

ACT I [90 min]

00:00:00 - 00:00:26 // WrC Intro

00:00:26 - 00:01:11 // [MING] (45 sec)

Live from the Eleonore, a 100-year-old survey vessel moored at the banks of the blue Danube, you're listening to WIDOW RADIO CHING. We begin our programming today with act I of the hydrofemme, which is a myth that has been heard murmured from the dockyards and found resounding in the aisles of your favorite fast fashion outlets. It tells of a creature emerging from the depths of the global supply chain. Over the next few days we will hear accounts from academics, activists and artists engaged with a similar untangling of all that is lost in the nebulous codes of current economic infrastructures. Thanks for listening to WIDOW RADIO CHING.

00:01:11 - 00:01:21 // JINGLE "Loose Lips, Sink Ships" (Nina)

00:01:21 - 00:02:03 // "Zorba the Greek" intro (42 sec)

00:01:21 - 00:09:37 // The Hydrofemme radio play ACT I (7:26+00:50=8:16)

[ELAINE] ZORBA! A man with such virility as to be unstoppable, his brutishness flying in the face of reason. "Madness!" Amancia Ortega would often exclaim, repeating the culminating line of the film Zorba the Greek to himself like a mantra: "A man just needs a little madness or else he never dares cut the rope and be free." People often wonder how the world's most successful fashion retailer rose to such prominence. The path was long and arduous, but comprised less of bricks and cement than of waterways. This tale is about more than just a single man, however. This is a tale about a creature known as the hydrofemme. You may know her best by the name of ZARA.

- sound -

It was 1975, on a central street in downtown La Coruña, southern Spain, that ZARA was born. Ortega, the son of a railroad worker, had planned to call his first shop Zorba after his favorite film character, but coincidentally found a neighboring bar with that name, thus thwarting the attempted association to the hedonistic tendencies of a man larger than life. Having already taken the pains to lay molds for the shop's sign, Ortega got down on his knees and began rearranging the letters by hand. In this way ZARA gained a decidedly more feminine but perhaps no less commanding character.[pause]

If you're wondering where the additional "A" came from, there is

speculation that there had been another set of letters. It is also noted that at the time the price for the letters "B" and "O" were significantly higher due to the additional labors of making a rounded edge. At any rate, this is only a minor detail of our story.

- sound -

[MING]The first ZARA products resembled high-end fashion brands and, naturally, instantly became wildly popular. Struck by his success, Ortega began opening more and more stores like an obsession. His compulsion to make newer, trendier garments faster, led him to revise the design, manufacturing and distribution strategies, reducing lead times and enabling the company to respond to market wants quicker than ever before. "Madness," he could often be heard saying to himself, "a man just needs a bit of madness."

- Zorba the Greek [crazy part] (50 sec) -

For all its speed, ZARA became known as a "fashion imitator" (a reputation it still holds today) producing low-priced goods faster, rather than dwelling on stylistic innovation. But its executives would (and still do) vehemently refute its characterization as derivative of runway trends. It's governance, they claim, relies solely on the strength of desire. ZARA only responds to what its shoppers want, they chirp. And it's true that today you can visit any ZARA store and you'll find the precise strapless sandals of your dreams, before you've even dreamt of them.

- sound -

But how exactly did this rapid ascension take place? What has fueled such merciless drive? Industry insiders are in constant awe of ZARA's ability to turn products around in a mere week compared to the six-month average. Its 12,000 new designs per year overshadow the meager two to four thousand standard of its competitors -H&M, COS, Mango, among them. "Instant fashion" Ortega is said to enjoy calling his creations, connoting a prepackaged food that springs to life once you pop it in the microwave.

- sound -

[ELAINE]Who is ZARA, and what makes her so inimitable? The director of Louis Vuitton, Daniel Piette, once described her as "possibly the most innovative and devastating retailer in the world," with a palpable tone of both fear and reverie. There are different versions of this story and it is with good reason that the narrative remains meandering and elusive. This is not an analysis of retail psychology or branding tactics. Rather, the tale of ZARA is deeply human but rarely told. And

this is because the interlocutors are dispersed, hidden, and confined to largely invisible spaces. Often, too, they are restricted to silence.

