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At sea

Katherine Spindler

Objects:

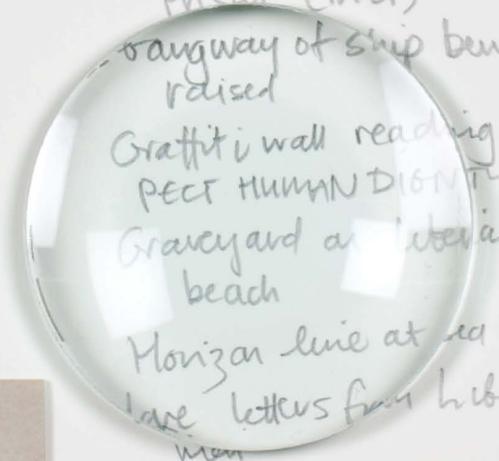
- Air vents
- Barnacles from the hulls of ships
- Binoculars
- Blenders
- Candles
- Clock mechanisms
- Condolence cards
- Coloured pieces of paper
- Dust from blasting done on ships at dry dock
- Dried prawn found at dry dock
- Door
- Electric fans
- Flashing LED lights
- Fishing net from local National Port Authority
- Fish tank & air pump
- Flip book
- Fold out story books
- Fold out paper houses
- Glass bottles
- Glass slides
- Glow in the dark pebbles
- Handbook from the Port Authority
- Holograms
- Mirrors
- Kaleidoscopes
- Knots
- Lamps
- Light boxes
- Magnifying glasses
- Noble mechanism
- Model boat
- Mooning line from National Port Authority

- Tools & mechanisms for movement
- Error ball with mechanism for rotation
- Muscle shells from hulls of ships
- Musical mechanisms
- Musical boxes
- Musical scores
- Musical sheets (blank)
- Critical music postcards
- Fluorescent pigment
- Map of Liberia water
- Praxinoscopes
- Rolls of grey vinyl
- Shipping light
- Sky lantern
- Sparklers
- Thaumatrope
- Torches
- Touch lights
- Touch lamp
- Wooden boxes of different sizes
- Wooden dolls house kit
- 3D glasses



Photographs:

- Billboard stating Charles Taylor's innocence
- Billboard reading 'all the best entertainment in front of dilapidated buildings'
- Boulders on beach
- Buoy
- Building sites
- Burns victims
- Cabin on ship
- Ceci's beach
- Corridors on ship
- Cooper's beach
- Cranes
- Docked ship
- Ethen Johnson - Sirleaf
- Eye surgery
- Freud in Monrovia Central Prison (MCP)
- gangway of ship being raised
- Graffiti wall reading 'RESPECT HUMAN DIGNITY'
- Graveyard at Liberian beach
- Horizon line at sea
- Large letters from Liberian
- Prison
- Note on a cabin door reading 'I am not the American Dream'

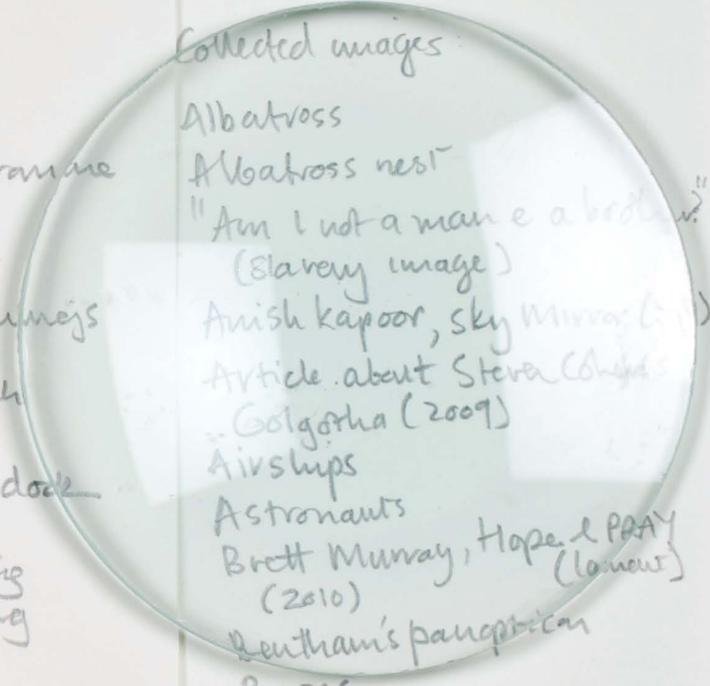


- Mooning lines
- Monrovia at night
- Monrovia skyline
- Moving possessions from one ship to another
- Oil lanterns at night
- People leaning over railings at Deck 8 of ship
- Piles of rubbish on beach
- Pinned ships
- Rocks and rubbish in dock
- Rowing boats
- Scaffolding for building
- Ship at sea bunkering
- Seascape
- Sea while sailing
- Ship in the dock
- Ship's school being refurbished
- Ship being dismantled
- Ship topping over
- Ship sailing into harbour
- Shipping containers piled high up in port
- Shipping containers being moved by cranes onto trucks
- Shipping containers being loaded aboard ship
- Swimming pool onboard ship
- Tombstones
- Tugboat in harbour
- UN camp at Freeport
- UN guards in Liberia
- UN vans
- UN watchtowers

Titanic. The name of the ship which famously sank when it hit an iceberg on its maiden voyage in 1912. The name comes from the Titans, twelve giants of classical mythology, but the word has long been used to describe anything massive. In a speech on 22 May 1909, Winston Churchill said: 'We have arrived at a new time . . . and with this new time strange methods, huge forces and combinations - a Titanic world - have spread all around us.'

Collected images

- Albatross
- Albatross nest
- "Am I not a man & a brother?" (Slavery image)
- Anish Kapoor, Sky Mirror (2005)
- Article about Steven Spielberg's Golgotha (2009)
- Airships
- Astronauts
- Brett Murray, Hope & PRAY (2010)
- Bentham's panopticon
- Buoys
- Building sites
- Captain's notice board
- Caves
- Cai Guo-Quang, Transient Rainbow (2002)
- Camping tent lit from the inside at night
- Chris Burden, Ghost Ship (2005)
- Christian Boltanski, Ombres (1986)
- Christian Boltanski, The Reserve of Dead Swiss (1990)
- Christian Boltanski, Personnel (2010)
- Chun Yim, Constellation no. 3 (2009)
- Collapsing monuments
- Cranes
- Curtains
- Diorama
- Docked ship
- Do-Ho Suh, Seoul home / LA home (1999)



At sea

Katherine Spindler (SPNKAT003)

Documentation and commentary on the body of practical work submitted for the degree of Masters of Fine Art.

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

2011

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: _____



INTRODUCTION

This body of work is comprised of individual pieces that differ in media and scale. While I have presented them with curatorial care, paying attention to the overall sensory experience of the viewer, each work is discrete and the collection is less an installation than a series of linked and related encounters. The generally dark space of the gallery is animated in places by the presence of lights that move, pulse and disappear. Rather than conjure a specific place and time, my intention has been to suggest and evoke, allowing the works to engage with the darkness and the light, and to vivify them so that they appear to have an internal life, at once evanescent and in a state of dormancy. The works are grouped into spaces, and include prints, paper cutouts, illuminated cases and pieces focused on light and dust.

This MFA includes both an exhibition and this book. All the displayed works find their origin in an eighteen-month period of tightly controlled living on a hospital ship in West Africa, and the story of this time forms the basis of the book. In addition the intense and emotional experience of caring for a friend in the last few weeks of her life brought into focus thoughts of living and dying that seemed to be reflected in much of what I encountered on board. The ship offered me, for a time, both a distance from an ordinary life, and a way to think about its significant waypoints, and much that the ship meant to me and to my co-inhabitants is worked into the details of the artworks I have made.

The ship is a space that holds many contradictions. It is both a curtailed area of confinement and a liminal space that moves across great distances, escaping the confinements of life on land. The ship is an isolated universe containing a world that moves to its own rhythms and rules that yet also contains a community of people with connections to many other times and places. The ship cannot be thought of without the sea. It is both at one with the sea and a protection against it. It is *at sea* that the ship finds both its meaning and its end, and the term 'at sea' with its multiple meanings has become the title of this project.

Many of my thoughts about the ship (and the sea) have been shaped by the writings of Foucault and Harrison, and writers such as Conrad, Coleridge, Woolf, Murdoch, Hemmingway, Melville, Martell and Banville. In particular I have drawn on Robert Harrison's text *Dominion of the Dead* (2003) that speaks about the marklessness of the sea – its inhumanity – literally its inability to be changed by human life, in contrast to the earth which allows for monuments and buildings and the marking of graves that speak to lives lived. The cyclical processes of life, decay, death and dust that are associated with the land differ from those of the sea, as McGonagle suggests, "Nothing seems transitory: even if the ships are still afloat rather than sunken, their perpetual decaying is plainly more purgatorial than transient" (McGonagle 2009).

For me the ship was a place of service and introduced me to a world very different from my own. I saw the ship (or perhaps only now see the ship) as a means of confinement and containment, not only for the ill who came onboard to receive medical care, but also for those living on board for whom the ship had become their city, and for some their world. The ship also functioned as a vehicle of escape, for those volunteers seeking to ascribe greater meaning to the work of their hands through enabling the alleviation of others' pain, as well as an escape for those battling ailments that would otherwise mark their fate. As much as the ship came to symbolize hope and healing to the people in Liberia, it too was subject to an unremitting process of decay. I came to think of the vessel as a body, world and grave.

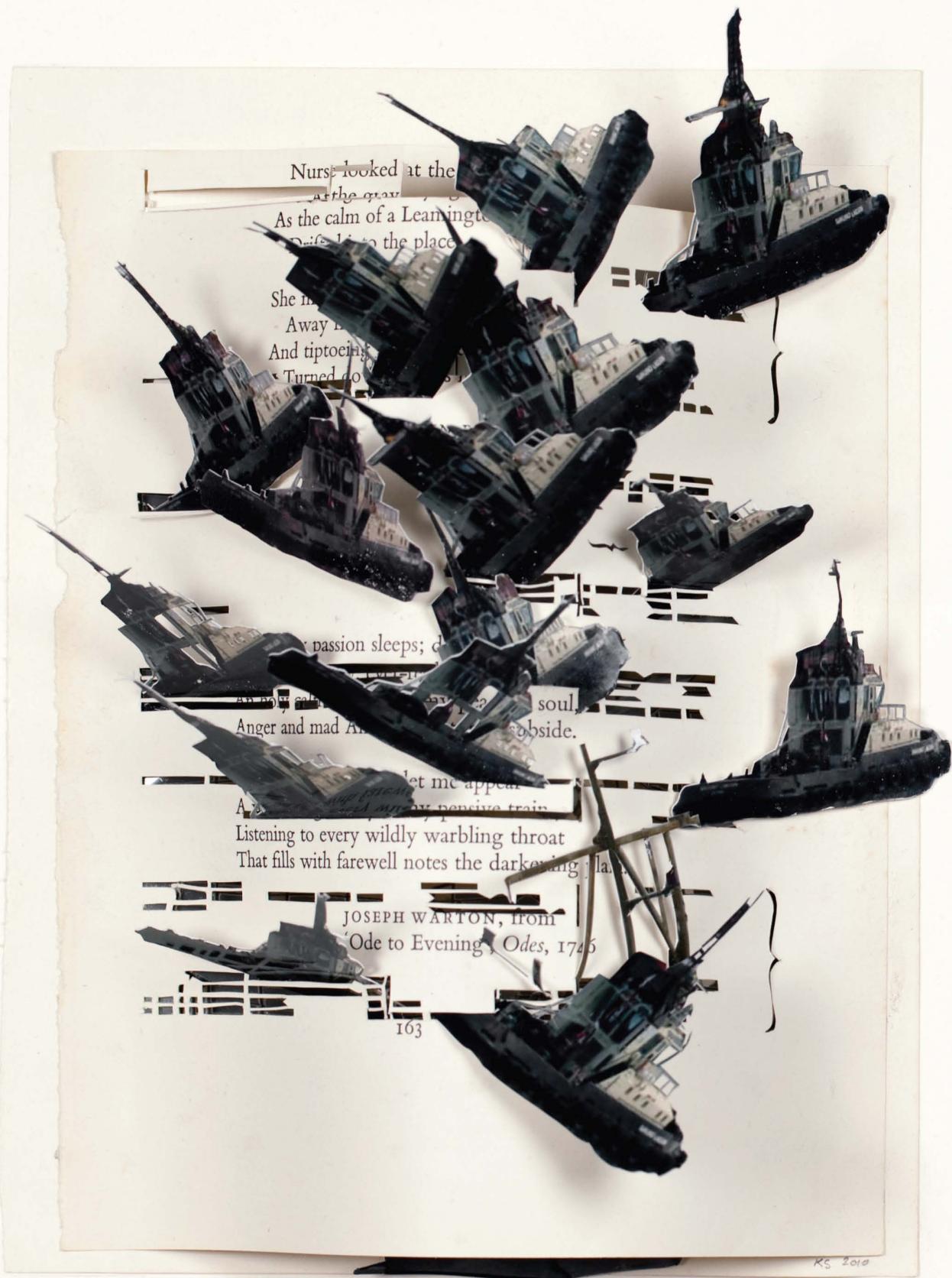
The experience of this ship and the years of reflection following my return home attracted me to other artists whose work articulates the intermediary space between life and death, and who employ the use of light and shadow and animation (at times) to evoke an emotional response from the viewer. These works, as well as my own photographs, notes, and a mass of other collected images and objects surrounded me as I worked on this project and insistently influenced the works I have made. These – my own works – have taken several different forms and in the end I have not produced a body of work and a dissertation, but rather a body of work and this book which is less an exegesis of the works included in the exhibition than it is a reflection of both my working process and the experiences, images and ideas that gave rise to it. I have tried to present the ambiguities of 'the ship', the paradoxes it embodies and its source as the inspiration for my work while at the same time hinting at its rich resonance in terms of both maritime histories and the literature it has generated. I have in no way been comprehensive, rather gathering fragments from many sources that have amplified my own concerns.

The narrative of my own ship experience runs throughout this book and is interwoven with images, small pieces of text (reflecting thoughts about confinement, escape, decay, and dust), and a discrete description of the works I have made. Initially the narrative did not appear to be central to this project, but in the process of writing it up and assembling this book it has found its place at the heart of it. This project is a tribute to my friends Janine and Marjolijn, whose deaths hemmed in this project.

I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Pippa Skotnes, for her interest in my work, and for her guidance, patience and encouragement throughout this project. She has always shared of her time, knowledge and insight generously with me and for that I am most grateful. Thank you too to the director of Michaelis School of Fine Art, Stephen Inggs, and to the school's academic staff for their support and input. In particular I would like to thank Jane Alexander, Virginia MacKenny and Penny Siopis who generously gave of their time to meet with me to share their thoughts about my work. To the administrative staff, technical support staff and library staff at the University of Cape Town, my gratitude. Thank you to my colleagues, especially Natasha Norman, Lauren Palte, Josh Ginsburg and Nina Liebenburg the rich and open exchange of thoughts and ideas during our weekly meetings. Thank you to all of my friends, in particular, Leasha Love, Andrea Steer and Cara van der Westhuizen for all of their help, support and care. Lastly I would like to thank my parents for their constant encouragement, enthusiasm and financial and emotional support.

I gratefully acknowledge generous financial assistance from the National Research Foundation, and from the following scholarships at the University of Cape Town: Katrine Harries Memorial Bursary, Maclver Scholarship, Jules Kramer Fine Art Travel Scholarship, Jules Kramer Fine Art Materials Award and Masters Research Scholarship.





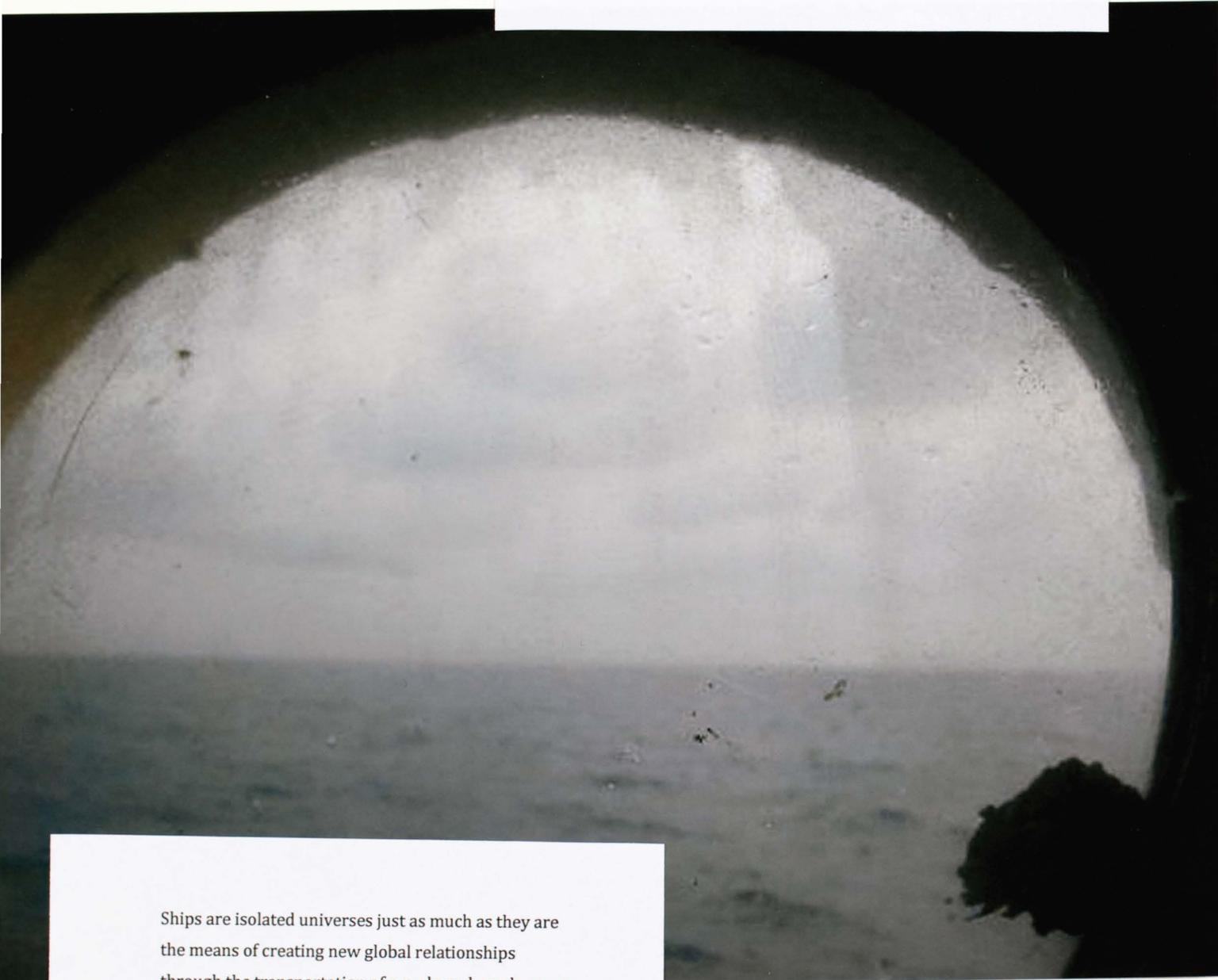
To absent friends and ships at sea¹

From February 2007 to June 2008 I lived aboard a hospital ship docked in Freeport, Monrovia and served the people of Liberia following their fourteen-year civil war (between 1989 and 2004). This experience has profoundly affected both my life and my work. The fragile state of the country at the time placed serious restrictions on daily freedoms and challenged the way in which I was accustomed to interacting with the world. The ship functioned as a place to confine the ill and restore them to health and, in certain special cases, a place where they came to die.

