Moral Seascapes

On the Ethics and Aesthetics of Maritime Emergency

Edited by Jonathan Stafford, Henning Trüper, Burkhardt Wolf

Leuven University Press

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Berlin and Vienna, May 2024

1. Moral Seascapes: Introduction

Jonathan Stafford, Henning Trüper, and Burkhardt Wolf

On the Moral Uses of the Sea

In July 1845, the American minister and theologian Horace Bushnell delivered a sermon on board the packet-ship *Victoria* while at sea, traveling between London and New York. "Now that we are out upon this field of waters," he reflected, "cut off from the society of man, and from all the works of God, save the waters themselves, it cannot be inappropriate to inquire, what is the meaning and use of the sea?" (Bushnell, 1845: 4) Primarily rooted in the sea's capacity as a medium of communication, Bushnell's sermon foregrounds the moral influence of global trade and mobility, promoting a distinctly imperial world view: without the sea, he insists, "there would […] be no commerce, except between nations that are adjacent; and society, being life without motion or stimulus, would rot itself down into irredeemable bigotry and decrepitude." (Ibid.: 10) In a more general sense, moreover, Bushnell insisted that the sea, as an intractably wild space of nature, was inherently productive of specific movements in men's minds and spirits. "The liquid acres of the deep, tossing themselves evermore to the winds, and rolling their mighty anthem round the world," give rise to, he considers, "great emotions and devout affections." (Ibid.: 16) Against the background of the doctrine of the sublime and of moral sense philosophy, which was still prominent at that time, this view can be understood as a conception of the moral rooted in affective responses to the sea's wildness, foregrounding the subjective experience of the overwhelming spectacle of nature. "What man that has ever been upon the deep has not felt his nothingness and been humbled," he enquires. (Ibid.: 17) Bushnell situates the human subject in the vastness of nature, which shapes and directs the individual's moral character. Such a concern emphasizes the role of the aesthetic, the visual field of the seascape as itself a moral force. The sea is a "great image," Bushnell reflects, of God's "vastness and power." It is "a liquid

symbol of the infinitude of God." (Ibid.) Religious language functions as an overarching framework in which the moral and the aesthetic are brought together.

Bushnell's shipboard musings give a coherent presentation of an established 19th-century discourse, highlighting a number of key concerns which are insightful for considering the moral meanings of the sea in the modern era: the role of religious ideas of providence, virtue, and morality which were progressively being dismantled or secularized by the middle of the 19th century; the specific status of maritime space, as both a material barrier to and medium of traffic and movement (just as Hegel (1991: 268) had already said in 1820 that the sea was the "supreme medium of communication" for trade, but also for political and cultural life in general); the moral consequences of developments in globalized industrial capitalism, especially as regards the necessity of cooperation or solidarity between workers at sea; the sea as a natural space, both terrifying and sublime, just as it was portrayed in numerous sea novels in the 18th and 19th centuries, from Daniel Defoe to Herman Melville; the maritime setting as a place of affective, subjective experience in the production of morality, which differs from the moral experience in terrestrial landscapes, for example in the mountains; and the significance of the sea's role as a visual phenomenon which has not only aesthetic but also moral components. All of these aspects come together in the concept of "moral seascapes," with which this volume attempts to help illuminate the longer history of morality's role in aesthetic representations of the sea.

Mediations in an Emergency

The volume takes its starting point from a contemporary situation, the proliferation of images of emergency at sea, today most prominently connected with the movement of boat people and its policing and politics. (with Rancière, 1995) This problem of images is distinct from the proliferation of actual emergencies at sea, which is not the primary topic we intend, or would be competent, to pursue. To be sure, the images reflect reality, but they do so only in indirect, refracted ways. The emergency always appears mediated by historically accrued conventions of investing images with meaning. Media discourse on such representations—at least the bulk of journalistic reports, but also quite a few of the artistic and scholarly contributions—tends to focus on the urgency of the contemporary crisis that is seen as being radically of the present, removed from the past. Yet the sufferings of boat people, the politics of these sufferings, and the concomitant production of images and narratives (Heller and Pezzani, 2020) have been a constant for decades, if in

varying constellations, intensities, and places. The fact that the many plights of migration, the search for refuge and a better life—"rebirth," as Hilde Van Gelder puts it (Van Gelder, 2021, and in this volume)—are rendered visible and intelligible to public perception through the various contemporary image types and plotlines of emergency and rescue at sea. The pervasive presentism of the resulting mode of perception can also be read as a crisis of reflexivity in a gaze that often fails to understand itself. At the same time, there is an ever-escalating skepticism about the authenticity of contemporary image production, as Hito Steyerl points out. (Steyerl, 2008: 7–9) This pervasiveness of doubt, however, is perhaps merely the reversal of the pervasiveness of presentism.

It is a truism that all images evoke other images, that images never stand alone, but are interrelated with others. They intersect with a historical record that is powerful and that we see along with the contemporary images, even when we fail to notice it. Emergency at sea is bound up with an iconography, more precisely a Russian-doll iconography where each type of motif is enveloped by a more widespread one: the sailor, the drowned, the ship, the wreck, the seascape, the landscape. Historically, there is a functional differentiation in place where the landscape tends to represent order, control, the idyllic, and the seascape disorder, powerlessness, and the sublime. As Roger Stein has observed, there is "a tension, inherent in the very notion of seascape; it implies the imposition of form and order, of a perspective and a point of view, upon that which is by definition formless and shapeless." (Stein, 1975: 2) Such a conception of the seascape does not necessarily presuppose a viewing subject. There is even a proliferation of technically produced imagery through, say, surveillance devices that is an index of asubjectivity. And yet, even this image production remains open, and prone, to the projection of subjectivity which connects the seascape's iconographies: a spectator, witness, agent, or participant, be it as victim or culprit. This figure of the subject can be represented within the image, or it is part of the space the image on display opens up on its outside. The subject position is also a marker for historical change. As Bernhard Siegert has argued, techniques of navigation are not merely a means to traverse maritime space, but are themselves instrumental in the production of this space. Referring to coastal views reproduced in 16th- and 17th-century Dutch navigational texts, he insists that such seascapes were composite images, disclosing a plurality of perspectives. (Siegert, 2014: 16–17) Practices of seafaring inform the unsteady relationship between subject and seascape.

The modern subject is, in an emphatic way, the subject of landscape, (Ritter, 1963) a perspectival observer, but also inextricably part of the scene; this scene is often even one of aloofness, of superiority, rule, conquest, and colonization. (Mitchell, 1994) Yet it is precisely the seascape

that provides a corrective inherent in the multifarious iconography in question. As Hans Blumenberg (1979) has argued, if for a textual topos, that of "shipwreck with spectator" as evoked in Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, the seascape contains a tentative history of moral norms. The topos evokes the philosopher as a figure able to watch a ship go under, from the safety of the shore, with calm and even joyous feelings about his (always his, in this literary tradition) security from disorder and suffering. The world cannot be helped. So it is virtuous and prudent not to partake in its suffering, neither as perpetrator nor as victim. In the 18th century, the topos would appear to have met with increasing levels of rejection, then fallen out of use. The scene of shipwreck, which represented the chaos and misery of the world at large, became charged with an imperative of engagement to relieve the suffering, which replaced the older ethos of philosophical detachment. The subject, a mere individual basically equal to all others, cannot extricate itself from the situation of suffering since it is always already part of it. The spectator's standpoint on shore disappears from the metaphorical ambit of the philosophical seascape, as Blumenberg suggests in conclusion. "Seeing individuals clearly," as Michael Titlestad puts it, "impels us to action. If, having seen, we stand back, then we have actively chosen to do so, and no political platitude can exonerate us. Seeing is both a moral imperative and a burden." (Titlestad, 2021: 192) Both understandings of the situation of shipwreck with spectator, through ethical imperatives of detachment as well as engagement, agree that moral meanings are written into the very fabric of reality. For the disorder of the world as represented by the sea space as such gives rise to norms of comportment and action. Yet there is a direct, contradictory interpretation of what these norms are. So there is a long tradition that links the seascape with moral imperatives, a moral subject that cannot be stably separated from its surroundings, and, through the position of the subject's spectatorship, aesthetics.

The volume is structured into three parts, the first two of which focus on the visual and textual histories of the moral seascape, while the third engages with the contemporary refugee crisis. The rationale behind this organizing principle—two sections which are organized around modes of representation and the third which is framed by its topic—is to draw attention to the extent to which the longer history of visual and literary tropes both structure and inform contemporary responses to disaster at sea. Although there are, inevitably, considerable overlaps, this approach foregrounds the way in which certain discursive or representational regimes are typified by modes of articulating the seascape's moral meanings: the visual's explicit invocation of spectatorship, for instance; or the literary text's depiction or, rather, construction of the relationship between subject and world. The contributions in the third section, overwhelmingly concerned with the problematic of representing suffering

at sea, also draw upon the visual and the textual, and their intersections, drawing attention to this intertwinement and even their continuations in other aesthetic registers, such as in the acoustic. The study of iconographies always relies on both visual and written documents, on the overall language and the particular texts accruing around, and influencing and being influenced by, image types, telling us what we are seeing, in a very diverse number of ways. Most of the chapters move between images and texts (or other media), even when they appear to focus primarily on one of them.

As Bushnell's sermon indicates, there is a cultural and intellectual history of moralities to which the seascape grants access and which is the reason for the privileging of "moral" and "ethics" in the title of this volume. This history is one of peculiar moral meanings forming a critical mass in the ambit of the seascape that distances its modern instantiations from the premodern. There is no clear moment of rupture, but a gradual transition, which we propose to map out. A two-pronged argument emerges from this observation: on the history of moralities in the modern period; and on the history of iconographies and textual topologies as aligning with moral language and practice in novel ways. The scene of shipwreck and rescue provides the keys that unlock both these lines of arguments. As Margarette Lincoln notes with regard to accounts of shipwreck from the 18th and early 19th centuries, such narratives are of interest precisely because "extreme situations crystallise in dramatic form social and moral tensions." (Lincoln, 1997: 157)

From a historical point of view, these are the main ideas behind the notion of the "moral seascape" around which we have built the volume: the moral meanings and cultural practices that are bound up with certain image types as well as literary and philosophical tropes and textual genres connected with the sea and with nautical accidents and calamities; and the modern transformation of these meanings that increasingly come to shape the perception and representation of maritime space.

Shipwreck, Humanitarianism, and Power on the Beach

From the 18th century onward, the figure of the distant suffering stranger increasingly becomes the target of social support movements. (Boltanski, 1993; Barnett, 2011; Fassin, 2012) Previously, charity had overwhelmingly been about proximate and familiar suffering, and in terms of practice, relief had been organized around religious institutions above all. Humanitarianism represents a relative breaking away of moral from religious language, as denominational and religious affiliations cease to matter in the motivation and extension of aid. Historically, humanitarianism as a moral culture is best understood as emerging from

the movement for the abolition of slavery, a movement that initially was driven by specific religious dissenting milieus, but only grew powerful and, ultimately, successful when it crossed denominational boundaries some decades later. Abolitionism, although often treated as a primarily British concern, was a broader phenomenon. It was closely attended to by a plural and uneven European public and also existed in Catholic imperial powers. And emphatically, abolitionism was not only driven by top-down European philanthropists, but crucially also by enslaved people in the Americas, both by the dynamics of incessant resistance and an endless string of uprisings, and by Black activism in Europe itself, which became a causally, but not symbolically, integral part of abolitionist culture. (Scanlan, 2020) Abolitionism also gave rise to a type of seascape in its own right, as connected to the slave ship and its atrocities, which disrupted earlier visual and textual conventions and added many new layers of moral meaning, in particular also meanings that moralize the boundless flow of monetary values in the new world of financial and industrial capitalism and connect it with the sea, as a dominant trope. (Baucom, 2005; Rediker, 2007; Robinson, 2014; Sharpe, 2016)

Humanitarian movements, however, did not remain limited to countering the suffering of slavery. Other movements soon started to spring up, addressing other causes as well, such as the promotion of the resuscitation of the drowned (a movement related to, but which prefigures, those promoting maritime lifesaving), the prevention of cruelty to animals, the treatment of prisoners, or indeed the rescue of the shipwrecked, which was related to, but institutionally and practically different from, first aid for the drowning. Subsequent movements militated against the violence done to indigenous peoples, against alcoholism, and, most famously, to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded of war, for whose relief the Red Cross was founded in Switzerland, in 1863, which is often regarded, quite arbitrarily, as the point of origin of humanitarianism. In the history of humanitarianism, the particular cause, a recognizable, typified pattern of suffering and response that nonetheless is marked by its concretion and its individuality as an event, has been crucial for defining the single issues that movements against distant suffering address. (Krause, 2014) There is no such thing as a general humanitarianism. Single issues are foundational, and the distribution of movements that has emerged is that of an archipelago rather than of a coherent landmass. The moral culture of humanitarianism—engagement across distances previously deemed unbridgeable (such as that between shipwreck and shore) instead of the Lucretian ethos of detachment—has become a dominant force of the moral culture of the modern world. It is something contemporary societies rely on for addressing a great number of crises, disasters, and forms of suffering, from matters of individual concern, such as ambulance services, to planetary crises, as

most prominently exemplified by global warming. This response template is no longer limited to Europe, or "the West," if it ever was.

In the genealogy of the humanitarian template, the history of abolitionism always remains present in more or less discernible ways. For the humanitarian movements coeval with abolitionism, the genealogical connections tend to be particularly salient. The rise of humanitarian meanings in the literary and visual tropes of the seascape around 1800 was undoubtedly a part of the world slavery had made, and it bears the more or less hidden markings of resistance to this system of deportation, suppression, exploitation, and brutalization, too. The radical political meanings emerging from resistance in the maritime underclass and inseparable from mariners' responses to chattel slavery (Linebaugh and Rediker, 2000) appear to have lost much of their force under the impact of the developing culture of humanitarianism. Humanitarian meanings accrue in prominent places within the iconography of the shipwreck genre in European painting of this period. Both J.M.W. Turner and Théodore Géricault, who were important for shifting the seascape out of its previous conventions, included direct comments on slavery as one among other humanitarian concerns connected with maritime space in a privileged way. (see Turner, *Slave ship*, plate 1) Géricault also alludes to the political meaning of abolition as of a piece with revolutionary and republican politics. In his *Raft of the Medusa* (1818–1819), it is, famously, a Black sailor who occupies the pinnacle of the painting and is endowed with the only potentially hopeful sign in an image that otherwise symbolizes the misery of the post-revolutionary, post-Napoleonic self-destructive drift of French society: the red cloth the sailor waves at the sail that has just come into view on the horizon.

The moral ill the humanitarian rescue of the shipwrecked sought to cure, however, was not primarily one connected with slavery. Rather, it had to do with perceived abusive practices of coastal populations, their eagerness to appropriate the salvaged cargoes and materials of wrecks (Rule, 1975; Cabantous, 1993; Pearce, 2010; Cressy, 2022), over which they had been in a longstanding conflict with territorial rulers, landlords, and sovereigns all over Europe. Supposedly, it was on account of their greed, topically labeled as "barbaric," that the coastal poor refused to help the shipwrecked. The belief that shipwreck and stranding was God's judgment on a sinful crew—a belief more often than not imputed on the coastal populations and propagated by numerous local clergymen—may have contributed to treating shipwrecked crews and passengers as unprotected outlaws. Needless to say, matters on the beach were far more complex. Again and again, sovereigns decreed in legal texts, such as the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* (1532) in the Holy Roman Empire or the French *Ordonnance de la Marine* (1681), that all wreckage was to be considered the property of the sovereign. Governments

themselves were frequently in conflict, not only with wreckers and salvagers, but also with shipowners, over property rights and damages. In an earlier period, even the lives of the shipwrecked had been alleged to be the property of those on whose shores they ended up, according to the diffuse set of customary rights labelled as *jus naufragii*, in a great number of legal texts since the Middle Ages that continued to be written with a view to banning these alleged customs. (Wolf, 2020: 291–308)

Around 1800 the enslavement of the shipwrecked had long ceased to be topical. Yet the very palpable and longstanding habit of wrecking was used as a common denigratory theme in the humanitarian campaigns for establishing coastal lifesaving. This is also true for the not so palpable practice of the setting of "false lights" to disorient ships at night, perhaps a matter of legend rather than of practice, yet exceedingly present in legal codes and still reflected in quite a few Gothic novels of the 19th and 20th centuries. The coastal population was branded as needing moral reform, but also as capable of it, through discipline and the surveillance of social elites and state institutions. Economic interests—of shipowners and insurance companies and the state—utilized morality to establish a novel power of control in a previously often neglected and highly impoverished part of the territory. According to the *Ordonnance de la Marine*, coastal dwellers were subjected to official oversight. Legal regulations were imposed on both rescue (rudimentarily) and salvage (in much greater detail). The forceful legal language also admits to its own lack of power when the *Ordonnance* adds, by way of commentary, that recognizing the duty to help the shipwrecked requires only "natural sentiment" even if one lacks "Christian charity," for "there is nothing sadder than seeing people in the danger of shipwreck." (1681, Book IV, Title IX, Art. II) So there is a sense that the powers of the law are distinct from those of morality. Soon-to-be-prevalent enlightenment-era notions of improvement, embodied strikingly by new orientation and safety systems increasingly installed on European, and in some cases colonial, coasts, were firmly tied to the moral projects of a self-empowering bourgeoisie. (on the latter context, see e.g. Searle, 1998; Janse, 2007) Humanitarianism emerged along with the overall discourse on liberty through unimpeded "commerce" that primarily saw maritime space as a producer of individual wealth subject only to the lightest conceivable rule of law. (see e.g. Pocock, 1985) Echoes of these notions can still be discerned in Bushnell's evocation of maritime commerce. But the relation to power is always downplayed. When Jules Michelet celebrates the widespread building of lighthouses, for instance, he holds that "modern civilization erects peaceful towers of most benevolent and beneficent hospitality." (Michelet, 1861: 100) Yet such a discourse occludes the linkage of social disciplining, technological regimentation, militarization, and surveillance in which

these technologies were implicated. (Tagliacozzo, 2022: 313–343) The analysis of relations between the modernization of moral thought and practice and the modernization of power in state and society (Foucault, 1976; 1997), especially as connected with lifesaving, a practice embodying a novel kind of agency, as a variant of "bio-power" (Lehmann, 2024), are guiding concerns for several contributions to the volume. (see the chapters by Chiara Giubilaro and Burkhardt Wolf)

Visual, Textual, and Media Histories of Shipwreck

The genre of shipwreck is the index fossil of the moral seascape. It emerged as an art market staple in Dutch painting in the 17th century, building on the older Italian model of *tempesta*. The seascape, at the time, can be seen as a family of genres that partly break away from older symbolic meanings and instead, as in the "tonal painting" of Jan Porcellis, was to depict the atmospheric characteristics of the sea and thus prompt a process of perception in the viewer that was affective rather than exegetic. This does not mean that symbolic meanings disappeared. The scene of shipwreck, especially, became successful and marketable as a recognizable image type because it also carried a viable symbolic reading. Its meanings, informed by biblical references such as the shipwreck of St. Paul in *Acts*, were generally understood: the vanity of human pursuits, the imperative to mind the end of things, the prophesied divine unmaking of the vessel of this world. As Goedde notes, contemporary understandings of Dutch shipwreck paintings foregrounded moral lessons. (Goedde, 1989: 127–130) In the common theological reading of the story of St. Paul, the church was the ship from which the faithful would be saved, even though it, too, was to be destroyed. It was this symbolic reading that stood in the foreground.

In 1753 the French court painter Claude Joseph Vernet was commissioned by Louis XV to produce entire series of French harbor and coastal views. In more than fifty images, Vernet varied the theme of a ship thrown on a rocky coast, whose crew are trying to save themselves. Rescue becomes an increasingly dominant pictorial concern. In his review of the Salon de 1767, Denis Diderot placed these scenes in a broader intellectual-historical horizon: he related them to Edmund Burke's doctrine of the sublime, in order to uncover in them a "je ne sais quoi de terrible," a mixed sentiment of both horror and delight. Diderot makes explicit a far-reaching shift in aesthetics, where all weight is shifted onto the spectatorial subject while the traditional symbolism is jettisoned. The aesthetic category of the sublime, the overwhelming quality of greatness attributed to the experience of nature, rose to prominence in the 18th century. Whether in its philosophical or its more quotidian usage,

the seascape featured prominently in this discourse. Notwithstanding the wider philosophical resonances afforded by Kant's notion of the "moral sublime," the shaping of the observer's moral faculties through exposure to sublime experiences, the basic idea was widespread: the sublime provides a model of the constitution of the subject in relation to the natural landscape, emphasizing the constitution of the viewing subject's affective condition in response to its encounter with the sublime spectacle. It is also worth keeping in mind Spivak's (1999: 10–30) argument on Kant's discussion of the sublime, in the *Critique of Judgment*, as requiring a certain rational mastery that stems from the development of moral ideas. To "raw man" the sublime is merely terrifying; but inserting the presumptive instance of "raw man" also means to include, and at the same time suppress, a figure of what Spivak calls the "native informant," a process that carries a wide range of claims to power and supremacy. These claims do not even disappear when subverted from within; but they also do not exhaust the ethical potential of aesthetic thought. The philosopher does not just appear as detached spectator, but also as participant of situations, as implicated in the human "rawness" of the state of emergency. (see Alexandra Heimes's chapter) And as Klaus Heinrich notes with regard to Géricault's *Raft of the Medusa*, the sublime allows the viewer to experience a certain fascination with misfortune, a "pleasurable appropriation of victimhood." (Heinrich, 1995: 7) The subject was involved with the sublime situation in rather more complicated ways than the dominant philosophical accounts assumed.

Géricault's Raft also illustrates another, cognate shift in meaning. Before 1800, there are relatively few shipwreck scenes where an identification of specific accidents was offered, usually for commemorative purposes. (Goedde, 1989; see also Landow, 1982, and Baader and Wolf, 2010) Subsequently, as the image type acquires an emphatic historical significance, the accidents are often rendered identifiable. There is a tight alignment of humanitarian with historical meanings. Disasters were emphatically historical on account of their moral meanings, of the appeal they expressed to end the ethos of detachment and comply with imperatives of engagement. In the 19th century, shipwreck in images always appears to pose a question of human rescue, whilst the divine agency of rescue is notably absent; and where the images do not suggest any prospect of rescue, the absence of divine agency always appears to be the point. In line with the humanitarian moral culture of the period, the religious motifs that had pervaded the premodern seascape receded. Instead, alongside the newly large-scale historicized disasters, images of humanitarian morality emerged: novel technologies of rescue, and novel self-sacrificial heroisms were put on display. The humanitarian template becomes a framework for giving meaning to narratives and images of shipwreck from the early 19th century onward. Indeed, George Manby,

the 1807 inventor of a lifesaving mortar designed to fire a line to a ship in distress near the shore, insisted upon the facility of the image in promoting his humanitarian mission:

> To illustrate the horrors of the storm, and for exhibiting the truly painful position of a ship thus circumstanced, I have caused a picture to be painted of a shipwreck in a hopeless situation, where no assistance could possibly be afforded, and thus express the touching epithet of Miranda, in Shakespeare's Play of the Tempest, 'Poor souls, they perish!' (Manby, 1851: 12)

The practical use of such a scene of pity for the promotion of Manby's invention shows that the sensory and aesthetic process of seeing was to be translated again and again into a process of moral action; the subject should be both aesthetic and moral.

To be sure, the narrative subject of seafaring had always been a figure of transgression, as the sea was, in any discernible tradition of writing in Europe and in the Mediterranean cultures, beset with a "moral geography." (Schama, 1987: 15–50) The Odyssey, the primary mythological text of the fundamental marine transgression that consists in the abandonment of life on firm soil for survival on water, reverberates through the literary canon. (Wolf, 2020) In Dante's *Commedia*, where Odysseus is reported to have crossed the threshold into the Atlantic Ocean and to have been wrecked on the Mount of Purgatory, (*Inferno*, Canto 26) the transgression is reinterpreted as the relinquishing of the bounded space of the *Mare Nostrum*, representative of legal, political, and cosmic order. The earliest impulses of the imperial outreach of European power are adumbrated here, as they recast the ancient epic tradition in a political-theological light.

The modern era of shipwreck narratives begins with the actual global maritime departure, as undergone by Luís de Camões and his *Os Lusíadas* (1572). In the Portuguese development of the sea route to Asia, economic motives suppressed the sailors' professional ethos of proper shipbuilding and careful navigation. On account of bad planning and hasty realization, the so-called India Run incurred heavy losses. Over the course of the 17th century a new narrative genre of "relaçãos" emerged that mixed reminiscence and documentation, travel report and poetic creation, and focused on the countless hardships and shipwrecks of the mostly overladen and poorly captained merchant vessels. The genre was termed *literatura de cordel*, literally "string literature," because the pamphlet-like texts involved were sold on Lisbon's streets on strings. They comprised the first form of global news reporting focused on nautical catastrophes. In 1735, the reports were collected and published in a two-volume selection under the title *História trágico-marítima*.

The last premodern caesura in the development of literary shipwreck can be traced back to William Falconer, who had himself experienced a number of shipwrecks as a sailor and published three versions of a poem entitled "The Shipwreck" beginning in 1762. In an idyllic style offering something like a nautical equivalent to Virgil's agriculturally centered *Georgics*, Falconer's three cantos deal with the heroic English merchant fleet, and with the minutiae of nautical science. The complementary nature of poetic and empirical knowledge in this work becomes clear in the independent annotation and illustration of nautical matters. The bent of the narrative tradition, then, is toward the moral seascape as pervaded by an empiricist attention to the "realities" of navigation, which aligned with other fields of early modern knowledge production. This created perceived spaces of agency that also informed humanitarian morality, with its emphasis on the sudden expansion of agency across previously unbridgeable distances. (Laqueur, 1989)

Since the mobilization of mass media—most consequentially in the case of the *Titanic,* where wireless telegraphy made possible a press coverage almost in real time (see Benno Wagner's chapter in this volume)—and even more so since the introduction of radio, then TV and the internet, shipwrecks have become mass or, more recently, social media events. The novel technologies of transmission, to cite Niklas Luhmann, "trivialize the place from which we see things." (Luhmann, 2012: 88) More precisely, the changing media environments impose ever newer forms of trivialization on the humanitarian appeal that emanates from such scenes of distress at sea. The technical nature of the images circulated must always be taken into account. Strictly speaking, technical images of the sea are not only produced in the mass media, but already on the coasts and on ships, for purposes of technical surveillance, planning, and navigation. Depending on the technical complexity (ranging from a simple view from a ship's bridge to satellite images) and the type of ship (from simple rubber dinghy to a fully automated container ship), the sea appears in the form of very different seascapes. These can be abstract and serve a function of mere surveillance, or vivid and articulate a certain appeal for help. (Sekula, 2018; Heller and Pezzani, 2017)

In the case of images circulating in a political public, there is also the question of their reliability, coherence, or "truth." In what Hito Steyerl calls "poor images," images that are poorly resolved because they have gone through several compression and transmission processes, it becomes clear that today it is precisely the supposedly documentary pictorial testimonies that give rise to a certain "wavering between belief and mistrust"—a doubt that paradoxically makes them "not weaker, but stronger." (Steyerl, 2008: 11) It is precisely such images that have an intense effect on the "economy of affect;" they take hold of the emotions of their viewers because, in their visible mediatedness, they convey

the impression of authenticity. (Ibid.: 13) However, not only on the level of image effect and image reception, but also on the level of the initial production and ultimate use of images, technical media have placed new conditions on the question of seascapes and their morality. In the analysis of these seascapes it is decisive who produced what images, under what conditions and with what means—whether, for example, a refugee in distress at sea with a cellphone, a coast guard employee with an onboard camera, or even a politically active photographer who was able to draw on certain funding structures for artistic work. (see Van Gelder, 2021, and in this volume, and the chapters by Chiara Giubilaro and Burkhardt Wolf) Nor should we forget that for refugees in particular, social media has become an indispensable channel of communication, through which images of successful crossings or even of shipwreck have become vital types of documentation for family and friends. If one wishes, one can speak, with regard to refugees, of "post-political" and in their own way moral communities that are constituted through technical images and their distribution—and through the appeal to rescue, help, and solidarity articulated in such images.

Morality in the Contemporary Seascape

In the contemporary situation, the scene of shipwreck signifies an expansion of the use of humanitarian morality as a resource of meaning. The humanitarian cause of saving lives from shipwreck takes on novel forms. Originally, in the early 19th century, the humanitarian imperative to attempt the rescue of the shipwrecked, no matter who they were and no matter the peril to the lives of the rescuers, recast shipwreck as a typified situation of emergency responded to by standardized procedures of succor. Aid was also limited to this type alone. The situation of saving lives from shipwreck became, as it were, purified, not including either the run-up to the accident nor the often-complicated aftermath. Humanitarian, philanthropic movements for saving lives from shipwreck never ventured into, say, improving the poor and dangerous working conditions of sailors. The stability of the situation type of shipwreck was furthered by the tendency to associate it with the images of shipwreck that proliferated in the visual culture of the period. The humanitarian response pattern moreover carried a promise of the future reduction of personal risk to the rescuers by technological means, which further helped to rigidify the situation type as a security protocol. (Trüper, 2015)

The overall practices of seafaring have meanwhile been subject to constant and tremendous technological change. (see Stafford, 2023 on the beginnings of this development; for a synthetic view of

maritime technicization and capitalism, see Campling and Colás, 2021) In professional shipping, crews have become ever smaller and the ships ever larger and more secure. Airborne rescue operated by state carriers instead of humanitarian philanthropies has become one of the most prominent maritime lifesaving procedures. The main application of lifeboats has shifted to leisure sailing accidents that ultimately always have to do with the transgression of going to sea unnecessarily. At the same time, unnecessary seafaring also increasingly symbolizes the empowerment of the individual as an autonomous moral agent and thus carries normative meanings of its own, dovetailing with the proprietor individualism of contemporary capitalism. (see Jörn Münkner's chapter) And yet the institutional stability of humanitarian shipwreck relief organizations has been such that they have absorbed these changes to the prevalent patterns of emergencies at sea.

Over the last two decades or so, however, the humanitarian situation type of emergency at sea has shown unprecedented signs of breaking apart. The "new" shipwreck of boat people is far more similar to 19th-century scenes of shipwreck than, say, the rubber boat and yachting or container ship and oil tanker accidents that have otherwise become the dominant types of maritime disaster since the 1960s and 1970s. Technological and economic change have, on the whole, produced seascapes of increasingly overwhelming alienation, in which individual human misfortune has even often been regarded as secondary to ecological disaster. Perhaps it is precisely because of the gradual transformation of the situation type of shipwreck in line with these economic and technological changes that traditional lifeboat humanitarianism now fails to accommodate types of accident seen as novel, although they actually harken back to the past. Established lifeboat associations now remain at the margins of this old-new type of emergency at sea, or else they find themselves the target of unprecedented political animosity and politicization, as the scene of shipwreck is increasingly also shaped by the governmental violence of pushbacks and detentions. In the Mediterranean, in particular, numerous novel humanitarian organizations have emerged that dedicate themselves exclusively to the rescue of migrants and refugees and thus create a novel single issue that greatly preoccupies political debate, even though the bulk of the rescue work is done by state coast guards. From the humanitarian point of view, there are now distinct scenes of shipwreck. Given that the 19th-century concern for shipwreck was in no small part driven by the increase in passenger traffic, which was a direct outcome of settler colonialism and European emigration, especially to the Americas, it is perhaps an almost logical kind of countersense that contemporary shipwreck is not recognized as a materially and morally analogous situation type of suffering, and seen and treated as entirely distinct, when immigration to

(instead of emigration from) Europe becomes its driving force. Even the earlier racialization of the shipwreck scene, in the ambit of early humanitarianism and the iconography of abolitionism, returns and is turned around. Africans figure as helpless targets of rescue deprived of agency, and at the same time as a menacing anonymous force endowed with uncontrollable agency (West Asians, who also use Mediterranean transfer routes in large numbers, do not usually represent the paradigm).

The overall framework of humanitarian morality, however, along with its concomitant entanglements with statal and societal power, spreads from the scene of human emergency and lifesaving more widely across different variants of the seascape (as Henning Trüper's chapter argues). To be sure, the sea, as an environment that is unlivable for human beings without technological support, is always on the brink of generating human emergencies. But the tropes of suffering, aid, protection, and rescue begin to spread throughout most representations of seascapes, both textual and visual, as early as the 19th century. (see Jonathan Stafford's and Rafael Jakob's chapters) As the sea itself is increasingly turning into a site of ecological emergency in need of protection and urgent, even desperate rescue efforts, the humanitarian template comes to inform even those representations of the maritime that would previously have seemed entirely disconnected from moral meanings: the image of the surf as a cipher of the natural sublime, say, or the image of marine wildlife, or the holiday photograph. The increasing instability of the idea of the nature–culture divide occasions a novel diffusion of moral meanings across maritime space that realizes earlier imaginations. (see Szilvia Gellai's and Johannes von Müller's chapters) Yet at the same time, one can read this development, potentially, as an overstretching of the humanitarian template, as a symptom of crisis and imminent breakdown in which other moral as well as more recognizable political languages gain novel space, for better or worse. Ethical discussions of detachment find new traction, (see Nora Weinelt's chapter) as the figure of the subject increasingly appears as the only possible—and also increasingly precarious—site of application for moral imperatives that fail to take hold in political language or legal practice.

Moralities, Ethics, Aesthetics

What is the work that the seascape is doing for this tangle of histories of morality? Would it not be possible to establish a similar line of argument about the connection of morality and the maritime without recourse to visual and linguistic representations? Perhaps these questions can be addressed through the peculiarities of the seascape as a genre and as a scene. Visual documents of the past, especially, provide access to the

different modes of seeing certain situations; and in turn, this is necessary for establishing situations as situations in the first place. The very term "situation" refers to a distribution in space, a territorialization of sorts. This mode of setting up symbolic spaces is connected in crucial ways with the visual culture of the modern era, the subject-in-landscape principle. The foundational inclusiveness that allows for the representation of a moral situation with a subject not distinct from the scene it observes remains in place. Both landscape and seascape operate with internal distributions of the sublime as well as the idyllic. It is the seascape, and to a lesser extent, the mountainscape, which, on account of their sublimity, provide a visual template for the notion of an obstruction, which gives a concrete symbolic expression to the distance-crossing required of humanitarian morality. Inasmuch as humanitarianism relies on such symbolic expressions, its history needs to account for visual history—and the available research literature on humanitarianism appears to underline this point. (Chouliaraki, 2006)

The scope of this argument is potentially vast, for it also pertains to the problem of a cultural history of morality at large. In the 18th century, one can observe, for instance, a relative abandonment of the notion of virtue as the central organizing feature of morality, which goes along, first, with a frenzy, then with a dilution and diminution of virtue discourse. Concomitantly, there is a shift, almost legalistic in nature, to individual courses of action as the primary object of moral judgment. (foundational Pocock, 1975; MacIntyre, 1981; Collini, 1991) Modern moral philosophies are commonly split over the question of unconditional duty versus the maximization of collective utility, with Kant and Bentham often treated as foundational figures. Both pivot ethics away from the question of the lived lives of complex moral subjects whose courses of action are thought to cohere, as the ancients had stipulated. The universality and atemporality of moral judgment is attained by a rigid standard of the equality, and the purely formal character, of moral subjects. Autonomy as the formal condition of such subjects emerges out of this constellation. (Schneewind, 1998) This development has, as its cultural historical correlate, the history of humanitarianism with its rigid focus on the typified situation of suffering, its commitment to universalism as the ideal of overcoming all distances and detachments between human beings; and even the sacrificial understanding of the selfless moral subject's own life, as particularly evident in shipwreck humanitarianism. And moral culture is more radical than moral philosophy. Kant, for instance, still believes that saving lives from shipwreck is a feat of dubious moral merit since, while in some sense dutiful, it also implies a certain neglect of "duty toward oneself." (1788: 126) In other words, self-preservation as the precondition of moral action must not be neglected, especially if such neglect is the consequence

of an unthinking pursuit of moral action for the sake of, say, others' approval. Repeatedly returning to the ancient dilemma of two shipwrecked with only one plank between them that cannot carry both—known as the "plank of Carneades"—Kant also argues, however, that, as a duty, self-preservation is only "conditional," since it must submit to the "unconditional duty" of not hurting others unless directly threatened by them. (1793: 299; 1797: 60) He does not formulate any unconditional duty of lifesaving.

Humanitarian morality aligns with the relative marginalization and emptying out of the subject of the moral course of action in the moral theories of the period. It has an impersonal element that one can partly consider as the expression of a professional ethos: a set of moral and practical norms that established itself among seafarers in the 19th century at the latest. "In the ideology of professionalism," Margaret Cohen writes, "individuals are held accountable for their excellent performance, and the surrounding personal context is comparatively unimportant." (Cohen, 2010: 9, 148) Yet there is an element to marine emergency that goes beyond the technological-disciplinary imaginary of control. The subject must not only act in acceptance of the possibility of their own death, a condition of discipline akin to norms of military conduct. In the so-called "Birkenhead drill," the imperative to rescue women and children first, military discipline and lifesaving ethos combined as the drill emerged from the disaster of the eponymous military transport where the soldiers were ordered to and stood back from the lifeboats to allow the women and children to be saved. The rescuers must also accept that they can exercise control over the unfolding of the concrete situation only to a certain extent. The overall rescue situation is, in many cases, beyond human agency; there is an insurmountable element of luck involved, which is understood to promote or counteract compliance with the imperative that typifies the situation as a moral one. In the unfolding of the situation, the subject can become, relatively speaking, a marginal participant. And this condition that supposedly "moral subjects" do not simply master and control complex and singular situations of emergency, but rather have to adapt their norms and values, all the way to self-preservation, to situational requirements and contingencies, converges with a current of modern ethics that tackles the scenarios and elements of older moral notions.

This tradition of ethics is characterized by at least three peculiar features: it starts from a historical critique or, rather, "genealogy" of morals; it focuses on the conditions and modalities of the moral subject's self-constitution; and, against this background, it exposes a certain aesthetic dimension of the ethical. "Moral sensibilities are nowadays at such cross-purposes," Friedrich Nietzsche wrote in 1881 about the disagreement between Kantian and Bentham's concepts of morality, "that

to one man a moral is proved by its utility, while to another its utility refutes it." (Nietzsche, 2006: 138) In Nietzsche's genealogical perspective, the "justification" of a morality is nothing more than a confession of belief, an unquestioning good faith in the prevailing morality or even just a mere fact within a ruling morality. *Neminem laede, immo omnes, quantum potes, juva* ("Harm no one, but rather help everyone as much as you can"), the very proposition that, according to Arthur Schopenhauer, all moral teachers try to justify by all means is, for Nietzsche, "inanely false and sentimental […] in a world whose essence is will to power." (Nietzsche, 2002: 76) Consequently, his thinking neither seeks to justify certain moralities nor to reconstruct these moralities as merely historical moral occurrences. Rather, he asks for the value of certain (moral) values, e.g. for the purpose and function of "suffering" and "compassion," or of universalist and humanitarian imperatives to "save," for the exercise of power. Seen in this light, certain images and narratives (concerning, for example, the plight of others at sea), along with their associated morals and aesthetics, are merely techniques of mobilization and impact, in the very same way as the Manby mortar, for example.

If the value of moral values is placed—according to Nietzsche's method—in overarching (social, political, economic, technical) contexts, then the "situation" of saving lives can no longer be abstracted from everything that led to it and what will follow from it in the short and long term. Then a non-moral or meta-moral critique of the rescue imperatives becomes possible. An ethics that is based on an unceasing critique of inherited morality is committed to a certain "ecology of practices": action under the premise that universal normative prescriptions always serve a certain agenda, but are insufficient for the specific situation; that one's power to act is conditioned in many ways and therefore unfolds as ethos precisely in resistance to this dependency; and that subjects design or constitute themselves through their particular actions in the first place. For Michel Foucault, for example, a "humanity" that is "central and centralized" within the system of modern rule and its norms cannot be more than "the effect and instrument of complex power relations, bodies and forces." (Foucault, 1995: 308) A "moral subject" in Foucault's sense is constituted against the imperative of compassion, and against the appeal for commitment, by a certain rehabilitation of the ancient ethos of philosophical distance or skepticism. It discovers and liberates its "ethical substance" less in "the strict observance of interdictions and obligations," but rather in the "ethical work" on oneself: in the "attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior." (Foucault, 1990: 26–27) If there is a general ethical imperative, then this lies alone in the rule of elevating one's doing in a certain situation against the moral codes to one's proper action, or, as Gilles Deleuze puts it, "not to be unworthy of what happens to us." (Deleuze, 1990: 149)

Under these auspices, the subtle distinction between "morality" and "ethics" may become apparent: if the first term primarily refers to given beliefs and corresponding actions or to established norms, then the second term refers to the reflection of "morals" in thought, but also in action, perception and representation, which determines the establishment of "moral subjectivity" in the first place. Seen in this light, "moral experience" does not only include "the reference to sanctions" or the law, as Jacques Lacan says, "but also a direction, a trajectory, in a word, a good that he appeals to, thereby engendering an ideal of conduct. All that, too, properly speaking constitutes the dimension of ethics." (Lacan, 1992: 3) It is precisely at this point that the significance of the aesthetic unfolds: to make an "extra-moral concept of the good" (Menke, 2013: 92) conceivable, representable, perceptible. Modernist literature and art in Nietzsche's slipstream brought the existential sphere of experience and becoming into play against normative ethics, despite the fact that "the actual ethical experience, even where it is social, is something very difficult to communicate," as Robert Musil puts it. "What there actually is today in terms of ethics lives very insufficiently in the arts or in essay writing." (Musil, 1978: 1093–1094) If "the good," in order to be not merely universally defined but also formulated in the singular, requires aesthetic modes of representation, if "ethics" is fulfilled in a self-constitution for which aesthetic experience marks the starting point, and if a general "aesthetics of existence" (Foucault, 1990: 11) is the goal, then both the good and ethics are inconceivable without the concept of the "aesthetic subject." The notion of a subjecthood in which sensory receptivity and artistic creativity are amalgamated is one of the momentous legacies of 18th-century intellectual history. This amalgam is forged by the idea of a supposedly dark, inscrutable field of sensory apperception and emotive and creative spontaneity within the mind that is not fully accessible to self-consciousness and rational analysis. It is this type of subject that is necessary also for treating morality and ethics as a matter of scenes, of landscapes or seascapes—be they idyllic, sublime, or a matter of media dynamics and technological dispositives that place the subject under a condition of permanent movement, doubt, and reflexivity.

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Part 1
Iconographies of the Moral Seascape

2. Disaster of the Sea: The Dual Motif of Drowning and Fishing

Johannes von Müller

In 2016, the Danish ARoS Aarhus Kunstmuseum presented *Textures of Life*, a monographic exhibition dedicated to works by the artist Joana Vasconcelos (*1971). (Vasconcelos, 2016) The large-scale installation *Valkyrie Rán* (2016) had been exclusively commissioned as a centerpiece, and when the exhibition ended, the work was acquired by the museum and shown again between March 2020 and January 2023. The installation occupied the foyer, suspended from the ceiling of the spacious hall (plate 2). Made from inflatables covered with different-colored fabrics, crocheted by hand, the soft body of *Valkyrie Rán* extended throughout the entire length of the winding space. Conical and tubular shapes formed a stretched torso to which long extremities were attached that reached far into the galleries. Here, the visitors of the museum were confronted with seemingly discrete parts all belonging to one and the same artwork. Too large to be perceived as a whole, it could only be grasped in the form of its fragments, an experience that in turn aimed at captivating the audience. Not only in terms of their form, the extremities of *Valkyrie Rán* have to be considered tentacles.

Not far from Aarhus, the frigate *Jylland*, built in 1860, serves as a museum ship in the historic harbor of Ebeltoft. Its carved and gilded figurehead is of a feminine form. Equipped with two attributes—a long staff which she carries in her left hand and a net—she has an allegorical quality. The net she holds in the crook of her right arm, worn around her back like a second garment and draped over her left shoulder. This is the goddess Rán, the same figure from Norse mythology whose name Vasconcelos has borrowed for the title of the colossal textile installation she made for the ARoS, less than 35 miles away from the anchorage of the *Jylland*. In Norse mythology—that is, in its post-pagan reception from medieval ecclesiastics to philologists and popular authors and artists of the 19th century—Rán prevails over the sea she embodies.

(Quinn, 2014: 73) As such, she captures shipwrecked sailors with her net and pulls them down into a realm of the dead at the bottom of the sea. It is this device that Rán seems to have lost between the museum ship and the Kunstmuseum. The explicit, iconographic attribute has been reduced to a mere gesture: the pull.

Valkyrie Rán plays with the phobic imagery of the shipwreck stemming from the 19th century, applying it within the context of the contemporary art museum. By so doing, the representation of a disaster *at* sea is transformed into one of a disaster *of* the sea, the implications of which go far beyond the metaphorical. This reversal is possible due to a duality of the motifs of the net and the tentacle and with it of drowning and fishing. It is this motif's history that will be explored in this chapter. First, the trail of the tentacle is to be followed, starting with *Valkyrie Rán* and placing it in the context of a practice of merging mythology and science as it can be found in comparable works of contemporary art. Then, in a second part, the tentacle will be confronted with the net and its particular visual history.

Tentacle

> The 19th century imagined Rán as a goddess of death dwelling in water, similar to Hel but limited to inflicting death by drowning. Her realm is the bottom of the sea […]; here, she holds the souls of the drowned, which she captures with her net out of the ships or when bathing or swimming and drags them down below, stealing them into the depths. [my translation] (Dahn, 1880: 222)[1]

This description stems from the popular retelling of Norse mythology by historian and novelist Felix Dahn (1834–1912). He envisions Rán as an entity that signifies an *otherworld* beneath the water surface in opposition to the world inhabited by humans. As Judy Quinn specifies, it is not merely the sea but the sea's treachery that is personified "in a more animated fashion and more often by the female figures of the sea-deity Rán […] and the daughters of Rán." (Quinn, 2012: 74) Its uncontrollable nature is why the body of water is envisioned in the bodily form of a woman. (Neimanis, 2012) The illustration by the artist Johannes Gehrts (1855–1921) that accompanies Dahn's rendering shows Rán sitting on a throne of skulls and coral (fig. 2.1). The net in her hands, an insignia of her rule, reaches beyond the waves where it entangles a castaway. Evidently doomed, he clings to the remnants of a ship but the broken mast he is holding onto is about to tilt over and will soon fail to provide any safety. The attribute known from the abovementioned figurehead functions as a means of mediation by which inhabitants of one sphere

Fig. 2.1.

Johannes Gehrts, *Ran*, in: Dahn, 1885.

are violently transferred into the other. The iconography employed by the figurehead and book illustration proves remarkably stable in popular visual culture as exemplified by a stamp the designer Anker Eli (*1959) composed for the Faroe Islands in 2004. It shows the goddess in a heroic pose, almost completely nude, wearing nothing but the net. In this highly sexualized vision of Rán, whose fishing net has been repurposed as a fishnet dress, the gendering of the sea is continued as well as amplified.

Vasconcelos abstained from adapting this enduring and, in its endurance, tendentiously charged pictorial element. Both the figurehead and the stamp approximate the knotted net to attire—the former as means of identification, the latter in the course of objectification. Formed of crocheted fabrics, *Valkyrie Rán* unquestionably possesses textile qualities too. Assuming that herein lies a continuation of attributing femininity to the natural force Rán embodies would rely on notions regarding a gender of textiles that have recently been challenged, (Bildhauer, 2020) just as an alleged masculinity of the practice of fishing evoked by the motif of the net does not hold from either a historical or sociological perspective. (Yodanis, 2000) In contrast to such incertitudes, the agency inherent in the name with which it has been adopted remains unchallenged. The notion of abduction that goes with it is indisputably present in the involving and absorbing faculty evoked by the creature's extremities. Groping through the museum, they have been described above as "tentacles." In its form, the installation owes less to a mythological deity than to aquatic fauna. The inflatables that define the main body, its tentacles, and bright colors all echo the anatomy of siphonophores such as the so-called Portuguese man o' war, or *Physalia physalis* according to the binomial nomenclature introduced by Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778). Buoyant by virtue of a gas-filled bladder that also serves as a sail, it floats and drifts with the wind. Beneath the surface, its venomous tentacles are dragged through the water and any creature that gets caught up in them is killed by the poison, before the contracting tentacle hauls the prey towards the digestive organ. The *Physalia* can be harmful to humans, which is why on some beaches signs warn swimmers of the danger below the water (plate 3).

A comparison of such a sign from the coast of Hawaii and Gehrts' illustration of Rán implies that the Norse goddess and the Portuguese man o' war inspire similar visual expressions of presumably related fears. The "Floating Terror," as the latter is also known, is shown against a bright yellow backdrop that attracts bathers' attention. A number of specimens drift below the waves and the legs of a human figure have become entangled with the tentacles of one of them. Where tentacles and legs overlap, clusters of lines articulate the painful reaction, as does the waving right arm of the stick figure above the waves, calling for help. The illustration shows Rán penetrating the water surface with the net; the pictogram represents the *Physalia* as violently mediating between the two spheres above and below the waves—even more so because it belongs to the pleuston, the "sailing" organisms whose natural habitat is the water's surface. The creature, demarking the border region by inhabitation, is its own attribute. The illustration draws on an ancient allegory of the danger of shipwreck; the pictogram—more mundane—warns of the danger of a recreational activity. Both shipwreck and

swimming accident, however, document in their pictorial hypostasis a specific relationship with a world represented as opposing the one humans inhabit and that is perceived as subsequently threatening.

Valkyrie Rán is not the first work by Vasconcelos to conjure a marine animal, nor is it her first *Valkyrie*. The Portuguese artist began the cycle in 2004. The first works were considerably smaller than the later ones, but just like them they were colorful textile installations, levitating and reaching out into the surrounding exhibition spaces. Those spaces kept growing with the artist's reputation and so did the art produced for them—one could almost speak of an evolution. In fact, this seems only fitting, since the titles follow Carl Linnaeus' abovementioned taxonomy of binomial nomenclature, by which they seem to identify the artworks as biological organisms. Belonging to one "genus," they all share the generic name *Valkyrie* followed by an epithet defining the particular "species," which consists of one singular specimen alone: the respective artwork. Applying this fundamental scientific principle, the entire "genus" of works was named *Valkyrie* after the feminine figures of Norse mythology. The programmatic merging of two distinct epistemic regimes, science and mythology, applies to the entire cycle of works. In 2015, *Valkyrie Octopus* was commissioned for the MGM Macau. It hovers above an enormous aquarium in the hotel's main hall. A wreath of golden fringes in the center of the installation repeats the circular shape of the glass cylinder and its blue shading reacts to the color of the water-filled tank. The aquarium is absorbed by the work, which in turn blends in with its environment. This highly adaptive response reinforces the distinct site-specificity that could already be observed in *Valkyrie Rán* in Aarhus. The epithet of the specimen in Macau, *Octopus*, may very well refer to this particular quality, given the octopus's renowned ability to camouflage. Furthermore, there is an obvious morphological relationship between octopuses with their eight limbs and the works of the *Valkyrie* cycle with their many appendages.

For *Valkyrie Rán*, the comparison with *Physalia physalis* seems nonetheless appropriate. As a pleuston, the organism inhabits the epipelagic zone, just like the net with which Rán penetrates the water's surface. This difference is not restricted to the habitats of octopuses and siphonophores but is reinforced by the contrast of the installation of the works in Aarhus and Macau. In the hotel, the *Valkyrie* hangs high above the aquarium, its limbs suspended in mid-air, dangling over the heads of the guests below but never reaching them. The *Octopus* remains an object of visual observation: yet another of the rare fish on display in the aquarium. In the Kunstmuseum, *Rán* denies that diaphanous border and crosses over into the sphere of the visitors. Its tentacles explore the space as they can be explored in turn, no longer by sight alone but physically drawing in the members of the audience. While these differences may

express the dissimilarity of the aesthetic experiences of visiting a hotel and visiting a museum, acts as categorically different as swimming accident and shipwreck, they do not have to be distinguished with the same rigor with which biologists distinguish between cephalopods and hydrozoa. In fact, disregarding taxonomic distinctions, notably by merging invertebrates, is not uncommon in contemporary art.

In 2010, Huang Yong Ping (1954–2019) devised for the Musée Océanographique in Monaco *Wu Zei*. (Ping, 2011) Almost twenty meters in width and more than seven meters in height, this gigantic octopus-like creature made of metal and silicone, foam and rice paper, took possession of the Great Hall of the museum built by its founder Albert I, Prince of Monaco (1848–1922). In the center of the hall, its head covered the medusa chandelier, an original design by the marine biologist and artist Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), from where its limbs spread out into the room. The presence of the work affected the space it occupied. *Wu Zei* is the Chinese denomination for both octopus and cuttlefish. As such, it challenges the modern European scientific classification and with it a general approach to nature documented in the surrounding museum. The two syllables refer to the "black" of the ink, the expulsion of which octopus and cuttlefish have in common as a protective strategy, and to the notion of them as "thieves" according to the belief that the animals float on the water playing dead and thus attract their prey in order to snatch them with their appendages. (Kleutghen, 2016: 407) In Monaco, *Wu Zei* appears as such a "thief," reaching out to grab the museum's founder, Albert I. The marble monument of the prince in the uniform of a naval officer by Denys Puech (1870–1949) is permanently exhibited in the Great Hall. For the duration of the exhibition of *Wu Zei*, it formed part of the installation. The life-size statue, in comparison with which the scale of the sea creature in its monstrous extent became demonstrably clear, allowed for the visitors to recognize themselves in the figure. Just as the title draws from legendary knowledge about the animals, the dimension of the sculpture evokes a legend that nonetheless is part of natural history—or rather the history of natural history.

The kraken is included in the *Histoire naturelle* by malacologist Pierre Denys de Montfort (1766–1820), published in four volumes between 1801 and 1804. The publication discusses the sea monster alongside more ordinary forms of marine animals. The "Poulpe commun" is made accessible to the readers through an illustration, showing the species in an objectifying top view, its eight arms being twisted so that the typical suckers are visible. The "Poulpe colossal," whose most characteristic feature is already revealed by the name's specific epithet, is shown in exactly the same mode of representation as its common cousin (fig. 2.2). In fact, the illustration may have been made after the very same specimen. No longer isolated on the otherwise blank page but integrated into

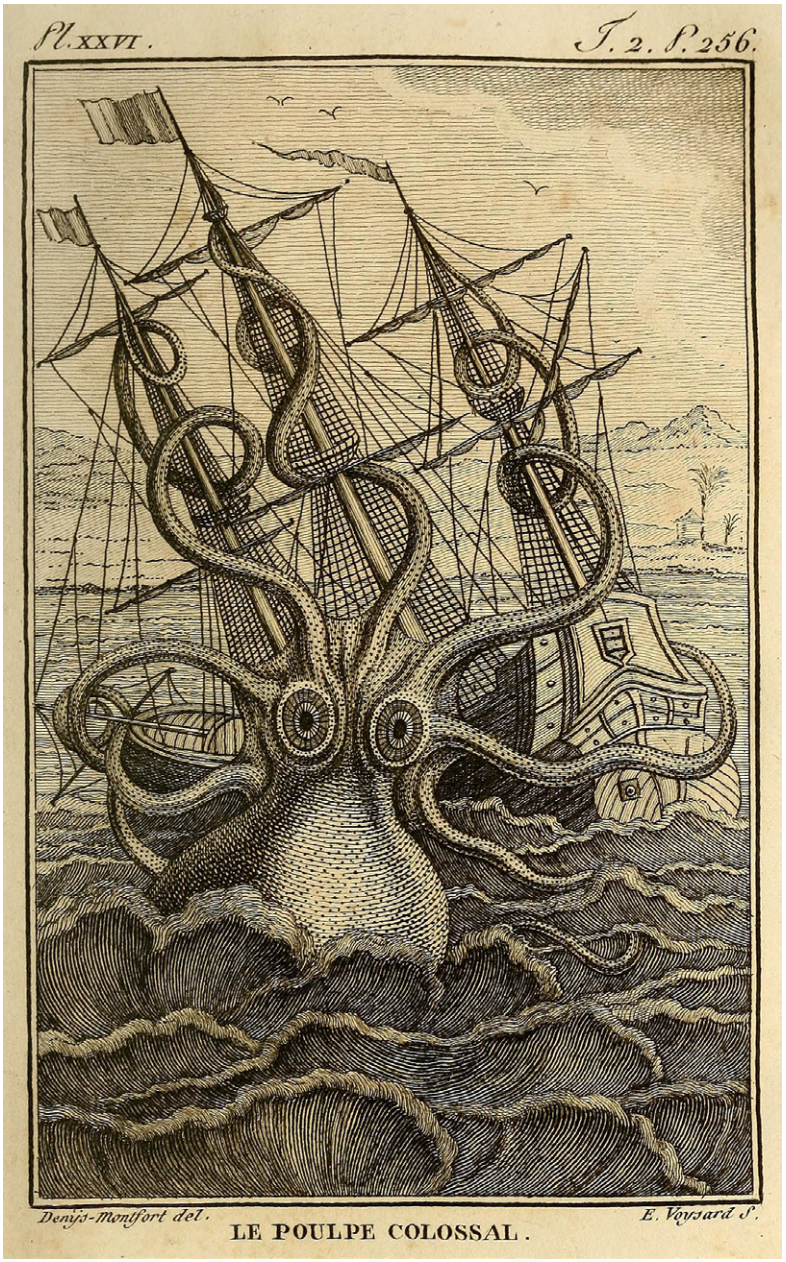

Fig. 2.2.
Pierre Denys de Montfort, *Poulpe Colossale*, 1801.

a scene, the top view is inverted into a side view. The octopus is shown rising from the water and attacking a frigate. Its arms are twisted as ever, only this time not to reveal their suckers but to grab the warship. On the page of the book, the size of the animal is the same as the one of the common octopus. It is the comparison with the ship that blows it up

to the literally colossal dimensions of a monster capable of devouring the vessel. Montfort's fantastic application of the supposedly scientific representation is a reminder that, historically, science and mythology cannot be dissolved—a fact that contemporary works such as *Valkyrie Rán* and *Wu Zei* are evidently conscious of.

Furthermore, the illustration gives an example of a visual discourse around appendages of sea creatures leaning towards the idea of the shipwreck.[2] This is revived in Huang Yong Ping's kraken holding the oceanographic museum in its grip. The museum's founder and mariner-prince, Albert I in his naval uniform, is a descendent of the sailor caught up in Rán's net. However, he is merely about to be entangled by *Wu Zei*, just as the visitors of the Kunstmuseum are confronted with the tentacles of *Valkyrie Rán.* Both works imply the possibility of a shipwreck, relying on an imagery in which the motif is fully spelled out, as done by the 19th-century illustrations of Johannes Gehrts and Pierre Denys de Montfort.

Octopus (2010) by Katharina Fritsch (*1956) goes beyond suggesting a mere possibility. (Criqui, 2010: 47–48) The monochrome polyester sculpture of an octopus is placed on a flat surface, its limbs evenly spread out like the ones of the specimen shown in the *Histoire naturelle*. Its dimensions match the actual size of a common octopus. Only two details deviate from such seemingly objective clarity: the bright orange of the animal and the black figure of a human enwrapped in one of its appendages, not so much dragging it down but holding it up as if to present it to the beholder. While octopuses are very capable of taking on the most garish of colors, it would not be justified to speak of camouflage. The signal color of the monochrome sculpture is related to the yellow of the warning sign on the Hawaiian beach. Likewise, the figure in the grip of the octopus is related to the one entangled in the tentacles of the Portuguese man o' war, both a pictogram signifying "human." Furthermore, the human figure allows for a comparison, very much like the ship does in the 19th-century illustration of the "Poulpe colossal," and to the same effect: not only does the beholder perceive a sculpture the size of an actual octopus to be in fact of colossal dimensions, but they also recognize themselves as being in the grip of that monstrous creature.

