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Europeans in-Between

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Mapping In-betweenness. On the Representation of Transculturality in “The Edge of Heaven”

Lora Markova



Figure 1: Film still, “The Edge of Heaven”,
http://www.auf-der-anderen-seite.de/THE_EDGE_OF_HEAVEN_presskit.pdf
(accessed 19.07.2012).

1 Introduction

The interrelated concepts of cultural identity, representation, in-betweenness and transculturality have emerged as recurring topics in cultural and media studies. Simultaneously, these notions can be traced as central motifs in contemporary artistic practices and cultural expressions. Departing from this context, this paper will adopt an interdisciplinary perspective in order to look at the relevance of these key concepts in rethinking and articulating contemporary European cultural processes. Drawing upon Gerard Delanty's perception of Europe as a discourse¹, the essay will deal with European artistic expressions (as discursive practices themselves) and their potential to construct a shared European cultural space and produce cultural identities.

This discussion will focus on an example of European creative production, which has been highly acclaimed in European and international contexts – the film *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)² by Fatih Akin. Referring to the metaphor of cinema as a map of cultural differences³, the central research problem posed by this paper is: In how far does *The Edge of Heaven* map transculturality? On a second layer, the essay will reflect on whether creative expressions (such as the chosen film) constitute transcultural spaces.

As a research method the paper will analyse the representation of transculturality in the chosen film by Akin, since his work is marked by the complex dynamics between European and non-European sentiments. As “others within” creators from diaspora and immigrant communities often deal with the inversion of identification processes in performing the freedom of being different from others as well as from their own selves in the interstice between cultures, roots and spatial distances. Therefore, identities will be considered as multiple, dynamic and constantly in-process social constructs, which are produced in between cultures, discursive spheres, real and symbolic spaces. The essay will also question whether the film potentially transcends transcultural codes and symbols. Thus, transculturality will be studied not simply as a subject of depiction, but also as an integral element of the conceptual and aesthetic dimensions of the director's work.

In order to ease the “navigation” through the essay a summary of its structure is presented here. The first part will discuss the notions of space, mapping and representation and their role in cultural discourse. The chapter will also focus on the relationships between space, representation and cultural identity, which will set

¹ Gerard Delanty develops this idea in *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), 3.

² *The Edge of Heaven* is the winner of the Best screenplay award at the Cannes Film Festival 2007, the Best film EU Parliament LUX award 2007 and was selected for Germany's entry to contest at the Oscars in 2007.

³ Among other authors employing the up-to-date metaphor of the map, Giuliana Bruno uses it in relation to cinema in *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002), 71.

a conceptual framework for the essay as a whole. The second chapter will address the highly contested concept of transculturality and certain theoretical approaches which have marked its interpretation. A link between the notions of transculturality and in-betweenness will be also outlined. The next part of the text will turn directly to *The Edge of Heaven* and its transcultural dimensions. The first sub-chapter here will discuss the representation of transcultural identities in the film. The second one will explore transculturality as inseparable from Akin's aesthetics and conceptual commitment. The final part of the text will present an ideal model of European space for transcultural existence. Conclusions and vectors for further research will be stated in the final section of the essay.

2 Space, identity, representation

The following chapter aims at providing certain complementary aspects in the understanding of the notions of space, identity and representation. The interrelation between these concepts is essential within the scope of the essay and sets its conceptual framework.

2.1 Space, mapping and representation

The concept of the "map" is one that logically renders the relationship between place, its representation and the production of space. Moreover, it signifies the conceptual disparity between *place* and *space*. Thus, the notion of mapping, which is applied in this essay, seems to be a relevant metaphor in the context of the overall question: *Europe – space for transcultural existence?*

The notion of space already suggests another reading of the geopolitical European territory – one that involves the symbolic and experiential dimensions related to the physical place. It also implies a perspective towards Europe, which considers a redefined time-space relationship in the process of globalization: if modernity can be articulated through time-based historicism, globalization is the *epoch of space*, the *epoch of simultaneity*.⁴

In their study on globalization and *glocalization* Roland Robertson and Victor Roudometof point out that this reformulated time-space relationship is intrinsic for the construction of identity.⁵ Moreover, the authors of the *reflexive modernity* such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have extensively elaborated on the effect of globalization upon the time-space correlation and how

⁴ Michel Foucault. "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring, 1986), 22-27, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0300-7162%28198621%2916%3A1%3C22%3A0OS%3E2.0.CO%3B2-F> (accessed 5 May 2011).

