Paralogistics: On People, Things and Oceans

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A first report

This is a first report from a long-term research into paralogistics. It covers about seven years of inquiry and travel over the course of several projects that dealt with questions around Hamburg port, shipping, radical seafaring, cruise ships and seafarers' rights, with piracy and the right to the sea – most of them conducted by the performance collective *geheimagentur*.[1] At the beginning of this journey, I did not know that this research was about paralogistics. In fact, the whole concept of paralogistics, including the term itself, is a recent invention – or rather discovery – that allows me to put experiences, difficulties and insights of these last years and months into perspective.

What might be agency, based on our connectedness through the sea? Paralogistics provide answers to the question of how to act together in ever changing entanglements of people, things and oceans. Often, paralogistics are hiding under the radar, but once you find and connect to them, they turn out to be everywhere. Then they can produce a feeling of evidence that is ubiquitous and contagious and paralogical. One might

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P. Hildebrandt et al. (eds.), *Performing Citizenship*, Performance Philosophy, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97502-3_14

suspect that paralogistics are related to logistics, as the paranormal is to the normal. In that sense, paralogistics talk to the ghosts of logistics and through them.

This is a report from an ongoing research process which intentionally manoeuvers between academic discourse on the one hand, and accounts from artistic experimentation and explorative travel, on the other. It traces paralogistical connections and movements more than formally investigates them, and it also includes dead ends and failing proofs. Ultimately, paralogistics are not just about how to hack logistics, but possibly also about how these hacks fail to be quite logical.

What is hydrarchy today?

In 2010, a group of Somali pirates hijacked the cargo ship *MS Taipan* that was sailing under German flag. Dutch naval forces captured the pirates and brought them to Hamburg for trial. It was the first piracy trial in Hamburg since 1624.

At the time I was working at the Theatre of Research, a children's theatre that had been turned into an institute for transgenerational art-based research.[2] Given that there was no birthday party without a treasure hunt, and that a kid pirate called Captain Sharky was depicted on their toothbrushes, the children were curious: 'How come the pirates have escaped from the movies and why does nobody like them anymore, now that they are real?' The children were asking questions we all had, but no one dared to ask. Therefore, *geheimagentur* and Theatre of Research decided to invite them to dress up in their pirates' costumes and record their questions for real pirates on video.

Exploring the idea that everyone on this planet is connected to everyone else through no more than seven links, we asked friends of friends of friends if they knew any Somali pirates. After a remarkable odyssey we finally found the pirates in Eastleigh, the Somali part of Nairobi, in the club room of a hotel. The pirates were more afraid of us than we were of them. Watching the kids' videos made them relax. They opened up and really tried to give an account of what had happened, for the kids of Hamburg to understand:

> 'How did you become a pirate in the first place?'
> 'How do you like *Pirates of the Caribbean*?'
> 'Have you ever killed somebody and doesn't it hurt you in the heart?'
> 'Would you like your children to become pirates, too?'

Among the pirates we met there was an old man who had been part of that first group of fishermen who had thought of themselves as acting on behalf of the non-existent coastguard of the non-existent state of Somalia, trying to reinforce the three-mile zone which had been violated by corporate fishing fleets that had taken away the livelihood of Somali fishermen. There also was a fragile-looking guy of 17 who had just escaped from Somalia and whose body spoke of lifelong hunger. Because he was so light he had been forced to be the first of his crew to climb up that shaking ladder onto the deck of the containership with a machine gun hanging round his neck. His bosses, who had safely stayed ashore, gave him 10,000 dollars out of the million-dollar ransom. Money that soon after was taken from him again, when he was robbed on his way out. He had never been on a ship before and did not intend to set foot on one again.

Paralogistics is first and foremost a take on logistics, coming from outside of the logistical systems to hack and interrupt them for access.

Have you ever looked up the bow of a containership from a little boat floating next to it? Next time you do a harbour trip in one of the small tourist boats, envisage your only way to escape from oblivion was to climb onto that deck up there in the sky and claim that monster of a ship as yours. Imagine what an extraordinary kind of courage it takes to do that, the courage of those who had no part in the global order of things, until they realised that one of the major logistical lifelines of global capitalism was right there, on the horizon, within their reach.

