

## First and last port of call

Perdita Phillips

It begins with the ocean. On the high seas *Radiolaria* roll. Their drifting is subject to the Indian Ocean's currents. The barely visible world of plankton supplies the bulk of the world's oxygen. The ocean is rich in movement and dynamism. Storms rise up from the south. How far is it possible to meld with this world gazed upon from the shore, from a ship, from satellites or submerged cameras? How does it affect the self? Can we be taken to places of entanglement and transformation? The deep ocean is a place of turbulent dissolutions and recombination. It is the territory of pelagic fish and mammals and deepwater specialists. It is a place of uncertain combinations of life and unknown hybrid forms in the still-largely unplumbed depths. This is territory owned by nobody, but subject to international treaties and crossed by cables and container ships coming and going from Singapore, Port Klang, Durban, Auckland and elsewhere.

Patricia Tarrant

Shiva Amir-Ansari

Nic Compton

Simon Gilby

An invisible line on a map traces Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone and by and by, the roiling depths give way to the edge of the continental shelf. It is followed by seagrass meadows as soon as sufficient sun can reach the shoaling bottom. Rounding Rottneest Island, the Fairway Landfall Buoy is the beginning of Gage Roads and the first navigation marker encountered by cargo ships. We of the shore are familiar with the modern container ships that anchor here. Contact is established between ship and shore. Protocols are enacted, a pilot boards a ship, and the Deep Water Channel is taken.

Denise V Brown

With the help of the pilot the great ship glides between the North and South Moles and over the ghost of the original limestone bar that was blasted out between 1895 and 1897 as part of C. Y. O'Connor's construction of the harbour. Remnants of the rock ledge can still be found beneath the Maritime Museum. The bar had been used as a significant river crossing point. It was the remains of an ancestral crocodile that had travelled down from the north. Part of living Whadjuk Noongar cultural stories, the crocodile was dismembered and its tail left as the bar to prevent salt water coming upstream<sup>1</sup>.

Tugs assist the container ship to tie up in the Inner Harbour. This is a working port. By day and night it provides a subject for intense observation of its goods, transactions and exchanges. In the present day, barges deliver supplies to northwest offshore and island oil facilities.

Sally Stoneman  
Lorraine Spencer  
Pichette  
Angelo Caranna

Back in time the *Travancore* arrives in Fremantle in 1853, one of the so-called bride ships<sup>2</sup> (and further back was the age of exploration). The roll-call of vessels that have arrived and departed from Fremantle is like the palimpsest of marks on the fender piles and jetty timbers. On the wharfs one can imagine past stories. Suitcases and trunks are piled up on Victoria Quay. Migrants arrive to uncertain futures. Hard times may be ahead.

Car transporters now ferry and disgorge the most recent mechanical servants. From the Perth to Fremantle train carriage window we can lean over and see the yards of cars but we hardly see those who work to bring them to us. The lumpers and fishermen of the harbour's 19th and 20th century histories are invisible through the glass.

Beverley Iles

David Small

Vanessa Wallace

Tracey Hart  
Eva Fernández  
Denise Pepper

Criss Sullivan  
Dianne Souphandavong

Who decides who belongs and who does not? Looking back in history we learn of fifty Chinese men from Hong Kong smuggled in the ballast tanks of the *Almkerk* in 1927<sup>3</sup>. And somewhere in present day offshore, a child drowns overboard. We are at flood tide. Strange reverberations are felt. We stand on a threshold in time between devastation and remembered possibilities<sup>4</sup>.

Anna DeLaney  
Richard Foulds

Andrew Nicholls  
Karin Wallace

Artists working through these pasts are re-examining their own transcultural histories. Their interest is not necessarily in nostalgia but, through criticality, a reexamination of the past that draws out our position today. Philosopher Walter Benjamin's well-known description of the Angel of History shows us the figure leading us into the future, unable to turn to face the vision, instead captured by the parade of destruction following in its wake: "where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet."<sup>5</sup> More recently, Rebecca Solnit has contrasted this figure that arose at the eve of WWII, with an Alternative Angel of History<sup>6</sup> that is more ambiguous: one that learns from disaster and continually retries ways to negotiate the future, for what is a past if not for creating new futures? Hence difficult ethical questions are raised in art as new spaces of possibility are generated.

