METAPHORS OF MIGRATION: AN INTRODUCTION

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Axel Fliethmann is an internationally recognized scholar in the fields of literary theory, media philology and theory of the image. He studied Literature, History and Philosophy at the University of Cologne (Germany) where he also received his PhD (*Dr. phil.*). Before joining the School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics at Monash in 2002, he was a post-doctoral fellow at the research center for "Medien und Kulturelle Kommunikation" (Centre for media and cultural communication) at the University of Cologne. In 2018 he was elected Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. He is the author of *Stellenlektüre. Stifter. Foucault* (Niemeyer 2001), and of *Texte über Bilder. Zur Gegenwart der Renaissance*, (Rombach 2014). He is also one of the co-founders and co-editors of the peer-reviewed journal *Limbus. Australian Yearbook of German Literary and Cultural Studies*. He has published widely on literary theory, visual cultures, and media philology. In his current research he investigates connections between material images and concepts of imagination in Early Modern Times, in particular intersections between image technologies, the formation of the modern concept imagination in aesthetic theory, and pathologies of imagination in medical discourse.

Metaphors of Migration: An Introduction

Currently, migration represents one of the most challenging problems to which societies are called to respond. This guest-edited issue of *On_Culture* engages with some of the less-explored facets of migration, focusing on the idea that the lived reality of migration is always also framed by discursive formations, and that metaphors can function as creative devices therein to establish a broader perception of what migration could or even should mean in the first place. Taking this perspective, where imagination and lived migration are intricately linked through layers of discourse, should allow us to shed some new light on the topic of migration.

At first glance, migration and imagination may seem quite blind to each other, with migration playing a central part in current Social Sciences research, and imagination traditionally discussed more within the Humanities and the Arts. However, the topics could also be viewed as interdependent. Social perceptions of and political discourse about migration often refer to or stem from particular forms and techniques of imagination, through which our understanding of migration is shaped and labeled as social reality. Thus, diverse "ways of worldmaking"[1] as much as our "society as an imaginary institution"[2] very much shape what has become the social reality of migration on a global scale.

We will not be able to understand and engage with the processes and phenomena of migration more comprehensively without acknowledging that, although it is a 'real' problem, and one often yielding tragic consequences, migration is founded in imaginative tropes. Perhaps more than any other subject today, migration is a powerful force in the production of cultural meaning and socio-political imagination. Thus, the phenomenon of migration should accordingly be analyzed as depending on social practices and imaginations; doing so would eventually inform the political discourse, equipping migration with meaning that could elicit demands for more appropriate forms of management.

With this in mind, we must understand how any cultural perception of migration is communicated through the use of metaphors, resulting in a distinct framing of migration that is determined by particular cultural codes exceeding the merely political. The use of metaphors as a social practice can help us to analyze migration as a distinct part

of a normative and a coherent *Weltbild*, allowing the social perception and construction of migration as a social reality to be linked back to practices of cultural imagination.

Migration, no doubt, is also connected to a complex history of cultural memorization that in itself is laden with imaginative topoi. In this respect, layers of migration as *cultural tropes* refer to figures stemming, for example, from mythology, poetry, or ideology. The reality of migration within society, then, emerges in various ways within a framework of performative cultural practices of imagination.

Migrating plants, animals, information, and people are the subjects of enormous restrictions, as much as they are also the focus of activism. Simultaneously, we are dealing with a constant migration of ideas, images, and art, all of which continue to influence transformations of a seemingly given social and cultural reality. Flows of capital — legally or illegally — are migrating; so too are objects ranging from food to weaponry, often with enormous consequences. And we should not forget the migrating threats to life posed by bacteria, viruses, disease, and radioactivity.

Given this multitude of migrating objects, we should not separate notions of disturbance and disruption, or practices of othering, exclusion, or assimilation from forms of signification or deliberations on "the meaning of meaning".[3] Adequate understanding of migration therefore essentially warrants a careful interdisciplinary collaboration.

The eight contributions to this issue of *On_Culture* feature approaches that focus on interdisciplinary design when addressing the manifold facets of migration. They also deal with migration as a global reality and challenge, as much as a phenomenon of discursive density or 'poetry.'

Hannes Kaufmann analyzes renegotiations of "cultural self-interpretation" as a means of understanding political superstructure in a social community evolving through current migration processes in the context of re-emerging authoritarian politics. Matteo Dutto and Andrea Del Bono focus on Prato's multicultural neighborhood Macrolotto Zero to explore how processes of exchange and conflict have profoundly changed the way in which the neighborhood is imagined and (re-)conceptualized.

In their contribution, Laurin Mackowitz and Daniel Lorenz trace figurative language regarding images of the house as applied to constellations of migration. By developing a critical metaphorology, they aim to analyze underlying contexts of patriarchy and nationalism. Finally, Chantelle Mitchell and Jaxon Waterhouse apply a metaphor of the pumice raft when reading the movement of people across porous borders, apprehending

migratory discourse, and critiquing framings of abjectness, fear, and colonial reperformance in an Australian context.

These research _Articles are flanked by two further contributions that tackle the topic of migration/imagination from two very different angles. In their _Perspective analyzing the intersection of digital and poetic language, Bonnie Reid critically engages with the question as to what extent the "trans" of "transborder" might be coterminous or conversant with the "trans" of "transgender," and how "trans" might be conceptually wielded to unpack the functions and slippages of metaphors that produce borders.

The second contribution, the _Essay by Thanos Zartaloudis, will be published later in spring 2021, together with two more _Articles by Laura Soréna Tittel and Andreas Hudelist.

_Endnotes

1   Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2013).

2   Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1997).

3   Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning,'" in *Mind, Language, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 227–229.