

"Studio of Realism": On the Need for Art in Exhibitions on Migration History

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Abstract: This essay takes "Projekt Migration" as point of departure and as a model—an exhibition on the history of labor migration to Germany and on European border politics, which contained both everyday life objects and art works. It concentrates on the materiality of the objects on display and challenges contemporary history scholars' and public historians' approaches, which rely primarily on artifacts, such as documents and objects of daily use, when they represent migration processes and immigrants' lives. The stories associated with these objects often allude to immigrants' everyday practices during their first years abroad. Transforming them into "eternal migrants," exhibits thus tend to create fictionalizations of immigrants, which are then read as realistic and neutral representations. Artists, unlike museum curators, sign their work and thus assume responsibility for the narratives and allusions, which evoke emotions in the viewers. They insert a critical distance between the viewers and the objects, and thus make the "cultural spaces" (LIPPARD, 2003) between object, author, and viewer perceptible. The generalized "othering" of the immigrants and the voyeuristic stance of the viewers towards these others' migratory fates can thus be avoided. Works of art in exhibitions on migration history enable and force the visitors, with or without migration backgrounds, to take position themselves as well. This article therefore argues for the need of artists' interventions in exhibitions on migration history.

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1. Questioning the Visual Representation of Immigration History

While I am watching scenes of a film on return migration to Turkey, I hear a group of visitors entering the exhibition room. From the corner of my eye I see three women, a girl, and a man engaged in a lively conversation. They search for an object on display in the exhibition. The oldest of the three women finds it in the showcase displaying a number of small items in the middle of the room. Looking at the artifact, she bursts into tears and, trying to comfort her, the younger women and the girl at her side start to cry as well. More than the film, this now draws my attention. The object which they see on display behind the glass is a wage packet, I understand, when the younger woman turns towards me after a

while: This pay envelope belonged to her mother's late husband, to their father. I recall her as a participant in a symposium which was part of the events accompanying the exhibit; she has been involved in setting up this exhibition on the history of labor migration to Germany. She is now obviously touring the show with her mother, her sister, her niece, and her partner. They talk and hug each other. Then the mother turns to me with an apologetic gesture. I assume that the object reminded her of the recent loss of her husband and express my sympathy. She says, that he died a while ago, and continues explaining, that the wage packet reminded her how hard pressed for money they had often been. [1]

This incident in an exhibit entitled "Projekt Migration" was one of the moments, which made me re-think exhibition displays documenting contemporary history and in particular on immigration and migration history. "Projekt Migration" took place in the fall and winter of 2005/06. The show focused on Germany as an immigration country and on European border politics. For the German migration historians and activists in public history who have long worked towards the foundation of a migration museum in Germany (MOTTE & OHLIGER 2004a), this exhibition was envisioned as a crucial step in this direction. In spite of my appreciation for their initiative and their efforts in collecting materials and information and building up invaluable archives of the history of labor migration to Germany, I felt irresolute about supporting their cause. I hesitated to endorse their project even though my background in migration studies, my work in and on exhibitions, and my interest in things visual might have made me a natural advocate. [2]

Coincidentally, an Anselm KIEFER show in Montréal¹ gave me the chance to reflect on my ambivalences and to explore "Projekt Migration" with a special focus on the objects on display. Invited to contribute to a symposium in the *Musée d'art contemporain*,² my recollection of Anselm KIEFER's paintings and sculptures, huge and heavy, dredged up various objects I had seen a month before in "Project Migration" such as the pay envelope—lightweights in comparison. My mental leap from Anselm KIEFER's imposing monumentality to the rather modest objects on display in this and previous exhibits on migration seemed to provide an answer. Thinking of works such as "Iron Path" (1986), "Census" (1991), and "Journey to the End of the Night" (1990),³ I did not consider their common reference to deportations and migratory movements, to archives and contemporary German history. It was the material quality of the objects that had drawn my attention. Rather than trying to find a political, moral, or sociological argument to dismiss the idea of a museum of migration or to endorse it, I saw myself challenged to find out if I could do so as a scholar of visual culture and material culture. In this essay, I thus raise questions of representation, analyzing

1 "Anselm KIEFER: Ciel et Terre," Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, February 11 to April 30, 2006.

2 "Arts de mémoire. Matériaux, médias, mythologie," International Max und Iris Stern Symposium, organized by the *Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes* in collaboration with the *Centre de recherche sur l'intermédialité* and directed by Philippe DESPOIX and Christine BERNIER on the occasion of the exhibition "Anselm Kiefer: Ciel et Terre" at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, March 22-24, 2006.