While we brought the answers of the pirates, recorded on video, back to the children of Hamburg and transformed their dialogue into a stage performance, the Atalanta naval mission slowly managed to reinstate what has lately been called 'supply chain security'. The shipping industry of Hamburg founded a centre to train private anti-piracy forces for their ships. These forces, trained in a remote industrial zone of the city, were more than discreet; they never took prisoners and no one in Hamburg has ever heard of their actions again.

Considering that the shipping industry of Hamburg had made donations to the Theatre of Research in the past, we realised that by connecting children and pirates in this improbable dialogue we had enacted a link that had already been there, but which somehow was hidden from our sight. We understood that, being citizens of Hamburg, one of the biggest ports in the world, there were many links between us and other people

somewhere else,[3] and that it was not by accident that these links remained hidden and remained offshore somehow. We understood that something crucial had happened to the logistics of the port during the last decades. And not just to our port; London, New York, Hong Kong – port cities around the world have moved their docks and terminals out into special zones with no connection to the urban space we live in.[4] Containerisation has brought the mass expulsion of labour from the ports. At Hamburg's Euro Terminal, no more than five people are needed to unload the biggest containerships in less than a day. Less than 20 people work on a big containership and none of them are from Hamburg. Instead, the captain and his officers are most likely from Russia and the crew is from the Philippines. Because they stay at the terminal for only one day at a time, they no longer get to visit Hamburg, not even the famous brothels of St. Pauli. For the first time since the city was founded, citizens of Hamburg do not sail the seas anymore.

From Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's book 'The Many-Headed Hydra',[5] we learned about the heritage of piracy. We learned about Atlantic piracy as an improbable alliance between liberated slaves from West Africa and a first form of the European working class which was forced into service on the ships of the European empires, effectively the first factories. Linebaugh and Rediker call this alliance 'Hydrarchy'. *geheimagentur* collective asked: What might *hydrarchy* be today?

A first step to finding out, we thought, would be to reclaim our right to the harbour as citizens of Hamburg. So, we tried. Some of us worked at the seafarers' mission, some of us kept a small historical steel ship afloat, some of us lived in an old shipyard. We did research about the boom of the cruise ship industry that had recently taken over big parts of Hamburg port. In summer 2015, *geheimagentur* collective temporarily opened an 'Alternative Cruise Ship Terminal' in the middle of the port, where for a few weeks different kinds of experiences of the port were facilitated and created.[6]

Learning by doing, we became knowledgeable about the power structure of Hamburg Port Authority (HPA) – a half-private, half-public organisation that owns the land and makes the rules in Hamburg port. We found that, in the name of safety and security, HPA keeps everyone out of the port who is not 'relevant for port economy'. Of course, only Hamburg Port Authority gets to decide who and what fits this criterion. Nobody can live in Hamburg port or to open, for instance, a café on a boat without the permission of HPA, which is very hard to get. In the port, it seems we are all illegal migrants.

The logistical turn

Meanwhile, people all over the world were squatting the streets and squares of their cities in the name of real democracy. The Tahir Square Movement, the Syntagma Square assemblies, the Occupy Movement in the US, the Indignados in Spain, and many others – and *geheimagentur* started to work within a network of artists, activists and researchers to explore this new 'art of being many'.[7] We met people from Tunis, Cairo, Madrid, New York, Athens and Istanbul. And we asked ourselves if in some way, the pirates of Puntland Somalia were to be counted in. But we did not understand what the connection between these struggles was, until we read Deborah Cowen's book, *The Deadly Life of Logistics*,[8] in which she constructs a relation between Somali piracy and the Occupy movement:

> Much like 'The Many-Headed Hydra', the seemingly disparate lives of these movements are connected through the infrastructures of logistics space. Alongside profound differences in strategy, tactics, and the logistics of struggle, together with the very real distance (socially and spatially) between these collectivities, there has also at times been exchange between members and overlap in organizers, events, and ideas that point to the potential for a different occupation and organization of logistics space. (Cowen, p. 227)

Cowen, as well as thinkers like Keller Easterling,[9] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson,[10] or Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, argue that capitalism currently is taking a logistical turn.[11]

