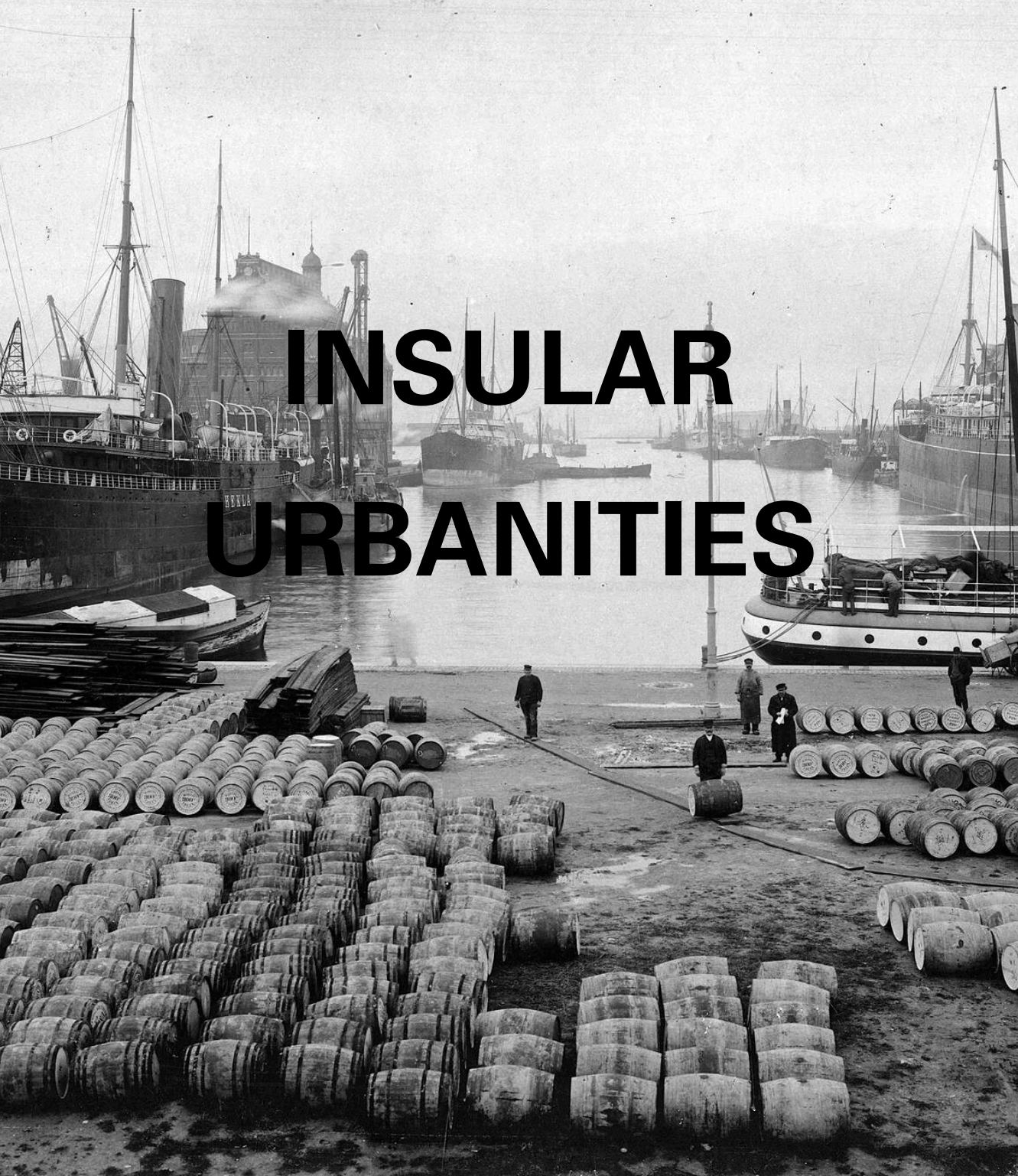


VOL 1. THEORETICAL RESEARCH

INSULAR URBANITIES



Abstract.

Every human being is driven towards creating its own bubble, self-contained worlds, islands. It can be equally seen on the urban level where this insular condition is a proliferating phenomenon. The contemporary city is characterized by the widespread propension of certain metropolitan fragments to detach themselves from their continuum of the city. Driven by the increasing dependency on logistics, this condition becomes a globalized urban form. It tends to become the privileged form of spatial organization in the contemporary city. Ports being its most accomplished version, by their monumentality, radicality and juxtaposition with the city. This theoretical research investigates the historical formations of insular ports and maps the ramifications of the insular urbanism.

Acknowledgments.

This theoretical research would not have been possible without my tutor **Alper Alkan**, who has stimulated this work’s progress through his critical interventions, fruitful suggestions and precious guidance.

I also wish to thank **Roberto Cavallo** and **Maurice Hartveld**, who encouraged me to undertake this research, and **Robert Gorny** for his inspiring inputs.

My deepest gratitude to **William Guild**, whose everyday support has been essential to me. Finally, in ways known or unknown to him, I will always be grateful to **Eytan Levi**.

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How insularisation got tied with harboring?

Part 2. Territories of exception

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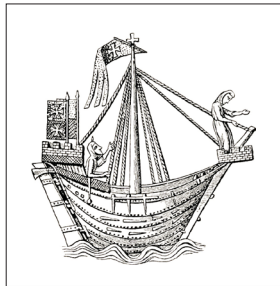
What are the modalities of emergence of a territory of exception?

Part 1.

Insular harbors

Prologue.

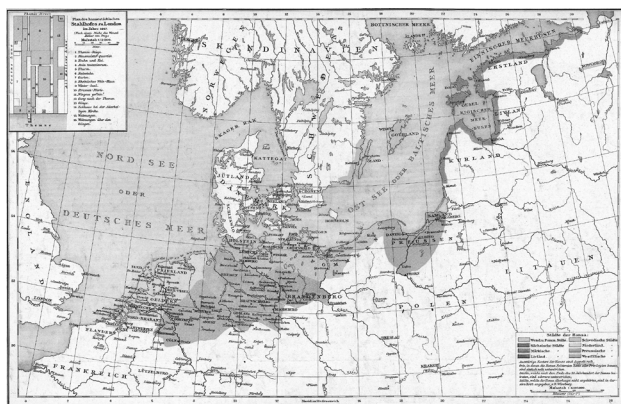
Although in the collective memory harbors are still the heart of the coastal cities, harbors tend to become increasingly separated from the city from which they emerged. Enclaves in the city or artificial islands in the sea, contemporary harbors have the curious property to become 'insular spaces'. Yet how did we get to that point? How harboring got tied with insularization? The eight case studies that follow are an attempt to reconstruct the historical formations of insular ports, to trace back their early developments, to identify their contemporary structuring dynamics and to project their future transformations.



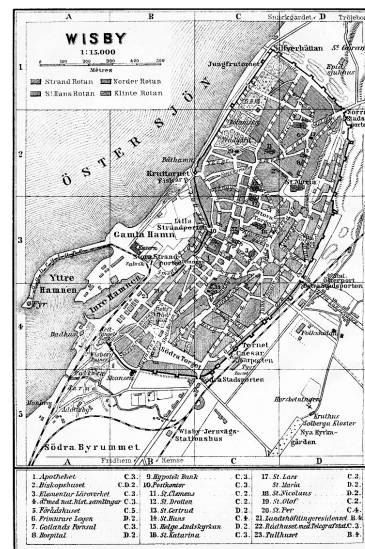
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VISBY, SWEDEN

Hanseatic League.

