By Way of an Introduction

Ariane de Waal and Paul Antick

In Spring 2017, the "Terror on Tour" collective staged the third in an on-going series of events, this time at the University of Innsbruck in Austria. "Borders, Detours, and Contingencies" was put together by Dr. Ariane de Waal, who, at the time, was a postdoctoral researcher and lecturer in the English Department. Most of the material in this special issue of *Liminalities*, the second from "Terror on Tour", was originally presented at that event. By way of an Introduction, Ariane (Halle-Wittenberg) and myself (London) decided that a 'conversation' would be in keeping with the relatively informal and international nature and ethos of the "Terror on Tour" project itself.

This is that conversation:

PA: Give me some idea about what prompted you to put together an academic event called, "Borders, Detours, and Contingencies"?

AdW: In April 2016, I started my first postdoc position at the University of Innsbruck. I had just completed my PhD thesis about British theatre's responses to the 'war on terror'. During the last stages of that project, I had come to realise that the urgency of the conversation about Western interpretations of terrorism

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and the way in which securitisation stifled the last stirrings of multicultural conviviality exceeded the narrow focus on theatre and performance that I had set for myself. So, I wanted to re-engage that conversation with more of an interdisciplinary focus. I thought back to the conferences I had attended as a doctoral researcher and wondered who might want to collaborate with me. The "Terror and the Tour" colloquium at the University of Roehampton, London, that you had hosted together with Jonathan Skinner and Andrew Wilford in April 2015, came to my mind. There was something irreverent about this colloquium, some kind of anarchic energy, that I appreciated and that I wanted to bring to Innsbruck. I got in touch with the three of you, and Andrew wrote back, suggesting the theme: "Borders, Detours, and Contingencies". It was particularly the focus on borders that spoke to me immediately.

Over the early summer months of 2016, still at the height of what was then reported as the 'refugee crisis', I took a lot of trains between Austria and Germany, between Innsbruck and Munich, to be specific. On that line, just before the train pulls into Rosenheim, the first station on the German side of the border, German federal police board the train and 'check' the carriages – well, essentially, they racially profile the train compartments and ask anyone who does not have a perfectly innocuous white complexion to produce their papers. Usually, I would sit there and give the police officers a confrontational look – not much more, because how do you disarm a scenario like that? I often thought about offering to show my passport too, which I was not once asked to do, but I was also reluctant to wave the proof of my rights-bearing German citizenship in front of travellers who possessed no documents that would enable a legitimate crossing. Sometimes, before the train drew closer to the border, I would have chats with young men who had come from Eritrea or Somalia and were passing through Austria in the hope of reuniting with friends or relatives in Germany. We would discuss their itinerary, or just the mundane matter of how to make it from the far-away platform at which the Eurocity train arrives at Munich's main station to connecting trains towards Ulm or Cologne. Whenever we had these conversations, I was worried about aggravating the situation by affirming their travel plans and hopes of crossing the border, which I knew was going to be impossible, yet I did not want to act as the extended arm of the German police by warning the men that their travels were likely to come to an imminent stop.

On my first weekend in Innsbruck, I participated in a "No Borders" protest against the re-introduction of checks at the Brenner Pass between South Tyrol, an autonomous northern Italian province, and the Tyrolean state in Austria. It felt inconceivable that the right of free movement between Schengen states would be violated in a concerted effort to prevent refugees from entering northern Europe. My own carefree transitions between different European universities, where

white academics would gather and discuss these matters, felt terribly jarring and out of touch with the realities of refugees, who had managed to survive against the odds of crossing the Mediterranean in vessels not fit for the passage, and were now deported from the trains on which I was travelling.

So, when the three of you responded to my invitation to host the next "Terror on Tour" event in Innsbruck, those weeks in the early summer of 2016 felt like a heated time and Tyrol felt like an appropriate place to problematise and ponder the state of 'borders', which were being redrawn and refortified as we spoke. The initial idea then was to bring together academics who worked on the intersections of terror and travelling with local political activists who contested the authoritarian border regimes recently installed by European states. As I realised pretty quickly, academic conferences are not necessarily a particularly inviting event for activists, who often rely on their anonymity or collective organisation and might not relish the prospect of being boxed in with people in airless rooms for hours on end, theorising borders through poststructuralist or psychoanalytical angles, while the physical and political realities of these borders remain in force. Actually, I'm not sure that academics enjoy such conferences either. But yes, when I planned to co-organise this next "Terror on Tour" event with you, I was brimming with optimism about making Innsbruck the setting of the "Borders, Detours, and Contingencies" instalment.

