

The double subversion here entails, as mentioned earlier, the subversion of both Western metaphysics and what he calls the Arab-Islamic theological-nationalist project. As Winnifred Woodhull also notes, Khatibi's idea of decolonisation (captured also by his notion of *bi-langue*) is a space open to margins (linguistic, ethnic, gendered, sexual, etc), where binaries co-exist as intractable difference without reaching unity or consensus. I concur with and applaud the spirit in which Khatibi advocates for an ontological plurality and especially for an internal critique of colonised societies that makes visible various erasures, hierarchies and forms of marginality. However, the trouble lies both with his too easy equivalence between colonial violence and internal hierarchies, and with the fact that his approach is, as remarked by several commentators, 'resolutely textualist' (see, for ex-

ample, Mary Ellen Wolf's 1994 essay 'Rethinking the Radical West'). In that sense, I am in complete agreement with Winnifred Woodhull's assessment that Khatibi 'has appropriated deconstruction for third-world peoples, and for reflection on third-world cultural politics.' Ultimately, in Khatibi's oeuvre, politics and decolonisation boil down to what Lionnet calls a 'question of language'. Reading Khatibi in our contemporary of climate change, the rise of far-right, rampant neoliberal capitalism, and migracide (to name but a few issues) – when, perhaps more than ever, we need creative ways of mobilisation, intervention and action – a call for a 'return to philology' as substitute for politics seems rather out of touch with the times.

Alina Sajed

Border crossings

Brigitta Kuster, *Grenze filmen. Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse audiovisueller Produktionen an der Grenze Europas* (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018). 344pp., € 29,99, 978 3 83763 981 0

'We did not cross the border, the border crossed us'. So say the migrant activists at the Mexican-US-American border. The categorisation of migration and the individual migrant does not exist apart from the formation of nations and peoples. Within the country of arrival, such categorisation of transborder movement remains a lasting description for those who do not belong and are marked as 'foreign'. Practices of migration are encoded through the patterns of perception of the (national) border. Yet, the border is not solely a matter of the state; through transnational migration the border is also constantly challenged, shifted and re-composed.

In her book *Grenze filmen [Filming Borders]* – unfortunately only published so far in German – Brigitta Kuster shows to what extent a political philosophy of migration may be interlaced with a study of film and cinema, in order to break free from state patterns of migration. Inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, by Michel de Certeau, Donna Haraway and Jacques Derrida, *Grenze filmen* is an exuberant book that analyses a range of perspectives on migration to be found in film classics and documentaries, and is interwoven with a vast number of references to digital audio-visual material from tele-

vision, the internet, DVDs, art exhibitions and mobile phone videos.

In the book's analyses of films, an affective practice and tactical narration of migration is explored, culminating with mobile phone video captured by young migrants on the open sea in their attempt to cross the wind-swept Mediterranean together with others. In this way, *Grenze filmen* reformulates theories of migration, along with theories of documentary filmmaking, and points to a paradigm change in our understanding of where the autonomy of migration overlaps with the audio-visual practices of its protagonists. The book is also written with a sound knowledge of various feminist and postcolonial theories of representational critique, as well as cultural studies' analyses of everyday practices.

Understanding the border as both an epistemic and a practical paradox, in de Certeau's terms, it emerges not only as a line of separation, but also, and simultaneously, as one of contact. Without contact on the border there can be no difference, and thus no migration. The pull of the border is always ambivalent. Migrants are not simply excluded foreigners, they are also actors in that they accept a certain subjectivation by the drawing of the border.

Crossing the border thereby becomes a performative and subsequently a creative act, a productivity of migration that is often not perceived by the dominant gaze of the 'West'.

The passport with its photograph belongs within a genealogy of *passing*, of letting someone pass, of a permission to pass, and of passing through: like a slave in possession of a permission slip by their owner to travel without them; or like the capacity to pass as white, in so far as white skin in itself represents a 'pass' in the sense of the racialised identification of an autonomous individual. Yet, passing is also a practice of challenging dominant forms of perception and of passing over conventions or social differentiation. Passing can become a tactic of passing for a passenger, of becoming common, evading forms of decision at the border and being waved on through. Kuster repeatedly shows that even if the passport photograph comes before migration, it is through migration that these images circulate. It is not the dominant perception that creates the images of migration, it cannot even depict migration.