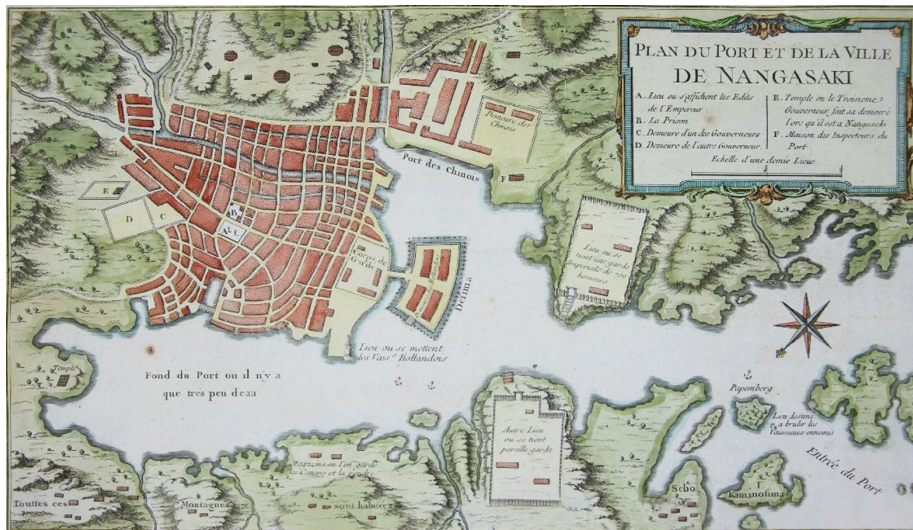
The leading position of Northern Europe ports in maritime trade nowadays appears as the fruit of a longstanding dynamic, opened up by the advent of the Hanseatic League, an extensive network of merchants that dominated trade in the Baltic sea for three hundred years. In their heyday in the 16th century, Hansa cities acquired a considerable power, building a trade alliance between nearly two hundred towns across northern Europe, including Dunkerque, Bremen, Hamburg, and Copenhagen. Although it is widely accepted that the Hanseatic League promoted free trade, in reality, their interest was primarily financial: insure their monopoly on maritime trade and acquire privileges for their ports. Lobbying hard decisions of monarchs, Hansa merchants' main goal was to protect their special status, which insured them to be tax-exempted in their dealings and to evade local jurisdictions.

Therefore, it comes as no surprise to learn that "the history of the League begins with the building of a wall." In the burgeoning decades of the Hanseatic League, merchants of the port city of Visby in Gotland erected an imposing wall "to keep peasants out" as journalist Chris Morris puts it. As maritime trade with other Baltic ports developed, the concentration of wealth attracted the envy of neighboring farmers who also wanted to benefit from it. It became so lucrative that the burghers of Visby saw the need for protecting their wealth from the rest of the island. Their commercial exchanges with foreign ports were much more profitable than trading with local cities. This led to the erection of the first fortifications that walled the port from the territory. Farmers had to pay customs duties to be able to trade within the zone. Inevitably, disputes emerged, leading to a civil war in Gotland to return the insular harbor to its territory.



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DEJIMA, JAPAN

Dutch colonial ports.

In 1634 the Japanese built an artificial island facing the city of Nagasaki called Dejima. Measuring 75 by 120 m, it was meant to accommodate a maritime trading post for Western merchants. It had a port, warehouses, and residences for merchants. However, after the Portuguese got expelled from Japan, for propagating Catholic religion among local populations, the Dutch were the only ones allowed to stay in Dejima. The island was kept separate from the city of Nagasaki and solely accessible by a bridge. Merchants were heavily guarded by a large contingent of soldiers and night watchmen. Being an important source of income for the Japanese and their Dutch counterparts, the port island was intentionally located away from the city as a way to both control and protect the flow of goods entering the city. The port island "was administratively part of Nagasaki, but autonomous in many other ways"... until 1854 when land reclamations merged Dejima into the urban fabric.



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HONG-KONG, MACAU, DJIBOUTI...

Colonial free ports.

Stepping aside from common supposition that merchants were entrepreneurs, some historians newly interrogate 15th-18th century mercantilism as an accumulation of power and privileges for the few. In particular, Fernand Braudel, in *Civilization and Capitalism*, offers a lengthy and thoughtful assessment of how the largest trade merchant companies resulted from trade monopolies. Willing to maintain a certain political insularity, 16th-century merchants avoided getting involved in national politics. Nevertheless, they were sometimes forced to win the favor of deputies or king to insure their privileges of monopoly and tax exemption will not be threatened. Harboring as monopolization was able to develop only out of the privileges distributed and guaranteed by the state.

It is against this background of a vigorous and expanding market economy that was established a network of 'freeports': enclosed zones which are handed out tax exemptions on importations. In the zone, customs can be stored, manufactured, consumed or exported to other territories without legal constraints from the territory to which they belong. Free zones are juridically not part of the host country, but still physically inside. This concept will proliferate between the 13th and the 16th century with the city-states of Venice, Trieste, and Genova. But the free port model became globalized with the colonial powers of Great Britain, Portugal, Holland, and Spain in the late 18th century. Initially established in the Caribbean, free ports' most notable examples certainly are Asian ports. Singapore, Hong-Kong, Macau, Djibouti, etc, all these free ports established during colonisation remain free zones nowadays. Recently, the attempt of the Chinese to reabsorb Hong-Kong in their territory generated conflicts with the local population, wanting to preserve their status of exception.

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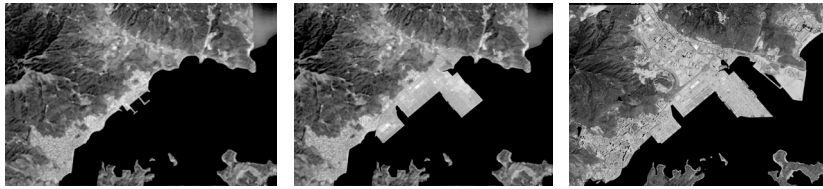
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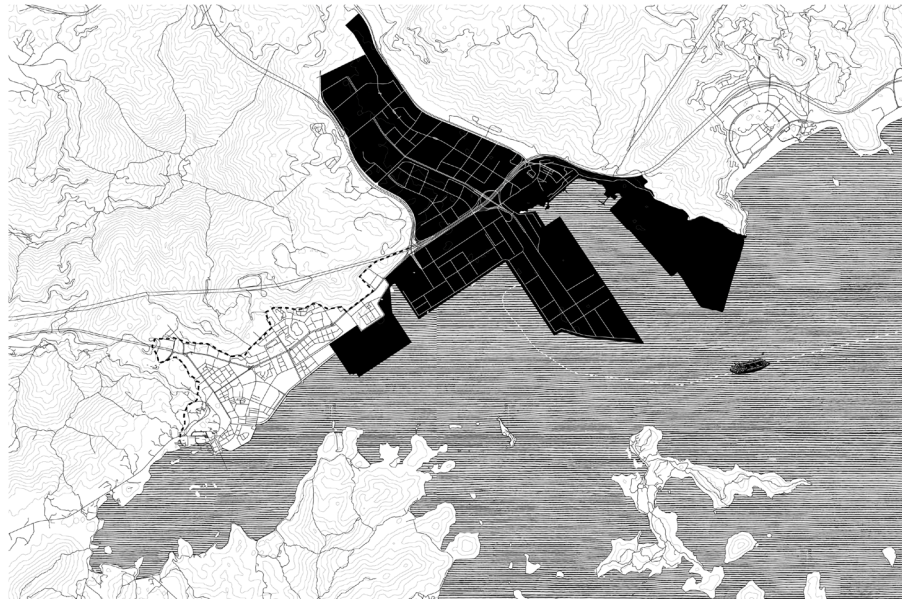
YANTIAN, CHINA

Contemporary free ports.

Merchants promoted monopolization as an instrument of economic growth and development. Although history will prove the contrary, similar reasons have been put forward to justify the proliferation of free ports in the post-war period. With the support of the world's highest international institution (United Nations, World Bank, OECD), the zone became 'prescribed' as the model for economic growth. The free zone was advertised as a catalyst capable of produce a spillover effect on a developing economy.

However, the special of free port produced unexpected developments. In the Shenzhen Yantian Free Port, the port has mutated from warehouse and transshipment facilities into a complex assemblage of architectural forms. On-site factories and offices first join the free zone. They were then complemented by residential programs to accommodate the large populations of free port workers. Cultural facilities and local transportation should quickly follow. The port that was initially planned to be a pure infrastructural space of warehousing, has grown into a real urban system. "In the first half of the 1980s, harder-line communists in the central government remarked on the wasteful proliferation of hotels and other luxury developments, instead of factories," reports Adrian Backwell. The harbor logics are inevitably characterized by a rigid ordering of buildings and roads, but the urban forms that it generate might be considered as an alternative proposal of urbanism. With the ambition to become a true independent city?

