

In Growing up Amid the Historical Mysteries of Proximity: Pros & Cons of Being Neighbours

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To speak of 'meaning' and of 'truth' in the middle of military agitation, geopolitical calculations, suffering, the grimaces of stupidity or else of lies is not 'idealistic': it is to get to the very nub of the thing. – Jean-Luc Nancy ²

The exhibition project and live events focus on the contradictory aspects of the notion of being neighbours, in relation to varying forms of deterritorialisations, reterritorialisations and the selective enforcement of borders, identificatory models offered by overlapping, competing and contested historical narratives, as well as political, social and cultural interaction between territory and desires in a time of globalisation, flexibilisation, precarity, mobility, migration, and occupation and how they combine to produce conditions of inclusion and mechanisms of exclusion.

The existing, seemingly insurmountable incompatibilities in the formulation of borders, whether in the past or in the present time, find their 'justification' in the forming principles of the idea of territory and its borders growing out of the collective space, temporal fantasies and memory, manipulation of interests by political elites and economic formations confronted and delimited by their neighbouring formations. This leads us to relate these complex issues to a formal inquiry into the ways in which (self-)images of nation, race, gender, subjects are produced and naturalized, and the role of a hunger for belonging and for a smoothed and purified historical memory in this process, interacting on the one hand with space-time characteristics, and on the other with the discursive formation of knowledge-power relations – what Michel Foucault calls *dispositive*. Space is structured by giving it a meaning, by naming it and identifying it, through language and narrative and such rhetorical devices as metaphors, as well as verbal and visual constructions of a 'homeland.'

Belonging and memory find their realization in the interweaving of landscape and identity expressed in a relation between 'nature' and 'home' in which the identity of a select group of people is seen as "rooted" in the soil. This then serves as a justification for naturalizing statements like that of the 'organic connection' between the identity of a region and the identity of its 'original' inhabitants and their home, village, town, country, land and everyday practices as well as their physical characteristics and traits of character.

¹ Apartment Project Participants (Reciprocal Visit / Re-Locate project groups)

Reciprocal Visit

Artists: Endam Acar, Selda Asal, Volkan Aslan, Fatma Çiftçi, Zeren Gökten, Deniz Gül, Gözde İlkin, Ceren Oykut, Gökçe Süvari; coordinator: Serra Özhan Yüksel

Re-Locate

Artists: Mehmet Dere, Ha za vu zu, Suat Ögüt, Zeyno Pekünlü, Ilgın Seymen Gökçe Süvari; backstage: Selda Asal

² Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Confronted Community (For Maurice Blanchot)," in *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2003, p. 24.

In these models of identification the question is not what multi-layered histories of the space are telling in themselves. “We” belong to that territory and it belongs to “us,” determined and dominated as it is by “our” history and practices, and not by the histories and practices of the other. The selectiveness of narrative structure eliminates contested stories with the entire rhetoric and pathos inherent to such gestures with their claim to authenticity. From these interactions visions crystallize, and imagined communities are formulated: we/they, inside/outside, here/there, and our land/their land. How does this process reflect on the inhabitants of border regions under social and cultural conditions of ‘conflictual consensus’ who in their everyday practices encounter the other and frequently live beside each other, even sharing the same meadow? Then history gets shaped, playing on imagined and actual wrongs suffered by people identifying with each side, smoothing the narrative along different lines to divide and conquer. These narratives channel and transform subjective stories that are then transmitted from generation to generation. How can these histories be juxtaposed to wrinkle the smoothness of each? Where is the belonging that will match the hunger while overcoming the divisions, even as the respective governments continue to insist on their conflicting histories?

The ontology of the border lies in the relation between the environment and the ideology of the landscape. The demarcation lines sketch not only geographical territories and their division, determination and perpetuation, but they constitute the folds between competing images and forms. This is why borders between two regions mark not only the space as physical nature by fixing geographical locations and their socio-political differences, but they constitute a clash of conflicting representations with all their manipulation of desires, hidden in the production and marketing of these images and the apparatus behind them. Cartography is a discursive practice of vision, a textuality of borders, a modulation of thoughts. The performativity of linguistic structures perpetuates borders in a continuous repetition and reproduction, making them subservient to the interests of an economy that is based on the control of the traffic of imported and exported goods, and of the mobility of people as labour and capital through conventions, visa regimes, the police gaze, custom duties, taxes. Visa regimes have not prevented, nor are they intended to prevent, migration on a scale never seen before. But they modulate the flows, the rights and the exploitability of migrants. There is no refuge but only temporary and transitory residence where those who do not fit the norms, the displaced, dislocated, rootlessness, stateless, travellers, ‘strangers,’ illegal/legal migrants, refugees are made to feel out of place.

The borders of a territory would seem to be socially constructed mindscapes and as such immaterial, but they are also the material embodiments of the economic and military elaboration of disciplining and control procedures, of a security regime. The enforcement of ‘b/order’ categories³ is a political act, and ideologically commands notions of value and truth, even as its immaterial forces translate at times into hard barriers and walls of rock and concrete. But as Anssi Paasi puts it nicely, the existence of borders implies the possibility of crossing them – even if sometimes at the price of taking a substantial risk. Under what conditions can contemporary art practices in their globalised hybridity contribute to creating new possibilities for transgression, overcoming the demarcation of image regimes constitutive of borders and subverting the naturalisations at play?

³ Cf. Henk van Houtum, Olivier Kramsch and Wolfgang Zierhofer (eds.), *B/ordering Space*, Ashgate, Hants/Burlington, 2005, <<http://ncbr.ruhosting.nl/henkvanhoutum/borderingspace.pdf>> (accessed 2012-05-24).