The ship: navigating the myths, metaphors and realities of Foucault's heterotopia *par excellence*.

1. Introduction

> Before the dream (or the terror) could weave
> Mythologies and cosmogonies,
> Before the time could mint itself into days,
> The sea, the always sea, it had been and it was.
>
> From 'The Sea', Jorge Luis Borges

In 1967 on 14th March, Foucault gave a short talk to a group of architects on the theme of heterotopia, a term which has been interpreted in multiple ways and become a prevalent tool of analysis across numerous disciplines in the human sciences, humanities and the arts[1]. He did not return to develop the idea and reluctantly agreed to publish a version of the talk in 1984, the year of his death. The notion of heterotopia, which is presented perhaps rather playfully, is in itself somewhat confusing and incomplete[2]. In a nutshell, Foucault tries to identify features of a range of socio-cultural spaces that behave in a different kind of way from most other spaces. They act as enclosed worlds within worlds, mirroring what is outside but at the same time converting it into something utterly different. Of the many sites he mentions, certain modern cemeteries are a good illustrative example. They are sites as much about time as space: bounded, designed like miniature cities, housing the dead in individual plots, steeped in ritual, bearing permanent memorials to the transient and a final rites of passage. When you step into a cemetery, you step into a different self-enclosed world: the same and other. As well as the 'highly heterotopian' cemetery other examples Foucault mentions include: brothels, gardens of antiquity, utopian colonies, prisons, boarding schools, magic carpets, Turkish baths, fairs and ships. Such spaces form family resemblances that mark points of crisis, enclose 'deviant' groups, function as sites of illusion or compensation, encapsulate a microcosm of the world or provide refuge or escape.

Amongst the dozens of major and hundreds of minor commentaries and studies that have followed Foucault's talk, very few have taken up his concluding example, the ship, which he describes as the heterotopia *par excellence*[3]. The final flourish of the text is worth quoting in full:

> Brothels and colonies are two extreme types of heterotopia, and if one considers, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is self-enclosed and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from bank to bank, from brothel to brothel, goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why, from the sixteenth century until the present, the boat has been for our civilisation, not only the greatest instrument of economic development but also the greatest reservoir of imagination. The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure, and the police the pirates[4].

It is also worth noting here that Foucault did present a shorter version of the talk the previous year as part of a radio broadcast – not yet translated into English[5]. The outline is similar although the first version includes reference to children whom he suggests know these 'other spaces' particularly well. Children make heterotopias through pretend games in huts, wigwams and dens in the garden as well as on their parents' bed, becoming, for example, such fantastic spaces as a raft or boat tossed by perilous waves. In this earlier version, his even more colourful conclusion about ships refers back to these make-believe spaces:

> Civilizations without ships are like children whose parents do not have a large bed on which they can play: their dreams dry up, espionage replaces adventure and the hideousness of the police the dazzling beauty of buccaneers (own translation)

Children's adventure ship (Nice, France). Own photograph.

The ship stands out amongst Foucault's examples of heterotopia because it has become an object of excess meaning, generating endlessly rich and varied symbols and metaphors from prehistoric rituals and cave paintings through to ancient and modern literature and art. As Conrad[6], an experienced sailor reflects: 'the antiquity of the port appeals to the imagination by the long chain of adventurous enterprises that …. floated out into the world….'. In this short essay, I will draw upon mainly Western seafaring literature and ancient myths to explore why ships and boats might be claimed as the prime example of Foucault's puzzling and enigmatic spatio-temporal concept. The essay will explore: the wide and diverse metaphors of seafaring; the relationship between ships and other heterotopias; and the multiple shifts and transformations of the ship, both mythical and real.