Valkyrie Rán, with its tentacles exploring the Kunstmuseum in Aarhus, is one of a number of contemporary works that explore the iconicity of marine life. They engage with the visual history of an unfamiliarity with the habitat of aquatic animals. Those creatures embody the fear of average and getting lost at sea, just as the shipwreck is in turn capable of expressing the fear of an environment inhabited by these animals with their foreign-looking bodies but uninhabitable for humans. Just as the multilimbed grip can be a metaphor for shipwreck, the shipwreck in turn can act as a metaphor for the otherness of sea life

and its incomprehensibility that translates into a threat. Or so it seems. Confronted with the motif of the net, the fear of the tentacle as it is represented in visual form may appear in yet another light.

Net

The binding of the human figure by a sinuous form that wraps itself around it in loops is an established, if not classical, motif in European art history. A striking example is given by the so-called *Eros with Dolphin Farnese*, a marble copy of a Hellenistic bronze dating from about the first two centuries CE, kept in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Naples (fig. 2.3). (Carmela and Pafumi, 2009) A dolphin, almost vertically erect, carries a winged youth on its back who is holding onto the animal's head with both arms, surrendering himself to the ecstatic vigor of the animal's downward movement. The humanoid figure is arched in such an exuberance that the feet come to rest above the head and the curve of the body opens up a space occupied by the spiraling tail of the dolphin. Lavishly elongated, this tail hardly seems to belong to a vertebrate or mammal. The perpendicular axis of the human body and the "fish" winding around it represent two different modes of existence.[3] And yet, those differences are only the prerequisite for the merging of the two opposing forms.

Their mutual embrace culminates in a twofold endpoint, the tail fin of the "fish" pointing to one side and the pair of overhanging feet of the youth to the other. By breaking out of the verticality of the curving of the inner of the two bodies, the position of the feet adopts the lateral rotation of the outer body and contributes to the effect of the overall sculpture. Just as the youth is entangled by the animal's sinuous tail, so is the eye of the beholder. Retracing its whirling movement, the gaze is led down into the water into which the dolphin sinks its beak-like snout. The element seems to emanate from the animal, flowing out of its open jaws, which makes the bondage of the Eros a cipher for the voluntary surrender to this element and its embodiment: riding the dolphin equals the act of swimming, or rather diving and immersing. An Etruscan vase, kept at the Museo nazionale etrusco di Villa Giulia, Rome, dating from 500 BCE, shows the myth of Dionysius transforming the Tyrrhenian Pirates who captured him into dolphins. (Ebertshäuser and Waltz, 1981: 139) About to dive into the waves of the sea, at this point only their upper bodies are transmorphed into animal form. Their still human feet are split, similar to the pose of Eros. It becomes clear that they emulate the dolphin's tail fin. Even more so, they reveal the ecstatic union of human and animal as a metamorphic act. (Kelley, 2014) The desirous love the Eros represents seems to entail seizure as much as devotion.

Fig. 2.3.
Eros with Dolphin Farnese, 2nd century CE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (photograph by the author).

After the Eros with Dolphin resurfaced—the sculpture was found around 1500 buried in Roman soil—it entered the Farnese collection. Its impact, however, extended beyond the collection. The motif reappears in the *Camera dei venti* (1527–28) in the Palazzo Te in Mantua, designed and frescoed by Giulio Romano (1499–1596). The circular frescos that decorate the upper zone of the room are dedicated to the zodiacs and the effects of planetary movements on human existence. The Ptolemaic constellation *Argo Navis* shows a group of mariners playing in the water (plate 4). Among them are two *putti*, one seated on a swan, the other lying stretched out on a dolphin. The scene could hardly be more different from the ecstasy exhibited by the sculpture in Naples. Its idleness

projects tranquility as well as order. The vastness of the sea is safely contained by the ships navigating along the horizon and its calmness does not demand relinquishing control to the elements nor does it call for an ecstatic union with them. The sea has become a space for playful exercise, for recreational activity. The semantic difference between ancient sculpture and early modern fresco is not so much encapsulated by the *putto* casually riding a dolphin as by one of the mariners in the back. This figure is a direct visual quotation of the Eros—only now without dolphin. The hands originally stretched out to hold onto the animal's head are reinterpreted as performing a handstand. The curved back and overhanging legs that carved out the space to receive the complementing otherness of the spiraling sea creature are left encircling a void. The feet, still split, no longer imitate the animal's tail fin; they seek to keep the isolated figure in balance. Falling over would mean tumbling into the nearby water but without the same self-negating consequences. The pose remains vertiginous but it has been moved onto the solid shore. Its thrill is that of a mere game, not nearly as existential as being dragged down below and stolen into the depths.

The fresco in Mantua and the sculpture in Naples seem to emerge from distinct notions of the relationship between humans and their environment, especially the sea. This raises the question of what has happened in the 1,500 years between them. Another (plate 5) of the round frescos in the *Camera dei venti* may hint at a possible answer. The constellation Pisces is represented by a fishing scene. A net expands between a number of boats. Clutched by the fishermen with bare hands and hooks, it is lifted up, and with it a catch of fish is pulled out of the water. A creature looks out of the net. Its long beak and the fringes around its eyes are reminiscent of the features of the antique sculpture. This could be the dolphin dragged back up from the depths it carried the Eros to. On the surface, its fate is decided: a flagged tail hangs out of the net, lifeless, just like another that has been seized by a fisherman and is about to be dragged onto the boat.[4] The trident in the hand of one of the fishermen, a fish spear ready to be cast, is the insignia of a new kind of rule over the sea.

The culture that produced the Eros with Dolphin relied on fishing just as much as its medieval and early modern descendants. A Mycenean hydria from 1200 BCE kept at the Archeological Museum in Naxos shows a scene of a group of human figures pulling a net filled with presumably tuna onto a beach. (Mylona, 2021: 31) However, it is the creation myth of the Abrahamic religions that sets forth the principle "let them have dominion over the fish of the sea," (Gen 1, 26) and it is Christianity that merges this principle with the idea of "fishers of men," (Matt 4, 19; Mark 1, 16) amplifying it as a missionary claim. The net as a symbol plays a particular role in this discourse and its visual manifestation.

A mosaic in Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, dating from between the 5th and 6th centuries, shows the abovementioned scene in *Matthew* and *Mark*. Jesus encounters Peter and Andrew fishing on the Sea of Galilee and makes them his apostles to increase the number of followers of his word like they catch fish in a net. In the form of the Greek acronym ΙΧΘΥΣ, the fish evokes Christ and the Eucharistic fish symbolizes his body, since fish figure in the feeding of the multitude. The two episodes of a miraculous catch of fish are especially popular subjects in Christian art. In both instances, Jesus tells the apostles to cast their nets out even though they have already labored the night through without catching anything. The first miracle follows a sermon by Jesus and culminates in the familiar phrase "from henceforth thou shalt catch men." (Lk 5, 10) The second miracle is particularly significant because it occurs after the Resurrection and marks one of the incidents in which Christ appears to the apostles. (Jn 21, 1–14) This scene can be found in illuminations like the one in the St. Peter Pericopes of St. Erentrud from the mid-12th century, (BSB Clm 15903, 44r) as well as in sculpture, for example in an early 13th-century capital in the church of Saint André in Bourg-Argental. A panel painting from the 14th century by Duccio di Buoninsegna († 1319) in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Siena, brings this iconography, at that point 1,000 years old, both in time and medium closer to Giulio Romano and his fresco in Mantua.

Despite the subject in the *Camera dei venti* not being a religious one, it cannot be comprehended without taking its prehistory into account, and with it its Christological connotations. That is also true for the later history of the iconography of the net. The *Historia Piscium* by Francis Willughby (1635–1672), published in 1668, is one of the first ichthyological studies of early modernity. It was funded by the Royal Society, of which Willughby was a member. The considerable costs of the heavily illustrated book did not leave any funds for a publication of another member of the society: the *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* by Isaac Newton (1643–1727). This anecdote exemplifies an institutional context that identifies the ichthyologist Francis Willughby as part of the beginnings of the Enlightenment. The frontispiece of his book, employing established pictorial forms to new ends, expresses the spirit of that transitional period (fig. 2.4). It is divided into two registers and the lower of the two, the foreground, is populated by ancient allegories. Minerva, goddess of wisdom, shown as a draftswoman, is sketching a fish and thereby demonstrating one of the key methods that has produced the knowledge to which the book introduces its readers. In the upper register, set apart from the foreground by an architectural frame, fishermen bring in their catch. Some fish are already being taken away in tubs, others are just revealed as the net that has caught them opens. The men who pull back the net are direct descendants not only of the fishers

Fig. 2.4.

Frontispiece, Francis Willughby, *De Historia Piscium*, 1668.

in the Palazzo Te but of the apostles themselves, and with them their profession and the missionary duties that profession has been made into. This metaphor is now reversed and at the same time once more transformed. Willughby's apostles of knowledge do use their net to catch actual fish again, but those fish have become objects of study—the overwhelming variety of the specimens in the net and arranged around the upper frame of the frontispiece give proof of the depth in which their forms have been examined.

Observation and the drawing that stabilizes the observation and makes it verifiable, as acted out by Minerva, are part of a methodological apparatus to which the net as an instrument also belongs. The potential relationship between the net and the grid used to reproduce a perceived reality by drawing must be left to further investigation. In taking on the mentioned function, the net has entered a realm of new meaning and significance. In Naples, in the Cappella Sansevero, *Disinganno* by Francesco Queirolo (1704–1762) displays the net in its grown semiotic potential. The sculpture was commissioned by Raimondo di Sangro (1710–1771) in the context of the refurbishment of his family's chapel—incidentally, around the same time the Eros with Dolphin was brought from Rome to Naples, inherited by the Bourbons from the Farnese. Raimondo was a proponent of the Enlightenment. Among other things, he invented a raincoat for the King of Naples as well as the famous *carrozza marittima*, an amphibian carriage that reaffirmed by mechanic means the idea of a human rule over the sea. *Disinganno—Release from Deception*—speaks of the ideals Raimondo di Sangro was evidently striving for. The sculpture shows two figures engaged with each other. To the left, the winged embodiment of Faith is crowned by a flame; to the right, a human figure is entangled in a net. The flame on the forehead of the winged figure merges the lights of both Faith and Enlightenment and guides the other figure in breaking free from the net. Lifting the net with the right arm, the figure is assisted by the hybrid allegory of Faith and Enlightenment, which pulls the net to the side with its left.

This net is certainly not an epistemic instrument, as in the *Historia Piscium*. But it serves as a meaningful component of an allegory of knowledge, and signifies the overcoming of ignorance, an effort it actually contributes to in the frontispiece of Francis Willughby's book. This particular notion of the net is later reinforced by the façade of the Institut Océanographique de Paris, which Albert I founded together with the museum in Monaco where Huang Yong Ping would eventually exhibit *Wu Zei*. The name of the institute is written inside a net secured by two anchors and filled with fish and other sea life to be studied as well as exhibited. The "deception" from which humans disengage themselves by pulling that net away is the inability to comprehend the forces they are subject to, due to ignorance. The sculpture therefore visualizes no less a subject than an ideal of emancipation. It is remarkable that the net features in this context as a manifestation of the forces of nature. After all, it is the net that, in the very motion of being shaken off, is in turn cast onto the world. In a gesture of power, the personification of the light of knowledge sets its foot onto the globe that serves as its pedestal. *Disinganno* was finished in 1758, the same year Carl Linnaeus published his *Systema Naturæ* introducing the binomial

nomenclature by which biological organisms have been classified ever since. Furthermore, Carl Linnaeus gave the first scientific description of *Physalia physalis*, the Portuguese man o' war, echoed in Joana Vasconcelos' *Valkyrie Rán*, the title of which is indebted to Linnaeus' taxonomy. By means of taxonomy, knowledge itself has become a "net" in which nature can be caught and made subject to human interests.

This development has also had consequences for the fishing industry. Giulio Romano's fishing scene must also be understood in the context of an actual practice of fishing. A floor of Maiolica tiles from Trapani, Sicily, dating from around the same time as Francesco Queirolo's sculpture, shows a so-called "*tonnara*." This ancient technique of tuna fishing entails the erection of a temporary structure out at sea. It is a labyrinth of nets, from which the shoal of tuna, once inside, cannot escape. Guided through a series of nets, they finally end up in the *camera del morte*. Once the animals caught in there reach a certain number, the fishers come together for the "*mattanza*." They lift the net, suspended between their boats, and kill the fish that have been forced to the surface. The fishing scene depicted in Palazzo Te has to be understood in very much the same way. This technique can be traced until the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. The Hamburg-born photographer Herbert List (1903–1975) documented it in the 1950s. Even in its more industrialized form, it shows remarkable resemblances to the practice Giulio Romano is drawing from. The consequences, however, are drastically different and severe. The labels on cans of tuna promising that the fish caught are "dolphin safe" are merely the promotional response to pictures of dolphins perishing in fishing nets. The dolphin no longer carries anybody down below with it, stealing them away into the depths. The sea creature is caught up in a net that is stealing it away, up and beyond the surface of the water.

Conclusion: Disaster at Sea, Disaster of the Sea

The tentacles of *Valkyrie Rán* by Joana Vasconcelos, as they seek to fish for the visitors of the Kunstmuseum in Aarhus, are themselves entangled in a particular history of visual representation. The spiraling form that binds the human figure reaches as far back as antiquity, evoking an opposition of culture and nature, of human and biological worlds. The oldest of the examples discussed spells out such an opposition as a dialectic dynamic between an anthropomorphism and a zoomorphism, which culminates in a union of the two. At the beginning of modernity, however, that opposition seems to comprise a latent threat. It is imagined as a shipwreck: humans are abducted from an environment that is habitable, i.e. the world above water, and carried away into an

environment hostile to human life below the water's surface. Pierre Denys de Montfort's "Poulpe colossal" has the frigate in the grip of its many monstrous limbs.

Complementing this motif with the net, a visual discourse is revealed in which the expressed fantasy of being subordinated by nature correlates with the factual exercising of control over nature. As an artefact, the net too implies an opposition of human and biological worlds. However, it does not threaten to drag the humans into the depths. On the contrary, it is deployed by humans to haul the inhabitants of those depths up to the surface. The fresco by Giulio Romano or the frontispiece of Francis Willughby's *Historia Piscium* show the net as an instrument of human "dominion over the fish and the sea," be it religiously, economically, or epistemically. It is for this reason that Francesco Queirolo's *Disinganno* can pull the net aside that binds the human mind. The liberation of the forces of nature is visualized as the casting-off of a net because the state of being subordinated to nature is imagined in the very terms by which the subjectification of nature is executed.

It is through the same inversion that this instrument is placed into the hands of Rán. The goddess represents the sea as an unruly force, resisting subjugation and, even more so, responding to it in equal terms. It is hardly coincidental that the figure that embodies this fear is feminine. Klaus Theweleit has discussed extensively the significance of an analogy between women and the sea in opposition to a male world. (Theweleit, 2019: 283–444) Along such lines, the creation myth told in Genesis has been read by Catherine Keller as the taming of a feminine principle represented by the ocean, recognizing the deluge (Gen 7, 17–24) as the moment when the "flux, repressed, returns as *the flood*." (Keller, 2003: 10) The illustration by Johannes Gehrts seems to result from a comparable form of repression: the goddess of death by shipwreck and drowning drags the unfortunate (masculine) mariner down to the bottom of the sea with, of all things, a net, the very technological device with which humans have been haunting the oceans for millennia. Cast out, the net evidently continues to inspire the fear of being caught up in it. The "Poulpe colossal" represents an analogous principle. This threat from the deep is connoted as feminine too. (Lindemann, 2021: 47–50) Its grip is the same as Rán's. In fact, in yet another inversion as vertiginous as the marine animal's winding limbs themselves, those limbs reveal themselves to be a net in reverse. It is not the net that is the image that responds to the pull of the tentacle, seeking to fend it off; rather, the tentacle is in fact the phobic 'Gegenbild', the counter-image of the net.

The *Eros with Dolphin Farnese* represents an opposition of zoo- and anthropomorphism. The modern rendition of this opposition, charged with fear, has spawned yet a third category that has superseded the other two: a technomorphism. The tentacle, as determined, is merely a net in

disguise, and both net and crypto-net are equally directed against the two former antagonists, nature and culture. This is of particular concern because the net as an antagonist of human and biological worlds alike, as implied by the shipwreck iconography of the 19th century, has since gained an unprecedented reality. An alarming amount of the plastic pollution in the world's oceans can be linked to fishing: discarded tackle threatens 66 percent of marine life. ("Fishing nets," 2023) Not only that, a significant proportion of microplastic particles stems from industrially produced fishing nets. Once dissolved into these particles, the nets no longer seek to fish for objects of consumption; they now invade the bodies they "catch," both animal and human. (Reichle, 2021)

Joana Vasconcelos' *Valkyrie Rán* is not the only contemporary artwork that comments on this alarming state. *The Great Haul* (2010) by the sculptor Anna Hepler (*1969) is a gigantic net made of sheets of plastic the artist has "hauled" from dumpsters and landfills. (Malarcher, 2011) *Kiko Moana* (2016) by the Mata Aho Collective, a giant piece of fabric woven from dark blue tarpaulin, foreshadows an ocean consisting of nothing but plastic. (Brunt and Thomas, 2018: 86–87) These and other works reaffirm the urgency of environmentalist debates concerning climate change, overfishing and marine pollution. The *Physalia physalis,* for example, the organism *Valkyrie Rán*'s form is reminiscent of, is thriving due to rising ocean temperatures. It was first scientifically described in Carl Linnaeus' *Systema Naturæ,* whose binomial taxonomy also informed the title of Vasconcelos' work. The title evokes the goddess Rán, the figure's femininity, and her prominent attribute, the net. The latter is represented by the installation's enormous tentacles. It is not the concrete motif of the net that is adopted, but its iconicity, its metaphorical pull. The dual motif of the tentacle and the net, the representation of drowning as an act of fishing, allow for an inversion in which fishing is in fact flagged as a state of drowning. The encounter the installation facilitates takes place between the tentacles, which symbolically signify a pull, and the museum's audience, whose very bodies contain a material net in the form of microplastic particles. Those bodies have been hauled in not because they have been caught in the net but because the net is in them. It is twists such as these inherent in the older shipwreck iconography that make it possible to address the actual harm caused by humans to their environment and through that eventually to themselves. The installation may activate this iconography in order to appeal to its audience. But it goes far beyond the moral, just as it transcends the metaphorical. No ship or mariner is dragged down to the bottom of the sea by a foreign body, animalistic or feminine, that represents that other world. The sea is the very entity that is in distress. No disaster at sea is imagined, but a disaster is revealed, a disaster the sea is subject to, and with it, the one world we all live in.

Notes

1. "[I]m Wasser hausende Todesgöttin, Hel ganz ähnlich, nur auf den Tod durch Ertrinken beschränkt. Ihr Reich ist der Grund des Meeres […]; hier hält sie die Seelen der Ertrunkenen fest, welche sie mit ihrem Netz aus Schiffen oder bei dem Baden oder im Schwimmen in die Tiefe zieht, hinabraubt."
2. Concerning the relationship between seafaring and the myth of the giant squid cf. Latva, 2024.
3. The relationship between these two modes of existence needs to be also understood in terms of sex and gender, just like the abovementioned embodiment of the sea; not so much because one of the two figures is evidently male but because the dolphin has its own history of gendered representation. (Bryld, 1996)
4. Whether that second tail belongs to another fish or to the same creature will not be discussed here. If so, however, that "monster" would have to be included in the visual history of the many-limbed sea creatures discussed in the above.

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3. Placing the Moral Spectator: Realism, Perspective, and Affect in the Visual Culture of Shipwreck*

Jonathan Stafford

Disaster at sea has long constituted a prominent aesthetic trope, a singular site of meaning in the history of Western cultural representation. Broad historical developments in the visual depiction of shipwreck and its reception can be seen as indicative of a shifting field of social and cultural meanings, narrating the moral assumptions underpinning the spectacle of the imperiled seafarer, and of the suffering human more generally. Within this iconography there is a persistent concern in the shipwreck painting's reception history with the image's realism, specifically as a trope which engages the parallel between aesthetic experience and reality. Certainly, "realism" is a loaded term, and I employ it here to refer to the painting's putatively realistic reproduction of the natural landscape, rather than to a specific school or style. As I will explore, such painterly verisimilitude rose to prominence with the Dutch tradition, and the claims made with regard to paintings of this era (their close observation of the natural world, particularly the texture of seawater and the elements at their wildest) clearly had a decisive influence on the tradition of seascape painting thereafter. Such realistic representation was of course subject to shifting historical meanings, not least the moral consequences of the claims made regarding the status of the viewer of the scene. It is precisely in this perceived relationship with the real, I argue, that the spectator of the artwork is compelled to enter into the world of the painting, and to respond affectively, which is to say morally.

My thesis in this chapter is that the shipwreck image's moral meaning operates through perspective and spectatorship, elements which are productive of the perceived distance of the spectator from the depicted suffering, both spatial and emotive. In order to engage with this

problematic, it is necessary to ask where we locate the viewing subject—the spectator's position both in relation to the depicted scene, and to the spectator within the artwork. How do we place the human in these artworks: those the image depicts, both sufferers and spectators; the artist; and the viewer, both real and assumed. Within the nexus linking the spectator, the depicted subject, and the creator of the image, is produced not only the image's meaning, but an affective response around which the ethical content of the shipwreck artwork is constituted. In exploring this theme, I rehearse a number of very familiar positions in the historical canon of shipwreck art. However, foregrounding the moral implications of the formal characteristics of these paintings—spectatorship, perspective, realism—and their place in the artwork's reception (particularly in relation to their affective resonances), and exploring the considerable continuities and discontinuities in this discourse, offers new perspectives on the moral landscape—or indeed seascape—of the modern age.

The earliest sustained engagement with the visual representation of shipwreck can be found in the paintings of the Dutch "Golden Age" of the 17th century. As Lawrence Goedde has observed in his wide-ranging overview of the genre, examples of this rich visual tradition tend to depict vessels struggling against the elements either on the open sea, or in the vicinity of a barren, rocky shore. (Goedde, 1989: 105–108, 165) Rather than representing the Netherlands' distinctly flat coast, upon which most of the shipwrecks familiar to the Dutch population would have actually taken place, such features emphasized the remoteness of the imperiled ship's situation. The depicted shores often lack human elements, or are populated by wild animals or stereotypically rendered, threatening "savages" who emphasize the distance and inhospitableness of the locale. (fig. 3.1) Seafarers are shown in a battle for life with the wild elements of the sea. The contemporary social meanings of these images has been much debated, due in part to the relative dearth of sources documenting their reception, and they have been subject to a range of interpretations, often emphasizing their allegorical, religious content. (Mentz, 2015: 22–24; Goedde, 1989: 169)

Although less is known about the subjective responses to and cultural status of such images, we know that these representations were not limited to an elite consumer: it was common for shipwreck paintings to be found listed in the inventories of Dutch poorhouses of the 17th and 18th centuries, for example. (Russell, 1983: 78) While their role in these situations is obscure, one can surmise that there was a moral purpose intended in their presence there—an edifying, instructive one. Already in written responses to the Dutch tradition, Goedde points out, one can recognize an emphasis upon the relation of the affective with the

Fig. 3.1.

Ludolf Bakhuizen, *Ships in Distress off a Rocky Coast*, 1667. Public domain. Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

painting's realism. Such texts, he writes, stress "the artist's faithful imitation of nature and his ability through this imitation to move the spectator as if he were present." (Goedde, 1989: 125) It is, however, difficult to place the viewer in such representations: due in part to the remote, hostile character of their setting, viewers are not invited to insert themselves imaginatively into these shipwreck scenes. Instructional here is George Landow's claim that, "whereas the traditional shipwreck takes place in the presence of God, it is precisely the point of the modern one that it occurs in His absence." (Landow, 1982: 17) As numerous scholars have observed, the early modern shipwreck was lent meaning by narratives emphasizing divine providence—distressing, tragic events, the sufferings of shipwreck were nevertheless God's will. (Thompson, 2007: 64, 71–82; Mentz, 2015: 5–6)

Shipwreck paintings of the 18th century increasingly saw the depiction of the shore-bound witness of maritime catastrophe. The exemplar of this scene can be encountered in the work of the French painter Joseph Vernet (1714–1789), who produced a large number of depictions of shipwrecks occurring in the vicinity of the coast in the latter half of the century. (plate 6) These coastlines are replete with people—the numerous "staffage" figures who populate the foreground of his paintings are active agents of the shoreline, involved in activities defined by their moral status: whether they scour the shore for objects washed up from the

wreck; aid in the rescue of the victims; or manifest the performative signifiers of powerful emotion, these are active, morally-engaged figures. These figures are far from the passive spectator of shipwreck beloved of the Western philosophical canon, discussed at length by Hans Blumenberg in *Shipwreck with Spectator*. (Blumenberg, 1996) They set up a distinctive relationship with the spectator of the artwork: we view the shipwreck, the figures in the painting view it, we view them viewing. Vernet's shipwreck scenes, and the numerous other similar 18th-century artworks of this type, constitute their audience as what Henning Trüper has referred to as the "second-order spectator" of shipwreck, the figure who encounters not just the scene of disaster, but also the witnesses to the scene, constructing and making sense of this nexus of affective actors. (Trüper, 2015: 130)

As Alain Corbin has suggested, this relationality set up between the observer of the shipwreck artwork and the depicted spectator was one implicitly concerned with mediating the viewer's proximity to the scene: "The viewer of a picture was first encouraged to identify with the spectator of the shipwreck so that he could eliminate the distance separating him from the event and suffer with the victims." (Corbin, 1994: 237) This distance was tripartite: it concerned geography, exposing 18th-century viewers to a treacherous seascape which would have been relatively unfamiliar to many of them; it concerned spectatorship, inviting the viewer to insert themselves imaginatively into the scene of the painting; and it concerned affect, engaging the viewer in an empathic nexus with the victims and depicted spectators. Moreover, these three functions were deeply interconnected: the shipwreck painting's moral content operates through a distance which is both spatial and emotional.

Goedde has suggested that Vernet's shipwreck scenes, although influenced by the Dutch tradition, presented a marked departure in their "close description of powerful emotions in spectators and castaways confronted with grandiose, overwhelming natural forces and mortal peril." (Goedde, 1989: 93) The didactic role of such images is much more overt than the remote scene of the Dutch shipwreck. Vernet's was an emphatically human shore: these patently (if generic) Mediterranean coastlines, replete with castles and lighthouses, were sites of potential danger, but also of salvation—not divine salvation, but earthly. Vernet depicted numerous attempts at lifesaving: if, in the Dutch tradition, shipwreck appears to be an inevitable risk of the folly of navigation, Vernet's shipwreck was an unfortunate disaster whose effects could be mitigated—suffering at the hands of nature's violence could happen at the ends of the earth, but not in sight of civilization. They encourage their audience to respond, if not with moral action, with a sense of the correct affective register to adopt in light of the depicted suffering—an emotional response rooted in the imagined insertion of the viewer into

the scene. Adam Walker, an English visitor to an exhibition of paintings at the Louvre in 1785, emphasized his response to Vernet's work as one rooted in an embodied, emotionally engaged encounter with the image's realism:

> Vernet still preserves his superiority in Water-scenes and Shipwrecks. A large scene of the last kind makes one shudder to look at it;— 'tis a Storm on a Lee Shore. I never saw a Sea or Waves on canvas before.—One starts back, for fear of being washed into the Sea, the Waves break so like nature. (Walker, 1792: 212)

While Walker's observations can be taken with a pinch of salt, they give voice to a certain lack of visual sophistication on the part of the 18th-century spectator. Like many responses to Vernet's paintings, Walker is preoccupied with the image's realism, which is essential to the visceral response he relates.

This persistent concern with the relationship between reality and representation in Vernet's oeuvre is exemplified by the most prominent contemporary response to the artist's work—French philosopher and Encyclopedist Denis Diderot's extensive discussions of Vernet in his writings on the French Salons. In his review of the Salon of 1765, Diderot emphasizes Vernet's realism as the veracious depiction of the natural world: "his truth," he writes, "is like that of nature." (Diderot, 1995a: 70) Describing one of Vernet's paintings of shipwreck, Diderot foregrounds the image's rendering of the imperiled seafarer's expressions of terror and desperate attempts at self-preservation. This precise depiction of the affective and active response to shipwreck, he writes, is echoed by the figures on the shore: "The same variety of character, action and expression prevails among the spectators: some of them shudder and turn away, others offer help, others still are immobilized by what they're seeing." (Ibid.) This affective mirroring provides a moral lesson of sorts—indeed, Diderot extends this concern with affect from the emotions depicted in the image, to those it prompts, delineating an aesthetic–affective continuum, from victim, to depicted spectator, to the viewer of the artwork: "Look at the drowned woman who's just been pulled from the water," he demands, "and remain untouched by her husband's pain if you can." (Ibid.: 72) The viewer is called upon by the artwork to respond in the appropriate affective register to the depicted suffering.

In his review of the Salon of 1767, Diderot famously played with the realism of Vernet's paintings, posing his descriptions of the landscapes as touristic explorations of real places. In this text, known as the "Promenade Vernet," his description of one of Vernet's maritime scenes reaches such heights that he suggests that, in their engendering of the

affective responses of the viewer, these representations were not merely true to life, but that they actually exceeded the real:

> His imagination, as finely tuned as it is fecund, provides him with all these truths; that their character is such that the spectator who'd remain unmoved and serene at the seashore is astonished by the canvas, that in effect his compositions preach the grandeur, power and majesty of nature, more compellingly than nature herself. (Diderot, 1995b: 121)

This inability of the art viewer to respond with affective coldness to the mimetic representation of nature's excess is rooted in the nexus between the viewer and the depicted subjects, mediated by the artist's ability to render the scene with an authentic commitment to the real. This topos, in which the spectator of the artwork imaginatively inserts themselves into the scene of the painting is one explored extensively by Michael Fried, in his influential 1980 book *Absorption and Theatricality*. Fried claims that Diderot's treatment of Vernet's paintings posits an—idiosyncratically bourgeois—viewer of the artwork who projects themselves into the painting, absorbed in the natural world it represents. Vernet's paintings invite the viewer into the space they depict—yet the shipwreck poses a moral quandary for Diderot's realist contrivance.

At the end of his promenade through the landscapes of Vernet's paintings, Diderot shifts away from his light-hearted promenade, describing instead a dream in which he encounters shipwrecks which recreate the details of Vernet's paintings. With this new device, Diderot in fact deepens the disorientation between the real and the imagined, describing the horrors of shipwreck with a series of statements beginning with the words "I saw." These words foreground the reality of the imagined event and the veracity of vision, emphasizing the aesthetic relationship between spectatorship and the affective, and betraying a distinctive preoccupation with the unsteady moral demands of the representation of suffering. "The inhabitants of the region," he narrates, "had been drawn to the shore and the rocks by this terrible spectacle, from which they averted their eyes." (Diderot, 1995b: 124) Diderot emphasizes the spectacular iconography of the scene of suffering, the strange attraction and fascination it holds, and the simultaneous unease with this voyeuristic frisson. "I saw all these touching scenes," he concludes his nightmarish account, "and I shed real tears." (Ibid.: 125) With these words, he embeds the veracity of vision within the authenticity of the artwork viewer's emotional response.

Diderot's employment of this discursive shift, from the real to the illusory, is far from a straightforward one. Yet it is clear that it is one thing to insert oneself imaginatively into a bucolic landscape, and quite

another to do so with the scene of shipwreck: the latter makes specific moral demands upon the spectator, under which conditions the fragile imagined realism he employs could not be sustained. The use of the dream schema allows for the "I" who witnesses the shipwreck, and who thus becomes a participant in the scene, and is simultaneously productive of moral distance, sustaining the remove through which the allegory of aesthetic experience functions—the spectator becomes a pure spectator, able to look but not to intervene in the moral seascape.

This motif of aesthetic experience is one famously elaborated by Adorno and Horkheimer, in their formulation of the mythos of Odysseus being tied to the ship's mast in order to hear the Siren's song—simultaneously secure from harm but unable to act, Odysseus experiences the song "as a mere object of contemplation, as art." (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 27) It is striking that this very trope features prominently in the mythology of shipwreck painting, whose moral content, as I have already suggested, is caught up in this same problematic: a popular anecdote concerning Vernet involves the artist having himself tied to a ship's mast during a storm, in order to observe nature's wildness in relative safety. As George Levitine has suggested, although this tale has antecedents in the Dutch tradition, its history was decidedly posthumous, fueling an emergent conception of the artist as romantic hero.[1] (Levitine, 1967: 95) This heroic episode, Levitine writes, particularly attained currency in the 19th century (it was depicted in a popular painting by the artist's grandson Horace Vernet in 1822), charting a shift in conceptions of realism away from the utilitarian, the exact observation of nature, toward the subjectivity of the artist and their emotional world. Nevertheless, the story was already established at least three years before Vernet's 1789 death, appearing in a 1786 encyclopedia, fittingly under the entry for "Enthusiasm." (Marmontel, 1786: 668)

English antiquary John Britton, in his description of an 1801 encounter with one of Vernet's shipwreck paintings, relates a version of the anecdote which he mobilizes to deepen the claims for the realism of the artwork:

> When the tempest howled, and other mortals shuddered and shrunk within themselves at the sublime, yet soul-harrowing effects of the thunder-storm, Vernet was sure to be on the beech [*sic*]; where he often prevailed on the watermen to put to sea, even during the heaviest storms, in a small open boat. By these means his mind becomes familiar to horrors, and his pencil capable of embodying the effects produced by the raging of the elements in all their sublimity and grandeur. (Britton, 1801: 269)

The artist's commitment to realism is evinced in a willingness to not merely observe nature, but to immerse himself in the terror of nature's wildness—increasingly, the shipwreck painting's realism was not just representational, but relied upon visceral, authentic suffering on the part of the artist. The knowledge that the artist suffered well helped the spectator to do so.

As the popular preoccupation with Vernet's mast story suggests, the transition from the 18th to the 19th century was a period of intense interest in the moral status of the representation of shipwreck. Not incidentally, this was also the period which saw the emergence of numerous campaigns dedicated to the promotion of humanitarian intervention to save the lives of imperiled seafarers. As Geoffrey Quilley has suggested, the late 18th-century depiction of shipwreck should be understood in relation to developments in conceptions of morality which posited a viewing subject of the artwork who was moved to pity by the spectacle of suffering. (Quilley, 2011: 147) Artistic depictions of shipwreck were increasingly characterized by a certain heightening of the proximity of the viewer to the scene, intensifying the status, and presence, of the human victim and their emotional world. This was accompanied by a shift in conceptions of realism away from one which simply emphasized the skillful observation of nature, of the waves and weather, to one which was characterized by a subjective, emotional encounter with suffering.

Depictions of the wreck of the *Halsewell*, an East Indiaman which had been wrecked with much loss of life off the south coast of England in 1786, narrate some of the shifting moral ground occupied by representations of shipwreck. The specific, sensational nature of the wreck meant that responses to representations of the event were characterized by a more emphatic intertextuality than other, generic images of shipwreck. British painter James Northcote's 1787 image of the wreck (fig. 3.2) was clearly intended to elicit sympathetic responses on the part of the viewer, and was produced with an eye to the late 18th century's burgeoning market for printed reproductions. It employed a distinctive perspective, placing the viewer on board the doomed ship itself, drawing them into close proximity with the wreck's victims. Not all viewers of the image were complimentary—Northcote complained that he had been attacked in the press by commentators who judged the representation of such suffering to be in poor taste. (Quilley, 2011: 147) These criticisms underline the increasing emphasis upon the subjectivity of the artist as the proper site of the image's moral meaning, and reflect Northcote's use of a perhaps too-close proximity to the depicted suffering. However, Northcote's was only one of a wealth of representations of the *Halsewell* wreck, emphasizing a growing popular appetite for consuming images of death and suffering at sea. (Thompson, 2014)

Fig. 3.2.

James Gillray, after James Northcote, *The Loss of the Halsewell East Indiaman*, 1787. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Indeed, a poem published in a 1789 edition of the *Gentleman's Magazine* implored the renowned history painter, Sir Joshua Reynolds (of whom Northcote was both pupil and later biographer), to produce "an affecting scene" depicting the wreck, despite the existence of numerous such representations: "Here might the potent magic of thy art | Create the look that wounds the feeling heart, | Bids soft companion's tearful source unfold, | Or points the dreadful pang that makes the blood run cold." ("L.M.," 1789: 450) For the poem's author, shipwreck was art's appropriate subject precisely in relation to the affective resonances of its imagined viewer. Reynolds had been an enthusiastic attendee of another prominent representation of the *Halsewell* wreck, the popular entertainment spectacle of the Eidophusikon. Although the Eidophusikon's creator, Philip James de Loutherbourg, a successful shipwreck painter in his own right, had originally created the small mechanical theatre, which featured a scene of shipwreck, before the wreck took place, the *Halsewell*'s celebrity provided a useful means for promoting his entertainment upon its exhibition in London in 1786. In some senses the Eidophusikon can be seen as the culmination of Vernet's representation of shipwreck—not only was de Loutherbourg Vernet's pupil, in its use

of sound, lighting effects, and moving parts, the Eidophusikon took the mimetic realism of nature's reproduction to its extreme, encouraging the spectator to immerse themselves in the representation of shipwreck as if it were the real thing. This culmination also marked a shift away from the mimetic as the main focus of the viewer's affective encounter with the image.

Fig. 3.3.
Théodore Géricault, *The Raft of the Medusa*, 1819. Musée du Louvre, Public domain (source: Wikimedia Commons).

Undoubtedly the most prominent depiction of shipwreck which was able to bridge the ill-defined gap between the artistic and the sensational was Théodore Géricault's 1819 painting *The Raft of the Medusa*. (fig. 3.3) Attracting intense interest upon its exhibition, the painting depicted the scandalous 1816 disaster in which 147 of the survivors of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Medusa* off the coast of today's Mauritania were abandoned at sea on a poorly constructed raft. Over 13 days, the castaways turned to violence and cannibalism before the eventual rescue of just 15 survivors. Géricault's vast canvas depicts these survivors (and the dead) at a moment of potential rescue, in various attitudes reflecting affective extremes: hope, despair, madness. The painting's viewer is thrust uncomfortably into this scene of torment, their viewpoint hovering uneasily just beyond the confines of the raft itself. Initially exhibited at the 1819 Paris Salon, the picture enjoyed celebrity upon its 1820 exhibition in London, and in Dublin the following year.

The journalistic response to the painting emphasized its affective impact upon the spectator. Upon its London exhibition, one reviewer wrote of "the grand object of the picture, the excitation of interest by means of horror and pity." The affective frisson the spectator experienced in the face of suffering was suspended between a horrified revulsion and a sympathy which softened this trauma, rendering it meaningful, and a source of aesthetic pleasure. The review goes on to observe that the painting

> will be gazed upon and admired as long as there is any thing in the soul capable of being touched by the highest exertions of art in the representation of the most awful and affecting of scenes. […] Cold must be that critic, and dull his feelings, who can look with apathy on such a representation of such a scene. (Parry, 1820: 814)

The spectator's moral sensibility was constituted through their emotional response to the scene of suffering at sea. The review's claims emphasize that, in the face of the representation of intense deprivation and hardship, there was a correct affective attitude for the viewer to take—to meet the image with indifference would be to exhibit a transgressive deficiency of moral feeling. Gericault's depiction of a moment of hope, the appearance of a ship on the horizon, the reviewer suggests, "means the spectator is spared the harrowing contemplation of miseries, of which human nature can hardly bear the recital." (Ibid.) It was a distinctly human response, it seems, to be affectively overwhelmed by the visual representation of suffering.

The stricken ship's name ironically underpins the image's moral meaning: that looking can inflict harm on the viewer. While earlier shipwreck paintings had certainly provoked responses which emphasized their viewer's affective identification with suffering, there is a growing sense that such images needed to make more strenuous moral demands on their viewers, to enter directly into the suffering of those depicted, to experience the empathic pain of witnessing another's pain. The natural realism and imagined presence which sustained emotive encounters with the earlier scenes were not sufficient, producing a removed, comfortable, affective response, characterized by a certain emotional distance. The 19th century increasingly saw this shift in the status of the artwork viewer, a move away from second-order to first-order spectatorship of the shipwreck scene. In the case of the *Medusa*, this was tied up with the painting's concern with proximity: no longer the staffage figures of Vernet, the fleshy, intimate corporeality of Géricault's bodies, bodies which bear harm, underpin a foregrounding of the human. Perhaps more significantly though, this humanism was also expressed through an increasing emphasis on the subjectivity of the artist.

An 1820 review from the *Examiner* again roots the painting's emotive power in the subjective experience of the artist, in a far different register to the naturalistic realism attributed to Vernet:

> The whole management of the Painter, founded as it is upon his own melancholy experience, his deep study of the life both of body and mind, and his evident acuteness of feeling, must be universally approved of an admired. The desired and deep impression of the subject is fully attained, our hearts yearn with sympathy, we stay long and lingeringly over the picture, and we walk away from it pensively. ("R.H.," 1820: 462)

The status of the artist is significant here not as a maritime figure attuned to the realities of seafaring and the vagaries of nature, but as one who has experienced intense emotional hardship. As Oskar Jensen has observed regarding the maritime spectacles of early 19th-century London, the subjectivity of the artist was increasingly at stake in the reception of the artwork's meaning: "in the realm of spectacle and representation, authenticity was likelier to be conferred upon those whose expertise derived from experience (ideally, experience that involved suffering or sacrifice) of the 'real' that was being represented." (Jensen, 2019: 138) In the shipwreck scene, this authenticity translated into a moral commitment to affective suffering. Through this commitment, the viewer entered into an affective relation with the artist, who, rather than a depicted spectator, mediated their empathic engagement with the suffering of imperiled seafarer.

Undoubtedly the most extensive 19th-century engagement with the visual representation of disaster at sea can be found in the career of J.M.W. Turner (1775–1851). His long artistic preoccupation with this theme—spanning over four decades—saw various experiments with the genre. Andrew Wilton has argued that Turner's progression of shipwreck pictures up to the 1810 painting *Wreck of a Transport Ship* "is one of gradually increasing involvement of the spectator in the scenes depicted." In this scene, he writes, "the spectator is wholly absorbed into what is happening, actually in the water which reels and towers about him, a victim of the catastrophe he witnesses." (Wilton, 1981: 46) Turner's shipwreck paintings are characterized by a developing preoccupation with perspective, with the placing of the viewer vis-à-vis the incidents portrayed. Indeed, this preoccupation would be sustained, the status of the spectator in Turner's subsequent representations of the perils of seafaring undergoing various experiments, which, I argue, are particularly significant for understanding the moral content of these paintings. While the 1810 painting (fig. 3.4) depicts a swirling chaos of

desperate humanity, with fraught attempts at rescue, the representation of suffering victims would feature less and less in Turner's shipwreck oeuvre. *Shipwreck off Hastings* from 1825, painted from the distinctive perspective of the wreck itself looking back towards the shore, is probably the last such example, featuring a few wretched survivors clinging to the wreckage, with distant, helpless spectators looking on. *Disaster at Sea* (*c.* 1835), a painting which featured Turner's most intimate encounter with the victims of shipwreck, a wretched mass of doomed women and children in an almost biblical scene of suffering, was abandoned by the artist, remaining unfinished.

Fig. 3.4.

J.M.W. Turner, *The Wreck of a Transport Ship*, 1810. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Public domain (source: Wikimedia Commons).

Through Turner's career there occurred a shift in representation which can be seen to have been in part rooted in developments in both the technologies and social practices of lifesaving at sea. These paintings emerged at a time when the moral status of shipwreck was increasingly contested. (Trüper, 2019: 42) *Life-boat and Manby Apparatus Going Off to a Stranded Vessel Making Signals (Blue Lights) of Distress* (1831) is a painting which, as its title suggests, is intimately preoccupied with the technical innovations of maritime rescue.[2] The spectators depicted on the shore, a woman and two children, appear to be concerned with the fate of those on board the distant wreck, exhibiting signs of emotional distress. A clear demarcation is at play here, a division of labor between that of the heroic, male lifesavers, risking their lives to rescue those in

peril, and the feminine, emotional labor of those on shore, pure affective observers of the scene. *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to warn Steam-Boats of Shoal-Water* (1840, fig. 3.5) also features a number of spectators on the beach, observing the imperiled vessels, the telescope employed by one of the onlookers emphasizing the spectatorial passivity and distance of the shore-bound gaze. However, there is a sense that such depicted spectators could no longer be sustained in the shifting landscape of the 19th-century maritime world, and not least in the development of steam propulsion, which pitted technology against the elements, and which featured prominently in Turner's paintings from the early 1830s on.

Fig. 3.5
J.M.W. Turner, *Rockets and Blue Lights (Close at Hand) to Warn Steamboats of Shoal Water*, 1840. Clark Art Institute, Public domain.

The exemplary image of this shift is 1842's *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth Making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the "Ariel" left Harwich*, to rehearse the painting's full catalogue entry. (plate 7) Showing the vessel of its title in a wild struggle with the elements, the human relationship with natural force mediated by the new technology of steam propulsion, the painting is distinguished by a nebulous abstraction, more pronounced even than that which characterized Turner's other paintings of

this period. It is perhaps anomalous that this chapter's discussion of the moral content of the shipwreck image culminates with this painting—it is not, strictly speaking an image of shipwreck, or even overtly one of suffering. It is precisely my argument, however, that the moral content of this painting is not fully available in the image itself, but is found in its relationality, in its dialogue with both Turner's own long engagement with shipwreck, and with the longer history of shipwreck painting I have explored here. Christine Riding has suggested that the image can be seen as being in tension with the history of shipwreck painting, both a "culmination and a departure" from this tradition, not least in its experimentation with aspects of spectatorship.[3] (Riding, 2014: 130)

As with much of Turner's oeuvre, the judgements found in the reception of this image were frequently rooted in its relation with the real, with many critics reacting negatively to its abstraction. As an infamous review from the *Athenaeum* complained, "where the steam boat is—where the harbour begins, or where it ends—which are the signals, and which the author in the Ariel […] are matters past our finding out." ("Royal Academy," 1842: 433) In this pithy critique, the reviewer inadvertently pins down what is perhaps the painting's very point—and that of its ponderous title, which is peppered with a series of spatial allusions. This spatiality refers to a set of bearings; to the impossibility of getting one's bearings in a storm, which destabilizes distance, scale, and visibility, a visual and spatial disorientation which is both depicted and implied. The title refers to the harbor: out of sight, land (and the potentiality of salvation) is nearby, but not represented, the coastal view of the traditional shipwreck scene hinted at, but denied; it refers to the making of signals, setting up a textual relation between ship and shore, action and visuality, the imperiled and the potential savior; it refers to depth, the "going by the lead" signifying the plumbing of the depths, the treacherous space below the water's surface, the shallows which spell potential catastrophe for the vessel; finally, in both Turner's claim in the title, and his subsequent comments regarding his presence in the depicted event, there is a concern with point of view.

The absence of human presence in *Snowstorm*, Turner's decision to omit direct representations of both imperiled seafarer and emotionally involved spectator, means that it refuses the direct access to affective encounter that such depictions, employed for centuries in shipwreck scenes, allowed for. The painting is nevertheless an experiment in placing the body—its title implies the presence of a body, specifically that of the artist, in turn encouraging the viewer's visceral engagement with the scene. Yet Turner's claims regarding his presence are ambiguous—for the painting's viewer, it is unclear whether Turner is on board the depicted ship, or if we are being presented with the scene from the artist's perspective. This unresolved grounding of perspective

keeps the viewer in an unsteady spatial disorientation, reproducing the desperate grasping for bearings of the imperiled vessel, to situate ourselves in the maelstrom of nature: to know where we are and to let others know where we are. There is an implied dialectic between the ship Turner claims to be on and the ship we see, destabilizing the spatiality of the seascape.

Turner's great champion John Ruskin defended the painting from the attacks on its abstraction, posing his response specifically in relation to the force of its realism, in placing the viewer in a visceral relation to the depicted maelstrom: "Few people have had the opportunity of seeing the sea at such a time, and when they have, cannot face it." There is a distinctive concern with presence, spectatorship, the fear of the visual, and a deficient lack of knowledge on the part of the viewer of such intimacy with the realities of the sea as a treacherous space of nature. For Ruskin, the painting's realism was intimately tied up with the corporeal realities of suffering at sea—it represented, he claimed, "a prolonged endurance of drowning which few people have courage to go through." Again, Ruskin's claims dwell on the painting's status as an authentic reproduction of nature, its merit contingent on its ability to render visible the elemental fury of the ocean as a natural landscape. Yet this is characterized by a resistance to the purely mimetic naturalism of the traditional shipwreck scene, dwelling on the subjectivity of the artist, his willingness—and the mimetic willingness of the viewer—to immerse themselves in the suffering of the drowned. Such an experience, he claimed, was "one of the noblest lessons of nature." (Ruskin, 1843: 376)

This position is again apparent in Turner's response to the praise of Reverend William Kingsley, who related his mother's complimentary comments regarding *Snowstorm*'s authentic resemblance to a real storm at sea she had witnessed. Turner reacted with emphatic spleen:

> I did not paint it to be understood, but I wished to show what such a scene was like; I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it; I was lashed for four hours, and I did not expect to escape, but I felt bound to record it if I did. But no one had any business to like the picture. (Ruskin, 1843: 346)

Turner's abstraction, often presented as a proto-modernist attempt to render visible the dynamism and fragmentation of modern life, is here rooted emphatically in a claim for realism. Kingsley specifically notes that Turner used the word "record," characterizing the role of the artist as the one who uniquely transmutes subjective experience, the raw power of nature, into the aesthetic. As Brian Lukacher has emphasized, *Snowstorm* is very much a painting concerned with foregrounding the

place of the artist's subjective experience in the production of the scene. (Lukacher, 1990; see also Riding, 2014: 130) Inevitably, Turner's exploitation of the mast legend brings such claims into a critical constellation with those regarding Vernet.[4] However, as Andrew Wilton has suggested, Turner's employment of this legend marks a departure from earlier conceptions of painterly realism, the purely mimetic representation of the elements. Wilton insists that Turner's "meaning was in the experience itself, and his object was to present the experience as totally and overwhelmingly as his art would allow." (Wilton, 1981: 99) Furthermore, Turner's insistence on painting *not* to be understood underlines that the comprehensibility of the image was incompatible with the reality claims found in Diderot's writings on Vernet, instead emphasizing subjective experience, presence, and the accompanying moral corollaries of empathic participation in the scene.

While Turner's claims have been much discussed, their gendered undertones remain overlooked. The fact that he was responding to the enthusiastic comments of an older woman emphasizes his contrasting of a feminine, passive, shore-bound gaze with the active, engaged, heroic, masculine mode of experience that he hoped to lay claim to with *Snowstorm*. Famously, Turner responded with exasperation to the derisive comparisons of one of the painting's more facetious critics, exclaiming: "soapsuds and white wash! What would they have? I wonder what they think the sea's like? I wish they'd been in it." (Ruskin, 1857: 15) This desire for the critic's immersion in the maelstrom itself underlines Turner's insistence on the painting's stark demand, to differentiate two modes of engaging with the scene of shipwreck: the optical, passive, shore-bound view; and the visceral, embodied encounter with nature's wildness—telescopic verses immersive experience.

There is something resistant to passive spectatorship in *Snowstorm*—placed in the wider history of shipwreck representation, it can be seen to play with themes of opticality and embodiment. Leo Costello has suggested that, in its inchoate depiction of the swirling mass of sublime nature, *Snowstorm* produces a viewing subject caught between the position of observer and participant, suspended between the chaos of sea and sky and the vulnerable stability of the imperiled vessel. (Costello, 2012: 219–220) Far from Turner's—and Vernet's—shore-bound spectators, the viewer of *Snowstorm* has no means to orient themselves to the picture's space—they themselves are an unmoored, imperiled spectator of nature's violence, an observer who can no longer remain safely outside of the scene. Zachary Tavlin and Matthew Hitchman have commented on "the decoupling of spectator and ground affected by Turner's composition and style." (Tavlin and Hitchman, 2019: 146) The painting is resistant to the contemplation of nature as a removed viewer, situated safely on the shoreline, instead thrusting the spectator into the vortex

itself. Again, this is contingent upon the situation of the artist, and their commitment to the authentic representation of the real, exemplified in Turner's mobilization of the claim of having been tied to the mast.

As Jonathan Crary has argued, Turner's painting of the late 1830s and 1840s "signals […] the collapse of the distance separating an observer from the site of optical experience." (Crary, 1992: 138) In the case of peril at sea, moreover, such a collapse has specifically moral implications. In figuratively involving the viewer in the scene, Turner refuses the distance which allows the artwork viewer to comfortably align themselves with the affective attitude of the passive observer on the shore: it is above all a painting about the empathic immersion of the artwork viewer in the same danger as those one board, collapsing the separation between spectator and scene which sustained the affective distance of the traditional shipwreck painting.

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The commonalities—and divergences—of Vernet and Turner's mast legends allow us to trace the themes of affect, spectatorship, and realism through the modern age. Changes in reception of the shipwreck painting, the social attitudes and assumptions regarding the relationship between representation and suffering, provide a means to interrogate the wider shifts in the moral seascape. I have suggested that the progressive heightening of the viewer's involvement in the scene throughout this long history reflects an increasing moral imperative to deny the sympathetic yet distant affective response which was provoked by earlier paintings.

As Alain Corbin has pointed out, already in 1799, the French artist Pierre Henri de Valenciennes made observations regarding Vernet's work which challenged the emotional force of the coastal depiction of shipwreck. De Valenciennes' comments are deeply concerned with perspective:

> When you paint the sea only along the coasts and on the shores, you run the risk of not being able to deploy all the interest that a shipwreck can inspire. […] What a difference if the storm is felt in the open sea! The ship, sad plaything of the winds and the raging waves, cannot resist their violent efforts. The sails are torn and their shreds carried away; the masts creak, break and fall on the deck. […] The spectator sees them in this cruel position; he follows them with his eyes; his heart is moved and grieved; tears come to his eyes; the pain he feels does not even allow him to conceive the hope that these

> unfortunate men will be able to reach a shore from which Providence will seem to stretch out its hand to pull them out of the abyss and save lives that may be precious to their children and useful to their country.

However, de Valenciennes concludes, "this interest is somewhat weakened by the appearance of help given or received from all sides." [my translation] (de Valenciennes, 1799: 490–491) These claims foreground lifesaving at sea as an aesthetic concern: even in at the turn of the century, the potentialities of rescue were already troubling the wild sublimity of the shipwreck scene.

Indeed, the developments in organized coastal lifesaving through the next decades meant that rescue was often close at hand for those wrecked near the shore. 19th-century innovations in the technologies of lifesaving—the Manby Apparatus, the lifeboat—can thus be seen as an aesthetic concern. In bridging the gap between spectator and suffering, they pierce the flat surface of the maritime painting, troubling the parallel between the viewer of the artwork and the shore-bound spectator of shipwreck. De Valenciennes seems to advocate for a return to the Dutch tradition, the depiction of forsaken vessels beyond the aid of potential salvation. In this context, the evolution of Turner's representations of shipwreck can be seen as a response to this imperative—to draw the viewer away from the safety of the shore, while at the same time foregrounding the subjectivity of the artist, mediating the subjectivity of the viewer. Turner's claims regarding his own position vis-à-vis the depicted scene, of human and technological frailty in the face of nature's elemental wildness, can thus be seen as a means to heighten the moral demands of representing peril at sea.

Notes

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1. Two of the most prominent painters of Dutch seascapes, Ludolf Backhuizen and Willem van de Velde the Younger, were also said to have gone out to sea in stormy weather in order to observe the elements. (Goedde, 1989: 122)
2. George William Manby, Barrack Master at Great Yarmouth, was the creator, in 1807, of the Manby Apparatus, a mortar used to fire a line of communication to aid those aboard ships imperiled near the shore.
3. Concerning Turner's close engagement with the Dutch tradition, see also Monks, 2009.
4. A number of scholars have already noted the similarity, and significance, of the claims regarding the stories of Vernet and Turner being tied to the mast. (Riding, 2014: 128–130; Wilton, 1981: 99; Levitine, 1967: 97; Warrell, 2009: 220)

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4. Seascapes of the Drowned: Günther Uecker and the Iconography of the Dead of Shipwreck*

Henning Trüper

Images of the Dead

The seascape is the depiction of a terrestrial space inevitably associated with human death, on one hand, and technology for preventing and postponing death, on the other. Even where the seascape serves as a stage for supernatural creatures—all those deities hovering above the waters—it uses the intimation of insubmersibility as a sign of immortality. There is a question, then, as to how the genre has historically regulated the representation of the dead; and a further question of how these regulations intersect with a cultural history of moralities—broadly understood as the historical sprawl of malleable language games about duties, virtues, and certain kinds of values—that concern the care for the dead, the saving of lives, and whatever else these domains of moral precepts have been made to symbolize.

The iconography of the dead in the history of European visual culture has always been based on apotropaic principles akin to euphemism: when the dead are to be represented—outside of the confines of medical illustration—they are treated as if they have to be placated or diverted by misleading signage from the fact of their being put on display. Their decomposition and disintegration is, to an overwhelming extent, concealed, for instance in tombs and graveyards of unending variety. The loss of the dead is often indicated through cenotaphs, markers for empty tombs. Where the dead are represented corporeally, they are shown as if quietly asleep; as transfigured, idealized figures in the afterlife; as ghosts; as clean bones and skulls in mortuary culture; as beautiful unfortunates, usually female and very recently deceased; as miraculously resurrected (Lazarus, the Last Judgment); and also as victims of violence,

especially of war, but if so, usually displayed with some degree of symbolic distancing in place (faces commonly hidden from view). The figure of the dead Christ, on and off the cross, is no doubt the most widespread type of representation of the dead body in European visual culture. The iconography of the crucifixion encapsulates the mentioned traits; it allows for varying degrees of ostentatious cruelty, but within limits.

The specific patterns of corporal decay that continued immersion in water operates on dead bodies remain without firmly established imagery. European visual culture has not supplied any even remotely realistic iconography of the dead of drowning; euphemistic tendencies are even more abundant than in other domains of the representation of the dead.[1] In recent years, there has been only one image of a drowned person, the three-year-old Syrian boy Alan Kurdi, that has circulated globally; and the salient breach of taboo in this case was implicitly and explicitly justified by the moral significance of showing the consequences of what amounted to a *de facto* European refusal of human rights to war refugees, thus with an overriding argument of political legitimation familiar from the history of journalism. Visually, the euphemistic character of the respective image is, however, obvious: averted face, no signs of decay, the body having been in the water only for a very short time; wetness is the only sign of drowning. (Fehrenbach and Rodogno, 2016)

I will pursue the notion, here, that the particular taboo around the dead of drowning is an indication that the drowned carry a specific symbolic significance. The apotropaic or avoidance iconography of the drowned is, I will argue, a privileged site for understanding crucial interconnections of modern European visual and moral cultures; and these interconnections are not stable but form a particular history of meanings, symbols, and signs that unfolds in what one might call seascapes of the drowned. I will start out from a point that may seem tangential, but is crucial to the problem at hand: this is the personalized genre of the "nail image" (*Nagelbild*) in the work of German artist Günther Uecker (*1930). I will then insert this image type in a trajectory of the modern iconography of the dead of drowning, from the 19th century to the present.

