

Luisa Passerini

CONVERSATIONS ON VISUAL MEMORY



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The image on the cover, drawn by Tarik El Amiri in Turin in April 2013, represents his journey from Morocco to Spain and Italy.

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Prologue

This book is an experiment: the result of a hybrid way of writing that combines some results of my research project in the field of cultural history with reminiscences of my life and of the friends and artists with whom I engaged in intellectual and emotional exchanges linked with that research project. The project mentioned in the Acknowledgements, “Bodies Across Borders: Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond” (BABE), was born of my need to expand the scope of my research on memory from the collection and study of oral testimonies to the investigation of visual memory. BABE’s methodological innovation consists mainly in this expansion within the context of an intersubjective approach focusing on memories of moving toward and through Europe and on the cultural implications of this process.

Some of the friends who inspired the first part of this book are no longer with us; they were evoked by my research practice and the questions posed by the process of interviews. In these cases, there are no tape recordings and not even anything similar to a diary, just my own memories of them, which were and remain very vivid. Sometimes they were revived by the process of writing, while my inner ear kept replaying extracts of our conversations. As for other friends mentioned in this book, fortunately they are still valued interlocutors in my continuing research and reflections on visuality.

The second part of this book is based on exchanges of various kinds with visual artists, which have not only deepened my understanding of the artistic process and results but have also greatly enriched my life

and ideas. This experience confirmed for me what an integral part of our daily struggles and pleasures art is. At the same time, it illuminated the entire research project and its results.

In the last three decades, the visual arts in their various forms (including films, photographs, and videos) have powerfully documented the global population diaspora, which challenges borders around the world—particularly those surrounding and crossing “Fortress Europe”. This book is an exploration in two fields of knowledge that were developing along different, sometimes converging and sometimes diverging lines: art concerning migration, on the one hand, and the documentation (oral, visual, and written) collected from people involved in the process of mobility toward and through Europe, on the other. One of my intents is to highlight similarities and divergences between the two research practices—the artistic and the cultural-historical—and to show how the relationship between the two can be one of resonance in the sense that they shed light on each other.

I feel I ought to say more on how the expansion of my focus from oral to visual memory came about. For more than forty years, starting in the 1970s, I interviewed people of all ages from all walks of life: factory workers, students, protagonists of the 1968 protest movements, feminist activists, and female and male migrants. I recorded their testimonies on tape and then transcribed them. I was intrigued by the relationship between the oral and the written and how they interplay within memory. In those years, I was already developing a parallel interest in all things visual, stemming from the appeal of the visual arts, and, more banally, from my constant use of computers. In the 1990s, I worked on the myth of Europa, the Phoenician princess who gave her name to Europe, a research context dominated for centuries—indeed millennia—by the images produced by artists, from the greatest to the less well known. I was struck by how “the visual” had transformed the myth over time, updating it with present-day images.

When I started researching migrations in the early 2000s, visual communication imposed itself slowly on my research, and I kept using oral interviews and transcriptions. As I was increasingly touched by the

impact of the visual arts, the pressure of events at the borders of Europe, internal and external, grew ever more dramatic. I was deeply moved by the urgency with which videos, photographs, and films by artists all over Europe represented the destiny of the people trying to cross the Strait of Gibraltar or enter the European Union from the East. I realized that they were much more vocal in denouncing the idea of “Fortress Europe” than were politics or the social sciences.

In the early 2010s, I started thinking of the collective research project on the memory of migration in Europe that has been the basis for this book. Fieldwork surveys provided a decisive impetus. At times, the interviewees found it easier to sketch their migration itinerary on a sheet of paper than to talk about it. From this came the idea of collecting personal maps of actual travels as records of visual memory. I thought that it would be a good idea to contrast these images with those created by visual artists working on the theme of migration to Europe. A research project on visual memory emerged, which received European funding for the years 2013–2018.¹

In the spring of 2013, our team started collecting “maps” of migration to Europe. This meant asking women and men who had migrated to Europe in the past twenty years to draw the itinerary of their trips. To do this, we provided them with paper and crayons, and sometimes cameras or mobile phones. The visual testimonies were almost always accompanied by oral interviews, either individual or collective. The interviewees, contacted at adult education and language schools for migrants in Italy and the Netherlands, or through volunteer organizations, came from all over the world, especially from Africa and South America (see the Appendix to this book). They were aged between 16 and 60 and came from many diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. The assumption was that what they presented to us in response to our request were the images of their mental maps, a notion I had derived from my readings in geography and psychology. At the same time, I kept looking for art works concerning human mobility, and this developed into an autonomous line of research in which we also used artists’ works to elicit responses from the interviewees.

What I read about mental maps did not satisfy me, as they were often considered as internal representations of external environments, emphasizing the gap between the “inside” and “outside.” The map was treated like an object, albeit an intangible one, like a pre-existing network or structure, a fixed worldview that the researcher simply had to elicit. At the same time, it was elevated to the status of counter-geography or counter-cartography to serve as a critique of Eurocentrism (in which I too had been involved for many years). Thus, all the maps collected from migrants were grouped together as if revealing “another” vision of the world and its history. Even more worrisome was the fact that I tended to reproduce these stereotypes in looking at the maps we collected. I found myself overwhelmed by their richness and yet unable to render it. Politically aware colleagues warned me that to try and interpret those drawings was a Eurocentric way of reproducing colonial and postcolonial prejudices, and I ended up thinking that perhaps the best option was simply to archive them and disseminate information on them through various media. The contradictions became sharper. While the testimonies and images expressed a high degree of subjectivity and agency, my approach seemed incapable of doing them justice.

The collecting process went on for one more year, and when in spring 2014 I arrived in New York to teach my course on memory at Columbia University, I had more questions than certainties about what I was still calling “mental maps,” while growing more and more doubtful about the appropriateness of the term and uneasy about the collecting effort.

Living and teaching for some months in New York City was liberating, as I always found it to be. That stay allowed me to take some distance from my doubts and hesitations. I had been so immersed in fieldwork, interviewing, and studying the oral and visual narrations that I did not dare to add my own voice to the chorus that I was contributing to put together. I was very uncertain as to whether I had the right to do this; a subconscious sense of guilt for being European, which meant being somewhat on the side of the former colonizers (and present exploiters), and a sense of privilege in comparison with many people

I had met during my fieldwork, also played a role. I realized that I had met the most fortunate, so to speak: those who had succeeded in surviving and sometimes creating a happy ending for their stories. But I was aware of the innumerable people who had perished in the effort to get to Europe or, having arrived, were subjected to suffering and humiliation associated with the condition of “migrant” or “refugee.” I write these words between quotation marks, because I learned to be diffident about the possible negative implications of such terms, as expressed by the interviewees themselves.

While I was still in Italy, returning home after the interviewing process, I often felt elated by the encounters, but sometimes speechless. I was deeply impressed by one episode: a young woman in a class handed back the blank sheet of paper we had given her; she had signed it with her name, written clearly in the bottom right corner, but she did not want to draw her itinerary or anything else, and she did not want to comment. Silence seemed the right choice for me too. In addition, on the basis of my long experience in oral history, I did not want to speak for others and I no longer had the illusion of “giving voice” to the narrators who had shared their stories with me. Nor did I believe that the visual memories of the interviewees could be simply compared with the artists’ productions. In the midst of this mental turmoil, New York provided constant stimuli in the field of visual arts, with exhibitions, installations, and panels and debates of all sorts.

In that situation so full of contrasts on the personal and general level, my attitude changed. It was in good part thanks to conversations with friends, colleagues, and students in New York that I slowly started to understand that all the various types of conversations, including interviews and discussions in classes and seminars, could contribute to forming a new story that I could narrate myself. In many ways, the City itself provided the right context to give me the courage to be myself among others, while also being another, and to join my voice to an ensemble of voices that would reflect my experiences in the course of the research.

Notes

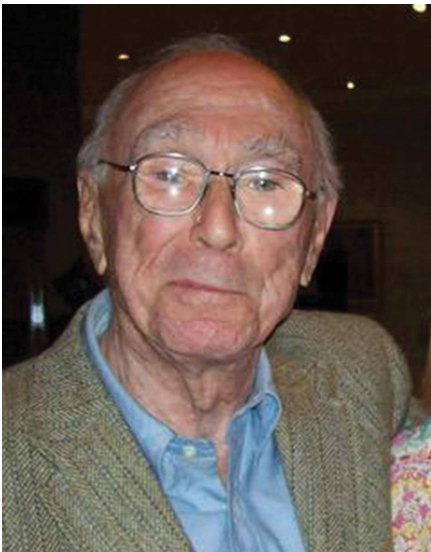
- ¹ The research project had a wider scope than this book, extending to such topics as the cultural archive; it also involved research in the field of teaching in secondary schools. See Luisa Passerini, Gabriele Proglione, Milica Trakilovic, eds., *The Mobility of Memory* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2019); and Graziella Bonansea, ed., *Quaderni della memoria e dell'oblio, Memorie migranti. Visualità, sentimenti e generazioni in una prospettiva transnazionale* (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2018). See also the contributions by Liliana Ellena, Iris van Huis, Gabriele Proglione, Milica Trakilovic and Luisa Passerini in *Dissonant Heritages and Memories in Contemporary Europe*, edited by Tuuli Lähdesmäki, Luisa Passerini, Sigrid Kaasik-Krogerus, and Iris van Huis (London: Palgrave, forthcoming in 2019).

PART ONE
DISTANT VOICES, PRESENT LIVES

Chapter 1

Acts of Mapping

In New York City, I went with my husband, Corrado Agnes, to visit our friend Jerry Bruner at his apartment on Mercer Street, as we had done many times since the early 1990s. It was a fine April day in 2014. Jerry, then aged 99, appeared slightly thinner than before but in good shape. He seemed to be less mobile than usual and blamed his difficulty in walking on the flaring up of an old injury suffered in his youth while participating in the 400-meter hurdles—a self-image that was in stark contrast to his occasional remarks about his shy and geeky teenage years.¹



For us, Jerry was first and foremost a dear friend, but he was also a wise and witty man, twenty-five years our senior and yet our contemporary. We never saw him as the great specialist he was, the founder of cognitive psychology, but as much more and much else. Jerry was often ironical in his attitude toward what he called the “famous” cognitive revolutions, and, in any

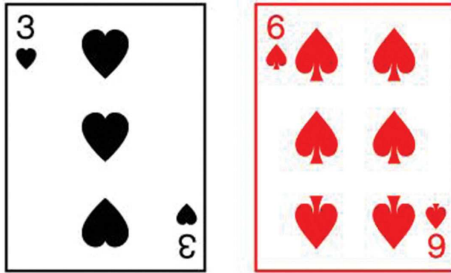
1.1 Jerry Bruner (1915–2016). Photograph taken by Corrado Agnes in April 2014.

case, he had gone well beyond them. Indeed, he was much too subtle and individualized to be confined to a specific field. For me, he was an ideal interlocutor for my digressions, harsh in pointing out what was not logically consequential and acute in understanding and responding; his intellectual depth and the rapidity of his thought providing a touchstone for testing ideas. To Corrado, who stood in awe of a man whom he considered very “special,” Bruner’s work was fundamental for his own teaching of physics and his studies on the history of science. Jerry’s books could be read in an almost literary way, as he wrote so beautifully, and the analytical and philosophical sections of his writing were just as riveting as his narratives. The importance of all of this for me, and for Corrado, was not only based on our appreciation of the scientific value of Jerry’s work. It also stemmed from the way in which everything he wrote was rooted in his personal history, and it was the interlacing of the personal with the intellectual and the scientific that moved us the most.

While lunching on Thai food, which we had brought at Jerry’s request, Corrado and Jerry began discussing the transmission of knowledge in physics education and went on to debate what it would mean to effectively teach any subject in an “intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development”² in present-day German and Italian secondary schools. Corrado often repeated this quotation from Bruner’s *The Process of Education* in his courses at the Polytechnic for teachers at various levels of school teaching. He also recalled, with enthusiasm, some of Jerry’s famous experiments, such as the one he had performed in 1949 with Leo Postman,³ in which Harvard and Radcliffe students were shown playing cards with images in reversed colors, like a black three of hearts or a red six of spades. (Figure 1.2)

The color inversion had created such disconcertment among the participating students that it had taken them much longer to recognize the “incongruous” cards than the normal ones, confirming that visual perception is powerfully determined by expectations induced by past interactions with the environment.

Corrado had first read about this experiment in Thomas Kuhn’s book on scientific revolutions,⁴ where the author recounts that Postman



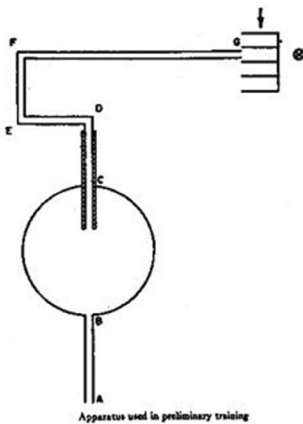
1.2 Inverted color cards used in the 1949 experiment conducted by Jerry Bruner and Leo Postman.

himself had felt acutely uncomfortable looking at the incongruous cards. Delighted to hear a reference to “Tom,” Jerry commented half-jokingly that Corrado must be a good card player and therefore a good observer, while he himself had never been one because he liked “real things.” Pointing at his thick glasses, he stated that life is about playing cards as if to imply that he was doubly inept at life, whereas everything we knew about him pointed to the contrary. But he was just teasing, as he often did, doling out contradictory hints in order to complicate things. Jerry had always had a strong sense of humor, mocking us when we tried to bring up ideas from his books—something that most of his visitors probably did and that, with time, must have become quite tedious (when this happens to me now, I often find that I do not even remember what I wrote thirty years ago). Jerry’s playful attitude became more prominent over the years, and he increasingly got into the habit of replying to theoretical and methodological questions with anecdotes, jokes, and episodes relating to his own life. He liked to surprise his interlocutors and often had us floored.

When I expressed my discontent with the concept of a mental map, which I increasingly felt was inadequate for understanding visual memory, Jerry chuckled and exclaimed: “In the beginning there were rats!”, alluding to his own studies on the behavior of female rats. Then he recalled Edward Tolman’s research on cognitive maps in rats: “When Tolman gave his paper in Toronto, I thought: this is the future. He was on the right way, but he was not going far enough.” I knew from Jerry’s autobiography⁵ that in the 1950s, Tolman, who was his senior by one generation, was his “hero” because he had treated an individual’s acquisition

of knowledge as a change in his or her “cognitive map” rather than as a mechanistic change of habit induced by repetition. However, Jerry later noted that Tolman had only added “a little mentalism to behaviorism,” while the missing step was the one that was subsequently made by Bruner himself, who introduced mind and meaning as specifically human characteristics of knowing. As he wrote in *Acts of Meaning*,⁶ he understood mind as including intentional states like believing, desiring, and grasping a meaning.

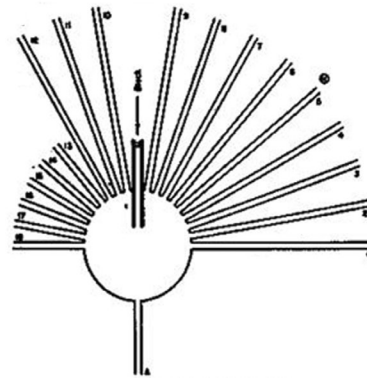
I had found Tolman’s article on rats’ cognitive maps,⁷ which was based on experiments carried out by himself and his students at Berkeley, enthralling and at the same time puzzling. His research showed that rats trained in spatial learning acquired a cognitive map that led them to food located within a maze. The rats developed the capacity to find a direct path through the maze, avoiding blind alleys. Two kinds of mazes were used in the experiment: a simpler one offering a limited number of options and a more complicated one entailing a wider range of options that implied the need to develop a more advanced sense of space and possibilities.



Apparatus used in preliminary training

FIG. 15

(From E. C. Tolman, B. F. Ritchie and D. Kalish, *Studies in spatial learning. I. Orientation and the short-cut. J. exp. Psychol.*, 1946, 36, p. 16.)



Apparatus used in the test trial

FIG. 16

(From E. C. Tolman, B. F. Ritchie and D. Kalish, *Studies in spatial learning. I. Orientation and short-cut. J. exp. Psychol.*, 1946, 36, p. 17.)

1.3 Examples of itinerary choices in different mazes. Source: Tolman, Edward C. 1948. “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men.” *Psychological Review* 55 (4): 189–208.

Depending on whether conditions were favorable, and on individual capacities, the rats either developed a narrow map strip or a broad and comprehensive one. Whereas the former consisted of a simple, single itinerary extending from the starting point to the end target, the latter entailed a wider arc of the environment, so that if the start position changed or the route varied, the animal could still choose an appropriate new route. Tolman ruled out the hypothesis that the rats' behavior could be understood as a mechanical stimulus–response connection that was based on a reductionist conception of their nervous system likened to a telephone switchboard. On the contrary, he argued that rats were able to develop a spatial orientation or “map” of the environment precisely because their responses to stimuli were highly selective.

I was so immersed in this story that my curiosity led me to explore whatever information I could find on Tolman's experiments, which began in the 1930s. I avidly searched for details such as the type of maze: whether it had lath walls or whether parts of it were made of wire-netting or of clear window glass, enabling the rats to visualize the situation as a whole. Therefore, it was possible to talk about rats' perception, or rather mnemonization, depending on the type of environment they were placed in and the stimuli they received.⁸

What I especially appreciated was Tolman's insistence on the ethical and social implications of his experiments and his suggestion that educators and world-planners of the future could provide the conditions for all individuals to develop “broad maps.” Consequently, upon finding ourselves in the “maze which is our human world,” we can all face it in the light of “the virtues of reason—of, that is, broad cognitive maps” because the well-being of all is “mutually interdependent.” As Tolman put it, “all of us in Europe as well as in America, in the Orient as well as in the Occident, must be made calm enough and well-fed enough to be able to develop truly comprehensive maps.”⁹

When I emerged from my reverie and returned to the conversation, sharing fragments of my thoughts with Jerry and Corrado, my husband teased me: “So rats have mental maps . . . ,” while Jerry retorted, “you bet they do!” Jerry also noted that when placed in a difficult setting, rats

sought to find something that would improve their situation. He recalled an experiment that he had conducted to demonstrate this. Such remarks fueled my intention to seek new meanings for “mental maps” and to understand them as a mobile function connecting individuals with their environment. Both Bruner and Tolman had observed that rats’ responses were individualized and that some of them were faster learners than others—Jerry even used to take the brightest rats home to play with his children as house pets. Other scientists had similar empathetic attitudes when reporting on the rats’ orientation process, describing the animals’ hesitation and vacillating attitudes at a choice point before actually moving in one direction or another in a manner that resembled human behaviors. Tolman’s work formed part of the backdrop for Bruner’s radical reformulation of the concept of mental maps in response to the question: “what is specifically human about them?” In *Acts of Meaning*,¹⁰ Bruner wrote that “man must be seen against the background of the animal kingdom from which he evolved” as well as in the context of the symbolic world in which he lives and in light of the processes that bring these two forces into concert. In that book, he made the crucial point that human beings are characterized by a readiness for meaning, and the human predisposition to organize experience in a narrative form implies the capacity to elaborate what is triggered by the acts and expressions of others. At the same time, in the construction of social reality, both the mind and the self are part of the social world.

Here, a point of disagreement emerged between Jerry and me, at least regarding the terminology used for the social dimension of the entire process. I interpreted the word “intersubjectivity” in light of the practice of oral history to mean the interactive process of constructing memory and historical knowledge, whereas Jerry adopted what I felt was a rather restrictive meaning of intersubjectivity as a sort of mind-reading in *Making Stories*.¹¹ I told him that the problem for me was how to introduce subjectivity—and individual subjectivity—into the notion of a mental map. Jerry shook his head and added a personal view of maps to the one he had offered in his autobiography, *In Search of Mind*, where he had described the various types of information provided by ocean charts (he

had a repertory of personal stories grounding his conceptual discourse). Now he recounted to us the story of his first visit to the Metropolitan Museum in Manhattan in 1925 when he was ten years old:

When I was a boy in Long Island, I kept constructing a map of New York City in my mind, changing it all the time. You could not move around without a map. But people have a very primitive idea of maps.



1.4 *The New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1920s.*

Jerry was born as the youngest of four children and spent his childhood in a middle-class suburban area of Long Island. His father came from a poor family in Poland, whereas his mother was from a prosperous family of merchants and professionals. They were a nominally Jewish family, but when Jerry was six, his father, who had become a successful businessman running the family's watch-making firm, joined the Reform Temple, representing a Protestantized Jewish denomination. In 1925,

they were living in a large house in Far Rockaway and had a car and a part-time driver. The trip to “the Met” meant going from almost rural areas, with large farms and wealthy mansions, to the urbanized area around 5th Avenue and Central Park.



1.5 Nostrand Bird's Eye View Map of New York City, 1920.

What remained impressed in the boy's memory from that visit were not so much single works of art as the entirety of the museum, perceived as a high point: a majestic image both from the inside and the outside. That image was a point of reference in relation to an expansive view that included many unexplored sites—"hidden," according to Jerry—both within the Museum and along the route that led to it. The resulting "map" prompted him to return to the Met on many other occasions in order to discover more and to broaden and deepen his knowledge of the site and its contents. Jerry's map, extending from Long Island to the Metropolitan

Museum, developed as he travelled through space and time, and he described this process as a mapping of space as much as of time, stretching from the remote past to the future. Paraphrasing Bruner, acts of mapping could be considered as acts that assign new meanings to places and movements as human beings move through time and space among different environments and develop new needs, or simply grow up.

At this point in the conversation, Corrado came out with another of his favorite quotations for physics students: Hermann Minkowski's statement that space cannot exist by itself and neither can time, with "space-time" being the only meaningful term. Jerry's face lit up on hearing the quote and he commented that as a young adolescent he was mapping not only New York in his mind but also the history of the world's arts and crafts, given that the Met is literally a repository of arts from all times and places, including arms, costumes, and musical instruments. The whole operation was possible because "maps help to focalize memory." Jerry's mental map of New York and the Met was extremely flexible so as to allow for the relentless addition of new meanings—his visual memory including projections of possible future developments. He always had a strong sense of "possible worlds," as reflected by the title of one of his books, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*,¹² and some of the studies focusing on his work significantly refer to the "possible" and to "possibilities."

The visual dimension is central in all of this. And it is not coincidental that Bruner's and Postman's approach was referred to as the "New Look." Their work on the ways in which individuals' needs, motivations, and expectations affect their perceptions counters the notion that perception can be considered separately from the world around it. They showed that the manner in which individuals look at objects and events is influenced by unseen social and cultural conditions. In one of Bruner's most famous experiments, poor children perceived the size of coins as significantly larger than richer children did, and the higher the monetary value of the coin, the larger it was imagined to be by the former group. In other words, a higher value of the coin corresponded to a greater overestimation of its value.¹³ Jerry was always amused by the fact that this particular experiment had "made" the *New York Times*.

Wide-eyed, he exclaimed: “An experiment of mine on the front page of the *Times*?!”

Jerry was born blind and did not recover his sight until the age of two, but he used to say that this traumatic experience had not crippled him; rather, it had shaped him. He said that good luck and advances in ophthalmology had made successful surgery possible, and with the help of the heavy glasses that he needed to wear for the rest of his life, his central vision was restored to almost normal. His thick roundish lenses added to his playful appearance—his smile was benevolent, and at times had an almost sardonic touch. Jerry acknowledged that “not everybody who is born blind goes the same way.” He did not have a precise memory of the process he went through, but he offered thoughtful hypotheses about his blindness. Had the fact of being blind for two years propelled him to internally construct a visual world of his own? Had it led him to understand, upon regaining his sight, that we see through the mind, making it easy for him to develop a kind of “constructivist” (not a word he knew at the time) view?¹⁴ Yet, later in life, he maintained that getting to know the world is constructing it. His constructivism did not refer to the individual mind but to a broader concept of mind as culture, that is, an inter-individual world.¹⁵ This insight can be applied also to Bruner’s idea of vision, as guided by pre-perceptions, for example guessing a shape from a glimpse caught through a “Judas eye” that is the eyehole in a door. This is why it is possible to go “beyond the information given.”

In his autobiography, Jerry reflected on the consequences of his visual perception induced by his initial blindness, which had possibly made him more alert because he had to move his head around to keep up with the passing scene.¹⁶ His cataract operations resulted in a narrowing of his visual field and a loss of his peripheral vision, but at the same time they enabled him to take in the world by moving his head rather than his eyes. He even traced his sailing skills to his original blindness. He had grown up with rowboats and a boatyard very close to the place where he lived, and sailing had opened up a range of possibilities where he did not have to master the conventional way of seeing the world; rather, a global perspective was required.

Undoubtedly, Jerry had a particular sense of movement and touch that may have been connected with his experience of moving on water. On one of my first visits to his home, I remember noticing an indoor rowing machine in his elongated studio. When in 1972 he had been “lured” to Oxford, he had crossed the ocean with his wife and some friends as crew to take up his post. He described this trip as “a great adventure, birds with us virtually all the way.” At some point later in life, he had sailed from New York to Puerto Rico—a place under the control of the United States but still not one of the States—to deliver a lecture. He had decided to go there just “to see what it was like.” The words “to see what it was like” aptly convey his visual aptitude. Moreover, for Jerry, water—considered a perfect metaphor for the capacity to establish a relationship with the world while remaining separate from it—never lost its appeal.

The gist of our conversation in April 2014 was that mobility and changeability are always the most important features of maps, whereas insurmountable problems arise when visual memory is conceived as a static map. Jerry’s example of mapping time and space together implies that visual memory cannot exist without the mobility of body and mind. I got the impression from this entire exchange that the map he was talking about could be better defined as corporeal rather than as mental or visual. Visual memory is anchored in the body. Vision, both internal and external, must be understood within the framework of the “mind” and always in close connection with the “world.”

The question of intersubjectivity loomed in the background. Perhaps Jerry did not like the term after all. In *The Culture of Education*,¹⁷ he wrote that it designates the condition in which people come to know what others have in mind and how they adjust accordingly. I felt that this definition was too limited, as my concern was to emphasize the intersubjective nature of knowledge and memory construction. But I also remembered Jerry’s observation that achieving joint reference to the world meant achieving a kind of solidarity with somebody.¹⁸ This resonated with my sense of the plasticity and emotional nature of maps as expressions of intersubjectivity. Thus, mapping comes to be seen both as a dynamic, self-reflexive activity and as a relational one that calls to mind the idea of

the dialogic self. In the end, Jerry's concrete manner of framing the question was the most convincing. Wrapping up his story on the Metropolitan Museum, he said: "Your map does not belong only to you. It has a context shared with others. Your map always belongs also to others."

I like to think that the above insight applies also to the sharing of the narration of our autobiographies. Jerry's reference to "the rough and perpetually changing draft of our autobiography that we carry in our minds"¹⁹ evokes for me a map of the contours of our lives. We change as we go on living and interacting, and experience various forms of intersubjectivity and intercorporeality. "I feel I can get inside your head and I feel that you are getting inside mine, and I love it," Jerry told an Italian colleague who interviewed him in January 2015.²⁰ All this has to be understood in narrative terms: "we are so adept at narrative that it seems almost as natural as language itself," Jerry wrote in *Making Stories*. Considering his interpretation of mapping as a narrative act connecting self and others, and his insistence on our narrative needs, this title could be reframed as "mapping stories."²¹

The last time I met Jerry was exactly two years later, in April 2016. When Lauren, his helper, opened the door, I saw Jerry sitting near his desk, waving his hand in greeting. He was now using hand gestures and facial expressions more than he had ever done previously in a very lively way. His tone had become lower and his hearing was not very good, but his body movements, conveying affection and complicity, had become an increasingly important means of communication for him.

On that occasion, he began evoking memories of our walking conversations in the 1990s, with few words and many expressive gestures, and my memory unraveled around that prompt. Every Saturday morning, I would walk from my apartment—first in a building located on the first block of Washington Square Village and later on the Mews—to 200 Mercer Street and would ring Jerry's bell. He and I would then head south and do our food shopping at the Gourmet Garage. It always took a long time to get there, as Jerry would stop whenever he was making an important point in his argument. Walking and talking at the same time punctuated the conversation, so that it became an experience of connections

forged between temporal and spatial movement and the exchange of ideas. At the Gourmet Garage, he would comment on the vegetables, recalling anecdotes of all sorts, while fruit seemed less deserving of his attention. It took the whole morning. Then we would have soba soup with Carol (Fleischer Feldman; his third wife) at the Japanese restaurant located at the corner of Houston Street, and the three of us would talk about everything, including the autobiographical mode and narrative.

We had met years earlier at a dinner gathering hosted by Ron Grele, then the director of the Oral History Center at Columbia University, at his home on Morningside Drive. Ron's guests, who included the psychologist, Don Spence, were all working on memoirs and narrations. Jerry loved Spence's idea of the self as storyteller and quoted it more than once, being himself a great storyteller. That dinner, which stayed in our memories, generated a sort of mental map connecting the Upper West Side and Columbia with the Village and NYU. Jerry often joked about the competition between the two universities and their law schools.

I also recalled Jerry's video conference during those years with the educators in Reggio Emilia, where he had spent time every summer since the mid-1990s working with their experimental preschool program. He had got me involved in the video-event to discuss my work on autobiographical narration. Jerry was brilliant in these situations, bringing together diverse people from various places and disciplines. He was up to the challenge of dealing with that technological medium, entailing a virtual kind of vision.

During our last meeting on that rainy April day in 2016, we recalled some of our shared memories. When the topic of visual memory came up once again, Jerry was in a reminiscent mood: "When I was five, my father bought the new *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 volumes! And the images!"—his gestures indicating how amazed and pleased he had been by the illustrations. I knew that he still had his father's morocco-bound eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which he had treasured since his death in 1928, when Jerry was twelve. Then he delved deeper into his reminiscences: "I remember when I was three," holding up three fingers on one hand . . . "I remember when I was a teenager . . ." Moments

of silence followed. Jerry recited a poem that included the words, “silence of things.” I asked who the author was but he was not sure; perhaps Wordsworth: “I can remember poems by heart”—but I often forget the names of the authors.”

He recalled the occasion when he had met Edna St Vincent Millay and told her how he admired her poems, quoting fragments from one of them: “. . . streets deserted . . . one-night cheap hotel.” Jerry made faces—grimaces of surprise, outrage, amusement—while reciting these lines. Then he added that he particularly liked three poets—Millay, T. S. Eliot, and Robert Frost—and recited lines from Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: “I grow old . . . I grow old . . . I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled . . . I shall hear the mermaids sing, but they will not sing for me.”²²

As I was leaving Mercer Street, it occurred to me that on this occasion I had been “the rememberer’s interlocutor,” as Jerry used to say to emphasize the dialogical function of recalling the past. Yet, the striking contrast between my dialogues with him and the professional practice of oral history was also apparent to me. Those conversations with him gave me a sense of intellectual freedom. It was crucial to our intellectual engagement that Jerry and I worked in two different disciplines, psychology and history, finding common ground in memory and narrative. I was never an expert in his field, and this left me free to talk at random with him. In the reminiscences that I have presented in this chapter, I have extrapolated from his work and from our conversations something that I myself had seen—perhaps he would have liked this way of proceeding—induced by my need to find ways of looking at the maps I have collected. My familiarity with his thought helped me to develop my own line of thought. As a final insight, Jerry’s interest in the law, conceived in a broad sense, and our discussions on this subject helped me to imagine how stories achieve legitimacy by evoking the past and connecting it with a sense of possibility.²³ In 1997, Jerry told Andrea Smorti that the words “it is possible” represent one of the most revolutionary slogans that we can use, encouraging us not to be afraid of possible worlds.²⁴

Jerry Bruner died on June 5 2016. Two years went by, during which I kept studying and teaching visual memory. It slowly dawned on me that

my conversations with Jerry and my desire to dialogue with the maps that I collected were deeply intertwined within me, each reinforcing the other in fostering my own vision and memory. The maps had prompted me to interrogate him, and it was my memory of the exchanges with my friend that enabled me to see the maps in new ways.

Notes

- ¹ See John Crace, “Jerome Bruner: The Lesson of the Story,” *The Guardian*, March 27, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/mar/27/academicexperts.highereducationprofile>. See also Patricia M. Greenfield, “Obituary,” *Nature* 535, no. 232 (July 13, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1038/535232a>
- ² Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 33. See also Jerome S. Bruner *Beyond the Information Given. Studies in the Psychology of Knowing* (New York: Norton, 1973).
- ³ Jerome S. Bruner and Leo Postman, “On the Perception of Incongruity: A Paradigm,” *Journal of Personality*, 18 (1949): 206–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.1949.tb01241.x>
- ⁴ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 62–64.
- ⁵ Jerome S. Bruner, *In Search of Mind. Essays in Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).
- ⁶ Jerome S. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 8.
- ⁷ Edward C. Tolman, “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men,” *Psychological Review*, 55, no. 4 (July 1948): 189–208, <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0061626>
- ⁸ Francine Ciancia, “Tolman and Honzik (1930) Revisited or the Mazes of Psychology (1930–1980),” *The Psychological Record*, 41 (1991): 461–72.
- ⁹ Tolman, “Cognitive Maps in Rats and Men,” 16.
- ¹⁰ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, XV.
- ¹¹ Jerome Bruner, *Making Stories. Law, Literature, Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 16.
- ¹² Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).
- ¹³ Jerome S. Bruner and Cecile C. Goodman, “Value and Need as Organizing

- Factors in Perception,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 42, no. 1 (January 1947): 33–44, <http://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/h0058484>
- ¹⁴ Giuseppina Marsico, ed., *Jerome S. Bruner Beyond 100. Cultivating Possibilities* (Basel: Springer International Publishing AG Switzerland, 2015), 9.
- ¹⁵ Andrea Smorti, “Jerome S. Bruner,” *Manuale di psicologia dello sviluppo*, ed. Ada Fonzi (Florence: Giunti, 2001), 36–41.
- ¹⁶ Bruner, *In Search of Mind*, 15.
- ¹⁷ Jerome S. Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 161.
- ¹⁸ Bruner, *Actual Minds*, 63.
- ¹⁹ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 33.
- ²⁰ Marsico, *Jerome S. Bruner Beyond 100*, 8.
- ²¹ Bruner, *Making Stories*, 3. Sébastien Caquard and William Cartwright, “Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping”, *The Cartographic Journal*, 51, no. 2 (2014): 101-106.
- ²² The actual verses from T. S. Eliot’s poem are: “I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each./ I do not think that they will sing to me.”
- ²³ Bruner, *Making Stories*, 13.
- ²⁴ Andrea Smorti, “Pensare attraverso le storie: Intervista a Jerome Bruner,” *Teorie & Modelli IV*, nos. 1/2 (1999): 139–66.

Chapter 2

Remote Pasts, Possible Worlds

Magdy Youssef; Blerina Cuni; Antony

As I have noted in the prologue of this book, fieldwork conducted for the “Bodies across Borders: Oral and Visual Memory in Europe and Beyond” (BABE) research project (2013–2018) focused on individuals who had migrated to Europe from all over the world over the last two decades (see the Appendix). My fieldwork location was Italy, and specifically Turin, because of its high concentration of immigrants and my knowledge of the town’s history. Although we approached a number of interviewees individually, the majority were students enrolled at adult education schools. Such schools, which were established in 1997 by the Italian Ministry of Education at locations throughout the country, offer a range of learning levels, depending on the students’ language proficiency. They are open to both Italian and foreign-born students and attendance is completely free. Teachers at the schools cooperated with our research project, and in the weeks before our visits, they prepared the students, whose ages and cultural origins varied widely, through practice exercises focusing on the topics of mobility and memory, incorporating this activity within their scholastic formative plans.¹

Although the methodological and conceptual background of the research was shared by all of the members of the wider team, here I will relate only some aspects of my own experiences and those of the researchers with whom I worked directly; the work of other researchers, who conducted inquiries independently, will appear in a collective publication.² The team in Turin comprised a researcher, Giada Giustetto, a film operator, and me. After introducing ourselves and the project to the

participating classes, we screened examples of video art created by various artists working on migration and then opened the floor for discussion. Over the course of several visits, we asked the students whether they would be willing to draw maps of their migration itineraries. If they agreed, we provided them with drawing paper (33 × 48 cm) and crayons of various colors.

The first significant observation relating to the pattern of responses that we obtained was that we often met with resistance to our requests for these maps, and, very rarely, with outright refusal. I consider these demonstrations of resistance comparable to the “silences” that I encountered in the late 1970s when I was collecting the testimonies of former factory workers during the Fascist period. The latter chose to talk about various aspects of their daily life in the interwar period, for instance describing small acts of dissent like anti-Fascist jokes, while leaving aside the issues treated in history books, such as the role of the Fascist trade unions in the factories. Thus, an unusual picture of the daily negotiations of working-class individuals with the Fascist regime emerged from their narration. Both resistance and acceptance contributed to shaping such transactions. Consequently, terms like consensus and dissent, used by historians to define people’s relationships with the regime, appeared imprecise and incomplete.³

In the BABE research, our queries during fieldwork were framed in ways that were apt for eliciting visual memory. The reactions were not easy to decipher, as they were often cloaked in the claim of an inability to draw. In some cases, the responses were more complex, and interpreting them was a lengthy process. Significant among the latter responses was that of Magdy Youssef, whom we met at one of the centers for adult education in Turin in May 2013. Magdy was born in Egypt in 1962 and left his country in 1980. After many years of travelling around the world between the ages of 18 and 34, he arrived in Italy in 1996. He spoke good Italian, as he was working as a court interpreter, but because he felt that a diploma would be advantageous in his job, he had enrolled in an evening class to further improve his language skills. After our presentation of the BABE project, the discussion of the art work we had screened,



2.1 *Magdy Youssef's map, May 2013.*

and our request for drawings, Magdy remained still for quite some time, inactive and pensive in front of his white sheet. We did not question him, and after 15–20 minutes, he began to draw his picture.

When Magdy was asked the following week to make an oral presentation of his drawing to the class, he prefaced his talk by explaining why his mind had gone blank at the sight of the white sheet of paper: “I am a void because my trip is not only from far away in distance, but also in time.” With a hint of irony that rebounded on us as the interviewers, he declared that he had felt confused because he did not want to draw a map of his travels around the world; rather he wanted to do something quite different. The resulting drawing corresponded precisely to his intent to convey travel in time, or perhaps in spacetime (Figure 2.1).⁴

Magdy made his presentation against the background of a traditional map of Italy, which highlighted the contrasts between different types



2.2 Magdy Youssef.

of “maps.” He spoke in Italian; a sign of his assimilation, for better or for worse, produced by the global diaspora in recent decades. In this case, Magdy’s speech in Italian served to affirm his capacity for intercultural mediation not only because he had been working in the field of translation but also because he saw himself as a mediator between languages, countries, and traditions.

Magdy’s drawing proceeds from left to right, following the direction of writing in Western languages, as opposed to written Arabic, and perhaps reflecting his expertise as a broker between languages. Egypt, which Magdy regarded as the origin of a cosmic order, is positioned on the left-hand side of the drawing, while the Italian words on the right-hand side—*Vita Pace Amor* (“Life Peace Love”)—express both an ideal and a message to the world at large. Images that have long represented Egypt to the world, namely the Sphinx and the pyramids, are combined with the rising sun and a wreath of green leaves, which, as Magdy explained, were intended to convey a combination of his love for nature and the memory of his country. The terrestrial globe is positioned at the center of the drawing; therefore, it is not the world that encompasses Egypt and humanity, rather, it is the reverse, with the world framed between history (the past) and hopes (the future). The whole drawing is encircled by a gigantic dove of peace, flying from Egypt toward a future of hope. In Egypt, as Magdy commented, there is always sun and warmth inside of people, who nurture “normal dreams” of Love, Peace, and Life,

and want to carry them to other countries in order to foster respect and acceptance—he used the Italian term *accoglienza* (meaning “acceptance”), which has both a technical meaning (providing institutional assistance to migrants) and a routine one that applies to everyday activities, such as accepting a letter from the postman.

Magdy Youssef’s drawing narrates various types of movements, ranging from the density of concrete symbols on the left side to the clarity on the right side, where meaningful words are placed in a rarefied atmosphere of white space. The two sides of the picture are significantly marked with two different signatures: a large and graphically elaborate one in the top left corner and a simpler one in the bottom right corner. The latter is the kind of signature used for signing documents in daily life, inscribing authorship as opposed to providing a decorative feature. Thus, different forms of writing are exhibited in the drawing. The words expressing the great ideals are formatted as inscriptions and distributed harmoniously on the right-hand side of the sheet, adding a utopian perspective to the dynamics of the map. Since the spring of 2013, when Magdy drew it, his map has acquired new meaning in the current context of global mobility. The situation in the Mediterranean has become increasingly tragic, and Magdy’s message has become ever more urgent; crossing the Mediterranean is now treated as an illegal act of war rather than as an act of peace.

In spite of his global experience and worldview, Magdy firmly refused to say anything about the lengthy period that lapsed between his departure from Egypt in 1980 and his arrival in Italy. We might conjecture that his expatriation was part of a wider exodus, the movement of migrants from that country toward the East, especially the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia, following the inclusion of the right to migrate in the Egyptian Constitution of 1971. Although Magdy arrived in Italy at a time of economic crisis, his arrival should be seen as part of the mobility process that brought millions of Egyptians to Italy, and especially to northern regions of the country. In any case, he was adamant that his drawing and oral presentation were to be treated as the sole documentation of his trip. While some of his classmates were glad to talk at length about

their lives and accepted individual interviews, he politely declined to do so more than once, not only at the time of the class interview but also in the following months, insisting that he did not want to talk so much about his wandering after he had offered the image of his cosmic vision.

This intent was coherently expressed in his oral narration, which established a connection between general history and a sort of personal mythology or “mythbiography”—a term coined by Ernst Bernhard in the 1940s.⁵ At the heart of his speech was a story about a tortoise. He was born in a family house—where he lived with his parents and several sisters—with a garden inhabited by a giant turtle, which, as he specified, was 100–120 cm long and 65–70 cm tall.

From the moment I understood something, I met this turtle named Kicca, which gave me much and stayed forever in my heart. She lived 82 years and was enormous. She had slow movements, but if she wanted to go somewhere, she was very determined, and you could be sure she would get there. She had a goal.

