

What we Talk about when we Talk about Sailor Culture: Understanding Danish Fisheries Inspection through a Cult Movie

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Abstract

As a concept, *culture* can easily appear quite diffuse and it is often contested. This ambiguity begs the question of what it means to invoke the concept in particular situations. This paper is an analytic experiment, which was kick-started when I asked informants about *sailor culture* during fieldwork onboard the Danish fisheries inspection vessel *The West Coast*. In response, fisheries inspectors, surprisingly, suggested watching the Danish cult movie *Martha* (1967). I describe this incident as a small *ethnographic moment* leading me to conduct the present experiment. This involves using *Martha* as an analytic device to investigate sailor culture. More specifically, I use a preliminary analysis of the movie as an entry point to understand five matters of concern, which I encountered during fieldwork. With point of departure in an analytic attitude I call *empirical philosophy* I propose the term *inter-reflexivity* to characterize this mode of lateral cultural analysis. Inter-reflexivity emphasizes a double movement emerging from an *ethnographic moment* in the field and the creative translation of that moment into an analytic device. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of using a popular cultural artefact encountered in the field as such a device for articulating some complex, current stakes in fisheries inspection and ‘inventing’ a particular version of sailor culture.

Keywords: Inter-reflexivity, sailor culture, ethnographic moment, fisheries inspection, freedom, nostalgia, technology, lateral analysis, post-actor-network theory, empirical philosophy.

Introduction

At the present moment, anthropology finds itself in the strange situation that the vision of culture, which it has maintained for the last decades, becomes more and more prevalent, yet, simultaneously, it is critiqued, deconstructed, and increasingly abolished by the field itself. (Liep & Olwig 1994: 7, my translation)

As a concept, *culture* may appear quite diffuse. In anthropology, one important source of its current widespread use, the analytic merits of the concept have been contested. On the other hand, Euro-Americans frequently use the concept, assuming that everyone ‘has’ it, albeit in different versions (Strathern 1987). The implications of this situation are many, but one is, surely, that it is an open question what it means to invoke the concept.

In this paper, I make use of a moment during fieldwork where I brought into play the concept to conduct an analytic experiment. I use the Danish comedy *Martha* (1967) as an analytic device to investigate *sailor culture* in relation to important matters of concerns encountered during my fieldwork onboard the Danish fisheries inspection vessel *The West Coast* in 2007-8. The fieldwork involved participatory observation (Flick 2002) for five weeks over one year, as well as several semi-structured interviews (Kvale 1996) with selected members of three different crews of nine-ten people who take shifts operating *The West Coast* for approximately three weeks at a time, allowing it to operate most of the year. In addition, I studied documents, notably performance contracts, evaluation reports, and strategy papers (Gad 2009a).

There is a story to tell behind the analytic experiment conducted here. In the beginning of my fieldwork, one evening during a discussion about ‘the greater meaning’ of doing fisheries inspection with three crewmembers, I asked them what it was like to be part of a sailor culture. In response they strongly encouraged watching *Martha*. At first, this seemed to make little sense because the movie is a rather horrible, peculiar, dated, and romantic parody of life at sea. However, *Martha* did, gradually, become an entry point for a dialogue with my empirical material and for engaging with important tensions in fisheries inspection. This paper is the end-result of the analytic experiment that this experience kick-started. It is both an experiment in using a product of popular culture, encountered in the field, as an analytic device for understanding some complex relations in the empirical material and in ‘inventing’ a particular version of sailor culture.

In what follows, I first describe the epistemological starting point for conducting this experiment as *empirical philosophy* and the purpose of the experiment, which is to do a lateral analysis of culture at home. Second, I discuss culture as both an evasive and ‘invented’ phenomenon. I do so in order to challenge a distinction between *the observer* and *the observed* as the concept of culture transgresses such classical distinctions. To elaborate on culture as such a hybridized concept, third, I describe the fisheries inspectors’ response to my question about their culture as a small *ethnographic moment*. Fourth, I advance

the concept of *inter-reflexivity* defined in partial contrast to the notions of *meta-reflexivity* and *infra-reflexivity* (Latour 1988). I use *Martha* as an inter-reflexive device, or in other words as an explicit *lateral device* for participating in the in-between. This leads me to, fifth, describing *Martha* and offering a preliminary analysis of the movie. Sixth, I explore five matters of concern on *The West Coast* and use *Martha* to analyse these, and thus in conducting my analytic experiment in ‘inventing’ a version of sailor culture. I end the paper with further reflections on what it means to use an artefact and its aesthetic form to ‘talk about sailor culture’ in order to understand some current stakes in fisheries inspection, and on some implications of this analytic move.

Empirical Philosophy and Lateral Experimentation: Approach and Purpose of the Paper

The experimental approach to culture adopted in this paper is not grounded in a Theory with a capital T, a rigid conceptual framework or well-defined perspective. Rather, it follows from a different kind of analytic *attitude* (Gad 2005, 2013) emerging from criss-crossing trends of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and post-plural anthropology (cf. Strathern 1992). Debates here question the status, meanings, and interrelations of such concepts as theory, practice, and the empirical. This kind of attitude has many names, but I here use it with reference to ‘After ANT’ (Law & Hassard 1999), ‘post-actor-network theory’ (Gad & Jensen 2010), and ‘empirical philosophy’ (Mol 2002; Gad & Jensen 2008; Gad 2009b).

Empirical philosophy is a revealing term. Dutch philosopher and science and technology researcher Annemarie Mol uses it to discuss philosophical questions through a so-called *praxiography* (Mol 2002). Empirical philosophy assumes that worlds, or ontologies, are emerging accomplishments involving both the practical and conceptual work of a variety of heterogeneous actors. Empirical philosophy answers the philosophical question of ontology (what makes up a world) through an ethnographic exploration of how different actors (human and non-human) practically make up *different* worlds. Empirical philosophy thus focuses on how informants, rather than simply being an effect of culture, take part in the ongoing production of the realities of which they are parts. This means that the informants in a given study are always conceived as more than *just* informants or examples to be explained by theories and concepts that the researcher brings to the game.

Empirical philosophy instead assumes that informants ask questions, pose problems, deliberate and reflect in just as philosophical ways as philosophers (or just as sociological ways as sociologist), even though they might, of course, answer those questions in different ways, drawing on different resources. For example when examining an ethical or moral theme, empirical philosophy would not start by developing or drawing on a comprehensive theory of the ‘good’ or the

'bad'. Rather Mol and actor-network theorist John Law describes the outset in the following way:

most everyday practices make use of, or try to create, scales to measure or contrast 'goods' and 'bads'. This opens a space for an empirical philosophy. An ethnographic interest in practice can be combined with a philosophical concern with 'the good' to explore which 'good/bad' scale is being enacted, and how this is being done. (Law & Mol 2002: 85)

Thus empirical philosophy adopts a *theoretical agnosticism* (Callon 1986) in order to learn from the theories, scales, and concepts that are used to produce worlds. Accordingly, we cannot know in advance what is important in a given situation or about a specific case or theme before it has been studied empirically and, following, the conceptualization of it must to a quite large extent draw on what is encountered in the empirical. This would then also apply to the concept of culture, which is not assumed to explain from the outside a given 'world', but is rather one amongst many other messy concepts, which informants use in more or less surprising and interesting ways, which call for interpretation and analysis.

