

Introduction

'TwiXt Land and Sea: Approaches to Littoral Studies

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The Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the summer of 2010 shocked the whole world. Any attempt to downplay its impact was thwarted by the proximity of the coast, which gave the lie to the reassuring remoteness suggested by the oil drilling rig's name. As beaches in the Gulf of Mexico became contaminated with oil, visual evidence of the extent of the ecological catastrophe was broadcast by the international media. The damage was not confined to the beaches close to the source of pollution but also affected the vulnerable ecosystem of the Mississippi delta. Rare plants, birds and amphibian creatures as well as the fisheries and tourist industries of the states bordering the Gulf of Mexico suffered from the estimated 4.9 million barrels of oil escaping over three months from the rig's underwater leak. This ecological disaster not only highlighted the dangers of offshore drilling and the ecological vulnerability of our shores; it also showed how interconnected various littoral spaces – coastal waters, beaches and their immediate hinterland, river deltas and marshlands as well as the settlements on and close to the shore – are, and how interdependent their various human, animal and botanical denizens prove to be. Moreover, the Deepwater Horizon disaster underlined the ways in which a relatively local occurrence in the littoral ecotone not only has an impact on geographically distant regions but is in turn caused, dealt with and represented by actors with little or no direct connection to the locale in question: global companies, national governments, international media and, in the end, the lifestyles of consumers all over the world that make offshore drilling profitable in the first place. For all these reasons, the BP oil spill had an affective impact that went beyond the usual muted sympathy with the victims of ecological disasters.

Similarly, when a devastating tsunami wreaked havoc in large parts of South Asia's coastal regions right after Christmas 2004, the ensuing media reporting, including the many private recordings distributed through the new media, bore witness not only to the extensive damage but also to the intense shock experienced by potential tourists worldwide at the sight of holiday resorts turned into sites of destruction. The symbolic impact of these images was enhanced by the peculiar conjunction of time and place: for Western TV audiences and internet users, the peace of the festive season and the dreams of escape to a tropical paradise in the bleak mid-winter were shattered, literally within minutes, by the uncontrollable forces of nature. While major natural disasters always cause dismay, the Christmas tsunami of 2004 was experienced as exceptionally personal and traumatic even by

those who witnessed it only vicariously. This particular impact can be explained not only by the scale and unexpectedness of the devastation, and by the instant availability of visual representations, but also by the psychological investment many people have in the beach as a vacationscape.

The Deepwater Horizon oil spill and the 2004 tsunami are two particularly prominent recent events that draw our attention to the fact that, as a real place, the beach is a contested site, claimed both by land and sea and symbolically construed by various, often contradictory, interests, practices and desires. The beach demarcates the precarious boundary between land and the sea, as well as between nature and culture. As a site which is claimed by various human communities and different aquatic, amphibian and terrestrial species, the beach is a contact zone where a broad array of interactions, from hospitality to hostility, are performed. Encounters here are not always peaceful but, more often than not, are conflicted and dangerous.¹ From early colonial encounters to the ecological anxieties of the twenty-first century, as a working place, as a contested habitat and as an arena for holidays, hedonism and leisure, the performativity of contact has been a crucial element in the socio-cultural as well as the political significance of the beach.

The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures sets out to investigate this polyvalent site from the point of view of the humanities. Our main concern is to analyse the generative role littoral space plays for cultural production. Conceptualising the beach as a creative trope and a socio-cultural site, as well as an aesthetically productive topography, the volume examines its multiplicity of meanings and functions: as an ecotone (a transitional zone where different ecosystems overlap and that is shared by their various characteristic species); as a natural environment engendering both desire and fear in the human imagination; as a social space inspiring particular codes of behaviour and specific discourses; as an historical site of contact and conflict, in particular in the colonial and postcolonial context; as a vacationscape – a place of regeneration and of withdrawal from everyday life, which is in turn the result of processes such as industrialisation and the rise of a modern leisure and health culture – and as both a setting and a subject for literature, film and art.

Depending on their chosen object of study and approach, the authors of the essays in this collection provide different definitions of the beach and look at different topographical zones, from the beach in the narrow sense – the strip of land on the margin of the sea – to littoral space in a more extended sense, which includes the adjoining geological and ecological zones in the sea and on shore. As studies of littoral space tend to stress, the beach is a liminal zone. On the most basic

¹ According to Pratt, the term ‘contact zone’ denotes ‘the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonialist encounters’ (7). The beach, often the site of first encounters, is a contact zone in this sense. The rules of engagement have to be negotiated by both parties; the outcome is unforeseeable; and the meaning of the event in question is interpreted differently by those who approach from the sea and those who watch their arrival from the land. Perhaps the most famous instance of such a conflicting interpretation of a landing concerns the events leading to the death of Captain Cook (see Thomas 384–7).

level, its topography is determined by its shifting boundaries, the imaginary lines which divide the sea from dry land. As the tides advance and retreat, the shore is alternately claimed by, and indeed becomes, the land and the sea; it is impossible to determine where the beach begins or ends. This shifting and elusive topography, with the conceptual liminality, instability and transitoriness contingent upon it, has been captured in one of the most recent studies on the topic:

The beach is an ambiguous place, an in-between place. It is a place where for much of the time nothing much seemingly happens: the tide comes and goes; people arrive to pass time in leisure activities; occasional ships anchor there. But at the same time, the beach is a place where everything transformational in the cultures of coastal peoples begins and ends. The tides create a shifting boundary between sea and land. Their effect is to emphasize the liminality of the beach as parts of it are successively revealed and then swamped by tidal action. The boundary between sea and land alters on a daily basis. It is a neutral space, neither properly terrestrial nor yet thoroughly maritime, awaiting a metamorphic role. (Mack 165)

This oscillating quality of the terrain also affects its symbolic dimension: just as the material spaces denoted by the terms ‘the beach’ and ‘the littoral’ vary and shift their shape, so do their conceptualisations and sociocultural functions. In the following, we explore some of the possible approaches to littoral space in scholarly studies as well as in creative representations.

