



Heimat in the Intercultural Dialogue

Workshop organised by NEXT- Verein für zeitgenössische Kunst

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Background

Artists from different countries attended a workshop which was organised by Mrs Luise Kloos, founder and director of NEXT an organisation based in Graz. The purpose of the workshop was to explore possibilities of bringing the arts and artists into constructive dialogue with persons focusing on social issues such as migration and integration of migrants into local communities. The guests, experts and artists were invited to engage in dialogue and the artists were subsequently expected to produce art that could contribute to sustainable and constructive integration of migrants and to a sustainable social transformation in Graz but also in other parts of Europe. The task of this author was to share with the invited artists insights from social science that could be helpful for their assessment of how such social transformation could be conceived of and put into artistic expression. What follows are a few reflections by the author on the discussions held in Graz but also on some general aspects of social change and integration of migrants into European society.

1. Heimat

The leitmotif of the workshop was “Heimat”¹ a German word which is defined by Wikipedia as consisting of the following aspects:

¹Definition of Heimt in English see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heimat> , in German see: <http://de.wiktionary.org/wiki/Heimat>

It is often expressed with terms such as home or homeland, but these English counterparts fail to encapsulate centuries of German consciousness and the thousands of connections this quintessential aspect of German identity carries with it.

Heimat is a specifically German concept to which people are bound by their birth, their childhood, their language and their earliest experiences. Heimat found strength in an increasingly alienating world as Germany's population made a massive exodus from rural areas into more urbanized communities around the country's major cities. Heimat was a reaction to the onset of modernity, loss of individuality and intimate community.

Heimat began as an integral aspect of German identity that was patriotic, without being nationalistic. Regional identity (along with regional dialect) is an important foundation for a person's Heimat. The specific aspects of Heimat — love and attachment to homeland and the rejection of anything foreign — left the idea vulnerable to easy assimilation into the fascist "blood and soil" literature of the National Socialists.

Many see the post-war concept of Heimat as having emerged as a reaction to Germany's self-imposed position on the world stage, a symptom of the forced introversion following the world wars, and an attempt at individual distancing from responsibility for Nazi Germany's actions.

In the wake of World War II, Germans are still rarely seen demonstrating a specific pride in their 'Germanness'. With the emergence of a renewed sense of Heimat, Germans show pride in their regional origins as Berliners, Bavarians, Prussians or Swabians

The concept of Heimat elicits positive and negative reactions from German as well as non-German speaking Europeans. The negative reactions to the term are mostly linked to the fact that the Nazi ideologists instrumentalised the term as a means of forging race-based identification with the Nazi doctrine of racial purity thereby dividing their own people as well as those occupied during the Second World War as being included or excluded from their narrow definition of Heimat.

2. Social Anomie

On the other hand, many citizens of European countries experience modern life as being without a Heimat and describe their private life as being lost in a world characterised by aimlessness and emptiness superficially filled with ritualised consumerism and a feeling of being adrift and lost. Such a sense of being lost is not new. The sociologist Emile Durckheim described it as in 1893 as social anomie² which is

“a term that signifies in individuals, an erosion, diminution or absence of personal norms, standards or values, and increased states of psychological normlessness. When applied to a government or society, anomie implies a social unrest. Emile Durckheim described anomie as a state of relative **normlessness** or a state in which norms have been eroded. A norm is an

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anomie>

expectation of how people will behave, and it takes the form of a rule that is socially rather than formally enforced. Thus, in structural functionalist theory, the effect of normlessness whether at a personal or societal level, is to introduce alienation, isolation, and desocialisation, i.e. as norms become less binding for individuals. Individuals thus lose the sense of what is right and wrong.”

Durkheim’s research focused on the migration of people from rural France to the newly industrialised cities in search of work who often ended up in isolation, poverty and psychological despair. In today’s Europe, a similar phenomenon can be observed as jobless migrants from mostly rural areas of poverty stricken developing countries flood into Europe through precarious land and sea routes sometimes ending in death and internment camps.

At the same time, Europeans living in cities and country sides can also experience a sense of loss of Heimat or belongingness due to a rapidly advancing globalisation coupled with high work stress, high divorce rates, persistent drug and crime problems which all combined can generate a sense of insecurity which in turn makes citizens prone to feelings of anxiety when faced with large numbers of immigrants from rural background and wide cultural diversity.

3. Social integration

In light of the simultaneousness of the phenomena described above- that is a) European citizens’ increasing sense of being adrift coupled with an increasing longing for Heimat or a sense of belonging to a group or community and b) a growing wave of people from at times very different cultural backgrounds who are immigrating through legal and illegal means into a Europe. A Europe increasingly characterised by an aging population and concomitant need to recruit and employ semi-skilled and unskilled workers from Non-European countries.

Sustainable and equitable solutions are needed to guarantee social integration of these migrants into Europe’s labour force and into communities where they can find a new home. At the same time, the hosting communities in Europe are in need of forging stronger social bonds and creating communities and a sense of shared Heimat between themselves as well as with those arriving now as migrants.

