

# East by Northeast

or

Performing the (mega)City: Movement of a Body  
Through Transportation Networks

ANTONÍN BRINDA



I.o Příbor, Czech Republic, before departure

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**ABSTRACT**

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<p>This thesis deals mainly with my final artistic research work <i>East by Northeast</i> which was conducted across two continents, took several months and involved dozens of people. The project consists of photos, videos, audios, writings, maps, performances, discussions, presentations, artist talks, and one workshop. The main (impossible?) goal/research question was finding ways how to articulate, <b>how to perform (mega)cities through the movement of the body through their transportation networks</b>. I have worked with and within (mega)cities of <b>Moscow</b> (Russia), <b>Ulaanbaatar</b> (Mongolia) and <b>Beijing</b> (China). In each one of them, I stayed for approximately one month. An important moment of the research was also a presentation of selected materials in the form of an exhibition in the Space For Free Arts (Vapaan Taiteen Tila) in Helsinki during June 2018.</p> <p>There are many differences between the three selected cities but also several important similarities. They are all interconnected by the Trans-Siberian Railway, the largest transportation network of its kind on Earth. They are all capitals, core cities in which the need for both the efficient urban planning and control over the movement of crowds are very high. All share a socialist past and all were strongly influenced by the Soviet urban planning. Finally, all are currently experiencing impacts of a certain kind of free-market economics.</p> <p>Aside from the micro-level movement within cities, the issues of global mobility and tourism are also important for the text. Why, where and how do people travel and what are the factors influencing their mobility? What is my position as a white European male researcher-tourist in the context of global travel and how can I move around the world in a non-exploitative, non-offensive, environmentally justifiable way? Apart from trying to find new ways of how to 'perform (mega)cities', some of these issues appear and disappear throughout the thesis.</p>			
<b>ENTER KEYWORDS HERE</b> performance art, walking art, urban art, artistic research, tourism, traveling, global mobility, public transportation, nomadism, urbanism, cities, megacities, Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, Beijing, Trans-Siberian Railway			

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accommodation in Moscow and the overall support and interest in the project. And to my high school classmate from Příbor, with whom I reunited in Beijing - Petr Slavík - who was my companion and helper in China.

Though impossible, I still at least tried to create this 'index' and presented it at the entrance to the *East by Northeast* exhibition in Helsinki as my expression of gratitude. Photographs from the entrance displaying the respective people's names (as well as the whole exhibition) can be accessed here: <https://myalbum.com/album/rRvGOo2dTl5t>

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **I TRAVEL BEGINS**

*My travel began on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018 in Příbor, Czech Republic and ended after one hundred fourteen days on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2018 in Helsinki, Finland or after one hundred forty-five days on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2018 in Příbor, respectively. Let me explain.*

*I grew up in Příbor, a small town with eight thousand inhabitants in Northern Moravia, Czech Republic. My parents still live there and I am always happy to visit. It is for me a place of safety and familiarity, simply: a home. Maybe it is the knowledge that such a place exists and hopefully will always exist which allows me to be highly mobile. Instead of trying to establish a stable living environment I aim to develop a sustainable strategy for personal mobility. Although it is true that before I was six and started to live in Příbor, our family moved four times from one city/town to another – from Ostrava to Olomouc, from Olomouc to Senička, from Senička to Rýmařov and finally from Rýmařov to Příbor. Could it be that the family environment in Příbor gives me an anchor, a stable space in a chaotic world while these early childhood movings made my soul restless?*

*My journey was definitely over after I came back to Příbor where I have closed the circle, reunited with my family and homeland. But even though few adventures still happened between my arrival to Helsinki and arrival to Příbor, the trip had its specific purpose which was fulfilled by visiting Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and Beijing and coming back to Helsinki. It was also in the capital of Finland where the results of my artistic research were presented in the form of an exhibition.*

*Finland has recently become my second home and it was the Theatre Academy in Helsinki who enabled and supported this project. It originated there a few years ago when I started my studies and in a way, it also ended there with the final presentation of the research. Shortly, my trip to the unknown and the main part of my artistic research was done after my exhibition was over. But for final closure, I needed to come back to Příbor. And there is still the last part of the journey which has yet to be traveled. You and I, dear reader, are about to experience this final section together.*

## East by Northeast

This master thesis is a conclusion of my study years in the MA program of Live Art and Performance Studies, Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts, Helsinki. It deals mainly with my final artistic research work *East by Northeast* which was conducted across two continents, took several months and involved dozens of people. The work consists of photos, videos, audios, writings, maps, performances, discussions, presentations, artist talks, and one workshop.<sup>1</sup> The main (impossible?) goal/research question of this work was finding ways how to articulate, **how to perform (mega)cities through the movement of the body through their transportation networks**. I have worked with and within (mega)cities of Moscow (Russia), Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) and Beijing (China). In each one of them, I stayed and worked for approximately one month. An important moment of the research was also a presentation of selected materials in the form of an exhibition in the Space For Free Arts (Vapaan Taiteen Tila) in Helsinki during June 2018.

In this written thesis, I decided not to discuss the exhibition and rather to focus on the trip itself as the research conducted during the travel was for me more important than the way it was presented. The documentation materials from the exhibition can be accessed through the links displayed in the footnote.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Various pieces of the project documentation are scattered throughout the thesis.

A general overview of the project, its 'atmosphere', can be gained from my analog photo diary: <https://myalbum.com/album/nnoHLDH5Jgg> and project's online diary: <http://antoninbrinda.com/east-by-northeast/>, as well as through its audio diary: <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast>

When other people are being displayed, I have informed them beforehand for what purposes I am gathering the material and that it may be used for the public presentation, for which they consented.

When in the public space, I have generally tried not to be intrusive and to focus my camera rather on streets, vehicles, buildings and other inanimate objects. Nevertheless, as cities were built for people and are filled with them, random passersby and transport users were inevitably entering the frame. From those tens and hundreds of accidental crowd members, I have, unfortunately, not obtained specific permission for publishing, as it would be nearly impossible

2 Walk through the exhibition (video): <https://youtu.be/FAszGITQFJU>

Walk through the exhibition (photo): <https://myalbum.com/album/rRvGOo2dTl5t>

There are many differences between the three selected cities but also several important similarities. They are all interconnected by the Trans-Siberian Railway, the largest transportation network of its kind on Earth. They are all capitals, core cities in which the need for both the efficient urban planning and control over the movement of crowds are very high. All share a socialist past and all were strongly influenced by the Soviet urban planning. All are currently experiencing impacts of a certain kind of free-market economics. Aside to the micro-level movement within cities, the issues of global migration and especially tourism are also important for the project. Why, where and how do people travel and what are the factors influencing their mobility? What is my position as a white European male researcher-tourist in the context of global travel and how can I move around the world in a non-exploitative, non-offensive, environmentally justifiable way? Aside from trying to find new ways of how to ‘perform (mega)cities’, some of these issues will appear and disappear throughout the thesis.

My methodology comes from strategies of Situationists<sup>3</sup>, land art and urban art practitioners, walking artists, and my preceding research. Through the movement of my body within the cities on foot, by bike, in buses, trams, cars, subways, trains and by other means of transportation I was mapping the possibilities of movement of individuals within large urban environments.

Before departing for the travel I have established a basic research plan/methodology inspired by my previous projects, most notably the *London Urban Research* and *Helsinki Urban Research* (I will discuss the two works shortly). This is how I described the strategy in my thesis research plan (as it

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Exhibition opening night (video): [https://youtu.be/DIa\\_6GDqtHY](https://youtu.be/DIa_6GDqtHY)

Exhibition opening night (photo): <https://myalbum.com/album/KomNRdAfCzp>

Exhibition credits: Supervisors: Ray Langenbach, Giacomo Bottà / Consultations and exhibition preparation: Ellen Virman / AV-Support: Jyrki Oksaharju / Sound support: Kaj Wager / Light support: Antti Kainulainen / Stage manager: Lauri Myllylahti / Props: Heli Hyytiä / Producer: Aapo Juusti

<sup>3</sup> I decided not to discuss the French movement of the Situationist International (1957-1972) in this thesis, despite their indisputable historical influence on the fields of urban and walking art. Instead, in the Chapter 5, where I am introducing my own art performances realized within the given urban environments and comparing them to works of other artists, I tried to provide less obvious examples of related art projects.

was written before the execution of the project, the future tense has been used)

When being in the respective cities I intend to use the following methods:

Always approximately five days of the research month will be dedicated to exploring the city from the perspective of a certain transportation mean. First five days in each city I will be only walking, second five days will be dedicated to cycling, after that I allow myself to use buses and trams only and finally the last five days I will be exploring the metro system.

When moving around the city I plan to document my explorations. I already have had various experiences with such documenting. During *Helsinki Urban Research* (2015) I was commenting on my research in a form of an audio diary and for *London Urban Research* (2015) I was taking photos and videos and writing a diary as well. For *East by Northeast* I plan to be switching between the variety of those documentation forms. The material gained might or might not become part of the final performances in the respective cities and most likely will be used as supportive material in the final exhibition presentation in Helsinki.

During those approximately twenty days (four times five) of moving around, I would be already searching for the right spot(s)/area(s) where to create my site-specific performance. The last ten days will be dedicated to the preparation and execution of the site-specific performance. If possible I aim to execute those performances in the public spaces and to announce them publicly in advance. When staying in the respective cities I wish to collaborate with different art institutions, embassies, and residency spaces. (Brinda 2018)

This original plan was for me rather a sketch – though very important sketch so I could have at least something, to begin with - than an unalterable and firm set of methods. I have also adjusted it almost immediately after I have begun to work in Moscow (which was the first research city), i.e. for practical reasons I eliminated the usage of the bicycle from the main research strategy (as it would mean to add another ‘complication’ - searching for the bicycle and paying additional money for its purchase or rent). Before leaving I was gathering data (through reading, watching documentaries, talking to people and similar) on the places I was about to visit but consciously did not develop a definite plan.

The project was an *artistic research* project, a back and forth dialogue

between art and theory. The notion of artistic research is approached by researchers Julia Marshall and Kimberley D'Adamo as a paradigmatic shift in our understanding of art and research. Art practice is no longer seen as only useful for research in (i.e. social) sciences (“art *in* research” (Marshall – D'Adamo 2011: 12, italics added)) but is considered as a form of research by itself (“art *as* research” (Ibid., italics added)). Those sympathizing with this understanding of art believe that “art practice can generate significant new knowledge.” (Ibid.) Art practice as research introduces “ambiguity, complexity, emotion, intuition, lived experience, and the celebration of personal interpretation or subjectivity” (Ibid.) to the realm of science which “often strives for clarity and objectivity” (Ibid.)

