

Port to Port: Making Connections Near and Far.
Transmissions of Care and Collectivity across Liquid Boundaries.

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Coastlines, with their narratives of liminality, erosion and the romance of distance that the sight of the sea brings, offer fertile spaces for artists to create work. These artists may be embedded in communities (creatives have historically coalesced around the more picturesque coastal locations of the UK such as St Ives). There is also another group of artists, who, supported by funding from new contemporary arts venues, can enjoy short term residencies in seaside locations. These residencies often focus on local environmental issues, community engagement or just the opportunity to create work in a non-urban environment.

Locations of marine industry are slightly different, offering a post industrial and commercial aesthetic which have led to them being neglected as spaces worthy of cultural funding (and the subsequent gentrification which follows). Felixstowe, one of the largest container ports in the UK has been one such town.

The Port of Felixstowe looks out towards the Hague and Rotterdam across the North Sea. You can sail to Rotterdam from Felixstowe port in approximately 7 hours on DFDS Ferries which also carry freight. It is also the home of Pier Projects which runs a number of community-led creative events and artist residencies.

As Introduction. Looking out to sea.

What does the sea-side offer to an artist in terms of a place to create? Can there be a kind of *off-shore-thinking* or *coastal-thinking* that engenders something unique within the residency context?

In pondering this question, it may be useful to start far out to sea:

Not owned by anyone, the 'high seas' are not officially part of any particular nation, they are a place where something close to anarchy has the opportunity to prevail. Piracy, overfishing, and the difficulty to regulate policies on climate change and plastics pollution are just some of the present issues in these unregulated waters ¹

¹In 1982, a new UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III) was formed. This enshrined Grotius' 'freedom of the seas' but with more detailed national rights and privileges. Vessels of all nations had the right of 'innocent passage'

The 'high seas' therefore contain a wildness and ambiguity with which many artists feel deep affinity. Artist Ursula Troche asks “*Where are you from?*” *How about the sea? Can we not answer with a sea – or more?*²

The sea exemplifies the symbolic marking of territory as a performed concept through the opportunity for new metaphorical and abstract boundary making.³ Into this seemingly arbitrary historiography of sea-mapping why shouldn't we name the sea as our place of origin? After-all the idea of drawing a clear territorial line in such fluid matter is somewhat difficult...This brings into relief the gendered historical practices which move between land and sea; the charting and map making, the esoteric codes and languages and the demarcated realms of fishing rights, national boundaries and the varied languages of oceanic navigation.⁴ (The trend towards feminist practices of wild swimming and eco-feminism, a reclaiming of waters within both theory and embodied practices speak of a kick back against these male striated sea faring, cartographic and navigational practices).

In terms of the UK coast/seas the Crown Estate owns its territorial seabed (but not the water itself, fishing rights are a different issue...) out to 12 nautical miles and around half of the foreshore around England, Wales and Northern Ireland.⁵

Beyond the 12 nautical mile limit the seabed is ownerless but various government bodies have sovereign rights over marine resources to the edge of the continental shelf and the 200 nautical mile limit. The Department for Energy and Climate Change have responsibility for gas and oil and the Crown Estate for offshore wind (which causes much political tension with the Royals acting as advocates for green energy and pushing for more, whilst also profiting from their installation on the sea bed).⁶

The North Sea is a place that artists look back and forth across – from Bruno Van Den Elshout who took photos from the Hague out to sea, pointing in the direction of the UK throughout the year of 2012, to the observations of artists inspired by the North Sea such as the group *Morimaru* which includes artists reaching out from the UK coast making scientific, historical and archaeological projects around of the sea and sea bed.

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through territorial waters. Fishing, polluting, weapons practice and spying are not considered 'innocent', and submarines and other underwater vehicles are required to navigate on the surface and to show their flags. See more at <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/united-nations-convention-law-sea-multilateral-diplomacy-work>

²Quote from Ursula Troche, read full article by her here <https://www.morimaru.org/seatoseaursulatroche>

³ For more on how space is constructed, ordered and controlled at sea in relation to politics and human mobility see *Lines in the ocean: thinking with the sea about territory and international law* in London Review of International Law, Volume 4, Issue 2, July 2016 Henry Jones.

