

# Reading of Anne Kockelkorn's Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary

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# *Reading of Anne Kockelkorn's Real Estates in Cyprus. A Diary.*

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Diaries, being open-ended diurnal constructions, do not usually include pages of contents, but this one does. The page of contents here offers a preparatory journey for the reader, an advance itinerary, letting them know towards what destinations they are about to set off. The diary as journey form becomes a travelogue that takes us to the divided island of Cyprus in order to introduce us to a number of characters, not all of them human, and material entanglements. The diary 'presents the double faces of the city by means of fragments, moments of experience and reflection upon these experiences'.<sup>1</sup> There is much that is implied by the diary form, 'who is being addressed? Who writes? Shouldn't the diary remain a secret? Or is this a document that was lost and then found?'<sup>2</sup> What unfolds is an exemplary instance of transversal writing-reading, with acknowledgment offered to F elix Guattari's important essay *The Three Ecologies*.<sup>3</sup>

A critique of the geopolitics and economics of infrastructures in the context of Cyprus is extended, revealed in a sequence of glimpses, the far away, the close up: from tears ritually shed to plastic washed up as flotsam and jetsam, from Saharan sand registered as the material index of the threatened 'desertification of Cyprus' to the point of view of parents rendered as hapless tourists. There is the colonial past that runs through this account of a split island state where displacements are procured via language and place; via ethnic, political, and class identity; and via troubled processes of subjectification. What we come to understand is that 'Cyprus is a *microcosm* of the Middle East'.<sup>4</sup>

A focus on an expanded understanding of infrastructures, failing, flailing, falling apart, challenges any assumption about architecture as the autonomous art of form-making. Infrastructures here concern territory and set the scene of real-estate reconceptualized as infra-

structural space. The infrastructure of EU citizenship is presented as a sociopolitical problematic. The infrastructure of the special economic zone or tax haven is drawn to our attention.

Again and again, the failure of such infrastructures is described through minor encounters: bank cards that do not work, which send us on a journey (with the diarist) through town, a transversal journey revealing the proximity of dilapidated streets just one block away from a luxury shopping strip. Centrally, the destructive role of real-estate as one of the most insidious infrastructures dedicated to the capture of spatial commodity takes hold. In all, a generalized failure of architectural infrastructures is witnessed through the eyes of the diarist, who presents 'a world being produced, made from mountains, deserts, the sea'<sup>5</sup> entangled with human modes of settlement and their devastating aftereffects.

Anthropos-scenic infrastructures composed of waste create the monsters that will continue to haunt the generations to follow. Plastics, plastics everywhere, and not a drop to drink. The post-Anthropocene Mariner must cope with a plastic-damaged planet suffused on every level and across even the most isolated territories with microplastics. Plastic trash is encountered everywhere, evidence of the failure of global waste management infrastructures and habits of production and consumption. The global flows of

plastic arrive on these shores to further demonstrate the embedded location of Cyprus, its conflicted histories both political and environmental. The collection and storage of flotsam becomes a project for the diarist. The promise of a possible project in collaboration: A 'to do' list, an ambition to make a change before the hopelessness of such an activity sets in. The anxiety of collecting one's own store of plastic water bottles, one's own plastic debris. Like the Wertheim sisters in Los Angeles who collect their own plastics to weave a distributed coral reef, a project that gathers over 10,000 people from all over the world, an enormous collaborative project, explains Donna Haraway in *Staying with the Trouble*.<sup>6</sup> The empty plastic water bottles that the diarist guiltily collects further speak to the failed infrastructures of the availability, on Cyprus, of potable tap water.

All this talk of infrastructure draws attention to the question of who should look after the infrastructure, for infrastructure always requires maintenance (a theme developed by Catharina Gabriellsson in *Architecture and Feminisms: Ecologies, Economies, Technologies*, 2018). Maintenance, it requires a manifesto (Mierle Ukeles), and an ethics of care (Maria Puig de la Bellacasa; Carol Gilligan; Joan Tronto; Virginia Held).

In contrast with these failed infrastructures, global and local, maintenance and an ethics of care emerge in the depicted

scene of Olga's garden. By contrast to the multi-residential development called *The One*, the new, empty, part object, part finished high-rise pushing people out of the city, Olga's garden is a refuge. An ecology of plants: 'Plants as expressions of geopolitical forces as "beings" subject to migration/translocation through physically being introduced to alter the existing landscape or being subject, in-situ, to a shifting climate.'<sup>7</sup>

The voice of the writer through understated asides, and non-intrusive descriptions, and even a quiet lament, a small worry. The voice of the diarist and her intimate observations, she is an 'informed outsider',<sup>8</sup> informing us of the goings on of the divided state, she offers 'an "open" mode of attention'.<sup>9</sup> The delicate, non-intrusive way in which a writer's own cultural background is brought into this geopolitical situation where sometimes the violence of her own political milieu is exposed: 'On April 24th 2018, the Bavarian Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, Markus Söder, adopts a paragraph to the general rules of procedure for public authorities of the Free State of Bavaria, "to install a cross in the entrance area of each official service building".' Simply: 'Crosses in the entrance of about 1100 public office buildings.' The horror of dogmatic Christianity, the fervor. This becomes a variant of a violent imposition of identities, revealing a subterranean yet strong current of racism in what she bears witness to. The cultural

context of an image of German forests flashes up, a dialectical image in contrast to the desert, in contrast to the Cypriot landscape and its histories of appropriation and transformation.