Conceptualisations of Littoral Space

It is not surprising that both the beach and littoral space more generally are currently the focus of a good deal of attention. As Gillis has claimed, coastal populations have increased worldwide by thirty per cent in the past thirty years; in the United States, fifty-three per cent of the population live in the coastal areas (fifteen per cent of the US land area), and similar trends can be observed in Australia, South America, Europe and Asia (1). As a consequence of this shift, symbolic geographies and the relationship between territorial ‘centres’ and coastal ‘rims’ are being transformed: ‘We are all now creatures of the edge, mentally as well as physically. Having experienced one of the greatest physical migrations in human history, we are in the midst of a cultural reorientation of vast significance’ (Gillis 1). Various fields such as historiography, social anthropology and archaeology have recognised the importance of this dynamic and consequently argue for a reconfiguration of their disciplines, shifting from a terrestrial focus – often organised around the nation state – to an orientation towards ‘the seas as globalized transnational spaces’ (Mack 20), to maritime travel routes and littoral contact zones, island cultures and coastal sites of arrival and departure (see also Denning, DeLoughrey and Finamore).

This claim is echoed by Cohen, who underlines the importance of sea fiction for a historical and methodological reconfiguration of literary studies and stresses its constitutive function for modern literature (2). However, Cohen’s comprehensive

overview of English sea fiction since the eighteenth century also shows that while the sea has already gained recognition as an important locale for literary studies, the beach has not yet received similar attention. Due to the publication of a number of groundbreaking works over the past decade or so, maritime cultural studies is now a thriving field, and it provides an important thematic and methodological impetus for our own work on littoral space. But so far, the littoral remains a largely neglected site in publications on the sea, which have concentrated on the specific characteristics which distinguish maritime from landlocked texts. Cohen's focus lies on fictions about seafaring, life on board ship and related nautical themes, and the beach is mentioned mostly in connection with shipwrecks. Similarly, two collections edited by Klein, and by Klein and Mackenthun, provide 'perspectives on the ocean' in British literature and culture and so focus on the high seas rather than littoral space (though Smith's contribution on the beach as a site of 'passing' in the collection by Klein and Mackenthun constitutes an important exception). So far, therefore, the littoral has mainly been considered under the more general rubric of a broader maritime space. Rostek's study on the sea in contemporary Anglophone fiction, for instance, looks at the beach as one among many maritime topographies, such as the deep ocean and islands. Our present collection, then, builds on the seminal work done by Gillis, Mack, Denning, Cohen, DeLoughrey, Klein, Mackenthun, Rostek and others but highlights the specificity of the littoral. While the sea and the beach are closely connected, and the one can hardly be thought of without the other, the focus of interest of this volume is explicitly on the zone *between* the sea and the land, the beginning and end of which are indeed hard to define and which is constantly reconfigured in a material as well as a symbolic sense, depending on whether it is approached from the sea or the land.

Existing book-length studies on littoral space either address literary and visual representations (Corbin, and Anderson and Tabb), or focus on particular historical aspects, such as the history of seaside tourism (Hassan, Lenček and Bosker, Walton, and Walvin). In his chapter dedicated to the beach, Mack attempts a broader approach, bringing together literary and ethnographic examples; however, this is part of a comprehensive cultural history of the sea and hence of necessity selective. A recent collection of essays addresses the importance of the sea and the beach in modernist culture (Feigel and Harris): this volume looks at a broad range of genres and material objects – from seaside architecture to picture postcards – but its geographical focus is clearly limited to the British coast. One of the contributors to the present volume, Christiana Payne, has written a seminal study of nineteenth-century British visual culture and the beach – *Where the Sea Meets the Land: Artists on the Coast in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Other studies look at specific usages of the beach, for example in the context of nudist culture (Douglas, Rasmussen and Flanagan, *The Nude Beach*). The connections between national identity and coastal geography are explored in a cultural studies context in Perera's recent book, *Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats, and Bodies*. A recent collection by Kloos addresses fiction on the coast and the sea from a didactic perspective: *Writing Coast and Sea*.

As this brief survey suggests, littoral studies is profiting from the momentum generated by the recent maritime turn in the humanities. The present collection seizes this moment in order to situate the emerging field even more prominently by exploring some of the most central conceptualisations of littoral space. The beach is a contradictory and unstable signifier: what it denotes depends on the beholder's position and aims: it can offer scientific insight, sensual experience, regeneration, pleasure, sustenance and shelter, but it can also appear as a place of segregation and as a closed border.