Logistics – the science of the supply chain – comes from warfare and, in warfare, has traditionally been a service dominated by the master discourse of warfare: strategy. Of course, logistics is also of crucial importance for trade, where it is also in a position of service to the system of production that has for the longest time been seen as the core of the economy. In this position of service, to either strategy or production, logistics has connected warfare to trade and trade to warfare for thousands of years. But when containerisation had its breakthrough – not least due to the U.S. Army's use of containers to keep supply chains open to their troops in Vietnam – something changed for logistics and made it rise up over its former masters. The free movement of capital around the globe, the digital revolution alongside the fact that the internet has become a gigantic catalogue to order from, crisis-driven migration between continents and

the primary importance of energy systems: all of this contributed to the rise of logistics. Thus today, strategy follows logistics in warfare, and production took its position in a system of circulation, in a gigantic supply chain that more and more models society as such. In a paper on *Extraction, Logistics and Finance*, Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson write: 'Stemming from military practices, logistics organizes capital in technical ways that aim to make every step of its "turnover" productive' (Mezzadra and Neilson, p. 5). Capitalism itself has become the movement of movements.

UPS,[12] global player of logistics, describes this as follows: 'Everybody loves something. We love logistics. We love its precision, its epic scale, its ability to make life better for billions of people. Each day, our customers count on us to choreograph a ballet of infinite complexity played across skies, oceans and borders. And we do. What's not to love?'[13]

Logistics seems humble. Its subordinate position turns out to be its strength. It focuses on operations which seemingly only build the platform, create the conditions for human life to happen. Customers count on it to supply what is needed in some other place, where life is supposed to happen. Logistics is not considered a part of that, it does not have to be thought of in terms of the public and the social. It is just a service. To really be of service it mainly has to be one thing: it has to be safe and secure. Or else, how is it supposed to provide what is needed in that other place where life is happening? But in its growth, global logistics takes the space where life was supposed to happen and turns it into logistical zones designed and defined by the safety of the supply chain.

Look at the things that surround us, such as clothing, furniture, technical equipment. Make a guess: how much of it has been shipped before it arrived where you find it right now?

Rose George turned the answer to that question into the title of her book, *Ninety Percent of Everything*.[14] In it, she cites the chief of the British navy: 'Today we suffer from sea blindness' (George, p. 4). George extrapolates, 'There are no ordinary citizens to witness the working of an industry that is one of the most fundamental to their daily existence' (George, p. 2). But citizenship needs witnesses. If there are no citizens to witness something, there is no citizenship in that which is not witnessed. George points out that citizen rights do not apply for everyone working on a

containership. 'Imagine you have a problem while on a ship. Who do you complain to, when you are employed by a Manila manning agency on a ship owned by an American, flagged by Panama, managed by a Cypriot in international waters?' (George, p. 10).

Obviously, ports are crucial sites for – maybe even something like the DNA of – the logistical turn. And this goes for all kinds of ports: airports, the tiny ports that connect digital streams of information to local interfaces, and, of course, seaports. Therefore, to observe what happens in ports, and what does not, might provide us with some insight about what to expect from the logistical turn. Is there a chance to persist, to claim, to squat or inhabit it? How are we going to take part in the dance of logistics? In what ways are we already dancing in this ballet across skies, oceans and borders? What if precision and epic scale are not exactly our strong side, and what if we suck at ballet?

Looking at seaports as crucial sites of this development, what do we see?

We see that we see nothing. We see that we are blocked out, we are blinded. And even if we really try and manage to enter the port zone to investigate, we find ourselves confronted with a striking difficulty to name and to politicize anything that happens there. Sea blindness starts ashore.

Epic scale also plays a role in that. In the world of logistics everything has to be as big as possible: ships, terminals, rivers, everything. Global scale is not human scale, and logistics generally does not like people much; it likes algorithms that try to create circuits of movements that rely on human agency as little as possible. Standing at the gate of a containership terminal, dwarfed by a form of capital that resembles the sublime – something that is so huge it is not even entirely here, but always partly somewhere else. Too big to even form something like a locality. Too big to concern us local dwarfs.