This becomes particularly evident in the practice of *passing down for research*, a practice of making yourself common from a position of superiority, in order to get in close contact with those to be portrayed and researched, and to seek to put yourself in their shoes. Such practices can frequently be seen at work in 'western' knowledge production or investigative journalism, for instance in Just-In-Time image production of migrants. In her criticism of such practices of authentication, Kuster makes it clear how questions of complicity thereby pervade the movements of migration.

Taking the example of the film *I See the Stars at Noon* (2004) by Saeed Taji Farouky, Kuster asks the question of how filmmaking can work when it not simply *about* but operates *with* the practice of migration. The filmmaker follows Abdelfattah who tries to reach Europe from Morocco over the Mediterranean Sea. The project is thus not only dependent on Abdelfattah's movement, but also on the time it takes him to migrate, as it aims to follow him and document his entire journey. This is the usual narrative of a documentary film. Yet, Kuster argues, this one is different. Abdelfattah refuses to represent himself as a protagonist in the film, to speak for himself – insisting that it is not only important for the film that Saeed understands him – while all the time Saeed is trying to

remain neutral behind the camera and not to involve himself as a person. The film does not only show this, but also Abdelfattah's demand that Saeed give him the remainder of the money needed for the journey. After all, the film narrative depends on Abdelfattah's illegal crossing to Europe. Both try to deal with the project of their counterpart on a tactical level. Again and again, the film reevaluates how far the complicity between film and migration goes, and, consequently, the separate roles of the author and the protagonist begin to dissolve. The path of this production is never straightforward and constantly changes, there are multiple forward time-lines and flash-backs. Then at one point, Saeed decides not to hold on to 'the story' at all costs, not to go all the way, but, rather, to stay the classic author of a film who owns all the exploitation rights. With this twist, he loses Abdelfattah as a person and a friend, according to Kuster, but wins him back as a character in his film. At the same time, however, Saeed loses the possibility for himself and for the film to connect complicitly with the narrative structure of border-crossing. He cannot evade Abdelfattah's implicit accusation that he is undertaking an abusive and exploitative use of aesthetics.

Saeed reflects upon all these power dynamics that are inscribed in the film project upon its completion. Maybe that is why *I See the Stars at Noon* is a film that so clearly articulates the relationships of migration and of clandestine border-crossing. Abdelfattah refuses to talk about his experiences of migration, and to represent them. And thus it becomes clear that migration is a dynamic social relationship, one that includes filmmaking and the filmmaker. The project of the film and of crossing the border constitute each other. Nobody migrates alone.

Kuster finds a model example of a tactical narration of border-crossing, which engages the social aspect of migration, and the social bonds that it creates, in Elia Kazan's 1963 film *America, America*. In Kazan's film, the bond of complicity between the two protagonists Stavros and Hohannes is shown as a mutual responsibility concerning the relations of exploitation and violence from which they flee. Here, social bonds are interwoven and interlocked *with* forms of complicity. It is not about merging, about becoming as one, but rather about something shared in its extreme precarity, about contact and temptation on the never linear path along and across the border. Almost at the end of their passage to the

United States, Stavros jumps into the midst of a waltzing, first-class society on the ship's deck and wildly begins a whirling dance, an ecstatic maelstrom of movement, more or less on the spot. Among other things, the film cuts between this letting-go and the first meeting of Stavros and Hohannes and his smile when he sees his friend dance in such a way. Then Hohannes jumps over board, leaving his shoes behind. The complicity is completed when Stavros enters the USA taking on his friend's pho-netic name Joe Arness.

Referring to Paul Valéry and his differentiation between dance and gait, Kuster claims that dance is the opposite of moving forward here, and represents the decisive movement of border-crossing in *America, America*: not as a geographic line, but as part of a complicit, non-identitarian subjectivation, as well as one that takes place in time. In the film's parallel montage, everything becomes simultaneously present, the present condenses, and intensifies together with the past, and thus transgresses a progressive linear time. In the whirling dance the potential of the illegal crossing of the border arises, a power that grows from the screams that connects to the

transatlantic space of *race* and of *blackness*, according to Kuster.