Scientific Perspectives on Littoral Space

Organic life on earth originated in the sea; the transition from aquatic to terrestrial life forms marked a momentous step forward in evolution. For nineteenth-century naturalists, the various geological sections of littoral space – beaches, cliffs, eroded rocks, submarine forests – provided important material for their radical reconceptualisations of the natural world. The pioneering geologist Charles Lyell devoted several chapters of his *Principles of Geology* to littoral phenomena such as silting and the effects of tides and currents. His observations, as well as the fossils found in coastal strata, prepared the ground for Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. In Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, written in direct response to Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*, the river is described as a conduit from the land to the sea, and from death to renewed life, while the beach is a site of transformation and regeneration. In Darwinian nature, generation and death, evolution and extinction are always closely connected. For many Victorian observers, the beach is a privileged site on which to observe this entanglement. Even an opponent of evolution theory, Philip Henry Gosse, one of the most important popularisers of the seaside, established a connection between its teeming life, mortality and moral and intellectual improvement. In his widely read books such as *A Naturalist's Ramble on the Devonshire Coast* and *Tenby: A Seaside Holiday*, he described both the pleasures of a carefree seaside trip and the improving effects of active observation of the geology and the flora and fauna of the beach. In typically Victorian fashion, his description moves from children's play to a contemplation of death:

It is in the middle of the day, when the tide recedes at that hour, and when the wind is moderate, the air warm, and the sun bright, that these sands are seen to advantage. The gay dresses and many-hued parasols of the ladies are dotting them over by scores; little boys and girls are scampering hither and thither, picking up shells and sea-weeds, throwing pebbles into the sea, and flying with affected fear from the advancing wave, or digging with their wooden spades moats and pits in the soft sand, as thoughtless of the next tide which will sweep all their works away, as their elders are of the scythe of Time, who, with like industry, 'heap up riches, and know not who shall gather them'. (Gosse, *Tenby* 10)

This passage exemplifies the contradictory responses the Victorians, and to a lesser degree later generations of visitors, too, showed toward the beach: delight

in the pleasant surroundings, leisure activities and the display of the latest summer fashions; the children's games that seem to prefigure Gosse's own more serious and learned interest in 'shells and sea-weeds'; but also the contemplation of mortality. Gosse's studies of littoral flora and fauna were geared to his theological views. In accordance with the paradigm dominant in the early nineteenth century, Natural Theology, he considered the study of the Book of Nature to be in complete accord with revealed religion, set down in the Book of Books. Accordingly, the beach functions as a pedagogical space: through its sensual pleasures, the visitor is ideally induced to look beyond the ephemeral to the eternal. Paradoxically, the invigorating, relaxing and educational effects of a visit to the beach ultimately derive their impact from an awareness of the futility of human striving induced by observing the inexorable movement of the tides.

For Darwin's supporter Thomas Henry Huxley, by contrast, the littoral functions as an epitome of a seemingly chaotic nature, in which the man of science can discern nature's underlying causality:

If one of these people [Darwin's adversaries] ... should be within reach of the sea, where a heavy gale is blowing, let him betake himself to the shore and watch the scene. Let him note the infinite variety of forms and sizes of the tossing waves, out at sea; or of the curves of their foam-crested breakers, as they dash against the rocks. Let him listen to the roar & scream of the shingle as it is cast up & torn down the beach, or look at the flakes of foam as they drive hither & thither before the wind, or the play of colours, which arouses a gleam of sunshine as it falls upon their myriad component bubbles; surely here, if anywhere, he will say that chance is supreme, and bow as one who has entered the very penetralia of his divinity. But the man of science knows that, here as everywhere, perfect order is manifested and that there is not a curve of the waves; not a note in the howling chorus; not a rainbow-glint in a bubble, which is other than a necessary consequence of the ascertained laws of nature; and that with a sufficient knowledge of the conditions, competent physico-mathematical skill could account for & indeed predict every one of these 'chance' events. (79)

As Huxley suggests here, for the nineteenth-century man of science the beach calls for close observation since it offers evidence of the ways in which nature works, both in a synchronic and in a diachronic sense. Moreover, for someone trained in the art of scientific observation, this evidence is apparently easily accessible on the beach – although, as the example of Gosse shows, completely contradictory readings of it are possible. But if the beach functions as a trope of phenomenological clarity for Huxley, contemporary science finds it more difficult to disentangle 'the laws of nature' from human impact in its assessment of the beach. When trying to determine the vulnerability of coastal systems to anthropogenic climate change, the 2007 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Assessment Report foregrounds the 'strong interactions both within and between the natural and human subsystems in the coastal system' (Nicholls et al. 318), conceding that the 'direct impacts of human activities on the coastal zone have been more significant over the past century than impacts that can be directly attributed to

observed climate change' (319). But even leaving aside the human element, the beach here features as a site of scientific uncertainty that contrasts strikingly with Huxley's rhetorical gesture, which dispels chaos in the name of scientific self-confidence. As the IPCC Report stresses, it is precisely the 'natural variability of coasts' that 'can make it difficult to identify the impacts of climate change' (318). Given the complexity of littoral change, the IPCC Assessment Report denies any easily discernible correlation, even between changing sea levels and beach erosion: 'there is not a simple relationship between sea-level rise and horizontal movement of the shoreline' (324). With the 'sufficient knowledge of the conditions', which Huxley celebrates, 'competent physico-mathematical skill' might perhaps be able to 'account for & indeed predict every one of these "chance" events' involved in littoral change, but the awareness of the great interplay of global and local, natural and human factors makes the beach a difficult site to navigate for contemporary scientific empiricism.

The Beach as Vacationscape

The subtitle of Lenček and Bosker's classic book on the beach is *The History of Paradise on Earth*, and indeed, the conceptualisation of the beach as vacationscape, which seems to dominate modern Western ideas of the beach, is deeply connected with the vision of the beach as paradisiacal. First constructed in travel reports and Enlightenment texts such as Diderot's 'Supplément au voyage de Bougainville' (written in the early 1770s but published only in 1796), the trope of the beach as a (tropical) paradise – already denoting easily accessible sexual fulfilment – has lost little of its force. Together with the resultant desire for the perfect beach, it continues to circulate in various popularisations, such as the film versions of the *Mutiny on the Bounty*, the romantic film *The Blue Lagoon* and, more recently, the novel and film *The Beach*, as well as through advertisements and travel brochures.