2. The metaphors of seafaring – dangers, opportunities and the unknown

> You fellows know there are voyages that seem ordered for the illustration of life, that might stand for a symbol of existence[7] (Conrad)

> As a man-of-war that sails through the sea, so this earth that sails through the air. We mortals are all on board a fast-sailing, never-sinking world frigate …[8] (Melville)

As Hans Blumenberg (1997) argues, with examples going back to early antiquity, we have recurrently represented our life as a type of sea voyage. This rich and varied 'nautical metaphorics of existence' include:

> …. coasts and islands, harbours and high seas, reefs and storms, shallows and calms, sail and rudder, helmsman and anchorages, compass and astronomical navigation, lighthouses and pilots.'

For Blumenberg, metaphors 'grasp connections' as tools to explore and test our curiosity, disturbing and prompting the imagination. Further than this, he places the use of metaphors as an initial starting point for the formation of any theory, scientific or otherwise, indicating features of our life that actually lead us to think theoretically in the first place. Drawing examples from, for example, Hesiod, Lucretius, Horace, Montaigne, Voltaire, Goethe and Nietzsche, Blumenberg demonstrates how the seafaring metaphor has numerous manifestations, shifting through the course of history, with notable transformations between antiquity and the critical age of the Enlightenment. Put very simply, the former questioned or problematised the wisdom of voyaging beyond the known, of leaving a familiar and 'natural' environment. For instance, in Hesiod's in *Works and Days*, we find a prevalent tension that is played out in different ways between the attraction of staying on land, the accustomed and 'normal' home, and going to sea to seek adventure or a 'better life'. For Hesiod, the attractions of sea travel to the young were dangerous and foolish, exposing themselves to the risks of shipwreck and disaster, an apt and natural punishment. In contrast, the Enlightenment tended to acknowledge the dangers of seafaring but considered that it was worth taking the risk in order to master and control nature through science and technology and to achieve human aspirations. Curiosity for the unknown boundaries of the sea is encouraged and celebrated.

There is certainly an ongoing tension in the seafaring metaphor of existence that can be found throughout Western literature. For instance, Hesiod's caution is echoed in Defoe's puritan fable *Robinson Crusoe*[9]. Crusoe's father warns his son against going to sea to seek his fortune. Was it more than a 'mere wandring inclination?' he asked. Sea adventures were either for 'men of desperate fortunes' or those with 'aspiring, superior fortune' and his son was neither! Staying on land represents here the 'middle station' that experienced the fewest disasters and avoided 'tempests at sea and troubles on shore'. Of course, rather than being content with the security of the land, Crusoe was tempted by the promised excitement and delights of the sea and suffered the consequences for his foolish inclinations. Having been shipwrecked, the desert island gives him the chance to rebuild a conventional normal life. More surprisingly perhaps, Hesiod's view of the perils of the sea is supported by Conrad in *The Mirror of the Sea*. The great modern novelist of seafaring argues

that the sea has been the 'accomplice of human restlessness…… playing the part of dangerous abettor of world-wide ambitions' and more:

> All the tempestuous passions of mankind's young days, the love of loot and the love of glory, the love of adventure and the love of danger, with the great love of the unknown and vast dreams of dominion and power, have passed like images reflected from a mirror, leaving no record upon the mysterious face of the sea.

Elsewhere[10] Conrad quips 'who would be a sailor, if he could be a farmer?'

Of course it is in the romantic tradition (in the widest sense of the term) that this metaphor of a cautious life is utterly reversed, where sea voyages come to represent freedom and exploration and the land is associated with a sedentary, restricted and stale existence. In Virginia Woolf's first novel[11], 'The Voyage Out', the view from the deck of a ship evokes London as a 'circumscribed mound' and a 'crouched and cowardly figure'. In complete contrast to these 'prisoners' of the land, the people going away to sea were now 'free of roads, free of mankind'. Woolf pokes fun at those on *terra firma* who remain amongst familiar surroundings with no inkling of the passion and exhilaration of sea travel. Ships vanishing on the horizon dissolve in their shallow imagination. The great poets of modernity take this attitude much further, above all perhaps through Baudelaire, embracing the freedom of the voyage into the unknown.   His romantic restlessness is inspired by the voyage beyond the conventional into a quest to discover something new, travelling without a destination into a mysterious world full of dreams and fantasies as evoked in *L'homme et la mer*:

> You are both dark and reticent;
> Man, none has sounded your profound abyss,
> O sea, none knows your hidden treasures,
> You keep your secrets with such firm intent!