⁴Indigenous territories also extend into the sea. For a Canadian perspective see

<https://coastalfirstnations.ca/our-sea/our-traditional-waters/> for an Australian perspective see <https://www.awe.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/indigenous.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1987/49/body>

⁶ <http://www.environmentlaw.org.uk/rte.asp?id=281>

⁷ <https://www.morimaru.org> curated by Natalie Mcilroy.

Morimaru acknowledges the historical richness of the North Sea; the development of European civilization and culture has been greatly influenced by its maritime traffic. The Roman Empire and the Vikings both extended their territories across this body of water. The Netherlands, and the British Empire sought to dominate trade across the waters and the North Sea was strategically important through both World Wars as Germany's leaway to the wider seas.⁸ In recent decades, the Sea's importance has largely shifted from military concerns to the economic and environmental concerns; many artists now have interest in coastal and marine locations for environmental research, often in collaboration with scientists and marine biologists.

Of course, at one point it would have been possible to walk across the North Sea from Felixstowe to mainland Europe...across Doggerland; the fertile lowland that once joined Britain to what are now, the Netherlands, Belgium and France (the name coming from *dogger* an old Dutch word for fishing boat). The submersion of Doggerland by sea level rise, glacial melt and freak tsunamis, highlights the precarious fates of our coastal communities in the face of climate change and rising sea levels (The east Anglian Fens may become our next Doggerland according to sea level rise predictions). At this point in history with the widening political divisions of Brexit, the idea of a land-bridge to mainland Europe may be very appealing, reminding us of past connections, and the fluidity of boundaries. See the work produced in '*New Doggerland*', curated by Jane Millar which opened on the eve of Brexit, 31st January 2020, particularly the work by Alison Cook using traditional Doggerland Clay.⁹

The UK's watery depths are littered with history: Hurd's Deep for example, an underwater valley between the UK and Europe, contains so many 'war graves' and shipwrecks that it was over two months before lost submarine HMS *Affray* and its 75 crew members were located in 1951. Hurd's deep also contains, dumped chemicals, military equipment, (including weaponry left behind by German invaders of the Channel islands) and up until the 70's was used as a dumping ground for nuclear and radioactive waste including plutonium, (which has a half-life of 24,100 years).

The North Sea also contains dumped materials including; alcohol, asthma medication, fly Ash, paracetamol and sewage which has been the source of much debate in parliament over the years. Also the wrecks of ships; from prehistoric longboats to Viking vessels, Dutch East India Company ships, submarines, patrol boats, fishing boats and lost cargo ships. These undersea cartographies are recorded meticulously by the organisation Noordzeeloket.¹⁰

To sail-over the sea from Felixstowe towards Rotterdam, a passenger would pass over at least 17 wrecks of historical note; including ships that collided in fog, early 20th century passenger liners which made mass

⁸For a more detailed account of the history of the North Sea see *The Edge of the World. How the North Sea made us who we are.* Micheal Pye. Penguin. 2015.

⁹ <https://alisoncooke.co.uk/Doggerland>

¹⁰ <https://www.noordzeeloket.nl/en/policy/noordzee-2050/wrakken-noordzee/>

migration across the Atlantic possible, and a ship carrying a cargo of Baccarat crystal to Russia for Tsar Nicholas II. There are also of course the histories of migrants lost while trying to cross to the UK and those seeking asylum and safety in shipping containers making their way to port.

Ferries from Felixstowe also pass near numerous oil and Gas fields with evocative names such as 'Vulcan' 'Valiant' and 'Neptune'. The Scottish artist Sue Jane Taylor documents the lives of the thousands of people who work offshore on oil rigs in the North Sea.¹¹ She has also recorded in her drawings the transmission to renewable energy and offshore wind – increasingly numbers of oil/gas platforms have become decommissioned in the North Sea but disconnecting and dismantling these platforms is a financially complicated operation and the abandoned platforms remain.

Our gaze then, when looking out from the Port at Felixstowe, towards mainland Europe and the EU also passes over these both submerged and floating narratives: The histories of the North Sea are ones of ghosts, extractions, collisions and connections.

Felixstowe itself also contains stories of the uncovered and spectral: from the eerie locations of MR James' *'Oh Whistle and i'll come to you, my lad'* (1904) where the blowing of a whistle signals an unknown apparition to appear, to the spectres roaming the town itself, including a sailor that is said to haunt Landguard Fort.