The Nail Image and the Drowned

The *Nagelbild*, a plastic genre, has one of its chief points of reference in surrealism; Man Ray's iron with nails (*Cadeau*, 1921), for instance, comes to mind. The surrealist preoccupation with nails may have had one of its cultural-historical points of origin in the strange phenomenon of the "Iron Hindenburg" statues in Germany during World War I: wooden likenesses of the military leader that were fortified by a

participatory practice of nailing, tickets for which could be bought from the government as a contribution to the war effort. The Dadaist Hugo Ball, in particular, reacted to this practice. At the same time, there was a growing consciousness, by way of ethnographic museums, of primarily African wooden statuary embellished with nails. (Haselbeck, 2021: 123–179; see also Diers, 1993) In the formation of European empires, nails, as the most transportable variant of a commodity made from often coveted iron, had played a significant role as a means of exchange. The subtle self-alignment of German society during World War I with qualities, and aesthetics, associated with "barbarism" was noted by contemporary observers, as was the sacrificial character of nailing as a practice of votive offering.

For Uecker, nail images have relied both on flat, canvas-covered carriers specifically designed for the purpose and on ready-made objects he then covered in carpets of nails. (on the overall oeuvre, see Honisch, 1983) The genre, which was, as it were, brand-making for the artist, is a hybrid of painting and sculpture; Uecker has often applied paint to the nails or covered flattened nails under white paper. The arrangements of nails indicate order or disorder, natural or industrial landscape, or indeed inner landscapes, as in *Field* [Feld] and *Sea* [Meer] (both 1970, fig. 4.1–2), of wildly swaying or rigidly controlled emotion. In this game of folding the inward and the outward into each other, the legacy of Romanticism is still discernible, as a pattern of mutual expression that entails the synchronicity of the nonhuman and the human. A work such as *Injured Field* [Verletztes Feld] (1982, plate 8) brings out these qualities clearly, with the landscape carrying an additional charge of trauma as injury. The presence of this basic pattern imposes a subtle limiting condition, an operational rule, on the abstract character of Uecker's nail images. The trajectory of abstraction in the nail image is one that is rooted in the rules of expression of Romanticism, and in particular the landscape genre, from which it departs, yet the memory of which it retains.

Another condition of this individual genre is that it makes visible a distinction of carrier matter and expressive matter. It is the nails that draw the viewer's primary attention, not the underlying canvas. Even when contrasted with a ready-made object that resists being relegated to the background in quite the same manner as a whitened flat surface, nails remain the chief agents of expression. These nails are serial objects, and they, too, are ready-made. Tokens of a rigid type, all of the same size and shape, products of industrial machinery and standardization—Uecker has overwhelmingly used just one make of nail per artwork—their expressive force is that of a collective of non-individuals. The viewer's gaze is not held by any individual nail; the individual nail one may have briefly focused on will be difficult to find again once the gaze has wandered.

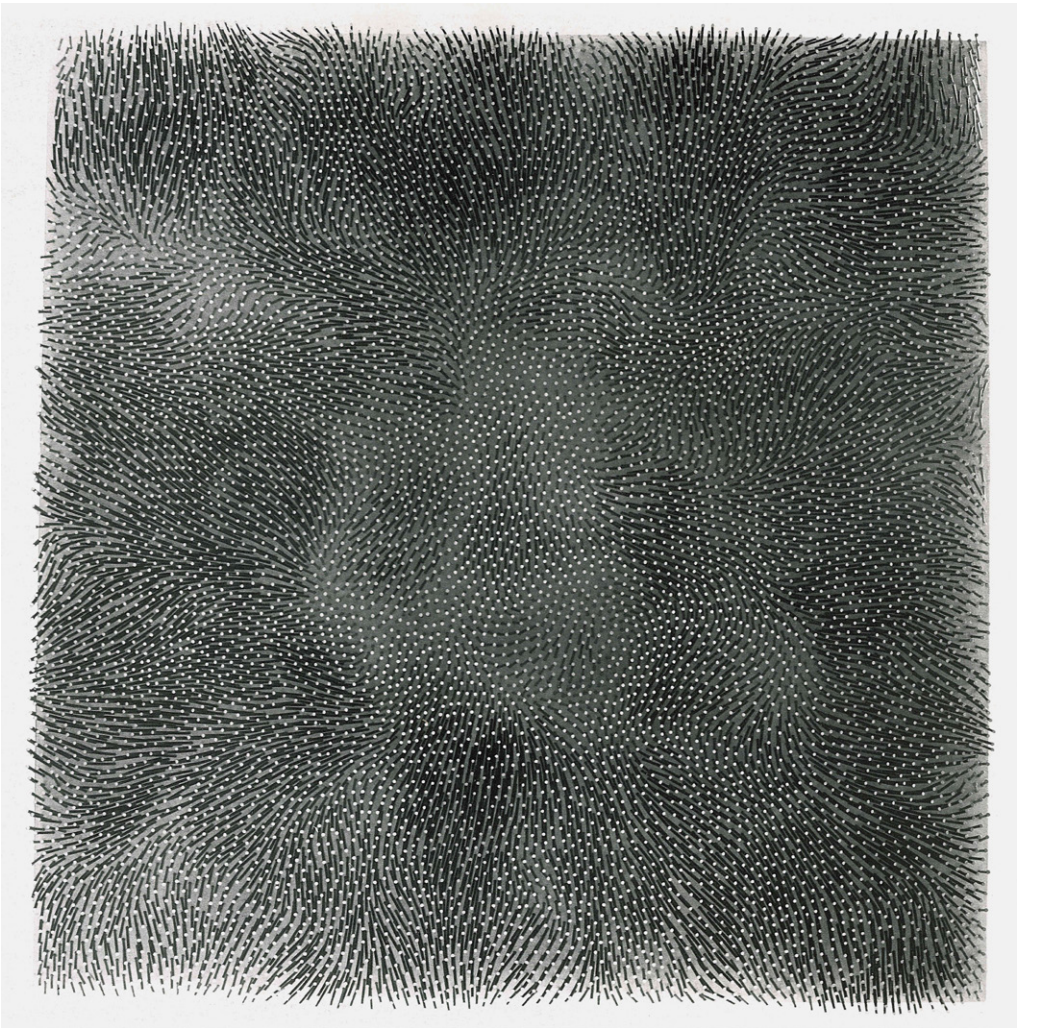

Fig. 4.1.
Günther Uecker, *Field*, 1970, nails on canvas on wood, 160×160 x10 cm. Private collection (Honisch 1983 WVZ 669).

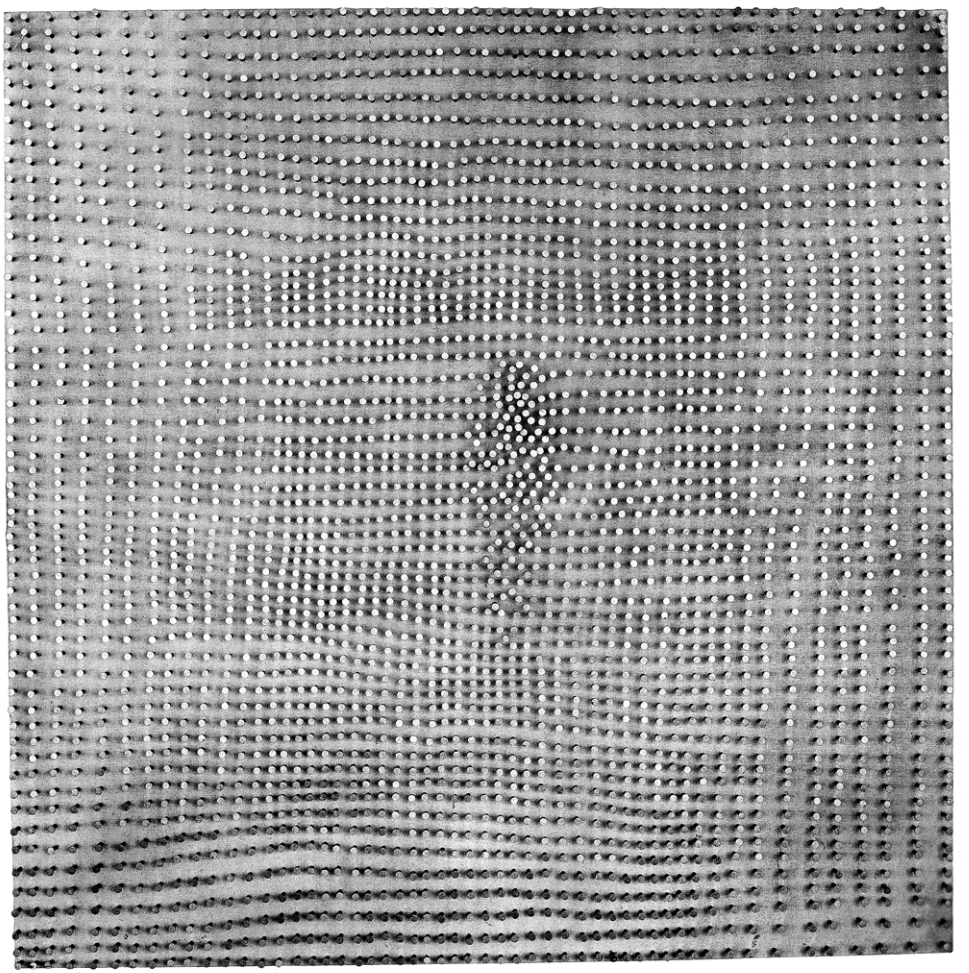

Fig. 4.2.

Günther Uecker, *Sea*, 1970, nails on canvas on wood, 150×150 x 15 cm. Private collection (Honisch 1983 WVZ 661).

And yet, the nail struck in epitomizes individuality; for, once hammered down, it is in place for good. Its position afterwards cannot be significantly altered, or else it will lose its hold. The damage done to the underlying surface is permanent as well. This antagonistic structure—repetitiveness and individuality, the defining features of what is usually called a situation, both typified and individualized—guarantees that the nail image, while often appearing meticulously planned, is actually gestural and spontaneous. The work the artwork carries out is that of an arrangement of appropriated, redeployed industrial products. The preceding act of appropriation is one of workmanship adapted to the pre-produced form of the nail. The artist adjusts his body to the necessities of the material; but the artwork is also determined by bodily possibilities, since its size is usually limited by Uecker's actual reach. The nail image is then an interface between the human body and the machine. The obstinate insistence of this image type on its own proper meaning, its *Eigensinn*, lies elsewhere, in a conquest of futility and uselessness.

The nail has played a specific role as an expression-bearing object in the European iconography of the dead body. It is most prominent in depictions of the crucifixion. The nail is a symbol of the violence and pain inflicted on the human-divine body of Christ. The crucifixion is the key event of Christian mortuary culture that redefines the very meaning of death. The nail acts as a metonymic sign. It draws up the entire complex of sacrifice, salvation, and the life eternal, even once-removed, as in the tradition of the suffering, showing, and depiction of the stigmata that begins with St. Francis and in which the wound is the miraculous metonymic sign of the nail of the crucifixion. The nail integrates the pain of torturous killing with the desire for the overcoming of death. This desire has a universalistic side; it is, or pretends to be, the master-desire, the organizing, governing principle of all human want, for which the pain of the crucifixion, and its metonymy, the nail, serve as substitutes. It is then not altogether surprising that the nail is also a symbol of penetration and carries sexual connotations.

Yet Uecker's use of nails also signals a departure from this iconographic tradition. In response to the obvious Christian connotation, he developed a one-liner: "Already Christ became famous with nails," to mock the banality of a mindset that only ever jumped to Christianity for the interpretation of art. (Holeczek, 1982: 16) The industrialized nail is overwhelmingly functional, a construction tool that aligns with the gestures and sounds of work; its shape and feel would appear grotesque in a crucifixion scene. In some of Uecker's nail-covered objects, such as the 1964 *Piano*, created in a live performance at a piano shop in Gelsenkirchen, (fig. 4.3) the character of the coating of nails is that of a protective armament rather than an injury (or, arguably, both). Moreover, Uecker's nails connote the texture of text, the dichotomy

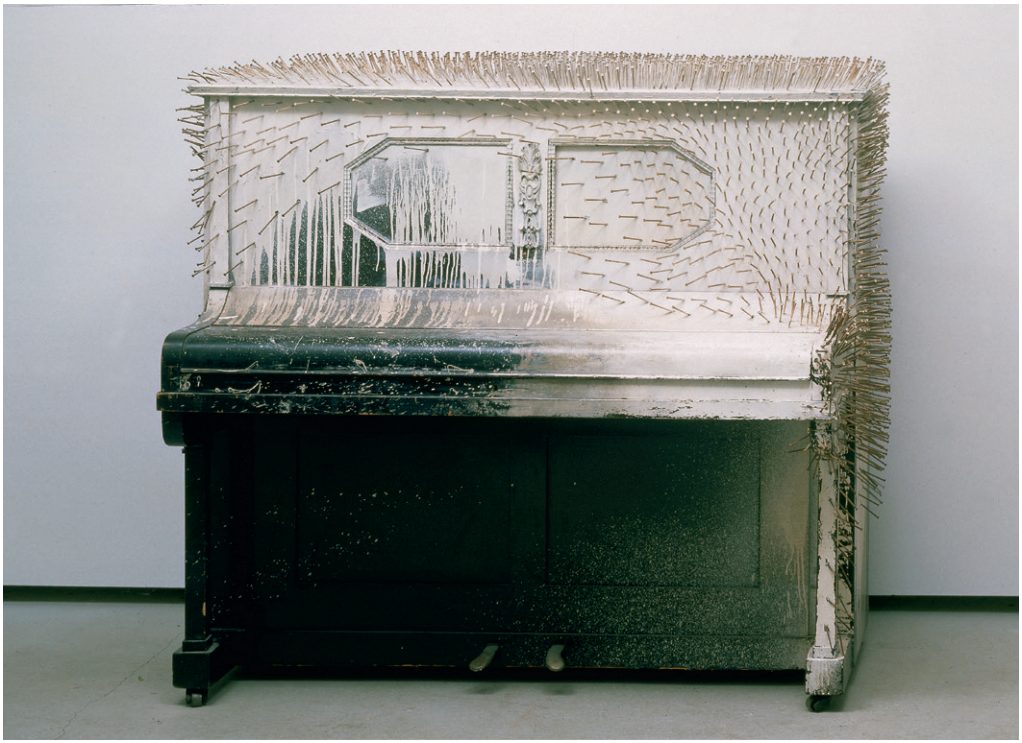

Fig. 4.3.
Günther Uecker, *Piano*, 1964, nails and white paint on piano, 138×150×80 cm. Künzelsau, Sammlung Würth, Inv. 3356. Photography by Philipp Schönborn, Munich.

of the written page with its contrast of signs and non-signifying background. It is consistent that another large complex of motifs in Uecker's work has to do with writing. (Dombrowe, 2006) With regard to the traditional meaning of the nail, Uecker primarily appears to pursue a formalist departure from an iconography whose expressive pretenses have become empty. This implies a specific stance toward history, namely a gesture of severance from the past that marks the nail image as a form of radical modernism. Uecker's association with the ZERO Group, an influential collective of primarily light and kinetic artists, all roughly the same age, who met as students at the Düsseldorf Academy of Arts in the 1950s, signaled that he shared, to some extent, in the willingness to be emphatically contemporary, to discard the past and embrace the material reality of the high-industrial present, of a life with and among technical objects. This life, no doubt, has a tragic dimension. Yet tragedy has also been industrialized; it has become generic. The nail image is also about nailing shut the coffin of a past that believed in non-generic tragedy (and it connotes the meanwhile defunct funerary ritual of closing the coffin). This also means, however, that the past never fully passes, as long as this artistic practice is upheld. Holding on to the coffin means holding on to the dead.

There is an element of compulsive repetition in the nail image that connotes Freud's ideas on repetition as a means of coping with, but also perpetuating, trauma. The repetition compulsion is carried over into ritual forms, another process the nail image intends to make visible. Repetition is an expression of what Freud calls the "death drive," the organism's directedness toward organically caused disintegration, which goes along with a strong impulse to protect itself from external forces of disintegration. (Freud, 1940) While initially the formalist intention of the nail images appeared to be their primary rationale, more recently, in a more retrospective vein, Uecker has used press interviews to add to and in a way reinterpret the meaning of the genre, specifically with regard to their relation to the past. In 2012, speaking to the *Welt* newspaper's Cornelius Tittel, he recounted several personal memories from the end of World War II that he considered decisive for his artistic choices. (Tittel, 2012) Uecker spent his childhood years on the Baltic coast of Germany, on the Wustrow Peninsula (near Rerik), at the time a restricted military training area (he emigrated to West Germany in 1953). He recalls two episodes from the spring of 1945 as particularly significant. The first is that of nailing shut the doors and windows of his childhood home in an effort to prevent the soldiers of the Red Army from entering the house. The sole male in the family at this point, for Uecker the actual success of this defensive craftwork would have been a source of pride and a symbol of imminent maturity, but also situated in a context of ubiquitous violence and intense fear.

After a few weeks, relations with the Soviet occupiers having become more routine, Uecker was ordered, along with two other boys his age, to inter a large number of dead bodies that had washed up on the beach at the beginning of May. These were victims of the bombing of the *Cap Arcona* and two further, barely maneuverable former passenger ships that had been anchored in the Bay of Lübeck. Over the preceding weeks, the SS had used these ships for the imprisonment of some 7,800 concentration camp inmates who had been forced to Lübeck on death marches from subcamps of the Neuengamme complex all over Northern Germany. With British infantry having already reached the city of Lübeck on May 2, the Royal Air Force flew an air raid on the flotilla and downed the vessels on May 3. Around 350 of the prisoners survived, but roughly 7,500 of them did not. Survivors were also shot at by German troops from boats and from land. Sailors and guard soldiers, too, died in the hundreds.[2] (Goguel, 1982; Lange, 1988; Ineichen, 2015; Watson, 2017; Vallaud and Aycard, 2017; Long, 2018) Corpses washed up on shores all around the bay, including in the Wustrow area.

Uecker describes the situation as one of abject abandon: "[f]ar more" than a hundred dead bodies were left decomposing on the beach for weeks—"they lay tightly packed like tourists on Mallorca in the present

day," and "they were already mummified and infested with maggots"—until he and the two other boys were forced to drag them into a mass grave and cover them up. The only identifying markers the bodies still bore were the remainders of their prisoner or navy uniforms. "Seeing this decomposition has made me speechless for decades," Uecker asserts, "only now in old age have I gained such composure in life [*lebensgefasst*] that I can speak about it." (Uecker in Tittel, 2012) He also emphasizes that his memories of the Soviet soldiers are not hostile; rather he speaks of their harrowed appearance and visible preceding suffering as having made a strong impression. In this way, a connection is struck: the dead of shipwreck as associated with the signifier of the nail, as mediated by the threatening and commanding presence of the Soviet soldiers. This is an associative leap, but clearly Uecker's own. The nails are abstract representatives of a personal trauma, but at the same time of a moral imperative: to process personal trauma, but also to respond to other people's suffering, to forego resentment, and to extend care to the dead. The proximity to funerary ritual is hardly accidental. Uecker also embraces a distinctly moral discourse when he emphatically denies hostility toward the Soviets, with a gesture that broadens the scope of violence and victimhood, but without levelling differences or creating false equivalences. Moral language is here deployed as a tool for reining in the sense of trauma, for creating agency over the repetition compulsion of trauma; and artistic expression is linked to this agency, and not merely to ritual as a formalization of repetition. Trauma becomes aesthetically active through morality. In *Framework* [Umrahmen] (1972, plate 9) Uecker uses nails as framing for a frame, generating a field of openness, which also carries a specific, even programmatic understanding of the nature of the image as potentially liberating.

There is even a wider impact of inhabiting a space of extreme violence the traces of which are not always visible any longer, but the general, even spectral, quality of which nonetheless lingers. Uecker also recounts being interrogated by suspicious West German officials as a refugee in 1953, and being held for months in a transition camp in Sandbostel, halfway between Hamburg and Bremen. This site was a former prisoner-of-war camp, where many thousands of Soviet soldiers had been starved to death, and where another 9,000–10,000 Neuengamme inmates had been evacuated in 1945, with roughly a third of them dying. (Borgsen and Volland, 2010) This indirect connection to the *Cap Arcona* disaster does not appear to have been known to Uecker. But of course, it was clear that the entire country was full of such sites of recent mass death. He expresses the conviction that he had been sleeping on the same straw mattresses as the former prisoners.

In the same interview, Uecker also gives an account of the origins of his artistic use of nailing:

> As an art student in Düsseldorf I drew my first nude studies. As a person with a rural mindset and sensibility, it was quite disconcerting to maltreat a nude model, reduced to small scale, with the pencil; it really unsettled me, I got pimples from it. In fact, one pokes around with the pencil in the model's vagina or pupil. To me it seemed a big lie. Then I read Mayakovsky—'Poetry is made with the hammer'[3]—and beat the pencil into the paper. This was realism for me. Emotions are in the hand, the hand is the tool, and the workplace is art. From there it was only a small step to work with hammer and nails. This is how the path presented itself to me then. But of course autobiographic experiences in the subconscious shape present action. (Uecker in Tittel, 2012)

So Uecker lays open a strategy of coping with revulsion about structural, also sexualized, violence in artistic practice. The use of hammer and nails, surprisingly, appears as the outcome of what in contemporary terms one could perhaps, if cautiously, call a rebellion against the male gaze in art. Uecker emphasizes that this motif was not recognizable to him at the time, but appeared in an abstract, almost art-theoretical guise. The painful, silencing memories from the end of the war function not as prefigurations of the practice of nailing, but rather as a revelation of the pervasiveness of violence that is, in some sense, to be countered and kept at bay by a practice of nailing things shut. So artwork is marked by an engagement in a fight against suffering, near and far, concrete and abstract.

The meaning of the dead of the sea in this context is specific. Unidentifiable except by the most tenuous markers, they are on the brink of being universal dead. More precisely, they are always on the brink of being negatively universal, constituted as such by their non-belonging to any particular community; and they have traditionally often been buried apart from the communal dead wherever they came ashore. Thomas Laqueur (2015) has argued, albeit tentatively, that there is a particular "work of the dead," their deployment for the symbolic maintenance of communities. The living tend to be eager to claim the dead as "theirs." The world over, funerary practices are ritualized and contain uniform elements, no matter the level of individual deviation and historical change that is tolerated. (Trüper, 2021) The dead of the sea have often been excluded from such practices. In some historical circumstances, washed-up corpses were cremated, as was common, for instance, in the early 19th century as a measure of "quarantine." Quarantine, in this context, signified statal authority over such dead bodies that had previously been treated, by social convention, as contaminating those who touched them with the taint of dishonor. (Lehmann, 2015) The dead of the sea have in the past been exempt from at least some of the claims of

the living, and their role has been to be exempt in this way, to mark the limits of the claims the living make on the dead. Uecker's reference to the dead of the *Cap Arcona* appears to me to align with this symbolic use of the dead of the sea, as a negative universal collective that marks, above all, the general frailty and vulnerability of humans and perhaps the ultimate non-belonging of all the dead.

Regarding the dead of the concentration camps, to whom the victims of the *Cap Arcona* belonged, Uecker has written of

> a spontaneous youthful sense of preferring to be Jewish and gassed over having survived; this readiness toward non-being led to a kind of necrophilia. […] As the minorities, we, the living, suppress ourselves both politically and intellectually when we cease to orient ourselves toward the majority of the dead. The dead belong into the realm of the dead. Yet human autonomy can only be recognized in a conscious relation to the dead. (Uecker, 1981; reproduced in Honisch, 1983: 150)

Artistic practice requires the overcoming of a youthful over-identification with the victims and the acceptance of belonging not to their community, but rather to that of the perpetrators. This also means submitting to what is ultimately a moral imperative to leave the dead alone, to recognize their separateness and release them from instrumentalization by the living. This cannot be done without maintaining both the distance and the moral tie to them that the pamphlet evokes; and it seems that this process is facilitated by recognizing, as Uecker has it, if perhaps wrongly, that, taking the entire history of humankind into account, the dead are in the majority.

The governing imperative, in the set of norms and normative language games around the care for the dead Uecker recognizes here, cannot, then, proceed in the familiar framework of funerary culture, or even of the cenotaph and other forms of integrating the "lost" dead, the elusive corpses most commonly represented by the dead of the sea, into moral practices of care. Nor is it possible to resolve this through routines of memorialization and heroic efforts at counter-memorialization, as was done for the *Cap Arcona* victims in Hamburg by Alfred Hrdlicka. (Schubert, 1989) One must, on the contrary, break with these established practices and recognize a distance that renders easy community with these dead impossible. The nail image, viewed from the perspective of this moral meaning, does not pretend to incorporate the dead in a specific community; rather it serves to recognize and accept the limits of belonging. These features endow the drowned with particular meaning for a morality in which the universal validity of norms and the basic equality of humankind are at stake. The dead of the concentration camps constitute what can be read as a limiting case of a specific modern

moral culture, that of humanitarianism, the tendency and exhortation to expand community to the distant suffering stranger, (drawing on Boltanski, 1999) by all means possible, even at the risk of losing one's own life (as most consistently in the extreme case of shipwreck relief), and often by drawing on all manner of technical and economic means. The tentative extension of the humanitarian template of sympathy to the dead of the concentration camps signals that the moral imperative of aid and rescue and the sense of the expansion of community must ultimately part ways. As the concentration camps were not simply a system of the economic exploitation of human beings, but rather one in which an economy was created over their deaths, the humanitarian reliance on moral economies (with Fassin, 2012: 7f.) breaks down. The pre-established ethos that is repudiated here is that which ascribes to morality the power of creating community. This is a crisis point in humanitarian morality, which is forced to decide to discard community to preserve its integrity as a moral language game. Uecker's integration of funerary morality and personal trauma into the seascape of the drowned signals a corrective to humanitarianism, within the seascape genre and within the humanitarian template itself.

Humanitarian Seascapes

How had humanitarian meanings come to inhabit the seascape in the first place? The shipwreck seascape, specifically, as the primary indirect representation of the drowned, had become a genre in Dutch painting in the 17th century, infused with eternal meanings that drew on the wreck and rescue of St. Paul in *Acts,* 27, and the underlying apocalyptic meaning of the fable, as well as on allegorical notions of *fortuna* and *vanitas* in a more general, less biblical sense that could, for instance, pertain to the passage of time and even the slow "sinking" of ancient ruins into the ground. (Trempler, 2020) The seascape was both variant and counterpoint to landscape images; if the latter stressed virtue and the ordered distinctness of objects, the former was tied to a representation of world, a set of ontological and moral meanings that emphasized ungovernable contingency and disorder. The shipwreck genre, unlike the decidedly historical genre of the sea battle, was mid-size, indicating its middling prestige in the art market. (Goedde, 1989) After shipwreck had turned into a matter of ever-increasing public interest in the accelerating imperial history of the 18th century, around 1800 the genre changed its status, most prominently in the oeuvres of William Turner and Théodore Géricault. (Venning, 1985) Some shipwreck paintings became huge. They had a novel claim to size because they were suddenly part of the category of historical painting, one of the most

prestigious and expensive genres before the eventual breakdown of the academy and salon art market system later in the century. While early modern representations of shipwreck had usually been generic, the new Romantic-era paintings often—implicitly or explicitly—identified the ships by name and memorialized the victims of specific disasters.

The historicization of the genre, however, was not an entirely autonomous process. It was informed by a novel moralization in terms of the co-emerging moral culture of humanitarianism. The wider history of artistic representations transformed shipwreck into one of the primary visual symbols of human suffering at a distance, and of a humanitarian duty to engage in this-worldly acts of lifesaving. The moral appeal of human insertion into a wildly contingent reality became bound up with imperatives of action instead of detachment.[4] Romantic-era seascape painting frequently played with abandoning a perspectival vantage point on firm ground in order to draw the viewer into the event as an imaginary participant, a fellow-sufferer of the drowning in the water, or almost. The distance of suffering was relative. Suffering became tied to outside spectatorship in novel ways, namely through a connection so stable it could not be disrupted. This stability could only be attained through the moral imperative with which the situation was charged. It was a bond of duty that underpinned the various sentiments of empathy and practices of engagement on behalf of the suffering. The moral meaning was universal. It created a community of the suffering and the witnesses to suffering which overrode other community boundaries. One of the decisive conditions of this arrangement was that the witnesses and the suffering were in exactly the same moment, their timelines, one might say, perfectly synchronized. Synchronicity was often signified by the inclusion of technological means of rescue—William Turner, in particular, focused on this repeatedly and persistently—that provide, within the image space, an objective, non-experiential measure of simultaneity, a temporal point of reference common to both the suffering and their humane helpers. The depiction of the flying rescue lines of rope mortars, of blue distress lights, or of lifeboats being pulled through the surf became indirect markers of a seascape organized around drowning as its defining boundary condition.

The occasionally eerie insistence of contemporary art to belong to the present moment, a non-negotiable "now," is rooted in the synchronization of the moral bond between the suffering and their witnesses.[5] (Trüper, 2019) The sublime quality of this synchronicity, the overawing effect it has on the viewer, whether of Romantic shipwreck paintings or of present-day works that ostentatiously exhibit their contemporariness, has to do precisely with the fact that these artworks make visible synchronicity across distance. The Romantic synchronization of the inner and the outer arguably was one of the earliest variants of this

arrangement. Ever since, the gesture of contemporariness in visual artworks has drawn on the humanitarian template of synchronization as ultimately based on empathy, an emotive sharing of suffering mediated, and even commanded, by moral imperatives. This condition has created the modern moral seascape of the drowned.

In this way, then, the dead of shipwreck acquired a new significance: no longer that of symbolizing the vanity of all earthly pursuits and the warning to mind the end and divine judgment, but a denunciation of suffering unalleviated, rescue missed, and duty unheeded. Turner relies on the humanitarian issues of his time; he was a pioneer of depicting the work of then novel volunteer movements for the rescue of the shipwrecked, for instance, and of novel technologies of lifesaving, such as the line mortar. He also uses the representation of drowning to draw on other, even more widely resonating humanitarian causes in order to create novel iconographies. So, for instance, in his famed canvas *Slavers Throwing overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon coming on* (1840, also known as *The Slave Ship*) (plate 1), he foregrounds (as Géricault did) "the dead and dying," of whom only single limbs and the manacles with which they were tied together are shown. In the lower right-hand corner, a single leg is visible of a body that is otherwise thronged and submerged by voracious fish. The painting is not one of wreck, though its original title suggests that the slave ship that can be seen on the astonishingly tilted horizon (which suggests a floating viewpoint, possibly among the "dead and dying") is about to enter the "typhoon" as a punishment of sorts. The painting is well known to be informed by Turner's support for, but also historicization of, the abolitionist movement. (Landow, 1982: 196–197; McCoubrey, 1998; Baucom, 2005; Smiles, 2007; Frost, 2010) The synchronicity at hand, in abolitionism, is that of the guilt of the consumers of slavery-produced goods, of implication in a much longer history of slavery. (according to Haskell, 1985) Subliminally, this sense remained in place beyond the actual legal abolition of slavery in the British Empire of 1833–1834.

Since the distance between the witness as the subject of representation and the reality of suffering as that which is represented is a prerequisite of humanitarian morality, there is a profound connection between this morality and the scene of "the dead and dying" of the sea. By virtue of the moral meanings invested in the dead of shipwreck, the genre of the seascape arguably acquires a distinct novel meaning that further sets it apart from the wider landscape genre. After *c.* 1800, the heavily agitated, sublime seascape is shot through with humanitarian moral imperatives of rescue and therefore is always, on some level, a seascape of drowning, while the sublime of, say, the mountainous landscape is not associated with humanitarianism in this manner. Turner's seascapes often contain an element of the fantastic, a hypostatization of the unreal for

the situation of suffering. Clearly, historicization for him did not mean providing an accurate visual account of how a given event had unfolded. In *The Slave Ship* this is clear from the frenzied feeding fish, which have few naturalistic qualities and connote mythical sea monsters. The ways in which seascapes avoid providing images of drowned corpses has a similar function. Iconographic euphemism keeps morality itself at a distance even in a scene that is as directly built on humanitarian moral culture as this one. Rather than or, perhaps more precisely, next to being simply exploitative in nature—as became a topical charge subsequent to David Dabydeen's (1995) poem on the painting—such images seek to reject the idea of a straightforward depiction of suffering for the sake of humanitarian morality.

The underlying structure of Turner's uneasy humanitarianism continues quite stably to govern the sense of reality in modern European visual arts. The constellation underpinning Uecker's nail images is in many regards still part of this structure. His orientation toward unease and an aesthetic not simply given over to moral normativity are rather continuous with Turner's seascapes, even though personal trauma and its concomitant moral language game are brought in as a novel element. The shifting meanings of the nail, between trauma and serial abstraction, between the stand-in for the human figure and the interplay of order and chaos in the foundations of the world, would appear to leave relations between the artwork and the reality of suffering on the move. Uecker's tendency to offer reinterpretive clues from personal memory might even be read as a contribution to this mobility, so as to not let the works become static and to re-establish their contemporariness over time. The work of art, as subject to the humanitarian template, would have to be ongoing, also in its relations with the artist's life, in order to sustain a sense of unease; and so the artist's involvement with its meaning, if not with its shape and form, would have to remain intact over the course of his life. The reflexivity the Romantics deemed necessary for working with and within the contemporariness offered by the humanitarian template continues to require this type of mobility. The shift in means of expression that characterizes Uecker's nail images can thus be seen as continuous with this older *mode de faire*.

The Trajectory from Trauma

How do more recent developments of the visual representation of the dead of the sea and of drowning relate to this historical trajectory? Uecker, in the 2012 interview with Tittel, insists that only the solidifying experience of a lived life has made it properly possible for him to discuss trauma as a point of origin for his artistic work; and he intimates that

he had not spoken about this background in his younger years. Yet, if one looks into earlier studies of his work, it is clear that he has pointed to these origins for a much longer period than he lets on in 2012. For instance, in a 1982 monograph, a biographical essay by Bernhard Holeczek already mentions "indelible experiences of horror in the encounter with death, with the creature tortured to death, and soon after, knowledge about the atrocities of Nazi terror" as a foundation of Uecker's artistic practice. (Holeczek, 1982: 10) While generic, these references are sufficiently concrete to indicate that the artist was already talking about his 1945 experiences in the 1980s, and probably earlier. It seems hard to deny that the place of trauma in the understanding of artwork has since shifted and that Uecker has followed along. Trauma was often marginalized, even concealed, in post-1945 modernist art until maybe the 1970s. Subsequently, trauma has been acknowledged and displayed ever more prominently. The uneasy relationship with humanitarian morality discernible in Uecker's work increasingly appears to be in retreat. Paradoxically, this appears to be the case not because humanitarian morality is playing a larger role, but rather because it is being integrated into, and instrumental for, a novel moral idiom.

In 2015 the Zentrum für politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty)—a Berlin-based performance art collective that has repeatedly made national news in Germany over the last decade or so—exhumed several bodies of victims of refugee shipwrecks in the Mediterranean who had been buried anonymously in Greece and Sicily. (On ZPS, see Stange et al., 2018) With the help of forensic methods, the bodies were identified, then transported to Berlin, where they were reburied in marked and named graves ZPS had procured for them. This happening, called *The Dead Are Coming* [Die Toten kommen], included the digging of mock graves and a display of mock caskets in front of the federal parliament building in Berlin. (plate 10) The work, within the medium of artistic performance, with actual corpses that represent themselves—although they remain invisible, the apotropaic taboo upheld—arguably marks a departure from, or at least a transgression against, the distancing model of representational unease that had been characteristic for the visual arts since *c.* 1800. In particular, the performance *The Dead Are Coming* relinquishes the older moral meaning of the dead of the sea as negatively universal dead, since the very point of the artwork is the identification and thus reunification of the dead with a community, and, in a political vein, a community of citizens. (Lewicki, 2017) The humanitarian moral impulse is emphatically on display: the dead of migrant and refugee shipwreck in the Mediterranean are to be recognized as part of a community comprising both their families and "us," in this case the German national public, or perhaps a "European" public. The distance separating "us" from "their" plight and "our" guilt (by neglect)

and complicity in "their" incurring the misfortune of drowning are denounced. A culture of denied witnessing, of willful ignorance, has to be overcome. The norms governing funerary culture are deployed for what is ultimately a humanitarian purpose: the dead are rescued (from the lack of care of the living, which their previous anonymous burials suggest), even though, and because, the living were not.

Fig. 4.4:
Christoph Büchel, *Barca Nostra*, 2019, Venice. Photograph by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, Paris (source: Wikimedia Commons, CC-BY 2.0).

It seems doubtful that one could understand the ZPS performance without understanding the cultural template of humanitarian morality, but in addition one also needs to take into account the ambition of achieving moral universality through the medium of communitarianism, a moral language that grants primacy to community as the precondition of morality. The decisive change that creates the contemporary lack of unease in the alignment of artwork and humanitarian morality seems to be the semiotic move by which any symbolism is abandoned and the dead are deployed, in the artwork, as signs of themselves. In a variety of ways, this is characteristic of numerous contemporary artworks that address the seascapes of refugee and migrant shipwreck, for instance Ai Weiwei's installations made from life jackets discarded on Greek beaches; or Christoph Büchel's display of *Barca Nostra* at the 2019 Venice Biennale, (fig. 4.4) where he presented an actual wreck from 2015, a recovered nameless fishing vessel that had collided with a freighter sent to its aid, and sunk so quickly that it took the lives of some 500

of its passengers. (Diers, 2023: 150–171) There is consistent use, in this fast-growing body of work, of indexical signs that bear a direct causal and material connection to the events represented. Indexicality here symbolizes the connectedness and oneness of all things. The mode of visualization becomes curatorial, musealizing rather than historicizing. The negative universal has been replaced by a positive universal: everybody (and, increasingly, everything) belongs. The "we" that the artists represent in the act of representation has no discernible outside. The dead of shipwreck and drowning are put to work in the service of this universal community, which can be seen as refusing ever to exclude anyone, but also as refusing anyone a way out.

The older aesthetic uses of humanitarian morality had relied on the retention of markers of the distance that needed to be bridged by active engagement and that could also be impossible to overcome. The contemporary situation in the visual arts indicates that the seascape of the drowned has meanwhile been the site of another transition. Visual culture appears increasingly bound up with a sense of universal belonging that still accommodates the humanitarian imperative of lifesaving, but only in a secondary position, since it has been extended to the dead. It is not the aim, here, to cast critical judgment on this transition. Rather, the goal is to try to understand it and to point to the ways in which it is part of an intertwined history of moral and semiotic shifts that have caused several sea changes in iconography, as well as in the cultural meanings connected with the seascape of the dead of drowning: historicization, humanitarianism, trauma, communitarianism—all of these have been bound up with novel types of visual artistic representation. The sequence of these interrelated types, perhaps more clearly than anything else, constitutes the continuity of the cultural history of moralities underneath.

Notes

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1. Ophelia (from *Hamlet*) is the literary character probably most frequently depicted as drowned. For a case of a particular iconography being forged from the death mask of an actual drowned person, see Saliot, 2015.
2. *Cap Arcona* had also served as a set for the 1943 propagandistic German movie *Titanic*.
3. The reference is obscure; Uecker appears to combine a phrase of Nietzsche's ("philosophizing with the hammer") with an alleged saying by Mayakovsky according to which an artwork is a hammer with which to shape society.
4. In this regard, the history of humanitarianism aligns with Blumenberg, 1979.
5. I think that moral synchronization ought to be seen as distinct, if not necessarily separate, from the capitalist-monetary and aesthetic variants that Baucom, 2005: 41–46 discusses with reference to Chandler, 1998.

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5. Heinrich von Kleist's Cosmopolitism and the Openness of the Sea*

Rafael Jakob[1]

Heinrich von Kleist, the Prussian, a cosmopolitan? His plays and novellas written with moral-worldly intent? He was indeed restless, lived briefly in Paris and Switzerland, created literature about the revolution in Haiti and the earthquake in Santiago de Chile (although he may really have been thinking of the Lisbon earthquake). And repeatedly, he placed the personae of his novellas in strong relationship to the wider world. He thus supplies the hero of *Michael Kohlhaas* with a soul "[w]ell schooled in the world's ways" (LR: 130f.; DKV III: 47);[2] he measures that titular figure's actions in terms of the "memory," *Andenken*, in which he will be held by the world and places the "order" located in the horse-dealer's "heart" in relationship to the "monstrous disorder" of that selfsame world. (Ibid.: 114, 131 [tm]; 13, 47) After Kohlhaas has abjured house and home to rebel against the authorities because of the injustice he has endured, Kleist has him declare himself a "freeman of the Empire and the world, subject to God alone," and he has him take a "peculiar position […] in the world," one that is hardly comprehensible from a standpoint of *raison d'état*. (Ibid.: 143, 147; 68, 72) And finally, he renders him into a figure through whom the "fragile arrangement of the world" becomes clear. (Ibid.: 121 [tm]; 27) The plot of *Kohlhaas* escalates from the modest economy of the protagonist's house to the territories of Saxony and Brandenburg and onward to the level of the Holy Roman Empire. In the end, it even opens a vanishing line over the ocean: Kohlhaas considers taking "a ship to the Levant or the East Indies"—or as far as the heavens stay blue above other people than those with whom he is acquainted. (Ibid.: 185; 112) All told, the plot is determined by a figure who here, in the moment of a collision with power, forms an "*idea* of how the world would have to be." [my emphasis] (Földényi, 1999: 510)

Kleist's use of "world" in *Kohlhaas* evokes the cosmological concept captured in the German metaphor *Weltgebäude*, "world edifice:" the world as a firm and static repository of all things, an approach formulated in 18th-century Wolffian metaphysics and that would find resonance

elsewhere in Kleist's writing as well. (Rössler, 2020: 496ff.) At the same time, in *Kohlhaas* "world" is an anthropological concept allowing inquiry into the extent to which moral claims can be honored under specific circumstances; it thus includes a moral outline of other circumstances. And finally, with a protagonist engaged in cross-border business with a view to the Levant and East India, "world" also has economic, mercantile resonance in *Michael Kohlhaas*.

This complexity of "world," *Welt*, as both a term and concept informs highly fashionable 18th-century references to cosmopolitanism, *Weltbürgertum*, the "world citizenship" of a "world bourgeoisie." The debate surrounding the concept becomes virulent in the context of, for instance, the slow disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire, the active immigration policy of many German-speaking territories, and the discussion of exploitative international trade and trade in slaves. And it becomes virulent in the context of the call of revolutionary France in the early 1790s, directed at all "thinkers in the world," (Kleingeld, 2012: 11) to comment on the development of a new constitution—as it were, a cosmopolitan project. (Ibid.: 9–11) Against the backdrop of such debates and circumstances, in the 1790s Immanuel Kant endowed the idea of cosmopolitanism with its modern characteristic. This idea would then remain a consistent reference point: as an argument, derived from a specific concept of being human, for a universal validity of subjective rights. More specifically, this was the idea of a legally regulated international federation of free states recognized as sovereign legal subjects, together with just trading relations making their peaceful coexistence possible. Along with this came support for the principle of a universal right to hospitality, read asylum.

Kant's *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*—lectures the philosopher held between 1772 and 1796, published in 1798—offers the outline of an anthropology with cosmopolitan intent—an anthropology meant to be "knowledge of the world, which must come after our schooling" (Kant, 2006: 4)—and considers human beings in their determination (Bestimmung). Michel Foucault observes: "in *Anthropology*, man is neither a homo natura, nor a purely free subject; he is caught by the syntheses already operated by his relationship to the world." (Foucault, 2008a: 54f.) The text focuses on what the human being "as a free-acting being makes of himself, or can or should make of himself." (Kant, 2006: 3) The world is the stage and horizon for such human (self-) determination. (Hinske, 2013: 272ff.)

In Heinrich von Kleist's work, we find an echo of the pragmatic-anthropological stance. This is the case, for instance, in his early letters, where the questions of human nature, of one's own personal destiny, and of the plan that can be devised for a life are insistently present. In one early letter, Kleist explicitly experiments with the distinction

between the state-anchored and cosmopolitan citizen, the *Staatsbürger* and *Weltbürger*. (Kleist, 1982: 35; DKV IV: 56) Nevertheless, his writing will invent entirely different geographies and draw different vectors than does Kant from his Königsberg perch. Unlike what was the case for most German authors around 1800, as is well known Kleist felt strong distaste for the idea of pursuing an official career. Instead of doing so, hence instead of accepting a life-model that was then becoming firmly established, (Strunz, 2021) he led an unorthodox life, never finding firm, state-anchored civic status as a basis for the opening of a Kantian cosmopolitan horizon.

In any case, in the course of the Prussian reforms and accompanying forced "statification," (*étatisation*; see Foucault, 2008b: 77) that process not least involving education, the possibility of distinguishing between the *Weltbürger* and *Staatsbürger* was becoming increasingly questionable; "human determination" was emerging as a duty of the state. On the occasion of the founding of Berlin's university, Kleist's friend Adam Müller makes this very clear in an article in the *Berliner Abendblätter*—Kleist was the paper's editor. On the "fatherland's soil," Müller argues, scholars are obligated to train not *Weltbürger* but rather, first and foremost, civil servants—this the duty of the university as well. (BA, Bl. 2–4) Let us here note that where the opening text of the *Abendblätter*, "The Zoroasters' Prayer" ("Gebet des Zoroaster"), is still placed in the Enlightenment service of determining human purpose, the paper's first edition also formulates the claim that its contents are "enriched by statistical news from the provinces." (BA, Bl. 1) In the case of the *Abendblätter*, we might say, the newspaper attests to a loss of world: of that world, imagined through an Enlightenment lens, that could serve as a fixed goal for the forward movement of cosmopolitan progress.

Kleist's novellas still contain broken forms of cosmopolitan thinking. Kleist moves the Kantian horizon, meant to orient human beings toward a self-perfection stemming from self-founded goals, (Rölli, 2011: 101) into a utopian or illusory realm. He responds to that utopism by offering a different referential frame: the novellas are "moral stories"—Kleist considered making this the title of the collected texts (DKV IV: 446)—because they assess the approach of their personae to a particular sort of event: sudden loss—or else its sudden threat—of one's instituted socio-existential position. One or another event is always insistently present: the war in *The Marquise of O*, embodying the rape of the novella's heroine; the earthquake in *The Earthquake in Chile*, the basis for the central amorous pair's improbable salvation; the fire and plague in *The Foundling*; the storm unfolding in *Michael Kohlhaas* as his humiliation is recounted. And in each case, the events signify a tear in the narrative's chronological fabric.

Because they inquire into the ways their personae embody such events, we can ascribe a moral intuition to these novellas in a manner formulated by Gilles Deleuze:

> Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us. To grasp whatever happens as unjust and unwarranted (it is always someone else's fault) is, on the contrary, what renders our sores repugnant—veritable ressentiment, resentment of the event. (Deleuze, 1990: 149)

Scenes of shipwreck and threatened demise furnish the paradigm for this event-ethic: an ethic, taking narrative form, that Kleist articulated against the backdrop of a state intervention increasingly rendering impossible the cosmopolitanism of Kantian stamp. Instead of the universality of world-citizenship, Kleist presents us with the event's impersonality; instead of a logic of progress, of general moral self-formation, the event's insistent repetition. This is the context for Kleist's editorial reworking of Achim von Arnim's and Clemens Brentano's critique, written for the *Abendblätter*, of Caspar David Friedrich's painting now known as *The Monk by the Sea* (1808–1810). Kleist here defines Friedrich's paintings as capturing a relationship to the world grounded in this different ethics; in his reworking, precisely at the point where Kleist decisively moves away from the version submitted by the two Romantic authors, he tellingly speaks of a "sad and uncomfortable position in the world." (Kleist, 1982: 231 [tm]; DKV III: 543)

Swaying Ground and Terra Firma: Kleist's *Earthquake in Chile* and *The Foundling*

Just after Kleist has given up his educational plans, his life becomes marked by the movements, characteristic of his writing, of plunging and fleeing within a border zone between state and world. In a letter revealing his famous "Kant crisis," he transfers a shipwreck that he nearly experienced into an existential metaphor—a metaphor meant, to paraphrase Hans Blumenberg, "to grasp the movement of his existence:" (Blumenberg, 1997: 7)

> But we were scarcely in the middle of the Rhein when such a fierce storm broke out that the boatmen could no longer control the vessel. The waves […] seized the ship on its surface and tossed it so violently that through its extremely dangerous swaying, it terrified everyone

> on board. Forgetting all the others, each person held on to a beam, I myself to survive. There is nothing more revolting than this fear of death. Life is the only property that is only worth something when we do not think highly of it. It is contemptable when we cannot easily let it go; and only those who could throw it away easily and joyfully can use it for great ends. Those loving it with great attentiveness are already morally dead, since their highest life force, namely being able to sacrifice it, molders while it is cherished. (Kleist, 1982: 115 [tm]; DKV IV: 247)

In an earlier letter, Kleist uses an archway as an existential metaphor: without supports, it will only avoid collapse because "all stones wish to cave in simultaneously." This offers Kleist a certain "solace:" "I as well will hold myself together if everything will have me sink." (Kleist, 1982: 76 [tm]; DKV IV: 159) Instead of this static image, considered from safe distance, which gives the cosmological metaphor of the world-edifice an existential turn, (Rössler, 2020: 496) now the experience of the loss of control of a ship's helm leads to a reflection on the right way to lead one's life. This was a period when life had long since been insurable, so that death had become calculable: paragraph 1968 of the second part of the Prussian Civil Code of 1794 declares, succinctly, that "everyone can have his own life insured." For Kleist, concern for life consists in finding an existential relation to death. Instead of re-presenting death in fear of it, a fear expressing a forgetting of death, that means opening life to the possibility of death. An element of ancient philosophy of death, perhaps conveyed through Montaigne, is being expressed here: an insistence that death be seen as a presence in the growth and decay of life, its "swaying." The alternative to this amounts to seeing death, from fear of it, as life's Other—"que philosopher, c'est apprendre à mourir," observes Montaigne in the First Book of his *Essais*. Radicalized as a call for scorning life and glorifying its sacrifice, the passage can be understood as an ethical counter—one addressing the question of "holding on" in a literal sense—to what Burkhard Wolf has described as Kant's demand, "precisely in the case of seamen, for replacement of the cult of 'sacrifice' by a moral culture that 'sacrifices,' even in the worst emergency, everything that is merely contingent, including one's own life, to absolute duty." (Wolf, 2020: 70)

In his novellas, Kleist varies the constellation manifest here of threatened demise, fear of death, and rescue. With Giorgio Agamben and Michel Foucault, Johannes Lehmann has argued that Kleist's scenes of rescue are reflections of a "rescue-politics" no longer solely concerned with "legal subjects" but now, as well, with "living beings" (Lehmann, 2011: 258): this against the backdrop of rescue societies founded around 1800 and with a view to regulations of the period

meant to make lifesaving possible. (Ibid.: 258ff.) From this perspective, the novellas mirror a modern juncture between sovereign power and biopolitical governmentality in which the "withdrawal of law in the state of exception," initially "producing naked life," would be aimed "not at ostracism and killing […] but at saving life." From this perspective, with his rescue-narratives Kleist "pursues the political until the roots of the concept of naked life." (Ibid.: 262)

In any event, before these Kleistian scenes reflect a "rescue-*politics*," we find scenes concerned with the use of life, the way it is led, in the presence of death. In the above-cited letter, on the very threshold of a typographical dash, a scenario of threatened drowning flips into ethical reflection. In the same way, these scenes always involve a constellation in which Kleist's personae are torn out of the given world of their local relations, after which comes an inquiry into the world, here understood as the pragmatic-anthropological dimension of a double determination: *being* determined on the one hand, *self*-determination on the other. Two texts of Kleist where this is evident in an exemplary way are *The Earthquake in Chile* and *The Foundling*; both texts have the sea and threatened drowning as their narrative abyss.

In Greco-Roman mythology, earthquakes are the purview of the sea god Poseidon/Neptune. Earthquakes are thus conceived as drowning scenarios—the backdrop to the Mapocho River spilling over its banks in *Earthquake*, that event liberating the novella's two main personae, Jerónimo from prison and Josefa from execution, and bringing about the destruction of an entire city. "The Viceroy's palace had collapsed," Kleist recounts, "the law court in which sentence had been passed on [Josefa] was in flames and in the place where her father's house had stood there was now a seething lake from which reddish vapors were rising." (LR: 56 [tm]; DKV III: 199) With the collapse of institutions—narrated as both literal collapse and drowning and as a cosmical event evoking the world-edifice metaphor, ("as if the very firmament had shattered;" ibid.: 52; 193) the story's chronological time splits into simultaneous episodes. It is the case that they are described in an internally focalized way—but in the medium of a torn-apart consciousness or ego experiencing things not synthetically but in disparate form. (Liebrand, 1992: 100ff.) That consciousness will contract the duration of what has occurred, looking back, into a "terrible moment," (*schrecklicher Augenblick*) duplicated in a series of "here" (*hier*):

> Here a another house caved in, scattering its debris far and wide and driving [Jerónimo] into a side street; here flames flashing through clouds of smoke, were licking out of every gable, and chased him in terror into another; here the Mapocho river, overflowing its banks,

> rolled roaring towards him and forced him into a third […] here people were screaming on burning house-tops, here people fought with the waves. (LR: 53 [tm]; DKV III: 193)

The city's shattering is manifest in the psychic shattering of the novella's hero. "Jerónimo Rugera," we read,

> stood rigid with horror; and as if his entire consciousness had been smashed to pieces, he now clung to the pillar on which he had wanted to die, for the sake of not falling. The ground was heaving under his feet, great cracks appeared in the walls all round him, the whole edifice toppled towards the street and would have crashed down into it had not its slow fall been met by that of the house opposite, and only the arch thus formed by chance prevented its complete destruction. (Ibid.: 52f. [tm]; 193)

Here we again find the existential metaphor of the arch that only fails to collapse because everything wishes to at once. Then, with the reference to heaving ground and a clinging to something stable (as well as in the analeptic narrative of Josefa's rescue), a vocabulary has resurfaced similar to that used by Kleist in recounting his own near-shipwreck.

In the cited epistolary passage, with his allegorical interpretation of the scene and its ethical maxim, Kleist gains distance from the threatened drowning and reflects on it in a straightforward way. By contrast, the situation in *Earthquake* is accompanied by a regular shock that implies a sharp split between before and after:

> He had probably lain there quite unconscious for about a quarter of an hour when he finally recovered his senses. […] He felt his forehead and his chest, not knowing what to make of his condition. […] [H]e did not understand what could have brought […] him to this place, and only when he turned and saw the city levelled to the ground behind him did he remember the terrifying moments he had just experienced […] And now, as if the one terrible impression that has stamped itself on his mind had suppressed all earlier ones, he wept from pleasure [*Lust*]. (Ibid.: 54 [tm]; 195)

With terminology anticipating that used by psychoanalysis a century later, Kleist here describes, in the reaction of his novella's chief character, the psychic dynamic involved in a shocking experience: incorporation into the mental constitution of an event experienced in an impersonal, unconscious, non-grasped way. Jerónimo's "pleasure" cannot be resolved by "suppression," and in the voluptuous ecstasy to which Jerónimo and Josefa will later succumb we find a repetition of the earlier

transgression, their night of love in a convent garden: a transgression that the two, having escaped misfortune, do not recapture through mutual recollection, but rather in chatter: "For there was no end to what they had to talk about, the convent garden [and] their prisons." (Ibid.: 57; 201f.; see Liebrand, 1992: 107) Into the register of a cosmopolitan pragmatic anthropology with a Kantian tenor, wishing to define the empirical basis for obstacles to the exercise of human capacity, hence to moral action,[3] (Louden, 2003: 68) Kleist brings affect, desire, and a psycho-logic marked by suppression and repetition: a complex unfolding in the mental reflex of an event narrated as threatened drowning.

The utopian world society formed by those who have survived the earthquake, wounded or not, is itself based on suppression (Liebrand, 1992: 110): "It was as if since the terrible blow that had shattered them, all were reconciled. In memory, they could not move back beyond it." (LR: 59 [tm]; DKV III: 205) On the one hand, a society is here imagined that, in the modality of illusion, overcomes institutionalized conditions, dissolves boundaries of status and estate. In this society, we find a sharing of possessions, an affirmation of natural familial bonds, reverence for the heroism involved in what Kleist, here as in his letter, calls a "life unhesitatingly cast away," (Ibid.: 60; 207) and a sublimation—entirely in the sense of Kant's cosmopolitan project—of nature to "human spirit:" "And indeed, in the midst of these horrible moments [*gräßliche Augenblicke*] in which all the earthly possessions of men were perishing and all nature was in danger of being engulfed, the human spirit itself seemed to unfold like the fairest of flowers." (Ibid. [tm]) On the other hand, the same society is threatened by a constantly possible return of the suppressed, of what has been inundated. It remains at work in wounds, the dangers threatening the pair of lovers, condemned before the quake, manifest as intimations and dream-like states of mind. It then breaks ground in the resentment of those assembled in the one church spared by the quake: a mob, urged on by a priest, that finally murders Josefa and Jerónimo, branded guilty for the divine rage expressed in the quake.

When Kleist describes this mass—the "people," *Volk*—as "streaming" toward the destroyed city, (Ibid.: 61; 209) he is not using coincidental figurative language. This is also the case when he speaks of an "immense crowd" "surging" in the church; (Ibid.: 63; 213) of the priest's trembling hands being "engulfed" by his surplice's folds; (Ibid. [tm]) and of a "naval officer" who plays a decisively hesitant role in the novella's unfolding scene of murderous ressentiment. (Ibid.: 65; 217) After the lynching, the lovers' corpses are brought to the same officer's house, the locus, now, of a salvaged remnant of the novella's utopian world-citizens' society: an artificial family consisting of Josefa's acquaintance Don Fernando, his wife, and the adopted child of the

murdered couple, replacing their natural son, likewise a victim of the mob. In its narrative account of the literal de-territorializing of an entire society as actual and threatened drowning, Kleist's *Earthquake* posits a watery zone mediating between a state of institutional organization and efforts at a new social order. That zone represents contingency, and with it an openness of social relations accompanying the loss of institutional frameworks; (see in detail Lehmann, 2002) at the same time, more generally, it represents the shattering of synthetically centered consciousness. As an inescapable abyss, it catalyzes an enmeshing of the present with a suppressed past—which can surface in the present in sudden and violent potency. And it demands an ethic centered on impersonally experienced events, only reducible by way of resentment, through clear-cut causalities and ascriptions of guilt. Oceanic expertise, for example a naval officer's protection, is required to create cosmopolitan circumstances on such tottering social ground.