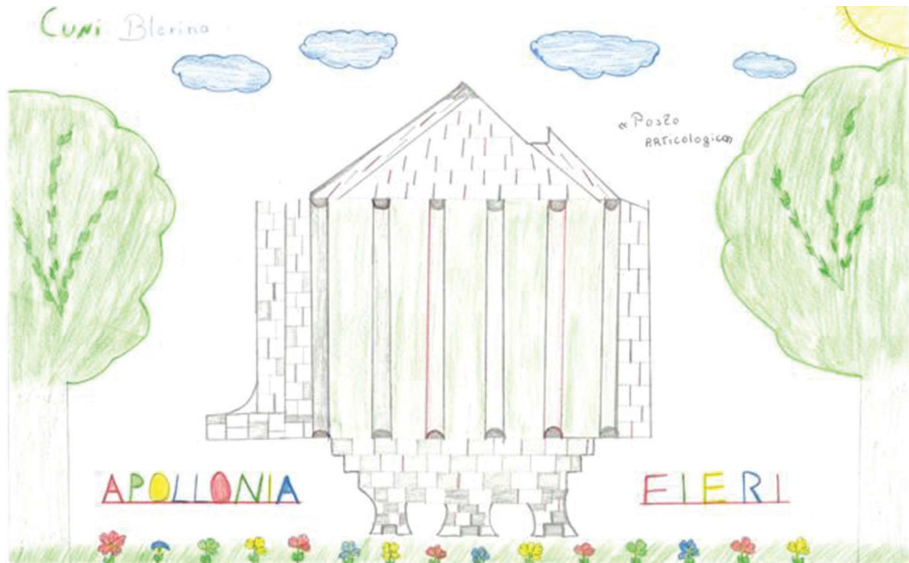
In her own way, the tortoise taught him something: “My trip was like that . . . During my trip, I was like the tortoise and like the dove,” meaning that he moved slowly like the tortoise, which carries her home on her back, but, just like her, he was determined to reach a goal. Magdy identified with these animals, both of which feature as the protagonists in many ancient and modern legends and myths in which they are portrayed as powerful and kind. Thus, although his story has the ring of truth, it conjures up a world of fantasy and magic. According to theories of ethnopsychiatry, myths and fairy tales lighten the dark moments of individual and collective crisis, functioning paradigmatically as narrative *rites de passage*⁶ in which a destination is never taken for granted. Magdy’s narrative shares some common features with fables, emerging as it does from his silence and entailing a combination of oral and visual memory. His story, like his traveling, has no beginning or end, but it contains a promise of happiness: “In spite of all my suffering through

time, I will have peace, love, and life. There is neither beginning nor end to my trip in the world.” His words echo those of the many migrants who never feel that they have truly “arrived” and yet retain the hope of a better future.

In his oral interventions during the collective discussions, Magdy expressed the conviction that although not every person is good, all of the peoples of the world have something inherently marvelous. He reacted vehemently to a critical comment by a Malian classmate who had been subjected to mistreatment in Algeria and accused Algerians of racism towards Black Africans. Magdy tried hard to explain to him, and to the rest of the class, that many other Algerians have contrasting attitudes toward Black Africans, offering words of conciliation.

Magdy’s type of resistance to our queries provided a valuable hint that prompted us to reflect on our own intent and become aware of the implicit forms of ethnocentrism that we conveyed. Jerry Bruner’s insight that images can challenge our expectations (as in the case of the inverted color cards; see Figure 1.2), also applied to Magdy’s map. Unconsciously or semiconsciously, I had expected Magdy to provide an illustration of a relatively recent migration itinerary, but instead he offered us images of a remote past, evoking icons that were not only familiar to scholars, and to the literate, but were also shared by many people around the world. Indeed, stereotypical images of ancient Egypt have been disseminated through the visual language of tourism that is widespread in wealthy countries but is also apparent to people in many poor countries that are the destinations of tourists. At the same time, Magdy’s map symbolically reflects a fusion between travelling in space and time, echoing the notion of spacetime that emerged in my conversations with Bruner.

Other interviewees’ gestures of resistance were not as explicit as those of Magdy, but they entailed a similar challenge that was clearly perceivable, as in the case of Blerina Cuni. Blerina was born in Fier, Albania, in 1982 and was interviewed by Giada Giustetto of the BABE team in Mestre, near Venice, on October 15, 2014. At the time, Blerina was pregnant, and her Italian was still very tentative, as she had arrived in Italy only two months earlier. But her drawing was very precise and neat (Figure 2.3).



2.3 Map drawn by Blerina Cuni, October 2014.

Again, our surprise upon viewing this image was partially a result of our expectation of seeing the usual images of the exodus from Albania (like the ones depicted in the film *Lamerica* (1994), produced by Gianni Amelio, or the mediatic photographs of Albanians in camps during the decade of the 1990s). But Blerina's response to our request for a drawing representing her migration with a visual memory was not one that conveyed a sense of deprivation, poverty, or scarcity. Rather, she chose, as the subject of her "map," the archaeological site of Apollonia, which is not far from her hometown, Fier, and drew an image of the Agonothetes, a monument built in the second century AD that served as a venue for discussion and deliberation of the assembled city council.

Blerina presented the monument as a symbol not only of her country's great past but also one that reflected its present status because it attracts tourists from Greece, Turkey, and Italy, where its image has been popularized in travel guides and on TV. As she put it: "I studied its history in school and I went to visit it." Nonetheless, Blerina, who is a non-practicing

Christian, proudly stated that the site includes an Orthodox monastery, testifying to the stratification of cultures and religions, notably Catholicism, the Orthodox Church, and Islam that coexist with the memory of classic culture in the country. She explained that this was true not only historically but also personally. The site, she said, “represents many things to me,” adding that it is especially beautiful in the summer because of the trees, flowers, and grass. Indeed, the merging of nature and history is also evident in her drawing, projecting the image of a golden age that could foster a positive sense of a future utopia.

For Blerina, although the original political function of the monument does not seem to have a place in her memory, its image provides a way to reconnect with a historical national heritage in a cultural and symbolic sense. The role of tourism in revamping the past and projecting it on to a mediatic screen assumes positive undertones, constituting part of a global language and an appropriation of identity within a consumable global space. The individual and the collective are intertwined within a shared memory whose images are often stereotyped in textbooks, advertisements, and travel guides, but are revived here based on individual experience.

The beauty and glory of Apollonia convey a message of pride, offering the hope of a dignified and flourishing future. The building is now a ruin, but it has been restored and its memory is alive. For Blerina, it represents Albania itself: “my country, and I like it.” At the same time, her narration realistically acknowledges that the country’s past cannot provide its people with the means for a good life in the present, as she talked at length about war, fear, and the lack of good jobs in Albania. In stark contrast to its recent history, the area had been the site of a prosperous civilization in ancient times, including those of the ancient Pelasgians, the Illyrians, the Greeks, and the Romans.

The traditional narrations shaping Albanian identity include the claim to have been the original people of south-eastern Europe.⁷ This myth of origin—also known as the Caucasian theory—was first expounded during the Italian Renaissance. It elides differences between the ancestral past and the present, bringing the ancient and contemporary worlds into

immediate conjunction. However, Blerina's version did not include the virulent elements of the myth, such as the assumption of ethnic homogeneity and purity because she claimed the dignity of an ancient identity without professing its ethnic superiority. This was not the only element of a stereotyped Albanian identity that surfaced in Blerina's oral testimony. Her statement on her own non-practice of Christianity echoes the myth of Albanians' indifference to religion, which entails a variety of meanings, ranging from syncretism of folk-religious practices, to tolerance, to the state atheism imposed by the Communist regime. All of these attributed meanings have been interpreted as indicators of the non-fanaticism of Albanians and of the desire for freedom and independence as the most important element in the essentialized Albanian identity.⁸

The close connection drawn between the ancient and the contemporary is evidence of silences within memory that skip the entire period of the twentieth century. Among these silences is Mussolini's invasion of Albania in 1939, resulting in its annexation to the Italian Empire under the King of Italy, who also claimed the titles of Emperor of Ethiopia and King of Albania. During World War Two, the Albanian Resistance fought against Italian and German occupation. Blerina's response when questioned explicitly on the presence of Italians in Albania, indicated her apparent non-receipt of any transmitted memory from previous generations or while at school: "I studied history for four years. I swear to you that I cannot remember anything." On this topic, she recalled memories of events that had occurred during her own life span: only at the age of eighteen, when she started working in a shoe factory, did she meet some Italians for the first time.

Blerina's testimony and her silences on Italian imperialism in Albania are set against the background of her own life story within a significant triangulation of a glorious ancient past, Albania's difficult recent history, and the prosperity newly acquired by her and by her family.

In April of 2013, Blerina met her future husband through the Internet. In 1998, when he was twenty years old, he had left Albania, and his job as a shepherd, to join his uncle, who lived in Mestre. There, he had found work as a bricklayer and was joined by his wife in 2014. They bought an

2.4 *Blerina Cuni.*

apartment and had a child in 2015. She completed her schooling in Italy as a housewife because the 1997 civil war in Albania that broke out in 1997 had disrupted her education, making it impossible for her to continue to attend classes as she had been doing for nine years. She told us that her uncle was mistakenly killed during the period of deep unrest that followed the economic and political crisis in 1996, when the violence of militias and military gangs was rampant. She had received a selective memory from her parents, who had told her about the upheaval in Albania in the late 1980s, brought about by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, including the communist regime led by Enver Hoxha. In the 1990s, the Kosovo War further destabilized the region, and the country witnessed large waves of emigration, with Italy being a prominent destination among emigrants.

Convergences as well as divergences between Magdy's and Blerina's visual/oral narratives are apparent. In spite of their differences in age, sex, length of stay in Italy, and drawing style—soft and nuanced for him and sharp and precise for her—their drawings convey a similar intent: to remind us of the value that these trips bring to Europe and to help establish a link with a heritage that can be ours too. Their maps originate from internalized perceptions and interpretations of the histories of their countries that are personally inflected. Their acts of mapping are gestures of subjectivity, but highly individualized so as to convey personal messages. Their narratives are not merely their own, as they

were not only shared with the BABE researchers and with their classmates, but they also originated in a shared culture constituted through the interweaving of stories throughout the centuries.

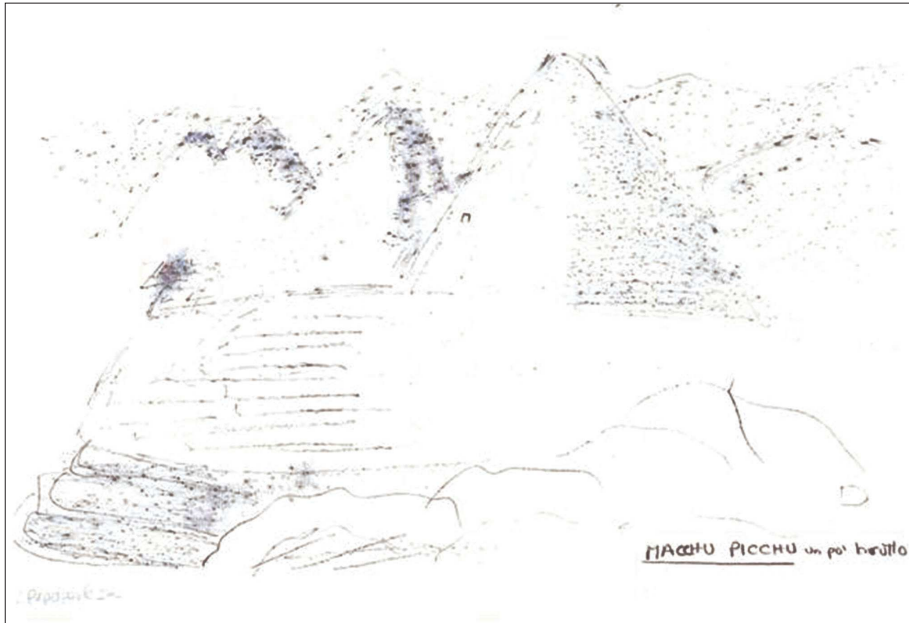
The markers of collective identity and shared historical memory chosen by Magdy and Blerina merged historical monuments and natural beauty, whereas in the responses of other interviewees, the natural sites characterizing an individual's place of origin assumed a full-fledged symbolic function, undergoing resignification within the process of constructing a new global culture. The drawing shown below was produced during an afternoon class held at an adult education class in Turin. Specifically, it was created during a practice exercise conducted by a teacher collaborating with the BABE project, who had posed the usual request to students to document their journeys.

The caption says: "A rather bad drawing of Machu Picchu." (Figure 2.5) Antony (a self-chosen pseudonym) was born in Peru in 1995. When he was three years old, his mother decided to migrate, leaving him and his five siblings with their father, a shopkeeper. She was allowed to apply for family reunification when Antony was sixteen, and he joined her in Turin, Italy. In April 2013, he wrote the following lines in a class essay:

My trip was not very interesting, and I was very depressed because I was leaving the people I was deeply affectionate to. In other words, I did not leave my country of my own choice. It was very sad to move away from everything I lived with. I had lived in Peru for 16 years, since the day I was born, and then I had to leave everything behind me from one day to the other and travel to Italy with hopes of a better future.

Four more siblings arrived in Turin after Antony, who graduated from junior high school and attended a computer class, later enrolling in a vocational school that offered training in tourism and catering.

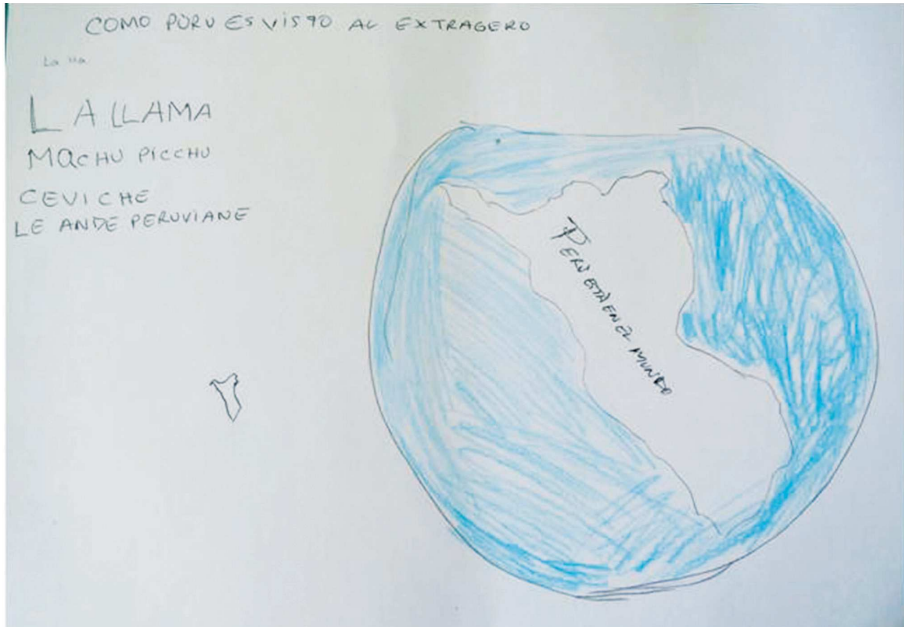
Now, I have been in Italy for one year and a half, and I am still looking for a better future. But I have found the way. I would like



2.5 *Machu Picchu* by Antony, April 2013.

to say—and I mean it—that I got a very warm welcome in Italy, where I found people who helped me a lot. Maybe my trip was not very nice in the beginning, but in the end, it did not go badly. I will continue my search. I hope I will find my better future soon.

In March 2015, almost two years after his participation in the class interview, we tracked Antony down with the help of his teacher, and Leslie Hernández Nova of the BABE team interviewed him, asking him why he had chosen that subject for his drawing.⁹ He replied without hesitation: “Machu Picchu is universally known; it is the symbol of Peru and one of the seven wonders of the world.” He spoke literally: Machu Picchu was designated as a Peruvian Historic Sanctuary in 1981 and as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. In 2007, Machu Picchu was voted one of the “New Seven Wonders of the World” in a worldwide Internet



2.6 Antony's drawing, 2015.

poll. The caption in the website is telling: “2000 years after the ancient 7 wonders have been defined, we create global memory again with the New 7 Wonders of the World.”¹⁰ He told the interviewer that someday he would like to go to the mountain and the site and really get to know them. Despite never having been to Machu Picchu, this is a highly significant place for him: “Yes, like my flag. Like a symbol that represents Peru. It is like the pyramids for the Egyptians; that is what Machu Picchu is for Peruvians.”

When interviewed individually in 2015,¹¹ Antony wrote down his family genealogy, indicating that he had some familiarity with the Quechua language through his grandfather (from Huamachu) and his grandmother (from the Sierra), thus claiming a direct ancestral connection with the ancient Peruvian culture. He also produced another drawing, in which Peru was positioned at the center of the globe with the

title “*Como Perú es visto al extranjero*” (“What Peru looks like to a foreigner”). (Figure 2.6) This drawing exposes the language of tourism through the imaginary of the Peruvian diaspora, seen as expanding across the entire globe. The caption inside the map of a gigantic Peru says: “Peru está en el mundo” (Peru is in the world). Antony concluded by stating that he would like to present an artistic performance to express his sense of belonging to the world. He envisaged wrapping himself up in the flags of his friends’ native countries: all of the flags of the European Union and those of Peru, Spain, Italy, Ecuador, Morocco, and Romania—the flags of “the foreigners of Turin.”

Antony also had in mind a photographic project illustrating the different cultures he had encountered through the friendships he had forged in Italy. For this project, he intended to paint various national flags on his body and then take photographs to express multiple identities and the embracing of others. As in Magdy’s drawings, the idea of spacetime is also evoked in Antony’s drawings. In both cases, the fatherland is located within the image of the world, which provides the right context for the solidarity that exists between the “foreigners of Turin,” that is, his friends and himself, who are not losing an original identity, but rather remolding it in light of a new global perspective.

These maps are not fixed representations of space and are not “mental objects” that can be externalized independently of intersubjective contexts. Perceived in light of Tolman’s concepts, they could all be described as “broad,” in the sense that they imply a complex itinerary through spacetime as well as flexible goals that can be adjusted according to the specific situation. This process of visual memory allows individuals to establish coordinates that enable movements, while retaining reference points during the trip: the displacement is real, but memory offers a spatial framework that operates as a structure.

The maps presented in this chapter implied criticism of our methodological approach of asking for figurative representations of migration itineraries that oversimplified complex stories. These maps could be read as an indirect critique of traditional geopolitical maps created in the Western tradition, which focus exclusively on the spatial dimension and

are relatively static, requiring continuous updating. In the Western geopolitical visual tradition, even historical atlases are composed of several maps that are static and have been created at different times.¹² However, digital maps are being produced that account for the temporal dimension, including “thick mapping” and “deep maps” that combine history and space with multimedia representations of changes.¹³

Although I recognize the deconstructive power of the maps drawn by the individuals interviewed for the BABE project, I do not want to reduce them merely to instances of counter-cartography, which would ultimately collapse them within a single category of opposition to Europe and to the West. We have seen how individualized the maps are, and they must be understood as such. They certainly challenge our ethnocentrism both as researchers and citizens, but they do much more than this. They can foster many interpretations, and the reading proposed here is merely the result of my personal experiences, including my encounters with their authors.

The category of intersubjectivity can be extended from the discursive to the visual when acts of remembering are created conversationally. The acts of mapping performed by Magdy, Blerina, and Antony each stemmed from an intersubjective exchange solicited by the interviewers. We always made it clear to our interviewees that our fieldwork was part of a project aimed at documenting Europe’s recent history and extensively disseminating the experience of migration to a wide-ranging public, including students at various levels. Magdy, Blerina, and Antony chose specific images for their mappings because they felt that these images were indicative of their intent to communicate with us, the interviewers—academic researchers and institutional witnesses—and at the same time suitable for explaining their views to their classmates and teachers, and to a potentially larger audience. Indeed, each of their maps could be seen to “belong,” in Bruner’s terms, to a possible wider community of the future; they might be understood as acts of dialogue, engaging the collective of the dead and the living.¹⁴ From this perspective, the order of the world is represented as an ideal that has not yet manifested. The images point to the fact that we are experiencing a transition from one era to the

next, potentially moving toward a goal of reciprocal understanding. To those who drew the maps, mobility—their own and that of others—constitutes part of the effort to reach that goal.

Notes

- ¹ The Italian term is *Piano dell'offerta formativa*, which refers to a comprehensive statement on educational policy planning, training, and the curriculum. It serves as a form of “identity card” for a school, highlighting its pedagogical and cultural approach and including not only curriculum planning but also extracurricular, didactic, and organizational planning of its activities.
- ² Luisa Passerini, Gabriele Proglia, Milica Trakilovic, eds., *The Mobility of Memory* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2019).
- ³ See Luisa Passerini, “Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism,” *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1979): 82–108; Luisa Passerini, *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class*, trans. Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- ⁴ James Gleick, *Time Travel. A History* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2016).
- ⁵ Ernst Bernhard, *Mitobiografia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1969).
- ⁶ Fabrice O. Dubosc, *Quel che resta del mondo. Psiche, nuda vita e questione migrante* (Rome: Magi Press, 2011).
- ⁷ Noel Malcolm, “Myths of Albanian National Identity: Some Key Elements, as Expressed in the Works of Albanian Writers in America in the Early Twentieth Century,” in *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (London: Hurst & Co., 2002), 70–87.
- ⁸ Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers, “Narratives of Power: Capacities of Myth in Albania,” in *Albanian Identities. Myth and History*, eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (London: Hurst & Co., 2002), 3–25.
- ⁹ Leslie Hernández Nova, internal communication within the BABE project.
- ¹⁰ See <https://world.new7wonders.com> (accessed January 14, 2018).
- ¹¹ By Leslie Hernández Nova, in Turin on 23 May 2015.
- ¹² Jerry Brotton, *A History of the World in Twelve Maps* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books Ltd., 2012).

- ¹³ An example is the HyperCities Project in Digital Humanities: <http://www.hypercities.com>
- ¹⁴ See John Berger, “Twelve Theses on the Economy of the Dead,” in *Hold Everything Dear. Dispatches on Survival and Resistance*, ed. John Berger (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007), 3–5; Elena Pulcini, *Care of the World. Fear, Responsibility and Justice in the Global Age* (New York: Springer, 2013).

Chapter 3

Signs, Sounds, and Skills

The Written, the Oral and the Figurative:
Mihail Tirdea; Irina Stan; Ali Arush; Stefan Alexandru Mihai;
Florina Claudia Negut; and Alina Gabriela Bolog

As our fieldwork progressed, I was struck by the frequent appearance of writing in the maps that we were collecting. I had noticed from the start that forms of writing were present in the drawings, but their role was limited, as is apparent in the maps depicted in chapter 2. In Magdy's map, terms denoting high ideals such as *Life*, *Peace*, and *Love* are written in a graphic manner that resembles his ornamental signature. In Blerina's map, short captions with the names and types of places as well as her signature are presented in a decorative format. In Antony's drawing, the insertion of writing is aimed at conveying information. Whereas the caption "*Machu Picchu un po' brutto*" ("A rather bad drawing of Machu Picchu") in his first map expresses an aesthetic, relativizing judgment, his determined statements in the second map are evidently aimed at situating Peru "in the world" as "seen from abroad/by a stranger."

However, these written inserts, while providing useful information, occupy relatively little space within the economy of each of the three drawings. Conversely, in many of the other maps, the writing is prominent, as I ascertained when engaging with students at evening and pre-evening classes held for adults with mid-level knowledge of the Italian language during the fieldwork. My co-researcher, Giada Giustetto, was

simultaneously working as a teacher at the same educational institutes in Turin, during the spring and fall of 2013 and in the spring of 2014. Giada continued to conduct fieldwork in Bologna and in Mestre during the period 2015–2016.

As shown in the figures below, writing was prominent in the maps drawn by Mihail Tirdea (born in Moldova on November 24, 1980) and Irina Stan (also born in Moldova on June 5, 1968), both interviewed in Turin in December 2013.

In the map created by Mihail (Figure 3.1), the “drawing” is reduced solely to writing, resembling a literary composition, or even calligraphy homework, produced on a sheet of a large copybook. In Irina’s drawing (Figure 3.3), the writing is handsomely displayed against a changing background in nuanced colors, ranging from blue to rose pink. This colored environment indicates a potential fusion between writing and drawing: the framework seems to suggest that this is not a white page; rather, it is a sort of canvas on which the change of colors, becoming brighter, can take on meanings and signify a passage from a difficult and unclear situation to a better one. In both cases, the writing is produced with great care, and, at times, even elegance, depicted in the crafting of the letters, especially capitalized ones, recalling a longstanding tradition in the art of writing.

In his map, Mihail introduces himself, his 29-year-old wife, and his 5-year-old daughter, specifying that the story that they share is neither bad nor tragic. What was wrong, he writes, was his effort to find a better life, a mistake he had previously committed when seeking jobs in Russia, Romania, and Moldova. He had behaved “like a cow” that believes that the grass in the nearby field (underlined in his drawing) is greener and better, and therefore feels frustrated and tired. Mihail concludes that he is now in another field and is trying to be content with what he has done and is doing. He has acquired a first middle-school diploma and will go on from there: “I will never give up.” Further: “I want to give more than what I take so that I feel happy.” This elevated concluding tone, implying a moral ground, is enabled by the written form. All of his writing, which is minutely precise, is concentrated in the upper part of the sheet, with

Mihail Tirdea

Sono un ragazzo Moldavo nato nel 1980 al 24 di novembre in città di Hincesti.
• Ho una famiglia: la moglie Elena e la figlia Elena. Siamo in Italia dal 2011.
La nostra storia non è per niente brutta, tragica o per strana. Siamo venuti
qui per una vita migliore quello che secondo me è sbagliato. Dico questo
perché con tutte le volte che ho provato di cercare una vita migliore lavorando
in Russia, Romania, Moldavia ho abbandonato la fortuna perché ho ragionato da
animale. È qui c'è il mio famoso racconto con la mucca: quindi la mucca mangia
in un campo, alzando la testa vede che nel campo vicino a questo l'erba è più
verde e sicuramente più buona, quindi corre di là, appena arrivata vede un altro
campo ovviamente più bello. Alla sera arriva acuta, affamata, stanca e frustrata.
Volevo dire che: la lezione l'ho imparata ma sono in un altro campo adesso,
questo mi lo voglio tenere tutto per me, comincio ad accontentarmi di quello che
ho di quello che ho creato, o ottenuto in adesso. Il nostro ragionamento lavora
per noi. Otteniamo sempre quello che diamo. Es: "Non ce futuro in questo paese, no-è
per me questa vita, non ce lavoro, pagano poco". Questi pensieri si materializzano.
Ho sentito sulla mia pelle. Tutto dipende da me da adesso, e ho cominciato con la
terza media e vorrei andare avanti. Spero che mi piaccia il mio cammino e non
mollerò. Voglio dare di più di quanto prendo così mi sento felice.

3.1 Map drawn by Mihail Tirdea, December 2013.



3.2 Mihail Tirdea.

the void below it making the content all the more significant in light of his refusal to draw, which he explained in his oral presentation: “I don’t want to draw. It’s too much of an engagement for me.” But he claimed the ability to “color with words everything.” He said that his document referred only to him; it was not valid for the rest of us: “You just listen to me.” We interpreted this statement as an assertion of his ability and identity; a vindication of his choice of the written mode of communication, contrary to our request and to the responses of many of his classmates. His composure and his gesture of placing his right hand on his heart conveyed his earnest attitude.

Irina Stan’s writing tells the story of her very difficult and clandestine journey, which included crossing the Carpathian Mountains, enduring cold, fear, hunger, and thirst (Figure 3.3). She underlines certain words that emphasize the physical fatigue brought about by the travel: “[W]e, 14 people, had to walk for 3 days to climb the mountains, run. My shoes broke and I walked barefoot, my feet wet and wounded.” This terrible trip, she writes, will give her nightmares for years to come. However, her last words speak of a better present and future:

[M]y son has been in Italy since three years, he is 9 years old, studies in primary school and I must say that in grammar he is much stronger than me and helps me to do my homework!!!

IRINA (MOLDAVIA)

Sono partita con altre persone (eravamo in 14) verso Ucraina (Ugorod) in macchina, poi il treno. C'era molta paura nel mio cuore e mi mancava mio figlio che ho lasciato a casa con mia madre. Mio figlio aveva 5 anni e 5 mesi. Mio marito ora in Italia da più di un anno (2006). Mi ricordo che faceva ancora freddo, era a maggio, ma in montagna (Carpat in Ucraina) è freddo, nebbia, pioggia, solo tutto in un giorno. Noi, 14 persone abbiamo dovuto camminare per 3 giorni a scavalcare le montagne, corere. Le scarpe mi si sono rotte e camminavo scalza, piedi bagnati, feriti. L'ultimo giorno di cammino era finito il cibo e le nostre guide ci hanno distribuito 2 sacchetti di tonno: le abbiamo aperte e con un cucchiaino abbiamo divorato un pezzetto di pesce ciascuno, bevavamo l'acqua dai ruscelli e ci mulevamo di nuovo in cammino. Di notte dormivamo per terra: ci stringevamo l'uno all'altro per scaldarci - non dimenticherò mai il freddo che ho avuto.

Abbiamo raccolto queste montagne, abbiamo viaggiato con il pullman sotto Bucovina (un viaggio di 8 ore, poi abbiamo dovuto attraversare il fiume per arrivare in Austria. Il punto di accoglienza a Traiskirchen (come in Italia Lampedusa). Poi il nostro gruppo è scappato da lì con 2 guide, che ci hanno portato con il treno a Vienna. Abbiamo dormito lì una notte in un appartamento affittato apposta. Ci hanno comprato i biglietti per il treno Vienna - Venezia. Il viaggio durò un giorno. A Venezia il nostro gruppo si divise, ognuno prese la sua strada. Il cugino di mio marito mi incontrò e con un taxi siamo partiti per Venezia. Mi ricordo tutti gli il profumo della minestra che ci ha servito sua moglie al nostro arrivo (loro abitavano a Venezia). Mio marito arrivò il giorno dopo, per poi portarmi a Berlino. Non mi ricordo che cosa sentivo arrivata a Torino, forse niente, ero stanca, sotto l'effetto del viaggio.

Leventure acute in montagna in Ucraina mi hanno portato degli incubi per anni, la paura che nascondono allora nell'anima mi uscirà quando ero più indifesa. Molti dettagli gli ho raccontati (non intendo di violenze di nessun tipo) per mancanza di tempo per scrivere, ma anche perché mi emozionano ancora.

Ecco il traffico di persone, ecco la clandestinità.

Mi chiedo, le persone con cui ho viaggiato, che sorte hanno avuto, dove sono?

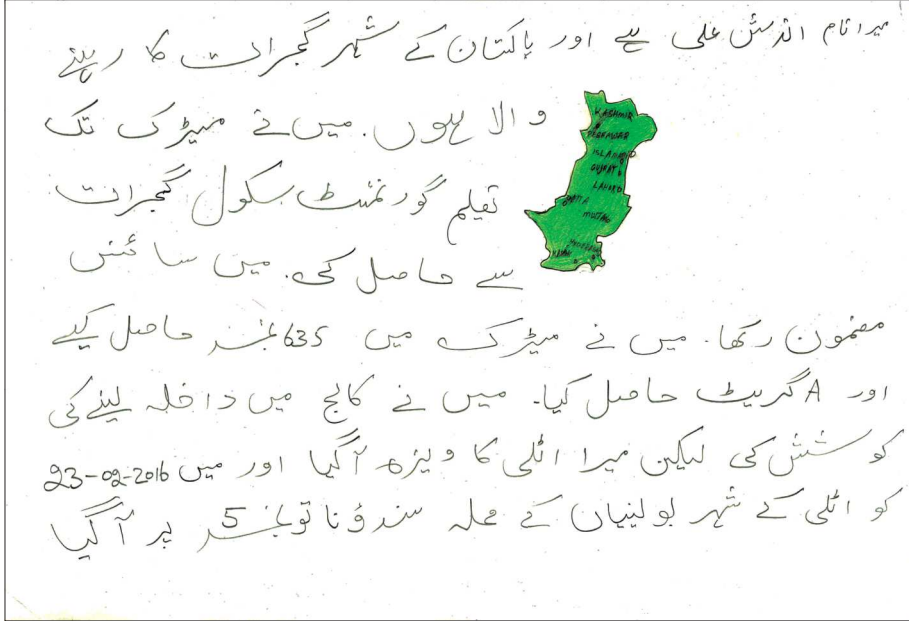
Mio figlio è qui in Italia da 3 anni, ha 9 anni e studia all'elementare e devo dire che in grammatica lui è più forte di me, mi aiuta a fare i compiti!!!

3.4 *Irina Stan.*

Orally, Irina commented at length on her drawing, and there were significant differences between her oral and written narrations. The oral contained more details, especially those that could seem problematic when inscribed in black and white, such as strategies for escaping the plainclothes police at a train station in the Ukraine. During this incident, the fifteen travelers had to shut down their phones and disperse to avoid being conspicuous as a group. On another occasion, the guides brought them canned food but no water. A notable difference between her oral and written expression was that from the start, she used the term “clandestine,” which does not appear at all in the written text. The oral and the written, however, converge in their references to gestures of solidarity between the travelers, but the written allows for expressions such as: “I wonder, the people I travelled with, what was their destiny? Where are they now?” This tone is part and parcel of a concluded composition, conveyed with its own simple rhetoric, and cannot find a place within more occasional and colloquial oral presentation. In Irina’s case, the written became a point of departure complemented by the oral, quite differently from their relations in Mihail’s composition and in those of other classmates.

As Giada Giustetto and I studied and commented on these drawings, we noticed that other drawings sought to combine written and figurative formats, notwithstanding the predominance of the former. One of the

most striking examples can be seen in the drawing produced by Ali Arush (born in Pakistan on September 20, 1997).



3.5 Ali Arush's map, April 2016.

Ali himself translated his writing into Italian words, stating the following: "My name is Arush Ali, I am from Pakistan, my town is Gujrat. I studied in Pakistan for ten years, finishing university. I came to Italy on 23/02/16, to Bologna." Ali explained orally that he used to live in Gujrat, where he studied mathematics and geometry for ten years, scoring very high marks, but then he decided to go to Italy, where he was ready to do any job (he was being interviewed by Giada at a school for adults in Bologna, Centro Provinciale Istruzione Metropolitan, in April 2016). He added that he was planning to visit Venice, having heard so much about it.

Our impression of elaborate graphism in Ali's drawing might have been caused partially by our exoticizing gaze. To us, the Persian letters appear particularly decorative, elegant, and beautiful, competing in



3.6 Ali Arush.

grace with the image of the country, which was retraced on an existing map, given its precision. The names of towns on the map are depicted in Latin letters, a sign that can be interpreted as a tribute to the Western mapping and geographical tradition. However, because the writing goes from right to left, the map of Pakistan is positioned, significantly, at the beginning of the document.

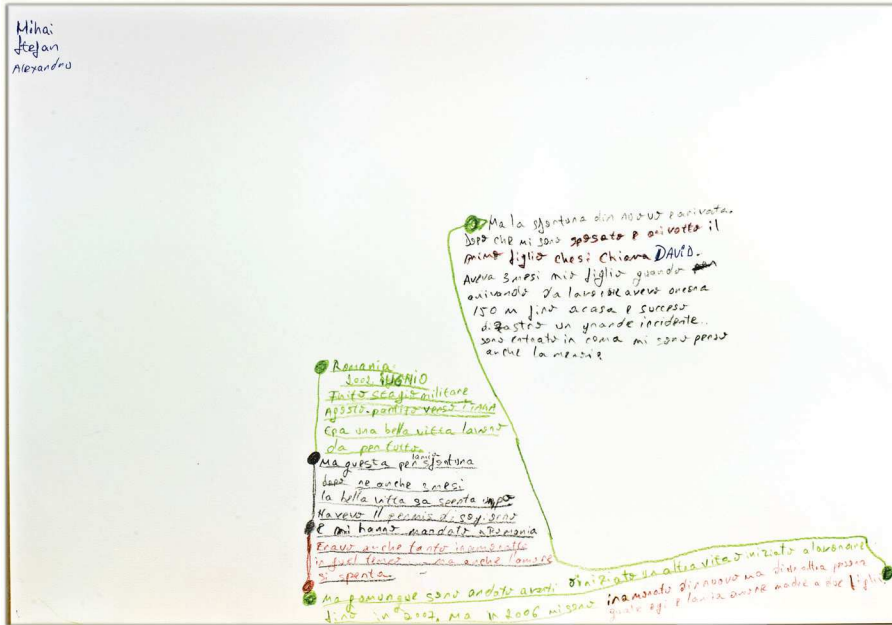
These and other examples of the recurrent presence of writing in the maps, which I had assumed would be mainly figurative, disquieted me. Why was the written becoming so invasive? What had I presupposed when choosing to request a “map” as the interview focus, and, more specifically, the drawing of a migration itinerary? I had been aware at the time that the choice of crayons and paper was a strongly conditioned one, although the use of cameras and/or the recycling of existing photographs (which was done by some students who produced montages or ‘galleries’) was simultaneously offered. I was assailed by the doubt that my original fieldwork request was flawed by ethnocentrism and exoticism in the sense that drawing could be considered a more immediate form of expression compared with speaking and writing. This was certainly the opinion of illustrious experts in the field, and we discussed Mirzoeff’s Introduction to *Visual Culture*¹ with Giada Giustetto. She agreed with Mirzoeff that visual memory has a sensual immediacy, or a surplus of experience that cannot be rivalled by a written text,

whereas figurative maps and photographs create an immediate bridge between memory and reality, thus having a greater impact than what is heard or read.

I took issue with this approach, remaining unconvinced by any hierarchy of the senses and being attracted by the notion of the multisensorial.² We debated this question, retaining our respective positions, but deciding to try to complicate Mirzoeff's view rather than reject it. We both read many texts on visual culture, which were helpful for our understanding, and for general conceptualization, but the mystery of the maps remained against the background of that literature. I had the same impression of inscrutability, at least partially, when I saw the fascinating maps collected more or less during the same period of time by Nausicaa Pezzoni³ in Milan, who asked migrants to draw their maps of the city and their itineraries within them. Ultimately, I felt that we had to invent personal forms of dialogue between the maps and us, between one map and another, and between our maps and the productions of artists and thinkers that, in our view, shared some affinity with the drawings.

In any case, a certain degree of complication appeared to indicate that our efforts to establish dialogues with the maps were headed in the right direction. Indeed, we encountered very different modes of adopting the written, revealing that the intent was often not even simply to combine written and figurative formats. This was illustrated most vividly in the recurrent feature of the organization of drawable space in the maps of some of some of the interviewees, like Stefan Alexandru Mihai (born in Romania on February 28, 1981), Florina Claudia Negut (born in Romania on September 12, 1978), and Alina Gabriela Bolog (born in Romania on November 24, 1980). The structures of their drawings departed drastically from the figurative, moving toward the abstract.

These three maps differ in the levels of their elaboration, but they converge in their boomeranging of our request. In all three maps, the portions of writing form a series of tiles, like *tesserae* within a mosaic, each being more or less square-shaped and containing a written fragment that is part of a wider composition. The *tesserae* are mounted to form a shape that could be seen to resemble the itinerary of a journey through Europe.



3.7 Map by Stefan Alexandru Mihai, May 2013.

Taking account of the content of the *tesserae* complicates the graphic message when considered in relation to the organization of the itinerary that is constituted through their convergence. This was evident in Stefan Mihai's drawing, which is depicted in alternating colors. On the basis of our oral exchange, we ascertained that this was dictated by a desire to alternate between red, black, and green in order to create a more pronounced effect, so that we could better perceive the complexity of his experience. Periods of hope are shown in green, and the times when he fell in love are shown in red (the first red portion indicates the time when he fell deeply in love, and in the second red portion he writes about "my love mother of two children"). Black conveys periods of "misfortune": on the first occasion, he was sent back to Romania because he did not have a residence permit at the same time that his first love was extinguished. On the second occasion, he had a serious



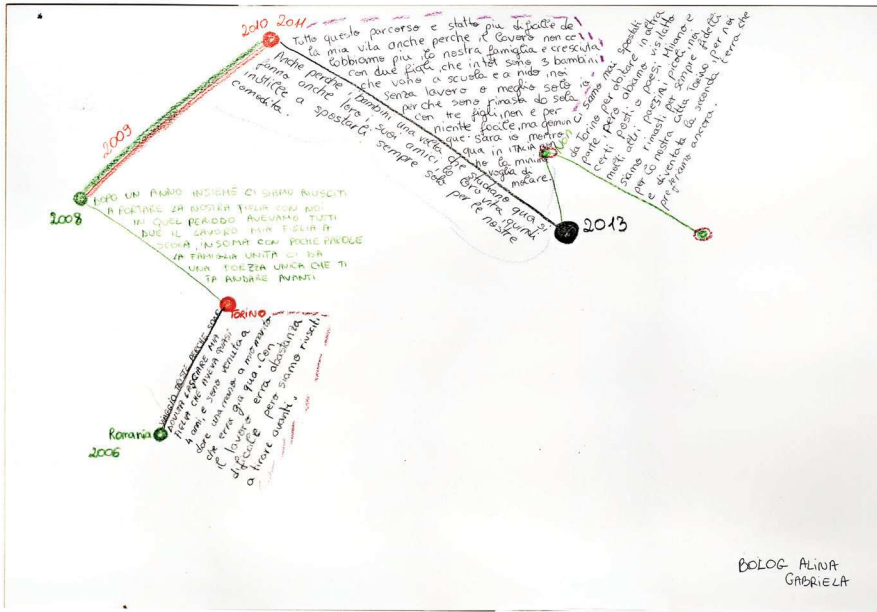
3.8 *Stefan Alexandru Mihai.*

accident when his son David was three months old: “I ended up in a coma and lost even my memory.”

This tragic story was nuanced in the oral telling at the time of the interview, when Stefan mentioned the accident and his part-time job as a house-moving helper. The graphic document is very dramatic, with uncertain lines that convey his disconcertment regarding his memory loss, but it is especially the concise and yet engaged oral narration, alternating between happiness and misfortune, that creates a strongly evocative atmosphere.

The same intent, to introduce the figurative mode through colors that have a strong visual impact, was openly declared by some of Stefan’s schoolmates describing their drawings. Their writing consequently became decorative and perceptually appealing, assuming an aesthetic quality. Here, I use the term “aesthetic” primarily in its original etymological sense, derived from the ancient Greek meaning of being perceivable; related to perception by the senses, and not so much in relation to a notion of beauty. However, there is no doubt that for the authors of the drawings, the colors are meant to add “beauty” or attractiveness. Some of the interviewees explicitly hinted at the emotional impact of color, which bridges the content conveyed by the words and the aesthetic structure of the drawing.

In Alina’s map, the first line and dots indicate the journey and departure/arrival (“a sad trip because I had to leave my 4-year-old daughter in



3.9 Alina Gabriela Bolog, May 2013.

order to come here and help my husband”), but the following ones are temporal scansions (indicating beating time) from her arrival in Italy up to the present. Her writing narrates a positive story, as she was able to build a good life in Italy for her three children, even when—two years earlier—she took care of them alone. She stated that she was very fond of Turin, which has “become our second land,” and the following declaration (written in 2013), encapsulated within a triangle that penetrates like a wedge toward the present, proclaims her loyalty to her new homeland: “[H]owever it will be, I will die here in Italy: ‘I have no wish to give up.’” (Figure 3.9) Alina’s oral presentation, intoned with a staccato rhythm, sounds like a lament:

I am Alina.