There are those who imagine the global supply chain as a seamless space, composed of mechanized routes devoid of human touch. Some would like to think of it as an entity whose movements simply follow nature's course, an animalistic logic of move or die. Still others would prefer to believe that it doesn't exist at all. But you, dear listener, should know that these pathways circulate more than lifeless goods.

Point your nose in the direction of the sea: In our case, ZARA is a watery being and her story is necessarily being kept at bay.

— sound —

[MING] Consider that those fearful dark shapes that loom just beneath the water's surface tell nothing of their actual matter and shape. Then hear that ocean liners crossing the Pacific transporting garments from factories in the South, also bear other, more precious cargo. In the hold are cramped living quarters where women and sometimes children wait attentively for the next wired signal. Storerooms are filled to the brim with bolts of blended fabrics—cotton/elastane, polyester/spandex, stretch denim—and tens of thousands of buttons, zippers and other trims. These are for making tank tops, jeans, T-shirts and underwear, sometimes socks. If you listen closely, a soft chanting can be heard emanating from within the ship's deepest chambers: "Diro, Chanel, Calvin Klien, Muccci!" drones a polyphonic chorus. In between this perturbed couture legacy, other lyrics are whispered: "feelings dance only by putting it on..."

This is a ballad of minor ecology. Those songs that seep from the hold are not the cries for pity or help, but gasps and murmurs of a perverse autonomy. Along these fluid lines strange synapses and assemblages have grown, new subjects are forming. I know this because I am one of them—or at least one head of this many-headed hydra, the hydrofemme: we are water and so are you.

Curated sound programme // ±30 min (00:09:37 - 00:40:50)

00:09:37 - 00:12:39 // "Ukigusa" (Floating Weeds, by Alejandra & Aeron adapted from Yasujiro Ozu's 1959 Japanese drama film // 3:02

00:12:39 - 00:16:01 // The Widow Ching by Borges - Natalie Galpern // Part I // 3:22

00:16:01 - 00:18:01 // CREDITS for sound // (2:00)

[MING] "The Widow Ching" as interpreted by Natalie Galpern (a classically-trained vocalist, performer and sound artist from New York City) is based on an excerpt from Jorge Luis Borges's short story *The Widow Ching, Lady Pirate* (part of *A Universal History of Infamy*, first edited in 1954). In this short essay Borges describes a semi-fictionalized account of Ching Shih's piracy in which she is "a lady pirate who operated in Asian waters, all the way from the Yellow Sea to the rivers of the Annam coast".

Name WIDOW RADIO CHING as inspired by Ching Shih

[ELAINE] Announce next song: "Pirate Jenny" (German: "Seeräuberjenny") is a well-known song from *The Threepenny Opera* by Kurt Weill, with lyrics by Bertolt Brecht.

The song depicts Jenny, a lowly maid at a "crummy old hotel", imagining avenging herself for the contempt she endures from the townspeople. A pirate ship - with eight sails, and with 50 cannons - enters the harbor, fires on the city and flattens every building except the hotel. The pirates come ashore, chain up all the townspeople, and present them to Jenny, who orders the pirates to kill them all. She then sails away with the pirates.

00:18:01 - 00:25:32 // "Pirate Jenny" by Shilpa Ray with Nick Cave & Warren Ellis from the 2013 album *Son of Rogues Gallery: Pirate Ballads, Sea Songs & Chanteys* (7:31)

00:25:32 - 00:25:36 // JINGLE "Lose Lippen, Versinken Schiffe" (4 sec)

00:25:36 - 00:26:50 // Explanation of "Loose Lips, Sink Ships" tie into *Sea Gossip* [ELAINE] (1:14)

00:26:50 - 00:28:50 // INTRODUCTION [MING] "Sea Gossip" with Pelin Tan // 2 min

Pelin TAN is an activist, sociologist and art historian based in Turkey. She is a visiting Professor of Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University; Associate Professor of Architecture at Mardin Artuklu University; and contributor to *Silent University*, a pedagogical platform for refugees and migrants. A past ACT Program Fellow, School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Tan is currently researching the Pearl River Delta as 'territorial sea'.