I first became interested in the ship when I came into contact with several volunteer crewmembers in Johannesburg when I was a teenager. The ship belonged to a fleet of hospital ships called Mercy Ships. These ships sail to third world nations that are in need of medical assistance, and by invitation of the government. The ships are equipped with specialised medical equipment and are staffed by professional volunteers from around the world who fund their own stays. Ten years after I came into contact with the volunteers in Johannesburg, I heard a radio interview with a local talk show radio host in which an elderly woman described her first visits to Liberia with the ship and relayed several stories about the child soldiers she cared for. I too was eager to contribute to the relief of others' pain and fear and discomfort. At the time of this radio interview in 2005, one of the ships belonging to the fleet, the *Anastasis*, had docked in Cape Town harbour and for several weeks was open to the public to tour. I queued for two and a half hours before I climbed onboard the ship, and trailed through its narrow passageways into its operating theatres, cabins, machine room and cargo hold along with over 20,000 other visitors in Cape Town. I filled out an application to join the ship that day, unsure whether it would be possible to afford such an endeavour as volunteers paid a monthly crew fee, in US dollars, to work onboard.

¹ Adapted from a traditional routine toast drunk after dinner in wardrooms on Sundays, *to absent friends, and those at sea*.

CONFINEMENT



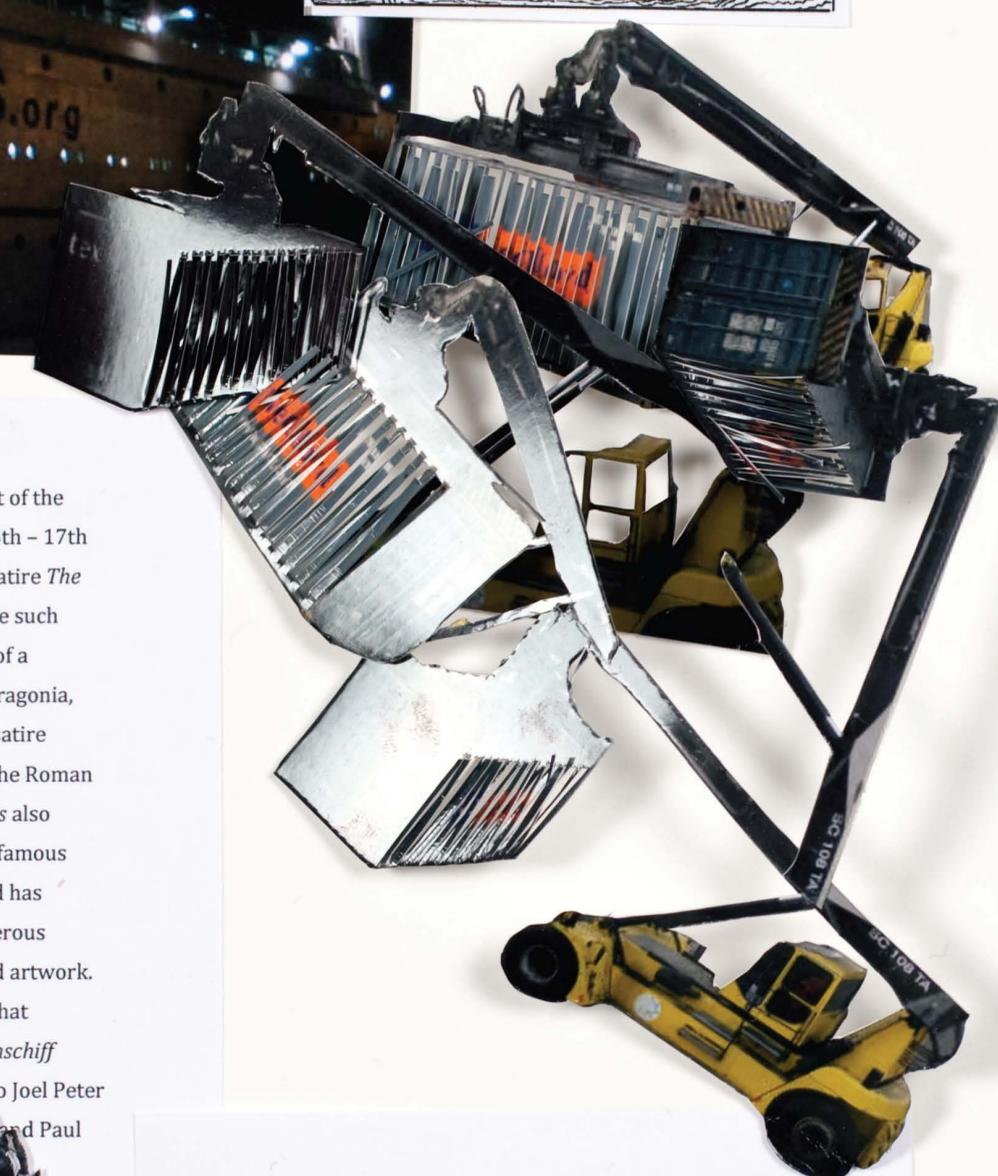
Ships are isolated universes just as much as they are the means of creating new global relationships through the transportation of people and goods across the oceans. Foucault, for example, in *Madness and civilization* (2000) described the practice of sending mad people away on ships. This practice was popular during the time of the Renaissance and represented Europe's symbolic voyage in search of reason. At times, sailors navigating on ships that bore mad people away became overwhelmed by their presence and "disembarked these bothersome passengers sooner than they had promised..." (Foucault 1977: 8). The madmen, though, on wide and open seas, were confined by the vessel as well as by their own malady.

Previously known as the *Victoria*, the ship was built by the Italian government in 1953 and had functioned as a passenger ship and cargo liner. The *Victoria* was purchased (at scrap value) by Mercy Ships in 1978 and was renamed *Anastasis*, Greek for resurrection. By the time I toured the *Anastasis* 27 years later, the ship was almost at the end of its working life and plans had been made for her sail to a ship graveyard in Alang, India.

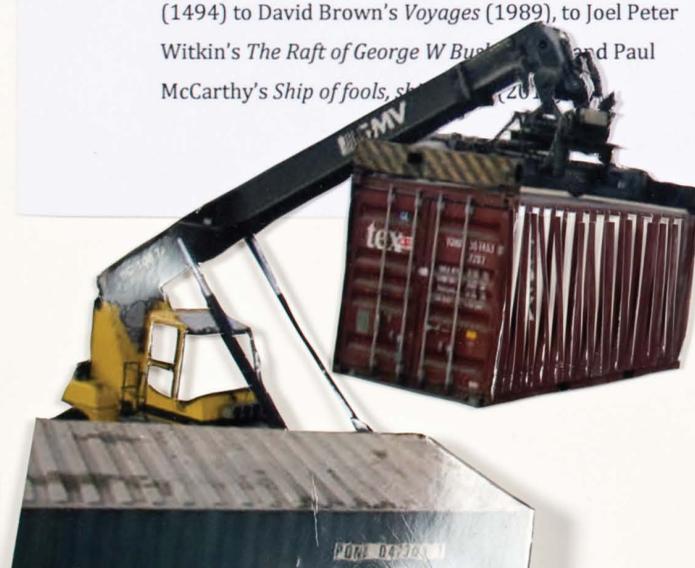
The *Anastasis* would soon be replaced by an old Danish rail ferry that had been gutted and refitted as a hospital ship with six operating theatres and a 68-bed ward. The refitting project would be the most extensive of its kind in the UK (costing about \$62 million) and would render the ship capable of doubling the annual medical capacity of the *Anastasis*. The ship had been donated by the Balcraig Foundation, which had also contributed to its refitting along with the Oak Foundation, multiple corporate gifts-in-kind, and individual donors. Previously known as the *Droning Ingrid* the ship was renamed the *Africa Mercy* by Dame Norma Major in 2000 (Ireland, 2007).

I visited the *Africa Mercy* for the first time during its refitting in the A & P Shipyard in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2006. There seemed to be a shortage of jobs in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and those contracted to work on the ship were fearful of having no job when the refitting was completed – this is one of the many reasons for the extended delay of the ship's departure. The ship's administrative staff had the impossible task of communicating projected departure dates for the hundreds of volunteer crew members who were waiting to sail with the ship to West Africa; many of these professionals had quit their jobs and packed up their busy lives only to find the ship's departure dates repeatedly delayed. This volunteer crew included medical professionals (nurses, specialised surgeons, doctors, radiologists, physiotherapists, etc.), as well as engineers, bankers, teachers for the onboard school, IT specialists, chefs, a hairdresser, postal clerk, and a purser. In addition to the many medical procedures onboard, volunteers initiated and worked in projects on land. These included medical and dental clinics, community health education and HIV/AIDS intervention, water and sanitation projects and well drilling, construction of hospitals, clinics, schools and orphanages, agriculture and various micro-enterprise projects.

² Dame Norma Christina Elizabeth Major, the wife of the former British Prime Minister, Sir John Major.



There is a rich literature on the banishment of the insane, fools and others in Europe in the 15th – 17th centuries. German poet Sebastian Brant's satire *The ship of fools* (*Das Narrenschiff*) (1494) is one such example, the poem describing the journey of a hundred fools aboard a ship bound for Narragonia, fool's paradise (Greenberg 2007: 92). The satire unsparingly highlighted the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church at the time. *The ship of fools* also formed the subject of Hieronymus Bosch's famous painting by the same title (1490–1500) and has subsequently informed the subject of numerous creative works, including poetry, music and artwork. Such works range from Dürer's woodcuts that accompanied the first edition of *Das Narrenschiff* (1494) to David Brown's *Voyages* (1989), to Joel Peter Witkin's *The Raft of George W Bush* (2001) and Paul McCarthy's *Ship of fools*, sh...



In England during the 18th and 19th centuries special ships (or, traditionally, hulks) functioned as floating prisons, confining convicts that awaited transportation to penal colonies. The conversion of ships into prison hulks by removing rudders, masts and sails rendered the vessels unseaworthy so that they retained only their ability to float. The internal structure of the ship was also often reconfigured to accommodate convicts and, occasionally, prisoners of war behind bars.

I too was delayed by about a year and found myself unexpectedly living and working in London while waiting to be notified that the ship was finally ready to sail. After settling into a full-time job in London, signing a lease on a flat, and braving an unexpected winter in cotton clothing, I received a call from the principal of the school on board the *Anastasis*. One of their teachers on board had had to return home immediately due to an unexpected family crisis and he hoped I would be able to fill her position promptly. The conversation ended abruptly as the satellite connection failed. Within ten days I had been released from my job and the lease on my flat, and after boxing up many of my possessions and shipping them home to South Africa, I boarded a plane for Ghana.

I arrived in Ghana a week prior to the *Anastasis'* departure for Liberia. I was driven to the port city of Tema in unbearable heat at midnight and could see the ship glowing at the end of the dock, appearing and disappearing as we wove through a multitude of containers piled high into the air in the port. I climbed the gangway in eager anticipation of what I thought then would be a six-month stay, and was taken down into the bowels in the aft of the ship to my cabin, a long and narrow room that was painted pale yellow and had several portholes looking out onto the surface of the water. There I met my cabin mates: Brianna from Alaska, who was training to be a nurse, and Kristen, an Austrian-American who worked in the Community Development Services, one of the ship's on shore teams and who, being the only woman on this team, received uncountable love letters and proposals from Liberian men.

The department of hospitality on the ship had prepared my space, furnished with one narrow cupboard and an equally narrow bunk-bed on which an origami ship and pack of information had been placed. The colour of the duvet matched that of the walls and I remember feeling disappointed by this. At a later point I pleaded with those in charge of the linen to perform an exchange and found myself with a beautifully crafted quilt and some soft sheets that I'm told had previously belonged to a Royal visitor.

The prison hulk, the convict ship transported convicts from a place of conviction to banishment. Between 1788 and 1850 the English transported 162 000 convicts to Australia in 806 of these ships, though prior to their arrival the land was already occupied by hunter-gatherer aborigines (Mander 2006: 362). The convicts, sailors and marines of the first eleven of these ships, the First Fleet, are acknowledged as the Founders of Australia. Similarly, when freed American and Caribbean slaves were transported on slave ships to the place they called Liberia (land of the free) by the American Colonization Society in the early 1820s, the land was already inhabited by sixteen different ethnic groups.

Slave ships were made from converted cargo ships and served to confine and transport newly purchased slaves across the Atlantic to Europe and the Americas. After the abolition of slavery in Great Britain in 1808, slave ships became illegal vessels and were subject to seizure by Naval authorities; upon being seized and condemned as "prizes of war" they became the immediate property of the Crown (Adderley 2006: 25). In other instances, slave ships captured by pirates became more powerful than those of the navy, as with the *Whydah*. After being built as a slave ship in London in 1715, the *Whydah* was captured by Samuel Bellamy ('Black Bellamy') on her return to London from her maiden voyage (Konstam 2007: 137). Bellamy appointed this vessel as his flagship, increasing onboard weaponry by sixteen guns (from ten to twenty-six), thereby rendering the vessel extremely powerful (Konstam 2007: 137). The ship was wrecked off Cape Cod in a storm in 1717 and its wreckage not discovered until 1984 (Konstam 2007: 137).

The notion of a vessel's presence in certain named waters is dependent on the supposition that waters can be owned and borders defined. This, however, remains an impossible task as ships continue to be lost at sea and evade capture by sailing in and out of policed zones. Nonetheless, naval authorities continue to police the waters and national port authorities (such as our own in Cape Town) have lock-ups in which to physically imprison crew of illegal vessels and crews that have failed to pay the fees of the local port authority or port authorities in the world.



Record keeping
written accounts

1829-30

MAY THEY WHOSE LOT THIS LOG TO KEEP
BE WORTHY OF THE TASK COMPLETE
AND NEVER LEAVE A SENTENCE OUT
WHICH SHLD OCCUR THE VOYAGE ABOUT-
BUT ALWAYS TRUE, AND FAITHFUL BE
IN EVERY PORT; AS WELL AT SEA
AND EVERY LAND THAT SHOULD APPEAR
MARK DOWN THEIR BEARINGS & DISTANCES HERE.
LIKEWISE THE WINDS AS THEY PREVAIL
AND WHETHER SNOW, RAIN OR HAIL
ROCKS & SHOALS YOU MUST INCLUDE
THEIR VIEWS, DEPTHS, & LATITUDE 18-19

A ditty
on a log
(USS)

Life at sea a
exhausting ph
or tedious. fo
Standing water
constant hor
nevertheless, a
unpredictably
reflection



I have battled the ocean's storms for
twenty years & am aware that
no language can give reality to
the story of my experience 23



During my first few days onboard most of the crew were very busy preparing the ship for the imminent sail. Tasks were numerous and varied and included: filling up the water tanks; disinfecting the hospital; loading fresh produce; saying farewells; embarking new crew and at the last moment repairing the engine. The school in which I was to teach was on holiday for these few days and I attended orientation meetings for new crew and completed a list of tasks around ship that involved meeting the crew nurse, the banker, and those in charge of administration. I was given a key to my cabin, C1 (that was always to be kept locked), an ID card, water bottle and other ship paraphernalia.

Arriving onboard I had been greeted by an elderly and zealous American woman, the vice-principal, who had tasked herself with readying the school (comprised of 80 students and 10 teachers) for international accreditation. The previous teacher in my position seemed to have fallen behind extensively and the vice-principal had been teaching in her place since her departure. She had prepared lesson plans for the following week for me and these were gathered together in a pile on my desk. My classroom was situated away from the rest of the school on the Aft Deck and was small and neat with several circular portholes and double doors that opened out onto a wide view of the sea and a hand-built wooden jungle gym. The class I was to teach was very small and included the chief maxilla-facial-surgeon's son and the daughters of the captain, purser and dental surgeon. Classes took place during weekdays and continued during sailing. The school followed an American system though students, as with the rest of the crew, were of differing nationalities. During breaks children enjoyed volleyball games on the deck and the last of the stock of Ghanaian ice creams from the tuck shop. There was also a small swimming pool onboard, though swimming was prohibited whilst sailing (because of the waves caused by the pitching and rolling of the ship).

After experiencing trouble with the engines and having to remake and refit a part, the ship set sail for Liberia in the early hours of a morning in February. Sailing was a restful time for those whose work ceased during sails and the time was used to catch up on sleep, enjoy friends and send news home. Crew attended various briefings relating to Liberia's history and security status and watched several documentaries on the subject of the recent civil wars.

Contents

• Yonder

I

The ship has also constituted a means to get away and to escape dangerous or unpleasant places and situations. Illuminated and glowing out on the open seas, the ship appeared as a kind of floating island, a site of curiosity as well as a place of refuge. Joseph Conrad described the ship at sea as “a fragment detached from the earth” that every now and then would spot “another wandering white speck, burdened with life” (Conrad 1897: 29).



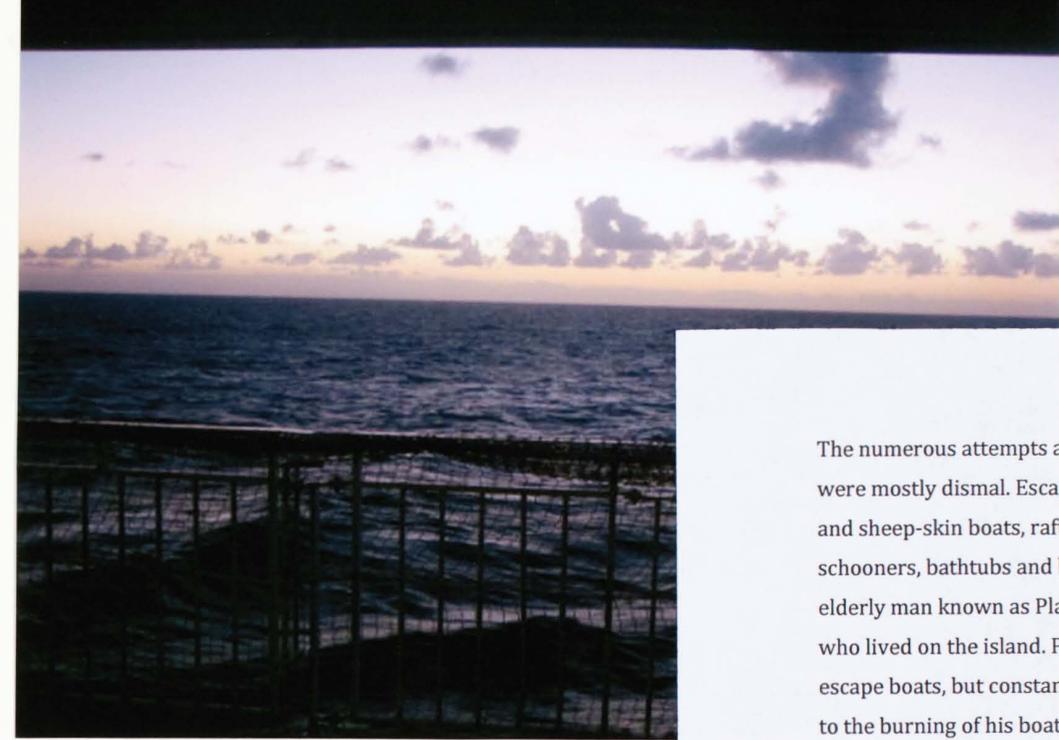
The voyage took about a week and the seas were relatively calm. During sailing, water restrictions were implemented and included the banning of laundry and limited showers. There were very few baths on board, except for a few in the hospital below the living quarters. Many of the crew took sea sickness tablets in advance and the galley provided a constant supply of cream crackers and apple puree to help fend off the waves of nausea. My doctor had performed sea sickness tests on me before I left South Africa and was sure I would not suffer from it, so I refrained and was quite well. The tests were entertaining and had involved marching on the spot and covering my eyes (sea sickness is brought on by the movement of the ship while sailing and is characterized by nausea (*naus* is Greek for ship), fatigue and sometimes vertigo). Though reference to the horizon helps one to maintain one's sense of balance, walking down the corridors of the ship I would often end up leaning flat against the wall, unable to predict the listing of the ship. At times it felt as if I could defy gravity as my steps were made deeper (and shallower) by the rocking of the ship from side to side. Access to the bow of the ship was restricted when sailing because of the waves that would crash right over it, and those working there were strapped into safety harnesses. When the waters were calm enough, as on the first evening of our sail, the captain would invite the crew to watch the sunset from the bow. There were often dolphins swimming alongside the bow of the ship, at times leaping out of the water. I was astounded to see a flying fish in the air for over half a minute on one occasion. An injured bird had been found nestled under one of the vehicles on board and was taken care of by a compassionate crew member until the ship docked. The stars seemed larger and the sky blacker on the open seas at night, and the water was sometimes brilliantly phosphorescent.



