The Ship in Geography and the Geographies of Ships

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Abstract
Although interest in the maritime world has been growing steadily within human geography over the past decade, the ship remains a largely neglected figure in its own right. In spite of facilitating the emergence of modern geographical study and being bound intricately to the movement of ideas, goods and people around the globe, past and present, the ship is an elusive, often invisible, and largely forgotten space. In this paper we seek to move the ship from the margins to the centre of geographical research. To do so, we firstly explore the potential of the ship for making geographical knowledge and as a means of understanding the world. We then go on to review studies from within the discipline and also from further afield which employ the ship as a vehicle for knowing and understanding colonialism, commerce, trade and conflict; embodied and resistant performances, and residual materiality, demonstrating the place of the ship in geography. We then contend that the ship could have a greater role in the discipline if it were not only utilised to make empirical and theoretical inroads in relation to broader geographic themes, but if it were the focus of study itself. Here we argue that geographies of ships would allow scholars the opportunity to reframe the history of the discipline, whilst also raising new questions and lines of enquiry relating to mobilities and more-than-human geographies, enriching wider academic projects beyond the discipline through employing the ship as a vehicle for novel empirical examinations.

Introduction
Despite the fact that ours is a decidedly watery planet, the work of human geography has, until recently, been rather neglectful of the maritime realm (MacDonald 2006, 629). Over the last decade or so, interest in challenging the apparent terracentrism of the discipline has been growing steadily, and although still a relatively marginal concern in the geographical literature, a rich set of debates have been prompted and pursued by those engaging in various ways with the seas and the worlds of seafarers, past and present. In the years since Wigen and Harland-Jacobs asked geographers what might be achieved if we were to shift the seas “from the margins to centre of academic vision” (1999, ii), much has been done to foreground the manifold geographies of the maritime realm. Clearly, for some, founding this project required a systematic rethinking of the very ways in which the seas have been understood by societies, indeed socially constructed, over time and across space (Connery 2006; Steinberg 1999a,b, 2001). For others, looking to the seas presents an opportunity for uncovering seafaring lives and the transoceanic networks and connections that such lives have constructed, negotiated and contested (Featherstone 2005, 2008, 2009; Lambert 2005a,b; Lambert et al. 2006; Mulligan 2005; Ogborn 2005, 2007, 2008). Others still understood the ‘bringing in’ of the maritime realm to be an opportunity for rethinking long standing concerns, like imperialism, commerce, and the processes surrounding globalisation more generally (Driver and Martins...
Comprehensively accounting for this literature and that to which it is cognate is, of course, beyond the scope of this essay. What is surprising however is that despite this marked attention to nautical worlds, the ship, so central to the function of maritime life, remains a largely neglected figure in the literature; a regularly acknowledged but seldom considered feature of the maritime worlds elucidated in the work mentioned and elsewhere. Indeed, the ship is often used as a vehicle for exploring a variety of socio-cultural, economic and political phenomenon at sea and beyond, but here we ask what might be achieved by shifting not only the sea from the margins of academic attention, but so to, the ship itself. As Lambert et al. write, “social and cultural differences … (can be) made, negotiated and contested in and through the geographies of ship(s)” (2006, 487). And as James Ryan adds, “any account of... geographies of the sea necessarily involves thinking also about ships and spaces onboard ships” (2006, 580).

The aim of this review essay is to turn our attention toward ships, those sea-going vessels described by historian Richard Woodman as “the most powerful artefacts produced by the hand of man (sic)” (2005, xi), and archaeologist Jonathon Adams as “by far the largest moving objects made” (2001, 300). In the first half of the essay, drawing on the writings of geographers as well as scholars from other disciplinary backgrounds, our attention will focus on the ways in which the ship has been a vehicle for making inroads into broader geographical debates and concerns. Here the essay will consider and draw out the ship in geography; the ways in which the ship has been foregrounded as a space useful for exploring commercial and colonial practices, embodied and resistant performances, and residual materiality. In this section we crosscut different moments in time, demonstrating the salience of the ship to debates past and present. In the second part of the essay we seek to move the ship itself to the centre of enquires, presenting the case for the geographies of ships. Here we contemplate what a sustained focus on the ship itself could offer to Geography and geographers. Notably we will argue here that the ship presents geographers with opportunities to, on the one hand, reframe some of the key concerns of the discipline (shedding new light on accepted knowledges and histories), and, on the other hand, to raise new questions and enquires (particularly relating to mobilities and the more-than-human world). We conclude by highlighting here not only the potential of geographies of ships within the discipline, but how a geographical take on sea-going vessels might add to other disciplines too. We begin our journey however with a discussion of ‘the ship’ and its place within the discipline, voyaging back to the eighteenth century and the role of ships in production of geographical knowledge.