TAN has participated in multiple biennials and triennials: Istanbul (2007, 2015); Lisbon (2013); Montreal (2014); Oslo (2016); and Venice (2016). She is an Artıkışler video collective member, co-directs the science fiction film series 2084 with Anton Vidokle, and publishes widely. Together with Joseph Grima, Tan is co-organiser of 'Institute

of Threshold: Border Infrastructures' for the Cyprus Pavilion as part of the 15th Venice Architecture Biennial (2016).

00:28:50 - 00:55:36 // SYMPOSIUM:"Sea Gossip" from the Pearl River Delta
// Part 1 // 26:46 min

WrC: Last time we spoke, you described seaweed as a minute example of a material infrastructure that in your research seems to have a possibility to infiltrate or tell a story about a larger infrastructure. We wanted to ask how you see this relationship between very hidden global-scale infrastructural movements and logistics, and questions of production? How do these relate to the question of seaweed for you?

PT: The research was somehow a shift in focus towards ocean from land. As researchers we are always looking at questions of urban space. Urban space is always understood as a kind of archetype for the production of economy, labor, society, etc. I have focused a lot on infrastructure in the last few years—infrastructure of land, infrastructure of territories, infrastructure of borders. The question became not one of infrastructure as a facility, of how it is produced, or is functioning in such a condition, but rather how border structures reproduce themselves as infrastructures of design, as a function of society, or a city, or a town. When I was in Hong Kong, I was there for six months doing research, I was interested in Hong Kong as a territory that surrounds a territory. We know that Shenzhen is a border city, but I was more interested in Hong Kong as that which surrounds—as an island, as a sea. Using the sea itself as an approach, considering the land as sea, as a space departing from the urban and moving more towards liquid territories.

This was much inspired by my colleagues, MAP Office who have been working like this for some time. They had been collecting seaweed from different islands and territories. We thought, when we think about borders it is always Shenzhen that comes to mind—Shenzhen as a border-city, as a border economy. But we started looking at the larger picture, the Pearl River Delta sea not as a shoreline of industrialization but instead the Pearl River Delta sea itself as an infrastructure, a liquid territory, which is contested and fluid at the same time—we don't know where the border is exactly and as host to many factors from the South China Seas to Hong Kong, and everything around. We tried to look from Hong Kong with a larger perspective at the islands, the archipelagos of islands. We ran a studio called "Floating Cities," a seven-week design studio at Poly U, where did a lot of research looking at floating settlements. We saw that many new economic, Post-Fordist structures have been emerging from those sea dwellings. The floating dwellings became a kind of Post-Fordist factory. Like, six worker-families trying to produce seaweed and fish-farming—we tried to record their life and housing structure,

what kind of relationship they have to the mainland, and how children are attached to this daily life. So, we came back to do this research with the decision to focus more on seaweed.

Seaweed is a very important means of production in South East China, in the cities as a food, as well as food for the seafood. Women are often those preparing for this kind of seafood production. We also became friends with a Chinese chef in Lama Island who's father was a fisherman and who's family ran a business there. She later went into business as a lawyer but then changed to running a restaurant and being a chef. We worked with her, through her experience being a chef and living in Lama Island, and being a fisherman's daughter, focusing on seaweed from different perspectives—cultural, economic, gastronomic. As an element you can see that it contains many layers. To me, seaweed is a cultural heritage, not simply a food. It is also a pattern, physical and also metaphorical through which you can redescrbed a subjectivity, from the fluid way it's been produced. With Christina, the seaweed chef, we organized a seaweed gala dinner last may and invited many friends to share our four months of research, talk about why seaweed is important, and also acknowledge Christina's engagements with it. We didn't just want to eat and leave money, the Hong Kong way, but we wanted to support the fishermen and local chefs, and local villages. We also wanted to be supportive of this collective knowledge of the sea, seaweed and the sea as commons that we were sharing. This was sort of the aim with MAP Office, to come together to support and empower Christina and through this reveal this function of seaweed.