In accord with the current terminology my method might be called a *research-based practice*<sup>4</sup>: “more goal-oriented, intellectual form that uses art practice to explore a subject” (Marshall – D'Adamo 2011: 14) yet still being “improvisational, and open to serendipity [...] less linear, rule-bound, and ordered” (Marshall – D'Adamo 2011: 14). During the trip, my work was indeed more intuitive, direct, first handed, experiential, I was collecting a vast amount of documentation of all sorts, walking, observing, presenting, performing. The writing phase of the project focuses more on a closer analysis of what I have discovered during the research and what were its conceptual implications.<sup>5</sup>

By other words, I did not have a clearly defined hypothesis which I wished to analyze and to (dis)prove. The more ‘practical’ as well as this more ‘theoretical’ part of the project revolved around the mentioned broad subject of finding ways of performing cities through the movement of the body through their transportation networks. Hopefully, this research proves itself to be valuable in producing new knowledge and bettering our understanding of big

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4 Cf. with *practice-based research* which is less goal-oriented and more “playful” (Marshall – D'adamo 2011: 14).

5 By which I was fulfilling the requirements for the “art practice to be research”, as not all art practice is automatically a art research: “it must engage the imagination and the intellect [...]. To do so, imaginative creation must be framed and expanded through critique – a mix of documentation, analysis, conceptualization, and theorization – that entails mining, extracting, and connecting ideas from artworks to generate coherence and meaning [...].” (Marshall – D'adamo 2011: 14).

urban environments and the three researched cities in particular.

## II TRAVELING (TO EAST)

### Life of a ‘nomad’<sup>6</sup>

Traveling and personal mobility became lately an important part of my life routine. I do consider myself somehow restless but not in a negative sense. I enjoy very much to move from a place to place, to get acquainted with different new cultures and contexts. Sometimes my transfers are logistically challenging and the whole lifestyle difficult to cope with. Yet even such moments I embrace as being part of the adventure.

What from an economical point of view makes this way of living accessible are different funding possibilities: I spend a lot of time applying for grants. I do fail to receive a vast majority of them but every now and then my activities are getting funded. It is important to mention that art project grants not only make the travels to happen, they often also require them to happen. I am searching for funds internationally and my movement possibilities are determined by the rules and focus of the respective funding bodies. However difficult, often frustrating and as it is nowadays in fashion to say – precarious – the struggle for funds might be, I am well aware that their very existence and my eligibility to apply for them gives me a privileged status.

Other advantages which make my mobility easier are my gender, sexual orientation, a passport of the EU country, education, skin color, age, the economic situation of my family, lack of any serious health issues and other factors. On the other hand I carry with me my own set of smaller disadvantages, such as minor health issues, my economical situation and that of my country not being so good in comparison to other ‘Western’ countries, English not being my

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6 I use the word *nomad* here in reference to the post-2000s discourse concerned with backpackers and location-independent workers who are traveling globally and often utilizing the most up-to-date technologies such as portable electronic devices and the internet for sustaining their mobility. This understanding of the term differs from the *nomadology* of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. I am discussing the topic more in detail in the following chapter (Traveling).

native language, although being a ‘man’, not being able to fulfil a stereotypical masculine image and so on.

### **Neo-colonialistic question**

Western intellectuals can behave like it [the former USSR] was a playground for their alternative tourism, and perhaps there's nothing objectionable in this per se – but even the most intellectually valuable of those projects can seem either exploitative or miss the importance of the context. (Pyzik in Hatherley 2015: 8)

In the context of domestic and global travel, who has the right to enter another community? Certainly, a firefighter or ambulance does when it responds to an emergency call. Perhaps the President does when touring a disaster area; this visit can be a public act of solidarity, not tourism. But what of journalists, social workers, artists, documentarians, and students? If students are permitted, what possible difference could academic credit provide as an ethical justification? (Selinger – Outtersson 2010: 113)

How to justify an (artistic) research of a ‘Westerner’ in/of the ‘East’? This key question is hard to answer. An unproblematic exploration of ‘non-Western’ societies by ‘Westerners’ is for very good reasons no longer possible at least since Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978). The highly influential book of Said, “the originator and inspiring patron saint of postcolonial theory” (San Juan 2007: 101), describes stereotypical images produced by the ‘West’ over the ‘East’ (mainly the Middle-East). With a reference to Michel Foucault, Said considers Orientalism as a discourse (Said 1979: 3), an “enormously systematic discipline”, a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient [...] by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it” (Ibid). What results from Said's writings is that a person from the ‘West’ can not unbecome a ‘Western’, escape the discourse which formed her. As well as she can not get rid of her privileges.<sup>7</sup>

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7 In other part of his book Said states: “No one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or unconscious) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position or from the mere activity of being a member of a society. [...] even though naturally enough his research and its fruits do

Yet, I believe that those who are privileged should not be taken away the possibility to research issues of the less privileged. The acknowledgment of own advantages should not result in paralysis but on the contrary, could generate a desire to use the inherited advantages for the common good. As a journalist and cultural critic Agata Pyzik states (above) it might be hardly possible not to be exploitative in one way or another when a 'Westerner' is researching (in) the 'East' (in her comment in the post-USSR countries). But it should not mean that people from the 'West' should stop going and researching (in) the 'East'. Or should they, actually?

Would it be better if the more privileged would stop to care about those less privileged in other parts of the world? This question might sound misleading, though it is a similar simplification as if one would bluntly say that traveling to poor countries is exploitative. It may be, if the presence of visitors is unwanted and/or if they behave arrogantly, ignorantly, disrespectfully; or it may be wanted and appreciated. And in relation to the question asked: also the 'help' of the 'West' focused towards the 'non-West' might indeed be unwanted, as Said writes: "The scientist, the scholar, the missionary, the trader, or the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he *could be there*, or could think about it, with the very little resistance on the Orient's part." (Said 1979: 10, italics in original) Still, I do believe that despite the risk of being (labeled as) exploitative, despite the power of the discourse, it is meaningful not to avoid such research projects. There might be positive results coming from the visit or research of the 'oppressor' on the 'oppressed' as well as it might be damaging, depending on the specific project and the chosen methodology.

When thinking about this very sensitive topic the question of gender inequality and feminism comes often to my mind for comparison. To me it seems essential not to exclude men from the discussions on feminism simply because they are men, be it in an academic field (i.e. in the Women's Studies) or in everyday life situations. Of course, those men who wish to get involved in such discussions (and I believe all men should), should be aware of their privileges, of the fact they are living in a patriarchal society. At the same time,

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attempt to reach relative freedom from the inhibitions and the restrictions of brute, everyday reality." (Said 1979: 10)

certain spaces assuring safe communication without the presence of the ones with higher privileges should be granted too. But in general, the exclusion of either the oppressed or the oppressors from the discussion blocks the communication and does not serve to what should be the common goal: a mutual understanding, reaching for equality.

Notwithstanding, if we discuss the question of colonialism and neocolonialism, roles of men and women in the society or other cases of inequality we should also keep in mind the complexity of the respective issues in our globalized world. On a general level there is an inherited inequality between the 'West' and the 'East', between men and women or between the white and the non-white people, etc but reverse racism exists, as well as oppression of men by women or an inadequate treatment of 'Westerners' by 'Easterners' based on their origins. A related anecdote might be my experience with a photo agency in China who refused to employ me for a photo shooting. They decided not to give me the job in which they were searching for young European men because, as they said, I did not look European enough.

My travel to the 'East' was an invaluable experience. One of many things which I have found for myself was a reminder of the current 'Western' obsession with the political correctness. I certainly do not wish to deny the existence of neocolonialism and inequality between countries. I am aware of the fact that for many the options in life are very limited and the living conditions challenging. What I am nevertheless saying is that the simple binary of the 'West' exploiting the 'East' does not seem to be longer valid. Not to mention the difficulty of defining what should be considered the 'West' and what the 'East' as the respective definitions might differ considerably.

One example for all might be what the above-quoted Agata Pyzik says about the difference between East Europe and the Far East: "of course, the Eastern and Western Europe still constitute an entity of the West in any comparison with the real East, like China [...] the expression 'former East' [for the former USSR countries] I can use [...] only parodically, ironically" (Pyzik 2013: 193-194). Even though she righteously calls for a differentiation between East Europe and the Far East, her statement about China being the "real East" has an Orientalist undertone and is questionable at least. But my intention here is not to catch people for words. Instead of playing a role of linguistic police I

would like to advocate for caution in usage of big terms such as the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ and to rather focus on the cases of individual countries and nations.

I am having difficulties to even properly label my own country. I have been born in the former Czech and Slovak Federative Republic<sup>8</sup>. Although, never being swallowed by the USSR, the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which dissolved just before my birth, was one of the so-called second-world countries as being part of the ‘Eastern Bloc’ during the Cold War. The position of the USSR's ‘satellite state’ and the spoken Slavic language relates us with the ‘East’ or at least with the ‘East Europe’. The prevalence of the Roman Catholicism in comparison to the Eastern Orthodoxy might label us rather as ‘Westerners’. Finally, we, Czech people, often prefer to position ourselves within ‘Middle’ or ‘Central’ Europe. Who are we, then? Westerners or Easterners?

Let me put this and other unresolvable questions to sleep for now and continue by discussing my artistic creations related to this thesis.

### **III PREVIOUS WORK**

#### **Before studies at LAPS**

The MA research work *East by Northeast* is a conclusion of my preceding artistic research which can be traced back at least to the year 2013. In spring 2013 I have graduated from the theoretical General Art Studies program (Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno) with a final thesis named *Site: Holešovice* (Brinda 2013). In this paper, I was from different perspectives trying to materialize the essence of one of Prague's district – Holešovice – in the form of writing. Those various approaches were administrative, historical, architectural/urbanistic, using Christian Norberg-Schulz's notion of *genius loci* and own fieldwork.

The core of the written part was enriched by practical walking experiments. Presumably, the most important was the one conducted on 28.4. 2013 in which I made a circle around the district's borders while simultaneously

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8 This particular state formation existed for less than three years – from 23/4/1990 (replacing the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) until 31/12/1992 (replaced by the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic).

writing down my immediate observations done in those four categories: colors, sounds, smells, materials. An excerpt from the ‘walking diary’ looks like this: “metal – wood – plants – trees – bushes – stones – green – yellow – grey – brown – smell of forest – sounds of birds – sounds of cars – red – bricks – brown – bark – green – the smell of water – the smell of blossoms – sheet metal – glass – sand – green.”

Other additions to the theoretical part of the thesis were an interview and an abstract questionnaire in which respondents were asked to find the best suiting associations for Holešovice in those categories: color, animal, plant, season, country, age, means of transport, food, gender, feeling.

On February 2015 I undertook a residency in London's Anatum Abode venue where I was focusing on urban research of the city. The content of the residency was close to my master project – I was trying to somehow articulate the public space of the city of London using different strategies. My explorations included long walks, riding for nine hours nonstop in buses and spending one full day inside of the Tube (this was the second part of my series *Metro*; other installments included *Metro I: Prague* and, under the umbrella of *East by Northeast*, *Metro III: Moscow* and *Metro IV: Beijing*). Similarly, to the *East by Northeast* also during the *London Urban Research*<sup>9</sup>, as I called the project, I was making photo and video documentation, creating maps and writing a diary.