The Ship in Geography

Although the ship has rarely been the primary focus of geographer’s attentions, it has, nevertheless, been a presence in a number of places within the discipline over the years. After all, ships, as Woodman (2005) points out, have played a major role in forging the world as we know it. In this section of the paper we discuss some of the ways in which the ship has featured in the work of geographers and cognate scholars working on maritime research, looking first to work on histories of knowledge and imperial practice, and then to emerging research on embodiment and materialities.

HISTORIES AND GEOGRAPHIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF IMPERIALISM

Ships, it seems, have ever been a means of satisfying the wants of curious minds and acquisitive societies. The history of the production of knowledge is one in which the
figure of the ship looms large, entangled not only with the workings of formal scientific societies and their ‘expert’ members (see Harrison 2009; Laloe 2010, Forthcoming; Livingstone 2003; Neil 2002; Sorrenson 1996), but with the everyday production of knowledge by ‘ordinary’ seafarers, whose observations were often coveted by those in the more formal business of science and philosophy (Drayton 1998; Hasty 2011; Jones 2010). Thinking quite explicitly about the role of the ship in the formal production of scientific knowledge in the eighteenth century, Sorrenson has argued that we must understand the ship as an important “scientific instrument”, as a technology which was essential for gathering, producing, refining and testing knowledge about the physical world (1996, 221).

For centuries the ship was to geography and geographers what the telescope was to astronomy and astronomers; a means of extending the ‘vision’ of their science, ultimately facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the “globe – its shape, geography, and topography, its magnetic, meteorological and atmospheric properties, its oceans, winds, and tides […] its peoples, animals, plants, soils, rocks, waters, and airs” (Sorrenson 1996, 221). Accounts of the process Sorrenson (1996) describes have typically focused upon commissioned ships, those fitted-out for scientific ends and manned by expert witnesses charged with conducting orderly experiments and making rational observations (see Cock 2005; Doel et al. 2006; Goodwin 1995; Harrison 2009; Laloe 2010; Livingstone 2003). Of course, different ships have fostered different cultures of knowledge production, and as such, our attention must not be limited to the floating laboratories described by Sorrenson (1996) and others. It is worth pointing towards some attempts recently made to explore this possibility, with the foregrounding of Spanish trading vessels early in the seventeenth century (Jones 2010), pirate ships of the late seventeenth century (Hasty 2011), whaling ships of the early nineteenth century (Bravo 2006) and touristic cruising ships of early twentieth century (della Dora 2010) being the most notable.

In the work of Latour (1987) on Actor-Network Theory, though much contested – even by Latour himself (1999) – we find one possible conceptual framework for understanding the ship as a technology in the production of knowledge. The ship, as evoked by Latour (1987, 224) and others (Hetherington and Law 2000; Law 1994; Law and Mol 2001), might be understood as an “immutable mobile”, a space both stable in its materiality and inherently mobile by virtue of its entanglement with various networks, which are themselves partly constituted by the very mobile actions of the ship (see Law and Mol 2001; 3–4). It is therefore possible to consider the ship in relation to the “centres of calculation” that it served, either directly or indirectly, with objects and knowledge of objects – in the form of representations such as notes, drawings, photographs, as well as artefacts and specimens – taken from the world at large (Latour 1987, 224). This, Latour refers to as the “mobilisation of worlds”, a feature key to the production of knowledge, and one which has, throughout human history, been successfully effected by the technology of the ship (1987, 224). It is clear that the materiality of many ships was not really stable, and that these ships were not always mobile, but nevertheless, Latour’s prompt to think about ships relationally is important (as we go on to discuss shortly).

It is worth noting that such work need not be the preserve of historical scholars, indeed it is clear that in the contemporary knowledge economy, ships often serve a similar function (see also Peters 2010). We need only think of the icebreaking floating laboratories that chart the effects of climate change at either pole, or those that are mapping changes in levels of biodiversity in the coral reefs of the southern Pacific, or indeed the sonar-mounted ships seeking untapped submarine deposits of oil or gas around the world. The ship has ever been entangled in the production of knowledge, a site of thought and accumulation of thought, a place wherein the facts and theories about which curious
minds wonder or hold dear are both crafted and contested. The ship then has a place within geography, in the making of geographical knowledge.