⁵ Victor Roudometof and Ronald Robertson, "The Space between the Boundaries: Globalization and Americanization," in *American Culture in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mike-Frank G. Epitropoulos and Victor Roudometof (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 185-6.

it has transformed identity into an unstable, unfixed, fragmented, ambiguous and *liquid* entity, which is constantly in the process of becoming; or, as Bauman remarks – to talk about the problem of identity is to assert a pleonasm, since identity can “exist only as a problem.”⁶ In studying further the link between globalization, identity and space, Robertson and Roudometof borrow the concept of *social space* coined by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) and later projected into Edward Soja’s perception of the *thirdspace*. The social space is a “dialectically linked triad of sociospatial configurations” including the *perceived*, the *conceived* and the *lived* space. The perceived space coincides with the empirical space of human interactions. The conceived space concerns the representations of space, where ideological, political and cultural conflicts take place. The lived space is the space of representation, which is “inhabited and used by cultural producers, where innovation and imagination can provide the terrain for changing power relations within the other two spaces.”⁷

It seems virtually impossible to distinguish any original reference within this interdependence between overlapping sociospatial (subjective, social, cultural, economic, power) formations. For instance, as will be later discussed in the paper – the experiences of the director Fatih Akin in the whole sociospatial triad, become conceptualized in his subjective *lived* space of creation, but also materialized in his films, which are cinematic representations and discursive practices within the *conceived* space. This dialogical coexistence between the spaces and their blurred boundaries resembles a simulacrum and revives another meaning encoded in the notion of the “map” – the one used by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1995).

Baudrillard’s text opens with a reference to Borges’ fable about the map which was created so detailed by its cartographers that it covered the mapped territory completely and in the course of its aging it could be confused with the real.⁸ Contemporary postmodern society, according to Baudrillard, is not one of copy and original – the reference to the real cannot be traced back, since the real already exists in terms of its representation. The distinction between reality and representation disappears, as the real exists as a sign – a hyperreal.⁹

The rhetoric of the hyperreal (the *authentic fake* as Umberto Eco has put it) has been embraced also by Edward Soja in his conceptualization of the *thirdspace* – suggesting the intersection between real and imaginary dimensions of a place. Soja’s *thirdspace* encompasses the interrelated notions of “place, location, locality, landscape, environment, home, city, region, territory and geography” and establishes connections between the representational strategies of real and imagined

⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity,” in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 18-19.

⁷ Roudometof and Robertson, *The Space between the Boundaries*, 183.

⁸ Based upon Lewis Carroll’s story about a fictional map in scale 1:1.

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.

places.¹⁰ Consequently, the concept of space should be comprehended as implying connotations of material and immaterial entity, whose symbolic dimensions are generated within representation.

2.2 Cultural identity and representation

A similar dialogical model between the object, its representation and their twofold (re)production is explored by Stuart Hall in his study on signifying practices. Hall suggests that representation is a process, a discursive practice and a medium for the construction of significations and meanings and consequently cultural identities. Applying a semiotic approach (in reference to Roland Barthes' concept of *myth*¹¹), Hall develops a theory of representation as a dual relationship between coding on behalf of the producer, and decoding on the side of the receiver. Furthermore, borrowing Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as a generator of power/knowledge, Hall also adopts a discursive perspective through which representation is understood as the medium or the channel through which the production of meanings happens. Combining the two approaches Hall assumes that events, objects and people do not possess stable meanings, but rather that the meanings are produced by the participants in a culture, who have the power to make things mean or signify something. Representation becomes the process or the medium through which these meanings are both created and reified. Since meanings are always changing and slipping, codes operate more like social conventions than like fixed laws or unbreakable rules.¹² In this context, according to Hall, identity should be understood "as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."¹³

Following the sketched-out context, the third chapter will exemplify further the relationship between representation, identities and space. It will employ the discussed concepts within the textual analysis of the cinematic representation *The Edge of Heaven*.

¹⁰ Edward Soja, "Thirdspace: Towards a New Consciousness of Space and Spatiality," in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. Karin Ika and Gerhart Wagner (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 50.

¹¹ Analyzing the cognitive dimensions of representations, Barthes discusses the levels of denotation – as a *naturalizing* mechanism, and connotation, where *codes* can be recognized. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (1990 ed. London: Vintage, 1957), 142-143.

¹² Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications & Open University, 1997), 61-2.

¹³ Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 222.

3 The coordinates of transculturality

This chapter aims at defining the relationship between the concepts of transculturality and in-betweenness and tracing how far their meanings intersect. Thus, the objective of this part of the essay is to outline the theoretical dimensions of transculturality, which will be projected into the cinematic example addressed in the following chapter.