3 Original titles: "Eisen-Steig" (1986), "Volkszählung" (1991) or "Voyage au bout de la nuit" (1990).

the artifacts on display in exhibitions on migration history as documents and as monuments of immigration history. I will furthermore discuss the potential of art in the context of exhibitions on contemporary immigration politics and migration history. [3]

2. The Musealization of Labor Migration

"Projekt Migration"⁴ took place from October 1, 2005, to January 15, 2006, in several locations in Cologne, Germany, including "Die Brücke"—the building of the *Kölnische Kunstverein* [Art Society of Cologne]—and two other spacious venues within walking distance, which had been turned into exhibition sites for the duration of the show. This show was the final event in a five-million-euro project that involved preliminary research and more than 100 public events. The *Bundeskulturstiftung* [German Federal Cultural Foundation] had sponsored the entire project as one of its first initiatives. Kathrin RHOMBERG, curator and director of the *Kölnische Kunstverein*, and Marion VON OSTEN, artist, curator, and professor at the Institute for Theory of Design and Art in Zurich, were the art directors responsible for the show. It was set up in cooperation with Regina RÖMHILD and other scholars from the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and European Ethnography in Frankfurt am Main, and the DOMiT⁵ team, led by Aytac ERYLMAZ and Martin RAPP, members of an association the full name of which is Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany. "Projekt Migration" presented visualizations of the results of scholarly research, artworks and pieces from the DOMiT collection⁶. DOMiT had already set up a travelling exhibition, "40 Years of Strange Homeland," which had started in 2001 in Cologne, and "Strange Homeland. A History of Immigration from Turkey," a show that took place in Essen in 1998: At the same time as "Projekt Migration," the German Historical Museum in Berlin presented "Immigration Country Germany: Migrations 1500-2005."⁷ Due to its transdisciplinary approach to migration, however, "Projekt Migration" was different; it became a benchmark exhibition. [4]

In order to pursue my question, I will concentrate on objects from the DOMiT collection presented in "Projekt Migration" rather than providing a comprehensive review of this show. Through "Projekt Migration," I will take a critical look at the

4 <http://www.projektmigration.de/english/> [Accessed: February 6, 2010].

5 DOMiT = Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration in Deutschland e.V. [Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration in Germany e.V.]. Its former title was Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration aus der Türkei e.V. [Documentation Centre and Museum of Migration from Turkey e.V.]. Meanwhile the acronym used by the association has changed title and DOMID is used, see: <http://www.domid.org/index-en.html>.

6 Kölnischer Kunstverein; DOMiT; Institut für Kulturanthropologie und Europäische Ethnologie, Universität Frankfurt/Main & Institut für Theorie der Gestaltung und Kunst, HGK Zürich (2005)

7 The original titles of these exhibitions were "40 Jahre Fremde Heimat – Einwanderung aus der Türkei in Köln" and "40 Yil Almanya – Yaban, Silan olur, So fing es an ..., Fremde Heimat. Eine Geschichte der Einwanderung aus der Türkei. Yaban, Silan olur. Türkiye 'den Almanya' ya Göçün Tarihi," and "Zuwanderungsland Deutschland. Migrationen 1500-2005." See <http://www.projektmigration.de/english/>, http://www.domit.de/seiten/ausstellungen/40_jahre_fremde_heimat/40_jahre_fremde_heimat-en.html, http://www.domit.de/seiten/ausstellungen/fremde_heimat_essen/fremde_heimat_essen-de.html [Accessed: February 6, 2010].

projected museum of migration. Does the material quality of objects brought together as part of a future museum collection ease or impede processes of musealization? Could it be possible that the quality of an object with some kind of significant relation to labor migration plays a role in the transfer of this object into the public culture of commemoration? Is there something to my first impression that, in contrast to Anselm KIEFER's works, which call for a museum of contemporary art or a national gallery, these artifacts documenting labor migration to Germany carry some kind of antibodies against processes of musealization or public representation? [5]

Aytac ERYILMAZ, managing director of DOMiT, gave me a copy of an article which appeared in *K.WEST*, a regional cultural magazine, when I visited the association's office and archives in February 2006. It was entitled "In Front of the Reichstag, if Necessary"⁸. Packing for their move to a still unknown but hopefully affordable place had already begun, as funding from the national culture foundation was to run out at the end of that month. "We should perhaps unload the whole collection in front of the Reichstag and hold a press conference there," said ERYILMAZ in the article (KLAHN 2005, p.8). At that time, the City of Cologne had not yet made its decision to finance the DOMiT depot until the end of 2006, and the North Rhine Westphalian government had not yet considered further support.⁹ Amazingly, in his passionate statement, ERYILMAZ does not suggest unloading the collection in front of an administration building of the association's counterparts in Cologne or Düsseldorf. By selecting the Reichstag as an appropriate stage, he positions DOMiT's concern on a national level and adopts the monumentality of the Reichstag for the DOMiT case. DOMiT, indeed, fights not only for a museum, with its archival tasks and educational obligations, but also for a monument to labor migration to Germany. As ERYILMAZ perceives it, immigrants are seen as welfare cases, are associated with murder in the name of honor and—in particular if they are Turks—are seen as people refusing to integrate. The immigrants' cultural achievements, however, remain unacknowledged. It is this situation that, in his opinion, calls for a museum of migration (KLAHN 2005, p.7). [6]

Similarly, the contributors to two conferences in support of a museum of migration, among them the historians Jan MOTTE and Rainer OHLIGER, editors of the book on "History and Memory in the Immigrant Society" (2004b), made claims for a museum. The museum should not only continue to collect documents, fulfill its archival functions, and serve as a showcase representing the history of labor migration to Germany; it should also serve as a place for identification and function as a memorial for immigrants to Germany (MOTTE & OHLIGER, 2006; OHLIGER, 2002). [7]

