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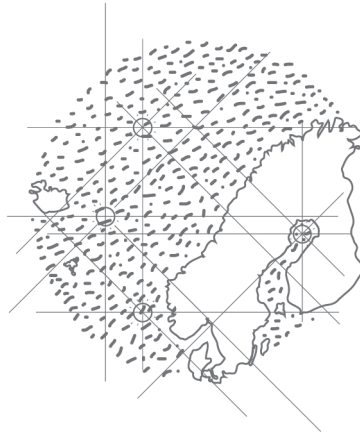
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# Beyond Borealism:

## New Perspectives on the North



eds. Ian Giles, Laura Chapot, Christian Cooijmans,  
Ryan Foster and Barbara Tesio

Norvik Press  
2016

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Biographies

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Karianne Hansen is educated in History at the University of Bergen

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Ellen Kythor is working towards a PhD co-funded by the Danish Arts Foundation and University College London, investigating the market for translated Danish literature in the UK. As part of her studentship, she has established a translators' network in collaboration with Danish-English literary translators. Ellen has a BA in German and Scandinavian Studies and MA (Distinction) in Scandinavian

Biographies

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Eleanor Parker received her doctorate in medieval literature from the University of Oxford, and subsequently held a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship at The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities. Her research focuses on historical writing and romance in post-Conquest England, and she has published several articles on Anglo-Danish literary culture and the reign of Cnut. She is currently writing a book on the literature of the Vikings in England.

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Silke Reeploeg is a researcher and lecturer with University of the Highlands and Islands and based in the Shetland Islands. Her research interests are in the fields of Nordic and Northern cultural history and literature, and she has recently completed a PhD thesis in Nordic Studies. She is currently co-editing a book entitled *Seascapes and Dreamscapes: Northern Atlantic Islands and the Sea* due to be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2016/17.

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Finnish-Romanian scholar Cristina Sandu recently graduated with an MSc in Comparative Literature from the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on, among other things, Finnish migrant literature. Cristina is currently writing her debut novel for Finnish publishing house, Otava. Her novel examines the Ceaușescu years in Romania and tells the story of an intellectual who manages to escape and start a new life in Finland.

# Coastal Cultures in Scotland and Norway: Narratives, Affinity, Contact<sup>1</sup>

Silke Reeploeg

This article investigates transnational cultural encounters that cross the established research areas of Northern European, Nordic, and Scandinavian Studies. Using approaches from Scandinavian research on coastal communities and cultural spaces, the article examines cultural transfer between Norway and Scotland through trade and exchange during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The interdisciplinary and transnational approach adopted throughout the paper suggests new perspectives in researching coastal communities in Britain, as part of a wider understanding of cultural encounters between the communities of the North (Thisted *et al.* 2013 [not in biblio. Please check]).

## Coastal Communities and Regional Identities

Responses to globalisation, climate change, and independence processes have seen established Northern European relationships and spatial metaphors transformed during the twentieth century. Coastal communities, in particular, have adapted to political, social, and economic changes which resulted in opportunities for self-determination as well as new intercultural encounters. As a result, established research paradigms are renegotiated, creating new areas for reflection and critical examination. One example of this type of research is exemplified in the study of coastal culture (*kystkultur*) in Norway, which has already added valuable new perspectives to existing, land-based research into regional cultural identities. The term *kystkultur*,

in Scandinavia, is perceived in different ways. On the one hand it encapsulates the life and activities in the days before industrialisation, in the form of material culture, such as structures and buildings. On the other, it also forms the basis for contemporary coastal heritage (Holm 1995). This ongoing creation of heritage selectively rediscovers and reinterprets coastal traditions and folklore, and plays an important role in how our perceptions of coastal landscapes are shaped.

At the root of the term lies the belief that life along the coast is not the same as life inland, or even along the fjords or other waterways that connect the land with the sea. So, coastal culture can mean a collection of artefacts that relate to living in this unique environment (where, for example, fishing may be as important as farming), such as work descriptions, stories, and artistic production. A similar approach can also be applied to the history and culture of Scotland's coastal communities, which should not be studied in isolation, nor only in relation to the other British Islands. Other regional and transnational perspectives need to be added – with the sea not seen a barrier but as 'more of a bridge, a link to the world beyond' (Smith 2003 [1984]: 323), an opportunity for intercultural contact. Coastal culture, created and communicated via maritime spaces, presents opportunities for intercultural contacts that lead to a variety of cultural identities, as well as a tool for demonstrating regional variety or even autonomy (Reeploeg 2012 and 2016).

Historically, coastal societies have differed from those inhabiting inland areas in that their culture is shaped by a combination-economy of farming and fishing, but also by their intensive use of coastal land- and seascapes (i.e. the area between high and low tides). This sea-focused cultural landscape exists across the coastal communities of the North, and informs the way in which regional cultural identities are formed and maintained (Rian 1997). It also forms the basis of ways in which coastal communities interact across the North Sea and other oceans, in transnational cultural regions or 'sub-national regions crossing international boundaries' (Winge 2001: 48). Parts of the British Isles, but in particular coastal Scotland, such as the Western and Northern Isles, have long been part of a wider Nordic territory, with political transfer of

the islands of Orkney and Shetland from the Norwegian to the Scottish Crown occurring as late as 1468 and 1469 respectively (Crawford 2013). The archipelagos of Shetland and Orkney therefore stand out as particularly evident areas of intercultural influences. Archaeological, historical and cultural evidence suggest regional communities that are far from isolated by their geographical position, but connected via maritime links both across the North Sea and the North Atlantic.