I come from Bacau, Romania.



I am here since 2006.
 It is the same old story.
 We came here in order to find a better
 life than the one we had there.
 Nothing—this is all.
 I am the mother of three.
 Now, I have no job.
 Everybody had said that here everybody
 has a job,
 And I am jobless.

3.10 Alina Gabriela Bolog.

Claudia uses almost the same words to describe her odyssey:

I am Claudia.
 I come from Romania.
 It is always the same story; we have come in order to better the
 quality of our life, but . . .

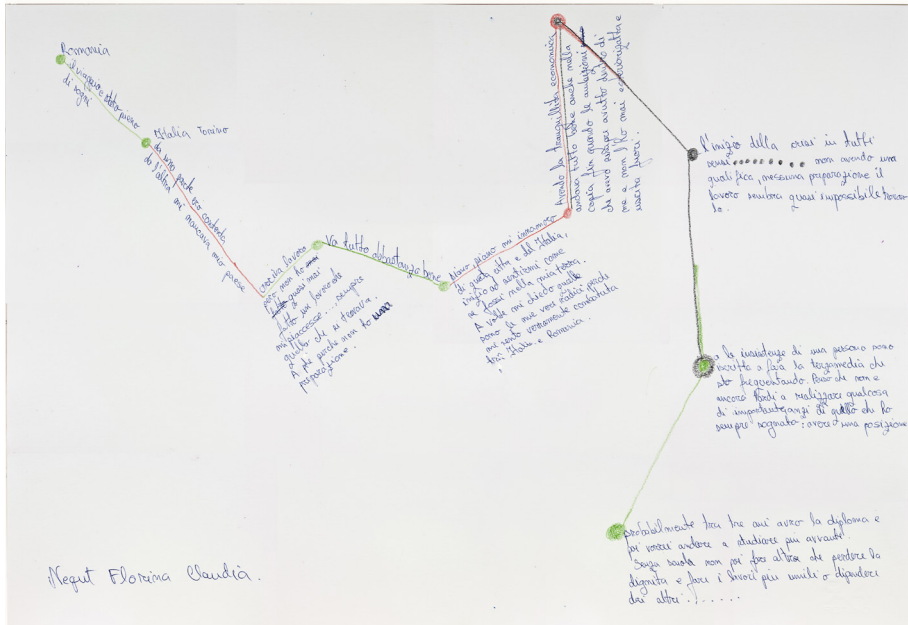
“The same story” relates not so much to the trip as to the issue of finding a job, which had become increasingly difficult in the years between 2005 and 2014. Listening to the two women, I wondered how many times they had had to reply to the question “Where are you from?” Consequently, they had decided to declare their place of origin right at the start. Claudia added important notes on her “map,” explaining how she used colors. Thus, the first line, “Romania–Italy,” was colored green to indicate her hope at the time of her departure by bus (“the journey was full of dreams”). The first period in Italy, when she felt relatively well, in spite of missing her country and having an unskilled job, was colored red. She indicates that the little round circles on the map are not towns; they were “*tappe nel tempo*” (landmarks in time). In spite of her internal tussle, torn between Italy and Romania, the green and red lines and circles reflect her positive perceptions. The black circle indicates a



3.11 *Florina
Claudia Negut.*

crisis—the lack of a good job and relationship trouble for the couple—signified by black dots, which exaggerate the usual written dots. The writer had changed her ballpoint pen for a black felt pen with which she drew nine punctuating periods, adding a graphic (and emotional) value to the dots (Figure 3.12). I recall that in her oral presentation, Claudia’s voice took on a tone of suspension, thereby indicating the occurrence of a sort of fusion between the written and the oral. Indeed, on more than one occasion, I have observed that visual memory is accompanied by the memory of sound. In her drawing, Claudia then returned to using the color green, signaling the raising of new hopes when, at the insistence of a person whom she does not name, she enrolled in a school and attempted to obtain a diploma so as to revive the prospects of finding a good job.

Because Alina, Claudia, and Stefan were all in the same class (of the adult education school “Aristide Gabelli” in Turin), a similar structure recurs in their drawings. This can be partially attributed to exchanges between the authors as well as to their common geographic and cultural origins. Claudia and Alina explicitly decided to collaborate in the construction of their maps and sat together exchanging views. However, their maps display different features and are highly individualized. As mentioned, their oral presentations showed more similarity, in so far as they both insisted on presenting self-images of victims, sharing the



3.12 Florina Claudia Negut, May 2013.

topos of an unavoidable destiny for many Eastern European women. Altogether, their oral self-presentations in front of the class were much more reticent than their written testimonies. Some of their remarks implied that it was the opportunity to write that had made it possible for them to say something that they would never have expressed in speech.

Altogether, the choices that presided regarding the organization of all of the maps were strongly personalized. Their motivations had emotional and aesthetic components that were not directly attributable to a common cultural or social status, and certainly not to a generic migrant condition. What the narrators shared was the temporary condition of being the recipients of our request to draw maps of their migration itineraries. Consequently, and perhaps even more importantly, a commonality was apparent in the reactions of some of the authors, as indicated in the previous chapter. In the examples of mappings described so far in this

chapter, the objection to the immediate meaning and the implied reversal of our request was even more emphatic. One of the art experts whom I had consulted to help us make sense of the aesthetic structures of the drawings asked, “Why should they draw if you don’t draw yourself?” I still maintain that this question, infiltrated by a sense of ethnocentric guilt, was rather crude; nevertheless, it moved me, and I suspect that there was a point in its elementary claim to political correctness. Was the voluntary insertion of writing a way of claiming a level of complicity that our “anthropological” request had sought to downgrade?

My discussion of these questions with Giada Giustetto, who was writing about her part in the research,⁴ brought forth valuable insights derived from her experience as a teacher. Her daily practice of teaching adults confirmed some of the observations made by experts like Bruner and other writers with specialized knowledge of pedagogy. Even in common opinion, drawing is usually assigned to a phase of life labelled as childhood; therefore, our request could have been perceived as an act of infantilizing individuals, who were not only adults, but whose knowledge of the Italian language was also at the stage classified as medium high. This could have been one of the reasons for the resistance of some individuals to the act of drawing and for their insistence on their incapability of conducting this exercise, while claiming more familiarity with words, whether written or spoken. We had to consider that in spite of our explanations, our request might have been interpreted as an external imposition and propulsion toward a banalization of highly complex life stories. More pertinently, we had to accept that a graphic dimension of writing was an essential component of the documents that we received and that we had to decipher.

Graphism: Gianni Carchia

These dilemmas directed my thoughts to the mid-1980s, more than three decades earlier, when I had just published a book on the memory of

fascism among the working class in Turin. Since the end of the previous decade, I had been engaged in a long bout of fieldwork that entailed interviewing older workers at Fiat and other factories. Consequently, I was confronted with cultural forms that had a strong oral component, notwithstanding continuous exchanges with the written. I still remember reactions to my efforts to “give back” through *restituzione*⁵ when I submitted the transcripts to the elderly women and men whom I had interviewed. Most of them took a look at the typed pages, but then pushed them aside and asked to listen to their original recordings; a salient lesson for an oral historian.

For several years, I had been engaged in trying to understand the many nuances and forms of crisscrossing between the written and the oral, reflecting on my ongoing experience and reading all sorts of books and articles, especially by Africanists. I learned much from Jan Vansina’s books on oral tradition,⁶ which induced me to reflect on the different degrees of formalization, codification, and crystallization between oral memory and oral tradition. I also read Jack Goody’s writings,⁷ especially his 1977 book titled *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (a bitterly ironical expression). Moreover, I met Goody and Vansina at a conference on *History and Anthropology: Oral Sources*, held in Bologna in 1976, which came to be known as the First International Oral History Conference, although at the time it was not defined formally as such.

The relationship between the disciplines of history and anthropology was particularly intriguing for me, including at a personal level, because almost all established Italian historians of the twentieth century at the time denied that researchers such as me were “real” historians and that “oral history” could be a meaningful historical practice. There was no place within the historiographical establishment for oral history, except through a subordinate role of providing oral sources as testimonial support. My own intent was not so much to mediate between anthropology and history; rather it was to maintain a firm but critical position—in spite of opposition encountered within the discipline of mainstream history—while drawing on methods and sources from anthropology, comparative literature, and folklore in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways.

During those years in the 1980s, I would discuss these questions with a friend, Gianni Carchia, who was a philosopher with a strong interest in anthropology and its relationship to aesthetics. Gianni was some years younger than me, but our age difference was not immediately apparent at the time. Gianni belonged to a younger cohort of the same “68” generation, having been born in 1947 (while I was born in 1941). We shared many political opinions, despite our different orientations within the vast landscape of the radical left—workerist in his case and a sort of mediated position between Spontaneism and Marxism-Leninism in mine (following my Filo-Situationist stance in the 1960s). Our age difference became significant for me over time because Gianni died of a neurological illness at the age of fifty-three. Thus, he remains in my memory as the brilliant young friend that he was at the time.

In his twenties, Gianni had spent time in the Sahara, living with Bedouins in Algeria and studying forms of economic exchange within tribal communities. However, this type of work had not been well accepted in his academic context, and he had turned to another of his interests, writing a thesis on Walter Benjamin. At the time, the field of aesthetics was one of the most interesting at the University of Turin. Innovative scholars at this university had deconstructed and radically reformulated traditional aesthetics from a transdisciplinary perspective. Along with a colleague, who was one of these scholars, Gianni had co-edited a collection of essays on aesthetics and anthropology that examined archaic aesthetics and the role of symbols within both disciplines, *Estetica e antropologia. Arte e comunicazione dei primitivi*.⁸ This book confirmed the transdisciplinary potential of anthropology.

Gianni had read the French version of Goody’s *Domestication*, a book that we both found admirable and inspiring. In our discussions on this work, we noticed that the French translation had reduced the original impact of the title, relegating it to a subtitle: *La raison graphique. La domestication de la pensée sauvage* (1979). This transformation implied something that we felt was foreign to Goody’s way of thinking. The interpretation by the two French editors, namely the anthropologists Jean Bazin and Alban Bensa, rigidified the distinction between the written and the

oral, reifying the “logic of writing.” For the two translators/curators, a “graphic reason or logic” referred to the formal matrix of the written, with its lists, tables, schemes, columns, and maps. By contrast, the notion of the “logic of writing” (which was the title of Goody’s book published in 1986) was malleable and pervasive, reflecting the author’s firm persuasion of the impossibility of accepting a completely clear-cut distinction between societies with and without writing. This conception was even more pronounced in his subsequent book, *The Interface between the Written and the Oral*, translated into Italian as *Il suono e i segni*. The Italian title perpetuated the dichotomy between these concepts, reserving only the subtitle for the term “interface,” a crucial one for understanding their peculiar linkage—as a continual process of osmosis and transfusion that I experienced while re-elaborating the findings of my field research.⁹

In the second half of the 1980s, I was still engaged in diverse kinds of fieldwork relating to oral history. Apart from conducting a bout of interviews with “68ers” (my contemporaries), I was interviewing children in the early grades of primary schools in towns and villages in Piedmont as well as feminists in central Italy. All of this work was strictly oral and based on audio recordings, but I retained the habit of showing the transcripts to the interviewees. There were strong reactions of censorship from some “68ers”: I still have a letter written in 1985 by one of them who sent back only twenty-five “authorized” pages out of the lengthy transcript that I had provided to her. She had added minute corrections and cancellations and multiplied the orthographic signs, which is typical of the written in contrast to the oral. Some of the feminists withdrew their interviews in subsequent years, fearing that they did not reflect the complexity of their experience and would likely stir up conflict. The children were curious to see the transcripts, but after a quick look, they did not seem to care. In any case, they were talking about something that went drastically beyond the written; to our surprise, their response to the question: “Which is your first memory?” referred to the period of time before they were born. Two or three of them introduced this theme, quoting stories told to them by their parents and grandparents, and most of the others enthusiastically followed them,

while also including memories such as a fall from a bicycle. We had evidently hit upon a family-based oral tradition of pre-birth post-memory, but unfortunately, the grant supporting the conduct of this type of research was very small. Therefore, I could not continue that study, and had to take up other tasks.

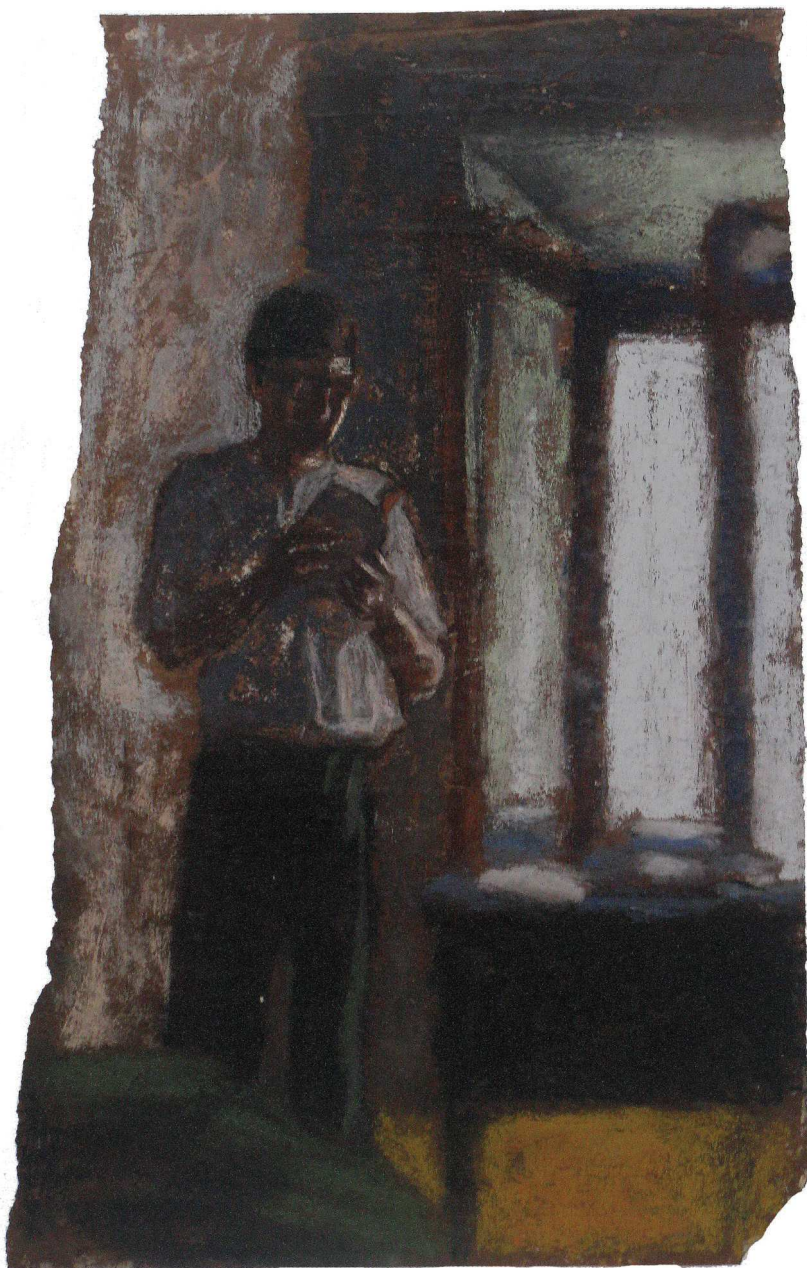
In any case, I continued to feel very strongly about the oral/written link, which for me was of personal and professional relevance. Because I wanted to avoid simplification, in our discussions I would sometimes quibble on this topic. Whereas Gianni was sympathetic toward my attitude, another friend—an old schoolmate of Gianni's who often joined us for dinners of Piedmontese food and wine—teased me relentlessly about my obsession. We enjoyed a sort of joking relationship, almost in the anthropological sense. With half smiles and sidelong glances, Gianni benevolently mediated between us. The two of them had been companions participating in fun activities like playing soccer, boating on the Po River, and driving bumper cars at fun fairs. Gianni combined extremely vast and detailed learning—which often leads to intolerance—with the opposite attitude conveyed through gentle humor and the openness to discuss any topic with complete candor. His was an authentic tolerance, notwithstanding the firmness of his beliefs. I admired his capacity to listen, the same art I was attempting to put into practice in my interviews. In him, this gift stood out more because of his overall reserved—never shy—attitude and his reduced sight, which obliged him to wear very thick lenses. The adjectives that have been used in necrologies to describe his posture, both physical and spiritual, are telling: calm, serene, suave, tender, delicate, light, modest, and at the same time sharp, sagacious, intense, and rigorous. He was a very complex man and a scholar without vanity. With his head bowed, as if looking down, he would say in the muffled tone of his singsong voice (which is an integral part of the image of him that remains in my mind): “In good substance, I had no teacher.”¹⁰

The anthology on aesthetics and anthropology edited by Gianni and his colleague included anthropological writings that emphasized the irreducible stylistic individualities of artistic or para-artistic expressions beyond cultural similarities. I now find this aspect highly pertinent

for grasping the relationship between the graphic and the oral that we encounter in oral and visual testimonies. The same can be said for another leading theme in the anthology, namely the argument that the same form can have very different meanings not only for groups but also for individuals, and that the individual dimension should always be considered. Indeed, it is the quality of an experience and not any difference in the organization of mind that produces the difference between various types of artistic and para-artistic production, illustrated in some kinds of African art and in various types of art associated with other cultures. Thus, the idea of the “primitive” was eroded from its very core throughout the anthology. Re-reading that book and remembering my conversations with Gianni, I have the impression that Giorgio Manganelli was right in maintaining that Europe as well as Europeans are differently perceived within the gaze of the European who has returned from Africa.¹¹

Along these lines, Gianni pointed out that in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Goody himself did not draw out all of the implications of his own potentially explosive thought in relation to the supposed separation between cultures. It is true that Goody’s argument is fully explicit in his later works and that its strength emerges in a rounded way only when his work is considered as a whole. Gianni insisted that what Goody had made clear in his books on writing, published in the decade between 1977 and 1987, was the fact that the anthropological interpretation of graphic tools as “primitive” was part of the violence inflicted on polyvalent forms of knowledge in archaic societies. Graphic schemes and a linear approach flattened out the oral dimension. However, we agreed that this criticism was a first cut and was not fully fleshed out. “Graphism” does not mean “written,” and graphic expression belongs also to cultures that were not centered on the antagonism between “archaic” and “civilized”; it does not entail a conception of writing that is simply a copy of the oral word. Gianni argued that the insistence on the “graphic” implied rediscovering graphic signs’ function of *trace*, which differs from their value as symbols.

My friend was soon to move to a succession of universities in Central Italy, Viterbo, and Rome, where he taught until his premature death in



3.13 *Pastel of Gianni Carchia painted by Monica Ferrando, 1993.*

2000. As for me, at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s, I started spending time in Germany and the United States, invited by various institutions to teach and conduct research. As a result, we gradually lost touch, meeting only occasionally during the 1990s. The tangible images that I have of him, aside from those in my mental memory, were created by the artist Monica Ferrando, an artist and his wife, during this later period, but they express something permanent of and about Gianni. I let them speak for themselves:



3.14 *Photograph of Gianni Carchia, taken in 1998.*

My memory of those conversations with Gianni, recalled by the migration maps after all these years, illuminates these drawings that were collected with the aim of documenting visual memory. In light of those old discussions, the maps appear to be much more than acts of opposition to awkward demands. They evidently express dissent relating to a literal and simplistic understanding of our requests, but the responses extend beyond mere disagreement, expanding the very idea of a “map.” All of them have to do with visual expression, understood as being inclusive of writing, which becomes a form of graphic decoration, thus testifying to the common roots of writing and graphic art.

Situated within the wider context of graphism as a complex mode of communication, the maps transmit a specific message rather than merely conveying opposition to our Eurocentrism and logocentrism in privileging the “word” of Western disciplines. They demand a complementary understanding of a range of styles combined along a spectrum of variables. Within this extension, each of the interviewees chose a tone corresponding to the “voice” with which he or she wanted to talk to us. Consequently, they widened the scope of their responses to include graphic signs (in various languages). The fragmented and spread out observations on the drawings presented at the beginning of this chapter only start to make sense when they are examined within this interpretive framework. At the same time, this historical/theoretical framework takes on meaning when connected with concrete “examples.” It is not the case that the maps can be considered particular examples in relation to a general law that counterposes the general and the particular; rather, they are possible conjugations of a paradigm or concretizations of a hypothesis, which serves as a useful guide across ages, peoples, and individuals, only if it remains flexible and admits exceptions.

Altogether, the theme of ‘graphism’ exalts the visuality of the written and opens up new ways of demonstrating it. What is at stake is the multiplication of *modes of communication*, an expression used by Goody to denote the combination of the means of communication with the relations of communication. In this way, Goody wanted to avoid the “slush into which one flounders”¹² when differences in ways of communicating

are attributed to a vague concept of “culture.” Similarly, I believe that the authors of the drawings were ultimately emphasizing the historicity of their experience, refusing to flatten it under the label of migration. Many of them proposed a vision of temporality that is reductively conceived within cultural geography, with its naïve belief that people belonging to cultures other than European/Western ones simply produce an alternative cartography that conflicts with traditional geography and upon which we researchers can base our deconstructive intent toward traditional academic disciplines. Much more significantly, the graphic universe/space that they produced responds to the need to communicate, simultaneously affirming identities and diversities. By revealing asymmetries and convergences with the investigators’ history and culture, these maps go beyond proposing a counter-position, obliging us, as researchers, to reconsider our assumptions and to accept being placed, in turn, in the position of the other. The graphic component of combined drawing and writing emerged more clearly during my subsequent conversations with Jack Goody.

**Gestural and Material Transmission:
Jack Goody. Youssef Boukkouss; Tarik El Amiri**

Jack Goody and I met again at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, where he had accompanied his second wife, Esther Newcomb, during her fellowship there in the academic year 1989–1990. In the 1960s, they had worked together in northern Ghana, and had written jointly on kinship, social intelligence, and interaction. I was very curious about their work, having studied the anthropology of West-Central Africa when I lived in Dar es Salaam and Lusaka. My interest was also piqued by my close relationships with leading anthropologists, such as Jaap Van Velsen, a very dear friend who died in Cambridge in 1990 (I sustained a strong friendship with his wife up to the time of her death). In the 1970s, I had worked with Giovanni Arrighi to put together an Italian anthology comprising Jaap’s work and the writings of other scholars from the Manchester

School. This book was centered on conflict and cohesion in pluralistic African societies, and especially on the interactions between individual and social networks.¹³ Consequently, during my first short stay at the “Kolleg,” I talked with Jack and Esther about these topics and about our common expat friends from Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, who were now in the UK, mainly in Cambridge. Then Jack and I got involved in an intriguing discussion on oral memory, which we continued while taking a walk in Grunewald from the Kolleg to Hagenplatz and back to the pond behind the Villa Walther. I can still visualize the little bridge with the statue of a hare where Jack and I had a heated debate on fieldwork.

Jack was critical of any attitude that entailed privileging the aspect of recording for its own sake because, while fully recognizing the importance of the transistorized tape recorder in the study of oral discourse, he sharply objected to the empiricist claim of letting the “actors” speak for themselves. His attitude reminded me of a similar skepticism demonstrated by Jerry Bruner, who would express doubt that changes in technology, like that associated with the cinema or with digital media could prompt radical advances in teaching and increase its democratic impact. More generally, Jack argued that privileging fieldwork leads to descriptions of “my people” combined with unsubstantiated global statements. I was already inclined toward the archival dimension of collecting oral testimonies that was linked to my personal horror of throwing away any piece of documentation. But I also feared falling into the trap of mere description (a permanent temptation for oral historians), and I fully appreciated the need for theory. At the time, however, I was much less appreciative of another aspect of Jack’s lesson, which was to situate the analysis of research materials within a scholarly tradition. Jack scolded me harshly for my persisting “68ish” and feminist inclination to believe that we had reached a zero point in history and that we could start all over from scratch. He tried hard to impress on me the idea that we had to take full account of our predecessors’ findings, though obviously in a critical way. I was recalcitrant to apply his advice in the field of the doctrinal and abstract historiography of the twentieth century, especially in

the Italian context, but was more willing to engage with the intellectual heritage of anthropology and folklore.

Conversations between Jack and me on these and other issues concerning the passage from the fieldwork stage to the written word continued to evolve in 1992–1993, when Jack was spending some months at the Kolleg and I was a Fellow there over the course of the entire year. We resumed our exchange on the oral and the written and he confirmed the conclusions that Gianni Carchia and I had reached in our discussions years ago. Jack insisted on the relevance of the physical basis of writing, which depends ultimately on the human hand with its opposable thumb (a thought that strikes me is that in the current context, even text messaging on cell phones is based on the opposable thumb). Writing has its roots in signs and designs of significance and can be accorded the same treatment as drawing, engraving, and painting, that is, the graphic arts. Although I had read Jack's books, hearing him "live" particularly impressed me. Jack evoked the caves of south-western France, the rock shelters of Southern Africa, and the birch bark scrolls of the Ojibway of North America, moving with ease between different ages extending from 30,000 to 10,000 years BC to the present. Some of his remarks were highly condensed and stuck in my mind like proverbs. For example, he used the phrase "writing as counting goods" to explain how economic, financial, and religious dimensions conjoined in the inception of writing in ancient Mesopotamia, which began with lists and inventories of goods acquired and/or exchanged in the context of managing religious property belonging to powerful priestly classes.

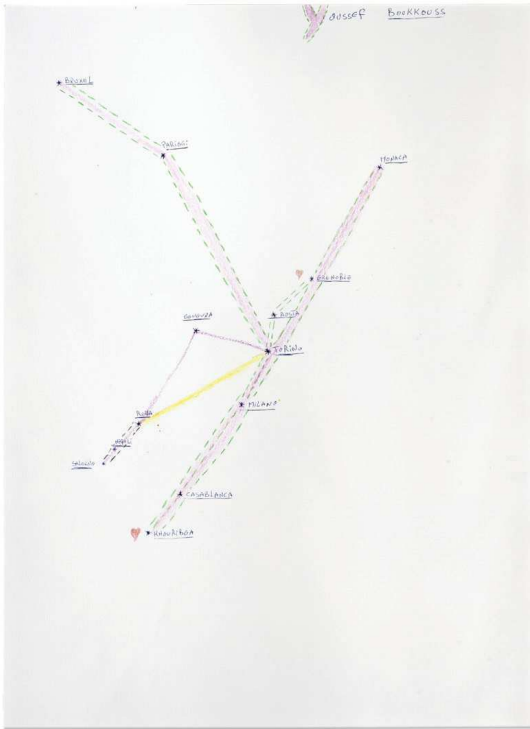
I told Jack about my exchanges with my American friends such as Ron Grele, the oral historian, and Jerry Bruner. Goody appreciated Bruner's understanding of writing as a way of adding a spatial frame to speech, and he repeatedly referred to Bruner's discussion of the role of space in relation to cognitive growth. Bruner had argued that a spatial locus was intrinsic to vision, enabling the brain to consider simultaneously information presented successively. Jack had read Jerry's works on cognitive growth published during the period between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s, and he fully valued Jerry's finding of the extraordinary impact of

vision's capacity to extend *beyond* given information.¹⁴ Thanks to these conversations that took place in Berlin, my concern about the interface between the oral and written in fieldwork and transcription was set against the background of the long history of that interface and its cognitive implications. Though my concern appeared minuscule in this context, it acquired meaning for me within a process that was to continue subterraneanly during the following decades. Of course, in 1972, Jack had famously transcribed the myth of the Bagre, a long piece of oral tradition among the LoDagaa of what was then the Gold Coast, presented both in the original language and in English.¹⁵ Only much later did I draw out the insights from this exchange; some of these only very recently when trying to understand the presence of writing in the maps that I have been collecting from migrants.

In my opinion, one of the most significant BABE maps illustrating graphism as a mode of communication is the drawing by Youssef Boukkouss (born in Morocco on January 1, 1978), which depicts the osmotic exchange between individual and collective forms of expression. I consider this map a high point of personal graphic expression within a tradition of nonfigurative representation that can be partially ascribed to the author's Islamic background.

In Youssef's map (Figure 3.15), the pregnancy of the written form and the figurative quality of the written word reaches its acme. The initial "Y" stands for the name, the person, and his itinerary, while also encompassing his future. Youssef modelled his itinerary in the shape of the first letter in his given name, as evidenced in his signature at the top of the drawing, which is in the same color as the larger image. This color, a sort of fuchsia pink, is accentuated by a green dotted contour. When asked about these voluntary coincidences, he simply laughed and replied: "Destiny!"; the same remark that he made when pointing out that his date of birth (January 1, 1978) was significant as it anticipated novelty; a promise of the beginning of something new, which, indeed, is a sign of destiny.

The bottom leg of the "Y" is anchored in the Moroccan town of Kourigba, where Youssef was born and where his natal family still lives. It is a place



3.15 Map drawn by Youssef Boukkouss, May 2013.

of the heart, which is indicated with the same icon as Grenoble, the town where his wife lives. The center of this letter is located in the place of his temporary residence, while the two upper arms indicate present and future developments: Munich, Paris, and Brussels as possible intended destinations relating to his next moves. In this organization of timespace (encompassing Morocco, Italy, France, Germany, and Belgium, and spanning over four years, plus those yet to come), some lines indicate digressions of minor significance, like the Turin–Geneva–Rome–Naples–Salerno work trip. This journey, which Youssef undertook with some co-workers as a theater technician focusing on music and cinema (the different colors indicate various means of transport) was relatively marginal to the life story represented in the drawing. Similarly, he considered the trip to Aosta to be a lateral one in



3.16 *Youssef Boukkouss.*

relation to his migration itinerary, as shown also by the types and thicknesses of the lines. By contrast, the Turin–Grenoble segment constitutes the axis of the right arm of the “Y” and is inserted in a central way within the main trajectory because Youssef’s wife, who is of Moroccan origin, was born in Grenoble and works there as a cashier in a supermarket. The map is a constellation of identitary and affective connections, combining the self, life mobility, memory of the past, and plans for the future. In his individual interview conducted some months later (in October 2013), Youssef emphasized the affective aspects. He and his wife had known each other since childhood, and their marriage had been arranged by Youssef’s mother, who was a good friend of his wife’s mother. They loved each other very much and travelled every week to meet each other. Although the marriage was conducted in a legal manner, his wife continued to live with her family, waiting for the big ceremony that was planned in Khourigba.

This graphic document illustrates the tension between the coherence of the subject and the multiplicity of converging relations that constitute subjectivity as well as the different directions that a life strategy can take. According to my perspective, subjectivity is the central element in the constellation, lending a specific nuance to the letter of the alphabet used in the drawing that leads to a conjugation of a sense of belonging

and continued mobility. Intersubjectivity is clearly at work, given that Youssef developed this self-representation to convey to us, the researchers, a message of cultural and personal identity; significantly, he reminded us that he had attended university in Morocco for two years. The map evidences the lack of a final arrival, at least at this stage of his life. This impossibility, both subjective and objective, of settling down has been remarked upon frequently by anthropologists and cultural mediators working with migrants.¹⁶ It was reinforced during Youssef's oral presentation in his reference to his indifference regarding the choice of Turin or Grenoble; towns that he held to be of equal significance in his life. Although my reading of the map confirms Goody's observation that the written adds visual, spatial, and motor elements to the linguistic act, it extends beyond his lesson through the insertion of the categories of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

During the peak period of our fieldwork, I came to realize that there was an aspect to Jack's teaching that I had not really considered for a long period of time, which was his insistence on the materiality of writing and drawing. Indeed, we oral historians often neglect the material aspect of memory. In the Berlin conversations with Jack, this aspect first surfaced during our discussion about flowers, which serve as a fragile but powerful aide-mémoire.¹⁷ Goody's book on the cultures of flowers, in which he explored the changes in their symbolic meanings over the centuries across various continents, ranging from China to some European countries, came out in 1993. In Berlin, I had accompanied him on some of his visits to cemeteries such as the Friedrichsfelde, where Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg are buried. As usual, Jack was engaged in what he called his personal ethnography in contemporary Europe, conducted—in his terms—in a non-systematic way. He used to question everybody around him on the subjects that interested him, so that our conversations were a sort of a continuing oral history. We talked about the use of red carnations by socialists and communists, and I described my political experience in the movement of students and workers, especially during the May Day demonstrations. I also remembered the practice of adorning tombs in Italian churchyards with fresh flowers during

the spring and summer, and with plastic ones during the fall and winter. When Jack grilled me on which flowers I would offer to women and which ones to men, I was reminded of the time when, as a girl, I had been instructed that I could give white flowers, symbolizing purity and friendship to my men friends, but I should give them neither red ones, which were symbols of passion, nor yellow ones, signifying jealousy.

Over the following three decades, many such conversations with Jack took place in various towns and villages of Europe: Florence, Essen, Bouzigues, London, and Cambridge. It is now apparent to me that the red thread implicitly running through these dialogues was the theme of material memory, which, for me, became explicit only at a very late stage. Jack's focus on materiality was a defining mark of his work and his daily life. He appreciated materiality in all of its senses. Whereas I had many dietary constraints because of my health issues, as I recall, there was no food that he would not eat. Jack made light of my restrictions and kept inviting me to eat things such as fried river clams, which were absolutely forbidden by my dietician. In Florence and Bouzigues, our conversations revolved around food and cooking, more specifically, "*g-nocchi*" (his pronunciation), mushrooms, and *fruits de mer*. Yet his interest in material things did not mean that he privileged luxury. He would always make the best of any situation, even when it was physically hampering, showing a certain indifference to comfort.

When Jack accepted my invitation to be a visiting scholar at the EUI during the academic year 1996–1997, he was given an office at Villa Schifanoia in San Domenico di Fiesole. This was one of the villas that might have been the site of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Jack liked the place and its garden, which was "all'italiana" and gracefully unkempt. He proposed to install a pallet in his office, which, like all of our offices, was simple and spartan, so that he could sleep on it, or just sleep on the floor, without bothering to find an apartment. I advised him that this would not be appropriate for such a distinguished visitor, and so he ended up renting an apartment in central Florence. I wondered how the idea of sleeping on the floor had come to him, and I figured that this solution stemmed from his experience of conducting fieldwork in Africa, where I

myself had slept on straw beds or on the dirt floor of huts (quite comfortably in my memory) during trips from Nairobi to northern Kenya. When I asked Jack about this, he shook his head in mild disagreement, but did not explain further at that point.

Jack's arguments were of importance for my work on Europe and love. During his six-month stay at the EUI, Jack gave a talk for my course, "Love in the Western Tradition" that was subsequently included as the fifth chapter of his book, *Food and Love*, titled "Love, lust and literacy," an example of his love for alliteration. Jack used alliteration whenever possible, especially for titles. Following Marc-Alain Ouaknin's hypothesis,¹⁸ alliteration could be interpreted as signifying the physical aspect of language. In that talk, Jack insisted on the central importance of changes in communicative systems. Specifically, he argued that "the discourse of love, and hence in a sense its practice" that is considered a characteristic of Europe does not result from any special European superiority or exclusive capacity to experience "lofty" sentiments; rather, it stems from the development of literacy, and particularly the novel. Thus, he argued that "literacy was the key to the mode of representation of love."¹⁹

Whereas Jack would question friends and other people endlessly in a sort of continuous interviewing process, he rarely talked about himself. I acquired some biographical information about him through his occasional recollections, but especially from his long interview, *L'homme, l'écriture et la mort*, published in French in 1996, and his memoir, *Beyond the Walls*,²⁰ which remained unpublished in English but was translated into Italian and French. Consequently, I learned of the time when he had spent three years in camps in Italy and Germany as a prisoner of war, although never undergoing extreme conditions, and something about his previous life story. Jack had been born in London in 1919 from a Scottish mother and an English father and had studied literature at Cambridge. In 1939, he had joined the Communist Party, but gave up his membership card six months later to join the army. He was then dispatched to Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Italy: he was stationed in Cyprus, Nicosia, Kyrenia, Cairo, Tobruk, Benghazi, and Bari. He landed up in a prisoner-of-war camp with 1,000 British, Indian, and South African officers in Chieti, where he



3.17 Jack Goody (1919–2015) as a prisoner-of-war in the Moosburg Camp, Germany, 1944.

took courses in Italian and Psychology. Fifteen months later, following the declaration of an armistice in September 1943, he was put on a train by German soldiers, but he escaped with three companions and lived for five weeks in a grotto near Sulmona, supported by local peasants. However, once again he was caught by the Germans and once again he escaped, this time to Rome, where, with relative ease, he lived in clandestinity. Recaptured and taken to two other camps in Germany, he was liberated by the Americans in April 1945.

Living in prison without (or almost without) books spurred Jack's interest in modes of communication, prompting him to reflect on the contributions of the

ancient Greeks in the areas of myth and history, democracy, and notions of time and space in the context of their invention of a fully alphabetic script. This provides a further testimony to the constant and multifarious connections between his daily life and his scholarly research.

Against the background of this sketchy life story, Jack's attention to the material aspects of life is all the more striking. This interest was not a stand-alone one; rather, it was linked to his critique of Eurocentrism and of all of the prejudices relating to the conception of the uniqueness of the West. Once, during a collective lunch gathering at Wiko, Jack reacted very critically to my naïve ethnocentric belief that spaghetti had been invented in Naples, declaring indignantly: "But they first came from Mongolia!" He was very attentive to any sign of an implied dichotomy between "us" and "them," Asia and Europe, East and West, and written and oral. Moreover, he was suspicious of the capillary infiltration of ethnocentrism and evolutionism into our way of thinking as well as of any attitude that takes for granted divisions between civilizations. In spite

of his constant diffidence toward Eurocentrism, especially in the field of memory, when the possibility arose of a chair being offered to me at New York University he was adamant that I should not accept: “You belong to Europe,” he retorted sharply.

The other crucial connection that he made throughout his study of the history of food was with writing. I remember an amicable dispute between us on the relationship between writing and cooking that took place at the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut in Essen, where I had invited him in the early 2000s to comment on a research project that I was directing on discourses on Europe and love. He was questioning me on cooking habits in Italy during my life, and I recounted some stories on the food scarcity during the Second World War that I had heard about, as a child, from my family and acquaintances. In the 1950s, our diet continued to be very simple, comprising many vegetable soups, eggs, salads, pasta, and bread, and only occasionally meat, mostly chicken. He also inquired whether we used cookbooks or handwritten recipes during those years. “Food” does not need to be written, I argued. I myself had learned to cook by watching my grandmother and father and performing tasks alongside them during my childhood and adolescence. After that, I did not cook for fifty years. During the period of my activism with the radical left, my food mainly comprised *trattorie* and *panini* and eventually some big “potluck” dinners. Then, amazingly, the memory of how to cook came back to me after I finally married for the first time at the age of sixty-seven (I had met my husband when we were both about fifty, but for many years we believed in cohabitation). It strikes me now that although I learn fairly quickly, it seems that I am slow in putting into practice what I have learned, because a similarly long lag occurred before I applied some of the points that Jack and I had discussed in the context of my own research.

In the course of our little dispute, Jack commented that at first, the connection between writing and cooking applied only to the wealthy and that haute cuisine cannot exist without written culture. In his book *Cooking, Cuisine and Class* (another of the titles that reveals his love for alliteration), Jack had written that it was in Greece and Rome where

logographic and syllabic forms of writing gave way to the simpler art of the alphabet through which cooking was conveyed in written form. He further noted that literature on Arab cooking had mostly developed during the Abassid period and referred to the cuisine of the court, entailing a pattern of conspicuous consumption. Therefore, cooking was another field that was included in his critique of the prejudice regarding the uniqueness of the West.²¹

Materiality was strongly reflected in his writing. For one thing, his way of writing sometimes led to an accumulation of empirical details, which disconcerted theoretically inclined readers. However, in some of his writings, his theoretical critique was quite precise and sophisticated, like his reflections on the legacy of Marx and Freud and his incisive insights into the theoretical and methodological implications of the history of anthropology in *The Expansive Moment*.²² Writing was a way of living for him. Every time I saw Jack, I was struck not only by his way of looking at things and people in daily life but also by his ability to write incessantly: he would write on a bench in a garden, in the street, while waiting in small railway stations in the South of France near Montpellier, or on the train, so that he would sometimes forget to get off at the right moment.

Although he rarely talked about himself, Jack promptly replied to nonautobiographical inquiries, even if they were unusual and unexpected. My husband considered him a source of knowledge and wisdom in all fields. When Jack was living in his Florentine apartment very close to the central market of San Lorenzo, Corrado and I would sometimes do our food shopping there and would drop by to see him. Corrado would question Jack on an issue that had struck him the day before, such as the question of why people who claim to be vegetarians still eat fish and, more generally, why attitudes toward fish and meat are so different. Jack thought over this question for a moment and then just said: “the blood,” meaning that blood was almost unobservable on a dead fish. This observation gave rise to a long conversation on vegetarianism, only fragments of which I recall. One of these was that people in the South of France understood the concept of vegetarianism very broadly, as illustrated by Jack’s daughter being served peas with prosciutto as the “vegetable” at a meal.



3.18 Image of an elderly Jack Goody.

The last time I saw Jack was in December 2014, when I visited him in Cambridge with Stella Tillyard. Stella drove her large old car from London to Cambridge and we went to Langdon House, where we found him in his room overlooking a small garden. He was watching television and reading *The Guardian*. We exchanged some remarks on the place, which he said was not bad, and there was no cruelty, unlike in some old people's homes. Stella reminded him of the time when we had all been together in Florence, evoking one night when we were his guests and went on drinking at his place until very late.

Then, as usual, I started to ask him questions. This time, my query was on the connection or difference between oral and visual memory, which was obsessing me then as it does even now. That time at Langdon House, Jack replied with a gesture more explicative than words. He moved his hands toward me as if offering me something and said (his speech was by then a little impaired): "You cannot hand down the visual in the same way as the oral—in visual memory you transmit an object, while in oral memory you can just talk or sing." I was struck by the essentiality and simplicity of his approach and its deep implications, because he had rendered his reply in terms of transmission—between individuals, between generations, and between cultures—regardless of whether what was being transferred was an object, a drawing, or a photo. This clearly also applies to the written, which is a form of visuality. The visual can be

mental or oneiric, but in order to be communicated it must become tangible, that is, touchable; it must be made by hand so that it can be handled.

The expression “handing down” conveys the association between visual memory and the hand. I was reminded of Benjamin’s essay on the *Narrator*,²³ who, while talking in the marketplace links words with gestures in a way that closely resembles how the mind and the hands are connected in the work of the artisan. I knew that handwriting has the same characteristics of stimulating thought as the hand moves. But at Langdon, for the sake of argument, I objected that visual memory is subjected to many losses throughout history. Jack retorted, as a rebuttal of my argument: “Nothing gets completely lost; the memory of skills endures.” I disagreed because in my experience of history, even if applied only to my individual life, I had observed that many skills have been completely forgotten, and I had been witness—often painfully—to the destruction of sources and the fabrication of false evidence. But Jack must have had in mind his last book on metals, published just two years earlier, which I had just glanced through.