The authors of the recently published study *From Interculturalism to Transculturalism* (2010) identify an emerging shift towards the paradigm of transculturality within cultural studies. A conceptual translation from postcolonial studies is also sketched out.¹⁴

In the context of mapping the *space* of culture, it becomes relevant to consider Homi Bhabha's highly celebrated concepts developed in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha has introduced a dialogical model¹⁵ that explains the production of *hybridity* along the clash of two cultures, in between cultural differences and in the interstice between discursive fields. Thus, new meanings, social relations and cultural identities are negotiated in a liminal, *in-between* space – a *third space*.¹⁶ For Bhabha, “the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge.”¹⁷ From a broader perspective, it can be assumed that Bhabha's *third space* can happen in any of the *perceived, conceived* and *lived* spaces or in the space between the boundaries as Robertson and Roudometof would put it. Then, the *third space* is rather the *contact zone*, which Mary Louise Pratt defines as the social space where disparate cultures meet¹⁸ and where transculturation takes place.¹⁹

Articulating further Bhabha's theory of liminality and hybridity, Mikhail Epstein conceptualizes transculturality as the difference in identity construction, which is the state of being different not only from others, but also from one's own self. This envisages that one can liberate oneself from dependence from the native culture and therefore experience the freedom to perform other cultures that one has acquired. According to Epstein, from a culturological angle this would mean that one can be a representative of other cultures within one's native culture and also one could represent one's native culture within the others. Epstein offers a

¹⁴ Heinz Antor et al., *From Interculturalism to Transculturalism. Mediating Encounters in Cosmopolitan Contexts* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2010).

¹⁵ Based on Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical principle of culture.

¹⁶ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 36-9.

¹⁷ Homi Bhabha, “The Third Space,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 211.

¹⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 4.

¹⁹ The correspondence between third space and contact zone has been already established by Bill Ashcroft in his article “Caliban's Voice: Writing in the Third Space,” in *Communicating in the Third Space*, ed. Karin Ika and Gerhart Wagner (Routledge, 2008), 107-122.

reading of transculturality in opposition to multiculturalism, considering the latter as an emphasis on the significance of inborn differences as generators of identity construction. Contrarily, transculture implies that cultural development transforms one's identity by providing those characteristics that one lacks in one's original, natural state.²⁰

Recognizing Epstein's contribution to the discussion on transculturality, it should be noted that the discourse has been largely problematized by Wolfgang Welsch. His idea of "the puzzling form of cultures today" has emerged by opposing variables to the established terms of multiculturalism and interculturalism. Departing from Theodor Adorno's perception that cultures should be studied beyond the traditional duality of foreignness and ownness – "beyond both the heterogeneous and the own," Welsch argues that transculturality is the relevant model for understanding contemporary culture.²¹

According to Welsch the concept of interculturality reflects the ways in which cultures may interact with one another. However, he discovers the deficiency of this concept in the fact that cultures are still perceived as separate spheres, which indicates a structural inability for effective communication between these cultures and rather generates intercultural conflicts. Welsch has similar objections to multiculturalism: although it recognizes the existence of different cultures together in one society/community/state, it still proceeds from the idea of clearly distinguished homogenous self-contained cultures. Furthermore, multiculturalism even strengthens barriers between cultures. Reflecting further on interculturality and multiculturalism, he claims that both concepts signify rigid boundaries between cultures – even if information has been exchanged through the boundaries, no change takes place as a result.²² Welsch argues that cultures actually no longer have the features of homogeneity and separateness:

They have instead assumed a new form, which is to be called *transcultural* insofar that it *passes through* classical cultural boundaries. Cultural conditions today are largely characterized by mixes and permeations. The concept of transculturality [...] seeks to articulate this altered cultural constitution [...]. Lifestyles and identities are no longer limited to nationally based cultures [...]. Work on one's identity is becoming more and more work on the integration of components of differing cultural origins.²³

²⁰ Mikhail Epstein, "Culture – Culturology – Transculture," in *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Post-modernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 280-306.

²¹ Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality – the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, ed. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 194.

²² *Ibid.*, 196.

²³ *Ibid.*, 197-8.

At the same time transculturality should not be understood as unification of cultures: “it is, rather, intrinsically linked with the production of diversity.”²⁴ A high degree of cultural variety exists just like in traditional single cultures. However, the differences are no longer articulated through a juxtaposition of clearly outlined cultures, but result between transcultural networks. These have both common and diverse aspects – showing overlaps and distinctions simultaneously. The process we are witnessing is a process of coexisting unification and differentiation.²⁵ Welsch goes further, claiming that transculturality encompasses globalization (in terms of universalization) and fragmentation, being able to cover both the global and the local. Therefore, it can be assumed that Welsch understands transculturality in terms of glocalization – in the way it has been studied by Roland Robertson as a dynamic model between global and local tensions, which has replaced the pre-existing debates on universalism and particularism.²⁶ Thus, an alternative reading of glocalization as a process of transculturation can be mapped in the *third space* in between global and local dynamics.

