

Rada Peter

Leu Tränkle

Techniksoziologie

The Train as “Third Space” For Artistic Practice

The train is late. Or is it? There is no announcement, no electronic display signaling its arrival. There is no one at the train stop in Turkestan, 36 °C, to show or indicate which platform it might arrive on.

“It’s behind the other train!”, Dilda shouts, “we have to go through the other train!”

Through the train? Yes. Parallel parking on rails. We go through step up step up, squeeze through, step down step down. Woman luggage

kid
suitcase
bag
bag
man
luggage
kid
bag
passenger
Shoe
– did you step on it?
No!
Good

Hundreds of passengers tunnel their way across one train to the one behind it – is this it? The one for Almaty? It has to be.

We leave Turkestan with its blue-domed mausoleum, cool white echo-chambers in the steppe heat, off to our final stop, after nine days of shivering over tiny water basins, schlepping bags with food and art supplies from one dusty platform to the next. We have to change trains three times between Basel and Berlin alone. On the tracks, on the road, offline since Moscow, we need to catch up with the season finale of Game of Thrones.

“izvinite pojalsta” – “izvinite!
spasiba! – izvinite pojalsta”

This is the mantra of squeezing past passengers on the train corridors: toddlers, elderly women wearing polyester socks with sandals, stout men walking from one compartment to the next, trying to make out the landscape behind the stained windows, stopping for a chat. The average person spends 50% of their time being in the way. You too are in someone’s way, almost constantly.

The sun sets in the most vibrant colours and everyone opens the windows that can still be ope-

ned. The train carriage is from 1972. Wood panels, like the inside of the wardrobe, Narnia on the outside. Steel and iron, nothing you could possibly break, nothing that hasn’t already been broken. Built for eternity, just like the Soviet Union. We fly a kite from the open window, and off into the sunset it floats away. We drink beers with some youths from Schu who find us a little too charming, so we have to shake them off. Not easy when the only directions you can move are forward and back.

“izvinite pojalsta” – “izvinite!
spasiba! – izvinite pojalsta”

All movement is streamlined. The only time you move outside of the perpendicular axis is within the compartment – two steps left or right, one pull-up to the top bunk. A game of chess on threadbare carpets.

Lucien is building an installation inside the compartment, coat-hangers, pencils, socks, the front page of DIE ZEIT all end up in a rotating mobile. “Chto eta takoye?”, the uniformed Belorussian conductress asks. What is this supposed to be? “Iz-kustvo”, we reply – art. She doesn’t find us amusing at all and shuts the compartment door. There is a misunderstanding with the tickets. We have booked places in two different carriages, and two additional seats overall. “That’s not allowed”, the conductress informs us. Why not? – Because. She wants to keep the originals of the tickets, which is a problem since the conductress in the other carriage has already kept them. “I am the one who has to keep the originals”, she says, “not the other one!” From one Sphinx to the next, two hours back and forth – finally, it’s settled. Everyone knows us now – the foreigners, the artists – what a hassle!

It’s important to be nice to the conductors because they determine your fate for the time you are on the train. If they like you, they will bring black tea and sit down for a chat. Where are you from? What are you doing here? Why do you travel by train if you could fly?

Takhir, Dilda and Gregor lock their cabin from the inside. We are somewhere between Warsaw and Moscow. They are turning their cabin into a camera obscura, a pinhole camera hastily fashioned out of thick sheets. The resulting photographs show a blur of white and gray lines, the landscape we zoom through. The conductress is not pleased. Why are they doing that?

We change from European to Russian tracks shortly after the Belarusian border, in a tunnel. Everyone tries to get a glimpse of the action: men in blue

overalls operate heavy machinery, smoke, cuss, lift wrenches the size of small horses. Our entire carriage is lifted and then dropped onto the new tracks with a thunderous growl that resonates for a full minute. Then we are in Russia and time is thick and viscous. Leonid is listening to a rap song on repeat.