Some of these deep secrets of the sea are glimpsed by other writers, if somewhat enigmatically. Conrad, in frequently suggesting there is something uneasy about the sea - hazardous, vast, unknown, unfamiliar – hints that it is a space that evokes mythical creatures and monsters. Edgar Allan Poe's elusive novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*[12], which draws on contemporary accounts of exploration in the South Seas, captures this unease. Again, the romantic attractions are spelt out by the young gullible narrator:

> My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown.

His voyage does indeed lead to terrible ordeals which he survives until reaching a conclusion that Poe seems to deliberately leave uncertain: 'unapproachable and unknown'. Battered by a torrential wave:

> ….. there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow.

Other illustrations of the mysteries of the sea abound in literature and legend. Mythical sea monsters are found in the Hebrew stories of Leviathan, developed from the earlier Canaanite sea monster, *Lôtā*; others populate late Norse mythology, for example, the giant sea creature Kraken, and can also be found in modern tales of, for instance, *Isonade*, a mythological sea monster said to live off the coast of Western Japan and which snares sailors and capsizes boats. And the myth of the Flying Dutchman (*De Vliegende Hollander*), a ghost ship that can never reach port and is destined to sail the oceans forever, influenced both Poe and Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in the depiction of the spectre-woman on board a skeleton ship:

> Her lips were red, her looks were free,
> Her locks were yellow as gold:
> Her skin was as white as leprosy,
> The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
> Who thicks man's blood with cold.

In contrast, D. H Lawrence's last poems draw upon ancient Viking and Etruscan rituals, as well as the story of Noah's ark, to instruct us to build a ship that will take us into death:

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

Facing the prospect of death, Lawrence seeks to construct a ship that will negotiate this most difficult, fearful journey and uphold his faith in the idea of a final adventure:

> 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.

3. The ship as a light and dark heterotopia

As testified by Baudelaire, the mysteries of the sea have 'excited the imagination' in a myriad of different forms and startling, troubling images, but it is the sailing vessel itself that Foucault pinpoints as a 'reservoir of imagination'. In the *Nigger in Narcissus*, Conrad conveys how the dynamics of the two are of course inseparable as the vastness and lurking mysteries of the sea amplify the spatio-temporal experience inside the vessel:

> The smiling greatness of the sea dwarfed the extent of time. The days raced after one another, brilliant and quick like the flashes of a lighthouse, and the nights, eventful and short, resembled fleeting dreams ….

In a short essay in his *Mythologies* (1972 [1957]) collection, Roland Barthes teasingly contrasts the excitement of sea travel with the enclosed space of the ship through comparing Jules Verne's sea tales with Rimbaud's giddying poem 'The Drunken Boat' [*Le bateau ivre*]. According to Barthes, Verne's travel is about discovering and populating spaces of seclusion rather than flights of adventure and escape. As with children's games in huts and tents – echoing somewhat Foucault's description of children's playful heterotopias -

the passion is to enclose oneself, to feel settled. Barthes suggests that Verne's image of the ship encapsulates this tendency:

> 'the joy of perfectly enclosing oneself, of having at hand the greatest possible number of objects, and having at one's disposal an absolutely finite space'. 66.

In the midst of the immense sea, the sense of enclosure is intensified, the safety of possession and ownership. For Barthes, the opposite is expressed in Rimbaud's 'Drunken Boat', where the comfort is left for a 'genuine poetics of exploration', as captured in the following extract:

> I followed deadpan Rivers down and down,
> And knew my haulers had let go the ropes.
> Whooping redskins took my men as targets
> And nailed them nude to technicolour posts.
>
> I didn't give a damn about the crews,
> Or the Flemish wheat and English cotton.
> Once the shindig with my haulers finished
> I had the current take me where I wished[13].