During the springtime of the same year 2015, I have obtained another BA in the Site-Specific Performance program (Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague) with a work called *Positive revolt*<sup>10</sup> which consisted of ten ‘micro-performances’ executed in the urban public space of the city of Prague and the town of Kutná Hora. Each one of the performances was in an ironical way crossing either the Czech law or at least some municipality regulation.<sup>11</sup> Various similarities can be found between this BA work and *East by Northeast* project such as the invisibility of the small interventions. Or the

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9 The diary and documentation from the residency can be accessed here:

<http://anatumsabode.dreamhosters.com/?author=6&paged=2>

10 The project can be accessed here: <https://positiverevolt.wordpress.com/>

11 The ten rebellious actions which I did were: (1) theft, (2) illegal ride, (3) alcohol beverage consumption, (4) drug abuse, (5) nakedness, (6) graffiti, (7) sleeping in a park, (8) foreign area entry, (9) night peace disturbance, (10) violation of Prague transport system conditions.

fact that they were not announced publicly and the random observers could hardly recognize their artistic nature. The main audience of the performances were those witnessing photo and video documentation and the short descriptions either online or during the exhibition. Also, despite its subtlety and amusing tone the work had for me a strong sociopolitical meaning: we are living in a society defined by law, which, although having its clearly written articulation is disturbingly dependant on the subjective interpretations of the authorities.

### **During studies at LAPS**

After entering the Live Art and Performance Studies program in Helsinki, first as an Erasmus, later as a regular student, I was deciding if to follow the urban-related research or my other interest in corporeality and body art. My focus went towards the urbanism yet I did not totally neglect my passion for the body and long durational art. My presence in the LAPS program enabled me to research and play through my own body with bodies of different cities. During the two intense years, I created several projects related to the matter, out of which I would like to shortly introduce three of them: *Helsinki Urban Research* (2015), *Rovaniemi Urban Project* (2016) and *Traffic Lights* (2017).

#### ***Helsinki Urban Research***<sup>12</sup>

was a four-month-long art research project executed during fall 2015 in the city of Helsinki. I have written and published this description on the website dedicated to the project:

In Helsinki Urban Research I created a few simple rules which I tried to follow:

- for one month I was supposed to avoid usage of public transport as much as possible and mainly walk when moving in a city (24/8 – 23/9 2015)
- for one month I was supposed to avoid usage of public transport as much as possible and mainly use a bicycle when moving in a city (24/9 – 23/10 2015)
- for one month I was supposed to use mainly buses, trams, trolleys, etc when moving in a city (24/10 – 23/11 2015)

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<sup>12</sup> The project can be accessed here: <http://helsinkiurbanresearch.wordpress.com>

- for one month I was supposed to use mainly the metro system when moving in a city (24/11 – 23/12 2015); in this month I was already too exhausted by the whole project and did not follow the rules as I planned.

There were two main outcomes of the project: an extensive audio diary<sup>13</sup> and a “list of failures”<sup>14</sup>, moments when for different reasons I did not succeed to follow my rigorous research strategy. Both kinds of documentation were gradually published online over the course of the project and are still accessible on the project's website. The research was partially based on the above mentioned *London Urban Research* executed at the beginning of the same year 2015 but this time extended from two weeks to four (respectively three, as the project was canceled prematurely) months. Importantly, in London, the research was my main and almost only activity whilst in Helsinki the art and life mixed into one common everyday experience.

While executing the project I was living in the outskirts of Vantaa, a city adjacent to Helsinki and taking a bus to get to the city. During my walking month, I did not find any better solution than to keep on using the bus to and from Vantaa and to at least walk in all other situations. It nevertheless meant that each usage of the bus had to be marked down in the list of failures. The distance from Askisto, my neighborhood in Vantaa, and Helsinki city center is some 30 kilometers. During the cycling month of October in which temperature began to be quickly dropping down, I was spending some nights in my flat and some nights in the school studio. It was just too much to cycle every day such a distance there and back in cold weather. On one hand, limitations I put on myself opened me the city in an unusual way, on the other one my daily life became much more complicated.

### ***Rovaniemi Urban Research***

was executed during winter 2016 in the capital of Finnish Lapland, Rovaniemi, in Northern Finland. Rovaniemi is interesting not only because it is

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13 The audio diary selection can be accessed here:

<https://helsinkiurbanresearch.wordpress.com/audio-diary/>

14 The list of ‘failures’ can be accessed here:

<https://helsinkiurbanresearch.wordpress.com/failures/>

located exactly on the Arctic Circle line but also for a specific administrative oddity. With some 60 thousand inhabitants it is more a town than a city. But it is a town very large in area, being certainly one of the largest towns/cities in Europe and the largest in Finland. This legal entity was established in 2006 when the used to be town of Rovaniemi merged with its surrounding area, Rural municipality of Rovaniemi. I decided to visit the town/city and articulate this phenomenon through my physical presence on its borders.

I and my classmate Jolijn de Wolf went to the north, south, west and east borders of the Rovaniemi municipality. The furthestmost borders of the town are located on the north, some 90 kilometers from its center. For travel to the north, south, and east we used local buses. It was important to be accurate in planning as the ‘public transport’ goes to and from those ‘suburbs’ only rarely. The edge of Rovaniemi was not distinguishable from its surroundings: forest, snow, sparsely located houses. For the travel to the west, we had to rent a car with a driver as no bus was stopping anywhere nearby.

For this project, I chose the most minimalist and the most, so to say, poetic form of documentation in comparison to other mentioned works. The only result of the trip are photographs captured on the analog camera by Jolijn. The subject of the pictures is me, posing in the respective borderlands, surrounded by heavy snow. I like saying about this project - in a positive way - that the strategy of ‘maximum effort, minimum results’ was used for its creation.



I.1 Rovaniemi Urban Project<sup>15</sup>

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15 Sources of all the visual materials used in this thesis are listed at the end of the text in the section “Bibliography + Lists of figures”.

The photograph above shows myself holding onto the street sign announcing “Jaatilan koulutie” - “School road of Jaatila” (which is the village on the south border of Rovaniemi municipality). I consider the image significant for the work for at least two reasons. Firstly, the visuality of the sign and the position of the body resembles a gesture of a conqueror marking his achievement by erecting a flag on the seized land or of a mountain climber performing the same after reaching the top. My own ‘conquest’ of the south of Rovaniemi could be seen as a parody of such power demonstrating performances, although it was not originally intended as such. Secondly, although Jaatilan koulutie is a street of a ‘large’ city, the sign marking its existence seems to be positioned inaccurately, as if out of place. Instead, of being a proud representation of a great city it serves as its opposite - a proof of the futility and absurdity of the human tendency to delineate the space.

It might be said that this is a conceptual project. Even though the resulting photographs have its aesthetic value, the execution of the initial idea was more essential. It is important that the concept was practically realized, that I really visited the respective places. Something is intriguing for me in this intersection between the idea developed over maps, creation of a simple but - hopefully - strong idea and its practical realization with all its difficulties including limits of the body, limited monetary funds, possible language barriers, lack of time and similar. In that sense, the work of artist Tehching Hsieh is for me an important inspiration. His projects are very simple and very strong. They stimulate the recipient's imagination. If one wants to let herself get affected by the work she has to invest some intellectual effort.<sup>16</sup> I wished to achieve a similar effect with my urban art research.

### ***Traffic Lights***

was a long durational performance created for the Riga Performance Days, a festival of performance art in Riga, Latvia. For the duration of the piece

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<sup>16</sup> Despite some similarities there are also important differences between the work of Hsieh and myself, such as the rigorous way of making documentation Hsieh is known for and the contracts he was issuing before executing his performances. We will encounter Hsieh again a few more times on our journey throughout this thesis.

(three hours), I was passing from one side of the street to the other using pedestrian crossings. I deliberately chose an intersection where it was possible to walk in a circle (or, better yet, a square) and where the traffic lights were installed on both sides of the street. Each time before I crossed the street I waited for the green light.

The performance was a comment on the ways how the organization of urban public space structures the possibilities of human movement. The chosen intersection was a rather calm one; most of the time I could have crossed the street safely even with the red light on. Yet, by doing so I would have violated the rules of the city and could have even be fined for my behavior. Hence, when following the order applicable within the infrastructure of the city and enforced through the given law and the machines installed in it (the traffic lights), I was artificially forced to cross the street in a certain manner that limited the choices of movement I might otherwise have.

Once again, it would be very difficult to recognize the work as an art performance but this time at least the chances were higher than for example in the case of *London Urban Research* where my ‘performances’ consisted of me sitting in a bus or a metro or *Rovaniemi Urban Project* where I was taking pictures of myself on the street etc. For *Traffic Lights*, I dressed in black clothes, as performance artists often do, and unlike in many other occasions, this time I was not walking casually but put a full concentration into my walking and my neutral expression. The whole setting and my attitude were more similar to a performance presentation in a gallery space. But as it was not presented in the gallery but a public space, it once again remained quite unnoticed. My choice of clothes and the attitude is demonstrated in the photograph below:



I.2 *Traffic Lights*

As you can see, recurrent motives and methods are to be found in the *Traffic Lights* piece. The subjugation of an individual to the orders of the urban public space, long duration of the work, minimalism, beforehand prepared concept, relation to the specific site, no props, no particular narrative, no portraying of a specific role other than the ‘role’ of myself being a performance artist. Those characteristics of the *Traffic Lights* are quite symptomatic to the other outlined pieces as well as to various other works I have created, including the *East by Northeast* research project.

#### IV (MEGA)CITIES OF THE EAST

Now, when some of the project's starting points should be clear, why have I decided to visit particularly the places you are going to read about in the coming pages and not some other ones? The cities which I have visited were chosen for different reasons. They are (a) of **very big sizes** (Moscow, Beijing), (b) very **distant** (Ulaanbaatar, Beijing), (c) I have **never visited them before** (Ulaanbaatar, Beijing), are (d) **connected by the Trans-Siberian Railway** (Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, Beijing), (e) **capital cities** (Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, Beijing), (f) **socialist cities** (Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, Beijing).

##### (a) big cities

The size of cities was important to me as larger means more complex transportation systems, more space for explorations. The same experience which could be gained in Moscow or Beijing would never be possible to achieve in Turku or Helsinki or Prague. In my work, I did not want to stay provincial but to deal with the global. Not that similar research would not be possible in smaller places – i.e. significantly smaller Ulaanbaatar was a very welcomed and functional addition to the project. But primarily, I wanted to get engaged with ‘megacities’, cities with a population higher than 10 million people, as of now largest species of cities on Earth. Somehow logically three places emerged.

I did not want to focus on a single site only but to have a possibility for comparison and to have predetermined travel nodes which to follow. With three points it was possible to travel around in a ‘circle’, not only to follow a line as in the case of two cities. It also seemed to be richer to compare more than only two places so not to fall into a binary comparison trap of smaller vs bigger, more

developed vs less developed, better vs worse. To include four cities would, on the other hand, make already large research possibly unmanageable. In the end, my trinity of cities consisted of a ‘small megacity’ (Moscow), ‘large megacity’ (Beijing) and a considerably smaller city of Ulaanbaatar. Ulaanbaatar is nevertheless the only big city in an enormous land area of Mongolia having an exceptional status of a special kind of ‘mega’ city for Mongolians<sup>17</sup> and for that reason also has a valuable and specific position within my research. In Europe we have four or less of entities which could be labeled as megacities, depending on the definition of a ‘city’<sup>18</sup> and the definition of ‘Europe’<sup>19</sup>: London, Paris, Moscow, and Istanbul, the last two being on the edge of Europe, both geographically and culturally. Even the most populous ‘European’ megacity, Istanbul, is still incomparable in size with a place like Beijing and I wished to include at least one ‘very big’ city in the project.