Upon arrival in Freeport we were met with ceremonial dances and a multitude of choirs whose voices were projected and distorted over PA systems as each sung their particular song, at times simultaneously. The crew leaned over the rails on various decks and joined with them in singing their national anthem (learned during the sail), *All hail, Liberia, hail*. The port authorities granted our director permission to come ashore, where she was seated next to Liberia's vice-president, Joseph Boakai, and amongst scores of national delegates who were there for the ceremony and welcoming speeches. The rest of the crew remained on board until all passports had been stamped and cleared. Though not a usual practice, the repeated visits to Liberia had resulted in the name of the ship being painted on the dock wall and this made us feel welcome. This was the ship's third visit, by invitation of the president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, since the end of the war. Although Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was unable to attend that day (because of the ship's delayed departure and thus arrival), she visited the ship on multiple occasions during our stay to meet with her people and to speak to the crew. Each time she addressed us she would lay aside her written speech to speak more conversationally with the crew whose affections she readily won. She knew how the ship had become a beacon of hope for those on land and recalled the sadness that filled her people each time the ship departed. For those who were very ill or needed surgery the ship was their only hope. For others, the ship was a means to flee the difficult and unsanitary living conditions in Liberia. Many Liberian people were employed to work on the ship during the day, and several remained on board as volunteers as the ship sailed to neighbouring countries.

The ship was docked at Freeport on Bushrod Island in Monrovia. Monrovia is the capital of Liberia, Africa's oldest republic (1847). Liberia was founded in 1822, by the American Colonization Society, in a movement to repatriate freed American and Caribbean slaves. Upon their arrival the freed slaves established the settlement Christopolis, later renamed Monrovia in 1824 after James Monroe, then President of the United States.

Gazing across Table Bay, Robben Island is in a constant line of view and serves as a local expression of this complex of ideas around confinement, isolation and madness. The island, as with the ship, is an illuminated space surrounded by water and beyond reach. As with other prison islands such as Alcatraz and St Helena Island, the mainland served as both a site of hope and longing for those incarcerated on the island. By contrast, for those on the mainland the island was a source of curiosity, but also a place of exclusion that provided a sense of public protection. During its long history of use it functioned, amongst other things, as a mental asylum, leper colony, hospital, garrison and high-security prison. The island served as a site of confinement and the people confined there were to be feared.



The numerous attempts at escape from Robben Island were mostly dismal. Escape vessels included seal-skin and sheep-skin boats, rafts, paddle-skis, hijacked schooners, bathtubs and boxes (Smith 1997: 36). An elderly man known as Plaatjies was a mental patient who lived on the island. Plaatjies created thirty-eight escape boats, but constant surveillance by officials led to the burning of his boats just as each was completed, and he remained on the island until his death (Smith 1997: 36). William Smith and James Hunt attempted to escape in a bathtub in 1844 but were gunned down, resulting in Smith's demise and Hunt's surrender (Smith 1997: 36). In 1896 five lepers attempted escape using boxes, only to capsize and be recaptured.



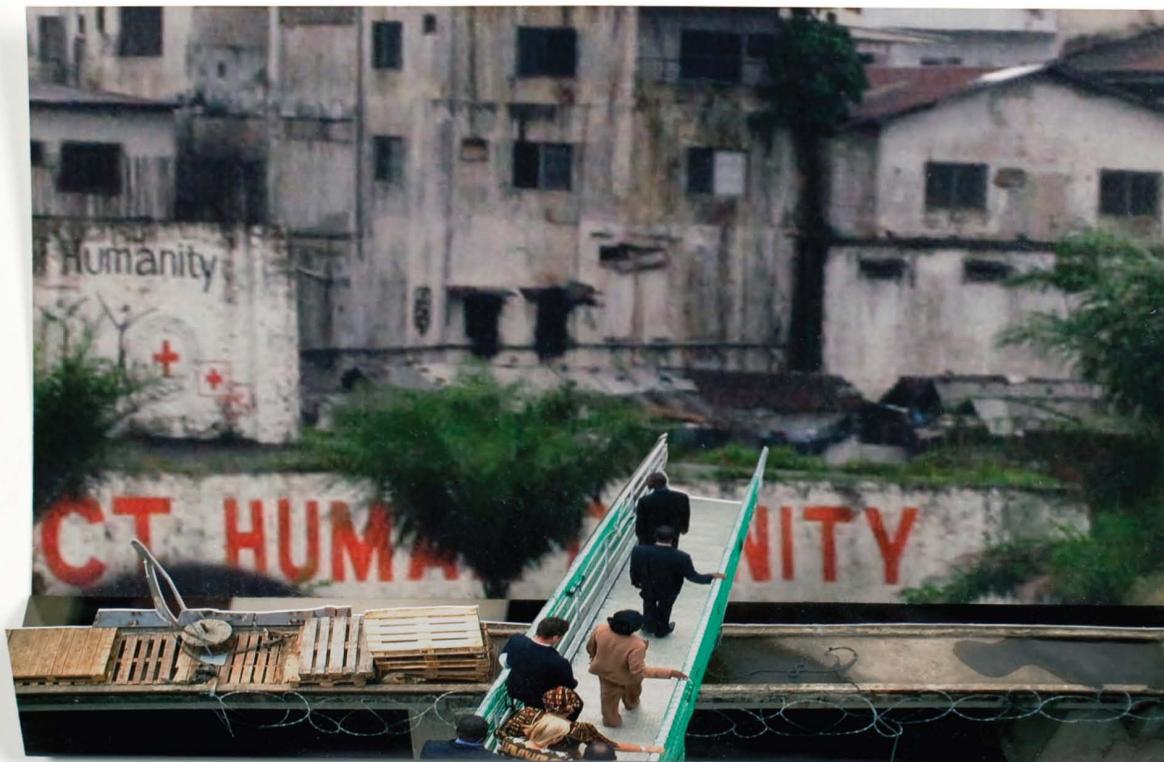
Escapes breached the isolation of the island, inducing a sense of fear on the mainland as they represented a threat to society. For those who managed to flee Robben Island, the sea potentially became a place of terminal confinement and the space between the island and the mainland remained a great and terrible divide. One of the prison's more famous inmates, for example, was the Xhosa prophet Nxele Makana. Makana escaped the island on a stolen longboat, but the vessel crashed into rocks as they approached Blaauwberg and most of those on board were drowned. Legend has it that Makana hugged tightly to a rock yelling encouragements to his friends before he drowned (Smith 1997: 40). The island enjoyed a reputation as being an "impenetrable fortress, surrounded by a bitterly cold tempestuous sea and great man-eating sharks from which few have successfully escaped" (Smith 1997: 36).



Belonging to a complex of ideas associated with the ship and the island (and often intersecting with them) is also the asylum. Foucault traces a history of the birth of the asylum in *Madness and civilization* (2000), beginning with the disappearance of leprosy from the Western World at the end of the Middle Ages. Buildings that were once occupied by lepers remained untouched until the 14th to 17th centuries when they would begin "soliciting with strange incantations a new incarnation of disease" (Foucault 2002: 3). Once cleansed from the disease that had crippled Europe, *Leprosariums* (at one time 19000 such structures existed) became valuable sites that needed to be reorganized and put to use (Foucault 2002: 3). In the Renaissance, in these very places of detention, the deranged, poor, and criminal were confined and took on the stigma of the leprosy.



Freeport was notorious for its high levels of crime and was heavily policed by the United Nations. Ship security was on high alert and we remained ready to cast off at any point should it become necessary to do so. At the time I was in Liberia the political and social climate was extremely unstable. This state of instability was emphasized by violent outbreaks, shootouts between national and seaport police, a foiled coup, and the neglect of the prison system. One such violent clash took place in July 2007, a quick walk from the ship, at the end of our dock. The Liberian National Police (LNP) confronted the Liberian Seaport Police (LSP) about reports of the theft of fuel by the LSP. The LSP were angered by the accusations and took the LNP director hostage. Though the fighting was eventually quelled by UNMIL troops, eighteen police officers were hospitalized ashore with serious injuries. At the same time a foiled coup was reported and a former army chief and speaker of parliament were charged with treason, later receiving a presidential pardon. Contributing to the sense of instability were corruption allegations against president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, whose alleged financial support of Charles Taylor during Taylor's warring against Samuel Doe's regime resulted in the TRC (that was instituted by the Johnson-Sirleaf presidency in Liberia in 2005) recommending she be banned from public office for 30 years.



The country had suffered through 14 years of ruinous civil war under the regimes of Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor. In 2005, after an interim government had been put in place, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (an economist educated at Harvard) defeated George Weah (a well-liked former soccer celebrity) with 59 percent of the vote. Liberian people refer to her as *Ma* or *The Iron Lady* because of her perceived warmth and political strength. The feeling of the people toward Johnson-Sirleaf was reiterated in the popular hip-hop song 'Letter to the president' (2007), in which rapper Alonzo affirmed the Liberian people's trust and hope in her governance and detailed the problems they faced in a post-war situation. In 'Letter to the president' Alonzo begins,

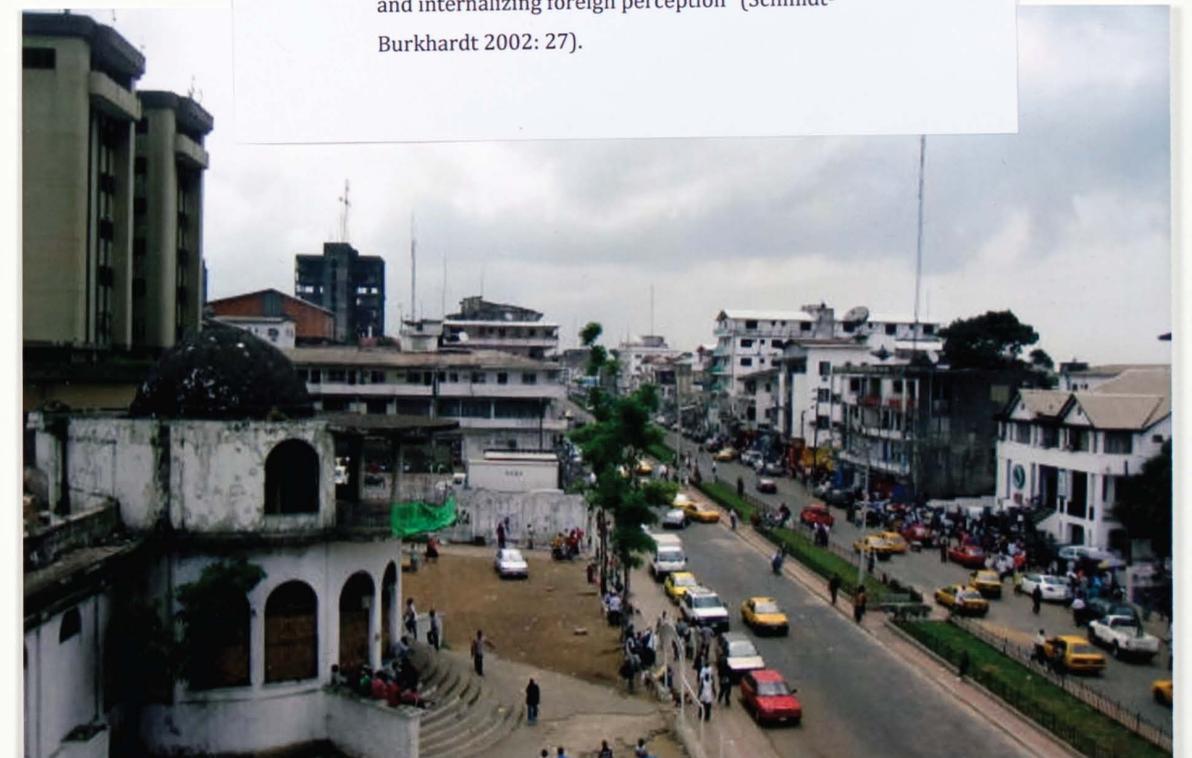
'Hey, Your Excellency, Ma, what we need is a change... Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, hello Ma... congratulations on your elections... we know you are the right person for this nation... all we need is a saviour, good roads... good education in Liberia cause our children don't got no education. Youths living their lives in frustration, life is so hard in this Nation, Ma... Iron Lady, Ma we know it won't be easy, just be focused you will definitely make it. No matter what they say just keep your heads up, do your thing and take us to the top... you can make it Ma 'cause Liberians got your back... we trust you that's why we voted for you... Remember that all we need is a change; change from suffering, a change from poverty, change economically, change democratically, so go ahead and give us all that change" (Alonzo, 2007).

The extended conflict left the country in economic and physical ruin and without basic services such as electricity and running water. The judicial system was corrupt and ineffective, and unemployment and illiteracy were endemic. Rape had only been outlawed a year before my arrival in Liberia. The streets in Monrovia were populated with hand-painted billboards that read, "Don't stop the women, they can contribute," "Forgive all child soldiers in Liberia," "Charles. G Taylor is innocent," "Our judiciary is still corrupt," and "Your woman is your friend not your enemy, stop violence against women." Though there seemed to be much hope under Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's presidency, Liberia still had limited resources and was dependent on foreign assistance to maintain peace.

The institutionalisation of 'unreasonable' members of the population became known as the Great Confinement of the 17th century, and at the end of the 18th century that madness was labelled a mental illness. William Tuke (working in England) and Philippe Pinel (in France) were revered by tradition as redeemers of the mentally ill (Foucault 2002: iv) through the creation of the asylum, which functioned as a means to cure the malady of madness, freeing the mad from their hopeless confinement. The asylum environment operated on the principle of self-surveillance, a principle demonstrated in models such as Bentham's Panopticon (Crampton, J. & Elden, S :324).



Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural model for a perimeter building in the form of a circle. The perimeter building was separated into cells with windows on both sides to allow illumination to the incarcerated. A guard could surveil the cells from a watchtower in the centre of the circular structure. Venetian blinds and various structural partitions within this central tower veiled it in darkness and made it impossible for those incarcerated to view those in the guard tower. Foucault suggested that the panopticon is a "visibility trap" (Foucault 1977:200) in which the principle of the dungeon is inverted and "...daylight and the overseer's gaze capture the inmate more effectively than darkness, which afforded after all a sort of protection" (Foucault 2002: 94). The panopticon was referred to as a "marvelous machine" that "induces in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1977: 201). As a tool, the panopticon promised to prevent the possibility of wrongdoing by means of self-surveillance. This kind of surveillance was thought to have had moralising implications and facilitated self-control by "imagining and internalizing foreign perception" (Schmidt-Burkhardt 2002: 27).





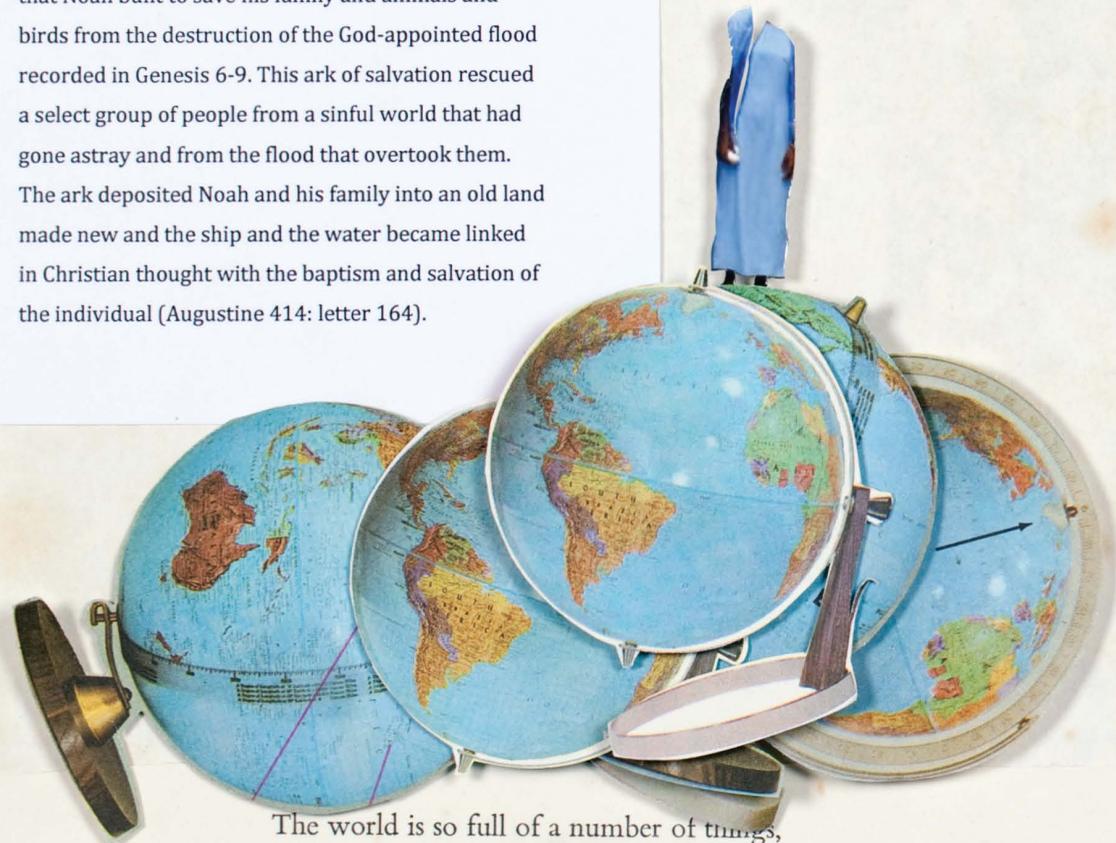
For Liberia's 160th Independence Day celebrations in 2007 a 45-minute fireworks display was executed in the capital. Despite Liberia's Information Minister Dr. Bropleh's encouragement to enjoy the festivities, the Liberian people had not heard and seen explosions since the end of the war and many were dismayed. Those in the port city of Buchanan were reported to have "taken to their heels upon hearing loud explosions" (Unknown author, 2007).