A handful of association members who had borne resentment to the museum plans were easily outvoted.¹⁰ The supporters of the museum of migration refer to Swiss, French, and other European countries' initiatives for museums of

8 Original title in German: "Zur Not auch vor den Reichstag."

9 This decision was made after the exhibition was closed (conversation with Aytac ERYILMAZ, February 10, 2005).

migration and, in comparison, deplore the absence of a social movement of the immigrant population of Germany, which might make claims for a public representation of their history (see OHLIGER, 2002). They list the migration museums abroad, previous exhibitions on migration in Germany, and the rare endeavors to erect public monuments honoring migrant workers in Germany in order to emphasize a trend. They call for securing the material and recording the stories of the first generation of migrant workers before it is too late. They advance the moral argument that the foundation of a museum is simply society's responsibility after the arson attacks against immigrants and asylum seekers in Solingen, Mölln, and Rostock. Immigrants' desire for public recognition of their contribution to Germany's economy is prominently mentioned (ERYILMAZ, 2003). A German museum of migration is put on the political agenda as an overdue update of national historiography. The museum of migration is discussed as an effort to correct German postwar history by adding a forgotten chapter and simultaneously compensating Germany's migrant population for lack of public acknowledgment and social recognition. Remarkably, the political objectives were discussed and the issue of lobbying was broached; the collection itself, however, or, more precisely, the objects to be displayed in the desired museum, seemed to remain completely outside the discussion. Here, I do not want to go further into the discussion of political representation, but rather, I wish to shed light on the aesthetics of immigrants' representation in Germany. I will begin with an overview of the DOMiT collection, which was started in order to kick off the political struggle for a museum. Secondly, I will draw your attention to selected objects presented in "Projekt Migration" in order to discuss the stories materialized in these exhibits and relate them to the objectives of the museum initiative. When the association was founded in 1990,¹¹ the collection concentrated on immigration from Turkey. Since 2002, DOMiT has extended its collection to represent labor migration from other countries to West Germany and the migration of contract workers to the GDR. DOMiT's collection of publications alone consists of 12,000 volumes in total. DOMiT has the most comprehensive collection of grey literature on migration. It collects items from organizations and companies, such as language books and manuals on how to deal with foreign workers. The collection contains 4,500 professionally produced photographs. DOMiT's audiovisual archives encompass news reports, commercials, didactic films, documentaries, and fictional films which are either topically related to migration or produced by filmmakers with migration backgrounds, as well as audio documents, including music on discs, cassettes, and tapes, public speeches, and interviews with the donors to the collection. Moreover, migrant workers and their families have entrusted DOMiT with personal documents such as family photographs, letters, and official documents, from passports to statements of eviction; they have donated items of personal use such as suitcases and musical instruments which they carried to Germany, as well as wall carpets, cooking pots, and other objects they used daily in Germany, not to forget their first purchases in German marks, such as a portable radio (the *Grundig Concertboy*), as well as bulky items such as couches, beds, tables, and even a van, a Ford Transit. Thus, the collection is

10 Interview with Aytac ERYILMAZ, February 10, 2006.

11 It was founded as "Dokumentationszentrum und Museum über die Migration aus der Türkei e.V." [Documentation Center and Museum about the Migration from Turkey].

—at least in part—based on the initiative of immigrants themselves. This engagement endows the collection and the claims for a museum of migration with the authority to represent the immigrants both aesthetically and politically. [8]

Before DOMiT engaged in "Projekt Migration," the association had organized exhibitions in Essen and Cologne. These exhibitions, in the Ruhrlandmuseum in 1998 and in the Historical Town Hall in Cologne in 2001, set up in the fashion of history museum displays,¹² centered on physical objects from the collection, while "Projekt Migration," in addition to these kinds of displays, consisted of art installations and made use of media such as films, slides and videos.¹³ [9]

The objects from the DOMiT collection which I have selected to serve as examples will therefore, in a manner of speaking, be carved out of "Projekt Migration" so as to discuss them as potential exhibits in a permanent exhibition in a museum based on the contemporary history and history-of-everyday-life approaches favored by DOMiT, and in order to answer the question as to whether modest objects of everyday use can be the cornerstones of a monument to migration. [10]

I had the opportunity of attending the final meeting of the board of "Projekt Migration," in which the team of curators relied widely on audiovisual presentations. The prevailing histories, which I remembered from this preview to the exhibition, were, however, not echoed in the artifacts, which I saw for the first time at the opening of the exhibition. At the board meeting, the curators had been able to draw attention to the construction and perfection of the border regime in Europe, to the connection between German history, the Cold War, and labor migration, to the inner dynamic of Fordism and consumerism, and to continuities in the organization of space from ghettos to gated communities and from work camps to workers' dorms. In the exhibition, however, I noticed not only the objects' capacity to document everyday practices of the past but also their capability to block or cross these master narratives. Instead of detailing the curators' story lines, the tangibility of the objects tended to reduce the complexity.¹⁴ Let me illustrate this contention with three examples. [11]

12 For images of these displays see http://www.domit.de/seiten/ausstellungen/40_jahre_fremde_heimat/40_jahre_fremde_heimaten.html, http://www.domit.de/seiten/ausstellungen/fremde_heimat_essen/fremde_heimat_essen-de.html [Accessed: February, 2010].