Supply chain security is another important factor in this scenario. It is not new, but it is diversifying and by now can appear in the disguise of workers' rights or children's health considerations. It goes along with a closed system of insurance calculations, which make us all accountable for the security of the supply chain and make it almost impossible to intervene, to create new, alternative supply chains. Safety is just too expensive. It is so expensive that only corporate capital can pay for it. And thus, there is only corporate capital left in the port, and there are fences and gates and cameras to shut everything else out: for your own safety. There are only operators, no citizens, in logistical space.

For centuries, Hamburg port has created the connections and the means to sustain a city of free people. The concept of the free port as a special economic zone was partly invented here (Easterling, p. 27 ff.). Of course, exclusion, extraction and exploitation always had a part in this. However, relying on the free port, Hamburg declared itself independent of kings and territorial empires centuries ago. The zone of the free port has been the key to this independence; it has enabled the growth and persistence of the biggest European city that is not a capital and has also helped to establish something like a citizenship by the seas. What is happening to this tradition, to this form of citizenship, after the port itself has been turned into a logistical zone beyond citizenship? Can the use of paralogistics be a tactic to reclaim the ports?

The beach of Badagry

During the most successful years of Somali piracy, containerships stopped coming to Mogadishu port. Containerised sea trade came to a complete cessation there. But sea trade itself did not.

In their documentary *From Gulf to Gulf to Gulf*, the artist collective Camp from India show footage of a different kind of sea trade that works under the radar of the global logistical machine. It stems from a coastal zone in India, somewhere north of Bombay, where special environmental conditions allow people to build massive wooden boats without big machinery, based on traditional craftsmanship. Hundreds of these simple cargo ships are then used to transport cargo between India, Africa and the whole Gulf region – a trade that is governed by people from the Indian province, who employ their families, friends and neighbours. The documentary consists solely of edited footage that people on those ships shot with their own cellphones. These videos show hard working conditions, but also give the impression of self-determination, of companionship and of living with and by the sea.

When *geheimagentur* temporarily opened the Alternative Cruise Ship Terminal in Hamburg port during the summer of 2015, Shaina Anand from Camp from India came to visit. Together, we discussed the idea of building a ship like that in Hamburg. Could that reconnect us to a civil and self-determined kind of seafaring? To a practice that, once upon a time, was essential for our city and for the claim to citizenship? Or would that just be a romantic regression?

In summer 2016, we saw ships like this again elsewhere. Not as big, not for crossing the oceans, but nonetheless cargo ships made from wood, in a natural dry dock. It was our last day in Nigeria and after seven days of full-on research, day and night, on informal trade between Hamburg and Lagos port, we had only one wish: to get out of this 20-million-people-no-public-infrastructure-monster of a city. Get out of the traffic, get out of the crude oil hub, get out of that never-ending street market, that zone of EFRITIN, and go to the beach. The beach of Badagry. 20 miles of white sand. No international resort, nothing much but coconuts and fishermen and people driving their motorbikes along the shoreline because there they could go faster than on the bumpy road. The waves of the Atlantic were just perfect, a surfers' paradise that seemed untouched, unseen, unheard of. And then there were these huge boats made from tropical wood overarching the beach. Actually, this was not quite a beach. It was a shipyard. The ships were made right here, probably to serve as cargo ships for the informal trade with Benin, the border being just ten miles away.

When we saw them, we realized that we would not have found them if we had not followed the informal sea trade from Hamburg to Nigeria, created by migrants, and that we would not have understood what we saw if we had not watched Camp's documentary. And that we would never have watched it if we had not opened the Alternative Cruise Ship Terminal. And that we would not have done that if we had not been involved in the improbable dialogue between pirates and children. And next thing we could do, together with our Nigerian business partners, would be to find out about these cargo ships and try and buy one, and turn it into a little cruise ship for our Alternative Cruise Ship company. And then all would fit together in an extremely seductive version of a happy ending, that comes with the feeling that everything is connected, people and things and oceans. That they arrange themselves and each other, that they never stop arranging each other, floating, bending, and not only building machines, but bodies full of needs and desires. And that we, as part of these bodies, are constantly following the moon and the tides around the planet, riding and at the same time creating, the currents.