Kleist's *The Foundling* can almost be read as a narrative continuation of *Earthquake*. Instead of moving toward the emergence of an artificial family, it starts with adoption, and with the replacement of a natural son (killed by the plague) with an orphan (rescued from the plague-ridden city of Ragusa, present-day Dubrovnik). And the comparison between natural and adopted child we find at the end of *Earthquake* ("and when Don Fernando compared Felipe with Juan and the ways in which he had acquired the two of them, it almost seemed to him that he had reason to feel glad;" ibid.: 67; 221) has a counterpart in *The Foundling*. Concerning the real-estate broker Antonio Piachi, engaged in business necessitating "long journeys" (Ibid.: 270; 265) and travelling in a carriage while the scenery "whirls by," (Ibid. 272 [tm]; 267) we read: "He had understandably become all the fonder of the boy for having had to pay so high a price for him; and after only a few weeks […] he adopted him as his son." (Ibid.) The reference is to the story's titular foundling: beforehand, Piachi's humanity, his pity, has led him take the boy—removed from all societal bonds, only a "child of God" or naked life, beseeching with outstretched hands—up to his carriage in a single "great motion." But here, a cosmopolitan ethos is undermined by calculating reason. (Ibid.: 271 [tm]; 266)

Correspondingly, the world imagined in the novella is, as a backdrop and yet decisively, a world permeated by commerce. Unmentioned by the narrator but certainly known to Kleist, the plague emerged first in the 7th and then again in the 14th century, when, after breaking out in Asia, it arrived through trading ships in Ragusa; there, measures of isolation and quarantine were applied for the first time. (Zumbusch, 2009: 496) With reference to Roberto Esposito, Cornelia Zumbusch has shown how the entire novella, starting with the plague outbreak as a world event and the following policies of confinement, is narrated in

terms of a dichotomy of opening and closing. Within this reading, the conceptual premises of Kleist's novella are formed by a new imagination of the political body, no longer conceived as only menaced internally, by revolts or despotic regimes, but rather by outside "intruders" as well. In this manner, for Zumbusch Kleist's story of a family destroyed by taking in a "foundling" is the narrative comment on—she here cites Esposito—a "dispositive of immunity:" insofar as "all procedures of inclusion" in the novella are a recipe for danger, (Zumbusch, 2009: 502) it finally is a plea for a "political immunology:" prophylactic protection meant to obstruct "all possible entry" to dangers. (Ibid.: 510)

Just as in *Earthquake* a general upheaval is manifest in an upheaval of consciousness, in *The Foundling* a dangerous opening to the world has its mental expression. The parental house of Elvire, wife of Piachi, was located—"designed for" the craft of her father, a "well-to-do Genoese dyer"—"right at the sea's edge." (LR: 273; DKV III: 268) With fire breaking out at the house, thirteen-year-old Elvire fled, "she scarcely knew how," onto a beam projecting over the water, "hanging between heaven and earth," "beneath her […] the wide, desolate, terrible sea," before being rescued, "suddenly," by a "young Genoese of patrician family," (Ibid.: 273; 268f.) who himself dies a long, painful death from a wound suffered in the rescue's course. From then on, "[t]he slightest circumstance that even remotely reminded her" of what had happened will lead to "singular and frequent upheaval." (Ibid.: 274 [tm]; 269f.) In the figuration of an unconscious process and literal repetition compulsion, this prompts her to collapse, again and again, before the portrait, kept carefully locked up, of the young Genoese. As something not actually recallable, the event that dissolves in rescue is insistently present in remarkably non-personal compulsions and sudden affects. The framed picture of the Genoese belatedly endows the trauma of his death, the paternal house's conflagration, and the openness of the sea with a form of composure; and with the foundling, the doppelgänger of Elvire's savior, who will simulate the portrait and send Elvire into shock, the composure dissipates, in that morbid scene, "in the embrace of death." (Ibid.: 284; 280)

In his novellas, Kleist thus invented cosmopolitan personae of a particular sort: they neither appropriate nor open up the world, do not develop themselves into world-citizens; rather, in traumatic moments they lose the grounding of institutionalized order beneath their feet and are torn away, out into the world. Instead of starting with a firm cogito like the "terranean spirit" of Kant, (Sloterdijk, 2006: 143) Kleist liquefies his figures' egos. Repetition compulsion and what has been suppressed—the consequences of impersonally experienced events—are what constitute the fragile unity of his personae. In a corresponding way, for Kleist institutions are constructed "right at the edge" of dangerous waters, both in a metaphorical sense (as in *Earthquake*) and against a

background of real economic developments (as in *The Foundling*). With that openness comes the danger of resentment-laden or immunological closures.

According to Martin Heidegger, in the late 18th century and in the context of increasing world conquest, a movement began that was marked by the emergence of mutually confirming forms of *Weltanschauung* and anthropological subject-centered doctrines, a focus on the human being's relationship to the world now placed in the picture. (Heidegger, 1977) With a pragmatic anthropology that starts with dangerous moments, Kleist's novellas resist this movement. We see this in the reworking of the abovementioned text on Caspar David Friedrich's painting *The Monk by the Sea*, (plate 11) submitted to Kleist as editor of the *Abendblätter* by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim. Kleist's assessment of Friedrich's small and lonely *Rückenfigur* (a figure with its back turned to the viewer) treats the painting as a representation of the same relationship to the world expressed in his novellas. Where the Romantic authors of the original piece understand the painting as an exhibition-work displaying an incomplete personal perspective meant to be transcended, in Kleist's reworking it becomes the model for expression of a loss of framing: of the same indeterminacy Kleist's figures experience when the world opens itself up to them in a way that makes it no longer possible to draw a world-picture. In addition, in the effort to grasp the sensory event that is *The Monk by the Sea*, the text presents a form of writing, and demonstrates a "writing ethos" (Campe, 2014: 51) corresponding to the event-centered ethics of Kleist's novellas.

Loss of Standpoint: *The Monk by the Sea*, Romantic Persona, Dionysian Ground

The occasion for Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim's piece was an exhibition that opened in September 1810, organized by the Royal Prussian Academy of the Arts. The critique published in the 12th edition of the *Abendblätter*, on October 13, 1810, with C.B. as its byline, was titled "Sentiments before Friedrich's Seascape" ("Empfindungen vor Friedrichs Seelandschaft"). Despite the "cb" signature, the text was markedly different than the manuscript submitted by Brentano and von Arnim—so different that it led to a veritable quarrel between Kleist and Brentano.[4] As can be seen in the extant manuscript, Kleist had received a text from the two Romantic authors, the first 80 percent of which was in Brentano's handwriting, the remainder in Arnim's, aside from the conclusion, which was again in Brentano's script.

Brentano and Arnim's text looks for the particular nature of Friedrich's painting in the difference between the feeling expected in

a confrontation with it and what is actually felt. Initially, the text imagines standing on a seashore and looking out at "an unlimited waste of waters." The liminal position in which the movement towards the water comes to a standstill and at some point will dissipate while returning from the shore prompts sensations ascribable to a generality, itself denoted in an indefinite pronoun. These sensations arise within the non-specific time shown in the passage's iterative mode; and they emerge from the interplay between what Brentano/Arnim term a "claim"—*Anspruch*—and a "break"—*Abbruch*. We are presented with the claim, which is rejected, of being able to cross over the waste-waters: to find something for life within them. This something is rendered palpable by the landscape in the course of withdrawal. It does so in that while "everything for life" is missing, "the voice of life" can be heard "in the rushing of the tide, the surge of the air, the pull of the clouds." (Arnim and Brentano, 1997: 357)

A first-person "I" only arrives on the stage of the text when the reference is no longer to the landscape but rather the landscape painting. The indeterminate, general time of experiencing the landscape becomes the determinate time of encountering the picture in the exhibition space: "what I was meant to find in the picture itself I only found between myself and the picture, namely a claim my heart made to the picture and a break the picture inflicted on me by not fulfilling the claim." (Ibid.) No longer is something being experienced here "in the picture," as is made possible in the illusionist landscape painting still being programmed into the generic norms of 18th-century art criticism.[5] Rather, only denial of this experience produces the concrete "here" of the interstice between observer and image and the concrete "now" of the narrated time of picture-observation within the exhibition space.[6] This suggests, not only in the case of Brentano/Arnim but also in that of other engagement at the time with Friedrich's oeuvre, the start of an entry into its special quality of being—to use Niklas Luhmann's term—"world-art:" decidedly modern art, art calling not merely for calibration with a program external to the individual artwork but rather for observation in what Luhmann calls its "self-programming:" the accrual of form emerging from a contingently posited beginning. (Luhmann, 2008: 189ff.)

Hence for Brentano and Arnim, until this point in the text, these two spaces and conditions are thematically present. On the one hand, there is the life-space of nature; on the other hand, the exhibition space. On the one hand, there is the generality of life-feeling; on the other hand, the person of the picture's observer, who experiences individual, personal uniqueness precisely through becoming aware of the observation's blind spot: "I thus myself became the Capuchin, the picture became the dune, but what I gazed out for with longing, the sea, was entirely absent." (Ibid.) Identification with the Rückenfigur in the painting no

longer means entry into the pictorial space, rather bringing about an artificial, pictorially sustained visual experience. This is the experience of a personally subsumed longing, offering a contrast to a sentiment, as potentially experienced in the landscape-space, that literally maintains itself in nothing: of a limited scope for viewing and an emptiness in the gaze, accompanied by a "wonderful feeling." That feeling is personal on the one hand, while on the other hand it participates in a certain generality, such that it can be "encountered" in the "expressions" of exhibition visitors vis-à-vis the picture. (Ibid.) Consequently, the art-critical first-person "I" of the text can compensate for the emptiness of his gaze by making himself the medium of a fictitious public discussion. In place of the seascape as the restless ground for a general life-feeling, the picture here emerges as a troubling source for action unfolding "before" the picture: action sustained by the "various viewers around me."

In this way, the text dramatically describes exhibition visitors arriving and departing before the picture, with their impressions and judgments about it: different (half-understood) art-theoretical and art-historical allusions, the identification of the sea as the "sea near Rügen" where "the colonial-goods come over," remarks about the artistic "mood" or "disposition"—*Gemüth*—expressed in the picture. (Ibid.: 357f.) Finally, the first-person voice enters into conversation with one exhibition visitor, the conversation then being continued outside the exhibition in domestic surroundings. The text thus closes in a third space that—after the general space of nature, in which only the esoteric "voice of life" is audible, and the exhibition space, which offers a venue for the "expressions" of the "various viewers"—furnishes a place for intimate conversation. As Rüdiger Campe has emphasized, the pictorial critique of this visitor—privileged as he is by the text's dramaturgy—consists in taking exception to the painting's Rückenfigur, whom he considers to be "like a brown spot." He imagines, in contrast, a monk who, "outstretched in sleep, or praying or watching, lying down in all modesty," would provide both hold and orientation for the observer's irritated gaze. (Ibid.: 359) The critique thus handles the impossibility, noted by contemporaries in confronting Friedrich's work, of discovering a fixed position in it[7] by imagining a figure who could "model the observation of all possible observers." (Campe, 2014: 65f.)

All told, we can see a form of Romantic irony, as characterized by Deleuze, at play in the double manuscript text of Brentano and Arnim. The logic of its progression consists of a vagabond movement in which an ironic first person tries out one garment after another, composes himself from one poetic person into the next, running through "numerous determinations"—but with the sensory event being confined "within the limits of the individual or the person." (Deleuze, 1990: 139) In this way the "wonderful feeling" of the text's first-person voice vis-à-vis the

picture is also expressed in remarks of the exhibition visitor, while always remaining personal, or even amounts to personal self-affirmation. This ironic form has its counterpart in an impersonal, "faceless Ground" that constitutes the Romantic person's "esoteric reversal and that speaks the Dionysian language of a voice of life audible in the noise of the waves." (Ibid.: 140)

Kleist's Cosmopolitan Writing

In his editing of the text, Kleist dispenses with the dramatic form of his Romantic template. To Brentano, he justifies his editing with a reference to the publishing medium's requirements. Everything printed in the *Abendblätter*, Kleist explains laconically in a letter written following publication, is required "to be short." (DKV IV: 453) Compared to the template, Kleist's edited version is in fact significantly shorter. The work of shortening produces an—in a certain sense—abstract text and in that respect is comparable to Friedrich's work on his painting. As can be seen in infrared images, in the course of his long labor on *The Monk by the Sea*, Friedrich erased one object after another from the picture, in the process removing the orientation points when viewing it, and composed it on the surface instead of in depth. (Grave, 2011: 70) In a similar manner, Kleist renders—in his words—the "originally dramatic" text (BA, Bl. 19) into a text that only offers a reference to the scene of an exhibition visit in its last sentence, and in which the spaces described by Brentano and Arnim, the exhibition space and the space of intimate conversation, are missing—together with all personalized voices from the original text. Hence loss of framing is not only thematically set in play when Kleist addresses the frame of Friedrich's painting and the lack of frame for its viewing. Rather, the theme is already present in Kleist's dispensing with any claim to institutionally endow the text with form—that is, through the exhibition itself.[8] Here it might seem that with such renunciation of institutional framing, the polyvalence of the Romantic template has bowed to the monophony of a Kleistian "I;" but in fact, we can identify here a highly particular babel of voices in Kleist's text. In place of the Romantic text's narrated spaces, a text emerges that devises no fictional spaces, but rather a textual surface with varying zones of intensity.

As has frequently been observed, Kleist's text contains a series of remarks from the public's discussion in the Romantic template—without, however, being attributed to specific figures as with Brentano and Arnim. Immediately after the Kleistian text breaks with the template with the formula of the "sad and uncomfortable position in the world," we find such a transfer in the explanation of this "position." The first periphrasis, "the only spark of life in the vast realm of death," is Kleist's;

the second, "the lonely midpoint in the lonely circle," is taken from the dialog. (Here and below Kleist, 1982: 231f. [tm throughout]; DKV III: 543f.) The following sentence, moving toward the formula of the cut-away eyelids, contains two fragments from the exhibition conversation. Both the analogy of seeing the picture lying before the viewer "like the apocalypse" and the prosopopoeia of the picture thinking "Young's Night Thoughts" come from Brentano's and Arnim's invented exhibition discussion. What the Kleistian text dispenses with alongside the dramatic-person form is the play of opinions in that discussion, and all the misunderstandings leading there from one statement to the next, so that the picture is always shimmering between alternatives, whether actually an object of discussion or simply a basis for one.

But it is not only voices from Brentano's and Arnim's template that are present in the Kleistian text in this impersonal form. When Kleist indicates that Caspar David Friedrich "without doubt broke fully new ground in the field of his art," he is incorporating the same argument and phrasing by Basilius Ramdohr, (1809) used in reference to Friedrich's landscape painting, in the above-noted, much-read critique of Friedrich. And relatively recently, Peter Bexte (2008/2009) has shown that Kleist's image of cut-away eyelids is itself a citation.

It becomes clear, then, that instead of taking over the template's dramatic form, Kleist chooses what can be described as a type of indirect discourse. It affirms the fact that, as Deleuze and Guattari observe, there is no direct path "between something seen (or felt) and something said," but "all manner of voices" speak together in a single voice. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 76f.) Hence it is not just a single voice and assessment that are fixed within the text's units, which are consistently labile, explicative, concessive, or periphrastic in function. Rather, in respect of the voices and judgments it articulates, the text proceeds evaluatively, one means for the evaluation being to have an expression's signification play out in a field of the possible: "The picture lies there, with its two or three mysterious objects, like the apocalypse, *as if* it had Young's Night Thoughts, and since in its uniformity and boundlessness, it has nothing but the frame as its foreground, it is *as if*, when we observe it, our eyelids have been cut away" [my emphasis].

Through this evaluative procedure, the Kleistian text's first-person "I" takes on a remarkable role. In its final sentence, the text of Brentano and Arnim shifts to the present tense, assigning the "I" a fixed locus within a diegetic space. By contrast, it is unclear from where and within what frame the Kleistian text's "I" is speaking. This placeless and non-institutionalized "I" is no narrative-logical orientation point. Rather, it modulates statements and judgments and sets them into relation with one another. We see this, for instance, in the case of conceptual figures conveyed in phrases such as "to express myself thus" and

"without a doubt." Hence even the "I" is impersonal here; in this sense, it repeatedly disappears behind a "one" that no longer vouches for a general life-feeling as with Brentano and Arnim. This is not an "I" standing for an incomplete perspective on Friedrich's work—a perspective meant to be transcended. Instead, this "I" is, to again use Deleuze's term, an "operator" for what is expressed in the discourse surrounding Friedrich's *Monk by the Sea* and consequently for the event of this picture. As such an operator, it produces the "surfaces and linings in which the event is reflected, finds itself again as incorporeal and manifests in us the neutral splendor which it possesses in itself in its impersonal and pre-individual nature, beyond the general and particular, the collective and the private." This is a text upon whose surface an "I" is playing as a "quasi-cause of what is produced within us:" the Kleistian variant of the "citizen of the world." (Deleuze, 1990: 148)

In the above-cited early letter, dangerous nautical travel and threatened shipwreck and drowning are metaphorical occasions for gaining a foothold and ethos: this in the sense of an opening to the world and in view of the questions of how to lead one's life and the relationship to death. In Kleist's novellas, the sea and threatened drowning continue to be what opens the world. But at the same time, the opening now carries along personae and, in both *The Foundling* and *The Earthquake in Chile*, inflicts a tear within the "I" and an insistence on the impersonal within the person. Such a violent opening is also expressed as a feeling vis-à-vis the artificial maritime landscape shown in Friedrich's painting. To cite this passage once again: "Since in its uniformity and boundlessness, [the picture] has nothing but the frame as its foreground, it is as if, when we observe it, our eyelids have been cut away." If the frame is not the picture's border but rather its foreground, then the painting forbids the forming of an image. This is the dimension of opening offered by Friedrich's painting: the vanishing line of sensations felt before Friedrich's seascape, taken up by Kleist in the described de-institutionalized diction. Kleist does not try to capture the sentiments provoked by Friedrich's Seascape in their personalized form, but rather in their genesis—when they are still impersonal, "confused," as Kleist puts it, and new. Kleist's counter-draft to the Romantic pictorial corrective, to the replacement of Friedrich's monk by an ideal observer, is at the same time his commentary on the connection between world-opening and anthropological turn. He tries to conceive of an independent state of "sensation-existence" for the painting—an existence "in the absence of man" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994: 164): "Indeed, if this landscape were painted with its own chalk and own water, I believe the foxes and wolves could be brought to howl."

Notes

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1. I would like to thank Joel Golb—not only for his sensitive translation but also and especially for his productive critique of the German version of this essay.
2. All English citations from Kleist's novellas are from the 2004 David Luke and Nigel Reeves translation, referred to parenthetically in the text as "LR;" these references are followed by an indication of their location in the Deutscher Klassiker Verlag (DKV) edition. Modifications to the translation for the sake of this essay's context are indicated by "tm."
3. The first part of Kant's *Anthropology*, centered on didactics, is structured in line with the doctrine of faculties in the three Kantian critiques.
4. On the relationship of the Romantic model to Kleist's edited version, see Begemann, 1990. Begemann, 1990: 56, argues that the model and the edited versions formulate different positions regarding "the subject's position in the expanse of space" "in the wake of the Early Modern cosmological revolutions."
5. Grave, 2015: 52f. observes that in the waning 18th century theorists of art still saw the aim of landscape painting as being to "invite and draw the observer so suggestively into the landscape that the pictorial mediation is hidden from him" and imagined "wandering" in the landscape becomes possible. Caspar David Friedrich breaks with the stipulation of covering over "the boundaries between picture and reality." "Instead, the picture's tie to a limited vehicle and the representational means of line and color" now come to the forefront."
6. See Campe, 2014: 53f.: "The juxtaposition of 'in the picture' and 'between me and the picture,' in which the 'before the picture' comes asunder, thus also places a particular decision on the agenda: whether we assume a *single* neutral observer or rather many *different* observers whose observations can then themselves be observed."
7. See Basilius Ramdohr's discussion of Friedrich's *Tetschener Altar* in the *Zeitung für die elegante Welt*: Ramdohr, 1809.
8. See Campe, 2014, who discusses the difference between the Romantic template through the concepts of *enargeia* (as a form of evidence that "presumes an institution and a framework for its validity" (Ibid.: 64)) and *energeia* (as a proto-institutional animating process).

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Part 2
Literary Visions of Maritime Ethics

6. From Shipwreck as Theatre to Morality as Technique: Two Emblematic Scenarios (Descartes, Leibniz)*

Alexandra Heimes

Leibniz's Ruse

"I have read or heard somewhere, but there is nothing in it, even if it should be wrong, that Mr. Leibniz once […]"—thus Georg Friedrich Meier, a German philosopher of the Enlightenment era, begins his account of a peculiar episode in the life of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. (Meier, 1747: 79–80) It describes how Leibniz was once almost shipwrecked on a boat trip, but ultimately—seemingly by an act of divine mercy, yet in fact by cunning behavior—escapes with his life. The small story is hardly known, and indeed the incident it reports is not historically verified. According to his secretary and later biographer Johann Georg Eckhart, however, Leibniz himself used to recount it frequently and with pleasure. (Eckhart, 1779: 159) Eckhart was also the first to write down the episode, and this text—only a small paragraph in his biography of Leibniz—provided the basis for further retellings of the story. Nevertheless, Meier's comment on the uncertain origin and validity of the narrative is telling: it hints at the peculiar ways the story was disseminated and received, which seemingly began with a French translation of Eckhart's report sometime in the 1710s and led to several adoptions, rewritings, and retranslations—in short, to quite divergent versions of the plot.[1] And although the overall response does not seem to have been very broad, the narrative appears in sometimes prominent places, like in the eulogy that Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle delivered at the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris after Leibniz's death (Fontenelle, 1994: 381–382) or in the entry on "Leibnizianism," written by Denis Diderot, in the *Encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert*.

(Diderot, 1765: 370) Eckhart's original report, however, from which all these versions more or less directly follow, did not appear in German until 1779, when the author's biography of Leibniz was first printed.

Part of this report is about the time that Leibniz spent, from 1689 to 1690, in Italy, commissioned by the Prince of Hanover to find sources about the widely ramified genealogy of the House of Welf. During this time, it so happened that Leibniz had to travel from Venice to Ferrara and, in order to avoid the dangers of a road trip, he embarked on a boat for Mesola. Apart from the sailors, he was the sole passenger on the small vessel, which was supposed to transport him safely along the Adriatic coast. But a "horrible storm" arose and Leibniz*[2] came to realize that the sailors, assuming that he, the stranger, would not understand their language, "agreed in his presence to throw him overboard and to seize his possessions." Not only, however, did Leibniz* understand the situation very well, he also knew how to handle it. "He did not let on and took out a rosary he had with him and pretended to pray: whereupon one of the sailors immediately declared to the others: He saw that the man was not a heretic, so he could not bring himself to have him killed. So he got away, and went ashore near Mesola." (Eckhart, 1779: 159)

It is apparent that the report is not very ambitious in formal and stylistic terms, and moreover it is not very consistent, as can be seen in the description of the sailors' motives to get rid of the passenger. If their decision to jettison him seems initially to be linked to avarice, just a moment later the question of whether the stranger is a heretic or a true believer becomes crucial. (cf. Blumenberg, 2010: 7) Nonetheless, the formal structure of the account, its narrative build-up and symbolic implications, is worth a closer look. To begin with, it should be mentioned that the small anecdote, when considered on its own, neatly fits into the broader framework of early modern narrative culture. This is probably most evident when taking into account that, at the time, the narrative treatment of contingent single cases had caught on as a favorite format of writing. (Mülder-Bach and Ott, 2014; Campe, 2012) Moreover, at least for a certain period of time, these narratives found a rich stock of motifs in the cultural archive of the maritime sphere. (Dünne, 2011; Wolf, 2020) Against this background, and probably also due to its brevity, Eckhart's report reveals at the same time a rather conventional, even template-like, technique of representation. This may be detrimental to the aesthetic quality of the text, but it is also possible, as I want to suggest, that the somewhat clumsy narration holds a key in that it points (intentionally or not) to another dimension, or hidden agenda, of the story.

Most intriguing in this respect is the climax of the story, which culminates in a truly emblematic scenario: the philosopher in the sea storm, deeply immersed in prayer. On an intra-diegetic level, the staged *pictura* facilitates a communication between the characters, which, bypassing

the question of language skills, relies on the legibility of a posture that is ritually encoded. Moreover, this figuration condenses a plot structure that deploys fairly typical tropes from the tradition of popular shipwreck narratives. Combining elements such as sea storm, prayer, and rescue, the storyline invokes the basic template of a miraculous salvation due to divine intervention.[3]

There is yet another dimension to the emblematic shape of the story and the possible ways of understanding it. For the task of making sense of the Leibniz* icon pertains as much to the crew on board as it does, on the extra-diegetic level, to the learned recipients of the story. Now, for this readership, and in contrast to the direct addressees, the ruse is immediately evident as such. This is not only because this audience can survey the entire storyline from an external standpoint, but above all because the protagonist (largely identified with the historical Leibniz) is certainly no stranger to them. Consequently, the various renditions of the episode can all do without explaining what the cunning maneuver actually consists of. The calculus of Leibniz's* gesture is virtually "inscribed" in the narrative—in the manner of an *inscriptio*, which later recipients variously interpret as "artifice," (Fontenelle, 1994: 382; Diderot, 1765: 370) as a "[swift and] prudent decision," (Lamprecht, 1740: 44) or, with a shift of accent, as "deception" based on "preventive intelligence." (Blumenberg, 2010: 7) At any rate, it seems to be common knowledge that Leibniz—nominally a Protestant, but essentially an advocate of confessional reconciliation—is in principle averse to practices such as praying the rosary. By his own admission, Leibniz considers them a hindrance to interdenominational understanding, and all the more so because in his view, they promote superstition rather than devout worship. Thus, as a scholar, Leibniz emphatically pleads for the abolition of these rituals of popular religion, which he dismisses not only as "inappropriate" but as "suspect of folly." (Leibniz, 1677: 680–681) The Leibniz of the anecdote, in turn, knows how to take advantage of them; he meets folly, if you will, with method.

It should be noted, however, that his ruse does not only take aim at the simple faith of his companions on board. Rather, it sets the stage for a more general and almost frivolous game with moral values and codes. Hans Blumenberg, in his reading of the episode, offers an instructive clue when stating that the story, as "originally" rendered by Eckhart, "has Leibniz pretend something in two ways." (Blumenberg, 2010: 7) On the plot level, there is the deceit vis-à-vis the crew, which "no one," Blumenberg confirms, "will find […] questionable." But the "second element of deception" (Ibid.) raises more sensitive issues, as it confronts the reader with a moral quandary: it lays out the collision of seemingly incompatible moral demands, namely the rational concern for one's self-preservation on the one hand, and the unwavering sincerity

towards God on the other. Viewed in this way, the narrative seems to be a prime example of casuistic considerations, ordered around the following question: is it permissible—in this specific case, under these particular circumstances—to merely pretend faithfulness in order to save one's own life? Furthermore, does the behavior described possibly nurture the suspicion that Leibniz—nicknamed "Loevenix" (Low German for "believes nothing") among devout Hanoverians (Eckhart, 1779: 201–202 and *passim*; cf. Antognazza, 2008: 546)—is not very reliable in matters of faith anyway? This, at least, seems to be the main concern for recipients such as Lamprecht (1740: 45) and Meier (1747: 78–80; cf. Blumenberg, 2010: 9), both of whom tackle the incident by way of casuistic reasoning.

In a sense, Blumenberg continues this practice of interpretation, though without tying in with its moral-theological framework. In fact, the Christian tradition of moral casuistry was already in decline in Lamprecht's and Meier's time (Kittsteiner, 1991: 204–215; Daston, 2022: 242–248), and it is telling in this respect that this approach does not even seem to occur to the French readers of the episode, or else, as in Diderot's rendition of the story, is outright ridiculed.[4] One can surmise that, for the enlightened *esprit* of a Fontenelle or Diderot, the story's appeal lies in what these authors probably consider as the true essence of Leibniz's* maneuver: a demonstration of irreverence towards false devotions.[5] The question of whether the report gives rise to casuistic sophistry—the "art of twisting the laws," according to the polemical tone of 18th-century criticism (Kittsteiner, 1988: 190)—is thus discarded from the very beginning.

Blumenberg, for his part, treats the episode as an anecdote in its most typical form (without, however, taking into account its French readers). In formal terms, this can be elaborated as follows: rather loosely joined, the story operates with "movable parts,"[6] that, depending on the reader's perspective or interest, allow for quite different ways of determining their potential coherence, not to mention the conclusion or even "lesson" that potentially can be drawn from it. In this sense, anecdotes encourage a "contingent" form of understanding, (Fleming, 2011; 2012) which may incite a kind of casuistic procedure. Instead of imparting binding moral guidelines, they instigate reflection on the normatively rather vague domain of a "para-ethical," life-world-oriented "moral of pragmatic procedures." (Blumenberg, 2006: 501; cf. Müller, 2009) In the same vein, Blumenberg ponders whether Leibniz*, in the dramatic situation at sea, might indeed have prayed after all, and according to the locally common rituals. Leibniz's* ruse would thus reveal a double meaning—typical of anecdotes—eventually setting an example of "his superior confessional pluralism: a tolerant person, who, heeding Epicurus's advice, follows the local custom and sacrifices to the gods of the country." (Blumenberg, 2010: 8)

However, it is also possible, even likely, that the anecdote in question has a double meaning itself—so that the whole story, as initially spread by Leibniz, would be based on a mischievous ruse. The point of reference here is an incident in the life of René Descartes, as it is handed down by his biographer Adrien Baillet. (Baillet, 1693) This story, too, revolves around a life-threatening situation at sea, and it shows—as the historian of philosophy Giuliano Gasparri has recently pointed out—some striking parallels to the Leibniz anecdote. (Gasparri, 2020)[7] The story is quickly told: In 1621, Descartes embarks on a small boat in order to cover a rather short distance between East and West Frisia. Accompanied only by a valet, soon afterwards he learns that the sailors around him are but "a pack of wicked Rogues" (Baillet, 1693: 45) who, as they take him for a wealthy merchant, intend to kill him. Right in front of him, the men—trusting that no one else on board understands their language—decide to kill him and seize his belongings. Unsurprisingly, their plans are thwarted, in the following way:

> Monsieur Des Cartes, seeing they were in earnest, starts up all on a suddain, puts on another Countenance, draws his Sword with that stearness they little expected, speaks to them in their own Tongue, but with such a Tone, that frightned them out of their Wits; and withal, threatning to run them through, if they durst but hold up a finger against him. It was upon this occasion, that he perceived what resoluteness of a Man may do, upon […] pittiful Low-spirited Souls. Such a resoluteness as is above a Mans power to execute, a resoluteness, which upon other occasions, might pass for a meer Bravado, such an one as he shewed upon this occasion, produced a wonderful effect upon the Spirits of these wretches; the cruel fright they were seized with, was followed with amazement, that they knew not how to make use of their Advantage, but brought him without any more adoe, to the place whither he was bound, as peaceably as he could wish. (Ibid.: 46–47)

That Leibniz was aware of this report is not proven with certainty, but there is evidence that he was able to see the preparatory documents for Baillet's book as early as the mid-1670s, most probably including the account on the young Descartes' Frisian adventure. (Gasparri, 2020: 643)

It is plausible to assume that the analogies are not coincidental, but that Leibniz's narrative refers deliberately, while obliquely, to that of Descartes. This suggests a conclusion which Gasparri also draws, namely that Leibniz presumably "fabricated his own boat adventure." (Gasparri, 2020: 643) This assumption implies that the story, which from the outset circulated mainly in various rewritings, is itself already a reworking of a pre-existing text, and also that Leibniz might have had

his reasons not to write it down himself, but to foist it on his secretary, so to speak. Acting as a prompter rather than as an author, Leibniz provides his version of the story with both obvious similarities to the Descartian plot and significant differences. Moreover, hardly accidentally, the most striking detail here is the contrast between the sword and the rosary as the respective "weapons" of choice. In both cases, however, these iconic objects function as theatrical props in the first place; they become effective due to their symbolic power, while each appeals to its own sphere of reference.

Defying Evil at Sea

Descartes' conduct in the situation of danger is undoubtedly more spectacular than the silent prayer performed by Leibniz*. In fact, Descartes' biographer places significant emphasis on the theatrical aspect, particularly highlighting the "wonderful effect" (Baillet, 1693: 47) that the chivalrous posture had on the evil-minded crew. The theatricality of Leibniz* is of a different kind, but it has a considerable impact as well. While on the one hand it ironically undercuts the Descartian heroism,[8] on the other it unfolds its very own "performative magic." Unlike for Descartes, I will argue in what follows, the maritime setting of events is key to Leibniz's* fictitious reenactment of the story. One could even say that Leibniz's* ruse is instrumental in establishing the image of a distinctive seascape—defining it, as we will see, as a specific yet exemplary site of exhibiting, and manipulating, the conflict of moral norms.

In the Descartes scenario, by contrast, the maritime context seems to fade more into the background, especially since there is no storm and no impending shipwreck involved. The setting is nevertheless pertinent, in the sense that, according to Baillet's account, robbers at sea are in general particularly ruthless, having no qualms about sinking their victims to the depths of the sea. This is unlike robbers in the forest, for whom it is less risky, since they are dealing with other topographical conditions, to leave their victims alive.[9] Moreover, when exposed to potential violence, passengers on a boat are unlikely to have any chance of escape and instead need to cope somehow. One may imagine, in the present case, that Descartes had to keep holding the sword aloft for quite a while until he finally could set foot on solid ground again. His posture may be static, almost freeze-frame-like, but, as we learn, this is exactly why it succeeds—it demonstrates the power of resolute will in a most direct and evidentiary manner. Against this backdrop, on the one hand, the contrast to the Leibniz* episode and the ambiguities it playfully deals with is all the more evident. And yet, it might be insufficient to restrict the Descartian story solely to the monolithic ostentation of

sovereign mastery. This is because, on the other hand, it should be noticed that Baillet emphasizes the processual nature of the situation, notably the learning experience that the protagonist undergoes.

Combining narrative elements with a more demonstrative form of presentation, the account not only praises Descartes' commendable conduct; Baillet seems, in addition, to be particularly concerned about making his readers aware of the exemplary and instructive character of the story. In this regard, and probably not coincidentally, his rhetorical strategy brings to mind the description Descartes himself gave of his philosophical "method." In a prominent place, namely at the beginning of his *Discourse on Method*, he elucidates the rhetorical form of his treatise using two comparisons: the "painting" and especially the "fable." His intention is not, Descartes explains, to "give precepts […] for the right conduct of [anyone's] Reason, but solely to describe the way in which I have endeavoured to conduct my own." On the basis of autobiographical examples, depicted in a comprehensible and narrative manner, the reader is meant to arrive at his own understanding and "to judge of them for himself."[10] (Descartes, 1965: 5) For it is only in this way that one can achieve what, according to Descartes, is at the core of the rationalist program: "to reform my own thoughts and construct them upon a foundation which is all my own." (Ibid.: 118)

Certainly there is no point in painting the scenario in question as a kind of archetype of the Descartian epistemological-ethical project.[11] With this project in mind, the imagery of the situation nonetheless appears particularly suggestive, as it virtually counters the topic of the dangerous sea voyage with the semantics of a "rescuing" *terra firma*. Or, to unfurl these metaphorical implications more precisely: it is by virtue of a rationality that is capable of engendering its own foundation that Descartes manages to defy the malice of the mariners. Perhaps this is the actual heroic aspect of his conduct at sea—the "swordish" power of the intellect, which provides a firm footing even when, empirically, there is no land in sight.

Leibniz*, like Descartes, meets the pressing situation by rationalizing it. His strategy, however, is more reminiscent of the behavioral codex that in early modernity trades as *prudentia*, i.e. as a form of practical knowledge that is cultivated in the courtly culture of the time—and which Descartes, for his part, explicitly wants to distinguish from philosophical wisdom.[12] Prudent behavior proceeds slyly and indirectly, and, rather than taking matters into one's own hands, involves trying to get others to act. It is therefore not the use or the threat of violence that is considered effective, but the control of the situation through communicative and highly mediated maneuvers. This requires constant attentiveness towards the conduct of others, and not least some proficiency in anticipating their intentions. (Scholz, 2002)

In this regard the inconspicuous detail that Leibniz* starts the journey with a rosary in his pocket is telling. Certainly, Descartes too, in the corresponding situation, has his sword ready at hand, but he only becomes aware of the need to act in the moment, prompted by the fact that he is apparently able to understand the vernacular of the mariners and realizes "they were in earnest." (Baillet, 1693: 46) In the Leibniz* episode, there is no indication of an actual verbal understanding, and also little fuss is made about the wickedness of the mariners. As we can infer from the fact of his well-preparedness, Leibniz* has considered the possibility of an incident in advance; he has taken precautions and finally implements them, thereby displaying a whole set of prudent "virtues." These in particular include certain skills in observing others—as modern systems theory has it, the ability for second-order observation,[13] or, as the Spanish Jesuit Baltazar Gracían advises: "Always act as if your Acts were seen."[14] (Gracían, 1892: 178)

From this perspective, emergencies, including when caused intentionally by malevolent persons, are generic in nature. They are basically contingent occurrences which demand for strategies of dealing with imponderable factors, instead of referring to some kind of evil "as such." In the same vein, the Leibnizian position is far from demonizing human nature, especially in terms of evilness. His position is a rather detached one, always already reckoning with the human propensity to selfish and wicked behavior. More generally, Leibniz advocates a privative determination of evil, according to which it has no substantive reality of its own, but precisely lacks such a reality. Evil, in this understanding, is first of all a deficiency, a lack of perfection that God allows concomitantly (*par concomitance*), while his world as a whole is disposed to constant progression and perfection. Therefore, by definition, evil in the world is a relative or "lesser evil," that is, an imperfect good.[15] (Leibniz, 2007a: 131; cf. Rateau, 2019)

However, what is true for the world as a whole—the doctrine that the existing one is the best of all possible worlds—does not necessarily apply to each of its parts. Individual events like the unforeseen encounter with robbers at sea will hardly pass for the "best possible event," (Murray, Greenberg and Feeney, 2016) and yet they do not conflict with the general tenet of Leibniz's "rational optimism" in any way. And if this optimism, given its precarious evidence, persistently provokes highly critical objections (Strickland, 2019; Weizman, 2011), then, in Leibnizian terms, it is because "[s]uch a demonstration is impossible for a finite mind, which cannot comprehend the world and all its parts." (Rateau, 2019: 171)

At any rate, it should be noted that Leibniz considers his belief in the best possible world to be not just as a theoretical doctrine but attaches "great practical value." (Strickland, 2019: 4) It has "the potential to bring

about contentment and satisfaction in those who understand its import" (Ibid.), and moreover it—potentially—shows the way to deal with contingencies in (morally) reasonable ways. Now the following question almost demands to be asked: what can the anecdote in question tell us about these background assumptions? Can we conceive of it as a kind of compact, maybe amusing narrative illustration? On the one hand, as one might expect, there is a lot to be said for it. Interestingly, on the other hand, the brief narrative shows a tendency to challenge precisely the axioms it alludes to. In other words, it is worth examining the seascape that is the frame of the narrated event, more closely.

Pretention, Prevention, and the Moral Subject

Facing imminent danger, Leibniz* shows himself adept at bringing the situation under control, picking up his travel accessory when it is time to. With this gesture, the scenario takes on a significantly different character: the fraught situation on the boat turns into a truly theatrical setting—a *scaenographia*, in more coeval terms (Bredekamp, 2004: 81–84)—in which both parties watch each other closely in order to decide on the next move. And if Leibniz's* central prop, the rosary, finally changes the situation, it probably does so because it surreptitiously brings yet another spectator into play: it virtually exposes the mariners to the view of God. For it is likely that the silent gesture only makes an impression because the mariners—(mis)recognizing the stranger as a man of deep faith—suddenly realize that the latter is not the only witness of their deeds (who will possibly be silenced forever) but that they cannot hide from God's gaze.

By invoking the trope of the all-seeing eye of God, Leibniz* appeals to a popular template of Christian sea imaginaries, a prominent example of which is the frontispiece illustration of James Janeway's anthology *A Token for Mariners, containing many famous and wonderful instances of God's providence in sea dangers, and deliverances, in Mercifully preserving the Lives of his Poor Creatures* […], published in 1709.[16] Right in line with Janeway's Puritan agenda, the emblem (fig. 6.1) presents shipwreck as a type of event that is entirely subject to divine will, "a didactic drama staged by Providence."[17]

By evoking this imagery, Leibniz* at the same time subverts it. At its core, the Leibnizian* *mise-en-scène* inserts a virtual, if not simulated, divine perspective into the situation, and this maneuver proves effective even without the dramatic visual rhetoric à la Janeway. Moreover, it is only with the fictitious synopsis—delegated to the divine "big Other"—that the setting on the rough sea transforms into a proper seascape. As such, it serves as the stage for the further progression of the plot in

Fig 6.1.

James Janeway, *A Token for Mariners, containing many famous and wonderful instances of God's providence in sea dangers, and deliverances, in Mercifully preserving the Lives of his Poor Creatures [...]*, London 1709.

which, from now on, the interplay of agency and spectatorship becomes crucial. This does not apply solely in the "coercive" sense that any deed will be observed and atoned for, but actually becomes the condition of possibility of action. If only implicitly, this raises the question of the moral subject and of the possible sovereignty of moral action more generally—while at the same time, I would like to conclude, it dislocates the idea of moral "protagonism" in peculiar ways. Once again, the comparison between Leibniz* and Descartes is illuminative here.

In that regard, one should take into account that the Leibniz* situation is anything but unequivocal. One the one hand, Leibniz's* "god trick" is reminiscent of the considerations on perspectivism, or *scaenographia* and *ichnographia*, that (the historical) Leibniz made, while he borrows both terms from the tradition of architectural theory. In Vitruvius' *Ten Books on Architecture*, written in the first century BC, the distinction is made between a "scenographic," i.e. foreshortened, view of a building as seen from the front, and its ground plan, perceivable in a clear and undistorted "ichnographic" overview. (cf. Bredekamp, 2004: 81–84) Leibniz, in adopting these terms, extends their conceptual scope considerably, as they now refer to the basic principles of vision and cognition in general. The Vitruvian distinction between the (many) partial views of a building and the (unique and unchangeable) view of its ground plan becomes reformulated as the metaphysical difference between the limited human perspective and the all-encompassing god's-eye view.[18]

Leibniz thus raises a problem that did not exist as such for Descartian philosophy, namely the fundamental relativity of human perspective.[19] At the same time, it is remarkable that this dynamic is not further played out in the anecdote, but rather comes to a halt; with Leibniz* assuming his posture, the narrative starts to dissolve. The mariners do their job, the storm is not mentioned anymore and when Leibniz finally disembarks from the boat, it almost seems as if he were stepping out of a picture that already faded. The opposite is true for the Descartes report. His biographer diligently narrates the boat adventure to the point where it has reached its glorious end, and furthermore, he draws the reader's attention to the instructive dimension of the story. Leibniz*, for his part, seems to become rather an element within that landscape which he constructed by his own ruse, until he, as much as the scene itself, finally vanishes from sight. His seascape, one could say, is in fact not the terrain for moral action, but can be regarded as a kind of moral "constellation," (Trüper, 2021: 41–78) that is, as a rather loose combination of factors, which is determined neither by individual protagonists, nor by general norms. Sometimes, however, a certain portion of moral luck helps out.

Notes

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1. After Leibniz's death, Eckhart was commissioned by Elisabeth Charlotte, Duchess of Orléans, to write the philosopher's biography. The manuscript (or parts of it) was sent to her in French translation; it underlies, among others, the "Eloge de M. Leibnitz" (1717) by Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle as well as the Leibniz biography by Jacob Friedrich Lamprecht, *Leben des Freyherrn Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz* (1740). Cf. Antognazza, 2008: 545; Gasparri, 2020: 646, n. 15.

2. In the following, the name Leibniz is asterisked when meant to designate the protagonist of the (possibly fictitious) anecdote.

3. Jacob Friedrich Lamprecht, in his 1740 biography of Leibniz, explicitly touches upon this context by drawing a connection between the philosopher's almost-shipwreck and the biblical narrative of Jonah, albeit without delving further into it. See Lamprecht, 1740: 44–45.

4. Cf. Diderot, 1765: 370: "While traveling alone in Ferrara on a small boat […], a rosary [Leibniz] thought always wise to carry in a country of inquisition saved his life. A furious storm was towering: the pilot who didn't believe he was being understood by a German, whom he considered to be the cause of peril, proposed to throw him overboard, keeping nevertheless his old clothes and money, which were not heretical. Unconcerned, Leibniz pulled out his rosary with an air of devotion, and this artifice caused the pilot to change his mind. An ancient philosopher, Anaxogoras the atheist, I believe it was, escaped the same danger, by pointing out to those who were planning to appease the gods by throwing him into the sea, some ships destroyed by the storm that were far away from him." For a more detailed analysis of Diderot's article and the author's specific use of irony therein, cf. Audidière, 2015: 183–190.

5. With regard to Fontenelle, Audidière states: "Le récit de l'épisode de la barque […] porte la marque d'une irrévérence qui ne pouvait que plaire à l'auteur de *La Comète* et de la *Relation curieuse de l'île de Bornéo*. Fontenelle semble tirer Leibniz du côté de sa propre impiété ou du moins du côté d'une religion naturelle dont on reprocha à Leibniz d'être un sectateur." Audidière, 2015: 182.

6. Trüper, 2021: 74. The formulation here serves to identify "situation types" which—structurally similar to the Leibniz anecdote—have a fundamentally heterogeneous character and in that respect pose problems for theoretical, i.e. principled, reflection.

7. Gasparri names Dinah Ribard's *Raconter Vivre Penser. Histoires de philosophes 1650–1766* (2003), as the sole source available to him that flags up the affinities between the Descartes and the Leibniz story. He adds that "because [Ribard] relies on Fontenelle's account of Leibniz's Italian journey, rather than on Eckhart's, she is not aware that the source of the anecdote is Leibniz himself, which makes a significant difference." See Gasparri, 2020: 647, n. 21. The resemblance between the two accounts is also mentioned in Mates, 1986: 25, n. 50.

8. Thomas de Quincey, too, did not miss the opportunity to comment on the Descartes scene with biting derision in his black-humored essay "On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts" of 1827. Cf. the depiction of the report in the section "On the assassination of philosophers," in de Quincey, 2006: 16–18.

9. These additional explanations are not included in Baillet, *The life of Monsieur Des Cartes*, but only in the French (unabridged) version of the biography. Cf. Baillet, 1691: 189: "[I]l y a cette différence entre les voleurs de mer et ceux des bois, que ceux-ci peuvent en assurance laisser la vie à ceux qu'ils volent, et se sauver sans être reconnus; au lieu que ceux-là ne peuvent mettre à bord une personne qu'ils auront volée, sans s'exposer au danger d'être dénoncez par la même personne. Aussi les mariniers de M. Descartes prirent-ils des mesures plus sûres pour ne pas tomber dans un pareil inconvénient. Ils voyoient que c'étoit un étranger venu de loin, qui n'avoit aucune connoissance dans le pays, et que personne ne s'aviseroit de réclamer, quand il viendroit à manquer."

10. On the characteristic tension between a "rhetoric of demonstration" and a "rhetoric of narration" in Descartes' *Discourse*, see Jay, 1993: 79: "[A]s Michel de Certeau has remarked, Descartes oscillated between a self-referential 'je dis' and a more objectivist 'vous voyez.' In so doing, he reproduced the same tension that existed in *Discourse on Method,* where he employed the rhetoric of demonstration (I will 'present my life here as in a painting') and the rhetoric of narration ('I am proposing only this work as, so to speak, a history—or if you prefer, a fable'), and often on the same page."

11. For the intersection of epistemology and ethics in Descartes' rationalism, cf. Menke, 2013: 4–5.

12. In summary, see Labarrière, 2014: 778: "Traditionally included among the four 'cardinal' virtues, along with courage, justice, and temperance (or moderation), *phronêsis* nonetheless has a special status. It is a 'dianoietic' or 'intellectual' virtue (Aristotle), and even a 'science' (the Stoics); but it is also an attitude or behavior that is involved in both private and public affairs […]. Every smart manager is a 'prudent' person (*phronimos* […]); to be such a person 'virtuously' […], one also has to know how to anticipate the future […]. From this point of view, the Greeks' 'prudence' has almost nothing to do with the 'prudence in business' to which Descartes alludes in his prefatory epistle to the French translation of the *Principles*, where he seeks to distinguish it from the wisdom with which philosophy must be conducted."

13. Cf. Baecker, 1995; with regard to the maritime context: Wolf, 2020: 150 and *passim.*

14. Gracían is not an arbitrary reference here: as one of the formative thinkers of moral theory in early modernity, he represents a concept of man and human life which undermines the separation of *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, as it is foundational for Descartes' philosophy. In addition, Gracían's writings, especially the allegorical novel *El Criticón*, are permeated by geographical imageries, mostly taken from the nautical realm of experience. Cf. Dünne, 2010, and Kinzel, 2002: 41: "*El Criticón* no longer depicts the battle between land-based *constantia* and sea-borne Fortuna, but a journey on which the prudent subject has to wind its way through the deceptions and opportunities of contingency."

15. As Leibniz further explains: "For as a lesser evil is kind of good, even so a lesser good is a kind of evil if it stands in the way of a greater good." Leibniz, 2007a: 131.

16. For an analysis of this illustration, see Mentz, 2015: 47–48, cf. also Wolf, 2020: 80 and *passim.*

17. I borrow the phrase from Blumenberg, 1997, 46, where it is used in a different context.

18. In a letter to the Jesuit Bartholomaeus Des Bosses from 1712, Leibniz writes: "[T]he difference between the appearance of bodies with respect to us and their appearance with respect to God is in some way like the difference between a drawing in perspective and a ground plan. For whereas drawings in perspective differ according to the position of the viewer, a ground plan or geometrical representation is unique. God certainly sees things exactly such as they are according to geometrical truth, although likewise he also knows how each thing appears to every other, and thus he contains in himself eminently all the other appearances." Leibniz, Letter to Des Bosses, February 15, 1712, in Leibniz, 2007b: 233.

19. Cf. Crary, 1992: 50 and *passim.* See also Deleuze, 2001: 21: "A needed relation exists between variation and point of view: not simply because of the variety of points of view […], but in the first place because every point of view is a point of view on variation. The point of view is not what varies with the subject, at least in the first instance; it is, to the contrary, the condition in which an eventual subject apprehends a variation (metamorphosis), or: something = x (anamorphosis). For Leibniz, for Nietzsche, for William and Henry James, and for Whitehead as well, perspectivism amounts to a relativism, but not the relativism we take for granted. It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject. This is the very idea of Baroque perspective."

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7. Scheerbart on the Beach: Visiting *The Sea-Serpent*

Szilvia Gellai[1]

In 1913 Salomo Friedlaender offered a sensitive comment on the work of his friend and writer-colleague Paul Scheerbart: "He practices 'bestowing virtue' more naively than Zarathustra. Those benefiting from the bestowing process haven't any idea what's been bestowed. […] [H]e plays being common; he's always uncommon, out of the ordinary." (Friedlaender, 2006: 376)

Scheerbart's artistic legacy is in truth anything but ordinary or "common," which is to say: generally accessible. Rather, it seems that, for the sake of gaining an entire range of unconventional impressions, his public has to develop a unique sensorium, a unique sense of humor. The extraterrestrial menagerie, for example, that Scheerbart—a gifted draftsman—prepared for his *Jenseits-Galerie* shows strange creatures, structured in pointillist fashion, sometimes shaped like coral or dripstone, sometimes supplied with enormous funnels. (fig. 7.1–4) Scheerbart refers to these figures as "anormal" precisely because of their sole humanoid trait: their facial forms, distinctly untypical on account of their innately cosmical domain—a domain located beyond a Neptunian orbit. (Scheerbart, 1907: [1])

The literary gifts Scheerbart bestows are also eyebrow-raising, starting with satirical generic labels such as, among many others, "hippopotamus novel" and "show-off novel;" "astral-pantomime" and "hangover-poetry;" "drama for world-improvers" and "telegram-novelette." No less remarkable are his real-life enthusiasms, which he also furnished with literary documentation. He thus tinkered for years on a *perpetuum mobile*, and his fascination with glass architecture bordered on the obsessional. Inspired by Scheerbart's manifesto *Glasarchitektur* of 1914, Bruno Taut designed the pavilion of German glass manufacturers for the Cologne *Werkbund* fair held that same year, dedicating the pavilion to Scheerbart. Thanks to being venerated by artists and architects close to the "Glass Chain" and Bauhaus groups, Scheerbart in fact left lasting traces in architectural history. His name became a synonym for the modern utopia of building in glass.

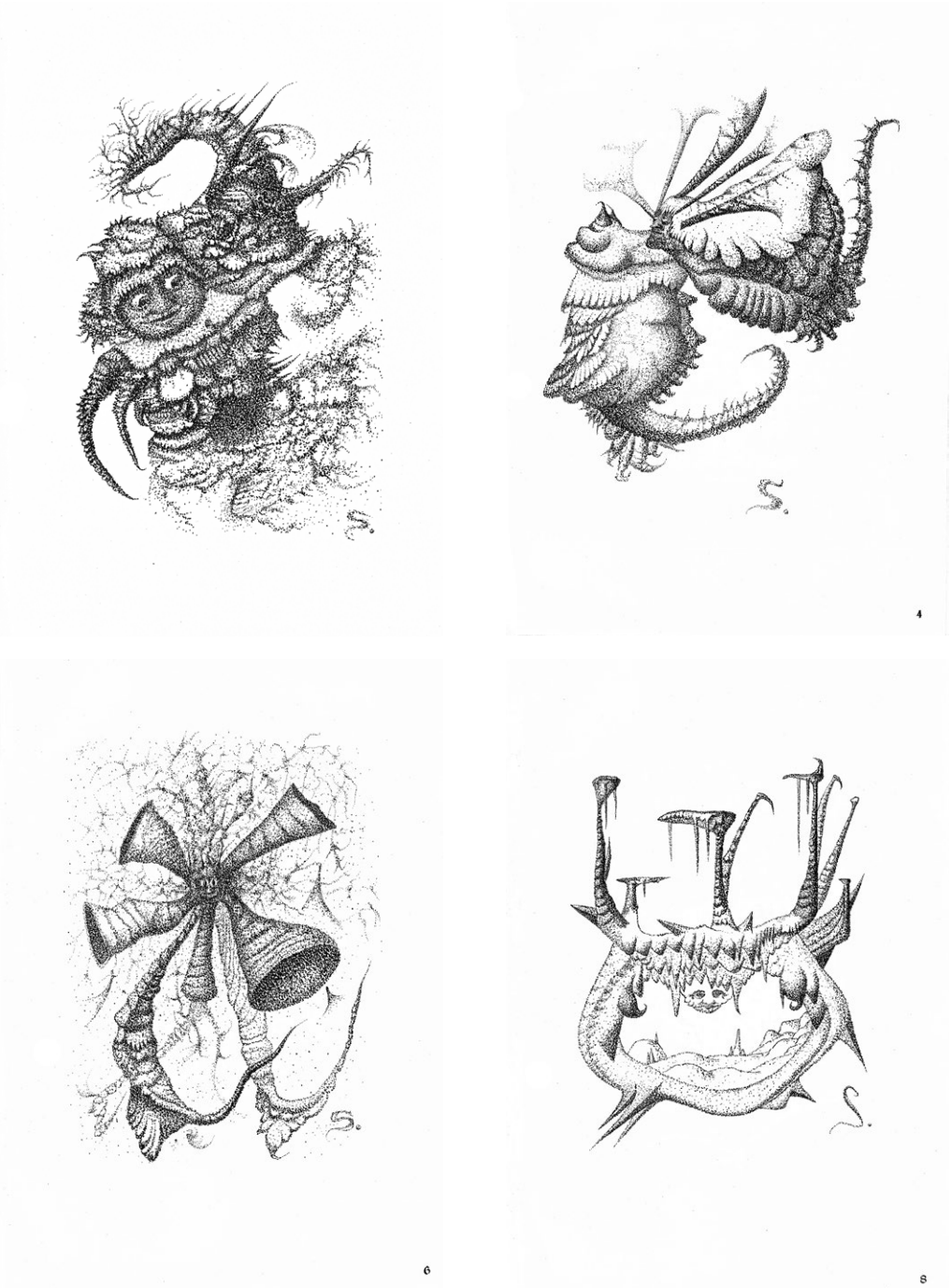

Fig. 7.1–4.
Paul Scheerbart, *Jenseits-Galerie*, 1907 (Berlin, Oesterheld & Co.).

With his recent rediscovery, owing a great deal to translations (often for the first time) of his texts into English, Scheerbart has now come into focus as representing an ecological and critical post-humanistic stance. (Svendsen, 2012: xiv) Exemplary in this respect is the asteroid-novel *Lesabéndio* (1913), which Walter Benjamin considered Scheerbart's most important work and granted eminent political relevance in his cultural theory. (Drews, 2022: 373–389) *Lesabéndio* is a serene piece of extraterrestrial literature, the narrative of the social, artistic, and technical development of dwellers on a planet named Pallas. Benjamin prizes this astral species first because it has learned to use technology in a constructive manner, which is to say without dominating and exploiting nature; (Benjamin, 2019: 631) and second because it has, laughing, turned down the humanistic principle of "humanlikeness." (Benjamin, 1999: 733) Instead of being born, Pallasians come into the world in nutshells. They are sexless, and their "dehumanized" names (Ibid.) are based on their initial babble. Their rubbery, elastic, tubular bodies have sucker-feet, and their eyes are adjustable for both microscopic and telescopic use. Individually and collectively, they are capable of extraordinary corporeal metamorphoses; at the end of their lives, they merge physically and spiritually into one another. The work's titular figure takes this capability to the next, cosmical level: through the idea of a grandiose tower-construction, Lesabéndio initiates the planet's conversion from a double-star into a unity, merging into it after this has taken place. In becoming a star under an architectural sign, Lesabéndio alters both the life, thinking, and feeling of the Pallasians and the interstellar order of the asteroids. This technically catalyzed new organization of both nature and the individual and collective bodies is what sparks Benjamin's energetic praise of Scheerbart's unique ability "to point out the revolutionary character of technical labor." (Benjamin, 2016: 368) Namely, in "To the Planetarium," the last section of *One-Way Street*, Benjamin observes that

> technology is the mastery of not nature but of the relation between nature and man. Men as a species completed their development thousands of years ago; but mankind as a species is just beginning his. In technology, a *physis* is being organized through which mankind's contact with the cosmos takes a new and different form from that which it had in nations and families. (Benjamin, 1996: 426)

But if what is at stake is the development of humankind "as a species," then the question emerges of the status of the new cosmical organization of *physis* if human beings continue to live on Earth. For what distinguished Scheerbart's creatures in *Lesabéndio* is the fact that the Pallasians' physical constitution and cosmic evolution correlate with

the constitution and evolution of their home planet. The ecological point of the asteroid-novel consists precisely in this narrow interchange between Pallasian bodies and heavenly body. The Pallasians can discard everything "humanlike" because they live on Pallas, not Earth. Hence, if being a Pallasian means living on Pallas and being human inversely means living on Earth, how are we meant to conceive of "dehumanization" under terrestrial, material conditions?

Scheerbart is already working on his cosmological project, the alteration of Earth-dwellers, in his early writing. The present essay will focus on a text of his that has hardly been examined until now, *Die Seeschlange. Ein See-Roman* (*The Sea-Serpent: A Sea-Novel*, 1901), which can be considered an entrée to the wider project. On the one hand, Scheerbart here explores the relationship between Planet Earth and its human inhabitants, offering a critique of their bourgeois-humanistic manifestation. But in doing so, his starting point is neither the human being nor nature, hence the two ideal-typical poles of terrestrial causal connection; rather, it is the medium that draws up and regulates these poles. From Scheerbart's perspective, this medium is very clearly architecture, or technique in general. For this reason, also at stake in the novel, on the other hand, is exploring architecture's metaphysical and ethical potential. These two thematic strands are intertwined in the mythic sea-serpent, conceptualized in a tripartite manner: as the vehicle for pan-psychic cosmology; as a higher-order fiction; and as planetary architecture. All three of these conceptual levels have elements that suggest an understanding of this maritime creature as the figuration of a critique of humanism. The sea-novel thus reveals an important moment in Scheerbart's poetics—a moment we might describe as his posthuman turn.

From Sea Monsters to the New Blue Flower

In the early 19th century, the idea of a great sea-serpent sparked the imagination of scientists, lay people, and various lovers of the high seas. Natural scientists such as Louis Agassiz and Henry Lee seriously pondered its existence. A reptile of primeval proportions hovered before their eyes, the idea quickly placing maritime adventurers on the agenda. As Natascha Adamowsky indicates, despite failed hunting expeditions, spectacular exhibits were presented:

> One famous case is the 1842 exhibition of a 35 meters long sea-snake skeleton in the hall of Berlin's Royal Iron Foundry, displayed as an unprecedented sensation. 'Unfortunately' it quickly became clear that

the bones belonged to at least five different fossilized ancient whales, which a Dr. Alfred C. Koch had put together with extraordinary skill and fantasy. (Adamowsky, 2017: 121) (fig. 7.5)

Enthusiasm for news about the monster endured over the following decades. It was said to have pursued ships and haunted harbors for days on end; hundreds of people claimed they had seen it. Jules Verne used relevant newspaper reports for the framing plot of *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas.* (1869) For Gloria Meynen, the narrative technique at work here aligned reality with fiction, did away with the "border between the novel's world and that of its readers." (Meynen, 2020: 268) Meynen emphasizes that within this "technique of seamless montage and convergence," (Ibid.: 273) Verne's narrative strategy comes together with the tinkering technique of various sea monster producers—Dr. Koch was far from the only person with such entrepreneurial ambition.