13 Deniz GÖKTÜRK (2006) therefore describes a visit to "Projekt Migration" as "reminiscent of a multiplex movie theatre where the audience would be allowed to circulate freely between several simultaneous projection screens."

14 In these conference proceedings, I will describe the objects discussed in my presentation; I used photos of the press releases as well as scans from the guide and the catalog, in addition to some of my own snapshots.

3. Weightless Monuments

There are, to begin with, seventeen pots and pans in the DOMiT collection. Although these cooking pots and frying pans have a place in the German history of accommodating foreign workers or in the intertwined histories of migrant workers' integration into the systems of industrial production and of the familiarization with new forms of consumption. In an exhibition following the contemporary-history approach, pots and pans may tell stories that point in other directions and give rather unwanted signals.



Illustration 1 [12]

There is, for example, a small aluminum pan. We can visualize—and even hear—how a bachelor who has cracked two eggs on the edge of this pan stirs them with a fork or even his knife in a shared kitchen. We can imagine a lentil soup simmering in one of the enamel pots in the collection, which may have been handed down to the wife of a migrant worker by the lady of the house she used to clean once or twice a week. The pots become tokens for Italian, Greek, or Turkish cooking under uncomfortable circumstances, and saving money whenever possible. They represent migrant lifestyles and stand for the people associated with these lifestyles. In other words, as protagonists of the stories circling around these ordinary household objects, their former users become the recipients' center of attention. [13]

Secondly, I want to focus on the great number of light and small documents in the collection. They immediately came to my mind as a contrast to Anselm KIEFER's heavy and large artworks. There were, in fact, many passports, identity cards, and samples of correspondence from and to public authorities such as employment centers and aliens departments, as well as samples of workers' correspondence with companies and landlords. Forms completed in pitiful handwriting and instructions written on typewriters, rehashing their tiny irregularities with every repeated letter, may arouse a smile in the digital-age visitor. Unlike objects he or she may treasure or hunt for in stores of vintage clothing or other more or less useful collectibles, there is neither material nor nostalgic value in these papers. Some of the papers are stained or crunched from having been carried from one office to another; some of them come in the light green or pink tone of official forms. Many of them are specimens of documents

one has to wait in line for or hopes never to find in the mail. The majority of these papers either refers to experiences of disgrace or were themselves requisites in humiliating processes. The visitors' intuition that such papers contain hoped-for or feared messages and the simple zest of handled pieces evoke emotional reactions in visitors with and without migration backgrounds: pity, compassion, painfulness, or embarrassment interfere with the curiosity and thirst for knowledge expected in the visitors. [14]

The enormous size of the exhibition—3,000 m²—made it impossible to read every written document carefully. Moreover, the documents exhibited were often hung a little too high or a little too low for comfortable reading. Unlike a scholar using an archive, the visitor would rather read the label and take a quick look at the document concerned. Thus, the labels carried the reading load and the document itself was perceived as an object whose physical qualities prevailed. Let us take the label attached to a deposit slip and the pay envelope, which had belonged to the late father of a member of the DOMiT team. May I call to mind the incident described in the beginning? When her mother, who had lent these objects to DOMiT, saw these objects on display in the exhibit she had started to cry, remembering the hardship she went through to make ends meet. The label underlines the curator's authority to lend the object authenticity. The label referred to the "Deposit-slips for money transfers" and gave the name of the family who had owned it. It dated it as "1960s and 1970s" and contained the lender's first name and her family name in addition to a reference to the DOMiT-Archives. Its text illustrates the curators' effort to render visible the trace between individual users, donors or lenders, and the archives:

"Most of the migrants supported their families abroad by regular money transfers and they built up a nest egg in case of return migration. Emigrants' transfers in foreign currency and investments were a considerable economic factor for their countries of origin."¹⁵ [15]

When the family had left, I went to the showcase: Next to the label was the small grey paper bag, open on one of its small sides. The imprint on the side visible to the visitor contains the name of a "KG," a *Kommandit Gesellschaft*, a limited partnership, which is not fully readable, since the paper is crunched. But the location of this firm is "*Pfungstadt*," a town south of Darmstadt. In the next line it says that the firm is a "*Bauunternehmen*," a construction company. A table is printed underneath, so that the payroll officers could insert a "*Vorschuß*"—an advance payment—if one was granted, and under "*Abrechnung für*" they would have to write the name of the respective month being accounted for. In this case it was "*Aug. 69*"—August 1969. The worker, whose family name was filled in first, followed by a comma and his first name, had indeed demanded 80 marks of the payment he expected to receive in September in advance, so that the *auszuzahlender Betrag*, the sum to be paid, was "361,02 DM." A line in small print on the bottom reads: "*Reklamationen müssen sofort geltend gemacht werden!*" [Complaints must be filed immediately!] While the print is in black, a blue ballpoint

¹⁵ This is the text of the label positioned in the showcase near the pay envelope in "Projekt Migration," translated by the author. The exhibition labels were written in German.