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- 17 Some 3 million people are living in Mongolia, out of which more than one third, approximately 1,1 million (2010 census) lives in its capital Ulaanbaatar. The number of inhabitants in other most populous cities of Mongolia is incomparably smaller: Erdenet (84 thousand), Darkhan (75 thousand), Choibalsan (40 thousand) (2010 census). (Geohive 2015)
- 18 In this respect to label the city of Paris as a megacity seems to be the most problematic. It is officially inhabited by 2,2 million people (2015 census), as its administrative borders did not change since 1860, and includes only a small portion of the conurbation's inhabitants. Larger administrative unit surrounding the ‘city of Paris’, which is de facto part of the same urban area, is called “Métropole du Grand Paris” (established 1.1. 2016) and contains more than 7 million people (2015 census). Finally, when the so-called “Grande Couronne”, Paris' outermost suburbs, is counted, the population of the ‘city’ (officially region Île-de-France) counts above 12 million (2015 census). (apur 2018; Brinkhoff 2019a; Laroche 2017)
- 19 From the geographical perspective Moscow is undoubtedly located within Europe. But culturally and politically the situation is more complicated as the Russian Federation can be in no means labeled as (only) European country taking into consideration that more than 75% of its territory is located in Asia. There is a significant divide between the more western-located countries of Europe and Russia, i.e. the visitation of the Russian Federation and Moscow is for the majority of European citizens not possible without a visa. Shortly, Moscow could pass as a European city only from a certain (geographical) point of view. The transcontinental city of Istanbul which divides Europe and Asia is an even more ambiguous case being only one of the few such cities in the world. The metropolis is split by the Bosphorus Strait into two separate but still tightly connected entities, the more populous European part consisting of around 10 million or two thirds and Asian part of roughly 5 million or one-third of the population. (2017 census) (Brinkhoff 2019b)

### **(b), (c) distant, unknown cities**

I wanted to set myself for travel outside of my known territory and familiar zone but not to get completely detached from it. Without a referential point, it is more difficult to get oriented in any situation. That is why it was important for me to begin and eventually conclude the whole travel in my hometown Příbor and not to focus on the unfamiliar only. Instead of putting myself into the situation of being suddenly dropped off in Asia by a plane I felt it much better to enter more slowly. To travel outside of Europe on a ground with a firm connection to the place from where I started.

When I arrived in, let us say, Beijing I could express myself easily to the locals about how did I get there and where I am heading next: i.e.: ‘It was snowing in February when I set myself for the trip, we went to the theatre with Mariya and Oleksiy in Kyiv and I slept in a hostel in Moscow when walking around the Third Ring Road, in Irkutsk I got to know the local anarchists and in Ulaanbaatar I got an ear inflammation, in Hohhot there are two main train stations, the new one being absurdly big ... next I plan to go to Chita via Harbin and Manzhouli. Maybe you could help me out finding some information on the Manzhouli/Zabaykalsk border crossing?’ That is a very different narrative and much closer relation to the places visited than a hypothetical: ‘I went to the airport in Prague, transferred in Moscow airport but did see nothing out of Moscow, now I am in Beijing.’

To enter and research the less known is the opposite side of one and the same coin of researching the familiar local context. Both approaches have positives and negatives. Through the *East by Northeast*, I hoped to be given an opportunity to compare my personal experiences and expectations gained in the places I am more related to (Czech Republic/Finland/Europe) with the places included in the project. For me, as an outsider, it indeed was difficult to understand the respective contexts in depth. And I also agree that there is a danger of misinterpreting the dynamics of the researched places and in the worst case to even cause harm to them by for example only supporting the known stereotypes and clichés about the location. On the other hand, I believe that my outside position provided me with a refreshing change of perspective and possibly new opinions on local matters.

### **(d) cities connected by the Trans-Siberian Railway**

To map European megacities, as I am considering above, indeed sounds to me as a suggestion for another interesting project. One reason amongst others, why I decided not to work with that group of cities, is that there is no strong common narrative related to them as there is around the cities I have chosen. For the ('Western') tourists to travel on the Trans-Siberian Railway is a classified narrative, almost a genre of travel on its own: THE TRANS-SIBERIAN. Some say that to travel by train on the Trans-Siberian Railway is the "ultimate train journey" (Bryn 2017), "one of life's greatest travel experiences" (Tan 2018), "the best epic journey" (Travelling the Trans-Siberian - life). By other words, popular and highly desirable travel experience. Especially, for those from outside of Russia who do not have to travel by it regularly<sup>20</sup>. A perfect case for the research on mobility and tourism.

The railway in my project serves as an important spine-like connection between the researched cities. In contrast to the air travel disconnected from the contact with the land, on the board of the train one can comprehend better the changes in the landscape, the distance traveled. As we shall see in Chapter 2, the invention of train travel during the industrialization period in the 19<sup>th</sup> century fostered the development of the (global) capitalism, which, in result, had also a crucial influence on the design of cities. Current technologies such as airplanes and the internet changed the world significantly yet global economic change did not come in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rather, the disappearance of feudalism in the 'West' and its replacement by capitalism was a gradual process that began with the Renaissance and, arguably, was concluded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century hand by hand with industrialization. (cf. i.e. UKEssays 2019)

I have chosen to travel by train also because it is presumably more ecological in comparison to the air travel or travel by car (cf. i.e. (The Guardian 2007) or (Choppin 2009)). I was not doing a project about the ecology of traveling/tourism but the issue necessarily comes to mind and it should be

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<sup>20</sup> Due to its sheer area, transportation possibilities within the Russian Federation are limited, can be more expensive (plane) or might not be available (bus). The car travel option obviously requires ownership of the car and also an involvement of a physical effort to overcome long distances.

mentioned at least. Similarly, as asking *who* is traveling *where* we also have to ask *how*.

Many factors are influencing which travel means are the most 'green' with cycling and walking being quite indisputably the most environmentally friendly. If I would intend to make an ecological statement, to travel on foot or by bicycle might be a logical conclusion, although such a project would have to have very different proportions and focus.

From the ecological perspective, it seems to be the train travel which beats the other possible means of long-distance transportation: "compared to cars and airplanes, trains emit between 66 and 75 percent less carbon." (Eurail) But this should not be accepted uncritically: "Some trains are worse than others (fast trains consume up to four times as much energy, and diesel can emit more than twice the carbon dioxide of electric trains." (The Guardian 2007) For example, the train powered by diesel might achieve worse performance than an electricity powered hybrid car. (Henley 2017) Aside to specific cases, the general opinion on trains being more eco-friendly than cars and planes seems nevertheless legit: "On average [...] a car carrying several occupants is usually better than a plane and trains are almost always the best of all. The UK government's calculations suggest a long-haul plane emits 110g of carbon dioxide per passenger kilometer, a medium-sized car with two occupants the same, while the train emits 60g." (The Guardian 2007)

### **(e) capital cities**

By no coincidence all the researched cities are capitals. Often, but not always, the capital is the most significant urban settlement in the country. And even in cases when it is not it still keeps its exceptional metonymical status. Indeed, many people tend to identify the capital with the country itself, their travels (me included) lead often first of all to the capital and later on possibly to other destinations within the country. The media are commonly replacing the name of the country, or of its representatives by the name of its capital: 'As Moscow stated...', 'Washington made it clear...', 'Istanbul agreed...'. In my project especially Moscow and Ulaanbaatar confirmed their undeniably exceptional status within the country, Beijing had a few competitors of similar sizes and importance (most notably Shanghai).

### **(f) socialist cities**

What all the three cities have also in common is their socialist past as capitals of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic / Mongolian People's Republic / the People's Republic of China. Since the crucial and most rapid development of the researched cities has happened within 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the socialist ideology and socialist urban planning have been an important element shaping their growth. It is possible on the one hand to observe a desire for equality, inclusivity and even access to the city facilities for all its inhabitants. On the other hand, socialist cities were designed as centers of the respective empires, centers of power and control over people. It seemed to me intriguing to research this dichotomy<sup>21</sup> which influenced significantly the urban planning and the resulting appearance of the respective cities, including their transportation networks.

## **V TECHNICAL NOTES**

### **Performance/perform**

As the words ‘performance’ and ‘to perform’ will be appearing repeatedly throughout this thesis, let me briefly introduce how are they being understood in the common discourse and how am I going to use them.

According to one of the originators of the field of performance studies<sup>22</sup>, theatre director Richard Schechner, “performances are actions” which are “framed, enacted, presented, highlighted, or displayed” (Schechner 2013[2002]: 1-2). Although I would say, one can as well perform for oneself only, what the

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21 For this important observation of socialist cities striving for equality while being *at the same time* authoritarian, I am indebted to Giacomo Bottà, the thesis supervisor.

22 One common narrative goes that the field of performance studies was established by Theatre Director Richard Schechner and anthropologist Victor Turner (cf. Schechner 2013[2002]: 17). Nevertheless, it might be more accurate to say that the field gradually emerged from other related fields (such as Anthropology, Cultural studies, Sociology, Theatre and Dance history and other) and that more scholars should be credited for its development (note for example the work of Peggy Phelan, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Dwight Conquergood or Diana Taylor, to name but a few).

field is mostly concerned with is performing *for someone else*. This might become clearer when we look at the verb 'to perform'.

Schechner defines 'to perform' "in relation to: Being / Doing / Showing doing / Explaining 'showing doing'" (Schechner 2013[2002]: 28). "Showing doing" is identical with "performing" and referring to "pointing to, underlining, and displaying doing" (Ibid), "doing" itself being understood as "the activity of all that exists, from quarks to sentient beings to supergalactic strings." (Ibid) Or to put it differently. A teacher whom I have encountered in my previous education was illustrating once a similar tension between what Schechner would call "doing" and "showing doing/performing" on an example. She introduced a hypothetical figure of a person working on her garden, alone. While another person came nearby and started to watch her, the gardening person adjusted her behavior. The change happened because she knew she is being watched and, although continuing the same activity, instead of just "doing", she switched to "showing doing" or "performing" by trying to behave like a 'gardener'. By Schechner's words, to perform in everyday life is "to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an action for those who are watching," (Ibid.) even if just a little bit.

The notion of performance gets more complex when we consider that "people are performing all the time whether or not they are aware of it" (Schechner 2013[2002]: 207) This is how, for example, gender or race are being *constructed* - by people enacting "social scripts" which "permeate daily life" (Ibid: 209). I was mentioning above some of my own 'attributes' which influenced my experience from the travel: i.e. being white (race), male (gender) or belonging to the 'middle class' (class). Not only was this setting affecting the way others were seeing me but also my own behavior. More or less unconsciously and more or less inevitably I was (re)performing "social scripts" assigned to me by the ('Western') society to which I belong. These non-artistic performances which I was continuously producing on the way were not consciously planned and not even desired by me yet remained rather unchallenged as the focus of my work lay elsewhere. I will get back to this issue together with linguistic philosopher J.L.Austin and his successors in the following chapter dedicated to traveling.