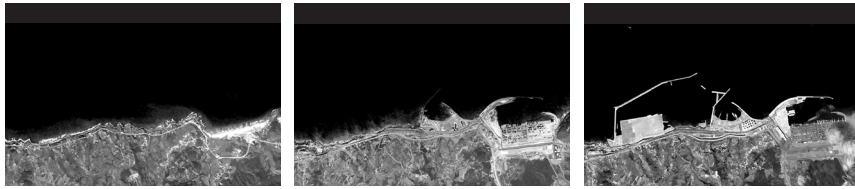
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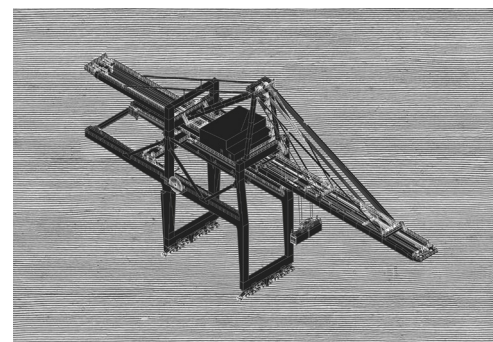
TANGER, MOROCCO

Containerization & automation.

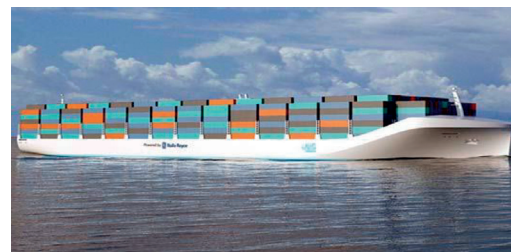
The modern harbor could become a full human exclusion zone as modern techniques evolve towards automation of work. It all started in the late 1960s with containerization. The metal box quickly came to dominate the shipping of things as it dramatically increased the performance of the port. It required space for stockpiling to accommodate gargantuan quantities of valuables, the modern port requires more and more ponds areas, docking terminals and warehouses; as well as good rail and road connections to the territory which was difficult in the typical ports. No container port would have been able to operate in these places. Thus, if the port needs to be extremely connected to maritime, rail and road networks, it no longer needs the host city. The later is an obstacle to the former's development. The port is elsewhere. It demands its spatial autonomy from the city it originates from, prompting the construction of container ports on the edge of town. The harbor becomes a rationalized space, whose organization is dictated by specific requirements and regulations. It is a separate area, which tends to extract itself from the continuous to the city, like the port of Tanger Med.

Containerization is also accompanied by a profound reduction of human labor in ports as it requires a tenth of former city port employees. "A cargo ship can now carry up to eighteen times what cargo ships used to carry in the 19th century, with only fifteen people on board." Additionally, as the profits per container have severely diminished in the past decades, the unmanned operation saved about seventy percent of manpower, increasing significantly harbors' turnovers. The amount of humans in the system continues to drop as automation reaches a high degree of complexity. Autonomous cargo ships, nowadays still in a build-up phase, should completely turn the process into a fully automated process, rendering the port as a machinic landscape.

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ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

Erratic ports.

The enormity of contemporary container ships enhances the historical metropolitan schism between the port and the city. Four hundred meters long, fifty meters in width and more than fifteen meters draft, the contemporary port adapts to these floating buildings. To face the challenge of ever-growing sizes of cargo ships and volumes of goods transported, the port has to move to deeper and wider sea zones... away from the city. Harbors abandon the fluvial estuary rendered obsolete in favor of installations in the deep sea.

The port of Rotterdam is the most striking example: in the last 15 years, they built a significant port expansion in the North Sea, reclaiming 20'000 hectares of new land. Tones of sand, thousands of loose rubble and kilometers of dunes were built, expanding that way the port area by 20%. The harbor progressively moves to become an artificial peninsula, disarticulating from the land, extending into the sea. The ideal harbor is the one situated in the deep sea, to fully exploit maritime conditions. Rotterdam's new terminal — Maasvlakte 2 — has, for instance, the advantageous property to be situated in 20 meters deep sea to handle much bigger vessels. The maritime infrastructure pushes that way harbors towards insularity.

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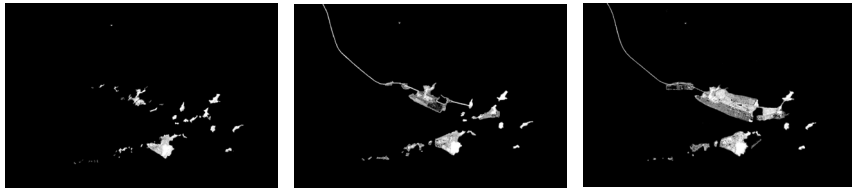
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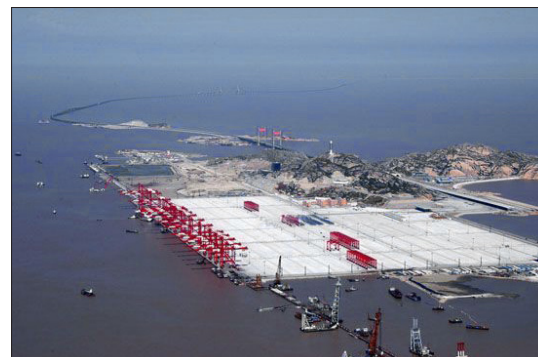
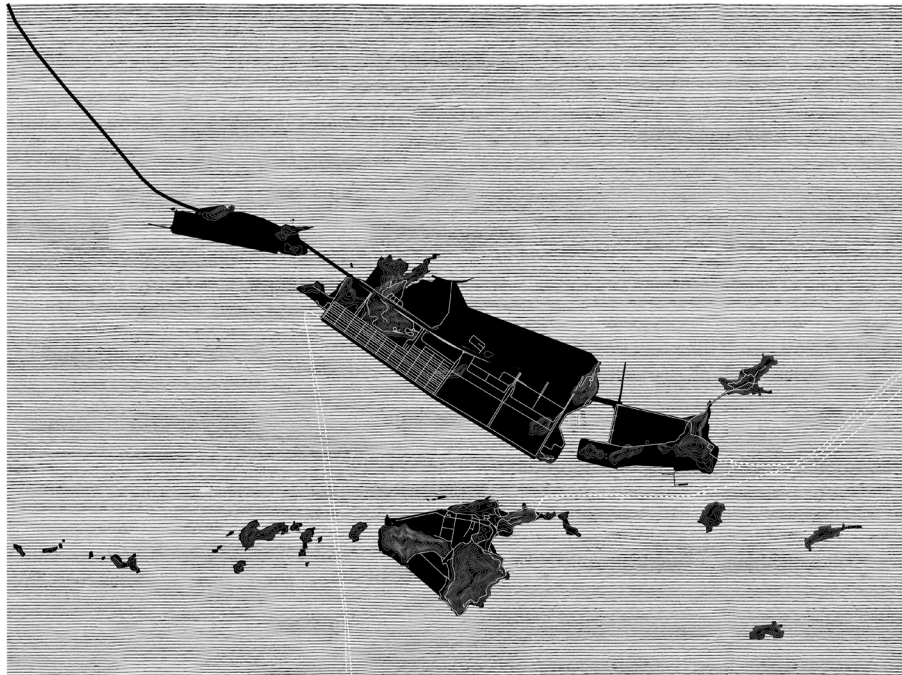
YANGSHAN, CHINA

Logistical era.

Global economic pressure makes life hard for harbors. A handful of major ports dominate the shipping economy as more and more businesses are centralizing in fewer and fewer ports. To keep the rhythm in the exacerbated competition, the contemporary port needs to free itself for land constraints. The ideal port is an insular territory, offshore, connected to the territory by a bridge. Unfettered expansion, great water depths, and commercial stocks previously protected, the offshore harbor flouts all the constraints imposed by land conditions to reach the highest degree of maritime accessibility. The most successful model certainly is the one of Yangshan. In 2005, the Port of Shanghai was partially moved to an archipelago in Hangzhou Bay where a deepwater port was built by amalgamating the chain of islands. An artificial island emerged from huge-scale land reclamation and filling work. Threatened by the competition with the nearby port of Ningbo-Zhoushan, the insular port maintained Shanghai's leading position as the gateway for international trade. A 32.5 km long bridge connects the Yangshan Port to the hinterland.