From Barthes' perspective, rather than a genuine poetics of exploration, the ship for Verne is a fascinating and yet safe, infantile and rather bourgeois conception. However, Conrad again provides a further perception that breaks such a neat dichotomy. Based on many sea voyages, including very dangerous ones, Conrad reflects in *The Secret Sharer*:

> And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems…

For Conrad, the space of the ship presented the possibility of a heterogeneous and conflicted mix of freedom, risk and security. Both Conrad and Melville's great seafaring novels, of and about modernity, explore these rich, contradictory and multi-layered qualities of the ship. In one of the few major studies of Foucault's heterotopia *par excellence*, Cesare Casarino (2002) explores the sea narrative of both authors by using the concept as a 'heuristic backdrop'. He investigates the ship narrative in a similar way to Deleuze's 'crystal-image' – a space somewhere between the virtual and the actual, pinpointing an essential heterotopian quality through Conrad's evocative description of the ship *Narcissus*:

> 'a fragment detached from the earth, went on lonely and swift like a small planet'

In this conception, the vessel - like all heterotopias - is a disconnected piece but also a self-enclosed whole. It is a 'minute world' within a world depicted as two opposites held together in tension. Moreover, the ship 'embodies the desire to escape the social while simultaneously representing it, contesting it, inverting it-'. Another facet of this curious feature of ships is played out in Melville's description of the ship *Neversink* as overlaid with associations with other heterotopias in an array of family resemblances. Casarino highlights how, for example, the *Neversink* is described as a medieval castle, a prison, a fortress, a theatre, a church, a hospital, a school, and a monastery – different enclosed worlds,

endlessly metamorphic. Other traits of life on the *Neversink* echo Foucault's examples of the routine of the heterotopian Jesuit colony or prison. On the ship, 'the bell strikes to dinner, and hungry or not, you must dine'. Melville also describes *Neversink* as a 'city afloat' which is laid out with avenues, squares, parks and distinct hierarchical spaces, mirroring such heterotopia as the self-enclosed city of the dead, captured by Ariés:

> The city of the dead is the obverse of the society of the living, or rather than the obverse, it is its image, its intemporal image. For the dead have gone through the moment of change, and their monuments are the visible sign of the permanence of their city' (Ariés, 1976: 74)

Such representational overlays are also mirrored through history in actual transformations of ships into prisons, asylums, hospitals, schools and brothels. An example of the last instance is traced by Rees (2001) *in The Floating Brothel*, a narrative based on trial records and letters from 1789, when 237 women convicts left England for a penal colony in New South Wales on board the Lady Julian. The women were shipped out to provide sexual services, and a breeding bank, for the men already in the colony. The colony, Sydney Cove, was a British garrison town, a labour camp worked by convicts and guarded by the military. On their journey, at different ports, men rowed out to the ship which became a transitory 'floating brothel' – a 'small world of Lady Julian' encapsulating a sailing vessel, a prison and a brothel in its journey to a penal colony and where eventually some of the women gained control over their lives. This darker potential of the heterotopian ship is vividly captured by J. M. W. Turner in lines placed next to his painting 'The slave ship' (1840), recording how the captain of the ship 'Zong' ordered 133 slaves to be thrown overboard so that insurance payments could be collected,. Ships, like all heterotopias, have light and dark extremes (Faubion, 2008):

> Aloft all hands, strike the top-masts and belay;
> Yon angry setting sun and fierce-edged clouds
> Declare the Typhon's coming.
> Before it sweeps your decks, throw overboard
> The dead and dying – ne'er heed their chains
> Hope, Hope, fallacious Hope!
> Where is thy market now?"