Pristine beaches, however, are increasingly hard to find. The densely populated coasts of continental seas such as the Mediterranean have been undergoing anthropogenic alterations since antiquity. Though they have been marked by long histories of human habitation as sites of work, religious practice, imperial conflict and cultural production, what such beaches tend to render most visible nowadays is the high investment in the beach as vacationscape. Today, only a few stretches of coastline resemble 'wild nature'; rather, the almost unbroken skyline of the Adriatic is prototypical of architectonic patterns along the shoreline. Not even the surface of the beach is given: sandy beaches need to be 'nourished' – the sand lost by erosion needs continually to be replaced – to maintain their resemblance to the ideal beach constructed in film and advertising (see Alvarez). In areas frequented by tourists and day-trippers, the beach offers various kinds of infrastructure to its users: showers, toilets, deck chairs and sun shades for rent, and kiosks selling refreshments and souvenirs. Often, the beach is differentiated according to access regulations, activities, sartorial rules and groups of users: there are communal and semiprivate areas allocated to hotels; clothed and nudist beaches; beaches

demarcated for families, volleyball players and surfers; doggy beaches. While beach culture in the 1960s denoted surfing, parties and sex as part of the lifestyle revolution of those years, today the beaches once famous for this kind of hedonistic freedom, in California and southern France, are heavily regulated and policed.²

The paradisiacal beach might persist as the vanishing point of the modern traveller's desire, but even 'dream beaches' in Thailand and on the Maldives cannot escape the impact of international tourism and commercialisation, and the reality is, more often than not, a scene of overcrowding, of sunbathers lying towel-to-towel. Commonplace as these images have become today, the beach as a holiday destination is a fairly modern invention. The negative perception of the beach, as a site of chaos and mortal danger, only began to change with the slow advent of seaside health resorts from the seventeenth century onwards. As Corbin has shown, the beneficial effects expected from treatment by the sea were built on a conceptualisation of the maritime environment as vitalising precisely because it was exacting. In other words, the older denotation of the seaside as a frightful place, inspiring repulsion rather than admiration, was not, at least not for some time, replaced but rather revalued. Basically, it was proximity to the sea as a piece of untamed and challenging nature that constituted some of the new appeal of the seaside:

This explains how the paradox developed on which the fashion for the beach is based: the sea became a refuge and a source of hope because it inspired fear. The new strategy for seaside holidays was to enjoy the sea and experience the terror it inspired, while overcoming one's personal perils. Henceforth, the sea was expected to soothe the elite's anxieties, re-establish harmony between body and soul, and stem the loss of *vital energy* of a social class that felt particularly vulnerable through its sons, its daughters, its wives, and its thinkers. (Corbin 62; emphasis in original)

Far from invoking scenes of idleness and sensual enjoyment, the early seaside holiday was much more akin to a battle: against the elements, against one's own constitutional weakness, against the temptations of the flesh. Stays at seaside resorts – mostly in an invigorating, northern climate rather than in the sensuous south – were prescribed for health reasons. The social rituals surrounding 'taking the waters' were rigid and, from today's hedonistic perspective, rather forbidding: stoical valetudinarians were driven into the sea in bathing machines in which they changed, then were 'dipped' into the cold water by professional bathing women. This practice remained in place well into the nineteenth century, long after seaside resorts had been transformed from places of self-inflicted torture in the service of health into fashionable meeting places for the higher classes, where activities

² For example, the following restrictions are imposed on visitors to Long Beach, California: 'No Smoking; No Alcohol; No Nude (or topless for women) sunbathing; No Pets of any kind (except Rosie's Dog Beach); No driving on the beach; No Camping or sleeping; No Fires or barbecues (except where fire pits or barbecues are provided); No Fireworks; No Amplified music; No Littering' (Deioma).

other than bathing provided the grounds for their attraction: social events such as promenades, exhibitions and balls ‘enabled the gentry and bourgeoisie to profit from each other’s company, with social, nuptial and commercial objectives in mind’ (Hassan 17).³ The late eighteenth century and the Regency saw the rise of English seaside spas under the patronage of royalty and the aristocracy. In the course of the nineteenth century, a socially differentiated map of seaside resorts developed: from Brighton, the favourite coastal residence of the Prince Regent, later George IV, to up-and-coming places such as Margate and Blackpool, patronised by wealthy merchants and manufacturers. With the advent of the railway and the offer of cheap day trips, the seaside became accessible for the working classes. In fact, ‘the working-class seaside visitor was a phenomenon of the railway age’ (Walton 26), a phenomenon that transformed the character of seaside holidays in the last quarter of the nineteenth century just as today cheap long-distance flights have changed the shores of Mallorca, the Dominican Republic or Turkey beyond recognition. The history of the beach as vacationscape, therefore, is characterised by the gradual displacement of the very features which rendered the seaside attractive in the first place.

Contact Zone and Place of Segregation

The beach is often represented as a contact zone where incongruent social elements meet and mix. To a degree, social distinctions are suspended. In Eduard von Keyserling’s *Wellen (Waves)*, for example, the divorced countess Doralice von Köhne-Jasky, who would be ‘cut’ by polite society in the city and on the Baltic gentry’s country estates, strikes up an acquaintance with the aristocratic von Palikow family. Rambles along the seashore make casual encounters inescapable; under these circumstances a rigidly enforced exclusion of the social sinner would appear ridiculous even to the defenders of old-fashioned morality. Similarly, in Colm Tóibín’s short novel *Brooklyn*, set in the 1950s in New York, the beach on Coney Island figures as a synecdoche of the melting-pot: a site easily accessible to the various population groups of New York where, by virtue of the proximity necessitated by overcrowding, they are forced to mix and to mingle. And while such mixing might be fairly provisional and temporarily restricted on the beach when it functions as vacationscape, Tracy Chevalier’s neo-Victorian novel *Remarkable Creatures* describes a more sustained form of contact between different classes, which is enabled by the beach as a place of work and study. The novel follows the history of famous nineteenth-century fossilist Mary Anning, sketching her life as a discoverer, restorer, and seller of fossils. Mary’s occupation provides the livelihood for her family, but it also creates social tension. As a palaeontologist, Mary spends her days on the beach either on her own or else in the company of middle-class amateur fossil hunters or, more importantly, professional natural