Like the broader history of knowledge – not least that which has been considered ‘geographical’ – histories and geographies of imperialism and commerce have also featured the ship. Indeed, at the heart of some of the grandest stories told about our world, of empires, of trade, of conquest, past and present, are ships. As the primary “means of communication between continents” the ship has long been the chief mechanism driving the wheels of global commerce (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, 152). Ships were, of course, absolutely central to the functioning of the many trading companies formed by European maritime states in the early modern period, the impacts of which reverberate through post-colonial and commercial relationships in the contemporary global economy. Perhaps the most significant of these is the English East India Company, for whom, Ogborn argues, the ship served as a “material”, “accounting” and “political” space (2002, 161–164) which drew together a network of trade and communication between Europe and Asia (see also Ogborn 2007). Ships here have provided the means of tracing routes of empire; for following the ways in which geographies of trade, commerce and communication were forged.

Anim-Addo’s research concerning the post-emancipation Caribbean expands upon this by considering not only the shipping networks which drew places together, but the dependencies and limits which could disable these flows of commerce (2010). Following the vessels of the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company, Anim-Addo traces the ways in which trade routes were reliant on coaling stations; those often invisible ‘ports of call’ or infrastructural sites which underscored trading in the post-emancipation era. Such research alerts us to less noticed elements which are integral to the operation of ships. The breakdown of infrastructure (for example, if coal workers were to strike) could debilitate supply chains, immobilising shipping (see Graham and Thrift 2008). Nowadays, voyages are not only determined by a reliance on sites for refuelling (and also ocean and weather systems – see Armitage & Braddick for the ways in which sea currents determined shipping routes, and thus the forging of imperial and colonial outputs in specific spaces and places 2002, 2–3), but also humanly created disruptions, such as the threat of predation (see Subramanian 2007). Considering the ways in which modern piracy poses a threat to chains of commerce has been addressed in the research of Lobo-Guerrero (2011) who has examined the ways in which ships (and their contents) are protected from such infiltrations, via maritime insurance regimes.

Whilst geographers have begun to consider the conflicts borne out of ship-based predatory activities (past and present), they have commented less upon formal or conventional warfare at sea, leaving this almost exclusively to maritime historians (see Howarth 2003; Padfield 1999; Rodger 2005). One exception to this can be found in the work of Deborah Cowen, who has employed the ship and port as places for examining the impact of new forms of conflict, notably the so-called ‘War on Terror’ (2007, 2010). Here the ship holds great potential for exploring the complex intersections between law (particularly international law), complex subjectivities, and the fluid, motionful, space that is the sea. Benton’s recent work on the emergence of European Empires in the early-modern period has explored this relationship through various spatial motifs, including the ship, which she positions as “vectors of law thrusting into ocean space” (2010, 112). Taking a contemporary focus, Steinberg (2010, 3) has shown how sea-based operations (such as those of ships) are incredibly complex because the lines which mark legal territories at sea are inadequate to deal with the fact that oceans are mobile spaces, and this can lead to legally intricate situations (such as the recent events surrounding the boarding of the *Mavi*.
Marmara off the coast of Israel). Such incidents demonstrate how shipping practices are entwined with the complex interpretation of fluid, legal spatialities. These ‘boundary crossings’ also demonstrates the ways in which ships can be used as spaces for challenging landed norms and laws. For example, the ‘Women on the Waves’ organisation sail ships equipped to perform abortions to international waters outside of nations where such practices are illegal. In the high seas, outside of the nation where such rules exist, the ship can act as a campaign vessel (Gomperts 2002).

Geographers however, may not only examine the fluid and contested nature of legal boundaries via an exploration of shipping practices, but may also consider how the provision or absence of international law can determine the activities permitted by ships and onboard ships. The historical work of Baker and Stanley (2003) explores the ways in which ship-space, situated outside the legal codes of a particular nation, opened up spaces for sexual freedoms which were legally forbidden on land (see also Stanley 1999). Hyslop’s (2009) recent work on the circulation of ‘guns, drugs and revolutionary propaganda’ among Indian Sailors in the 1920 is also interesting with respect to the ship’s ability to facilitate apparently subversive practices. Here it is apparent that the ship has been employed as a novel space for exploring and expanding debates relating to the contested identities, embodiments, and acts of resistance, which we now explore in greater detail.

SHIP-SHAPED EMBODIMENTS, IDENTITIES AND RESISTANCES

The ship-shaped nature of life at sea permits a novel frame for thinking through some of the complex questions relating to identity, resistance and embodiment currently animating the geographic literature, not least because of how the specific spatialities of the ship might be seen to produce particular or different socio-cultural outcomes. It is clear that many scholars work on the assumption that lives at sea can be thought of as ship-shaped, that is to say, that the embodied practices of seafaring are necessarily coloured by being aboard ship and living at sea. The identities performed and held by those at sea can only be understood in that context, as being of the ship and ship-board life. Some of the best accounts of the what might be thought of as the ‘geographies of ships’ (a theme to which this paper will return in the second section) have sought to cut through the utopic and dystopic narratives of seafaring life to reveal the multitude of ‘ship-shaped’ ways of living at sea by foregrounding the embodied practices of sailing and the various identities forged at aboard ships.

