

politics means taking time to listen for ways of responsibly intervening in the world's becoming. A postdigital desire for embodied yet open-ended collectivities, rather than political programs or national flags, can trigger a contagious feeling of responsibility, and this excess of energy and desire could perhaps be directed towards creating and sustaining communities by horizontal movements. Famously, Derrida once made a "plea for slow reading, even at a time of political urgency"<sup>20</sup> – perhaps the soundpoetic event may serve as a space for slow listening, a space in which the Nation and the language of the Nation may be challenged by other, as yet unformed languages and meanings. ✕



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## references

- 1 Cia Rinne, *notes for soloists*, Stockholm 2009, 6.
- 2 Rinne, *notes for soloists*, 7.
- 3 Rinne, *notes for soloists*, 10.
- 4 Cia Rinne, poetry performance, Århus, 2010-11-5.
- 5 Cia Rinne, poetry performance, Copenhagen, 2010-11-8.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 238.
- 7 Ibid, p. 16.
- 8 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham, NC 2007.
- 9 Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 263.
- 10 Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter", in *Material feminisms*, edited by Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2008, p. 150 note 20.
- 11 Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity", p. 135.
- 12 Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, p. 33.
- 13 Rasmus Fleischer, *Det postdigitala manifestet*, Stockholm 2009.
- 14 Fleischer, p. 45. "[This does not] betecknar [...] ett nytt kulturhistoriskt stadium, snarare en mognad av den digitala erfarenheten som får oss att åter lägga vikt vid närvaro."
- 15 Fleischer, op. cit. p. 69.
- 16 Ibid, p. 63. "Eftersom [kollektiva upplevelser] inte kan kopieras, inte raderas och inte kalkyleras sätter de starka begär i rörelse. Begär kan spridas vidare som smittor i det postdigitala, från en tillfällig gemenskap till nästa, förutsatt att vissa av deltagarna återkommer."
- 17 Deleuze and Guattari, op. cit. p. 161.
- 18 Gilles Deleuze and Rosalind Krauss, "Plato and the Simulacrum", in *The MIT Press* 27 (1983), p. 48.
- 19 Deleuze and Krauss, op.cit. p. 48.
- 20 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Note on the New International", in *Parallax* 3 (2001), p. 15.

# The land, the sea and the water in between

## On the liquefaction of culture

lecture by **Sven Rucker**

On September 2 in the year 1967, Paddy Roy Bates, a former major in the British Army, landed in the middle of the water. He occupied a marine fortress called Fort Roughs, which has roughly the size and the appearance of an oil platform, 10 kilometers away from the British coast on the open water. After landing, Bates immediately founded the state of Sealand and proclaimed it to be sovereign – a constitutional monarchy with, of course, himself as the king. Since then, the Royal Navy has tried several times to reconquer the platform; one of the citizens of the "Principality of Sealand", the German Alexander Achenbach, even started a revolution. Bates, however, has successfully defended his state by both judiciary and military means until today. Currently, ten people live on the platform, and so Sealand lives on too, with its own currency, its own passports and its own flag.

Even though the sea is characterized by its transgression of all borders, the founding of Sealand has shown that one can transform the sea into some sort of land, into Sea-Land. Because the sea is dislocated, one can set up a location. Because it is not the realm of defined territories, one can declare part of it as a territory and thereby align it with the land and the terrestrial idea of a state. But if one does, it is no longer "sea" in the strong sense of the word,<sup>1</sup> but rather a symbolic aggradation of the sea – just sealand.

**While these sea commonly** stands for homogeneity, the classic symbol of culture is the house. The house sets up the basic opposition of inside and outside, just as classic culture defines itself by the separation from other cultures or from non-culture: in other words, by its frontier. It is the frontier that permits localization and creates a closed territory.

Culture begins with the installation of a border. But not only culture, the world itself begins with a border. The Book of Genesis starts with the spirit of God, hovering above the indifferent water: "And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. [...] And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas."

On the first day, God created Sealand. But what God does is actually not creating, but dividing. He divides (as Moses will do later) the water from the water, then he divides the water from the sky, and in the end of the beginning, he divides the water from the land. Creation means division: it means setting boundaries and, by doing so, defining territories. As long as there is only water, there is no world in the sense of the Greek kosmos, an organized and well-regulated totality – only the chaos of transgression.