“Еду по России, не доеду до конца”
“I ride and ride across Russia, But I never
reach its end”

The steppe is dry and yellow and sometimes green, all smeared like a Turner painting because nobody has bothered cleaning the windows in a decade. Horses, cattle, horses, birds, horses, fences, teenagers on roaring motorcycles. At every station, some woman with headscarf will board and sell freshly cooked pelmeni, tiny dumplings filled with meat or piroshki, deep-fried pastry with meat or potatoes. Another is selling bed linen, yet another – cheap plastic toys.

I sit across an old man from Uzbekistan. He gives me a bag of instant coffee, which I politely refuse, but he insists. It’s unlike anything I’ve ever tasted and I am infinitely grateful that Jana and Marea brought a French press. The old man prays to Mecca five times a day. He is more reliable than any clock, any compass. Once the sun sets and we are engulfed in darkness, everyone retreats to their cabins. Nothing much to see or do. Where are we? A toothless man points at a framed schedule next to the door. Someone pulls out a map and tries to locate us. Not easy given that most towns have changed names since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Borders have shifted this way and that, lakes dried up, roads changed their course.

When are we? It feels like midnight, but the train has its own time-zone. All trains on Russian territory run on Moscow time. But we are one hour ahead, locally, and yet another hour since we crossed the Kazakh border for the first of two times. The border guards have watches and we could ask them, but they’d rather be the ones asking questions. What are you doing here? Tourists? From where? Why? We squeeze past the other passengers once more –

“izvinite pojalsta” – “izvinite!
spasiba! – izvinite pojalsta”

What else can you do with all this time on your hands and no Wi-Fi to kill it?



QWAS – *Migrating Dialogue* is a cultural exchange project connecting Zurich and Almaty by train.

The project is organised and conceived by Rada Leu and Peter Tränkle.

It is part of the international programme of ZHdK and consists of two parts: a 9-day train journey from Zurich to Almaty (via Berlin and Moscow) in late summer and an exhibition in both locations during the fall semester. QWAS took place for the first time in 2017 and will be conducted a second time in 2018.

The following text centers on one of the key ideas behind the project: using the train as a “third space” of artistic research and production.

What is The Thirdness of The Train as a Space/Place?

During the development of the QWAS project, we began to speak and think of the train as a “third place” and this name came quite naturally. It occurred to us that the moving train is always in-between different states of being as well places, and we often referred to it as a time-capsule. Some key points of this ambiguity are:

- It’s temporally confined: You are not free to leave it (DEATH ON RAILS!!!). There is a necessity to interact with others in order to share the space. Travelers with different social status, incomes, tastes, and political attitudes are in the same place for a while; long enough for strangers to meet in everyday situations, situations that otherwise take place privately.
- It’s temporarily yours: With increasing time spent on a train, the legitimately occupied space increases and the number and duration of activities, besides sitting, rises. The nature of the functional interior design of the train, as well as the traces of usage in some places, are a constant reminder of the frequent changes in its temporally limited habitation.
- The public and the private are ambiguous: Public and private space is defined situationally and interlinked in a specific and often weird way. Also, the train provides rich sensory stimulation: it smells, it overwhelms, it’s got a rhythm – and rhythm is a dancer.

In the course of the project, we did not compare it to other definitions of third spaces, such as the one given by Ray Oldenburg (see below). We thought of other theories and ideas of space (*non-places* by Augé, *heterotopias* by Foucault, *liminal space* by Turner), theoretical references which could also resonate with our experiences of the train.

Cultural Heterogeneity as The Third Space

For the Indian-British intellectual Homi Bhabha, culture cannot possess an essential kernel. In his approach, culture presupposes its own otherness and is therefore intrinsically constituted as heterogeneous. This very cultural heterogeneity is, according to him, a third space: it bears an ever-present potential of change and provides an area of possibilities in which different cultural and societal conditions can be both imagined and implemented.

On significantly long journeys like ours, the train produces the “third space” as described by Homi Bhabha. The differences between Western-European and post-soviet Central Asian cultural understandings are materialised and even seem amplified in such confined spatial conditions. At the same time, their constructedness, contingency and therefore the very heterogeneity of culture becomes observable.