³ On the history of seaside resorts, see also Anderson and Tabb, Lenček and Bosker, Walton, Walvin, and Corbin.

historians. As such, she is in constant contact with middle-class men and, hence, is at odds both with her own working-class background, as well as with notions of female propriety. While her work on the beach grants her an immense sense of freedom, it also leads to social ostracism.

As the example of *Remarkable Creatures* shows, it is precisely because social intercourse is potentially unrestricted on the beach – be it in the form of vacationscape, working place or site of scientific observation – that the beach is not exempt from surveillance and attempts at segregation. In Chevalier's novel, Mary's movements on the beach are never hidden from the eyes and ears of the town for long, and her 'goings on' in her littoral workshop, the various places on the beach in which she finds and excavates fossils, render her socially suspicious. In *Brooklyn*, by contrast, the beach is depicted as a site that is overtly free from surveillance: precisely because it is overcrowded, individual misdemeanours go unnoticed. For the protagonist Eilis, a recent immigrant from Ireland, the trips to Coney Island constitute a process of hybridisation, a mixing of American, Italian (via her Italo-American boyfriend Tony) and Irish practices. The beach allows her to experiment with different codes of behaviour, to acquire sexual experience and, finally, to achieve a new sense of self-confidence and identity.

Implicitly, this liberating effect only works for white visitors. The presence or absence of New York's black population on Coney Island is not mentioned. This blind spot can be put down to Eilis's lack of awareness of racial issues in US culture. Historically, however, it is a central issue, severely compromising the positive conceptualisation of the beach as a 'free' space where classes and races mix without restraint. On American beaches, racial segregation was widely practised, at least unofficially, until well into the second half of the twentieth century. The online *Encyclopedia of Chicago* describes incidents that occurred when the idea of the beach as a space accessible to all was taken at face value by the city's black citizens:

The fight between public and private interests over the lakeshore included racial divisions that resulted in the segregated use of the beaches and waters of Lake Michigan. Through the first decades of the twentieth century African American children were not welcome at most of the bathing beaches in the city. In 1912 an African American child was attacked for attempting to bathe at the 39th Street Beach. As a mob grew, the police responded and quashed the riot. Racial tension soared again in 1919 over a similar incident. On a hot summer day in July at the 29th Street Beach white beachgoers threw rocks at an African American teenager who crossed an invisible line in the lake that extended from the racially segregated beaches. The black teenager drowned, igniting a race riot in the city that lasted for seven days. Though the beaches in Chicago were never officially designated by race, racial segregation continued along the lakeshore for much of the twentieth century. ('Shoreline Development')

In many countries, invisible – and sometimes visible – lines divide the beach and regulate access according to unforgiving social rules. Anti-Semitic segregation

was practised in German seaside resorts well before the Nazis officially came to power in 1933. As early as 1900, hotels, resorts and entire islands on the Northern and Baltic Seas were advertising themselves as *judenfrei* (free of Jews), a policy that was officially implemented by the Nazi government in 1935 (see Bajohr). Official race segregation, regulated by the ‘Reservation of Separate Amenities Act’, Act No 49 of 1953, was practised on South African beaches until the end of Apartheid (see Samuelson’s contribution in this volume, and also Booth xix–xxii). These examples show that the Western conception of the beach as an innocent, paradisiacal space, as a space where social distinctions and conventional fetters dissolve as visitors shed their clothes in the sun, can always turn into a political nightmare. The freedom one hopes to experience on the beach is deeply subjective and might well be regarded by others as an infringement of their own licence to enjoy themselves. Indeed, a particular person’s mere presence on the beach might already be felt to be just such an infringement. Whether in the context of American segregation, South African apartheid or First-World prosperity, the rights of access to beaches are as strictly regulated as they are contested. In this respect alone, littoral spaces are, of course, not unique. The peculiarity of the seaside in this context lies in the tenacity of its association with pure freedom, even while it functions not only as a social and racial frontier but also as a border for countries situated on the coast.

Border Zone and Non-Lieu

The beach may be a contact zone, but it is also a space of demarcation: a strip of land that separates *terra firma* from the sea, belonging to neither; a border that is policed, where strangers – such as Odysseus when found by Nausikaa – may receive a warm welcome but, more often than not, are refused entry, provided they even make it to the shore alive. In our day and age, the beaches of the Mediterranean have increasingly become a repository for such human debris. Thousands of Africans, trying to escape from the poverty in their home countries, cross the *Mare nostrum* – construed by the European Union as ‘our sea’, rather than as a space connecting its European, African and Levantine shores (see Braudel) – and endeavour to reach the Spanish, Maltese or Italian coasts, the liminal zone ’twixt land and sea that is a holiday destination for others. The European coastline has become a border zone policed by Frontex, the EU agency created to patrol its external frontiers. For the migrants crossing the Mediterranean in unseaworthy boats, littoral space either becomes a site of detention or, in fact, the site where their dead bodies are washed up on the shore. At the time of writing, news reports are coming in covering one of the deadliest shipwrecks in recent history: in autumn 2013, close to Lampedusa, the Italian island that is nearest to the African coast, 296 Eritrean refugees perished in their attempt to reach European territory. The survivors, who, by the very fact of being rescued and brought to shore by Italian fishermen and the coast guard, had infringed the country’s law against illegal immigration, were automatically placed

under investigation (see Kington). While this most recent disaster was particularly shocking, it is by no means a unique event.⁴