As I will elaborate on in the discussion of infra-reflexivity versus inter-reflexivity below, it is indeed, important to note, that empirical philosophy and theoretical agnosticism do not imply, that culture (or anything else) emerges *ex nihilo* and can be encountered as natural existing entities or domains in the field. Accordingly, the concepts which actors use are not simply naturalistic and descriptive categories, they are world changing and productive. The point is rather then, that in so far that the researchers theoretical and conceptual apparatus cannot be assumed to explain *in advance* whatever is encountered, both 'our' and 'their' concepts become important. Both for the encounter itself and for its later articulation. Moreover, the implication is that what is considered theory and what is considered empirical are rendered negotiable, which opens a space for productive exchanges between the researchers' and informants' concepts. This empirical philosophical attitude forms the backdrop of the analytic experiment conducted here.

The purpose of the experiment is to make a small contribution to a current debate about lateral thinking and analysis in post-reflexive anthropology (c.f. Maurer 2005; Riles 2011) and STS (Gorm Hansen 2011), which may also be of interest to cultural studies. Among other things, this debate concerns the potentialities and limitations of using aesthetic and conceptual forms and artefacts encountered in the empirical as the primary analytic tools. Doing so can be seen as one implication of empirical philosophy, letting 'their' conceptualisations coproduce the analytic tools, but also as a response to critiques of anthropological knowledge production.

The anthropological approach, despite its aspirations to do the very opposite, cannot fully escape accusations of ethnocentric conceptualization (cf. Fabian 1983), the most famous of such critiques coming from Edward Said's notion of

orientalism (Said 1978). Furthermore, while artefacts were once predominantly considered to be expressions of a local culture, this idea was challenged by strange encounters between ethnographers and Western and hybridized artefacts in the setting of the Other, turning ethnographic description into a kind of surrealist experiment (Clifford 1988). While these debates origin in the so-called ‘crisis of representation’ of the 1980s (Clifford & Marcus 1984), their contemporary consequence is the realization that distinctions made between ‘our’ and ‘their’ concepts, along with ‘our’ and ‘their’ artefacts are artificially drawn (Riles 2006).

One response to this situation is to experiment with the very distinction between the conceptual and the empirical. For instance, anthropologist Annelise Riles (2000: 70pp) draws on the aesthetic form of artefacts she encountered in the field (e.g. Fijian mats) to analyze *other* aspects of her ethnography (the collaborative production of a policy document concerning South Pacific women). She does so in order to render the empirical material ethnographically accessible, which she claims that ‘traditional’ anthropological theory fails to do.

The aim of this paper is, accordingly, to understand and discuss sailor culture drawing on a specific artefact and its aesthetic form, which I encountered during fieldwork: the artefact of a Danish folk comedy, which was presented to me as the fisheries inspectors’ ‘culture’. As such the paper will exemplify some methodological and conceptual challenges in making a lateral analytic move ‘at home’. In so far that culture is indeed a contested and complex term that does not explain the empirical this paper is simply an experiment in how one can approach it differently. What is implicated by studying culture laterally, with an empirical philosophical attitude?

Culture as Evasive Invention

It should be an uncontroversial statement that *culture* has become a commonly used term, for instance, in discussions of identity or when people articulate their differences and similarities to others. It should also be uncontroversial to say that people do not use the term in exactly the same way. The concept has attained multiple meanings in academia, throughout history, and across a range of disciplines and different countries. One of the fathers of cultural anthropology, Franz Boas used it to attribute a special status to human, organized ways of life (Hastrup 1999: 79). In this view, culture was pluralized, yet also came to denote a kind of boundedness, a static and entity-like character of different communities. Current anthropology has tried to move away from such a explanatory and homogenizing version of the concept towards perceiving culture as a contested, constructed, political, complex and/or processual phenomenon (Barth 1989; Gupta & Ferguson 1997). This is a move to a less *determining* sense of the term. Indeed, to talk about what culture *is* or *implies*, generally, seems to make little sense if one

agrees with Cultural Studies scholar Raymond Williams that it is among the two or three most complex English words (along with 'nature') (Williams 1981) and Philosopher Hans Fink's following argument that the concept is hyper complex (Fink 1988). In this sense, for analytic and interpretative purposes, culture tends to imply *too much* (and thus nothing in particular), even if one strives to deploy only a limited version of the term.

After social anthropologist Tim Ingold presented a paper at the sociology department at Lancaster University in November 2007, he was asked why Anthropology did not simply abandon this extremely fuzzy and to some extent worn-out concept of culture. He responded that this did indeed seem tempting at times, yet, it could not be done without costs. Even though the concept might have become unhelpful analytically, he stated, it somehow still had a remarkable capacity to capture a certain kind of *creativity* in how people continuously *reinvent* their realities and relations. This evocative effect is not as easily accomplished by comparable concepts, such as world, society or network.

In a comment on fellow Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' reflections on the creativity inherent to anthropological and cultural analysis, Marilyn Strathern highlights how this creativity always relies on a creativity of one's others:

Sahlins implies that the kinds of dualisms by which 'we' create our exercises – individual and society; symbol and function – [...] providing us with both problems and practice, how to understand the cultural production of other societies and how to embody cultural creativity ourselves in decoding alien systems. There is a coda he fails to add: that this creativity requires that we exploit the creativity of others. (Strathern 1987)

While culture as a concept entails referring to a complex and contestable matter, without any clear analytic hooks, it can also produce evocative moments of mutual creativity and 'exploitation', in the positive sense of the word. This idea is one predicament of this paper.

As described above, fisheries inspectors encouraged me to watch *Martha* whilst talking about sailor culture. I find their discursive move interesting. Even if culture, as a concept, is contested and somewhat vague, their answer suggests that one way to talk about culture is by invoking *something else*, something that does not represent culture but performs or conjures a certain relation to it, deeming it important, yet leaves it unspecified.

In that sense, their move is comparable to Raymond Carver's short story collection *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (Carver 1982). These short stories are not *literally* about love, not even the title piece.¹ Rather, they all encircle the topic. On the one hand, love is present throughout the short stories while at the same time remaining in the background. Carver's style is descriptive, minimalistic, a psychological and unromantic, and his short stories do not seem to be parts of a composition about the same matter. The stories are simply related to each other by virtue of comprising one volume. Carver, then, does not seem to

view love as having certain characteristics, which he seeks to identify or unpack. He literally writes about love by writing about something else. The short stories exemplify what we might talk about when we consider what love is, but are unable to speak directly of it, yet also remain incapable of avoiding it. One power of Carver's work thus stems from his resistance to essentializing, pinpointing, generalizing, or reducing the matter at hand. Love is not defined or nailed down. Instead it remains multiple, dynamic, but no less captivating. In this sense, talking about something (difficult) can be seen as a moment of both *evasion* and *inventive displacement*.