Rutherford, Jonathan & Bhabha, Homi (1990): „The third space: Interview with Homi Bhabha“. In Rutherford, Jonathan (ed.): *Identity: community, culture, difference*, pp. 207-221. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

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“The ‘originary’ is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning – an essence. What this really means is that cultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentered structures – through that displacement or liminality opens up the possibility of articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities.

Now, the notion of hybridity comes from the two prior descriptions I have given of the genealogy of difference and the idea of translation. Because if, as I was saying, the act of cultural translation (both as representation and as reproduction) denies the essentialism of a prior given original or originary culture, then we see that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. But for me, the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom.

[...]
The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”
 (author’s emphasis, Rutherford & Bhaba 1990, pp. 210-211)

When is a Train a Nail Studio?

The term “Third Place” was coined by the US-American sociologist Ray Oldenburg in his 1989 book *The Great Good Place*. He defines it as a space other than the two primary, structure-oriented fields of work and home, where neither the domestic codes of familiarity nor the formal rules of the work-place apply. It is a place necessary for social cohesion, but also the breeding ground for many revolutions. Examples include coffee houses, clubs of all kinds, bars and hair salons: these informal gatherings have other categorical functions, conditions, sets of rules and “membership requirements” than the first two social places. Oldenburg provides eight characteristics for this concept (see below), but those characteristics seem to be best applicable to the examples he provides, most of all to coffee-shops.

Oldenburg, Ray (1989): *The Great Good Place: Café, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You Through the Day*. Paragon House.

For us, Oldenburg’s concept of the “Third Place” is less important because of his emphasis on its functions as social hygiene, a relief of or a breeding ground for societal or political criticism. A train is obviously not a beauty parlour or a coffee shop. And for Oldenburg, not every pub or club house fulfils the criteria of a third place either. He also prioritises the concrete place, but at the same time suggests a list of abstract characteristics of a third place for the sake of comparison. As argued by Wright (2012, p. 11), this is inconsistent, since the cause for people to come together might rather come from a shared topic or interest than a specific location. Nevertheless, Oldenburg’s concept is an interesting point of departure as it asks about other places in society beyond home and work. It is also provides a good example of the analytical distinction between space and place as theoretical notions. His approach to space is from a concrete and situated place, a hic et nunc. The term “space” is tricky, because it can refer to a geographic or material dimension, or a dimension of symbolic conditions like social, societal, cultural, etc. Pursuing a place-based approach like Oldenburg’s, the abstract, material and symbolic features of space are secondary to circumstances, possibilities and restrictions of a specific place.

So, when is a train a nail studio? The consequent answer: In the Third Place, of course! A commuting train might be the closest result in a desperate search for examples of trains to meet the characteristics of Oldenburg’s concept. But since our task is not to confirm or deny any approach but rather to shed analytic light on the train as a special place for artistic practice, we can use Oldenburg’s Third Place as one approach for thinking about the otherness of certain places.

For demonstrative and contrasting accounts about “space” vs. “place” see Scott Wright’s article on political talk in non-political online-spaces:

Wright, Scott (2012): „From “third place” to “third space”: Everyday political talk in non-political online spaces”. *Javnost-the public* 19 (3), pp. 5-20.
 For a historical synopsis on space vs. place in philosophical discourse see for a



general overview: Günzel, Stephan (2017): *Raum: Eine kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung*. transcript Verlag, pp. 45-60, and with a flavour of Human Geography in the overview refer to: Tuan, Yi-Fu (1979): „Space and Place: Humanistic Perspective”. *Philosophy in Geography*, pp. 387-427. *Theory and Decision Library*. Springer, Dordrecht.

for a deep dive into spatial thirdness and Human Geography: Soja, Edward W. (1996): *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Wiley.