Pier Projects and Alisa Oleva's Port-to-Port.

So, what does it mean for artists making work across, upon and next to the North Sea; the maritime, industrial, military, spectral and coastal-leisure histories it contains? Pier Projects seeks to connect its coastal community in Felixstowe with artists in order to work with the histories of the town in a meaningful way. Out of one of their recent commissions has emerged the Port-to-Port project created by artist Alisa Oleva.

Port-to-Port is an expansive artwork and interdisciplinary project which spans photography, walking-art, broadcasts, sound-art and includes public workshops and a series of maps and postcards. Alisa Oleva was selected by a panel made up of local residents and she subsequently began a conversation with local people about the town which included personal reflections, memories, grievances and hopes. This process opened up an emotional cartography that shaped her subsequent thinking process.

Inspired by the internationalism and comings and goings in Felixstowe embodied by the port – its cranes and shipping containers always in sight – each of the locations where Alisa collected from local residents was sent to someone living in a different port town somewhere else in the world, along with an invitation to respond.

¹¹<https://www.scottishmaritimemuseum.org/age-of-oil-by-sue-jane-taylor/>

Alisa oversaw 25 exchanges across all corners of the globe, these exchanges became recorded as sound works to be experienced as 'sound walks' by residents and available to be personally transited live by wider audiences at a time of their choosing.

Pier Projects description of the work reads *'Alisa set in motion a signal for action, sparking a relay of transmitted memories and forming a web of connections between people living near and far'*.

The idea behind her collective transmissions was deepened by the town's histories of the decoding of signals during the second World War and Cold War (From Martello Tower and the Pirate Radio station *Radio Caroline* which ran from 1964 to 1990, and via satellite from 1998 to 2013, set up to undermine record companies' control over radio broadcasting at the time).

Alisa says *'All these findings about pirate radio and the Martello Towers, with people sitting there trying to decode signals from the Soviet Union or Germany...allowed my intuition to be supported...and I am very much aware of the hostility of this coast and of people trying to cross borders in containers and not making it...so I don't try and romanticise the sea as a source of transmission, of possibility, of movement, of coming and going – sending and receiving, but I am trying to highlight its potential and also the presence of others...'*

Alisa sought to *'problematise'* her relationship with the town to avoid romanticising the sea from the outset. She talks of arriving and feeling it to be such a content city and began to look for some way to include other voices *'I was thinking...how can I invite something from outside into this, something that will disrupt this space but not in a hostile way because that might provoke a rejection – which is also something the media for example grows around – a certain feeling of otherness that can be hyped and grown, and it was through small acts and personal connections that I think established the presence of that other, but also creating the bridge towards that other...an encounter and almost discovering that its not very different...'*

The audio works created with support from Sound Artist Olesia Onykiienko (also known as NFNR) merge the spoken narratives of two paired locations (Felixstowe and elsewhere, locations including Picton, Canada; Gothenburg, Sweden; Odessa, Ukraine; Istanbul, Turkey and Biarritz, France). The contributors to the sound-works may not meet face to face (although this is still possible) but of course this does not preclude the forming of a relationship...

The postcards and photographs (mostly analogue) that were created for the project are symbolic of this meeting/merging of Felixstowe with other locations. Here overlaid images of the town have a hybrid and slightly illusory aesthetic, we look at the port as if a mirage, flickering and glitching on the horizon...or see Felixstowe juxtaposed with an image of a distant port town – part tourist snap, part postcard, part walking prompt or invitation to elsewhere.

Residencies and Communities, the Artist's Body.

Alisa Oleva calls herself a *'residency addict'*, someone whose practice has in the past relied on the itinerant *place to place* model. She describes the residencies she undertook when she was younger as a *'sprinting*

process', going somewhere for 2-3 weeks, delivering an artists' talk or workshop perhaps, and leaving again.

The Covid epidemic changed her mode of production drastically. She says, in reference to finding online solutions to a cancelled residency in Turkey (especially since many female Istanbul residents had already signed up to work with her) '*that the work became bigger than me...it became so important that we would walk together to a place that feels like home...I will be walking in London to accompany them.*' She describes how important it became for her *not* to go in person, to let go of the traditional residency element (and all the excitements that come with travel) and create an alternative model. These were ideas that she took with her to her self-organised residency in Felixstowe.