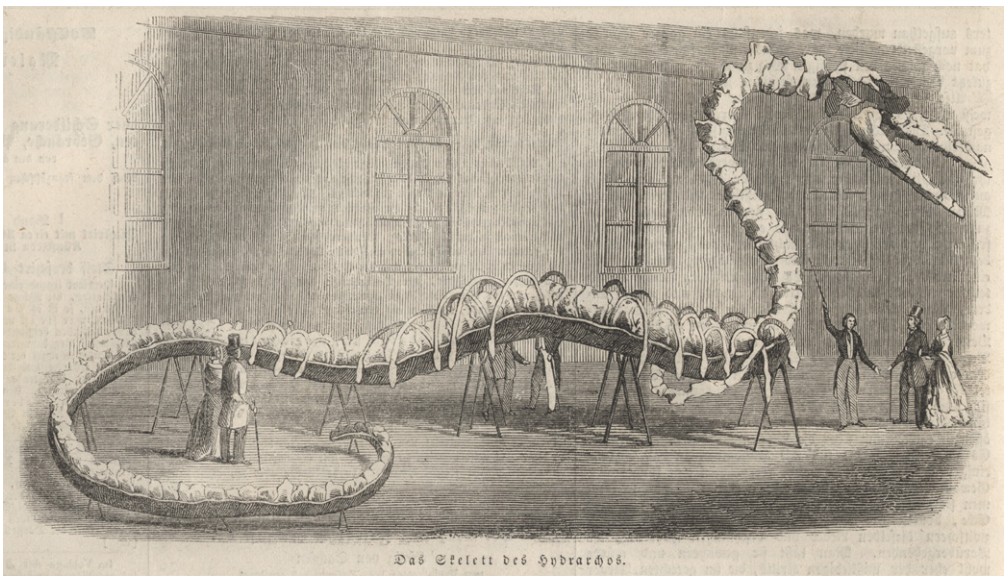

Fig. 7.5.
Carl August Reinhardt, *The Skeleton of the Hydrarchos*, Leipziger *Illustrirte Zeitung*, 131, VI (January 3, 1846): 16. © Deutsches Historisches Museum.

Finally, we should note that the 19th-century sea monster is mainly a hybrid construction: physically-materially made out of diverse objects, compounds, and bones of various animals; and in a literary sphere built from a textual complex including myths, fables, historiographical works, newspaper reports, and natural-scientific treatises. Scheerbart's sea-novel calls for a mode of reading adept with such chimeras. Namely, the Scheerbartian sea-serpent is a skillfully "constructed" hybrid located at a juncture between literature and architecture.

Large snakes and the fabulous creatures associated with them play a central role in Scheerbart's early poetics. Stefan Tetzlaff has suggested reading the Scheerbartian artistic approach in a framework of "neoromanticism," since he sees major affinities with the irony and self-reflexive poetics of Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, Ludwig Tieck, and E.T.A. Hoffmann. The core of Romanticism's "new mythology," Tetzlaff argues, a shared inventory of themes, figures, and literary procedures, is a "physical approach to the supernatural" that we find as well in Scheerbart. (Tetzlaff, 2010: 260) To be sure, as Tetzlaff emphasizes, Scheerbart moves past mere adaption of Romantic procedure, modifying and potentiating it and seeking his own style. In the tale "The Blue Flower" (1902), he thus declares, referring to Novalis's famous trope, that "the old blue flowers are all withered and no longer sufficiently pungent [*scharf*]. Not much can be done with such dry weed—for human beings even absolutely nothing, for they have gradually […] become accustomed to the different poisons." (Scheerbart, 1990b: 181)

For Scheerbart, who in his younger years was an art and architecture critic, one path to developing new artistic approaches was to study symbolism in the visual arts. He was especially fond of, precisely, Hermann Hendrich's painting *Die blaue Blume* (*The Blue Flower*, 1893), which he declared the best modern program-painting created in the early 1890s. According to Scheerbart, Hendrich here demonstrated "that our age's artist does not leave theorizing to the critics" but rather "shapes his artworks into theories and his theories into artworks." (Scheerbart, 2021b: 91) And Scheerbart sees the art resulting from this process as resembling "a large polyp whose tentacles reach out on all sides." (Ibid.: 89) Here the polyp has advanced to become the heraldic animal in a new, theoretically informed fantastical art.

The neoromantic *bestarium* begun with polyps is soon expanded to include dragons and giant snakes; but for Scheerbart all these figures only emerge "out of fantastical longing to represent the other." (Scheerbart, 2021a: 96) The poetical function of Scheerbart's non-human fantastical species is to replace the old Romanticism's "dry weeds." The sea-serpent is part of this species. It is the new sly pungent blue flower that is all the more important since what is at stake for Scheerbart is a critical approach to human beings "accustomed to the different poisons."

Into the "Temple of Interiority"

According to Mechthild Rausch, the underlying impetus in Scheerbart's writing is a "pietistic striving for personal access to God, an overpowering experience of revival, the rebirth of a new human being." (Rausch, 1997: 82) In addition, for Scheerbart it is astral creatures like

Lesabéndio who "arrive at what is most human," so that the striving for renewal needs to be understood, from the start, "*ex negativo*." (Ibid.: 36) And since the tendency to ascend is dangerously close to intoxication, the transforming process needs firm ground beneath one's feet (Ibid.: 180)—architecture fulfilling this function of sustainment and grounding. For just this reason, as Benjamin observes, Scheerbart placed "the greatest value on housing his 'people' […] in buildings befitting their station." (Benjamin, 1999: 733)

Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that *The Sea-Serpent* takes a great deal of time to introduce its title figure, instead unfolding an entire cosmology as a housing problem. At the beginning, we are presented with a reunion of two old friends. Host Lorenz and his guest, Captain Karl Schwarz, have not seen each other for thirty years. While the captain was voyaging in South America, China, and the South Seas, misanthropic "old Lorenz" set up his personal domain on the seashore, in total isolation from the world. Already the opening scene, in which the black servant serves the men cigars, coffee, and exotic fruit in an Orientalist interior, evokes an entire tableau of colonial stereotypes. Before Scheerbart discovered the potential of the astral thematic for his stories, he drew above all on the objects, ideas, and figures of, at the time, a still undifferentiated "Orient," especially on Arab, Chinese, and Japanese cultures. Intimations of European rule run through *The Sea-Serpent* and other works of Scheerbart. In any case, running alongside the ideological problematics this poses is Scheerbart's implicit effort to overcome "humanistic" assumptions—consciousness and agency as human privileges, anthropocentrism, a dichotomous conception of nature and culture—an effort manifest in a number of aspects of his text. In the first place, consciousness is not limited to human subjects. In the second place, the novel consistently questions both anthropomorphic conceptual patterns and the dichotomy between nature and culture.

As Paul Valéry had already done in *Eupalinos, or The Architect* (1921), Scheerbart uses the threshold between land and sea to explore the metaphysics of architecture. These liminal zones are the locus for Valéry's famous *objet ambigu*: a formless, riddling thing spilled up on the shore, a thing defeating Socrates's efforts to decide between its having natural or human origins. (Valéry, 1956: 110, 118) For Scheerbart, the shore is likewise a place of profound ambiguity and fluid boundaries. For the architectonic thinking of this Danzig-born author, the sea-coast paradigm had no less guiding force than had the southern French port city of Sète for Valéry. But where in *Eupalinos* the question of construction is modelled on the harbor and shipbuilding, hence on principles of naval architecture, (Siegert, 2010) Scheerbart here already pursues the idea of a colorful glass architecture rendering "human dwellings into cathedrals." (Scheerbart, 1914: 118)

A labyrinthian edifice extends from old Lorenz's dwelling on the shore. Subterranean passages lead deep down, into the interior of a stony structure toward a group of chapels. Later, spiral staircases ascend to galleries with an open view of the sea. Lorenz names the site a *Tempel des Innern*, a "temple of interiority," since his mystic *Weltanschauung* is architectonically manifest within it. In this "Laurentian" realm, religion becomes architecture, architecture religion. The temple serves the purpose of generating the greatest possible proximity to the three central divinities that, Lorenz is convinced, dwell in the Earth's interior. Just as the Earth's crust consists of land, sea, and air, he explains, "the Earth's interior consists of three spirits: one of 'blaze' or 'embers,' [*Glut*] one of stone, and a third of ether." (Scheerbart, 1962: 255) Lorenz is here by no means suggesting a simple equivalence between phenomena on the Earth's crust and in its interior. For example, Lorenz does not see the Earth's volcanic activities as stemming from the ember-god. He postulates an irreducible difference between crust and core, a difference similar to that between the snail's shell and the snail. (Ibid.: 258)

Lorenz derives his belief in the gods "from the trinity of the old religions," (Ibid.: 255) religions older than Christianity. He thinks of the Earth as an organism, but one different from either the human or non-human variants. Scheerbart is here leaning strongly on the ideas of the physicist and natural philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner, developed in his *Zend-Avesta oder über die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits* (*Zend-Avesta, or: About Things in the Heavens and the Beyond*, 1851). (Brunn, 2010: 45–47) As a representative of panpsychism, Fechner viewed the Earth as an animated organism and higher being, richer and more powerful than plants, animals, and humans—which merely serve as disparate planetary organs. At the same time, they are all integrated into the Earth's superordinate consciousness in accordance with their range of psychic differentiation. (Fechner, 1901: 163) Fechner clarifies this schema with an architectonic metaphor: the Earth does not correspond to the steps of a staircase upon which human beings, animals, and plants are located; rather, it is the *house* within which the staircase has been built. (Ibid.: 195) For Fechner, this intricate connection between animated terrestrial and cosmical beings points to the responsibility of human beings to submit to their planet's developmental principle and contribute to its fulfilment.

Scheerbart already mentions *Zend-Avesta* in his article "The End of Individualism," referring to Fechner as a pioneer of his own cosmo-psychology. (Scheerbart, 1895: 1096) That psychology conveys the irony that human beings, as in their entirety—including their heads—part of the terrestrial organism, actually do not themselves in any way think. Rather, the Earth thinks through them. Scheerbart declares himself incapable of "even thinking [*denken*] the existence of a

distinctive [*apart*] human being," since he finds it impossible for two people living at mutual distance to be living independently from each other: "Through the earth and air they are interconnected." (Ibid.: 1094) For this reason, he argues, the talk of "individualities" with entirely original new ideas is "entirely absurd nonsense." (Ibid.: 1093) Here the exorbitance of Scheerbart's depiction of *The Sea-Serpent*'s protagonist becomes clear. Although Lorenz preaches cosmo-psychology, he described himself to everyone as a "distinctive [or: "unusual"—*apart*] individual." (Scheerbart, 1962: 311) He not only lives fully "encapsulated" (Ibid.: 332) but considers himself the "most profound and witty person conceivable," furnished with "unearthly [*überirdisch*] powers" (Ibid.: 318) enabling him to fulfil the role of savior—the only such organism on Earth. One element in this caricature is a strong streak of despotism—Lorenz steadily communicates through commands and promulgation.

When it comes to Lorenz's "temple of interiority," the same thing applies to it as what Valéry observes about a "singing" architecture (which is to say an architecture comprising human beings in the same way as music), tellingly explaining this through a temple: "But a temple […] forms for us a sort of complete greatness within which we live […]. In it we breathe in, as it were, the will and preferences of an individual. We are caught and mastered within the proportions he has chosen. We cannot escape him." (Valéry, 1956: 93–94)

In contrast to Eupalinos, who, in building, elevates and recognizes himself, (Ibid.: 81) through his constructions Scheerbart's architect wishes to recognize his gods and meet them. The inescapability, the enormous power, of his singing architecture is presented in the chapter titled "Storm Sirens," which shows the aerial temple, open to the sea, in action. In a storm, a space decorated with colorful cords and ropes is transformed into a swaying ship's deck; and for Lorenz, the storm-sirens, howling like enormous aeolian harps, are akin to the call of his gods.

But the building's other spaces have a similar overpowering effect—all carefully curated, architectonically, sensorily, and media technologically composed. For the creation of immersive mediated surroundings where nature and culture are complexly intertwined, auditory and tactile components play—alongside visual impressions—an important role. Spring water from the mountains moves via glass pipes first into colorfully lit fountains, then onward into the sea. The entire arrangement bristles with tentacular splendor.

Located in the cave-like space of the ember-god is "a glowing monster extending strange limbs on all sides—like avid arms. To the captain, the monster seemed like a coral tree—like a red polyp." (Scheerbart, 1962: 256) The electrically illuminated sculpture is made of glass. And since steam circulates in its glass limbs, it seems nearly animated, as

if tentacles would constantly grow from it and form face-like shapes. Aesthetically and ontologically, the metamorphoses of the divine sculpture move between the animated and inanimate and the animal and human, as well as between various emotional states that strongly affect the spectator. In its entirety, the temple facility represents a veritable gallery of drives, affects, feelings, faculties; these can best be ascribed to those setting up the symbols involved, rather than to the invoked divinities.

The system of communicating pipes presiding in the numerous fountains draws our attention to processes of communication. The imparting of an architectonic idea in Scheerbart's work has nothing in common with the wondrous orations of Eupalinos, who was able to instruct his workmen as if they were his own limbs. (Valéry, 1956: 70) Lorenz, to the contrary, reports on grave problems emerging in the course of construction. In the "temple of interiority," everything has been "merely the result of many misunderstandings"—"a torso." (Scheerbart, 1962: 311) In retrospect, he sees the main source of the misunderstandings as the fact that the sculptors "only think in a human way." (Ibid.: 263) In any case, as Fechner (1901: 159) already warned, it is inadequate to conceive of a higher psyche merely as an expansion of what is human. In line with Michel Serres' parasite theory, (1982) we might formulate the critique of anthropocentricism evident here in terms of media theory: from that perspective, Scheerbart views interruption as a constitutive element of communication; he places noise at the start of the relation represented in the constructive processes unfolding between human beings and nature. Put pointedly, the Laurentian credo is thus as follows: if architecture is present, then it only exists because its founding relation, communication itself, has failed.

The Sea-Serpent as Higher-Order Fiction

Following the inspection, the captain now finally gets his chance. His arrival on the scene has not been by chance: he was commissioned to gather information about the selfsame creature at the center of Lorenz's hopes to perfect the Earth, the sea-serpent. As Lorenz explains, the relevance of this creature to him lies in the fact that the sea reveals itself in it. (Scheerbart, 1962: 277) And Lorenz views himself, analogously, as embodying the land.

The captain's inquiries about the sea-serpent consist of a series of stories that involve second-, third- (or even higher) order information. They either constitute interpretation or require it. The old Paraguayan monk's story thus comes from an old chronicle that purportedly has been lost. (Ibid.: 270) For its part, the account by a South Sea Island resident of her encounter with the creature, offered in her native language, was only

available to the captain in German translation, which he transcribed literally. (Ibid.: 279) And the gist of an American hermit's story is so fantastical, dream-like, and humorous that in Lorenz's eyes it needs to be symbolically deciphered. (Ibid.: 277) In this manner, in all its nuances the captain's report exemplifies what Clifford Geertz has termed "thick description," meaning "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures." (Geertz, 1973: 7) For Geertz, pieces of ethnographic data should always be understood as "fictions, in the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned'—the original meaning of *fictiō*." (Ibid.: 15) In that light, the quasi-ethnographic contributions in Scheerbart's text represent a refined self-reflexive strategy in the sea-serpent's introduction. They establish it from the beginning as a higher-order fiction within which both this creature's poetological function and its highly ambiguous constitution are expressed.

The reports of the few witnesses registered by the captain in his notebook point to ontologically tenuous zones. In these descriptions, mutually contradictory metaphors and similes accumulate. The sea-serpent is thus first "the gulf stream," then "a widely ramified polypoid" being, "an enormous jellyfish of mile-wide expanse" "comparable to a great mass of mud," silently and immovably "bound to the depth of the sea for all time." (Scheerbart, 1962: 270ff.) In others of the captain's stories, it suddenly surfaces on the shore: once as a three-eyed white snake, (Ibid.: 280) another time as a strange yellow-headed giant fish. In that fish form, it is endowed with an almost baroque costume, a handsome ruff "of pure light blue lace" that glows "like an elegant halo." (Ibid.: 274) The hermit is said to have ascended into the animal's mouth, the lower jaw measuring "six lengths of a man," (Ibid.: 275) then finding himself in a bright yellow transparent amber head.

In the Germanic languages, amber is etymologically tied to the different variants of *Glas* (glass). Specifically, the Germanic tribes considered the initially unknown material glass, discovered through the Romans, to be a kind of gemstone and named it after their own word for transparent, yellowish amber, *Glas*. The fossilized tree resin continues to be spilled up on the Baltic coast, where great pine forests grew in the Eocene epoch; in the 19th century, an especially rich collection point was, precisely, the beach at Danzig.

This takes on relevance in Scheerbart's sea-novel when the serpent's body reveals itself as luxurious architecture with ivory stairs and a magnificent bright yellow amber waiting hall, where after a short time an electric (ghost) train arrives on the scene. In the animal's depths, its "amber skin" becomes transparent, "like water-clear glass," (Ibid.: 276) offering a free view of the deep sea's colorful activity and the wild spirits of the Earth's interior. The giant fish is, then, a surreal amusement park—one made from the material that in nature is closest to glass.

As a higher-order fiction, however, the sea-serpent remains a deeply hybrid, indeterminate and indefinable creature. It corresponds to the sea—that old cosmological embodiment of primal chaos (compare Siegert, 2010: 423)—in that, in the captain's stories, it very much alternates between animated and inanimate, organic and inorganic, natural and artificial. In this manner, the creature undermines the descriptive categories and border demarcations of enlightened bourgeois rationality. If, as Valéry writes, "to look at the sea is to look at the possible," (1975: 29) then Lorenz's longing to unite with the amorphous symbolic embodiment of the sea contains a suggestion of another wish: to dispense with the burden of determination, or more precisely, of a specific sort of being human.

The Image of the Earth: Between Similarity and Difference

As artificially reshaped nature, the sea-serpent is ascribed planetary relevance in Scheerbart's novel. This is expressed in the staging of the captain's ethno-fictional research report. To that end, Lorenz and his guest meet in a room in the residence that renders the situation a ceremony. They sit at an eight-corner table in the middle of an eight-corner room, towered over by a "domed ceiling of white frosted glass." (Scheerbart, 1962: 268) The octagonal layout cites the articulation of perfection found in sacral buildings from Late Antiquity and the Early Byzantine period onward. The combination with the dome also intensifies the sacral impression—the dome serves as a reference to the firmament as a "cosmological primal experience." (Gerling, 2013: 41) Domes of course often offer space for representing celestial scenes—the starlit sky or, say, a planetarium's projection of the firmament. Scheerbart is playing with all these associations.

From the beginning, this scene in Scheerbart's novel is centered on an object forming an almost literal pivot in Lorenz's cosmology. Hanging above the table is a large lamp in a "sea-blue glass bell, which presented itself as a globe and revolved very slowly." (Scheerbart, 1962: 268) Lorenz describes this object as "an image of the Earth"—for present-day readers thus evoking iconic images of the blue planet. He observes: "This is the way our star looks, should we be able to hover in the ether—far away from this human life. The star is blue because the atmosphere through which we see it is blue." (Ibid.: 272.)

For Lorenz, the sea-serpent is, first, the essential, creaturely representative of the sea and, second, the key to an encounter with the divinities of the Earth's interiority: "We ought not forget," he warns, "that we here wish to approach things only accessible to ordinary human sense and our conceivable tools for apprehension in an indirect way—only

through detours." (Ibid.: 279) The sea-serpent is this detour; it "becomes a medium" (Vogl, 2007: 15) both for understanding and transforming the Earth and those dwelling on it. At the same time, it points to a cosmical dispositive installed in human vision at the latest with the invention of the telescope.

As documented in *Sidereus Nuncius* (1610), Galileo already sees more than other planets when he looks through a telescope. In the moon's craters and chasms, he recognizes a thoroughly terrestrial landscape, another Earth. Joseph Vogl observes that "the concept of 'world' itself changes with this view: the difference between Earth and other heavenly bodies is erased, and the Earth itself appears as a star among stars." (Vogl, 2007: 19) Scheerbart explicitly takes up this difference in his novel and even endows it with precision. When the friends look into the night sky on the house's terrace, Lorenz draws a distinction between the world as universe and the Earth as "a very, very small portion" of it. (Scheerbart, 1962: 283) Lorenz is convinced that the Earth and its dwellers exist in a state of fundamental disharmony. The tense relationship between land, air, and sea mirrors the three divinities within the Earth's interior, who mutually tear themselves asunder. Lorenz sees his metaphysical mission as bringing about harmony by uniting with the sea-serpent: this because if they succeed in meeting as two exemplary representatives of the Earth's crust, then the air, as the third power, would automatically join in "the great accord"—in order to produce the "never before heard triad." (Ibid.: 327) The great chord would then also produce itself in the Earth's interior.

Let us pause at this point and consider a theoretical formulation of these mystical propositions. In one of his collected lectures in *Facing Gaia* (2017), Bruno Latour offers an unusual comparison. On the one hand, he outlines Galileo's procedure. On the other hand, he offers an account of the reflections of the physiologist and engineer James Lovelock. Together with his colleague Dian Hitchcock, in 1967 Lovelock was working at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory to develop technologies for recognizing life on Mars. Instead of sending expensive space probes to the Red Planet, they opted for a far simpler and more economical strategy for observing and analyzing its atmosphere from Earth. Lovelock's suggestion involved simply testing whether or not Mars' atmosphere was in chemical balance. But as we read in Latour's account, Lovelock proceeded to extend his argument to take in the Earth: to the extent it was clear "that Mars is a dead star, since its atmosphere is in chemical equilibrium," from a Martian standpoint it would have to be equally clear "that the Earth is a living star, since its atmosphere is in chemical disequilibrium." (Latour, 2017: 78) "If this is the case," Latour continues his summary, "something must maintain this situation in place, some agency that has not yet been made visible, one

that is absent on Mars as well as on Venus and on the Moon." (Ibid.) Evidently, then, the Earth is "capable of actively maintaining a difference between its inside and its outside. It has something like a skin, an envelope." (Ibid.)

In distinction to Galileo, who in view of the moon underscored the Earth's similarity with other planets, Lovelock played down such similarity, instead emphasizing the Earth's special quality: its capacity to generate and maintain thermodynamic disequilibrium. That disequilibrium is what makes the Earth's living nature possible. But although the insights of Galileo and Lovelock are fundamentally different, in Latour's eyes they are analogously related. As is well known, Lovelock and Lynn Margulis chose the name "Gaia" to denote the unique potency of Planet Earth, its power as a living super-organism. But Latour argues that, within this theory, "Gaia" neither refers to an animated entity nor represents a holistic conception. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, he observes, Gaia is not even a goddess. Rather, she is a dark, chthonic power from the time before the Olympians. Born from chaos, she represents violence, primal origins, cunning—as Latour emphasizes, the opposite of harmony. (Ibid.: 82–83)

In light of Latour's observations, some striking parallels between Lovelock's approach and Scheerbart's fiction come to mind. The main figure in *The Sea-Serpent* assumes an irreducible difference between the Earth's outer region (Latour: "something like a skin, an envelope") and its interior, a difference defining the possibility of its animation. Importantly, the novel does not articulate this difference in thermodynamic terms. Instead, the problem of imbalance is posed in the symbolic language of a "new mythology:" as a disharmony of the Earth's interior, the unceasing struggle of divinities of ember, stone, and ether. Scheerbart as it were operates both programs that Latour will identify. Old Lorenz recognizes both the similarity between the Earth and the other planets, like Galileo, and—tracking down a constitutive below-surface imbalance—a manifest crucial difference, like in Lovelock. This tension is literally at work at the story's core. There is also a striking mythopoetic conceptual parallel: toward the story's end, Lorenz identifies the sea-serpent with the serpent of Oceanus. (Scheerbart, 1962: 347) Now Oceanus, the transmitter of Laurentian cosmology, stems from the same pre-Olympian age as does the chthonic power Gaia. In Hesiod, Oceanus belongs to the Titans, who Gaia bore.

However, the imbalance that releases salvational visions in Scheerbart's protagonists is not primarily of an energetic but rather of a moral nature. In Lorenz's words: "The Earth is like a beaten-up artwork in which the relationship between the individual parts is incorrect. It seems that the Earth can no longer overcome the disharmony. The

animals on the Earth's crust mutually devour one another—only those who can kill can live." (Scheerbart, 1962: 281) It is precisely this focus that in the end renders *The Sea-Serpent* a moral seascape.

The Laurentian Ethic of Dwelling on the Earth

The novel's morality can be given interpretive contour in two ways that exist in and through Lorenz (and in general) simultaneously. If we understand morality as a life practice in which people, communities, and behavior are measured according to specific standards, judged as correct or incorrect, good or bad, then there are two main agents of morality in the narrative. There is firstly humanity, which in the protagonists' judgment has failed to a catastrophic degree. The need of the Earth's human dwellers for salvation or a miracle is akin to a declaration of moral bankruptcy. Then there is Lorenz. As the novel's exemplary representative of the Earth's crust, Lorenz is admittedly anything but a morally superior being. He is a tyrannical figure, full of hate and disgust, incapable of any intersubjective opening—apparently hardly someone made to redeem the Earth. The novel presents this figure in a completely unflattering way. In a letter to Scheerbart, the novel's publisher, Max Bruns, addressed what he termed its "And-Coronation" (*Und-Krönung*), a reference to the fact that nearly every sentence on the last pages begins with "and." Scheerbart answered that the "often faltering figure of old Lorenz" needed to be expressed in a way containing that *"helpless"* quality. "After all, the too-violent intensifying of self-glorification actually has to result, in the end, in a doddering old man." (Scheerbart, 1990a: 92, italics Scheerbart's) And in fact, the novel successively takes apart its protagonist. It presents a fragile, scarcely mobile old man in narcissistic frenzy, plagued by dark visions, increasingly confused and mentally broken. When then, at the end, Lorenz moves out over the sea in a motorboat, in mystic union with the sea-serpent, he finds both the longed-for triad—and death. Scheerbart's human being thus does not vanish "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea," (Foucault, 1994: 422) but like a dead man travelling "inexorably" in his motorboat "on and on, straight ahead." (Scheerbart, 1962: 354) Scheerbart has this human being dissolve within the dark waves of the sea or, to use Serres' phrase, within noise itself.

We can also understand morality in critical-genealogical terms and move back to the concept's origins. Within the Greek origins of our word "ethics," we may discover a bifurcation between the word ἔθος (*ethos*), denoting usage or custom, and ἦθος (*ēthos*), denoting both dwelling and character. Whatever our reading of the particular historical-ideological backdrop and premises of Heidegger's early postwar writing, taken on

its own terms, that writing was oriented around this distinction, for the sake of circumventing what he viewed as an anthropocentric understanding of ethics. In that framework, in his "Letter on Humanism," (1949) Heidegger considers Heraclitus' Fragment 119, ἦθος ἀνθρώπωι δαίμων (*ēthos anthrōpōi daímōn*), problematizing a popular and, in his view, anachronistic translation of that phrase, in order to then propose an alternative:

> 'A man's character is his daimon.' This translation thinks in a modern way, not a Greek one. ἦθος [*ēthos*] means abode, dwelling place. The word names the open region in which the human being dwells. The open region of his abode lets what pertains to the essence of the human being, and what in thus arriving resides in nearness to him, appear. The abode of the human being contains and preserves the advent of what belongs to the human being in his essence. According to Heraclitus' phrase this is δαίμων [*daímōn*], the god. The fragment says: the human being dwells, insofar as he is a human being, in the nearness of god. (Heidegger, 1998: 269)

Within this particular interpretive framework, we might understand Scheerbart's protagonist as acting ethically in that he shapes the open region of his abode on Earth, his transition from this world to the next one, in such a way that he can be near to his gods: to the fearsome, passionate, and mighty divinities often operating as tentacular monsters. He has a labyrinthian edifice built on the seashore, a site in which demons can make an appearance. Consequently, Lorenz does not enter into the condition of homelessness in the midst of the existant that Heidegger derives from the non-poietic impact of modern technology, the non-emergence of the sustenance-endowing new.

For Scheerbart, technology does not impact human beings in the manner of Heidegger's *Gestell*, the "framework" or essence of technology, its dynamic of "ever-expanding demand for production, stockpiling, and consumption." (Bambach, 2013: 116) Lorenz's immersive mediated surrounding consists of poietically shaped—through *technē*—spaces for abode; it is thus a living-space within the existant allowing proximity to the absent, closed-off, unfamiliar. *The Sea-Serpent* doubtless offers a fascinating early manifestation of Scheerbart's utopian glass-architecture. The hybrid titular figure shimmers, in turn, on the ontological threshold of indeterminacy; the creature also draws human beings into a zone of fluid borders, a locus preceding any split between nature and culture, material and discourse, the animated and inanimate, organic and inorganic. In doing so, it paves the way for those metamorphic astral creatures that Benjamin praises for their "dehumanized" nature.

Notes

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8. Lord Karl: Jumping Ship and Professional Ethics as Narrative Drivers in Conrad and Kafka

Benno Wagner

Je sauve donc je suis. Henning Trüper has retraced the 19th-century slogan of the rescue society of Boulogne-sur-Mer, that is "the idea that life-saving amounted to an irrefutable justification, and thus foundation, of one's own being," (Trüper, 2015: 118) as moored in the *kairos* of colonial empires and the massive expansion of sea travel that accompanied it. In a radical shift from Hans Blumenberg's account of the classical trope, *Shipwreck with Spectator*, (Blumenberg, 1997) the existence of the spectator is no longer grounded in their safe detachment from shipwreck, but from their fearless involvement in it. In this article, I will shift focus once again, from those involved, lifesaving spectators of shipwreck to the immediate actors, or rather: the actor-network of sea travel, which includes shipping companies, crews, passengers, and ships. This actor-network, with the sailing crew at its core, has been subsumed into a binding code of behavior in distress ever since the 1852 foundering of the Royal Navy steam frigate *HMS Birkenhead* at Danger Point, off the Western Cape of Africa. The code's two key imperatives—"women and children first" and "captain goes down with the ship," henceforth known as the Birkenhead drill (Brierley and Larcher, 2020: 119)—were safely embedded in Victorian morals by popular life guides, such as Samuel Smiles's self-published *Self-Help* (1859). Obviously, the chivalrous requirement spelled out here adds a Boratesque twist to our initial slogan. I save therefore I am—*not.* Saving life is transformed here from the foundation to a dilemma of human existence: in order to survive as a maritime professional, one has to perish as an individual. In the famous verse of the "Poet of the Empire:" "To stand and be still | to the Birken'ead Drill | is a damn tough bullet to chew." (Kipling, 1896: 173)

Based on this shift of attention, I will look at two different articulations of this dilemma, the "*Jeddah* incident" of July 1880 (a shipwreck that never happened), and the sinking of the *Titanic* of April 1912 (a shipwreck that has been happening ever since), and unfold the translation of each case in a modern novel: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* for the former, and Franz Kafka's *Der Verschollene* (*The Man who Disappeared*) for the latter. I will pay particular attention to the role of professional ethics as drivers of the narrative in both cases, and I will highlight how the two authors, while using an almost identical plot structure, pursue different strategies of fictionalizing the Birkenhead dilemma.

A Shipwreck that Never Happened: SS Jeddah, 1880

Damaged by four days of heavy weather, the *Jeddah* was abandoned by her captain, his officers, and the son of the owner, leaving 953 passengers, mainly pilgrims on the *hajj* to Mecca, to their fate. The apparent survivors were then rescued by the British convict ship *SS Scindian* and taken to the Port of Aden the following day, where they reported the tragic loss of their ship and her passengers. The particular moral quality of this case is connected to the temporal structure of the unfolding events. Judging from the first press coverage of the *Jeddah*'s foundering, it seems that Captain Clark and his companions might have *just* gotten away with not exactly standing still to the Birkenhead drill. On August 12, the *London Times* commented as follows on the news of the loss of the *Jeddah*:

> [N]othing is more rare than that, in a disaster at sea, the captain and the principal officers of the vessel should be the chief or sole survivors. Nothing can be more admirable than the manner in which, as a rule, the commanders of vessels stay by them to the end, and insist on being the last rather than the first to be saved. (Moore, 2000: 118)

The very source of the comment indicates a key feature of shipwreck in the age of the telegraph and the rotary press, of international media networks. "News of the sinking […] was first spread by telegram from Aden," the compiler of the Conrad Society summarizes. "Printed in newspapers, the telegrams gave rise to further letters and commentaries," (Moore, 2000: 104) thus constituting an international jury of real time morality. Shipwreck now becomes a construct of an imperial media narrative—a narrative that arranges facts and judgments, matters and morals, according to its own, intrinsic rules and procedures. In the case of the *Jeddah*, the spin of public emotion and moral feeling was to change radically only two days later. On August 11, the *Jeddah*, unable to navigate

but safe, and all of her passengers arrived in Aden, towed by the Blue Funnel Line steamship *Antenor,* causing an immediate swing of public emotion. The initial "thrill of horror," as the Singapore *Daily Times* commented, was "succeeded by quite a different [feeling]." (Moore, 2000: 117) The London *Times* expressed "immense relief" mixed with the "pain" of the now pending inquiries, and a protective attitude of incredulity: "It would have been terrible that more than nine hundred helpless pilgrims should have perished at sea. But that they should have been abandoned by officers of the ship to which they had entrusted themselves, and saved by the accidental services rendered them by another vessel, is scarcely credible." (Moore, 2000: 118f.)

The comment of the *Daily Chronicle* explicitly highlights the transition from a presumptive accident to a scandal—an accident of professional recruitment, as it were—with professional code and national honor now the two main victims: "It is to be feared that pilgrim ships are sometimes officered by unprincipled and cowardly men who disgrace the *traditions of seamanship*. We sincerely trust that *no Englishman* was amongst the boatload of cowards who left the *Jeddah* and her thousand passengers to shift for themselves." (Moore, 2000: 120)

Another collective actor in the moral equation of the *Jeddah* case emerges from the ship's line of business. From the mid-19th century, pilgrims were increasingly being transported by specialized companies and carriers. (Miller, 2006: 190) Colonial elites in places like Bombay, as well as the local and global English press, perceived the hajj as problematic, and the pilgrims as a threat to the colonial order, and as potential spreaders of epidemic infections. The Muslim pilgrimage was now constituted by a network of religious and ethnic stereotypes on the one hand (as a restive cargo, always happy to take the shortcut to paradise by cutting the throats of a few infidels), and a set of regulatory discourses, from medicine via logistics to safety regulations, on the other. (Lombardo, 2017: 983f.)

The infamous Captain Clark tried to win over the public mood by putting all his money on the stereotypes. Upon his arrival in Aden, he told authorities that before the sinking of his ship "the pilgrims murdered the second officer and second engineer, and did their best to kill the Europeans who have been saved […]. The captain's wife was passed out of the sinking ship through one of the ports." (Moore, 2000: 117)

On August 11, however, this line of defense was shattered by the entrance of yet another, and this time non-human, actor: the return of the damaged *SS Jeddah* safely to port three days earlier. The comment of *The Globe* adds another important aspect of our unfolding moral seascape that was emerging into the discourse in those days, namely the fact that, in today's terms, "objects too have agency," (Latour, 2005: 63) and the impact of this fact on moral judgment:

> [E]ven if the *Jeddah* had afterwards foundered there would have remained an indelible stain upon the credit of the men who had thus run away at the moment of peril. *But the fact that the ship was not in any extremity of peril is clearly proved by her eventual safety*, and the charge becomes *thus* one of over-timidity as well as simple *lache*[*té*]. [emphasis added] (Moore, 2000: 120)

One month later, Mr. Campbell, a member of the Singapore Legislative Council, would summarize the public reading of the events like this:

> That boat when being lowered is attempted to be swamped by the Hadjis—a most natural thing, I think; and I question whether any of us in the same situation would not have shot Captain Lucas Clark like a dog for his dastardly attempt to desert his vessel in such dire distress. (Moore, 2000: 123)

Exploring the Professional Scandal: Joseph Conrad's Lord Jim

Twenty years onwards, Joseph Conrad's breakthrough novel *Lord Jim* undertakes a fictional probe into the ethical and psychological implications of this type of maritime scandal. Jim, the young first mate of the rusty, Chinese-owned pilgrim steamer *Patna*, joins his captain and part of the crew in abandoning their crowded vessel when a collision with some mysterious object under the water renders it unmaneuverable in the face of an approaching squall. Subsequently, the *Patna* and her human cargo will share the miraculous-scandalous fate of the *Jeddah*. The public police court inquiry triggered by the events unfolds, with Conrad's intradiegetic narrator Marlowe in the audience, as a somewhat farcical, though not inconsequential, legal procedure. While the captain and his first officer have, once more, fled the scene, Jim alone faces the committee and, eventually, has his certificate cancelled.

In Conrad's world, however, guilt is not decided by the findings of the courts, and shame is not the result of self-scrutiny—rather, both are products of a public discourse that escapes the control of either instance. In *Lord Jim*, it is this discourse that determines not only key events of the plot, but the condition of narration itself. The accidental encounter between the intradiegetic narrator and the tragic hero right after the court hearing is apparently motivated by the suggested execution of Captain Clark ("like a dog") in the meeting of the Singapore Legislative Council. Having stumbled over a native dog, a stranger exiting the courthouse next to Marlowe exclaims, "Look at that wretched cur," before being separated from the scene by a flood of people entering for the next case. Jim, who had been walking in front of the two, spins around:

"Did you speak to me?" (Conrad, 2007: 56) After a tense exchange on the meanwhile empty courthouse verandah, Jim's blunder eventually becomes clear—the speaker was not Marlowe, and the reference was not to Jim—and Jim's mood changes from anger about the assumed insult to embarrassment for his erroneous identification.

While the reconstruction of the events in the public court hearing "was as instructive as the tapping with a hammer on an iron box," (Conrad, 2007: 45) the cur incident leads to a second inquiry in the subsequent private conversation between Marlowe and Jim. Here, Jim describes his abandonment of the ship, and of his professional code, as a moment of partly suspended and partly transferred agency. In his foundational study *Conrad's Eastern World*, Norman Sherry identifies Conrad's purposeful alterations of the *Jeddah* blueprint "in order to remove all possible excuse for Jim's action in joining the deserters, and, at the same time, to isolate them from him:" even after the collision, almost all of the pilgrims are peacefully asleep, and there is no captain's wife they could threaten to harm. (Sherry, 1966: 52) Hence, there is no conflict of chivalresque codes, nor any external physical forces to explain or even justify the abandonment of the vessel in distress. Instead Jim's mind, infected by nautical fiction heroics, (Acheraiou, 2009: 97–99) gets a sobering reality check when he is sent to inspect the collision damage to the rusty vessel below the waterline. The technical conditions he finds—an "overwhelming flood," available lifeboats for perhaps half of the passengers, and most importantly, "No time! No time"—deprive him of any agency: "It seemed to take all life out of my limbs." (Conrad, 2007: 68) Jim's inactivity is contrasted by the hyperactivity of other crew members. As the squall is closing in on the helpless ship, the German captain and the first officer have already boarded a lifeboat and are now calling for the third engineer to follow them: "Jump, George! We'll catch you! Jump!" However, George has died from a heart attack during these scenes of utter panic. The appeal to the dead man is eventually answered by the paralyzed Jim: "'I had jumped' […] It seems. […] I knew nothing about it till I looked up." (Conrad, 2007: 86) Turning to Marlowe, Jim explicitly shifts the agency for his fateful leap to the captain and officers in the lifeboat: "It was *their* doing as plainly as if they reached up with a boat-hook and pulled me over." (Conrad, 2007: 96)

This strategy of suspending the requirements of the professional code by denying agency is expanded when it comes to the discussion of the second, probably more obvious and more despicable, abandonment—the decision to steer the lifeboat away from the presumably sinking ship. Marlowe now treats his intradiegetic audience, and, by extension, his reader, to a full-fledged actor-network theory account, when he describes how wind, rain, sea, and ship collaborated to release, as it seemed, Jim and the officers from their moral obligation, from their

professional duty, to return and save as many lives as possible: "They had seen no light of any sort though they were well within range, and they could only explain this in one way: the ship had gone down. It was obvious and comforting." But in fact, the *Patna*, conspiring with the wind, the current, and a raincloud in the approaching squall, had outplayed Jim's perception in a way that seems to leave Marlowe no other choice than to introduce human agency by way of simile:

> [She] swung her head to the wind as sharply as though she had been at anchor. By this change in her position all her lights were in a few moments shut off from her boat to leeward. It may very well be that, had they been seen, they would have had the effect of a mute appeal—that their glimmer lost in the darkness of the cloud would have had the mysterious power of the human glance that can awaken the feelings of remorse and pity. It would have said, 'I am here—still here'. […] But she turned her back on them as if in disdain of their fate. (Conrad, 2007: 105)

This feat of nonhuman agency, however, is not sufficient to abdicate Jim. The novel illustrates this by the mysterious case of the impeccable Montague Brierly, introduced to the reader as "Big Brierly—the captain of the crack ship of the Blue Star line." (Conrad, 2007: 46) In his comments on the proceedings, related by Marlowe, Brierly distinguishes himself from other observers by doing away with the concept of individual courage as the core of the matter:

> 'Why are we tormenting that young chap?' […] 'Why eat all that dirt?' […] 'Courage be hanged' […] '[W]e must preserve some *professional decency* or we become no better than so many tinkers going about lose. We are trusted. So you understand?—Trusted! […] We aren't an organized body of men, and the only thing that holds us together is just the name for that kind of decency. Such an affair destroys one's confidence.' [emphasis added] (Conrad, 2007: 54)

By the end of the 19th century, the professional code (women and children first) was not so much a tool to evaluate and judge professional behavior than a value in itself, a foundation of maritime existence—a *collective* professional existence that must, under no circumstances, even be questioned by individual behavior: I save, therefore I am. "He committed suicide very soon after," (Conrad, 2007: 47) is how Marlowe laconically closes his account of Brierly. As for Jim, the Birkenhead bullet he dodged would dog his footsteps. He works as a manager in a rice mill and then as a water-clerk for various trade companies, staying in each station only until word of his shame catches up with him, causing a

series of abrupt departures: "[A] word carries far—very far—deals destruction through time as the bullets go flying through space," (Conrad, 2007: 134) Marlowe sums up the expansion of the moral seascape into a moral landscape. Eventually, with the help of a friend of Marlowe, Jim manages to escape the reach of steamship travel, press, and telegraph networks by taking charge of a trading post in exterritorial Patusan. Here, with literally nothing left to lose, he finally displays unreserved agency and lives up to full responsibility: against the machinations of a corrupt Sultan and a gang of local outlaws he stabilizes the position of Doramin, the local chief of trade, and achieves the rank and honor of "Lord Jim." But when a gang of Western bandits is stranded on his shores, threatens to loot and kill his people, and their leader challenges the improbable white Lord with "a sickening suggestion of common guilt," (Conrad, 2007: 296) Jim offers the already subdued intruders a means of escape. They in turn use their unexpected luck to make a surprise attack on the village and kill Doramin's son. This time, Jim takes responsibility "upon [his] head," (Conrad, 2007: 317) faces the bereft father, and takes, as it were, that long-delayed bullet to his chest.

A Ship that Keeps Sinking: HMS Titanic

While the case of the *Jeddah* sent ripples all across the British Empire, the sinking of the *Titanic* in the night of April 14–15, 1912 was—due to its sheer technological and humanitarian dimensions, the arrival of Marconi's wireless radio signals, and the fierce competition among the New York yellow press—arguably the first *global* media event. (Heyer, 1995; Morgner, 2009: 298–306) This begs the question of how this epochal maritime disaster, with only about 700 survivors out of 2,227 passengers, could leave not the slightest trace in the work of Franz Kafka, an industrial accident insurance expert and emergent writer at the time, the engineer of a full-fledged poetics of accident (Wagner, 2009) in the years to come. Except that is not the case. In fact, Kafka's work, from the first steps of his first (*The Man Who Disappeared*) to the darkest hour of his last unfinished novel, *The Castle*, is scattered with references to the greatest transportation accident in his lifetime.

Before we listen to the "ghosts" of the *Titanic* in this modern Poseidon's polyphonic ocean, let us briefly retrace our main topic, the moral seascape and professional ethics, in one of his daily news staples, the *Prager Tagblatt*. A representative sample of the highly networked global reporting, (Stölzl, 1979: 78f.) and at the same time a likely primary source of information for Kafka during the red-hot news period directly following the event, the *Tagblatt* reporting displays three different (and partly contradictory) discursive shifts as compared to the *Jeddah* case.

While in the technological disaster of the *Titanic* (1) the center of agency clearly moves from human actors to technology, (2) moral judgment shifts from individuals to economic structures, and at the same time (3) the concepts of nation and national character play an even more distinct role than in the moral catastrophe of the *Jeddah*.

The latter shift comes into full view on the second full day of coverage, April 17. The *Tagblatt* now seemed to crave some human interest and turned to the Birkenhead drill: maritime chivalry and professional standards. Despite the newspaper's previous emphasis on the neatly implemented selectivity of the rescue procedures ("all women and first-class passengers were saved"), page 1 features, under the subtitle "The death struggle of the passengers," a lively depiction of the situation on board after the collision: "All prudence had left the desperate passengers. Nobody paid attention to the officers in command. Everybody was rushing for the lifeboats, in a wild chase." [Translation, and all subsequent quotations from this source, my own] (*Prager Tagblatt*, April 17, 1912: 1) To support its picturesque description, the *Tagblatt* treats its readers to the comments of a local source, a certain Maximilian J. Sonnenschein, who had earned his pundit status by having completed 92 transatlantic passages at the time. When one of his ships ran aground, he witnessed the unheard-of brutality of the English crew toward the passengers:

> The sailors and the engineers rushed to the lifeboats and pushed back the passengers. The reason is that the English and American sailors are an undisciplined lot, which has been hired for the passage by haphazard. […] The situation on German steamers is completely different. Their crew consists of former war navy personnel, with a much higher sense of responsibility and discipline. No German sailor would dare to approach the lifeboats without orders to do so, and never in case of shipwreck a German captain left his ship before all passengers and the whole crew, down to the last cabin boy, had been saved. (*Prager Tagblatt*, April 17, 1912: 1f.)

In the same news period, right after the event, the search for the cause and responsibility for the collision had begun. Competition for the blue riband, namely the fastest crossing of the Atlantic, was soon identified as the reason, with the hapless Captain Smith as the first culprit. While Captain Clark of the *Jeddah* had *fallen short of professional morals* by doing the unthinkable, Smith, it was found in the world media court, was guilty of sinking the unsinkable by *excessive professional ambition*. Here, too, the personal flaw was immediately connected to a nationalized professional code: "A German steamer does not participate in races"—and here, too, moral agency eventually shifts from the captain to the actor-network of steamship travel. "The actual reason for the collision," we read on April

17, right below the guilty verdict about the captain, "is the mad competition between American and English steam line companies. […] Their ambition to establish ever new records must have affected the captain's due diligence." (*Prager Tagblatt*, April 17, 1912: 2)

The shift of moral agency away from human individuals did not stop with blaming unchecked Anglo-Saxon capitalism from the moral high ground of the German/Austrian social state and its standards of public security. Already in the first three days of reporting, various attempts at explaining the unthinkable—the sinking of this pinnacle of modern security technology on first contact with a quasi-static object—based on the ship's construction and the angle of collision circulated in the news. Embracing our two case studies, Joseph Conrad's "Some Reflections on the Loss of the 'Titanic'," published in the *English Review* of June 1912, set out to deflate the "feverish exploitation" (Conrad, 1949a: 212) of the disaster by the press, the "great babble of News and eager comment," (Conrad, 1949a: 223) by the voice of an expert not only of the "words," but also of the "realities […] of this life." (Conrad, 1949a: 217) The focus of his scorn was what he termed "a new kind of seamanship"—a transfer of agency from professional sailors to ship construction technology: "the triumph of the material, of clever contrivances, of the whole box of engineering tricks" over professional navigation skills. Against this surrender to a technology getting out of hand—a technology that would not only undermine the "close relationship between specialized nautical knowledge, cooperation, and solidarity," but, with these, the "existential analogies" between "seafaring and authorship, sailing and writing"—Conrad insists on prioritizing the human agency of maritime professionals:

> A commander should be able to hold the ship and everything on board of her in the hollow of his hand, as it were. But with the modern foolish trust in material, and with those floating hotels, this has become impossible. A man may do his best, but he cannot succeed in a task which from greed or more likely from sheer stupidity, has been made too great for anybody's strength. (Conrad, 1949a: 224)

Back in Kafka's Prague-based German textual network, we find a summary of the main talking points in the 1912 volume of the *Zeitschrift für die gesammte Versicherungswissenschaft*, another significant source for the poetic arrangements of the insurance lawyer. "The *Titanic* is 'practically unsinkable'," says Rudolph Ulrich, (1912: 1046) Secretary General of the International Union of Marine Insurance (founded in Berlin in 1874 as Internationaler Transport-Versicherungsverband), citing the assurance London insurance brokers had offered maritime insurers. He then continues:

> In fact it is hard to imagine an accident that would cause the sinking of the excellently constructed ship with its 15 lateral and water-tight bulkheads. […] Even if a fast steamer runs aground on a rock and tears up the lower part of her double bottom, she will not sink after being towed clear, but keep swimming on the upper layer. […] so that it was hard to imagine a case that would be able to put the unsinkability in question. But the unexpected happened, the *Titanic* did not hit the iceberg head on with the bow […] but chafed along the edge of the iceberg below the waterline, ripping up her hull above the protective double bottom. [my translation] (Ulrich, 1912: 1047)

Ulrich also quotes from a few improvements to the safety design of steamships suggested by the President of the British Court of Inquiry, Lord Mersey: "It should be considered to add to the transversal bulkheads a double hull below the waterline, but also all the way up above the waterline." [my translation] (Ulrich, 1912: 1048; for illustration see figure 8.1)

Encrypting the Global Disaster: Franz Kafka's The Man Who Disappeared

"The very bottom space of the ocean steamer, which transverses the whole ship, is completely empty, however it is barely one meter high. The ship's construction requires this empty space. In fact, it is not completely empty, it belongs to the rats." [my translation] (Kafka, 1994: 46) The isolated entry about steamship safety design in the Hunger Artist notebook of spring 1921 indicates Kafka's lifelong obsession with the discursive wreckage of the *Titanic* incident. This obsession, unsurprisingly, also includes Rudolph Ulrich's "hard to imagine case" that would happen against all odds. So, in a famous dialogue between K. and the castle secretary Bürgel, the latter muses about the diligent precautions of the castle administration in dealing with the public, and the extremely unlikely chance that a public party will actually face the official dealing with their case, in an unmarked quotation from the *Titanic* files:

> But it isn't necessary to think of it, because it almost never happens. What a strange little grain of matter, formed in a certain special way, how very small and clever such a member of the public must be if it's to slip through such a perfect sieve. You think it can't happen? You are right, it can't. But then—and who can guarantee everything?—one night it does happen. (Kafka, 2009: 234)

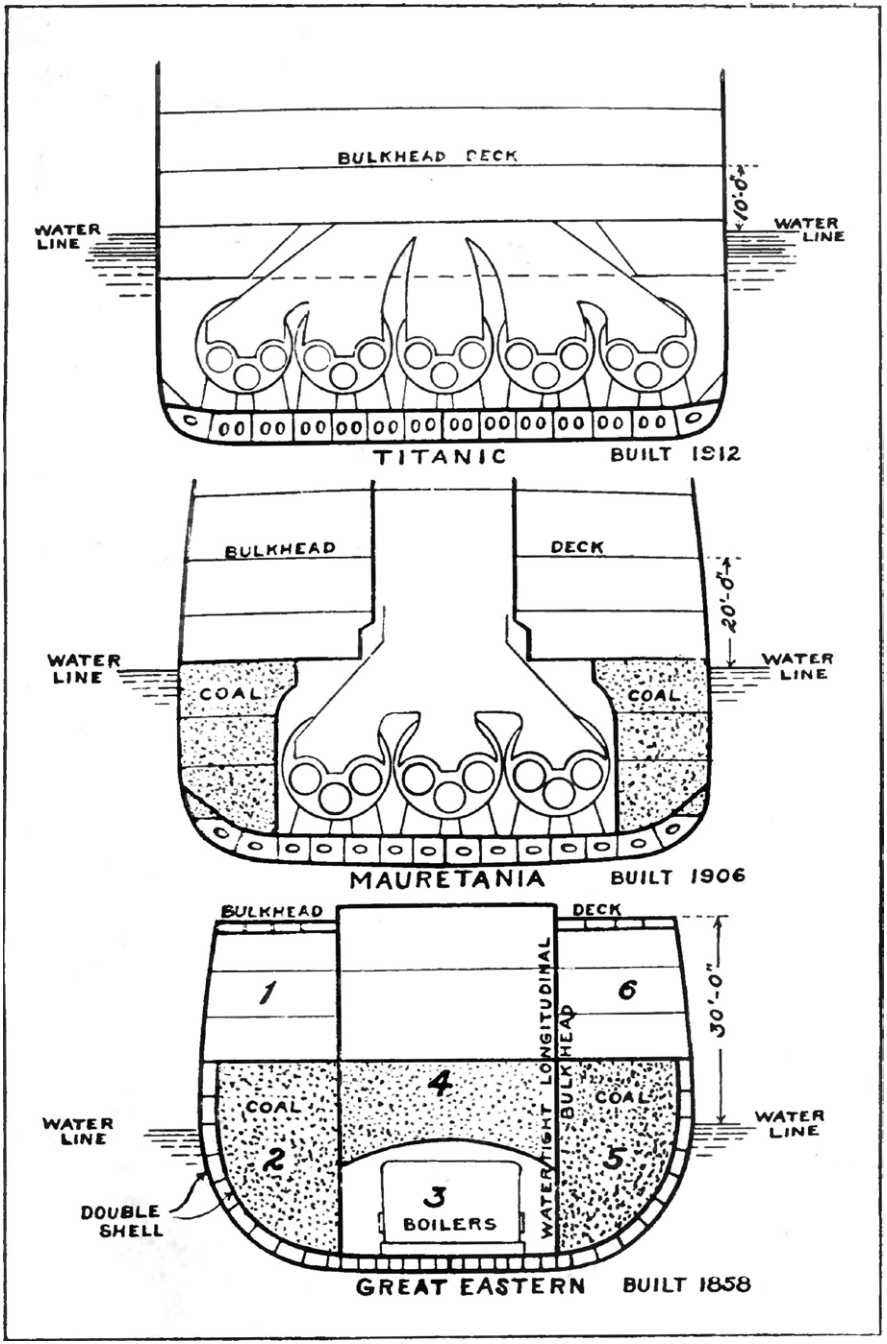

Fig. 8.1.

Two Extremes in Protection, and a Compromise, 1912. From the book *An Unsinkable Titanic*, by John Bernard Walker, p. 83. Public domain (source: Wikimedia Commons).

Nine years earlier, in May 1912, a few weeks after the *Titanic* disaster, Kafka gave up on his first attempt at his America novel, and he would only launch a second approach on September 25, right after completing his breakthrough story, *The Judgment*. We may now wager what made him abandon (and later destroy) his first manuscript, and what drove his new approach.

While in Kafka's novel, as I will argue, the *Titanic* sinks, but in a figurative way—as a submerged layer of signs and discourse—the plot structure is strikingly similar to Conrad's *Jeddah*/*Patna* tale. Like Conrad's Lord Jim, Kafka's Karl Rossmann is driven by the conflict between jumping ship and an ethical code that would sanction this act with a social death penalty. Like Jim, Karl follows a downward trajectory that is driven by a series of formal or informal trials, each of them triggered, as some sort of compulsive repetition, by an original failure: young Jim's shirking an unexpected rescue operation on a training ship on the River Thames; young Karl's turning into a deadbeat father when he was "sent to America by his unfortunate parents because a maid had seduced him and had a child by him." (Kafka, 2002: 3) Like the former, the latter will eventually escape to and lose his life in an exterritorial space where the blind machinery of rules and regulations is replaced by plain murder. (Kafka, 1964: 343f.) And like Conrad's novel, Kafka's is driven by a relentless investigation in the life-defining, bio-graphical power of professional codes and ethics.