Table: Oldenburg’s (1989) eight characteristics of “third places” applied on a train journey

Characteristics	Definition	Train as a Third Space (for artistic practice)
Neutral Ground	Third places are neutral grounds where individuals are free to come and go as they please, with little obligation or entanglements with other participants.	Passengers are free to come and go and are not obliged to be anyhow relationally involved other than as a passenger. Any further contacts or relations are voluntary. The train is a specific combination and overlapping of public and private space.
Leveler	Third places are spaces in which an individual’s rank and status in the workplace or society at large are of no import. Acceptance and participation is not contingent on any prerequisites, requirements, roles, duties, or proof of membership.	Since the only relevant role on a train is that of a passenger, which marks the minimal rights and expectations of behaviour during one’s time on board, any other features of a passenger are at least <i>formally</i> irrelevant. But <i>informally</i> they may become a topic of interest to co-passengers or train personnel (e.g. being the only foreigner on the train or the only smoking woman in a train car etc.).
Conversation is Main Activity	In third places, conversation is a main focus of activity in which playfulness and wit are collectively valued.	The main activity is being transported in a rather passive way. If traveling alone, one is forced to have at least minimal interaction with co-travelers regarding the mutual co-occupation and usage of shared train space, which is less intense or necessary if traveling in a group.
Accessibility & Accommodation	Third places must be easy to access and accommodating to those who frequent them.	The only condition to access a train is a valid ticket and/ or reservation next to a document of personal identification.
The Regulars	Third places include a cadre of regulars who attract newcomers and give the space its characteristic mood.	The work of regulation is mainly carried out by the train personnel (two conductors on each car). But newcomers can expect to be approached, rebuked, repressed, informed or assisted by fellow passengers in case of formally or informally contradictory behavior.
A Low Profile	Third places are characteristically homely and without pretension.	Well, the level of pretension in soviet sleeping trains, their sanitary and catering facilities, is sacrificial in both of its two traveling classes (3rd and 2nd, there isn’t a 1st). Get ready to experience your fellow travelers in their coziest outfits. The profile is rather „underground“.
The Mood is Playful	The general mood in third places is playful and marked by frivolity, verbal word play, and wit.	A shared sacrifice allows and demands a shared sarcasm, fatalism, irony and humor.
A Home Away from Home	Third places are home-like in terms of Seamon’s (1979) five defining traits: rootedness, feelings of possession, spiritual regeneration, feelings of being at ease, and warmth.	The resemblance of a prolonged train travel to a stay at home is rudimental, because all basic intimate activities like eating, washing, sleeping, sickness, conflicts etc. are necessarily carried out during the journey, more or less before the eyes of strangers. It’s rather the lowest common denominator of home – not from a perspective of personal comfort but of one’s existential needs.

Liminality

Victor W. Turner introduces the theoretical concept of liminality in his 1969 book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. He builds on the theoretical description of rites of passage, as formulated by Arnold van Gennep at the beginning of the 20th century, based on many studies of various tribal societies. Turner also had van Gennep's main work on this subject, *Rites des Passages* (2011[1960]), translated into English, thus helping a forgotten and – thanks to Emile Durkheim – actively hampered classic of sociology, social anthropology and ethnology, to a late reception and recognition (see Thomassen, 2009).

In his analysis of 'rites of passage', van Gennep elaborates three phases as a common abstract structure: *separation*, *transition* and *incorporation*. Based on the characteristics of the transition phase, Turner focuses on the threshold states in which individuals or groups are "betwixt and between" specific social positions – a social grey area – and calls these states *liminal*.

Turner's examples are initiation rites of both pre-industrial tribal societies as well as industrial societies. Within groups whose members, as a community of fate, share the threshold state in the transition process, there is a levelling of social difference (e.g. socio-economic status, class affiliation, inherited or acquired privileges, or disadvantages, etc.). Turner describes the group's social constitution before entering and after leaving the threshold state as structured, meaning their societal status, hierarchies and structural inequalities. But during the transition phase, the described structural ties are dissolved and the group is constituted as a collective of equals which Turner calls *Communitas*.