The work of God is also the work of his legitimate successors on earth, or on dry land: the philosophers. Thinking also means creating order by dividing one from the other, by setting boundaries. In spite of a heretical tradition beginning with Heraclitus's sentence, "Everything flows", the exponents of mainstream – or rather, mainland – philosophy use architectural terms to describe their work. Thinking is building in a concrete sense. It uses repetitive elements and connects them with the help of the laws of logic to build a system in which one element supports another. That is what Spinoza and Descartes called "geometrical method" and what, from another point of view, Heidegger analyzed in his text

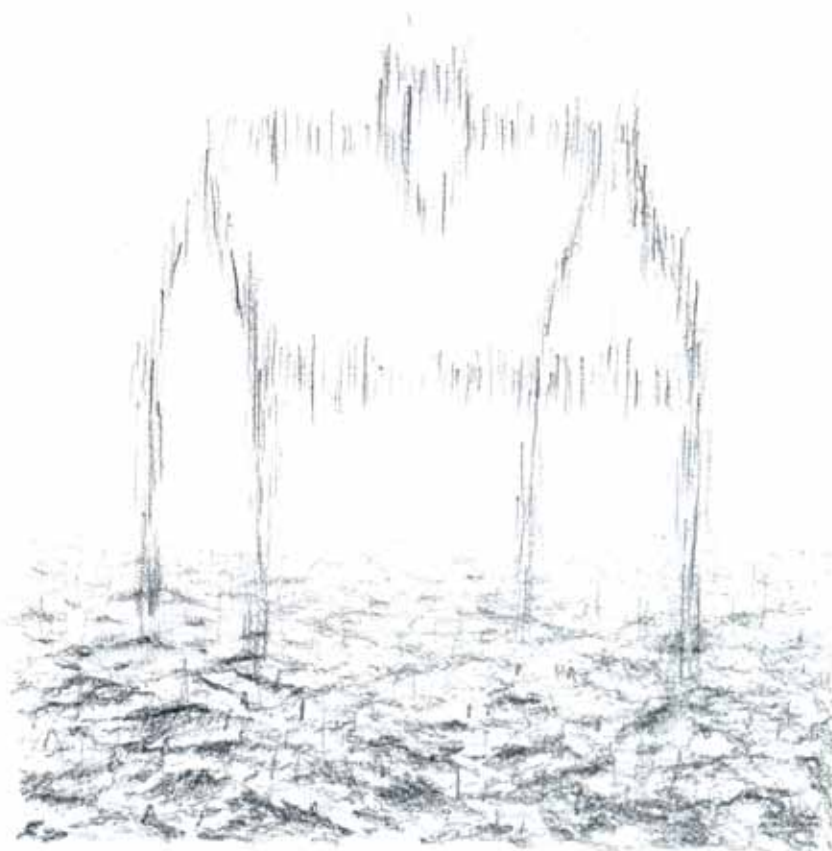


Illustration: Moa Thelander

“Building, Dwelling, Thinking”. And even before them, the great *Summae* of Thomas Aquinas showed such an obvious architectural structure that they were often compared to the great cathedrals of his time. Kant calls his system the “architecture of pure reason”. But he also criticizes the architecture of classical metaphysics by saying, “We have found, indeed, that although we had contemplated building a tower which should reach to the heavens, the supply of materials suffices only for a dwelling-house... [A]nd inasmuch as we have been warned not to venture at random upon a blind project which may be altogether beyond our capacities, and yet cannot well abstain from building a secure home for ourselves, we must plan our building in conformity with the material which is given to us, and which is also at the same time appropriate to our needs.”<sup>2</sup>

One might say that Kant replaces the old cathedral of thinking – the towers that reach to the sky – with a middle-class family house. He wants to build on solid ground, on a foundation that can support the house instead of collapsing under its own weight or ending up a monstrous ruin because it can never be finished. But, of course, this is just a change of the building plan, and does not touch the central identity of thinking and building. Perhaps words pour out of the soul, but when they are printed, they are fixed. In a late text, “The Conflict of the Faculties”, Kant mentions a crisis of the petrified words caused by their liquefaction. First he admires the type, the printed words, because they look like an army of stone soldiers or a Greek temple – like something that can carry the weight of his thoughts. Kant insists on the original meaning of the German word for “type”, *Buchstaben*: staffs of beechwood to hold onto for support: “mit Breitkopfschen Lettern, die ihrem Namen Buchstaben (gleichsam bücherner Stäbe zum Feststehen) ... entsprechen”.<sup>3</sup> Philosophy needs such a solid ground because Kant defines thinking itself as the

“fixation of a term” (*Festhalten eines Begriffs*).<sup>4</sup> But when he read at university, something strange happened: suddenly, the words began to shift and disintegrate before his eyes.<sup>5</sup> They became fluid, and so did Kant. The architecture of pure reason tumbled down and Kant panicked. But he found a solution: Kant ended the crisis by closing his eyes for a few seconds.<sup>6</sup> By petrifying himself – with eyes closed, like a dead man – he managed to petrify the words on the paper again. The liquefaction was stopped, the text was rebuilt, and the equation of thinking and building was reestablished.