But some of those currents are quite old, and within them something is transported through time that will never find a happy ending. And thus, just when you feel happily connected with everything, the ghosts of logistics might come and speak to you, opening up a paralogistic dialogue.

Back in the city we got ready for the flight back, when a guy turned up at the bar of the hotel, just in time for last orders. 'My name is Memory', he said, 'like memory. Do you know the card game?' He asked me about my day, and when I told him about the beach of Badagry, he smiled: 'Did we know', he asked, 'that Badagry was ground zero of human trafficking? Did we know that that beach saw the very beginning of the Atlantic slave trade and that just a few miles from where we were, there was a famous and bloody stone that was called the stone of no return, because everyone who had passed that stone had turned into a thing to be shipped? No, we had not known that. But there was Memory standing right in front of us, raising his glass to our safe journey.

In *The Undercommons*, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten sometimes seem to speak with the voices of the shipped with the voices of those who had walked past that stone of no return. In their discussion of the logistical turn they argue that modern logistics was born there, that the Atlantic slave trade is the first model of modern logistics. This does not mean that all logistics involve the slave trade, but it does indicate that the position afforded to people in logistics tends to be that of the shipped. However, this is no position, no standpoint. At least not when it comes to the circuits of capitalism. Harney and Moten write:

> If the proletariat was located at a point in the circuits of capital, a point in the production process from which it had a peculiar view of capitalist totality, what of those who were located at every point, which is to say at no point, in the production process? What of those who were not just labour but commodity, not just in production but in circulation, not just in circulation but in distribution as property, not just property but property that reproduced and realized itself? The standpoint of no standpoint, everywhere and nowhere, of never and to come, of thing and nothing. (Moten and Harney, p. 100)

If this is what happens when logistics takes over, the question of what logistics might be from 'our point of view' cannot be answered, as logistics moves us and moves us around until we become the shipped, those who have no standpoint.

I asked Memory if he would agree that if Badagry is ground zero of the Atlantic slave trade, it also had to be ground zero of hydrarchy? As by producing the shipped, it also produced new alliances of the shipped, pirates' alliances, that crossed borders of continents and races and powers

in a new planetary dimension? But Memory did not know that, and I had to get to the airport to fly back to Hamburg. Maybe I was too stoned to make myself clear.

The shippings of the shipped

The weed dealers from our neighbourhood were the ones who finally cleared our heads and started to cure our sea-blindness beyond our projection of the Hamburg port. They added a most important piece to the puzzle. When we had opened the Alternative Cruise Ship Terminal we had postulated publicly that the citizens of Hamburg had lost their relation to their port and were not using it anymore, which is why the port was now sold to them as spectacle in festivals and cruises. And that might still be right, but then we found out that the non-citizens of this city do use the port. Not so much for transporting weed. No, they were using the port for the same reason they had started to sell weed in the first place; they had recently come here from West Africa. Hence, most of them had no citizen rights, which means no access to the market where they could sell their labour and become a properly exploited member of what is left of the proletariat. So, they tried to find access to the entanglement of people, things and oceans in a different way.

They told us that some time back, in the early 1990s, people had come to Hamburg from West Africa to find that there is an abundance of things that are thrown away here, but were wanted in West Africa, or – as they prefer to put it – things are moving, are moving in Lagos, in Gambia, in Ghana. Fridges, TVs, hairdryers, hoovers, water heaters, remote controls – basically everything used in a household and everything with a plug. And that if they could find a way to collect these things and ship them from Hamburg to West Africa that would make a big difference in the lives of their families. Ever since, most people coming from West Africa were trying to do that one way or the other.

geheimagentur conducted extensive interviews with some of them. Everyone who had recently come from West Africa had the same answer to our question, whether they knew someone related to this business or not: 'All the people I know.' All our interview partners introduced themselves as businessmen. Some of them had studied logistics back in West Africa. During the interviews the impression of talking to refugees faded and, though most of them had in fact had horrific reasons for fleeing their country, we realized that we were at the same time talking to a first or

second wave of aspiring African businessmen, of lower middle and working class people from Africa, who were trying to turn things around and were looking at Europe from the perspective of what to extract from it, what to set in motion, for the only reason that it is moving in Lagos. All of them stressed that they were able to do this now because the internet allowed them to build informal logistical networks between Hamburg and Lagos with their phones, including ways to regulate money flow.