Faced with the enormous floods of refugees at the end of the first World War, a psychiatrist and art expert, Jakob Moreno, came up with a new theory and techniques that were used to create new homes or Heimat for the thousands of war orphans and displaced people who fled to Vienna and other larger cities like Budapest and Prague of the Austria-Hungarian empire which at the same time started to disintegrate into new countries offering new homes but not necessarily a new sense of Heimat during the subsequent process of break up and building of

new countries.³ He developed ways to help re-integrate war orphans and displaced people in 1917 and later published his theory of sociometry in a book titled “Who shall survive” (published in English in 1930).

Jacob Moreno was originally from today’s Romania, then moved to Vienna to study medicine. Moreno developed sociometry, an observational charting of how people interact in groups. This practice furnished objective evidence of interpersonal and intergroup relations. Adam Blatner describes sociometry as follows⁴:

Moreno developed sociometry in the early 1930s and wrote a major book on the subject, titled “Who Shall Survive?” The title indicated his belief that our survival as a species required a maturation and application of insights in the social sciences that would then catch up to the advances being made in the hard sciences. In other words, what good is it to develop sophisticated technologies capable of making ever-more-destructive weapons when we don’t have in place a widespread cultural matrix of social methods for more peacefully working out conflicts?

Moreno is best known as the inventor of the therapeutic role playing method called psychodrama, but was also a brilliant innovator who helped pioneer group psychotherapy, social role theory, improvisational theatre, and applications of role playing in business and education, as well as in other settings.

Moreno had been interested in the dynamics of relationships since his college years, and intuitively recognized that people tend to be more spontaneous and happy when allowed to affiliate with others with whom they had good rapport. Moreno called this invisible current of attraction or repulsion “tele”, a term related to words like telephone or television.

Tele, simply stated, is what is measured by sociometry. With whom might you prefer to share some common experience—having lunch, going on a date, playing tennis, working on a study project, etc. (Right off, you’ll notice that it’s possible to prefer one person for one kind of role or criterion, but another person might be preferred for a different role! So the method exposes the complexity of the field – it’s not just a matter of “who do you like?”

While in Vienna from 1910-1921, Moreno also studied social interactions for instance by observing children’s ability to invent stories to which he later added theatre methods by asking the children to act out their stories. He later used this method with adults, founding a theater named Das Stregreif in 1921 in which actors and audiences acted out real and imagined stories.

4. Finding synergies between art and social integration

Vienna and other larger cities of the former Austro-Hungarian empire were rich in innovation and inter-disciplinary experimentation especially in the years from

³ For an example of this transition period visit : <http://www.csend.org/PageGenerics.aspx?id=15>, then go to Logik des Zerfalls and related two audio features (logic of implosion).

⁴ For full article by A. Blatner on sociometry, see : <http://blatner.com/adam/pdntbk/sociomnotes.htm>

1880-1925.⁵ Artists and scientists exchanged views, collaborated on joint projects and were often active as social advocates urging for social change and adaptation of the empire's infrastructures (physical, social, legal, and political) from their feudal roots to a modern society based on industrialization, full democracy, decentralization, a more market oriented entrepreneurial economy and respect of cultural diversity.

As history shows, this adaptation unfortunately did not succeed despite initial promising reforms. Austria-Hungary descended into the destructive chaos of the First World War which ended up with the destruction of lives, institutions and co-existence of various societies and cultures who co-existed over centuries albeit not as equal partners. Attempts to re-create past glory and power through the national-socialist terror regime in Germany and in annexed Austria did not bring about a rebirth of past glory. Instead it ended up with the Second World War with more destruction and more separation (cold war).

Today's times are different and to some extent similar to the crucial transition period of Austro-Hungary. As then, central Europe is experiencing again civil wars, wars and violence especially in the former Yugoslavia but also in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe. In addition, legal and illegal migration has brought large numbers of economic and political refugees to western European countries resulting in xenophobic reactions by some members of the host countries.

At the same time, technological advances gallop ahead with ever more new discoveries and inventions offering enormous potential to humanity to find solutions to most of our current problems however, the political will seems to be insufficient to change current habits and bring about the necessary adjustments e.g. in regard to environmental and economic crises. Similar to the ending Austro-Hungarian Empire, the postmodern era of the so called Pax Americana seems to produce brilliance in regard to scientific invention and artistic expression but remains poor in regard to constructive social transformation.⁶

What is needed are more initiatives bringing the arts into contact with society and providing support for the inevitable and necessary social transformations described above. Art and art journals have supported initiatives giving artists a possibility to exhibit their views on society such as the art journal "Frieze" with its special issue on how artists frame social reality.⁷ Even more promising and beneficial for all parties are initiatives which invite artists to dialogue with their respective society and environments. Pioneering initiatives of the genre "social dialogue" are for

⁵ For more detailed information on this very creative period in the arts, social and natural sciences see:

<http://www.csend.org/files/file/20080801-Logik.pdf>

⁶ For a comparison of today's arts, social sciences, and management see:

http://www.csend.org/files/file/Off_Off_Broadway-abstract.pdf

⁷ Artists and their framing of social reality, Frieze, contemporary Art and Culture, Issue 114, April 2008.

instance the université nomade ⁸, the workshops on art and aesthetics for organizing and management led by Pierre Guillet de Monthoux and Antonio Strati ⁹ and now by Luise Kloos and NEXT with her innovative approach of bringing the arts to social issues like migration and social integration.



⁸ www.nurope.eu

⁹ http://www.eiasm.org/frontoffice/event_announcement.asp?event_id=526