For example, in Dening’s seminal account of the infamous mutiny on the Bounty, he argues that the tensions which erupted among the crew in the Pacific had their roots in the specific geography of the ship, or at least the way in which the spaces of the ship were understood by the crew and the ship’s officers (1992). Dening notes in one pithy observation that “space and the language used to describe it make the ship” (1992, 19). Indeed in the case of the Bounty he suggests that the antagonisms which emerged aboard the ship reflected a strict spatialised hierarchy, and the discourse enacted to support it. Many have sought to situate the ways in which identities can be considered ship-shaped, perhaps none more than Rediker in his work on the ‘Atlantic working class’ (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; see also Rediker 1987), the motley crews of pirate ships (Rediker 1996, 2004a,b,c) and the insurrectionary slaves who challenged the social and spatial organisation of transatlantic slave ships (2007; see also Christopher 2006; Christopher et al. 2007). Rediker has pioneered an approach to the ship which situates it as a space wherein a ‘world turned upside down’ is apparent. This notion of the the ship as a site of alternative orderings and a place where the conventions of identity – figured in terms of class,
gender, race, nationality, and so on – are subverted has engaged a number of geographers of late (see especially Featherstone 2005; Hasty 2011; Ogborn 2008). While Rediker’s strong Marxist interpretation is not held quite so strongly by most of his interlocutors, his work has opened up exciting new avenues for understanding the ship as a space of difference, of contestation and negotiation, as a place where identities were forged in the response to the embodied experience of seafaring and the ever-changing milieu of the sea. There have been important accounts of the ship and race and ethnicity (see Bialusewski 2008; Bolster 1997; Chappell 2004; Gilroy 1993), sexuality and gender (see Creighton and Norling 1996; Ryan 2006; Stanley 1999, 2008) nationalisms (see Rediker 1987), and labour, class and subalternity (see Featherstone 2009; Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Ogborn 2008). Here the ship has worked as a device for drawing out spatial distinctions between domination and resistance, between centres and margins, between same and other, often refracted through an the difference apparent between the land and the sea.

Of course, not all scholars of the ship agree on the inherent difference of the ship and the influence of its enclosedness and separateness, or the embodied experiences of seafaring, on the formation of identity. Pearson has argued that “people on early modern ships-replicated quite precisely landed society, as seen in authority structures, food, reaction to stress, the comforts of religion and so on” (2010, 9–10). Indeed he goes on to suggest that it “may be then that an attempt to find a distinctive maritime society is to make an artificial distinction. Perhaps a ship-bound society is merely a landed one which has taken to sea, in no way sui generis” (Pearson 2010, 9–10). However, in the work of Palsson (1994) we find an account of the ship which acknowledges the influence of landed-society which Pearson strongly advocates (see also Pearson 2003, 2009) but which avoids his apparently reductionist conclusions about the influence of the ship as a space. Palsson (1994) outlines how the ship board society of Icelandic fishing fleets depended upon the acquisition of “one’s sea-legs”, and in “becoming skilful”, a notion which recognises the immersion in the practical world, the “being caught up in the incessant flow of everyday life”; which was so much a part of ship-board life (1996, 901; see also Ingold 2000; 236–238). The influence of collectivity on shared values and identities is also a feature of Michel Serres’ notion of the ship, which he positions a site governed by what he terms as the ‘natural contract’ (1995, 40). Despite the overly-romantic tone of his writing on the matter, what Serres usefully highlights is the material effects of the seas on the seafarer’s outlook, a point echoed by Peters who argues for an understanding of the visceral affects of the motionful nature of the ship on the embodied experience of seafaring (2012). It is to this materiality that we now turn, to consider the place of the ship in geographical debates concerning materialities and matter.

MATERIAL CULTURES OF LIFE, DEATH AND THE WASTE

Woodman has noted that ships are, first and foremost, ‘things’ (2005, ix). Unsurprisingly, with the re-materialisation of human geography now firmly underway (Jackson 2000), ships have begun to gain increasing attention and might serve as a useful window through which to extend and develop these debates further. This is because ships are ‘things’ – some of the largest constructions to be built, from a range of materials; reeds, timber, steel and so on (Lavery 2005, 9) – and they also carry ‘things’, from motorcycles, flip flops to shampoo, (see Cook and Tolia-Kelly 2010), as well as being a material, physical and tangible means of connection (and separation) at a range of scales.