For Turner, there is a categorical difference between tribal or traditional societies and modern consumerist societies regarding liminal experiences. In modern biographies, there are still rite-like states and phenomena (e.g. initiation rites like graduation or marriage ceremonies). But largely, threshold states have become voluntary, taking place in leisure activities and lacking existential consequences. He suggests calling those new modern forms *liminoid* instead of *liminal*.

"[...] in contrast to liminal experiences, liminoid experiences are optional and do not involve a resolution of a personal crisis or a change of status. The liminoid is a break from normality, a playful as-if experience, but it loses the key feature of liminality: *transition*." (Thomassen 2009, p. 15)

van Gennep, Arnold
(2011[1909]): *The Rites of Passage*. University of Chicago Press.
Turner, Victor (1974): „Liminal to liminoid, in play, flow, and ritual: an essay in comparative symbology“. *Rice Institute Pamphlet-Rice University Studies* 60 (3).
Thomassen, Björn (2009): „The uses and meanings of liminality“. *International Political Anthropology* 2 (1), pp. 5-27.

A System of Its own – Thought Experiments in Physics

In his 1917 publication on special and general relativity, Albert Einstein uses a moving train car as an imagined space for a thought experiment on the "Relativity of Simultaneity". It could be summed up as follows:

Imagine Person A standing in a train while Person B is standing outside the train, watching it pass by. If lightning struck both ends of the train, Person B would see both bolts of lightning strike at the same time.

But in the train, Person A is closer to the bolt of lightning that the train is moving toward. So Person A sees this lightning first, because the light has a shorter distance to travel.

This thought experiment showed that time moves differently for someone moving than for someone standing still and illustrates Einstein's belief that time and space are relative and that simultaneity doesn't exist. This argument is the cornerstone of Einstein's theory of relativity.

Einstein, Albert (1920[1916]): *Relativity, the Special and the General Theory; a Popular Exposition*. London: Methuen.



Movies

"No wonder there was a murder on the Orient Express" – *Samantha, Sex and the City*

Trains have been inextricably linked to cinema since its very beginning: the first movie ever made, *L'Arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* by the Lumière Brothers (1895), depicts a train arriving at a station. Since then, trains have been a welcome setting for fight scenes and chase sequences, hopeful arrivals and emotional farewells, murders and passing encounters that evolve into life-changing story arcs. The anonymity of train travel predates the airport in this aspect, available to a large part of European and US-American population before commercial air-travel became accessible for the masses. Furthermore, train stations are connected to images of metropolitanism and modernity, ideal signifiers of progress and social mobility in the figurative and literal sense.

Train tracks are often metaphors for decisions characters make and their development, quite literally setting the course for further action. Train interiors are the perfect place for characters of different backgrounds to meet and merge their respective storylines, for instance, in *Strangers On A Train* (Hitchcock, 1951), two strangers conspire to "swap murders" – a plotline made possible by the fact that the two characters have nothing in common would they not have met on the train. Plotting whilst riding the train is a common motive used in many films, as the confinement of the cabin provides both the characters and the narrative a welcome interruption. In *Mission: Impossible* (De Palma, 1996), the characters explain and plan the central coup of the movie – breaking into the CIA headquarters – in a train cabin. In the middle of this action-packed movie with its plot twists, the cabin provides the ideal setting for a narrative break with cutbacks to the potential pitfalls of the high-security room. The viewer – and characters – are given a caesura, a place for thought between two sequences. The cabin becomes a break-room on wheels, a visual space that can be used as a third space in which the relative passivity of the characters is made useful.

There is so much more that could be said about trains in movies. *Once Upon A Time in The West* is perhaps the most obvious example of a movie in which both train and train station are central to the plot. Further noteworthy examples include: *Berlin: Symphonie einer Großstadt* (Ruttman, 1927), *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959), *Strangers On A Train* (Hitchcock, 1951), *The Darjeeling Limited* (Anderson, 2007), *Superman* (Donner, 1978), every single *Anna Karenina* film adaptation ever made, *Mystery Train* (Jarmusch, 1989), *Les Vacances de M. Hulot* (Tati, 1953), *La Bête Humaine* (Renoir, 1938), the *Harry Potter* film adaptations and a personal favourite, *Back to The Future III* (Zemeckis, 1990).