Interestingly, social anthropologist Roy Wagner sees the emergence of culture as the result of similar inventive moves. For Wagner, culture is something we find at the intersection between familiar concepts and unfamiliar experiences in anthropological work. Neither anthropologist nor 'the natives' will know from scratch exactly what culture is, and none of them inhabit cultures. Culture is rather invented in transformative exchanges:

As the anthropologist uses the notion of culture to control his field experiences, those experiences will, in turn, come to control his notion of culture. He invents 'a culture' of people, and they invent 'culture' for him. (Wagner 1981: 11)

In this sense, culture emerges in encounters where people, observers and observed alike, are simultaneously trying to make sense of themselves and each other, albeit likely in different ways and for different purposes.

Encountering *Martha*: A Small Ethnographic Moment

In Wagner's sense, 'culture' emerges from encounters between researcher and empirical matters in a situation where the researcher's conceptions of the culture of the Other is invented, by drawing on the cultural inventiveness of that particular Other. We might consider such an encounter an *ethnographic moment*. According to Marilyn Strathern, an ethnographic moment is an *event*, which may set in motion such invention. It is a moment where encountering something strange and peculiar challenges the researcher's very basic assumptions (Strathern 1999: 3-6), and thus might affect the occurrence of what cultural researcher Barbara Herrnstein Smith terms as *cognitive dissonance*, happening

when one's ingrained, taken-for-granted sense of how certain things are - and thus presumably will be and in some sense should be - is suddenly or insistently confronted by something very much at odds with it. (Smith 1997: xiv)

Strathern and Smith both refer to a *radical* experience, a confusing realization that one's beliefs, basic values, or conceptions of the world are not as universally applicable, as we, willingly or not, often happen to take for granted. It is a *relativising* moment. Yet, it is also inventive as it potentially changes the meaning of the object of study and, accordingly, may take the inquiry in quite new

directions. It was, admittedly, a much less dramatic event, which occurred when inspectors recommended me to watch *Martha*, yet of a similar kind.

Doing ethnography ‘at home’, like I did, is commonly seen as *easier* than conducting ethnography in foreign and exotic places, because both researcher and informants will tend to assume that their particular version of culture is (to some extent) known or even shared. Yet, it is also considered to be *harder* because we also fear being analytically blind when navigating our own culture, ending up stating the obvious (Strathern 1987). The ethnographic moment seems not to happen as easily at home.

In my case, something like a ‘homely version’ of the ethnographic moment did occur. At first, their suggestion confused me. I did not anticipate a reference to popular culture when trying to discuss how working at sea was meaningful to them. The confusion only worsened after watching *Martha*. I was puzzled as to why they would suggest that I could learn anything about their way of life from this clearly dated and parodic portrait of Danish sailor culture. Maybe I simply took for granted too much about *Danish culture* so that, at first, I perceived their suggestion as a non-committed and frivolous reference to something Danes and other Westerners readily mention when asked about culture: movies and television.²

Over the course of my fieldwork, *Martha* and *The West Coast* gradually became more related. For one thing, the fisheries inspectors often quoted the movie when joking and commenting on daily situations. More interestingly, they pointed out that many people, themselves included, consider the movie *the* unavoidable cultural reference for Danish sailors; *Martha* is a *cult movie* for seamen. *Martha* does, indeed, thematize issues analogous to important matters of concerns on *The West Coast*. The movie highlights themes such as modernity vs. tradition, managing the introduction of new technologies, a certain form of nostalgia concerning life at sea, tensions in power relations on ships, and, not least, handling a threat of losing freedom.

These themes also repeatedly emerged on *The West Coast* in talks about what it means to be a fisheries inspector and a sailor. Fisheries inspectors quite frequently initiated such discussions among themselves and with me throughout my fieldwork. Thus, I gradually formed the idea of using *Martha*, the peculiar ‘packaged’ version of culture they had suggested to me, as an analytic device to understand my ethnographic material.

Encountering Sailor Culture: *Martha* as an Inter-reflexive Device

Actor-network theorist Bruno Latour uses the concept of *infra-reflexivity* to argue that researchers should focus on the explanatory devices and conceptualizations that people deploy, rather than use, for instance, sociological theories and methods as a meta-reflexive way to explain *their* practices from the outside:

If meta-reflexivity is marketed by an inflation of methods, infra-reflexivity is characterized by their deflation. Instead of piling on layer upon layer of self-consciousness, why not have just one layer, the story, and obtain the necessary amount of reflexivity from somewhere else? (Latour 1988)

Latour calls on social researchers to fetch ‘the necessary amount of reflexivity’ in the ways people present themselves and reflect on their situation, and not in meta-theoretical deliberation. This is very similar to empirical philosophy. His related suggestion, that researchers should start with a ‘meaningless’ (1999) or even a ‘vulgar’ (2005) conceptual repertoire in order to let the informant’s infra-language dominate the analysis is, however, very debatable. This suggestion exhibits a kind of pseudo positivism, which makes little sense, not least considering that Latour’s own analyses hinge on a quite sophisticated vocabulary, and draw inspiration from a wide range of theories and conceptions that does not *just* emerge from the empirical settings he studies (Gad & Jensen 2010).

In nominating *Martha* an inter-reflexive device, I follow Latour’s suggestion not to use sociological or cultural theory as a meta-reflexive language to explain (away) fisheries inspection or sailor culture, and I also try to obtain the necessary amount of reflexivity from somewhere else. Quite obviously, *Martha* does not present a coherent, believable meta-reflexive theory about sailor culture. Yet, even if *Martha* was the packaged version of culture, which fisheries inspectors presented to me, it is also not a literal form of self-expression or, for that matter, an infra-reflexive one. In no simple way, does *Martha* reveal how fisheries inspectors see themselves and make sense of their situation. *Martha* both idealizes and is a parody of sailor life, and fisheries inspectors know this. Nevertheless, they did suggest using it to make sense of a sailor culture to which they belong. This was, in Wagner’s sense, a moment where a means for inventing culture was ‘invented’ for me. Suggesting *Martha* was their way of performing a relation to culture. In this sense *Martha* is neither a meta-reflexive, nor an infra-reflexive theory. It is situated in-between, or on the side of this conceptual couple. *Martha* appeared *inter*, in our meeting, rather than *infra*, from the inside. *Martha* is thus my *lateral* means for entering into a dialog with empirical material from *The West Coast*. I use *Martha* as an analytic device to make sense of fisheries inspection and the themes they highlighted, but in doing this I am also inventing a very particular (and maybe also a very peculiar) version of sailor culture.

It is thus both in Carver’s sense of evasiveness of the topic studied and in Wagner’s sense of culture as invention that I utilize *Martha* to write about sailor culture. *Martha* is, following Wagner, deployed to ‘control’ my field experiences and to articulate *matters of concern* on *The West Coast*, which forms my notion of ‘their’ sailor culture. Fisheries inspectors contributed to inventing this version of sailor culture by evading talking elaborately about culture and instead handing me *Martha* as a ‘packaged’ version of ‘their’ culture.

Martha - the Movie

Erik Balling, a famous moviemaker in Denmark, directed *Martha* in 1967. The movie is part of a dominant genre in Denmark during the 60'es and 70'es, the folk comedy, which is especially known for its slapstick humour. Few, if any, in Danish film studies has taken *Martha* or the genre to which it belongs seriously, and whether the movie has any 'artistic value' is, indeed, debatable.