Arguably geographers examining the ship and its material geographies have followed in the footsteps of maritime archaeologists who have investigated the ways in which the
materiality of ships and boats can unlock social and cultural knowledge of the past (see Adams 2001; Cooney 2003; Gould 2000). As Adams notes, investigating the ‘artefact assemblage’ of the wreckage of the Sea Venture, maritime archaeologists have been able uncover the ship’s purpose, aspects of its ‘identity’ and the onboard events which took place during the hurricane which lead to its sinking (2001, 298). Geographers have adopted similar approaches using material culture as a window to exploring the internal social worlds of ships (see Ryan’s account of how Lady Brassey made a home on the Sunbeam for example, 2006), and also the ways in which the material formation of the ship is entwined and co-fabricated with social life (mutiny, order, hierarchy) (see Dellino-Musgrave 2005; Hasty 2011; Jarvis 2007; Peters 2012). The historian Marcus Rediker has also investigated the biography of various slave ships, following the transformation of sloops, into vessels suitable for the transportation of human cargo (2007). Ships would often leave British ports and only undergo material alteration once anchored alongside the West African coast, with the drilling of air holes for breathing on the lower decks and the installation of shackles for incarceration (2007, 41–72).

The significance of the materiality of the ship itself, has prompted some geographers to explore the ‘biography of these objects’ (following the approaches of anthropologists, see Gosden and Marshall 1999; Hoskins 1998 and Kopytoff 1986); ‘following the thing’ (Cook et al. 2004). Of particular note is the Economic and Social Research Council ‘Waste of the World’ project, which has traced the biography of cargo ships, from their life to death on the beaches of Chittagong (see Crang 2010; Gregson et al. 2011). Elsewhere there has been an investigation into the ways in which the material practices of ship breaking are entangled with workers welfare (Langewiesche 2004, 197–239). These projects demonstrate the role that a focus on ships might play in advancing broader studies which ‘unveil the fetish’ of material culture (Marx 2010). By considering the stories or ‘biographies’ behind these ships, these studies establish paths towards greater social justice and an acknowledgement of the (often) complex, global chains which underlie the production, consumption and ‘afterlives’ of objects.

To date, as we have shown through these three cuts through the geographic and cognate literature, studies of ships are indelibly tied into research which considers various issues and addresses a range of questions, from colonialism and conflict to identity and materiality. However, these ships have been largely peripheral or marginal in geographical work, indeed academic scholarship more generally. While we have not argued that the ship has been totally omitted from geographical attention, we would suggest that, given its role in the production of knowledge, its position at the heart of globalising processes of imperialism and commerce, its influence on the formation of identities, and its material residuality, it has been rather neglected in and of itself. An additional point is that the ship, where it has featured, has usually been a vehicle for broader geographical investigations rather than being an explicit focal point of those investigations. We thus next seek to shift the ship from the margins to the centre of academic enquiry, by moving attention towards geographies of ships.

Towards Geographies of Ships

REFRAMING THE HISTORY OF GEOGRAPHY AND ‘GLOBALISATION’

A flurry of recent work by historical geographers, historians, sociologists and science studies scholars has endeavoured to ‘put science in its place’ (after Livingstone 2003) by attending to a whole range of sites, locations and networks employed in the production
of knowledge, from the experimental laboratory (Schaffer 1998; Shapin 1988) to the coffee house (Stewart 1999) and pub (Secord 1994), ultimately challenging the assumption that science constitutes ‘the view from nowhere’ (after Shapin 1998). Despite a surprisingly slow start (see Livingstone 1995; 5), the practice of geographers and the discipline of geography has been increasingly subject to the same spatial interrogation (see for example Livingstone 2000, 2003; Lorimer 2003; Lorimer and Spedding 2005; Naylor 2002, 2005; Withers 2001, 2005, 2007; and Withers and Finnegan 2003), and although studies of the field-site abound, and much has been said on the role of national cultures of science, very little attention has been paid to the ship in the history of geography and what a central focus on the ship might reframe in terms of what we know about the formation of the discipline.

That this oversight is only now being redressed (see Doel et al. 2006; Hasty 2011; Laloe 2010), is remarkable given the role that the ship and seafarers have played in the formal and informal accumulation, as well as the production and dissemination of geographical knowledge. As with the wider field of history of science studies, the range of vessels, voyages and voyagers who contributed to what was then, and is now, understood to be geographical knowledge, needs to be widened, a point made by Hasty in his account of the pirate and naturalist William Dampier (2011, 49). Indeed, by considering the plethora of ships more explicitly – transatlantic steamers, coastal fishing boats, river canoes, deep-sea sailing ships, and so on – historians of geography could further unpick some of the ways “landscapes, regions and places inform – consciously or not – scientific theories and practices” (Naylor 2005, 11). This is because, “it matter(s)”, as Sorrenson writes, “what kind of ship was chosen for a particular voyage, who had commissioned it, and what kind of scientific instruments and techniques made certain its navigation” in the formation of geographical knowledge (1996, 222). The ship then, is not simply a vehicle for exploring the creation of knowledge, but is part and parcel of that knowledge.