On our way back to London, Stella and I were stuck on the road because of the heavy evening traffic, and the comfortable old Mercedes provided an ideal ambiance for reminiscences. I told her the story of one of my previous visits with Jack at Saint John’s College. In the cold spring of 2011, after attending a conference on Europe in Edinburgh and a lecture on oral history in Glasgow, I stopped to visit with him on my way down to London on a slow and pleasant train journey. He had a house in Cambridge that he shared with his third wife, Juliet Mitchell, but he often stayed in his rooms at St John’s College. I still have a vivid memory of that day, and I own a material object to revive it: Jack gave me the Italian edition of his book on the European family with a dedication to “Louisa,” as he always insisted on spelling my name, and the date: “Cambridge 13/5/11.” After lunching in the high-ceilinged hall, we returned to his study, where every available surface was covered by papers and books. With amazing ease, Jack would fish out papers and books from the heaps of things piled up on the floor and overflowing from the stacks on the shelves. As he went on talking, he showed me

copies of some of the chapters of his new book on metals, which he was in the process of finishing.²⁴

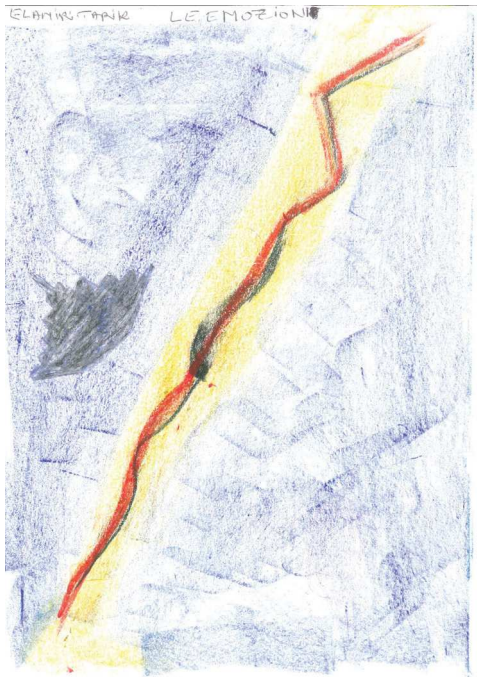
This book, which I finally read attentively when I returned to Italy, is very much about material memory, and how it has been transmitted from one population to another across the globe, starting from the Bronze Age. This transmission has been made possible by the movements of goods and skills such as extracting, melting, shaping, as well as the marketing of the finished product. In this work, Goody's constant effort to move the barycenter between Europe and Asia is very apparent, as is his intent to further dismantle the separation between continents. It was enthralling to learn, from an immense quantity of information, how the trade of objects was most often a reciprocal exchange between peoples and cultures and that this exchange was multidirectional, following the pursuit of new goods as well as the exchange of existing goods. Religious objects were particularly significant—Jack had always stressed the historical importance of religion, religious beliefs, and religious rituals, and in *Metals* he acted on this conviction. What emerged from the book was an osmotic connection between matter and knowledge, so that materiality appeared to be more than just matter, indicating a coupling of the knowledge of manipulating metals with the mobility of people and goods.

I was finally ready to understand the issue of material memory in the double sense of rendering and transmitting the physicality of bodily experience. Jack had gestured “handing down something.” The things that had been handed down to me were drawings and writings, a peculiar type of memory object that certainly did not resemble the relics of migrants' shipwrecks displayed at exhibitions like “Restless Earth,” curated by Massimiliano Gioni at *La Triennale di Milano* (the Milan Triennial) held in 2017.²⁵ An abyss exists with respect to such objects, which signals differences between the lives of many migrants who reached Europe before the early 2010s and those who have tried to do so in recent years. I am acutely aware of this difference and the bias it implies for the research I am writing about in this book, and of the limitations of my fieldwork and my analysis.

Within these limitations, the reviving of Jack Goody's lessons contributed to opening my eyes to some of the maps that we had collected and their quality of what I call "materiality." An affinity is discernable with the notion of haptic visuality used by Laura Marks²⁶ in her argument that when an encounter occurs between two or more cultures (because of exile, emigration, or colonization), new forms of sense experience and new modes of bodily representation are required. Marks defines this as a type of visuality in which the eyes themselves function as organs of touch. For her, the task of intercultural cinema is to summon up the meanings that reside in the objects and to evoke memories stored in the bodies and thereby the sense of touch.

The Italian word that best expresses what I mean is *materico*, which implies the overcoming of bi-dimensionality so that the resulting product shows an almost tangible texture and the chromatic is perceived as palpable. I can see that many of the maps we collected possess some degree of this material quality, which is greater in some than in others. This was the case with a series of maps drawn by Tarik El Amiri (born in Morocco in 1982) for our fieldwork, two of which are reproduced below.

Tarik started his trip from Casablanca to Europe in 2004, when he was twenty-two. In class, he first worked with his teacher Elena Gobbi of the "Aristide Gabelli" school for adult education, to prepare for the meeting with us. At her request, he produced a written composition titled "The emotions of the trip" and a small (21 x 29.7 cm) drawing of his trip (Figure 3.19). In Tarik's written comment, completely in upper case, he stated: "My trip to Europe made me lose 8 years of my life," while also mentioning the "happiness" of visiting a foreign country with another culture and another language: "This was the most beautiful and long[est] trip I [have] ever made." For us he created a larger (33 x 48 cm) drawing (Figure 3.20), which he then presented to the class. In it, as he explained in the map key located at the top right corner, the color green indicates Morocco, red denotes the line of departure, and black indicates the worst part of the journey. The still (Figure 3.21) is from his oral presentation. Thus, hand, body, and voice were fused together in his messages.



3.19 Map drawn by Tarik El Amiri, April 2013.



3.20 Map drawn by Tarik El Amiri, May 2013.

3.21 *Tarik El Amiri.*

The story that unfolded was about eight young Moroccan men, a group of peers who had started their trip on a truck that crossed the Gibraltar Strait and took them to the town of Manzanar, where they spent two days. Then they continued, two by two, on foot, toward Madrid to avoid attracting the attention of the police. In Tarik's larger drawing (Figure 3.20), the physical nature or corporeality of the image became more visible with the support of the oral and written narration. The thick black tract in Spain indicates the hardest part of the route: "I can never forget those 40 km. After those 40 km, I just threw myself on the ground, I wanted only to sleep. I believed I was going to die." He and his friend walked from six in the morning to four in the afternoon. They were assisted by and found solidarity with strangers. For example, one man, who ran a petrol station on the highway, let them use his telephone to call their families, told the police that they were good boys, and called a taxi to take them to the station. Tarik said, "I can never forget what he did for us." The taxi driver bought the bus tickets so as not to expose them, but when they arrived in Madrid, they had to wait outside all night in the bitter cold for the bus. Tarik described how he and his friend were trembling so much that he gave his jacket to his companion, and in the morning when a café finally opened, they could not even tell whether the cappuccino was warm or cold. In Madrid, a fellow countryman gave them tips on how to avoid the police, provided them with a change of

clothes and some food, and helped them to get money from home. Then they went by bus to Barcelona, and from there, they traveled by train to Turin. The green bus, the tall buildings in the town, and the international train seem to stand out from the map in an almost tactile way.

The physicality of the travel experience is even more apparent in the smaller-scale abstract representation (Figure 3.19) than it is in the larger and more detailed drawing: the black line becomes thicker, so that the 40-km stretch dominates the drawing, as it does the emotions. The abstract nature of this drawing may be the reason for its stronger effect; from the work of Eric Kandel we learn that abstract art, which can be considered as “an event rather than a picture,” poses greater demands to the viewer’s imagination, in so far as “it teaches us to look at art, and in a sense, at the world-in a new way:” “abstract art dares our visual system” to interpret images that differ from the ones our brain has evolved to reconstruct.²⁷

Tarik’s oral narration, punctuated by bodily movements when he spoke in a very expressive way to the class, conveyed affects, senses, bodies, landscapes, and environments. All of these were expressed through gestures, grimaces, smiles that were literally expressions of body memory. Intersubjectivity and intercorporeality appeared to be intertwined, as the whole story is punctuated by details of the physical exertion and of encounters within networks of friends and countrymen. The presentation of Tarik’s drawing could be seen as a communicative performance entailing a contagious effect.

To complete Tarik’s story, his troubles began upon his arrival in Turin. Initially, he had a stroke of good luck, when he was unable to figure out how to recognize the person with whom he had an appointment but did not know personally. He happened to ask someone what the time was, and this person turned out to be his contact, exclaiming: “But you are Tarik!”; a narrative turn that is recurrent in many oral and written stories. His luck, however, stopped there. From this point on, he met with “the meanness and cruelty of people, suffering for almost five years.” He had a job where he tarred roads, but his boss fled with the workers’ salaries, and the landlord, a countryman, chased him away. Finally, when

things started to improve, he decided not to marry so that he could work and study.

In his exposition on the history of the alphabet,²⁸ Marc-Alain Ouaknin illustrates the material genealogy of the letters of the alphabet that originate from parts of the human body and from material culture. Thus, for instance, P reproduces the sound of the moth and of lips and S the sound of air passing through teeth. Based on his study of ancient languages, Ouaknin hypothesizes the relationship between the origin of letters of the alphabet and materiality. Body memory and images of the body and its parts therefore offer ways of memorizing words, in addition to assonances and onomatopoeic resonances. This makes me think that the aspects of Goody's teaching that I have drawn together in this section,²⁹ namely the visibility of writing, the omnipresence of materiality, and the relevance of mobility, are, after all, closely interlinked. Visual art necessarily constitutes the next exploratory step required to understand these links.

Notes

- ¹ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009).
- ² Here, I am referring to works such as C. N. Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity," *Visual Anthropology Review* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 2–18; P. Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship*, (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); P. Denney, "Looking Back, Groping Forward: Rethinking Sensory History," *Rethinking History* 15, no. 4 (2011): 601–16; Eleni Kallimopoulou, Panagiotis C. Poulos, Kostis Kornetis, and Spyros Tsipidis, *Learning Culture through City Soundscapes: A Teacher Handbook* (Athens: sonorCities, 2013); and Y. Hamilakis, "Senses, Materiality, Time: Transitions to a New Ontology," (Presentation, Hellenic Studies Series–Transitions New York University, New York University, New York, December 5, 2013).
- ³ Nausicaa Pezzoni, *La città sradicata. Geografie dell'abitare contemporaneo. I migranti mappano Milano* (Milan: ObarraO Edizioni, 2013).

- ⁴ Giada Giustetto, “Memorie di memorie. Migrazioni di memoria” in *Quaderni della memoria e dell’oblio, Memorie migranti. Visualità, sentimenti e generazioni in una prospettiva transnazionale*, ed. Graziella Bonansea (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2018); Giada Giustetto, “‘Languages on Mobility / Mobility of Languages’: Between Words and Imagery” in *The Mobility of Memory*, eds. Luisa Passerini, Gabriele Proglia, Milica Trakilovic (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2019).
- ⁵ *Restituzione*, which means “giving back,” was the term used by Italian oral historians at the time to indicate the need to give something back in exchange for what we had received from the interviewees.
- ⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition. A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965); Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966).
- ⁷ Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) translated into French as *La raison graphique. La domestication de la pensée sauvage*, trans. Jean Bazin and Alban Bensa (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1979); Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
- ⁸ Gianni Carchia and Roberto Salizzoni, eds., *Estetica e antropologia. Arte e comunicazione tra i primitivi* (Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier Editori, 1980).
- ⁹ Jack Goody, *Il suono e i segni. L’interfaccia tra scrittura e oralità*, trans. Paolo Cesaretti (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1989).
- ¹⁰ Texts on Carchia published after his death include Liliana Lanzardo, ed., *Aura. Scritti per Gianni Carchia* (Torino: SEB27 Edizioni, 2002) and Sergio Givone, “In memoria: Sergio Givone ricorda Gianni Carchia,” interview by Tamara Tagliacozzo, Daniela Angelucci, and Gianni Saporetto, *Una Città* 86, May 2000, <http://www.unacitta.it/newsite/intervista.asp?id=1732> (accessed November 25, 2018).
- ¹¹ Giorgio Manganelli, *Viaggio in Africa*, (Milan: Adelphi Edizioni, 2018).
- ¹² Jack Goody, *The Domestication*, 46.
- ¹³ A. L. Epstein, M. Gluckman, J. C. Mitchell, V. W. Turner, and J. van Velsen, *La politica della parentela. Analisi situazionali di società africane in transizione*, eds. Giovanni Arrighi and Luisa Passerini (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).
- ¹⁴ Jerome S. Bruner, Rose R. Olver, Patricia M. Greenfield, et al. *Studies in Cognitive Growth*. (New York: Wiley, 1966); Jerome S. Bruner, *Beyond the*

- Information Given. Studies in the Psychology of Knowing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1973).
- ¹⁵ Jack Goody, *The Myth of the Bagre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
- ¹⁶ Joseba Achotegui Loizate, “Estrés Limite y salud mental: El síndrome del inmigrante con estrés crónico y múltiple (Síndrome de Ulises),” *Revista Norte de salud mental de la Sociedad Española de Neuropsiquiatría* 21 (2005): 39–53.
- ¹⁷ Jack Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
- ¹⁸ Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Les mystères de l’alphabet. L’origine de l’écriture* (Paris: Assouline, 1997).
- ¹⁹ Jack Goody, *Food and Love: A Cultural History and East and West* (London: Verso Books, 1998), 123; Jack Goody, “From Oral to Written: An Anthropological Breakthrough in Storytelling,” in *The Novel, Vol. 1: History, Geography and Culture*, ed., Franco Moretti (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3–36. During his period at the EUI, Goody also wrote a chapter on the European family: Jack Goody, “L’unicità della famiglia europea,” in *L’identità culturale europea Identità culturale europea: idee, sentimenti, relazioni*, ed., Luisa Passerini (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1998), 157–71.
- ²⁰ Jack Goody, *L’homme, l’écriture et la mort, Entretiens avec Pierre-Emmanuel Dauzat*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996); Jack Goody, *Beyond Walls*, unpublished manuscript (1944–1990). Italian translation: “Oltre i muri. La mia prigionia in Italia,” *Il Mondo*, 3 ed. (Rome, 1997). French translation: *Au-delà des murs, Préface et entretien réalisés par Dionigi Albera*, trans. Marianna Kennedy (Marseilles: Parenthèses, 2004).
- ²¹ Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class. A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- ²² Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment. The Rise of Social Anthropology in Britain and Africa 1918–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- ²³ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–38 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).
- ²⁴ Jack Goody, *Metals, Culture and Capitalism. An Essay on the Origins of the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ²⁵ Comitato 3 Ottobre, a humanitarian association that is committed to defending migrants’ human rights, has collected personal items belonging to some of the individuals who were shipwrecked and subsequently drowned off the

coast of Lampedusa on October 3, 2013. Photographs of these items were included in the exhibition titled *La terra inquieta (The Restless Earth)*, curated by Massimiliano Gioni and held at La Triennale di Milano from April 28 to August 20, 2017. The exhibition was organized by the Fondazione Nicola Trussardi and the Fondazione Triennale di Milano for the Visual Arts Program of the Triennale, directed by Edoardo Bonaspetti. See the Exhibition Catalogue (Milan: Electa, 2017), 124–25.

- ²⁶ Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film. Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000).
- ²⁷ Eric R. Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science. Bridging the Two Cultures* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 11, 179 ff.
- ²⁸ Marc-Alain Ouaknin, *Les mystères de l'alphabet*.
- ²⁹ When writing this chapter, I consulted other works by Goody, which include the following: Jack Goody, *Representations and Contradictions. Ambivalence towards Images, Theatre, Fiction, Relics and Sexuality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1997); Jack Goody, "Bitter Icons and Ethnic Cleansing," *History and Anthropology* (January 2002) 13 no. 1: 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200290002851> Jack Goody, "Love and Religion: Comparative Comments," in *New Dangerous Liaisons. Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century*, eds., Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, and Alexander C. T. Geppert (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010), 21–32.

PART TWO
DIALOGUES BETWEEN IMAGES

Chapter 4

Figurative Borders of Europe

Emptiness, Absences:

Eva Leitolf. Leonardo Puris; Mohamed. Ai Weiwei

To me it doesn't matter at all if someone considers my work as art or something else. It's just how . . . how powerfully it interacts with . . . it's about communication. And I think your whole project is not about artistic value or not; I think it's about triggering a discourse between the different disciplines, how they could talk to each other.

This is what Eva Leitolf told me when I interviewed her in 2015.¹ As a photographer, she has worked on many projects focusing on Europe and its borders, some of which are ongoing: *Rostock Ritz* (2004) on traces of German colonialism in Namibia; *Deutsche Bilder: Eine Spurensuche* (1992–2008) on racism and xenophobic violence in Germany; *Postcards from Europe. Work from the Ongoing Archive* (ongoing since 2006) on Europe's borders; and *Matters of Negotiation—Approaches to Switzerland* (2017), which proposes a narrative on Switzerland that contrasts with one of defending its borders. I found deep resonances between her photography—especially in *Postcards*—and the BABE research, and in December 2013, I went to meet her in Lucerne, Switzerland, where she was teaching at the time.² It was there that I first saw her striking series of photographs on Namibia, which brought to me an unusual perspective on the connection between colonial and postcolonial times and a novel approach for addressing the question of Europe's external borders.

Leitolf's *Rostock Ritz* project, the title of which is taken from a hunting lodge in Namibia,³ unequivocally implies that historically, the external borders of European territory were not limited to continental Europe—and they still are not—because to this day, “Europe” includes, among other areas, the French Overseas Departments of Réunion, Guyana, Martinique, and Guadeloupe and the Spanish territories in North Africa, Melilla, and Ceuta. Culturally speaking, the extension of what is often considered as somewhat “European” is even broader, encompassing North America.⁴

The external borders of Europe are contested, both as a concept and as an image.⁵ When the foundations for defining a European civilization were first laid down by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers, parts of what is now Eastern Europe, such as the Balkans, were not included in the European space. Europe's image has been equally controversial throughout the ages. Even up to the twentieth century, history books presented maps of Europe in which the Scandinavian states were horizontally cut in half, with only their southern parts included, while Russia was represented as a vast space extending limitlessly toward the East. Even the present epoch bears traces of European colonial global expansion and of its “external borders.”

Leitolf has documented a type of border existing outside of Europe in her photographs taken in Namibia in 2004.⁶ One of these photographs depicts Shark Island, a small peninsula advertised on the Web as offering “campsites at budget rates, beautiful scenery and a rich history.”⁷ This history includes the siting of a concentration camp on the peninsula, established by German troops in the years 1905–1907 during one of the natives' rebellions against the occupying forces. Beginning from the fifteenth century, the country remained a zone of influence of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British until it came under German rule (1884–1915) and was renamed German South West Africa. Faced with resistance, the colonizers emulated the British, who had established concentration camps during the Boer War. Thousands of people belonging to various ethnic groups, including the Herero and Nama, were subjected to medical experiments and perished as a result of deprivation and torture.



4.1 *Site of the Former Concentration Camp on Shark Island, Namibia 2004, photographed by Eva Leitolf.*

The barren land shown in the photograph is the site of the former concentration camp. Similar to other sites in the country, this is a desert area where no life seems possible. Leitolf observes that “There is nothing left there. There is absolutely no more visible trace left.”⁸ Even in a graveyard (shown in the following image, 4.2), which was first a Herero settlement and then sequentially a mission, a German garrison, and the site of a Herero rising in 1904, traces of this past are scanty and dispersed.

The effect of the figurative method chosen by the artist is comparable to the role of silence in oral memory: the void suggests devastation



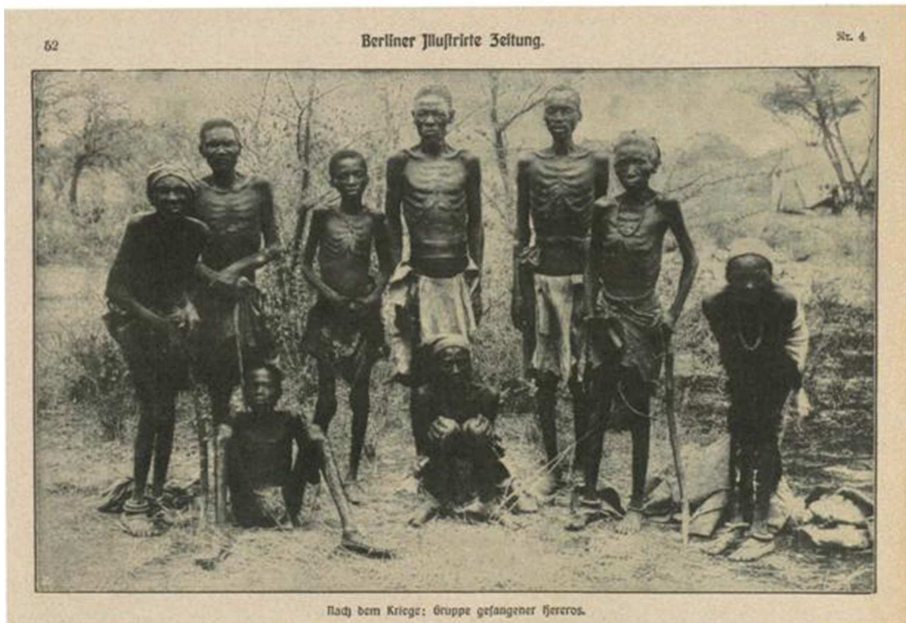
4.2 *Zeraua White Flag Day, Omaruru, 3 October*, by Eva Leitolf.

and oblivion. There is no apparent sign of remembrance to be found on this land, apart from a glimpse of the town of Lüderitz, which is barely visible in the distance, with a typically northern European bell tower—a symbol of imposed Christianity (Figure 4.1). This figuration evokes multiple absences that cannot be reduced to the desert landscape; rather, the allusion is to an emptiness resulting from efforts to erase the local culture and annihilate the native people; the emptiness of Europe itself as a colonizing subject and its message of destruction. Uwe Timm's stories⁹ (part of a novel based on the history of that time) portray human beings starving to death, while a few meters away, cattle drop to the ground

and their carcasses rot. This evokes, in my mind, colonialism's "heart of darkness" in Joseph Conrad's terms. Conrad referred to the emptiness of heart of a colonial agent in the Belgian Congo of the nineteenth century: "he was hollow at the core;"¹⁰ an emptiness to be understood in a literal sense, as a lack, a void, an absence that is both ethical and psychological.

The emptiness of Shark Island's landscape can be filled with images of some of the absentees, testifying to a genocide that anticipated the one which occurred in the Nazi camps (Figure 4.3).¹¹

When we spoke of her Namibia work, Eva Leitolf told me that she is not interested in creating a "memorial" or representing a specific "site of memory" because in her view, all of the sites, no matter how important, somehow become sites of memory. For her, the scenes of empty spaces respond to her intent of providing a stage for images connected with colonialism or racism in order to de-dramatize them.



4.3 *After the War. A Group of Herero Prisoners.*¹²

The idea of a stage came directly to her from her subjects, in the sense that, historically, Namibians have performed parodies of the colonizers' customs and attitudes, demonstrating cultural resistance in a mocking way. Since the early 1900s, the subversive use of German uniforms had been ongoing among the African population in Namibia, and in 1905, recognizing the rebellious implications of this appropriation, the colonial administration prohibited such use of this uniform by "natives"; a ruling that the African population refused to comply with. European ideas and practices were not only imposed but were also appropriated and given new meanings by the local population, engendering new political, religious, artistic, and social expressions resulting from the reciprocal influences of the conflicting cultures.¹³ When Leitolf visited Namibia in 2004, she witnessed various commemorative events during which this parodistic appropriation was re-enacted. At one of these events, held to commemorate of the Battle of Ohamakari, the *mise-en-scène* of a fake hanging was set up using fragments of the uniforms of the German colonial troops, thus effecting a kind of self-empowerment (Figure 4.4).

In some cases, the Namibians staged a parody with colonial uniforms, adding Christmas stickers and other funny objects in a farcical rendering of dramatic colonial events. In her Namibian fieldwork notes, which she calls her "production diary," Eva recounts how in the reenactment of the Battle of Okandjira of March 9, 1904, in which German troops killed a number of Ovaherero and Ovambanduru, the German soldiers were played by children, while men on horseback represented the Herero. The "leader" of the German colonial troops impersonated by the children screamed: "Schweinhund, dreckig Schweinhund!" ("hogdog, dirty hogdog!"), and the spectators laughed. She also describes a carnival parade in Windhoek where participants chanted the slogan "We are all equal in the kingdom of carnival fools."¹⁴ The presence of children may become clearer if this scene is compared with the film, *Al Araba Al Madfuna I* (2012; the film is the first of series of three) produced by the artist, Wael Shawky. The script of this film, comprising a short story authored by the Egyptian writer, Mohamed Mustagab, is recited by children with



4.4 *Ohamakari Battle Commemoration, Okakarara, 14 August, by Eva Leitolf.*

moustaches stuck on their smooth faces, and adult voices dubbed in. “The kids do not bear the weight of the past, the weight of memory,” Shawky explains: “they can recite innocently with the voices of adults, and at the same time they represent a link to the future.”¹⁵

The Namibian performances avoided all tones of self-commiseration: there was no self-pity, no portrayal of victimization, and no attempt to induce a sense of guilt in the listeners. Such a voluntary mocking attitude of reappropriation does not negate awareness of suffering and mortification. By contrast, another type of parody entailing the transformation of local sites into touristic areas, named after great hotels in the



4.5 *Rostock Ritz Guest Farm*, by Eva Leitoľf.

Western world, is involuntary and triumphalist, appearing awkward and offensive in the context of the conversion of colonized land into touristic resorts.

Some years later, Eva Leitoľf told an interviewer¹⁶ that in her *Rostock Ritz* photographs, human figures were still present because the search for traces of German colonial history could not function without the presence of people, at least in certain cases. It was in the *Deutsche Bilder* project that she decided to stop showing people altogether. These images are of 24 localities in Germany where arsons, pogroms, acts of violence, and verbal expressions of racial hatred were perpetrated against

foreigners, migrant workers, and asylum seekers.¹⁷ Seeing people in those photographs made her uneasy. She wanted to avoid any visual “emotainment”—that is, media-like emotional entertainment—and to establish a distance that would enable her and the viewers to get more involved in a different way. In this sense, *Rostock Ritz* can be seen as marking the beginning of a process that coherently connects the various works of this artist, notwithstanding changes and refinement.

The approach focusing on emptiness and absence was fully adopted by Eva Leitolf for her series of *Postcards from Europe*, in which Europe’s territorial borders are depicted as uninhabited as opposed to crowded with hordes of migrants, as is typically portrayed in media representations. Each image in this series is accompanied by a written note containing detailed information sourced from daily newspapers police records, or the author’s diary, the harshness of which contrasts starkly with the apparently calm and idyllic scene. As Leitolf told an interviewer in 2009, this was how she intended to explore conceptions of Europe that were broader than those that she previously had:

I am interested in the enormous field of the European Union’s external borders and their inclusionary and exclusionary functions . . . especially the areas one could describe as no-man’s land, where spaces have been and are being created for those who supposedly don’t belong.¹⁸

“A boat carrying twenty-three undocumented Moroccan immigrants went down off Tarifa during a severe storm on 1 November 1988. The bodies of ten who drowned were washed up on the beach at Los Lances. Nine were never found and there were four survivors. A vessel with more than thirty people on board sank near Tarifa on 15 September 1997. Six passengers survived, fourteen corpses were found on the Playa de los Lances and an unknown number were lost at sea.”

El País, November 2, 1988 and September 16, 1997; *Diario de León*, October 9, 2002.¹⁹



4.6 *Playa de Los Lances, Tarifa, Spain, 2009, by Eva Leitolf.*

This solitary beach, where a flag that seems to mark the border between Africa and Spain at the southwestern tip of Europe is posted, induces a sense of disconcertment and estrangement. Just as silences structure oral memory, voids structure visual memory. At the same time, the tension between the image and the text offers a strong critique of prevailing representations of migration in the media. Leitolf's photographs convey a denunciation of the refusal to fully acknowledge the presence of migrants in Europe and an urgent call for a more powerful way of rendering them visible. Below is the scene of another desolate landscape photographed by Leitolf, this time on land at the opposite tip of Europe, that is, its central-eastern border:



4.7 *Maize Field, near Záhony, Hungary 2009, by Eva Leitolf.*

“On 25 June 2007 three smugglers and twenty-eight Moldovan citizens were detained in a maize field between Záhony and Zsurk after crossing the River Tisza in a line of rubber dinghies and passing the Ukrainian-Hungarian frontier between border stones 356 and 357. According to the police each of the detained persons had paid the smugglers between \$1,200 and \$1,500. Because they had entered Ukraine legally they were immediately deported back there.”

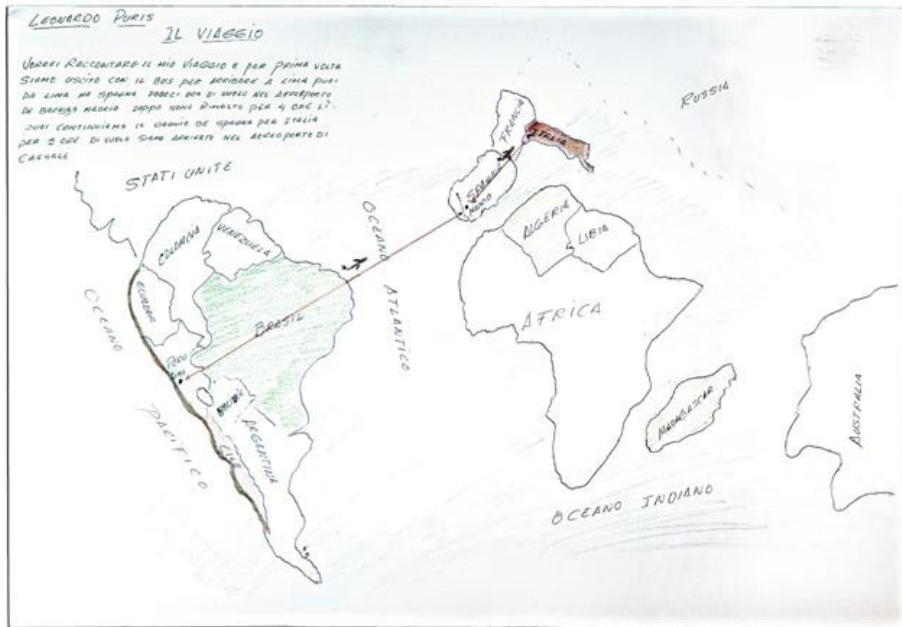
*Records of Záhony border post, 25 June 2007.*²⁰

In 2014 and in early 2015, I studied Eva Leitolf's work and presented it to students while conducting fieldwork for the BABE project. I did so after ascertaining that an interlocution could be fruitfully established between her artwork and the BABE project, particularly in relation to some of the "maps" that I was collecting. Whereas her images speak of the absence of bodies, certain voids in the self-produced migrants' images alluded to other absences.

In his drawing of his migration itinerary, Leonardo Puris²¹ applies a global context to illustrate his journey from Peru to Spain–France–Italy. Envisioning Europe as a territory limited to a small and specific group of countries was a recurring theme in the drawings collected during the BABE fieldwork. However, it would be reductive to assume that this was solely the outcome of an automatic choice of privileging the countries that the traveler had visited. In this case, the intentionality of the reduction is confirmed by the precision with which other continents, especially South America, are drawn. This intentionality is especially notable, considering that the author had access to traditional maps of the world available in the classroom, but he chose to use them only for the sections that he wanted to highlight in his drawing. Of the three countries he has depicted, Spain is historically significant for Peruvians because the narrative on the *Conquista* has been recorded in books and films, taught in schools, and transmitted through living memory, as oral history interviews conducted by a BABE researcher with Peruvians in Europe confirm.²²

"The Trip. I would like to recount my trip, and for the first time/ we went out with the bus to arrive in Lima then/ from Lima to Spain; twelve hours of flight to the airport of Barrajas [in] Madrid/then I remained there for more than four hours/ then we continued the trip from Spain to Italy/after 2 hours of flight we arrived at the airport of Caselle." (Figure 4.8)

Although the narrator never complains, his story conveys a sense of the hardships and suffering that he experienced during his journey and during the periods that preceded and followed it. His wife had left Peru to work in Italy in 2001, and in the years following her arrival there, she had



4.8 Map Drawn by Leonardo Puris, May 2013.

succeeded in bringing out their four daughters. But Leonardo was only able to join them in 2009. In a written composition, he commented on the emotions of fear, relief, and joy infused in his family story (Figure 4.9).

The empty space left between the three countries and the vague border with Russia in Leonardo's map can be interpreted as an allusion to the absence of Europe: Europe as a whole is not depicted; it does not seem to exist as a subject. It is the concept of a unified territory that is missing, both geographically and politically. This blank echoes—and gives new meaning to—W. H. Auden's line, "Europe is absent," in the poem, *Journey to Iceland*, written in 1936. This verse has been read as conveying an impression of Iceland being a happy place by underscoring its distance from the European turmoil. However, to me, this reading seems incongruent given the conflictual context of Europe at the brink of the Spanish Civil War, in which Auden would participate one year

4.9 *Leonardo Puris.*

after writing this poem.²³ In the context of the BABE research, Auden's verse assumes a new significance, referring to the absence of a European politics relating to migration that is capable of overcoming the divisions between the states of the European Union and curbing the violent and cruel measures implemented to stop the entry of migrants.

A symmetrical absence is denounced in other mobile people's descriptions of their efforts to cross the European borders. Against the background of the global diaspora of populations, the "absence of Europe" is conflated with the absence of the "others." Thus, the void alludes to the bodies that have tried to occupy the now empty space as well as to other bodies that could try to cross this space. It results in a nullification that is not only visual, but also corporeal, as this emptiness incorporates memories.

In his oral interview, Mohamed, who is from Syria, described his long and painful odyssey from Aleppo to Malaysia, then on to Turkey, Greece, Switzerland, France, and finally to the Netherlands, where he found that the prospect of getting a permit was good.²⁴ After his father's factory in Aleppo was bombed and destroyed, Mohamed and his fiancée fled to Malaysia to complete their studies, but because he was working there illegally, he was jailed under terrible conditions. As soon as he was released, he decided that his only choice was to go to Europe: "Europe for me was not a dream. Normally I used to come to Europe a lot of times as a tourist. Like: it's real; it's nothing for me. But that was the situation."



4.10 *Mohamed's Photograph of his Journey*, 2015.

The story of Mohamed's trip back to the West is punctuated by hunger, robbery, corruption, and violence inflicted by guards and smugglers in various countries. He showed the interviewer his own photographs as a visual memory of his journey, documenting his crossing of the Aegean Sea when he moved from Turkey to Greece. One of these photographs (Figure 4.10) shows the boat that he and his forty-four fellow travelers had been obliged to inflate themselves, as the smuggler would not do this: "Actually I was the only one in the boat who had the courage to take this mobile and shoot."

The photograph testifies to an overlapping of personal memory, the media, and the arts. The rubber boat has become a symbol of migration, and, as such, is present in many figurations conveying different meanings. One of these is the photograph shot by the artist Ai Weiwei (Figure 4.11).



4.11 Ai Weiwei, *Zodiac Boat*, 2015.²⁵

This image is both a denunciation of the tragedy of migration and an act of defiance in relation to the codified history of art. It is one of the many photographs that Ai Weiwei shot when he visited Lesbos in 2015, where he extensively documented the situation of refugees on this island.

The image of the boat has become a sort of master key, but a comparison of this photograph with Mohamed's shows that they are only similar in appearance, as they testify to the same tragedy but in very different contexts. Mohamed's image is less colorful and aesthetically appealing than Ai Wei Wei's photograph. It stems from his own experience and proclaims his capacity to overcome a tragic event, evidenced by the fact that it was shot from the shore, revealed by the submerged rocks under the water. Ai Wei Wei's image does not show a point of arrival, and instead supports the prevalent imaginary in Europe that is centered

on annihilation, his position made stronger by his non-Europeanness. The consumption of Ai Weiwei's art, worldwide, has greatly impacted on public opinion and in this sense it has championed effectively the cause of migrants. His aesthetic strategy implies an effort of impersonation of the other that differs from the approach of other artists whose work is explored in this chapter and book, and who choose to let the refugees speak for themselves. I would like to avoid taking any moralistic stand in relation to this operation, my intent being to advocate thoughtful reflection on differences, artistic or otherwise, in the treatment of the recent past and present.

In the case of Mohamed, the image has to be set against the background of his individual story. It is just one of many photographs that Mohamed has shot of his trip, during which he also photographed many objects and places that pertained to his travel: tools, glasses, a bag, a shirt and jacket as well as the stadium on Kos Island where he was confined with a thousand others. In spite of his turbulent travel, Mohamed projected an affirmative self-representation throughout his testimony; he repeatedly affirmed in all circumstances: "Be positive. Just be positive. We're gonna make it." Seen in this light, the image of the empty boat indicates his capacity to overcome the numerous difficulties of his perilous journey, a symbol of his resilience, and a part of the wider picture that he has decided to document by taking a photograph at each stage of his journey.

When Eva Leitolf and I met again in March 2015, I questioned her on the contrast between images and texts in her photographic production, which resonates with the relationship between the oral, written, and visual in my research. She immediately enriched my question, adding new meaning and clarifying that the empty stage is also a way of avoiding the "we" and "they" distinction, enabling the viewer to take part in processes of migration, acceptance, or refoulement. Her images are not intended to be "beautiful images;"²⁶ rather, they serve as tools for dealing with these issues in contrast to the dramatic way in which the media portrays them, so that we, as viewers, cannot consume them as emotionally entertaining, saying: "Oh, I feel so much pity, that's so sad!"

and then move on. The challenge, Eva said, is to affect us at a much deeper level than just an emotional one invoked through rapid consumption; to slow down the reception of images. The rapid and relentless transmission of images leaves viewers of the Internet, television, and other visual media—and these days even art—with ever decreasing possibilities to pause for breath. Nevertheless, techniques for fostering a more intense way of relating to images can be acquired.

“Postcards” is a never concluded work; the outcome of a subjective and personal search, always ongoing, that is, in the artist’s words, an open and “unlimited archive.”²⁷ Leitolf refers to these images as “critical frontier narrations,”²⁸ responding to the needs induced by the conflictual context of contemporary visibility:

It is very hard to counteract the archetypal image in the version diffused by the media: the image of a flood of *others* trying to get into a place, overcoming fences, borders, obstacles; the image of thousands of strangers who want to come inside the place where we live. An archetypal narrative of a threat. Something of this image projected from the mainstream media angle remains in my memory—of all these people trying to get into the picture. Showing images without people is a way of showing/seeing from a different angle.²⁹

The poetics of this artist are imbued with a sober attitude of keeping the measure, maintaining freedom from exaggeration, and giving value to silence and secrecy. This aesthetic attitude is conveyed in her declaration that she prefers not to spell out every last detail, allowing the images to preserve some kind of secret at the visual level. It is reflected in many of her statements, in which she rejects any type of labelling and quick theorizing, instead aiming to foster critical thought and understanding. Examples of these statements include: “I wouldn’t say I had an educational intention”; “My work is not dedicated to developing a particular visual language, which I could attempt to perfect”; “We are overwhelmed by a flood of images, and I often ask myself whether I really

need to add my tuppence worth, but taking photographs is my means of expression.” But she is assertive in affirming that she hopes to generate a critical train of thought and to discover something about the structures and mechanisms of social situations.³⁰

Returning to Eva Leitolf’s statement cited at the beginning of this section, the basis for an interlocation between her art and the BABE research appears clearer in light of this perusal through some of her productions. Their common ground lies in the choice of showing and questioning, without claiming to belong to any particular disciplinary field, while choosing to adopt a critical stand within art and cultural history, respectively.

Presences Across Frontiers: Henry Moses; Maricica Anasie; Ludmila Dmitriev

Victor López González is an artist who bears the mark of migration. His parents were migrants who travelled from northern Spain to Paris, where he was born, and the family then moved back to south-eastern Spain when he was five years old. Later in life, while based in Valencia, he travelled widely for his art work. For him, “immigration is nothing new. Immigration is not a problem. It is a situation of life, which has existed and will continue to exist. This is why I wanted to go to East Germany where the wall had fallen in ’89, and then to Mexico.”³¹ From Mexico, he returned to Germany and then travelled on to Senegal, continuing to move and often following the itineraries of migrants whom he wanted to document. In 2013, he started the “Atlas” project, which focused on people’s movements across the border between Spain and Morocco. The project includes photographs of *portadoras*, that is, women who carry smuggled goods across this border.

The Spanish word for porters is gendered, and gender emerged as a theme in the artist’s comments on these images. He asserts that they portray the inequality of gender, migration, and underground economies:



4.12 From the “Atlas” Project, 2013, produced by Victor López González.

Every day, thousands of women cross the border on foot, carrying up to eighty kilos of weight at one time loaded on their backs; the goods transported on their bodies are not considered as baggage and therefore are not subject to custom duties. It is an “illegal” trade that moves millions of euros, although the “turtle women” get a very low reward.³²

López González named his project after Atlas, a hero of ancient Greek mythology, who was condemned—after he and his fellow Titans rebelled against the gods—to hold up the celestial sphere:

Atlas are people who carry smuggled clothes, but they are also people belonging to a social level from where it is difficult or practically impossible to step up, and yet in one way or other

they hold up, they carry on their shoulders the global economic system. Concretely, this is my 'Atlas' project. I am not talking only about Ceuta or Melilla, but of a series of individuals; of a context in which they are obliged to live and which they are obliged, like the mythological Atlas, to carry, to hold up. . . . Mine is not a closed project because I am talking not only of these people but also of those in China, or Indonesia, or in other parts of the world who are producing these clothes. They depend on what is above, but they construct their globalization, they must construct it from below."³³



4.13 From the "Atlas" Project, 2013, produced by Victor López González.³⁴

Through the Atlas project, López González intends to explore processes related to the global economy and economies of subsistence along with the dependencies, subordinations, and tensions that they generate. In the context of global mobility, he shows how the border—understood as the frontier of a national territory and, in the artist's words, an area of resistance where a life support system blooms—becomes “a permeable membrane, a space for transgression.” He portrays the environments of two of these membranes, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco, which extend the concepts of limits and frontiers. These two autonomous cities have inherited a colonial past entailing the persistence, over time, of economic power relations that have been stratified, creating a singular society characterized by subordination, servitude, and contemporary slavery.³⁵

Out of the thousands of images that constitute the artist's archive, he chose 27 for deployment in the Atlas project. “Chosen” means that whereas a realistic image would show huge crowds of carriers daily on the move from early morning to noon, the artist has digitally isolated some of the figures, presenting them as individuals, either alone or one behind the other in a long line of women. This, I think, is the crucial key for understanding this artist's work: he is not only documenting, but he is transfiguring the photographs in a way that symbolically restores to each woman her individual subjectivity. Thus, he transports us, the viewers, to another level; that of hope and struggle relating to a different potential life, even if in reality, the same grim repetitive existence continues. Victor's images hint at the possibility of a better story in which the border constitutes an area of resistance, constructing a new life support system.