pen had been used for the entries. In this display case, right next to the pay envelope, there was a deposit slip, also from "*Pfungstadt*," and also with blue handwritten entries, disclosing that 500 marks had been sent to a person in Sicily, whose name was hidden by the pay packet, which covered a part of this small piece of pink paper. A stamp underneath the address shows "9.10.74" as the date of this financial transaction. It was thus completed at the same time of year, just five years later. [16]

For donors to the DOMiT collection, the objects of their first years in Germany may well have become "museal" (ADORNO, 1981 [1955], p.175).¹⁶ This may have allowed the member of the exhibition team to ask her mother for the deposit slip and the pay envelope, and it may have made it easy for her mother to relinquish it. She may have even been relieved to get rid of it without tossing out an object that belonged to her husband, who had passed away. She may have wanted to make the exhibition a fitting "funerary site" (SHERMAN & ROGOFF, 1994a, p.xiii) for these objects. But, all by themselves on display in the exhibit, these two small pieces started to tell their old story of hard work for meager pay, of her husband's long-distance family responsibility and her unfulfilled needs all over again. [17]

The objects—in a strict sense of the word—re-present the migrant workers and their families. The unchanged appearance of these items of everyday use evokes a sense of continuation of a reality of labor migration, which stretches migrant workers' past into the audience's presence. While the migrant workers become the object of the exhibition, the diversity of the real visitors is condensed in and reduced to a categorized German observer with a non-migrant background. Visitors become observers of Others' timeless daily practices. A dichotomy of "Them" and "Us" is put into operation. [18]

Like the visitors to "Projekt Migration," the potential audiences of a museum of migration have, in fact, experienced labor migration to Germany from dissimilar individual perspectives, from different social positions, and from the varying viewpoints of contemporaries of the first generations of immigrants and of later cohorts. Visitors who rather intend to seal the mostly uncomfortable and often humiliating experiences of their past materialized in the objects on display and others who want to use these objects as exhibits in order to give a political signal to accept immigrants' presence as an intrinsic part of Germany's economy, society, history, and cultures are then confronted with a perpetuation of a generalized story of migration. This re-emerging timeless tale of migration does not reflect their points of view. Its alienating effects will, however, not come to an end as long as the terms *Migranten* [migrants] and *Ausländer* [foreigners] are used as synonym categories, applied to the *Gastarbeiter* [guest workers] of the 1960s and 1970s, to their children and grandchildren, and to anybody from their

16 Theodor W. ADORNO's use of the term "museal" implies an abandonment of outdated or uncomfortable images and narratives of a majority (see ADORNO 1981 [1955], p.175). Irit ROGOFF (1996) provides evidence for this case in her critical review of the musealization of National Socialism in German exhibitions of the 1990s, which deliberately relied on "lightweight" objects of everyday life to render the majority of Germans harmless or even portray them as victims in their own right.

countries of origin, as well as to the young men and women from Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe who manage to overcome today's border restrictions, but never to Germans working abroad or to Americans and West Europeans who work in Germany. The institutional authority of a museum is—as I am going to argue—not capable of providing the stories inscribed in the objects with the presumed historical distance. [19]

My third and last example is a light blue Ford Transit. This type of van, produced since 1965, was one of the most expensive purchases of migrant workers in Germany. During the summer, Ford Transit owners would drive this vehicle, loaded with friends or family members and all kind of commodities—TV sets, sewing machines, and, of course, many small items of daily use and presents for family and friends—to their houses abroad. A Ford Transit could also serve as an investment in a transport business at home. To audiences with a migration background, this piece of the DOMiT archives, purchased and repaired in Istanbul,¹⁷ tells stories about exciting family events, roadside picnics and the high spirits of having time off from work and school, as well as about exhausting journeys, traffic accidents, and the pain of parting. Other passers-by, however, may not even notice the van in a row of parked cars. Unlike an equally well-restored car, a Ford Taunus or a Ford Mustang of the same year of production, this used vehicle is just an old van. It does not achieve the recognition of an "old-timer" proper. [20]

Among the many photographs on display in "Projekt Migration," I found only one photograph of a Ford Transit. Browsing the catalogue and the DOMiT publications, I found a second one. A professional photographer, journalist Manfred VOLLMER, took both pictures. Remarkably, none of the numerous family photographs taken by the migrant workers themselves and presented in different places and contexts of the exhibition featured a van. Even a tableau about two meters square¹⁸ presenting a collection of forty-seven original-sized family photographs featuring vehicles contained not a single van.¹⁹ In each of those pictures, the cars are the photo stars, posing with their proud owners. I attribute this selection to the photo amateurs and takers of family snapshots rather than to the exhibiting archivists. According to the rule of visual family narratives (BOURDIEU, 1990, pp.13-72, pp.19-46), the Ford Transit does not count. It is not worth mentioning. In this respect, the heaviest object of the DOMiT collection is only a lightweight. [21]

As objects evoking commiseration or memories of agony, the van, the cooking pots, and the pay envelope are not suitable for a museum inviting processes of identification. They would not support an institution meant to become a memorial

17 This fact was provided in a conversation with Aytac ERYILMAZ on February 10, 2006.

18 This tableau was on display on the second of the two floors (the fourth floor) of the exhibition site at Friesenplatz, one of the venues, at which "Projekt Migration" was on display; this particular venue had been an empty office space, which had been rented by the *Kölnische Kunstverein* for the duration of the show.