Nearly a half year after the *Titanic* disaster, Kafka "embarked on a second version, which went swimmingly," as his translator Michael Hofmann (2002: vii) puts it in a fitting comment. Right after having written down in one night his wet dream of drowning the businessman and good son for the sake of the writer, (*The Judgment*; cf. Wagner, 2019: 75f.) his second approach to the America material takes off with writing *The Stoker*, at once the new first chapter of his intended novel and the second of his three variations of the impossibility of dedicating one's life to art. (*The Metamorphosis* completing the trio) In *The Stoker*, the cipher for art is the title character, as any skilled reader of Kafka's *écriture lecture* will have noticed:

> Have you ever made a longer journey on a steamship? Do you remember a strange, almost pathetic figure emerging from the engine room, staying on deck for fifteen minutes to catch some fresh air? The man was half naked, with a blackened face and red, inflamed eyes. You have been told he is the stoker from the engine room. […] Such are the stays of the artist among the people, when he emerges, staggering and with dull eyes, from the fiery belly of his work. [my translation] (Hofmannsthal, 2000: 66)

An avid reader of Hofmannsthal's essays, Kafka was obviously acquainted with his fictitious conversation about "characters in the novel and in drama." (Brod, 1966: 276) And now, to raise the heat, on April 22 yet another stoker emerges, right from the *Prager Tagblatt*:

> Meanwhile a crowd of sooty figures emerges from the engine room. These are the stokers, who know perfectly well that down there is horror, and no chance for escape. Stokers and waiters take possession of several life boats; they do not care about the officers' orders, or about their guns, and thus save their lives. (*Prager Tagblatt*, April 22, 1912: 1)

Hofmannsthal's artist and the *Titanic*'s ship-abandoning stokers appear as two unrelated father candidates of Kafka's title character: the writerly existence and the Birkenhead drill, living *outside* the law or *under* it, two opposite modes of being that *both* turn out to be at once indispensable and impossible. In Kafka's novel, however, the maritime topic of "jumping ship" expands into modern professional life in general; the Birkenhead drill is overwritten by Max Weber's influential 1904 essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* where Weber traces the birth of modern professional ethics (*Berufsethik*) as its main point. Like in a palimpsest, the fateful commandment "women and children first" (Weber, 2005: 160) is now superseded by the Lutheran imperatives "dwell in the land and feed of his faithfulness," and "*bleibe in deinem Beruf* ." (Weber, 2005: 155) Right from the start, Kafka's hero shows little concern for these commandments. While trying to debark in New York harbor, Karl Rossmann loses his way and runs into the stoker. He first clarifies his nationality—"Are you German?"—and soon shares his interest in mechanics with his new acquaintance: "I'm sure I would have become an engineer if I hadn't had to go to America," but now "I might as well become a stoker." (Kafka, 2002: 5) For as it happens, the stoker, who fits Conrad's generic description of this group of para-professionals, as an "unthrifty, unruly nondescript crowd the boilers require, a crowd of men *in* the ship, but not *of* her," (Conrad, 1949b: 238) is set to terminate his engagement on this steamship as he feels badly mistreated by the engineer—the perceived scandal of a Romanian harassing a German on a German ship. Karl then joins the stoker in going to the captain's office, not without stumbling over one of those double bottom rats that, ever since Shakespeare's *Tempest*—"A rotten carcass of a butt, […] the very rats instinctively have quit it" (Shakespeare, 2006:145)—become the sub-moral incarnation of the instinct to jump ship. After the stoker puts forward his complaints, with Karl acting as his proxy, the engineer is called in and accuses the stoker of spreading rumors and picking trouble, and of frequently leaving his post while on duty. After a while, a New

York senator, who had remained in the background of the semi-public court scene, identifies Karl as his nephew from Prague. Karl, against his better judgement, understands that he must accept his new position, debark with his uncle, and leave the stoker to his fate. What follows is a variation of a lifeboat scene: while the landing boat is pulling away from the steamer, Karl, who "discovered to his surprise that they were facing the side of the ship where the head office looked out," finds the room "flooded" with the engineer's witnesses. "It really was as though there was no stoker any more." (Kafka, 2002: 27)

While *this* stoker is thus duly, if metaphorically, drowned, his fate of being abandoned in court is jumping, like a flea, on ship jumping Karl. His American career unfolds as a negative *Lehrstück* attached to Weber's *Protestant Ethics*. While Weber underlines the Calvinist principle of restless work—"Not leisure and enjoyment, but only activity serves to increase the glory of God" (Weber, 2005: 104)—and concludes that in modern times the "cloak" of Puritan asceticism had become an "iron cage," (Weber, 2005: 123) Karl's uncle warns his nephew against "solitary inactivity, gazing down on an industrious New York day" (Kafka, 2002: 29) from the balcony of his "iron house." (Kafka, 2002: 31) After living for a while under the strict regime of his uncle, the wealthy owner of a "commissioning and forwarding business," (Kafka, 2002: 34) a friend of the latter tells Karl to leave the house and protection of the senator after overstaying a visit in his country house. Karl now shares the fate of "the worker who cannot and will not adapt himself to [the manufacturer] and will be thrown into the streets without a job," (Weber, 2005: 20) where he teams up with two of those "vagrant rogues whose lives," according to Weber's witness Baxter, "are nothing but an exorbitant course: the main begging." (Weber, 2005: 240) Their names, Robinson and Delamarche, encrypt the Calvinist doctrine for the salvation-seeking man: "he was forced to follow his path [Delamarche] alone [Robinson] to meet a destiny which had been decreed for him from eternity." (Weber, 2005: 61) After a period on the road, he wins the heart of the Austrian head cook of a giant hotel named Occidental, and lands a job as a lift boy—a profession that leads us right back to the *Titanic* and the competitive business of fast steamship transportation: "Concerning the speed during iceberg hazard," Kafka reads in Ulrich's 1912 *Titanic* insurance review,

> shipping companies and captains agree that, under conditions of clear weather, speed will not be reduced. This usage will not make sense to the layman. From the perspective of captains, however, this behavior is understandable. *A large part of the customers requires the fastest possible transport*. Therefore, captains must make sure to reduce speed only under the most unusual circumstances. (Ulrich, 1912: 1053)

Transcribed from the "floating hotel" (Conrad, 1949a: 224) *Titanic* to the landlocked hotel Occidental, the passage looks like this:

> Often […] there would be such a crush, that barely had the guests got out at the top than he had to race back down to pick up more waiting downstairs. By pulling at a wire that ran through the lift, he had the option of increasing the usual speed although this was forbidden by the lift regulations, and was supposed to be dangerous as well. Accordingly Karl never did it when he had any passengers on board, but when he had dropped off some upstairs, and there were others waiting below, he would be ruthless, and pull strongly on the wire, hand over hand, *like a sailor*. He knew that *the other lift boys did this as well*, and he didn't want to lose his passengers to the other boys. [emphasis added] (Kafka, 2002: 97)

But once again, the impeccable sailor–lift boy Karl cannot escape the spell of the stoker. One night he asks a colleague to briefly take over his duty, as he needs to handle the inebriated Robinson, who has found his fellow vagabond to ask him for shelter and some money. Unfortunately, Karl's abandonment of his post is noticed by a porter, and he is summoned to the head waiter's office. Having silently enjoyed his breakfast for a while, the head waiter all of a sudden, much like Georg's father in *The Judgment*, draws himself up to his full height, and yells at Karl: "You left your post without permission. Do you know what that means? It means dismissal." (Kafka, 2002: 115)

Although the head cook rushes to his aid, Karl, like the stoker previously, presents his already weak case in such an unconvincing manner that his proxy eventually gives up on him and offers her support to find a job in a low-end country pub. Karl, however, reunites with his fellow vagabonds, and they end up in the household of a prostitute. The whole cycle of "wandering, adoption and expulsion" (Hofmann, 2002: x) is lived through again. Only now, having in the meantime lost his papers, does Rossmann find his Patusan. He enters the recruitment apparatus of a certain Nature Theater in Oklahama, allegedly "the greatest theatre in the world," (Kafka, 2002: 205) a venture, where "all [are] welcome," (Kafka, 2002: 202) and which Kafka has assembled from the contemporary propaganda campaigns of Zionism, social insurance, and the Great War. (Wagner, 1998) Rossmann, now a *sans-papiers*, a ghost of the American seascape, introduces himself as "Negro." (Kafka, 2002: 210) By this move, he not only inscribes his fate into the traditional maritime narrative "theme of false names and identities," but, more specifically, he admits to having occupied the vacant position of the stoker, after all. In his classic *Titanic* account *A Night to Remember*(1955), popular historian Walter Lord retells the widely reported anecdote of a stoker who

had tried to steal a first operator's life jacket. He eventually summarizes the moralistic gist of those survivors' accounts that had been greedily lapped up the New York press:

> To the survivors all stowaways in the lifeboats were 'Chinese' or 'Japanese'; all who jumped from the deck were Armenians, Frenchmen, or Italians. […] In contrast, Anglo-Saxon blood could do no wrong. When Bride described the stoker's attack on first operator Phillips, some newspapers made the stoker a Negro, for better effect. (Lord, 1955: 113)

Eventually, Hofmannsthal's poet, the sub- or post-Birkenhead professionals of the *Titanic*'s engine room, and Kafka's American protagonist have been reunited under the sign of the stoker.

If, in the history of painting, landscapes "stressed structure and virtue," while seascapes represented "a set of ontological and moral meanings that emphasized ungovernable contingency and disorder," this distinction is collapsed in Kafka's America. Up to the very last fragment of the novel, Karl-Negro's trajectory across the American landscape remains safely within the semiotic spell of the *Titanic*'s moral seascape. In the *Prager Tagblatt*'s early reporting, another indicator of the captain's reckless behavior was the fact that the timely perception of iceberg danger did not solely rest on the attention of the lookout: "Icebergs," the *Tagblatt* informs its landlocked Prague readership, "clearly announce themselves from afar by a *rapid drop of temperature* clearly noticeable not only for the ships commander, *but also for the passengers*." (*Prager Tagblatt*, April 17, 1912) And here is Kafka's description of Karl Rossmann's train passage to his anti-Patusan, the promised land of Oklahama:

> The first day they travelled over a high range of mountains. Blue-black formations of rock approached the train in sharp wedges; […] broad mountain streams came rushing like great waves on their hilly courses, and, pushing thousands of little foaming wavelets ahead of them, they plunged under the bridges over which the train passed, so close that *the chill breath of them made their faces shudder*. [emphasis added] (Kafka, 2002: 218)

Conclusion

Two shipwrecks that could not be more different: the stubborn survival of a rusty barge in heavy weather, and the sinking of the unsinkable on a starry night in calm waters. Two global news cycles that, despite their

relative proximity in time, seem to come from two different planets: one processing a clearly defined scandal of a colonial empire in decline, the other treating a global audience to a morality unchained. And two master novels, both negotiating the fate of human agency and morality in face of ever denser, ever more compelling human-nonhuman actor-networks, and both driven by the moral stain of jumping ship, abandoning position, both heroes haunted by compulsory repetition of their failure, until they escape to, and eventually lose their lives in, what first appears to be an exterritorial space of redemption and forgiveness.

And yet, at the very end, an obvious and significant difference between the Lord script and the Karl script comes to the fore. While Conrad's Jim strives to claim individual agency over the treacherous networks that undermine his compliance with the professional code, Kafka's Karl always seems to be already entangled in the distributed agency of unescapable actor-networks. And while Lord Jim is granted the end of a tragic hero, with his feeling of shame as his fatal flaw, Karl-Negro, from the very beginning to the end of his expulsion cycles, is at once the subject and the object, perpetrator and victim of abandonment. Accordingly, Kafka projected his end as an accidental effect of institutionalized providence, when he compares the protagonists of *The Man Who Disappeared* and *The Trial* in his diary: "Rossmann and K., the innocent and the guilty, both executed without distinction in the end, the innocent one with a gentler hand, more pushed aside than struck down." (Kafka, 1964: 343f.)

Moreover, and more significantly, the two novels differ in their respective writing strategies. Conrad, the actual sailor, conceives his novel as a thinly veiled narrative discussion of the *Jeddah* incident. Jim's problematic is not about "us" (the educated readers, and by extension humankind), as John Henry Stape has suggested, (Stape, 1996: 63) but about a sharply defined professional group, the "maritime community," as John G. Peters has rightly corrected him. (Peters, 2006: 66) The account of Kafka, the bureaucrat of the oceans, differs in two significant ways. First, there is not only no shipwreck, but not even a storm in his plot. The *Titanic* incident, though the most likely reason for the abandonment and later rebooting of his writing process, appears as but discursive wreckage across the novel (and, as indicated above, across the whole corpus of his oeuvre). While it took literary critics over two decades before one of them noticed the obvious presence of the *Jeddah* case in Conrad's novel, (Sherry, 1966: 41) the slightest reference to the *Titanic* case would have flooded the space of Kafka's novel with the deafening noise of its media coverage, and hence destroyed the possibility of reading it with a Nietzschean "third ear." (Nietzsche, 2000: 182–183) It is this move of covering the traces, then, that enables Kafka's second move: Rossmann's trajectory and fate are construed as a series of highly

transtextual image-files that arrange citations from, and produce allusions to, the contemporary key projects of collective solidarity: Zionism, social insurance, and war mobilization as the three most obvious of them. His narrative addresses the lives of *all* of his contemporary audience. Jumping ship, then, abandonment and being abandoned, turns out to be amphibious. Transformed from a singular turning point into a cascade à la Michel Serres, (1982: 3f.) an open series of betrayals where each is the parasite of the previous one—a scorpionship without limits, as it were—it appears as the true signature of the modern social contract. *Nous sommes debarqués.*

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9. Ego Trip into Solitude: Christian Kortmann's Novel *Single-Handed Sailing*

Jörn Münkner

Christian Kortmann's novel *Einhandsegeln* (*Single-Handed Sailing*, 2021) tells the story of a voyage on the open sea by an anonymous sailor in the first person. Maneuvers, meal preparation, and the encounter with the maritime infinity fill the pages. Is it a sailing book? Is it a self-testimony or oceanography? Is it all in one? Yes and no. The novel indulges in sailing and maps the waters of the southern hemisphere. Against this backdrop, a man has become weary of a dubious way of life on land, reflecting on his personal existence. The novel contrasts the indulgence of being alone at sea and being social on land. Although the single-handed sailing trip sets the narrative pace until the last page, the book blends into a multifarious text that also puts the seafarer's morale to the test.

Plot

An avid hobby sailor, born in 1974, is incessantly cruising westward all by himself. Sailing maneuvers, weather observation, control walks, polyphase sleep, and hygiene procedures structure the plot. With the vast sea as the background, the skipper, his yacht, and the ocean are the protagonists. The book is made up of five logbook entries, recording the boat's positions and movement, the daily business on board, and the sailor's musings. Originally, the sailor wanted to sail from Hamburg to Hamburg, "alone, non-stop around the world. Course south-southwest—past the three great capes: Cape Horn, Cape Leeuwin, Cape of Good Hope." [my translation] (Kortmann, 2021: 11)* The entire cruise goes against the wind, which is fine with the sailor, who states that he has "rarely sailed downwind." Instead, he has always been inclined "to go against it." (11–12) The journal picks up on the 100th day at sea, Cape Horn lying ahead, oceanic rock 'n' roll. The sailor sees no reason to worry, because

in his yacht, his "swimming bachelor's den," (122) which he has named after the supermodel Kate Moss, he feels safe. He knows his boat, and he is familiar with the sea, for training has enabled him to sail, while years of employment on land have made the sailing possible in the first place. But then, planned as a return voyage, the circumnavigation gradually changes the sailor's mind. In a polyphony of soliloquies and imaginary interlocution with his ship, his grandfather, real-life single-handed seamen, a mermaid, and mammals, as well as in live talks with Polynesian boaters and through Morse with an old friend and a female stranger, he settles his accounts with the growth logic of the economic system of the Western world, and furthermore with the intertwined social system. Eventually, he comes to the decision not to go north again and not to return home but to continue westward, sailing on into the watery expanse—"I'm sailing on around the world." (154)

Ego Trip in Solitude, Nature Abounds

What has driven the man out to sea, what has led him to take the decision not to return home? He was not made for a "landlubber life," he reveals. (12) He knew that one day a landlocked life would be too small for him. Eventually, he "began to see [his] fellow human beings as animals, the roofer as a squirrel, the neighbors as cattle, the toddler as a rabbit." (12) A symptom of incipient schizophrenia? No, the perceptual disorder turns out to be land-induced, a defense against the despised daily grind. On board, his condition improves; the sea clears the sailor's mind, even though "in his head the ideas are foaming like the sea around the stern." (12) He knows that people on land celebrate their community and assure each other of their affection through small gifts. For him this is just a cheap trick, which he negates with the formula "Work-Wife, Work-Husband, Work-Parents-and-Children feelings." (12–13) He no longer wants to settle for trifles; he wants to treat himself to a real gift, a gift of greatness, the freedom of being alone. But "freedom is an apprenticeship:" (132) before it can be earned, it is necessary to unlearn what we have been conditioned to, namely acting in accordance with the beat of the drum, that is, "salut[ing] when the horn of the fat ship sounds." (132) The "fat ship" is the soloist's allegory for the way modern life in the Western world operates: as an overregulated, disciplining, and schematic routine, restricting and confining personal freedom. The older generation built the fat ship system in which the young must function now. Standing on the bridge of such a big ship may be fine, but having to work in the engine room means a state of intense dependency and torture. (63) The employee of the fat ship may not have to worry about existential insecurity, but its cage-like confines

will not allow for a truly independent life. As a result, the sailor wants to break free, he wants to rely on himself, even if that entails the loss of human companionship. His fear of living and dying as the wrong person is simply too immense. (18) Therefore, he sings the Song of Songs of the single-handed sailors, this "order of individualists," "restless spirits" who rate the "danger of staying ashore higher than shipwreck off Cape Horn." They are people "who feel cramped and lonely among people and who can escape this feeling only in the complete isolation of the oceans." (15–17)

In the history of culture and narrative, sea voyages have often been linked to curiosity. The ocean in particular has been identified as the route *par excellence*, leading from the known to the unknown. The circumnavigation of the world by sail "as a form of its own kind, as it were as a genre," starts to be on the agenda from the middle of the 18th century onwards. (Honold, 2006: 122) Alexander Honold explains that to begin a complete circumnavigation of the planet in the second half of the 18th century means "in the mode of circumnavigation to reconcile a certain geographical orbit with a philosophical figure of history." (Ibid.) If that holds true, any large-scale journey, especially across the sea, should be perceived as an instrument of (self-)questioning and knowledge production. If, furthermore, ocean crossings have also always been "inspired by mythogeography," (Richter, 2014: 67) the soloist's voyage is likely to mean more than an idle sea trip around the world, no matter how magnificent, no matter what destination it may have. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, in his *Geographical Foundations of World History*, was of the opinion that the sea

> gives us the idea of the indefinite, unlimited, and infinite, and insofar as man adapts himself to this idea and realm of infinity, it encourages him to transcend the limited. […] The land, the valley fixes man to the ground, it brings about a great deal of dependencies. The sea, though, takes him beyond these narrow circles. […] This infinite surface is absolutely soft, for it does not withstand any pressure, not even breath; it looks incredibly innocent, yielding, kind, and soft, and it is precisely this supposedly trait of yielding that turns the sea into the most dangerous and violent element. Against such deceit and violence man merely puts up a humble piece of wood, relying only on his courage and his ability to think quickly, and thus leaves the solid underground for the unsteady, carrying his soil with him. [my translation] (Hegel, 1970: 118–119)[1]

Hegel's conception of the sea's nature and its imprint on the human imagination can be considered a blueprint for and analogy to the sailor's attitude and perception. The discontented man who wants to rely only

on himself, his courage, and his yacht does not accept the limitations of a social and communal life tied into a system of permanent economic growth. He desires to transcend these confinements and break the limitations. The sea provides him with both the escape route to untraceable solitude as well as abundant space-time for exploring the self—at no point with a realistic destination where an alternative and agreeable social and economic system would exist. The sea is his last exit from a way of life that allegedly fixes man to the ground and "leads directly from the cradle to the bend." (18) In other words, or in the words of the sailor, the sea holds the promise "of another life in the unknown. […] We untie the lines to survey the horizon […] We set a course into the most expansive earthly solitude, where our own solitude seems tiny." (18)

The novel is replete with observations of the sea and natural occurrences, among them the atmosphere, lighting conditions, and landmarks, like islands passing by:

> Today it is rough, the sea. A superior force that rubs against the boat and makes you feel its power. Outside, the eternal dark grey and bluish green billows, the raindrops speckle the panes with the archaic patterns of a primitive people […] Starboard there is Isla de Los Estados, the uninhabited rugged forested dream island. Notched by deep bays, its contours on the globe look like the signature of God's little left-handed brother. The creative one who did not agree with the strict world order. (7; 19)

The motifs taken from the sea and nature do not merely embellish the story. The protagonist perceives the ocean attentively, he looks closely at nature as partner, he does not tinker with a special language that makes it possible to aptly capture hitherto-overlooked details. Rather, sea and nature, and also personal belongings (his books, his fine jacket, his fountain pen with royal blue ink), seem to have their own profile, if not spirit. In particular, the sea is alive and acting by itself, so to speak. Viewed in this light, Kortmann's novel—narrating in the fictional mode and therefore perhaps being less compatible with the genre of nature writing[2]—meets criteria that qualify as nature writing: "The nature book implies the idea that freedom comes from choosing to live inside natural laws." (Lillard, 1973: 538) It is precisely the soloist's willingness to prefer the risk of monster waves and exhausting doldrums to the existentially secure life in the "monstrosity of modernity" (152) that brings the novel into contact with nature writing. There is the soloist's decisive willingness to engage with nature untamed, as it were. As a keen observer of his environment as well as being the narrator himself, the sailor fulfills another fundamental requirement of any practitioner in nature writing, namely acknowledging natural laws. And there

is still more in Kortmann's text that is reminiscent of nature writing. According to Richard G. Lillard, "the author of the nature book will admit that his presence affects the nature he is observing, but he wishes to intrude as little as possible. He wants to record not alter; understand, not possess; leave alone, not replace; be in something already a going thing, not in any way redirect or stop it." (Lillard, 1973: 539) The sailor is aware of his own insignificance in the face of the immensity of the ocean. He has no intention of changing the universe, "which is alive and constantly forming and reforming;" he recognizes that "we are sliding over [the universe], have long since understood how futile it is to search for a hold." (7–8) As if the narrative engenders a resistance to the loss of a tangible seascape, it becomes a manifesto for (single) man's *retour à la mer*.

Hurrah for the Ego, Posh Cruise

Several figures from real life illustrate the self-image of the soloist, among them Francis Chichester (1901–1972), Donald Crowhurst (1932–1969), and Bernard Moitessier (1925–1994). They are introduced as masters of the single-handed sailing guild, having set standards not only in daring, extreme one-man enterprises, but also in individualistic extravagance and personal tragedy. Moitessier represents the most fitting role-model, being remembered at the moment when the soloist sails ships "around the most dangerous cape of the world [i.e. Cape Horn]." (32) In 1968–1969, Moitessier had been in almost the same situation: unlike the soloist, who is sailing west, Moitessier came from the west, but like the soloist he would not turn toward Europe after Cape Horn, nor would he sail north; instead he "sailed further east […] 'The rules inside me had changed.'" (33) Moitessier felt sick at the idea of having to return home; no longer could he bear the false gods of the West. In his view, the modern world was the monster, destroying the earth and trampling on people's souls. (34) The restless French circumnavigator thus appears as a predecessor, almost a doppelgänger, being at odds with his contemporary world and society, like the soloist. Even in his name "Moi-tessier", Kortmann's sailor muses, the man had emphasized his ego, while at sea he found his own universe. He succeeded in "training the beast [i.e. loneliness] so that it ate out of his hand." (33) Elsewhere, Moitessier is quoted as saying, "A long ocean voyage is the shortest way to yourself,"[3] this saying underlining the quintessential status of his action and conviction for the soloist.

If Kortmann's novel is viewed from the perspective of single-handed adventure at sea, vital self-confidence, and daring self-sufficiency, one cannot but think of Hannes Lindemann (1922–2015). Although the

story does not mention the German doctor and solo-sailing pioneer, the protagonist's endeavor and mindset conjure up Lindemann and his incredible seafaring. In the 1950s he crossed the Atlantic twice all by himself. Among other things, he wanted to refute Alain Bombard (1924–2005), a French physician and politician, who had become famous in 1952 for sailing across the Atlantic Ocean in a small boat without provisions, and who had claimed that it was possible for a castaway to survive on the open seas by drinking salt water. Lindemann found it impossible to accept this claim: he was convinced that the human body was not capable of surviving the danger of dehydration without fresh water. Thus, he felt challenged both as a doctor and as a sailor to put Bombard's theory to the test for himself. He made his first Atlantic crossing in a dug-out canoe from the Liberian coast of West Africa to St. Croix in the Lesser Antilles, the second in a tiny rubberized canvas folding kayak from Las Palmas in the Canary Islands to St. Thomas in the Lesser Antilles.[4] Not only are Lindemann and Kortmann's sailor connected by their same wish for immersion in oceanic solitude, there are also parallels in their writings as are both documentary-style ego-reports that take the form of logbook-like entries and extended prose passages. Lindemann observes the sea and himself as keenly as the novel's soloist. He intensifies his observations to such a degree that he himself acts as a voluntary living object of study. Repeatedly he voices his attention to the psycho-mental disposition that arises in an extreme situation such as an ocean crossing. As said, the planning of his second cruise was sparked not by any record-setting goal, but to find a solution to the psychological problems of survival at sea. In order to make the subconscious a better ally, Lindemann utilizes autogenic training as a suitable method:

> I remembered the system—a form of self-hypnosis—advocated by the American, J. H. Schultz, which he called autogenesis training, whereby one concentrates to such a point of relaxation that the environment is forgotten and the self is found. I had made good use of this method before. (Lindemann, 1958: 104)

During his six-month preparation in Las Palmas, he continues his self-hypnosis, which he had already started eighteen months before, trying to talk himself out of fear by actually impregnating his subconscious with the sentence "I will succeed […] I will make it." (104) Lack of sleep bothers him, leading to various hallucinations, but the mantra-like self-assurance "I will make it" provides him with strength. The fundamental insight is that "morale is the single most important factor in survival." (179) Anyone who takes on a solo ocean crossing "must learn command of himself and, of course, of his boat, which is

often his strongest and most resilient ally." (179) The novel's protagonist sums up his undertaking quite similarly—he keeps telling himself: "My life is bigger the smaller the section I choose. […] I sail out into my world. I have everything on board I need. […] I do not condemn myself to settle [on land, for good]. I remain under a wide sky in the open. […] It is so simple. […] I am so much alone with myself, I will never be lonely again." (151–155) While Lindemann encounters shipwreck (and survives), there is none in the novel. Nonetheless, shipwreck occurs, as metaphor, meaning the failure of losing one's job, predicaments in dealing with family and fellow people, and coping with the pressure and constraints of the economic system. But are these really failures? During the voyage, the sailor begins to wonder, and in the end he is certain that at least being fired was not a failure but the best thing that could have happened to him. So both texts, although of different provenance, are performances of formidable mindsets. Lindemann's celebration of the courageous and exploring individual, as comprehensible and unmistakably clear as it is, must be reckoned with as a further subtext.

The novel also mentions names who have nothing to do with single-handed sailing in the strict sense of the word. Among them are the giant of the German feuilleton, Fritz J. Raddatz (1931–2015), or John McEnroe (*1959), who dominated international tennis in the 1980s. Both men are counted among the "one-handed sailors" because they personify what the novel's protagonist is arguing for: an extraordinary personality with a will dedicated to independence. Raddatz is probably included because of his self-stylization as an individualist and unparalleled thinker, McEnroe because of his unusual technique of striking the ball and his self-confident, almost arrogant style of play. The statement, that you lose a part of yourself when you lose your greatest opponent—attributed to McEnroe[5]—bespeaks McEnroe's belief that one's personality is only fully expressed in competition with one's strongest opponents. The emphasis on confrontation with others implies challenging oneself, and that one must constantly prove oneself in order to be complete.

Eventually, there are allusions to fictional characters involved in ventures that mirror the soloist's ego trip, for instance the anonymous, somewhat mysterious old man adrift and utterly alone at sea portrayed by Robert Redford in a near-mute performance in the film *All Is Lost* (2013).[6] Redford's boat first hits a wayward shipping container floating in the ocean; later on, after a desperate struggle to survive and keep his yacht intact, he goes below deck but is knocked out when he collides with a post. When he regains consciousness, he finds that the boat is sinking. Kortmann's sailor does not suffer such a real shipwreck, but his boat also collides with an object floating in the sea.[7] The collision causes

the boat to "take a dive out of the sea." The movement makes the sailor lose his balance; he stumbles, falls forward, and hits his head against the closet. "When I woke up again, sweating, the oilskin sticking to my body, I was on a South Sea course." (41) This allusion, together with the references to the aforementioned real people, places Kortmann's sailor in the company of uncompromising, determined self-made men. All of them are, in a certain way, larger than life. At the same time, they are at odds with the social and economic conditions of their contemporary world, the insufficient self-determination of their fellow human beings, a neglect of mental hygiene, and a lack of self-confidence.

The sailor's experience, as believable and valid as it is, is nonetheless questionable, up to the point that is partly denounced. This impression and verdict derive from the fact that the protagonist partly counteracts his rejection of the Western growth system and its concomitant consumer culture that enslaves its members, who are obliged to work and earn money. The dissonance is palpable in the gap between his plausible escape and articulated critique, on the one hand— supported, by the way, by a small but fine library on board, holding his personal intellectual and literary heroes, from Arthur Schopenhauer and Roland Barthes to Fritz J. Raddatz and Friedrich Nietzsche—and, on the other, his equipment and the self-fashioning pursued on board by Greenblatt. His yacht is a display of personal hedonism gleefully celebrated. The almost lustful description of precious accessories and belongings (his leather jacket with "snaps [which] make a rich noise […] I bought it for myself for my 44th birthday, custom made […] the tailor sewed me a secret inside pocket, with two compartments: one for the sommelier's long bladed knife and one for the compass" (101)), the preparation of exquisite meals and the serving of expensive drinks (eggs benedict and fennel risotto; fresh coffee, black and lightly sugared; crémant and champagne: "On Mondays I drink a bottle of Riesling, uncorking it at sunset; on Tuesdays I have pickled wild salmon or fresh fish […] on Wednesday evening I drink sparkling wine; on Thursdays I go swimming and use a shower gel with the scent of real bacon; on Fridays I mix gin and tonic with fresh lime" (38)), as well as the emphasis on preferring Friedrich Gulda's interpretation of the Mozart sonatas, all make the portrayal of life on board slip almost into a cliché, if not a caricature. In short, the contrast between his uncompromisingly critical assessment of the Western social system, in which he himself has toiled and participated long enough, and his dandy-like lifestyle on board is striking and irritating. If neoliberalism describes the free-market regime of Western economies since the 1980s, and if the term may be used to extend the idea of universal economic freedom to personal freedom, then the soloist's plea for radical autonomy and his insistence on being independent seem like the manifestation of a neoliberal conviction.

Neoliberal Mindset in Disguise

Kortmann's literary sailing adventure is credible because it is saturated with a seafaring reality and fine maritime observations. It is a hymn to the sea, celebrating it as a unique nature-space. It is also a hymn to an individualist, alone and counting only on himself, with the sea being the testing space for a solitary ambition. Through reflective introspection, the story turns into the study of the troubled mind of the searching character. On the one hand, the protagonist expresses harsh criticism of the social system, in which only economic growth counts. On the other, he falls short of a comparably critical reflection on what has enabled him to make his escape-journey. This lack results in the narrative becoming a document of ambivalence. While it is the account of a soloist venturing forth on his ultimate trip and vanishing into thin air, it is also the self-testimony of a contemporary affording himself a luxurious cruise: as comfortable as possible, requiring assets, indicating the sailor's collaboration with the system. The unresolved tension between, on the one hand, the celebration of the ego that has broken free from the various land-induced constraints and that has supposedly liberated itself and, on the other, the denouncing of a life that has afforded his cruise draws protest. The emphasis on self-sufficiency and the unflinching ego without adequately accounting for the ego's dependencies appears to be gimmicky and morally dubious. Because of the story's focus on self-reliance, and because the capitalist, de-individualizing social system is conjured up as the negative counter-image to the self-liberation in maritime seclusion, the novel "smells" like a masked manifesto of a contorted neoliberalism. The question of whether the beauty of the sea and the lure of the solo journey into the marine infinity can compensate for the renunciation of human company remains open—as open as the novel's ending.

Notes

* For all following quotes from the novel only the page numbers are given. All the translations are mine.

1. "Das Meer gibt uns die Vorstellung des Unbestimmten, Unbeschränkten und Unendlichen, und indem der Mensch sich in diesem Unendlichen fühlt, so ermutigt dies ihn zum Hinaus über das Beschränkte. […] Das Land, die Talebene fixiert den Menschen an den Boden, er kommt dadurch in eine unendliche Menge von Abhängigkeiten; aber das Meer führt ihn über diese beschränkten Kreise hinaus. […] Diese unendliche Fläche ist absolut weich, denn sie widersteht keinem Drucke, selbst dem Hauche nicht; sie sieht unendlich unschuldig, nachgebend, freundlich und anschmiegend aus, und gerade diese Nachgiebigkeit ist es, die das Meer in das gefahrvollste und gewaltigste Element verkehrt. Solcher Täuschung und Gewalt setzt der Mensch lediglich ein einfaches Stück Holz

entgegen, verläßt sich bloß auf seinen Mut und seine Geistesgegenwart und geht so vom Festen auf ein Haltungsloses über, seinen gemachten Boden selbst mit sich führend."

2. "The traditional nature book is a non-fiction work that is lyrical, informational, and apolitical." (Lillard, 1973: 537)

3. The quote, though not documented and only in German, can be found in the entry for Bernard Moitessier on the German version of Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Moitessier (accessed July 22, 2023; my translation).

4. Nils Theurer has summed up Lindemann's seafaring adventure in excellent brevity for the weekly magazine *Yacht*, see Theurer, 2023.

5. The quote, though not documented and only in German, can be found in the entry for John McEnroe on the German version of Wikipedia, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McEnroe (accessed July 22, 2023; my translation).

6. *All Is Lost*, a US-American drama film, produced in 2013 by Black Bear Pictures/Tearhouse Pictures/Before the Door Pictures/Washington Square Films/Sudden Storm Production; written and directed by J.C. Chandor, starring Robert Redford; 105 minutes.

7. The novel later depicts the collision as a possible chimera; its factuality (as part of the plot) is therefore doubtful.

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Part 3
Approaching the Contemporary Refugee Crisis

10. Mediterranean Seascapes: Migrations, Photography, and the Haunted Spectator

Chiara Giubilaro

Introduction

Located nineteen miles away from Portopalo di Capo Passero, a small town in southeastern Sicily, Italy, lies a sunken wreckage on the seabed. This wreckage is all that remains of the *F-174*, a vessel that departed from Malta on the night of December 26, 1996, and sank a few miles further in the Sicilian Channel while attempting to reach Italy. That night, 283 people lost their lives: it was the first documented sea massacre[1] along the Mediterranean migratory route. This event, coupled with its complex judicial and political ramifications, has been masterfully reconstructed in the inquiry conducted by journalist Giovanni Maria Bellu and documented in his work *The Ghosts of Portopalo*.[2] (*I Fantasmi Di Portopalo*, 2017)

Following the publication of the second edition of the book, Bellu reconstructed the various events related to the reception of the news surrounding the so-called "ghost shipwreck." While the first inquiry, published in the Italian daily newspaper *La Repubblica* on June 6, 2001,[3] remained in the media spotlight for only a few days, an entirely different scenario unfolded upon the publication of the images of the *F-174* wreckage, recorded by an ROV (remotely operated vehicle) in the depths of the Sicilian Channel. Released in *La Repubblica* on June 15, 2001,[4] these images resonated profoundly, prompting widespread attention both in Italy and elsewhere. Bellu writes in this regard:

> The clamor was immense, especially because of the images. They were immediately picked up by all Italian television stations, and after a few days, international broadcasters began to request them […]. Apart from the horror, the ROV images did not add anything new to what had been known for years—confirmed by the first article—yet it was only because of those images that the world finally became aware of the Christmas shipwreck. (Bellu, 2017: 210)

In the weeks following their publication, the images of the *F-174* wreck video dominated both national and international media, surpassing the impact of the detailed journalistic inquiry carried out by Bellu in his previous articles. The video of the "underwater cemetery" would be extensively used by news programs to illustrate news about deaths along the Mediterranean route, becoming a key topos in the contemporary visual border regime of Mediterranean migrations.

The ghost ship of the Portopalo massacre is but one of countless vessels that have sunk in the Mediterranean Sea over the past three decades, along with the bodies of those trying to cross this deadly liquid frontier.[5] The policies implemented by the European Union and its member countries have enacted a border regime along southern European coasts, combining geopolitics and biopolitics, and producing violent forms of differential inclusion. (De Genova, 2014; McMahon and Sigona, 2018; Mountz and Loyd, 2014) The echoes of these dramatic events reach us through speeches, texts, and images that, by retaining traces of the events, interfere with our capacity to build appropriate responses.

Photography, notably, constitutes the most pervasive medium through which migrations are daily brought to the forefront. Images of crowded bodies on boats, lying on beaches, and surveilled on decks, have progressively colonized screens and imageries, building up an immense collective archive frame by frame. In the following pages, I will attempt to reflect on the topography that these "visual events of place" construct, (Giubilaro, 2020) with particular emphasis on their ethical dimension. The regimes of spectatorship engendered by the photography of migration in the Mediterranean context are indeed imbued with profound ethical, political, and aesthetic ramifications. The aim of this intervention is to use the specter and its haunting force as a heuristic figure to reinterpret images of migration and their troubling effects on the viewer. In this respect, I draw inspiration from Jacques Derrida's hauntological approach, as articulated in his *Specters of Marx* (Derrida, 1994) and more recently adapted by scholars in the visual culture realm. In the first section, I will thus try to outline the theoretical framework of this analysis and its potentialities when applied to the photography of migration. Through this analytical prism, the

focus then pivots towards the images of the Christmas shipwreck that occurred on December 26, 1996, to understand how visual practices, emotional politics, and ethical responsiveness can concretely interact.

(Im)possible Spectatorship: Haunting Migration Photography

From 1996 to the present, our perception of events occurring along the migratory route in the central Mediterranean Sea has been consistently mediated by various types of images, which have played a key role in shaping cultural, political, and affective responses.[6] Migration photography, in particular, represents one of the domains in which visual norms and social norms are most closely intertwined. Although the relationship between media and migration has been extensively explored, particularly in the past two decades, (King and Wood, 2001; Moore et al., 2012) photography seems to have received comparatively less scholarly attention than other visual media, such as cinema (Berghahn and Sternberg, 2010; Loshitzky, 2010) or cartography. (Cobarrubias, 2019; Lo Presti, 2019; Tazzioli, 2016) Existing literature on migration photographs largely revolves around visual content analysis.[7] This technique, widely employed in visual sociology, focuses on what lies within the frame of the image in terms of composition, perspective, and focus. (Rose, 2001) While this approach sheds light on some visual patterns governing migration photography and their implications on our perception, on the other hand it has in my opinion overlooked some aspects that deserve to be considered. Specifically, all that occurs outside of the frame—production processes, circulation mechanisms, exhibition spaces—remains somewhat underengaged. Consequently, questions related to the photographer's position (commissioning, funding, devices, etc.) and image production spaces (accessibility, conditions, relational networks), as well as consumption circuits, media vehicles, and exhibition venues, have not found adequate resonance in visual content analysis approaches, leaving these articulated geographies of vision largely unexplored. To gain a better grasp of these complex visual economies (Poole, 1997) and avoid essentializing tendencies in the analysis of photography, (Edwards, 2014) we should also engage with the material processes involved in its production and audiencing. A geographic approach to photography, shifting the focus from the visual object to the spaces in which it engages with observers, can thus unlock new interpretative horizons. (Giubilaro, 2020) Each photograph is not only the product of a specific visual event, arising from the relationship between the photographer and his/her subject(s), but is also the origin and catalyst for countless other visual performances, one for each interaction between the image and its viewers. (Bal, 2006) Critically mapping some visual performances without

neglecting the materiality of their events of place (Massey, 2005) entails constructing a topography of looking, aimed at investigating the shifting and transformative field in which images, subjects, and spaces relate to one another.[8] (Rose, 2000)

In the topography of looking that migration photography mobilizes, ethical considerations have a prominent role. Can we look at migration photography ethically? What does it mean to establish an ethical relationship with the photographic object and the subject(s) it portrays? The debate on the ethics of images, particularly those depicting suffering, encompasses a variety of themes and approaches that cannot be fully addressed within the scope of this contribution.[9] What I would like to propose here is to rearticulate part of this debate around the hauntological approach and its spatial implications. Every visual event of place, every space of encounter between photograph and spectator, can eventually be the site for ethical questioning. Faced with images of suffering or drowning bodies, my gaze is solicited in diverse and unpredictable forms, modes, and intensities. My argument is that haunting can represent an aesthetic strategy, endowing visual encounters with ethical responsiveness and political potency. Transposing the hauntological approach to the visual domain can offer a perspective to reorient the reflection on the ethical implications of migration photography.[10]

In his reinterpretation of Marxism and its legacy in contemporary Europe, Jacques Derrida suggests the possibility of a shift from an ontological perspective, focused on what *is*, to a hauntological one, better suited to grasping all that escapes the logic of pure essence and is between visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, life and death. (Derrida, 1994) At the root of Derrida's proposal is the need to abandon totalizing claims and recognize what eludes our control, yet profoundly conditions our speech and actions, such as specters. Studies on images are also haunted by specters and ghosts. In his pioneering work on photography, Roland Barthes defined the subject/object of representation as the "spectrum" of photography, evoking the term to connect both with the aesthetic dimension of the "spectaculum" and with the return of the dead that permeates his reflections on photographic images. (Barthes, 2010: 11) This ambiguity between presence and absence and the resulting difficulty in definition also surface in foundational texts of contemporary visual culture studies. For instance, W.J.T. Mitchell, one of the main representatives of American visual culture studies, in his work *What Do Pictures Want?* employs the figure of the undead to capture the paradox of images—inert objects that are still capable of conditioning, persuading, and seducing those who face them: "No wonder that images have a spectral/corporeal as well as spectacular presence. They are ghostly semblances that materialize before our eyes or in our imaginations." (Mitchell, 2005: 55) Perhaps most

explicitly, Nicholas Mirzoeff's article "Ghostwriting: Working out Visual Culture" delves into the forceful connection between image and spectrality, imbuing the notion with analytical depth. (Mirzoeff, 2006) When visual culture tells stories, he writes, they are stories of ghosts. Derrida's hauntological approach is here immersed in the unstable world of images, consolidating the analogy and analytically engaging with some of its implications. The image-specter hovers within an indistinct zone between material and immaterial, and its appearances are always subject to the singularity of a particular point of view and the historicity of a given moment, capturing the gaze and infesting the imagination. They control us, even when and where we do not want them to. Drawing on this body of work, Elizabeth Roberts has recently proposed reconsidering the relationship between geography and the visual through a hauntological approach. (Roberts, 2012) Landscapes, photographs, and artworks provide the backdrop for a decisive shift in perspective. Rather than focusing on the image itself, attention should be given to how images condition and govern us: "With each viewing or haunting the photograph mutates, transforms, performing as part of an assemblage of signification, material objects, affects, multisensory elements and context." (Roberts, 2012: 397) Only by questioning our role as spectators can we hope to establish an ethical relationship with the image and what it bears witness to. (Roberts, 2012: 396)

The hauntological approach, besides allowing us to reframe the visual around the unstable relationship with the spectator, can represent a strategic vantage point to analyze migration photography from a geographical perspective.[11] Indeed, the figure of the specter and its haunting force allows us to bring back into play some of the categories that are often evoked in the literature on migration and its media representation, opening up a space for theoretical investigation worthy of attention. First, the traditionally established dichotomy between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, shows its limits, thus inviting reconsideration. The dual absence of the emigrant and the immigrant recounted by Abdelmalek Sayad (2002) or the juxtaposition between the scene of exclusion and the obscene of inclusion that Nicholas De Genova's spectacle of migrations returns (2013) find in the heuristic of spectrum a chance for recomposition: "The spectrum is first of all something visible. But it is of the visible invisible, the visibility of a body that is not present in flesh and blood." (Derrida and Stiegler, 1997: 55) The performativity of the spectrum and its appearances mobilizes another stream of the debate on migration photography. As we have already observed, the primary significance of the image-specter lies in the relationship with the subject encountering it. The spectral event finds its meaning *within* this space of relation: it is here that we can re-establish an ethical relationship with the stories that the image-specter invariably

carries with it. (Mirzoeff, 2006: 249) Not all gazes are haunted by image-specters, but only those that are able to recognize the sense of loss inscribed on their surfaces. Lastly, we turn to the third pathway opened by Derrida's hauntology in the realm of migration photography: specters infest spaces. Here, the focus extends beyond the relationship between the image-specter and the haunted subject to encompass the space in which that relationship materializes. Content analysis can and should be complemented by a critical analysis of the topography of looking implicated in migration photography. This analytical approach will account for the intricate weave in which visual events, spatial practices, and ethical dispositions combine with one another.

In the following section, I attempt to bring the hauntological approach to migration photography. To do so, I begin with the images of the December 26, 1996 shipwreck, where the *F-174* sank off the coast of Portopalo, resulting in the loss of 283 lives. I adopt a mixed methodology combining visual content and visual discourse analysis. (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Wodak and Meyer, 2009) Moreover, in order to explore the space of production and exhibition of these photographs, the contexts where they traveled, and the relationships they variously entertained, I analyze the sites where these images were produced, as narrated by Giovanni Maria Bellu in his book, and the debate surrounding their reception, as reconstructed from newspapers, blogs, and social media. Finally, I supplement the analysis with some autoethnographic annotations (Askins, 2009; Holman Jones and Adams, 2010) to reflect on how my gaze as a white, European, and Western female spectator is solicited by these images and their haunting force, and the risks and potential these performances open up with regard to ethical and political responsiveness.

Torturous Gazes: Regarding the Mediterranean Shipwreck

> We found the ship of the 'phantom shipwreck.' North: 36, 25', 31"; east: 14, 54', 34", international waters nineteen miles from Portopalo di Capo Passero, the extreme southern tip of Sicily and Italy. We discovered the largest cemetery in the Mediterranean: dozens and dozens of skeletons wrapped in rags at a depth of 108 meters. [my translation]

This is the incipit of the article written by Giovanni Maria Bellu and published on the front page of the newspaper *La Repubblica* on June 15, 2001.[12] The "phantom shipwreck" occurred off the coast of Malta five years earlier, during the night of December 25–26, 1996. Here, approximately 400 people from India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were transferred from

a larger vessel, the *Yohan*, to a smaller one, the *F-174*, which had come from Malta to transport the passengers to the coast of Sicily. However, during the transfer operations, a collision between the two boats caused a breach along the side of the *F-174*, which sank, resulting in the death of 283 people. Despite reports from survivors and victims' relatives, the news of the alleged shipwreck was met with skepticism by the authorities and soon vanished from the media discourse. It was only thanks to the report made by Salvatore Lupo, a fisherman who had found human remains in his nets off the coast of Portopalo di Capo Passero, and the obstinate work of journalist Giovanni Maria Bellu that the "phantom shipwreck" resurfaced.

Despite the news having already been published in *La Repubblica*, the turning point in the reconstruction of the Christmas shipwreck came a few days later. On June 13, 2001, an ROV, an underwater robot, was deployed at the location where Salvatore Lupo had previously discovered traces of the shipwreck. The operation was funded by *La Repubblica* and the weekly magazine *L'Espresso*. Both Lupo and Bellu were on board the vessel. After several attempts, the ROV bumped into the remains of the *F-174* and those who sank with it: a ribcage with a tennis shoe, a femur, a shirt, another shoe, a tibia, and then the broken wreck. After two days of filming, on June 15, Giovanni Maria Bellu wrote another article. The four slightly blurred images that accompanied it seemed to prevail over his words. Against a blue background, recognizable objects stand out on yellow surfaces: the torn side of the *F-174*, the deck of the vessel interrupted by a black frame opening onto the hold, a laced shoe resting on the seabed. Overlaid on these images are captions indicating the date and time of the footage and the ROV model.[13] The images published in *La Repubblica* were accompanied by brief captions: "The torn side of the boat;" "Remains at the bottom of the sea." Faced with these frames, my gaze is entranced. I scrutinize them, wondering what they represent and seeking answers within and beyond the frame, in the faded forms and in the words of the captions.

In the aftermath of their publication, everyone wanted those images: "The images were everything, they were the whole story." [my translation] (Bellu, 2017: 212) The "phantom shipwreck" took center stage. The images were published in the main national and international newspapers within a few hours.[14] The CNN website reported as headline news: "PORTOPALO, Sicily – A newspaper has published pictures it says are of a sunken ship and corpses of some 283 illegal immigrants who drowned as it went down off the Sicilian coast."[15] The photographs became the core around which the shipwreck was narrated. For a few weeks, the images of the wreck infested the spaces where they were exhibited and the gazes of those who encountered them. On the day of their publication, the four Italian Nobel laureates issued an appeal asking for the recovery of

the victims' remains: "For Italy, it is a moral duty. Leaving the bodies at the bottom of the sea would be the ultimate outrage to their memory in a civilized Europe." [my translation] (Bellu, 2017: 206) The Presidents of the European Parliament and the European Commission also intervened in the debate. The images of the *F-174* produced a sort of shock in the discourse on migrations in the Mediterranean at that time. Patrick Farrell, the author of an iconic photo taken after the hurricane in Haiti in 2008, describes the difference in potential between these images and the others that usually pass before our eyes: "It's like a noise you hear but tune out. Then there's one loud pop! that you pay attention to. This picture is that."[16] Like a loud and sudden sound, shock images can pierce our sphere of attention and provoke a strong emotional reaction. These photographs freeze us, filling us with suffering or indignation. (Berger, 2013) The shock triggers a sense of moral inadequacy that inhibits or blocks the possibility of becoming aware of the political responsibilities behind the image and the event it portrays. Thus, "[t]he picture becomes evidence of the general human condition. It accuses nobody and everybody." (Berger, 2013: 56) The emotional burden of shock images risks blocking our capacities for ethical responsiveness to human suffering. (Butler, 2009: 63) When I recognize the shape of a shoe in an image captured on the seabed of the Sicilian Channel, my gaze is filled with horror, but this strong emotional involvement takes precedence over my ability to (re)act. As Susan Sontag writes about shock images: "Images transfix. Images anesthetize." (Sontag, 1977: 15) Thus, shortly after their staging, the photographs of the "phantom shipwreck" lost their force, and with it, the efforts to keep the spotlight on what had presumably been the "largest shipwreck in the history of the Mediterranean since the end of the Second World War." [my translation] (Bellu, 2017: 4)[17]

However, there is another image that accompanied the narrative of the "phantom shipwreck" that received a different degree of exposure compared to the images of the wreck. It was this image that for me marked the beginning of the long process of recognition of what happened on Christmas night in 1996. It is the photo ID of Anpalagan Ganeshu, a 17-year-old boy from Sri Lanka.[18] Found by Salvatore Lupo in his fishing nets, the ID card was later handed over to Giovanni Maria Bellu, becoming a key object in his journalistic work of inquiry. It is a black-and-white photo of a young boy posing in three-quarter profile. His gaze fixed ahead does not meet the camera lens. He does not look me in the eyes as I observe the photo; his gaze is directed elsewhere. On the photo are some Tamil words highlighted in green and some numbers, a date. This photograph infests the space of our interaction. Like a ghostly presence, it comes back to my mind even when and where I don't expect to see it. The aesthetics of the fragment and the enigma contained in it strike me and stimulate my imagination, raising questions

without providing answers. In this perpetually unresolved relationship with the image perhaps lies its ethical possibility: "This ethical relationship requires critical ambiguity and delayed interpretation. We might first question how an image affects us, how it speaks to us, examine its 'expressive authority', before we fix what it means." (Roberts, 2012: 396) The enigmatic trace of the other infests the space of encounter, inviting us to relate to the subject of representation in ways that cannot result in empathic communion or full recognition. Like background noise accompanying the vision, an element of strangeness allows the Other to remain other than me. Its visible yet absent specter pervades visual and affective spaces, promising to come back and demand accountability for these lives and deaths, in Portopalo as in Lesbos, in Lampedusa as in Zuwara.

Conclusions

In a deferred and passionate dialogue with Susan Sontag regarding the capacity of images to stimulate the work of interpretation, Judith Butler finds in a passage from *Regarding the Pain of Others* (Sontag, 2003) an opportunity for rethinking our relationship with photography: "Let the atrocious images haunt us." (Sontag in Butler, 2009: 97) Images can cause bewilderment or relief, they can enrage or gladden us, they can meet indifference or arouse attention. However, sometimes certain images capture our gaze to the point of haunting our imagination: they obsess and torment us, returning even when and where we do not wish to see them. It is precisely in this haunting force that, according to Butler, recognition of loss can manifest (Butler, 2009: 97): "If we are not haunted, there is no loss, there has been no life that was lost."

In this contribution, I have sought to reflect on the network of relationships in which migration images are immersed, focusing in particular on the ethical possibilities that can arise in the encounter between photography and the spectator. To understand what spaces of ethical responsiveness these visual events of place offer, I have chosen to look at these performances of vision by adopting a hauntological approach. Images can sometimes haunt gazes and imageries. My argument is that only by recognizing and making room for this haunting force can we engage in an ethical relationship with images of suffering. In this sense, the hauntological approach can represent an aesthetic strategy, a peculiar way of inhabiting visual places and their ethical implications. The pivot of this strategy lies in a reversal of how we traditionally think about our relationship with photography. Scholarly literature on photography, particularly migration photography, invites us to think of photographs as objects of vision, interpretation,

and analysis. They are the surfaces on which we direct our gaze and build our discourse. The hauntological approach asks us to overturn this perspective. Photographs, by virtue of their spectral presence that oscillates between material and immaterial, are also a subject capable of hitting our gaze and imagination. It is not merely an object that we control as viewers and scholars, but sometimes a subject that, in turn, observes, questions, and challenges us. Visual places, the here-and-now of our encounters with photographs, can be haunted, especially when we look at images of suffering. It is here that our relationship with photography can become a space for critical questioning. The image of Anpalagan Ganeshu, with its resolute pose and composed gaze, strikes and questions me. It raises questions without the possibility of answers, eluding my interpretative work. And above all, it returns even when and where I do not expect to find it. This image, like others I encountered during my research on migration photography, has haunted my looking and contributed to spaces of ethical responsiveness and political action. It is in this impossible and ceaselessly deferred relationship that I face and feel my responsibility for the loss.

If each visual event of place has a fragile content, as its meaning is linked not only to the subjectivity of the spectator but also to the contingency of the here and now of its exhibition, then our critical work must be shielded from abstractions and generalizing pretenses. The haunting force is not a characteristic of the image but an attribute of its relationship with each of us. The photo ID of Anpalagan Ganeshu has the power to haunt my gaze, but it does not necessarily have the same effect on other gazes and other spectators.

The invitation of this contribution is to make room for the image and our relationship with it, to be traversed by its affective implications and interrogate its political implications. Cultivating ethically responsive gazes means learning to inhabit this space of encounter with awareness of our positioning and the responsibilities that follow. What is happening in the Mediterranean Sea is the product of a specific border regime, which continues to let vessels sink in one of the most heavily surveilled seas in the world. The visual archive of these tragedies is multifaceted. For these images to open spaces of ethical and political responsiveness, we must critically position ourselves before them and allow ourselves to be haunted. When an image catches our attention, invading our affective atmospheres and disturbing its assets, the sense of suffering and vulnerability that is always connected to the human condition may find a chance for recognition—a recognition that is at once necessary and impossible, sought even though inaccessible. (Dauphinée, 2007: 143) Only by keeping this contradiction open and facing its radical ambiguity can we aspire to establish an ethical connection with those images and build spaces for ethical responsiveness and political recognition.

Notes

1. The choice to use the term "massacre" instead of the more widespread "shipwreck" responds to the need to avoid the risk of normalising these events, as highlighted by Daniele Salerno (Salerno, 2015), among others.

2. Giovanni Maria Bellu's *The Ghosts of Portopalo* inspired a TV miniseries produced by RAI Fiction in 2017 under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The series had a 25 percent viewership share, with over six million viewers.

3. See https://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/palo/palo.html (accessed July 3, 2024).

4. See https://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/trovati/trovati.html (accessed July 3, 2024).

5. According to the most recent International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates, 57,407 people have lost their lives attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea since 2014. See: https://missingmigrants.iom.int/.

6. The most famous case is the tragic images of Alan Kurdi taken by Nilufer Demir, and their digital journeys, as described in Vis and Goriunova, 2015.

7. An established stream of scholarship on migration photopgraphy has been developed, not surprisingly, in Australia since the early 2000s, see Gale, 2004; Stratton, 2007; Perera, 2010; and Bleiker et al., 2013. Other works investigating the relationship between visual and migration through content analysis are Gariglio et al., 2010; Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2015; Lenette and Miskovic, 2018; Bischoff et al., 2010; Falk, 2010; and Batziou, 2011. There are also many studies on Lampedusa, perhaps the most densely constructed location in the aesthetics of migrations. Notable among these are Mazzara, 2015; Rinelli, 2016; and Odasso and Proglio, 2018.

8. These reflections are part of a larger research project entitled "Migrant Imaginations. Mapping the Visual Geographies of Migrations" (Giubilaro, 2018; 2020).

9. On the entanglements between ethics and images of pain, it is worth mentioning some contributions from visual culture (Berger, 1971; Sontag, 1977; 2003), social sciences (Boltanski, 2004; Sliwinski, 2004; Dauphinée, 2007), and Holocaust studies (Apel, 2002; Zelizer, 1998), and the volume edited by Grønstad and Gustafsson, *Ethics and Images of Pain* (2012). On the ethics of migration photography, see also Chouliaraki, 2006; Perera, 2010; Chouliaraki and Musarò, 2017; Chouliaraki and Stolić, 2019.

10. While the relationship between ethics and migration photography has been explored across several disciplines, it is in the field of photography studies that the most engaging reflections on it have been developed: see Phu 2018; Zarzycka 2018; Bassnett 2021; Egea, 2023. For a critical overview see also Giubilaro, 2020.

11. On the geographies of haunting, see Bell, 1997; Holloway and Kneale, 2008; Pile, 2005; Pinder, 2001.

12. See https://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/trovati/trovati.html.

13. The frames can be viewed at https://www.repubblica.it/online/cronaca/palo/trovati/trovati.html. I have chosen not to show the images on these pages in the belief that even the academic literature on migration photography is exposed to the risk of fetishization and commodification of images of suffering.

14. Major media publications included *The Guardian*, the *New York Times*, *CNN*, the *Irish Times*, and *Al Jazeera*.

15. http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/06/15/italy.ship/index.html.

16. http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/150903-drowned-syrian-boy-photo-childr en-pictures-world/.

17. Although the investigation had led the Public Prosecutor's Office of Siracusa (Italy) to open a manslaughter investigation against the crew of the vessel, after the wreck was found in international waters this was filed in the face of silence from the authorities and institutions.

18. See https://www.antiwarsongs.org/img/upl/Anpalagan.jpg.

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11. “The best word is the word you never said”: Perspective, Stance, and Silence in Davide Enia’s *Appunti per un naufragio*

Nora Weinelt

Positional Errors

In 2016, Gianfranco Rosi’s *Fuocoammare* (*Fire at Sea*) was the first documentary to ever be awarded the Berlin Film Festival’s Golden Bear, the prestigious prize for best film. Rosi’s feature-length movie depicts life on Lampedusa, the island that is closer to Tunisia than to the Italian mainland and has long come to epitomize Europe’s failed migration policy. In the light of an unprecedented number of refugees that had fled the Syrian War and crossed the Mediterranean Sea in the summer of 2015, the jury’s decision was, more than anything, a political one. According to actress Meryl Streep, who served as head of the jury, *Fuocoammare* presents “a daring hybrid of captured footage and deliberate storytelling that allows us to consider what documentary can do. It is urgent, imaginative and necessary filmmaking.” (Moulson, 2016) Focusing on how the everyday merges with the catastrophic, Rosi shows how Lampedusans try to cope with the constant dying on the island’s shore. *Fuocoammare*’s main characters are 12-year-old Samuele, who wants to become a fisherman just like his uncle, and Pietro Bartolo, a doctor who treats Samuele’s hyperventilation and also performs autopsies on hundreds of drowned or burnt bodies. Rosi’s “masterstroke,” a review in *The Guardian* argues, is “to not approach the hot-button material—of sinking boats, clamouring migrants, bellowing officials—head on, but instead watch it at one remove, through the eyes of the locals on Lampedusa.” (Pulver, 2016)

It is precisely this view from a distance, however, that fellow Italian documentarist Andrea Segre criticized in "Dopo *Fuocoammare*. Lettera aperta all'Europa che si è commossa," (Segre, 2016) a much-discussed text he first published on his personal blog.[1] His open letter is, as the title suggests, directed at a European public deeply moved by the images they had seen, in Rosi's film and elsewhere. In Segre's opinion, *Fuocoammare* operates from a perspective that is deliberately limited, and therefore ethically problematic:

> *Fuocoammare* has, or rather chooses, two limits, and within those limits it finds its position and its power: on the one hand it limits its gaze to the moment of impact, to the border of war, to the space of transit between an unknown before and an at least uncertain after; on the other hand it avoids getting to know the migrants and gives them the epic role of bodies poised between life and death. (Segre, 2016)[2]

In order to work on sustainable solutions and facilitate true change—a goal that is, for Segre, a precondition of political art—Segre considers it vital to first become aware of the "positional errors" (Segre, 2016) the European public has been committing for far too long. He argues that most cinematographic—and, by extension, journalistic or literary—representations of the so-called migrant crisis focus on transitional zones and thresholds, "the Lampedusas of Europe (Idomeni, Lesbos, Calais, Ceuta, and so on)," (Segre, 2016) where the pain of refugees is most condensed and most visible, where the situation is at its most dynamic and its most dramatic. For Segre, instead of drawing voyeuristic pleasure from witnessing the tragic events conveniently located in Europe's most remote areas, such (art)works should extend their scope to broader political contexts and relations on the one hand, and to the actual stories of asylum seekers on the other. Solely engendering "emotion and pain" (Segre, 2016)—a formulation that is reminiscent of Aristotle's description of catharsis—in the viewers as *Fuocoammare* does, without giving the victims a voice of their own, is, in Segre's view, not only an insufficient mode of political expression, but also a technique that may "clean" (Segre, 2016) the recipient's conscience and thus be complicit in preventing political action.

