

homing desire

Part three of the first 'home' trilogy exhibition series, homing desire, will present the concluding works by Ioan Godeanu, Tamara Henderson, Denise Mawila, Anna Ostoya, and Giovanna Sarti.

Thus far during the past year participating artists have received texts concerned with the theme of home and the relationship between diaspora and identity and the processes thereof. Texts by Paul Gilroy, "Diaspora and the Detours of Identity" and Avtar Brah, "Diaspora, Border and Transnational Identities" have served as a theoretical backdrop. Site-specific installations were created in the kitchen for 'home is where the heart is' and in the living space for 'home is where the hurt is'.

Ioan Godeanu's first work, multiple selves photographed in black and white on transparency represents the balancing act of being between inside and outside. The self is in constant motion until it loses itself. His next two transparencies in red and blue are of mirror opposite non-functioning targets mounted on two windows. Godeanu is the center marked by a lone star while parts of him disappear erased by the exterior of 'home'. 'Global problems meet local solutions' and 'Local problems meet global solutions' refers to simultaneous operating local and global identities and crucial positionings at work.

Tamara Henderson invited us to hear sketches of her journey away from home while she called 'home' for 'home is where the heart is'. For the second part of the trilogy, Henderson's photograph, 'two mats borrowed from neighboring apartments, slightly altered, and then returned to the same apartments' presents her own modification of conditions. Here an after-snapshot; she has dislocated the rooster's tail of the doormat found in the stairwell of a private home. The rooster may have to get use to his new situation but he will soon find his tail embedded in the doormat next door and appreciate the improvement.

In the first exhibition, Denise Mawila's installation of significant objects and items of clothing re-discovered at different places at different times reveal her desired self as a twofold process guided by chance. Mawila invites us in her second installation piece to discover, like she has the references of four pairs of books' marked pages about the (often painful) process of becoming such as J.D. Salinger's "Catcher and the Rye", who was in turn influenced by Raymond Radiguet's "Devil in Flesh" also included, yet in another paired set. Hanging from the ceiling a banner-like poster of a collection of found private photographs of the authors such as, Charles Baudelaire, young Oscar Wilde dressed as girl, Andy Warhol with his mother, and the film stars portraying the novel's characters such as Robert Redford or Deborah Kerr as Francoise Sagan's Cecile has been assembled into a multiplied collage. The work convenes at the small intersection of the same satin bookmarks found between the marked pages woven in warp and weft resembling exotic colors of a peacock's feathers.

Anna Ostoya's 'Pictures and Bubbles' recollects and rearranges memories of her different former European homes in photos hung and fragmentations thereof directly imprinted on the wood-chipped kitchen wall. In 'home is where the hurt is' Ostoya's rootedness is centered and enclosed with modern-day halos of golds and yellows. She

has found a celebrated moment from her private archive. Values, norms and their internalization have been documented, identified whereby the genealogical source has been digitally idealized.

Giovanna Sarti's 'Construction Connection' bridges different forms of remembering and returning to mythic origins. The never-ending process is revealed in subtle nuances of light among the dark paint of the small burlap piece placed upon the enlarged image of the Mediterranean. Continuing with more than one artistic position, Sarti installs 'Angst' and 'Krank' for 'home is where the hurt is'. Invisible at first white strips of insulating tape on the white wall emerge and read 'Angst'. The brush-stroke-like strips reveal core feelings visible on the surface. Muddled tones of white brushstrokes in, 'Krank' go astray among unfamiliarities of the unknown. The chemical process of the paint continues to develop revealing new transfigurations of being sick connected with angst.

The three part structure of the trilogy entails corresponding parts reflecting the complexity of the notion of 'home' and consequently of the project itself. Each exhibition deals with the process of identity and the representations of redefined ideas concerned with an imagined home and with the structures that form the home. The three exhibitions, 'home is where the heart is', 'home is where the hurt is', and 'homing desire' serve as a mini-oeuvre in which issues and practices unfold. 'Homing desire' is about the journey and settling, roots and routes and will critically confront not only the wish of one fixed beginning but the yearning for a sole stable basis as well. The final exhibition will conclude each artist's interventions for now with project space 'home'.

What journey have we taken upon both leaving and returning to 'home'? Which contexts are producing 'home'? What do they signify? How have we positioned you and ourselves individually? What stories have we told during the past year? How should we continue?

The search has taken us to home from a mythic place in our imagination to the lived experience of locality and back again. The imagined and the real intersect. Identity as a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which shifting subjectivities are formed plays an important role in this project. The processes of identity as both a conscious and unconscious one involve social relationships based on similarities and differences within cultural practices. Paul Gilroy states, "the self can no longer be plausibly understood as a unitary entity but appears instead as one fragile moment in the dialogic circuit that connects 'us' with our 'others'.<sup>1</sup> Home is related to certain processes of inclusion and exclusion at work and subjectively experienced under a certain time and place.<sup>2</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Gilroy, *Diaspora and the Detours of Identity*, in: Kathryn Woodward ed., "Identity and Difference" 1997, pg. 315.

