

Mapping here, there and elsewhere.

About the perception of
locality, mobility and migration.

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CONTENT

1

Briefing

Page 7

2

Introduction

Page 9

3

Research

Page 11

4

Literature review

Page 15

5

Aims and Objectives

Page 17

6

About my work

Page 19

7

Conclusion

Page 29

8

Bibliography

Page 30

9

Table of Figures

Page 36

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1 Briefing

**I would like to leave and return,
to see once what it is like at home.
(Friederike von Koenigswald, 2004, p. 2)**

Introduction

My point of departure for my final project has been images and experiences of home. Through exploring and researching ideas of location, I realised that there is no contradiction between travelling and being at home, it is rather a dialectic experience. Hence I have become interested in what is in-between these locations and would like to focus and examine different aspects of travelling and migration.

Reasons for choosing this theme

The theme emerged from a very personal motivation: an experience of being bound to my roots and at the same time being a migrant – not just between locations, but also between cultures. Moreover the topic has a special connotation in that my parents both have jobs dealing with travel and mobility.

Research so far

My research is predominantly based in the field of cultural studies, human geography and philosophy. My visual research focuses on artists such as Rachel Whiteread, Anthony Gromley, Martin Parr and Krzysztof Wodiczko. (Road) movies seem to be particularly a good source, considering the fact that they deal with moving image themselves.

Aims and Objectives

Selecting various examples of migration I would like to realise different projects. Using a variety of media I will try to question the pleasure of travel and examine what migration means. My final project may involve media such as photography, typography, product design, film and/or an installation. The exploration could be summarized in a predominantly visual book.

2 Introduction

**It seems to me that I would always be better off
where I am not, and this question of moving
is one of those I discuss incessantly with my soul.
(Charles Baudelaire, Paris Spleen, 1947)**

Being in transit has always been an integral way of life. Explorations of the idea of “movement” and “travel” can be found in various traditional narratives, both literary and visual.¹ However, what used to be an imaginary longing for adventure has become a current reality of increased mobility and circulation of people.

Migration generally denotes any “movement from one place to another – between geographical locations or cultural experiences”. (Putman, 1994, p. 2) Throughout history migrants have been driven by various reasons and were on the move as nomads, refugees, migrant workers, commuters, pilgrims, travellers, globetrotters, tourists or homeless. Experiencing a global world, whether this is good or not, is a proceeding process in our society and has formed a hybrid cultural mix.

Observing the geopolitical map of Europe, we can observe a shift of borders towards south and east. Boundaries dissolve and are redrawn, countries disappear while others emerge. According to the German cultural and art initiative *Projekt Migration* the expansion of western hegemony creates a zone of global migration and transit. By mapping migrant policies, Europe becomes smaller and a “providence of global action”. (*Projekt Migration*, 2005, Outline)

However, migration does not necessarily imply traditional practices of travel. Running shoes, IKEA-furniture and drawer units on castors in big offices have become supporting tools of mobility. Literally speaking every desire can be a movement to elsewhere, every object a souvenir of somewhere. Even the usage of a Japanese toy or a visit at the local Pizzeria have become signifiers of a global world.

Likewise the term “global village” (McLuhan, 1962) refers to a modern world without geographical or time barriers. In his book *The Gutenberg galaxy* McLuhan argues that by using electronic media our world becomes transformed into a neighbourhood.

¹ *Don Quixote*, *Moby Dick*, *The Divine Comedy* or even the *Book of Genesis* or Moses' Exodus are a few examples of literary journeys. (Delbanco, 2004) A famous visual exploration of movement is Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912).

It has emerged that these phenomena indicate proceeding possibilities of mobility, both physical and psychological. Yet the question remains when “freedom from location becomes dislocation; the ability to escape an inability to belong”. (Blamey, 2002, p. 274)

Being a migrant myself, I coevally experienced a strong longing for the distance and having arrived there, a terrible homesickness. “I would like to leave and return, to see once what it is like at home²”, says Friederike von Koenigswald in her literary digressions. (Koenigswald, 2004, p. 2) In this spirit my final project happened to be a journey detecting various examples of deterritorialisation³.

The following dissertation has been written as a corroborative documentation and report of my practical work, providing further insights into my working practices. Based on the discourse in social and cultural studies my project happened to be a very personal exploration observing the processes of migration.