Even if they reach the shore safely, migrants taking the sea route experience littoral space not as a site of hope and hospitality but, rather, as a non-place (*non-lieu*) in the sense of Marc Augé: ‘a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity’ (77–8). The non-place, while part of an international mobility grid, is in fact a place of stasis for those who are not considered legitimate participants in that mobility: ‘Non-places, often spaces of transit, refer to other places without taking you there’ (Cresswell 244). This is literally true for those whose northbound journeys come to a stop on the European coastline. For them, littoral space is not a destination but a zone of deferred transition, of suspension, of waiting. Dislocated and uncertain about their future, those stranded in the reception centres of Southern Europe experience a complete loss of agency and an erasure of social identity which brings them close to the condition described by Giorgio Agamben as ‘bare life’, a form of existence defined by exclusion from the *polis* (Agamben 11), that is, the loss of political entitlement. Lampedusa’s euphemistically named *centro di primo soccorso e accoglienza* (early assistance and reception centre) is chronically overcrowded; detainees regularly sleep on the floor or in the open. Psychological support is insufficient, and conflicts between various groups are frequent. Deprived of their status as citizens, the inmates of the reception centre are treated as criminals rather than refugees: following a fire incident in September 2011, seven hundred men waiting for repatriation ‘were handcuffed with plastic cuffs and kept below deck [of three ferryboats appropriated for the purpose], without any external associations, lawyers or doctors allowed access to them. Their mobile phones were confiscated to stop them communicating with people outside’ (Maccanico 1). As a result of the European Union’s refugee policy, the local authorities are logistically and financially unable to offer adequate solutions and to treat the African refugees in a humane way. In consequence, news reports on the refugees’ plight, and images of hundreds of coffins lined up in Lampedusa’s harbour jarringly contrast with the symbolic investment in the beach as a vacationscape: in the consciousness of European TV audiences (and potential paying visitors), places like Lampedusa are transformed from popular holiday destinations to areas branded by mass detention and death. As these regions are dependent on the tourist industry, their inhabitants, not among Europe’s richest populations to begin with, are in danger of losing their own means of sustenance as they are left by European governments to shoulder the burden of poverty-driven migration.⁵ While the experience of dislocation and

⁴ According to the latest UNHCR report, the number of refugees peaked in 2011, with more than 58,000 people crossing the Mediterranean sea and more than 1,500 drowning or going missing in that period (see ‘Mediterranean’). Despite this death toll, there are no indications that the flow of refugees may be slowing down in 2013. On the refugee situation on Lampedusa, see also Reckinger.

⁵ According to the Italian daily *La Stampa*, tourist numbers fell off by sixty per cent in 2011 as a result of the influx of refugees following the Arab Spring (see Geremicca).

depersonalisation is certainly not unique to detainees in littoral space, it is precisely the contrast between the connotations of the beach as a site of regeneration, pleasure and freedom, an economy dependent on this positive construction, and the bleak reality of detention camps that epitomises one of the most dramatic conflicts about the meaning, use and control of littoral space at present.

This list is by no means exhaustive, but the concrete examples given here illustrate some of the vital issues raised by littoral space. Whether we consider the beach from the vantage point of affluent consumers in the West, of local residents affected by the geographical and climatic changes wrought on the coasts or of participants in globalised mobility, the zone 'twixt land and sea has become a highly visible, contested territory. The present volume offers new perspectives on cultural representations of this space and thus hopes to stimulate a debate about one of the most fascinating spaces on our planet.

The Beach in this Book

Contributions to this volume come mainly from literary studies, as well as from art history, film studies and cultural studies, and they focus on cultural objects such as literary prose fiction, non-fiction, poetry, painting, documentary and feature film and photography. One of our objectives is to demarcate areas of future exploration, and consequently the analytical focus of the individual essays varies. While some of the chapters of the present volume provide overviews, others take the form of case studies, concentrating on the oeuvre of a single author or on thick descriptions of single works. In order to reflect on the polyvalence of littoral space, they choose a variety of theoretical approaches, drawing on fields as diverse as marine ecology and Kristeva's concept of the abject. Despite this breadth, however, the essays are interlinked by an interest in the beach and the littoral as an aesthetic and culturally productive terrain; as a liminal space between nature and culture; as a social space that can function as a contact zone or a site of closure and separation; and as a site of intersection between postcolonial and ecocritical concerns.

Throughout the volume, there is an ongoing conversation between classical Western visions of the beach and postcolonial perspectives. Geographically, the contributions consider seaside beaches in various climatic zones, from the Northern and Irish Seas to the beaches of the Caribbean, South Africa and the Pacific Rim; they highlight distinct social and historical problems related to these particular littoral landscapes. Viewed together, they tell a story that explores the variability of the littoral across global geographical and cultural space. At the same time, our contributors also share a strong interest in the significance of the beach as natural environment – as a site which promises a connection with nature or as a specific ecosystem in itself. They consider forms of interaction between humanity and nature and between different species and they view the littoral as a particular landscape which enables cultural expression. Some of the essays foreground formal qualities and concentrate on the rhetorical and poetic characteristics of littoral texts. They share a primary interest in the aesthetic aspects of the beach