There is often a complacency exhibited within artist residency contexts particularly regarding the unexamined role of the artist's presence in the location that they have been invited to respond to, or have gone to for inspiration. Alisa puts the question about how she responds to place at the heart of her work and she's very reflective about what it might mean to respond to a location in a non-extractive way – she foregrounds the words *holding*, *responsibility*, *gifting* and *care* and has described her practice as '*site-sensual*'¹² which automatically implicates the artist's body in any explorations, extractions or enjoyments which take place during a residency.

It seems an important way to begin any residency, be it in our home country, locations of environmental precarity, political upheaval or colonial damage, by asking the question 'What does my physical presence mean in this space?'

Alisa Oleva sees herself as a walking artist but she has also worked as a walking tour guide, making private tours of London's tourist sites. On the two different experiences she says '*I see them as very different yet they do blur. In both there are certain expectations of the relationship and there is a certain transactional relationship... there is a certain contract...they are definitely similar as they are walking with others, and there is a moment of invitation to follow...*'

These experiences have led her to be sensitive to different registers of bodily mobility; the tourist (coming as afresh from afar) as well as the locals who may wish their everyday vistas to be invigorated through other perspectives or be given tools through which to play with their location.

Alisa's work and Port-to-Port provoke multiple questions about the near and far, the proximal and distant and what they mean in terms of engagement with audiences and place. It was the contributions from local residents (their submitting of place names) that first instigated her creative process. '*The first initial process was very subtle, I was just the receiver*', says Alisa. This set the tone for the project, these gifted locations

¹²Instagram 19th August 2021

made it legitimate for her to '*send the project further*', to other locations around the world.

Alisa also has her background feeding into this, a complicated emotional mapping of missing family, friends and moving to London from Russia at a young age – cartographies of cell phone connections, video calls, social media posts and perhaps letter communiques.

In terms of on the ground residencies the physical coming and going process also becomes part of a place – your potential to leave is written into your time there, whether you will depart by foot, or car or by boat.

The Port and its Metaphors. Turning Away and Turning Towards.

The Port of Felixstowe is the largest container port in the United Kingdom – deep enough to accommodate the world's latest generation of the deep-draught Ultra Post Panamax vessels and large enough to have its own police force.

We may imagine living by the sea in sight of a port may evoke fantasies of sailing away – constant thoughts of leaving. *Down the Sea in Ships*, a book by Horatio Claire describes the author's desire to venture away on these great ships into a predominantly male world. He boarded his first ship at Felixstowe where he was invited to be the writer on board for the Maersk Group.¹³

Within this man's world, the sailors' fantasy of land and sea, docking and departing, we may also think of the novels of Jean Genet, the perhaps stereotypical world of a sailor's port life which is seedy and dark. His novel *Querrelle de Brest* is set in the midst of a port town where the sailors, and the sea from which they come, are associated with danger, prostitution and murder.

But as Alisa Oleva discovered, residents of Felixstowe often choose to ignore the port and its extended worlds and associations; '*their presence in the town is so prominent, yet as one of the people I talked to said, commenting on the fact that the Port is at the very end of the Promenade and the town in general: "you can just turn your head away and the Port is not there"*'¹⁴ Alisa reflects that visitors to Felixstowe run the risk of exoticizing the port slightly, focusing on the '*those who are not there*' that the port represents rather than the town itself, but she says it is the moving between the seeing and not seeing that interests her '*...this switching on and switching off, ignoring or choosing not to ignore...is definitely something that for me is intriguing and forming the identity of the town.*' furthermore she says '*I have heard comments that sonically it is very present, you can't see it maybe, but you can hear it...but I guess you can decide not to tune in to this*'.

Shipping is a world our lives as consumers depend on but few of us know anything about it – for all the

¹³ *Down the Sea in Ships. Of Ageless Oceans and Modern Men.* Horatio Clare. Chatto and Windus 2014.

¹⁴ As recorded by Alisa Oleva on Instagram. 2021 Post June 16th 2021.

vastness of the Port in Felixstowe, the world remains hidden to most residents, experienced as a distant soundscape.