### **Cultural Regions Rediscovered**

Historical regions (geopolitical or cultural) have often been seen as representing the first state in an evolutionary progression from region to nation to global village, or outdated remnants of a pre-globalised world. Little attention has been given to what happens to historical links, regional cultural identity, and cross-national regions in new, globalised, geographical spaces which are still 'impregnated with administrative boundaries' (Häkli 1997: 9). This includes transnational regions, which manifest themselves in concrete policy such as through the implementation of European structural funds. The roles of local, regional and national boundaries, symbols and identity narratives in the production and reproduction of regions seems altogether less obvious. Both **Sven Tägil and Christopher Harvie** [Please add this to the bibliography] have provided useful contextual introductions to the issues of regionalism and regionalisation within Northern Europe and the British Isles, where they describe regionalism as the dynamics of being part of a nation, but also being part of a network of transnational European regions (Jönsson, 2007 [2000]). Regional narratives then become a significant factor in terms of providing a basis for self-determination and de-centralisation projects that are an alternative to reactionary forms of regionalism based on essentialist geographical, ethnic, or racial notions of identity (Råberg 1997).

Anssi Paasi (2009) has explored a range of critical approaches to analysing regions which link human geography with other social sciences, in order to escape traditional and ahistorical centre-periphery models. He sees regional identities much more as products of cultural

and social dynamics, influenced by global, national, and transnational ideas and processes:

[R]egions should be seen as complicated constellations of agency, social relations and power. Regions are institutional structures and processes that are perpetually 'becoming' instead of just 'being'. They have a material basis grounded in economic and political relations. Various time scales come together in such processes. Similarly social institutions such as culture, media and administration are crucial in these processes and in the production and reproduction of certain 'structures of expectations' for these units. (Paasi 2009: 131)

It is clearly important to break down historiographical barriers that restrict intercultural contact to political histories, connecting the study of cultural history and historical context to that of everyday lives and material culture. These represent tangible and continuous intercultural links between North European regions on an interregional, rather than national, level. Cultural legacy or inheritance is therefore not simply a process of documentation and transmission across time, but also of renegotiation of what is meaningful to specific contemporary historical and political situations. The historical flow of material, cultural and narrative production between Scotland and Norway, for example, have clearly left their mark in the form of a regional Nordic cultural heritage, particularly in the Scottish Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland. This ranges from language and literature to maritime knowledge and boat building. Many of these activities cross established discursive or geopolitical boundaries, creating intercultural narratives that adapt and renegotiate national and regional identities over time (Reeploeg 2015). An interdisciplinary approach therefore enables the consideration of both historical and cultural material side by side. From this perspective 'Nordic' and 'European' discourses and narratives can be better understood, and linked to their respective historical and economic realities.



## **Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Transfer: The North Atlantic Rim**

A useful sea-based approach using an intercultural stance lies in the study of the North Atlantic Rim. As a conceptual tool for political economy the North Atlantic Rim has allowed Northern marginal regions to be compared and policies to be developed (Leroy 1999). Within the social sciences, Atlantic history emerged from a network of economic, geo-political, and cultural exchanges between the British, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese empires, and the Americas. Atlantic historians argue that the continents and societies bordering the Atlantic Ocean can therefore be studied as a shared, regional sphere (Armitage and Braddick, 2009 [2002]). As an emerging academic field, North Atlantic Rim studies can thus be seen to follow Bernard Bailyn's *Atlantic History: Concepts and Contours* (2005), which focuses on cosmopolitan and multicultural elements. This encourages a critical engagement with issues such as (mainly British) colonial studies, imperialism, and other spheres often neglected or considered in isolation by traditional historiography dealing with Europe or the Americas. In this context, the study of the North Atlantic region offers the opportunity to compare North American historical and cultural perspectives with those of the Northern European and Nordic countries.

The North Atlantic, as a historical and cultural region, is thus an equally complex spatial concept. When looking at the history of the North Atlantic Rim area, it becomes apparent that the societies within this region have had strong historical connections through trade, migration, and political unions/divisions. The movement of Norse explorers and settlers, for example, stretches over parts of the North Atlantic region and Northern Europe, with archaeological finds indicating cross-regional communities with a shared sense of identity and beliefs (Magnusson 1980; DuBois 1999).