as a trope, and they address questions of genre, intertextuality and the imaginary. Though keenly aware of how aspects of class and cultural tradition influence a person's access to and aesthetic appreciation of littoral space, the authors approach such issues through analyses of literary, cinematic and artistic form. They show how aesthetic responses to the beach as a natural and social space represent a complex cultural terrain in which contact between coloniser and colonised, humanity and nature, and between social groups and individuals is not only staged and negotiated but also creatively transformed into a starting point for cultural work. Others approach these matters from a more context-oriented perspective and focus on engagements with the social and historical aspects of littoral space. They continue to engage with formal elements but shift their focus to the social practices that determine cross-cultural and cross-species relations on the beach. They turn their attention to the manner in which littoral space is shared between classes and social and cultural groups and across geographically removed regions. In most of the chapters, the emphasis is on conventions of inclusion and exclusion, as well as on the social, cultural, ecological and global interconnectedness of littoral space. As regards the temporal scope of this volume, some of the contributions have a focus on the nineteenth century, but most essays concentrate on contemporary cultural production. Many of them, however, reach back to Victorian concepts of nature and littoral space and, by considering the repercussions of nineteenth-century formulations of the beach, provide a link between the Victorian Age and the present. Since the Victorian period, the age when mass tourism on the beach first developed, the conceptualisation of the beach as vacationscape has acquired particular dominance, and many of our contributors touch on this meaning of the beach, either by making it their main concern or, more often, by using it as a foil for other conceptualisations of littoral space. In its entirety, this volume engages with and emphasises a great variety of different formulations of the littoral. In terminology as well, littoral space evokes a wealth of expressions: beach, shore, coast, seaside – these are just some of the words that spring to mind. While many of the essays concentrate on the beach, they also engage with other terms and concepts, such as shorelines and the land-sea divide. As a whole, and rather than adopting a unified terminology, the volume makes use of the advantages of a collection in that it affords an opportunity to survey and examine the terminological diversity on offer. The manner in which the contributors approach terms associated with littoral landscapes reflects the complexity and suggestiveness of the littoral both as a topos and a trope.

Christiana Payne opens our collection with a discussion of the beach as a social space that in nineteenth-century England acquired new meanings as a realm in which class and gender boundaries started to become permeable. Payne, curator of a number of influential exhibitions related to the beach, offers a comparative analysis of four mid- to late Victorian paintings. Highlighting the particular resonance which seascapes and the seashore hold for the British, she shows how the paintings analysed in her essay negotiate a great many conceptualisations of littoral space, among them the beach as contact zone, as a subject of scientific

and aesthetic reflexion and as a space of work. Payne shows how the particular aesthetic choices the artists make allow them to fuse a variety of paradigmatic meanings of the Victorian beach in their representations and to turn them into documents typical of their period.

From painting, we turn to poetry. Katharina Rennhak covers a broad spectrum in her piece, which ranges from the Victorian period to contemporary literary production. She analyses Matthew Arnold's classic beach poem 'Dover Beach' and pursues its literary, philosophical and theological afterlife through a focus on Dover beach as an aesthetic and cultural contact zone. In reading a variety of prose and lyrical texts that are intertextually related to Arnold's piece, Rennhak traces the aesthetic development of the Dover beach trope in English, Scottish and Black British pre- and post-Arnoldian poetry which hinges on the topographical positions of their narrators and speakers in relation to the shore. She suggests that in order to oppose Arnold's liberal politics, lyrical subjects need consciously to choose a location on or relating to the beach which does not repeat Arnold's perspective and vantage point. This is particularly pertinent to poems which, by voicing the position of the cultural other from a location on this most famous of English beaches, point to differences not from the outside but from within Britain itself.

Like Rennhak, Anne-Julia Zwierlein is concerned with the dialogue between the nineteenth century and the present in her investigation of the land-sea divide as an existentialist and ecocritical trope in contemporary British and Irish fiction. She links scientific and aesthetic perspectives on littoral space by observing how Victorian perceptions of evolutionary deep time led to the questioning of human uniqueness and by examining the repercussions of this re-evaluation of humanity's position in contemporary novels which set their negotiations of human identity on the beach. Focussing on the cultural symbolisms of the land-sea divide, Zwierlein reads the littoral in these texts as a catalyst for human relationships. In addition, the beach offers a stage on which the position of humankind is examined from an ecological perspective. In all of the novels discussed in this essay, scenes of coastal erosion underline the precariousness, as well as the possible meaninglessness, of human existence. At the same time, Zwierlein demonstrates how the coastal setting also emphasises the tenacity of life, partly by foregrounding the Darwinian closeness of humans and animals in their struggle for survival. Nature and natural processes, here, do not merely serve as backdrops for the unfolding of human stories but crucially influence human fates, and call into question the sovereignty of the human species.

Neal Alexander turns to shorelines as physical and metaphorical border zones. He analyses the poetry of Michael Longley and Robert Minhinnick, two poets of place, as test cases for the possibilities and shortcomings of ecocritical analysis. The manner in which both writers revisit the same Irish and Welsh littoral spaces in the course of their poetic production lends itself to a questioning of the Heideggerian concept of dwelling. Alexander foregrounds the fact that, for Longley and Minhinnick, sense of place is not secure and comforting but always unstable and unsettling. In the two poets' disorientation of dwelling, the seashore

as a characteristic locus of contingency and fragility becomes a crucial element on their poetic agenda. Furthermore, their poetic constructions of the beach allow them to challenge a nature-culture dualism which separates the human from the non-human and to show instead how people and human traces are integral parts of littoral landscapes.