Not to affirm commonality with the first-class, to decide not to pass as a privileged subject, is part of the defining narrative of Kazan's film and of the intense movement of migration that surpasses and changes the order of space and time. Nobody migrates illegally as an autonomous legal entity. Migration breaks apart such humanist narrowness. Instead, it runs towards a boundary where everything spins and time itself gets out of joint – and you see the stars at noon. In clandestine migration, the material and embodied mode of existence is no longer isolated, but becomes one that is always more or less than one. It is precisely this 'becoming' of migration that produces mobility through affection, says Kuster, but a mobility that never has a definitive point of arrival, since the migrant never knows when, where or as who they will arrive.

What happens when the passengers get stuck in transit? What happens when that time of dancing intensifies into a standstill, and those who move do not arrive because they cannot or do not want to stay?



Sir, Alfred Mehran (Mehran Karimi Nasseri) lived in Terminal 1 of the Parisian airport Charles de Gaulle for eighteen years, from 1988 until 2006. Countless films and television programs were made about and with him. Kuster follows these image sequences and dialogues and shows how they all failed in their attempt to portray the becoming of Sir, Alfred Mehran. This becoming cannot be unfurled in a documentary manner. When he is filmed it can only be said that he performs 'well' in his role. Every film invents him as a movement-image, whose storyline entails continuing his journey, traveling on and leaving the airport. But he would rather not. Time and again, he smiles into the camera and conspires with the viewers. Despite every reflection provided by the films, the only thing they are left with in the end is to pull back up the fourth cinematographic wall and to leave Sir, Alfred Mehran as a character in a film, as a non-passing passenger in the airport.

The non-passing passenger is someone who trains themselves in becoming imperceptible, to become like every other passenger traveling in the space: like the journeying everybody. In order to see this becoming you have to develop a perception that is located in the in-between things, says Kuster. To this day, becoming imperceptible means to undermine the dominant colonial gaze. The cinema of migration renounces the colonial time and emphasises the simultaneity and the interconnectedness of Europe and Africa.

The Arabian market stands as a paradigm for the fear of losing control, as well as the temptation of the paranoid colonial viewpoint. It is only the cinema of migration that can reflect upon such places like the market, where the eurocentric world is turned upside down, such zones of commingling and simultaneity, in a manner that is independent and deficient. That is also why the cinema of migration shows the sea as a space that is not made until it is traversed, from the middle and out of its midst, and shows the practice of being-on-the-sea and its *entangled histories* – such as the history shared by Algeria and France. Up until its independence in 1962, Algeria made up eighty percent of the French territory, and as it was a part of France it was not only a member of the European Coal and Steel Community, but from 1957 on-

ward also of the European Economic Community (EEC). In the course of the process of visa requirements and the Schengen Agreement, the late 1980s saw a new partitioning of the space between the Maghreb and Europe. And in this time the *harraga* came into being, those who burnt their passports before traveling to Europe in order not to be identified, and sent back to the countries of their passports.

Harraga, which is how the majority of the migrants define themselves, have posted countless mobile phone videos and video assemblages that articulate their very own history of migration. These are filmed out on the open sea, are only a few minutes long, on a windy dinghy set on a journey of less than twenty hours – if all goes well. The boat becomes a stage, one solo follows the next, many young women can be seen, *harraga*-songs are sung together and toasts raised. In this in-between space, in the midst of the sea, these mobile phone videos show celebration and improvisation. The vanishing lines of migration turn the practice of border-crossing into affective points of contact.

Indeed these flight lines of migration materialise border-crossing as an affective touch. In the middle of the sea, a cinematic dynamic comes into being that shows an affection in and as migration, something day-to-day, mundane and world-changing that is articulated over or under the dominant thresholds of perception by those who are ready to lose everything, those who left their identities behind to become everybody, passengers who pass on through. At the same time, using the newest mobile phone technology makes locating them possible in the constant whirling of the passage – both by the police as well as by a rescue boat.

Migration today is often dealt with as if it were a scandal, and even left-wing positions rarely go further than taking a reactive stance against this. *Grenze filmen* introduces a difference into this deadlock: out of a mix of philosophical perspectives and film and cultural studies approaches, Kuster draws up a precarious map of how migration over the Mediterranean Sea both destitutes and simultaneously re-constitutes Europe's borders.

Isabell Lorey

Translated by Christopher Hüttnersberger