There are a number of artist residencies based at sea but none in the ports themselves. The artist Rebecca Moss was stranded at sea after the operator, Hanjin that owned the ship she was on whilst doing her residency, went bankrupt.¹⁵ The residency *An Owner's Cabin*¹⁶ invited artists to stay aboard a working merchant ship for anywhere between three weeks to two months. Mobile residencies such as *Falkor* encouraged artists to collaborate with scientists and use exclusive technology-based research to create work about the ocean. There is also the *The Seapoint International Artist Residency* in Kittery, Maine. *TwentyThree days at Sea* an itinerant artist residency aboard a container ship, and *Container* the artist residency aboard commercial container ships working with the idea of the artist as stowaway '*voyaging into the heart of international commerce*'.¹⁷

The majority of these residencies are mobile and not embedded in the ports, but in a location such as Felixstowe, the large stacks of immobile containers, visible from great distances can as mentioned be a great source of intrigue for visitors. The inside of the container, its contents are of course not visible, we may wonder about their cargo, reading their logos from around the world (*China Shipping, Maersk, Hamburg Sud, Evergreen...*) and think perhaps of them as conduits not only of commerce but of refuge and migration.

We get to see the inside of containers when they are cleaned and reused as artists' studios, or the impromptu headquarters of arts organisations – often installed in urban gardens, cleansed of their mobile histories apart from traces of shipping insignia.

In one of her analogue photographs Alisa superimposes an image of tourists staring out from the promenade on top of an image of the Port, giving the impression that they are staring directly at the stacks of containers, ships, cranes and winches that their gaze may have actually sought to avoid.

Long Distance Signalling – Connecting with Others.

In developing the Port-to-Port sound works Alisa Oleva put out a call to people living in other port towns around the world inviting them to collaborate and connect with the town of Felixstowe from a distance; she received twenty five replies from various locations.

The sound work plays with ideas of transmitting and receiving, the idea of different Port towns communicating in a way other than through, shipping routes, trade or radio-communication. Creating a network which became more of an emotional cartography and a cross-over of signals across the sea. Alisa

¹⁵ <https://hyperallergic.com/321490/artist-in-residence-stranded-at-sea-on-bankrupt-container-ship/>

¹⁶ <https://www.theownerscabin.com>

¹⁷ See <http://www.containerartistresidency01.org/about/>

speculates ' *Where does the meeting between Felixstowe and other port towns occur? Who is meeting who? What's meets what? Is the connection possible? Do the two places reverberate, resonate, respond to each other?*'

¹⁸ The correspondences retain their potentiality. Signals which contain the seeds of emergent friendships and affinities.

The first long distance radio transmission was made on Signal Hill, St John's Newfoundland on the afternoon of December 12th 1901, Guglielmo Marconi and his assistant George Kemp sat alone in a cliff-top hut listening closely through static and howling winds. Their radio receiver was attached to 500 ft of wires supported by kites. Approximately two-thousand miles away in Poldhu, Cornwall the largest known radio transmitter was sending out groups of three clicks, the Morse code signal for the letter 'S'. There is still some debate over whether the signal was actually heard or whether Marconi wishfully misinterpreted the radio static.

The events of the first long distance radio transmission contain ideas of communication and miscommunication across distances, the possibility of mistakes and misinterpretation. It is symbolic of what lies *between*, both digitally – as '*haunted code medium*' (Carpenter) ¹⁹, and geographically. Marconi's Wireless Telegraphy was subsequently developed into the SOS (1906), a simple signal which represents a cry for help. Within a project such as Port to Port the motif of the SOS may indicate a request to be saved, or at least to be recognised by a distant other, *I am out here, I receive you*.

The S Project, a cross Atlantic collaboration between myself and the nautical artist Carly Butler takes as motif the first wireless signal and plays with ideas of remoteness, navigation and communication. 'S' involves a combination of real and virtual walking, various documented mapping processes, a series of photographs, prints and performance works, morse code signalling and an archive of postal communique. Tracked by pedometers, our steps, taken around our respective domestic locations are translated to a digital map where our 'avatars' walk carefully designed routes between the UK and Canada.²⁰

These networks of digital communication are also made explicit in Eva Roth's *Red Lines*, a peer-to-peer network performance commissioned by Art Angel that took place from September 2018 to September 2020. The network connected users with servers in geographically specific locations to participate in the sharing and viewing of 82 individual pieces from Evan Roth's Landscape series. Over the course of two years, 120,000 people in 166 countries connected to the Red Lines network.