Later I focused on islands through the Pearl River Delta Sea, north and south, trying to understand mostly the China side (west not east) of Shenzhen. I proposed to do a small surgery on the last fishing villages. I didn't know what I was going to find, but the Hong Kong Design Trust supports my research and I had from MAP Office already some ten years of research. They also gave a lot of advice. So I went to several islands and found that in one of the archipelagos south of Lantau Island there used to be a refugee island. There is currently discussion within the Hong Kong government to reinstate this once again as a refugee island. So how are islands functioning? Islands are usually imagined as a retreat, as a local knowledge, as a space of other—it occurred to me that most islands are an infrastructure themselves. Infrastructures, refugee camps, storage for oil and gas (for the Hong Kong airport or the Shenzhen airport) for emergency cases, I started think about how islands themselves are a border infrastructure and then visited Panyu and other places around Guangzhou. I visited four villages and they were really hard to find. Even if you know Chinese. You really have to navigate through gossip. This was an important methodology. There are several kinds of fishing villages. Some of them are far past 19th century versions of themselves, for example one of them is totally

touristic. It is still worth it to visit, though. It is right by the water and has a museum and in it you can see all the history. You may find it kitschy or touristy but I don't find it that way. I think it's worth it to turn touristic in order to attract local people. Another is simply a land village, there was water there 150 years ago. You can walk there. It's totally past gossip realm, the information that they gave, I'm not sure it's accurate. We spoke with old people and their memories are really strong.

WrC: It used to be in the sea?

PT: Yes, yes, but now it has been filled with land. So now it's just a village. We started from there and it was interesting to hear old people recall "when I was a child..." and then show where the water was and there being just a highway. It's impossible to imagine. It's a dream, a childhood memory. You hear these things and try to make sense looking at the map. This village has the two oldest temples with beautiful courtyards, minimum 150 years old, and you can see in the decorative elements of the wooden structure that they are about sea. And then there's a goddess who's the protector of this sea village. From this you understand that this must have been really near to water. Now they use these temples as communities centers, for meetings and playing music, but to motifs are very valuable I think and it's really incredible that they kept those. So finally, you believe them that this was fishing village.

And then we went to another island closer to Guangzhou, nearer to the city. It's a beautiful old harbor—the first in Guangzhou—and again there's a little museum there, near water. I liked it a lot and had read a lot about it on Wikipedia and found the accounts of some Arab travelers who had written about this place. It was really a global place until the end of the 18th century. The arrivals in this harbor were of Iranian, Arabic people. You can see in the museum that there's a Persian cemetery there. There are many many stories, it's incredible, and when you read them it's unbelievable. People travelled there from the Arabian peninsula. There are even accounts of people describing the entrance into the harbor of Guangzhou until the 19th century. So you can see that it was a total global city—totally open with many people, Jewish people, Arabic people. This little harbor is very poetic in that sense. You could make a film.

We then went to another, still functioning village surrounding the river which runs towards the north of the Pearl River Delta Sea. There there were some women still making fishing nets by hand. It's still a kind of functioning fishing village and they have a very close relationship with farming too. Behind the village is farmland—banana plantations, etc—for me it was very surprising to see sea and fishing activities together with farming. And they have a nice old housing structure attached to

the river and then there are many boats, as in Holland, where you can live. It was very nice to see this functioning village, people were very active there. They also get support from the municipality and there's a community center and a festival there too. But we wanted to go to one of the islands we had heard about that were impossible to reach by car or highway. We met a fisher couple who were doing sea fishing, selling to bigger fishermen, and they had a boat and agreed to take us there. I don't think it will be there in five years because a big bridge is coming. But in June when I was there many people were sitting around. It is not fishing season. So my assistant will go back. I should mention that this is ongoing research. Next January I will have a whole survey. We are still waiting to go a little bit north of Pearl River Delta Sea. We are waiting for the fishing season, which starts from the end of September. But this was the start of our research, seeing the scale, meeting the women—women are more open compared to men, it is always like that in local cities and local towns. Men are shy, they have reservations or are scared. Women are much more open, it's the same everywhere. Just today in Turkey I was with some Kurdish women and they spoke continuously. Men are closed, they need time.

Looking at the seaweed that is being dried and the nets that are being made by hand, they are so elegant and they are part of the sea commons. All the social-spatial design that you see—from the street, to the woman's body, her hands, to the boat, to the liquid territories—everything is related. I think seaweed, and the nets, are the crossing patterns that reveal all the layers of what we are looking for, social, economic, female, gender, etc. It is important to look at things from the sea perspective. I searched and all the studies are from the urban perspective. No one sees Pearl River Delta as a social space, as a territorial space, as a space of activities. Everybody's focusing on housing structures, villages eaten by the urban—I didn't have this feeling with the villages I visited. The fishing villages are alive. They are not being eaten by the urban. I was surprised to find that they were surrounded by farming belts rather than being connected to big cities. I have to research more, but this is what I've found. We will transcribe the interviews with women that we've done and hopefully in Autumn we will fish with them. This speaks metaphorical very strongly. I really hope we will be able to do this.