In May 2007 the *Africa Mercy*, the ship commissioned to take over the *Anastasis* on which I was serving, successfully completed sea trials and began its maiden voyage to Liberia. The event made headline news around the world and was documented by several international news channels. The voyage took several weeks and, as we learnt later, rocking from the high seas was frightening for the crew, most of whom fell ill. Equipment and furniture fell and slid and in some cases blocked doorways. One of the children I later taught in the school recounted his experience of this voyage to me in great detail, explaining that whilst eating his breakfast one morning he had found himself unexpectedly reversing at top speed to the other end of the dining hall!

The arrival of the *Africa Mercy* had been both anticipated and dreaded. Whilst it was to provide a greater number of surgical procedures, it also reinforced the fact that the *Anastasis*, a ship we had come to think of as home, would soon be gone. For several weeks the crew had been packing up their personal possessions and workspaces in preparation for the transfer to the new ship. This time came to be known as 'The transition' and strangely, although it began at the beginning of the rainy season, for those three weeks, except for the odd drizzle, it did not rain. The rain in Liberia falls hard and without warning and all had hoped that the move would not have to take place during this season.

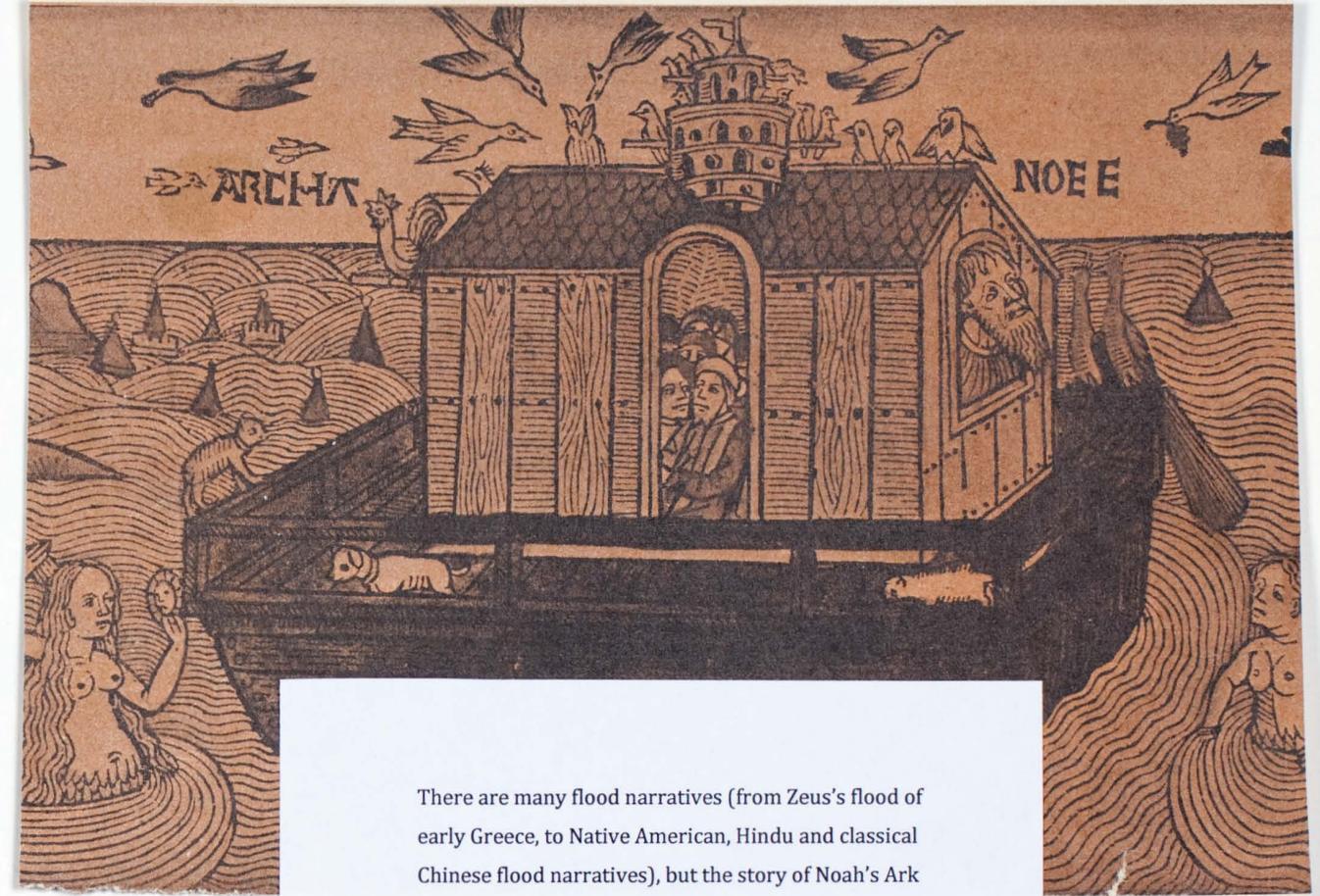


Perhaps the earliest references to the ship as vehicle of escape can be found in the Biblical story of the Ark (also described in the Qur'an and Torah), the vessel that Noah built to save his family and animals and birds from the destruction of the God-appointed flood recorded in Genesis 6-9. This ark of salvation rescued a select group of people from a sinful world that had gone astray and from the flood that overtook them. The ark deposited Noah and his family into an old land made new and the ship and the water became linked in Christian thought with the baptism and salvation of the individual (Augustine 414: letter 164).



The world is so full of a number of things,
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

K Spindler
2010



There are many flood narratives (from Zeus's flood of early Greece, to Native American, Hindu and classical Chinese flood narratives), but the story of Noah's Ark is most often related to the story of the flood in *The epic of Gilgamesh*. Originally titled 'He who saw the deep,' *The epic of Gilgamesh* is a series of ancient Sumerian poems that were discovered by George Smith in 1872 amongst the ruins of King Ashurbanipal's royal library (Bechtel 1911). Stone Tablet XI of the Nineveh fragments of *The epic of Gilgamesh* describes a quest to build a ship to escape an impending deluge inflicted by the gods (Birrell 1997: 220) and attain immortality (Dundes 1988: 51). The square boat (similar in shape to Noah's vessel) built to escape the flood is constructed in six days and subsequently laden with pairs of all living creatures and all silver and gold. When the terrifying deluge comes to an end and the waters subside, all human life has been turned to clay and the land has been levelled; a translation of the tablet reads: "I looked around all day long - quiet had set in and all the human beings had turned to clay! The terrain was as flat as a roof" (Kovacs 1989: 101).

In both stories ark and boat are built as a means of salvation from the world and all its evils, and from the rising power of the sea, which can reclaim the earth and erase traces of life. Though used as a means of escape, the vessels also functioned to confine those on board until the waters had subsided and allowed for a passage of transition and symbolic and literal cleansing. Both vessels came to land upon mountains, the ark on Mount Ararat and the boat from *The epic of Gilgamesh* on Mount Nimash. I imagine these mountains poking out of a vast ocean, slowly rising and expanding; the image of the island is also an image of the ship, adrift as it is, and ungrounded. Important as the story of the flood and Noah's ark has been for Jewish, Muslim and Christian thought, the symbolism of the flood has been, as Birrell suggests, "a strategy for debating other concerns, such as the lessons of history, the decline of civilization, standards of moral behaviour, social control, and political order" (Birrell 1997: 255).

two abysses — one on the side of the macroscopic, the other on the side of the microscopic

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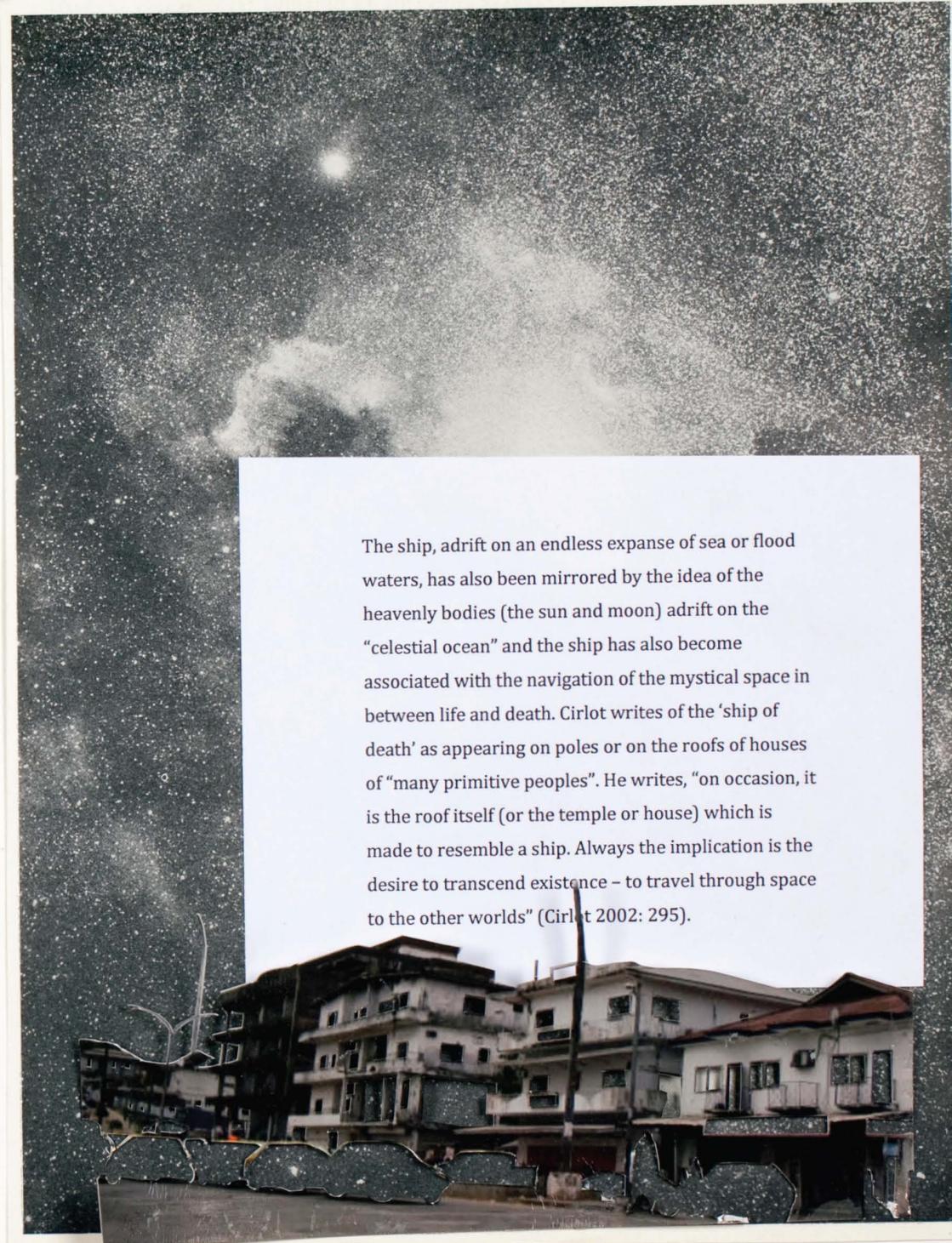
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The ship, adrift on an endless expanse of sea or flood waters, has also been mirrored by the idea of the heavenly bodies (the sun and moon) adrift on the "celestial ocean" and the ship has also become associated with the navigation of the mystical space in between life and death. Cirlot writes of the 'ship of death' as appearing on poles or on the roofs of houses of "many primitive peoples". He writes, "on occasion, it is the roof itself (or the temple or house) which is made to resemble a ship. Always the implication is the desire to transcend existence — to travel through space to the other worlds" (Cirlot 2002: 295).



The journey of the *Anastasis* to a graveyard in India was dealt with as a confidential matter. For Liberians any place was better than Liberia and had news got around of its departure, many would have attempted to stow away (regardless of the ship's destination). On the morning of the ship's departure the painted address of the Mercy Ships website was removed from the sides of the ship before it set sail into the North Atlantic with a skeleton crew. I understood that images of the dismantling of the ship were prohibited by the organisation, so was surprised to find a few images of the ship's arrival at Alang, taken by Peter Knego, a cruise journalist and historian who documents ships being scrapped at Alang each year. Knego's images reveal the *Anastasis* (clearly identified by her name) sailing into the scrapyard, and stranded on the beach (Knego, 2007).

Some who were on the final voyage documented how quiet the ship had become (Thibodeau, 2007). Upon return to the *Africa Mercy* some spoke of the eeriness they experienced on board. They mentioned that they began to refer to the ship as a 'ghost ship' because the usual hustle and bustle of people walking, talking and working day and night had ceased and but for the humdrum of the engines and the scratching of cockroaches, the ship was silent. The sail to India was prolonged by several weeks as the ship's internal workings ceased intermittently, and at times those on the *Anastasis* wondered whether it would survive the sail.

Back in Liberia, screening days were held at various stadiums and buildings to determine whether patients were candidates for surgery. Those in need of medical assistance would queue for hours and sometimes days in the hope that they would receive a date for surgery. There were few local doctors in Liberia and only one functioning hospital, the others having been reduced to mere shells. Screening days were difficult and overwhelming for the ill as they waited for long stretches in the sun. These waits led to frustration; at times anxieties exacerbated by poor health resulted in tragic stampedes. Conversely, those in line were often aware of the condition of those around them and gave up their place in the queue to move them to the front for immediate attention. Patients who were unable to get to the screening venues because of the poor roads were flown to the ship by Red Cross helicopter.

DECAY



D.H. Lawrence writes about this passage between life and death, suggesting all must travel it upon their own ship of death, in his poem *The ship of death* (De Sola & Roberts 2004: 603-605):

Build then the ship of death, for you must take
the longest journey, to oblivion.

And die the death, the long and painful death
that lies between the old self and the new.

Already our bodies are fallen, bruised, badly
bruised,
already our souls are oozing through the exit
of the cruel bruise.

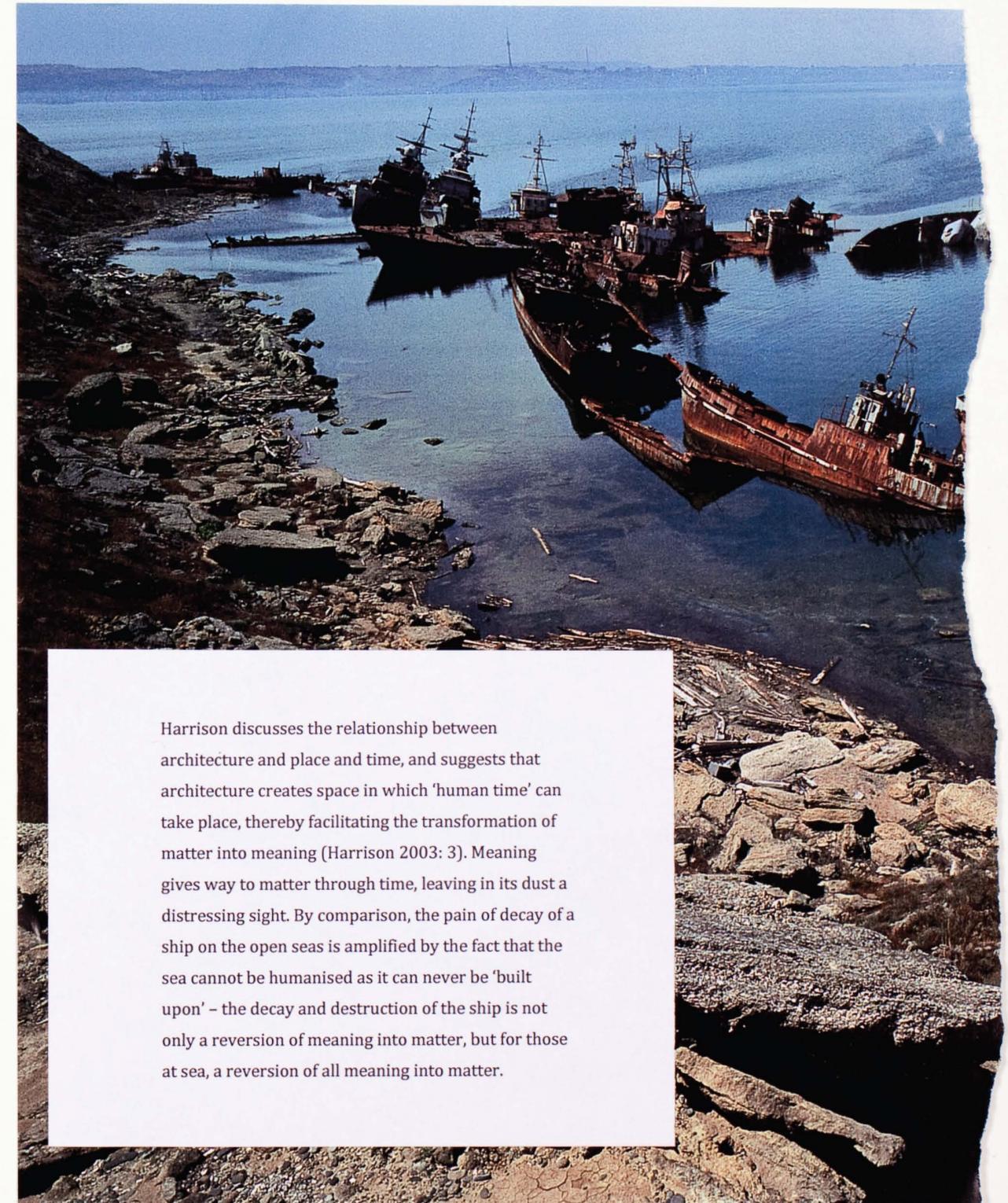
Already the dark and endless ocean of the end
is washing in through the breaches of our wounds,
Already the flood is upon us.

Oh build your ship of death, your little ark
and furnish it with food, with little cakes, and wine
for the dark flight down oblivion.

Piecemeal the body dies, and the timid soul
has her footing washed away, as the dark flood
rises.

We are dying, we are dying, we are all of us dying
and nothing will stay the death-flood rising within
us
and soon it will rise on the world, on the outside
world.

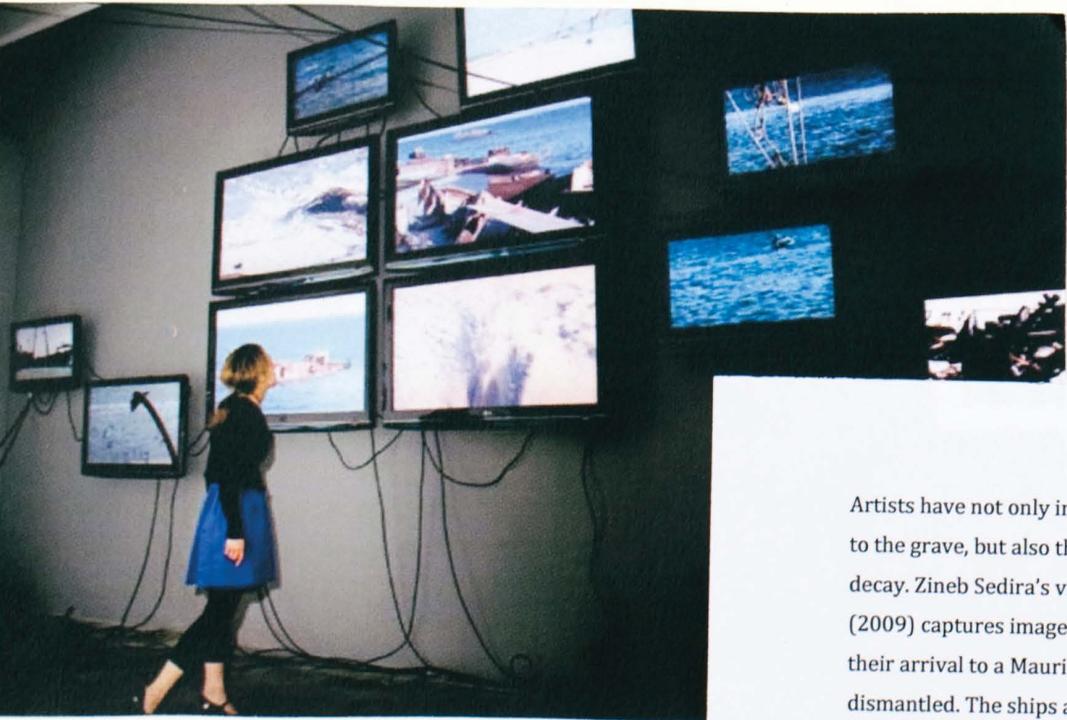
Though sea-going vessels have come to symbolise salvation from the evils and problems of society, and protection from the danger of the sea, they too inevitably fall into disrepair and decay (from the Latin *dēcadere*, to fall away) and are broken down into their component parts. The decay and destruction of a ship seems to be a process unequalled by similar forces of destruction on land. Robert Pogue Harrison associates the experience of pain with sites of decay and ruin, because the ruin reveals the process by which what was meaningful has reverted into mere matter.



