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Pleasurescapes

From Maritime Stereotypes to Uncanny Infrastructures

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In the 1920s, as in many other port towns around the world, jazz was widespread among the working class and the urban underworld. It permeated union guilds, community groups, and neighbour organisations with workers and youngsters performing, listening to, and dancing foxtrots, one-steps, and other varieties of the jazz genre. Pablo Garrido (1905-1982) was the most important musicians' union leader in Chile during the first half of the 20th century. He was a left-wing intellectual, composer, violinist, and orchestral conductor, who founded the first jazz band in the country and wrote the first groundbreaking ethnomusicological book on Chilean cueca. He traveled the world researching, playing, and composing, however most of his music was not recorded, and therefore remained unknown. Five professional musicians[10] recorded the digital album [Obras Escogidas de Pablo Garrido](#) that we launched in 2021, with eight of his compositions.

The website is still growing and, with Estefanía Urqueta, we are preparing to launch a new section to hold the digital archive of another key musician of this story: [Pedro Cesari](#), an Italian maestro who worked in the Southern Cone in the late 19th century and founded the Musicians' Mutual Aid Society of Valparaíso. His transnational musical work is a great case study to deeply understand the historical relevance of Valparaíso as a cosmopolitan port city at the turn of the century, where workers, music, and ideas from all over the world coalesced.

Memoria Musical de Valparaíso Website: <http://memoriamusicalvalpo.cl/>

MMV Twitter: <https://twitter.com/MusicalValpo>

MMV Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/memoriamusicalvalpo/>

MMV Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/memoriamusicalvalpo/>

MMV YouTube: <https://youtube.com/@memoriamusicaldevalparaiso5637>

Pleasurescapes: From maritime stereotypes to uncanny infrastructures

by Vincent Baptist, Judit Vidiella Pagès, and Aurelio Castro-Varela

Where people have fun, encounters happen. Where encounters take place, change begins. Are pleasurescares in port cities Europe's true driving forces after all?

With this tagline, the research project [Pleasurescares](#), funded by HERA (Humanities in the European Research Area) and running from 2019 to 2022, investigated historical spaces and legacies of modern entertainment and deviant culture across European port cities. Established as a collaboration between scholars from the port cities of Hamburg, Rotterdam, Barcelona, and Gothenburg, the Pleasurescares project sought to address the dominance that has traditionally been reserved for port cities' economic and industrial importance, and rebalance this by shedding light on their underexplored cultural heritage. In doing so, the research team utilised the new 'pleasurescares' concept to craft links between past and present maritime urban contact zones, from bygone sailortowns to contemporary waterfronts, but also to point the attention to overlooked international events and intriguing cultural practices that found a fertile breeding ground in port cities' transnational environments. Main publications focused both on the conceptual ramifications of the 'pleasurescares' term and its operationalisation within different contexts.[11] Additionally, the project's final output intends to reimagine and recount the cultural counter-narratives of the investigated port cities: a museum exhibition and theater play, both based on sources and heritage objects uncovered during the collaborative research, are set to launch in the coming year.

This cultural output will reconnect audiences in port cities to their roots, so to speak: by (re)presenting the cultural traces that have made port cities stand out from other cities through history, and by showcasing how such legacies are still being reworked nowadays to competitively position maritime urban environments. Think of Hamburg's famous Reeperbahn, a pleasurescape par excellence, whose dense cultural facilities nowadays present a glossier, touristified version of the rowdy sailor street it once was, populated with seafarers and 'women of pleasure'.[12] Such quintessential figures, together with other emblems like anchors, lighthouses, and mermaids, have become firmly ingrained in the general public's imagination of port cities and the maritime sphere. Contemporary usage of this kind of iconography often appears more lucrative than subversive, however. A recent campaign to market Katendrecht, a formerly neglected port peninsula in Rotterdam with a past as Chinatown and red light district, for instance appropriated stereotypical sailor imagery to attract more affluent resident groups, thereby

uncovering strong ambivalences among former inhabitants regarding the use of such nostalgic and class-based markers.[13]