Julika Griem, in the next chapter, reads Scottish writer John Burnside's littoral landscapes as liminal zones which generate aesthetic reflexion about being in and speaking about the world in ways which echo some of the concerns of Alexander's contribution. Burnside's continued revisiting and rewriting of littoral spaces endows his beaches with a multiplicity of metaphorical and symbolic meanings which trigger reconsiderations of the relationship between questions of literary form and of environmental conflict. With the help of spatial theory, Griem systematises Burnside's littoral and maritime motifs and identifies differences in his engagement with the beach in his poetry and in his prose. She teases out the relations between Burnside's littoral topographies, the political commitment of his writing and his eco-philosophical project.

Similarly concerned with littoral landscapes as creatively fertile sites for cultural production, and continuing the discussion of intertextual relations while moving to another cultural and geographical setting, Tobias Döring focuses on literary traces left on Caribbean beaches. Conceptualising littoral space as a cultural contact zone, he analyses the particular form of creativity that develops from the gathering of lost wreckage and debris and its reassembling as a bricolage. For Döring, Caribbean beaches are important sites for processes of creolisation. Focussing on the poetic oeuvre of Derek Walcott, Edward Brathwaite, and others, Döring explores the beach as an enabling trope for Caribbean literary production. Reading the cultural practice of beachcombing as a metaphor for literary creation, he suggests that a poetics of fragmentation and recycling forms an essential constituent of contemporary Caribbean writing and its engagement with tradition and newness. Hence the literary sea and beach emerge, in a Caribbean context, as crucial spaces for autopoetic reflexion.

If the beach in Döring's essay features mainly as a place in which various people and cultures meet and intermingle, Meg Samuelson addresses a diametrically opposed function of the beach by analysing it as a site of segregation. Directing our attention to South Africa, Samuelson seeks to recover the beach as a significant locale of South African literature, which, she argues, has been marginalised due to the way in which it complicates binaries and boundaries. Samuelson encourages us to reconsider the beach as a site which enables the narrativisation of the various encounters that have crucially shaped South African history. Like Payne's chapter, Samuelson's essay is historicist, and she traces the function of the beach as a cultural contact zone in a survey of South African literature stretching from the period of colonial exploration and expansion, through the apartheid regime to the post-apartheid present. Both as a setting and as a figure, Samuelson suggests, littoral space encourages the imagination of alternative positions that challenge the national story of South Africa.

The next two essays in our collection are more specifically concerned with the relationship between humans and animals and with the manner in which they coexist in coastal spaces, or perhaps even share them. Ursula Kluwick's analysis of the representation of sharks and shark attacks in popular science books and film investigates the complex dynamics between beach and shore. Kluwick discusses how shark attacks challenge conceptualisations of the beach as vacationscape, and she explores the shore as a thanatoscape with ambivalent alliances to humanity, artifice and nature. Popular renditions of shark attacks examine the relationship between humanity and nature on the beach through a combination of cultural and scientific visions of littoral space. Kluwick interprets the voyeuristic pleasure inspired by sharks and their victims in terms of abjection and examines how the cultural mediation of shark attacks turns littoral landscapes into spaces where divisions collapse, prompting interrogations of what it means to be human, in relation to nature as well as to other humans.

The marine creatures in Virginia Richter's essay have an entirely different cultural meaning. Taking whales as exemplary figures of inter-species contact, Richter compares three postcolonial works: Witi Ihimaera's novel *The Whale Rider*, Niki Caro's film *Whale Rider* and Linda Hogan's *People of the Whale*. The focus of this essay is on coastal communities whose members dwell and work in littoral space and, thus, on changing social practices such as indigenous whale hunts and the rescue of stranded whales. The beach functions here as a contact zone in a very specific sense: not only as a meeting ground between human groups with different cultural backgrounds, and between human and non-human species, but also as a space in which different ethical stances towards nature are negotiated. The aesthetic mode employed in the novels, magic realism, allows a perspective on littoral space that foregrounds its potential as a nature-culture continuum as well as a realistically depicted human working environment. The comparison with Caro's film gives insights into the repackaging of these themes for international consumption.

In the final contribution to this volume, Alexa Weik von Mossner shifts the focus to the disappearing beach. Like Kluwick, Weik von Mossner distinguishes between the beach and the shore, but, in tune with the ecologically informed orientation of her essay, her definitions of these sites are influenced by geography and marine science. She considers beach and shore as specific natural environments in which various perspectives, such as the scientific, the local and the global, can come into conflict or can be productively combined. Applying Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence to Briar March's documentary *There Once Was an Island*, Weik von Mossner examines the ways in which the future existence of the tiny Pacific atoll of Takuu hinges not only on local but also on global developments. Due to rising sea levels, the vanishing beaches of Takuu are losing their protective function as border zones. As a result, the inhabitants of Takuu are faced with the gradual submersion of their island home, which also entails the loss of their traditional Polynesian culture and autonomy, as the Bougainville government already treats them as refugees in need of relocation. Highlighting both the collaborative aspects of the film, which

brings together local and scientific knowledge, as well as the interactive notion of space with which it operates, Weik von Mossner presents March's documentary as an eco-cosmopolitan project reaching out to new forms of solidarity.

The scope of the essays included here demonstrates that some of the most pressing concerns of our age can be articulated through an engagement with littoral space. Though our collection reflects the theoretical and methodological state of the art, more work, of course, remains to be done, and *The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures* sees itself as a critical intervention intended to stimulate further investigation of littoral topics. Beach architecture, to name but one example, would constitute another fascinating object of analysis, from the facilities offered to tourists to buildings commemorating invasions and landing operations in war, such as the memorials and information centres dedicated to the landing of the Allies on the beaches of Normandy. For researchers turning to this and related objects of study, the present volume seeks to supply a broad spectrum of model analyses and theoretical explorations which can point the way towards future engagements with the beach and establish littoral studies as a productive new field of interdisciplinary research.

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