Harrison discusses the relationship between architecture and place and time, and suggests that architecture creates space in which 'human time' can take place, thereby facilitating the transformation of matter into meaning (Harrison 2003: 3). Meaning gives way to matter through time, leaving in its dust a distressing sight. By comparison, the pain of decay of a ship on the open seas is amplified by the fact that the sea cannot be humanised as it can never be 'built upon' – the decay and destruction of the ship is not only a reversion of meaning into matter, but for those at sea, a reversion of all meaning into matter.



The journey of a ship to its grave informed the subject of JMW Turner's painting *The fighting Téméraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up* (1839). The work shows the *HMS Téméraire* being tugged towards its final berth, to be broken up for scrap at the Rotherhithe shipyard (as is the fate of ships that are not beached, wrecked, or sunk at sea). The *HMS Téméraire* had once assumed a notable role in the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805 and functioned too as a hulk in Chatham Dockyard after having been in use as a prison ship. The ship's journey towards the setting sun rather than away from it echoes the finality of its voyage. A review of the work appeared in the *Morning Chronicle* of 7 May, 1839 and reads: "the gorgeous horizon poetically intimates that the sun of the Temeraire is setting in glory" (Stein 1985: 167).



Artists have not only imagined the journey of the ship to the grave, but also the ship in various stages of decay. Zineb Sedira's video installation *Floating coffins* (2009) captures imagery of abandoned ships upon their arrival to a Mauritanian shipping graveyard to be dismantled. The ships appear to be in a constant state of decay and, as McGonagle suggests, "[n]othing seems transitory: even if the ships are still afloat rather than sunken, their perpetual decaying is plainly more purgatorial than transient" (2009: online). This process of decay appears to be indefinite, unceasing – unlike the cyclical process on land: life, decay, death, dust.

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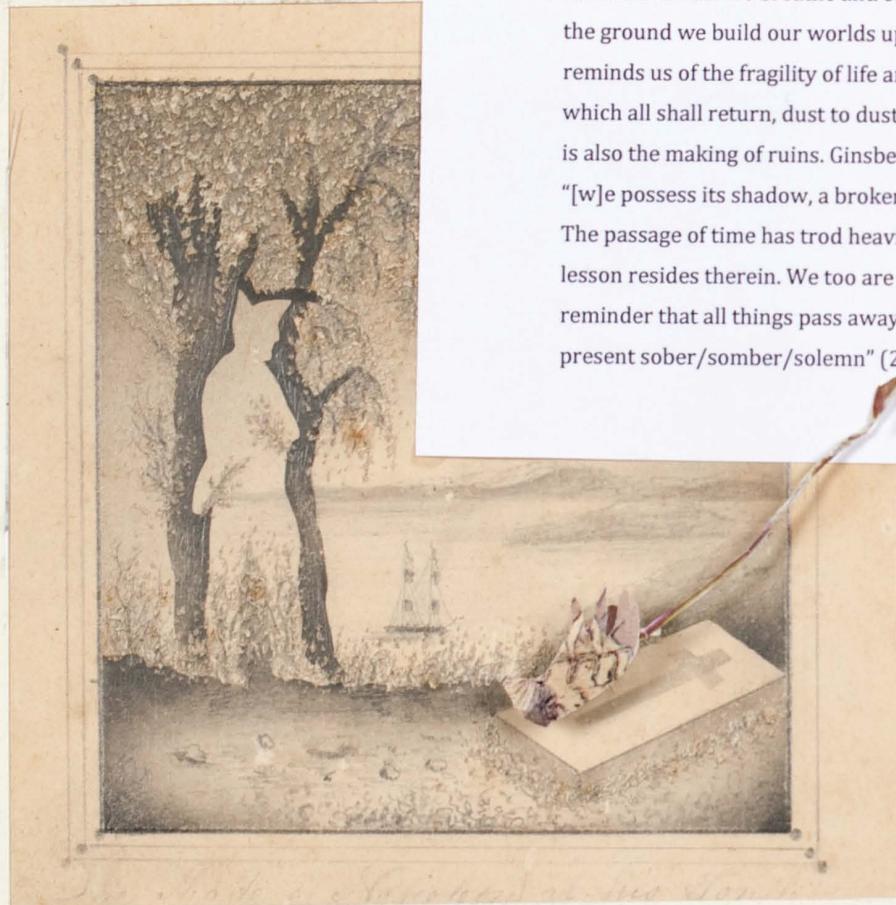
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DUST

CONSIDER the sea's listless chime:
Time's self it is, made audible,

Dust fills the air we breathe and covers the surface of the ground we build our worlds upon and serves to reminds us of the fragility of life and of the state to which all shall return, dust to dust. The making of dust is also the making of ruins. Ginsberg writes of the ruin, "[w]e possess its shadow, a broken image, fragments. The passage of time has trod heavily upon ruin. A lesson resides therein. We too are subject to ruin. The reminder that all things pass away renders our present sober/somber/solemn" (2004:315).

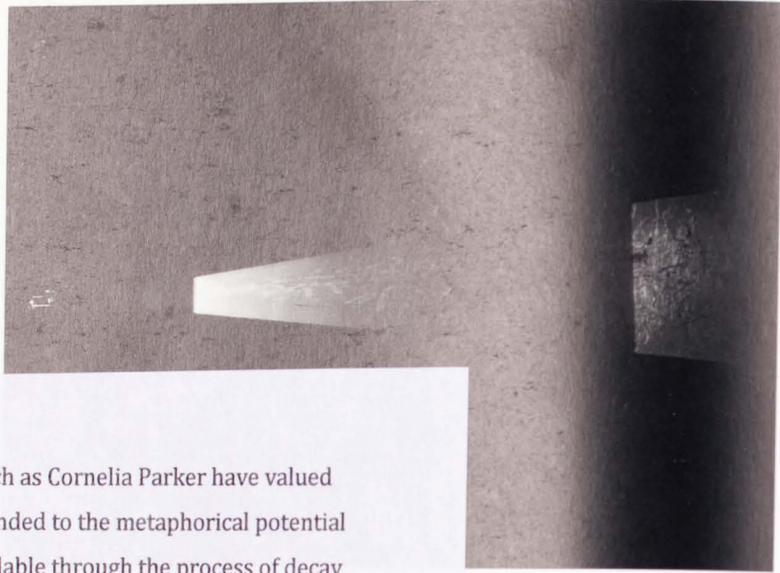


Viney (2011) discussed the etymology of the word *waste* as derived from the Latin *vastus* (to make empty) and related it to the English *vast* (void, immense or enormous). He suggests the earliest uses of *waste* were used most often to describe an enormous and desolated landscape, a land neither inhabited nor inhabitable, such as a desert, wilderness or sea (Viney 2011: online).



DUST always blowing about the town,
Except when sea-fog laid it down,
And I was one of the children told
Some of the blowing dust was gold.

Decay is an inevitable process that occurs through the passing of time. Methods of conservation and preservation are employed to defer, resist or arrest this process of decay so as to prevent a loss of meaning. For the ship the sovereignty of the sea is inescapable and the process of decay inevitable and continuing.



Artists such as Cornelia Parker have valued and responded to the metaphorical potential made available through the process of decay and dust. In many of her exploded works, such as *Cold dark matter: an exploded view* (1991), Parker reveals a compelling and literal use of the ruin. After careful planning with the British Army she arranged for a garden shed to be blown up. The salvaged remains of this shed were then suspended in a room and lit from to create an artwork, the shadows causing the work to appear to be in the process of an ordered explosion. The piece of garden architecture that had been destroyed – meaning evacuated – is re-pieced together to reveal new meanings. Jonathan Watkins suggests that the process of blowing up the garden shed throws into question all the shed has come to represent, and “its contents are revealed, damaged in the process and yet somehow more eloquent” (Nesbitt, J. & Watkins, J. 1996: 30). In an interview with Bruce Ferguson (1999), Parker commented on what she saw as the Catholic symbolism present in the process of making the work, “I like the life/death resurrection bit, which is very Catholic, something dies, but it’s resurrected in another form”.



en projected



Perhaps a more interesting use of the themes of decay and resurrection might be found in some of her work in which she embraces dust as a medium. In *Exhaled blanket* (1996), *Negatives of sound* (1996), and *Negatives of whispers* (1997) Cornelia Parker re-inscribes dust with meaning by its transubstantiation into art objects. She relates much of her work to processes of inhaling and exhaling. In *Exhaled blanket*, dust and fibres from Freud’s couch are magnified, illuminated and projected onto an opposite wall via overhead projector. The enlarged scale gives them a greater sense of importance and the light with which they are projected seems to imbue them with an almost religious aura. In *Negatives of whispers*, Parker’s collected dust (during the whispering at St Paul’s Cathedral) has been gathered together and shaped into earplugs. In *Negatives of sounds*, black lacquer residue from the initial cutting of grooves into records has been gathered into a small pile and exhibited, evidence of the ruin of a perfectly smooth surface, but also of the ‘anti-matter’ that had to be removed in order to inscribe sound (Morgan 2000).



The new hospital onboard the *Africa Mercy* covered an area of 1200m² and had six operating theatres and a 68-bed ward and was well equipped with specialized medical equipment, including a CT scanner and X-ray, laboratory services and a Nikon Coolscope (a digital camera and microscope in one). The equipment enabled doctors and surgeons to perform various surgeries that included the removal of cataracts and growths and correction of crossed eyes; removal of disfiguring tumors; reconstruction of cleft lips and palates; procedures enabling greater mobility for patients suffering from burn contractures and leprosy; corrective surgeries for congenital abnormalities; healing of oral diseases that destroy facial tissues; dental procedures and extractions; and vesico-vaginal fistula repair. The new facilities were equipped to double the surgical capacity of the former ship. Crew members could sign up to observe surgical procedures and there was a long waiting list.

Having a hospital on board came in particularly handy one day when a child in my class hit his head on a sharp corner of a cupboard door and began to bleed profusely. I held his head tightly while another student dialed 911 – 911 calls rang through to a specific bright red phone at the reception desk and within a few minutes an emergency medical team filled the classroom, each carrying their respective emergency apparatus. As his teacher I was embarrassed to hear that the cut was small and did not need a stitch, and after cleaning himself up he returned to class for the rest of the day.

Though doctors did their best to facilitate healing, not all surgeries were successful and some ended in death. Even for those living aboard, the proximity of efficient doctors was not always enough to save them either. When I first boarded the ship in Ghana I noticed humble recognition of this fact by the crew, as a few days before a Gurkha⁴ had contracted cerebral malaria and died before diagnosis. The Gurkhas were the only crew members on board who were employed by the organisation. A short while afterwards a fellow crew member was caught up in a strong rip current whilst swimming at Cooper's Beach, about an hour's drive from the ship, and after fighting the waves for an extended time drowned and could not be resuscitated. Tragedies were traumatic for patients and crew (especially the children) and everyone knew of the unfolding dramas as emergency medical teams were always ordered to the medical wards in the middle of the night by a panicked voice that echoed down the empty passages on the overhead system.

⁴ A Nepalese paramilitary unit attached to the British or Indian army.



The presence, surveillance and protection offered by the Nepalese and Bangladeshi UN Military (UNMIL) base camps at the end of our dock enabled our being there. During this time there was a deployment of 15,000 UN peacekeepers present in Liberia, and multiple watchtowers and security checkpoints existed throughout the city. UNMIL and UN International Police (UNPOL) Land Rovers and military vehicles dominated the roads. I was especially aware of the presence of the soldiers during morning and evening bouts of exercise as I jogged past several manned UNMIL watchtowers along the road that led to the dock.

Those entering and exiting the ship were required to scan in and out with personalised security cards and leave a written record of where they would be going. Cards were worn at all times and were destroyed when crew members ended their time on board. On one bout of exercise several Bangladeshi and Nepalese generals and captains had invited a few colleagues and me to dinner at the base, a few steps away from the ship. Differences in customs led to a delayed arrival back on the ship. The late arrival constituted a transgression of security measures and all were promptly issued with a warning, three of which led to dismissal from the ship. The whereabouts of each crew member was to be accounted for at all times. Several crew members were dismissed during my time on board.

The ruddy patch of ground within the base camp formed the school field for the children of volunteers living aboard the vessel. Children dodged military tanks and trucks and troops of armed soldiers whilst participating in sporting activities, and athletics events were held on their field. Sonar and radar equipment surrounded their 'playground' on deck eight of the ship. Crew members' recreation included regular volleyball and soccer matches with the soldiers.



out of place

electrical Islands popping up.

rendering visible the immaterial



Everyone carries a room inside them. Franz Kafka.

presence & absence
of infra mind

inside outside
outside inside

Living aboard the ship meant having to interact with others on a constant basis. Almost all spaces aboard were communal and it was a challenge to have time to oneself. Permission to be alone whilst off ship was mostly prohibited, especially at night. There was a small closet-like prayer room with no windows which could be signed out for periods of up to an hour. Soundproofing on the walls of this room was poor and the footsteps and voices that trailed down the passage were often loud and disturbing. The space was dull and unwelcoming, but afforded short reprieves. With all the demands of living in close community there was little time to reflect and contemplate.

I was grateful to have the space of my classroom to retreat to, and there I had a view of the harbour, a private telephone and internet connection. Telephone calls were expensive (as they were routed through the USA) and were kept short. Though every cabin had a telephone, calls were mostly made while others hovered around the small space, so I was grateful for the use of the private line in my classroom. The ship had its own small but bustling post office, which sold local stamps and sent and received mail. It seemed to be a popular thing for Americans to receive 'care parcels', large boxes filled with clothing and food and notes from their friends back home. Post from South Africa was costly and mostly limited to letters and I thought often of home, especially on the long and quiet Sunday afternoons. Plans had to be made in advance to get off the ship on weekends - cars needed to be booked about a week in advance and could be signed out by approved drivers for four-hourly slots.



Come, sweet death, come heavenly rest!
Come, lead me away in peace,
For I am weary of this world.
Oh come! I wait for thee—
Come soon, come take me,
Close thou mine eyes,
Come, heavenly rest!

K. Spindler
2010

Living quarters aboard the new ship were tight and almost always shared with up to ten people. Waterproof-like curtaining sectioned off areas of two beds each. For the first three weeks on the new ship I stayed in a six-berth cabin that was without a porthole, but because I had volunteered for an extended time I was moved to a four-berth cabin with a small sitting area and porthole, where I stayed for the remainder of my time on board. Within each bed was a belt for strapping oneself in on rocky seas. Bathroom facilities were neatly compacted, so much so that it was possible to use all amenities concurrently. Strict water restrictions meant two-minute showers and limited laundry loads and harsher restrictions were employed when sailing. Toilet facilities were separated into 'liquids only' and 'other'.

There was not much to purchase on the ship save for a few groceries from the ship shop's limited supply, or a cup of coffee at Starbucks. Though people came from different economic brackets, it was not apparent who was well off and who was less so. There was a room on board called the 'boutique', where those departing could leave behind whatever they wished that might be useful for the rest of the crew. It was a small room packed with a vast selection of everyday items, clothes and nick-knacks and included: vitamins, anti-malarial medication, sunscreen, CDs and DVDs, books, games, sewing supplies, clothing, children's toys, stationery. For my entire stay I washed my hair with Toni and Guy shampoo sachets from a volunteer hairdresser who had left a box of the sachets behind. Crew members could help themselves to whatever they wanted, but were limited to three items per visit.

⁵In an article in the Liberian newspaper *Daily Observer* in 2010, Peter Fahn reported that according to the Government of Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy document, 25 percent of the population of 3.5 billion have access to safe drinking water and sanitation. A water line had been specifically laid to facilitate our work on the ship prior to our arrival.

AT SEA

THE SHADOW-LINE

A CONFESSION

JOSEPH CONRAD

Joseph Conrad wrote that a docked ship, lamenting its imprisonment to the land, "...surrounded by quays and the walls of warehouses, has the appearance of a prisoner meditating upon freedom in the sadness of a free spirit put under restraint. Chain cables and stout ropes keep her bound to stone posts at the edge of a paved shore ... lying passive and still and safe, as if lost in deep regrets of her days of liberty and danger on the sea" (Conrad 2004: 78). For sailors the ship is an extension of the body and the open seas represent freedom from the constraints and feebleness of land, the sea being preferred as free from constraint – but however free the sea may appear it is also a place that confines. To be *at sea* means both to be on the ocean and to be in a state of confusion or uncertainty.

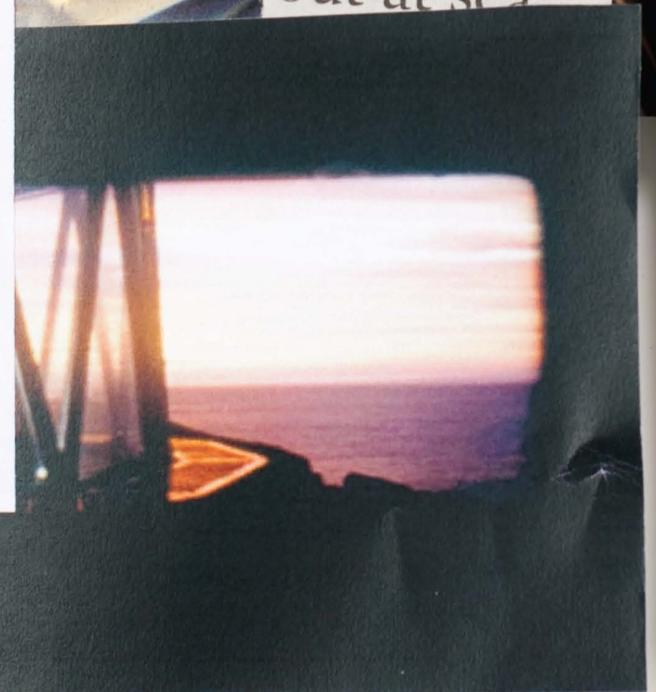


The anchor heaves, the ship swings free,
The sails swell full: To sea, to sea!

"What could be more full of meaning? – for the pulpit is ever this world's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favorable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow" (Melville 2008: 43).