The adoption of a black background that decontextualizes the daily environment highlights the intentional counter-realistic nature of the images, reinforcing the sense of a political act of denunciation of contemporary living and working conditions. In his interview, the artist said, “What I would like to suggest to a viewer is to question what reality is,” which reminds me that one of his strategies for reaching this goal is to use black and white alternately with color. He repeats that his work



4.14 From the “Atlas”
Project, 2013, produced by
Victor López González.

“does not contain a text; it is an image,” and he explains that the *portadoras*’ bodies express more than any words can: “they are individuals each of whom has their own life. I cannot talk of each one’s situation because it is impossible. Yet I want to talk about their situation.” We do not hear their voices, but the images of their bodies speak for them.

In this project, the activity of smuggling appears as a central livelihood strategy. López González has worked on historical contexts of smuggling as an economic source of subsistence. His work, “The Smuggler of Images” (2012), is premised on an interrogation of the concept of frontiers using the figure of a smuggler as an allegory that exceeds these limits and therefore “ignores” them. It is part of a project (conducted in 2010–2012), supported by European funds, that was realized as a result of a collaborative initiative of an Italian region (Piedmont) and a French region (Haute-Provence). Within these two regions, two specific municipalities:

Caraglio (in Italy) and Digne-Les-Bains (in France) are divided and at the same time united by the Maddalena Pass (1,996 meters) in the Alps, which for centuries has been of strategic and commercial importance. Thanks to the “Via per l’arte contemporanea” (VIAPAC; Route for Contemporary Art) project, the two towns have been connected by an itinerary of contemporary art, extending across an area covering over 235 km and including permanent and temporary installations that explore historical, cultural, and artistic links between the two alpine regions.

Victor, who was one of several artists from various European countries involved in the VIAPAC project, created the installation “The Smuggler of Images,” composed of objects, photographs, videos, and posters, and set in the village of Moiola in the Stura River Valley. The protagonists in the video installation are immigrants and local people as well as donkeys that are essential actors in the activity of smuggling. Fishing within the pool of collective memory, the artist has bridged virtual and experiential realities, creating a “narrative labyrinth” in which images are the new illegal goods that have the capacity to tie together ethical and social themes. The work entails the use of a labyrinthine narrative strategy, with various levels of “reality” serving to create a common space between two figures. The installation includes an interview with a local inhabitant, Antonio Giavelli, who talks about his own experience of smuggling between Italy and France. In the video he encounters a fictitious smuggler of the past who tries, with the help of donkeys, to transgress the boundary line, carrying an indefinite number of images that Victor calls “illegal goods,” extending the label of illegality from bodies to images and mockingly reversing it. Thus, the frontier is deconstructed, both materially and symbolically. In the video installation, images from different geographical regions of the Stura Valley converge with shots of the high-tech industries that are located there, suggesting a common cartography for both protagonists and a way of thinking about history.³⁶

The fictional smuggler is a key figure for understanding Victor’s work and his constant intertwining of experienced reality and an imagined past and future. This imaginary character, with historical implications,



4.15 *From The Smuggler of Images, 2012, produced by Victor López González.*

opens up a new prospect for onlookers, who become participants in this story and its present day reverberations.

Controversies have arisen between France and Italy because some of the ancient routes created by smugglers have been and are being used by migrants who are attempting to establish what have been termed secondary movements across Europe's internal frontiers, prohibited within the Dublin Regulation (DR) introduced by the European Union (EU). Primary movements are those that bring migrants to a first country of arrival, for instance Italy. The DR has established a control mechanism that allows asylum seekers to apply for protection only in the country of arrival and

regulates transfers of people between member states. It has also established a Europe-wide fingerprinting database for unauthorized entrants into the EU. Consequently, it undermines the legal rights and personal welfare of asylum seekers. This regulation not only leads to mounting pressure at the EU's external borders but it especially places people at risk of being deported and returned to conditions of persecution.

For us researchers working in the BABE project, the junction created by Victor López González between the real and the imaginary immediately calls to mind many of the images that we have collected. In the course of our fieldwork, it soon became clear that the people who landed in Italy, often risking their lives in the process, were bringing with them not only their working and thinking capacities but also stories and images, oral and visual narrations that intertwine with our own memories as Europeans, having the potential to construct new stories around Europe and new European memories. One such narration was collected by and analyzed by Giada Giustetto, as reproduced below (Figure 4.16).³⁷

“I am from Nigeria:

I cross Nigeria border to Niger

From Niger I cross to Libya Saba [Sabha]

From Saba I cross to Tripoli

From Tripoli I cross to Zwara

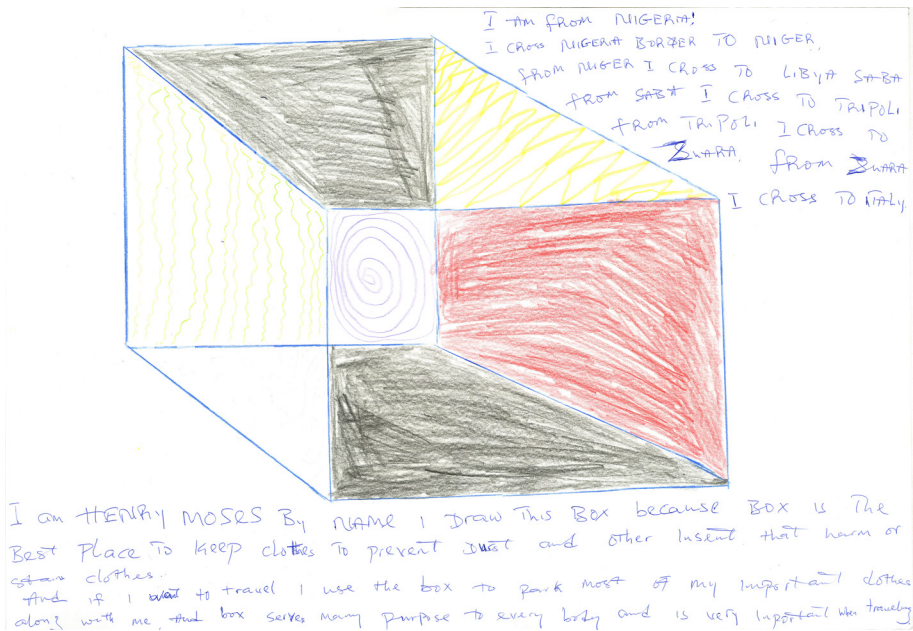
From Zwara

I cross to Italy

I am Henry Moses by name. I draw this box because box is the best place to keep clothes to prevent dust and insect that harm and stain clothes.

And if I want to travel, I use the box to pack most of my important clothes along with me. And box serves many purposes for everybody and is very important when traveling.”

In his oral presentation, Henry Moses (Figure 4.17) added other considerations, listing the items he kept in the box, such as shoes and combs, and explaining that “when you are tired and must rest, you can put your head on the box . . . when I was walking in the desert toward Libya



4.16 Drawing by Henry Moses, April 2016.

because the car had broken down, I always dragged my box with all my things and it had many many uses, and I also used it as a pillow.” He explained that he travelled by land for a week and then took a boat. The latter part of the trip lasted for four days, and some of his companions, boys and girls, died in the sea. While studying in Bologna, Henry expressed his hope that he would “find a job in a bank, which would require a lot of study” or—as he concluded jokingly— “become a Ferrari driver!”

Jokes open up the world of imagination and invite us to dream. Accepting this invitation, I glimpse similar fantastic worlds glimmering through images that are distant in time and space. The world of the fictional smuggler, with his boxes and donkey, conjures up a world of fantasy that challenges a hard reality. Henry Moses’ box too has a touch of the fantastic, with some transparent surfaces and other ones over-



4.17 *Henry Moses.*

lapping and blending with each other. Each side of the cube doubles thanks to the coloring. The different colors of the six sides project a multidimensional space with nooks and crannies, hideouts as well as openings. It is a concrete and yet magical box with mysterious resources, containing not only goods but also the grand dream of becoming a sports car driver along with the more modest hope of working as a bank employee, which is a figure equated with financial security. The central spiral projecting forward perhaps alludes to a possible fabulous prospect. The resulting object operates an optical game, multiplying planes and playing with perspective so as to create a disconcerting effect that calls to mind the works

of the Dutch artist Escher. The presence across frontiers thus has a double meaning, both real and phantasmatic, in the sense that mobile people, as suggested by Victor López González, carry with them also “illegal” images and dreams.

Placing the works of artists and mobile subjects in conversation with each other yields unexpected insights. As we had anticipated, the crossing of national frontiers was a recurrent motif in many of the maps collected during the BABE fieldwork. However, we could not foresee the richness of the variations on this theme. This is illustrated in the map drawn by Maricica Anasie, who started her trip from Romania in November 1997.³⁸

In Maricica’s map, Eastern Europe is positioned at the bottom of the page, while the point of arrival, which is north-west Italy, is located at the top. Consequently, rotation occurs that is unexpected, at least for us



4.18 Map drawn by Maricica Anasie, May 2013.

researchers, accustomed as we are to viewing current ways of mapping Eastern Europe.³⁹ In Maricica’s map, the national frontiers between European countries are not visible, as the tortuous line of her itinerary does not change color according to countries; rather, it changes according to the fortunes and misfortunes that unfolded during the journey. Both Hungary and Austria are colored in green and black, whereas Italy is colored in green, blue, and orange. These last two colors are associated with a period of renewed hope for the traveler, although just for a short time, because as the caption reads, “at the end, I had lost all hope.” In this

4.19 *Maricica Anasie.*

picture, Maricica does not mark her first crossing—between Romania and Hungary— as one that is significant. Neither of these two countries were part of the EU at the time of the trip, as they joined respectively in 2007 and 2004. Not even the crossing of the Austrian border is shown, even though Austria became an EU member state in 1995 and was therefore the entry point into the EU for a migrant proceeding on to Italy. In this personalized geography, seven days of travelling and three state borders are depicted, but only the trip from Venice to Turin, the final destination, is represented as a real crossing into a different space.

Since the captions on the drawing are integral to the act of mapping, only some notable ones of the numerous observations in Italian that feature in Maricica's map have been transcribed and translated here. What is observable initially is writing, in capital letters, which is green on yellow: "My trip starts from curiosity more than from need . . ." Just above this text, Maricica writes in red capital letters: "Departure 7 November 1997." "Map drawn on 9 May 2013." From her village, she traveled to the Hungarian border. There, she notes: "Exit" (she draws an arrow "--→" indicating a passage of time and space). Nadlac, a Romanian town with (8,000 people) is located on the border with Hungary in the district of Arad. Along the curve, on the left side of the black line, she writes: "Here starts the real trip, which I believed easy, but which has not been → the

nightmare starts, all that way to walk and in the dark.” Underneath this text, following the curve, she writes: “During the day I remained hidden in the woods, under the straw --→ moreover it rained every day.” In Austria her situation became even worse, as indicated in one comment: “Austria. I stayed hidden under the trees and I watched dogs pooping --→ a nightmare. . . . I was tired I wanted to be caught.”

Around the drawing of the train, Maricica writes: “I got on a train transporting iron, completely open air – and finally I arrived in Udine,” referring to her crossing of the third state border, Austria–Italy. The black line representing the itinerary becomes green again: “Udine. Here finally I took the train as a normal passenger to Venice.” Then, the line becomes blue, like the sea in Venice: “Venezia. Finally a bit of calm, I remember that I was drying [in the sun] the little money I was left with, in order to buy the ticket to Torino.” Now the line becomes red/orange: “Torino --→Porta Nuova [the train station]. In the end I had no hope left,” and on top: “Arrival 14 November 1997.”

At the onset, Maricica writes that her migration trip was motivated by curiosity. However, that experience turned out to be “a week of hell,” and Maricica repeatedly defines it as a “nightmare,” noting that they were obliged to travel only at night and almost always on foot, while throughout the journey, she was praying in her heart to be able to go back. Frontiers were part of the incubus, and yet her experience shows that they could be successfully crossed. In his artistic projects, Victor López González shows bodies moving incessantly and “illegally” across frontiers. Maricica Anasie’s itinerary evidences a similar capacity of “ignoring” frontiers, not in the sense that she does not know that they exist; on the contrary, they are very present in her story. But this story reveals the permeability of frontiers, even at a high cost, which becomes apparent when this map is compared with a traditional map, such as the ones hanging in the classroom where Maricica created her drawing (Figure 4.20).

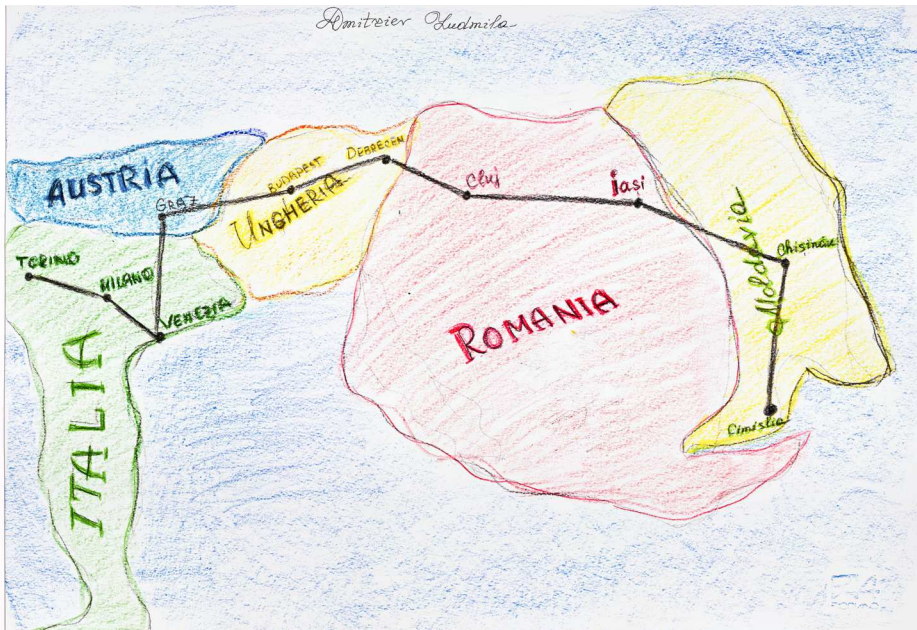
This last sort of map is assumed to correspond to reality and its representational form to be realistic. In both the images by artists and in the drawings of mobile people, different strategies are employed to construct



4.20 Map of South-Eastern Europe.

visual memories that do not follow the mode of realism; rather, they tend to position experience in tension with subjectivity. Indeed, a definition of these kinds of visual testimonies as “counter-memories” or “alternative cartographies” seems too abrupt, although such a definition prevails within cultural disciplines. I would prefer to consider them as (oral, written, and visual) narrations in their own right. Such images work not only to defy and unfreeze our geographical stereotypes but also to acquire at least a partial understanding of their multiple meanings; it becomes necessary to view them as personal narrations generated through acts of intersubjectivity. Such acts transpire, even within drawings that seemingly entail naïve reproductions of existing mapping practices (Figure 4.21).

Ludmila Dmitriev, the author of this map⁴⁰ began her journey from her hometown of Cimishlia (with a population of 12,000 people) in south-



4.21 Map drawn by Ludmila Dmitriev, May 2013.

ern Moldavia. There being no train station in Cimishlia, the first leg of the journey consisted of a bus trip to Chisinau (Cishnau), the capital. An initial trip, bringing the traveler to the capital of his or her own country in order to be able to proceed abroad, features in many of the migration itineraries that we compiled. At first sight, this map seems to resemble the usual geographical depiction more closely than Maricica's map, at least in the sense that nation-states are clearly indicated and East and West are portrayed in a similar way to their representations in atlases. However, what is notable is that not only are Moldova and Italy shown as having similar shapes, but Moldova is also represented as being larger than Italy. Again, this is a recurrent motif in the maps collected for the BABE project: the country of origin is emotionally privileged, assuming a special spatial relevance and often revealing a double sense of belonging.

In her map, Ludmila extracted the countries through which she trav-



4.22 Ludmila Dmitriev.

eled, indicating towns and cities that were the most significant stops. National borders are clearly shown, but in her oral and written narrations, the only frontier crossing that really counts for her is the first one that marked her departure from her home country. In her composition, written in Italian, she notes: “I was prepared to make that trip, long, unknown and hazardous, but only in order to change for the better the future of my daughters.” She states that ultimately, the journey was relatively easy and when the bus was moving, she felt as if she was flying. However, the stops seemed to last forever, bringing to her mind the frightening reality and the risks associated with returning. She strongly desired “to go always forward to be able to change the way of life for my family, my dears . . .”

The aesthetic effect produced by her extraction of the countries of transit was one of a predominance of a blue background, which looks like a sea on which the land that Ludmila traveled over floats. I cannot help thinking that this is a sea that invades the imaginary and the memory of the narrator, exactly as it does for us as the listeners and viewers. This effect reflects the central role currently played by the Mediterranean as a frontier in the narrations of many mobile people, and not only them. While conducting the BABE fieldwork, we collected a large number of drawings that depict the Mediterranean, sometimes in a tragic way. While this is to be expected for anybody going through Lampedusa,

from a “realist” perspective, this would not be the case for those traveling from Moldova to Italy. Ludmila knows perfectly well that other countries like those of the former Yugoslavia exist within the blue space that hints at the sea in her map. I simply conjecture that in our shared imaginary of and about migration, land is often ignored in favor of the sea. In the countries of Southern Europe, it is the Mediterranean that has come to symbolize Europe’s dangerous frontiers.

Ludmila’s story is a positive one and she concluded her oral presentation with a message of hope, alluding to the need for a more mobile, open, and inclusive Europe. This could convey not just a wish that is expressed by people with disparate European itineraries but also aspirations for an intellectual and political project aimed at the “transformation of the ‘European subject’ through the politics of encounter.”⁴¹ Seen in this light, the role of images and of imagination in cultural history can be considered as constituting a step toward a more democratic history of and in Europe. The challenge is to discern new forms of memory and identity engendered from the tens of thousands of lives in movement; of people driven by economic and political urgencies as well as by dreams of another life and time. When I listened to Ludmila and saw her written and visual narrations, as well as those of many other interviewees, I had the feeling that the memories of mobile people are already mixed with ours within multiple encounters in which new shared subjectivities are being constructed, visible to those who look closely enough to catch a glimpse of them.

However, I was shaken out of my reverie by the dialogue with artistic images. If art acts as a container of dreams, and as a reminder of the right to nurture dreams, it also works as a warning of the persistence of suffering, injustice, and oppression, and of the worsening conditions of migrants. All of this is conveyed by the media and politics, often in horrifying ways. But in many cases, the call of art is more thoughtful and powerful.

Victor López González’s art has often engaged with the tragic aspects of migration, as in his Lampedusa project in which a chained boat and squalid shelters are juxtaposed.⁴² More recently, he has been working on a project that further develops the themes of flight and exile as well as



4.23 From the “Constellation of Aquarius” Project.

the political denunciation of the failure of migration policies in Europe. Victor’s “Constellation of Aquarius” was inspired by the chronicle of a rescue operation accomplished through Aquarius, a ship chartered by humanitarian organizations, which on June 9, 2018 rescued 629 people drifting in the sea off the Libyan coast and brought them on board.

After completing the rescue operation, the Aquarius kept cruising around the Mediterranean, given the impossibility of docking in a nearby port, as the governments of Italy and Malta had not authorized this. A temporary solution emerged with the announcement of the reception of the ship in the port of Valencia for humanitarian reasons. In “Constellation of Aquarius,” Victor López González plans to focus not on the arrival of the ship at a safe harbor but on the context of the media covering the event. He emphasizes the fact that at the same time when this event was unfolding, others were undergoing a similar destiny without being the targets of media focus and without receiving a response from European politicians. In this installation, the artist intends to expose the failure of the EU’s migration policies as well as their tragic impacts, which extend beyond an absence of solidarity to become an open act of rejection.⁴³ For many of us who are engaged in research, this work in progress and the grim reality that underlines it confirm the urgency of our work, all the while being a strong reminder

of the limits of our engagement and of our intellectual productions. We must heed Eva Leitolf's warning relating to her dilemma of whether "to add my tuppenceworth" of artwork. I can only echo her conclusion that doing research is our only means of expression.

Notes

- ¹ Extract from an interview with Eva Leitolf (born in 1966 in Würzburg, Germany), conducted by Luisa Passerini in Turin, Italy, on March 23, 2015. The artist studied at the Gesamthochschule Essen, Germany, and at the California Institute of the Arts. Her work has taken her to Spain, Morocco, Serbia, Ukraine, Namibia, France, England, Italy, India, and Greece.
- ² I first interviewed Eva Leitolf at the School of Art and Design in Lucerne, Switzerland, on December 12, 2013. Unless differently indicated, the oral quotations in this chapter are from the 2015 interview in Turin.
- ³ Originally the farm was named "Rotstock" after the reddish rock in the area ("rot" in German means red), but the "t" was lost in the 1960s during the resizing/division of the farmland; "Ritz" plays with the names of high-class hotels like Ritz Carlton. Email communication from Eva Leitolf to the author on October 15, 2018.
- ⁴ Jack Goody, "La cultura europea nel secolo ventesimo" in *Storia d'Europa*, Vol. 1, ed. Perry Anderson, Paul Bairoch, Walter Barberis, and Carlo Ginzburg (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), 811–33.
- ⁵ For a discussion on the relevance of borders for imagining Europe, see Etienne Balibar, "Europe as Borderland," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, no. 3 (2009): 190–215.
- ⁶ Eva Leitolf, *Rostock Ritz*, no publisher, Kirchheim b. München, 2005, no page numbers.
- ⁷ See: <http://www.nwrnamibia.com/shark-island.htm> (accessed September 28, 2018).
- ⁸ See note 2.
- ⁹ Uwe Timm, "Warning Signs" in *Rostock Ritz*.
- ¹⁰ This description applies to the protagonist of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Norton, 2017), 58.
- ¹¹ Jürgen Zimmerer, "The First Genocide of the 20th Century. On the Problems

of Confronting Germany's Colonial Legacy," in Deutsches Historisches Museum, *German Colonialism. Fragments Past and Present*, Catalogue of the Exhibition "Deutscher Kolonialismus. Fragmente Seiner Geschichte und Gegenwart", 14 October 2016-14 May 2017 (Berlin: Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, 2016), 138-45.

- ¹² This photograph was originally published in *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, No. 4 in 1907, and is reproduced in Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, *German Colonialism*, Cat. No. 2-62, 27.
- ¹³ Larissa Förster, "Parody and Subversion. German Colonial Culture and the Herero Oturupa in Today's Namibia," in *Rostock Ritz*.
- ¹⁴ Eva Leitolf, "Rostock Ritz," in *Rostock Ritz*.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Wael Shawky conducted by Luisa Passerini on November 2, 2016 at the launch of his exhibition at the Fondazione Merz, Turin. A clip from the film can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGC4Jd7FirU>. For a discussion of this artist's work, see Abdellah Karroum, "Wael Shawky: *Al Araba Al Madfun*. Histories' Perpetual Storyboards," in the Catalogue of the Exhibition: *Wael Shawky. Al Araba Al Madfun*, (Torino: Fondazione Merz, 2016), 20-21.
- ¹⁶ "Multiple Exposure – Eva Leitolf's Work in Progress," interview with Eva Leitolf conducted by Franziska Brückner (Berlin: Netzwerk MiRA, March 2009). <https://www.evaleitolf.de/app/download/14232792696/Interview.pdf?t=150> (accessed October 5, 2018). The interview was originally published in German within the compilation, *Kritische Migrationforschung? Da kann jeder kommen*, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:kobv:11-100199292> (accessed October 5, 2018).
- ¹⁷ Eva Leitolf, *Deutsche Bilder: Eine Spurensuche 1992-2008* (Köln: Snoeck, 2008), which was published to coincide with the launch of the exhibition titled *German Images - Looking for Evidence* (Munich: Pinakothek der Moderne, July 25 to October 19, 2008). The photographs are accompanied by text, which includes the oral testimonies of the victims, posters, police reports, newspaper articles, juridical records, and witnesses' statements.
- ¹⁸ "Multiple Exposure."
- ¹⁹ This text is appended to the photograph, as the artist intends the text to be an integral part of her art work.
- ²⁰ See previous note.
- ²¹ Born in Peru in 1960, Leonardo was working as a laborer at the time of his interviews, which were conducted by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto in Turin on May 9 and 23, 2013.

- ²² Leslie Hernández Nova, a researcher in the BABE team, collected testimonies in which interviewees explained that they decided to move to Italy rather than to Spain because of Spain's historical exploitation of Peru. See her essay "L'Europa narrata dalle nuove generazioni di peruviani: Barcellona, Torino e Stoccolma," in *Quaderni della memoria e dell'oblio, Memorie migranti. Visualità, sentimenti e generazioni in una prospettiva transnazionale*, ed. Graziella Bonansea (Perugia: Morlacchi, 2018), 125-181.
- ²³ Cf. Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love Love in Europe. Imagination and Politics in Britain between the Wars* (London: Tauris, 1999), 247-55. For a reading of Iceland as a "happy place" in Auden's poem, see Eveline de Smalen, "Dreaming of Elsewhere": Landscape in W. H. Auden (Master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2015).
- ²⁴ Mohamed (born in 1994) arrived in the Netherlands in the summer of 2015. The interview and photograph were collected by Milica Trakilovic in Utrecht on December 18, 2015. Because of his unstable legal situation, I have used a pseudonym and have not included an image of him in this chapter.
- ²⁵ Ai Weiwei, *Libero Exhibition Catalogue*, September 23, 2016 – January 22, 2017 (Florence: Palazzo Strozzi, 2016), 69. This exhibition included an installation of twenty-two rubber boats hanging on the façade of the Palazzo Strozzi Museum, which provoked a major public controversy, as this was seen as defacing a monument that symbolized the Renaissance. <http://www.palazzostrozzi.org/mostre/aiweiwei/> (accessed November 20, 2018); <http://arrestedmotion.com/2016/09/streets-ai-weiwei-reframe-palazzo-strozzi-florence/> (last accessed November 20, 2018).
- ²⁶ Eva Leitolf, "Critical Counter Narratives: The Visual and the Written in 'Rostock Ritz' and 'Postcards from Europe'" (Presentation at the BABE Final Conference, Archivio di Stato, Florence, April 26, 2018).
- ²⁷ Eva Leitolf – Fotografa, Germania, "Postcards from Europe"; *LandscapeStories*, Interview with Eva Leitolf, edited by Camilla Boemio, translated by Federica Barbon, April 29 2011, <http://www.landscapestories.net/interviews/eva-leitolf> (accessed November 20, 2018).
- ²⁸ Eva Leitolf, "Postcards from Europe e altre narrazioni critiche di frontiera," (Presentation, Workshop "Etica dell'immagine. Un dibattito interdisciplinare", Goethe-Institut, Turin, March 15-16, 2017).
- ²⁹ Interview conducted by Luisa Passerini on March 23, 2015.
- ³⁰ See previous note.
- ³¹ Interview with Victor López González conducted by Luisa Passerini and Leslie Hernández Nova in Turin, Italy, on March 24, 2015. The artist studied

in Spain (Valencia), Germany (Halle and Leipzig), and Mexico (Monterrey).

³² See a description of the Atlas Project on the artist's website: www.victorlopezgo.com (accessed November 20, 2018).

³³ See note 31.

³⁴ The Farnese Atlas is a second-century Roman copy of a Hellenistic sculpture that is crafted in marble. It is displayed at the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, Italy.

³⁵ From a description of the Atlas Project at: www.victorlopezgo.com (accessed November 20, 2018).

³⁶ Victor López González, *Transitions. L'umanità in transito*, Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Museo d'Arte Orientale, Torino, October 20–November 7, 2016, ed. Patrizia Bottallo (Torino: Vanilledizioni, 2016), 46–67. See also the artist's website: www.victorlopezgo.com (accessed November 20, 2018).

³⁷ Giada Giustetto presented this work at a panel titled “*Corpi che attraversano i confini. Memorie dell'Europa di oggi*” (“Bodies Across Borders. Memories of Present Day Europe”), held at the Museo del Novecento, Florence, on October 25, 2016. The other panel participants were Luisa Passerini, Leslie Hernández Nova, and Gabriele Proglia. Henry Moses (born June 5, 1998) was interviewed by Giada Giustetto at a school for adults (Centro Provinciale Istruzione Metropolitan), Bologna, in April 2016.

³⁸ Maricica Anasie (born in 1979) was interviewed by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto in Turin on May 9, 2013.

³⁹ This brings to mind Larry Wolff's argument that during the Enlightenment period in Europe, North and South were replaced by West and East as intra-European cultural binaries. The aim of this shift was to establish the dominance of Paris as the political and cultural hub, while reinforcing the notion of Eastern backwardness. See Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization and the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁰ Ludmila Dmitriev (born in Moldova in 1968) was interviewed by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto in Turin on May 9 and 23, 2013. Her written composition was produced in class with her teacher Elena Gobbi on May 16, 2013.

⁴¹ Sandra Ponzanesi. “Europe in Motion: Migrant Cinema and the Politics of Encounter,” *Social Identities* 17, no. 1 (2011): 89.

⁴² See *Transitions. L'umanità in transito*, 34, 32.

⁴³ Victor López González, concept for the “Constellation of Aquarius” (a work in progress), communicated to the author on October 2, 2018.

Chapter 5

Reverberations and Critical Distances in Mobility Research:

Ursula Biemann

In the fall of 2005, while spending some months at the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin, I visited an exhibition that included *Europlex* (2003), a video essay created by the anthropologist Angela Sanders and the video-artist Ursula Biemann. Bringing together the two differing sets of disciplinary competences of its creators, *Europlex* shows people on the move in the area of Africa that is close to the Spanish-Moroccan border and their border crossings to engage in smuggling activities. I was struck not only by the essay's powerful political message, exposing the situation of migrants at Europe's borders, but especially by its implications relating to a consideration of art as a mode of knowledge and its suggestion of an extended research methodology that could include social and cultural processes. It dawned on me that we cultural historians could combine two lines of inquiry: exploring the construction of visual memory through art—video art, photography, and cinema—while applying our primary methodological tool, the interview.

I shared this idea, which was then rather formless, with Helga Nowotny from the Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich (ETH), who at the time was also visiting the Kolleg. Though Helga's field of study and teaching was science and technology, she also had a background in sociology and jurisprudence. We discussed the relationship between

various fields of knowledge, which we conceived of more in terms of links, bridges, and gaps between entire groups of disciplines rather than as cross-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary research. We were both interested in the hybrid lines of research created by the overlapping of traditional disciplines with thematic areas, which in my case included history (oral and cultural) and memory studies along with visual studies and geography. We acknowledged that certain types of connections are more frequently explored, such as those between the arts and the “hard” sciences on the one hand, and those between the socio-historical disciplines and the sciences on the other.

As Helga Nowotny asserted forcefully at the time, what was lacking was a comprehensive exploration of a third connection between the socio-historical sciences and the arts. This observation resonated with me, given my line of research, which centered on a history and critique of European identity. I was discovering that the visual arts were more vocal and explicit than political and cultural history—not to mention politics—in their tackling of the problematic issue of ongoing changes relating to a European sense of belonging. It seemed to me that visual art was taking the place of these other branches of intellectual and political engagement not only in their denunciation of the narrow and hierarchical nature of the traditional forms of European identity, but also in their exposure of crucial features of “Fortress Europe” in relation to migrations to and across the continent. This line of inquiry and reflection was inspirational for developing the BABE project, which originated from the intent to widen the field of cultural and oral memory to include visual memory.

I was then considering the works of artists and film makers, who included Ursula Biemann, Abdellatif Kéchiche, Angela Melitopolous, Bouchra Khalili, and Yto Barrada; visual anthropologists like Angela Sanders; media scholars, notably Lisa Parks; and many others working on the topic of migration via visual forms of art and their public value. Ursula Biemann’s¹ concept and practice of the video essay proved particularly salient for my formulation of a research strategy to survey and select art works of relevance for my research. The video essay entails

both texts and images, which are combined with the sonic dimension of voices, music, and environmental sounds. Being situated at the juncture of different forms of knowledge production, this genre offers a global perspective on mobile bodies and a geopolitical view of borders.² Thus, the visual arts can be a source of inspiration for cultural history if art is conceived as a system of signification that infiltrates socially relevant discourses.³ More specifically, I found that the two approaches, namely Ursula Biemann's artistic practices and my own cultural historical practice could be brought into a fruitful relationship, starting precisely with her video that had been so suggestive for me.

Multiple Mobilities: Luz Fabiola Sanmaniego Jimenez

One sequence from *Europlex* portrays women putting on several layers of clothing before moving across the Moroccan-Spanish border to sell these clothes on the other side.



5.1 From *Europlex* by Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders: Preparation for smuggling (in Border Log I).



5.2 From *Europlex* by Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders: *Smugglers* (in *Border Log I*).

The above stills from *Europlex* show scenes that resemble those of the *portadoras* in the photographs taken by Victor López González in 2013 (see the section on “Presences” in chapter 4 of this book). However, the significant difference between the two types of images of the same phenomenon is mostly one of context as opposed to differences in the dates for the images or their media—video versus photography. What characterizes the images of *Europlex* is their contextualization within a much broader configuration of the Spanish-Moroccan border that stretches across the coastlines of the two continents; the only anomaly comprises the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, which though situated in Africa, belong to Spain. The video, which is of twenty minutes duration, is structured in *Border Logs*, placed between the *Pro-log* and the *Epilogue*. The term “log” refers to both ethnographical travel logs and the logs of the captured video shots (at one point, the filming of this video was prohibited by the authorities) entailed in the editing process.⁴

Europlex exposes the connections between various kinds of movement and temporality. In the *Pro-log*, a contrast is suggested between the

lightning quick movement of an explosion in the sky and the apparently slow pace at which human beings move along the Spanish–Moroccan border. These are Berber nomads who live in the desert as well as smugglers, migrants, and workers employed in outsourced factories that manufacture various products. The incipit of the video narrates the fall of a meteorite in 2002 as seen by Omar, a Berber, who was tending his camels at the time and interpreted the light in the sky as a military event. This meteorite, which reaches earth after transiting in astral space, becomes part of a complex composition within a space in which astrophysics and geography are connected, as shown in the four sections on the screen: military; science; living space of the nomads; and markets.⁵

In *Border Log II*, women who work as domestic servants in Ceuta cross time zones when leaving Africa. Their images evoke the global care chain that displaces them as they move to take care of the children or old parents of other women engaged in other sorts of work. These women move at a slow pace, but their movements, like those of the vast groups of people shown in the video, appear equally relentless and unstoppable. Because there is a two-hour time difference between the adjacent territories in Spain and Africa, the domestic workers are transformed into perpetual time travelers within the border economy. In *Border Log III*, the huge cranes sliding slowly back and forth in the containers' harbor of Algeciras convey a sense of an inexorable machine connecting many countries in the world. At the same time, the names of the international companies and carriers presiding over global trade float across the screen: AIROSEC / MAGIPAK / CIDICO / SOTEMA / EUROPLEX / BONATEX / SOTRADEX / IMACID / GABANEX.

Europlex is a good example of Ursula Biemann's art depicting human mobility. In her work, space is gendered in line with the premise that gender is a major constitutive force in the formation of the new global condition.⁶ In this context, there are no neutral bodies, only gendered ones, and gender is performative in the sense that mobility can be understood as the creation of a mobile space. The first video ever produced by the artist, *Performing the Border* (1998), shows the bodies of women who move between Mexico and the United States in order to work in factories,

domestic service, and the sex trade, or to give birth in Texas rather than in Ciudad Juárez. In *Remote Sensing* (2001), sex workers from the Mekong Delta, the Philippines, or Eastern Europe move from country to country, and from continent to continent, encountering occasional clients or waiting on the road for cars and trucks, in some cases finally returning to their places of origin.⁷

In Biemann's terms, "the migrants create material space,"⁸ as well as symbolic space, which the artist's practice renders visible. She theorizes a performativity of the body in her video essays, which reverberates in one of the working hypotheses of the BABE project: individual and collective movements of embodied subjects crossing borders produce not only spaces but also the visual and material memory of new spaces, which can be generative of new intersubjective relationships.

I use the acoustic term "reverberation" metaphorically to convey the relationship between Ursula Biemann's approach and our cultural-historical approach within the BABE project. Reverberation means that a sound bounces back and forth between its source and a surface. Whereas resonance belongs to the source and is essential for the listener to hear the sound, reverberation must be kept at a level that allows for effective listening without interference from direct and reverberated sounds. I do not intend to propose that an affinity exists between the artist's work and the visual material collected by BABE researchers from mobile people. Rather, my intent is to show how the two research practices, namely the artistic and the cultural-historical, illuminate each other. In the second part of the chapter, I counter the balance resulting from limited "reverberations" with the notion of "critical distance" in the hopes of rendering the complicacies of the relationship visible.⁹

During the preliminary stages of the BABE research, I assumed that I would discover close connections existing between the two forms of visual production. However, this assumption proved to be an oversimplification, as it ignored the gaps between art and cultural history as well as those between new forms of visual memory. These new forms comprised art creation on the one hand and induced production during fieldwork (maps, drawings, photographs and other images documenting the

process of migration) on the other. After years of research and reflection, it became evident that no simple and direct connections exist among various forms of visual memory.

Reverberations between the two practices of video art and cultural history start to become apparent when the idea of the creation of space and memory by mobile people is connected with its product, which is the multiplicity of movements extending to the global scale. Below, I discuss the various types of reverberation.

The first type of reverberation that occurs in Ursula Biemann's work contextualizes human mobility in relation to other forms of movements: passages, transits, and flows, which imply the movements of objects such as goods or containers as well as of natural entities such as oil, air, water, and land.



5.3 Black Sea Files by Ursula Biemann.



5.4 Black Sea Files by Ursula Biemann.

These stills from Biemann's videos momentarily immobilize the sequence of images that nevertheless retain their original connotation of mobility concerning the flows of objects-materials and people. Viewed through an inclusive lens, they show how human migration becomes one of the many flows that cross continents; one among the multiple strands of interaction taking place across different spaces. In the artist's words, "migration is a global phenomenon but it is also a geopolitical one. It does not occur separately from all other movements—of capital, resources, data and images. It is an integral part of them."¹⁰ Even people who are not allowed to move are depicted as being connected with communities situated beyond their confinement.¹¹ Biemann's work is not only an invitation to contextualize every movement but also to situate mobility within a geopolitical perspective entailing a re-consideration of the structure of power at Europe's borders.¹² The overall impression conveyed by this art work is of an emerging "carpet of trajectories" in which "movement in one direction causes movement in another direction."¹³

Such inclusiveness can also be found in recent works by the artist that trace the flows of primordial fluids like oil and water that are changing the ecology of Planet Earth.¹⁴ In Biemann's perspective, mobility is associated with the concepts of interconnectedness and intermediation. The movements of bodies become gestures of transaction, translation, and brokerage, creating connections¹⁵ that are mobile and not fixed. A telling case is the oil pipeline presented in *Black Sea Files* (2005), a two-year project that entailed various field trips to the Caucasus and to eastern Turkey.¹⁶ At the time that the video was made, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline, a transnational infrastructure of geostrategic importance, was under construction and though it was in the process of being buried underground, it remained visible. In its open structure, the video (constituted by ten files) reflects the process of a work-in-progress enterprise as well as the human interchange that this entailed: connections are evident among the farmers who had to sell their land, the workers constructing the pipeline, and the migrants and prostitutes revolving around its construction.



5.5 *Black Sea Files* by Ursula Biemann.

In itself a rather banal phrase, “multiplicity of movements” loses its neutrality when conjoined with the creation of space by moving subjects and the intersubjective links among them. Within the framework of the first type of reverberation, my own research and the research conducted more generally for the BABE project, focus on human mobility. In our type of research, the multiplicity of movements is present in the sense that the interviewees—and subsequently we researchers—always connected the movement of one body with that of other bodies, that is, individual and collective mobility. Many examples of these connections are illustrated in this book. They include, for instance, the oral and visual narrations of Tarik El Amiri, who moves with a group of peers, and of Youssef Boukkouss, who draws itineraries entailing family ties (chapter 3). But they also include those of Leonardo Puris and Ludmila Dmitriev (chapter 4) that center on connecting the narrators with their children and spouses or preparing a different future for them. Many other stories in this book illuminate these connections. This multiplicity of moving bodies is represented most incisively in the icastic drawing by Luz Fabiola Sanmaniego Jimenez (born in Ecuador on June 24, 1973).¹⁷

The narrator, who expressed a strong desire to create this drawing, was overwhelmed by pain when recalling her past and suffered greatly



5.6 Map drawn by Fabiola Sanmaniego, May 2013.

while making it. I sat with her in front of the white sheet, and she began to draw the blue sea and green land while telling me, confidentially, the story of her family difficulties. When she got to the point in the story where, following her decision to migrate (made possible by her sister who was working in Italy and sent her money for the trip), she had to leave her children behind in Peru, as written in the drawing's caption, she broke down in tears. I suggested to Fabiola that she pause the visual and oral narration, but she refused and, while still crying, she completed her "map." When she presented it to the class, she was cheerful and proud—rightly so—of her colorful drawing, in which her own image and those of her children testify to a corporeal memory and a sense of belonging through their costumes. The drawing is not realistic, given that she had to leave her three male children behind in Peru, while the daughter was born much later in Italy.



5.7 Fabiola Sanmaniego.

Fabiola's oral presentation consisted of a full theatrical performance; she began by offering her compliments to the classmates who had preceded her. She then affirmed her role as a woman and mother. She described the great suffering she underwent as a result of having to leave her children (three boys then aged 10, 8, and 6 years, respectively) to work as a *badante* for seven years, and the long period of time that it took for them to be able to reu-

nite with her. At the same time, she indicated the success of her story, based on her desire to change her life, her own strength of will, and the goodness of God. The private details are left out of this account, except for her final remark in her oral presentation: "There is no husband."