19 The same is true for a page in a DOMiT brochure: it shows a collage of forty-five family pictures with cars and not a single van.

of labor migration, at least not in contemporary Germany. These documents of experiences, which are now banned from the lives of those who arrived in Germany as "guest workers," are rather ambivalent building blocks for the desired monument to migration. [22]

If we think of a Mercedes Benz, a set of stainless steel cooking pots by brands such as Fissler or a WMF, or ATM cards and online banking practices that have replaced these items and practices, we may set these objects in a historical perspective and focus on migrants' achievements. Marketing statistics from the 1990s, for example, would suggest a Mercedes Benz as the vehicle of choice to tell the success story of migration: While only 7.6% of the entire population of Germany's car owners drive a Mercedes, this car is driven by 20% of the Turkish car owners in Germany (see CAGLAR, 2005, p.42). Would a museum that aims at emphasizing the success of integration processes and ultimately acknowledging labor migrants' accomplishments not have to consider former labor migrants' achievements? Could that exclude the adoption of consumer values and habits? Would this museum of migration not have to showcase a Mercedes, a set of stainless steel pots, and a personal computer? Should it not show such tokens of personal choice and economic success, at least as long as the process of economic integration of the families who live in Germany as a result of labor migration in the 1960s and 1970s is either not common knowledge or not publicly admitted? As a consequence, any parking lot and any department store may document former guest workers' integration into the German economy as producers, service providers and consumers fifty years after the first workers were hired. Any one of these mundane places could be featured as an exhibition site and serve as a museum of migration. [23]

4. Giving Weight to the Archives of Labor Migration

After having "cropped" these objects from "Projekt Migration" in order to demonstrate the effects their material quality may achieve in apparently neutral presentations, I suggest taking a second look at the pay packet, the pots, and the van, and I invite you to revisit the same objects or to take a look at similar objects displayed in "Projekt Migration." The pots mentioned earlier were, in fact, presented as an assemblage of pots, arranged on a light base. The white light from below accentuated the materiality of the objects and displayed the aesthetic attraction of enamel, sheet metal, and scratched aluminum. These pots were all the pots belonging to the DOMiT collection. They were on display together with all the musical instruments, all the suitcases, all the sport cups, all the typewriters, and all the dolls and teddy bears in the collection. They were also lighted from below. These groups of specimens were set against a number of single pieces exposed on—or better, in—high pedestals. These artifacts were also lighted from within these mountings. The collections of objects of the same kind were exhibited on six low, white parallelepipeds, the tops of which were covered with white glass, illuminated from the inside. Seven higher, differently single-colored pedestals contained the special pieces, invisible from the outside. In irregular order, these bases were placed in a white cube. [24]

One example of the treasures on display consisted of characters from an Ottoman shadow show featuring "Karagöz and Hacivat," which are still popular among Turks. These single pieces were only visible to viewers who bent over to take a closer look into the cases. The viewer would become a listener to the story of the respective object. A murmur of recorded voices hung over this audiovisual installation like an invisible cloud. The third element of this ensemble was a selection of films, audiotapes, books, posters, photographs, newspapers, flyers, and documents issued by municipal administrations, customs offices, and banks. They were presented on shelves inserted into three rectangular, indirectly lit openings in the white wall. Christian Philipp MÜLLER was the author of this work entitled "Unicum, Groups of Specimens, Archives."



Illustration 2



Illustration 3 [25]

His installation featured the pots and pans, and the other objects, as well as the activities of DOMiT. In this context, the objects do not tell stories of poor migrant cooks; they rather talk about collecting and archiving, about ways of seeing, displaying and framing. MÜLLER's contribution to "Projekt Migration," on display

on the ground floor of the *Kölnische Kunstverein*, stages the DOMiT collection and plays with elements of the museal. MÜLLER's institution-critical installation acknowledges the distance between objects and lives: Turks, Greeks, or Italians are not the Other, whose past and presence fall into one. Here, they are not imprisoned in such an "allochronic" (FABIAN, 1983, p.32)²⁰ discourse. Rather than as foreign cooks forever puttering about with scratched pans, this installation presents the former workers who prepared their meals in cheap pots and pans as donors to a public collection and gives them credit as contributors to the history of labor migration. [26]

Let us take a closer look at the Ford Transit parked in front of the building of the *Kölnische Kunstverein* during the exhibition period. There is a tiny addition to the object which I left out in my first description: the van carries a special license plate, which contains nothing but the word "Transit." "Transit" is the name of this particular Ford model. At the same time it alludes to "Transit Migrations," the title of the anthropological research projects whose results were presented in the exhibition. This plate gives the van a name and gets a smile from those who know the Transit stories. This light blue "Transit" thus becomes a fetish of border traffic. Even a minor intervention by a curator makes a difference: it points to a mediator, who transfers an object from the past into a part of a contemporary installation. [27]