Martha is the name of the ship, which is the primary scenario in the movie. The ship is a ramshackle dump, but her crew is quite content. They eat extravagant meals, drink a lot, and enjoy an unbelievably high degree of freedom. As long as *Martha* sails, the owner of the shipping company does not interfere with life on the ship. So with quite a minimal effort, the crew of *Martha* is able to indulge in a free life at sea.

The ship owner's competition with a Norwegian shipping company constitutes the central plot. The first ship owner to arrive in the fictive Mediterranean country *Abbeden* will get a large order from an oil sheikh. However, the ship owner soon realizes that his other ships are located far away, and that his only chance of winning the race is to use *Martha* for transportation.

From the moment the ship owner boards *Martha*, he discovers that everything is a mess. The captain drinks, the ship is extremely untidy, a prostitute has sneaked onboard, the crew has built a bar on deck, the telegraph operator is dyslectic, and the quartermaster is extremely creative with the ship's accounts. The ship owner orders the crew to behave, clean up the mess, and to follow the company regulations of staying sober and eating oatmeal for breakfast. Tensions rise between the crew and the ship owner and culminate when he fires the captain and the mate, and requests a quote for scrapping *Martha*.

However, his chance to arrive first at *Abbeden* is threatened when the Norwegian ship *Harald* overtakes *Martha*. The ship owner then pledges that *Martha* will not be scraped and that the crew will be allowed to continue their way of life if only they win the race. From this moment, everybody onboard cooperates. A community of competent seamen takes form. Even the ship owner participates, shovelling coal in the engine room. The ship owner's daughter sneaks onboard *Harald* and steals a modern Norwegian toilet pump, which the engineers use to replace a malfunctioning pump in *Martha*'s engine. The narrative peaks when the captain heroically makes a shortcut through a shallow strait. *Martha* arrives first in *Abbeden*, and the old ship and her crew can thus continue their free way of life. The End.

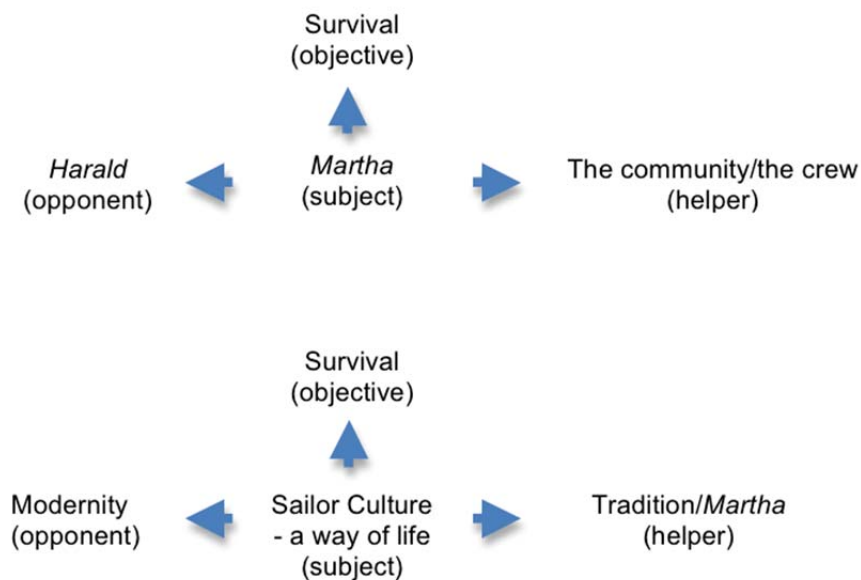
The Epic and the Narrative

At first glance, *Martha* is almost unbearable to watch. The narrative does not start until halfway through the movie. Until then, we watch various scenes of lazy sailors hanging out and enjoying themselves, while the scenes are loosely glued

together by folk songs praising *Martha* and the sailor's free way of life. In this sense *Martha*, rather than a dramatic story, is first and foremost an epic, lyrical musing on sailor culture. In an interview on the DVD-version of the movie, scriptwriter Henning Bahs states that the movie 'touches a string of the sailors soul [...] on *Martha* they do not want to become modern.' The epic musing in *Martha* is directed at a static situation.

The narrative part of the movie, however, depicts seamen as capable of stepping up to face challenges threatening their way of life. When the ship owner threatens the crew's and *Martha*'s existence, they overcome the challenge by temporarily forming a competent collective of sailors. To visualize the plot I use a simplified version of the actant model.³ Two overlapping interpretations of *Martha* are obvious:

Illustration 1: The simplified actant-model applied twice to *Martha*



In the effort to preserve a certain way of life, *Martha* gets help from the crew. Despite internal disagreements and tensions in the existing hierarchy, everyone cooperates against the Norwegian ship *Harald*. *Harald* is a high-tech, proper ship with a crew bearing smart white uniforms and represents modernization. Low-tech *Martha* and her laid-back crew overcome the threat of modernity by temporarily summoning sailor virtues: acting as a community, heroism, and using engineering and navigational skills. At the end of the film when *Martha* crosses the shallow strait, the members of the crew have reinvented themselves as brave Danish seafarers, an ideal the ship owner presents to his employees. For a

moment, the crewmembers pause their lives as lazy bonvivants in order to save *Martha* and this exact way of life.

The Cult of Martha

Fisheries inspectors told me that *Martha* has a special status for sailors in Denmark as a cult movie. The movie is further described as ‘the cult movie of the blue Denmark’ in a maritime dictionary (Marcussen 2008). It was not clear to me how fisheries inspectors related to this cult (whether they thought themselves to be part of it, found the cult a bit silly, or both). Nevertheless, they regarded it as important for sailors in general. All Danish sailors apparently know *Martha* and their children will undoubtedly get introduced to the movie. The inspectors also pointed out that in the seaside town of Svendborg, where several of the inspectors I talked to reside, people gather regularly to watch *Martha*, dressed up like its characters and quoting its punch lines and songs, similar to the events surrounding Jim Sharman’s famous movie *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* from 1975. 260 people assembled in Svendborg Cinema, May 2007 and 240 people in 2008 (Matadorstuen 2008). A bar in Svendborg has been furnished to resemble the galley of *Martha*. The movie is the centre of similar gatherings in other towns such as Elsinore, and even in Sweden (Logen *S/S Martha* 2008). On the club *S/S Martha* Elsinore’s website, the perceived effects of the cultic engagement with the movie are reflected: important *memories*, both of a certain era in Danish film history, a specific ship, and an image of a life at sea are kept alive by a continuous re-appreciation of the movie:

In the winter of 1967 / 1968 the real *S/S Martha* ceased to be and now only exists on film. Most of the crew of *S/S Martha* is no longer among us but their memory is still traversing the blue Mediterranean waves. (Logen *S/S Martha* 2008)

According to Danish media researcher Anne Jerslev, a movie becomes cult, not because of some basic characteristics, but when a special kind of interaction between a movie and its audience repeatedly occurs. The audience of a cult movie is presented with an image of its ‘common otherness’, which is different from how mainstream movies are usually experienced. According to Jerslev, among other things a cult movie encourages its audience ‘to talk back’ (Jerslev 1993: 26-27). In this light, *Martha* is not just interesting because it touches a string in the sailor’s soul, as suggested by scriptwriter Bahs. *Martha* is also interesting because it enables its audience to *talk back*, engaging in an *active* reproduction of sailor culture.