WrC: If you need any assistants, let us know!

00:55:36 - 00:56:01 // "WrC opener" interlude, (25 sec)

00:56:01 - 00:57:01 // Interlude(1:00)

[MING] This is WIDOW RADIO CHING, currently in conversation with artist, activist and academic Pelin Tan in Turkey. She is discussing with us her concept of Pearl River Delta as "territorial sea." We're going to

have a short break and when we get back we'll hear more about net-weaving as common's generating, her notion gossip as methodology and also what she calls the transversal method or "transversality." Thanks for listening to WIDOW RADIO CHING.

00:57:01 - 01:00:20 // Kaitlin REES, "Language of Water" (3'19")

01:00:20 - 01:01:20 // CREDITS for sound and interlude repeat intro Pelin // (1:00)

[ELAINE] You've just heard a piece by Kaitlin Rees & Liam Welch with their piece "Language of Water", speaking in onomatopoeias of water, in English and Vietnamese, and thinking about water in its natural state, water manipulated by human, and water manipulated by language.

Kaitlin REES, poet and translator, born the year of the buffalo in Wampsville, New York, has written one tiny book of poetry, *Language Without Color* (2014), self-published along with other poems and translations from the Vietnamese by AJAR press, which she co-founded with Nhu Thuyun. Her translations of Nhu Thuyun's poetry have been published in a collection of three Vietnamese poets compiled by Vagabond Press (2013), as well as a full-length collection *words breathe, creatures of elsewhere* (Vagabond Press, 2016) and in various online places. An on-going poetic artwork of compiling fragments of an infinite dictionary was exhibited at Zalaegerszeg, Hungary, in 2015 and in the lilongs of Shanghai, China, in 2016.

Liam Welch seeks to recognize the narratives heard at the busy intersections of sound and symbol. He is a songwriter and composer currently living in Montreal, Canada.

01:01:20 - 01:17:09 // SYMPOSIUM: "Sea Gossip" from the Pearl River Delta with Pelin TAN // part 2 // 15:49 min

WrC: Can you tell us a little about the attitudes that you've encountered in some of these fishing villages? How does this differ in terms of female labor as you've witnessed it?

PT: I think males are managing the business and infrastructure there, and managing the money. This is of course the negative side that you see, a gender imbalance. But we don't know which is more of a burden. I don't want to approach with the typical gender perspective because you never know, when you go very deep you understand differently true patterns—which job is more hard work and who is doing the decision-making. In the villages it is mostly common decision-making.

Once we asked about the ecology of the water, the contamination of

the Pearl River Delta Sea and they said that industrialization somehow stopped, that the factories around the Pearl River Delta are diminishing and may stop. This would possibly enable a return to fishing. I will be interviewing anthropologists, archeologists and biologists to try to find out how this post-industrial contamination affects daily activities in the water. Some have said that in the past ten years the fishing economy is not so good. I have to research this more.

WrC: We were really taken with your description of your research method as "gossip" and actually our slogan here at WIDOW RADIO CHING is "Loose Lips, Sink Ships," so there seems to be a resonance. Your work strikes us as important because you are highlighting the sorts of voices that remain unheard. Particularly in the face of current nationalist discourse, for example the Chinese government making historical claims in territory in the South China Seas in order to build military bases, what do you see your role—as an activist, academic and artist—as within these spaces?

PT: In one perspective you can view this as a method of anthropology. Many anthropologists go into field interviews and so on...but there was a criticism of anthropology in the late 90s that was very much discussed in contemporary art, which was about participation and engaging—the role and the actor-network. It's impossible of course to choose one method. We are living in a condition of transformation, that is continuously becoming. Knowledge production today is the same. It is continuously becoming. We are constantly meeting people, gathering new information, collaborating, etc. We are going into a transversal mode, which comes to include not only living matter, but also non-life forms—like seaweed, or other non-human forms. This was neglected in the last 20th century, but has come to the forefront in the last few years in the New Materialist approach. Speculative Realism is no longer speculating about the future. Typically speculation is about the future, however within these methodologies it has become a kind of everyday activity that opens up the possibility for different kinds of knowledge production. Most of my colleagues, like MAP Office, are concerned with how we can understand human and non-human life together, not so much subject-oriented knowledge production. How can we understand them in relation, strong or loose, what kinds of structures are producing such knowledges, and how can we work with transversal methodologies?