From a critical angle, a relevant reaction to Welsch’s rhetoric of transculturality points out that “the terminological shift from (traditional) culture to transculturality does not remove the unsettling *experience* of cultural and national difference.”²⁷ Sharing the perception that the re-labelling of long-existing discourses is rather a semantic challenge than a solution of a problem, the essay will not contest further the notions of inter-, multi- and transculturality. Therefore, the following chapter will adopt an “ideal” perspective and will reflect on the different dimensions of the concept of transculturality and its relationship with space and cultural identity.

4 The transcultural dimensions of *The Edge of Heaven*

The Edge of Heaven (Fatih Akin, 2007) tells the cross-stories of six people – two mothers, two daughters, a father and a son, structured in three novels – *Yeter’s Death*, *Lotte’s Death* and *The Edge of Heaven*.²⁸ The film opens with a scene where young professor Nejat travels through Turkey – an episode that recurs at the movie’s end. Nejat’s elderly father Ali encounters a Turkish immigrant prostitute Yeter, whom he invites to join him as a live-in girlfriend. Although Nejat seems

²⁴ Wolfgang Welsch, “Going global or transcultural?” in *The Contemporary Study of Culture*, Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft u. Verkehr und Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften (Wien: Turia + Kant, 1999), 205.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Roudometof and Robertson, *The Space between the Boundaries*, 187.

²⁷ Hans Ulrich Seeber, “Transculturality and Comedy in Zadie Smith’s Serio-comic Novel *White Teeth* (2002),” in *From Interculturalism to Transculturalism. Mediating Encounters in Cosmopolitan Contexts* ed. Heinz Antor et al. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter GmbH, 2010), 102.

²⁸ Its narrative structure has been often compared to other recent films portraying globalization through intertwined fragmented stories such as *Babel* (Alejandro González Iñárritu, 2006), *Crash* (Paul Haggis, 2004), *Magnolia* (Paul Anderson, 1999).

disapproving about his widower father's choice, he gradually grows fond of Yeter when realizing that she sends the earnings from her occupation to Turkey for her daughter's university studies. Yeter's sudden death (caused accidentally by Ali) distances father and son. Nejat travels to Istanbul to search for Yeter's daughter Ayten and support her education. Political activist Ayten has fled the Turkish police and is already in Germany. Ayten is befriended by a young woman – Lotte, who invites Ayten to stay in her home. Lotte's mother Susanne is not pleased by this friendship. It happens that rebellious Ayten is arrested and when her claim for political asylum is denied, she is deported and imprisoned in Turkey. Lotte travels to Istanbul, where she gets caught up in the hopeless situation of freeing Ayten and is accidentally shot. Susanne finds a catharsis in following the route of her lost child. The lost connections between mothers and daughters are reinvented when Susanne accomplishes Lotte's dream and helps Ayten to get released from prison. Nejat also rediscovers the need to be close to his father.



Figures 2-7: Film stills, "The Edge of Heaven",
http://www.auf-der-anderen-seite.de/THE_EDGE_OF_HEAVEN_presskit.pdf
(accessed 19.07.2012).

4.1 Transcultural identities

Transculturality can be mapped in Nejat's character, since he is a second generation immigrant with Turkish heritage, who works as a university professor in German Studies and Literature at Hamburg University. In his quest for Ayten in Istanbul, he encounters the owner of a German bookshop, who feels homesick, wants to sell his business and return to his native Germany. Thus, Nejat replaces him as the owner of the German bookstore.

It can be noted that in his “return” to his *imaginary homeland*²⁹ Nejat’s identity inverts. Transforming from a representative of his native (Turkish) culture within the other culture (in Hamburg), now (in Istanbul) he exploits the freedom to perform the other (German) culture within his native one – a plot line corresponding to Mikhail Epstein’s formulation of transculturality. Questioning the traditional notions of European cinema, the editors of *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context* (2008) recognize that “film directors such as Akin subvert traditional binaries such as European vs. non-European in a multitude of ways. As ‘others within,’ these directors present their audiences (both in Europe and elsewhere) with an experience of inversion in identificatory processes.”³⁰ It is exactly this inversion in the process of identification (the condition of being different from others and also from your own self, if following Epstein), that is projected in Nejat’s transcultural character, which depicts the shifts between a number of cultural identities that one can perform.