> J.M.W. Turner *Untitled poem* (1812)

There are of course numerous accounts of the use of ships for brutality and murder. During the American War of Independence, studies have shown that more colonist Americans died as prisoners of war on British prison ships through intentional neglect than died in every battle of the war combined. More recently, the *Esmeralda* was used as a kind of floating jail and torture facility for political prisoners of the Pinochet regime from 1973 to 1980[14]. Over a hundred people were kept there and subjected to hideous treatment. And presently, we should not forget the most troubling and deadly of sea passages involve vulnerable boats, ferrying exploited refugees in flight from the miseries of war, a perilous crossing, not from, but to the promise of safety.

The Slave Ship J. M. W. Turner - Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (public domain image)

As in all of Foucault's work, there is no sense of a realm of freedom or liberation in these heterotopian sites. They shift and transform endlessly, opening new dangers and opportunities. Some of these varied shifts and contrasting uses of ships – both dark and light - are taken up by the German media theorist Bernhard Siegart (2015) in a perceptive reflection on the possibility of an anthropology of the ship 'as heterotopia'. In contrast to Blumenberg, who as we have seen, places the metaphor before the concept, Siegart works from 'cultural techniques' which he projects as conditions of representation, a technical *a priori*. In a move away from discourse analysis, he explores the 'always already', the inconspicuous technologies of our knowledge which include instruments (typewriters), language operators (quotation marks), disciplines of learning (pedagogies of reading and writing). His interest is in how the real, imaginary and symbolic are stored, transmitted and processed'.

As a specific example, Siegert refers to Francis Bacon who cited the nautical compass as one of three technologies (along with gunpowder and the printing press) 'that changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world'. A literary example provided by Siegert refers to 'Moby Dick', where Ahab's becoming whale would not be traced through Melville's bioethics but more the practical cultural techniques of whale hunting. If we are concerned with different spaces as described by Foucault, Siegert asserts that we should focus on how space comes into existence through some form of control mechanism, for example, the cultural technique of doors dividing space, separating inside/outside, pure/impure, sacred/profane, male/female, human/animal, prisoner/guard and so on. The essential question concerns the different mechanisms and patterns of inclusion and exclusion which Foucault in his talk suggests are still 'animated by an unspoken sacralisation'.

Siegert agrees with Serres that '*Un vaisseau est tourjours un résumé parfait de l'espace comme il est'* but suggests that a ship is at the same time a summary of the world as it is not. Such a description chimes with Foucault's discussion of the modern space of the

cemetery and many other examples of heterotopia. Sites are thoroughly heterogeneous and transformable, both this and that simultaneously, both mythical and real. Following Foucault's classification, Siegert mentions how ships have been sites of crisis, deviation, illusion and compensation. Heterotopias are different yet concrete spaces that are transformable and 'mirror, invert, connect themselves to, or sever themselves from the world as it is', both a fragment and a planet as Conrad imagines. From this standpoint, Siegert investigates the anthropology of seafaring as the *ground* for the metaphorology of the ship. Such an approach is about examining the ship as an 'image of excess meaning' but based on human activity – not so much what humans do with ships as what the challenges, dangers and opportunities of seafaring do to people. However, he argues that although the archives of Western culture contain much knowledge about the cultural techniques of seafaring , they cannot offer an adequate platform for investigation as the oldest 'European literary and archaeological evidence' assumes a division between ship and ocean and also separates out techniques of say navigation and culture, ship building and religion'. As an alternative he provides an analysis of Malinowski's famous book from 1922 about Argonauts of the Western Pacific: the Trobriands. Malinowski's ethnography of the Trobriand Islands describes the complex institution of the Kula ring and became foundational for subsequent theories of reciprocity and exchange.

I want to conclude with a few insights into the tangible roots of Foucault's 'reservoir of imagination' from research into marine archaeology. Evidence here does intimately relate ships and ocean, navigation and culture and ship building and myth, evoking images of excess meaning based on the tangible challenges, threats and opportunities of setting out to sea.