<sup>2</sup> Avtar Brah, *Diaspora, Border and Transnational identities*, in: Avtar Brah, "Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities" 1996, pg. 192.

making of identity has a history within intercultural and transcultural contexts. The discourses of fixed origins need to be critically analyzed.<sup>3</sup>

Diaspora<sup>4</sup> can help define cultural theory, our experiences, and the creative practice we are producing here. It can be used as a theoretical tool to understand our own life situations and the representations thereof. Although we, the contributors to 'home' who have freely chosen the experience of displacement or possibly not at all, are not part of the historical experience of diaspora which Paul Gilroy writes about.<sup>5</sup> Avtar Brah addresses a wider audience of people on the move in chapter 8 of "Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities": labor migrants, highly qualified specialists, entrepreneurs, students, refugees and asylum seekers. Brah's theorization and clarification between diaspora as a theoretical concept, diasporic 'discourses', and distinct historical 'experiences' of diaspora are of interest. The concept of diaspora serves as a new mode of thought. In introducing her new concept, diaspora space, Brah argues that diaspora space is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendents but also equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous.<sup>6</sup> The subject positionings of those who never left, 'stayed put', are intertwined in the genealogies of dispersion. Brah explores a new way of inhabiting space from a multi-axial performative conception of power.

"The concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'diaspora' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins."<sup>7</sup> Home and diaspora implicate both fixedness and non-fixedness. Not all tensions between 'home' and 'dispersion' imply a homing desire or a return, a homecoming of sorts. Origins are complex as are roads taken; leaving, settling and the psychic and cultural journey alongside the possibility of leaving and returning again. There is a need to understand identity in motion, as nothing is stable amongst cultural flux.<sup>8</sup> Another paradox surfaces home can be a place of both safety and of terror. Trauma may transpire due to dislocation and separation. Yet new beginnings and new transformations can come out of situations where cultural reconfigurations take place.<sup>9</sup>

Imbedded in the concept of diaspora is the reference to the theme of location. Displacement and dislocation are experienced by the first generation of migration. They have socially assimilated and reoriented themselves while learning to negotiate new economic, political, and cultural realities. Following generations have different experiences as passed on memories of home have changed. Brah points out; within the imaginary there is a difference between feeling at home and claiming a place as one's

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<sup>3</sup> Essential and unchanging notions concerned with sameness in the traditional usage of identity as an anchor, something genetic have resulted in fascism in the 1930s and today in nationalism, 'tribalism', and ethnic divisions. Gilroy, pg. 307.

<sup>4</sup> The word, diaspora comes from the Greek meaning of 'dia', through and 'speirei', to scatter. It refers to dispersion, from something, thus implying there is a center, a home. Brah pg. 181.

<sup>5</sup> "The word connotes *flight from the threat of violence*.." Gilroy pg. 318.

<sup>6</sup> Brah pg.181.

<sup>7</sup> Brah pg. 192-193.

<sup>8</sup> Gilroy pg. 334.

<sup>9</sup> Brah 193.

own. As can homelessness exist within the very home itself and especially for women.<sup>10</sup> Inherent in the concept of diaspora is multi-locationality within and across of imagined and encountered boundaries.

Homing desire inscribes a longing for a remembered prior home, the desirability of its return yet this is questioned itself. Why desire the past as a real single starting point? Why the wish for a future anchored in one home base? The word, home is the root of the verb, homing, a continuing process to go or return home, to be guided, or to move towards a goal. The ability to wish, request, or to desire this continuous process implies structures of power and the freedom to aspire. Power is part of the discourses, institutions, and practices that inscribe diasporic experiences.<sup>11</sup> Power dynamics operate various modes of identity and racialize social relations.<sup>12</sup>

Returning to homing desire, the drive to return ought to be thought as equally with and distinct from its former and present geographical and genealogical home. Such a form of homing desire is not to idealize one over the other and maintain oppositional value systems, but rather recognition with respect to both. The diasporic imaginary isn't rootless it claims many homes. Most importantly is the creative tension between the fixed and non-fixed while referring to a center, margins and borders.

Brah states the notion of a politics of location emerges as locationality in contradiction. "...that is, a positionality of dispersal; of simultaneous situatedness within gendered spaces of class, racism, ethnicity, sexuality, age; of movement across shifting cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries; of journeys across geographical and psychic borders."<sup>13</sup>

In conclusion there are multiple processes of identity operating at the same time within shifting boundaries and across borders. Thus there is need for theoretical crossovers to decode social relations and subjectivity. Brah's solution is diaspora space, the intersectionality of borders, dis/location, and diaspora. Here multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, and proclaimed. Opposed to diaspora, diaspora space includes those who've left and those who've never left their home. Both are diasporians. A new political and cultural formation though processes of decentering challenge the concept of a 'minority' identity. In addition, the global and local condition of 'culture as a site of travel' problematizes the subject position of the native. Diaspora space allows for positionalities and standpoints, which are simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Grosz explores the home as a dwelling, women did not build, a space of duty with no value, and one of domestic violence and isolation. *Women, Chora, Dwelling*, in: *Space Time Perversion*, 1995, pg. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Brah pg. 201.

<sup>12</sup> Brah again coins a new concept, *differential racialization* for analyzing the processes of relational multi-locationality within and across formations of power marked by one form of racism with other modes of differentiation, like lifestyles and traditions. Brah pg. 186.

<sup>13</sup> Brah 204.

<sup>14</sup> Brah pg. 208-210.