While Fabiola's oral and visual narration clearly illustrate the multiple bodies involved in mobility, the multiplicity of many different types of movements is also evident in the stories presented in this book. Some of these stories present the temporal dimension of movement, thus multiplying and extending it, as shown by the case studies (Magdy Youssef, Blerina Cuni, and Antony) described in chapter 2. Cast in the light of intersubjectivity, this theme of multiple mobilities is filtered through subjectivity, that is, it encompasses the multiple motivations behind mobility: material need, the desire to join relatives and friends, study, and knowledge. The point of departure can be either a situation of extreme danger or poverty or a sense of curiosity and a willingness to change. Moreover, the movement itself can be dramatically difficult and the arrival successful as well as tragic. From this perspective, the collective and the individual always appear to be intertwined in a choral and solo combination. In our research, we emphasized the contextualization of the agency implicit

in migration, which is a fundamental feature of what we define as the history of subjectivity. For this approach, networking and decision making, which are intrinsic to migratory mobility, are foundational components of subjectivity, understood as human intervention in history.

A second type of reverberation concerns the respective roles of the artist and the researcher. From our historical biographical perspective, the objectual mobility of humans, materials, and things in Biemann's video essays is consonant with the mobility of the artist herself. She has moved across the world for her research and production: from her place of origin, Zurich, to Boston, Mexico, and New York for her studies, and subsequently to North Africa, Canada, Bangladesh, and other parts of the globe for her fieldwork. Her trajectories reflect the geographies of problematic areas and the sore points in the life of the planet. For *Black Sea Files* (2005) she travelled to Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, and for *Egyptian Chemistry* (2011) and *Forest Law* (2014), her respective destinations were Egypt and Amazonia.

In the case of the BABE project, one of its underlying premises has been the disavowal of the opposition between mobility and sedentarism not only in terms of content but also in the manner of proceeding and envisaging the relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee. BABE researchers moved to different countries in Europe as well as within Italy and the Netherlands to meet with their interviewees.¹⁸ Some of the researchers found that the interviewees' mobility was consonant with their own experiences of migration, both individually and family-wise,¹⁹ almost like an echo inducing or increasing an awareness that can translate into a methodological focus for the exchanges induced by the research.²⁰ A further step has been to formalize this consonance and make explicit the respective positions of the producers and collectors of memory sources, especially in the case of shared cultural origins.²¹

Extending the meaning of mobility sheds light on both the disavowal of the opposition drawn between mobility and sedentarism and the expanded critique of sedentarism. In reality, even families that have been "sedentary" for generations have a previous or collateral history of mobility, as recognized by both sociologists and anthropologists. In

our fieldwork conducted in schools, we often found that even for native Europeans, it was often the case that their parents (or grandparents or other relatives) had moved to Europe or across Europe at some point in their lives. Mobility is not exceptional, and the term “migration” encompasses a blend of different meanings that are foregrounded according to the circumstances. This was confirmed by the unease conveyed by some of our interviewees when the term “migrant” was applied to them, and their frequent refusal to be grouped under this undifferentiated category in the absence of further elaboration. This is not to deny the exceptionally tragic nature of contemporary migrations in many parts of the world or to ignore the dramatic aspects of forced nomadism. Rather, it implies a warning to take heed of the subjective and intersubjective meanings of mobility for the people to whom it applies.

I would now like to add a third type of reverberation. Returning to Ursula Biemann’s work, it can be observed that besides the many movements of living beings, including those of the artist, and of natural phenomena and material objects, another type of mobility is apparent. This mobility relates to the movement introduced into the medium itself, that is, the modification of the genre of the video essay and the multifariousness of its installation through the introduction of multiple or divided screens.²² (Figure 5.8)

Techniques used in the modification of this genre include, split screens, composite images, stop actions, and slow motion.²³ The film *Remote Sensing* (2001) provides a good example of video animation, juxtaposing filmic material shot on earth with satellite images in high definition to compose an artificial videography. The combination of rapidly scrolling images, including the launch of a satellite into space and short individual interviews with women who assist or study sex workers, illustrates the multiplicity of movements through space and the parallels between flows of people across territories and those of moving images and texts positioned together by the artist. The resulting alternation conveys a sense that everything is transitory and temporary.

For our part, we tried within the BABE project to expand the range of possible expressions for historical research beyond the traditional mode of writing. It is not by chance that the project generated three



5.8 Sahara Chronicle by Ursula Biemann presented at the Museum of Fine Art, Bern, 2011.

exhibitions, in which maps, drawings, and multimedia products were displayed. The exhibition titled *Corpi attraverso i confini: immaginari soggettivi e integrazione europea* presented the results of research conducted by teachers and students working with the audio-visual materials collected by the BABE's researchers, in a Palermo high school.²⁴ The exhibition titled *Bodies across Borders: Memories of Europe Today* portrayed the outcomes of fieldwork conducted for the BABE project in schools and communities and provided a general overview of the research project.²⁵ A third exhibition titled *MemoriaImmagine. Archives of a Europe under Construction* was held at the State Archives of Florence from April 5 to May 5, 2018. This exhibition showcased the materials produced in the course of research projects conducted in schools and during individual and collective interviews conducted in Italy and the Netherlands, in conjunction with maps and documents on Italian colonialism in Africa

provided by the Florence State Archives. Moreover, it included a performance inspired by migratory movements, and by the exhibition itself, titled “Nos gestes migratoires.”²⁶

Montage is a practice commonly applied across different fields. Used within a video, a piece of writing, or a painting/collage, it can reflect structures of memory as well as memorial analogies and associations that at first sight could appear as “wild.” An example is Biemann’s insertion of a scene into the *Black Sea Files* depicting the eviction of a thousand Kurds from the periphery of Ankara by the Turkish police in 2005. The images of this violent eviction are intended to remind us of the violations relating to the construction of the oleoduct.²⁷ The conceptual and political connection lies in the fact that the pipeline’s trajectory had to take into consideration the areas where Kurdish rebellions were anticipated. These violations were not visible around the construction site of the pipeline, but the video essay introduced a link to related activities in distant Ankara.

Apart from using typical procedures such as associating apparently distant concepts and images, cultural historians working with memory often follow similar “wild” practices, introducing sources and data on the basis of similarities and contrasts to connect microhistorical and macrohistorical dimensions. One of our principles relates to the conception of an individual as never merely being an example of the general: there are always divergences and exceptions, dissonances and consonances between these two levels. Stories of individual migrants are not representative of the “migrant crisis”; they are either more or less than that, although they take light from or shed light on the general process of mobility.

It is my conviction that the reverberations listed above are not restricted to the relationship between the work of one artist and one cultural historical research project. An indication of this non-confinement is that they point back to a major past reverberation reflected in Henri Lefebvre’s work on the production of space by embodied subjectivities. I remember how struck I was in the 1970s by Lefebvre’s idea that space is neither a “mental thing” nor a “mental place”; it is a product, or rather,

it is a corporeal entity as well as a field of knowledge. Lefebvre understood “production” not in the reductive sense used by economists but in a wider Marxian sense, according to which human beings simultaneously produce goods or commodities (and surplus value) as well as social relationships. For Lefebvre, this meant that they produce their lives, their histories, their world as well as different spaces: physical, mental, and social; in other words, the space where social relationships take place.²⁸ Although he referred principally to urban space and landscapes, his perspective was global, offering a radical critique of the conceptualization of space as something passive and empty to be filled with consumables. In her re-visitation of Lefebvre’s work, Irit Rogoff observed that a revised understanding of geography could indicate an alternative set of relations between subjects and places, challenging the authority of traditional geography.²⁹

While the various reverberations between Biemann’s and my approaches emerged from the practice of research, this reverberation toward Lefebvre is suggestive of an approach that enables the interlacing of theory and practice across different forms of knowledge.

**Modes of Knowledge:
Coumba; Adawa; Hanane Radouane;
Angelica Judith Canchi Cornejo**

What can one know through art? The relationship between art and socio-historical research has often been posed in inter-, or cross-, or trans-disciplinary terms. The artist and scholar Danielle Boutet posed this question within the framework of her pledge for trans-disciplinarity, referring to the correspondence between the individual and the structure of the universe and thus proposing to revive the archetype of Hermeticism and the Renaissance.³⁰ I am convinced that her argument stands up even without the presupposition that a harmonious homology exists between microcosm and macrocosm, which is untenable today; on the contrary, it may be useful to restore a correspondence

between human beings and their habitat beyond the present conflictual situation. I believe that the term “trans-disciplinarity” is too restrictive, but I share her concern with the way in which different modes of knowledge explicate how human beings work and how they know what they know.³¹

The disciplinary horizon is too narrow for the topic of this chapter because the two directions of research considered here share an interest in critiquing the traditional apparatus of knowledge and its partitions, and both Ursula Biemann’s approach and my own in the BABE project consider interstitial practices and cognition. Biemann’s video essay practice has been defined an “in-between,”³² and the artist herself states that “art is not a discipline in the academic sense”;³³ in fact, her work enlarges the field of art toward theory and politics. My own work has often contaminated history with literature, anthropology, and folklore, thus challenging the academic limitations of historiography. Moreover, I have always tried to insert the individual into history, which often requires contacts with psychology, psychoanalysis, and philosophy. However, I will limit my analysis in this chapter to my involvement in the BABE project.

The cognitive value of Ursula Biemann’s artistic practice is coupled with the artistic value of her cognitive research. She has developed an “aesthetic-theoretical” approach³⁴ that can shed new light on memory studies. As a historian of subjectivity and memory, I do not use the word “aesthetic” with any artistic implications, but rather with the intent to restore its etymological sense in ancient Greek, which indicates the quality of being sensitive and perceptive. From this perspective, the term refers to the senses, focusing on the dimension of bodies and their trajectories, as well as on corporeal memory. Etymologically, “theoretical” means to see and consequently to contemplate and reflect. This etymology implies the need to give a speculative background to visual memory; something that traditional historiography is disinclined to do, given its endemic diffidence about theory.

I find a reverberation of my interest in this direction in the conjunction of the aesthetic and the theoretical that Ursula Biemann has applied

in many of her videos, starting with a philosophical thought and looking for mediations between theoretical concepts and people on the ground:

I have always been an artist who is strongly driven by theories . . . such as gender and postcolonial theories, and technology . . . I set a kind of matrix for myself: bringing really large ideas and meta-reflections on mobility, transnational spaces and borders together with what individual women do somewhere, what I observed them doing on the ground.³⁵

This is another reason why Biemann's revisitation of the video essay is of interest for cultural historians.³⁶ The practices of the film essay and the video essay evoke alternative, dialectical forms of temporality and history, and contribute to generating a postcolonial approach. "Knowledge" in the ethnographic film used to be bound to the hierarchies of race and mastery implicit in colonial culture, while the new hybridity advocates the postcolonial revision of the anthropological mode of knowing.³⁷ It is especially in the work of Irit Rogoff, one of the advisers of the BABE project, that I find reverberations in a triangulation with Biemann. For Rogoff, the dislocation of subjects implies the disruption of collective narratives in the field of vision, inviting to a new knowledge order. Her proposal for "mapping subjectivities and bodies of knowledge that are not traditionally linked to cartographic forms" coincided with the ambition of the BABE research project.³⁸

Against this background of reciprocal reverberations, it is time to introduce the point of view of critical distance, understood in a metaphorical sense.³⁹ By this I mean that while, on many aspects, there is a closeness between the research approaches adopted by Biemann and myself (and BABE) that allows for reverberations, in other respects there is a distance, not so wide as to make communication impossible but wide enough to create two very different perspectives, between which a critical exchange is possible. This difference emerged in my conversations with Ursula Biemann, especially in respect of our different approaches to the strategy for establishing a relationship between the individual and

collective. Ursula Biemann's approach is systemic, while my approach is intersubjective. In the BABE research and in my other projects in the past, human subjectivity is placed at the center, and intersubjectivity is the guiding line to interpret the result of exchanges with mobile people and artists.

For Biemann, "systemic means that I look at the migration system in and of itself."⁴⁰ The combination of macro and micro perspectives in her work, "brings a systemic approach to questions of migration and globalization, while maintaining a focus on human agency, particularity, and unpredictability."⁴¹

The critical distance between the two approaches will appear more clearly if we focus on the practice of the interview, which is the principal methodological tool for the study of oral and visual memory—mainly the individual interview, even when coupled with a process of collectively interviewing groups of various kinds. When I questioned Ursula Biemann on the individual interview, her response was resolute:

I hardly ever approach people to ask them about their personal stories. Coumba is one, maybe there is one other example . . . Let's say, out of fifty interviews perhaps two would be like that. I approach people from other cultures in a way that they can theorize their own situation.⁴²

Biemann is referring to one of the individual interviews included in her video *Sahara Chronicle* (2006–2009), one of her major video essays, documenting transit migration through the Sahara as a large-scale collective experience and showing the attempts of various authorities to contain these movements.⁴³ *Sahara Chronicle* has been defined as "a transformative map of the North African zone of migration," which opens up a field of uncertainty between the real and the artificial, between the objective documentary and the fictional construction (Figures 5.9 and 5.10).⁴⁴

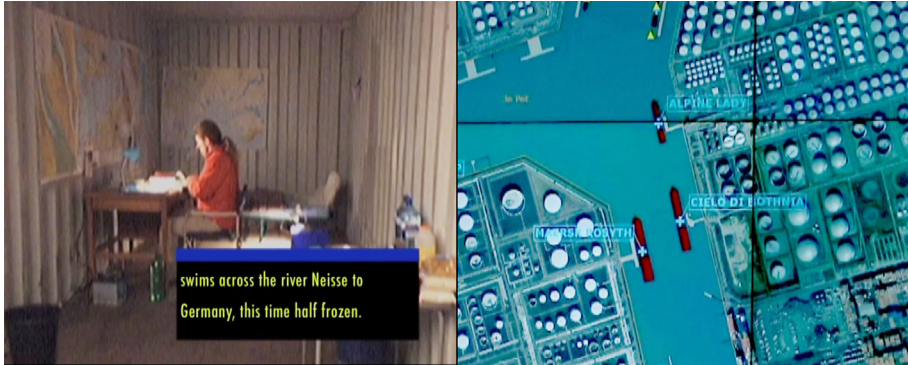
The other case Biemann refers to is her interview with Adawa, in the same video. There is another telling example, that of Anatol K. Zimmerman (the protagonist of another of Biemann's videos, *Contained*



5.9 Sahara Chronicle by Ursula Biemann.



5.10 Sahara Chronicle by Ursula Biemann.



5.11 *Anatol*, from *Contained Mobility* by Ursula Biemann; and the harbor where he lives in a container.

Mobility, 2004), who travelled for years through several European countries, suffering great vicissitudes, in search of an asylum that was never granted. His itinerary, which appears as a scrolling timeline in *Contained Mobility*, has never been recorded by the various asylum or homeland security offices; it is documented only in this video. Hence, in his case, the art work is not only an aesthetic representation, it also turns into a unique document of historical evidence—another reverberation with oral and cultural history (Figure 5.11).

However, such reverberations coexist with critical distances, which emerge clearly from the simultaneous presence of the collective and the individual in *Sahara Chronicle*. In this video essay, two individual interviewees, Coumba and Adawa, emerge powerfully from the chorus of figures that appear on the screen.

Coumba Sow of M'bour is a young woman who tried to leave Senegal when she was sixteen and go to Spain to help her mother to raise their family. She gives a dramatic account of her boat trip, which failed to reach its destination (when her whole group of fellow travelers was seized by the Spanish military and sent back), and of her return home, where she has adjusted to keep on living and to make realistic plans for the future. It is a very vocal, moving account, which I (and other mem-

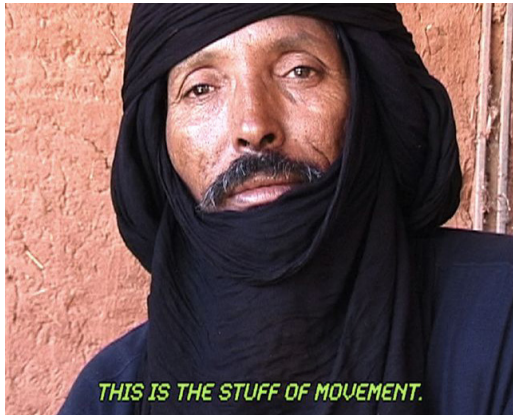


5.12 *Coumba Sow of M'bour, Senegal, from Sahara Chronicle by Ursula Biemann.*

bers of the BABE team) have often used in school classes, arousing great sympathy in audiences. This sequence has been considered as exceptional with respect to the artist's systemic rather than subjective approach: "the style confirms a shift in Biemann's aesthetic strategy," while adding a "self-reflexive" dimension to the systemic approach.⁴⁵

I do not agree that this interview is an exception. The systemic approach hosts the individual interview in its framework, bringing it to a different level within its collective dimension. As mentioned, a similar approach is used by Biemann in the interview with Adawa, overseer of the migration route from Niger to Algeria, who participated in the 1991 Tuareg rebellion in Niger.

Adawa, speaking in French, is very lucid about his role as "broker," in anthropological terms, between the authorities and the migrants. At the time of the interview, he was acting as a mediator between migrants and the legal system that hampered their movements. Thanks to his nomadic tradition, he knew how to overcome obstacles and cross borders, and he was adamant in stating that without the "crazy square of the Tuareg community" there would be no crossing through. Adawa situates himself at the margins of the law, in the illegal interstices that allow border crossings; he embodies the centuries-old tradition of resisting occupation and domination by maintaining local practices of space typical of nomadic populations.⁴⁶



5.13 Adawa, Niger, from Sahara Chronicle by Ursula Biemann.

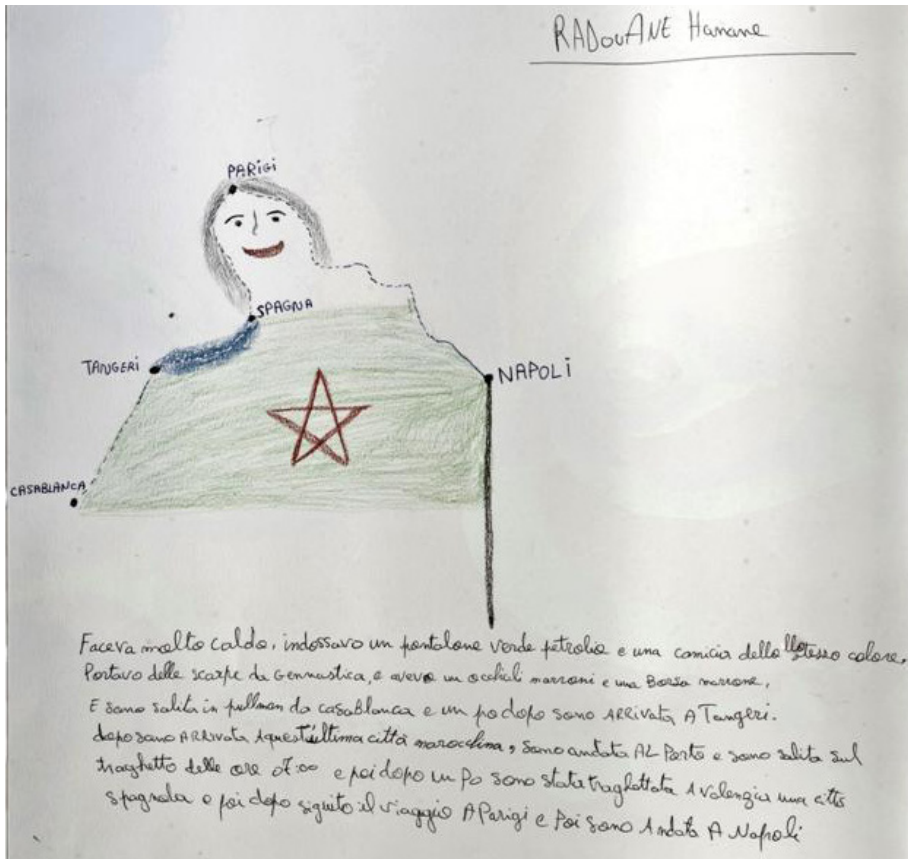
An example directly related to Adawa's interview can be singled out from the BABE fieldwork. It is a testimony from the other side, by somebody who was among the travelers whom Adawa "helped": Abdou Cissé (chapter 6, *Hand and Voice*). The two stories, Adawa's and Abdou's, make full sense when considered together. They contribute opposite points of view, providing an image of the complexities of migratory movements and the internal conflicts inherent in them. The two are placed in different discursive and visual universes: Adawa's interview is set in a geopolitical context thanks to the systemic approach adopted by Ursula Biemann; Abdou's narrative and drawing are situated within an analysis of memory and subjectivity, understood as agency and performance in the process of mobility. These two testimonies are brought together here primarily in order to show the differences in methodology and practice between two research itineraries, but their conjunction also shows the concurrence of various subjectivities in resisting the system of global domination and control of human movements.

Coumba's and Adawa's testimonies acquire historical value against the background of the past vicissitudes in the context of the Sahara; a place contested and divided by the colonial powers in the nineteenth century. Both of these protagonists emerge as very dignified, thoughtful, and self-aware. Their interviews are encapsulated in a narration showing

collective movements, landscapes (including aerial footage of the Sahara), seascapes, and ports where international companies keep their containers; an indicator of the global network of commercial exchanges enveloping the world. The whole video lasts 78 minutes, much longer than the individual interviews, each about 10 minutes long. Thus, Biemann proposes a way of interviewing and using interviews that combines a few individual cases with the representation of large movements of people within the process of capitalistic globalization. “Systemic” implies a critique of advanced capitalism, which does not prevent the artist from presenting glimpses of survival, thereby refuting the notion of total sovereign domination.⁴⁷ An instructive warning comes from this practice, reminding us of the Lefebvrian distinction between the temporary suspension of oppression obtained by making a different transitory use of space, on the one hand, and the full reappropriation of spaces that could act as an example for the production of new spaces, on the other.⁴⁸

Students in adult education classes and high school classes in Italy (in the years 2013–2016) and in one Oral History master class at Columbia University in New York (September 21, 2017) were shown Coumba’s testimony. Their reactions were always very lively. The students often inquired about the methodology of the interview, and Ursula Biemann was so kind as to reply to this question (by email), specifying that she usually first discusses with the interviewees what they think is most important to speak about. However, in the case of Coumba, given her young age, she decided to ask the first question about her experience of the *traversée* and then continued in a conversational style, as we can hear from her comments and questions in the video.⁴⁹

The reception of Coumba’s interview in adult education classes in Italy was often emotional and accompanied by interesting discussions: comments on her courage and generosity, the risks she had run, and her desire not to be content with what she had and to better her and her family’s situation. They also included judgements in which having less and staying with family in one place where strong ties exist was deemed preferable to running risks. Occasionally, the interview triggered negative reactions. In one case, Hanane, a woman from Morocco, was very



5.14 Map by Hanane Radouane, May 2013.

antagonistic; she reacted harshly to the implication that people from Africa moved to Europe because of poverty and hardship, insisting that her country is not at all like that. She was very critical of such a young girl embarking on a very difficult trip, without enough experience to face it. And she vehemently counterposed her own experience, presenting a very positive drawing and narration (Figure 5.14).

Hanane⁵⁰ superimposes herself, her country, and her migration itinerary in her drawing. In her oral comments, she stressed the importance



5.15 *Hanane Radouane.*

of the joyful face she had drawn: “Here is a smiling face. My trip too has been like that, because I was cheerful, my travelling was like playing.” The smiling woman appears to represent both the travelling subject and Morocco itself, in a close connection between her body, self, and the trip from her country of origin toward and across Europe. All are collapsed together, so that the embodied self appears mobile and at the same time anchored in a territorial sense of belonging, symbolized by the Moroccan flag that constitutes her body; the body in green coincides with the Moroccan land but Naples is inserted into it. The drawing is partly figurative, although decidedly unrealistic, which highlights its nature as an expression of subjectivity.

It was hot, I was wearing blue-green trousers and a shirt in the same color. I had sneakers on, brown glasses, and a brown bag. And I boarded a bus at Casablanca and in a while I arrived at Tangier. Then I got to the last Moroccan town, went to the port, boarded the 7 o'clock ferry, and was taken to the Spanish town of Valencia, and then I continued the trip to Paris, and then I went to Naples.

Hanane's is a memory emphasized by the temporal distance, almost ten years, and the narrator reinforces the sense of remoteness by suggesting that the smiling face looks "like a dream." Hanane remembers that she left in June on a Friday, a holiday, following a decision taken out of curiosity: "What is this Europe? I want to go and see." This joking version is a narrative device adopted to transmit a self-representation that imbues her whole testimony in spite of its often tragic content. She insists that her decision to leave was not due to economic need, since Morocco is "almost like Italy" when it comes to employees' salaries and living conditions.

Hanane's drawing offers a positive representation, contradicted by her oral testimony, which, in spite of the narrator's intentions, reveals a series of hardships, big and small, and the impossibility of settling down. In fact, she left Morocco after losing her husband, who died suddenly, very young, when their twins (born in 1999) were small. Hanane, who had been helping him in their small firm, went to work in a lawyer's office. But she was unsatisfied and unhappy, and decided to pay 5,000 euros for a Schengen visa valid for two months. While in the case of Mohamed (chapter 4), the positive tone of his oral story corrected the dramatic meaning of the image, in Hanane's case, it is the other way around: the self-image of the narrator is affirmative but the content of the story transmits a sense of failure for not finding a point of arrival for herself and her family. In spite of the contradictions between experienced difficulties and narrative optimism, which is a recurrent expression of subjectivity in the autobiographical mode, both her drawing and testimony are coherent in transmitting a sense of continuous travelling, nourishing multiple belongings combined with an original loyalty.

A similar attitude is testified by the drawing by Angelica Judith Canchi Cornejo (Peru 24.10.63), which transmits the idea that mobility can be reconciled with fixed points, such as strong identification with the land of origin.

We do not have any information about Angelica apart from this drawing, since she did not attend the class in which we should have discussed it. I feel that it is right to accept this silence and interpret the drawing



5.16 Map by Angelica Judith Canchi Cornejo, April 2013.

as the sign of her continued memory of her country, her allegiance to it, and her hope for the future, including the possibility of returning to that smiling land. In both her case and Hanane's, the gendering of the land is unmistakable, perhaps even more strikingly for Angelica, whose individual story and image we did not obtain. This reminds me of the blank sheet of paper that was handed in by a participant in one of the adult education classes: the student, a young woman, had signed it, but left it blank, and did not wish to explain why. This right to opacity will be one of the topics of the next chapter.

While the results of the two different approaches to interviewing can sometimes be complementary, as in the example of Adawa and Abdou,

in the case of Coumba and Hanane, the juxtaposition of their narratives can be better defined as critical distance. Of course, I am not referring to the two individualities; only to their public narrations. Coumba's story contributes to a collective fresco to which it belongs and, to my understanding, it signals that the subject can never be totally expunged from a well-founded systemic context. Hanane's story reflects the chorality of voices that is present in most of the results of BABE's intersubjective interviewing, aiming to construct an intersubjective tapestry of memories. The self in the stories we collected is always both individual and collective, within the context of subjectivity. In Hanane's case, this is well expressed by her collapsing together the images of land and the woman. The narratives by Coumba and Hanane cannot be compared but can be brought together to show their contrasts and parallels. Taking these two stories into account, the critical distance between Biemann's and my approach appears clearly: if it were wider, there would be silence; if it were narrower, there would be reverberations between the two. Thus, there is a balance between the two approaches, which allows for a critical dialogue along parallel lines.

The general context of this dialogue between the works of an artist and a cultural historian goes beyond disciplinary walls, combining convergences, divergences, contradictions, and parallels. A final example, on the issue of Europe and democracy, seems to me particularly significant in this respect.

The BABE project has explicitly chosen a European horizon, with the intent to criticize and problematize present-day concepts and images concerning Europe. One implication of this intent is that the new connections forged by the journeys to and through Europe, as well as the memories of the subjects of these itineraries, increasingly challenge common representations of European history and identity. At the same time, they may contribute to inspiring new and deeper forms of democracy, not only in the political arrangements of some European countries, but also, and more directly, in the everyday contacts between "European" people, both "native" and "new" ones. The global diaspora of populations in which Europe is situated evidences the shortcomings of existing

democracies, and their inadequacies in the face of the state of the world today. The connection between communication and democracy in and on Europe has been central to the BABE project from its very inception in 2010: a direct implication for everyday democracy is that embodied subjects crossing borders reaffirm their subjectivity by putting into practice their right to decide how they will live.

Biemann's art and thought have stimulated me in this endeavor, although her work is not restricted to a European perspective, and the artist does not position Europe as the main focus of her research and production.⁵¹ Since I found her art significant from the point of view of a potential Europe, I invited her to give the inaugural speech at the *Biennale Democrazia* series of events in Turin, Italy, in 2015.⁵² In her keynote, Ursula Biemann made not only an artistic but also a theoretical and political contribution to criticizing the limits of democracy in Europe and the incompleteness of its forms of citizenship. She argued that there is something unfinished and suspended in European citizenship in the double sense that no European citizenship as such exists—only national citizenships are recognized—and that this defect has repercussions for existing forms of democracy. She proposed a broad idea of democracy, composed of three main meanings: as an actual space of mobility, that is, the geography produced by migratory practices; as democracy within the visual space of representation, with alternative practices challenging media images; and as the space of a social imaginary in which artists can intervene with “a deconstructive method, a form of world-making practice.”⁵³ In her recent production, the artist contributes to expanding the understanding of democracy in the face of ecological crises,⁵⁴ in addition to her direct engagement in ecological movements in various parts of the world, from Canada to South America to Asia.

Another form of cultural-political intervention fostering democratic practices has been enacted by Ursula Biemann in her mediation between art and the institutions of art. She considers her curatorial work as a way of critiquing and possibly modifying postcolonial power relations between art institutions, especially Western institutions in possession of funding and decision-making power, and artists who are in need of

international exposure.⁵⁵ In this experimental practice, art works are not judged and selected; instead, new projects are developed together in a collective process, engaging with the democratic forces on the spot so as to transform and not simply reproduce power relations.

For the BABE project, integral components of a wide idea of democracy in Europe are, as we have seen, the right to mobility in its multiple meanings; the practice of alternative representation; and elements of alternative imaginaries created by artists and other subjects. Intellectual researchers' participation in undertaking these tasks includes an element of utopian thought, which can hopefully contribute to a new attitude toward Europe's present dramatic situation regarding migration. In the present situation, I feel much more pessimistic than a decade ago, when I started working toward the BABE project. When I asked Ursula Biemann whether she shared my pessimism, she replied in a determined way:

No. I don't make any speculations about this really. I'm just observing some of the dynamics that are happening. I don't have any predictions to make.⁵⁶

The contrast between these words and her active engagement on many fronts conveys a sense of the complex positionality of being a European by birth and location, and finds a strong reverberation in my work, crossing many distances. My work does not make predictions either, but it does nourish the hope that it might contribute to challenging the state of our field of research and indirectly favor new ways of imagining Europe. In their production of spaces, mobile people create new connections between many parts of the world, thus giving a vanishing Europe a new possibility of existence.

Notes

- ¹ Artist, writer and video essayist, Ursula Biemann (Zurich 1955), studied Art in Mexico and New York. She is the author of several books and the cofounder of the collaborative World of Matter project. I am very grateful to her for making herself available to discuss her work during our various encounters. The most important sources for this chapter are two conversations that I had with her in Zurich; the first occurred on December 20, 2013, and the second was a conversation that Karen Diehl and I jointly had with her on July 8, 2015. I also thank the artist for sending me the stills that are reproduced in this chapter.
- ² The film essay genre, on which the video essay is based, was conceptualized in the 1940s by the filmmaker, Hans Richter, who was one of its first practitioners. The techniques of using montage, mixing fact and fiction, and inserting the personal musings, thoughts, and concepts of the filmmaker were further developed in the works of directors such as Alexander Kluge, Daniel Eisenberg, and Chris Marker. The interchange between video essays and theory has contributed to its cognitive value and its educational use. As many have observed, the video is a medium that extends far beyond the art world to a wide range of cultural practices, and it can impact on many aspects of everyday life.
- ³ Cf. Ursula Biemann, “Agadez Chronicle. Post-Colonial Politics of Space and Mobility in the Sahara,” in *The Maghreb Connection. Movements of Life across North Africa*, eds. U. Biemann and B. Holmes (Barcelona: Actar, 2006), 42–67.
- ⁴ For more details on *Europlex*, see Amy Charlesworth, “On Reporting, The Documentary and the Aesthetic in Ursula Biemann and Angela Sanders’ *Europlex*,” <https://www.ibraaz.org/essays/66> (accessed May 30, 2013). See also Domitilla Olivieri, *Video di confini: attraversamenti fra realtà, visioni e visualizzazioni*, as well as Domitilla Olivieri, *Haunted by Reality. Towards a Feminist Study of Documentary Film: Indexicality, Vision and the Artifice* (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2012), chapter 4, 148–80.
- ⁵ In fact, some of the black stones into which the meteorite disintegrated were sold by the nomads to tourists, while the biggest part went to the museum of the University of Washington and was catalogued as the “Bensour Stone.” Cf. Ursula Biemann, “Logging the Border: *Europlex*,” *Mission Reports, Catalogue of the Retrospective Exhibition, Bildmuseet*, eds. Ursula Biemann and Jan-Erik Lundström (Umeå: Umeå University, November 25, 2007–January 20, 2008), 47–54, especially 48–9.

- ⁶ Federica Timeto points to “women’s asymmetrical mobilities” in Biemann’s work; see Federica Timeto, “Tracing Women’s Routes in a Transnational Scenario. The Video-Cartographies of Ursula Biemann,” *Feminist Media Studies* 9, no. 4 (2009): 448.
- ⁷ Cf. Pamela C. Rosi, “Film Review: *Performing the Border, Writing Desire, Remote Sensing, and Europlex*,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 177–86.
- ⁸ Conversation among Ursula Biemann, Luisa Passerini, and Karen Diehl, July 8, 2015.
- ⁹ By “critical distance” I mean the distance at which a balance is created between the source of sound and the receiver, so that the reverberation is reduced (limited bouncing back and forth), while the resonance continues to occur. The distance is determined, among other factors, by the different positions of the source and the listener, so that the combination perceived by the listener results in a calibration between direct and reverberated sounds. I use these metaphors in a reductionist way in comparison to their technical and scientific meaning. For a discussion on reductionism in the relationship between art and science, see Eric R. Kandel, *Reductionism in Art and Brain Science. Bridging the Two Cultures* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).
- ¹⁰ Conversation among Ursula Biemann, Luisa Passerini, and Karen Diehl, July 8, 2015.
- ¹¹ For instance, Biemann’s video, *X-Mission*, situates the Palestinian camps within a wide network of relationships. Cf. Federica Timeto, “Tracing Women’s Routes in a Transnational Scenario,” on the video essay practicing “dislocation” across national boundaries and continents.
- ¹² “The object of Ursula Biemann’s work is the struggle between mobility and the politics of containment.” T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image. The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 201.
- ¹³ Ursula Biemann, “Agadez Chronicle,” 43.
- ¹⁴ A good example is the video *Deep Weather* (2013), which portrays movements from one side of the world to the other, documenting climate change induced by human actions, such as carbon extraction in northern Canada that results in floods in Bangladesh. For further discussion on *Deep Weather*, see Nabil Ahmed, *Fluid Territories*, <http://www.inmg.org/archive/biemann/catalogue/ahmed/#.WPOZx-S1vIU> (accessed April 16, 2017).

- ¹⁵ The term “connection” is a crucial one in Biemann’s work, as indicated by her title *The Maghreb Connection*, which refers to a complex series of linkages between people, relationships, ideas, and objects. See U. Biemann and B. Holmes, eds. *The Maghreb Connection*.
- ¹⁶ Cf. Ursula Biemann, “Embedded Fieldwork and Global Oil Circulation: Black Sea Files,” in *Anywhere But Now. Landscapes of Belonging in the Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. S. Kanafani, M. Khayyat, R. Salti, and L. Al-Zubaidi (Beirut: Heinrich Böll Stiftung Middle East Office, 2009), 194–201.
- ¹⁷ She was interviewed in her class by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto in May 2013. An individual interview was done by Leslie Hernández Nova on July 13, 2013, for which Fabiola requested anonymity and which therefore has not been used here.
- ¹⁸ See Appendix on the places of origin of the interviewees at the end of this book.
- ¹⁹ Iris van Huis made the following observation: “I am drawn to the topic of migration because of my personal experience of moving to Indonesia and back to the Netherlands as a child, which is certainly different from a refugee’s experience but offers possibilities for making connections.” This remark is all the more significant given that Indonesia was one of the sites of Dutch colonialism. Internal correspondence for the BABE project, February 10, 2017.
- ²⁰ Milica Trakilovic observed: “For me there are personal reasons involved in conducting this work. As I share an experience of forced migration [from Serbia to the Netherlands] with my interviewees, this experience often serves as a bridge between our different positions of interviewer and interviewee, and I do actually use my experience as a methodological tool. . . . At the same time, since I mostly interviewed recently arrived forced migrants, my own story of migration of over twenty years ago also sheds light on the gap between our experiences, as the asylum procedure has been much stricter in the Netherlands over the past twenty years.” BABE’s internal correspondence, December 8 and 13, 2016. It should be noted that “reverberation” and “echo” differ in their meanings, given that the latter repeats a sound, whereas the former alludes to the prolongation and persistence of sound. I apologize to acoustics experts for the simplifications entailed in my use of these metaphors.
- ²¹ Leslie Hernández, whose cultural heritage includes a Mexican formation, has interviewed many Peruvians in Italy, Spain, and Sweden. She notes:

“In my case [making the shared heritage explicit] would explain why the memory of the *Conquista*, the colonial period and the feelings linked with the condition of postcoloniality have emerged constantly in the case of the interviews I conducted. The theme of shared cultural origins emerged spontaneously, and it was usually in this way that we started talking about the common history of Mexico and Peru as a trace of/for memory.” BABE Working Document, January 2017.

- ²² An example is Biemann’s installation, *Black Sea Files*, with its five synchronized pairs of video monitors, each showing two images that either contrast with or complement each other. The use of this technique establishes a further network of connections, this time with the viewers and inside each viewer. In *Sahara Chronicle*, the full structure of the networks of migration in the Sahara comes together thanks to the agency of the viewer, who mentally and visually draws connecting lines between the nodes at which migratory intensity is bundled. The multi-perspective audiovisual environment of this installation, which shows a collection of videos on different screens simultaneously playing the various sections, becomes inhabited by visitors in much the same way as migration space is inhabited by the depicted actors (conversation between Ursula Biemann and Luisa Passerini on December 20, 2013). In Biemann’s words: “the connection happens in the minds of the viewers themselves. I do not provide that anymore myself.”
- ²³ Demos, *The Migrant Image*, on Biemann’s video *Performing the Border*, 210.
- ²⁴ This exhibition [the title translated in English is *Bodies across Borders: Subjective Imaginaries and Integration in Europe*] was held at the Palazzo delle Aquile in Palermo from May 28 to June 9, 2016 and was supported by the Municipality of Palermo and by Leoluca Orlando, the mayor of Palermo. The research was conducted by Graziella Bonansea of the BABE team at the Liceo Classico Vittorio Emanuele II High School in Palermo.
- ²⁵ This exhibition was part of the “Biennale Democrazia 2017” program organized at the Fondazione Merz in Turin (March 29 to April 5, 2017). Several interviewees attended the opening, and groups and students from different schools visited the exhibition. A documentary on BABE’s fieldwork in schools was produced for the exhibition by Giulia Ciniselli, *In Viaggio per Torino*.
- ²⁶ This exhibition was the outcome of a collaboration between the Historical Archives of the European Union and the European University Institute, Florence. The performance was made possible through the collaborative

initiative of Professor Marina Nordera from the Université de Nice Sophia-Antipolis, who was a member of the advisory committee of the BABE project. Valerio Finessi produced a documentary, *MemoriaImmagine*, placing the exhibition in the context of the BABE research.

- ²⁷ Ursula Biemann, “Embedded Fieldwork and Global Oil Circulation: Black Sea Files,” in *Mission Reports*, 70.
- ²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *La production de l’espace* (Paris: Anthropos, [1975] 2000).
- ²⁹ This alternative set of relations could foster “a meeting ground between epistemic, historical/experiential and the signficatory, just like the arena of visual culture.” Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma. Geography’s Visual Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 7.
- ³⁰ Danielle Boutet, “Vision and Experience: The Contribution of Art to Transdisciplinary Knowledge,” *Transdisciplinary Journal of Engineering and Science* 4 (2013): 105–15, especially 105–6, 113, and 108. Boutet references the classic book by Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) on the connection between the art of memory and the development of the scientific method in the Renaissance.
- ³¹ Although the term “trans-disciplinarity” is limited to relationships between and across disciplines, it has relevant meanings. At least four directions of trans-disciplinary research (theoretical, transgressive, transcendent, and trans-sector) are mentioned by Clive Graham, “Trans-Disciplinary Convergence in the Performing Arts,” *Studies in Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development* 8, no. 2, (2011): 26–39.
- ³² Olivieri, *Video di confini, passim*. Demos too defines Ursula Biemann’s as a “quasi-ethnographic video-based practice,” *The Migrant Image*, 201.
- ³³ Conversation between Ursula Biemann and Luisa Passerini, December 20, 2013.
- ³⁴ Conversation between Ursula Biemann, Luisa Passerini, and Karen Diehl, July 8, 2015.
- ³⁵ Conversation between Ursula Biemann and Luisa Passerini, December 20, 2013.
- ³⁶ Nora M. Alter, “Memory Essays,” in *Stuff It*, ed. Ursula Biemann (Zurich, Vienna, New York: Institute for Theory of Art and Design Voldmeer, Springer, 2003), 12–23.
- ³⁷ Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography. The Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). Russell’s classic work on the connections between ethnography and cinema pointed out that the

interpenetration of these two fields produced a new type of cultural critique and a subversive-expansive form of ethnography, challenging the epistemological foundations of visual knowledge. See also Ivelise Perniola, *Chris Marker o Del Film-Saggio* (Turin: Lindau, 2011).

³⁸ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, Introduction. I would like to thank Irit Rogoff for reading an early, very rough version of this chapter and providing helpful critical comments.

³⁹ For a technical definition of the term, see note 9 to this chapter.

⁴⁰ Communication from the artist, October 19, 2018.

⁴¹ Deniz Göktürk, commenting on Biemann's lecture at the University of California, Berkeley, Department of German, on April 30, 2009: *Ursula Biemann in Conversation: A Screening and Discussion of Black Sea Files (2005)*, 4, <http://transit.berkeley.edu/2008/gokturk/> (accessed May 5, 2017).

⁴² Interview with Luisa Passerini, December 20, 2013. This methodological strategy reflects a theoretical attitude: "the subject is not the most important thing to think about anymore, but the Earth itself" (conversation with Luisa Passerini and Karen Diehl, July 8, 2015), which explains the artist's choice to work on ecology and climate change.

⁴³ *Sahara Chronicle* (78 minutes) is an anthology of 12 videos, which is part of the collaborative art and research project *The Maghreb Connection—Movements of Life across Northern Africa*. See Ursula Biemann, "Dispersing the Viewpoint: *Sahara Chronicle*," in *Mission Reports*, Biemann and Lundström eds., 77–92.