Finally, I would like to return to one of the light, small documents: a list of names and signatures. This paper lists the names of workers who signed in to be called on should a wildcat strike at Alfred Pierburg AG, a factory for car parts, be staged. The list of signatures was on display at the entrance to a section in the back of a room on the second floor of one of the makeshift exhibition halls at Rudolph Platz. This part of the room was used as a screening room for "Pierburg: Their Struggle Is Our Struggle" by Edith SCHMIDT and David WITTENBERG (1974/1975). This documentary from the DOMiT collection was projected continuously during the exhibition's opening hours. The poster for this cinematographic treasure was on display as well. The film shows how women migrant workers from the Pierburg company, paid less than their male colleagues doing the same work, fought for a raise. In their illegal strike, they successfully forced the abolition of a gendered wage system. During the 1970s, this film, produced in cooperation with the workers and never shown on television, was screened at many meetings of political activists in the labor force. These images of their uprising against injurious working conditions were and still are capable of arousing identification with the first generation of migrant women in Germany. Only, in connection with this collaborative effort by workers and filmmakers, the handwritten list of names did not evoke pity but admiration as a document of human resources management from below. It is at this point that the exhibition celebrates migrant workers' initiatives. [28]

A still from the film, a close-up of young female workers from Pierburg, is the title picture of the catalogue. This catalogue, designed by Florian LAMBL, was

²⁰ Johannes FABIAN refers to "the denial of coevalness as the allochronism of anthropology" (FABIAN, 1983, p.32).

awarded the German photography book prize of 2006. It is neither a reader with a collection of articles on the topic of the exhibition nor an exhibition guide proper. It plays with the small and light documents, written papers, and photographs. And it weighs more than one can carry. It literally loads the script on its back: "This book casts new light on, and gives new weight to, the significance of migration for society, its history, economy, and culture." In its monumentality, this catalog does commemorate the history of migration to Germany. [29]

5. The Necessity for Art in Exhibitions on Labor Migration

When scholars of contemporary history, academic and other, show objects in order to represent labor migrants' lives and lifestyles in their exhibitions, they avoid being part of the picture they create with their displays. While an artist's name has to appear on the label of an artwork, this is not the case in the displays of historians and archivists who work for a museum or any other public or private collection. Their labels name or describe the object and credit the loaner or donor, or the archives, as in the case of the pay packet. They do not assume the role and responsibility of authors of their installations, of the series of pieces they combine, or of any other ensemble. They let the artifacts tell stories which their former owners may want to forget or to keep to themselves.²¹ Those stories allude to their everyday practices during their first years abroad and thus turn the former users of these objects into objects of interest. The objects then re-present the resident of a workers' dorm stirring his eggs, the housewife and mother preparing a soup, the worker who sends money to those left behind back home, the driver at the wheel of the Ford Transit and his family members. They are brought to life, and thus these labor migrants from the past achieve an uncanny fictional contemporariness as the eternal migrants, unable ever to integrate into society's normalcy. Artists intervening as authors assume responsibility for the narratives, allusions, and the emotions they evoke. They have to use their opportunity to position the objects they show or use in their works in ways which they themselves define according to their individual perspectives. They insert a critical distance between the viewers and the objects, and thus make the "cultural spaces" (LIPPARD, 2003, p.343) between object, artist, and viewer visible. A voyeuristic stance as seemingly neutral viewers of others' migratory fate can thus be avoided. Furthermore, artists' interventions enable and force the visitors to the exhibition to position themselves individually as well. Let me elaborate on my contention with reference to an artwork by Vlassis CANIARIS which addresses this point in "Projekt Migration."

21 The results of my study on return migration to Turkey point in that direction. Returnees would share stories of hardship and humiliation in Germany with friends, colleagues, neighbors, and relatives who had themselves worked in Germany. In the company of others, however, they would keep these stories to themselves (see WOLBERT, 1995, pp.154-156).



Illustration 4 [30]

This ensemble consists of a mass of furniture stacked up inside and outside three thin, plywood walls, about three meters high, forming an open room. Everything has been handled, everything seems dusted. To the right of the room we find cardboard boxes, and on top of them rolled-up carpets, cheap fabric-made oriental rugs, as well as a bathmat; one rolled-up carpet seems to have fallen down from the pile, on top of which sits the carriage of a pram in which is stuck a flat box that may have been the inlay of a kitchen table drawer. There is a trunk on a bucket, a child's chair, and a toy, a red truck that has lost its front wheels and sits with its nose on the floor of the *Kölnische Kunsthalle*, while most of the other items are displayed on wooden pallets. Astonishingly, the bulbs of a standard lamp with three movable shades are turned on. In the makeshift room, we notice suitcases, boards, and rolls of wallpaper, as well as the wheel of a bike leaning against the back wall. The walls of the room themselves are partly painted; in some areas, the original surface of the walls is visible, and most parts of the walls are covered with wallpaper and yellowed newspaper. A picture frame and a drawing of a ship on waves within this frame are painted on the wall. This simple picture of a sailboat, painted directly on the wall—red for the boat, white for the sail, and blue for the contour of the boat and sail, the mast, the surface of the water, and the frame of the entire picture—sits right at the spot where, if this were the interior of a house, a decorative framed painting could be expected. With his disturbing installation, entitled "Interior," Vlassis Caniaris "portrays the life of foreign workers as unidentifiable, as uncognizable. The guest workers seem to be trash in the eyes of their hosts" (KÖLNISCHER KUNSTVEREIN, et al., 2005, p.36). [31]