When I'm doing the research, I'm going into villages and filming and you could call that anthropology, participant observation, you could call it that. But then you see the nets they are making and you touch them, you see the seaweed and you create speculative stories about them. It's not about writing a novel, I'm not interested in that. We are living in such condition that imagination has totally broken down. Especially in the last two years. I mean, what else can you do? You're losing a

social-futurist hope. This is the current situation. As a researcher you think, what can I do?

This affects the way you look at research—to live objects and non-live objects—and you have to reconsider how to make the world meaningful. Speculation has a role in this. You have no choice and want to go beyond the reality we are living right now, but actually you are not speculating because the reality we are living right now is really surreal. Writing a science-fiction is not so surreal in my opinion. Speculative Realism can help to charge up your words. I don't see myself so much as an artist, but its more because you don't have any choice anymore if you want to share or make sense with those you're sharing with. You choose a poetic way, which is not a cliché or romantic way, but rather a realistic way today.

WrC: There's actually a term for this recently coined by a Chinese writer named Ning Ken called the "Ultra Unreal." He says that the present is already so strange that we don't need science fiction anymore.

PT: Exactly. Or I can write science as a fiction.

WrC: You just mentioned the transversal and touching on your methodology and I remember you recently presented on this.

PT: The transversal is something I borrow from Felix Guattari. I'm a very big fan of Guattari, focusing on his writing more than his practice. He has a small description in one interview where he speaks of the transversal as neither a social pedagogy or making an institution, it's in between. He doesn't provide such an extensive definition, but he understands it as a sort of knowledge-making, as well as institution building, but doesn't create a sort of normative social dealing. It's more that you bring action and practice together. He practiced this himself as an activist, academic and psychologist. Following this I think that if you put desire, the institution, and everything together it can become a "non-becoming" institution that is never fully filled. It's a very French subjectivity theory that comes from the Post-Structuralist philosophers, but it's something very similar. The transversal method is really about urgent everyday life practices. It doesn't need to be an activist practice. You just have to leave your house in the morning and you see refugees having to leave their homes and travel to some island from Turkey. This is not an activist practice, this is everyday life. This is about theory too—about Agamben's Homo Sacer, Spinoza's affect theory in which we are part of society and can create an effect. It's not about theory versus practice, it's about a mythology that you can go and understand for yourself. My colleague Gerhard Ronig from Vienna has written about the transversal method too. There's also a new pedagogical structure, they call it New Pedagogy, I call it transversal method.

WrC: Thank you so much!

PT: Yes, keep in touch. Perhaps we will see each other in Europe or China.

WrC: If you need any fishing partners let us know.

PT: If we go away in a boat, we will never come back!

01:17:09 - 01:20:47 // curated sound programme—"Sugar Water" remix from Cibo Matto, taken from Super Relax EP // 3:38 min

01:20:47 - 01:22:17 // CONCLUSION of ACT I, sign off, introduce Aliyah Hussain (1:30 min)

[ELAINE] As a multi-disciplinary artist, Hussain has worked in performance art (with collective Volkov Commanders), visual art and music (as a member of Horrid) having performed in numerous countries and venues including and having shown work in New York, Venice and Barcelona.

Aliyah Hussain's debut release on Sacred Tapes label comes in the form of a four track EP entitled Sultana's Dream. Created using contact mics, keyboards, pedals and vocals, Sultana's Dream is based on the 1905 short story of the same name by author Rokheya Shekhawat Hossein in which women are the ruling gender and have created a world of peace whilst harbouring scientific advances to control the power of the sun and the rain.

01:22:17 - 01:29:55 // curated sound program
"Zenon" from limited edition cassette Sultana's Dream // 7:38 min

01:29:55 - 01:30:00 // JINGLE "WrC whisper" (5 sec)