Liminal states can be differentiated concerning their *subject* (individual, group, society), their duration in *time* (moment, period, epoch) and their extension in *space* (specific places or thresholds, areas or zones, larger regions as countries or continents) (cf. Thomassen 2009, p. 16).

Our train journey, as the unit of inquiry, can be located in these three dimensions of liminality: a group of individuals (young Swiss and Kazakh artists) which changes its geographical position from Zurich in Switzerland to Almaty in Kazakhstan, crossing two continents, during a period of nine days.

Compared to the transition between two social or societal positions or states as described in rites of passage, the transition of our train journey lies between two places located in different cultural regions – a post-Soviet capitalist East and a European-capitalist West. This process takes nine days of continuous change of cultural references outside and inside the train (artefacts of material culture, language, social expectations like gender stereotypes, legal boundaries like restrictions of audio-visual documentation, etc.) and includes changing between different trains. The participants differ in cultural traditions, everyday life, external expectations, perspectives, goals, experiences and motivations. They begin the journey as strangers and will complete it as protagonists in a shared story. Their shared fate or sacrifice as fellow travellers and members of a strange group who call themselves "artists" but mostly don't make art in the expected meaning of the term (drawing, drawing, or drawing), provide a common ground for the group's cohesion against external attributions.

Their differences don't disappear during the journey. They become visible and approachable as a topic for personal inquiry or as a motive for artistic exploitation. Being both young and artists in a foreign cultural surrounding, or a confined space with strict formal and informal rules like the train, they are sensitive seismographs of inconsistencies, irrationalities, changes, excuses, lies, and instrumentalizations of cultural aesthetics. As artists they necessarily dwell in a liminal state of cultural questioning and the train functions as an perceptual amplifier of this liminality. Cultural heterogeneity, formulated by Homi Bhabha as a third space of openness and potential for imagination of alternative social realities, is an important source and resource of artistic practice.

Excursus: Table: Types of liminal experiences as suggested by Thomassen (2009, p. 17).			
xy	Individual	Group	Society
Moment	Sudden event affecting one's life (death, divorce, illness) or individualized ritual passage (baptism, ritual passage to womanhood).	Ritual passage to manhood (almost always in cohorts); graduation ceremonies, etc.	A whole society facing a sudden event (invasion, natural disaster, a plague) where social distinctions and normal hierarchy disappear. Carnivals. Revolutions.
Period	Critical life-stages. Puberty or teenage.	Ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies; Group travels.	Wars. Revolutionary periods.
Epoch (or life-span duration)	Individuals standing "outside society", by choice or designated. Monkhood. In some tribal societies, individuals remain "dangerous" because of a failed ritual passage. Twins are permanently liminal in some societies.	Religious fraternities, ethnic minorities, social minorities, transgender persons Immigrant groups 'betwixt and between' old and new culture Groups that live on the edge of "normal structures", often perceived as both dangerous and "holy".	Prolonged wars, enduring political instability, prolonged intellectual confusion. Incorporation and reproduction of liminality into "structures" Modernity as "permanent liminality"?

Non-Places

Marc Augé's *Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995) defines non-places as “spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (Augé, p. 94). They are transit zones where identity doesn't play a big role and which are structurally opposed to settling in (the German word *unheimlich* is appropriate here, as it conveys both a sense of uncanniness these spaces can have and the impossibility of them becoming “homely”). Similar to liminal spaces, they are in-between states or on their thresholds (cf. the figure of Tiresias in Greek mythology). Inextricably tied to consumerism and common to hyper-modern societies worldwide, they lack distinguishing characteristics, but have a very clear set of codified rules and injunctions. The most obvious examples are airport lounges and motorways, as well as places with a global corporate identity (retailers and food chains). As an individual moves within such spaces, the relative anonymity has an introspective effect on him or her: “The only face to be seen, the only voice to be heard, in the silent dialogue he holds with the landscape-text addressed to him along with others, are his own: the face and voice of a solitude made all the more baffling by the fact that it echoes millions of others.” (Augé, p. 103)

Augé, Marc. (1995): *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. Verso.