⁴⁴ Demos, *Migrant Image*, 219.

⁴⁵ Mackenzie Hayden-Cook, *Envisioning 'Bare Life': A Critical Analysis of Ursula Biemann's Aesthetic Representation*, Dissertation, Master's Degree in Contemporary Art (London: Sotheby's Institute of Art, 2016), 28 and 36–7.

⁴⁶ Nilgün Bayraktar, *Mobility and Migration in Film and Moving Image Art: Cinema Beyond Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

⁴⁷ Hayden-Cook, *Envisioning 'Bare Life'*, 51.

⁴⁸ Cf. Lefebvre, *La production de l'espace*, 194–5.

⁴⁹ Communication from the artist to the author, October 19, 2018.

⁵⁰ Born in Morocco in 1974. Interviewed on May 9 and 23, 2013 by Luisa Passerini and Giada Giustetto in Turin, Italy. Hanane left Morocco in the late 1990s, stayed in France for a few years, and in 2004 moved to Naples, where she worked as a babysitter and domestic help. With her second husband, in 2013, she decided to leave for Liège, Belgium, to find more favorable housing, citizenship, and work conditions.

- ⁵¹ “Europe has not been ever a subject of mine so much. Anatol is of course...”: conversation of July 8, 2015. Biemann refers to the video *Contained Mobility*, mentioned earlier in this chapter.
- ⁵² The BD series of events, starting from 2009, is sponsored by the Municipality of Turin and funded by public and private institutions. The 2015 edition was entitled “Crossings” (*Passaggi*). See <http://biennaledemocrazia.it/>. The artist presented parts of *Sahara Chronicle* and a full screening of *Deep Weather*. On Biemann’s lecture, *Crossings by Land, Water and Air*, delivered on March 25, 2015, see <http://blogbabeproject.eu> “Crossings by Land, Water and Air,” by Luisa Passerini. See Johanna Laliotou, “On Luisa Passerini: Subjectivity, Europe, Affective Historiography”, in *Borders, Conflict Zones, and Memory. Scholarly Engagements with Luisa Passerini*, eds. Donna R. Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta (New York: Routledge, 2018), 64–82.
- ⁵³ Email communication from Ursula Biemann to Luisa Passerini, August 3, 2016.
- ⁵⁴ I am referring to videos like *Deep Weather* (2013), *Forest Law* (2014), *Subatlantic* (2015), and *Acoustic Ocean* (2018), in which Biemann investigates climate change and the ecologies of oil, ice, forest, and water.
- ⁵⁵ During the period when she was co-curator at the alternative art space Shedhalle in Zurich in the mid-1990s, she initiated the collaborative project *Kültür. Ein Gender-Project aus Istanbul*, exploring the urban situation in Istanbul from a gender perspective and aiming to provoke changes in the existing cultural topography (<https://www.geobodies.org/> accessed on July 1, 2015). The intent of that project was to disrupt the opposition between the categories West and non-West, while changing the very concept of curating.
- ⁵⁶ Conversation with Ursula Biemann, July 8, 2015.

Addendum

In my study of Ursula Biemann’s productions, I considered the following works (listed in chronological order in each category):

1. Audiovisual works by Ursula Biemann
 - Performing the Border*, 43 minutes, 1999.
 - Writing Desire*, 25 minutes, 2000.
 - Remote Sensing*, 53 minutes, 2001.
 - Europlex*, 20 minutes, 2003 (in collaboration with Angela Sanders).

Contained Mobility, 20 minutes, 2004.

Black Sea Files, 43 minutes, 2005.

Sahara Chronicle, 78 minutes, 2006–2009.

X-Mission, 40 minutes, 2009.

Egyptian Chemistry, 3 videos lasting 13 minutes, 13 minutes, and 20 minutes, 2012.

Deep Weather, 9 minutes, 2013.

Forest Law, 42 minutes, 2014 (in collaboration with Paolo Tavares).

Subatlantic, 11 minutes, 2015.

Twenty One Percent, 18 minutes, 2016 (in collaboration with Mo Diener).

2. Websites curated by Ursula Biemann

www.geobodies.org

www.worldofmatter.org

3. Writings by Ursula Biemann (in addition to those quoted in the endnotes to this chapter)

Biemann, Ursula. "Vorwort/Prólogo." In *Zwischenräume. Bilder und Texte von Frauen in der Fremde//Interespacios. Imágenes y textos de mujeres en lo extraño*, eds. U. Biemann, A. Lyana, and P. Malatesta, 5–6. Zürich: eFeF Verlag, 1995.

Biemann, Ursula. *Kültür: ein Gender-Projekt aus Istanbul; Kunst, Feminismus, Migration*, transl. by A. Jendrjeko and Z. Herkmann. Zürich: Shedhalle, 1997.

Biemann, Ursula. *Been There and Back to Nowhere: Gender in Transnational Spaces. Postproduction Documents 1988–2000*. Berlin: b_books, 2000.

Biemann, Ursula. "Geographie und die Politik der Mobilität/Geography and the Politics of Mobility." In *Geografie und die Politik der Mobilität / Geography and the Politics of Mobility*, U. Biemann and S. Breitwieser, 14–20 (German) / 21–27 (English). Vienna and Cologne: Generale Foundation and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2003.

Biemann, Ursula. "Performing Borders: The Transnational Video." In *Stuff It*.

Biemann, Ursula. "The Video Essay in the Digital Age." In *Stuff It*, 8-11.

Biemann, Ursula. "Black Sea Files." In *B-Zone. Becoming Europe and Beyond*, edited by A. Franke, 16–95. Berlin and Barcelona: KW Institute for Contemporary Art and Actar, 2005.

Biemann, Ursula. "Premise." In *The Maghreb Connection*, 2–3.

Biemann, Ursula, and Brian Holmes. "Introduction." In *The Maghreb Connection*, 6-9.

Biemann, Ursula. and Jan-Erik Lundström (Eds.). *Mission Reports*.

Biemann, Ursula. "Counter-Geographies in the Sahara." *Art and Research. A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 3, no. 1 [2009–2010]: 1–11.

<http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v3n1/biemann.html>

Chapter 6

Keywords for Shared Memories:

Bouchra Khalili

- From where do we start?
- From the beginning. From the three of us.

The above lines are the incipit of *The Tempest Society*, a film produced in 2017 by Bouchra Khalili. The three protagonists in this film, a young woman named Isabella and two young men, Elias and Giannis, decide that they will tell a story together: “Telling it will say what we are . . .” Their story brings together Paris during the years 1972–78 and Athens in 2016.

The film’s opening words are echoed in the first lines of *Twenty-Two Hours* (2018), another production by Khalili:

- So how do we start? Do we start with the story? With the image of the story? Or with what remains of them?

“Them” refers to the Black Panther Party (BPP), which was active in the United States from 1966 to the early 1980s. Images in the installation alternate with the words of Jean Genet, who visited the Panthers in 1970, and with those of Douglas Miranda, a BPP militant at that time.

My own story, or rather the story I have to tell in this chapter, comprises a series of dialogues triggered by Bouchra Khalili’s work; dialogues that are situated between the experienced and the imagined. Some of my actual conversations with the artist prompted my writing of this chapter, but the following “conversation” is largely autobiographical

in the sense that it reflects my own views and my personal interface with her work. Which one of the two forms—my writing or her art—acts as the mirror, and which one is mirrored, will change according to the discursive context. It seems to me that this is more a matter of reciprocal reflection, at least from my perspective.

**Mirror:
Jean-Willy Mundele-Makuso**

“Mirror” is the first keyword that for me connotes a convergence in so far as part of Khalili’s work functions as a mirror of my life story as well as of my research on visual memory. First, in an elementary sense, in certain videos produced by this artist, I see reflections of my memories of the 1960s and 1970s transformed by her gaze. This was my immediate impression when I attended her exhibition *Foreign Office* at the Paris Palais de Tokyo in April 2015. Its reverberations relating to a historical past (not simply my own) and, simultaneously, its contemporary resonances for the present profoundly affected me.

On entering the exhibition hall, I was plunged into my own experiences during the 1960s. The images sliding across the screen to the left were of people I had known and talked with: leaders like Amilcar Cabral of the Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (PAIGC), assassinated six months before his country attained independence; Agostinho Neto of the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), a poet and the first president of independent Angola; and Samora Machel, the military commander of the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and the president of independent Mozambique. I also recognized militants whom I had not met personally but who were well-known to me through their fame, such as Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver of the Black Panthers; Nelson Mandela, the leader of the African National Congress (ANC), who was then in prison, where he remained for twenty-seven years; and women like Peninsular Moon, who fought for women’s rights in Oman, as well as Miriam Makeba.



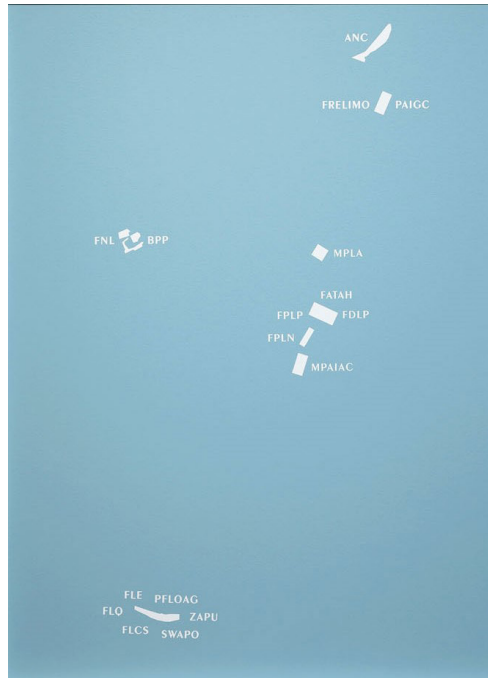
6.1 Foreign Office: Inès and Fadi against the background of a wall with photographs of Fanon, Cabral, and Neto, among other freedom fighters.

By the end of the late 1960s, I had worked with and on some African liberation movements at their headquarters in Tanzania, Zambia, and Egypt. I spent almost a year in Dar es Salaam, and shorter periods in Lusaka and Cairo, compiling documentation on FRELIMO, ANC, the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) that propelled Namibia toward independence, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). In particular, I worked closely with FRELIMO, gathering their documents, including many poems by Mozambican militants, which I published in a 1970 book on the liberation struggle in Mozambique.¹ The *Foreign Office* exhibition vividly recalled for me the entire period of the liberation movements that with the passage of time had been almost forgotten in the domain of public opinion.

The *Foreign Office* installation blends together different media: a digital film, a series of photographs, and a silkscreen print. On the silkscreen, titled “Archipelago,” (Figure 6.2) I could see more than a variation of the recurrent theme of the “constellation” in Khalili’s work (see the third part of this chapter). The archipelago is composed of the floor plans of the headquarters of the liberation movements in Algiers floating in a blue space that represents the topography of the town and evokes the sea. Among the featured acronyms on the screen are those of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and of numerous movements in Eritrea, Quebec, South Vietnam, the Somalian coast, the Canary Islands, as well as those of African-American movements. The shapes of the small images representing the plans of the offices or buildings resemble islands of resistance. In my memory, they invoke physical spaces, sometimes rather small and meager, where the elaboration of new forms of subjectivity and new ways of life, proclaimed in the programs of those movements, took shape. Thus, they offer glimpses of positive utopias for societies to be created out of the struggles of women and men. Seen in this light, the acronyms take on a function beyond simply representing the initials of the names of the movements, rather like puzzles that need to be deciphered to reveal the content of their promises.

Some of the sites expand the temporal perspective, like the image of a dilapidated building—once the site of the Hotel Victoria—where Karl Marx stayed from February to May 1882. All of the photographs taken by the artist in Algiers depict the passage of time, revealing a geography of places transformed over the decades. Poetry is another crucial medium used by Khalili, who has always insisted on the poetic dimension of resistance, be it political, cultural, migratory, or all of these in combination. It is not incidental that *Foreign Office* includes images of the place where Kateb Yacine lived and of the flowers that this Berber poet, writer, and activist used to give to women.

The mention of Yacine brings to mind my conversation with Khalili in Berlin at the beginning of March 2015. She had spoken of the poetic aspect not only of her art but also more generally of the connection between resistance and poetry. During the conversation, she referred



6.2 Foreign Office: *Archipelago, Map of the Liberation Movements' Headquarters in Algiers, 1962-72.*

to Abdellatif Laâbi whose autobiographical work I was familiar with. However, I had not read his poems, and when I searched for them, I found one that I felt very vocal for our own time:²

*Une seule main ne suffit pas
pour écrire
Pour les temps qui courent
Il en faudrait deux
Et que la deuxième apprenne vite*

Le métier de l'indicible

One hand isn't enough
to write with
These days
It takes two
And the second needs
to quickly grasp
The craft of the unspeakable

*Broder le nom de l'étoile
Qui se lèvera après la
prochaine apocalypse.*

To embroider the name of a star
That will rise after the
next apocalypse.

This poem was the Ariadne's thread that led to my discovery of other Berber poets and reminded me of the crucial importance of language, reflected in these poets' choices of whether to compose their poems in French, Berber, or Arabic. Laâbi's experiences of many years of imprisonment for "crimes of opinion," including a period spent in solitary confinement, as well as living in permanent exile, equally testify to the link between poetry and resistance. This poem alludes to the constellation theme, already evoked by the silkscreen "Archipelago."

The film *Foreign Office* is a montage of images of political figures cast in political and historical light. For me, the combination of these images with those of the two young Algerians, Inès and Fadi, who narrate the story of the decade 1962–72 (the former in Algerian Arabic and the latter in Kabyl), when Algiers hosted the "foreign offices" of many liberation movements from various parts of the world, is integral to its impact. The fixed camera (the film is a composition of static shots) and the apparent immobility of the two young people create a provocative contrast, with their vibrant words accusing the generation of their parents of putting the blame on them for the amnesia of that period. Yet, as they point out, these missing stories are all around us. Although I belong to the generation of their grandparents, I feel an affinity with these "grandchildren"; an attitude that anthropologists are familiar with and describe as an affective attraction between alternate generations that contrasts with the opposition between adjacent ones. In this case, it is a convergence in historical and political terms. The two protagonists (see Figure 6.1) are actors/authors because, as Bouchra Khalili told Omar Berrada,³ they co-authored part of the film script with her.

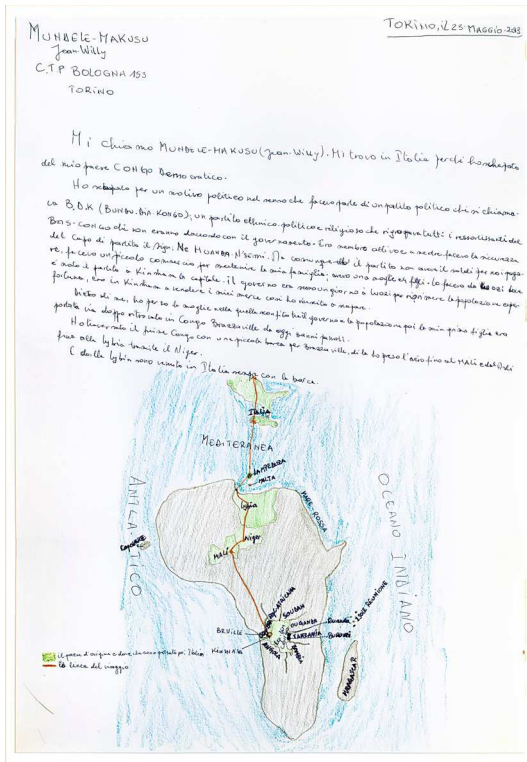
Some of the sentences and phrases they utter make sense from my own perspective. For example, Inès' observation that "this reading is the translation of a translation" clearly hints at a type of mirroring through quotes from past authors that echo our present. Fadi adds: "We'll never read the

original text,” signaling the inevitability of translation—considering all of its meanings—and the task of coping with the temporal thickness between the readers and the original texts, between present and past generations, and between different languages. The two protagonists interrogate themselves on what they should have done. Should they have asked questions of their parents, or more generally of the generations that preceded them? This line of questioning is familiar to my contemporaries and to me, albeit in a different historical context. Should we have asked our parents about their attitudes toward the Fascist regime and the Resistance?

During the course of fieldwork conducted by the BABE research team, including myself, between 2013 and 2016, some of Bouchra Khalili’s videos were shown to students in adult education classes in various Italian towns. We—Giada Giustetto, one of researchers participating in the project and myself—discussed these videos and other works of art with the students and their teachers, requesting the former to draw their migration itineraries. One of the students, Jean-Willy Mundele-Makusu, from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (born on May 6, 1975), who at the time was applying for political refugee status in Italy, drew a map of his flight in 1997 from Kinshasa to Italy.

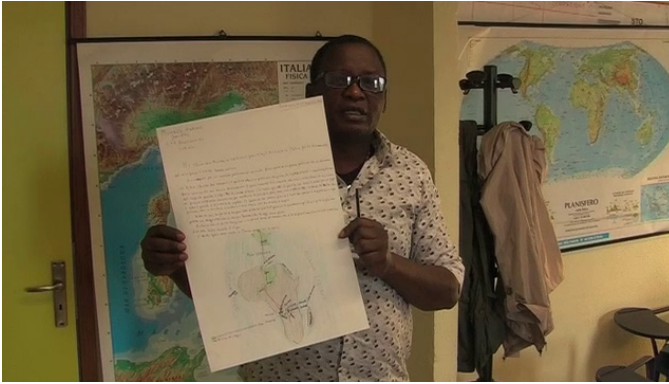
“My name is Mundele-Makusu (Jean-Willy) I am in Italy because I fled from my country Democratic Republic of the Congo. I fled for a political reason in the sense that I was part of a political party called B.K.K. [Bundu Dia Kongo]; an ethnic-political-religious party . . .” (Figure 6.3)

The caption continues with Mundele’s narration of his membership within an opposition party (against Mobutu), in which he was in charge of security and sometimes took part in military action. Because the party could not pay him, he supported himself and his wife and four children through small-scale commercial activities. A dramatic story of civil war follows, in which he recounts the killing of his wife and loss of contact with his children, followed by his escape to Brazzaville by crossing the River Congo in a small boat. He then travelled through Mali, Niger and Libya, finally reaching Italy after paying US\$ 1300 for his passage from Zuwara to Lampedusa, where he applied for political asylum and was sent for some months to Gorizia d’Isonzo, an acceptance center



6.3 Map drawn by Jean-Willy Mundele-Makusu, May 2013.

for refugees. After he was interviewed by a committee, he was taken to Rome, where he underwent a process that lasted almost two years and resulted in his acquisition of “subsidiary protection.” This status is similar to political asylum but has a validity of only three years as opposed to five years. Thanks to assistance provided by a Catholic church, Mundele attended a school for learning Italian, and was subsequently trained as an agricultural expert. In February 2013 he moved to Turin, where he had been told it was easier to renew his document. At the time of the interview in May 2013, he was assisting an Italian woman who had fractured both of her shoulders; she hosted him and helped him to renew his documents. In the spring of 2018, he sent us his greetings via Facebook from France, where he had moved.⁴



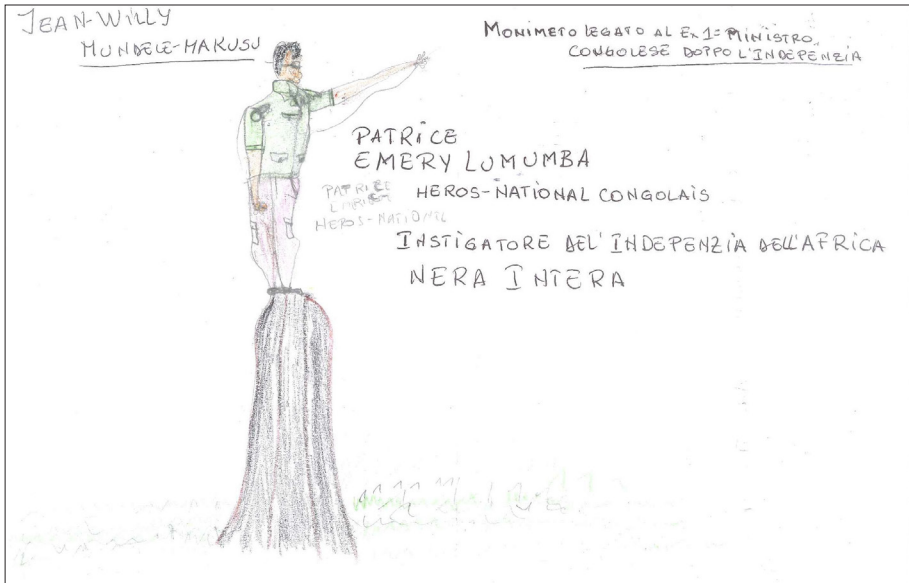
6.4 Jean-Willy Mundele-Makusu.

Mundele commented very eloquently on his map during his presentation to the class, but he also expressed the desire to be interviewed individually. In his drawing, Africa predominates, and the countries relevant for his travel are indicated in a precise and detailed way. The centrality of Africa is better explained with reference to another drawing that Mundele produced spontaneously (Figure 6.5).

“PATRICE EMERY LUMUMBA HÉROS NATIONAL CONGOLAIS INSTIGATOR DEL’INDEPENZIA DELL’AFRICA NERA INTERA” (national Congolese hero [and] instigator of the independence of the whole of Black Africa).

This second drawing leads the viewer much further away from the dimension of an ethnic-political-religious belonging toward a conception of Southern Africa as the center of a desire for freedom that holds promise of contributing to a universal civilization.⁵ Mundele thus transmitted to us his memory of the African legacy of struggles for independence, which he considered meaningful, in order to express his continuing political convictions.

An actual bronze monument of Lumumba exists in Kinshasa, in which Lumumba raises his right arm rather than the left one in a gesture of a stereotyped salute, whereas in the drawing, he is represented as a living human figure moving and gesturing to indicate the way forward. Lumumba’s gesture can also be interpreted as a sign of welcome and



6.5 *Monument to Lumumba, drawn by Jean-Willy Mundele-Makusu, April 2013.*

acceptance beyond any divisions of Africa. His posture is that of a great hero of African or global stature, and there is a sense of Mundele's identification with him. Indeed, Lumumba stands for the path that Africa could have taken; a dream that was alive during the struggles on the continent against colonialism, entailing hope for the birth of an African socialism and a "new man." The drawing represents this political and emotive memory, which extends beyond the Democratic Republic of the Congo (which became independent in 1960) to the whole of Southern Africa. Mundele thus erects a symbolic monument to Lumumba as a memento of the dream of independence of the subcontinent. This creates a tension between Mundele's declaration that one of the motivations underlying his choice to be a militant in an opposition party was his ethnicity (Mobutu was from the northern part of the country, while Mundele is from the central-western part) and the universalizing interpretation of the figure of Lumumba. Mundele's story and drawings go against and

beyond the interpretation of civil wars in Africa as merely being ethnic conflicts (partially suggested by Mundele himself), setting them in the context of an emancipation effort, represented by Lumumba, with a universal dimension.

This digression is not intended to establish an analogy between Mundele's drawing and the work of Bouchra Khalili. Rather, my intention is to show that it represents a link between my own memory of the African liberation movements, my fieldwork for the BABE project, and my emotions induced by the exhibition, *Foreign Office*. It is a purely subjective connection, which probably has a value and a meaning only at a personal autobiographical level.

Let me now return to *The Tempest Society*, introduced at the outset of this chapter, and the intention of its protagonists to tell a story together. The linking of Paris in the 1970s and Athens in 2016 in this story creates a crucial knot that not only bridges gaps among various generations but also among their memories. *The Tempest Society* evokes three activists from the past: two French students and a North African worker, who opposed racism and fought for equality and immigrants' rights. They created an open collective named Al Assifa, meaning "tempest" in Arabic, staging political theatrical productions in the streets of Paris and in occupied factories and cinemas. Although images and sounds of that period have been lost, and many people who were active then have died, some books and photos have survived. Al Assifa's experiment was a sort of theatrical newspaper focusing on the here and now; a theatre understood as "a series of situations." This phrase resonates with my own memory of the time when I was very closely connected to the Internationale Situationniste (IS),⁶ and our small group of Italian sympathizers (three women and two men) tried to "create" scandalous situations, as we did, for instance, at a leftist teachers' conference in Trento (was it 1966?), with impertinent speeches and defiant attitudes that outraged the participants.

In the Athens of 2016,⁷ the three narrators of the video each hold up a photograph of one of the three activists who had lived in Paris like a mask, producing a strong mirroring effect between the past and the

present. Their faces are serious, and their eyes are fixed in a still gaze that conveys a mixture of sadness as well as the voluntary intention to appear expressionless. They adopt a monotone in their speech, which is reminiscent of the voice-over in Guy Debord's film *La société du spectacle* (1973). Even more evident, and intentional, is the inspiration emanating from Godard's films. I recognize the desire to avoid sentimentality, which indirectly increases the viewers' emotions. There is no emphasis and no rhetorical tone in their speech, and while they mention "beauty" and "emotion," they clarify that these should be, as they say, "not imposing."

Overlaid one upon the other like playing cards, the images and words in this video are composed into a collage that evokes memories of poetry and revolution; the portrait of Antonio Gramsci and the references to Alexandros Panagoulis, Giorgos Seferis, and Pier Paolo Pasolini, who fought for freedom not just through their poems. Most of the video is narrated in Greek, except for one short section that is in French and one that is in Arabic.

Isavella, Gianni, and Elias introduce the burning question of *inheriting a story* when many traces have disappeared and others are disappearing. I wonder—am I among those who left behind this inheritance, but without a will? Are these three youths among the possible inheritors? Someone once said that there are legacies that are addressed to no particular heirs; consequently, anyone has the right to claim them as theirs. However, such claims have not been successful in the case of the legacy of 1968 and the years of unrest defined as the long 1960s.⁸

This question opens the way to a further level of mirroring between the past and the present: could that past happen again? The relationships between generations are now foregrounded more directly. Some of Bouchra Khalili's videos function as mirrors between the young and the old as well as between different historical periods. The intricate mirroring between the past and the present is explicitly reflected in the architecture of *Twenty-Two Hours* (2018). In this film, two young African-American women, Quiana and Vanessa, interview Douglas Miranda, a former Black Panther activist. They pose to him a question that continues to haunt us: "Could the Black Panther Party exist today?"



6.6 *Twenty-Two Hours*: Quiana and Vanessa.

These words echo within my mind. Can history repeat itself? Will it happen again? Or, more pertinently, what form might it take next time? An internal voice adds other questions, for example, will I/we live long enough to see it happen again? I mean myself and my generation, so many of whom have disappeared already. I wonder whether my lifespan will be sufficient to allow me to view a reprise of the tide, reversing course and moving once more toward hope and insurgency. Quiana and Vanessa are both the storytellers and editors of this film, reflecting on the positions of the storyteller and the poet as witnesses. But, in Hannah Arendt's words, will they live through their allotted days and hours of "public happiness"?

Khalili's *Twenty-Two Hours* centers on Jean Genet's visit with the Black Panthers in March 1970, when Douglas Miranda was a 21-year-old militant from Boston. We see him as a fiery youth with a crown of hair in the Afro-American style and are then suddenly confronted with an image of his face as it is now and his grey hair trimmed in braids; a very dignified appearance that commands respect. The two women pose

epochal questions to him: “Mr. Miranda, could the Black Panther Party have the same impact today?”; “Is it fair to assess that the Black Panther Party failed?”

The old activist replies with words that at times sound prefabricated and worn out, like: “capitalism still exists today . . . the extreme brutality, oppression of African-Americans and the working class continues unabated . . . the government would not allow it.” But he soon switches to a biblical tone: “the demands of history have found us wanting . . . there is no shame in being defeated . . . we will bury our dead, learn our lessons and move forward.” He talks of fighting, even today, for “the liberation of the soul.” Douglas Miranda speaks with wisdom that emanates from his experience: “The party already exists in history; it cannot replicate itself . . .” and invokes a critical approach, with new tactics and strategies. His speech sounds unfashionable, in Nietzschean terms, going against the grain of the present time and projecting a possible future.¹⁰

A subversive *détournement* of Miranda’s words will be necessary so that they can be fully updated and understood in a contemporary context. A sign of an already ongoing *détournement* is perceptible in the very situation in which Miranda pronounces and addresses these words to the two young women who are eager to know the answers to their questions and are anxious for change. But a full updating can only come from the unexpected. I recall how the situation of Europe in the early 1960s seemed to be imprinted with atonic passivity in spite of some sudden, scattered eruptions. This situation was diagnosed as anomie by sociologists, and many of us, then in our twenties, felt completely hopeless and impotent. I also recall attending a meeting in Paris with the Situationists, including Debord, Khayati, Vaneigem, and Viénet. At this meeting, they explained that *détournement* has many meanings, but especially one of leading someone astray from the right path, as Sade was wont to do with innocent girls. However, a *détournement* might also just refer to the displacement deployed by advertisers to garner attention for commercial purposes. The theme had emerged from the extensive application of this practice in the IS bulletin, for instance in the insertion of Marx’s words within the speech balloons of cartoons. Mustapha Khayati described

how during the Strasbourg affair the money belonging to the university students' association, which the pro-Situationists had taken control of, had been hijacked to pay for the mordant pamphlet *De la misère en milieu étudiant*.¹¹ This created a scandal on a wide scale, foreshadowing the events of 1968. Both 1967 and 1968 were sudden, extraordinary, and unforeseeable. All of the old passwords were *détournés*, and the IS dissolved itself.

The BPP cannot reappear or even be evoked; it must be *détourné* in order to be narrated, that is, performed to exist again in any effective form. The same applies to "1968" and to the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s as well as feminism. Mirrors reflect a nonlinear back and forth movement between the past and the present, and between the past and the future. The future is latent within the present. This is the effect of history being constituted by subjectivities. It is full of digressions, lost opportunities, and faux pas. Success comes only from turning everything upside down, including revolutionary theories. In the same way, the *détournement* in words and attitudes of many of the characters appearing in Khalili's video should not be taken as a way of repeating old words of order; rather, it signals the possibility of reinvention, a revelation of the potential and as yet unseen sense of the original expression that can be diverted, embezzled, re- or mis-directed. It is a rehearsing, a crucial *mouvance*—in the sense of a form of mobility—in Khalili's artwork.

Chapter 1 of *Speeches*, significantly titled "Mother Tongue," reveals multiple levels of *détournement*. Five volunteers, women as well as men, worked with the artist to select excerpts from writings by authors addressing the European nations on such questions as civilization, colonization, citizenship, and equality. A first level of *détournement* is apparent in the extraction of text from works like Aimé Césaire's *Discours sur le colonialisme* (1950) and Abdelkrim Al Khattabi's *Lettre aux puissances européennes* (1922). A second level of *détournement* occurs when these excerpts are articulated by people who have experienced mobility under harsh conditions along with discrimination and the loss of their rights in various countries. The translation of these excerpts into the speakers' mother tongues, thus generating a sense of displacement that

gives new meaning to the spoken words, constitutes a further level of *détournement*. Listening to some of the sentences expressed by Malcolm X in his speech made at the founding rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity in 1964, now being spoken in Malinke by Anzoumane Sissiko, who works in the United States, gives a new importance to utterances of “self-respect,” “freedom,” “equality,” and the right to be a human being. The speakers hand Europe a mirror in which she can see herself reflected, including not just the words she has proclaimed to humanity but also the distortions they have undergone as well as the distortions of images of migrants within the contemporary public sphere.

Listening to Al Khattabi’s address to the “civilized nations of Europe” or Aimé Césaire’s denunciation of “decivilized” European colonizers, articulated in Dari and Moroccan Arabic, changes the positionality of the words, which are powerfully addressed to present-day Europe, condemning the European nations’ policies toward minorities and migrants. The “mother tongue” is not necessarily singular; nor does it always stand for an identity that is fixed in one homeland. During interviews,¹² the artist herself explained that she has two mother tongues, one of which is Moroccan Arabic, an unwritten dialect with a long oral tradition. At the same time, this film asserts the power of language, considering it a more powerful source of identity than the “fatherland.” An identity sourced from “I am my language” is more expansive than one sourced from the homeland, potentially extending to a wider community, such as a Pan-Arabic one.

All of this suggests a further connotation of “mirroring.” In Khalili’s *Speeches Series*, forms of *détournement* and *dépaysement*/estrangement are created through the recital of the words of others—poets and theorists—or even the protagonists’ own words, after they have been prepared and curated. We onlookers are *détournés* from our usual expectations and initially cannot precisely make out which part of the message is unexpected and which part is *déjà vu*. The horizon of expectations has been moved aside and the unforeseen shines through. This appropriation instigates a feeling of surprise, creating emotion and disconcert, puzzling the viewers, and obliging them to reflect on themselves and their experience. What emerges is the question of subjectivity and the subject,

and, within my own research, a critique of the notion of European identity and Eurocentrism.

We need a multifaceted mirror, capable of reflecting multiple identities. In the second chapter of *Speeches*, one of the narrators, Alice, returns home after her first day spent in an Italian primary school in Genoa, and, looking at herself in a mirror, does not recognize her own face. This is because her eyes preserve the memory of the faces of her schoolmates: “It was not me”; “I had believed to be like you.” Although born in Italy, Alice finds herself surrounded by persistent racism, reminding her of her physical differences from those around her, so that she ends up exclaiming: “I am an Italian girl disguised as a Chinese!” Speaking of her mother, she observes: “She does not know who I am.”

In a conversation we had after I sent her some of my thoughts on mirroring, Bouchra Khalili added new meanings to “mirror.” For her, mirroring also connotes her feelings when she meets people like Mr. Miranda, who belong to the same generation as her parents (and myself), so that her videos convey a sort of homage to that generation. She spoke of the reflections of many of the people who appear in her various films, who in turn mirror other people whom she has known. I observed that in her art work she never discloses her autobiographical memory, and she confirmed that she keeps this to herself. But everything she has produced is based on her family context of story-telling during her childhood and adolescence. These stories—shared by a generation of North Africans—are ones of resistance and liberation; of the hopes that independence would have also meant democracy, while history, as taught in textbooks, remained firmly in the hands of the ruling authorities. A heritage of stories that included the dream of Pan-Arabism—one community without borders—as a short-lived one of the early 1960s.

I recognized Bouchra Khalili’s own claim to the right to opacity—in Edouard Glissant’s terms—as a defense against the imperial domination that erases the right to poetry. In our conversation, I mentioned mirrors that are opaque like the ancient ones uncovered by archaeologists. She spoke of the old Venetian mirrors, and other types of mirrors like the ones used by the police, in which you can be seen but through which you cannot see.

There are opacities that can be penetrated and dissolved, like the fog that hides the real images of transient people labelled as migrants. All of the protagonists of the three chapters of *Speeches* would usually be defined as migrants. However, they are more than that when situated against the background of the temporal continuum from the 1960s—and the preceding colonial period—up to the present. From a historical perspective, there is not much difference between Bouchra Khalili's works on the history of the African liberation movements and her videos on migration.

Hand and Voice: Abdou Cissé; Laila Mountassir



6.7 Mapping Journey no. 3 (2009): The narrator is drawing a route from Ramallah to East Jerusalem that diverges from the usual one.

The young man who drew his itinerary on this map, which is bristly with hard to decipher signs—symbols that represent multiple obstacles and icons that appear obscure to our eyes—comments on it in Arabic to Bouchra Khalili. He used to travel regularly from Ramallah, where he lived, to Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood in East Jerusalem where his girlfriend worked. The normal route, covering a distance of 14 kilometers, would have taken around fifteen minutes, but considering the Israeli checkpoints and military surveillance of the roads, the trip's duration would be up to one hour. In any case, a Palestinian who wanted to bypass checkpoints would avoid this route, opting instead for a parallel one entailing detours, crossing mountains, and finding a taxi for part of the way and finally a spot where the wall was still under construction. The narrator ends by saying that he does not know when he will ever be able to go there again, because “the roads have to change perpetually.” The maps too change, as Bouchra Khalili explained. She had obtained this particular map from the cartographers at the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which releases new maps of the West Bank every three to six months. Yet, the instability of the territory, and of the maps, does not completely curtail the movements of people through an area under occupation.

As a result of these reflections, I began to perceive this chapter of *Mapping Journey* as portraying an affirmation of subjectivity, agency, and decisionality; an act of resistance against the denial of the right to move and a testimony of the endurance of a community that is threatened and harassed by the measures implemented by an occupying nation-state. Whereas I had earlier considered this chapter to be secondary in relation to the other videos that collectively compose *The Mapping Journey Project*, and that at first sight appears to focus on migration, I now began to understand why the artist considers this particular video to be crucial.

The seven other chapters in the series present itineraries of migration drawn on conventional maps of the Mediterranean and Africa. These itineraries extend from the Algerian port of Annaba to Naples, Milan, Nice, Paris, and Marseille; from Tunis to Lampedusa, Naples, Rome, and Marseille; from Mogadishu to Addis Ababa, to Sudan, Libya, Lampedusa,



6.8 Some videos from The Mapping Journey Project shown at the “Here and Elsewhere” Exhibition at the New Museum, New York, 2014.

Palermo, and Bari; from Dhaka to New Delhi, Moscow, Skopje, back again to Bangladesh, and on to Dubai, Mali, Niger, Algeria, and Italy; from Afghanistan to Kuwait, Turkey, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria, Germany, Belgium, England, France and finally Rome; from Morocco to Algeria, Spain, France, Italy, back to Spain, on to the Netherlands, and then back and forth between France and Spain; and from Sudan to Libya, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece.

I recognize the itineraries, having listened to many such stories and having also asked travelers to draw maps of their journeys. My request to them was actually to map their stories, and I termed the outcomes “migration maps.” So, what does my work share with Bouchra Khalili’s project in this respect? In the course of writing this book, I have come to question my intent and my methodology, and I have also tried to deconstruct definitions such as “counter-geographies” or “alternative geographies” in relation to my research products as well as to art works like Khalili’s because of their reductionist implications (see chapters 2, 3, and

4). The reflections induced by writing have confirmed to me that the value of these products lies not simply in criticizing the existing geography but in expressing individual and collective experiences of agency and subjectivity.

The short film on Ramallah–Jerusalem challenges the assumption that *The Mapping Journey Project* is a work on migrants. Moreover, Bouchra Khalili’s insistence on its centrality within the entire series indicates that this series is about something that extends beyond migration. I can visualize the many people whom my co-researchers and I have interviewed as well as those interviewed by Khalili (although I am aware that there are differences in status between interviews in the visual arts and those in cultural history). As already mentioned, these individuals, who differ greatly from each other, often adamantly refuse to be subsumed under the “migrants” label.

In an interview for *Canvas* magazine, Khalili observed that art is about showing how much the word can be an image.¹³ Thus, the word becomes an image, but then the image is transformed into a word. The visual memory is not only in the image; it is also in the sound. As the artist explained to me, it is the sound of their voices that conveys the most important message: what they share is a deprivation of citizenship. *Mapping Journey* is about the right to be citizens and, further, the right to be equal citizens, which is denied to many people in their countries of origin as well as in their transient or final destinations. This is eloquently expressed by Mahoma Garfias, the protagonist in the third chapter of Khalili’s *Speeches Series*, titled “Living Labour” (2013). A student from Mexico, Mahoma went to the United States, where he worked as a dishwasher and a laborer in the food industry before becoming a labor organizer (Figure 6.9).

“A citizen is a person who lives here
 Who participates in the community
 Who acts as a citizen
 Who enriches the culture
 And pays taxes
 I am a citizen because my conscience grew up here



6.9 *Speeches Series, Chapter 3, Living Labour: Mahoma.*

I am a citizen because I decided to not accept the fear and to defend my rights

I am a citizen because I helped to organize my co-workers.”

This monologue endorses Khalili’s claim that in the case of Mahoma, and many others like him, the deprivation of citizenship is what makes them political subjects as they—not others—have defined themselves. The demand for “equal civic belonging”—a phrase that Khalili used when explaining why the topic of migration is too narrow to define her work—featured frequently also in the interviews that I compiled.

In the case of Abdou Cissé (born in Mali on January 3, 1989), one of the individuals who participated in the BABE project and narrated their journeys to us, this demand was closely connected with his plan of cultural betterment and self-promotion, one of the aspects mentioned in the above quote by Mahoma, who includes “enriching the culture” as an element of citizenship (Figure 6.10).

Abdou begins by saying: “Unfortunately I cannot draw, although I tried”—a statement that he repeats in the course of his narration. “A pic-



6.10 Map by Abdou Cissé, May 2013.

rogram would be necessary,” he explains, alluding to a digital icon that evokes a physical object. He uses many such refined terms in his speech, for instance: “*patrocinare il mio viaggio*,” which is a formal way of saying “to sponsor my trip” (as noted in sections of this book, the BABE voices are mostly in Italian, for good and bad). In any case, Abdou’s form of orality is strikingly eloquent and he is aware of this: “The only thing one can do is to explain the oral.”

Abdou’s speech entailed a circular format, repeating certain sections and becoming so long that the class grew impatient. It was a story that

6.11 *Abdou Cissé.*

contained a lot of direct dialogue, which he quoted using a standard formula: “And I said: ‘Look, my brother, if you help me now . . .’ and he replied: ‘All right, brother. . . .’” Yet there is a striking correspondence between his oral and drawn narrations: both are sinuous and serpentine, fully expressing the vicissitudes of the trip, with his map demonstrating a close correspondence with the circularity of his oral narration.

The first part of the drawing partially reflects the conventional geographic representation of the trip from Bamako to Gao, and then to Kidal, while the horizontal line connecting Kidal, Adrar, and Tripoli denotes a south–north direction (usually represented as vertical in Western geography), and the line curving toward the top denotes a west–east direction. Abdou stayed in Kidal for twenty-one days because he wanted to learn and to further his understanding during his journey: “When you travel, you cannot just go through a place. In life, it is not only a question of eating and sleeping, but there is also suffering—one must know.” Because he grew up in the urban environment of Bamako, the capital of Mali, which has a population of more than 3 million, he was interested in observing life in a smaller place like Kidal (with a population of 25,000). There he witnessed extreme poverty and “learned that there are people who live and have not a cent in their pockets.”

Abdou’s story is very complex and detailed, entailing good and bad encounters. After leaving Kidal, he and his friends were caught by the

Tuareg rebels, who threatened them, saying: “Either you obey, or we kill you.” They negotiated with the Tuareg (see chapter 5, “Modes of Knowledge”), giving them all the money they had left, and so they traveled to Algeria in a car transporting arms: “It was a miracle. The only person who can understand is me, but one cannot live only with the hope of miracles.”

