unlike Jäger does so by engaging with animal lives and human societies' relations to the animal world. His piece is a meditation on his practice involving the transformation of animals into art in a series of prints made of dead or sedated wild animals – a calf, a wolf, a brown bear, among many others – over a number of years. In his tale, which revolves specifically around the crowning achievement of the series, the printing of a polar bear, Günzburger takes up metaphysical questions of man's relationship to animals; an artist's responsibility to their art; the boundaries of what he was willing to do to procure a polar bear to fulfil a promise he once made; and the significance of representing a polar bear in

the first place. Polar bears, he writes, are pure fields of projection; metaphors really, and when you finally literalise the metaphor by touching the actual thing, it transforms the very modes of experience.

The last part of *Maritime Poetics* is entitled 'Dreamscapes'. It takes us into the what-ifs of past and present, showing us the side of port cities and sea-shores that breeds adventures and fantasies, vast imaginaries and cabinets of tangible and intangible treasures. In an age in which the scale of migra-tion to and settlement of, coasts is unprecedented, 'Dreamscapes' aims to consider the potential of unconscious textures and imaginary realms in the seashores of the twenty-first century, despite the materialism brought to our societies by measurement and rationality. The capacity of aesthetics to explore the past, present and future dreamscapes of European borders and shores is seen here as a crucial step in the process of understanding, repre-senting and positively shaping a multi-textured European identity.

Bryan Biggs' introductory chapter 'Haul away: The Mersey's cultural flow', is a cultural history of Liverpool, located on the banks of the Mersey River, a powerful stream that connects the city first to the Irish Sea and then to the Atlantic. In the 1960s Liverpool became famous for two cultural exports: the Beatles, who played what was known as *Merseybeat*, and a fiery young brand of poets that helped upset the staid world of British poetry in a collection entitled *The Mersey Sound* – two references to the river that cap-tured the combination of grittiness and irreverence that flowed from Liv-erpool at the time. None of these, however, were the first to set forth from Liverpool: some thirty years earlier, the modernist author Malcolm Lowry had set sail from the Mersey as well, in his case to write books 'about a par-ticular place *from another place*' (like James Joyce, who couldn't shake Dublin even during years of exile). The topography of Liverpool is a mythical site that would surface throughout Lowry's work. Historically, its location at the very edge of Europe marked it as fringe; come the 1970s, it was cut adrift from mainstream England after a long post-war slide, until the EU infused it with structural funding that rejuvenated the abandoned dockside buildings and resulted in the opening of the Merseyside Maritime Museum and the Tate Liverpool. Like Altona and Hamburg, Liverpool, too, had a more successful, more tightly structured sister city, Manchester, whose status as economic powerhouse rendered Liverpool a poor relation. And like Altona, it histori-cally welcomed people from all over the world: refugees, merchants, seamen and slaves, who brought wealth and dreams to the city, which continues to

offer a bedrock of difference that allowed the imagination to flourish to this day.

David Jacques keeps us in Liverpool, interlacing voices from a 2010 installation piece that explored the encounter between maritime industrial waste and virtual imagery in the twenty-first century in his text 'North Canada-English Electric (2010)'. The medium at the heart of the installation and its extended questioning is stereoscopy, a visual device by which two drawings or photographs when viewed by both eyes suddenly seem to become three dimensional. As the artist scrutinises the reconfiguration of Liverpool's abandoned docklands, the site and the forces at play behind it stare back and reality becomes veiled behind a screen of smoke. In the next piece, 'A short journey (from Derry to Inishowen)', artist Conor McFeely engages place, time and materiality in a philosophical meditation that brings together the hinterland of memory and the tangible objects of the everyday. Ruminating on his responsibility as an artist to question the time and place he lives in, he takes a journey through Northern Ireland, from Derry to Inishoven on the Donegal Atlantic coast, to investigate the psychological and physical traces left on the urban and rural landscape over the last 200 years, during a period in which territorial markings in the region have been infused with complex partisan inscriptions.

The last two texts in the volume, the first by Dorota Lukianska entitled 'A letter to Henrietta', and the second by Ursula Biemann with the title 'Acoustic ocean', delve into the realm of fantasy to imagine our connections to the past, and to immerse us in the underwater world of ocean acoustics, respectively. Lukianska reflects on the letters she wrote to Henry, the Navigator, or Henrietta as she imagines him in female guise, King of Portugal, known for his patronage of long-distance maritime journeys in the mid-fifteenth century. In her letter, Henry is not the man he used to be. Rather, Lukianska points to some newfound qualities the former Portuguese ruler's lingering presence reveals to the interrogations of our twenty-first century. Biemann brings up the rear of the volume with an annotated video-script of a work that takes us underwater to experience the vast acoustic and semiotic ecospheres of the ocean, a sonic dimension first discovered by scientists establishing spy technologies in the mid-1940s. That technology, however, not only picked up on human communication relayed through the waters but also on low-frequency vocalisation by whales. Biemann here depicts an argonaut she sent to the edges of Northern Norway, equipped with a range of hydroponic sensing

technologies to connect with the narrations emanating from the non-human world and bring them into sync with a new understanding of an ecosystem under duress.