For geographers the ship presents an opportunity to reframe the history of the discipline on a number of fronts. Engaging the ship not only brings to the fore a unique set of sites – solid, yet changeable in their construction, and highly mobile in their existence – and different sets of practices, collecting and preserving on the move, observing and recording on heaving decks and in cramped cabins, but also encourages the inclusion of much neglected groups, from the common sailors of vessels (Drayton 1998; Hasty 2011) to the captains, ‘amateur’ observers and social improvers in command of such vessels (Bravo 2006). Moreover we might not only think productively of the ship in terms of the history of the discipline, but also centralise the ship in view of its role in making contemporary geographic knowledge. For example, let us return to the ‘War on Terror’. In what ways might the ship itself; the battles played out through shipping, the surveillance intelligence collected from the decks; form and forge knowledge about the world?

Lambert et al. note, attention to the geographies of the sea offer the opportunity to deconstruct taken for granted understandings of the world, namely “nation-state centred historical master narratives” (2006, 480), which have arguably dominated understandings of historical and contemporary globalisation. One of the ways in which geographers have seized this opportunity has been to consider the histories and geographies of global connection and exchange constructed and contested through the ship. Looking at the historical geographies of globalisation, Ogborn has argued that “sailors, pirates and slaves...offer another global geography...one of hard labour and rebellion, which gives a view – from below – of the making of global networks and the ways in which people tried to challenge or step outside them” (2000, 61).
Centralising the ship presents geographers with the opportunity to reframe not only the history of the discipline, but historical and contemporary processes of globalisation in all sorts of interesting ways too. Firstly, the ship can be thought of as a window on the embodied processes of globalisation, as a site forever embedded in networks of global interaction, wherein social, cultural, political and economic negotiations and exchanges literally take place (see Featherstone 2005, 2008; Ogborn 2008; Pearson 2009; Worden 2009). Secondly, focusing on the ship offers an insight into the ways supposedly global legal orders and hegemonic sovereignties are made and contested through practices of domination and resistance (see Benton 2010; Featherstone 2009; Ogborn 2007, 2008). If the seas have ever been “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination” (Pratt 1992, 7), then it is the ship which has served as the primary space of, and means for, such encounters. It follows that ships themselves are both “bastions of power and islands of cultural difference” (Clayton 2000, 153), and that they are active in the construction and contestation of such differences elsewhere (on other ships and ashore). Thirdly, following the work of Massey (2005, 11), we might usefully interrogate the messy and complex realities of globalisation through the ship, as a space which highlights the “always in process” nature of space, and as a reminder of the contested nature of global networks. Helen Sampson and others have usefully explored the complex realities of global shipping in this light (see Sampson 2003; Sampson and Schroeder 2006; and Sampson and Zhao 2003). The material construction of the ship, its voyages and the finance that underpin them, the people that form its crew and the exchanges they have with others, and the cargo it traffics, all highlight the connected and entangled nature of the globalised world. At the same time however, the ship, as a vector for the unfolding of a multiplicity of global geographies, undermines grand narratives of globalisation by virtue of these juxtapositions, forever emerging as a site of “contemporaneous heterogeneities”, as a space always somewhat unique in character (Massey 2005, 5). Having highlighted here the potential of shifting ships to the centre of concerns in view of reframing existing knowledge and understandings in and of the discipline, we next turn to the capacity of ships to pose new questions and lines of enquiry in relation to mobilities research and work on more-than-human geographies.