² Translation from German. („Ich würde gerne von hier weggehen und dann wieder kommen, um einmal sehen zu können, wie es hier ist.“) (Koenigswald, 2004, p. 2)

³ Referring to culture, the term deterritorialized often describes a weakening of ties between culture and place or the dislocation of cultural subjects and objects.

3 Research

My research contains both descriptive literature, predominantly cultural research, and visual formats exploring various parameter of migration. Especially I got interested in the photographic work of David Blamey, Mark Glassner, Mariele Neudecker and Martin Parr whose pictures retain and track contemporary signs of migration.



Figure 1: Martin Parr (2006) Photographing Britain.

While the British artists Rachel Whitehead and Anthony Gromley transformed the idea of home into sculptures made out of concrete, Krzysztof Wodiczko created a homeless vehicle as an articulation of the fact that people have to move around the urban space not having a home at all.



Figure 2: Krzysztof Wodiczko (1988) Homeless vehicle.

In the field of film it has been obvious to consider Road movies, notably the cinema of Wim Wenders, David Lynch and Jim Jarmusch.

Moreover there have been some interesting art and culture initiatives that have been engaged with the discourse about migration and mobility. To name a few: The *Projekt Migration* launched 2002 by the German endowment for culture and arts. Using a variety of (visual) media the project has tried to illustrate current tendencies of migration.

Similar topics were discussed within the German project *Transit Migration*, launched again in 2002 as a collaboration of artists, researchers and film makers that held symposia and workshops. A slightly different approach was presented at the exhibition *Gastarbajteri* at the Wien Museum Karlsplatz, held 2004 in Vienna. The retrospective presented four decades of migrant work in Austria using objects, film, photographic and written material. Feridun Zaimoglu's flag installation *KanakAttack. The third siege of the Turks* at the Museumsquartier in Vienna in 2005 had a rather critical approach. Using the Turkish flag as a strong symbol of nationalism he tried to satirise the fears of the mainstream of Austrian society and question the tolerance towards migrants.

All those projects were very influencing, though the main source remained literature, mainly philosophy and cultural studies.



Figure 3: Projekt Migration (2002-2006).



Figure 4: Feridum Zaimoglu (2005) Kanak Attack.

4 Literature review

Home is “were we start from” suggests Donald Winnicott (Blamey, 2002, p. 26). Whereas it is seen as a physical place until the late 19th century, we find a reorientation with the emerging modern spirit. (Morley, 2000, p. 32) Hence home is seen as an obsolescent and unprogressive world that does not cope with the new possibilities of mobility. Emmanuel Levinas describes being at home as the “heathenism [that] strikes roots” and forms the antagonism of the bad reactionist and the “good, nomadic, deterritorialised subject”. (Žižek, 2006)

But is it not the deterritorialisation that makes identity “vanish into thin air” and leaves us homeless? Heidegger refers in his *Letter on Humanism* on Marx’ thoughts about alienation, expressing “Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world”. (Heidegger, 1947, p. 232)

An example for the examination with the state of homelessness and alienation is the cinematic work of the German filmmaker Wim Wenders. In his Roadmovies, there is no need for the utopia of home and homeland:

The idea is that not at home, my heroes are nevertheless at home with themselves. In other words, not being at home means being more at home than anywhere else... Maybe the idea of being more oneself when one’s away is a very personal idea ... Identity means not having to have a home. (Wim Wenders, In: Cartes/Donald, p. 25)

Similarly the Hungarian philosopher and literary critic George Lukács describes his expression of “transcendental homelessness” as the urge to be at home everywhere. Hence a nomad does not “stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity”. (Braidotti, 1994, p. 22)

However, there is no necessary contradiction between travelling and being at home. It is rather a dialectic experience. Location is an act of consolidation, but at the same time an experience imposed on the unknown and exotic we are longing for. “Somewhere else better than here. Nowhere else better than here.” (Felix Torres Garcia, In: Blamey, 2002, p. 5)

The question is what finally makes us leave? According to Bruce Chatwin there have been two main impulses to wander: Economic and Neurotic. (Chatwin, 1996, p. 83) Migrants, nomads or refugees are forced to travel whereas independent travellers (Neurotics) are travelling by own choice,

since they have reached at home a point of satiation. Thus it may be a concrete choice of dislocation for those who leave on their free will, but for the other the „lost home can be an unforgettable tragedy“. (Morley, 2000, p. 44)

In one of his lectures about films and migration the Slovenian cultural critic Slavoj Žižek claims to question the pleasure of travel, giving a radical example: To describe a poor farmer who had to leave because of a local ethnical war or a devastating economical crisis with the same term as a member of the “symbolic class” (academic persons, journalists, artists) who travels between cultural capitals, is like an equation of dearth and a diet. Žižek is longing for a complex observation, a spectral analysis of the term, in order to maintain a critic discourse. (Žižek, 2004)

That is where I would like to join the debate examining different aspects of migration and providing an accumulation of (visual) examples.