We learned that another crucial element of these paralogistics are cars. However, cars are not only cars in this informal supply chain, they are containers. The car makes use of a hole in the system, as customs will charge you for the car, not for what is inside the car. Therefore, to send stuff to West Africa, you first buy a car, a scrap car will do, and then fill every cubic inch of the car with stuff.

Hidden in the industrial zone in the east of Hamburg – in close proximity to that centre where the anti-piracy forces are trained – there is a place that is organized by this trade. In Billstraße you find everything that is moving in Lagos. The place does not look much like Hamburg, it looks more like Tin Can Island in Nigeria. Whereas logistics makes every port look the same, a paralogistic zone is more like a passage to a completely different place. Unfortunately, this is not the kind of trade Hamburg Port Authority has in mind when it comes to what they call 'development towards the future' (Hamburg Port Authority).

Most of the West African movers and traders from our neighbourhood recently came to Hamburg via the Mediterranean Sea in little boats and ships from Libya, headed towards the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa as an access point into Europe. Larry Macauley, an activist for refugees' rights, born in Lagos and now living in Hamburg,[15] has also come via that route. He told me that the little ship packed with hundreds of people in a way that reminded him of Hollywood movies he had watched about the slave trade. The ship was balanced with human bodies and was in danger of tipping over whenever someone moved. The chance of survival, Larry said, was equal to the ability of the people to stay motionless for 21 hours, to keep the balance, to function together as weight. I told Larry about my plan to do a project about the shippings of the shipped, about the informal trade between Hamburg port and West Africa, and he connected me online to his friend, George Adetayo Adewoye from Valuehandlers International Limited, and sent me to Lagos to see the other side.[16]

Hamburg Port Hydrarchy and the African Terminal

Within the program of the Alternative Cruise Ship Terminal project in summer 2015, people from different initiatives and backgrounds took each other on local cruises to share their practices of reusing the port. A network of people emerged who are active in Hamburg port while trying to stay under the radar of Hamburg Port Authority – a network of port-(non)-citizens one might say. In the end, they built a raft together, the Hydra, and sailed with it from the terminal situated in an old shipyard to the centre of the city. There, next to the town hall, a demonstration on the water took place reclaiming the right to the port for all citizens.[17]

To follow up on this collective effort, Hamburg Port Hydrarchy was founded in January 2016. Mirroring or mocking Hamburg Port Authority, Hamburg Port Hydrarchy is on a mission 'to develop Hamburg port towards a hydrarchical future'.

First, eight members of Hamburg Port Hydrarchy received small grants to travel to different port cities all over the world. They visited 'radical seafarers' and the so-called 'offshore art' scene in Brooklyn, New York. They took part in the uprising of Venetian citizens against the cruise ship industry. They explored the history of the boat people, as well as the current situation of seafarers trapped on board of bankrupt ships in the South China Sea. From each trip, teams brought back to Hamburg port an array of connections, insights and sometimes proposals for a different future. These were presented on board the MS Stubnitz, an old ship for industrial fishing turned into a cultural venue, in a performance consisting of lectures, installations and assemblies. On the MS Stubnitz, Hamburg Port Hydrarchy was collectively performed for the first time, as an experimental claim to a citizenship by the seas that does not yet exist. Transmitting from the old radio room, the Department of Paralogistics argues for a paralogistic approach to hydrarchy by accessing logistical systems through the backdoor, through waste and ruins, through passages that open up in the frictions that logistics is allegedly trying to overcome.