Heterotopy

Foucault's 'heterotopias' are places that function differently from other places or counter spaces in society: they are often filled with “undesirable” people (e.g. prisons, asylums) or temporally expelled people (menstruating women, adolescents, the elderly). Yet they have a defined set of functions relative to all other spaces of a given society (e.g. brothels), and are usually spatially removed from the rest of social life (boarding schools, motels, cemeteries, ships).

One of the six characteristics of heterotopia is the opposition of the heterogeneous place to its surrounding space. Foucault ends his text with a combination of utopia and heterotopia, a rather cheesy poetic example of the ship as “the heterotopia par excellence” and an appropriation of Newton's concept of relative space (cf. Günzel 2017, p. 101). We, in turn, would like to appropriate the coda of Foucault's text by replacing “boat” with “train”:

“The train, is a moving piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the landscape and that, from station to station, from track to track, from border to border, it goes as far as the post-colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the railway has not only been for our civilization, from the nineteenth century until the

present, the great instrument of economic development [...], but has been simultaneously the great reserve of the imagination. The train is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without trains, dreams dry up, adventure takes place of espionage, and the pirates take place of the police.” (cf. freely adapted from Foucault 1984, p. 9)

Foucault, Michel (1984): Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias. In: *Architecture / Mouvement / Continuité*, October 1984. (“Des Espace Autres”. March 1967, translated by Jay Misco-wiec.)

Credits photos: Gregor Vogel, Dana Iskakova, Peter Tränkle



Overcoming Loss of Space With Travel Literature

Travel literature (as in literature to be read whilst travelling, not thematically about travelling) is familiar to all of us: who hasn't stood in an airport bookstore and weighed the pros and cons of a Rosamunde Pilcher versus a Dan Brown? Reading as a way of killing time can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century when passenger trains became a transportation fixture. At the time, travelling by train was quite novel and the passengers' gaze had to be “schooled” in adapting to this new form of transportation.

“The typical European seating arrangement in the compartments of the first and second class, although modelled after the stagecoach, forced the travellers into constant eye contact with their counterpart. This vis-à-vis relationship was experienced [...] as unbearable, even embarrassing – since the composition of the traveling party could change at each station, the establishment of a closer relationship became pointless. [...]

While there was still lively communication on the stagecoach – for there the passengers were dependent on each other's help in the event of an accident or robbery and built a community for several days – the fluctuation and anonymity of the railway travellers ended entertainment through communication. It was replaced by specialised travel literature [...].(Haug, p. 55)

In the early days of the railway journey, travel literature would attempt to restore the “perceived loss of space”. Travel authors would write about object and sight near the tracks or visible in the distance – particular landscapes, towns, or landmarks such as castles. Their writing would, however, be punctured with breaks whose purpose was to allow the eye of the traveller some rest. This practice that was only possible as long as travelling speed remained around 30 km/h. With the increasing speed of passenger trains, the focus of travel shifted towards the end-point of the journey. Had the focus of travel literature been on information about the traversed space, with tourists eagerly preparing for the journey and the sights they would see, in the late nineteenth century, the gaze had already adapted to the passing landscape and perception was no longer irritated by the movement through space.

For the sake of brevity, we will not go into the use of trains as spaces in novels, but the top candidates would be: Zola: La Bête Humaine; Christie: Murder on the Orient Express; Welsh: Trainspotting; Tolstoy: Anna Karenina; and, had Charles Dickens lived a couple years longer, he might very well have written about his horrific experience in a train crash.

Haug, Christine (2007): *Reisen und Lesen im Zeitalter der Industrialisierung: die Geschichte des Bahnhofs- und Verkehrsbuchhandels in Deutschland von seinen Anfängen um 1850 bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik*. Otto Harrasowitz Verlag.