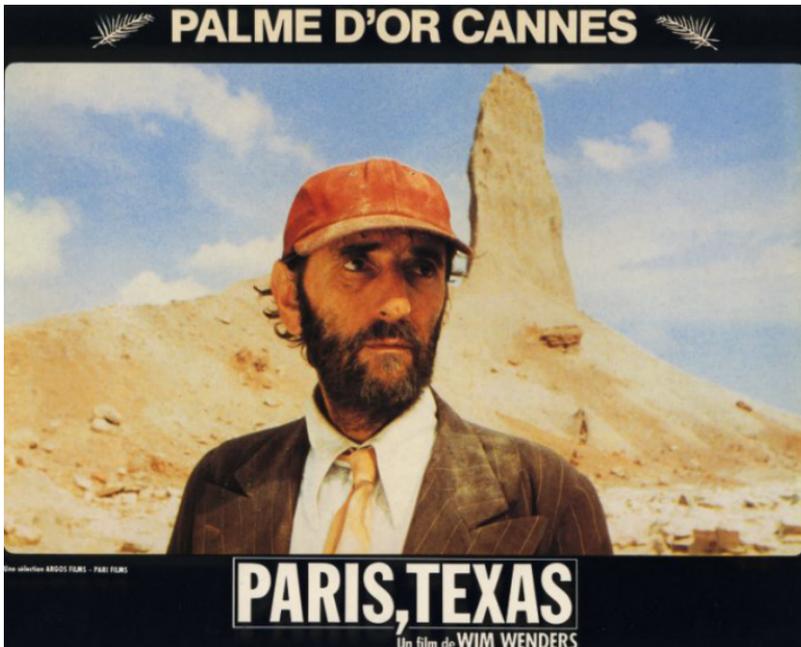


Figure 5: Wim Wenders (1984) Paris Texas.

5 Aims and Objectives

The Flight attendant brought two beers. It was a few minutes after one, too early to start drinking, but he was edgy, and what the hell. It was 5pm somewhere. (John Grisham, In: Blamey 2002, p. 5)

Using a variety of media I have tried to identify different phenomena of mobility. Thus a descriptive collection of (visual) material in the form of a book evolved. The book itself is a documentation of personal stories that trace both political and cultural implications of migration on our lives. Display formats include photographic and graphical material, essays, interviews, correspondences and other documents, whose unidentified protagonists undergo the desire and fear to leave, be displaced, travel and return home. In examining how migration both “defines and erodes identity” (Blamey, 2002, p. 274) my work questions the pleasure of migration and locality.

Methodology

A literature review and visual research was followed by a stage of “*dérive*”⁴ through my environment, second hand shops, my house, life and mind. Thus various little conceptual projects evolved that were later linked together in an anthology in form of a book. It was a rather long process of localizing texts, stories, objects and people to work with. All material was later incorporated in written, graphical, photographic and/or filmed projects.

⁴The expression “*derive*” [literally: “drifting”] is borrowed from the theories of the International Situationists and describes a technique of “rapid passage through varied ambiances”. (Debord, 1958) Being drawn by the attractions of the terrain it should raise a new awareness of the inhabited environment.



Figure 6: Nataša Sienčnik (2007) I wish I could.

6 About my work

My body of work consists of three main parts:

- (1) A book as a documentation of all projects and accumulation of material,
- (2) secondly, a small edition of the book to be used when travelling,
- (3) and additionally, a documentary film – an oral history project telling the stories of three former migrant workers back “at home”.

In the following paragraphs I would like to go into detail, explaining the objectives of every single project.

6.1 Book

The compendium-book is structured into three main chapters, beginning with the idea of migration without a physical movement, followed by a section of spatial dislocation and examples of mobility, finally leading to the last part of the book, describing the home coming. My visual projects are accompanied by essays and written contribution by Heinrich Heine, Alexander Micheuz, Meike Rottermann and Erich Staudegger.