4. Some alternative lessons from archaeology

We know that boats through history and prehistory appear in various forms of art, were surrounded by ritual and were themselves the object of ritual. Experts are divided on when, how and under what circumstances the earliest open-sea passages began, with a critical debate surrounding the peopling of Sahul (Pleistocene Australia-New Guinea) over 40, 000 years ago. Rock art from this period, depicting boats made of papyrus have been found on the shores of the Caspian Sea[15]. Moreover, throughout prehistoric societies, there is evidence from building patterns of ancient monuments, rock carvings, burials and offerings that the border between land and sea had the qualities of a liminal zone (Westerdahl, 2010). There are also cross-references between terrestrial and maritime artefacts and symbols which repeat dualities between life/death, light/dark, male/female, summer/winter, tame/feral – all part of early human cosmology. In other words, boats have been fundamental to existence: the difference between 'life and death, as sanctuaries on the sea, as transports of colonisation, as tools of harvest and as instruments of lethal force'. Our experience of, and approach to, human existence has been deeply affected by different inventions for sea travel. For example, the introduction of sailing, which can be traced as far back to ancient Egypt around 3200 BCE, meant eventually 'learning to live on a three-dimensionally mobile surface, navigating out of sight of land, surviving the threat of hyperthermia, devising new diets… and learning about what to carry on board' (Anderson *et al* 2010: 7). Above all, it exploited a new form of energy for transport: the wind, affecting the 'shape of human geography'. The sailing boat brings a qualitatively different form of human activity (Waters, 1958).

The ship's persistent magical connotations are found in early manifestations of the representation of the relationship between land and sea as a liminal space, a site of ambiguity, or disorientation, which occurs through rituals of transition from one to the other. Evidence from many ancient societies reveal representations of ships and sailors carved, drawn or painted on a great variety of raw materials – stone, wood, metal, textiles and pottery – and can be found in settings such as caves and tombs. Ships appear as symbols in Bronze Age rock carvings but my specific example focuses on ancient Mediterranean images, mainly from Phoenician and Punic ships dated around the middle of the first millennium BC, for example, cave paintings from Laja Alta. Although there are few


Boat Painting from Laja Alta from research by Mireia López-Bertran *et al* (2008)

interpretative archaeological investigations involving the relationship between people and seascapes, a study by Mireia López-Bertran *et al (2008)*, provides a fascinating insight into how representations of maritime life involve surplus meaning through a range symbolic and ritualistic connotations in cave paintings from Laja Alta. The researchers found sailors performed rituals at the beginning, during and at the end of journeys, for example, throwing flowers, honey, incense burners and even miniature ships into the sea, seemingly as a votive offering. Different groups from ruling elites to those directly involved in the practice of seafaring 'needed to represent ships as a basic element in their *imaginaire*'. Interestingly, if we refer back to the dilemmas of classical authors as previously discussed, they find evidence of a 'permanent tension: the sea is the source of vital commodities, but at the same time, it is dangerous, unpredictable and volatile'.

The act of representing seascapes seems to be a ritualised practice in itself. Some representations are on cave walls that are difficult to reach, emphasising the journey and a pilgrimage and a way of 'creating identity and memory'. The images of seascapes depict a wonderful nautical universe full of fantastic animals, fishes and magical characters. The researchers suggest that the various hybrid representations manifest a mixture of 'fear and fascination' and 'seascapes become spiritscapes in which they have extraordinary powers'. The magical figures, hybrid symbols and fantastic images (fish and man) represent maritime spirits, emphasising the 'liminality of the sea' itself. Strikingly, the sea is not represented passively as something observed from the safety of land, but as a rich and different world with its own ways of working. And, just as the sea is viewed actively with its own mode of functioning, the representations of ships are not depicted as mere 'methods of transport, or passive objects, but as persons with their own features and lives', with, for example, 'apotropaic eyes'. Classical authors note that ships were tended to be named after divinities, but the researchers argue that they do not acknowledge how the eyes emphasise the

'agency of ships' perceived as the construction of a 'living object with its own personhood'. Ships are also shown with bird's heads on their prows, as well as associations with different animals such as horses' heads, transferring the animal's swiftness and speediness to the vessel. Interestingly, they note both a zoomorphic and anthropomorphic outlook that seems to break thoroughly with modern Western assumptions that separate humans, animals and objects.