Furthermore, I would suggest that Nejat acts as Akin’s alter ego and gives expression to the director’s transcultural identity. The paradox that Nejat embodies – a scholar of Turkish ethnic origin teaching Goethe and German culture – can be directly projected onto reality regarding Fatih Akin himself. Akin, as one of the new faces of German cinema, has been often questioned on his German belonging.³¹ As a son of Turkish immigrants (however born, raised and educated in Germany), he perceives himself as a German filmmaker, although his artistic expression has been marked by the recurring themes of the return to the homeland, the search for identity, the dynamics between European and non-European sentiments. Similarly to other filmmakers emerging from immigrant or diaspora communities and bearing the label of hyphenated identities³², Akin displays a complex sense of “Europeanness” on the shifting boundaries between cultures, languages, perceptions of space, home and belonging.

Therefore, I consider Akin’s complex identity to be reflected in Nejat’s character and his “travel to the self” (symbolised by the narrative shift between Hamburg and Istanbul) illustrates a model of transculturality that goes beyond any binary opposition of “native” and “other” culture, which is still tangible in Ep-

²⁹ Referring to Salman Rushdie’s concept.

³⁰ Miyase Christensen and Nezih Erdoğan, “The Many Faces of Film and Media in Europe,” in *Shifting Landscapes: Film and Media in European Context*, ed. Miyase Christensen and Nezih Erdoğan (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), 3.

³¹ Especially, after Akin received the Golden Bear for Best Picture with *Head On* (2004), it has become controversial that the first in decades German-produced film winning at the Berlinale, is a product of a second generation immigrant.

³² See also Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). Naficy researches the filmmaking of postcolonial, Third World, and other displaced individuals living in the West and how their personal experiences of exile or diaspora translate into cinema.

stein's understanding. Akin rather articulates a transcultural identity, which refers to Bhabha's conceptualization of negotiated difference – “where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between*”³³ – a new entity, which is constantly shaping in between cultural contexts.

On another layer, the plot of the film tells another transculturally encoded story – the one of the German university student Lotte and the Turkish asylum seeker Ayten. To a certain degree they represent the dichotomy between the metaphors of the *tourist* (Lotte) and the *vagabond* (Ayten) with which Zygmunt Bauman conceptualizes freedom of choice and movement in the postmodern condition.³⁴ At the same time, their narrative evokes Turkey's accession to the EU and in a Foucauldian manner displays the biopolitical order which frames Lotte's and Ayten's experiences. Still, the gradual falling in love of the two girls renders the emotional texture of a relationship, which crosses nation-state borders, physical distances, gender and cultural categorizations. This new theme of “queering” in Akin's work could be read as a symbolic crossing of boundaries that signifies a process of constructing a transcultural subjective (*lived*) space.

A recent critical account of Welsch's definition of transculturality points out that among the abstractions used by him the ones missing are the terms “sex’, ‘love’, ‘friendship’, ‘function’ and ‘ideology’ which are in fact subversive forces of integration because they ignore cultural borderlines.”³⁵ It is difficult to gauge whether the experiential dimensions of these notions guarantee transcultural transformation of one's identity *per se*, however the transcultural potential of the *spaces* that they constitute can be easily recognized.

Contrary to Lotte and Ayten, the other couple in the film (the first generation immigrants Ali and Jessie/Yeter) are rather representatives of an “utterly failing multiculturalism.”³⁶ A clear distinction between the separate spheres of their native (Turkish) culture and the host (German) culture can be clearly identified in terms of Welsch's perception of multiculturalism as the reinforcement of differences between homogeneous cultural spheres. The native cultures of Ali and Yeter seem to dominate any state of cross-cultural existence within their *lived* spaces. For instance, Ali and Yeter listen to Turkish music, read Turkish books, do speak the German language, but rather as a performative form of *mimicry* and *resistance*³⁷ towards the German culture. The German cultural codes are most obviously identifi-

³³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 219.

³⁴ See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Seeber, „Transculturality and Comedy in Zadie Smith's Serio-comic Novel *White Teeth*,” 103.

³⁶ Referring to the highly contested statement of Chancellor Angela Merkel.