## Space, Identity, and Organisation in Coastal Regions

Both tangible and intangible cultures are rich sources in terms of considering the European ‘trialogue’ between space, identity, and organisation (Jönsson, 2007 [2000]). Northern European and Atlantic coastal communities share a set of environments and cultures that are different from their respective inland areas. As already mentioned, coastal regions are shaped by a combination-economy of farming and various ways of using the sea and coast. So, for example, underwater topographies, together with seasonal changes in temperature, determine the production of plankton, which affect the quantity of fish in a particular area. A shared, cross-cultural vocabulary of intangible knowledge about both the sea and the land (i.e. offshore fishing grounds and the seashore) is therefore a critical part of the economic and cultural capital of coastal communities (Klepp 1992). Coastal culture is visible in not only tangible objects such as harbours, boats, and coastal buildings, but also the less tangible knowledge about the cultural landscape of the coast such as fishing meds (a combination of inland and offshore orientation to located fishing grounds), safe anchorages, and other underwater landscape features. Shared traditions and narratives thus connect coastal communities in their diverse, but similarly sea-focused cultural landscapes that exist across the oceans of the world. Narratives, in turn, inform the way in which regional cultural identities are formed and maintained (Rian 1997). They also form the basis of ways in which coastal communities maintain communal memories (Aronsson 2009), constructed through cultural traditions, which maintain ‘sub-national regions crossing international boundaries’ (Winge 2001). Seen in a wider context, island cultures, such as the British Isles, are also essentially coastal cultures, and need to be approached as a network of diverse identities that include intercultural features:

Although islands have a very easily defined border, between sea and land, the cultural identities of the islanders neither define themselves in isolation or only in relation to their nearest - [Delete dash? Please check original] national centre. In view of an intercultural analysis of cultural practices and historical

narratives, the sea that surrounds the British Isles is therefore not a barrier, that somehow keeps - [Delete dash? Please check original] Britishness contained [...]. (Reeploeg 2012)

## **Trade and Cultural Exchange across the North**

Coastal maritime and economic links are fruitful areas for the investigation of coastal cultures in areas with long coastlines and relatively small populations. These small societies are said to be marked by a particular mentality characterised by not only a combination of strong individualism, but also a sense of community and solidarity (Holm 1995: 219). Mercantile links are essential to societies living in areas with limited resources or opportunities for agriculture. Norway, for example, has had a long tradition of interregional encounters along the Norwegian coast based on fishing and trading in economic resources. Both 'obvious and hidden regions' (Winge 2001) have been the result of these economic, social, and political/administrative regional relationships, with complex cultural encounters occurring. These are used as the basis and context for the formation of identities, both on a sub- and transnational level (Reeploeg 2012).

Economic and social relationships are important when studying transnational coastal cultures, as well as the possibility of 'hidden' regions, where cultural elements can be detected via the analysis of both contemporary and historical material. So, for example, when considering the cultural links between Scotland and Norway, earlier contacts, such as the Hanseatic trading networks into Europe and the Baltic are often good starting points. Historical analysis allows us to look at the development of trade and cultural exchange between Norway and countries across the North Sea, especially centred on not only the supply of resources such as timber, grain, and salt, but also migration and the creation of cultural networks stimulated by trade (Andersen *et al.* 1985; Bjørklund 1985).

Regular trading links between Scotland and Norway meant the opportunity for people to not only maintain and extend a variety of

commercial networks, but also to engage in cultural contact (Murdoch and Sher 1988). In Norwegian history the Dutch period (1550–1750) or *Hollendartida* is connected with a triangular trade in timber, dried fish, grain, and commodities to and from the Norwegian port of Bergen. However, it also links into regional trade along the whole northern and southern coast of Norway (Løyland 2012 [Missing from bibliography. Please add]) and the subsequent Scottish Trade, which continued existing timber imports between Norway and Scotland, and across Northern Europe (Næss 1959 [1920]). Scottish traders often bought timber directly from coastal regions such as Ryfylke, and later directly to the fjords of Sunnhordland, the area between Ryfylke and Bergen, Western Norway's main port. This led to the Western Norwegian region of Sunnhordland becoming 'the leading source for timber exports to Scotland' (Thomson 1991: 15). The commercial networks created by the timber trade also instigated a new, semi-official, triangular trade between the Dutch/Northern German coast, Norway, and the eastern coasts of the United Kingdom, which revolved around the trade of dried stockfish, salted-dried cod (*klippfisk*), and imports of commodities from mainland Europe (Bjørklund 1985).

It is hard to measure the impact of the cultural exchange that took place during both the Dutch and Scottish periods in Norwegian history. Margit Løyland points out the cultural influence the Dutch period had on West Norwegians, focusing on Dutch place- and family names, as well as lexical additions to the Norwegian language (Løyland 2012). She provides a list of words and phrases from historical documents that have been retained in both languages, or were mutually intelligible at the time. Equally, on the other side of the North Sea, eighteenth century Shetlanders, for example, were said to speak a dialect that continuously accommodated other contact languages from across the North Sea area. This was the result of pragmatic, but also dynamic choices by the population in response to ongoing social and economic change (Knooihuizen 2010). Other, more specific terminology seems to have developed around regular trading objects such as timber and boats, but intercultural exchange is also found in coastal folklore, literature, regional traditions, and music (Anttonen and Kvideland 1993; Shaw 2007). So, for example, Andreas Næss studied the place