PA: A couple of things: First, given the circumstances at the time – certainly in Europe – it was probably inevitable, and desirable too, that most of the contributions in Innsbruck addressed the situation you just described, regarding refugees and the physical, political, and ideological borders that rapidly began to distinguish them from most of the rest of (white) Europe. I must admit that for someone living in the UK, it's somewhat ironic to hear what you say about your concerns with the German response, specifically in this case at the border with Austria. I say that because here (in the UK) the perception was – at least on parts of the left (or centre-left) – that one of the few countries in Europe to take a positive and rational stand in relation to the 'situation' was Germany. I can't comment on the extent to which it actually did that or not, I mean in practice, but this was certainly one of the ways in which I think the refugee story was organised by left-leaning sections of the media in Britain. For the right, of course, Germany's position was considered neither positive nor rational! I think there's probably a perception now in parts of Britain, parts of the British media, a perception that's obviously been exploited by the right, that many of the 'tensions' that have emerged in German politics over the last few years – most obviously the rise in popularity of AfD and, more specifically, the stranglehold over the political mechanisms of the AfD by the (very) far-right elements of that party, as opposed to just the far-right elements (!), are in some ways tied to Germany's 'management' of that situation: its

relatively 'open' and 'welcoming' approach to refugees. I suspect that this analysis is quite crude but I think it's one that has a fair amount of currency outside Germany, if not within it. I guess that compared to the responses by some other EU countries – Poland and Hungary obviously spring to mind, Italy too, as well as the UK – Germany's approach did appear to be relatively enlightened, at least to people like me. But I wonder if you could say a few words about this? In particular about some of the contradictions – if you think there are any? – between perceptions of German 'open-ness' and the situation on the ground in Germany, including German media discourse, and also in Austria – a space that for many outside the region is often construed as being more or less indistinguishable – culturally and politically – from Germany itself.

The second thing I wanted to mention is how it sometimes seems to me that representing the 'person' of the refugee often appears to be more difficult for some of the traditional organs of the left – in Britain at any rate – than it is for the right. For obvious reasons, I suppose. The right doesn't generally have any reservations about representing refugees negatively, in fact it usually has an investment in doing so – the Brexit Party's notorious EU referendum 'Breaking Point' poster being perhaps the most obvious example of that.[1] Someone from Eritrea steals food from a shop in Cologne and in the process scares a young, (preferably) white female shop assistant – and hey, fantastic. It's all grist to the mill. But for me the flip side of this is often no more edifying – and can potentially be almost as destructive. This involves producing a story, a melodramatic one, in which the Other is hysterically idealised; in which their 'goodness' is represented as an effect of their suffering.[2] The more they suffer, the better they are. As a result, some people end up having an awful lot to live up to. But what happens when and if they can't do that? What happens if and when they 'fail' to do it? It seems to me that very often they're not permitted to do so. Because to 'fail' is to betray the image, the reassuring fantasy of the 'good Other', which it seems they're implicitly required to honour. I wonder sometimes if this alternative version of 'the refugee' is no more or less dehumanising in its own way than the more obviously corrosive fantasies of the right?

AdW: I think that some of the current political predicaments in Germany are born out of the contradictions you mention. I have to say, though, as someone who identifies more or less unequivocally with the left – although I partly agree with your assessment of failings on the left, and will try to come back to those – I never

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[1]https://www.newstatesman.com/2016/06/nigel-farage-s-anti-eu-poster-depicting-migrants-resembles-nazi-propaganda. See Antigoni Memou's "Photography, Borders and the Fear of the 'Racialised Other'" in this issue of *Liminalities*.

[2] See Elizabeth Anker's *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Duke University Press, 2014).

perceived Angela Merkel and her CDU government to be acting as amiably towards refugees as was widely commented. Undeniably, her approach stood out in comparison with many other European countries. However, the ostensible opening of borders – which is not, in fact, what happened, as my earlier travel anecdote reveals – was from the start contingent on very precise demands. Before I moved to Austria, so during the first year or so of the 'refugee crisis', not a day went by without local, regional, and national radio stations hosting call-in shows where concerned citizens could voice their fears about incoming Syrian refugees diluting German values. The term that had wide circulation at the time was *Leitkultur* – the 'leading' culture of the mainstream. Another phrase that was then replayed incessantly was, "Der Islam gehört zu Deutschland" ("Islam is part of Germany"), which had been expressed in different variations by several conservative politicians such as former President Christian Wulff, who had first used it to great effect in 2010. To me, it felt as if the conservative government could hide behind this lip service and let 'concerned citizens' do the dirty work of pulling up cultural and ideological borders that would signal to incoming refugees, and particularly those from predominantly Muslim countries, that their values did not at all belong here. The more benevolent of these citizens, those of the centre and right-of-centre, would call in to the morning radio shows hosted by *Deutschlandfunk* or *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, which I would be listening to in the final stages of my PhD project, and express their doubts and fears. Suddenly, these citizens were all for the rights of 'our' women and same-sex couples, now that they felt these brilliant achievements of our liberal, tolerant society to be under threat by people moving here from culturally conservative regions in Syria. The more militant of these citizens joined *Pegida* or other far-right movements and took to the streets to turn their anger about the ostensible 'invasion' of Muslim refugees into vocal and physical violence. These citizens, which news outlets at the time labelled *Wutbürger* ('angry citizens'), were only the most visible vanguard of sentiments running through mainstream society, and Merkel's conservative government did little to resolve these tensions. It would be too facile to pin the blame on particular politicians or political parties, yet we have to ask to what extent the international reception of Merkel's position that you alluded to earlier and the many commentaries on Germany's supposed *Willkommenskultur* ('refugees welcome culture') might actually have been harmful, rather than helpful, with a view to providing a social climate in which refugees are truly 'welcome'.