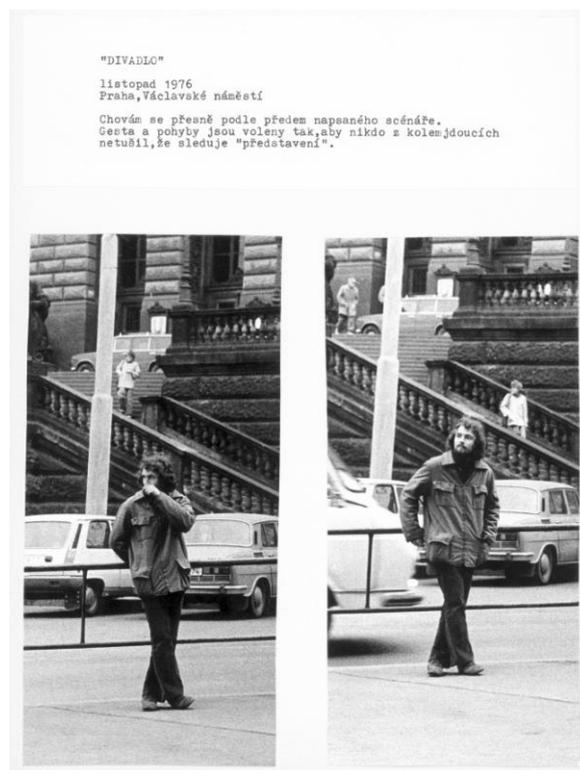
Performance studies does not deal only with the everyday. Indeed, the biggest advantage of the field is at the same time its greatest weakness - the

subject it studies is very (too?) broad. Schechner, for example, proposes eight (not exhaustive) categories where “performances occur”:

- 1 in everyday life - cooking, socializing, ‘just living’
- 2 in the arts
- 3 in sports and other popular entertainment
- 4 in business
- 5 in technology
- 6 in sex
- 7 in ritual - sacred and secular
- 8 in play (Schechner 2013[2002]: 31)

I do not aim to discuss all these categories here, but given the artistic nature of my project, it might be useful to briefly explore at least the notion of performance in (relation to) the arts. Theatre (and performance art) professionals seem to be obsessed with defining the difference between ‘acting’ and ‘performing’ (at least in the European context where I am mostly operating). Schechner ‘resolves’ the never-ending quarrel simply by stating that the “acting is a sub-category of performing.” (Schechner 2013[2002]: 174) Acting itself “consists of focused, clearly marked and framed behaviors specifically designed for showing.” (Ibid.) It is commonly being related to playing a character which is what performance artists are supposedly not doing. By words of a visionary theatre director Jerzy Grotowski, “Performer, with a capital letter, is a man of action. *He is not somebody who plays another.*” (Grotowski In Schechner-Wolford (eds.) 1997: 317), italics added). Yet, the discussion is more complicated.

Are actors not using “their own selves - bodies, psyches, notebooks, experiences - as material” (Schechner 2013[2002]: 162) - as are some of the qualities of performance artists according to Schechner? Let us consider, for example, a scripted action “specifically designed for showing”, which is happening in a public space and being so inconspicuous that it is (almost) imperceptible, as is the work *Theatre (Divadlo)* (1976) of the Czech performance artist Jiří Kovanda. See the photograph below:



I.3 Divadlo (Theatre)

The author's artistic statement about the work circulates in this English translation: "I behave exactly according to the written script. My gestures and movements are chosen so that no one of the passers-by can guess he is watching a 'performance'." (Kovanda [1976]) Why is this action (despite its title) considered a 'performance art' and not a 'theatre'? Could it be solely because the author does not have any acting education<sup>23</sup> and he himself as well as the art history are labeling him as a 'performer', not as an 'actor'? Or because, said with Grotowski, he does not portray any other character but is just 'performing himself'? Both could be true, though the borderline between the 'theatre' and 'performance art' seems still very thin and porous. To give another example, is it not beautifully paradoxical that the *theatre* history appreciates Grotowski so much exactly because he has abandoned the theatre and even proclaimed himself "a teacher of Performer" (Grotowski In Schechner-Wolford (eds.) 1997: 317) rather than 'a teacher of (A)actor'?

<sup>23</sup> Not that one would necessarily require such an education to deliver an acting performance, as sociologist Erving Goffman points out: "almost anyone can quickly learn a script well enough to give a charitable audience some sense of realness in what is being contrived before them." (Goffman In Schechner 2013[2002]: 210)

One way or another, there is a difference between deliberately artistic performances (as in art fields such as dance, pantomime, theatre, performance art, and other ones) and performances belonging to a different realm (be it sport, business, technology or other). When conducting the *East by Northeast*, I was both creating ‘artistic performances’ as well as ‘performing myself. In my application of the word ‘performance’ in the coming pages, I will be using it mostly in those meanings, my respective intention hopefully being clear from the given context.

Finally, one more alternative understanding of the word will be coming from the realm of technology in which a “bar code” could be considered as a “script of technological performance” (McKenzie 2001: 10). This is a rather different approach to comprehension of the word, “a sense of performance used by engineers, technicians, and computer scientists” (Ibid.). I will be referring to the performance of technology, of machines, mostly in relation to the phenomena of the city itself.

In the following section, I am offering a simple system which, I believe, will help you to navigate better in the respective *artistic* performances executed in this project.

### **Performance types**

I sort performances conducted during my travel/research into three categories. A detailed list of created works is to be found in the Appendix of the thesis.

Performances of the “**first-order**” were actions fundamental for the project. They were executed in a *public space* of the respective cities and *not announced publicly*. Their nature was such, that for random passersby it was impossible to recognize them. I have documented those actions through video, photographs and audio recordings as well as each one of them was recorded in a form of a cartographic representation. All the maps were presented publicly in the project's online diary.<sup>24</sup> In those works I was moving within the researched

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<sup>24</sup> The online diary of the project can be accessed here: <http://antoninbrinda.com/east-by-northeast/>

cities in a particular manner, each time choosing a specific route and a means of transportation.

Performances of the “**second-order**” were works which all of them were *publicly announced* and mostly presented *in collaboration with a local institution – inside of a gallery or similar*. Whilst first-order performances were conducted only in the three main research cities, performances of the second order were presented also in other places, which I have visited on my travel (Lviv, Kyiv, Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude). I have often, but not always, presented those works together with a lecture/artist talk and concluded by a common discussion (list of artist talks and lectures is also disclosed in the Appendix). When giving the talk, I was mostly discussing my research project. This way, I was able to present my invisible work – performances of the first-order – to the local audience (the uncountable unofficial conversations put aside).

The three performances of the “**third-order**” were somewhere in-between, as although being *publicly announced*, they were presented in a *public space* and *imperceptible* for the uninformed.

### **Thesis organization**

The thesis is divided into five main chapters.

We begin our common journey by exploring more in detail issues related to the topic of travel and tourism in **Chapter 1 Traveling**. Before discussing my research in the case cities, it is at first essential to understand what does the process of traveling to other countries entail. Here, I am using multiple sources mostly written by tourist researchers such as Maximiliano E. Korstanje and Lourdes Cisneros Mustellier (Korstanje - Mustellier 2014), Judith Adler (Adler 1989), Dean MacCannell (MacCannell 2001), Tim Edensor (Edensor 2001), Mike Crang (Crang 2011) and others. This chapter also opens the relation between performance and tourism/traveling together with philosopher J.L Austin (Austin 1955), neo-Marxist philosopher Louis Pierre Althusser (Althusser 1970), and includes a mention of gender theorist Judith Butler (Butler 1993).

As I have mentioned above, when it comes to the topic of traveling it is not enough to only think about “*who is traveling where* but also how”. That is

why the following **Chapter 2 The Railway** focuses on the phenomenon of the railway, its invention, expansion and influence on the development of modern cities and particularities related to the travel by train. It is based mainly on two books. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Schivelbusch 1986) by culturologist and historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch, which will lead us into the topic and will be accompanied in the second half of the chapter by a source specifically exploring The Trans-Siberian Railway: *The Edge of the World* (Wolmar 2013) by historian Christian Wolmar.

After getting acquainted with the notion of global mobility and more in detail with the one specific travel means which I was using during my travel, it is time to move from the *intercity* to the *intracity* level. **Chapter 3 Birth of Public Transportation** introduces what it promises in its title: the development of public transportation in cities and the confluence between urban planning and intracity transport. Two modernist urban planners are taken as examples: Otto Wagner (Wagner 1912) and Georges-Eugène Haussmann. A working definition of “public transportation” is suggested with researchers Michael C. Hall, Diem-Trinh Le-Klähn and Yael Ram (Hall - Le-Klähn - Ram 2017). Importantly, in this section of the thesis Michel de Certeau comes in (de Certeau 1984).

Following **Chapter 4 Socialist cities** takes us from more general thoughts on mobility closer to specific objects of the research which are three *(post)socialist* cities. A crucial helper in the discussion on *(post)socialist* urbanism is the writer and journalist Owen Hatherley and his two books: *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings* (Hatherley 2015) and *Militant Modernism* (Hatherley 2008). Another researcher on socialist cities whose voice materializes in this section is R.A. French, who brings the working definition of the “socialist city” in his paper *Plans, pragmatism and people: The legacy of Soviet planning for today’s cities* (French 1995). Also, the concept of “garden cities” of Ebenezer Howard is offered as he introduced it in his *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (Howard 1902).

They key **Chapter 5 East by Northeast** looks in detail to my performances in Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and Beijing. It builds on the material explored and the theoretical apparatus developed in the previous sections of the thesis. The chapter uses a multiplicity of sources on the three cities and their

respective countries, their history and present - such as online journals and articles or, notably, own direct observations and information gained from personal conversations (meaning not in a sense of interviews but simply by being in the respective cities and talking to people). It is also this part of the thesis where works of other artists (i.e. Tehching Hsieh, Marina Abramović and Ulay, Francis Alÿs or Hamish Fulton) are discussed in relation to the research.

The Conclusion aims to take a look back at the whole project, and summarizes its results, analyzing what worked and what did not and how could it evolve in the future.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **TRAVELING**

#### **Introduction**

In this master thesis I was not traveling through and within cities where I grew up or to which I have close ties but, quite on the contrary, ones which for me were far away and unknown. Those places do not exist in a vacuum, they are located in specific geographical locations, in different countries. Countries which are more or less open to a large group of people of various kinds who share with me at least one common feature, they are - or we are - foreigners, outsiders, visitors, not locals but 'the others', ones who have limited knowledge on the local customs, language, culture. Aside to being 'the others', members of this disparate group can differ in many essential ways. Just think of all the various labels we give to people who are entering territory 'foreign' to their own: travelers, tourists, migrants, refugees, nomads, vagrants, vagabonds, researchers and academics (such as, for example, ethnographers, anthropologists or sociologists) as well as backpackers, businessmen and recently digital nomads, global nomads or flashpackers to name but a few. Some of those identities can overlap, others stand in a sharp contradiction. As I have already discussed in the thesis introduction, there are many factors influencing possibilities of people to travel. Also, for some to be on move is not a privilege but an unwanted necessity.