The island stands as the culmination of the harboring. Soon, residences for the workers, offices and leisure programs will be built to accommodate the 'citizens' of this insular port. Seascape would be transformed as a space for potential urbanization. A city will grow out of the ocean. But the ever-growing competition between ports will push ports to find even more extraterritorial solutions. The port may then become a system in motion, geographically undetermined, intercepting the flows of ships in the deepest water zones. Formally versatile it would constantly readapting to connections and accumulations, renegotiating its disposition to capture as many containers as possible.

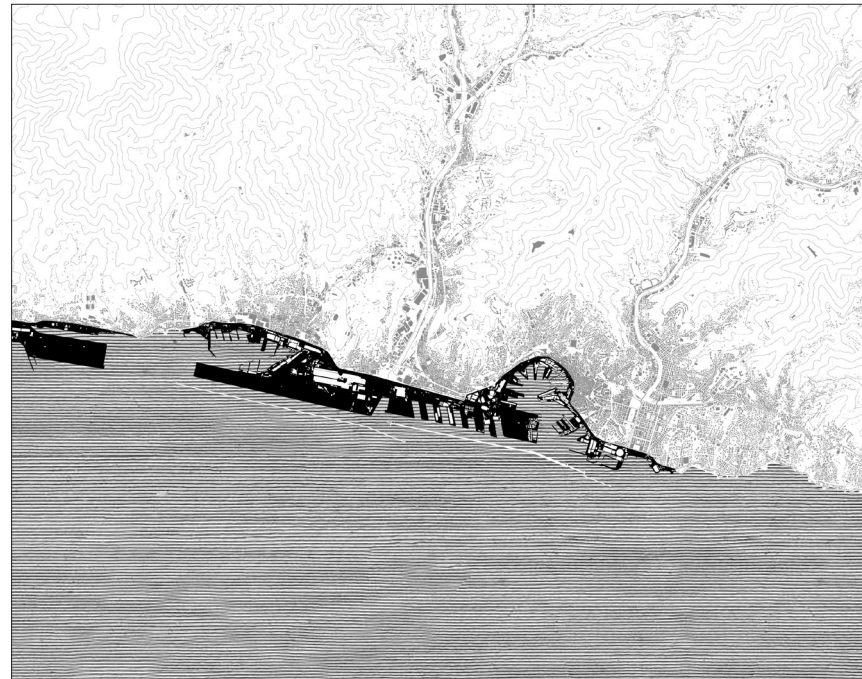
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GENOVA, ITALY

Conflictual territories.

Due to harbors' growing territorial footprint exceeding their competencies — the port of Rotterdam is bigger than the city itself — port cities were prompted to create a separate governance entity in charge of administering port trade activities. Presented that way, they received the enthusiastic approval of local governments, that did not measure the insularisation mechanisms they activated...

In their move towards deep sea, ports could leave behind them precious spaces in the heart of the metropolitan territory. These vast terrains, flat and very well connected to infrastructure networks render port leftovers as attractive opportunities for possible metropolitan expansion. City authorities seek to reclaim this land to respond to the challenging pressure building land scarcity in the context of a housing shortage. Consequently, port authorities could decide to cede its leftover spaces back to the municipality... or not. Indeed, their particular status of free ports allows them to keep sovereignty over these territories, even if the port activities have moved away. They could develop the newly liberated plots by themselves. By their status of potential new development areas for cities, these lands acquire high property values, making port authorities the new property developers. The metropolitan territory of the harbor is thus claimed by incompatible stakeholders, aiming at contradictory projects. Antinomic interests between the metropolitan planning and port authorities start to arise, making the port area the object of conflicting desires. Architecture production finds itself on the battlefield on which the financial and the political stakeholders want to spatially materialize their power.

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Part 2.

Territories of exception

A city of islands.

Problematique.

The contemporary city lies on a strange paradox. On the one hand, driven by globalisation, digitalisation and increased mobility, it is the place of flows, interconnectivity and uniformisation which tend to dissolve boundaries and eliminate all necessity for separations. On the other hand, the contemporary city is also characterized by the widespread propensity of certain metropolitan fragments to detach themselves from the continuum of the city. Driven by the increasing dependency on logistics, this condition becomes a proliferating and globalized urban form. Container ports increasingly detach themselves from the city from which they emerged; warehouses and data centers are being built on the fringes of metropolises; research laboratories organise themselves in autonomous clusters within the city; parkings, banks and even apartments evolve towards ever more introverted spatial arrangements. The multiplication of such spatial anomalies within the city reveals the flaws in considering the city as a cohesive and coherent entity. It rather suggests the idea of an *archipelago of insular territories*: a constellation of isolated urban fragments floating against a backdrop of urbanisation. Given the accelerated pace of logistics' infiltration in our everyday life and the host of built forms it can take, the city of the future is expected to be increasingly confronted with the proliferation of insular territories.* Yet, this profound transformation of the city remains a remarkable blind spot in our understanding of the contemporary built environment. Despite its broad appeal, few efforts have been put on disentangling insularity's modalities of appearance camouflaged behind these eclectic spaces of exception.*

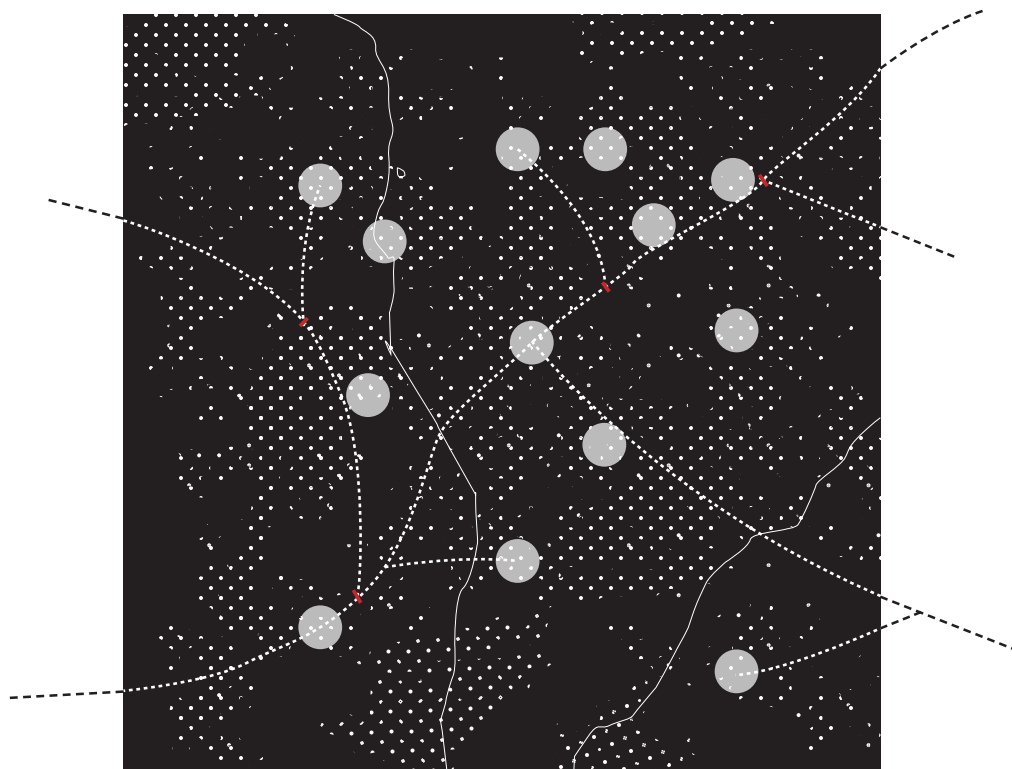


Figure 01. An archipelago of insular territories
(by the author)

Method.