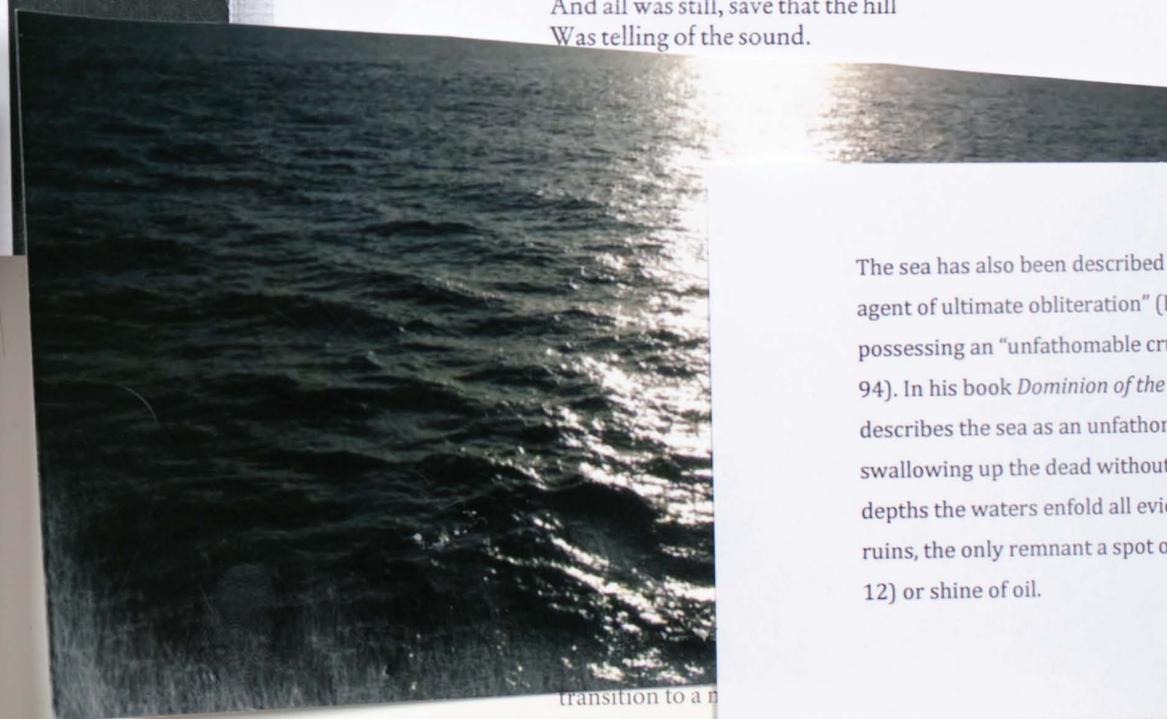
Artists have been drawn to the freedom offered by the sea. For Dutch conceptual artist Bas Jan Ader, "setting sail alone in a small boat, surrendering himself up to the forces of the sea, was the highest form of pilgrimage. The sea was the last free place on earth" (Dean 1998: 128). This pilgrimage cost him his life, as three weeks into his sail across the Atlantic from Cape Cod to Falmouth his boat *Ocean wave* was found, capsized, by a Spanish fishing trawler.

The work of Berlin-based English artist Tacita Dean reveals an interest in the ambiguous nature of the sea and its surrounding narratives, in particular an interest in the story of Donald Crowhurst. Crowhurst was a British businessman and inexperienced sailor whose attempt to compete in a solo non-stop circumnavigation race around the globe in 1968 resulted in deceptive logs, time-madness, and his eventual loss of sanity and suicide at sea. His faulty chronometer and fictitious logbook were recovered just a few hundred miles from the coast of Britain. The story of Crowhurst's demise is explored in Tacita Dean's *Disappearance at sea I* (1996), a 16mm film that reveals alternating scenes of the Fresnel bulbs within St Abbs's Lighthouse in Berwickshire, and a view from the lighthouse out to sea as day is overtaken by night. The film subsides into darkness as rising cries of seagulls fill the air.



Harrison reflects on the marklessness of the sea that is described in Marianne Moore's poem *A grave* (1921) in which she laments that those casting nets into the sea do so unaware that they are violating the sacredness of a grave (Harrison 2003: 7). For the Spanish fishermen who discovered Bas Jan Ader's boat, they would have been all too aware of the description of the sea as a grave, and their discovery of the boat would have echoed into their beings that this too could be their fate. Harrison affirms that we are grateful to the sea for its proclivity to conceal, and "that unlike empty space, it receives, hides, and reabsorbs the dead" (Harrison 2003: 12). He writes of the sea's ability to 'erase' by its concealment of not only the dead, but also of the site where the disappearance itself took place. "There are no gravestones on the sea. History and memory ground themselves on inscription, but this element is un-inscribable" (Harrison 2003: 12). The sea's indescribable nature echoes that of the ruin whose inscription has been degraded over time.

Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,
The boat spun round and round;
And all was still, save that the hill
Was telling of the sound.



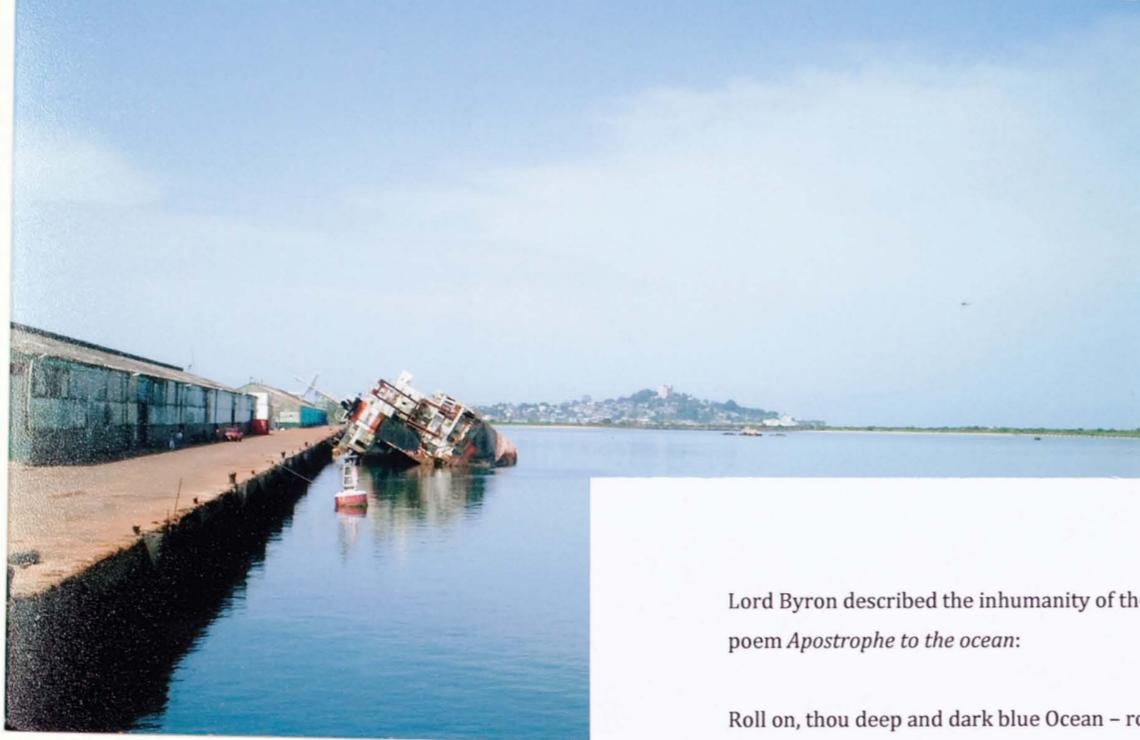
The sea has also been described as an "imaginary agent of ultimate obliteration" (Harrison 2003: 4), possessing an "unfathomable cruelty" (Conrad 2004: 94). In his book *Dominion of the dead* (2003), Harrison describes the sea as an unfathomable unmarked grave swallowing up the dead without a trace. Within their depths the waters enfold all evidence of that which it ruins, the only remnant a spot of foam (Harrison 2003: 12) or shine of oil.

transition to a n...
following notes in his logbook, which the artist quotes — does it mean to see space as if time



For those on the mainland in Liberia, the trauma of war was raw in their minds and for many the ship appeared as a means to better their lives and a means of escape. In addition to those who came aboard for surgery, many local Liberian people worked on board during the day and some continued on board to other nations. Several families on board adopted local Liberian orphans, and were later falsely accused in the news as being involved in child trafficking.

Various security watches took place aboard. 'Swimmer watch' was performed each night by crew members who would wield bright heavy torches for signs of movement in the surrounding water that signified 'swimmers', who posed a security threat. On one occasion 'swimmers' had made off with sets of blue plastic chairs that at a later date appeared dotted throughout the town outside various shanty shops and businesses. Other 'swimmers' intentions were more sinister. A crew member who lived a few doors down from me awoke one morning to the cold blade of a machete at her neck, a 'swimmer' having scaled the mooring lines and found his way into her cabin. Unfortunately for him his next choice of entry was into the security officer's cabin. Thereafter security aboard was tightened and the ship was overhauled in a search for any 'swimmers' who might be hiding on board. Similar searches for stowaways were carried out before setting sail. On another occasion one of the school children spotted a 'swimmer' in the water at the abandoned barge at the end of our dock. Within moments the Liberian Seaport Police (LSP) apprehended him and the crew on the ship could hear him wail and yell as he was beaten for his attempted crime. 'Swimmers' were not always water-fit and at times their quest ended fatally. As I climbed the stairs to my exercise class one afternoon, I happened to look out of a porthole and stared in disbelief at a lifeless body bobbing head down in the water. Stunned by what I had seen I continued up the stairs and watched as a few minutes later the LSP retrieved the body from their motorboat. Pirate watch took place on the open seas in the way 'swimmer' watch did on land and various drills were weekly events.



Lord Byron described the inhumanity of the sea in his poem *Apostrophe to the ocean*:

Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin – his control
Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths, with bubbling groan –
Without a grave, unknelled, uncoffined, and unknown
(Hillard 1863: 363).



On one occasion I heard of a 'swimmer' who had appeared in the water and, on ignoring warnings from UNMIL soldiers and our ship, continued swimming straight towards our dock. As he made his way to the ship it appeared that the person was not a Liberian swimmer but a Chinese man in great distress. He was helped up and onto the dock whereafter a crew member translated his story to the ship's security officer (Thibodeau, 2007). The swimmer, Mr Li, explained that his captain on the ship across the way had unexpectedly died three weeks earlier, leaving himself and another crew member on board. They had been waiting for another captain so that they could leave Liberia and were catching fish over the side of the ship to survive each day. Local criminals had attempted to access the vessel several times and had previously been held back by two watchdogs onboard. On the day that Mr Li braved the waters to head for our ship, the criminals had made their way on board, hitting the dogs with branches and sticks, before seeking to harm Mr Li. The UN subsequently offered to search and guard his ship, but Mr Li swore never to return to it.

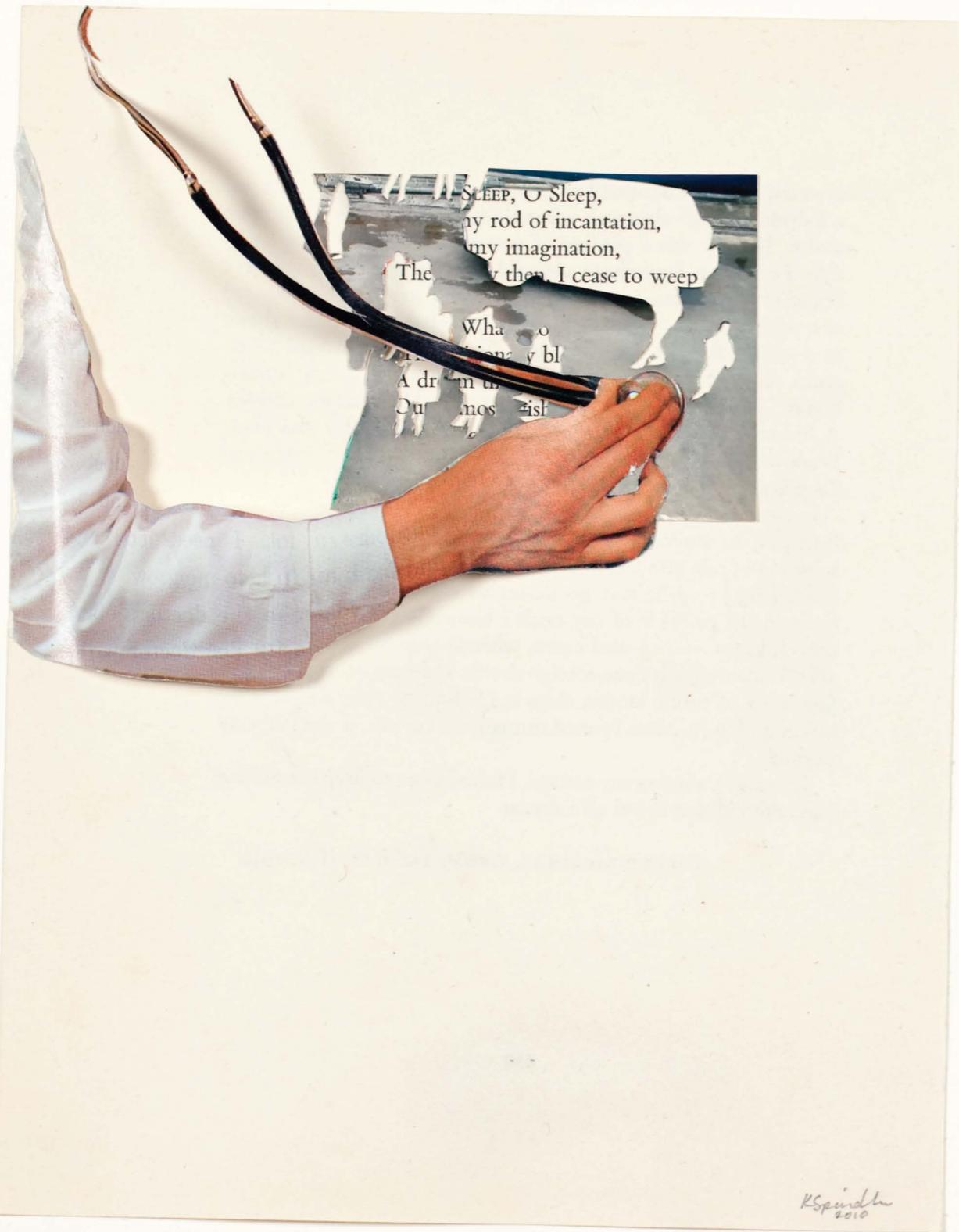
On another occasion there had been an act of piracy nearby when the cargo vessel *Tahoma Reefer* (anchored off the coast of Monrovia whilst awaiting repairs) was attacked by 25 pirates wielding machetes. Crew were assaulted and forced overboard before the pirates towed the vessel towards the Ivory Coast. The Liberian government lacked resources for coastal law enforcement and upon crossing the border to Ivory Coast it was surmised that the ship would never be recovered.

The dock was for our private use for almost all of our stay except for a short period when we shared it with the *Blue Atlantic*. The *Blue Atlantic* had made international headline news after the captain and crew were arrested for attempting to smuggle about 90 barrels of cocaine to Lagos. Hundreds of UN armed guards patrolled this ship from within and without before later exploding it at sea.

Shudder of something in the days that are:
Possible music in sweet notes that jar:



A short drive into town was Monrovia Central Prison where I visited my friend, Nancy, on weekends for six months until her release – those on ship had built a good relationship with the prison personnel over the years and an invitation had been extended to the crew to visit with the prisoners. I met Nancy on my first visit and she shared with me the devastating affects the war had had on her life and the patterns of abuse that she had fallen into. Strangely, many similarities existed between her imprisonment and my confinement on the ship: the close quarters, the restricted access, the surveillance. After many months of her imprisonment someone working in the prisons had approached the judge, pleaded her case and paid her bail. Nancy had been in prison for a month when I met her. She was a young mother of three, two girls and a baby boy. When she was first imprisoned she became extremely antagonistic and frustrated and would often run naked up and down the passage, fighting with her inmates, one of whom punched out her front tooth. Over the months she had been there she had become quieter and more contemplative. She was eager to return to her three children, the youngest of whom she was still nursing when she was arrested for theft. On my arrival at the prison late one morning, the superintendent informed me that Nancy could go home that day and gave me permission to tell her the good news. He had had a busy morning at the prison and the women were still locked in their cells (they usually spent the day in a communal space alongside their cells). I looked through the peephole to Nancy's cell and called for her. She was in the process of braiding her hair, one half of it stood up on end, the other neatly plaited. I told her her departure date had arrived, and she would not believe it to be true. She had not expected, though I know she had longed for, her imminent freedom. I wished I had some money to give her as I left that day, as I feared for her in her readjustment to the outside world.



The judicial system in Liberia was ineffectual and corrupt and most who were incarcerated suffered pre-trial imprisonments that were unnecessarily lengthy and denied due process. Prisoners were at times arrested arbitrarily and incarcerated until they paid to be released, often as insignificant an amount as 30 US dollars. The women's prison was small, with between 15 and 25 incarcerated at any time. The men's prison housed over 600 prisoners, five times its intended capacity. Because of extensive overcrowding men slept on the floors on their sides, and the close contact with each other's skin often resulted in skin sores. Though conditions were regrettable the state of the shanty towns seemed as bad or worse. People living in these areas dealt with having no access to basic services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity and severely limited access to healthcare and education.

During the time I visited the prison, the UN was in the process of building another facility. Before its completion it had housed two inmates (who had attempted to assassinate the president) as they were suffering from chicken pox. Attempts to isolate them and prevent the spread of illness throughout the prison were unsuccessful and the prison was closed to visitors for several weeks because of the outbreak. Prisoners were allotted one small sachet of powdered food daily, but the water from the well that they mixed it with and drank often made them ill. Their days were largely spent hanging through the bars looking out and banging their water bottles as people passed by outside, in the hope that someone would pull water from the well for them.

Next to the prison is Palm Grove Cemetery. During the war the space had been occupied by rebels for the many hiding places it afforded, as well as for its strategic placement in the centre of town. During the time I visited the prison the cemetery was in the process of being raided, cleared out and walled off to curb use of the area for housing and the relief of human waste. People, having taken up residency amongst the graves, became known as 'the living dead'.

Hemingway's *Old man and the sea* attributes the volatile nature of the sea to its relationship to the heavenly bodies, and refers to the sea as *la mar*, "He always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman... as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought" (Hemingway 1952: 30).