NEW LINES OF ENQUIRY INTO SHIP-SHAPED MOBILITIES AND MORE-THAN-HUMAN RELATIONS

In spite of emphasis on notions of ‘flow’ and on mobile ‘networks’, the ship has attracted relatively sparse attention within the ‘new mobilities paradigm’ which is currently (re)shaping significant elements of the social sciences and humanities (see Sheller and Urry 2006). Whilst the car, train and aeroplane, have been focal points of research, the ship, no longer seen as vital to the mobility of people and things crossing long distances, has been largely absent (Lavery 2005, 364). At present watery additions within mobilities studies are few but notable, and demonstrate what the study of ships may add to this literature. Stanley, for example, has explored the ways in which female stewardesses travelling on liners between 1915–1955, not usually regarded as travelling in their own right, were in fact mobile as ‘working vacationers’ (2008). Cresswell has also examined women at sea, uncovering how the development of the suffragette movement did not simply occur of its own accord, but in space and places, particularly within those which created opportunities for open debate such as “the microgeography of the SS Bohemian (which) provided a context for debate and the swapping of books” (2006a, 207).
Yet potentially, the ship itself poses a variety of new questions relating to mobilities which attention to the plane, train and automobile (all considered in recent mobilities research, see Adey 2008a; Verstraete 2002 and Merriman 2009, respectively) have neglected thus far. This because the ship is a moving technology, traversing a moving surface; in a space of fluid legal boundaries. It is also so intricately bound-up with the everyday lives of much of the world’s population, indeed approximately 95% of trade is still carried by ship. A whole range of sea-going cargo vessels traverse vast ocean spaces and littoral zones. Thus it is important to explore the mobilities of vessels which carry with them cargo which shapes our daily lives. Rather than simply focusing on trade routes themselves, or the connections between places, or broader globalising processes of ships, we might also ask what governs the watery mobilities of ships engaged in trade. How, for example, does the size of the ship, the flag under which it sails, the company whom owns it, the cargo it holds, the insurance underwriting the vessel, the security level of the ship, determine where it might travel and dock? Questions too about the mobilities of human subjects arise with the subject, about the conditions of labour and transit, about the actual freedom of movement experienced by seemingly mobile subjects, for example.

As Wilkinson (2006) and also MacCalla and Charlier (2006), demonstrate, ships are also involved in another form of trade – the tourist trade. Whilst ships may no longer be the primary means of transportation for being travelling cross-continent they remain important drivers in the leisure travel industry. There remains much work to be conducted on the cruise industry, which raise new questions relating to mobilities. For example, what are the shifting and mobile environmental impacts of cruise shipping? How do, for example, polluting emissions, waste disposal, the removal of ballast water travel as the ship travels and what impacts does this have on environments (especially watery environments which are mobile too). What are the mobilities (and immobilities) of transnational crews who travel from places around the globe and gather in these floating places, working onboard (for some existing work on this see Sampson 2003). But moreover, what are the corporeal and bodily mobilities of crew having to conduct skilled tasks (from entertainment, dancing and singing to waiting) on an undulating and fluctuating mobile surface? Following Cresswell’s ‘constellations of mobility’ – how are new questions relating to mobilities of speed, force and rhythm played out through the ship (which is often slower than other mobile technologies, travelling through a different ‘forceful’ mobile medium than the air, or over rails or the earth) (2010). Hodgson and Vannini touch on the novelty of such debates through an examination of how the ship brings to light new rhythms of daily life for those who live on islands – a rhythm non-comprehensible without paying full attention to the ship itself (2007).

Moreover ships are motionful not only in terms of their routes or the transnational mobilities of those working aboard, but in respect to their motion upon a fluid, moving surface – the sea. Boshier for example has investigated the ‘lumpy’ nature of travel by boat and the romance this holds compared to ‘smoother’ forms of travel (2009). Peters has additionally sought to consider the capacities of crew members on ships to be affected by the dynamism and motion of sea currents, swell and tides as corporeal mobilities are entangled with the surface mobilities of water (2012). There is further scope however to take into account the mobility of the ships in combination with the mobile sea. Peter Adey has explored the affective politics of air travel, noting the ways in which affects are ‘engineered’ in airports, influencing the ways in which bodies move and are moved (2008b, 438). Clearly there is potential to consider how through the specific context of the ship, which is governed by particular, discrete laws, other political affects might be
engineered, in terms of behaviours onboard (through ship architecture) or between vessels through acts of communication or surveillance.

Geographers may consider not only mobilities but also the immobilities of ships too. Again the specific nature of the ship at sea might pose fruitful new questions relating to immobility. Can the ship ever be immobilised when, even at anchor, it is subject to the sway produced by wider relationalities with the sea and wind? And when the routes of ships between places are immobilised (by weather, political concerns, insurance regimes, crew mutiny) what are the wider impacts spun forth? Vannini demonstrates how ferry immobility fuels specific island attachments for those dependent on this form of transport, harvesting a sense of place (2011). The ship then, offers the vast potential to extend studies of the mobilities paradigm beyond their current parameters, raising new questions because of its distinct spatiality.