Taking the format of a genealogy of urban islands, the following research calls for more attention to the particular afflictions that make certain territories insular. Undoubtedly it highlights less its exact classification than the vagueness of the idea of the island, which refers to very different 'creatures'. Nonetheless, the following research allows us to identify insularity's conditions of emergence and its co-constitutive causation factors. By doing so, it aims to better understand the causes of the proliferation of metropolitan spaces of exception and to explore ways to respond to these mutations, in order to face the crucial challenges of the city of tomorrow.

Heterotopology.

Since Thomas More's *Utopia*,⁰¹ the image of the island has often been mobilized to describe ideal worlds, one that is isolated, elsewhere and thus fundamentally alternative. The phantasm of insularity endured as the model for space production and generated a myriad of urban islands in the heart of the city. In a short essay entitled 'Of Other Spaces',⁰² Michel Foucault introduced the concept of heterotopias to describe a number of these spaces that are somehow other: cemeteries, prisons, asylums, zoos, rest homes, boarding schools, ships... Essential for the effective functioning of a city, heterotopias are characterized by the tendency of being in relation with the surrounding city yet fundamentally isolated from it. They paradoxically lie inside the city and stand in opposition to the city in a 'controlled form of discontinuity', as Foucault puts it. Heterotopias stick out as discontinuities inserted into the urban fabric that seems out of order, odd or erroneous. Foucault offers here a thoughtful assessment of spaces removed from everyday experience of space (territorial exceptions) and time (temporal exceptions).

Although this concept has prevailed successfully to this day, the urban mutations of the last thirty years have revealed other ramifications of this issue: the increasing pressure of urban sprawling argues for the importance of urbanisation exceptions ; the recent infiltration of automation and robotisation sheds light on spaces of workforce

exception ; the multiplication of free trade zones highlights the crucial reality of spaces of legal exception. Hence, although insularity is essentially a spatial fact — living isolated from its context — its contemporary manifestations also take the form of territorial, urbanisation, workforce and legal exceptions. Which generates new types of frictions and unintended effects. Additionally, their abrupt, uncompromising, radical appearance make their true content indecipherable for traditional interpretative scaffoldings. This prompts us to broaden our field of investigation and carry Foucault's idea further in order to envision an actualised 'heterotopology' in the form of a 'genealogy of territories of exception'.

- 01 Thomas More. *Utopia* (1516), ed Edward Surtz, London: Yale University Press, 1964
- 02 Michel Foucault. "Of Other Spaces", in *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, no. 5, 1984, pp. 46-49
- * For all terms marked with an asterisk, see the glossary

Territorial exceptions.

Incipit.

13th century, in Gotland, Sweden. In the burgeoning decades of the Hanseatic League, the merchants of the city of Visby erected an imposing wall around the port “to keep the peasants out”. As maritime trade with other Baltic ports developed, the concentration of wealth attracted the envy of neighboring farmers who also wanted to benefit from it. It became so lucrative that the burghers of Visby saw the need of protecting their wealth from the rest of the island. Their commercial exchanges with foreign ports were much more profitable than trading with local cities. Afraid to lose their monopoly and privileges, merchants started the erection of the first fortifications that walled off the port from the territory. Farmers had to pay customs duties to be able to trade within the zone. Inevitably, disputes emerged, leading to a civil war in Gotland to return the insular harbour back to its territory.⁰²

Containers.

Far from More’s idealized world, the story of Visby reminds us that insularity has essentially a protective function. In Foucault’s heterotopology, prisons, asylums, hospitals and cemeteries protect the city from respectively criminality, mental illness, diseases, and death, that is to say they protect the outside (society) from an inside (evil).⁰³ Nonetheless, others forms of insularity seem to rather protect an inside from the threats coming from the outside (society). Ports shelter ships and their containers, warehouses shelter goods of all kinds, parkings shelter cars and trucks, data centers shelter computing information, banks shelter money and valuables, in other

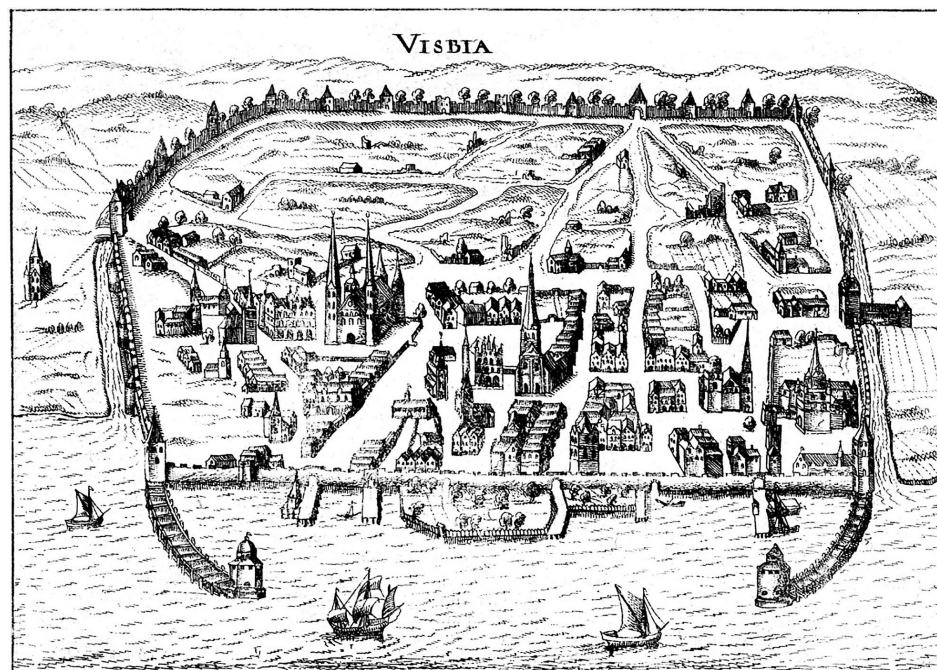


Figure 18. G. Braun & F. Hogenberg,
Copper engraving of Visby, 16th century

words, they harbour commodities.* Insularity offers a privileged form of protection for these places of value accumulation against their hostile exterior environment which menaces to trespass. Harbours delineate security zones in the same way an animal delimits its territory in which no neighbor intrusion is tolerated. Harbours filter, funnel and discriminate and thus interfere with the continuity of the 'ordinary space'. They appear as territorial discontinuities: chunks of space spatially isolated from their context.

Conduits.

Besides sheltering, harbours' performativity resides in impermanence and movement, in other words, in their ability to move and distribute goods through the hinterland. Consequently, they do not respond to the conditions imposed by their immediate surroundings as they operate in a system whose scale refers to a broader territory. The power of the harbours is fundamentally conditioned by its extraterritorial relationships with other distant harbours. They together constitute a constellation of nodes that work as departure terminals, distribution hubs or arrival points of logistic flows. These nodes are then connected by a network of conduits, which ensure the smooth continuity of flows across the metropolitan territory.⁰⁴ Such an infrastructural interdependency between solitary islands allows them to remain autonomous vis-à-vis their context. If the harbour needs to be extremely connected to maritime, rail, road or fiber optic networks, it no longer needs the host city. Therein lies the ambiguity of infrastructure, which simultaneously helps smooth flows through the city and encourages territorial insularity. By this dualism of isolation and permeability, harbours can remain spaces of enclosure and yet be particularly well connected to the territory, city and society they serves.⁰⁵ They stay secluded from the rest of the city, standing alone as islands. Context sinks!

Islands.