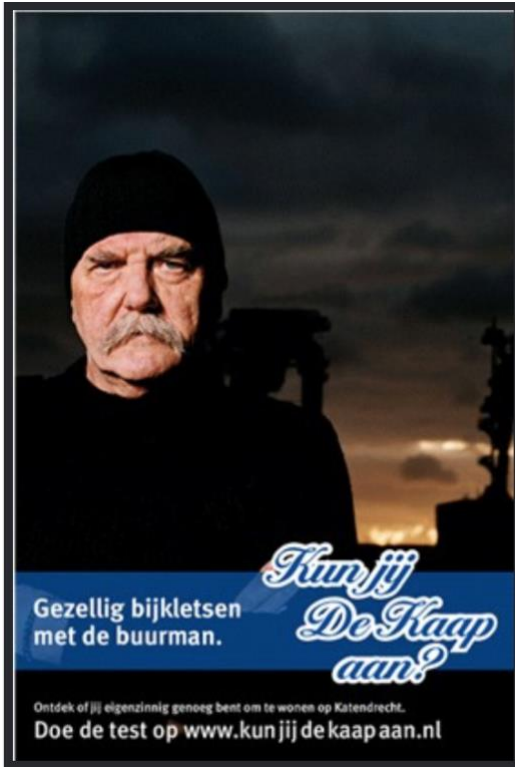


Fig. 6: Residential campaign poster for Katendrecht, Rotterdam (2006).

Class-based tensions have underlaid many older instances of socio-cultural appropriation and control in other port cities, from the strict practices of alcohol licensing and shifts towards civilised amusement parks in Gothenburg,[14] for example, to the 1929 Barcelona International Exhibition.[15] During the latter event, Barcelona's local elites saw an opportunity to turn Montjuïc, a mountain overlooking the harbour from the southeast, into a site of civic values, modernisation, and monumental character. To this end, a set of modern infrastructures (gardens, pavilions, a funicular railway) came to re-urbanise Montjuïc. This established a landscape streamlined for the middle class and attuned to principles of morality and beauty, while simultaneously sweeping away very different, more informal pleasure practices on the mountain: picnic areas next to rural fountains and

surrounded by barren land. The clash between these two forms of entertainment on the same urban waterfront shows how the material and the cultural can become 'hyphenated', [16] through the infrastructural patterning of pleasure and social life.



Fig. 7: Picnicking crowd on Montjuïc, Barcelona (1907).

During early-20th century modernity, entertainment in port cities not only concerned the arrival of varied groups of people looking for fun; it also depended on socio-material forms that shaped these urban milieus to offer that fun and make cultural exchanges possible. In other words, pleasure in port cities required infrastructures to be located, displayed, felt, and valued within specific areas. From avenues to docks, parks, cafes, terraces, theaters, or brothels, these spaces all entailed particular ways of lighting up, making audible and visible, arranging mobility, leading to encounters or even hiding from social conventions. These infrastructures were therefore not fixed or inert, but rather alive in their mediation of the entertainment on offer, and in the spreading of new cultural repertoires and practices coming from overseas. This mediating role can be ascribed to port cities on a more general level. Their role as logistical hubs is not merely a technical one, but also often establishes a reciprocal relationship with local elites and entrepreneurs regarding the management of a successful industrial complex that can bring competitive advantages and prestige. As much as this side of port cities has

been meticulously planned and replanned by actors throughout history, their equally crucial role as a mediating 'switchboard of culture' has proven more heterogeneous,[17] even giving an impulse to cultural fringe practices as another Barcelona-related example shows.