This suggests that *Martha* is not only a focal point for a cult(ure), but affords a critical perspective on sailor culture, allowing both its contestation and reinvention. Both the epic and dramaturgical elements of *Martha* might support this because both idealize and ascribe value to life at sea, but at the same time do so in a clearly ironic manner. *Martha* switches between a sympathetic portrait and ironic mocking of sailor culture. The movie depicts life at sea as quite valuable, yet

also as it never really was, and thus invites the viewer to reflect on present conditions and future possibilities in living such a life. This might be one reason why the crew of *The West Coast* suggested watching the movie. Throughout my fieldwork, I noticed how *critically* inspectors talked about current changes in the conditions of life at sea. Even if the movie does not come close to depicting what life at sea was ever like, *Martha* portrays a situation where freedom at sea is threatened and how such a situation can be managed. In the following, I first present my fieldwork with focus on how inspectors expressed their situation to me and then I use the movie to further discuss freedom and four other interrelated matters of concern in fisheries inspection.

Fisheries Inspection in Denmark: Perceptions of Current Challenges

The main task of *The West Coast* is fisheries inspection at sea. Since Denmark joined the EU in 1973, Danish fisheries have become highly regulated, with quotas, rules regarding equipment, landing and registering catches, licensing, and much more. By means of surveillance, the task of *The West Coast* is to ensure that fishermen comply with such regulations (Gad 2009b).

Even though inspection accounts for 95% of their work hours today, inspectors primarily presented themselves to me as *seamen*. Throughout my fieldwork they repeatedly uttered a strong concern that fisheries – and life at sea in general – was becoming less and less *free*. As may be known, many fishermen have found it difficult to accept the intensification of inspection and control. Their struggle is not surprising. It was more surprising to note that the fisheries inspectors all expressed that the concerns of fishermen in many regards were entirely their own. Inspectors also seem to struggle with the predicament fishermen face today. As one said, what is currently at stake is the very meaning of living as a sailor.

Working as a fisheries inspector means working as a sailor whose job it is to control and manage the lives of other sailors. To some extent, this means working in a paradoxical situation. In the TV-documentary *Sea Cop* about life on *The West Coast*, which aired in 1996 on Danish national television, an inspector sums up the ambivalence of being both a sailor and an inspector. He is asked how he feels about inspecting others and replies: ‘not so good because it is contrary to my *nature* to control others.’ During my fieldwork, this kind of sentiment was often invoked. Even though many inspectors expressed that they were proud of their work as part of an effort to protect the environment and create sustainable fisheries, it was nevertheless depicted to me as paradoxical to work as a seaman controlling other seamen. In addition, inspectors also found that their own daily life was becoming more and more accountable. The Fisheries Department, the Danish State and the EU continue to intervene to a greater extent in their everyday business. For instance, inspectors are now subjected to performance contracts and

indicators, used to measure the output of their work (Gad 2009a). The situation in which Danish fisheries inspectors find themselves is thus ambivalent and paradoxical in several ways. They have to control others who they believe are very similar to them, while they simultaneously are also being subjected to increasing control themselves. Their situation might be comparable to that of local tax collectors in the outskirts of the ancient Roman Empire who were simultaneously locals (non-Romans) and non-locals (representatives of Rome) (Gad 2009b: 83f). However, the inspectors' ambivalent condition afflicted by the 'the tax collector syndrome' also rendered them very talkative and critical informants.

That inspectors not only envisioned themselves as bureaucrats, but also as 'locals', that is as seamen, was highlighted over and over again by their repeated emphasis on their ship's important role in the Danish National Rescue Service. Ten to fifteen years ago, the primary task of *The West Coast* was acting as a rescue vessel. At that time, the ship more often played the role of a friend, a caretaker, or even a hero in relation to fishermen. Currently, the ship has come to serve a more or less pure monitoring function. Yet, the capability to participate in rescue operations is still extremely important, not least for how fisheries inspectors presented themselves to the surrounding world. This is also emphasized in descriptions of the history of *The West Coast* and Danish fisheries inspection in general (see Sandbeck 2003). Even though fisheries -- and life at sea in general -- today is very regulated, the value of freedom seemed to be intact, epitomized in emphasis of the potential role of 'the hero' that *The West Coast* was still capable of playing. Yet, recent strategy documents and especially consultancy reports often suggest, that it would be better if *The West Coast only* did inspection (e.g. Kristensen 2006). This jeopardizes fisheries inspectors' sense of freedom and of being sailors, grounded in their participation in the rescue service. In constantly highlighting this role, fisheries inspectors underlined the importance to them of maintaining a sailor's identity and the hope of freedom this entails.

Five Matters of Concern

Reinventing Freedom

That life at sea is, or at least used to be, tougher but also freer than other ways of life, I think, is a common, idealized Western conception of sailor life. Fisheries inspectors stated that they used to choose this kind of life exactly because it carried a promise of freedom. Regardless of whether life at sea *really* used to be freer, there was no doubt among inspectors that the ocean was becoming a more and more confined space. For instance, they told me repeatedly how management initiatives, enabled by new ICTs, have affected a thorough monitoring of their work. According to one captain, even if they still planned most of their everyday

tasks, the continued existence of their ‘freedom under responsibility’ could no longer be taken for granted. Today it is actually possible to plan most things from land and thus they were aware that their job could *potentially* be more or less reduced to ‘following orders’. Freedom in conducting inspection work was thus currently experienced as under pressure due to the now ever-present possibility that even more external governance could be introduced.

In *Martha*, freedom at sea is also depicted as *challenged* from ‘the outside’. Here the villain is modernity, depicted as technological progress. Freedom, in turn, is romantically illustrated as a stable state. This seems rather far from the reality on *The West Coast*, and, indeed, no inspector would ever suggest that the movie describes what freedom at sea really used to or *can* be like. When freedom is imagined as threatened, however, this might be related to picturing it, like in *Martha*, as something more or less static, a desirable state of affairs, a positive situation where one is in control of one’s life.

The movie depicts a state of total freedom as positive and desirable, yet the depiction is not without irony. It both confirms that freedom is important for sailors; it is something that it is worth fighting for, *and* depicts static freedom as a quite unfeasible situation. *Martha*’s version of freedom can thus be understood as iconic. It is a kind of yardstick, but it does not depict an end-goal. Rather, by overstating and thus turning ironic on itself, it affords discussions of continuity and change in how much freedom can be expected at sea today, exactly because the specific form of freedom depicted is *both* rendered desirable and absurd.

Talking with the inspectors revealed that freedom was deemed important; yet they also articulated some surprising versions of the concept. Obviously, neither total freedom as in *Martha*, nor the opposite is practiced on *The West Coast*. Rather, inspectors seemed to be quite actively and creatively engaged in inventing new ‘versions’ of freedom in relation to perceived threats. A captain told me that ‘the best thing about working at sea is that here it is way easier to maintain a meditative and calm attitude because one does not have to deal with the large variety of demands, choices, and opportunities that one is constantly confronted with on land. At sea we are free to work [sic!]’. I see this odd, contemplative ‘freedom to work’ as an interesting expression of how fisheries inspectors were in the process of reinventing what could count as freedom in relation to the ambivalence of being *both* sailors and inspectors, both managing other seamen’s lives and being increasingly managed themselves.