For container ports, the island is not a mere metaphor, but it stands as the culmination of the harbouring, its ideal condition. The ideal

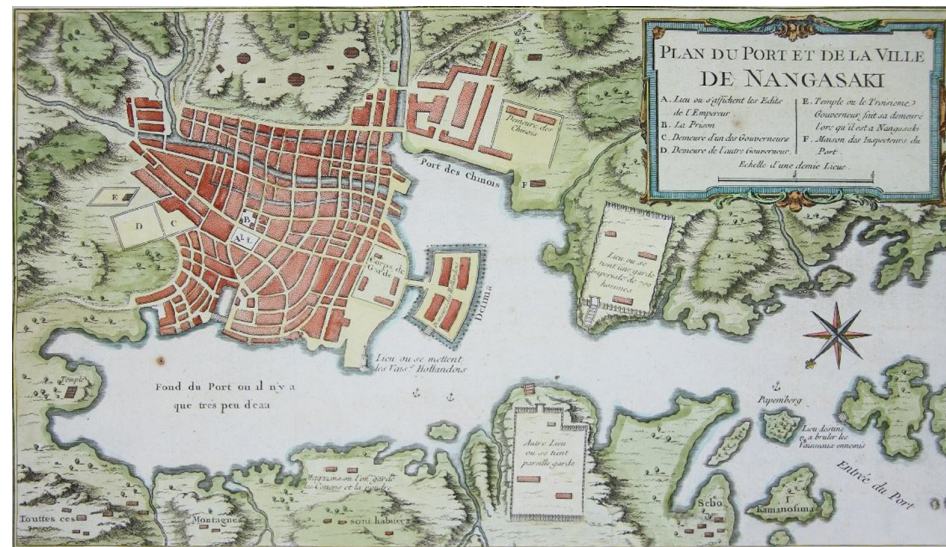
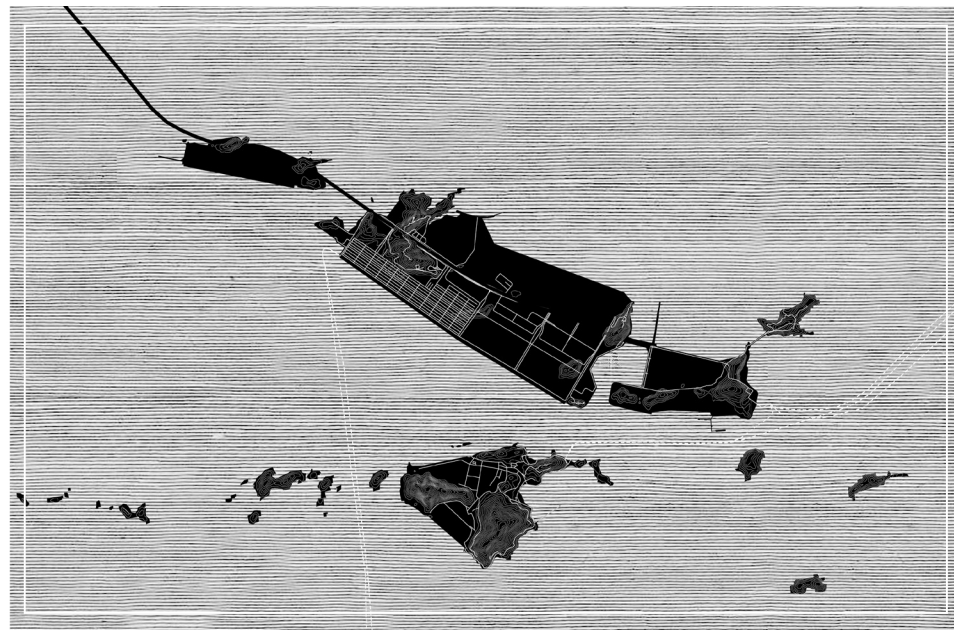


Figure 18. J-N Bellin, "Plan du Port et de la Ville de Nangasaki", 1764

port is an insular territory, offshore, connected to the territory by a bridge. Unfettered expansion, great water depths and commercial stocks preciously protected, the offshore harbour flouts all the constraints imposed by land conditions to reach the highest degree of maritime accessibility. The most successful deepwater port model certainly is the one of Yangshan, built amalgamating the chain of islands and connected to the hinterland by 32.5 km long bridge, as a modern translation of Dejima Port in old Nagasaki. An operation of absolute de/reterritorialisation has taken place.



- 02 Chris Morris. *Hanseatic League*, BBC News
- 03 Foucault, 1984
- 04 George Papam Papamattheakis. "The Floor is not the Ground", in *Footprint*, Volume 12, Number 2, 2018
- 05 Pier Vittorio Aureli. "Toward the Archipelago" in *The Possibility of an Absolute Architecture*, MIT Press, 2011

Figure 18. Offshore port of Shanghai Yangshan (by the author)

Ground exceptions.

Quadrillage.

This territorial condition is further radicalized by the insularisation of the harbour's ground. The efficient operation of the harbour is slowed down by topographic irregularities. The harbour re-territorializes itself by constructing its own ground whose flatness neutralizes any given context to make it universal, efficient and easily manageable.⁰⁶ The ground becomes a floor, that is to say, a seamless organised and ordered mesh, antithetical to the unpredictable chaos of the city. In its ultimate form, the floor is pushed to such a degree of abstraction that it becomes a grid. Patterns, numbers and other inscriptions constitute a horizontal readability that makes quantities immediately measurable and controllable. This enables the port authorities to reach a regime of total control.⁰⁷

Surface.

The performativity of the harbours tends to be dampened by discontinuities that inevitably occur when a commodity is moved from one system to another, or 'scapes' to borrow from Reyner Benham's terminology.⁰⁸ The insularisation of the ground mitigates as much as possible these disjunctions by offering smoothening layer for the frictionless flows. The port, interface between the seascape and the landscape, utmost hinge between the realms of maritime navigation and land circulation, tries to unify as much as possible these two systems by conferring to the floor the attributes of the sea: horizontality, extent, continuity.⁰⁹ The shipping container

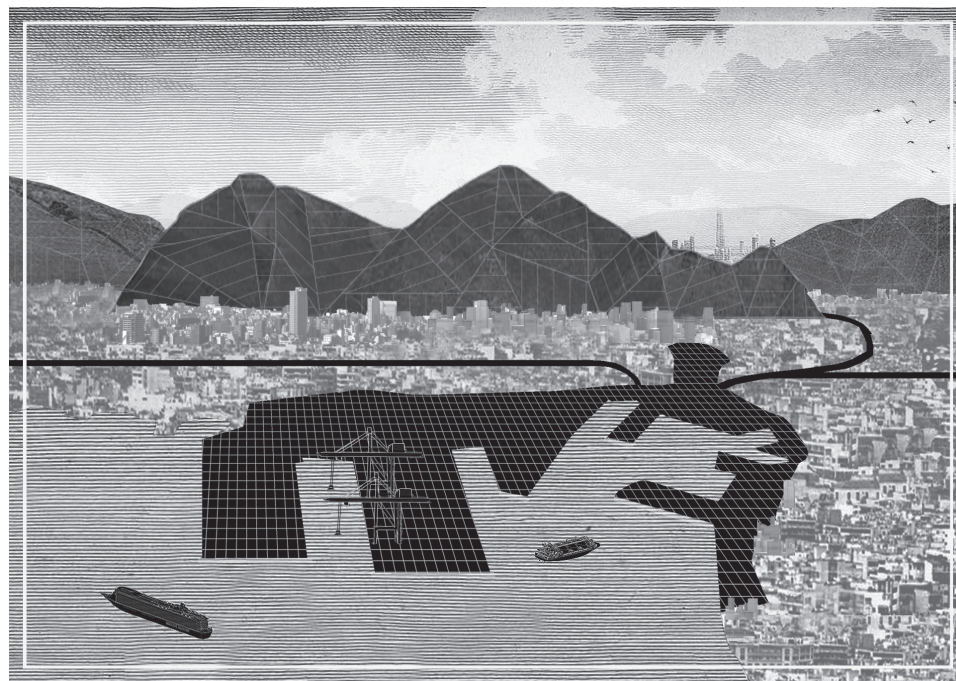


Figure 18. The port of Piraeus, Urbanisation and ground exception (by the author)

is also an exemplary element of such frictionless strategy, allowing, by its standardisation, a continuous transportation of goods in twenty foot boxes to which the remaining links of the logistic chain need to adapt. In the process, the floor becomes a key component in neutralizing frictions for a smooth circulation of commodities. The roads emerging from that insular floor are the extensions of a frictionless surface across the metropolis.

- 06 Papamattheakis, 2018
- 07 Keller Easterling. 'Floor.dwg', in *Cabinet* 47, 2012, p. 98
- 08 Reyner Banham. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Berkley: University of California Press, 1971
- 09 TVK, "La Méditerranée au milieu de la mer", in *Classeur*, n°2 Mare Nostrum, Ed. Cosa Mentale, 2017

Urbanisation exceptions.