³⁷ Drawing upon Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Homi Bhabha develops the idea of mimicry as a form of resistance in *The Location of Culture*, 1994.

able in their *perceived* and *conceived* spaces where social and political relations are carried out.³⁸

One of the initial episodes of the film (among others) further exemplifies the discussed relation. For instance, the conversation between Ali and Yeter starts in a formal German, when Ali wanders the red light district of Bremen. Sarcastically, Jessie offers her services in French, Italian, German and promises to “do it internationally” for the approaching Ali.³⁹ However, the code quickly switches to Turkish, when Ali recognizes the Turkish song that Jessie had played in order to set the atmosphere. In response to Ali’s self-reflexive cultural discomfort, she reveals her ethnos and “true” name – Yeter.

Akin’s linguistic and cultural sensitivity can be marked throughout the film. The use of multilingualism is conceptually inseparable from the narrative turns and the aesthetic integrity of *The Edge of Heaven*, since the linguistic shifts in the movie are an organic part of the plot and the characters that it constructs. Thus, I would suggest that to a great extent the representation of multilingualism in Akin’s work (in addition to other European cinematic traditions) corresponds to the representation of transcultural identities and reflects European cultural hybridity.

From a broader perspective, it can be observed that the film draws a clear distinction between the “level” of transculturation of the first and the second generation immigrants (such as Nejat and Akin himself). It also suggests that transculturation most probably starts in the subjective *lived* space.⁴⁰

4.2 Transculturality as the sampling of cultures

Akin’s stereoscopic perspective towards cultures does not only define the identity inversions of his characters, but also maps aesthetically his overall work. Akin perceives his aesthetics as one that resembles DJing:

I am a cinema DJ. I can mix Fassbinder with Fellini. Cinema reminds of sampling. Costa-Gavras’ movie *Missing* influenced me. I tried to shoot the runaway scene like Polanski would do it. I try to watch a movie a day. I watched a lot of silent movies before this. I really tried

³⁸ The shifting boundaries and simulacral relationship between the elements of the triadic *social space* have already been established in the beginning of the essay, thus a fixed matching between spaces, power relations and cultural flows is unnecessary.

³⁹ On Akin’s linguistic use see also David Gramling, “On the Other Side of Monolingualism: Fatih Akin’s Linguistic Turns,” in *The German Quarterly* 83, n.3 (2010). <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1756-1183.2010.00088.x/pdf> (accessed 2 May 2011)

⁴⁰ This context brings about questions that go beyond the scope of this essay, such as studying the difference between *transculturality* as a philosophical concept and *transculturalism* as its practical implementation in social policy.

to tell the story in the form of a silent movie, without language. This is DJing.⁴¹

This quote grasps well the postmodern creative gestures of Akin, involving appropriation, quotation and recycling of cultural repertoires. For instance, Hanna Schygulla, performing as Susanne (Lotte's mother), is one of the stars of the New German Cinema and a long-term inspiration for Rainer Werner Fassbinder, whose work Akin admires. Thus, in her role in *The Edge of Heaven* Schygulla emerges already as a *myth*, which Akin can employ conceptually into the plot of his film. Or, as Zygmunt Bauman has put it, if "[...] the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of postmodernity is recycling."⁴²

According to Bhabha such a process should be understood as an act of cultural translation, both as representation and as reproduction:

[...] translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense – imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the 'original' is never finished or complete in itself.⁴³

In this intertextual interplay, I suggest that transculturality can be also understood as the dynamic cross-cultural exchange of signs into a simulacral relationship, whose reference point has been lost in translation. For instance, the discipline of film studies has explored the phenomenon of the "road movie," which demonstrates the mentioned correlation. Well-known as a typical American genre, it has been adopted by European directors such as Wim Wenders (working at that time in-between America and Europe) in his road films from 1975. Thus, he has recontextualized the genre, subverted its codes and encoded it with new meanings. The American indie filmmaker Jim Jarmusch has openly claimed the significant influence of Wender's travel narratives on his own artistic expression. Thus, Jarmusch has also recycled the signs and renegotiated the meanings, providing the material for the next stage of recontextualization. Attempts for tracing back the origin of this transculturation seem impossible – one can perceive the earliest reference (Lumiere brothers' *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat, 1895*) as a road film itself⁴⁴; or search the origin of the trope of the journey in literature and mythological narratives.

⁴¹ Interview discussing the making of *The Edge of Heaven* by Karin Luisa Badt, "Fatih Akin 'The Other Side of Heaven,'" *Paris Voice*, 2010, <http://www.parisvoice.com/movies/427-fatih-akin-qthe-other-side-of-heavenq> (accessed 7 May 2011).

⁴² Zygmunt Bauman, „From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity," 18.

⁴³ Bhabha, „The Third Space," 210.

⁴⁴ See further Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *Crossing New Europe: Postmodern Travel and the European Road Movie* (London: Wallflower, 2006).