The explicit iconic form of freedom illustrated in *Martha* contrasts the situation on *The West Coast*; on *Martha* the crew is free *not to work*. That the movie both depicts freedom as important and worth fighting for while maintaining an ironic distance to an ‘absolute freedom’, enabled me to understand why inspectors invented and performed new versions of freedom. As a value, freedom seems still very much operative in sailor culture, even though the sea today has become

highly regulated. This produces occasions for conflicts and critique but also creative work in reimagining what gets to count as freedom.

Momentary Traversals of Hierarchy

Another story of how highly valued freedom is currently changing relates to consequences of an almost complete alcohol ban in Danish fisheries inspection, implemented in 2006. Prior to the ban, as a mate told me, the crew used to meet for a beer after work. They gathered in a room where a line was painted on the floor. When they crossed the line, the formal hierarchy was momentarily suspended. The crew was now allowed to tell the captain what they *really* thought about this or that decision he had made. Yet, after alcohol was banned, the ritual also disappeared, even though he and many others did not drink beer at these gatherings. The ban was imposed on *The West Coast* because of specific unfortunate events that happened elsewhere, and without taking into account its unintended consequences here. The story could be seen as another example of how freedom at sea is currently challenged. Drinking (or at least bantering about it) is also part of the common image of the ideal type sailor. The story, however, also highlights that hierarchies are important on ships, while it is equally important to be able to temporarily suspend them.

I was told that the Captain has the overall responsibility for the operation of the ship and, historically, ships have, indeed, been hierarchical organizations, epitomized for instance, in the division of meals: the Captain usually ate alone and the ship's mates had their meal together. Historically speaking, another segregation on many ships has existed between the engine room and the bridge. Frequently, I heard inspectors joking that any ship would actually have two 'captains': the captain and the chief engineer. On the bridge, you deal with navigation, control, and management of the ship's overall tasks, while the engineers take care of the ship's engine, fuel, and the day-to-day maintenance of equipment. Both kinds of tasks are essential for a ship to be operational, yet they might sometimes collide. The organization of ships is to some extent undergoing change. Today the engine control is often moved to the bridge. Furthermore, it often takes much fewer crewmembers to operate ships today than it used to, at least onboard ships like *The West Coast*. Here the 9-10 crewmembers also dine together, making hierarchies *seem* even less pertinent and sometimes diffuse. Yet, there is still no doubt, that the Captain has the last word.

A hierarchical organization is caricatured in *Martha*. The relation between the captain and the rest of the crew is depicted as clearly top-down. The hierarchy is also illustrated through more or less meaningless power struggles between the different domains of work. For instance, in the beginning of the movie, the Captain and the Chief Engineer get into a fight over right to use *Martha's* limited production of steam power. *Martha* also depicts the importance of being able to temporarily suspend the hierarchy. Like on *The West Coast*, the crewmembers of

Martha also enjoy their meals together. In this forum, power relations are temporarily levelled. Second, the struggle between the engineer and the Captain is momentarily dissolved during a party, where the drunken Chief Engineer suddenly sits on the lap of the Captain and tells him how wonderful he is. Third, and not least, when *Martha's* existence is challenged the crew gathers and resists as a collective.

Martha portrays a community of brave and competent sailors filling out needed roles as necessary for the hierarchy to work during a crisis situation. When *The West Coast* participates in rescue missions, I was told, it was similarly important to both follow orders and to simply 'step in' as there would not always be time for the captain to give orders. Such situations were frequently rehearsed onboard. During exercises, it became clear that inspectors also use them as opportunities to discuss how responsibilities are distributed and what they entail.

Rehearsal was important as they created room for learning and discussing the distribution and content of such roles without fearing the hierarchy. This might also be why the mate expressed being annoyed with the abandoned ritual. The ritual continuously *created* a room for discussing hierarchy and role distribution, by temporarily suspending them. *Martha's* message is at least that it is only possible for sailors to survive if they can both respect and suspend the hierarchy in a continuous reinvention of the collective.

Managing Technological Change through Comparison

One important difference between *Martha* and *The West Coast* is the crews' relation to technology. On *Martha*, things are extremely untidy. While long overdue technologies produce a lot of mess and challenges, the crew is always able to fix them and thus keep *Martha* running and stay independent. The movie performs an opposition between, on the one side, modernity, high-tech and order, and, on the other side, the way a 'real' sailor lives.

When boarding *The West Coast* the first thing striking the eye is the exact opposite. The ship is tidy and it has several modern navigational technologies installed. These aspects were essential as the crew always needed to be ready to participate in a rescue operation. In such a situation, even the slightest amount of mess is not acceptable and the technologies need to be ready for use.

Of course, unlike in *Martha*, orderliness and the high-tech were also not articulated in contrast to true seamanship on *The West Coast*. Rather, the crew talked about their technologies in terms of the ambivalences they were seen to produce, as if they produced *both* new order(s) and disorder(s) (Berg 1998). One captain exemplified this ambivalence with a story about the introduction of Internet and email. In the past, *The West Coast* usually received letters when in harbor, about once a week. These letters contained updates on legal matters and new directives from the Danish Directorate of Fisheries, obviously important

information for inspecting fishing vessels. Today, *The West Coast* receives such updates by email, sometimes even on a daily basis.

Although, *in some sense* this has made it easier for inspectors to stay updated and do the legally right thing, it has also introduced new challenges. The acceleration of updates meant that individual inspectors found it more difficult to keep track. One consequence was a new specialization of inspection work. Individual inspectors might obtain a more precise and updated view of aspects such as rules for net-size or restrictions regarding catching cod, but simultaneously, each individual perspective becomes much more limited. This specialization was partly an effect of frequent changes to laws but even more an effect of how email technology conveyed (more) information in what was perceived as a fragmented form. The consequence was both a clearer perspective, in terms of what to look for when inspecting a fisheries vessel, and a more blurred one, as in more dependence on the legal knowledge of other inspectors. In this sense, email technology both produced a sense of increasing order and increasing disorder.

Navigation technologies offer another example. The inspectors particularly appreciated the radar because it, as one said, ‘shows reality as it really is,’ when positioning the ship. They also expressed concern about relying *too much* on the radar as this would make one more prone to forget to look out the window. There were several stories about shipwrecks because navigation technologies had been trusted too much. A technology that is normally deemed trustworthy can easily become a safety hazard if it suddenly stops working, or if one is not cautious about the changes in behaviour it brings about. Fisheries inspectors were thus simultaneously reliant on and happy about certain technologies but also concerned about automatization and mindless adoption of new ones.