The following paragraphs will describe the chapters of the book.



Figure 7: Nataša Sienčnik (2007) Postcard series.

⁵FM4 is an Austrian radio station especially targeting a young critical audience. Characteristic is its heterogeneous music off the mainstream charts and multilingual moderation. Additionally the station is streaming live online, providing a cross-border access and hosting a wide platform of communication in form of chats and discussion forums.

6.1.1 Longing for the distance: Migration without physical movement

Emergency suitcase

Children's escapism

As a child I always had a suitcase ready in case our house could burn down and I would have to flee. It was neither an imminent danger nor I had any similar experience. It was more an idea I had in my mind – to be prepared to leave immediately if necessary. For my first project I recovered this suitcase from our attic and documented it with my camera to revive my infantile notions about migration.

At home in the world

Visiting a miniature world

In my home town Klagenfurt there is a miniature world with attractions and famous building from all over the world that enables people to visit those places without physically being there. It literally brings the world to the visitors. With putting a little house made out of paper in this world I tried to invert this process again. Thus those places first moved to my home, while my response was to relocate my home within this miniature world. A series of photographs keep record of this symbolic journey.

I wish I could go to

Series of postcards

The series of postcards shows portraits of people who would like to travel to a foreign place but are hindered to do so. I asked them to make a note with their desired destination and the reason why they cannot undertake this journey and hold them in the camera. The reader of my book is encouraged to take those postcards out and with sending them to a destination fulfil the dreams of the protagonists of the project.

Saying Goodbye

Web forum of the Radio FM4⁵

With post modernism came along new practices of communication. From now on chats make it possible to join a conversation from different parts all over the world. The project is a screen shot of a conversation amongst young people in a web forum, called FM4, discussing, leaving their homes, being apart from their loved ones or being “left over” at home. It is a impulsive discussion of what migration means to them.

6.1.2 Being elsewhere: Spatial dislocation

Travelling southbound

Where life is on the streets

“Travelling southbound” is a photographic documentation of my journey along the Nile directly after the terrorist attacks in 2005 which badly affected Egyptian tourism. However, the ordinary people carried on with their lives as before. So a vivid urban life has been formed both by the permanent mobility and serenity of its inhabitants.

In the area migration has always been an integral part of life. Egypt has 5.105 km of railway tracks, 50.000 streets, 3.500 waterways but not one motorway. (Dieckmann, 2006) Thus people cannot move very fast but still transit very long distances. With my camera I tried to record this patience of the people, the flow on the streets and the intrusion of the western world.

London calling

Itinerary calculation

Since travelling is an expensive undertaking, not everyone can benefit from the new possibilities of mobility. Yet low-cost carriers changed the attitude and flying practices of the European population without caring too much about the environmental consequences. However, there is a direct Ryanair-connection from my home town to London Stansted. Summing up all my travel expenses I tried to illustrate my personal flying habits.

To be a foreigner

Passport for Foreigners

A passport usually implicates a proof of identity that shows our nationality. However, some people do not have a home country, are stateless or refugees. Moreover we tend to forget that every one of us is a foreigner in most countries of this world. With a photomontage I created a fake passport for myself as a foreigner. A foreigner of nearly every existing state.

Translating Culture

Vocabulary of Migration

According to Michael Cronin (2000) there is a need to define the “relationship between travel and language, focusing on the pivotal bond of language and culture as mediated through translation”. Every time a word is translated to another language, a part of its connotation gets lost or the meaning gets transformed and adapted. Using practices of socio-linguistics and

semiotics I tried to examine the vocabulary of migration. Which words are important to migrants? What cannot be translated? What are the names for the diseases of migration? And where does homesickness end and xenophobia start?

Letters out of exile

Correspondence of family Hocke 1954–65

Rummaging in some junk goods I got hold of letters of an Austrian family with the name Hocke. Some dozens of letters were written between 1954 and 1965, documenting the correspondence amongst family members spread over Europe. Their letters, written in Vienna, London, Hamburg and other major cities are a symbol for a tradition that seemed to die with the appearance of new technologies. I tried to implement their stories in my book as a documentation of migration and its impacts on their lives.