Segre's idea of "positional error" touches on questions that have long been at stake with regard to representations of shipwreck: who sees, who speaks—who is able to speak, who is allowed to speak, who is obliged to speak?—and from what perspective? The following chapter will discuss Davide Enia's 2016 novel *Appunti per un naufragio* (*Notes on a Shipwreck*), a text with a very similar approach to *Fuocoammare*. Just like the film, the book tries to depict the situation on Lampedusa, and just like the film, it does so by combining logged footage and deliberate

storytelling, while almost fully omitting the perspective of the refugees. A novel by paratextual definition,[3] Enia's book is a mixture between report, philosophical meditation, and memoir which intertwines documentary elements—mainly eyewitness accounts that he gathered from conversations with Lampedusa locals—with his own autobiographical story, namely that of his uncle's terminal cancer and his complicated relationship with his father. In the case of the *Appunti*, however, the (almost) complete lack of firsthand accounts by refugees is, I will argue, not merely a "positional error" but, on the contrary, a function of the novel's pondering on the structure and formation of a certain type of refugee discourse, the limits of (documentary) representation, "distant suffering," (Boltanski, 2004) and the ethics of narrative position. It thus re-evaluates the Blumenbergian metaphoric constellation of shipwreck, shifting it further towards the moral implications for the spectator.

Everyday Shipwreck

Davide Enia's *Appunti per un naufragio* is steeped in metaphors of water and the sea. The first is established before the main body of the text even begins: the book is dedicated to his wife Silvia, his "*approdo*," or "landing place." (Enia, 2017: 9) But "*approdo*" is also the Italian word used for the "mass landing" (Enia, 2017: 39; Enia, 2019: 36) of refugee boats on the Lampedusan coast and thus serves as a metaphorical focal point to indicate the fragile line between solid ground and unsteady sea, highlighting the entanglement of private life and global events. This first paratextual mention suggests very early on that, in Enia's novel, the sea is much more than a natural or a geographical entity. Rather, it is a protagonist of its own, one of the main protagonists at that, the one that is discussed most frequently by everyone Davide[4] speaks to, and the one whose actions are, even after thousands of years of harmonious coexistence, the most unforeseeable. As one of the Pelagic Islands, Lampedusa is defined by what threatens it, as Davide explains to his uncle Beppe, quoting from a Greek dictionary: πέλαγος "indicates the sea that, in constant movement, torments the shores with its waves." (Enia, 2019: 85)

Life on Lampedusa is deeply intertwined with the sea and all of the infrastructural requirements and cultural techniques that have to do with it; the water surrounding the small island shapes and permeates the way people move, work, dwell, and eat, and sometimes even the way they die. On the sparse island with an area of eight square miles and a population of around 6,500 inhabitants, Davide stays in a bed and breakfast run by his friends Paola and Melo, which is mostly built out of driftwood. Like many Lampedusans, Paola and Melo rely on tourism to make a living; it is one of the biggest—and one of the few—industries

on the island, second only to fishing, and the novel is imbued with scenes that underline the importance of both sectors. There is always someone catching, selling, buying, gutting, or cooking fish, and there are various memories of childhood summers spent by the sea, many of which are Davide's own, blending into those from his native island of Sicily. (see e.g. Enia, 2019: 216–217)

For most Lampedusans, therefore, the sea plays a key role in their professional lives as well. Their jobs correspond to different sorts of ships being used, so much so that, at times, the *Appunti* read like a typology of boat models and sizes. In addition to sailing yachts, cruise ships, and luxury vessels for tourists and the fishing boats for the locals, there are also ferries that help maintain contact and trade with the Italian mainland, police watercraft, rescue ships—and the rubber or wooden dinghies used by refugees in the hopes of reaching European soil, in numbers so large they have long since become an almost daily sight for the islanders. At various instances, the novel stresses the historical continuity of migration, the island's geographical and geological proximity to Africa—as opposed to the rest of Europe, it is located on the African tectonic plate (Enia, 2019: 86)—and the fundamental similarity between the refugees and the locals, many of whom, like Paola and Melo, moved to Lampedusa quite late in their lives, looking for new beginnings and a brighter future, and are a sort of asylum seekers themselves.

Working predominantly on or around water, the people of Lampedusa are no strangers to shipwreck either, and many of them have their own stories to tell. Vito, for example, a former carpenter originally from Bari in Apulia, recounts a day at the beach as a teenager, when he and a friend had drifted too far away from the shore in a rubber dinghy and almost drowned. Eventually, after long minutes of panic and desperate attempts to get back to shallow water, they were rescued by a fishing boat: "It veered toward us and from aboard the boat, a fisherman shouted to us: '*Guagliò, ma add'o cazz ve n'avìt 'a ji*?' Kids, where the fuck are you heading? They took us aboard, with our rubber dinghy, and we returned to land. It took us about an hour and forty-five minutes to reach the port." (Enia, 2019: 175) Davide's friend Melo shares a similar memory: when he was working as a skipper in the 1980s,

> he [and two friends] had run into a terrible storm on the Tyrrhenian Sea, so bad that it sank the boat. A genuine shipwreck, with water pouring in and the hull sinking straight to the bottom of the sea. […] Melo and his two friends jumped overboard in great haste, taking with them everything they were able to gather in time […]. After two days on the open seas, they sighted land. There were only rocks and brushwood. They abandoned their little dinghy and started walking. It was evening, the wind was blowing, and they were practically

> naked and drenched to the bone. After an hour, they saw a light: a big hotel. They ran and pounded loudly on the door. The night clerk came to answer and found himself face to face with these three individuals in their underwear and life jackets. (Enia, 2019: 25–26)

In one way or another, both Vito's and Melo's stories resemble those of refugees: the existential dread when the ship is sinking, the panic and despair, combined with the ever so mundane experience of seasickness and vomiting, (Enia, 2019: 175) the feeling of absolute powerlessness while sitting in a paltry rubber dinghy trying to brave the sea, and the relief of finally reaching land again, with nothing more than drenched rags on their bodies. Shipwreck, these passages imply, is a risk every seafarer takes, no matter their ethnic, economic, or educational background. Yet this is where the similarities end; for while agony on a sinking ship may be part of the *conditio humana*, the likelihood of finding oneself in a situation of shipwreck and the chances of being saved from it vary greatly, and depend on political privilege, nautical knowledge, and financial capital. And while for Lampedusans, shipwreck constitutes an exception to the rule, something that can always happen but is very unlikely to, for most refugees drowning in the Mediterranean is just as probable an outcome of their journey as surviving. Consequently, the locals' own experience with shipwreck has changed: dealing with it has become their almost daily business. In *Appunti per un naufragio*, shipwreck is indeed used as the Blumenbergian "Metaphor for Existence" (Blumenberg, 1997)—not least in the title, where "*naufragio*" refers to actual shipwreck, but also to Europe's moral and political failure to adequately respond to the crisis—yet as a metaphor for existence that, above all, highlights how human beings, despite being very similar from the outset, are subjected to very unequal conditions.

Shipwreck with Spectator

Over the course of the novel, it becomes clear that the metaphoric complex of shipwreck also extends to those on solid ground, who are being "knocked back and forth" (Enia, 2019: 15) as if on the tumultuous sea. The shipwrecks that migrants endure on the island's shore also affect those who witness them (Heimgartner, 2019: 130) and undermine the assumed stability of life on land and the islanders' relationship to the sea. "From that day on," says Vito when he tells Davide about October 3, 2013, the day he rescued 47 drowning people during a boat trip with friends, "my attitude toward the sea changed once and for all." (Enia, 2019: 170) For most Lampedusans, the Mediterranean used to be a part of their natural habitat, a space that belonged to their lives as much as

the island itself. By the time Davide arrives on the island, however, their ease in relation to the water has vanished. "You look on helplessly at a shipwreck," Davide concludes in a passage that is dominated by philosophical reflection about the situation on Lampedusa, "and it's as if the water were pouring into you too." (Enia, 2019: 108)

Enia's book, therefore, is Blumenbergian also insofar as its emphasis lies on the spectators of shipwreck more than on the shipwrecked themselves, tracing the epistemological and ethical position of those who stand in safety. Rather than being a book about shipwreck, *Appunti per un naufragio* is a book about witnessing shipwreck. The act of eyewitnessing, or, more broadly, the question of "who sees?" (who sees what and from where, who does not see and why, and what is not being seen at all?) holds immense political importance in relation to the situation on and around the island, as the novel suggests. In a pivotal passage, Davide reflects on the role of the visual in Western culture after learning about a rubber dinghy that went missing at sea with hardly anyone noticing:

> [T]he image certifies the reality of what exists: an event, a revolution, a death, are all to some extent amplified if captured by the eye. The things you haven't seen are to a certain extent rendered less powerful precisely because they have not been the object of your sight. Oral culture has made way for visual culture. (Enia, 2019: 124–125)

It is due to this amplifying role of the image that many Lampedusans share a desire to unsee, driven by both personal and economic reasons. Some locals and officials on the island prefer the shipwrecks to remain invisible, in order for them not to interfere with tourism and fishery; "the corpses found in the fishing nets, for example, were simply tossed back into the sea in order to prevent the fishing boats from being confiscated." (Enia, 2019: 17)

Most importantly, this strategy of turning a blind eye to the shipwrecks extends to the political sphere and manipulates sociopolitical discourse. The disaster of October 3, 2013, the deadliest shipwreck the island has seen to date and the only one widely covered by the media throughout Europe, sparked broader public interest and prompted a political response not least because of its visual confirmation; "[f]or the first time a vast number of corpses were seen, recovered, and counted on the shores of Europe. The pictures of lifeless bodies bobbing in the waves wound up on the screens of the mass media around the world." (Enia, 2019; 169–170) In order to prevent such coverage—more so than the shipwrecks themselves—from happening, "the Italian government [had] proudly proclaimed the figure of 'zero landings on Lampedusa'" one year earlier, as Paola explains to Davide. "And do you know why? When the refugee boats are intercepted they're escorted all the way to

Sicily, and that's where the landings take place, far out of the spotlight." (Enia, 2019: 16) Similarly, reports from shipwrecks by surviving refugees are often dismissed unless accompanied by tangible evidence, such as washed-up corpses, which cannot be ignored. Throughout history, shipwrecks have been events for which "definitive proof is rarely if ever available," as Burkhardt Wolf has argued. (Wolf, 2020: xx) Some people on Lampedusa and across Europe, Enia's book suggests, are willing to happily accept this lack of evidence in order to deny the reality of what is happening, leaving those who want effective change "helpless in the face of the invisible." (Enia, 2019: 108) What *Appunti per un naufragio* provides, then, is not only a documentary report of the migrant crisis on Lampedusa, but also an examination of the structure of sociopolitical discourse itself, of the conditions under which it evolves and the blind spots it contains. Above all, however, the text reflects on its own political dimension and the role it could—or should—play within a broader discursive context.

One of the main topics the book deals with—if only implicitly—is the complimentary question of Davide's own position and perspective, his own limitations, positional errors, and blind spots. Davide, who had previously only known about the events in Lampedusa through news coverage, travels to the island to experience the situation first-hand. Shortly after his arrival on the island, Paola informs him about an imminent landing and asks: "Do you want to see it with your own eyes, Davidù? That's why you came, isn't it?" (Enia, 2019: 37) While his trip to Lampedusa may not have a defined objective other than "doing research" (Enia, 2019: 8) for his book, it soon becomes apparent that his primary goal is to witness, to be as close to the situation as possible. Transitional zones like Lampedusa, which constitute thresholds of sociopolitical discourse, root sources of media reports, and places where the stories of locals and refugees converge, are often believed to be of fundamental epistemic value. It is this underlying assumption (also criticized by Segre in his open letter) that motivates Davide's journey to Lampedusa, where it is shared by many locals. For instance, Doctor Bartolo—the same Doctor Bartolo who is one of the main characters in *Fuocoammare*—urges him to help raise awareness of the situation on the island: "Write about it, go around and tell everything you've seen, because that's needful. On the Continent they don't have a clear idea of what's really happening down here, but I don't mean what's happening here on Lampedusa, this island is simply a point of transition, one leg of a vaster odyssey." (Enia, 2019: 60) For Davide, Lampedusa represents a nexus of converging and colliding perspectives on migration and a place in which the horrors of shipwrecks dominate daily life. As such, it promises to offer a deeper, more condensed, more immediate, and more affective understanding of broader sociopolitical dynamics.

However, while Davide's intention is to travel to a position of great immediacy, he does not get to witness the most important events at stake—the shipwrecks, the many deaths—firsthand. This is especially evident with regard to the refugees themselves: they remain largely invisible to Davide, and consequently also within the novel itself. Their stories are—if at all—told to him from at least two removes. Benmet, for example, a refugee who arrived at the island in 2013 and then continued his journey to Switzerland, returns to Lampedusa to attend a memorial service for the victims of the 2013 shipwreck, where, years later, he speaks to Paola, who in turn tells Davide about the encounter. This is why, then, Davide decides not to include the migrants' perspectives at all—he is too far away from their stories to write about them, as he concedes at the end of the book:

> Right now, what's still missing is a tile in the mosaic of this present day, and it is precisely the story of those who migrate. Our words are incapable of fully capturing their truth. We can name the border, the moment of the encounter, display the bodies of the living and the dead in our documentaries. Our words can tell of hands that provide care and hands that raise barbed wire fences. But it will be they themselves who tell the story of the migration, those who set out and, paying an unimaginable price, have landed on these shores. It will take many years. (Enia, 2019: 167–168)

Despite his geographical proximity to the events and his exploration of Lampedusa as a transitional zone, Davide's own position turns out to be an intermediary one at best, a position "from a remove," (Enia, 2019: 57) the position of a second-degree spectator: he sees people who have seen.

For the main part, therefore, the book consists of conversations with the various locals—a doctor, a fisherman, and a rescue diver, among others—he meets up with to ask them about what they have experienced and witnessed. The stories his interlocutors recount often resemble each other, to the point where, for the reader, the many different shipwrecks described become indistinguishable. The one exception is the disaster of October 3, 2013, which is first mentioned in the very beginning of the text but explicated only towards the end, and serves both as the climax within a quasi-dramatic build-up and as a counterpoint to his uncle Beppe's death. Apart from that, the many descriptions of similar encounters and eyewitness accounts are repeated with slight variations, creating an iterative textual structure that stresses the overwhelming number of tragedies on the Lampedusan shore and the entanglement of catastrophe and everyday life. And while many of the

interviewees emphasize how much the shipwrecks have impacted their own lives, the lucidity they experience for themselves never translates onto the more global political situation: it remains unchanged, in invariable repetition.

The conversations with the Lampedusans are woven into the text in long sections of mostly uninterrupted direct speech—often containing exclamations or whole sentences in local dialect—so as to not misrepresent any of their accounts. The orality of these passages suggests the authenticity of a story that is written down verbatim and in as much immediacy as literature can offer, and an author whose role is to simply register what he is being told, without any creative interventions of his own. This documentary approach, which corresponds to an ethics of listening and a "discourse of sobriety," (Nichols, 1991: 3) is further enhanced by the external focalization that is deployed when describing in precise detail the settings of the conversations—many of which, again, closely resemble each other—and the demeanor of Davide's interlocutors. They sit down, prepare and pour coffee, sip from a glass of water, play with their hands, smoke too many cigarettes—displacement activities that "reveal the speakers' complex relationship to language." (Vitali, 2019: 335; my translation)

Yet even though the plot of the novel is mostly made up by a series of interviews and conversations (with Lampedusa locals, but also with Davide's father and uncle), the predominant sound of the text is silence. The constant dying and despair on the island's shore, incomprehensible to everyone Davide talks to, corresponds to a fundamental inability to put into words what has happened. Davide's interlocutors struggle to recount what they have seen, although most of them know that they would benefit from talking about their traumatic experiences and corresponding excruciating feelings of guilt—of not being able to help enough, of not being able to help at all, but also of being irrationally frightened of the migrants who have washed up on the island's shore. (see e.g. Enia, 2019: 32) Davide's main challenge in his conversations with the Lampedusans, therefore, is "getting [them] to speak." (Enia, 2019: 111) A commander in the Italian Coast Guard, for example—"the samurai," as Davide calls him due to his "regal baring of a noble warrior" (Enia, 2019: 99)—admits:

> Talking about it helps, for sure, even just to get free of the things you carry inside you. But, honestly, I never do it. Not even with my wife. Inflicting my anguish on her wouldn't be fair. […] Among my colleagues, we always hold a briefing after a rescue, to figure out if there was anything we could have done better. We discuss the things that happened, in and of themselves. But we don't dig any deeper. We avoid that. (Enia, 2019: 109)

If Davide's interviewees do end up trying to dig deeper, their reports are often elliptical, omitting the most graphic scenes and sparing the very details that could help understand the cruelty of the events on the Mediterranean. When Doctor Bartolo speaks to Davide about the many refugee girls and women whose dead bodies he has to inspect, he skips over a description of the injuries with which he is confronted, hinting only at how brutally they must have been inflicted upon the victims: "'The things they do to women, they wouldn't even dream of doing to animals,' was all the doctor managed to say." (Enia, 2019: 60) The most painful events—those that could potentially impact the political discourse most effectually—as Davide's conversation with Bartolo demonstrates, cannot be told; they remain covered by silence. For many people on Lampedusa, their trauma of seeing results in a "suspension of language, a blocking of meaning." (Barthes, 1985: 209) Davide, the only truly "uninvolved spectator on dry land," (Blumenberg, 1997: 10) the only one unaffected by trauma and guilt, also becomes the only one capable of reflecting on the situation, resulting in various passages of philosophical meditation about death and human nature. Since the immediacy of eyewitnessing, on a spatial but also on a temporal level, prevents traumatized firsthand spectators from speaking, his perspective as a second-degree spectator turns out to be a prerequisite for narration.

Enia's novel mirrors this struggle to speak through its fragmentary and tentative character, which is already alluded to by the eponymous *écriture* of *Appunti*, or *Notes*. The text is composed of interruptions, time leaps, ellipses, gaps, and blanks, many of which are also implemented typographically, through very short paragraphs, line breaks, and blank lines reflecting the respective speaker's (and sometimes also the narrator's) failure to establish coherence, to make sense of the events. (Vitali, 2019: 335) On a much more fundamental level, they also reflect the speakers' discomfort with language, their distrust of the ability of words to represent reality, and the ineffability of violence, trauma, and guilt. This general difficulty of speaking about events which are so daunting that they defy description is, as the *Appunti* show, paired with (and aggravated by) a specific southern Italian culture of silence in which talking is perceived as a feminine (and therefore, a negative) trait: "'*Omo di panza*'—literally, 'man with a gut'—is the complimentary way we have of describing someone thought to have such a strong stomach that he can hold it all in: his doubts, his secrets, his traumas." (Enia, 2019: 41) On Lampedusa, despite everything there is to be talked about—both on a personal and on a political level—"*'a megghiu parola è chìdda ca 'un si dice*. The best word is the word you never said." (Enia, 2019: 41)

Impasto Writing

The character who best embodies this southern Italian silence is Davide's father, a retired doctor from Sicily who serves both as a figure for poetological and medial reflection and as a link between the reports of eyewitness accounts and the autobiographical storyline revolving around Davide's family. He joins his son in Lampedusa, where, as usual, he talks very little. Instead, he resorts to photography, the medium that has become his preferred mode of expression, precisely because it—seemingly—does not require immediate authorial arrangement or intervention:

> In this asphyxiating and, emotionally, almost illiterate setting, where the ability to name the things you desire is lacking, my papà's photos configure themselves as attempts to open out to a larger reality. His photos, in a certain sense, become the words that haven't been spoken. Taking pictures is the way that my father has finally found to speak aloud to himself, admitting his own helplessness concerning a given situation, or evaluating the scope of a failure, investigating deeply the reasons behind things, without any urgent need for an immediate response. At the same time, photography also aspires to [fill] in exactly those silences for which words aren't adequate. (Enia, 2019: 41–42)

Photography, in its indexicality, makes it possible for Davide's father to show things in an immediacy that language does not allow for, thus overcoming what Rosalind Krauss has called the "trauma of signification." (Krauss, 1977: 78) Drawing on Charles S. Peirce's semiotic theory and Jacques Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, Krauss argues that the photographic image—an index and an icon at the same time—disrupts the reign of the Symbolic, and, therefore, of language; in photography, there is no immediate "connection between objects and their meaning." (Krauss, 1977: 75) Unlike language in its linear and arbitrary character, photography does not depend on syntagmatic relations created by the linking of signifiers, which always require some sort of coherence, structure, and sense-making. And unlike the symbolic reign of language, photography is based on a material, physical link with what is depicted: photography implies eyewitnessing, and therefore promises intrinsic objectivity.

The poetological and medial reflection that is inherent in the discussion of the father's photography practice constitute a paradigm for the entire novel, which examines the (im)possibilities of an objective, documentary approach. Throughout the book, the perceived limitations of language in representing reality are countered by a primacy of seeing,

expressed through various other references to photography, but also to painting, theater,[5] and, more generally, to the realm of visual perception. Apart from highlighting the complex relation between seeing and speaking, the visual references, and most explicitly the continued discussion of the father's photography, also serve as a poetological tool to explore the appropriate distance between the spectator and the object being represented. When Davide asks his father why he did not take any pictures during a landing they both witnessed, his father responds by quoting renowned war photographer Robert Capa: "[He] was right when he said, in the case in question, that photography never turns out well if the photographer wasn't close to the event. And I was far away from the landing." (Enia, 2019: 56) However, this requirement of being in close proximity to the represented object is challenged in another passage, where Davide describes a photograph his father took of a stray dog on the streets: "Papà had gotten very close to the stray mutt to get a shot of its open pupil. At the center of the pupil was him, kneeling, with his camera in front of his face, caught at the instant that the shutter snapped." (Enia, 2019: 83) Getting too close to the event, this sentence implies, blurs what is represented: as Susan Sontag states, photographs always "represent the view of *someone*," (Sontag, 2004: 31) even if they claim documentary objectivity through their indexical quality; and the closer the proximity between photographer and the object, the more likely it is for the photographer to take center stage in the picture.

It is precisely this tension between the need for distance and the urge to get closer that turns out to be one of the novel's central themes. The problem of finding an adequate distance between the observer and the observed is first established at the very beginning, when, in a sort of poetological exposition, "Lampedusa" is described as a "container-word" that has come to mean many things at once: "migration, borders, shipwrecks, human solidarity, tourism, summer season." For Davide, it thus forms "an impasto that still seems to defy a clear interpretation or a recognizable form." (Enia, 2019: 9) Through this metaphor of impasto—a painting technique relying on the application of thick layers of paint and expressive, visible brushstrokes—the challenge of writing a book about a multifaceted "container-word" like Lampedusa is translated into the sphere of visual art, thereby shifting the perspective from the documentary representation of events—a "Story of Refugees, Borders, and Hope," as promised by the subtitle of the English translation (which is nonexistent in the Italian original)—to the question of perspective itself.

Impasto paintings require distance—the heavy brushstrokes blend into a homogenous whole and form the intended shape only when seen from the proper perspective. Typically, the viewer needs to be positioned at a considerable distance from the painting for the brushstrokes

to disappear, revealing the represented object; looked at from up close, impasto paintings exhibit their own materiality and the techniques used in their creation rather than the depicted object. At the same time, the painterly brushwork is often regarded as an expression of subjectivity. (see e.g. van Alphen, 2005: 35) The metaphor of the impasto, therefore, is twofold: it applies to Lampedusa as a multifaceted island which, to Davide, only blends into a coherent whole when seen from a distance; but it also applies to the book's literary technique, which weaves documentary elements into an autobiographical framework and eventually privileges subjective expression, deliberate pastose ambiguity, and poetological self-contemplation.

This negotiation between a distance that is needed in order to form a comprehensive picture and the desire to get closer is best exemplified when Davide and his father discuss one of the landings they have witnessed—the only type of event they are actually able to see with their own eyes, albeit from far away:

> Witnessing the landing […] was a powerful experience, but one that I lived from without, from a remove, I was physically distant from the wharf. When you see such a large number of people so weighed down with suffering, the most that you can bring yourself to say is: 'It certainly can't have been easy, it must have been terrible for them!' Perhaps, what you ought to do is try to find a comparable situation to the desperation of people landing on an island, so that you could get closer to an understanding of what happens there, if there could ever be anything comparable that could help someone to understand that sense of bewilderment that I detected in them. (Enia, 2019: 57–58)

Davide's father, who, again, serves as a figure for poetological reflection in this passage, proceeds to talk about his brother Beppe's terminal cancer, and it is indeed this very comparison that constitutes the framework of the book and dominates many of Davide's philosophical meditations about life and death on Lampedusa. Just like his father when photographing the stray dog, Davide comes as close to the events as he possibly can, only to see himself, in his anguish and mourning, take center stage in the picture.

This paralleling of the refugees' pain and Beppe's imminent death is, more than anything, the expression of an aporia in determining the adequate distance to the events described, and of a corresponding poetological hesitation. While distance turns out to be a prerequisite for comprehensive perception, narration, and reflection, it nevertheless cannot lead to a truly factual representation of reality, as the islanders' struggle to speak, their desire to unsee, and the idea of Lampedusa as a kaleidoscopic "container-word" show. If, as T.J. Demos has argued with

regard to *The Migrant Image* in the art and politics of contemporary documentary practice, "the representational link between sign and referent has been severed and truth must be reinvented on the grounds of uncertainty," (Demos, 2013: xxi) Enia's book tries to fill this representational void through layers of subjective identification, affective reaction, and compassion in the very literal sense of "suffering too," albeit from something very different. The "paradigm[] of authenticity" (Ibid.) Enia's novel puts forward, then, is one that privileges a self-reflexive, subjective, and, to a certain extent, fictionalized view on objective facts in order to—paradoxically—make the impossible representation of a complex, multifaceted reality—the representation of the impasto that is Lampedusa—more accurate. Referring, once again, to the realm of visual perception, Davide states at the end of the text that "[n]o photograph can be more precise than the feelings you have toward someone you love," (Enia, 2019: 238) thereby discounting the indexicality and alleged objectivity of photography in favor of the more subjective, uncertain, pastose quality of language and literature.

However, this comparison between the catastrophe in the Mediterranean Sea and Beppe's illness, a sort of leitmotif throughout the novel and a necessary precondition for Davide's—and Enia's—writing, puts *Appunti per un naufragio* at constant risk of running into an ethical pitfall that Susan Sontag has described in her seminal work *Regarding the Pain of Others*:

> The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferers […] and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet once more a mystification of our real relations to power. So far as we feel sympathy, we feel we are not accomplices to what caused the suffering. Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence. To that extent it can be (for all good intentions) an impertinent—if not inappropriate—response. (Sontag, 2004: 102)

It is precisely in order to prevent an inadequate identification between onlookers and refugees that the text foregrounds a poetological reflection on the spectator's position and the ethical prerequisites of narration. By reflecting extensively upon the conditions of its own existence, the necessary distance while describing traumatic events, personal involvement, and immediacy, Enia's novel aims to emphasize the incompleteness of (documentary) representation in the light of trauma while at the same time depicting Davide, in Luc Boltanski's terms, as a "moral spectator," a spectator who "report[s] to the other both what was seen and how this personally affected and involved [him]." (Boltanski, 2004: xv)

Appunti per un naufragio is the negotiation of "a fundamental tension […] between the desire to give expression to the tragic experience of [the migrant] crisis, and the recognition that representation is ultimately unable to capture that experience in its fullness and directness." (Demos, 2013: 171) The pondering on the conditions of the spectator's involvement and the focus on subjective—and often egocentric—affectedness thus turn out to be the novel's preferred mode of (self-)documentation. Ultimately, *Appunti per un naufragio* can be read as a concession to the impossibility of fully grasping the eponymous shipwreck and its socio-political effects, resulting in a very different kind of *naufragio*: Enia's text exhibits the struggle—and failure—to find an appropriate way of regarding and representing the pain of others.

Notes

1. Segre's text has been picked up by journalists and scholars throughout Europe, see for example Winkler, 2019.

2. Segre's "Dopo *Fuocoammare*" has not been translated. English quotes from the text are my own translations.

3. The back-cover blurb of the Italian edition clearly states that the book is a novel: "*Appunti per un naufragio* è un romanzo." (Enia, 2017)

4. Since the text is a hybrid between factual report and fictional novel, the protagonist Davide cannot simply be identified with the author Davide Enia (as it would, for example, be the case in purely factual texts like newspaper articles). I will therefore speak of "Davide" when referring to the protagonist of the novel and of "Enia" when referring to the author of the text.

5. Enia, a well-known playwright in Italy, stages the island and the sea as a theatrical space. If the sky serves as a "*fondale*" (Enia, 2017: 102), a stage set, as the text states at one point, the Mediterranean becomes a stage, with the audience seated on the island.

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12. When Seascapes Collide: Visual and Vocal Contact in Kröger's and Scheffner's *Havarie*

Burkhardt Wolf[1]

> *Nimm die Stimmen, die du hören wirst, nicht für die Geschichte der Stimmen. Auf keinen Fall aber die Geschichte der Stimmen für die der Stummen.*
>
> —Günther Anders, "Über die Nachhut der Geschichte" (2020: 306)[2]

Treating the sea as a scene of adventure seems an outdated cultural-historical topos. Many adventures do take place here, but mainly in a commercial and logistical sense: that of "adventurous" voyages adjusting their course according to the current chances of profit and the weather conditions, rather than steering toward a fixed goal. The sea no longer promises a voyage into the blue but at most a good business opportunity and good weather; and it constitutes less a scene than a secured transit-sphere for streams of people, information, capital, and goods. What mythological names refer to in, for instance, the present-day Mediterranean—an example is the "Hermes" program of Europe's Frontex border-protection agency—are above all maritime policing measures for migration and movement control via data collation and risk analysis, medial supervision, and uninterrupted border-guarding. Today, what Michel Foucault once said about the nautical "heterotopia" only applies to refugee boats on their passage from North Africa: that ships are "a floating piece of space, a place without a place that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself, and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea." (Foucault, 1986: 27) Ships are places, then, that use the sea as a medium at the same time that the sea confronts them with peril and possibility.

Seascape

But a completely different sea encounters ships and ship-types that are both seaworthy and integrated into an extensive infrastructure of maritime transactions and logistics. Tankers and container ships have opened connecting routes that, via harbors as transmission points, make possible seamless transport—thus liquefying the land to the same extent they territorialize the sea. By contrast, navy and coast guard ships plow through the sea as a sphere of asymmetric visibility and latent threat; even more than the tankers and container ships, these vehicles are medial aggregates repeatedly sighting their surroundings anew and constructing it anew in the process. Here the ships, with their radar and sonar instruments, only form the mobilized spear-tip of a scopic system extending from distributed tracking and sensing techniques to drone and satellite images and beyond to real-time observation at a distance and up-to-date risk analysis: a system that—for instance with a view to maritime border-crossers—tries to determine the most likely flight routes. Seen from a medial-ecological perspective, the sea has thus here become a data-space in which, according to the state of risk involved, elastic border proceedings are registered in the style of mobile thresholds.

For their part, cruise liners serve, like ferries, not only to swiftly transport human freight but also, as Joseph Conrad has already succinctly formulated it, to set up "sham shore conditions"—to which end they virtualize the sea in their own manner. (Conrad, 1926: 55) On their adventure voyages, they resemble swimming hotels or rather, starting with the launching of the first gigantic "fun ships" in the 1970s, mobile amusement parks and shopping malls. With their bilge keels, rendering the swell almost unnoticeable, with their numerous panorama windows and permanent entertainment and service offerings, they represent a model milieu of maritime event-capitalism: a milieu that, on the basis of a comprehensive technical security system, is fully geared toward management of fun. As invisibly as possible, behind the facades and user surfaces, a globally recruited staff, competition-free and correspondingly cheap, sees to the maintenance of the onboard operations, sustenance, and entertainment. And with the cruiser basically housing, as Bob Dickinson and Andy Vladimir put it, "a motion-based virtual reality theater and a blue-screen room," the sea is unmistakably neutered into a mere simulacrum—largely shifted into the ship's interior as a virtual spectacle.[3] (Dickinson and Vladimir, 2008: 54) Provided now for sea voyages without goal or purpose, it is a peripheral space lacking horizon and event.

Consequently, the different types of ship (among which the cruise ship and refugee boat represent something like opposite extremes),

although moving through the same water, travel on distinct seas. Put otherwise: the sea contains different seascapes. As both a term and concept, the seascape, emerging in analogy to the landscape, has its origins in early modern painting, above all the Italian *tempesta* and Dutch *seestuck*: hence in a sort of landscape painting that crosses over the coastal line to the sea and places it in the picture as a scene of phenomena involving waves, storms, and fields of light. On the basis of this aesthetic perspectivizing, as an analytical and planning concept the seascape developed in a way again analogous to the landscape: as an open system or interplay of atmo-, hydro-, phyto-, litho-, zoo- and anthropospheres, and beneath these signs as an *environment* both producing specific living conditions and stamped by certain forms of life. In the water more distinctly than on land, the formation or even constitution of such milieus is based on media and infrastructures—on what Sverker Sörlin and Nina Wormbs have described as "assemblages of technologies and practices" of "environing;" (Sörlin and Wormbs, 2018: 6) and these are embodied in seagoing vessels in an exemplary way. That media create environments to the same extent that environments can be considered media is revealed not least in the mentioned extreme cases of cruisers, on the one hand, and dinghies, on the other: the so-called service environments (Näser-Lather and Neubert, 2015: 9) of highly technologized "fun ships" present the sea as a product of medial visualizing; and the sea serves simple refugee boats as a medium of their secret and daring passage.

For Foucault, "from the sixteenth century until the present, for our civilization the ship has not only been the greatest instrument of economic development […] but also the greatest arsenal of the imagination." (Foucault, 1986: 27) The short, oft-cited lecture on "Other Spaces" from which this and the previous quote are taken was delivered in 1967, when the sea was gradually turning into a space of transit dominated by security technology and the maritime-cruise industry had just invented itself anew. The fears Foucault expressed in face of these conditions seem to have been realized: a "drying up" of dreams in "civilizations without ships" and a simple prohibition of adventure by "the police." (Ibid.) If the heterotope archetype of the ship no longer exists, then the literary imagination has lost one of its specific and defining historical milieus—neither battleships nor police boats, tankers, container ships, or cruisers continue to provoke narration in the manner of the classical maritime novel. What characterized that genre from the 19th until the early 20th century was a close relationship between specialized nautical knowledge, cooperation, and solidarity that—as we see, exemplarily, in Melville and Conrad—points to seafaring and authorship, sailing and writing as existential analogies. For a type of maritime transport that mainly navigates with medial support and is functionally highly differentiated, this relationship is obsolete. As Ernst Jünger already observed

in 1931, in the age of security, a death knell has sounded for maritime literature "in the old sense;" it has been replaced by "objective reports of experience." (Jünger, 1993: 27–32) The "ship of poetry," referred to as such since antiquity, no longer sets out from domestic shores for unknown harbors or simply for catastrophe; and indeed "it bears me from no fatherland away, bears me onward to no shipwreck," as Samuel Beckett put it in *Molloy* in 1951. (Beckett, 2009: 50)

The Maritime Scenario

Nevertheless, in 2015, author Merle Kröger located an entire novel on the Mediterranean: on a body of water that at least from the period of Foucault's speech onward has had to be considered not only a highly frequented connective zone but at the same time a strictly observed border region. The events around which everything in this novel centers are the maritime distress of a refugee boat with a damaged motor off the Spanish coast; the boat's sighting by a cruise ship with the telling name *Spirit of Europe*; and the encounter of both with a Spanish coast guard rescue vessel and with a container ship. The novel's original German title, *Havarie*, whose literal English translation "average" fails to convey the word's complex meaning, is the nautical designation for malfunctions and accidents suffered by maritime vehicles; and it is also the older insurance-technical term for contributory distribution in the salvaging of a ship (above all through jettisoning of freight and the "sacrifice" of certain parts of the ship). The title of the 2017 English translation, *Collision*, opens up a third dimension: the collision of different seascapes in a shipwreck's context. Correspondingly, both the polylogic contents and the multi-perspectivism of Kröger's novel attach a different relationship to the world and the environment to different kinds of boat: the "boat people" on their very basic water vehicles see their situation above all through the prism of circulating stories and rumors, myths and fables; on the cruiser, we find a temporally removed economy of consumeristic attentiveness that allows the sea to vanish beneath a "display" of the aforementioned all-encompassing service and entertainment offerings; (Kröger, 2017: 36, 55, 94) and the coast guard ship is fully oriented toward speedily detecting and approaching a target.

In the style of a filmic montage, the novel's plot unfolds in a breathless present over twelve simultaneous narrative strands woven together into a geopolitical and global-economic intrigue. Taken together, the novel, divided into two nights and a day, is constructed like a "sea drama" with an exposition, peripeteia, and catastrophe. In the first section, "The Night Before," the story maintains a dramatic mode, presenting several settings (alongside the ships there are, above all, the Algerian

and Spanish ports of Oran and Cartagena) and in addition a number of characters (especially the personnel on the cruiser and the travelers on board the refugee boat). The second section, "The Following Night," is arranged like a screenplay, for which reason a "film length" of eighty-six minutes is indicated. The section opens with nautical positioning and is repeatedly interrupted, under the title "ether," with the transcript of radio communication between the Spanish *Salvamento Marítimo* and the *Spirit of Europe*. (Ibid.: 62) As soon as the cruiser haphazardly encounters the damaged refugee boat and—because it is obliged to under maritime law—drops anchor within its sight, various tourists on board the ship complain about the annoying "incident;" others stare at the "boat people" from the railings, thus rendering them into extras in what Kröger refers to as an "unhealthy fixation on the spectacle" dominating onboard operations. (Ibid.: 135, 184) When the firm's central office in Miami prohibits taking the refugees on board, the cruiser's security chief uses the situation to have a gravely ill "illegal" taken from the underdeck, and disposed of on the dinghy. A Northern Irish tourist notices this and films it on his smartphone.

The novel's third section then closes the plot in two ways. The Northern Irishman loads the video onto a YouTube channel, and the refugee's dinghy, having evaded the coast guard through fog and a storm, goes aground at night on the Spanish coast. An emergency call to the closest hospital is fruitless, the illegal dying from his brain hemorrhage and the Algerian helmsman taking over both his papers and—Syrian—identity. It is precisely this theme of tricksters, of false names and forged identities, that ties the novel to a maritime narrative tradition extending from Odysseus to B. Traven's *Death Ship*. For just as the cruise ship's management plays tricks with identification of the cruiser's crew (the Syrian "illegal" has to share his identity with a Nigerian), the North African "harragas," for their part, endure as persons who (as their name programmatically indicates) burn, exchange, and falsify their papers. "[T]he journey and the lies. Without this, there is no future for us at all" (Ibid.: 14) is their motto: as if they wished to demonstrate Hegel's geophilosophical dictum that the sea is only meant to be encountered as "the most unreliable and deceitful element." (Hegel, 2001: 108)

If one looks less at the depths of literary and philosophical history than at the most recent tendencies of the literary industry, one could describe Kröger's novel—in the words of Moritz Baßler—as a case of "popular realism:" "popular" precisely because it no longer participates in canonical classicity, but in current "problem discourses" such as those on migration, racism, and capitalism; and "realism" insofar as a form of narration is established here whereby "reality" is accessible in as "barrier-free" a manner as possible. The text could therefore be understood, from Baßler's cynical perspective, as a prime example of

"Midcult:" it is "born translated," i.e. it is written in a kind of translational German, and it reads from the beginning like the screenplay for its film adaptation. (Baßler, 2022: 10, 39, 49, 383) In terms of genre theory, one could understand it as a "postcolonial thriller" that reveals the maritime globalization of the modern era as the agent of our present's exploited labor and desperate migration. (Krobb, 2017: 20–22) And against this background, it could also be understood as a "present tense novel" that has transformed the old narrative fiction with its past tense into an actualist fictional narrative. Here, it is no longer a matter of creating a second world, but of continuously shifting the reference to what we consider to be our world. (Avanessian and Hennig, 2012: 13, 17, 278)

Indeed, *Collision*'s polylogue and multiperspectivity—quite as described above—link a different world reference to each ship. And contrary to what the theme of the tricksters with their identity swindle suggests, even more pressing than the question of truth is that of visibility. For as if not only the possibility of sea rescue but even more so the necessity of panoptic control were linked to that question, radio communication is accompanied by the directive to "keep visual contact." (Kröger, 2017: 63) Such "visual contact" consequently takes in not only the constellation defined by "refugee drama" and bystanders "looking the other way;" even more decisive is the dialectic between rescue by means of the (technical) image and surveillance through the same. (Villeneuve and Blythe, 2020: 77f.) The book's entire narrative construction can be understood in a similar way: we are presented with maritime milieus as medial spheres, and the hubbub at sea is given voice in its dependency on regimes of geolocation, tracking, and visualization. For this reason, the plot not only turns from start to finish around what is "invisible […] between the waves;" the narration proceeds in accordance with ubiquitous image technology. When for instance, an employee of the *Spirit of Europe* goes overboard, his disappearance is initially investigated detective-style—but then as it were forensically reconstructed using the CCTV system's recorded images. (Kröger, 2017: 168, 173, 177)

On account of this retroactively disclosing, and in the process medially supported narration, *Collision* invites description as a crime novel, and as a thriller because of the global-political intrigue. But as the afterword itself underscores, the book, although a work of fiction, was based on documentary research. (Ibid.: 223) And its starting point was found footage—the jetsam of a data-ocean. Namely, by coincidence Kröger, together with her collaborator, the filmmaker Philipp Scheffner, came across a YouTube video recorded by none other than the abovementioned Northern Irishman Terry Diamond in 2012 off the Spanish coast, on board the *Adventure of the Seas*. They researched the background, met Diamond, obtained the relevant radio recordings from the Spanish coast guard, and finally interviewed and filmed both the cruiser's personnel

and a number of refugees. When in 2015 Mediterranean crossings from North Africa multiplied and the mass media issued alarmist reports of a "refugee crisis," Scheffner and Kröger wanted to do more than simply contribute their already-produced documentary film to the image flood. They decided on a new approach involving something like parallel literary and filmic action: Kröger shaped what had been researched into a possible scenario; and Scheffner worked with the video recordings as image material and with both the radio and interview recordings as sound material.

The Maritime Screen

Visually, Scheffner's film presents nothing other than the recording made by Diamond: what at first view appears to be a theatrical scene, with the sea as the stage and schematic "boat people" as actors. (plate 12) Because the *Adventure of the Seas* represents a massive and solid platform in the midst of the elements, the film *Collision* initially appears tied to three pictorial traditions: first to Lucretius's image of "shipwreck with spectators," reflecting on the stoic distance of those on shore observing the fate of those cast away; second to the *tempesta* and the *seestuck*, which already began to shift the representation's visual focus into the sea; and third to cinema, which even early on, alongside theatrically oriented "sea dramas," produced immersive films on the theme of distress at sea. But *Collision*, the film, does not present its viewers with some sort of spectacular going under; rather we are offered an endless drifting forward, a movement uninterrupted by any event. And although the image-frame for the most part remains beneath the horizon, the sea here has less immersive than abstract qualities. What the image tries to generate, despite its disturbance by blurring and flickering, is *visual contact*—and with it, as already in Kröger's novel, an ambivalent connection. For keeping the refugees in view means not only retaining a chance to see them saved; at the same time they are thus drawn out of concealment in the sea's "elemental space" (to use Carl Schmitt's terminology), guarded, kept from their illegal course.

It was precisely this ambivalence that motivated Terry Diamond's recording. On the one hand, he cannot turn the view away from this scene of maritime distress, whether from pity or documentary interest. On the other hand, Diamond's relationship to his environment is consistently a relationship of supervision, when he registers it with his cellphone camera as a tourist, or else controls it professionally, in his role as an employee of a Belfast security firm, by means of CCTV screens. Concerning that work he explains as follows: "You're always on edge, you're waiting on the unforeseen. And it's sometimes when you least

expect it, that's when it can happen. So you always have to be on the lookout." (cited from Kühnemund, 2018: 140f.) Scheffner's film examines and processes Diamond's video under this sign: not only to exhaust its evidentiary substance in the style of a documentary realism, for which "reality," especially in the case of maritime border control, is essentially constituted by techniques of environing, i.e. by media technologies. Moreover, it seeks to transform visual contact with the "boat people," contact produced from the cruising ship, into a kind of *visual collision*. (Kröger, Scheffner and Wolf, 2021: 271) The sea's surface becomes a kind of film screen, a projection surface for water-gazers. The image is characterized by a pervasive blue, a pure color, that as such signifies nothing, but also does not lack expressive capacity. Rather, the blue will induce what—initially—is objectless sensation; it marks a *sentiendum*, something that is "still to be felt." At the same time, the sea appears as a "blue screen" and, similarly to Derek Jarman's film *Blue* of 1993, as a monochrome projection surface of anxious expectation, if not deadly boredom. For, in marked difference to Kröger's accelerated narration, Scheffner captures the *Havarie* in a temporal prolongation, or blow-up. He extends Diamond's three minute, thirty-six-second video to feature-film length: to precisely the eighty-six minutes that the rescue action had lasted.

In Diamond's video, the sea's turbulent flow has become a pixel-stream that generates moving images through enduring changes in resolution and differential displacements. Scheffner's film now renders the stream into a series of fixed connected frames. (Linseisen, 2020: 210) Cinema is here, to play on Godard's famous dictum, "truth once per second." And as such, it is meant to produce *no* visual contact with the refugee boat—no contact that would mean empathy facing the screen but rather surveillance and control. It is the case that the film begins with an indication of precise positioning in the Mediterranean. (fig. 12.1) But *Collision* works on dislocating the boat by becoming, as it were, a close-up of Diamond's video: this through technical and, in the cinema, also institutional upscaling. Already for early film theorists such as Hugo Münsterberg and Béla Balázs, the close-up corresponded to a mental mode of intensified attentiveness, making possible a discovery and preservation of "small life." (Münsterberg, 1916: 72–91; Balázs, 2001: 49) We could also say that it protects and conserves apprehended reality by tearing it from its spatio-temporal conditions. Along these lines, Gilles Deleuze describes the close-up as the transfer to what he terms "space-whatsoever:" a sphere of potentialities or a place in placelessness containing incalculably many connecting points, within a virtual space of waiting and attentiveness to what is only at the point of happening. For just this reason, each frame here gains a characteristic, sometimes menacing, then sometimes calming, expressive force. For each interval

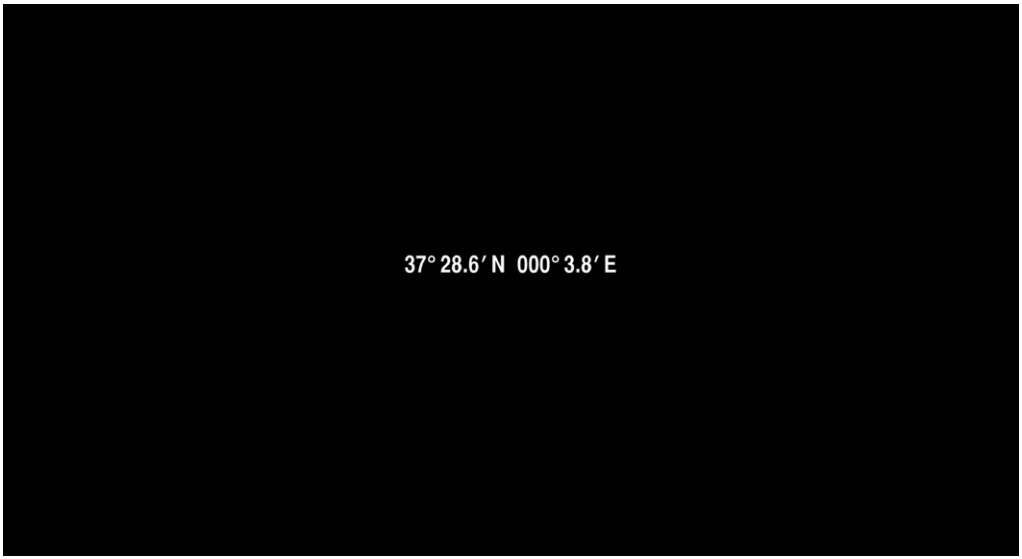

Fig. 12.1.
The coordinates of the event (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (*Havarie*), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

between the serially connected frames could hold a fatal or fortunate event—the boat becomes blurred in one moment, in another seeming to tumble out of the image and then to re-consolidate itself at the center. (plates 13–14) With this extension, the film reaches the edge of motionlessness and threatens to turn into a film-still, but in the same course, it manages to represent time and to liberate the *punctum* from every frame.

When at one point the shadowy "boat people" suddenly wave toward the cruiser, movement comes to the camera view—as if, once glimpsed *itself*, it has to assure itself of its own locus. "Am I the one here being addressed and gazed at?" Diamond and with him his camera seem to ask, the camera panning rightward to the other gapers on the neighboring railing, and then leftward where the blazing sun stands behind the ship's silhouette. We can understand this double panning as a conscious documentary gesture, and also as just that effort, beyond volition, at confident self-location. (Balke, 2020: 119) But in the end, this effort precisely does not lead to reflexive validation. For what is revealed with this look into the sun is on a technical level a glitch: (plate 15) an image disturbance that might have countless causes, from delayed rendering to a mistake in compression. As minimal, "normal" slippage, this disturbance does not interrupt the film's processual logic. (Linseisen, 2020: 203) In the film, however, it becomes a state of emergency of image-making capacity in general: a beam of light breaks up the image, forces it into a color change, renders it a negative and prompts the emergence of a kind of curtain or screen made of ghostly material: an image-screen upon which, in place of circumspective perusal, something only shows itself by something being hidden. (plate 16)

This spot or blot in the image prompts a kind of blinding in the observer's view; but at the same time it leads to the material or images on the screen taking on a spectral or ghostly appearance. For this reason, *for a moment* the cruiser becomes a ghost ship. The border-crossers, however, banished to the individual images either in doubled or shadow form, (plates 17–18) appear subject to ghosting *forever*—they are, after all, beings accorded at most a "telepresence" and, as long as they are seeking a home, are feared as a visitation. We could easily invoke various predecessors from the history of the sea and seafaring for these revenants of migration: from ancient rumors that seafarers are neither dead nor living, to the *Flying Dutchman* as a phantom-like remainder and revenant of the early modern-capitalistic opening up of the world, and onward to the ghosts imagined, from the early 20th century onward, to reside in the "electric ocean," the radio-telegraph waves with their unregulated frequencies and countless forms of interference.

These are the radio-traffic signals that Scheffner's film concretely records. Namely, in the movement from sight to blindness, replacing a touristic seascape is the soundscape of a radio operator and migrants. The soundscape is more a radio play than a soundtrack. We can here speak of acoustic images that emerge alongside their visual counterparts but no longer bind with them seamlessly in the manner of cinematic *suture*. What is manifest here is neither an "off" continuing or completing the image-field beyond the *cache* or framing mask, nor the transcendent field of a narrator's voice or a commentary, but rather a fully autonomous dimension—documentary in the radio transmissions, narrative in the other passages. The soundscape contains recordings of the radio traffic, back then, off the Spanish coast, together with the research of Kröger and Scheffner, *ex post*: recordings of interviews they themselves conducted on different ships and on the Mediterranean coasts of Africa and Europe. While the radio traffic concerns the police operations that will lead to the image-field's closure with the border-crossers' rescue and apprehension, in other acoustic passages the film opens up to a "space-whatsoever." When a border-crosser explains that according to the Koran, spirits populate the desert and sea and that his own experience of flight on the open Mediterranean (where blinding shifts into imagination and sensation) can only confirm this, he is describing a situation similar to the one we are all placed in by Scheffner's film. And when through their battle cries, a group of harragas declare the sea a "space-whatsoever" (before they are spotted and quickly turn to flee),[4] then the extent to which an autonomous speech act can transform what is visible becomes unmistakable. Just as Deleuze once described it, (Deleuze, 1997: 241f.)

here the "off" becomes a refuge of the possible: the fabulation, as the harragas practice it on their border crossings, furnishes the images with an imaginary dimension, allowing them to break out of imprisonment in the merely visible and merely present.

In this way, Scheffner extends a tradition of political filmmaking that, since the 1960s, has formulated dispersal, expulsion, and migration as "popular" problems—as problems of a "people" that is not only fooled or suppressed (as in early 20th-century cinema) but is simply absent. (Ibid.: 241f.) This people does not exist, but nevertheless it *insists* in the discourse and fabulation of individuals, articulating the cause of an expected or hoped-for collective. In Scheffner's film, this merely virtual collective (of refugees, migrants, or harragas) is attested to by the phantom image—and by what Michel Chion has termed the "*phantom acousmêtre*:" a voice that cannot be localized, whose origins are invisible and that, so to speak, is in search of a place and body. (Chion, 1994: 71–74, 129) "Acousmatic" voices are neither within nor outside the visual image. But within the visual realm they allow us to seek their source, since they command its images in a riddling way. In *Collision*, all the voices are "acousmatic." But while those on board the cruiser emerge from an—in any case irritated—culture of spectacle in the "funopticon," and those on the radio transmission from a context of pan-optic or ban-optic power seeking to get hold of everything that flees,[5] the voices of the border-crossers emerge from a lack of power, an absence of names and places.

And precisely for this reason, an appeal is tied to them. The images of *Collision* cannot be encountered with an approach grounded in eloquent empathy; (Boltanski, 2004: 6f.) and as long as we do not claim a role of "perpetrator" or "victim" in the face of them, what remain for us are only a few possible positions: the position of an accomplice, of a passive bystander, or, as Michael Rothberg has put it, of an "implicated subject." As such subjects, privileged as onlookers and listeners, we are not directly responsible for what is shown but nevertheless participate structurally in it (Rothberg, 2019: 1, 200f.)—and for just that reason should see ourselves addressed through what is said by those without place and body, power and legal status. *Not* wishing to synchronize the phantom voices and images of *Collision*, *not* seeking the speakers' voices, but nevertheless trying to locate the underlying statements tied to what is being uttered—hence to see oneself as implicated by these voices, regardless of their place: *that* is perhaps the ethical problem posed by *Collision.* Or to offer a Lacanian pun: *ce qui importe, c'est que la voix me regarde.* What's important is that the voice concerns me—and that it holds me in view.

Conclusion

In both Kröger's and Scheffner's *Collision*, what initially appears to be the sea emerges in the end as a data-space or a media-ecological sphere. As a conglomerate of various seascapes or environments, this sort of sea calls for a range of approaches. For this reason, the work of Kröger and Scheffner was not limited to work on a normal film or a conventional novel. As if to underscore its non-classifiable nature, Elmar Krekeler has referred to Kröger's book as a "docufiction-thrilleressaynovel." (Krekeler, 2015) Kröger herself named it a "multi-perspectival collision" and fictional 3D installation, while Philip Scheffner described his film as a montage of simply bisected dialogs, which was then also exhibited as such.[6] The shared work led in the end to an installation of voices and images; with its synchronous, looped, and network-like structure, it freed itself as much from cinematic dispositif as from the novel's narrative order. Tied to such an installation is not only the renunciation of established work structures but, above all, a production context whose aesthetic and political program is aimed at enduring interventions in the medial space. The close proximity of this program to so-called counter-forensics becomes clear precisely in the case of *Collision*: we need only think of the project of "forensic oceanography" initiated by architects and filmmakers Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, involving the collection and processing of countless documents and statements, together with "big data" from the Mediterranean communication and surveillance interface, in order to demonstrate Frontex's engagement in systematic and murderous failure to provide assistance.[7] (Heller and Pezzani, 2014a; 2014b)

Documentarism, understood as research that includes the space of digital data and as the alignment of the pictorial documents of a "vast apparatus of remote sensing technologies" with the testimony of survivors, (Heller and Pezzani, 2020: 101f.) is also the basis for Kröger's and Scheffner's productions. It was only for this reason that they came across Diamond's vacation video, which was more tagged than titled "Refugees" on YouTube and ultimately was merely a sort of flotsam in the data-ocean. (plate 19) What they then organized with this video can only be termed remediation in multiple senses.[8] Firstly, they turned to one of those now ubiquitously produced, in the end authorless and conceptless "poor images" that Hito Steyerl has described as "ghost[s] of an image" of "dubious" origin; precisely because they have been "downscaled," i.e. "squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed," such images can circulate on a global scale and thus—as in the case of the harragas and sea migrants—unite "dispersed worldwide audiences," creating post-political communities that use media and data as much as stories and voices.

(Steyerl, 2009: 1, 7) Scheffner and Kröger took one of those images through which portable media has altered the cinema (and the political significance of the film essay) in a fundamental way, back into a filmic and indeed literal medium. Second, in the manner of a *remedium*, using narrative and visual upscaling, the book and film endowed initially inarticulate pictorial evidence with context and resonance—and perhaps even the power of a more than aesthetic, ethically and politically potent "post-cinematic affect."[9] In this way, book and film push forward a parallel line of development that has characterized *littérature engagée* as well as political documentary film in recent decades: namely, on the one hand, the "popular" de-auratization of canonical traditions by aligning narrative with other artistic and social media; on the other hand, the abandonment of mimetic concepts of representation in favor of an aesthetics of "documentary feeling" beyond the visual. (Steyerl, 2008: 13)[10] Last but not least, in this manner Kröger's and Scheffner's working material received, for its part, a new medial positioning. For just as the border-crossers (or revenants) in *Havarie* move "from no fatherland to no shipwreck," here book and film neither fulfil an original medial function nor become, as a medium, entirely obsolete. Both are vehicles or catalysts for that enduring medial border crossing that alone can still lead us toward and through the sea.

Notes

1. My thanks go to Joel Golb for his, as always, congenial translation (of most of this text).

2. A literal translation of this—in the end untranslatable—quotation: "Don't take the voices you'll hear for the history of voices. But by no means take the history of the voices [*Stimmen*] for that of the voiceless [*Stummen*]."

3. On the history, economy, and aesthetics of contemporary cruising see Papathanassis, Lukovic and Vogel, 2012; Dowling, 2006; and Wolf, 2020: 101–112.

4. "Harraga is our motto!," is called out here. "Here brother. Look around, so that you can believe it! We weren't made to stay on the shore. There are no mountains, nothing! There are only us and our God, heaven and the water." *Havarie* (Germany/France 2016, dir.: Philip Scheffner), Cue: 0:32.20–0:32.45.

5. On the concept of the "funopticon" in the context of a globally established "security-entertainment complex," see Thrift, 2011: 5–26 and Lewis, 2017; on the concept of "banoptismus," tying panoptic surveillance of data streams and human streams with a ban on certain forms of existence ("abnormal" people, migrants), see Bigo, 2008: 10–48.

6. See Maunu-Kocian, n.d.; see also Kröger and Scheffner, 2021: 319.

7. Together with Amel Alzakout, Kröger and Scheffner have tried out a "counter-forensic" procedure from the opposite side in *Purple Sea* (2020), this time using image and sound recordings from a GoPro camera. The Syrian director Alzakout had this gadget on her wrist when her refugee boat capsized off Lesbos in October 2015; she survived but forty-two other passengers died. With its lonely, trance-like voiceover narration, the film (edited by

Scheffner) is an effort to reappropriate literally immersive material, to large extent coming into being under water and, in addition, without intent, in the course of a struggle to survive. The Forensic Architecture agency had worked with this material previously.

8. On the concept and its dimensions, see Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 59–61.

9. Steven Shaviro has observed that "recent film and video works are *expressive*: that is to say, in the ways that they give voice (or better, give sounds and images) to a kind of ambient, free-floating sensibility that permeates our society today, although it cannot be attributed to any subject in particular." (Shaviro, 2010: 2)

10. According to Steyerl, it is its expressiveness with which contemporary documentarism responds to the "uncertainty principle" (*Unschärferelation*) of its reference to reality. (Steyerl, 2008: 8) The fact that "reality" is "embedded" or "environed" by media technologies at the key sites of the present (for example, in its corridors of flight and migration or on its battlefields) represents not only a challenge for the documentary film, but also an opportunity for its renewal and repoliticization.