So where is the left in all of this? Or, which positions (could) have been taken left-of-centre that might have allowed for a fuller appreciation of the complex personalities of refugees, beyond the caricatures of them either being forcefully rejected by the German *Wutbürger* or welcomed into the open arms offered by the proponents of *Willkommenskultur*? One of the biggest challenges regarding the framing of the 'refugee crisis' for the left came with New Year's Eve 2015. In the

early days of 2016, various women who had been celebrating that night in Cologne reported that they had been sexually attacked and robbed at the main station by a very large group of men suspected to consist mainly of refugees from North African countries. For those who had been pursuing a discourse that posits the inherently 'good' refugee as an innocent victim to be saved by, for instance, the many German volunteers that travelled to Greek islands or met arriving refugees at train stations with provisions of food and clothing, the obtrusive fact of the criminal behaviour of these 'bad' refugees could not be processed along established discursive parameters. I would not say that many commentators on the left had ever subscribed to such binary constructs, though. Rather, this was how progressive positions on the 'refugee crisis' were misrepresented by those who located themselves explicitly outside of them. Yet I must confess that I, too, find it easier to assume the speaking position of the cynical observer, who comments on these discursive frames as if I were not somehow implicated in them myself. I would not have felt prepared to offer a commentary, let alone an analysis of what happened in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015. It impressed me that my colleague from Innsbruck, the peace researcher Josefina Echavarría Alvarez, presented such a sharp, yet sensitive discussion of these events in her paper held at the "Terror on Tour" event. Without diminishing the plight of the women who were assaulted that night or deferring blame from those who had attacked them, Josefina presented a model that would help us confront the event without reproducing the triangular structure of perpetrator-victim-bystander. She expertly engaged the *Leitkultur* controversy without accepting or reproducing the terms in which it has been carried out. In the published version of her paper, Josefina writes that, rather than asking "how 'new members of society' can adapt to an existing polis that is seemingly free of tensions among culturally similar 'insiders'", we should conceive of the European Union as "a living and democratic system", which requires "change for those who arrive, but also for those who already reside in the territory."[3] To me, this is a good example of how to capture *openness* and the conceptual fluidity of borders without flattening the complexities of arrival, adaptation, and change into a one-way street that is either cleared or obstructed by those welcoming or refusing refugees.

PA: Thanks for bringing us back to the event you put together in Innsbruck. Perhaps you could say a bit more about the event itself and how effective you thought it was, specifically perhaps in terms of some of the other contributions people made?

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[3] The article referred to here was published in *Transrational Resonances: Echoes to the Many Peaces*, edited by Josefina Echavarría Alvarez, Daniela Ingruber, and Norbert Koppensteiner (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

AdW: The idea behind the "Borders, Detours, and Contingencies" symposium in Innsbruck was to cross conceptual and disciplinary borders. We wanted to blur conceptual borders in the sense of destabilising the neatly circumscribed notions of terror/terrorism versus security/counter-terrorism by, first, highlighting the resurgence of 'state terror' in connection with the re-drawing and fortification of borders across Europe; second, asking what modes of alternative travel, radical tours, or detours could serve to counter the punitive technologies of security established around travelling, such as racial profiling; third, critically reviewing our own positions as academics and artists in view of the current geopolitical conjunctions of terrorism and tourism. 'Interdisciplinarity' is, of course, a well-worn rallying cry, yet there was a genuine hope of generating exchanges across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. By and large, the Innsbruck event did zig-zag across these borders.