This chapter aims to touch upon certain concerns related to the phenomena of concurrent global mobility. Some of the key 'players' will be introduced and I will try to understand my Trans-Siberian trip in this context. It seems to me crucial to introduce this topic as it significantly colors the core part of my research in the *visited* cities.

#### **Why do people travel**

Travels are undoubtedly of great importance for civilizations. [...] Over centuries, humans have migrated from one to another point of the planet creating substantial changes in the geography of the new lands. [...] Nobody is native where today dwells, its ancestors came from any point of the world. (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 60-61)

One of the key questions one might ask in the given context is why do people travel in the first place. What is the motivation for individuals to invest money, time, mental and physical energy to go to places which might be outside of their comfort zones? To answer this – seemingly simple – question it is at first essential to narrow down its scope. As the center of this chapter is concerned with one particular travel conducted by myself, what I aim to discuss are mobilities and reasons behind them which are most relevant to this trip. Were I a refugee of war, my motives would be significantly different. I might be traveling then to simply save my life. Were I a businessman my main reason might be closing a deal. Were I a soldier my main aim might be to conquer the land to which I am heading. Since my travel research was a combination of work and leisure my motivations resemble people whose mobility aims are similar, such as tourists and researchers.

Many of my basic motives could be equated with those people conducting similar kinds of travels. From the side of leisure some of my desires were surely to, for example, “explore other cultures, interact with local people, increase my knowledge, experience everyday life abroad, meet people from other countries” (Richards 2015: 11) though not so much to “relax mentally, avoid hustle and bustle, be in a calm atmosphere, relax physically” (Richards 2015: 11) as were some of the motivations offered to respondents of a survey conducted by the New Horizons Research Programme (more on the research in (Richards 2015: 7)).

Looking at the first from the two short lists of possible stimulus for travels one can see there a common desire to learn. Similarly, in seventeenth and eighteenth century (male) members of young, particularly British nobility were obliged to travel around Europe “in quest of education and high-culture” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 62) in which they were also supposed to “learn on the customs and habits of their people” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 62). The travel was labeled as a ‘Grand Tour’ and one of its main purposes was education of the respective young men: “Moving away from the comfort of kingdom was a pedagogic mechanism that [...] showed the potential realities they would face at a later day [...] One of the original goals of this tour was to give original and particular education to the future elite.” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 62) While there is nothing problematic about the desire to get

educated (quite the opposite) it is obvious that the Grand Tour was an opportunity accessible only to a very particular group in the society. Its exclusivity supported the status quo of gender and class inequality.

One possible way of looking at the history of tourism<sup>25</sup> is to see it as a development from trips such as was the Grand Tour, to the more inclusive situation brought by the emergence of the mass railway and steamship travel in the nineteenth century. (Culler 1990: 3) Resultantly, travelers from not only the highest strata could afford to travel for pleasure or education or *both*. As a sociologist of tourism Judith Adler points out: “Professional and middle-class groups notoriously seek opportunities to combine work with travel valued for its own sake” (Adler 1989: 1370). Elsewhere she interestingly adds an example of “young males of poorer classes [who] have at times used the search for work as a pretext for a poor man's Grand Tour” (Adler 1989: 1370). Shortly, with the democratization of tourism, many people started to search for opportunities to travel despite obstacles such as insufficient funds and do not avoid the combination of work and leisure.

But once again: why should an individual want to create situations in which he or she would be (temporarily) dislocated from the environment familiar to them? For the German stream of tourism sociology, where a Swiss tourist scholar Jost Krippendorf is a key figure, (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 71) “tourism was [...] a social institution whose function oriented to the balance of psychological frustration”, it “fulfills a basic human needs, escapement.” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 71) Speaking for myself the need of escapement is a familiar one although, as I can also confirm from own experience, people seem to be “subject to two contrasting trends, the needs of resting avoiding hostile environment and the needs of discovering to set apart from routine” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63). So the desire to travel ‘elsewhere’ is being contradicted by the opposite desire to rest and avoid “hostile environments”.

Following Krippendorf, tourist researchers Maximiliano E Korstanje and Lourdes Cisneros Mustellier state that the balance between the two human desires is necessary for people to be satisfied. Bitterly, “the social function of

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 62) for other ways how to approach the history of tourism.

holidays confers to the worker the necessary revitalization to reassume the labor at a later day.” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63) Although, providing a necessary relief, instead of reaching the revolutionary breakpoint which might lead to an attempt to escape the unjust capitalist labor system, this temporary ‘refreshment’ only further serves and supports the worker's subjugation to the system.

Traveling also “opens the doors to social recognition and a higher status” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63) which brings satisfaction. To my understanding, this happens specifically in two ways. Firstly, in the sense, as it was originally meant by the authors of the citation in which “the drive of the escapement is validated throughout *the rites* of holidays” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63, italics added). Not only are individual's desires satisfied by travel but the travel itself as a concept becomes something which is being created by and subjected to the social forces which enabled it. For those participating in a common 8hrs per day/5 days per week work routine the significantly shorter period of ‘holidays’ supplements the significantly longer period of ‘work time’. The proof of holiday trips being only a false ‘escapement’, providing a false ‘freedom’ is their mandatory nature. Not to participate in a tourist/holiday *industry* results in a punishment: “Since holiday's [sic] gives status to the worker, [...] a great variety of stigmas are surfaced [... to] anyone who rejects to face this experience” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63). As a result, people do travel not only because they want to but also because they are ‘supposed to’.

Secondly, achieving “higher status” might not only happen after the travel but also already during it, although only seemingly. Being temporarily free from constraints of work/family/routine economic behavior/certain laws and similar might boost the sense of pride and superiority, especially in people coming from richer/more developed countries to the poorer/less developed ones. According to Korstanje and Mustellier, this notion of superiority is an artificially created myth which circulates in the ‘West’. They use as an example a specific mythization of Columbus' ‘discovery’ of America. Although “the conquest was cruel and bloody, we are taught from childhood, that Colon [Columbus] civilized Americas. The archetype of America's discovery not only represents a powerful myth but also instills a covered message which means

that moving is a way of appropriation.” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 61)

I can say from personal experience that while being ‘abroad’ I do feel more ‘free’, more powerful. Nevertheless, this is rather just a feeling since I maintain my ties to my home country. In crude terms my home nation-state, Czech Republic, ‘owns me’. Its bureaucratic apparatus, its unemployment offices, its monthly medical and social insurance fees, its police and juridical system and so on and so forth are structuring my life – for better or worse. As I have realized from several years of living abroad and traveling extensively, this presumably more difficult form of living might be in some respects paradoxically easier. For example, aforementioned medical insurance fees can be bypassed by obtaining a cheap private *travel* insurance (which means it can be only used ‘abroad’) or I could use (and I am using) various programmes of exchanges/internships/volunteering which are nowadays available for (young) people who wish to *travel abroad*.

When it comes to my profile as a traveler/tourist I would call myself an opportunist. Not in a sense of a ruthless ‘go-getter’ but simply as a person who is using available opportunities, possibly in the way as others belonging to the middle-class do, who, to remind the words of Judith Adler, “notoriously seek opportunities to combine work with travel.” (Adler 1989: 1370) My desires and motivations do not seem exceptional to the common interests I have been describing above, i.e. to “explore other cultures, interact with local people, increase my knowledge” (Richards 2015: 11) etc, simply, to experience something yet unknown to me, something different, to go for an ‘adventure’, if you wish. And, as suggested above, in my particular case the notion of mobility is also related to sustainability. Strangely, when traveling my living and working conditions can be better than when I am staying stationary.

To conclude this section, Korstanje and Mustellier suggest that our motives for leisure travel “ranges from the recovery need to meet new friends or experiencing new situations.” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 63) Similarly, tourist sociologist Dean MacCannell refers to the anthropologist of tourism John Urry by stating: “According to Urry, the motive for touristic travel is based on nothing more than a desire to leave home and see something different. Nothing could be more obvious or less contestable than this,” (MacCannell 2001: 24-25) But MacCannell does not continue his paper in support of Urry,

but to contest what can not be “less contestable”. Let us take a closer look at this discussion between the two ‘gurus’ of tourism research.

## **Tourism**

Tourists are human beings. They must have free will. (MacCannell 2001: 23)

The issue MacCannell finds in Urry is that “implicit in Urry's argument is that touristic travel is compensatory behavior for a life that is, compared to life on tour, unpleasurable, flat and dull” (MacCannell 2001: 25) which in various instances does not have to be true.<sup>26</sup> Other related concerns focus on the tourist gaze – the ways tourists perceive the environments which they visit and the expectations they have from such visits. It is this “desire to see something different”, something “extraordinary” (MacCannell 2001: 26) that MacCannell considers problematic.

He compares the construction of the tourist gaze with the specificity of the gaze between men and women introduced by the feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. MacCannell reminds readers that “the powerful subject possesses the gaze while the powerless other is completely defined by its status as the object of the gaze” (MacCannell 2001: 29). Still referring to the feminist theory, MacCannell adds that there exists a particular affirmative reaction of the “powerless” to the “powerful”: “women tend to see themselves as they believe they will be seen by men and behave accordingly” (MacCannell 2001: 29). Analogously could be described the relation between the tourists as the “powerful” and those whom (i.e. the locals) or what (i.e. the sights) they encounter as the “powerless”. Various attractions “‘see themselves’ as they would be seen by tourists and arrange their appearances so as to be attractive to tourists.” (MacCannell 2001: 26)

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26 In the words of MacCannell: “I [...] have no doubt that there are tourists whose everyday lives *are* exciting and rarely boring, whose work is productive, creative and appreciated, who maintain strong erotic and other attachments to their lovers, and who are buoyed by a large network of engaging friends, relatives, and acquaintances. These would be people for whom there is little difference between their everyday lives and life on tour, at least in terms of interest value and pleasure.” (MacCannell 2001: 25, italics in original)

MacCannell concludes his observations of some of Urry's claims by citing Stendhal's 1838 *Memoirs of a Tourist*. What MacCannell finds in Stendhal is a resistance of the main protagonist to the "extraordinary": "The extra-ordinary is always over-rated for Stendhal. The unexpected that can happen any time in everyday life and while on tour, is cherished by him." (MacCannell 2001: 33) MacCannell argues that *any* tourist, even one participating in the most commercial 'packaged' tours, has a strong inner desire to see beyond the spectacle arranged by the tourist industry. Instead of encountering what is *labeled* as extra-ordinary he or she craves for what is 'real', what is truly extraordinary and unplanned. Or what is possibly not extra-ordinary at all but beautiful in being so unexpectedly mundane. Though, as stated in the last citation, this can easily happen too in every day, 'stationary' life. For the hero of Stendhal's prose "to travel was not to experience the extraordinary. In fact, he takes great delight in the very ordinary details of places he visits." (MacCannell 2001: 32)

There are two tourist gazes which are opposite to each other. The first is "installed by the institutions and practices of commercialized tourism" (MacCannell 2001: 34). The second is the subversive one:

[the second gaze] may be more interested in the ways attractions are presented than in the attractions themselves. It looks for openings and gaps in the cultural unconscious. It looks for the unexpected, not the extraordinary, objects and events that may open a window in the structure, a chance to glimpse the real. (MacCannell 2001: 36)

Though MacCannell does not use the notion of 'performance', the tourist sights and other related elements of the tourist industry could be perceived as such. Let us take a closer look at the notion of tourism as performance.