The recurring theme of the journey has been studied in different cultural contexts.⁴⁵ As Vladimir Propp's extensively applied structural analysis of Russian folk tales already suggests, the hero – the protagonist – can prove as such between the functions of *departure* and *return*⁴⁶. Thus, the trope of travel (also as a metaphor for living) is archetypal in our collective imagination. It has emerged as a transcultural leitmotif – a subject of constant recontextualization between cultures and creative expressions. The road can be also read as an archetypal model of transculturation, since it symbolizes the *third space* of cultural encounters, interactions and potential cultural transformations, where identities are negotiated and performed. Fatih Akin has also utilized the transcultural meaning of the trope of travel within the narrative shifts of *The Edge of Heaven*, involving multiple journeys between Germany (Hamburg, Bremen) and Istanbul.

In summary, this part of the essay tried to conceptualize transculturality as a creative gesture of cross-cultural enunciation. It suggests that cultural repertoires, such as the trope of the journey, exist in constant intertextual and intercontextual translation between cultures and artistic practices.

4.3 “Another Europe” – space for transcultural existence

In the context of the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*, the author was asked why he had chosen to remain in Britain despite his criticism of racism and class control that he recognized in the British society. Rushdie replied that it was because he felt connected to “another Britain” – the Britain of Blake, Shelley, Orwell, C.L.R. James, Ken Loach, the Beatles, the Clash, etc.⁴⁷

Correspondingly, the sociologist Chris Rojek offers an extension of Rushdie's concept into “another America” or “another Australia.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, Rojek connects the idea of “another” culture to the conception of *social imaginary*⁴⁹. While being critical towards the utopian dimensions of this theory, which undermines political structures and economic power, Rojek still recognizes that the “the arts, in which the cultural imaginary perhaps achieves its most profound expression, constitute a cultural universal with the capacity to dissolve the many divisions and frictions of religion, race, ethnicity and politics.”⁵⁰ This view directs us once again

⁴⁵ For instance, by Mircea Eliade's book *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

⁴⁶ Propp defines 31 narrative functions in the *Morphology of the Folktale* (2nd ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968) among which leaving home is central for the progression of the plot.

⁴⁷ Chris Rojek recalls the famous controversy surrounding the author being a target of 1989 fatwa (calling for Rushdie to be murdered). A worldwide Muslim protest rose against Rushdie and his novel, since it carries religious elements which were interpreted as offensive towards Islam.

⁴⁸ Chris Rojek, *Cultural Studies* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2007), 26.

⁴⁹ Rojek formulates his critique referring to Charles Taylor's understanding of *social imaginary*.

⁵⁰ Rojek, *Cultural Studies*, 158-9.

towards the definition of the *lived* space - “inhabited and used by cultural producers, where innovation and imagination can provide the terrain for changing power relations within the other two spaces.”⁵¹

In this sense we can outline the dimension of an ideal space of cultural interaction and transformation – “another Europe,” which seems most tangible in the *lived* space of artistic expression, where cultural codes, themes and repertoires transcend beyond cultural boundaries and constitute collective imaginary. The coordinates of “another Europe” can be mapped throughout the oeuvre of Fatih Akin, especially in *Crossing the Bridge – The Sound of Istanbul* (2005). This documentary investigates the fusion of Eastern and Western music influences in the Turkish capital’s music scene. It can be observed that Istanbul, at the interstice between Europe and the Orient, has emerged as a real and a virtual centre on the map of transculturality. Furthermore, *Crossing the Bridge* with its transcendence of cultural boundaries and literal crossing of geopolitical borders already carries the presentiment for the theme of transculturality, which *The Edge of Heaven* develops further.

The Edge of Heaven evokes the fusion between West and East and between Christendom and Islam through employing the interreligious narrative of Abraham’s sacrifice of his son. The final scene in the film takes place in Turkey during Kurban Bayram, which celebrates Abraham’s devotion to God. In a conversation about the holiday between Nejat and Susanne, the subversive moment for Nejat’s relationship with his father arrives; as well as the anticipated revelation that both religions share the same plot. Thus, I believe that in Akin’s intertextual play the story of Abraham is stylized into a transcultural repertoire and a symbol of the parent-child relationship which the movie recounts.