Images from archaeological research by Mireia López-Bertran *et al* (2008)
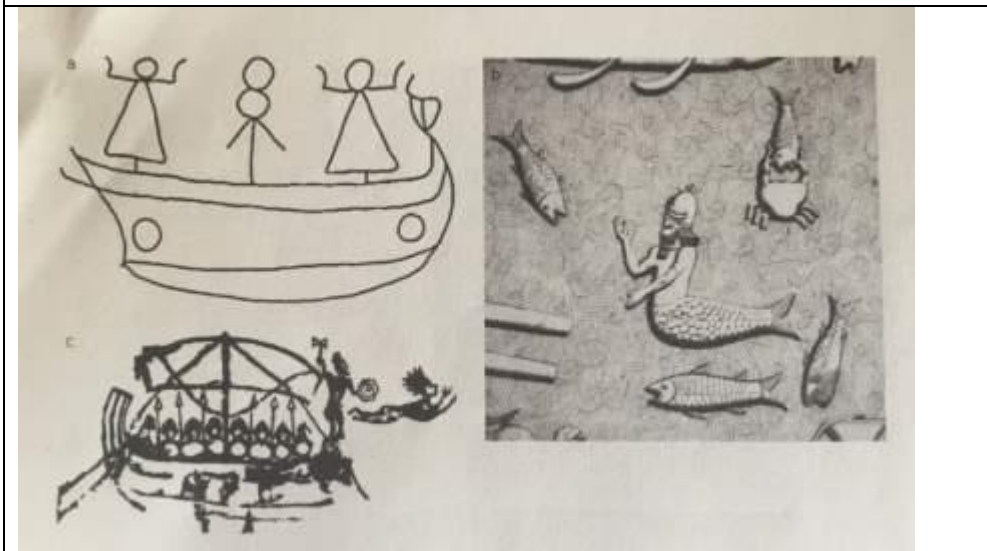
Finally, to take the journey towards another heterotopian site identified by Foucault, the researchers pinpoint a relationship of boats and people within a funerary context as found through Punic monuments from Carthaginian cemeteries. The evidence of people buried with maritime representations (boats, fishes, anchors) suggests that people saw seafaring objects[16] as a way of negotiating between the living and the dead:

> The sea constructs its own cosmology because slipping beneath the surface of the water, either physically or symbolically, involves entering an unpredictable world, changeable world. In fact, the dead do not disappear from society but are reinterpreted and transferred to another world, closely attached to the world of the living'

This association between ships and death can be found widely in ancient customs and rituals. For example, the study of ancient Egyptian ships is facilitated by the practice of burying them at funerary monuments during times of great social prosperity (Ward, 2006).

5. Conclusion

As seen from the above anthology and brief turn to anthropology, sea travel provokes a permanent tension of fear and fascination. Safety, security, familiarity, life and the finite are exposed to risk, vulnerability, the unknown, death and infinity. The ship is built to confront this challenge whether in seeking food, commodities, slaves, a better life,

territory, status, discoveries, escape or adventure. It is noteworthy that during the pioneer years of aeronautics, terms such as 'aerial ships', 'airships' and 'ships of the air' referred to any kind of navigable or dirigible flying machine. The terms ship and boat seem to be appropriate for the invention of vehicles that leave the land and journey to unchartered spaces, an association with innovation and the unfamiliar. Similarly, we speak of 'space ships', both in reality and science-fiction, to describe vehicles that transport people, laboratories and experimental equipment way beyond our own planet. The ship literally and imaginatively takes us beyond the familiar, forever stretching the envelope of experience and imagination. And as we have seen through ancient rituals, the ship has long associations with the journey to the perhaps ultimate other space of death.