Due to the historical connection between maritime trade and freedom of conscience, in the second half of the 19th century European port cities like Barcelona took the lead in cultivating and articulating novel socio-cultural practices and ideals. New forms of entertainment even included spiritualistic practices and hypnotic experiments related to the modern supernatural, which spread through transnational flows supported by the rapid expansion of new transport and communication means.[18] Spiritism built 'real and productive communication networks around an infrastructural uncanny',[19] which travelled over land, overseas, and wirelessly to reach millions of people. As with the transmission of global epidemics or traditional cultural repertoires, port cities were nodal points in this infrastructural communication network through which supernatural literature and seance practices spread from the US to Europe. The historical spread of spiritist leader Allan Kardec's ideas is illustrative in this respect: news articles from the mid-19th century recount how 300 of Kardec's forbidden books became a pawn in the hands of clandestine maritime trade networks, with merchant captains, notaries, and editors all weighing in on the cargo's sea routes. On arrival in Barcelona, however, the books were confiscated by order of Bishop Antoni Palau, who burned them on 9 October 1861 at Ciutadella Park in a ritual of public penance to condemn heretics. Nevertheless, Kardec's work remained very impactful on Barcelona's maritime pleasures and populace, and its transnational allure did not die out immediately. In the Netherlands, the translator of Kardec's work was J.G. Plate, son of an important merchant – linked to the port of Rotterdam.



Fig. 8: Impression of a spiritualist seance published in a Spanish newspaper (1853).

Authors

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Carola Hein is Professor History of Architecture and Urban Planning at Delft University of Technology and Director of the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus PortCityFutures Center. She serves as Vice President of the International Planning History Society (IPHS) and as President of the Global Urban History Project. Her (co-)edited books and monographs include: *Oil Spaces* (2021), *Urbanisation of the Sea* (2020), *Adaptive Strategies for Water Heritage* (2020), *The Routledge Planning History Handbook* (2018), *Port Cities: Dynamic Landscapes and Global Networks* (2011).

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Wyatt Moss-Wellington is Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Cognitive Film and Media Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2021), *Narrative Humanism: Kindness and Complexity in Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), and co-editor of *ReFocus: The Films of Spike Jonze* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). Moss-Wellington is also a progressive folk multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter with four studio albums: *The Kinder We* (2017), *Sanitary Apocalypse* (2014), *Gen Y Irony Stole My Heart* (2011), and *The Supermarket and the Turncoat* (2009).

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Francesca Savoldi works at the intersections of human geography, political ecology, and urban studies, with a focus on terraqueous spaces. As a Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral fellow at TU Delft (2021-2023), and a member of PortCityFutures, she is critically investigating the port-city relationship. Her ongoing project examines the contested production of space and relationalities, and the emerging of civic resistance and socio-political emancipation in port territories. Her previous work investigated the changing nature of sea spaces and disputed dynamics of maritime borders, as well as contested cities and feminist urban geographies.

James Louis Smith is Senior Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the [School of English and Digital Humanities](#) at University College Cork, working on the project [Ports, Past and Present](#) (2019-2023). His work is at the intersection of the blue, environmental, spatial, and digital humanities. His first monograph is *Water in Medieval Intellectual Culture* (Brepols, 2018). James is the editor of *The Passenger: Medieval Texts and Transits* (punctum books, 2017), and co-editor of the Open Library of the Humanities collections *New Approaches to Medieval Water Studies* (2019) and *Medieval Minds and Matter* (2023). His current book project is titled *Deep Maps and Blue Humanities*.

Judit Vidiella Pagès has developed a career in art and cultural pedagogies with a focus on arts-based research practices, first in the Fine Arts Faculty at University of Barcelona, later in University of Évora (Portugal), and since 2015 in Girona at ERAM College (University of Girona) as lecturer of performing arts and audiovisual communication and multimedia. She has co-curated several exhibitions and international performance festivals. Her recent areas of research are linked to gender studies and performative practices of body subversion, with topics like the role of Spiritism, Magnetism, and Hypnosis as popular entertainment and political 'bodyscapes' among working classes from 1853 until the Spanish Civil War.

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