Geography of homesickness

Mapping the home

Un-mapping, remapping and counter-cartographies can be found within contemporary art practices referring to different perceptions of geography. (Rogoff, 2000) In my project about “mapping home” I tried to join this practice, drawing a map of my homesickness. The graphical outcome is a rather subjective and emotional interpretation of land and distance, but nevertheless a signifying representation of both location and identity.



Figure 8: Screenshot (2007) Google Earth.



Figure 9: Nataša Sienčnik (2007) Virgin Mary.

6.1.3 Coming home

My grandmother, a pilgrim

Souvenirs of a Roman Catholic lifetime

Souvenirs are what all children are longing for. My grandmother used to be very religious. Her name was Rosalia, named after a tale in her village of a girl that allegedly had a visitation of the Holy Mary. So it happened that my grandmother visited various places of pilgrimages: Lourdes in France, Brezje in Slovenia, Altötting in Germany, Medjugorje in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a lot more. And from every journey she brought me a souvenir – a little statue of the Virgin Mary. These little souvenirs will always remind me of her travels.

Home sweet home

Migrant workers back home: Interview with Malika Knez (13.08.2007)

Four decades ago the economic boom in Austria and Germany raised the demand of workers that was satisfied by inviting so called 'Gastarbeiter'⁶ from economic weaker countries. A lot of people from Turkey and former Yugoslavia followed this trend and stayed in Germany and Austria for some years, decades or forever. Using film material I recorded some interviews with former migrant workers who had returned home to retire in Slovenia and spoke about their experiences as migrants.

O, du mein Österreich

Space for peoples

During the summer I revisited Vienna, where I lived the last years. Being away for a long time changes the perception and approach to some things. Suddenly I realised how multicultural and friendly the city is. With my camera I tried to trace those spaces and signs of different people living together, forming a melting pot of cultures.

⁶German expression for 'guest worker' or 'migrant worker'.

6.2 Documentary film

The word is linked to strong feelings, mostly remembrances and longing. Heimat (Home) always evokes the feeling of something lost or very far away, something which one cannot easily find or find again...It seems to me that one has a more precise idea of 'Heimat' the further one is away from it. (Carter, 1993, p.7)

Gastarbajteri doma

Migrant workers back home

The documentary film *Home sweet home* is a poetic portrait of three former migrant workers that left Yugoslavia in the seventies to try their luck in Germany. The economic boom of postwar Europe produced an increased demand of labour. Hence so called 'Gastarbeiter' (guest workers), mostly from Yugoslavia and Turkey, were invited to work in the car industry and custodial services. Whereas Germany became a new home for some of them, our protagonists of the film decided to return to their home country. However, being back home they had to realise that a lot of things changed: not only people have changed, but also the political system and a new state was born. In insightful interviews Malika, Jože and Marija speak about their experiences of leaving home, living in a foreign country and coming home. The film was produced during the documentary film workshop "Active participation through the eyes of young people" 2007 in Krško (Slovenia) in cooperation with Stefan Kreuzer and Nino Leitner and was shown during the Luksuz film festival 2007.



Figures 10/11/12: Nataša Sienčnik (2007) *Gastarbajteri doma*.

7 Conclusion

My project about migration took me on a long journey. By highlighting cultural practices of migrants I tried to examine what impact migration and mobility have on our lives and found a bunch of answers – and questions. Mobility has become part of our Zeitgeist, that opens new possibilities but at the same time provokes problems and disorientation.

However, a single example of migration might seem unimportant, but as a movement it provokes a distinct modification of our society. Thus it has formed our way of life and became part of our experience, including a cosmopolitan gaze towards our changing world.

Being completely engrossed in the topic I realised that there is still so much more to explore. The project revealed my interest in analysing and describing transcendental phenomena including public and urban space, cultural changes as well as artistic and cultural economics. Using a variety of media the project aims to encourage the transfer of knowledge between artists, cultural critics and other people and reveal an interest for the topic.

Since I have the feeling that this matter is still under represented within the cultural and artistic discourse I will hopefully have the opportunity to take my work further and implement my experience in future projects.

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Bargehouse Gallery, 2-10 November 2007.

Figure 10/11/12: Sienčnik, N. (2007)
Gastarbajteri doma [screen shot].
in *Gastarbajteri doma* (2007) [film]
Slovenia: Luksuz film productions.

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**It seems to me that I would always be better off
where I am not, and this question of moving
is one of those I discuss incessantly with my soul.**

(Charles Baudelaire *Paris Spleen*)