The film furthermore constructs a space of transcultural coexistence. “The bookshop in my film is the neutral no-man’s zone between Germany and Turkey: the opening to a new world,” Akin shares in an interview on the making of *The Edge of Heaven*.⁵² The *thirdspace*⁵³ of the bookshop fuses cultural codes from different contexts, such as German literature, other literary traditions (signified by hanging photographic images of Oscar Wilde and Mario Vargas Llosa on the walls)⁵⁴ and audible motives from Bach’s compositions. Thus, it represents a space of transculturation, reminiscent of Akin’s previously discussed *lived* space of cultural creation (but also extended into the *conceived* and *perceived* spaces), where the recontextualization and the resemantization of cultural codes takes place.

Going back to Stuart Hall’s analysis it should be noted that,

one way of thinking about ‘culture’, then, is in terms of these shared conceptual maps, shared language systems and the codes which gov-

⁵¹ See also note 7.

⁵² See also note 41.

⁵³ Including the real and the symbolic dimensions of place referring to Soja’s understanding.

⁵⁴As Philip French observes in his article “The Edge of Heaven,” *The Guardian*, 24 February 2008. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2008/feb/24/drama.worldcinema> (accessed 5 May 2011).

ern the relationships of translation between them. Codes fix the relationships between concepts and signs.⁵⁵

Simultaneously, Hall reminds us that codes function as conventions, which are constantly negotiated in different contexts. This remark seems essential for understanding transculturation as a process of transformation – a flux of cultures, which constitutes a new space *besides, in-between*.

Then, it can be concluded that the bookshop in *The Edge of Heaven* represents the conception of “another Europe” and it also serves as the social space of enunciation where differences and identities are negotiated. It is the synecdochic version of an ideal Europe which encompasses Soja’s *thirdspace* (between real and symbolic dimensions) and Bhabha’s *third space* (the contact zone between cultures).

5 Conclusions – trajectory and future directions

This section will track back the trajectory of the essay, draw conclusions and outline directions for further research. The initial part of the paper discussed the interrelation between the concepts of space, cultural identity and representation within the dynamics of globalization. Furthermore, the text centred on the production of cultural identities within discursive practices and pointed out the dialectic relationship between representation and identity and how they mutually (re)produce each other. Following this train of thought, the concept of mapping was used as a metaphor that suggests the simulacral relationship between object and its representation. Overall, the chapter implied that the notion of space should be comprehended in terms of material and immaterial entity, whose symbolic dimensions are generated within representation.

The second chapter explored the theoretical incarnations of the concept of transculturality and its interrelation with the notion of in-betweenness. Thus, the conceptualizations of Homi Bhabha, Mikhail Epstein and Wolfgang Welsch were sketched out. The followed discussion did not intend to juxtapose and assess the notions of inter-, multi- and transculturality, but rather to reveal the different “plots” of reading the terms. Therefore, transculturality can be understood as one’s freedom of being different from others, but also from one’s own self. Another aspect of the term involves processes of simultaneous cultural unification and differentiation, similar to the process of glocalization. In general, this section of the essay aimed at showing that transculturality takes place in the interstice between cultural spheres, in between discursive fields, in the contact zone between negotiated differences – the *third space*.

The last part of the text employed the discussed theoretical frameworks in addressing the case of *The Edge of Heaven*. In order to answer its research problem,

⁵⁵ Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 21.

the essay tried to map the different transcultural dimensions of the film. First, the representation of transcultural identities and narrative turns implying transculturalization were brought to light. Thus, the suggestion that transculturality could be most evident in the subjective *lived space* was marked out. The chapter continued into exploring transculturality as a creative gesture – an artistic practice of sampling other cultures, cultural codes, symbols and repertoires and the constant negotiation of their meanings. It also intended to outline that artistic expressions and artefacts, such as the discussed film by Fatih Akin, construct transcultural spaces. The central contribution of the sub-chapter to the discourse on transculturality was reinventing the concept in terms of cultural translation and constant intertextual transformations. On a second layer, pointing to the “origins” behind the examined theoretical approaches aimed at implying that the modality of sampling cultural repertoires is not intrinsic to the culture of making art, but also defines the culture of making social sciences.

Furthermore, the transcultural potential of recontextualizing flows of cultural signs was projected into the final part of the essay, which presented the concept of “another Europe” as an ideal model of transcultural coexistence.

The discussion of the research problem is a prerequisite for extensive research in a range of directions. At this stage a logical guiding route seems to be the study of the interrelations between transculturality and the *social imaginary*.⁵⁶ From a similar angle, the interstice between the concepts of transculturality, cultural syncretism and cosmopolitanism could mark another direction of interest. In this sense this essay can be understood as a conceptual map of a future in-depth research project, which will continue the journey into European culture, space and identity.

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⁵⁶ Especially in its dimensions of global cultural flows – *ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, idioscapes* as coined by Arjun Appadurai.

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