Here we all are, in our own way, making art today, pursuing many different courses. We are making art here on the Indian Ocean rim as a "celebration of the wondrous present" but which requires an "agonistic struggle"<sup>7</sup> with the estranged. At the same time, "our strategies must be more like water itself, undermining everything that is fixed, hard and rigid with fluidity, constant movement and evolution"<sup>8</sup>.

It is night. Now comes the time to depart. Ties are undone as the tide ebbs out to sea. Between the vessels whose engines rumble and echo through the port-side suburbs in the early hours of morning, silent grey cetacean bodies glide and surface, crossing over the ghost bar and then disappear out between the moles' lighthouses<sup>9</sup>. From Walyalup (Fremantle) we move silently past Carnac Island (Ngooloomayup), the island of tiger snakes that breaches its broad back from out of Parmelia Bank. We travel past another part of the crocodile's body (Meeandip, Garden Island) and further out again, following humpback migrations, heading towards the Antarctic. In the Southern Ocean Shy Albatross are off on ocean-crossing migrations, global travellers of pelagic waters.

Robyn Pickering

We return to the wild waters where our unsettled imaginations can roam. The towering shapes of icebergs shadow us at the edges of consciousness. The future of icebergs is uncertain<sup>10</sup>. Change is coming. The Alternative Angel of History is here to nudge us along in imagining *What-Is-Desired-But-Not-(Yet)-Existing*. How will we combine unresolved pasts, presents and futures? Art's role is to create new territories: neither to depart from urgent questions nor to arrive at clarity, but to sail on the edge of what it is to be uncertain.

Stuart Elliott  
Perdita Phillips

- 1 Australian Interaction Consultants, **The changing Cockburn Coast. Appendicies - Indigenous Heritage. Preliminary Investigation of Aboriginal Heritage: Cockburn coast draft district structure plan.** 2008, Western Australian Planning Commission: City of Cockburn.
- 2 Stocker, L., L. Collard, and A. Rooney, *Aboriginal world views and colonisation: implications for coastal sustainability.* **Local Environment**, 2015: p. 1-22.
- 3 My great-great grannie Winifred Nealis was an Irish famine orphan who was sent out to be a domestic servant on the *Lady Kennaway* that arrived in Melbourne in 1848.
- 4 Dowson, J., **Fremantle Port: A pictorial history.** 2011, Fremantle: John Dowson.
- 5 Houston, D., *Crisis and resilience: Cultural methodologies for environmental sustainability and justice.* **Continuum**, 2008. **22**(2): p. 179-190.
- 6 From *Theses on the Philosophy of History*\* —the last major work Benjamin completed before attempting to flee Vichy France a few months later, and committing suicide in September 1940 after being unable to cross the French-Spanish border. \*included in Benjamin, W., **Illuminations.** 1969, New York: Schocken Books.
- 7 Solnit, R., **Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities.** 2006, New York: Nation Books.
- 8 Scalapino, L., **How Phenomena Appear to Unfold.** 2011, (New and Expanded ed.). New York: Litmus Press.
- 9 Solnit, pages 135-136
- 10 Holyoake, C., et al., **Toxicant exposure, population genetics, and trophic associations of bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) in the Swan River. Final report to the Swan River Trust for the Swan Canning Research Innovation Program (SCRIP) Project RSG09MUR01.** 2011, Murdoch Cetacean Research Unit Murdoch University: Perth.
- 11 Gutt, J., et al., *The Southern Ocean ecosystem under multiple climate change stresses — an integrated circumpolar assessment.* **Global Change Biology**, 2015. **21**(4): p. 1434-1453.