## Tourism as performance

Significations, shared with particular publics and nourished by an entire way of life, can be drawn from choices of dress, transport, accommodation, social relations maintained in transit, use of temporal and financial resources, foci of interest, cultivated forms of sensibility, dramatizations of motivation, and concluding testimonials. (Adler 1989: 1370)

To begin with, a short exposition of relevant performance theories will be necessary, such as John Langshaw Austin's notion of “performativity” which he introduced in the book *How To Do Things With Words*. (Austin 1955) According to Austin, performatives are a special type of speech acts, utterances which, when pronounced, has the power to change reality. A typical example might be the marriage ceremony in which a priest pronounces a couple to be married. After this proclamation and other formalities, they really happen to be ‘married’. As we can read in Austin, for a performative to succeed, to be valid (“felicitous” or “happy”) (Austin 1955: 42), the utterance has to be executed by the authorized person. (Ibid: 42) If I would want to pronounce a couple as a husband and a wife such a proclamation would not be effective - so, according to Austin, it would not be a performative act at all – because I do not have that performative power.

The concept of performatives/performativity had profound implications for performance studies, poststructuralism as well as performance art.<sup>27</sup> When elaborating on her theory of “gender performativity”, American gender philosopher Judith Butler uses both Austin and French neo-Marxist Louis Pierre Althusser (cf. Butler 1993). I do not wish to discuss here Butler’s theory as such but rather her methodology as she works not only with Austin but also with Althusser who brings into the discussion the notion of power structures. Building on Marx, Althusser introduces two categories of State Apparatuses: Repressive and Ideological<sup>28</sup>. The latter is more important as it includes various non-repressive “realities” (Althusser 1970) such as religion, education, family,

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. (Schechner 2012[2002]: 123-169)

<sup>28</sup> Althusser distinguishes between Repressive State Apparatus (singular) and Ideological State Apparatuses (plural).

communications or culture. Although, not being mentioned on the list, tourism could also fall under this categorization.

The main aim of Ideological State Apparatuses is to assign a person a place in the society with which he or she would be satisfied, would want to go to work and by that to participate in the system's reproduction. They also teach one how to behave, which codes one should follow, what is appropriate for his or her position (defined by the social class, gender, age, etc.). Althusser calls the influence of Ideological State Apparatuses on citizens *interpellation* or *hailing*. (Ibid). Different individuals and institutions hail other individuals to make them understand how to behave correctly in the given social system, often in goodwill. That is how a person inconspicuously learns and incorporates rules of the dominant ideology. This process accompanies us since childhood and throughout the whole life.

Coming back to Austin, although not everyone is eligible to marry people<sup>29</sup>, we all share our assumptions and personal ideologies influenced by the prevalent ideology or, speaking about the language, a dominant discourse. All of us have an impact on others even without having a performative power in Austin's sense.<sup>30</sup> Since their early childhood people are learning how they should behave and, consciously or not, expect others to behave accordingly. This is not a 'natural' state of things but a learned, *performative* behavior, in which on top of their "being", in a sense of Schechner, people are performing 'being themselves' (i.e. being a student, researcher, tourist, man, etc. - which is what I do). Concluding my theoretical inquiry, let me get back to the notion of tourism.

The tourism industry can be understood as a performance with various actors/performers, as well as other non-human 'actants'<sup>31</sup> (vehicles, sights,

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29 Or, said with Butler, to assign a person a gender as in case of "the medical interpellation" which "shifts the infant from an 'it' to a 'she' or 'he'." (Butler 1993: 11)

30 While Austin developed a rather "neat division separating authentic from parasitic performatives", this "cannot stand up to scrutiny," (Schechner 2013[2002]: 124), referring i.e. to French philosopher Jacques Derrida, for whom "all utterances are infelicitous." (Ibid.: 125)

31 The term *actant* comes from semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas' narratology where it is "one of six basic categories of fictional role common to all stories." (Oxford University Press 2019) An actant can be manifested in a form of a "character (or *acteur*)" but also as a "non-human creature [...] or inanimate object [...] or in more than one *acteur*." (Ibid., italics in

etc.), playing their roles in different stages/venues specially devoted to those performances. These ‘roles’ are being assigned by the Ideological State Apparatuses and relate to the personae which we - and other humans and non-human entities - learned to perform<sup>32</sup>. Although seemingly providing an escape, travels are not, in this sense, liberating an individual. Tourism researcher Tim Edensor tells the same story with different words when he says that to travel means to follow “unreflexive, embodied, shared assumptions about appropriate behavior in particular contexts” (Edensor 2001: 60). How ‘alternative’ or ‘commercial’ the trip is does not matter in this context: “shared norms instantiate a way of being a backpacker, a participant on a tour-bus or a member of a Club 18-30 holiday” (Edensor 2001: 60), a “common sense understanding of how to be a tourist” (Edensor 2001: 61). Indeed, as semiotician of tourism Jonathan Culler notes “getting off the beaten track [...] is the ‘most beaten track of all’”<sup>33</sup> (Culler 1990: 7).

Depending on the style of the travel various settings and actants are constructed to provide to the visitor the expected (even ‘unexpectedly expected’ as in the case of ‘adventurers’ seeking the ‘unknown’) experience. It is not easy to escape this construct as even in cases when the external performers and marked sights are missing, the traveler’s inner conditioning still maintains.<sup>34</sup> The process of “staging tourism” (Edensor 2001: 59) is only possible with an

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original)

32 Respectively, in cases of non-human actants it might be better to consider how people *made* these entities perform as they might not be able to make their own decisions. Think of, for example, tourist sights.

33 This is how Edensor ironically summarizes the particularity of the ‘backpacker’ figure: “performance [of ‘backpackers’] centres on how far off the beaten track they have gone, the quality of their encounters with ‘locals’ and their commitment to backpacking – variously identified by the length of the trip, degree of hardship and disdain for material comforts, goods and experiences regarded as ‘touristic’. [...] [Their] Clothing is often ‘rough and ready’ and apparently signifies scorn for fashion, or is local apparel to signify ‘going native’. Books are used among backpackers to signify a shared disposition towards exploration, a form of cultural capital which signifies a sophisticated facility to attune oneself to cultural ‘otherness’ (favorites on ‘The List’ include *The Beach*, *Out of Africa*, *100 Years of Solitude*, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, *Catch 22*).” (Edensor 2001: 74)

34 Cf. with Richard Schechner’s statement that “people are performing all the time whether or not they are aware of it.” (Schechner 2013[2002]: 207)

unspoken collaboration of those for whom the simulation is created – tourists themselves – who are in return “performing tourism” (Edensor 2001: 59). It is a self-confirming loop in which the tourist industry performs for tourists who perform for the tourist industry.

Coming back to the question of the tourist gaze, Edensor introduces another way of understanding the ‘first’, institutionalized gaze stating that “performers are [...] subject to the disciplinary gaze of co-participants and onlookers” (Edensor 2001: 72). Tourists might not only be (inappropriately) empowered, as I have discussed previously, but their gaze and own performances are being evaluated through the gazes of others. This is, once again, an alternative wording for what might be said with Austin and Althusser. Tourism is being performed for maintaining the status quo, with all the involved parties participating in the creation of the performance through their individual performative actions.

Edensor made me smile by giving an example of Western tourists visiting the Taj Mahal, who “mobilize a romantic gaze, feasting their eyes upon the mausoleum for unbroken periods, preferably in solitude.” (Edensor 2001: 72) Such behavior is part of the shared know-how (supported, for example, by guidebooks, “a kind of master script for tourists which reduces disorientation and guides action” (Edensor 2001: 73)) approved and supported by others. In the example given, there is a “shared understanding that one should gaze in meditative fashion upon buildings designated as important.” (Edensor 2001: 73)

Scripts with or without<sup>35</sup> a physical representation are being enacted because people know that this is what is requested from them and that by misbehaving they would be putting themselves in the risk of punishment. On the other hand, those who follow are being rewarded: “the subject not only receives recognition, but attains as well a certain order of social existence, in being transferred from an outer region of indifferent, questionable, or impossible being to the discursive or social domain of the subject.” (Butler 1993: 121) The normativity of tourism can - and should - be resisted, similarly as the normativity of gender (cf. i.e. Butler 1993: 121-140) or race, etc. In my master

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35 Cf. “social scripts” mentioned in Introduction.

project, this was not my direct aim but others<sup>36</sup> had worked around the topic, such as Japanese performer Haruna Hirano.

In her unnamed performance from 2016, Hirano traveled from Tsukuba, Japan to Helsinki, Finland via Moscow, Russia by plane. For the duration of the travel, she was carrying a small stone in her mouth. Throughout the journey, she was posting online snapshot photographs of herself being in transport together with short comments in which she focused on expressing the influence of the unusual object in her mouth on her travel experience. In the final presentation at the *Body Error* event, which I co-curated together with Hilda Kahra, Hirano spat the stone out, concluding her performance with a single gesture. Cf. the photograph from the performance in which the artist captured herself in the mirror, presumably when on board of an aircraft. With her mouth open, Hirano is displaying to the internet audience the stone resting inside:



1.1 Performance of Haruna Hirano

Hirano was otherwise behaving like an ordinary traveler, but the stone in her mouth was not part of the social script she was expected to enact. In her minimalist subversive action, she followed the strictures related to security protocols of flying while at the same time questioning their purpose. Instead of using her body for drug smuggling, the artist chose a more poetic way and

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. i.e. Skip Arnold's *Freight* (1993) or Francis Alÿs' *Lada Kopeika Project* (2014) - I will return to this project in Chapter 5.

transferred an object which people often associate with ‘calmness’, ‘nature’, or ‘stability’. By relocating an immobile thing belonging to one part of the world to another Hirano also brought to light the issue of non-human mobility in the hypermobile world.

While Hirano has transformed her travel into art, this is not what most of the tourists would do. My preceding text does not look at tourists in a very positive way. Yet tourist-shaming is certainly not my intention here. I have encountered supportive voices from some of the theorists towards the figure of tourist. For example, Culler tries to deconstruct the common-sense outrage towards tourism. “The tourist, it seems, is the lowest of the low,” (Culler 1990: 1) he writes and adds that “even books that celebrate travel engage in the denigration of tourists.” (Culler 1990: 2) His explanation for this is quite simple: “Ferocious denigration of tourists is in part an attempt to convince oneself that one is not a tourist. The desire to distinguish between tourists and real travelers is part of tourism” (Culler 1990: 3).