UNIFORM EDITION OF THE
WORKS OF VIRGINIA WOOLF

Fiction
- THE VOYAGE OUT
- NIGHT AND DAY
- JACOB'S ROOM
- MRS. DALLOWAY
- TO THE LIGHTHOUSE
- THE WAVES

Criticism
- THE COMMON READER
- A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

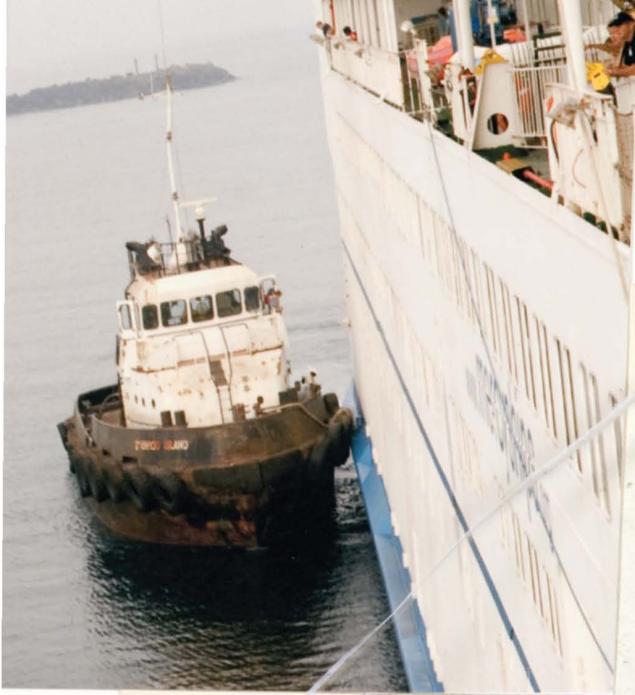
THE WAVES

VIRGINIA WOOLF

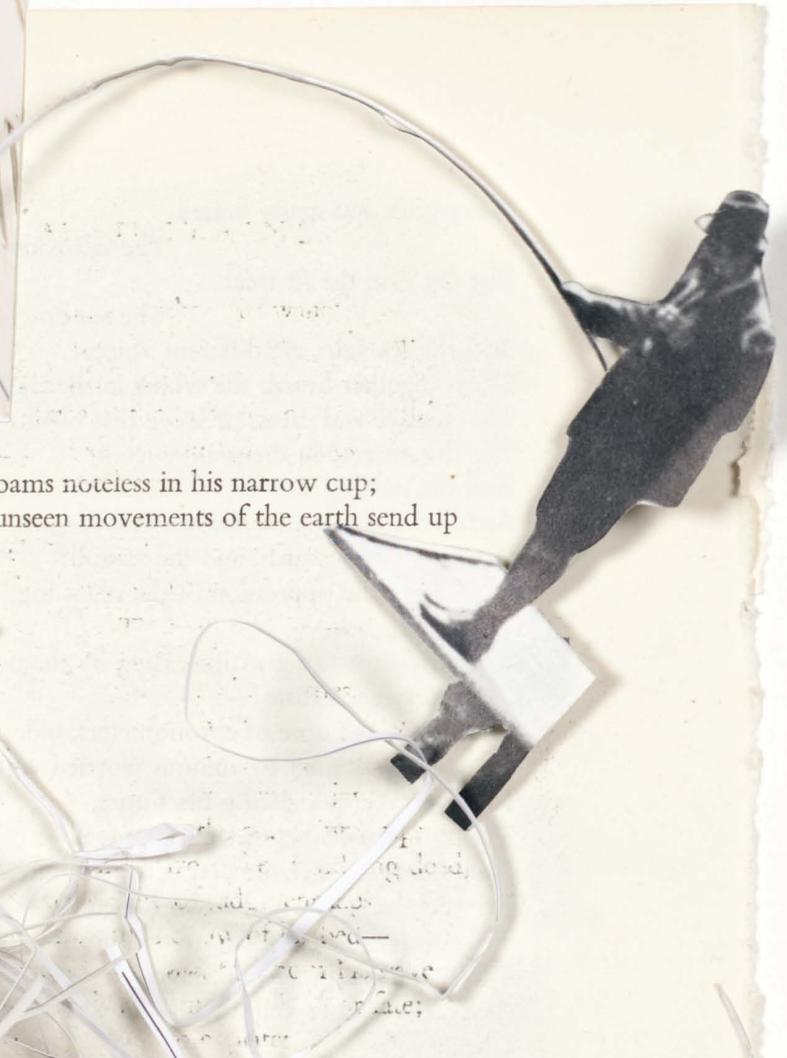
The sea, unlike the land, cannot be marked, but is restless, always moving. Its tidal patterns resemble the involuntary act of breathing, its waves rolling in and out, in and out, as if to signify life and death and living and dying. In *The waves*, Virginia Woolf relates the motion of the sea to breathing and sleeping. She writes, "As they neared the shore each bar rose, heaped itself, broke and swept a thin veil of white water across the sand. The wave paused, and then drew out again, sighing like a sleeper whose breath comes and goes unconsciously" (Woolf 1931: 5).

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Drawing the sea



The sea foams noteless in his narrow cup;
And the unseen movements of the earth send up
A murmur



water talk
you are water
I'm water
we're all water in different containers
that's why it's so easy to meet
someday we'll evaporate together
but even after the water's gone
we'll probably point out to the containers
and say, "that's me there, that one."
we're container minders

Cece's Beach and Cooper's Beach were frequently visited by the crew and were in opposite directions from the ship. While Cece's had been developed with grass huts and a restaurant with a central bar, Cooper's was simply a beach. Cece's water was warm and gentle but not very clean, and many crew who dove under the water there were plagued by ear infections. A short walk along the white sand one day revealed a mass of concrete graves reaching into the sea, many of them washed open and their remains swept away. Climbing up on the bank revealed hundreds upon hundreds of painted cement graves, a graveyard from before the war.

I was unable to join my friends for an outing to Cooper's beach one morning, but had been before and observed the striations of cloud in the sky and the heaps of rubbish that at various intervals would sweep into the clear water from a restaurant up coast. On ship, the emergency overhead system alerted the crew to gather in prayer and shortly afterwards the crew was informed of the drowning of a friend and colleague who had been trapped in a rip tide. I had sat next to him at dinner the night before. Having fought the waves he had become stricken with panic and overwhelmed by the high waters. With the help of some local Liberians his body was pulled out of the water and he received immediate CPR from a nurse who happened to be in the area, but he could not be resuscitated. After many hours, those who had witnessed the drowning and attempted rescue arrived back at ship unable to speak. They requested to be isolated from the crew for a time. His body was kept in one of the ship's refrigerated shipping containers before being flown home to the United States.

This drowning came shortly after the crew had been witness to the drowning of a tugboat pilot in the Canary Islands when the ship had been to dry dock a few months before. The captain of an adjacent cruise ship caused a fatal error, dragging the tugboat and pilot to their grave beneath his ship.



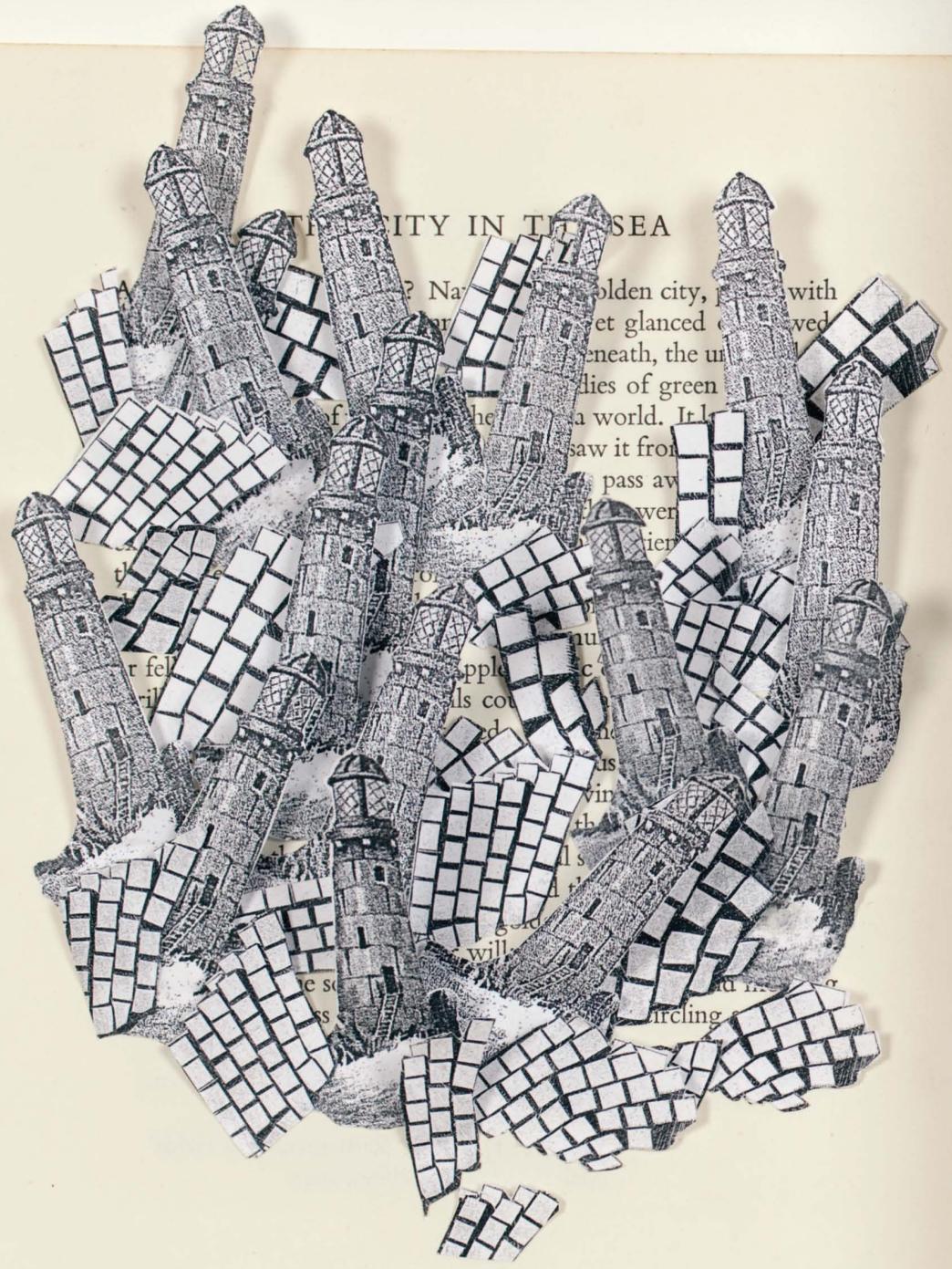
In constant view from my porthole was a container ship that had been incorrectly offloaded during the war. It rested on its side, its containers fallen over, half sunk. Over the months, efforts were made to refloat it, which involved first sinking it to just below the surface and then pumping it up again with air, but the process was unsuccessful. This was evidence of one of the numerous sites of ruin in Liberia.

At times vessels vanished from the harbour at night. The *MV Aimi* that had docked in Liberia for three weeks, owing the Port Authority thousands of US Dollars in port fees, escaped the harbour at 2 a.m. Several weeks later a Nigerian ship on the other end of the harbour attempted to do the same and, upon lifting their anchor in the late afternoon, caused the Liberian Seaport Police to move the ship to another dock where they could keep a more careful eye on them.



At the end of the 2008 school year I was to return to Cape Town. Crew members who stay long-term are required to do a further training course in Texas and I felt that my time on the ship had come to an end. Leaving the ship after a year and a half was difficult and emotional. Over many months I had formed deep friendships and was aware of the finality of most of these goodbyes. I attended an optional debriefing session the day before my departure and spoke at length about the challenges I'd experienced working aboard and how the many well-intentioned but unrealistic demands placed on the teachers by the vice-principal had contributed to a mass burn out, about my feelings about leaving, and about the reverse culture shock I was anticipating back home.

It was a two hour drive to the airport, where I boarded a plane for London together with other volunteers from other humanitarian organisations, and I cried quietly almost all of the way. The only other plane on the runway was one that belonged to the United Nations. The airport building was small and bustling and passengers strolled down the dirt road to Open Sky, a restaurant in a run-down rondavel, to have a curious bite to eat before boarding. The only thing on the menu was 'fried piranha' with rice.



L. Spiller
2010

During the completion of this body of MFA work the ship unexpectedly docked in Cape Town for a day in February. I went to the harbour and waved her in as the captain manoeuvred her box-like frame through the water and aligned her next to the dock outside the Table Bay Hotel. I spent the day with friends who still lived on board whose children I had taught. The purser took me on board so that I could revisit the familiar spaces, and upon trying to find my way out I got slightly disorientated and had to retrace my tracks. At dusk I fought the traffic up Signal Hill and parked amongst those having their candle-lit Valentine's picnics. As the sun set I watched the tugboat guide the ship out to sea to set sail for its new destination, Sierra Leone.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS

This body of work comprises 6 digital prints, 40 collages, 10 cut out photographs, 3 cut out musical scores, numerous cut out blank musical sheets, a large scale paper cut, bottles of ship dust, three light box work and a video piece. The works have been made by cutting, constructing, experimenting with light and shadow, photographing and making prints from sections of other works, and collaging collected materials.

I began the project by making several series of cutouts (maybe illustrate these early works). At this early stage I was not fully aware of the centrality of the ship to this project and in the first works I made I spent many hours cutting the figures out of the photographs I had taken in Liberia. These photographs were of decayed and devastated structures and buildings in Monrovia, and of the hundreds of people that lived and worked in and around them. At that stage my interests were focused on looking out of the ship towards the land, later on they became almost entirely focused on the ship itself and its relationship to the sea.

My working method is informed by my training as a printmaker and though I do not make many prints, I work with paper and light. In the catalogue for *Curiosity CLXXV* (2004) Skotnes, Langerman and van Embden suggest that an artwork can be defined not so much by its materiality so much as by the "history of the discipline it brings with it into the zone of display in which it is encountered" (Skotnes, van Embden & Langerman 2004: 8). They also suggest that in this way "[a]n installation of paper works and projections could be described as printmaking" (Skotnes, van Embden & Langerman 2004: 8). I have always worked on a very small scale but in this body of work I have, at times, attempted to use light and shadow to amplify the scale of what I have made. Most of the works are experiential, and engage, through the use of moving lights and shadows, a feeling of time or tides. In addition to these experiential works, framed prints, collages and cuttings, are captured moments of stasis and of reflection.

During much of the process of this MFA I have been cutting a paper net. I began it after a visit to the dry docks in Cape Town harbour and then worked on it on and off for two years up until the making of this book. I began the cutting thinking of it more as a nest than a net. The net is suggestive of safety and containment but also (when animated with light) of prisms of light in water. A net is an object that is normally used to confine but in this case it is empty, holding only the viewer in its shifting shadows.

As I began to collect images I was attracted to an image of a container ship on the brink of toppling over and loosing its containers. I printed out a significantly enlarged copy of this image and for much of my process it remained on my studio wall above a plinth. This image loomed at me from my wall but also appeared in several colour and black and white copies potted around the studio, some with the container spaces cut away and those empty spaces filled with images of interior spaces I have lived in. The image of these containers on the brink of disaster and toppling is reflected in the hanging of some of the framed works that hang tilting on the wall.

During my research I began to experiment with light and motorised contraptions such as windscreen wiper motors and thaumatropes. I looked at a history of light works and became especially interested in the use of light by artists such as; Christian Boltanski, Olafur Eliasson, Mona Hatoum, William Kentridge, Nobel and Webster, Cornelia Parker, James Turrell, Rachel Whiteread and the United Visual Artists (UVAs).

In 2009 I received the Jules Kramer Travel Award and was afforded the opportunity to travel to the Venice Biennale where I came into contact with a host of artists whose work has served to inform my process, particularly the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko, Hans-Peter Feldman and Chun Yun. Together with images of these works I collected a mass of visual resource that have served as visual references and that appear listed in this book.



NATURE GEOGRAPHIC

COMMUNITY art

WE SAY: ENOUGH!

Outstanding Success for JACK BUCKLEY
There isn't any limit to love
THIS WILL MAKE YOU WHIS

We'll all sleep well tonight
no worry about tomorrow
everything's alright
safe in our panic room

ONE MORE DAY
WITHOUT
FEAR
PLEASE

Steven Cohen - Life is short, art is long



Between here and there

Cut outs of photographs from personal collection
21.5cm x 16cm

Whilst in Liberia I took several snapshots of the city and harbour. The local people were deeply offended by the camera and so most of these images were taken through car windows while in a moving vehicle. In this work I have delicately cut out signs of life with a fine Japanese blade, making use of the surrounding world, or shell, that remains. Each cutting is displayed in reverse to reveal a bleached image. The reverse side of the cuttings provides a view of the work that appears to be a familiar sight. The cuttings are hung alongside each other in a line in reference to an horizon, the space that might also be referred to as yonder and that Siri Hustvedt writes of as being "between here and there" (Hustvedt 2006: 1).





Vessel

Paper, plywood, motorised light mechanisms, mirror, large glass bottle containing dark grey ship dust
71.5cm x 172.5cm x 41cm

I began to recreate miniature scenes of domestic spaces out of layers of cut paper shapes. These domestic spaces echo spaces in which I have lived or that are particularly resonant for me. The view into these paper cut interiors is obscured by a piece of glass (or window) that is covered with grey vinyl. Behind each paper living space is set a snapshot of Liberia out of which I have cut all traces of life (as in the previous work). These boxes are cased together and resemble a block of flats. The work is exhibited in darkness, and is lit by a motorised lighting mechanism that blinks and lists at regular intervals projecting light shapes onto the grey vinyl windows. In the work the domestic space is conflated with that of the sea. The work suggests a kind of underwater scene as well as a bedroom wall at night (as it catches light projections of cars' headlights).

If these small windows appear as a block of flats, the large window below might be considered as a basement area. Behind this large grey vinyl window is a bottle of ship dust that is animated by a moving light. A light projection is captured on the window and is suggestive of a trachea and pair of lungs.



Wave

About 70m 200g Academia paper, motorized light mechanism

This work finds its origin in cutting out people and traces of life from snapshots of my Liberian experience, after which I began to cut out a large paper fishing net. A small light bulb attached to a motorised arm moves from side to side in the shape of an arc and rhythmically illuminates the suspended net. As the light shifts it casts layers of shadows onto the surrounding walls and ceiling. These shadows are more calming than disorientating. The movement and shapes refer to an underwater space, the square and rectangular shapes like those projected through water onto the bottom of a swimming pool, and the movement from left to right of the slow rocking and listing of the ship while sailing on calm waters.

The regularity of the rocking motion in this piece relates to the ticking of a metronome, and implies a rhythm for the piece (*Sail*, described below) that is comprised of ruined musical sheets.





THE purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols. If certain sensitive persons listen persistently to the ticking of a watch, or gaze persistently on the monotonous flashing of a light, they fall into the hypnotic trance; and rhythm is but the ticking of a watch made softer, that one must needs listen, and various, that one may not be swept beyond memory or grow weary of listening; while the patterns of the artist are but the monotonous flash woven to take the eyes in a subtler enchantment. I have heard in meditation voices that were forgotten the moment they had spoken; and I have been swept, when in more profound meditation, beyond all memory but of those things that came from beyond the threshold of waking life.

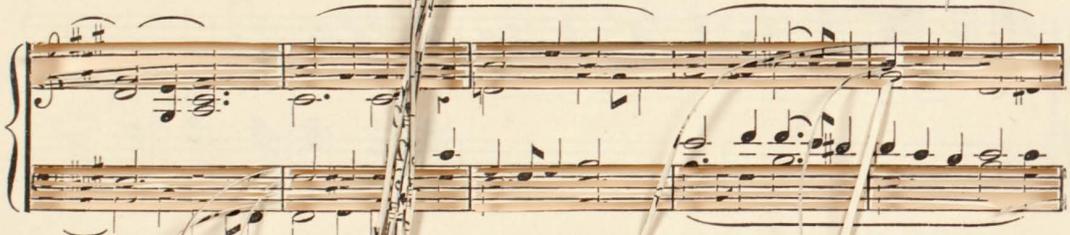
W. B. YEATS, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, 1903



175—Slumber Song.

(From Cantata "The Blind Maid of Bethany.")

CAREY BONNER.



K. Spudler 2010

Nest

Small nest woven together from cut out staves from blank musical sheets.