On *Martha*, new technologies are kept at bay; you only rely on what it is possible to fix locally. On *The West Coast* inspectors did not rely solely on technologies that they can repair themselves. Yet, trust in new technologies was enabled by not throwing out old ones. *The West Coast* still carries a sextant and paper charts (required by law) even though they mostly use the new electronic sea chart for navigation. Comparing information that new and old technologies provide was done continuously on the ship’s bridge to make them more reliable. Technological redundancy and comparability (they also carried, for instance, two radars) enabled specific possibilities to manage the uncertainty of relying too much on any particular technology, whether low-tech or high tech, old or new. Comparisons kept in check potential risks affected by the introduction of new technologies.

There was one concern that comparisons could not counteract. The inspectors often worried that basic seafaring skills might subtly disappear. For instance, it is difficult to maintain the competence to use paper charts when the electronic sea chart is mainly used. This uncertainty afflicted the comparative value of both

technologies. Yet, when commenting on the electronic sea chart, a captain stated that: ‘we are happy with the new technologies as long as they work. Since the technological development runs its own course, we might as well make the most of it.’ The captain’s statement evokes technological determinism and is thus directly opposed to *Martha’s* ideal of resisting technological development. His statement, however, could also be interpreted as a coping strategy. Conditions exist and evolve over which inspectors have no direct control. The task instead becomes to make visible how such developments jeopardize existing competencies.

As in *Martha*, ‘automatic’ technological development was not simply accepted on *The West Coast*. Again, *Martha* exhibits a kind of self-conscious iconicity, which makes visible the much more complex situation that new technologies bring about on *The West Coast* (Gad & Jensen 2008). *Martha* illustrates that it remains important to ground the use of technologies, whether new or old, in good old-fashioned seamanship. This reflects one of the most basic concerns about introducing new technologies on *The West Coast*. Yet, if *Martha* illustrates coping with modernization through pure resistance, the fisheries inspectors illustrated to me that managing technological change can also be done by continually *comparing* the old and new, and though this understand the reshuffling of disorder(s) and order(s) that the addition of new technologies to the existing network of technologies and work tasks brings about.

Nostalgic Visions

Stories and anecdotes about ‘the good old days’ at sea frequently occurred on *The West Coast*. Often, these stories were about drinking tours during shore leaves before the above-mentioned alcohol ban. Another common story was about courageous colleagues risking their lives, or even losing them, in rescue operations. A third type of story was about the happy, prosperous and unrestricted life that fishermen enjoyed ‘back in the days’ before control, management and inspection accelerated. For instance, an inspector, who used to be a fisherman, stated that in the 1980s, the situation was characterized by less restrictions. Cod and herring would voluntarily jump into fishing vessels and there would be plenty for everyone who wanted to join the party. A fourth type of story highlighted how working as a fisherman entailed turning your ship into a home. Often fishermen would go away to fish for months and the inspectors emphasized the need to act respectfully during inspection, which was still akin to entering a home. Talking about ships as homes they often did in an almost solemn tone and the relationship between sailor and ship had a nostalgic tone.⁴ According to them, the intensification of fisheries management challenged this kind of relationship. *Martha* also suggests that life at sea used to be better and this is hypostasized in the way the crew of *Martha* has domesticated their ship.

Yet, as a crewmember told me: ‘*Martha* definitely doesn’t describe what it is really like to be a sailor, it only provides for a funny glimpse into life at sea’. A Captain further reflected that thinking about the past involved imagination: ‘the good old days, as we imagine them, will never return.’ A glimpse that *Martha* does provide into *The West Coast* is again, a kind of homely relationship between sailors and ships. The inspectors talked about the West Coast as their ‘second home’. What this means is that life at sea, like in *Martha*, is attributed value through seamen relating to ships as places you need to care for and belong to. However, *Martha* also caricatures this relationship, making it obvious that this ‘home’ is really nowhere to be found, neither now, nor in the past. Yet again, *Martha* does visualize how caring for a ship is important for being a sailor. Keeping their ship tidy as described above, the inspectors told me, expressed exactly this kind of care.

The nostalgic stories can be interpreted as fun and banter, but also as kinds of ‘beacons’ in navigating a complex and changing life. On *The West Coast*, nostalgia was directed towards an imagined former situation where the EU, the Danish state, and the Directorate of Fisheries interfered less in their everyday life. It was often in relation to discussions of present challenges that stories of the past were invoked. Inspectors know that things were never like they are portrayed in *Martha* and that they never will be, and also that the past was never really like they imagine it.

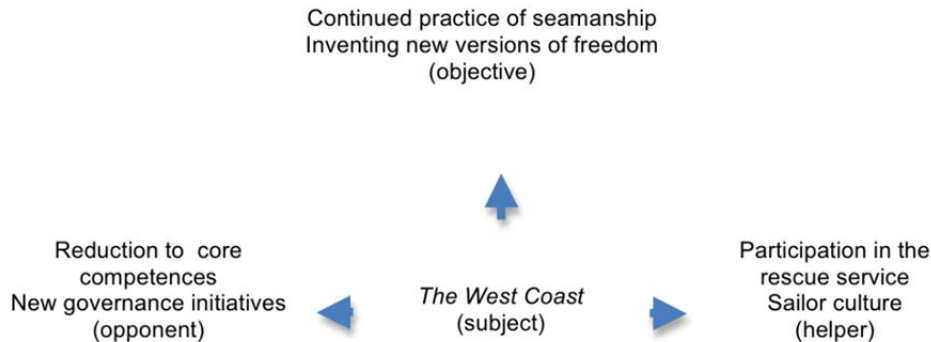
Nostalgic stories, like their technologies, can thus also be seen as parts of a comparative practice. Where comparison of technologies is used to make navigation safer, nostalgic stories are used to compare the present situation with both an imagined past and imagined situations elsewhere (what life on other ships might be like). Comparison is thus both used for making sense of the present situation and projecting a possible future life at sea. In the same sense, *Martha* exhibits a reflexive attitude to the imagined past by both depicting its version of life at sea as ‘antiquated’ and desirable.

Reinventing Sailor Culture

In this last section I will draw some preliminary conclusions from the above suggestions as to how inspectors reinvent their sailor culture in a situation of increased control and surveillance. Previously, I have discussed how the inspectors reinvent sailor culture through ‘new versions of freedom’, ‘new competences in the face of new technology’, and ‘nostalgia’. If we consider these strategies in relation to the managerial idea of reducing fisheries inspection to its core competencies, that is, stripping away their role in the rescue operation, there are important implications. *Martha* depicts that sailor culture is maintained through its creative ‘rebirth’. The movie characterizes sailors as persons who can reinvent themselves as a brave and competent collective in the face of danger. This readiness to face challenges as a team is analogous to the situation on

The West Coast. Applying the actant-model to *The West Coast* the situation might look something like this:

Illustration 2: The simplified actant model applied to *The West Coast*



If participating in rescue missions represents an important way in which fisheries inspectors reinvent themselves as sailors, as the analysis suggests, the reductive tendency in current policy papers seems to threaten this very mode. If the function of *The West Coast* is reduced to its so-called ‘core competency’ fisheries inspectors would have to find new ways of reinventing themselves as a community of sailors. *Martha* states that *this ability* is important for sailor culture, which resonates with the inspector’s concerns.