In Algeria, Abdou worked as a whitewasher and a cleaner so that he could return the money he had borrowed (with interest doubling the original amount). He thought that Algiers was in Europe rather than in Africa not only because of the climate but especially because of the attitude of Algerians towards blacks. “I am African, I am black,” he asserted, reporting that sometimes he had been accosted with taunts like: “Hey, you stranger, you African! What the hell are you doing here?” This story stirred up controversy within the class, as a classmate from Egypt—Magdy Youssef—while acknowledging Abdou’s courage, stated firmly that Algerians are wonderful people. The dispute was settled as a result of the Solomonian acknowledgement of the class as a whole that in every country there are good and bad people. However, Abdou was not satisfied and claimed that there had been a misunderstanding, saying: “Let us drop this point.”

Evidently, his classmate’s objection contradicted the self-image that Abdou was trying to project. His speech was punctuated with words of wisdom, resembling proverbs: “Important things are difficult to say”; “In life anything can happen”; “Incapacity exists.” His is a special type of wisdom, as he explained, more than once, that at home, he was called a “devil” because he had wanted to leave ever since he was very young, in spite of the opposition of his parents, who finally gave in when they saw his determination. This epithet was also used against him during a quarrel with some of his travel companions, who told him: “tu vai a fare il diavolo”, which literally means “your job is to do the devil.”

In concluding his long and winding story, which tested the patience of the teacher and the other students, Abdou described how he refused to participate in the weapons trade and went to Libya and, from there, on to Lampedusa. He sees his life as a continuous trip: “Now that we are

in Italy, a new trip begins.” “When we arrived in Italy, I told my companions: ‘My friends, we have just started another trip. This means we must study Italian,’ and so I did.” The “we” indicates a type of self-recognition that implies being part of various communities; it expresses a subjectivity that is not only individual but also collective, open to others and to novelty. Finally, Abdou presents a lucid and yet proud self-portrait: “It is clear that I am a young man who knows nothing, but in any case I do know what to do in life. I have not even been to elementary schools—yes, I watch TV—but people who have studied for ten years have to ask me for explanations.” With these words, he concludes a narrative in which the relationship between his life trajectory, the migration voyage, and the transformation of his self-recognition are adeptly interwoven.

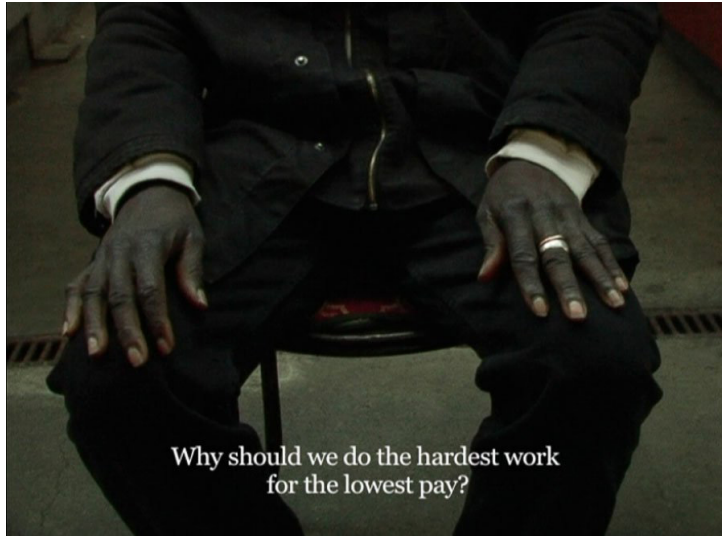
At the time of Abdou’s presentation, Fabrice Dubosc, an ethno-psychiatrist and the author of various books on cultural resistance, migration, and mythology,¹⁴ was serving as an advisor to the BABE project. Dubosc interpreted Abdou’s reference to the devil as denoting a djinn, observing that in many African myths, djinns are spirits that have the power of alterity; of traveling elsewhere and encountering the unknown. Djinns are viewed as “brothers” of human beings, but they are composed of a different substance and belong to a different species. They live in an intermediate space in which negotiations between humans and spirits are transacted. Although differing radically from humans, they can mediate between the repetitious animal world and the human imaginary as a source of the transformations that are necessary for constructing new cultural equilibria. Dubosc added that Abdou’s reference to a pictogram could be understood as referring to a world in which words and images serve not merely signs for communication; they also evoke a mythic construction of the self and its relationship with old and new communities. In his self-image Abdou identifies with the goblin because of his love of novelty and his desire to improve. However, Dubosc predicted that one of the challenges for him would be the symbolic poverty of the new world in which he finds himself—Italy and Europe—seeing a sign of this in the feeble lines depicted in the second part of the drawing.

The line showing the part of the journey entailing the crossing of the Mediterranean is weaker and less incisive, while the serpentine trajectory changes, becoming linear, and the circle drawn around Italy is also lighter.

Like all of us attempting to interpret the drawings we were collecting, Dubosc himself assessed his comments as being arbitrary. I was nevertheless fascinated by Dubosc's interpretation, while agreeing with his opinion that his interpretation was not exhaustive. As Lutz Niethammer, another BABE project advisor, observed: "the maps speak for themselves." I would add that they withhold their mystery. And yet I take the liberty to suggest that Abdou's whole story, including the references to the devil/djinn, can be heard as the narration of acts of cultural resistance to the static attitude of his culture of origin and not only. He narrates a similar resistance to the traffickers whom he meets during his journey; to the racism of both Algerians and Europeans who he finds discriminate in equal measure against Africans; and to the reduction of migrants—both material and symbolic—to the status of uncultured workers.

I see this type of reduction as the source of one of the meanings of the images of *hands* portrayed in Bouchra Khalili's work. Various videos produced by this artist depict the narrators' hands. Not only hands but also other parts of their bodies are sometimes shown in these films. For example, the curve of Alejandra's neck and chin and Tony's chest appear in the third chapter of *Speeches*. However, as many observers have pointed out, it is the hands that feature most prominently, and this can have various meanings, including the intention of not showing the individual's face. However, the hands are selected also in cases in which the entire figure of the subject appears.

This recurring detail made me think of the Italian word *manodopera* (*mano* means "hand" and *opera* means "work"), literally meaning hand of labor. This term, which indicates both the workforce and manpower, maintains the original reference to the fact that these people are manual workers, or rather, their bodies are reduced to their hands, which do the work (in English too, as the Oxford dictionary notes, "all hands" means the entire workforce). However, "hands" simultaneously speak of



6.12 Mother Tongue: *Hands*.



6.13 Foreign Office: *Hands*.

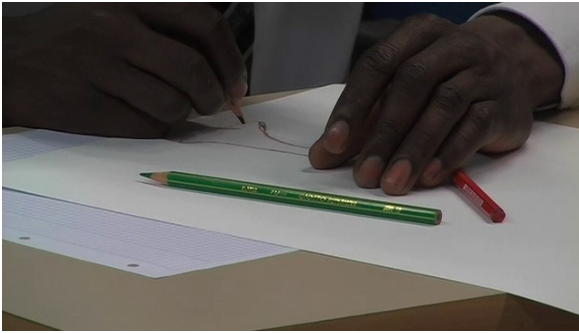
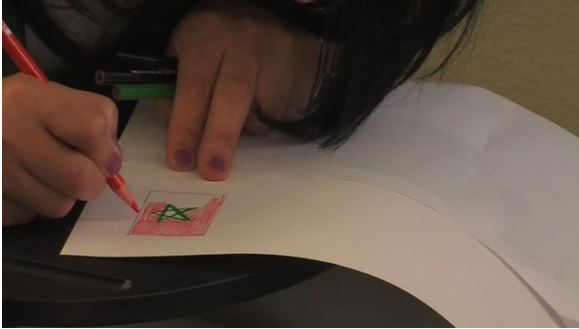
competence, capability, and artfulness and not merely of strength or service. As Walter Benjamin, inspired by Valéry, wrote, they speak of intelligence, and they are also tools for/of narration (see chapter 3 of this book). In the act of narration, hand and voice are inextricably linked, interacting with one another. In the past, whereas the role of hands in production (for instance, those of artisans) was more relevant than it is in the present, the coordination between the soul, eye, and hand remained integral to storytelling. In its sensory aspect, storytelling is far from being a task for the voice alone; its gestures, trained in work, support what is being told.¹⁵

This connection reminds me of another one, an essential commonality shared by the interviewees in the BABE project and various visual artists whose works featured in the project: they are narrators. The connection between hand and voice expresses their subjectivities. Seeing the images and listening to the voices of people I have met as well as those whom Bouchra Khalili met, I can discern a web of stories with innumerable variations of similar narrations. We are immersed in a sea of storytelling. Stories were being narrated before us, and we receive them and pass them on. Initially acting as catalysts, we become bearers and *passseurs/passeuses* of these narrations, so that the autobiographical and the biographical have become muddled up.

In the BABE fieldwork, the camera operator filming the individuals who were interviewed in the schools often focused on hands as well (Figure 6.14).

However, the prominent role and strong meaning of “hands” in Khalili’s art work are not apparent in the BABE research project, in which hands only play a partial and literal role, given that the narrators drew with their hands, which shared an equal emphasis with their voices. And of course, we cultural historians cannot be considered artists in any proper sense.

One essential component of subjectivity that I would like to foreground is gender as a source of shared identity that is capable of generating new connections and innovating old ones. In stories like Abdou Cissé’s and Tarik El Amiri’s (see chapter 3 of this book), the group of



6.14 and 6.15 *Images of hands from BABE field-work. Stills from videos shot by Dario Cicchero.*

young men is a crucial element of both the journey and the narration. I came across many affirmations of gendered subjectivity by women travelers. One of them that struck me because of its straightforwardness was that of Laila Mountassir, who is from Morocco (Figure 6.16).

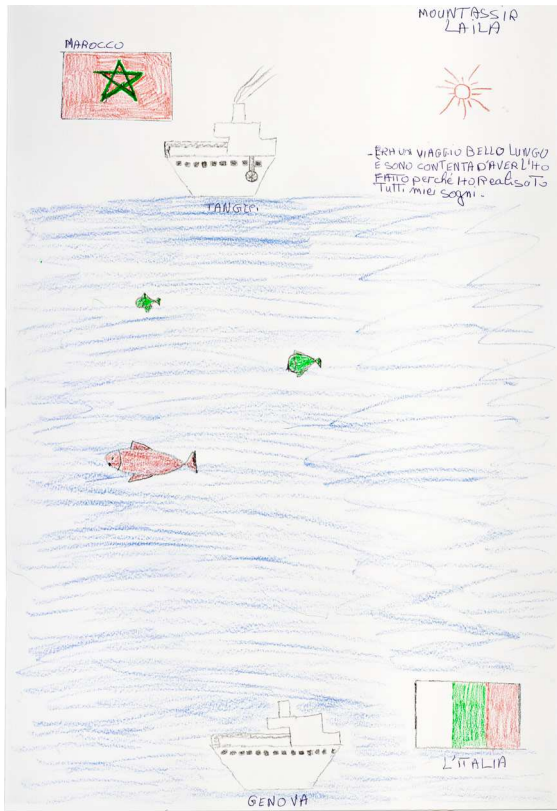
At the age of twenty-two, Laila wanted to “better her future,” but her family did not approve: “My father used to say: ‘Let’s send the boys rather than Laila,’ but they could not do anything.” Eventually, her family recognized that she was more dynamic and positive than her brothers. She was the first to migrate successfully—before her eldest brother—and to lead the way, with the whole family later joining her: “I succeeded in making a house for them.” She began her trip on July 23, 1999 and enjoyed the two days of navigation: “I really had a good time on the ship.” After she arrived in Genoa, Laila proceeded to Turin, where she had family networks. One day, two months after her arrival, she visited

6.16 *Laila Mountassir.*

Porta Palazzo, a large multicultural market, with two friends, and they shopped at a stall. The Sicilian seller asked her in Italian whether she was looking for a job, because he needed a girl to help him, but she could not understand the language. One of the two other girls translated, and the second girl said: “I am looking for a job.” “No,” the man replied, “her,” pointing to Laila. She got the job and four months later they were married. Laila now has an eleven-year old son: “It was wonderful, I did well to come here. I did what I wanted to do.”

Laila speaks proudly of her capacity to travel, and this capacity becomes part of her self-representation. She repeats: “I succeeded in doing what I wanted.” She states that she has chosen, but has also been chosen by destiny, by god, and by her husband. Hers is a trajectory of intersubjectivity and agency for herself and for others. She arranged for her mother to join her, and while her mother learned how to move across the city, walking and taking buses, Laila still has to use GPS on her phone to navigate her way around Turin. However, her mother was unable to learn Italian, watching only Arabic TV channels, and Laila ended up organizing her return to Morocco (Figure 6.17).

In Laila’s drawing, the Moroccan flag positioned at the top dominates the representation of her trip as the foundational image of the place and culture of her origins. By contrast, the Italian flag is positioned at the bottom of the drawing, and its colors are in the “wrong” sequence, showing perhaps a combination of integration and acceptance of new ways



6.17 Map drawn by Laila Mountassir, May 2013.

with her original values and sense of belonging. Between the two flags, a vast sea, scarcely populated by fish, dominates the drawing, constituting a middle space between the two lands to be filled by the relationships that Laila herself is weaving. I can perceive a tension between the visual and the oral in Laila's representation. Whereas the oral emphasizes her capacity for integration and organization, the visual shows not only a predominance of the culture of origin but also a large empty space. Significantly, she positions Italy at the bottom of her picture. We might read her story in the context of the conflictual innovation of the role of women in Morocco and the transformation of gender roles in the process of migration. Fabrice Dubosc commented that in Laila's case, the

process of creolization, while maintaining her sense of cultural belonging and thus generating new possible forms of identity and belonging, produced a positive dynamism, enabling her to rework her relationships.

These stories highlight the need to understand “mapping” in a wider sense, not merely as the description of an itinerary and its accidents. It is not so much about geography as it is about establishing connections that are being forged between people, places, objects, temporalities, and sociopolitical phenomena. This brings us to the crucial theme of *constellations* that illuminates ways of mapping these connections.

Constellation: Iryna Prokaza

“Constellation,” a word that encompasses the mysterious side of creation, the “poetic” aspect in the original ancient Greek sense of making and producing is the final keyword for the construction of a shared memory. As mentioned in chapter 4, Victor López González uses this term for his last creation. In my own work, I first used the metaphor of a constellation almost twenty years ago while participating in GRINE, a collaborative research project initiated in the early 2000s that connected researchers from the universities of Budapest, Copenhagen, Sofia, Utrecht, and the European University Institute in Florence.¹⁶ Specifically, I applied it in my interviews with Eastern European women who had migrated to Western Europe as well as women from the receiving countries.

The constellation *subject/love/Europe* was embedded in the European cultural traditions during the period spanning the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Prior to my engagement in the GRINE project, my historical research had been devoted to exploring this cluster of notions and attitudes within European subjectivities during the interwar period, using essays, novels, and private correspondence as sources for a history of European subjectivity.¹⁷ My intent was to criticize Eurocentrism from within, deconstructing the myth that Europeans had invented courtly and romantic love and that European identity was root-

ed in the exclusive privilege of this sentiment. My critique of the privileged subject of Europeanness as male, white, and Christian conjoined feminist theory and the Europeanist political legacy.

In the GRINE project on women migrants, I transformed the above constellation into another cluster comprising *subjectivity/gender/Europe*. My conception of this constellation entailed a circularity that allowed for movement from one term to another and vice versa, as I wanted to avoid establishing any prioritization between the three “stars,” although at times one of them could act as a motor. The simple phrase “being a woman in Europe” is indicative of this constellation, and as such, it inspired the activities of prominent Europeanists like Ursula Hirschmann and other notable women during the decades between the 1930s and the 1960s. It is a constellation that expresses change, as the meanings of “woman,” “Europe,” and “being or becoming a subject” continually change. There is movement of each of these three terms along with a concomitant mutation in the deep connection between them, whereby they move as a configuration of stars over the ages, changing their respective places in relation to one another and to the general context. These terms pertain to a partially unconscious or semiconscious reality, implying an affective as well as intellectual investment. If an individual recognizes herself as a woman experiencing a sense of belonging to Europe (without denying other forms of belonging), while at the same time being willing to change the role and status of Europeanness in a global dimension, this is accomplished thanks to a set of emotions and affective investments that this recognition entails.

This is the essence of what I wrote in 2007 upon concluding the collective research on migrant women and women in the receiving countries, who had in various ways expressed interest in forms of Europeanness that could be shared by women of diverse cultural and geographical origins. The migrant women, who contested Europe as it was then (at the beginning of the 2000s) through their mobility, entailing movements between different countries, had a particular constellation in mind: themselves, as women, wives, and mothers; their desire to become citizens of a potential new Europe; and their capacity to change themselves and the world. The women of the receiving countries largely agreed with

these aims, although at times with reservations. But it was only in subsequent years following that period and up to the present that the situation worsened drastically for migrants in Europe with the development of extreme right-wing populism alongside xenophobia and racism. Since that time, I have become increasingly pessimistic about contemporary Europe, although I reckon that it is precisely the current situation that requires increased intellectual and artistic engagement to manifest the tension between the Europe of the present and a possible one.

Over the course of the following decade, my application of the constellation concept has shifted to include more personal aspects, thus reviving the initial Jungian sense of the term, referring to a set of psychic elements that are closely related as a whole and cannot endure without each other. I had discussed this conceptualization on various occasions with the Jungian psychoanalyst who had been my therapist and who subsequently became a friend. The connection between the psychic elements is partially evident but can also remain invisible, unconscious, or semiconscious. The personality of every single subject is constituted as an individual constellation, a structure of emotions and complexes that can be conflictual and unbalanced. It is a dialogic system, existing in dynamic relationships with the constellation of the collective psyche. From this perspective, the subject is unitary, a site of interactions occurring both within itself and with others.

Recalling my conversations with my friend, I can make out connections between two types of projections. The first is the projection of itineraries from the land and sea to the sky, alluding to the ancient *points-de-repère* for travelers, and especially sailors. The second has to do with projections and movements within the structure of the psyche: projections between the “I” and the Self; projections of the individual subject onto other subjects; and the notion that we and our eyes are like projectors—that we actually see what we project (as Bruner taught me; see chapter 1). In the psychic sphere, the direction of the movement is the reverse of that in astrology: it is not the configuration of the stars that influences human beings; rather, it is the other way around: human beings radiate their projections toward the outside.¹⁸

In comparing the dynamic structure of the psyche and the structure of the universe, my friend, the Jungian psychoanalyst, talked of the cosmos as a phantasmagoria that composes a background shared by all human beings and against which the path of each individual interacts with those of others, thus generating a mapping of the sky. To support his vision, he told me the story of geomancy, in which he had been interested at the time of his training. He had studied an Arabic version of this system of divination, entailing the digging of small holes in the desert sand at random, with the figures thus produced then being studied and interpreted, thereby establishing connections with astrological figures. Both the figures in the sand and those connecting the stars could be seen as forms of horizontal narration.

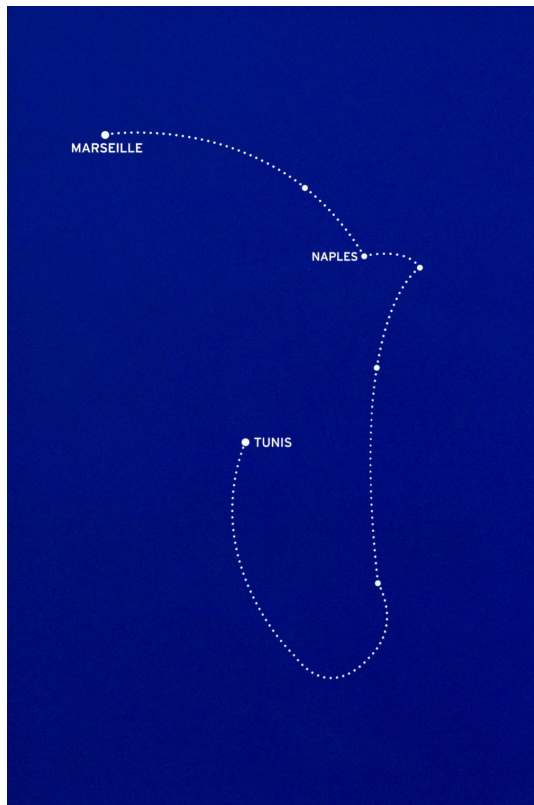
I told Bouchra Khalili this story, which reminded her of her childhood interest in medieval Arabic astronomy, particularly in the work of Al Idrissi, the Moroccan mapmaker and botanist who produced a map of the world commissioned by Roger the Second of Sicily. This map was “turned upside down” through the inversion of the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, thus representing an anti-Eurocentric move. The connections between earth and sky that these exchanges created were significant in the context of my personal discovery of *Constellations*, the eight silkscreen prints, elaborations created by Bouchra Khalili of her videos comprising *The Mapping Journey Project* (Figures 6.18 and 6.19).

When I first came across these prints, I was struck by their mystery. I had seen reproductions, and I was able to see two of them “live” for the first time in 2012 at the *J'ai deux amours* exhibition held at the Cité de l'Immigration in Paris. The leaflet describing the exhibition insisted on the idea of a “counter-geography,” providing the usual ready-made interpretation, but it usefully reminded visitors that the two exhibited *Constellations* were the last chapters of a work that was three years in the making, involving eight narrators and five countries.

As I have observed in the course of writing this book, I find the idea of a counter-geography unsatisfactory. However, at this point, I will leave aside polemics, treating this notion as a first approximation and attempting to articulate another level of interpretation. The artist herself has



6.18 The Mapping Journey Project, no. 2, by Bouchra Khalili.



6.19 Constellation no. 2, by Bouchra Khalili.

provided us with a clue in this direction in the form of her title, which indicates the transformation of itineraries by land and sea into traces projected on to the sky. It is now a celestial map that we see. And any easy interpretation is disclaimed by Bouchra Khalili in her interview with Dorothea Schoene conducted on September 27, 2012:

I aimed to produce an ambiguous space that refers both to the sea and the sky, blurring the limits between them, as well as blurring the limit between borders: literally erasing them, by translating the drawings of clandestine journeys into constellations of stars.”¹⁹

She made her point even more pregnantly in an interview with Cedric Vincent some years later in 2015:

I never considered that *The Mapping Journey Project*, *The Constellations*, or even *The Speeches Series* had to do with migrations; rather they deal with single voices that articulate collective voices because they are aware of their position at the margin from where they elaborate a possible form of resistance and its discourse. It is precisely because my work deals only with the singularity that it proceeds by metonymy. The narrations appear to be vast, historically and geographically, but visually they are always metonymical fragments, where a dialectical tension is at work between what is shown and the voice-over.²⁰

In 2016, I had the opportunity to view all eight videos comprising *The Mapping Journey Project* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York along with the class of students attending my course on visual memory within the Oral History Master of Arts (OHMA) program at Columbia University. The absence of the *Constellations* felt almost painful to me. The first time I saw the two series together was at the Jeu de Paume in Paris in 2018, and I was better able to grasp the connection and the difference between the two series. The physical distance between them,

being located in two different rooms of the exhibition venue, was an apt reminder of their respective autonomy.

This series of serigraphies raises profound questions for me. Are they traces of the past or orientations for the future? As forms of visual memory that are projected high above us serve to guide us but also encourage us to question our movements, they are both. *Constellations* simultaneously presents an aesthetic type of formalization: a sketch of an itinerary that becomes a rarefied and precious sign, depicted on silk, playing with the tension between the sky and the sea, the high and the low.

I have noticed that Bouchra Khalili's idea of the constellation appears in a number of her works: *The Mapping Journey Project* (2008–2011), *Constellations* (2011), *Foreign Office* (2015), and *The Tempest Society* (2017). One chapter in the last of these works is devoted to "The Galaxy" and the entire Epilogue focuses on constellations. In the latter, the constellation appears in a blurry photograph, taken from high above, of a very large demonstration in Athens that took place on July 3, 2015 against the European agreement of June 25, 2015.²¹

The narrators in the film tell us: "From the sky we resemble a galaxy of tens of thousands of people, an assemblage of heterogeneous stars that radiate together. Galaxies are said to be made up of hundreds of billions of stars." They talk about populations of new stars, populations of dying stars, a multitude of stars, and about themselves as not yet constituting a real constellation. The theme had been introduced in the description of an experiment in political theatre during the 1970s, which amounted to "a constellation of individuals, events, time, and geography." At the end of the video, it is explicitly relaunched: "Between the 1970s and us, there are many things," and the three narrators list events that include the demonstrations in Syntagma Square. They write them down using white chalk on a blackboard, producing a constellation of the names of people and places of demonstrations quoted in their narration (Figure 6.20).

The activists of the 1970s and the young ones of today are connected in a new constellation, which mixes together the mythological and the historical: "The dream of a real civic identity emerges from history



6.20 *The Tempest Society: Blackboard.*

and connects all of us”, the three actors/authors explain. They pronounce the ancient names of the stellar constellations: “Andromeda, Centaur, Berenice’s Hair, Hydra, Perseus, Cassiopeia, Orion, Pegasus . . . these myths are stories written in the sky.” They conclude by bestowing their “common family name:” “Equality,” on their constellation. They talk about the Europe they desire: a community that is connected through the common aim of saying NO to a Europe without democracy and countering Europe’s denial of a perception of itself as a continent of migrants and refugees, intents that engage me deeply. I am glad to hear them say that at the demonstration “all ages were gathered hoping that new stars would be born” and that besides the young scintillating stars, dying stars at the periphery were “extinguished in glowing color.” I identify with the

latter, content that their color remains and continues to glow. The narrators express the wish to “give voice to voiceless people,” an old hope-illusion that we oral historians know well, and they read aloud stories about immigrants recorded in a book written by a journalist. Each story is narrated in the first person, but by someone other than the subject, thus producing a collective and interchangeable narration.

I shared my perceptions with Bouchra Khalili, saying:

– This series is mysterious, poetical, rarefied, like the final distillation of a long process.

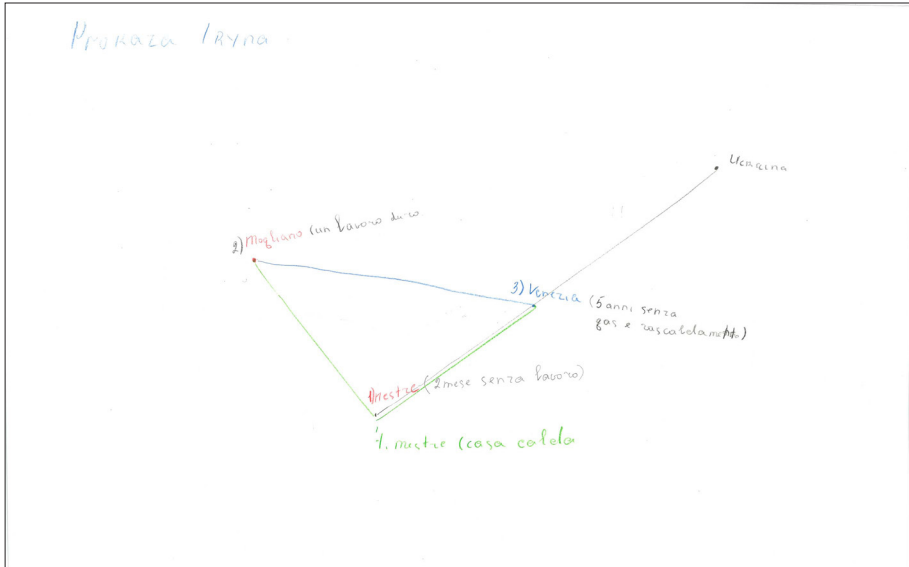
– It is the other way around. Constellations are not the result, they are the beginning. My booknotes look like that. It is the way I take notes and plan projects that look like constellations.

– Like the writings on the blackboard in *The Tempest Society* video?

– Exactly like that. My way of putting things together. For me it’s natural. I start with a lot of things and then there are just a few left that are connected, because I start seeing the connections, my way of thinking.

When I shared with her some of the meanings that “constellation” had for me, she added new ones. In her mind, a constellation could be composed of photographs and quotes, like the montages in *Foreign Office*, connecting time, space, and ideas. Constellations are compositions that make connections evident. Then, the idea came to me that I myself—and any other viewers of her work—could add other connections emerging out of a subjective reading and viewing. I recalled the montage in which Fanon’s image figures prominently (Fig. 6.1), and my memory linked it with a poem by Kateb Yacine:

C’est vivre
Fanon, Amrouche et Feraoun
Trois voix brisées qui nous surprennent
Plus proches que jamais
Fanon, Amrouche et Feraoun
Trois sources vives qui n’ont pas vu
La lumière du jour
Et qui faisaient entendre



6.21 Map drawn by Iryna Prokaza, October 2014.

*Le murmure angoissé
 Des luttes souterraines
 Fanon, Amrouche et Feraoun
 Eux qui avaient appris
 A lire dans les ténèbres
 Et qui les yeux fermés
 N'ont pas cessé d'écrire.²²*

But I could also add to the constellations featured in this section some of the drawings by the individuals whom we interviewed in the BABE project. Examples could include the drawing by Youssef Boukkouss depicted in chapter 3, but also the one by Iryna Prokaza (born in Ukraine on December 9, 1963), who was interviewed by Giada Giustetto at “Giulio Cesare”, a school for adult education located in Mestre, on October 13, 2014. (Figure 6.21)

Iryna drew a constellation of the stops of her journey that focused on working and housing conditions that she experienced: “1 Mestre

6.22 *Iryna Prokaza.*

(2 months without a job, Mestre (warm house); 2 Mogliano (a hard job); 3 Venezia (5 years with no gas and no heating).” Giada reported that Iryna railed against life, furious and also depressed as a result of all of the adversities she had endured and her destiny, so much so that she did not appear at the following meeting, at which, as she knew, she would have to present her drawing to the class. Hers is a constellation of sufferings, and Iryna chose the right to opacity.

Once more, I insist that I do not want to establish a direct analogy between the maps of migrants and the art work. The connection is indirect, grounded in my own experience and subjectivity. It is not in the things, it is in the subject, and I am the connection. My intent in asking for the maps was to discover new ways of imagining Europe, which can be done only in interaction with those who have arrived and are presently arriving on this continent under such dire conditions.

I showed some of the drawings that we had collected to Khalili and she expressed the hope that they had not been influenced by our showing of her work in the classes. In any case, the maps were straightforward ways of visually transmitting some of the connections that the travelers had established, not only in geographic form but also embodied within human intersubjective relationships. She agreed that they should not be hyperscrutinized, respecting their right to opacity. What made her unhappy was the injunction of transparency that is being imposed in the contemporary discourse on migration: “You are never free of your

image because it is not your image that is being captured.” She reiterated the point that if the present movement of populations is perceived as a migration crisis, then what is lost is the temporal dimension, that is, the historical framework.

Bouchra Khalili spoke of the numerous contemporary art shows that explicitly define themselves as shows on migration—a massive number of them—but only a few, she observed, really question the word itself. Her point is that this is not an appropriate word because “if you continue to define them as migrants, you will never be able to see them as equal citizens.” None of these shows raises a question that urgently needs to be discussed: that of equal rights. Whereas they adopt a humanitarian position, what is actually needed is a political position. But then, as Khalili noted, it is not easy to attract visitors to an exhibition held in a museum or in an art gallery saying: “this is a show about equal citizenship.” When I protested that in any case, art is more vocal than politics and the social sciences, she responded convincingly: “But when you go out of the show, what has changed in your perspective? What I am questioning here is the museum: what kind of space is the museum? To whom does it belong?”

Her response reminds me of the discussion we had in my class at Columbia University on April 14, 2016, after we visited the exhibition of *The Mapping Journey Project* at the Museum of Modern Art. The participants in the OHMA program at Columbia University are a very mixed lot in terms of age, gender, and geographic and cultural origins, which makes for very interesting classes and challenges the instructor. The students in my class concurred in criticizing the space of the museum from various points of view:

“Her work placed at MOMA is locked up in a museum environment, it should be shown more widely to a broader audience [. . .] the audience of MOMA appeared wealthy or well-to-do [. . .] cultural tourism: you come to New York and you go to Macy’s and to MOMA—some people were looking at their phones [. . .] but art exists not only in museums, there are schools and other public spaces [. . .] it made me meditate on the privilege of my mobility and that of people walking in the room [. . .] their places of origin do not mean much without their itineraries.”

Interestingly, some of the students had fully grasped the significance of chapter 3 of *Mapping Journey* on the trip from Ramallah to East Jerusalem: as Christina commented, “a very long time for a very short journey.” The students stressed the similarity of Khalili’s and our methodology of intersubjectivity and co-creation in our interviews. For them, her art work was most stimulating, as they saw similarities as well as differences in relation to their own work as historians of oral and visual memory. One student observed that “the similarity between her and us is an act of communication, although we do things less artistically than she does.” Some wondered whether oral history could to some extent be considered an artistic practice. Being familiar with their works, I confirmed that in some cases this could well be the case, although the artistic side of oral history has hardly been explored. Many students recognized themselves and the histories of their families in the exhibition. Jonathan reported: “A small group of us went to have coffee after seeing the exhibit. He is from South Africa and the others are from elsewhere—a very cosmopolitan group. All of us had very different experiences of migrant traveling, but all of us were from elsewhere.” Mario’s response was: “I felt like drawing on the map myself. It had a brilliant and despairing effect on me.” Liza told us of her engagement in *Embodied Mapping*, an interdisciplinary project in Manhattan’s Lower East Side, in which oral historians and artists had collaborated; they had asked neighborhood participants, in pairs, to remember the boundaries of their childhood neighborhoods, to recount what happened at these “edges,” and to make maps of this remembered place.²³

At the conclusion of this chapter and this book, the last word goes to my former students. I feel that we—these students as well as many others with whom I have been connected within the fields of teaching, learning, and researching—formed a constellation, which somehow still exists, fostering ongoing conversations and enduring memories.

Notes

- ¹ Luisa Passerini, *Colonialismo portoghese e lotta di liberazione nel Mozambico* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970).
- ² The poem is extracted from the following publication: Abdellatif Laâbi, *L'étreinte du monde* (Paris: La Différence, 1993).
- ³ Élisabeth Lebovici and Nacira Guénif-Souilamas, "A Populated Opacity. Conversation between Bouchra Khalili and Omar Berrada" in *Blackboard: Bouchra Khalili*, Catalogue of the Exhibition "Blackboard" (Paris: Jeu de Paume, 2018), 149, 163–168. On the notion of opacity (*opacité*), see Édouard Glissant, *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (Paris: Gallimard 1996).
- ⁴ Mundele's story is very long and complex. Therefore, only salient events are outlined here and in the text. In his twenties, during the 1990s, he went to Angola seeking diamonds. Meeting with some success, he returned to the Congo and opened two textile shops. He married and had twins, but his wife died shortly after a caesarean delivery. By 1997, he had remarried and now had four children, but his family was torn apart by the civil war. At this time, Mobutu, who as the chief of the army had deposed Lumumba in 1960 and had him executed in 1961, was ousted from government by Kabila. Mundele was advised to discard his party membership card and to flee immediately. Friends assisted him to attain a Malian passport, and he crossed the River Congo at night, embarking on a long journey that finally led him to Italy. Mundele's map, his oral presentation, and his individual interview were done in Turin in May 2013.
- ⁵ The concepts of "civilisation universelle" and "désir fondamental de liberté" are taken from Achille Mbembe, *Essai sur l'Afrique décolonisée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), 12, 46.
- ⁶ The Situationist International was founded in 1957 by intellectuals, avant-garde artists, and political theorists. Among its members were Guy Debord, author of *La société du spectacle* and Raoul Vaneigem, author of *Traité de savoir-vivre à l'usage des jeunes générations*, both of which were published in 1967. René Vignet's *Enragés et situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* was published a year later in 1968. The idea of creating a "situation" that would shake up the established order, especially within the fields of art and culture, was central to the IS's international activity. Central guiding concepts were "the situation," as a subversive moment of the existing order; the revolution of daily life; overcoming the distinction between life, art, and

politics; a radical critique of late capitalism; the practice of *détournement*; and the practice of the “derive” as a critique of the existing urban order. These brief notes are inadequate for conveying the richness of the experience associated with IS, and they would have been ridiculed by its members, who rejected any attempts to formalize their theoretical and practical attitudes. The IS played an important role in May 1968, after which its scope of activity was reduced to very few components until its final dissolution in 1972.

- ⁷ For a political and economic contextualization of the Greek situation in 2016, see Pothiti Hantzaroula, “The Tempest Society: Towards a Politics and Poetics of Emancipation,” in *The Tempest Society*, ed. Bouchra Khalili (London: Book Works, forthcoming in 2019), 96–105.
- ⁸ Charlotte Rotman and Patrick Rotman, *Les années 68* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008).
- ⁹ Hannah Arendt applied the concept of public happiness in her works, which include Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).
- ¹⁰ I am referring to Friedrich Nietzsche’s use of the German word, *unzeitgemäß*, in the title of his work, *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (1873), which has been translated as “untimely” or “unfashionable.”
- ¹¹ *De la misère en milieu étudiant considérée sous ses aspects économique, politique, psychologique, sexuel et notamment intellectuel et de quelques moyens pour y remédier par des membres de l’Internationale Situationniste et des étudiants de Strasbourg* (On the Poverty of Student Life: A Consideration of Its Economic, Political, Sexual, Psychological and Notably Intellectual Aspects and of a Few Ways to Cure it) (Paris: Supplément à la revue *Internationale Situationniste*, Novembre 1966).
- ¹² Adnan Yildiz, “Oral, Paradoxical; and Political,” *Mousse* 36 (December 2012–January 2013), 230–233.
- ¹³ Misal Adnan Yildiz and Myrna Ayad, “Interview with Bouchra Khalili,” *Canvas Magazine* (Spring 2014), 162–7.
- ¹⁴ Fabrice Olivier Dubosc, *Quel che resta del mondo. Psiche, nuda vita e questione migrante* (Rome: Magi, 2011) and Fabrice Olivier Dubosc, *Approdi e naufragi. Resistenza culturale e lavoro del lutto* (Bergamo: Moretti e Vitali, 2016).
- ¹⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 3, 1935–38 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).
- ¹⁶ Passerini Luisa, Dawn Lyon, Enrica Capussotti, and Ioanna Laliotou, eds. *Women Migrants from East to West. Gender, Mobility and Belonging in Contemporary Europe* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2007).

- ¹⁷ Luisa Passerini, *Europe in Love, Love in Europe. Imagination and Politics in Britain between the Wars* (London: Tauris, 1999) and Luisa Passerini, *Women and Men in Love: European Identities in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn, 2012).
- ¹⁸ Carl G. Jung, *On Psychic Energy*, in *Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Complete Digital Edition, Bollingen Series XX, eds. Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, and William McGuire (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1975), chap. 1, 16–129, [https://the-eye.eu/public/concen.org/Princeton%20Jung/8%20Structure%20&%20Dynamics%20of%20the%20Psyche%20\(Collected%20Works%20of%20C.%20G.%20Jung,%20Volume%208\).pdf](https://the-eye.eu/public/concen.org/Princeton%20Jung/8%20Structure%20&%20Dynamics%20of%20the%20Psyche%20(Collected%20Works%20of%20C.%20G.%20Jung,%20Volume%208).pdf)
- ¹⁹ Dorothea Schone, “Absorbing Displacement: Bouchra Khalili in Conversation with Dorothea Schoene,” *Ibraaz. Contemporary Visual Culture in the Middle East and North Africa*, September 27, 2012, <https://www.ibraaz.org/interviews/40>
- ²⁰ This text is from an interview of Bouchra Khalili: Cedric Vincent, “Interview with Bouchra Khalili,” *Arts & Pedagogy*, June 9, 2015. I translated this text from French into English. The original text in French is as follows: “Je n’ai jamais considéré que « The Mapping Journey Project », « The Constellations », ou même « The Speeches Series » (triptyque vidéo, 2012–2013), portaient sur les migrations, mais plutôt sur des voix singulières qui articulent des voix collectives parce que conscientes de leurs positions aux marges, depuis lesquelles elles élaborent à la fois une forme possible de résistance et son discours. Et c’est justement parce que mon travail ne s’occupe que du singulier qu’il procède par métonymie. Les récits semblent amples historiquement et géographiquement mais visuellement, il s’agit toujours de fragments métonymiques, où se joue une tension dialectique entre ce qui est montré et le hors-champ.”
- ²¹ The Agreement specified the bailout conditions for Greece, proposed jointly by the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank. See Hantzaroula, “The Tempest Society.”
- ²² The poem is included in Kateb Yacine’s posthumous collection, *L’oeuvre en fragments: Inédits littéraires et textes retrouvés* (Arles-Paris, Actes Sud, 2012). What follows is my preliminary translation. “Life is like this/Fanon, Amrouche and Feraoun/Three broken voices that surprise us/Closer than ever/ Fanon, Amrouche and Feraoun/Three living sources that have not seen/The light of day/And who have rendered audible/The anguished murmur/Of subterranean struggles/ Fanon, Amrouche and Feraoun/They who

had learned/To read in the darkness/And who with eyes shut/Did not stop writing.”

- ²³ This account is based on notes taken on that occasion by Nicki Pombier-Berger, my research assistant at the time. One of the students in that course, Liza Zapol, had been active in the Embodied Mapping Project in Lower Manhattan, see www.lizazapol.com/2015/embodied-mapping-at-pier-42/

Appendix.

Interviewees' Places of Origin and Arrival

What follows are some indicative and partial data on the group of interviewees among whom those present in this book were chosen. By no means is the group of interviewees to be considered as a representative sample in a quantitative sense. The BABE research approach has been micro-historical, with the aim to produce and analyze a series of case studies around the themes of memory, visibility and mobility from the perspective of a cultural history of intersubjectivity. The group of interviewees was put together through networks of various kinds, from institutional to friendly, and thanks to casual encounters in public and private spaces, such as schools, railway stations and airports, offices of cultural and humanitarian associations, and acquaintances' homes.

At the time of this book's completion (November 2018), the process of organizing and classifying the material collected for the BABE Project is underway. The total number of interviewees whose testimonies will be deposited at the Historical Archives of the European Union, European University Institute, Florence, is approximately 400. There will be around 1,000 research products (drawings, audio and visual recordings, and documents connected with the fieldwork). A provisional calculation of the sex ratio of men to women among the interviewees is 53% to 47%.

The countries of origin of the interviewees are:

Afghanistan; Albania; Algeria; Argentina; Bangladesh; Belarus; Brazil; Cameroon; China; Colombia; Cuba; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Ecuador; Egypt; El Salvador; Ethiopia; Eritrea; Gambia; Ghana; Guinea-Bissau; India; Iran; Ivory Coast; Kazakhstan; Kosovo; Lithuania;

Mali; Moldova; Mongolia; Morocco; Nepal; Nigeria; New Zealand; Pakistan; Peru; Philippines; Romania; Russia; Senegal; Somalia; South Korea; Sri Lanka; Syria; Tunisia; Ukraine; and Venezuela.

The countries of arrival are:

Belgium; France; Italy; The Netherlands; Spain; Sweden.

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