**This changed** in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main protagonist promoting this change was Friedrich Nietzsche. With him, philosophy, indeed culture in general, leaves the house and sets sail. Thinking is no longer creating a static system, a system in which everything remains in its assigned place. It has to be mobile and encompass multiple perspectives. The world is not a totality of territories that can be closed off, but a fluid mass. It is not ruled by identity, but by alternation; not by borders, but by transgression. If everything is floating, the thinker must float too. He is no longer an architect, but a drifter.

“On to the ships, philosophers”, Nietzsche pathetically exhorts. But he also says: “There is another world to discover” – and another world means a new land. Thinking leaves the land, not to go to sea, but to cross the sea. Thinking moves, but it moves like an occupation army that relocates when dislocated, that deterritorializes itself only to establish new territories by setting new boundaries. The movement on the sea is liable to become aggradation.

Is it possible to reverse this process, to initiate a liquefaction? Another text by Nietzsche “On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense” continually alternates between the fluid and the fixed, between liquefaction and petrification. “What

is truth?” asks Nietzsche, and he answers, “A mobile army of metaphors [...] illusions that we have forgotten are illusions.”<sup>7</sup> Again, here is an army, or to be more exact, here are two forces fighting each other: a mobile army – or navy – and an army of stone soldiers. One is the result of liquefaction, the other of petrification. As long as the metaphors are known for what they are, they stay fluid and flexible. But as soon as we forget about their nature and take them for some sort of “truth”, they become immobile and petrified: “Only by fossilization of an original mass of pictures that once – as a hot liquid – gushed forth from the primeval imagination”<sup>8</sup>, man builds truth as a “system of classes, laws and boundaries [...] and the great building of terms shows the fixed regularity of a Roman temple”<sup>9</sup>. In other words, the great philosophical tradition of an architectural self-description is just a monstrous aggradation of metaphors that were once fluid, and their transformation into terms that are now fixed. Finally, the thinker himself becomes petrified, like Kant when he closes his eyes to prevent the words from liquefying: “He does not show a twitching, moving face, but rather a mask of symmetry. He does not scream, he does not even change his voice. If it starts raining, he hides under his cloak and slowly slips away.”<sup>10</sup> The architect of truth obviously does not like water.

**To fight those stone** soldiers of the mind, one must mobilize the other army, the army of metaphors, which is buried under the building of terms. To uncover it, one must destroy the temple of truth and build a ship or raft out of its ruins. One must put the house to sea; in other words, one must dislocate it. Nietzsche describes this new fluid model of thinking: “Now we can admire man as an architectural genius who succeeds in building a complex cathedral of metaphors on mobile foundations and on fluid water. But to stand on

such foundations, it must be a building of cobwebs, so airy that it is carried away by each wave, and so strong that it is not destroyed by the wind.”<sup>11</sup> The fluid is not just the opposite of the house. It is rather a new way of building – a building of cobwebs, airy and strong at the same time, conjunctive and flexible: a world-wide web.

**In Nietzsche's text,** land and sea, the fluid and the fixed are not separated and therefore not identified as they are in the biblical myth. Instead, his text describes the permanent transformation of the fluid into the solid and vice versa. The difference between land and sea itself is not solid, but fluid.

Nietzsche was not the first to liquefy the idea of culture. In 1845, Ernst Kapp wrote his book *Vergleichende allgemeine Erdkunde*. Kapp analyses the history of world culture, not in terms of the shifting of political frontiers and territories, as most other cultural theorists did, but in terms of the rising of water in relation to land. Kapp distinguishes between three phases of world culture. The first phase, called the “potamic phase”, starts with Mesopotamia and the Egyptian Nile culture. It is characterized by rivers and streams. The potamic phase is followed by the “thalassic phase”, the cultures of the inland seas, represented by Greco-Roman antiquity and the Middle Ages, and including, in my view, the Baltic Sea. The third and last phase starts with the modern era and the conquering of the oceans. According to Kapp, the progression of world culture expresses itself in the liquefaction of mankind. The history of Man does not start with the resettlement after the Flood; rather, Man is the Flood. In Kapp's model, high water and high culture become similar. The rise of culture is directly connected to the rise of water.

Kapp's fluid Hegelianism floats into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is collected again by Carl Schmitt. His book *Land and Sea* constructs the progression of culture as a struggle between land cultures and sea cultures. For Schmitt, the progression of culture is the sum of spatial revolutions. The beginning of each spatial revolution is marked by a new “nomos of the earth”, the conquering of new land, and with it a new definition of space itself. Therefore, the triumph of the sea cultures does not mean the triumph of water over land – because even victorious sea cultures like England are characterized not by a transgression of the land, but by a transgression or crossing of water and a definition of new territories. Ruling the waves means finding a safe way to reach new land. The deterritorialized sea is surrounded and delimited by territories. And to the same extent that the theory of culture is liquefied, it transforms the sea into a different kind of land, into an area of transportation rather than transgression.