I have woven together hundreds of staves (removed from blank musical sheets) into the shape and form of a bird's nest. The empty nest sits on top of a glass shelf and is illuminated from within by a simple small bulb. The nest is empty and implies a sense of absence and a period of waiting. In Coleridge's poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the albatross, shot dead by the mariner, will never return to nest, even as the mariner wanders the world in search of absolution. In the stories of Noah's ark and the Epic of Gilgamesh a dove and a raven (as well as a swallow in the Epic of Gilgamesh) are sent out to search for dry land. The birds act as an intermediary between sea and land. Historically, ships uncertain of their position in waters along the coast, would liberate a caged crow that would inevitably fly directly towards the nearest land, thereby providing a course of direction for the ship. The most elevated lookout on the ship became known as the crow's nest. In this way the empty nest implies not only a search for land, but a search for relief or freedom.





Arca

Cut outs from photographs in my personal collection, black box, mirror, one-way mirrored vinyl, lighthouse-simulated light-bulb
63cm x 68.5cm x 62.5cm

During the making of *Between here and there* I kept aside the fragmentary images of life I had cut out of my snapshots. These images have been re-assembled inside an internally mirrored black box to reveal a kind of underwater wreckage. The top of the box is regularly illuminated by a lighthouse-simulated light bulb that slowly pulses on and after getting brighter gradually dims and goes off.

Ark originates from the Latin *arca* and means chest or box and is therefore suggestive of both the heart and the grave.



Ship in a bottle

Large glass bottle filled with ship dust.

After several visits to and from the NPA building at the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront I received written permission to enter the dry docks and was able to request several items they were going to discard. Shipping yard waste is categorized under different levels of toxicity and everything to be discarded is accounted for in writing. I was able to retrieve a large bag of ship dust. Ship dust was what remained from blasting work and repairs done to the underside of the ship while in dry dock. For this work I have separated the dust from the gravel used in the blasting process *and* collected it into a large glass bottle. The bottle is placed on top of *Breath*.





Breath

Wooden box, glass sheets, blender mechanism, ship dust and photo-luminescent pigment, industrial shipping light
71.5cm x 110cm x 41cm

In *Breath* a motor blows up ship dust and photo-luminescent pigment into a glass box at regular intervals and creates a cloud, also referencing mist, or fog. The mist hovers for several minutes before settling and is then blown up again into the air. A faint afterglow of the photo-luminescent powder can be observed in darkness.

At regular intervals a large shipping light illuminates the glass box and casts a shadow onto the anterior wall. The shadow appears simultaneously as a mantle piece and tombstone, an intimate space within the home and a marker for a grave. A double reflection of the light bulb appears on the glass of the box and might be read as sun and moon, a reference to the ebb and flow of the tides. In Old English and Middle English, the words *tide* (n.) and *time* were used synonymously and referred to a unit of time, such as eventide, and noontide.

I am interested in the relationship between the ship, the house and the grave. Ark (Latin *arca* meaning box or chest) relates to the Italian word for *house*, the same as *coffin*, *casa*, and also meaning chest, safe, coffer, chamber (Harrison 2003:52). Harrison describes the domestic interior as a place that is fundamentally mortuary, asserting that before human beings housed themselves in permanent dwellings, they housed their dead. These places were marked with mounds of stones and were returned to by the living so as to commune with their ancestors. Greek and Roman houses commonly featured alters on which a sacred fire burned, representing a place of "interpenetration" between those on land and those beneath it (Harrison 2003:39–40). The appearance of a house resembles that of a tomb. Whilst a house typically includes its external environment by way of windows and doors, a tomb is enclosed, its contents protected from the elements. Harrison questions, "Is it, even for us, essentially a halfway house, a site of intersection between two realms?" (Harrison, 2003:39).

The shipping light is reminiscent of those used to scan the waters to spot swimmers at night whilst aboard the hospital ship in Liberia. The spotlight or blinding lantern is historically tied up with surveillance and fear. Spotlights were used for military purposes on battleships, in fortress warfare, and field warfare, in order to recognize the movements of the enemy at night and also to search the area for the wounded (Kittler 2002:80).



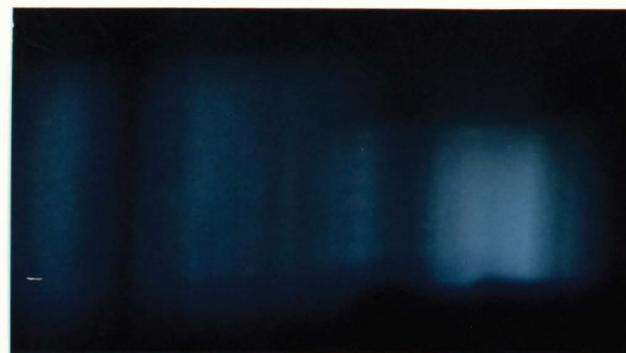


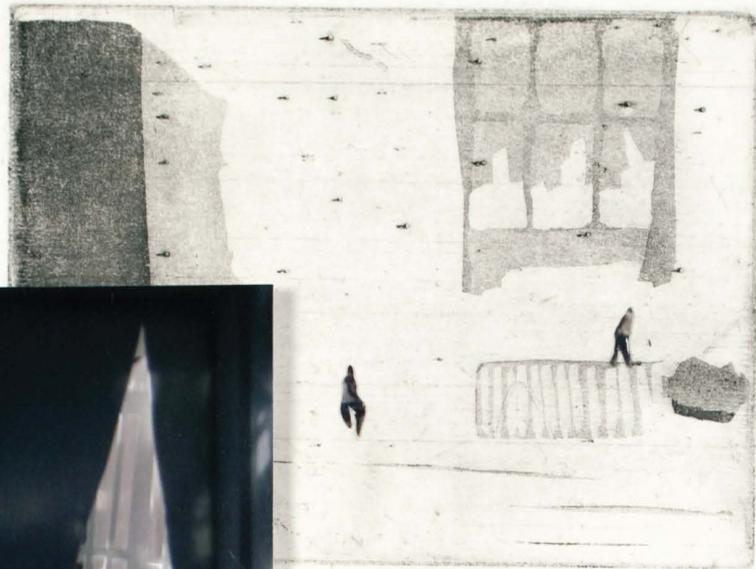
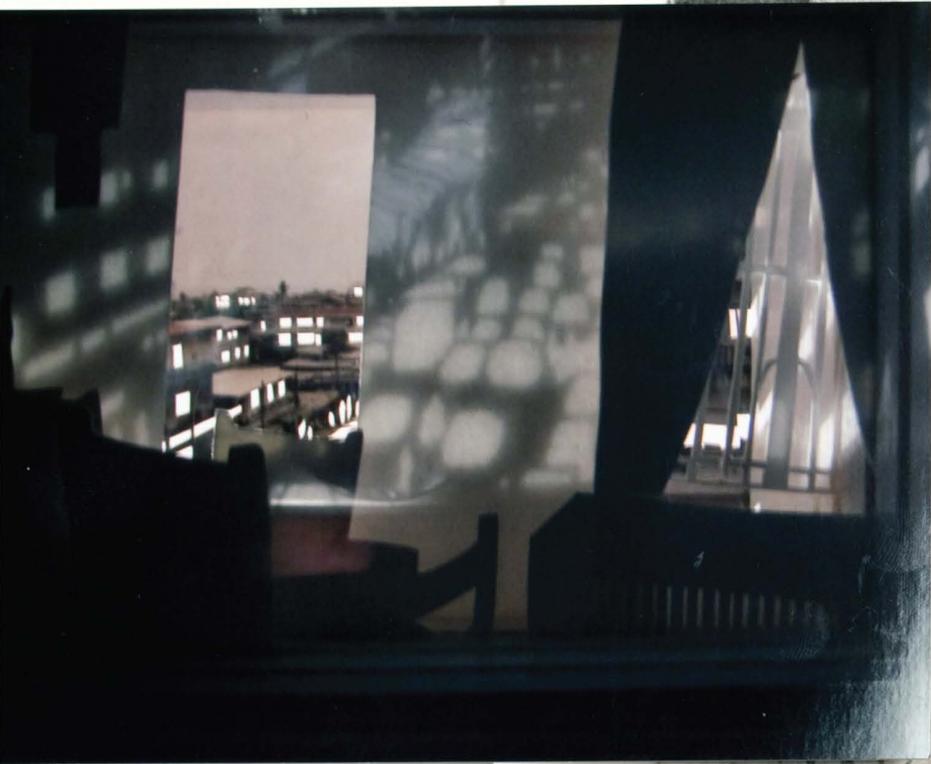
Tide

Video filmed in HD

3 minutes 40 seconds (on loop)

I constructed a domestic interior out of paper shapes set inside a small black box and then filmed the box from sunrise to sunset on a windowsill in the house of a close friend. The work reveals moving light and shadows that lengthen and shorten as the day progresses. In this way the work is reflective of a sundial, the oldest known device for measuring time that depends on the movement of shadows from east to west during the day. For the Saxons, sundials divided their days into tides (for example, noontide and eventide) rather than hours (Waugh 1973: 4).





EXODUS

Prints

A2 digital prints on archival matte paper

A series of 6 digital prints reflect enlarged stills from *Vessel* while in its making. Though the images are of paper cut interior scenes, it is unclear whether the images reflect real spaces or constructed spaces.

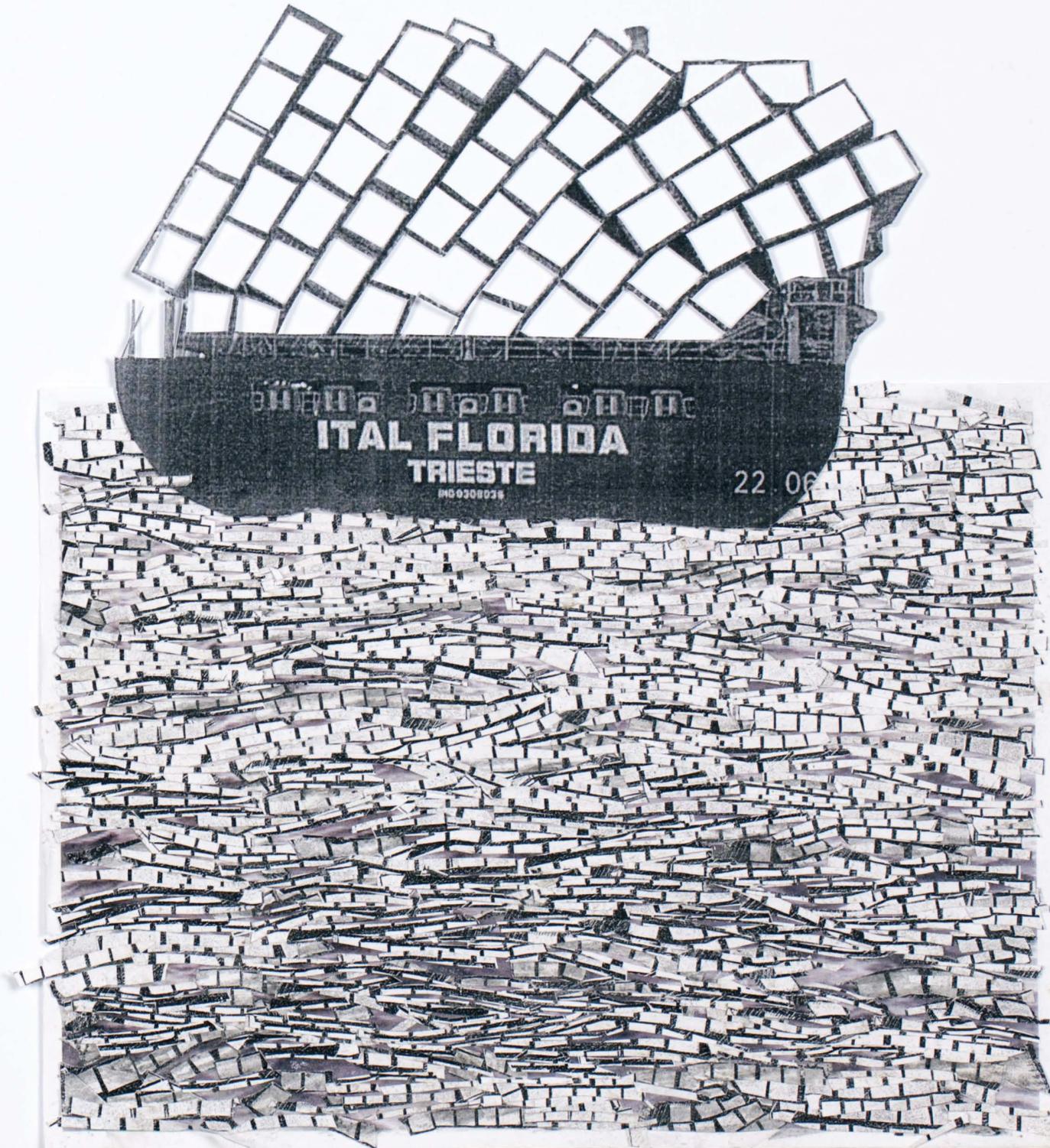


a fine balancing act

Collages

Variety of collages in mixed media, some with internal lights and clock mechanisms

The collages reflect my process and have been assembled from the objects and images from the lists appearing throughout these pages. They have both provided me with a way of thinking about the themes that inform this body of work and an explication of some of them. They are hung grouped together as if to topple over in reference to the early image of a container ship on the brink of capsizing.



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AND IS IT NIGHT?

AND is it night? Are they the eyes that shine?
Are we alone and here and here alone?
May I come near? May I see you shine?

Oh, how I wish I could see you shine,
Like the stars that shine in the night.
And I wish to see you shine, yes,
Silence and sleep prepare us for the night.
Oh, how I wish I could see you shine,
O dear, O dear, O dear, O dear.

ANNE MONTGOMERY
"The Nightingale" (1919)



19—Heavenly Father, hear my prayer.

(Tune "Cassel.")

From "The Reminder," altered.

DOH is G.

|d :r |m :s |f :m |r :- || m :r |d :r |d :t |

mf Heav'n-ly Fa - ther, hear my prayer, Day and night I'm in Thy

|d :- || t, | :d |r :s |a :t |l, :- || :d |

care; Look up on me from a - bove, Bless the

|r :m |f :m | :- || d :r |m :s | :- || m |r :- ||

home I dear - ly love. Bless all those with whom I play,

|m :r |d :r |d :r |d :r || d :- ||

Make us bet - ter ev - ery day. A - men.

K Spindler
2010

sonnet which can be rendered literally thus: 'Music often takes me like a sea! / Towards my pale star, / Under a ceiling of mist or in a vast ether, / I set sail; / With chest thrust forward and lungs inflated / Like canvas, / I scale the back of the heaped-up seas / That night veils from me; / I feel vibrating in me all the passions / Of a vessel that suffers; / The fair wind, the tempest and its convulsions / On the immense abyss/ Rock me. At other times, flat calm, great mirror / Of my despair!'

2. *It was in an Eastern port* (p. 44). Singapore (from the Malay 'Singapura': 'city of the lion'). Situated on an island at the southern tip of the Malay peninsula, it was conquered by Sir Stamford Raffles and ceded to the East India Company. It was the site of the first British settlement in the East Indies. The fort was built on a hill, and the city was surrounded by a wall. The fort was destroyed by the Dutch in 1819, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1822 and was still standing in 1842. The fort was destroyed again in 1842, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1842 and was still standing in 1862. The fort was destroyed again in 1862, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1862 and was still standing in 1882. The fort was destroyed again in 1882, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1882 and was still standing in 1902. The fort was destroyed again in 1902, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1902 and was still standing in 1922. The fort was destroyed again in 1922, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1922 and was still standing in 1942. The fort was destroyed again in 1942, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1942 and was still standing in 1962. The fort was destroyed again in 1962, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1962 and was still standing in 1982. The fort was destroyed again in 1982, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 1982 and was still standing in 2002. The fort was destroyed again in 2002, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port. The fort was rebuilt in 2002 and was still standing in 2022. The fort was destroyed again in 2022, but the city was rebuilt and became a major port.
3. *She was*
January

Let the great light be on us like a music,
Light and water flooding down with sound,



Double-sided nest
Dredger
Dove
Firefighter putting out
mountain fire
Fishermen
Fishing nets thrown into
the air in different
formations
Fish in water
Flying fish at sea
Handkerchief tree
Hiroshi Sugimoto, Baltic
Sea, Rügen (1996)
Hiroshi Sugimoto, Radio
City Music Hall (1978)
Hurricane damage
Infinity mirrors
Islands
Ivan Navarro, Death Row
(2006)
Jamie Antoni, Moor (2001)
James Turrell, Rodin Crater
(2006)
Jean Tinguely's kinetic
sculptures
Jeff Wall, After Ralph
Ellison, Invisible Man,
The Preface (2002)
Jellyfish
Jenny Holzer, Truisms
(1977-)
Jiyeon Sang's one Day
Avillan (2008)

Joseph Cornell, Setting for a
Fairy Tale (1942)
Kentridge, Breathe (part of
REPEAT) From the
beginning/Da Capo (2008)
Kentridge, Set designs for
The Nose at the MET (2009)
Kentridge, What will come
(has already come) (2006)
Knots
Luc Thymans, Alter (2002)
Labyrinth
Lighthouse surrounded by
sea
Lighthouse, frozen
Landscape snapshots
Lookout points
Lygia Pape, Têia (2002)
Metronome
Milky Way
Mona Hatsum, Routes 4
(2002)
Mona Hatsum, Misbah
(2006)
Mona Hatsum, Light Sentence
(1992)
Navigational tools for ships
Newspaper headlines
Night sky
Noah's ark
Northern lights
Nobel Webster, Miss
Understood e Mr Mcanor
(1997)

Oil lanterns at night
Olatur Eliasson, The Weather
Project (2003)
Pendulum
People leaning over dock
Phosphorescent water at sea
Paarl Rock
Postal stamp
Portholes
Projections with light
Rope
Rebecca Horn, Parrot wings
Blue (2009)
Ruined ships
Rockets launching into space
Rowing boat
Room interiors
Rice
Roof tiles
Scaffolding
Security cameras
Shells
Ship graveyards in India
and China
Ship in electric storm
Ship in the dark
Ship of fools
Ship on fire
Shipping disasters
Shipping containers
washed ashore
Shots of my studio
Silhouettes
Skyscapes
Snow globes
Sundial

Swimming pools
Ta Dean, Girl Stowaway
(1994)
Ta Dean, How to Put a
x in a Bottle (1995)
Ta Dean, Disappearance
at Sea I (1996)
Tsuo Miyajima, Spirits
in the water with Cuban
artists (2009)
W. G. Sebald's sculptures
telescope
Theater interiors
Thomas Demand's photographs
of paper works
Substances engulfed by sea
Topping van
Turner, The Fighting
Temeraire tugged to her
last berth to be broken
up (1839)
Twelve-lens camera built
by Muybridge
United Visual Artists
Volume (2006)
United Visual Artists
Chorus (2009)
View from studio at
night
Vija Celmins, Untitled
(Big Sea I) (1969)
Vija Celmins, Desert-
Galaxy (1979)
Watchtower
Rachel Whiteread,
Embankment (2006)

Rachel Whiteread, Place (2008)
Rachel Whiteread, Water
tower (1998)
Window frames
Whirlpool
Wind-powered mechanisms
Yinka Shonibare, Nelson's
Ship in a bottle (2010)
Yoko Ono, Where all Water
(2005)
Yoko Ono, Wish price (1996)
Yoko Ono, Space transformer
(2009)
Yoko Ono, HELMETS (Pieces
of sky) (2009)
Yves Klein, Leap into the
void (1960)
Zootrope