The opening keynote lecture by Gene Ray prepared the ground for such an endeavour. Gene's paper traced the proliferation of terrors and different versions of the sublime in the epoch of the so-called Anthropocene; his intriguing discussion of a global spectacle of terror that we can no longer oversee or enjoy from a safe shelter forms part of this special issue. The first panel of the conference was devoted to analysing the "Conjunctions of Terrorism and Tourism". It was chaired by a very dear colleague from Innsbruck, Helga Ramsey-Kurz, who has done uniquely important work bringing together students and refugees through teaching Life Writing courses at the University of Innsbruck. She facilitated a conversation between anthropologists Tereza Kuldova and Jonathan Skinner, who talked about the sublime terror elicited by "Outlaw Bikers" and "Dark Tourism" sites, respectively, and architect Anna Lerchbaumer. Anna presented a collaborative project as part of which she had travelled to all-inclusive holiday resorts in Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey, all of which were located in regions generally considered to be unstable. This was one of the papers that, for me at least, most effectively questioned our own, relatively effortless border-crossings as academics, artists, or tourists; it was also an excellent example of how to navigate the boundaries between terrorism and tourism while confounding the established parameters of how we conceptualise and document 'safe' versus 'unsafe' spaces.

Blurring the academically enshrined hierarchies between researchers, students, and artists, we also immersed ourselves into a theatre event, which brought together the professional performers Raymond Waring and Robert Hamilton from the UK with the student theatre group that I directed at the time, RAI – renegade actors innsbruck, in a double bill. Raymond and Robert staged a short piece called "Have You Eyes?", which contrasted a disgruntled costumer review posted by a British guest about a hotel in London with an interview conducted with an anonymous Syrian refugee, who had risked his life to cross the Aegean Sea. RAI

performed the collage "To the Light/Over. A Postmodern Pilgrimage", which I had stitched together by mixing literary and other sources revolving around pilgrimages in the widest possible sense, from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* via Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to blog entries written by fascinated travellers to Innsbruck, India, and along the Camino de Santiago. So, these were two artistic experiments, if you will, that pushed against the modes of representation with which we approach, book, consume, review, and record our travels at a time when detention centres swelled, borders were closed, and refugees were left to die in the Mediterranean.

The second conference panel focused on "Challenging Borders", and this was perhaps the most interdisciplinary of the conference as a whole. It was particularly thought-provoking to hear about border controls and repatriation from the perspective of legal scholar Andreas Müller just before Antigoni Memou, whose essay is featured in this special issue, dissected dominant images of the 'refugee crisis' from a visual theory angle. Another highlight of this panel was Gabriella Calchi Novati's analysis of the paranoid political fantasy of 'beautiful walls'. Gabriella's paper, in turn, had interesting resonances with Elisabeth Massana's examination of border-crossings from a theatre studies perspective, which is also included in this special issue.

In terms of geopolitical boundaries, the conference managed to cross numerous frontiers, especially in the final panel, "Terror Tours and Detours". For me personally, the interrogation of Austria's own "Unhomely Architectures" felt the most acute: Andreas Oberprantacher, a philosopher based at Innsbruck University, presented a virtual tour through the Styrian deportation centre Vordernberg, which powerfully critiqued a governmental regime predicated on deportability. The format of the virtual tour was complemented by papers that discussed the presenters' own precarious or disruptive travels – such as Praveen Sewgobind's report of collective action undertaken to contest a roadblock between the village of Yabad and the city of Jenin in the Palestinian territories and your own discussion of tours/detours to "places of historical interest" in Ukraine.

I hope this has conveyed some idea of the extreme variety of iterations of terror, from state brutality to the pleasurable sublime, as well as modes of travel, from forced deportation to package tourism, that were discussed at the colloquium in Innsbruck. If you are asking me about how effective the event was, I would say that it was very effective when measured against academic parameters, precisely by disturbing some of these. It would be an entirely different matter to assess the ethical or political efficacy of such an event. As I was saying earlier, I would have liked to open up more of a dialogue between researchers and activists, or activists and artists, as well as students. I know it is not radical to swap the conference

venue for a dimly lit theatre space, but that was one of the things that, as far as I could tell from my conversations with the participants, felt refreshing about the event. As did the conference dinner at Villa Mundus in Innsbruck, then also known as "No Border Kitchen", which was run by Gilda Safarian and felt like one of the most open spaces in town at the time – and I mean that in a cultural and political sense, but also with a view to the atmosphere and tone of conversation. For our dinner at Villa Mundus, academics, artists, and students shared food from big bowls placed on the centre of a long dining table, rather than ordering *à la carte*. Again, I know this might not be the most progressive thing ever attempted at an academic event, but as Elisabeth Massana discusses in her essay in this special issue, sharing food can be an ethical act that contributes to establishing "horizontal relations", which is a term that I like. If Elisabeth is right in claiming that such encounters around shared food can provide lingering positive associations and memories, then this might be another way in which the Innsbruck event has been effective, if only for those involved.

PA: Thanks Ariane!

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