Red Lines was composed of 82 individual network located videos, filmed in 11 countries on six continents, with durations between 3 and 19 minutes, totalling over 20 hours. Most depict a landscape where the cables which facilitate our intercontinental connections emerge from the sea.

Filmed in infrared, (a spectrum through which data is transmitted through fibre optic cables), the videos are

¹⁸ Alisa Oleva Instagram post October 4th 2021.

¹⁹ J R Carpenter *Whisper Wire* <http://luckysoap.com/generations/whisperwire.html> [accessed 5 Oct 2021].

²⁰ See more about *S Project* and access the virtual map here <http://www.sprojectarchive.com>

stored on servers located in the same territories coastal locations in which they were filmed, and made available to be streamed.

Eva Roth's work highlights the difference between algorithm generated connectivities, and ones which are more material/human, where your actions may change and re-route systems of connection. In *Red lines* when you view a network located video made in Argentina, for example, it activates the submarine cable route between Argentina and your own location. You then become part of the wider person to person network which enables this work to be experienced by more participants. In Port-to-Port Alisa Oleva makes individually tailored broadcasts to each audience member (they are able to select the specific time they want to receive the broadcast through an online form). The artist will then make sure she is available, day or night, to generate a personal broadcast for each listener. The material actions of her preparing the broadcast involve physically pressing a button to make a personal transmission – making explicit the ideas of broadcast and connection in their analogue sense, as well as undertaking proxy action on behalf of another which speaks of thinking of them, caring for them.

Activism across Oceans. Networks of Care and Friendship.

On network building Alisa says ' *I think it is very much embedded in my own personal history, in having multiple homes...choosing to be displaced...it just manifested itself in my practice*' it is through this process of missing 'home' that she became interested in being with others without being physically present.

Inadvertently through her own connections and the networks of her own past itinerant residency led life, she brought the narratives of two very different locations to the project: In forming the discussion panel for Port to Port she looked for alternative structures, reflecting on the ideas of signalling and invitation. She invited curators she had worked with on other residencies, including independent curator Maria Sarycheva based in Moscow and Diana Berg, the director of *Platform Tu* in Mariupol, Ukraine – often the site of violent political upheaval and repression.

Artist residencies are encouraged in locations such as Mariupol, as part of the act of resistance perhaps (differing from the usual - often indulgent travel that we often see in richer nations...). Post residency the artist can return to their home country and talk openly about the repression and violence of their host location, when the residents themselves do not have the luxury of such mobility. *Platform Tu* refers to itself as '*the queer art-space in Mariupol – the city, where it is dangerous to say the term “queer”*'²¹. Situated next to the military frontline, the organisation often finds itself the target of Ultra-right nationalists – whose activities range from graffiti to violent attacks.

²¹ <https://uaculture.org/organisations/platform-tu/>

In these contexts, the covert and secretive languages of the military and the sea (Medium-wave receiver radio signalling, morse code, pirate radio) have a particularly urgent resonance. Reminding us of resistance, interceptions, signal scrambling, political activism and networks of change, connecting us with locations of political instability, where allies and friends from other places are much needed. *TU art-platform* cites their interests as '*diversity, tolerance, inclusivity, social equality, fighting violence, gender sensitivity, memory and commemorative practices, freedom of self-expression, local identity, right to the public space, and decommunization*'.

How do we as visiting artists extend these aims and create commemorative practices? Open up space for marginalised voices, the dead, and those right now amidst conflict who are asking for solidarity? How do we translate these histories and political calls to action into culturally consumer-able art (indeed is it ethical to do so...?) and how valuable is the artist residency industry to this process? For Alisa, developing friendships and networks of care becomes a political act in itself. She talks about '*Women's work*'²² a 1972 publication set up as part of and counter to Fluxus (and in turn male led walking practices such as Flanery) and also cites Janet Cardiff as deepening her interest in the 'encounter' within walking practices.

These artists and past works gave her she says, the strength to begin '*spreading things further*' with art works like Port to Port. '*I think it's a practice of togetherness and of care – what allowed me to do what I do was the feeling of support and presence of other women*'.