The duration of the diarist's stay in Cyprus is enunciated simply: 'So that's Spring.' An economy of language places us in the vicinity of the coast, in a somewhere else, with an immediacy and concision of language. Some of the diary fragments are but a few lines long. 'Life', for instance, becomes some exigency apprehended by architects and planners, this impossibly difficult concept-experience is given but two lines: life, survival, vital. Concepts emptied, one wonders, on account of their marketability.

The aim is to allow the transversal relations of architectural objects to emerge, populated by characters, conversations, histories and controversies. The backdrop of postcolonial conflicts and ethnic differences is crucial, seeping into all the combined infrastructures. These broader geopolitical themes are cut through with everyday stories and conversations through which characters begin to emerge. Processes of subjectivation tied up amid social relations amid environmental issues of territorial development, and again, the brute insistence of a real-estate urban economic logic.

The cast of characters that play their parts, the subjectivities in process, in

and out of relation, from these characters we can chart a cartography of their matters of concern: the diarist's parents, who take a travel deal advertised in *Tagesspiegel* or *Zeit*, offer us an insight into tourist infrastructures. Tourists, we are told, outnumber cats and people; Maria the artist, who recalls a visit to a northern Greek village in the 1980s, reflects on the social reproduction of crying that eludes commodification, a caesura where resistance persists, a possibility; Olga's house and garden are now entangled amid the new real estate development called *The One*; A colleague, Chrysanthe talks of the Saharan sands and the associated atmospherics that suffuse the environmental milieu; the two administrative officers G. and N. in the planning office might be associated with the many gatekeepers of Kafka's novels; A. the memorable CEO of *happyhouse developers* (yes, there is a sense of sarcasm in that fictional name) a property developer millionaire, who has his doubts about socio-demographically mixed residential development: what a bad idea, he says, to mix affluence with poverty. Social housing tenants can happily live on another plot, that is to say, preferably elsewhere, and yes, development means further social segregation, and what of it, says A. In contrast, the diarist's conversation with the planners already alluded to those built projects that are no project at all, ghost projects left incomplete, secured sufficiently for other purposes: tax evasion and citizenship.

Non-humans emerge alongside these human characters. The street cats, for instance, venture back and forth across the UN buffer zone claiming no political allegiance.

Then, in conclusion, a small wonder, even hope. A moment of redemption, 'a disobedient and redemptive creature':<sup>10</sup>

'Suddenly a hedgehog . . . drama of a hedgehog.'

Here we conclude as though with a parable. A small hedgehog, lost, vulnerable, momentarily seeks shelter beneath Petrus's chair before escaping across the border into the buffer zone. Petrus, you see, stands in for those who come and go, the ex-patriot, whose liberty is one of movement. The hedgehog is a refugee from Northern Cyprus. Those gathered for yet another going away party are decided on this fact of the refugee hedgehog, they laugh together. A minor event, an encounter that expresses 'pathos without sentimentality'.<sup>11</sup>

I am compelled by this sudden appearance of a small hedgehog. I have it in my head that there must be a Kafka parable that depicts a Hedgehog, perhaps a Hedgehog who sings, or else one that offers a report to an academy, or one who tells of the cares of being a family man? Minoritarian voices. I go in search of more hedgehogs, and find some other clues:

From Friedrich Schlegel: 'Ein Fragment muss gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.' (A fragment should be like a little work of art, complete in itself and separated from the rest of the universe like a hedgehog.)<sup>12</sup>

Or, from Gustave Flaubert: 'The soul was entirely folded in on itself, like a hedgehog wounding itself with its own quills.'<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, neither a fragment separated from a world, nor an infolded entity, but a creature in the miniature that reports of the local and global tangle of self-harming worlds.

- 1 Klaske Havik, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018. Throughout this reading the voices of the other readers at the Transversal Writing workshop will occasionally be inserted as quotes.
- 1 Catharina Gabrielson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 3 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000).
- 4 Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 5 Marko Jobst, Transversal Writing

- workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 6 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 133.
- 7 Robin Wilson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 8 Klaske Havik, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 9 Robin Wilson, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 10 Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 11 Naomi Stead, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.
- 12 Friedrich Schlegel, *Athenäums-Fragmente und andere Schriften* (Berlin: Holzinger, 2016), 53.
- 13 Gustave Flaubert, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert: 1830-1857* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), fn 1, 22. Kim Gurney also draws attention to another hedgehog reference: Muriel Barbery, *L'Élegance du hérisson* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), published in English as *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Gurney describes the story briefly: 'The concierge of an apartment block who is secretly an art and culture lover and more sophisticated and knowledgeable than the wealthy inhabitants of that block. Nobody pays her much attention except for one resident who notices this fact.' Kim Gurney, Transversal Writing workshop 2, Kavala, Greece, 2018.