This becomes clear when we look at the most famous conqueror of the modern era, whom we know as Columbus, but who gave himself the Spanish name “Cristóbal Colón”. “Colón” means “colonist”, “conqueror”; and “Cristóbal” is St. Christopher, who carried Christ over the river. And this is exactly what Columbus did, carrying Jesus, the Christian ideology, from coast to coast over the ocean, not transgressing but transporting it. In sum, the difference between land and sea is an aggradation because it localizes the dislocated, it creates a territory for the deterritorialized.

But this creation is only a human construction. As mentioned earlier, the difference between the fluid and the solid is itself not solid, but fluid. One can only regard the sea as another kind of land – as something to be crossed, as a medium of transportation – as long as one stays on its surface. But the real water begins underwater. “The idea of depth is a general idea”, Roland Barthes writes. And of course, this gen-

eral idea is derived from the idea of the sea, and specifically from its third dimension. One of the most erroneous interpretations of the so-called postmodern theories claims that there are no depths, but only surfaces. To experience what water really is, you cannot hover over it like the spirit of God and his armed missionaries, the European Conquistadores. You have to dive into it. This would add a fourth phase to Kapp's three-phase model of world culture. After the potamic, the thalassic and the oceanic phases, all defined by the surface of water, something new would begin, something that one might call the abyssal phase or, from the old name of the Deep Sea, the hadal phase. In this fourth phase, to think means to sink. Thinking would no longer be defined by the distance to its object, but – as Deleuze and Guattari say about the rhizomatic rooting in the underground – by interlinking; not – as Kant said – by the fixation of terms, but by drifting.

**But if we choose** this close connection between thinking and sinking, we must be aware of the fact that mankind may have had good reasons to form an aggradation instead of a liquefaction. Depth is always near to death. The classical European concept of identity itself is based on the idea of a territory or a terra firma; beginning with Plato, we are accustomed to describing our inner life in architectural terms. Under the fragile building of the soul, under the surface of identity, there is only the chaos of drives and unadjusted powers. This is why the same man who claimed the idea of depth was a general idea wrote an article about the death of the author. To undermine the building of the self can be a dangerous undertaking – as Nietzsche's fate illustrates. It is no coincidence that Nietzsche's deconstruction of the self used maritime metaphors. The ocean always was connected with the loss of identity, as in the Romantic paintings of Caspar David Friedrich, such as the famous “Monk by the Sea”. But the liquefaction of the self is not necessarily a loss of identity – just as getting near to the fluid underground of the self does not necessarily mean the aggradation of the “inner ocean” by making it conscious, as in Freud's famous phrase. The hadal phase stands neither for the loss of identity nor for the aggradation of its fluid parts: it is a transformation of our concepts of self-identity. In relation to this change, we are still standing on the shore, looking into the great wide open. ✖

Sven Rucker received his PhD in philosophy from Freie Universität Berlin in 2010, where he is currently teaching. His dissertation “Das Gesetz der Überschreitung: Eine philosophische Geschichte der Grenzen” will be published by Wilhelm Fink Verlag this year.

## references

- 1 This is why I will not discuss the Baltic Sea in particular: it is something like an inland sea, and therefore not a good example of water as a transgression of all borders. A sea that can even freeze and so transform itself into a kind of land cannot be “sea” in the strong sense mentioned above.
- 2 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B 735.
- 3 Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten*, (GA, vol. 11), A 203.
- 4 *Ibid.*, A 199.
- 5 “Unter den krankhaften Zufällen der Augen . . . habe ich die Erfahrung gemacht, wo das Phänomen darin besteht: daß auf einem Blatt, welches ich lese, auf einmal alle Buchstaben verwirrt und durch eine gewisse, darüber verbreitete Helligkeit vermischt und ganz unleserlich werden.” *Ibid.*, A 205.
- 6 “Zufälligerweise kam ich darauf, wenn sich jenes Phänomen ereignete, meine Augen zu schließen [...] meine Hand darüber zu legen, und dann sah ich eine hellweiße wie mit Phosphor im Finstern auf einem Blatt verzeichnete Figur [...] mit einem auf der konvexen Seite ausgezackten Rande, welche allmählich an Helligkeit verlor.” *Ibid.*, A 205. What Kant sees with eyes closed, this strange figure “as if painted with phosphor in the dark on paper”, is the ghost of the text, the type in its liquefied form.
- 7 Nietzsche, “Über Wahrheit und Lüge im außermoralischen Sinne”, in *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen*, Stuttgart 1964, p. 611. Translation by the author.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 614.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 612.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 622.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 613.