She has developed an abstract network of support for herself through curators she has befriended on residencies and the works and writing of women she has never met, some no longer living but through which she gathers strength. Connections slipping through time, transferred responsibilities, activisms and knowledges, are what Alisa hopes to pass on to younger generations of 'walking artists' in time.

The Water Between Us. Ghosts at Sea. Voices. Transmissions.

The body of water across which our signals cross is a mysterious one; utilised by conceptual artists such as Bas Jan Ader the Dutch conceptual artist who, in 1975, boarded his little ship 'Ocean Wave' and attempted to become the first person to cross the Atlantic Ocean in the smallest boat possible. Three weeks after the expedition started, his radio lost its signal. His boat was found some miles away from the Irish coast. His disappearance remains a mystery but is hailed by some as a masterfully executed conceptual artwork.

The ocean is haunted as JR Carpenter tells us. She writes about the history of the north Atlantic as one of ghosts not only in a literal but an ontological sense. Telegraphy has always been associated with otherworldly

²² Magazine edited by Alison Knowles with Annea Lockwood, 1975
Facsimile edition re-published by Primary Information, New York, 2019

realms. If intelligent speech and 'consciousness' could be transmitted independent of the body's direct voice then surely the dead could also speak to the living through these same electromagnetic means...Carpenter suggests the medium has always been haunted – morse code clicks through static, cables laid under the ocean carrying voices, messages distorted by distance, misheard, delayed. She plays with these ideas in *Whisper Wire*, a work about sending and receiving through electromagnetic medium, disjointed and disembodied messages appearing as poetry through a javascript generator.

The first wireless transmission in 1901: the message breaking through the radio hum across the vast ocean – easy to misinterpret, or mishear perhaps. Although Marconi claimed he heard the three clicks, the truth of his claim is still a matter of some speculation based on residual notions at the time that radio waves travelled in straight lines and that Marconi may have mistaken atmospheric static for clicks. perhaps it was the wind, or some disembodied message from somewhere else, another time.

Amanda Lagerqvist suggests there may be different types of ghost – analogue and digital – according to the era in which the subject died. These presences shift from the back and forth of telegraphy and wireless radio to the transcendental realm of the internet which is always awake, always transmitting.²³ The sea is awash with ghosts, analogue and otherwise.

To be at the edge of this watery and vast local offers something very particular and also yet intangible to the minds of artists and writers. In *The Pleasures of the Coast, The Technical Coast* a 'Hydro-Graphic Novel' JR Carpenter writes

*'I pass days at the very edge of the sea, my feet touching the Ocean. An indefinable superstition condemns me not to lose contact with it. Because there is only one way left to escape the alienation of the Coast: to retreat ahead of it.'*²⁴

Perhaps humans like to be at the edge of things...dip your toe in the Ocean at the same time as your lover on a distant shore and you are touching perhaps, or so when we are lonely we like to believe.

*'Water extends embodiment in time – body, to body, to body. Water in this sense is facilitative and directed towards the becoming of other bodies...we require other bodies of other waters (that in turn require other bodies and other waters) to bathe us into being.'*²⁵

The presence of the other – as with the paired locations, bodies and voices in Alisa Oleva's sound works facilitates a kind of temporal '*body, to body, to body*' relay that engenders the emergence of something new. Neimadis's '*bathing into being*' seems somewhat romantically naissant, but our uncomfortable-ness with the corporeal connections and watery affinities are perhaps symptomatic of what Elizabeth Grosz called '*somataphobia*'²⁶. Why shouldn't water *feel* our bodies and transmit them, and from them, towards others?

²³ *The Internet is Always Awake: Sensations, Sounds and Silences of the Digital Grave in Digital Existence: Ontology, Ethics and Transcendence in Digital Culture*. Edited by Amanda Lagerqvist. Routledge 2018.

²⁴<http://luckysoap.com/pleasurecoast/en/technicalcoast.html>

²⁵ From *Bodies of Water. Post Human Feminist Phenomenology*. Astrid Neimadis, Bloomsbury 2016. Quote can be found in the introduction *Figuring bodies of Water*.

²⁶ Elizabeth Grosz sites the body as a blind spot within the history of western philosophy and theory. See *Volatile*

Masuro Emoto (the sometimes debunked pseudoscientist) claimed that water changed its molecular structure according to human feeling. What does the water across which we yearn for a place or person look like? Can the Ocean *feel* our longings and affinities across distances according to his logic? How does the molecular structure of water shape itself as it coalesces around the lonely, lost or far from home...?