Floors are part of a whole apparatus of delimitation of islands from the dominant model of space production: sprawling urbanisation. Islands stand as obstacles disrupting the ever-expanding regime of urbanisation and compensate the sea of apartments blocks by 'unprofanable' voids of exception. Insularity protects islands from the very essence of urbanisation: 'integration' and 'expansion'.¹⁰ Their quality lies in their indigestible character which makes expensive and ineffective, for the isotropic logics of urbanisation, to absorb their territory as it absorbed towns and faubourgs on its periphery. This way, the island becomes a sort of fishing reserve against the voracious expansion of urbanisation. Paradoxically, the insidious process of insularisation can equally be considered as the revolutionary project of para-urbanisation. The expansion of insular territories becomes the obstruction to further urban growth in order to establish "free zones, conceptual Nevadas where the laws of architecture are suspended and some of the inherent tortures of urban life."¹¹

- 10 Aureli, 2011
- 11 Rem Koolhaas & Bruce Mau. "Imagining Nothingness", in *S,M,L,XL*, Rotterdam: The Monacelli Press, 1995, pp. 198-202

Time exceptions.

Dehumanisation.

The absence of the city sometimes further enhanced by the absence of people. Containerisation resulted in a profound reduction of human labor in ports within a span of fifteen years. The operation of a container port requires a tenth of the number former of dock workers.¹² More than spatial exclusion, the disappearance of dock workers inexorably insularizes the port territory. The amount of humans in the system drastically dropped in the last decades. The current mutation toward automation will eventually eliminate the human factor in the production line. In the new Port of Shanghai, for example, an intelligent system unloads the boats with automated overhead cranes, moves the containers using track mounted loaders, before storing them thanks to driverless vehicles. The whole process is remotely operated from control rooms or even by algorithms in its ultimate form. Autonomous cargo ships, currently still in a build-up phase, should completely turn the process into a fully automated process, rendering the port as a dehumanized landscape. Harbours become rationalized spaces, disembodied hubs of exchange. The process of dehumanization is part of the frictionless strategy of the floor which aims at liberating the operation of the island from human inefficiency, errors, low speed and labour issues.

Perpetuality.

Free from human labor, the island is no longer constrained by the work schedules, nights interruptions, weekends or strikes that

the city imposed. It can operate continuously, perpetually, without interruption or temporal friction, in a different regime of time than its immediate context. Alike prisons' cyclical repetitive routine, hospitals' linear recovery or cemeteries atemporality, harbour's uninterrupted operation breaches traditional time.¹³ It moves at their own pace, or, as Roland Barthes put it, in "dysrhythmia, heterorhythmia",¹⁴ operating in an abnormality of rhythm, in other words, insular.

- 12 For a powerful description of this mutation see Alexis Madrigal. Containers, SoundCloud podcast, May 2017
- 13 Foucault, 1984
- 14 Roland Barthes. Comment vivre ensemble : Cours et séminaires au Collège de France, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2002

Legal exceptions.

State of exception.

Free zones are perhaps the most subtle and unspoken form of insularity. No fence nor floor nor void defines these territories of exception but simply a legal status, which insures settled businesses to be tax-exempted in their dealings and to evade local jurisdictions. In these territories, customs can be manipulated, stored, manufactured, consumed or exported to other territories without legal constraints from the territory to which they belong. Free zones are thus physically inside the host country while stepping aside from its juridical order.

Unlike other forms of insularity, free zones are institutionalised territories of exception: the state itself grants legal adjustments in order to boost its local economy. In *Civilization and Capitalism*, Fernand Braudel offers a lengthy and thoughtful assessment of how states historically guaranteed and distributed these privileges.¹⁵ Free zones are unthinkable without the legal framework that encouraged and facilitated their development. In the 20th century, with the support of the world's highest international institution (United Nations, World Bank, OECD), the zone became 'prescribed' as the model for economic growth.¹⁶ It was advertised as a catalyst capable of produce a spillover effect on a developing economy. This incentivized insularity is reminiscent of what Giorgio Agamben called 'states of exception', special situations in which the state temporarily suspends ordinary law in order to face an emergency.¹⁷

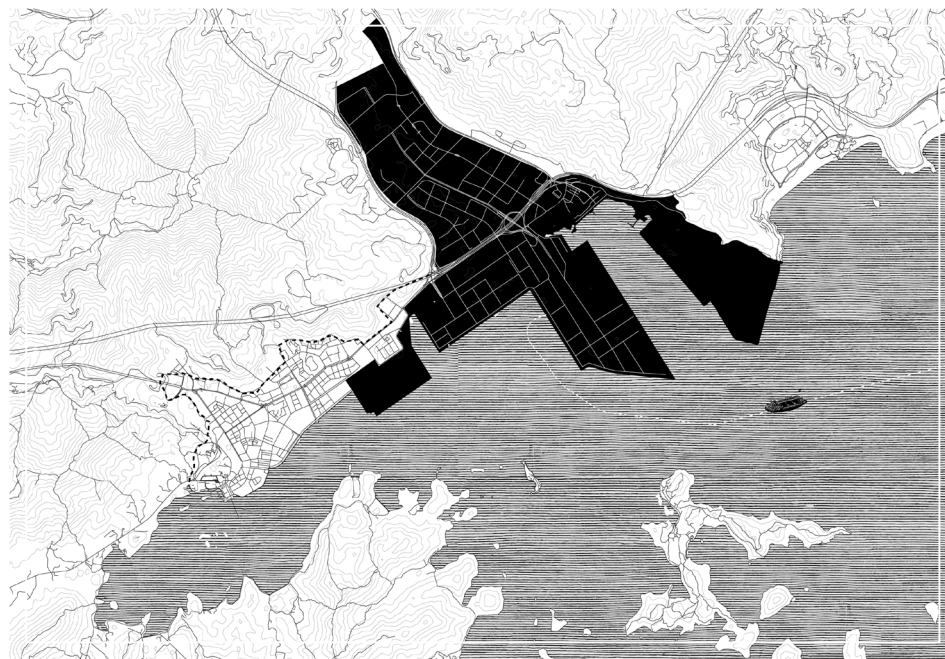


Figure 18. Yantian, urban by-product of the port of Shenzhen, China (by the author)

Regime of exception.

As Agamben has demonstrated, the state of exception, intended to be temporary, tends to become a protracted state of being, that is to say, a 'regime of exception'. In fact, helped by the polite *laissez faire* of city authorities, free zone authorities gradually become independent political organisms, free from state control, governance and jurisdiction. Ports in particular, due to their growing territorial footprint exceeding the competencies of local municipalities, are given rights to sovereignly govern the trade activities of their territory. Harbours incrementally shift from the mere transportation of goods to a set of practices seeking for political insularity. Keller Easterling's analysis, 'Zone: The Spatial Softwares of Extrastatecraft', brilliantly demonstrated the system drift: "While UN may have envisioned the zone as a temporary strategy in a changing market environment, the zone authority may issue guarantees that the zone will not be reabsorbed by the host nation."¹⁸ Legal exceptionalism is thus tacitly a political device for sovereignty.

Urban by-product.

Liberated from legal frictions, the free zone generates a myriad of possible mutations beyond the logistical form. In its most completed realisation, it is inclined to mutate from a confined role of distribution facilities to a power position of urban generator. Residences, offices and leisure programs are being built to accommodate the 'citizens' of the legal island. The Shenzhen Yantian Free Port, for instance, initially planned to be a pure infrastructural space of warehousing to boost Chinese economy, transgresses its sheltering function and grew into a real urban environment.¹⁹ Hence, the island takes on a chimerical dimension that oscillates between a form of urbanity and its total absence. The city no longer engenders the harbour, but is instead a by-product of the free zone, its urban satellite. The existential hierarchy that usually prevails is fundamentally reversed: the harbour precedes the city. Or to quote Easterling, "infrastructure is not the urban substructure, but the urban structure itself."²⁰ The harbour replicates the original settlement, duplicates it, builds its shadow in the

vicinity of the zone. A juxtaposition of cities with incompatible logics is generated. Each city goes its own way in a parallel system, where societies function in the indifference of cohabitation on either side of the divide. Beyond control and expectations, the granted status of free zone produced an intriguing level of schizophrenic urbanity.