This excerpt from the short guide to the exhibition is a quotation from the catalogue of another exhibition, the "Studio of Realism" ["Realismusstudio"]. That show, organized by the NGBK—the *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst* [New Association for Visual Arts in Berlin]—took place in 1974. Vlassis CANIARIS had been an artist in residence, sponsored by the *DAAD Künstlerprogramm*, the Artists' Program of the German Academic Exchange Service, at the very time of

the so called *Anwerbestopp* [hiring stop], when the period of hiring workers from abroad came to end and the labor migrants either left for good or had their partners and children join them in Germany. [32]

With my examples of the pots and pans, the pay packet, and the van, I tried to show that there is a necessity for art in an exhibition on migration. With my reference to Vlassis CANIARIS' work, moreover, I want to return to the ambiguities of a museum of migration in particular. Like Vlassis CANIARIS' "Interior," other works of contemporary art shown in "Projekt Migration," such as Adrian PACI's "Turn On" (2004), David BLANDY's "Hollow Bones" (2001), and Anri SALA's "Lak-kat" (2004) have been on display in previous exhibitions elsewhere. CANIARIS' work, however, is not just exhibited again in a new context. Unlike these recent works of video art, CANIARIS' work functions as art and as an artifact. In this new context it remains a work of art and, at the same time, it represents art exhibits of the 1970s, one of the first art shows dealing with post-war labor migration in Germany. In "Projekt Migration," CANIARIS' work "Interior" thus dates the identification of migrants with trash, which is so easily, even unintentionally, re-enacted in an exhibition based on the museum-of-history type of exhibiting. But it dates this dangerous linkage and thus outdates it. In its new context, provided by "Projekt Migration," "Interior" sheds light on the intersecting histories of migration and the representation of migration. Rather than a show on an art fair, in an art gallery, an annual art show or biennial, or any other primarily art-related context, this show centers on a topic and is set up as a multidisciplinary exhibition. It intends to give "new weight to the significance of migration for society, its history, economy, and culture."²² Artworks can, however, only date and outdate, comment on and question a reality as long as they are not musealized themselves, as long as there is an artist who intervenes, not an authority, but an author who speaks through his work. In the case of "Interior" in "Projekt Migration," the curators who presented this installation as a former art intervention played an active role as art directors. They intervened. If there is a necessity for art in an exhibition on migration, there is also a necessity for an active and identifiable curator, him- or herself taking a stance at a certain time. A monumental museum display, expected to last for many years or even decades, is not independent and not flexible enough to fulfill this task.²³ A Migration Museum, which does not restrict itself to temporary exhibits but takes pride in its permanent displays, will overwrite the script of the author or the collective of authors, artists, or curators. The authority of a Museum of Migration, I am afraid, will turn art into museum design or artifact and give its artifacts an overbearing weight. It is, however, necessary to keep in mind that the artwork came out of a "studio of realism." [33]

22 See above, a quote from the back cover of the catalog of "Projekt Migration."

23 It might be the task of another essay to explore the Cité Nationale de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris, comparing its permanent exhibition, which includes both artists' works and artifacts, with the museum's exhibition hall, hosting temporary shows and in particular art exhibitions related to migration processes and immigration experiences.

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Appendix: Illustrations

Illustration 1: This photo, *Pots and pans*, by Christian Philipp MÜLLER shows items of the DOMiT Collection. These items were part of MÜLLER's work *Unicums, groups of specimens, archives* on display in Projekt Migration. The photo appeared in the exhibition guide. In the context of this article, the photograph is supposed to represent objects of everyday use by labor migrants in Germany, which have become part of a collection on Germany's immigration history (DOMiT Collection, Projekt Migration 2005-2006, Exhibition Guide, *Kölnischer Kunstverein*, copyright: Christian Philipp MÜLLER & Kathrin RHOMBERG).

Illustrations 2 and 3: These two photographs show Christian Philipp MÜLLER's work *Unicums, groups of specimens, archives*, shot from two different perspectives by photographer Dietrich HACKENBERG on behalf of DOMiT. The

work was commissioned for Projekt Migration and on display in "Die Brücke," the exhibition hall of the *Kölnische Kunstverein* in Cologne (MÜLLER, *Unicum, groups of specimens, archives*, 2005, in "Projekt Migration," Cologne, October 1, 2005 – January 15, 2006, *Kölnischer Kunstverein*, copyright: Dietrich HACKENBERG).

Illustration 4: This photograph by the author shows Vlassis CANIARIS work *Interior* (1974), for the first time shown in the exhibit *Realismusstudio* [Studio of Realism] at the *Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst* [New Association for Visual Arts] in Berlin in 1974, which was on display in "Die Brücke," the exhibition hall of the *Kölnische Kunstverein* in Cologne as part of Projekt Migration (in Projekt Migration, Cologne, October 1, 2005 – January 15, 2006, *Kölnischer Kunstverein*, copyright: Barbara WOLBERT).

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