Conclusive Remarks: *Martha* as an Inter-reflexive Device

Martha does not work as a meta-theory that reveals what is important about sailor culture on *The West Coast*, and *Martha* is obviously not mimetically related to the ship. *Martha* might be regarded as an infra-reflexive means through which inspectors obtain a perspective on or anchor their sailor identity. The movie depicts a ‘common otherness’ of sailor life and tells us how important it is. Yet, the depiction is also a caricature, which differs profoundly from how life at sea takes shape today and surely from whatever it ever was. Yet, when inspectors presented *Martha* to me as a packaged version of their culture, I do not believe that they presented me with much more than a creative opportunity to ‘invent’ their culture. Inspectors, in this moment, used *Martha* to invoke a relation to sailor culture, while leaving it up to me to specify it. This opened up a space for empirical philosophy and the lateral experiment conducted. In following *their*

move, it has not been my intention to nail down or define what exactly their sailor culture is, has been to partially elucidate a basically evasive concept in order to shed light on some of the inspectors' matters of concern.

When we talk about sailor culture, an important aspect seems to be that it is negotiated, not least in the light of (perceived) effects of regulations getting implemented at sea today. The analytic experiment conducted in this paper underlines fisheries inspectors' concerns for the state of sailor life as participants in practicing control and management of such life. When attending to fisheries inspection through *Martha*, we see how one important enabling condition for this work is the very opposite. Fisheries inspection relies on continuously reinventing the 'sailors way of life', including new versions of freedom. However, using *Martha* also makes such quasi-realized values in sailor life visible by *exaggerating* their importance. This entails a focus almost exclusively on the productive challenges of doing inspection *as a seaman*, and less so as a bureaucrat.

The analysis conducted here, like any other, is thus both limited and enabled by the explanatory means it deploys. Yet, the fisheries inspectors have been equally important in inventing and delimiting how I have been able to analyse sailor culture. For instance, if too much explanatory power is ascribed to *Martha*, the list of relevant themes for understanding sailor culture could be expanded in many other ways. Most obviously, *Martha* treats the topic of *gender*, but in a way, which I do not think resonates and contrasts as well with *The West Coast*. It is thus important to note that the invention of culture, in Wagner's sense, is a matter of *controlling* field experiences without *determining* them.

In a situation where culture seems rather impossible to talk about, one academic drive could be to strive for specification, clarification, or definition of the concept. With point of departure in empirical philosophy this paper has rather experimented with taking exactly the opposite: an *inability* to make the concept explicit as the starting point, and to think of it as evasive and as an invention. On this background the paper has exploited a specific moment where mentioning culture was evocative. It is thus *both* the contested status of the concept in academia and this exact moment that acted as incentive to regard culture as an evasive and invented phenomenon. This has had the consequence that the analysis cannot be regarded as either meta-reflexive or infra-reflexive. Rather it emerges as a form of lateral thinking where an artefact and the fictional aesthetic form it exhibits is used as a perspective on empirical material, in order to find a new entrance to the somewhat tired concept of 'culture'. According to Gupta and Ferguson, the critique of the anthropological concept of culture(s), does imply that 'cultures must be seen as less unitary and more fragmented, their boundedness more of a literary fiction —albeit a 'serious fiction'—than as some sort of natural fact'. (Gupta and Ferguson 1997)

In this sense the paper could be regarded a *lateral analytic fiction*: it draws both on theoretical and empirical matters in order to make its points, yet it *privileges* neither. According to Cultural Critic and Feminist Donna Haraway fiction, *like fact* refers etymologically to human action. Fact belongs to a rational mode of knowledge production while fiction belongs to a romantic mode. Both kinds of accounts are privileged in the Western world (Haraway 1989: 3-5). *Martha* clearly belongs to the romantic tradition. *Martha* portrays sailor culture, as it never really was: it exaggerates, it highlights, and it turns freedom into an iconic state. It is a fairy tale, albeit a serious one. In a way, it is also explicit about exaggerating the importance of a *particular version* of sailor culture. Following Haraway, fiction should, be taken just as seriously as factual accounts because they enable a different way of discussing the concerns and stakes of the present moment. Fiction allows one to imagine how things could always be otherwise when we realize that the boundary between ‘fiction and social reality is an optical illusion’ (Haraway 1991: 149). For analytic purposes, bracketing this boundary enables the empirical philosophical move and for attending to ‘matters of concern’ rather than ‘matters of fact’ (Latour 1994). It has enabled me to discuss matters of concern that fisheries inspectors shared with me, as resources in the world building in which I have assumed that they are engaged. In that regard, *Martha* portrays life at sea as, for better or worse, *inflicted* with a *hope of freedom*, and it portrays *total freedom* as quite unfeasible, yet as something still worth fighting for and *inventing new version of*.

The inspectors stated that they shared this concern with the fishermen they inspect. Articulating such concerns may thus also be seen as one way in which they understand the situation of *their* ‘similar Others’. Similar to the way I use *Martha* to both identify ideas and values of sailor culture, and produce an analytic contrast to the *West Coast*, inspectors also seem to be engaged in comparative activities. Comparison on *The West Coast* is both of a theoretical and practical nature and is used to navigate both the seas and a broader complex of problems, as the analysis above testifies to. An aspiration to openness as to how one can understand such concerns connects fisheries inspectors’ worlds and the empirical philosophical attitude of the present analytic experiment.

In relation to current discussions about lateral analysis across anthropology and STS, I hope this paper exhibits some conceptual and methodological consequences of invoking this mode of analysis when doing ethnography at home. That is, in a situation where the artefacts and aesthetic forms, encountered in the field and exploited for analysis, are both surprising and forms part of the researchers own cultural outlook and thus, in some sense, already exists as mediating, inter-reflexive or in-between artefacts. What in this situation gets to count as ‘the empirical’ and the ‘conceptual’ is, indeed, *explicitly* evasive and negotiable.

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Notes

- ¹ Carver’s famous short story collection including the title story was originally named ‘Beginners’. Carver’s editor picked a new title and cut down drastically in Carver’s original manuscript to some extent changing its style (Stull and Carrol 2010, vii). The statement, I claim, “what we talk about” make is thus not attributable to Carver in a simple way. Rather it is my interpretation of this book *as* a statement.
- ² It comes as no surprise to anthropology (or to cultural studies) that people use cultural products to ‘anchor’ and discuss ‘identity’. See for instance, Askew and Wilk (2002), Ginsburg, Abu-Loghod & Larkin (2002) and Stald & Tufte (2002). It is not my goal to enter this discussion. The experiment here is rather using *Martha* as my analytic device to investigate fisheries inspection.
- ³ As known, Greimas originally developed the actant model. I use a simplified model without ‘giver’ and ‘receiver’ roles because my errand is to compare *Martha* and *The West Coast*. The model has many weaknesses. Its strength is that it open towards what can count as an actor in a story: Anything is allowed to act, as in actor-network theory Latour 2005: 54f) and empirical philosophy.
- ⁴ According to Literary scholar Svetlana Boym, nostalgia can take a ‘restorative’ form, i.e. a hope for the recurrence of a past. Yet, nostalgia can also take a ‘reflexive’ form where the past becomes a resource for discussing what futures might possibly come into being (Boym, 2001).

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