- 15 Fernand Braudel. Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century, Volume II: The Wheel of Commerce, London: BCA, 1983
- 16 Keller Easterling. "Zone: The Spatial Softwares of Extrastatecraft", in Places Journal, 2014, pp. 25-70
- 17 Giorgio Agamben. State of Exception, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008
- 18 Easterling, 2014
- 19 Adrian Blackwell. Forms of Enclosure in the Instant Modernization of Shenzhen, Volume #39, 2014
- 20 Easterling, 2014

A city of conflicts?

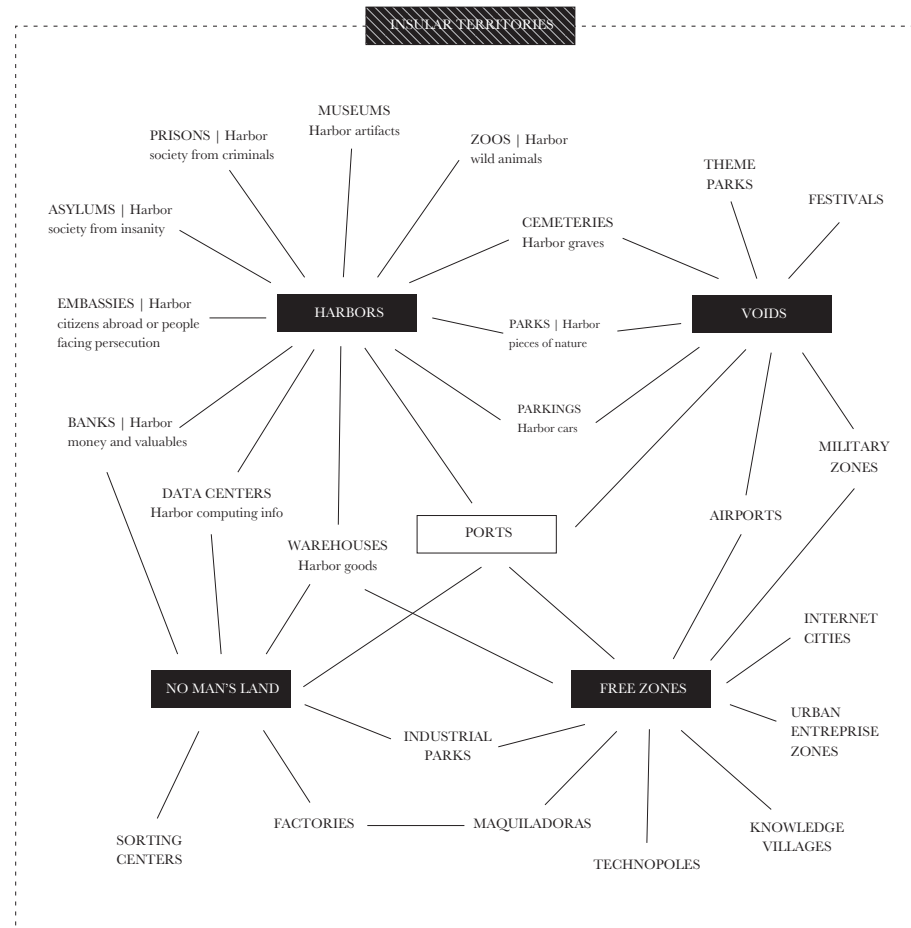


Figure 18. An uncompleted cartography of insularity's ramifications (by the author)

Zero-degree urbanity.

Behind eclectic forms, insular territories share the pursuit of the same phantasm: living isolated from the ordinary space with nothing more than the internal life of its constituents. The quest for autarky and contentment is somewhat reminiscent of the hermits, who decided to snatch themselves away from the world, or at least to keep very few contact points with it, in order to live independently, away from power authorities. Similarly, territories of exception refuse integration into society's forms of power, be them spatial constraints, topographical asperities, urbanisation's expansion velleities, time restrictions, work regulations, legal obligations. To that end, they build spaces of timeless time, groundless ground, territories without surroundings, workplaces without workers. They undertake a process of deterritorialization, which involves a removal of a territory from its context existence.²⁰

Islands evolve into a state of abstraction from the metropolis, reducing the world to a set of micro-elements: a floor, a fence, a roof. They bring us back to a primitive practice of architecture as described by Le Corbusier's *Toward an Architecture*: a man delimits a piece of land, smooths the ground, surrounds his territory with a palisade and structures it with a primary mathematics of measure, repetition and order. These modus of operanti appear as the remaining of modernist promises, which strategy continue to shape the contemporary city. Logistical territorial of exception are not the expression of an idea of a city, but almost only the technical

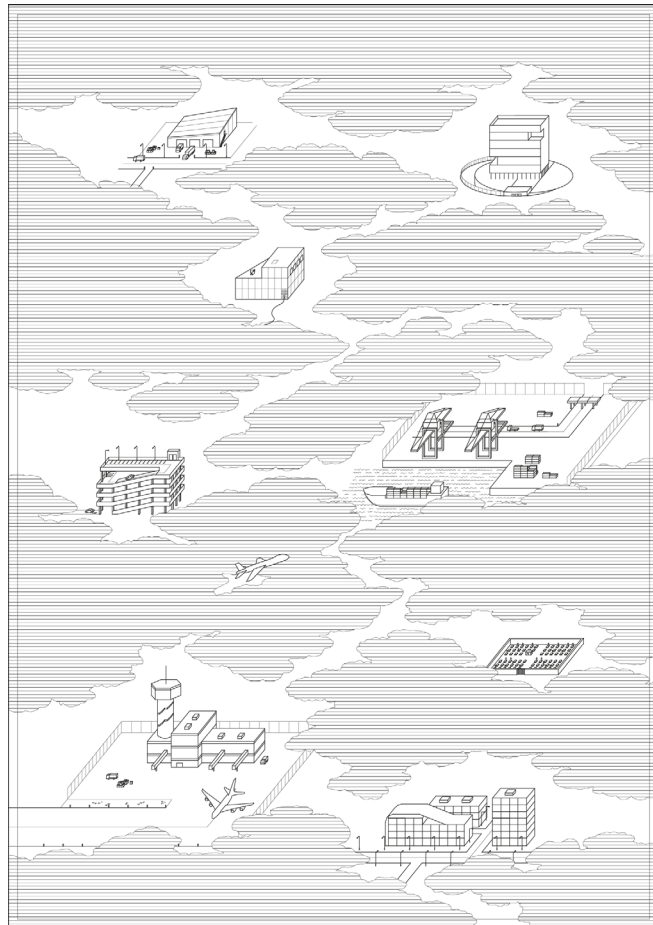


Figure 18. Deterritorialization of geopolitics (by the author)

fulfillment of function. They are devices that want nothing more than to function efficiently with no sense of architectural intent at all. This evolution seems to result in the cultivation of an urbanity without city, leaving us with nothing more than a logistical urbanity. It might be said that, paradoxically, the most dynamic parts of the city consist of an absence of the city.

Means for dispossession.

The most prominent manifestation of this utopian — or rather I should say heterotopic — enterprise may be the container port. The port is the territory of exception reduced to its ideal incarnation, the island par excellence. It crystallizes, intensifies and condenses all layers of exception in one place. By the size of its territory, it operates exclusion, abstraction and repetition on a massive scale. By an ambivalent vocabulary of inclusion and exclusion, the port constantly avoids any confrontation with the city that might threaten its existence. Far from annihilating the emergence of conflicts between the city and the island, the exception is trivialized, constructed as something natural, inevitable or ‘banal’ to paraphrase Hannah Arendt.²¹ Nevertheless, the port is a territory of huge uncertainty where everything is possible, for the best or for the worst. It is a mutant urban hydra fitted to shrewdly exploit the vulnerability of the city and to cannibalise its fragile areas. Architecture production finds itself in the battlefield on which the financial and the political stakeholders want to spatially materialize their power.

If buildings become the means for dispossession and urbanism the means to smoothen supply chain operation, what are the possibilities for architecture’s subsequent future?

21 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari. “Anti-Edipus” in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980

22 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Viking Press, 1963

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