We remember that water is also a site of violence and sadness: loved ones lost, boats sunk, plutonium buried, and refugees set adrift... even if we feel the ideas of eco feminism and its watery connectivities to be literally 'wishy washy' then we are reminded very explicitly of water as connector in projects such as Ephemeral Coast,²⁷ a cross Atlantic research project that works with the idea that microorganisms, climates, and animals of the seas are affected by our actions and have repercussions across continents. We need only look at the mobilities of micro plastics to see how our gestures impact distant places (traces found in the breast milk of those living in the most remote locations for example).

Our debris travels in the same way as another signal may; a text message, a radio transmission.

Conclusion: Offshore-thinking.

In Alisa Oleva's Port-to-Port, the distance between collaborators and their transmissions surely becomes a space for multiple affinities across liquid boundaries, one full of voices: merging with lost radio transmissions, old Mayday signals, pirate radio static. Flowing over subterranean gas pipes, internet cables, to emerge in Mainland Europe. Then speeding towards Mariupol, towards Moscow, towards Canada – voices becoming multifarious across time, distorted, echoing (glitching perhaps) but always received...

The concept of *Off-shore thinking* that I proposed speculatively at the beginning of this essay encompasses to me the multitude of conflicting voices and open questions the sea contains, the mess of cross historical chatter and histories which can include theories of affinity and feminine aqua-embodiment and corporeal feminism²⁸ alongside misogynist histories of seafaring and can also include and tolerate the human histories (wrecks, tragedies, mistakes) and begin a dialogue with and caring for living organisms and their habitants. I am thinking, as a metaphor, of the intricate eco systems which grow upon and around ship and submarine wrecks, rendering them almost unrecognisable to divers, or the cans of plutonium (as uploaded as photos to google maps by Greenpeace) taken over by barnacles and seaweed at the bottom of the sea bed.

Off-shore thinking will encompass the striated worlds of navigational practices, Meridian lines, longitudes, latitudes, circle routes, parallels- distances measures, lines on maps drawn: Lines of possession demarcating the damaging histories of setting out and colonising that the sea holds as well as the smooth ethically resonant ideas of eco-feminism – '*In me everything is already flowing*' (Irigaray).²⁹ This thinking may

Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism. Elizabeth Grosz. Bloomington, Indiana University press 1994.

²⁷<http://www.ephemeralcoast.com/about-1>

²⁸For references to this term see *Volatile Bodies. Towards a Corporeal Feminism.* Elizabeth Grosz. Bloomington, Indiana University press. 1994.

²⁹See Quote from *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* Luce Irigaray and also cited in *Hydrofeminism: Or on Becoming a Body of Water* Astrida Neiminas from *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilising Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in*

embody the practical elements of sea faring with the ephemerality of desire and longing.

Someone who is able to *offshore- think* will be able to encompass and 'hold' these ambiguities and voices without subsuming any of them; to be able to think about the local and the distant both at once, the detailed (up close) and the far off that bring different, and much needed, kinds of affinity and friendship, as Alisa Oleva has clearly managed in her open and generous work *Port-to -ort*. Reflecting on the project she says '*It is porous, and it is soft and it is full of potential...it is aware of itself also being hostile*'

Because, of course, a work like this set in a port town also contains a *land-ness*, the possibilities of turning your back to the sea and its confusing ambiguities and *elsewhere* and looking inward – but this thinking holds the danger of being insular, closed off, as the desires for the parochial in Brexit have revealed. It is also a mode of survival, of getting on with one's day to day without being troubled by other people, other places and all that the Port represents.

It is these ambiguities – these land-sea tensions – that enable towns like Felixstowe to offer rich territory for the visiting artist (as well as the local resident).

Perhaps best to straddle both land and sea? To keep one toe in the water (like JR Carpenter) one foot on the shore, and eyes to the horizon...

Because, as the old folk saying goes, *never turn your back on the sea* –

you might get hit by a wave.

NB: All quotations from Alisa Oleva (apart from where otherwise footnoted) come from an interview/dialogue between Alisa and Gudrun Filipka which took place in October 2021.

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