As Foucault remarks, the ship is a curious floating space that connects to and yet separates itself from the rest of the world, a fragment that is whole, a placeless place. Both the metaphorology and the realities of the ship never settle, continually connecting and unravelling. This is a hallmark of all heterotopia: mythical and real, the spaces perpetually disrupt and disturb, taking us somewhere else, both free and imprisoned. Although not mentioned in his talk, Foucault had some years previously, in his *History of Madness* (Foucault, 2006 [1961]) highlighted the remarkable transformative and dizzying power of sea travel, a voyage in an utterly irreconcilable floating space, bringing together both the passenger and the heterotopia *par excellence*:

> Locked in the ship from which he had no escape, the madman was handed over to the thousand-armed river, to the sea where all paths cross, and the great uncertainty that surrounds all things. A prisoner in the midst of the ultimate freedom, on the most open road of all, chained solidly to the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger *par excellence*, the prisoner of the passage.

In his radio broadcast on heterotopia, Foucault says that some are naïve enough to want to establish a space that actually realises an illusion. He refers here to nineteenth century Jesuit utopian communities. Others are clever enough to want to create spaces of illusion that dispel reality. He has specifically in mind nineteenth century Parisian brothels. Ships and boats criss-cross both, a reservoir of imagination that never settles the mad play of illusion and reality.

Notes

[1] For the best account of Foucault's talk and the text that followed see Dehaene and De Cauter's introduction and annotated text in *Heterotopia and the City* (2008). I find Faubion's essay in this collection particularly stimulating. There are at least four English translations of the talk. Over the years, I have tended to use Hurley's – see Foucault (1998) – but they all have their merits. The easiest to get hold of on-line is the first and unfortunately the weakest: http://foucault.info/doc/documents/heterotopia/foucault-heterotopia-en-html

[2] For more on the history and various interpretations of the concept, see my article in *Geography Compass* (Johnson, 2013) – below.

[3] I refer to some texts that do look at the ship in relation to heterotopia, namely work by Cesare Casarino and Bernhard Siegert – see below. I would also recommend Diane Morgan's 'The Floating Asylum, The *Armée du salut* and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project' (2014).

[4] As in Foucault's text, I use both terms 'ship' and 'boat'. Historically, water transport can be divided into three main groups: floats, rafts and boats. A ship in this context is a large plank boat and the earliest evidence of such transport is the Egyptian Cheops or Khufu vessel of 2,600 BC. (Anderson *et al*, 2010 : 98-100).

[5] Foucault, M. (2009) [1966] *Le Corps Utopique – Les Hétérotopies*.

[6] Joseph Conrad: *The Mirror and the Sea*.

[7] Joseph Conrad: *Youth, a narrative.*

[8] Herman Melville: *White Jacket*

[9] Daniel Defoe: *Robinson Crusoe*.

[10] Joseph Conrad: The Nigger of Narcissus.

[11] Virginia Woolf: *The Voyage Out*.

[12] Edgar Allan Poe: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket.*

[13] *The Drunken Boat*, translated by Martin Sorrell.

[14] Amnesty Internationa.l

[15] In providing these few examples, I am indebted to the wonderful collection of essays in Anderson *et al* (2010) *The Global Origins and Development of Seafaring*.

[16] Such findings are supported by research concerning the cultural significance of the ship in pre-historic and medieval Scandinavia. In Nordic folkloristic literature there are again many

references to different ritual behaviour around the dichotomy of land and sea, treated as two worlds involving taboos and initiation rites. Here the path to the boat and the boat itself 'acquires the quality of a liminal space'. The space of the boat, for example, is full of dangers, but these dangers could be averted by ritual magic. The contrast, the transition between land and water, is relevant to magic, but at the same time it is perceived as one of the most definite borders provided by nature. It is the 'cognitive border *par préference* of environmental cosmology' (Westerdahl, 2010).

[17] 'The use and significance of Mediterranean ship representations' Mireia López-Bertran *et al.*

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