Moreover, as suggested earlier, centralising the ship offers the opportunity to raise new questions relating to more-than-human geography. Lambert et al. contend that attention to the more-than-human world is necessary in work which considers the seas in order to tackle the “overemphasis on human agency” which pervades much understanding on the topic (2006, 482). We would contend such attention is also vital when seeking to understand the geometries of ships and moreover offers the opportunity to raise new questions about the ways in which the more-than-human world matters. Whilst one way to consider the more than-human world is to investigate the affective materiality of the ships (from their rotting wood, to confined dimensions, to the letters and trade items held within them – see Bennett 2001, 2010), geographers must also engage with other material elements of the more-than human world which enjoin with and ‘affect’ life onboard ships (Anderson 2006; Thrift 2004). Whatmore for example, has called for geographers to “return to [studying] the livingness of the world” (2006, 602). Ingold (2008) and McCormack (2008) in particular have examined this livingness through exploring atmospheres and weather-worlds and moreover their affective natures; the agency they have (in their own right) to ‘register’ with “the perpetual affordances of sensing bodies” (McCormack 2008, 415).

Following the assertions of Lambert et al. (2006, 486), arguably, when studying the ship, scholars could productively consider “climatic, geophysical and ecological processes” which are at work and the ways in which this living world “is a modality of connection between bodies....and (geo-physical) worlds” (Whatmore 2006, 603). Ships may then offer the potential to ask new questions about ‘affect’ through exploring life onboard in line with the ‘energetic’ sea. Peters for example demonstrates how in making the pirate radio vessel a focal point, understandings of human and more-than-human relationality (normally assumed to be ones of co-composition) are compromised when the figure of the ship is explored. Whereas humans can actively shape earthly nature for example, they can do so less at sea, and as such worlds on ships raise new relational geometries as humans refract less agency back onto nature (2012). Additionally Jones demonstrates how geographers can seek out new assemblages of relations when studying the material culture of tidal forces which are connected to extra-terrestrial lunar rhythms (2011). This alerts us to the host of questions which may be posed by centralising the ship in research of the more-than-human in geography. In what ways are ships combined with nature to create novel affects and relationalities which are not apparent when staying safely within the confines of terrestrial, earthly research?

**Conclusions**

In his exposition of the ‘Black Atlantic’, Gilroy suggests that we should understand the ship as “a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (1993, 4). An ever
A growing body of work has embraced Gilroy’s injunction to treat the ship as living, as dynamic, as a place. If, as Cresswell claims, “geography is self-evidently about places” (2006b, 31) and the ship is a ‘place’, then it figures the ship should have a significant role to play within the discipline. Here we have reviewed the current place of the ship in geography, as a figure for exploring broader debates concerning colonialism, trade and conflict, embodiment and resistance and residual materiality, and have latterly worked towards a geography of ships, highlighting how they might not only act as peripheral vehicles for exploring other central geographical debates, but might actively reframe existing knowledge and histories and moreover raise new questions and lines of enquiry because of their distinct spatiality.

By way of a conclusion, we do not wish to simply summarise the points we have raised during the course of this paper, but rather to examine where geographies of ships might lead in the future. Notably a geography of ships might create productive opportunities for other disciplines focusing on the ship. In this review we have drawn on the work of not only geographers, but historians, anthropologists, archaeologists and cultural theorists for whom the ship often figures as a site of conceptual and empirical concern. Arguably taking seriously the spatialities of the ship as a technology of knowledge production and a distinct mobile and more-than-human space; could present opportunities for productive engagement between scholars, as well as offering other disciplines new ways of thinking through past maritime narratives, the lives of ships and seafarers and the cultures of these extra-territorial floating sites. For example, studies of underwater archaeology might focus not only on the ways in which ships communicate stories of past communities, but how more-than-human elements (salt water, reefs, debris) connect to these narratives to create new maritime histories of decay (DeSilvey 2006); historians might attend to the mobilities and spatialities of ships and their crews in writing fresh accounts of global seafaring pasts, simultaneously writing new knowledges outside of the discipline as well as within it.

Clearly, as we have noted throughout the paper, there is still much work to be done, to move the ship “from the margins to the center” of academic enquiry within geography and outwards towards other disciplines (Lambert et al. 2006, 480). Yet a move toward geographies of ships (as well as the greater acknowledgement of the ship in geography) will, as we have shown, prove fruitful for opening up new lines of exploration. Moreover, geographers and scholars from other disciplines, for whom the ship is a site of interest, may also expand their watery research concerns beyond ships, considering the whole range of watery vessels afloat now and in the past (from canoes, kayaks, rafts to light sail boats). We may also do more to recognise the ship as a site of current social, cultural and political concerns, as well as historic ones (following Peters 2010). However, importantly, we have argued that the ship be taken seriously within human geography, because it acts not only a vehicle for innovative and exciting empirical research but also as a tool in reframing some of geography’s core concerns and for breaking across borders and voyaging towards new insights for the future.

Short Biographies

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