Finishing my own research trip to Lagos Nigeria I came home to a flood. A leakage had turned my basement into a hot tub. The janitor showed up and we smoked a cigarette together, contemplating the damage. It turned out that he had sailed West African waters for years as a member of the former GDR fishing fleet. He had once worked on the MS Stubnitz that had served as a swimming factory, to which other vessels brought their catch to be frozen and stored. Tin Can Island, the port of

Lagos, he remembered, was largely pirate territory back then; they had to keep watch all through the night. However, he also said that the GDR had good and fair business relations with African states. With the Stubnitz, and other ships like it, the GDR provided technical equipment for industrial fishing and therefore got a share of those states' fishing contingents. When the currency of the GDR went down, the industrial fishing fleet of the GDR went down with it. Overnight, it became unaffordable to be fair. The MS Stubnitz was rescued by sound artist Urs Blaser and a bunch of boat punks and is still afloat today. It is now moored at Baakenhöft in Hamburg port and serves as a venue for experimental music and performance. During German colonialism, the ships coming from Namibia were moored not far from here. The huge Afrika Terminal, build in the 1960s and now out of use, is still located next to the MS Stubnitz. In spring 2017, during the theatre festival – Theater der Welt – the warehouse will be open to the public for the first time and will temporarily become a venue for theatre and dance. Nobody knows yet what is going to happen to it next.

After presenting on board of MS Stubnitz, Hamburg Port Hydrarchy will develop an experimental assembly of hydrarchical setups, all to be tried out at Baakenhöft / Baakenhafen, the last remaining part of the old Hamburg port that is in close proximity to the city and not yet sold to investors for 'development'. One element of that assembly will be the re-opening of the Afrika Terminal as an African Terminal in becoming. How might a paralogistic African Terminal operate? What might it sound like, look like, move like? And could it be a place for us to learn more about this new kind of 'citizenship by the seas' that we have to invent?

Loose Ends

On our first day of research in Lagos, our guide refused to take us to the harbour. First, we would have to do this one thing for him and accompany him to a business conference hosted by the government. When I put my name on the list of participants, he stood right next to me and whispered in my ear: 'Put *German Embassy*.' Given my confusion, it seemed about right so, strangely, I obeyed. Then, our guide introduced me to people he wanted to impress. Pictures were taken, me shaking hands, smiling, receiving a promotional plastic bag, and showing the bag to the camera.

At the end of our visit, our guides posed for our camera, too, holding the flag of Hamburg Port Hydrarchy in front of the chart with the business

plan we had made together: Back in Hamburg port we were to open a temporary business school, where people who had recently arrived in Hamburg, as well as long-term citizens, could learn about the informal trade between Hamburg and Africa and how to do it. In the end, we would send at least five cars full of stuff that is moving in Lagos from Hamburg Baakenhöft to Tin Can Island.

This is how to get to Tin Can Island: right before you leave Lagos mainland and take the bridge that brings you to the terminal, you have to park the car and take a motorbike taxi. Only the motorbike can pass between those hundreds of oil trucks, which are blocking the highway. The trucks are rocking to the left and to the right, almost bumping into each other each time one of their wheels gets caught in one of the holes in the road. The names of the companies are written on the trucks with paint, one of them reads: *God's Will Limited*. The motorbikes pass through the dust as quickly as possible, calculating the moment when trucks are leaning outwards and not inwards against each other. 'There's no new way to die in Lagos', people say.

When we arrived at the terminal, a man pretending to be an 'authority' took our camera. One hour and 12,000 naira later, we got our camera back. When adrenalin stopped pumping we found ourselves in a yard where people unpacked containers and cars with signs on them saying 'Hamburg to Lagos'. A bunch of kids' bikes and hoovers spilled out. All moving in Lagos. One of the traders wore a shirt saying 'There's less here than meets the eye'. The place looked just like Billstraße in Hamburg.

The business conference we were taken to was about agriculture. During lectures, electricity went on and off. Nobody seemed to care; speakers just went on speaking in the dark, in the pitch-black room. Listening to them, I learned that the state of Nigeria wants the country to change, wants it to become more independent from import, more independent from the oil price. Or maybe does not exactly want, but has to, as the oil price is down and so is the Nigerian currency – the Naira – that lost half its value in 2016. It did not help that the government had tried to fight corruption by limiting the exchange of naira to dollar or euro. We understood that the informal trade we were about to throw ourselves into was in serious trouble, and what it means that the agency of everyone working in worldwide logistics is tied to the oil price, now including our own.