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Havarie, directed by Philip Scheffner, Germany/France 2016.

13. Thirty-Three Blueprints for the Right not to Drown*

Hilde Van Gelder

De wateren zijn
Zo blauw als de dood

[The waters are
as blue as death]

Jo Lemaire, "Eenzame Boot" (Lonely Boat),
on the album Enkelvoud (Singular)
(Mercury, 1998)

Brussels, 23 April 2023

Dear Remco van den Berg,

Recently we received mail on the Boulevard, from my good friend Othillia G— in Amsterdam. It had taken quite a lot of thinking on her part, as she warned at the start of her letter. Revealing disgraceful matters in public tends to have negative effects when the culprit involved is an influential individual. To denounce their misconduct may prove, after all, that they matter. It will strengthen their conviction that their poisonous arrows have in fact hit their target. Still, Othillia strongly felt that ignoring the incidents—or leaving the matter *blue-blue*, as we say in our painterly Dutch language—was not an option. Choosing her words carefully, occasionally using softened phrases, she wrote me, bit by bit, about the anything but affable atmosphere at your recent book presentation at Le Cercle. It was disconcerting to see, she reported, how you exploited the opportunity to make unfair claims about me. She talked to you about it immediately afterward, during the reception. But your response didn't make any sense to her. Grinningly you dismissed the matter as insignificant. Half-jokingly you added that polemics are simply part and parcel of this kind of informal *format*. True enough, it seems, the event's atmosphere was rather light and casual. For you, of course, jibing at my book in fact served as a warm-up event for your society's Narcissists Ball, scheduled later that same evening.

Your book, honored with five stars in the newspapers, deals with the relationship between contemporary visual art and what you refer to as the *European migration crisis*. In your exposé, you praised several successful artists for making sublimely detached photographs or arthouse films of people on the move, often fleeing from some form of violence or bitter poverty. As of the turn of the century, but openly and visibly after 2015, they have therefore tried hard to reach the EU (and sometimes, later, the UK). They cross borders under the direst circumstances, in some desolate landscape or at sea, outside of the legal paths. Some of the artists discussed in your book, mostly men, notably, have purposely posted themselves in hideouts near such borders, using military thermal imaging cameras to make spectacular recordings of this phenomenon. As such they confront their audience with artistic images of persons who may recognize themselves in these pictures, or who may be identified by people who know them, say when they encounter these works within the context of an exhibition. Sure enough, there is a commercial market for these artworks and the subsequent coffee-table books. Many of those artists will earn quite a nice sum by callously representing the deep suffering of others.

Such oeuvres, if not unappealing to the eye, are accompanied by a passive-aggressive discourse, as found for instance on the websites of the major awards these artists win. In short texts the reader is presented with a lesson, often somewhat childishly: as if the artists uncover the "naked life" in their recordings of these unfortunate people, only to attribute human dignity to them again by elevating their representation to the level of major works of art. Renowned names such as those of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben are frequently used in this context. Star curators are quite happy to select such artworks for their traveling exhibitions. And several collectors have an appetite for these tasty objects, which they experience as pure visual poetry, because they have no trouble imagining owning them. All of this will certainly benefit the galleries representing these artists. Of course, this powerful market mechanism merely exists by the grace of the collective moral disconnection of a specific group within the current art circuit. For there is one inevitable precondition for being able to enjoy such works: you need to be capable of ignoring *en masse* the raw realities shown to us in these images, as if the aesthetically concealed facts took place on a distant planet.

Today, a celebrated art critic like you, Remco, also apparently has no qualms about chipping in. Othillia wrote how, in support of your argument, you used my *Ground Sea*, a study on *Photography and the Right to Be Reborn*, as an example of how not to go about it. Although you characterized the work (sarcastically, I suspect) as "a remarkably in-depth study," you devoted the remainder of your available time during the presentation to ruthlessly vilifying it. To a general sense of

hilarity, you even went into overdrive. Firstly, you esteemed that *Ground Sea* offered rather interesting reading "at moments." Yet at no point did you feel the case studies presented in it to be "world shattering." Though the two of us are not very close, we have obviously known each other for a long time—so when you address the quality of a text or an artwork, I know that one of your hobbyhorses is *world-shatteringness*. When invoking this criterion in your reviews, you always use phrases like the power of the "modest" or "clenched" *sensation*. That's horrendous! Do you ever pause and wonder what it *truly* means that such artists, through their ill-conceived use of such surveillance technology, shamelessly further expose the few ways out available to these people? What sort of consolation does it in fact offer them, that they are re-humanized within the aura of Great Art? These poor anonymous fellows, who will not have the slightest inkling that they are secretly, yet recognizably, being filmed by artist X, certainly have nothing to gain from it. Outright cynical, isn't it?

Secondly, you posited coldly that I as author crossed a line in the sand by having my own children, as well as my pet, appear in *Ground Sea*. Certainly, this is a reproach worthy of careful unpacking, and I will do so shortly. But let us return to what for the exclusive members of your club apparently must have been a very enjoyable evening. Othillia wrote that the discussion got bogged down from the start by amusement about what you described as *Ground Sea*'s stifled attempt at giving a name to the countless migrants, the many people on the move worldwide. In my absence you also made much fun of what you consider my rather absurd undertaking of writing 700+ activist pages on such a remote issue. Well, the Strait of Dover is not that far from our doorstep. For us Belgians, it is even in our own backyard, in the old French-Flanders region. Othillia in hindsight felt embarrassed to be there at all, given her professional background as a former human rights lawyer. The gathering's ambiance seemed exclusively devoted to downplaying the real issue at stake as one that was not directly of interest to those present in the room. After Othillia once tried to interrupt you by asking you to no longer use that stigmatizing and dehumanizing notion of *transitory migrant* ["transmigrant" in Dutch], the chair of your society intervened to retort that this notion, in "our regions," had become the common term to use. Afterward, Remco, you felt no embarrassment about using shamelessly inappropriate language, which in your society still seems fashionable among intimates. You will surely have reasoned, after all, that Le Cercle is a closed society in which all are free to choose their own words?

You called me someone who soils her own nest, as well as a *salon sailor*. Well done! Good for you! Othillia was totally unprepared for what she had to listen to. But it is not up to her further to respond, which is why I do so here myself. I will not waste any words on this idea of soiling of one's nest, as I imagine you'll understand. In the second half of the

previous century, blunt and hostile art critics like you still tended to be successful at instilling fear. I admit that twenty-five years ago I would have felt awful upon receiving such insults. But today art criticism has been reduced to an innocent pastime. It is the market that almost entirely alone in the art world determines the quite deregulated rules of the game, which has turned it into a highly enjoyable gamble for various protagonists. Increasingly, in recent years, larger and shadier figures find themselves among the players. Now, Remco, I am convinced that you do not do any business with these greedy guys. It is primarily several major auction houses or traders specializing in somewhat older modern art who could and should put in more effort in screening their—at times—less savory clients. In this context, you too, like me, are just a tiny North Sea shrimp. This is precisely my reason for finding your de-solidarizing from *Ground Sea* even more regrettable.

Evidently, however, our visions on the possible role of contemporary art in relation to the current flows of migration to and within Europe are miles apart. I am willing to admit that, as it stands today, you and yours have won out on this theme. Salon art crying victory. What else is new here? This is precisely why your "salon sailor" insult made me furious. For how do you dare to proclaim this unthinkingly? How, then, do you yourself define this concept? Years ago, you once asked me about our plans for the family holiday. When I told you that my husband and I liked to sail and that we felt it was important for our children to learn the ropes of sailing as well, you laughed at me mockingly, right to my face. I remember it as vividly as if it happened yesterday. An academic who goes out sailing—you really had a good laugh about that one. Let us therefore discuss more closely what sailing the Channel may have taught me, in order finally to come to the matter at hand.

Where were you on Wednesday November 24, 2021 at 6 pm, right after sunset? This moment is etched upon my mind. In my car returning home from work in Leuven, I found myself near where the E40 highway and the Brussels Ring Road meet. Despite the heavy traffic, I like driving home around that time, for usually I will tune into Radio Klara and listen to *Pompidou*, a news program on art and cultural events that I generally enjoy listening to. By the time I switch to Radio 1 for the evening news, most of the everyday hassles of university life will have left me. As is my habit, I listened to the news on that day as well. In a neutral tone, the female newsreader started to announce the latest news from Belgium and nearby places. This was how I learned that at last the feared moment had come, the moment written in the stars for so long. On an unremarkable November day, which always seemed to me a dime a dozen, thirty-one persons had drowned off the coast of Calais. Their inflatable dinghy appeared to have capsized, most likely through the pull of the screw propeller of a large cargo ship.

Fishermen, as the familiar voice added before finishing the short bulletin, were the first to have seen, at around 2 pm that day, the bodies floating in the sea. Later it would become known that thirty-three persons were on board that unfortunate small boat, meaning that only two people survived. Twenty-seven bodies were able to be recovered, while four people are still missing. It was the largest shipping disaster in the Channel in thirty years. That very evening in my car, as I was driving home and the ongoing news program reminded me—by its seamless transition to the next item—that the order of the day would not be disrupted at all, I felt as if time stood still for a while. My eyes filled like an aquarium. Clasping the steering wheel more tightly, I felt like I was close to passing out. Before being able to enter the yawning mouths of the tunnels and surrender myself to the Brussels traffic chaos, I looked for a spot in the emergency lane to get my breath back. I imagined that other road users must have heard the same news as well. Yet no one at all, either in front of me or behind me, joined me in taking the same measure. For a moment it seemed as if I had fallen out of time in that messy no man's land between the ring road and our exhilarating capital city.

Four months before, during the summer in which I had left my *Ground Sea* manuscript in the safe hands of the dedicated designer Theo van Beurden, we were finally able to get away from home for a longer time. Because that year the British ports were still closed for Belgian (recreational) boating, it was an easy decision to go sailing up and down along the French side of the Channel. In 2021, the second half of July proved strikingly warm and sunny. Moreover, there had been no wind at all for several days. Because it is easy to get bored, motoring on a boat with lowered sails, we did have time, of course, to pay attention to what was going on around us. Near the Calais–Dover axis the Channel is narrow. The entire time, then, we motored right alongside the zone of the Traffic Separation Scheme, the highway for large cargo ships, which basically amounts to a two-way lane. On the English side, ships sail in a lane demarcated by buoys toward the Atlantic Ocean. Closer to the French coast you see at moments the mammoth tankers steadily crawling toward the North Sea. On clear days, like on that day, you can easily see the white cliffs of Kent with your bare eyes. The *plaisanciers* are only permitted to cut across this professional two-way traffic lane as fast as possible, and as far as possible perpendicular to the zone's demarcated boundary line. Because this is anything but a relaxing crossing, we were not inclined to take chances that particular year, especially because we were not allowed to enter English ports anyway.

Still, during the middle of the day and without anyone around having any place to hide, we came across several small boats motoring and maneuvering past the large ships and toward the United Kingdom. They were going along at a fair clip and seemed to know quite well

where they were heading. Who knows, perhaps they simply pointed the helm at the white cliffs reflecting the sun's bright light. But we could also see along the British shoreline, we believed, sharp white lights flashing on and off in a regular pattern. Did these small boats receive support? Were they perhaps guided by people on the beach to some planned landing site? It could well be. At any rate, on July 19, 2021, as we continued on our way to our own planned destination, I filmed a short clip of this phenomenon. This was merely to convince myself that I was not hallucinating there and then, not because I was on the lookout for spectacular artistic footage.

Let me linger a bit longer on that day. Multiple times, the Dover Coast Guard (DCG) dispatched VHF radio messages to all stations and all ships. Thus, we were informed that at that very moment on one of the south English beaches (its name is irrelevant here), a significant number of persons were wandering about, still wearing life jackets. We knew, then, that the boats within our view, about which we were potentially concerned (if they were indeed improvised boats, which was far from certain), would in all likelihood reach their destination shortly. The weather conditions were perfect, the sea being a mirror. And yet the marine radio operator, in the safety information section of her regular weather forecasts, requested all sailors in the Channel to keep a sharp lookout. The DCG even requested all mariners to report any "unusual activity" in the shipping lanes through VHF Channel 16, in particular regarding "small vessels crossing the Dover Strait." Each message ended with the notice that the DCG oversaw coordination.

How do you think that we felt upon hearing this disconcerting information at sea? Let me give you one example. Through Channel 16, the very high-frequency channel always used by mariners as a safety precaution, the DCG passed on a Mayday relay from the Netherlands Coast Guard. The voice over the radio reported the coordinates of a dinghy with engine problems and with approximately twenty-five persons on board, all wearing life jackets. The vessel, it was announced, was in the approximate position of the Sandettie West Buoy, near the deep-water route, or in the southwest lane of the Traffic Separation Scheme. Any vessels that could provide assistance or any further information were requested to contact the DCG on VHF Channel 16. The Sandettie West Buoy was too far from where we were at that moment. But the message certainly spoiled the cheerful mood of our crew (which included our two children, then aged twenty and eighteen), I can tell you that much.

During those months of July and August we felt increasingly paralyzed by the moral dilemmas we ran into as a crew. International maritime law requires states under whose flag a boat sails to summon their skippers to rescue people at risk at sea. When for instance a skipper of a boat sailing under the Belgian flag is informed of the coordinates of

a nearby vessel in a dangerous situation, they basically must do all they can to provide help as swiftly as possible. There is, however, a crucial caveat provided for by Article 98(1)(b) of the 1982 UN Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS), ratified by the EU: the skipper is allowed to assess at their discretion if a rescue action can be reasonably expected from their vessel. The criteria are that the operation must never put one's own vessel or crew at risk. The skipper must report this in the log and write down the reasons for not offering assistance. Commercial considerations should thus never play a role.

Of course, it is a sheer impossibility safely to take on board two dozen people on a sailing yacht built for at most eight persons, with four on board already. Obviously, when your boat happens to be near a sinking *makeshift dinghy* you would still try to move toward the site of disaster and see if you can help, to the best of your ability. But even in cases with fewer people at risk, victims are often so badly off when in the water that only professional rescue services are equipped for proper and successful rescue operations. This can be seen in a shocking film clip, with accompanying text, posted by the British Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) on its website on October 18, 2022. They regularly carry out rescues at the request of the HM Coast Guard. No single private sailing boat can do what these heroic people can do. They have been trained for every kind of medical urgency, including childbirth at sea. They can make the right decisions when faced with multiple bodies simultaneously floating in the water. It is a matter, then, of correctly assessing whether these persons' condition is an irreversible *delta charlie delta* (or: deceased) already.

This requires sound training. Until recently, the training for yachtsmen did not prepare mariners in our waters for such circumstances at all. This is still true, in fact. The sense of collective powerlessness regarding this phenomenon at sea is growing stronger, which further complicates the situation in the Channel. According to clause 2 of Article 98 of UNCLOS, each coastal state is required to establish operational search and rescue services and maintain them at an adequate level. It is even the case that, where circumstances so require, neighboring states must cooperate for this purpose, by way of mutual regional arrangements. That is where the shoe pinches between the United Kingdom and France, and painfully so. In the summer of 2021, while we were sailing at sea, the British Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), based in Dover, was remarkably active. Its counterpart, the French Centre régional opérationnel de surveillance et de sauvetage (Cross) of Cap Gris-Nez, remained surprisingly silent. The sharp contrast between the Cross and the over-performing DCG could not have been more pronounced. Like the sailors we became friends with, we wondered how this was possible. For if we as amateur mariners could see such small

boats navigating the waters, the French coast guard surely should also be capable of providing much needed help in the case of Mayday signals. Why did the Cross not issue those messages, while the DCG did? Because the alarm pertained to problems in British territorial waters, rather than French? As we concluded that summer, the French hardly seemed involved. They simply seemed to observe the horrendous spectacle from their look-out station on top of Cap Gris-Nez, high and dry.

The painful consequences of this lax stance came to the fore in the weeks leading up to the first anniversary of the deadly shipping disaster of 2021. On November 13 and 21, 2022, the French broadsheet *Le Monde* published two contributions with several informative maps of the border zone between French and British territorial waters, in which the dramatic events took place during the night of November 23–24, 2021. The articles presented clearly the main actors involved. This helped readers to visualize the tragedy that unfolded on November 23 from 10 pm, when the thirty-three persons embarked from a sandy beach near Dunkerque (probably Loon-Plage), until the finding of fifteen bodies floating in the water by the fishing vessel *Saint-Jacques II* at 1.49 pm the next day. The occasion for the articles was a report written by military officials from the investigation department of the maritime gendarmerie of Cherbourg (Manche), which was ordered to investigate possible negligence on the part of the Cross in respect to this specific case. Their recommendation amounted to a request to the prosecutor's office in Paris to carry out a further study that could throw more light upon possible criminal facts, for not aiding people in danger. I advise you to read both newspaper articles yourself (they also come in an English version). The journalistic language is rather plastic and explicit. If *Le Monde* is to be commended for that, it would be too much for me here to reiterate the event in fine detail to you. For example, the captain of the *Saint-Jacques II* described the capsized and unusable rubber dinghy he ran into as an emptied blood sausage ("*un boudin dégonflé*"). This is telling enough.

Read the article, I urge you. In that way you will observe for yourself that the chaotic embarkment of *bateaux de fortune* (as the French euphemistically put it) from the stretched-out line of beaches in northern France has become unmanageable for the Cross. This has had to do with the toxic combination of a lack of means and physical overburdening of the limited available staff, which for many involved has also been mentally exhausting. And yet the preliminary investigative commission concluded that the staff's failings that night may have been indefensible, which is why further study was desirable. Already after a few hours and still in French waters, the overburdened rubber dinghy—unsuitable for use at sea—ran into problems due to serious engine trouble. Given the lack of navigational devices, those on board had first called the MRCC of

Dover, which subsequently contacted the Cross. Next, they called the emergency medical service of Calais (SAMU), which in turn informed the Cross as well. From recordings of all these conversations, it can be seen that the operator at the Cross, Fanny R., having received via WhatsApp the geolocation of the boat in distress, misjudged the severity of the situation. Immediately those on board shouted on the phone that it was urgent, and they continued to call the rescue services. Because the dinghy found itself, effectively, in French waters, if barely, the Cross was supposed to send assistance.

This it did not do, even though a French patrol boat, the *FS Flamant*, was nearby and not engaged in a vital operation that could not wait. The investigation even shows that the operator told those on board that help was underway, even though this was false. During their interrogation, the staff of the French Coast Guard conceded that they frequently receive calls from people at sea who want "to be escorted" to British waters. They assessed that this was the case here as well. But the fact that no engine noise could be heard during the phone conversations should have alarmed the operator, the investigators countered. Once the unfortunate boat reached English territorial waters, the British took over. The Border Force immediately dispatched its patrol ship, the *Valiant*, but this found itself forty-five minutes away. Next, the British asked the French to dispatch the *Flamant*, since it was closer. The Cross did not do so. Those on board the small boat in peril meanwhile persisted in desperately calling all the emergency services. The French operator responded to them with irritation and claimed that their problem was "not a French problem." At the same time, she continued to repeat that help was on the way, thereby counting exclusively on the British. After the British Coast Guard launched a Mayday, not a single nearby ship responded at first. It was only at 4.16 am that a tanker, the *Concerto*, contacted the Cross after seeing the boat in distress from up close. The captain asked the French authorities how to proceed. The operator told him to continue his course because the *Flamant* was on its way to provide assistance, which again was not true, as revealed by the investigation. At 4.34 am, the last emergency call from the thirty-three helpless persons followed, after which all communication ceased.

In the dead of night, the *Valiant* rescued, with the help of a helicopter, ninety-eight people from three other small boats. Because they did not receive another alarm call from the Cross, they assumed that they also had picked up the people on board the doomed boat, as can be read in the report. The file was closed with the term "rescued." Later that same day, this proved to be incorrect, however. When reading the investigative report, one gets the impression that the Cross staff indeed suffered from a moral deficit. When the person pleading on the phone said he was "standing with his feet in the water," the operator replied

laconically, "Yes, you are indeed in English waters." The report also refers to improper conduct within the internal communication of the Cross. For example, the center's deputy director used "Super Migrant" as his alias in internal correspondence. In response to being investigated, the Cross staff stressed that potentially every night as many as thirty to fifty small boats were in the water, and that they *all* called in, even when they were not in trouble. Clearly, this service has been unable to live up to its task. Its staff, at the time having available only two patrol ships and one helicopter, had been trained for a different kind of rescue operations. This resulted in a different expectation in relation to what a rescue operation at sea amounts to. This is also why they left all the initiative to the British. One statement by Fanny R. sums up the problem. During that fatal night of November 23, she said *off the record* to her colleagues when the connection with the near-drowned was broken: "You're standing with your feet in the water; well, I did not ask you to leave."

Ever since all of this has come to light, pressure has again increased on the political authorities to put in more effort into halting the highly risky crossings. Around the time of the report's publication, British and French policymakers agreed the umptieth arrangement on the issue. The French were afforded more financial resources by the British to guard their coast. But this has not stopped similar tragedies from happening again, of course. On December 14, 2022 another four casualties were found. This time, a nearby fishing boat, as reported by *The Guardian*, managed to rescue thirty-one people from the icy water, a heroic act. Some of them were merely wearing T-shirts and were reported to have paid 5,000 euros for a place on board. The year ended with a figure of at least 45,000 persons who tried to cross in small boats, a record. On March 10, 2023, the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and the French President Emmanuel Macron entered into an additional bilateral agreement, involving 541 million euros to be allocated to stopping Channel crossings once and for all. That same month, a refurbished patrol ship, the *Armoise*, was dispatched to Boulogne-sur-Mer with an active mission—thereby also taking some pressure off the Cross's shoulders. This took place in the margins of a legislative proposal currently before British Parliament, the controversial Illegal Migration Bill, also named the Stop the Boats Bill. The then British Secretary of State for Justice, Dominic Raab, even threatened that the UK would leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) if justices at the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg prohibited the implementation of this new bill.

Human rights serve to protect individuals against states. They are needed because of the friction that can arise between individuals who claim their rights and states which do not meet their duty to warrant these rights. This is why Othillia was so upset that night, at your Le

Cercle. For the obligation to rescue people in peril at sea has a counterpart in human rights: the right to life. This right is legally laid down in Article 2 of the ECHR and, as you well know, there are good historical reasons for it being so powerfully protected. It is not altogether unthinkable, by the way, that an injured party will eventually succeed in bringing a case pertaining to facts similar to the tragedy of November 24, 2021 before the ECtHR. Othillia and I discussed it, when I talked to her on the phone after receiving her letter. She explained to me that it will be difficult, yet not impossible, to bring such a case. The reason for this is the legally complex matter involved: the British or French domestic courts would first have to address the case and issue verdicts, which could then be appealed to the ECtHR. In addition, there must be sufficient evidence, of course. Finally, the complainant would have to make a case for being subject to the jurisdiction of the country accused in relation to the facts presented.

And yet I cannot escape the impression that Dominic Raab perhaps felt rather worried when recently he voiced his threat that, if needed, the entire UK would leave the ECHR. Perhaps the ECtHR will indeed let the right to life prevail if it needs to formulate a verdict on such a case, rather than the argument of a state such as the UK, which suggests that the duty to rescue at sea has come under such great pressure in recent years, due to the large numbers of people who take the risk, that it is no longer reasonably possible to comply with it. If you have managed to read my letter up to this point without putting it aside, I encourage you to go a little further and try to imagine what a universal, fundamental *right not to drown* would amount to. You can do so using the visual illustrations I have included. For on July 19, 2021 I also took a couple of photographs of the moment we saw several small boats navigating toward Great Britain amidst the cargo ships. In the spring of 2022, I passed on one of the photos as a RAW file to the Belgian artist Els Opsomer. For me, the photos had in the meantime become emotionally charged, which is why I failed to find the methodological detachment needed. Opsomer made various prints of the photograph: lithographs in mirror image, riso prints in color, and silk prints in black and white. (fig. 13.1 and plates 20–21) In the silk print series, she combined still other sea photos and archival images of mine with photos she herself had taken, as well as footage she found. In this way, portraits of her children became intertwined with portraits of my children. Although the entire history of Western art is rife with artists who portray their loved ones as Madonna or Venus, you will probably be offended by this as well. If in 1994 a work by Marlène Dumas, *The Painter*, was thought to have paved the way, there is still a long way to go, it appears, in the domain of women who let images of their children resonate as echoes in their artistic work.

Fig. 13.1.

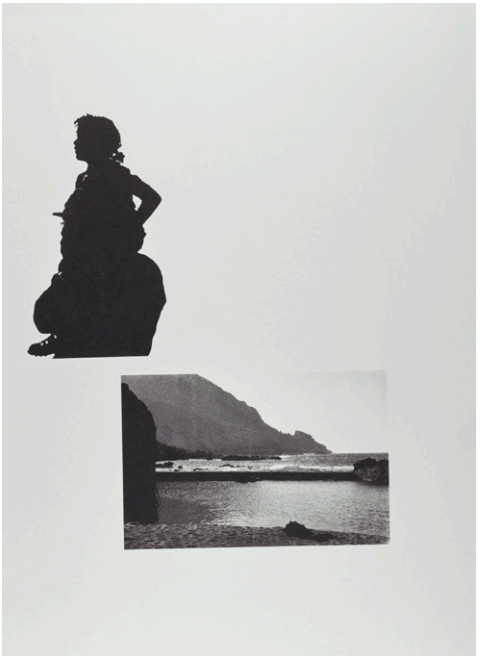
Els Opsomer, *From a dialogue between Hilde VG & elso (10.2022)*, 2022, silkscreen print, 55×72 cm (framed dimensions: 58×76 cm). © Els Opsomer. © Original photo: Hilde Van Gelder.

It is precisely for this reason that I attach a selection from the series made by Els Opsomer. They include a silk print of the picture I took on July 19, 2021, combined with a photo of Opsomer's oldest daughter. (fig. 13.2a) The father of her children is from Senegal. You can see him in another silk print with their youngest daughter on his shoulders, gazing toward the horizon. (fig. 13.2b) The combination photo below it I took on the island of La Palma, one of the arrival spots of the Canarian migration route. There is also a silk print of a brief note by Opsomer's youngest daughter, combined with a photo I took of my son as seventeen-year-old at the helm of a thirteen-meter-long sailboat somewhere near the far west corner of the EU, in the Atlantic Ocean.

(fig. 13.2c) The note reads, "I am gone / I am leaving for a while / I love you." The father of my children is from Bruges, a fact to which I briefly return below. I myself come from a family who during both World Wars experienced horrible things in our Low Countries. The message of all four of our grandparents to their grandchildren was to always "make sure you can save yourself and those who are dear to you, in particular when things get precarious."

That's why, Remco, we taught our children the art of navigating in open water—not because it was meant to be a walk in the park for them. During these past winter months, I experimented with making blueprints, as a way to sustain my artistic dialog with Els Opsomer. They are based on three negatives of still other photo-recordings I made while sailing. The choice of technique has to do with the contrast I see between the seductive, Prussian-blue color of the cyanotype and the cyanide component of the mixture I use to paint the paper to be developed. The poisoned atmosphere of the entire Channel zone is contained in these prints. The central work of the triptych shows a picture that I took of Cap Gris-Nez while observing the buildings of the meanwhile notorious coordination center from the sea. (plate 22) A boat that looks as if it were a patrol ship resolutely sails toward land. I took the photograph on August 5, 2021, sensing that something was wrong and that there would be casualties if the lax and poorly organized collaboration between the French and British coordination centers were to persist.

The other two blueprints, the left and the right panel if you like, depict our children—when younger, in 2018—at the helm of an inflatable dinghy. In one of the images, the atmosphere is light and merry. But looking carefully, you see pop up the *Mutiny* cartoon from *The Dockers' Museum* by Allan Sekula. In 1996/1998 Sekula created a series of thirty-three photos, *Deep Six | Passer au bleu*, most of them made in the Calais–Dover region (and reproduced in full in *Ground Sea*). As a response to this series, I illustrated *Ground Sea* with thirty-three doodles. That number proves to have been a premonition. I'm sure you will now understand why my memory of the radio news item on thirty-three persons on board the dinghy that capsized on November 24, 2021 continues to haunt me. In total, the sequence *Thirty-Three Blueprints for the Right not to Drown* involves eleven sets of the same three blueprints—one blueprint for every person on board. The two side panels enclose the view from the sea of the Cross, as a *pense-bête* for the painful conclusion that the privileged crew of our boat sailing under a Belgian flag, with a skipper born in Bruges, will have a guaranteed right not to drown, in sharp contrast to those who must make a superhuman effort to claim that same fundamental right. Even our accompanying dog would be rescued more quickly.



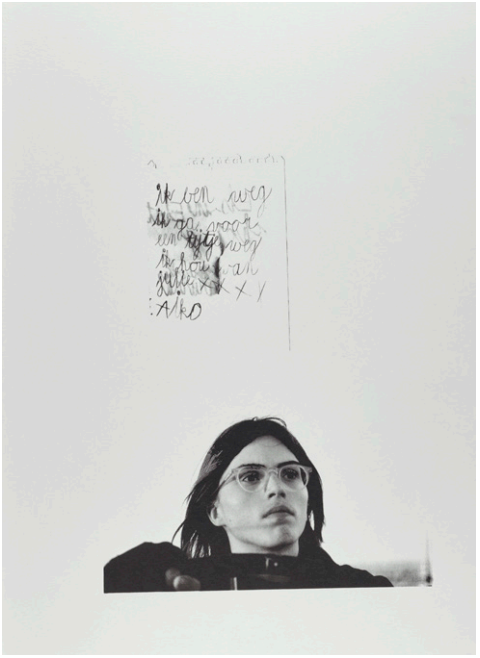


Fig. 13.2.

Els Opsomer, *From a dialogue between Hilde VG & elso (10.2022)*, 2022, three silkscreen prints, 55×72 cm (framed dimensions: 58×76 cm). © Els Opsomer. © Original bottom photos of each print: Hilde Van Gelder.

Nine triptychs comprise twenty-seven blueprints for those who did not make it, but whose bodies were found. The middle image of each of the remaining two triptychs I cut in two horizontally, to present the two parts in the form of a "less than" symbol (<)—a wide open mouth. (plate 23) These are the blueprints for the two survivors, who, like Jonah, were again spit out by the sea monster, and who are the only ones who can recount their catastrophic hours in agony. The four blueprints flanking these two opened middle panels represent the four persons reported missing. Being a mother of two young adults now, I feel strongly for the many parents across the world who, powerless, have seen their children take to sea, never to return. Imagining how today and tomorrow they will desperately look at pictures of their lost children with tears in their eyes, I decided to pay tribute to two of the four persons still missing at sea by blurring the two blueprints from these two remaining triptychs that represent my own two children joyously waving goodbye. In reference to W.G. Sebald's observations about dogs possessing the alien, wild capacity to see right through us, I left the two blueprints featuring our dog sharp. However, I mirrored one of these two images. This I did to encourage viewers to think about the topic from opposite angles, and to see more than one side to the discussion. These blueprints representing the two other missing bodies are indeed meant to look deep into our eyes.

When it comes to finding real solutions, I am not properly positioned, unfortunately. But please, never think that touring the Strait of Dover is a salon trip for us! This summer we plan to do another round of sailing in the Channel. We wish to find out how things stand. Some 5,000 persons have tried to cross the Channel in small boats since January 1, 2023. Yesterday alone, almost five hundred reported persons arrived at the British beaches, in eleven boats—a new record for this year. For now, I bid you goodbye with Mathilda Della Torre's recollection of a conversation she had in Calais with a person on the move:

> You told me that back in Greece, you used to swim in the sea, in the evening. It was your meditation. Your way of getting away from the camp. You said we all needed to learn to swim, or else we would drown.

Sincerely, Remco, if we don't force ourselves to learn how to swim together, we will all get a ducking eventually.

See you around,

Hilde

* This text was written during a residency in the Academia Belgica in Rome (March–April 2023), in the context of a sabbatical period awarded by KU Leuven. Thanks to Hannah Baader, Manon de Boer, Stefanie Diekmann and the students of her MA seminar at the University of Hildesheim, Luuk van Middelaar, Aiko Niang, Elhadj Niang, Oumi Niang, Els Opsomer, Torsten Scheid, René Smets, Dirk Snauwaert, Jonathan Stafford, Henning Trüper, Sarah Van Marcke, Sabine van Sprang, Pieter Van Reybrouck, Gommaar Van Reybrouck Van Gelder, Vivian Van Reybrouck Van Gelder, Charles Verraest, and Burkhardt Wolf.

Translation: Ton Brouwers

Suggested Reading

For an example of the passive-aggressive discourse surrounding art and migration, see: https://prix.pictet.com/cycles/space/richard-mosse (accessed on April 23, 2023).

Leuven University Press published my *Ground Sea. Photography and the Right to Be Reborn* in 2021; the Open Access e-book is available through OAPEN under a Creative Commons License CC BY-NC-ND 4.0: https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/89964.

The video of the RNLI can be consulted at: https://rnli.org/news-and-media/2022/october/18/rnli-releases-new-channel-rescue-footage-and-first-hand-crew-testimony (accessed on April 23, 2023).

For an excellent introduction to the obligation to rescue people at sea in relation to the right to life, see Irini Papanicolopulu, "The duty to rescue at sea, in peacetime and in war: a general overview," *International Review of the Red Cross*, 98, 2 (2016): 491–514.

The contributions mentioned in *Le Monde* are: Julia Pascual, "Investigation of 2021 drowning of 27 migrants in Channel shows rescue services ignored calls for help," *Le Monde*, November 13, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2022/11/14/investigation-into-2021-death-of-27-migrants-in-the-channel-shows-rescue-services-ignored-calls-for-help_6004228_7.html (accessed on April 23, 2023); Abdlehak El Idrissi and Julia Pascual, "Death of 27 migrants in Channel: Investigators consider criminal charges against French rescue services," *Le Monde*, November 21, 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/les-decodeurs/article/2022/11/22/death-of-27-migrants-crossing-the-channel-investigators-consider-criminal-charges-for-french-rescuers_6005126_8.html (accessed on April 23, 2023).

For the disaster of December 14, 2022, see: Rajeev Syal, Diane Taylor and Dan Sabbagh, "Channel deaths: desperate call from boat raised alarm for rescue operation," *The Guardian*, December 14, 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/dec/14/channel-deaths-desperate-call-from-boat-raised-alarm-for-rescue-operation (accessed on April 23, 2023).

For the numbers, see: Jessica Elgot, "Channel crossings: 45,756 people came to UK in small boats in 2022," *The Guardian*, January 1, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/01/total-of-45756-people-crossed-channel-to-uk-in-small-boats-in-2022 (accessed on April 23, 2023); and Alexandra Rogers, "Almost 45,000 migrants have entered UK since Rwanda deal was announced, analysis shows," *Sky News*, April 14, 2023, https://news.sky.com/story/almost-45–000-migrants-have-entered-uk-since-rwanda-deal-was-announced-analysis-shows-12857309 (accessed on April 23, 2023).

For a critique of the March 2023 deal between the UK and France, see the press release by the non-profit France Terre d'asile of March 10, 2023: https://www.france-terre-asile.org/communiques-presse/communiques-de-presse/sommet-franco-britannique-la-france-ne-peut-plus-rester-complice (accessed on April 23, 2023).

For the threat by Raab, see: Charles Hymas, "Britain prepared to consider leaving ECHR if it blocks illegal migration plan," *The Telegraph*, March 15, 2023, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/03/15/britain-prepared-consider-leaving-echr-blocks-illegal-migration/?utm_content=politics&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1678914414–2 (accessed on April 23, 2023).

The British Home Office keeps statistics of persons reaching the UK in small boats and publishes this information on its website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats/migrants-detected-crossing-the-english-channel-in-small-boats-last-7-days (accessed on April 23, 2023).

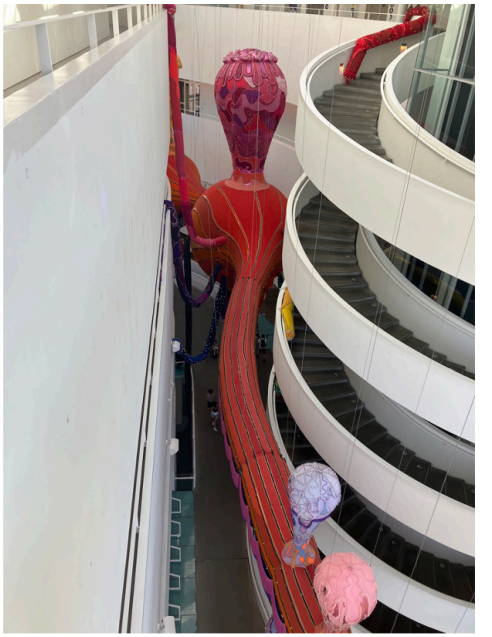
W.G. Sebald developed his argument about dogs in his "As Day and Night, Chalk and Cheese: On the Pictures of Jan Peter Tripp," in W.G. Sebald and Jan Peter Tripp, *Unrecounted*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 2003/2005), 94. See also my "As a Dog Finds a Spear," in *W.G. Sebald's Artistic Legacies: Memory, Word, and Image*, ed. L. Kovač, Ch.-M. Lerm Hayes, I. van Rijn and I. Saloul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023), 261–282.

Substantial information is available online with regard to the actual names of the victims of the shipwreck of November 24, 2021, most of which are known. See, especially, the open letter addressed to Rishi Sunak by the Registered Charity Care4Calais: https://care4calais.org/letter/ (accessed on April 23, 2023).

The letter's closing quotation is taken from @conversationsfromcalais, in *Conversations from Calais. Sharing Refugee Stories*, ed. Mathilda Della Torre (London: Welbeck Balance, 2023), 52.

Plates

Plate 1



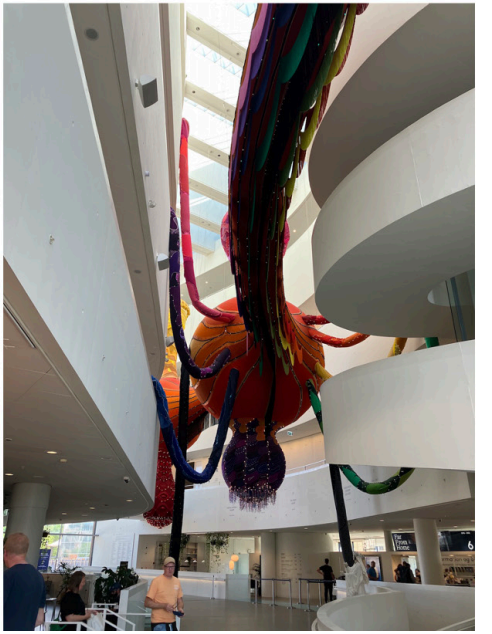


Plate 2

Plate 3

Plate 4

Plate 5

Plate 6

Plate 7

Plate 8

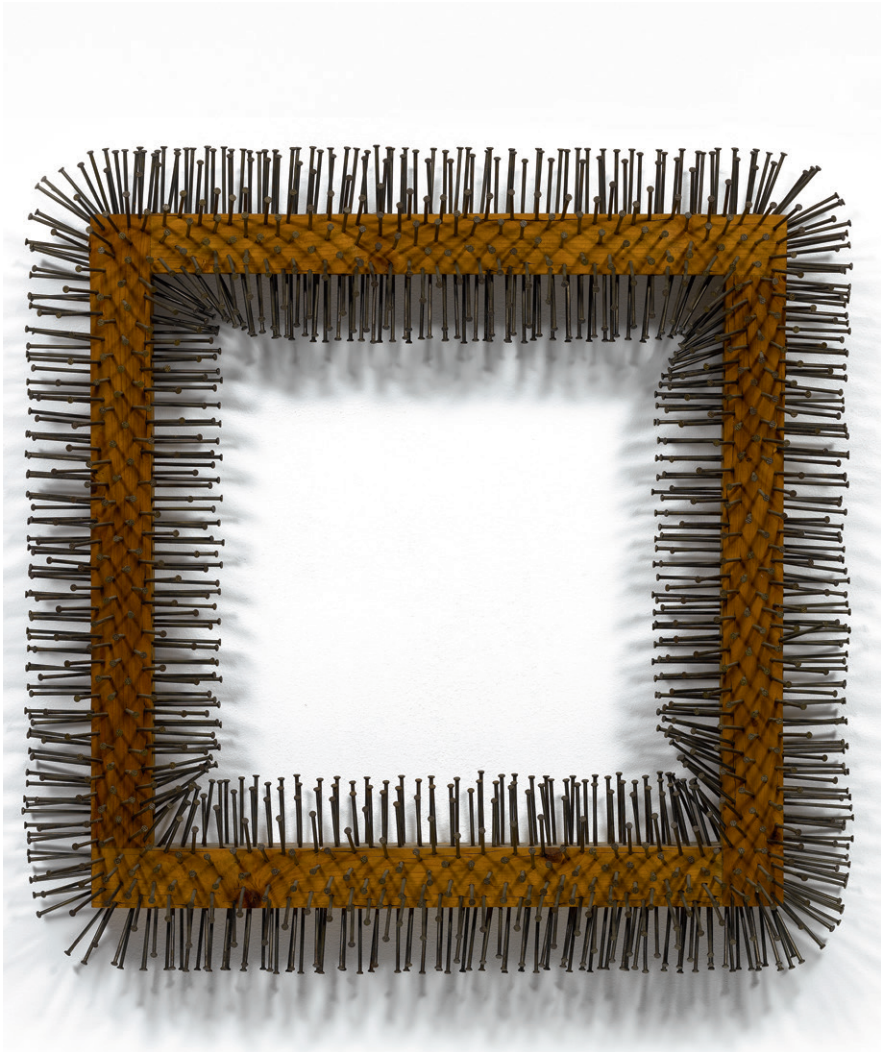


Plate 9


BORDERS KILL
FRONTEX MÖRDER
GRENZEN TÖTEN
GRENZEN TÖTEN
GRENZEN TÖTEN

Plate 10

Plate 11

Plate 12

Plate 13

Plates 14

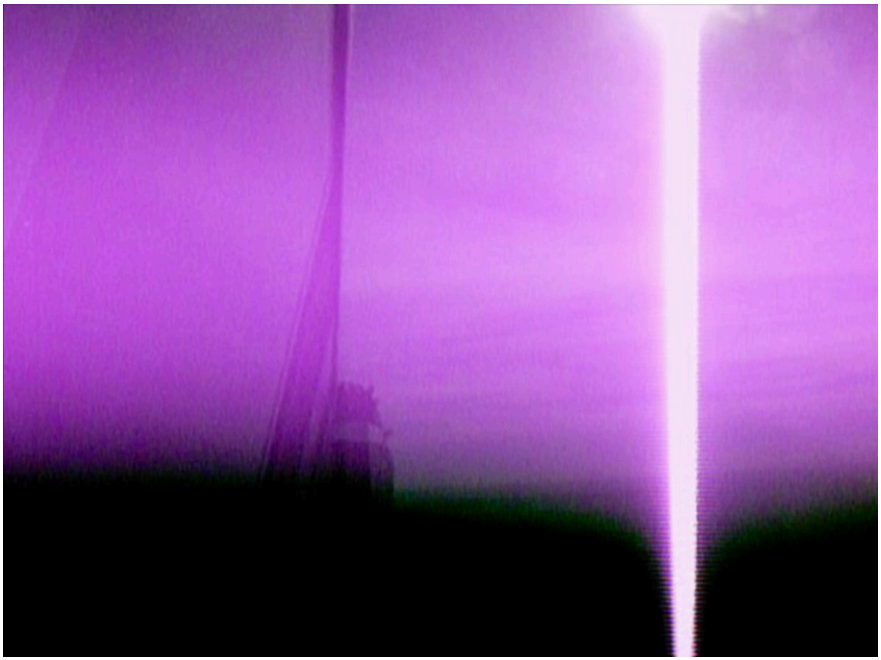


Plate 15

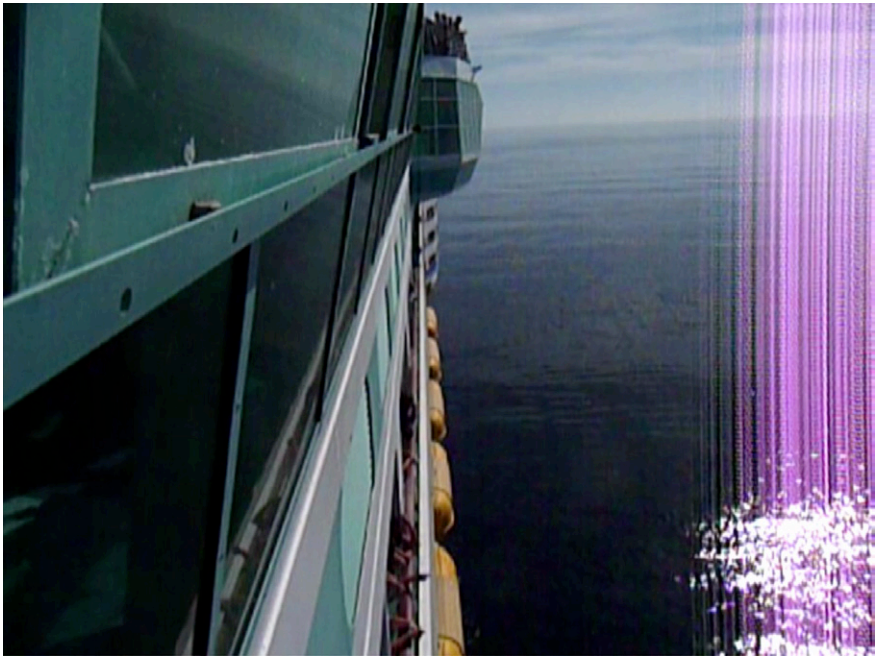


Plate 16

Plate 17

Plate 18

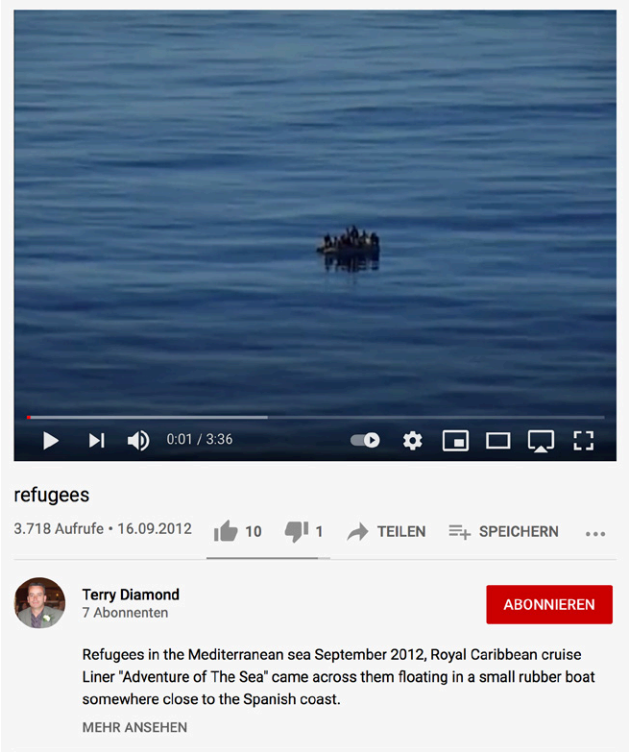


Plate 19

Plate 20

Plate 21

Plate 22

Plate 23

Plate 1
J.M.W. Turner, *Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On)*, 1840, oil on canvas, 90.8×122.6 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts.

Plate 2
Joanna Vasconcelos, *Valkyrie Rár*, 2016. ARoS Kunstmuseum, Aarhus (photographs by the author).

Plate 3
Warning sign, *Portuguese Man-of-War*, Hawaii (source: Wikimedia Commons).

Plate 4
Giulio Romano, *Navis Argo*, 1520s. Palazzo del Te, Cammera dei venti, Mantua.

Plate 5
Giulio Romano, *Pisces*, 1520s. Palazzo del Te, Cammera dei venti, Mantua.

Plate 6
Claude-Joseph Vernet, *The Shipwreck*, 1772. Public domain. Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Plate 7
J.M.W. Turner, *Snow Storm—Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, 1842. Tate Gallery, Public domain (source: Wikimedia Commons).

Plate 8
Günther Uecker, *Injured Field*, 1982, paint, nails, canvas on wood, 90×90×22 cm. Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, Inv. DKM P 389. Photograph © Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Plate 9
Günther Uecker, *Umrahmen* (*Framework*), 1972, nails on wooden frame, 80×80 cm. Lenz Schönberg collection, Tyrol, inv. UE-8. Photograph © Archiv Lenz Schönberg.

Plate 10
Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, *Die Toten kommen*, 2015. Photograph © Nick Jaussi, courtesy of Zentrum für Politische Schönheit.

Plate 11
Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea* (*Der Mönch am Meer*). bpk / Nationalgalerie, SMB / Andres Kilger.

Plate 12
Breakdown on the open sea (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (Havarie), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

Plates 13/14
Distress within the "space-whatsoever" (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (*Havarie*), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

Plate 15
The blinding spot (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (*Havarie*), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

Plate 16
Ghostly material (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (*Havarie*), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

Plates 17/18
Ghosting of the boat people (film still from Philip Scheffner, *Collision* (*Havarie*), 2016. © Philip Scheffner).

Plate 19
"Refugees" (film still from Terry Diamond's upload on YouTube).

Plate 20
Els Opsomer, *From a dialogue between Hilde VG & elso (10.2022)*, 2022, lithograph, 27.5×37.5 cm (framed dimensions: 31×41 cm). © Els Opsomer. © Original photo: Hilde Van Gelder.

Plate 21
Els Opsomer, *From a dialogue between Hilde VG & elso (10.2022)*, 2022, riso print, 65.5×99.5 cm (framed dimensions: 70×104 cm). © Els Opsomer. © Original photo: Hilde Van Gelder.

Plate 22
Hilde Van Gelder, *Thirty-Three Blueprints for the Right not to Drown*, 2023, cyanotypes, each measuring 29×39 cm. These are the three "mother images," unframed (although the image with the dog is the mirrored version). Each image has been hand-produced by the author eleven times. *From a dialogue between Hilde VG and elso (09.2023).*

Plate 23
Hilde Van Gelder, *Thirty-Three Blueprints for the Right not to Drown*, 2023, installation view of six cyanotypes numbered 1, 2, 3, and 7, 8, 9. Part of a sequence of thirty-three numbered cyanotypes, hand-produced by the author, and each measuring 29×39 cm (framed dimensions: 35×45 cm). *From a dialogue between Hilde VG and elso (09.2023).*

About the Authors

Szilvia Gellai

Szilvia Gellai attained her PhD at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology. Currently, she is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of German Studies at the University of Vienna, where she researches and teaches at the intersection of literature, media, and cultural studies. During the winter term of 2020/2021 she was a fellow in the LOEWE research cluster "Architectures of Order." She is the author of *Netzwerkpoetiken in der Gegenwartsliteratur* (Stuttgart, 2018) and co-editor of *Technisierte Lebenswelt. Über den Prozess der Figuration von Mensch und Technik* (Bielefeld, 2016). Her recent publications include the essay *Glass Scenographies: Notes on Spaces of One's Own* (Weimar, 2023) and articles relating to her habilitation project "Building types of transparency. Experiments in living under glass" in the journals *Kritische Berichte, Technikgeschichte* and *Figurationen.*

Chiara Giubilaro

Chiara Giubilaro is a researcher in geography at the Department of Humanities at the University of Palermo, Italy, and co-chair of the "Research methods in Geography" International Geographic Union Commission. She received her PhD in European Cultural Studies from the University of Palermo and the Heinrich-Heine University of Düsseldorf in 2014. She has published articles in several peer-reviewed journals such as *Geopolitics*, *ACME*, and *Cultural Geographies*. She is also the author of a monograph entitled *Corpi, spazi, movimenti. Per una Geografia critica della dislocazione* (Milan, 2016). Her main fields of interest include the geopolitics of migrations, visual culture, and critical urban studies. She is currently working on the relationship between photography and migration from a cultural geography perspective, with particular reference to the visual construction of the Mediterranean border regime and its ethical and political effects.

Alexandra Heimes

Alexandra Heimes is a research team member on the ERC project "Archipelagic Imperatives. Shipwreck and Lifesaving in European Societies since 1800" at the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural

Research (ZfL), Berlin, since 2021. Her research interests focus on the genealogy of the concept of normativity and of moral norms, the philosophy and cultural history of technology, morphology, and theory of form since the 18th century, aesthetic theory, and temporal structures in fictional narratives. Together with Eva Axer and Eva Geulen, she co-authored the monograph *Aus dem Leben der Form. Studien zum Nachleben von Goethes Morphologie in der Theoriebildung des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen, 2022). Her publications also include articles on the concept of ecology in modernity, on cosmological speculation, and an edited volume on the notion of the undead (*Suspensionen. Über das Untote*, co-edited with Carolin Blumenberg, Erica Weitzman and Sophie Witt, Paderborn, 2015).

Rafael Jakob

Rafael Jakob studied philosophy, Greek studies, computer science, and German literature at Humboldt University Berlin. From 2019 to 2024, he was an assistant to Prof. Burkhardt Wolf at the Institute of German Studies at the University of Vienna. Under the working title "Nachricht und Neuigkeit. Heinrich von Kleists Poetik der Information," he is writing his doctoral thesis on the archaeology and poetologies of the concept of information around 1800.

Johannes von Müller

Johannes von Müller studied art history and history in Berlin and Rome; he received his PhD in art history from the University of Basel. Between 2014 and 2022 he was coordinator of the research project "Aby Warburg's Legacy and the Future of Iconology" at the Warburg Institute; since 2022 he is at the department of art history at the Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel where he is responsible for the programme on "Maritime Art History". Among other topics, Johannes von Müller publishes on visual politics, the iconology of the sea and art historiography. In 2020, his monograph "Herrscherbild und Fürstenspiegel: Eine ikonische Politologie" was published by De Gruyter as part of the series "Studien aus dem Warburg-Haus".

Jörn Münkner

Since 2015 Jörn Münkner has worked at the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel as part of the Marbach Weimar Wolfenbüttel Research

Network (MWW). He explores private libraries and intellectual networks of scholars in the early modern period. Currently, he reconstructs book biographies from the collection of a professor at the Universität Helmstedt. His latest article, together with Maximilian Görmar and Hartmut Beyer, is "Digitale Exploration und hermeneutische Bewertung. Profilierung einer frühneuzeitlichen Gelehrtenfigur mittels Netzwerkanalyse am Beispiel von Leonhard Christoph Sturm (1669–1719)," *Zeitschrift für digitale Geisteswissenschaften*, 2022, DOI: 10.17175/2022_008.

Jonathan Stafford

Jonathan Stafford is a research fellow on the ERC project "Archipelagic Imperatives: Shipwreck and Lifesaving in Modern European Societies since 1800," at the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research (ZfL), Berlin. His sub-project focuses on the role of visual culture in the historical genealogies of lifesaving at sea, particularly engaging with the interrelation of technological and aesthetic experience. Working at the intersections of cultural history, critical theory, and visual culture, his research is marked by a sustained interest in the role of the sea and maritime technologies in the making of the modern world. His book *Imperial Steam: Modernity on the Sea Route to India* (Manchester, 2023) documents the 19th-century introduction of steamship travel to Britain's eastern empires, a shift embedded in a discursive nexus of technology, modernity, nature, and the global.

Henning Trüper

Henning Trüper is a senior researcher at the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research (ZfL), Berlin, where he heads the ERC project "Archipelagic Imperatives: Shipwreck and Lifesaving in Modern European Societies since 1800." He is also an associate professor in the history of ideas at the University of Oslo (on leave until 2025). After PhD study at the European University Institute, Florence, he was postdoctoral researcher at the University of Zurich and EHESS Paris, a member of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, a lecturer and associate lecturer at Technische Universität Berlin, and a core member of the Helsinki Center for Advanced Studies, before moving to ZfL in 2019. He is the author of *Topography of a Method: François Louis Ganshof and the Writing of History* (Tübingen, 2014), *Orientalism, Philology, and the Illegibility of the Modern World* (London, 2020), *Seuchenjahr* (Berlin, 2021), and *Unsterbliche Werte: Über Historizität*

und Historisierung (Göttingen, 2024). He also co-edited, together with Dipesh Chakrabary and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Historical Teleologies in the Modern World* (London, 2015).

Hilde Van Gelder

Hilde Van Gelder is professor of contemporary art history in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), where she is at present Chair of the Research Unit Archaeology, Art History, and Musicology. She is director of the Lieven Gevaert Research Centre for Photography, Art and Visual Culture (www.lievengevaertcentre.be). She is an editor of the Lieven Gevaert Series (Leuven University Press) and of RAW (Brill).

Benno Wagner

Benno Wagner is an extraordinary (apl.) professor of literary theory and modern German literature at the University of Siegen. He studied communications and literature at the Ruhr University of Bochum, ethnology in Brisbane (Queensland), and received his PhD in 1990 from the University of Siegen for a study of the political party system, media symbolism, and so-called "alternative" groups in Germany in the aftermath of the "Deutsche Herbst" (*Im Dickicht der politischen Kultur*, Munich, 1992). He subsequently has published widely about the work of Franz Kafka. From 2011 to 2022 he has taught at Chinese universities in Taipei, Beijing, and Hangzhou. In 2023 he has joined the Advisory Board of the Austrian School of Government with a research focus on organization studies and administrative history.

Nora Weinelt

Nora Weinelt is a postdoctoral researcher at the Chair of Comparative Literature at the University of Augsburg. She holds an MA in comparative literature, Italian, and art history from LMU Munich. In 2020, she received her PhD from the Humboldt University of Berlin for a thesis on modern conceptualizations of failure, for which she also won the Merkur Dissertation Prize in 2021. Recent publications include the monograph *Figuren des Versagens. Poetik eines sozialen Urteils* (Berlin, 2023), a paper on Surrealist writer Nora Mitrani (forthcoming), and a paper entitled "'Do you recognize me?' Notes on the temporality of the surface in *Twin Peaks*" (German version 2020, English version forthcoming).

Burkhardt Wolf

Burkhardt Wolf is professor of modern German literature/literary theory and media theory at the University of Vienna and founder/main applicant of the WEAVE research group "Bureaugraphies. Administration After the Age of Bureaucracy." His main research areas include: discourse history of violence, economy, and governmentality; poetics of affect; cultural and media history of seafaring; cultural techniques and literary history of administration; and media aesthetics of film. His recent books include: *Handbuch Literatur und Ökonomie* (co-edited with Joseph Vogl, Berlin/New York, 2019); *Sea Fortune. Literature and Navigation* (trans. Joel Golb, vol. 10 of *Paradigms. Literature and the Human Sciences*, Berlin/Boston, 2020) (English version of: *Fortuna di mare. Literatur und Seefahrt*, Zürich/Berlin, 2013); *Untergang und neue Fahrt. Schiffbruch in der Neuzeit* (co-authored with Andreas Bähr, Peter Burschel and Jörg Trempler, Göttingen, 2020); *Teilweise Musil. Chapter commentaries on the 'Man without Qualities'* – second volume: *Aktenzeichen MoE – Bürokratie* (co-edited with Peter Plener, Berlin, 2020), and third volume: *Bauform und Lebensform – erzählte Architektur* (co-edited with Roland Innerhofer, Berlin, 2022); *Das Formular* (co-edited with Peter Plener and Niels Werber, Berlin, 2021); *Das Protokoll* (co-edited with Peter Plener and Niels Werber, Berlin, 2023); and *Akten* (co-edited with Peter Plener, Berlin, 2024).

Colophon

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