Later on, we met Aderemi Adegbite, an artist who makes a living as a line producer for film crews from abroad. His main service is to pay the

authorities 12,000 naira before white people show up with their cameras. He lives in Makoko. Makoko is where migrants from Benin first enter Lagos. They do not actually step on Nigerian soil but build their houses on wooden stilts in the waters of the Lagoon. Makoko looks amazing. No wonder that everyone in the art world loved that project shown at the Venice Biennale in 2013 – *Makoko Floating School* by the Nigerian architecture practice NLÉ. Only Aderemi Adegbite did not. It turns out that Makoko community never wanted a floating school: why would we send our children to a school that can be taken away by the currents or by towing it with a motorboat?

Larry, activist for refugees' rights in Hamburg, is a proud Lagosian. He is no fan of the people of Makoko. They are no Lagosians, they live no Lagosian life; they belong somewhere else he thinks. What would I think, Larry asks me, if people from Africa were living an African life right here in Hamburg?

Wikipedia defines paralogistic as a term for a circular argument, a failing proof.

Epilogue: Searching for Alternative Supply Chains

Epilogue

When this text went to print, the core group of the African Terminal consisted of nine members from Gambia, Nigeria and Ghana and three members from Germany. The first transaction – in which the African Terminal group claimed the space of the old Afrika Terminal to collect goods and send them to Gambia – had just been successfully finished. However, in terms of common logistics, the transaction didn't turn out to be profitable. Even though – due to its partly cultural character – the transaction was partly funded, it didn't pay out for the African members of the group in terms of money. Clearly, the German members of the group were more frustrated by this fact than their African colleagues. The latter were still on board with the project and keen on developing the African Terminal further. Asked for their reasons, they referred to the things we learned during the process but also made it clear that it is simply important not only to be shipped, but to ship something yourself. Important to collectively take the subject position of traders and of citizens that is denied to these group members by the German state. And they convinced us; indeed it seems crucial to go on trying to find alternative supply chains, to chase that

dream and to turn logistics around. And it is fruitful to use cultural production as a place to do that. Here, apart from breaking it down to numbers, we can enjoy whatever surplus – or even *jouissance* – the search for the alternative supply chain may produce. In this sense, paralogistics overturn – and at the same time reclaim – logistics as what often appears to be its opposite: a planetary form of conviviality including shared conflicts, shared resources, shared learning, shared memories and shared mourning.

Notes

1. *geheimagentur* is an open collective working in performance art, cultural studies and activism, www.geheimagentur.net, date accessed 1 March 2018.
2. www.theatreofresearch.org, date accessed 1 March 2018.
3. In May 2013, a delegation from Colombia turned up at the Labour Day demonstration in the Wilhelmsburg quarter of Hamburg and demanded the microphone. They had come to let people know that the charcoal needed for the newly built power station in Hamburg port is imported from Columbia, and that mining it had destroyed their villages and their livelihoods. An alliance of protesters was formed and people managed to block the port with 30 boats and ships for one hour in protest.
4. See Alberto Toscano (2011) 'Logistics and Opposition'.
5. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh (2013) *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*.
6. http://www.geheimagentur.net/projekte/ein-kreuzfahrtterminal-3/, date accessed 1 March 2018.
7. Results and insights from this process can be found in the book: *geheimagentur*, Martin Schäfer and Vassilis Tsianos (2016) *The Art of Being Many. Towards a new Theory and Practice of Gathering*.
8. Deborah Cowen (2014) *The Deadly Life of Logistics. Mapping Violence in Global Trade*.
9. Keller Easterling (2014) *Extrastatecraft. The Power of Infrastructure Space*.
10. Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson (2013) 'Extraction, Logistics and Finance'.
11. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney (2013) *The Undercommons. Fugitive Planning & Black Study*.
12. United Parcel Services.
13. Cited after Cowen, p. 204.

14. Rose George (2013) *Ninety Percent of Everything: Inside Shipping, the Invisible Industry That Puts Clothes on Your Back, Gas in Your Car, and Food on Your Plate.*
15. http://www.refugeeradionetwork.net/, date accessed 1 March 2018.
16. http://www.valuehandlers.com/, date accessed 1 March 2018.
17. http://www.geheimagentur.net/statement-der-besatzung-des-alternativen-kreuzfahrtterminals/, date accessed 1 March 2018.

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