But to be a tourist does not mean to be stupid. I would argue that what is problematic about tourism has less to do with the individual travelers and is more about larger structures which facilitate and frame the tourist performances. Deconstruction of the “codes of performance” (Edensor 2001: 75) might lead to dissatisfaction with the provided simulacrum and initiate actions undermining those codes. These do not have to be labeled as art: Edensor speaks about several typologies of ‘rebellious tourists’ who do not ‘want to play,’ such as those engaging in “cynical performances, resistant performances, improvisation, and involuntary performance.” ((Edensor 2001: 75), cf. (Edensor 2001: 75-78))<sup>37</sup> Another type of unorthodox tourist is a tourist researcher.

### **Tourism research**

As I knelt, what felt like dozens of bored eyes turned to look at this odd behavior, with expressions as if to ask why anyone would want to take such a picture.

And at least I felt then I must be a researcher. (Crang 2011: 222)

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<sup>37</sup> I will leave these categories for now but return to them later (in Chapter 5 and Conclusion) when discussing my own art performances.

What worried me for months was how to justify, indeed how to cover, my desire to travel to Mongolia, China and other countries which happened to be part of my master project. The most important source of funding for this research was provided by the Theatre Academy itself so to prove that this was not a leisure trip seemed essential to me. Though that would be only partially true as the travel was half (70 percent? 90 percent? 30 percent?) research, half a trip aiming to satisfy my touristic desires. If one puts down the hypocritical altruistic mask, voluntary works for NGO's abroad are also often tickets for exotic trips. This does not make work of those volunteers any less valuable. Yet it is important to acknowledge that the people I am now talking about are also 'just people' and the destination where they want to operate might be chosen by desires to explore the respective place. I can imagine such an approach having its dark sides but on the other hand, it should not lead to situations of general self-shaming for engaging in activities one likes.

A study of tourist researcher Mike Crang *Tourist: Moving Places, Becoming Tourist, Becoming Ethnographer* provides an amusing commentary on the topic. Crang's essay is not only research of the tourist industry on the Greek island of Kefalonia but also a witty study of this study itself. "Sure a partner raised eyebrows about the fieldwork in mid summer in Greece, sure too did several colleagues. Not gritty enough. Not serious enough," (Crang 2011: 209) writes Crang pointing out assumptions of his university colleagues about the legitimacy of the research.

Tourist researchers have to make sure they are not enjoying the trip too much. Due to this implicit demand, Crang finds himself being on one occasion "the only person in long trousers" (Crang 2011: 219) on one of Kefalonia's beaches, other time having "an urge to start making notes [he] profoundly hoped would be profound as a way to telling [himself] that this was indeed work" (Crang 2011: 210). I remember a similar urge to justify myself by creating an extensive (even excessive) amount of documentation during the trip or feeling guilty when moving around the city while not 'working' – i.e. not following particular geometries of the city.

When conducting the research which could be labeled as autoethnographic it is hard not to alter one's performance. While studying tourists Crang became "such an obsessively 'good' tourist as to be a bad one.

[He] read guidebooks, and the signs and labels on places, and the brochures, and the fliers. [He] really [got] anxious about missing things that [he] should see or visit.” (Crang 2010: 210) Although to become a sort of hyper-tourist was more an unfortunate result of Crang's research, for me, this is an important moment which resonates with my working methodology:

Edensor refers to Michel de Certeau stating that “tourists may deviate from organized tours in ways akin to how [...] pedestrians (temporarily) transform the public space and transmit alternative meaning by using ‘tactics’ to reappropriate space.” (Edensor 2001: 76) I was also re-appropriating certain city patterns, although the exceptionality of my movements did not lie in an obvious subversion. Rather, the tactic was to perform an unusually good ‘city user’ and by that to reveal the unspoken about researched cities. This notion is being discussed in a closer detail in following chapters. I can see a strong similarity between Crang and myself. Though coming from different fields and describing our work differently, the chosen methodology had the same objective – to understand and deconstruct a particular system of directive signs by not directly fighting against them but to underline them, emphasize them.

Unsurprisingly the ‘real’ tourists of Kefalonia “appear[ed] to have rather blithely ignored the guides – or at least not been such slaves to them” (Crang 2011: 210). Similarly to Culler and other researchers, Crang is not overly critical towards the tourists considering tourism as a “knowledgeable activity” (Crang 2011: 205). Although he too makes it clear that despite their (seeming) proximity tourism and tourism research (in his case (auto)ethnography) are two different activities (Crang 2011: 207), tourism “not necessarily producing knowledge of an academically respectable kind.” (Crang 2011: 207)

### **Global nomad**

According to Korstanje and Mustellier, we are not living in a mobile world, instead we “dwell on a sedentary society, an industrial society which is based on a false consciousness of what means being mobile” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 69). They compare tourism to a carousel (Merry-go-round) which “connote[s] mobility but the displacement is always on the same axis in a circularly basis” (Korstanje and Mustellier 2014: 69) The so-called ‘digital’ or

‘global nomads’ attempt to transgress the status quo by introducing new modes of traveling and laboring within our post-Fordist society. The use of transportable digital technologies such as laptops and smartphones which are connected to the internet are amongst common tools. These travelers are traversing the globe, working remotely often without ever meeting their clients, bringing back<sup>38</sup> into our “sedentary” societies the migrating figure of the nomad. Or are they, really?

The origin of the word *nomad* refers to the Greek *nomas* meaning “roaming, roving, wandering (from place to place to find pasturage for their flocks or herds)” (Harper 2019) and relates to *nomos* “pasture, pasturage, grazing” (Ibid.). Life of traditional nomads are influenced by seasonal changes, i.e. when nomadic herders travel with their animals in search for a pasture. As discussed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>39</sup>, the typical environment for this type of living is a “smooth” one, such as a “desert, steppe, ice, sea” (Deleuze - Guattari 2010: 46) which stands in the opposition to the “striated” (Ibid: 5), geometrical space of a city. But the concurrent popular use of the term ‘nomad’ seems to be rather ignorant towards the philosophical understanding of the word canonized by Deleuze and Guattari.

The question here is, to what extent can the so-called *global nomad* really be called a ‘nomad’ in a traditional sense of a figure who “does not belong to this relative global, where one passes from one point to another, from one region to another. Rather, he is in a *local absolute*, an absolute that is manifested locally, and engendered in a series of local operations.” (Ibid: 46, italics in original) By other words, it is “false to define the nomad[s] by movement” (Ibid: 44), by their mobility. More important than the motion itself are its quality, motivations behind and the relation of nomads to the space they ‘occupy’. Instead of

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38 According to media theorist Joshua Meyrowitz, the modern nomad movement represents a return to earlier, more ‘natural’ state of being a human: “as we are moving swiftly into a new era of globalization and wireless communication, we are also spiraling backwards, in some key ways, to the earliest form of human association: nomadic hunting and gathering. We are, in short becoming, ‘global nomads’.” (Meyrowitz In Richards 2015: 4)

39 The figure of *nomad* is being discussed in a section of their seminal work *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). This segment has been later published as an independent volume under the title *Nomadology: The War Machine* (1986) which is also the version with which I was working.

territorialization typical for the State, their actions lead to deterritorialization: “They add desert to desert, steppe to steppe, by a series of local operations whose orientation and direction endlessly vary.” (Ibid: 46) While ‘global nomads’ might be achieving certain levels of independency and fluidity in their way of being, they do not succeed in what is fundamentally ‘nomadic’: detaching themselves from the influence of the State apparatus and its understanding of mobility (as stated above by Korstanje and Mustellier). Thus, labeling them as ‘nomads’ might be considered inappropriate.<sup>40</sup> I will stick with the term nevertheless, in accordance with its current use, but keep it in quotation marks so to indicate its ambiguity.

Even though it would be naive to consider those remote workers independent on the nation-states or the global market, what they bring is a different ideology of labor. The high – and sustainable (!) - mobility of ‘digital nomads’ questions economic models brought by the industrial revolution. Working as a freelancer enables them to be more in charge of their own working time, also the leisure and the work can get mixed in a way unthinkable in a Fordist factory. As being limited only by the quality of the internet connection, ‘digital nomads’ are often enjoying living and working in various “exotic” locations (Wang et al 2018: 7). Which, on the other hand, brings once again ethical concerns related i.e. to the travel styles, ways of behavior in the chosen destinations, ways of interaction with the locals and similar. It seems that academia is only beginning to catch up, to map and theorize the new phenomena of the ‘global nomadism’ (cf i.e. Wang et al. 2018, Richards 2015). So to be able to discuss the matter, different labels have been recognized such as i.e. ‘backpackers’, ‘flashpackers’, ‘digital nomads’ or ‘global nomads’ with an aim to establish a more subtle differentiation between various identities of modern ‘nomads’. This is how the tourist researcher Greg Richards summarizes his

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40 For a further discussion on the difference between ‘traditional’ nomads and contemporary ‘global/digital nomads’ cf. an unpublished chapter of the doctoral thesis by media and performance studies scholar Michiel de Lange (de Lange 2009). De Lange is critical towards the concurrent use of the word and concludes his text like this: “We have seen that the ‘digital nomad’ has little to do with ‘real’ nomadism, that it is misleading as a metaphor, that it rests on shaky theoretical foundations, and neglects political dimensions of unequal access to hyper-mobile lifestyles.” (Ibid: 16)

observations on the topic:

The traditional backpacker can be seen as a form of ‘neo-tribe’, gathering in self-sufficient enclaves. In contrast, the flashpacker, or ‘digital nomad’ utilizes existing digital and logistic infrastructure to maintain a fluid, individualized lifestyle. The global nomad, or ‘location independent traveler’, tries to integrate with the local community, while trying to avoid the strictures of the ‘system’.  
(Richards 2015: 1)

To me, the label of the ‘global nomad’ is the most sympathetic concerning my own current style of mobility, the misuse of the word ‘nomad’ put aside. It not only signifies the global mobility but also an interest in the local communities. The ‘global nomad’ might not be the same figure as the ‘digital nomad’ who, as the self-explanatory title already suggests, is highly dependent on the digital technologies and is likely to be engaged in the computer software-related jobs. To me a more general description, such as the one provided by Richards referring to researcher Päivi Kannisto, is more appealing: “[global nomads] are location independent travelers who stay away from ‘home’ for long periods of time, and who generally reject the ideology of settled society.”  
(Richards 2015: 7)

When it comes to the freedom of (performance) artists to travel, it is not only a choice but also a necessity. The local performance scenes and related job markets, especially in smaller countries such as the Czech Republic, are not sufficient. If one wants to be a ‘professional’ (performance) artist, one is required to travel. With seemingly ‘no time to stop’ (both in place and in time) art nowadays became a lot about creating one's own portfolio and promotional websites, trying to fight the never-ending stream of open calls, grant and residency applications accompanied by sorting out documentation from previous projects which can be utilized for applying to future ones. What for me personally results from the situation described is a need for an evaluation of my own situation which would ideally help me to focus on the plausible and eliminate what I began to blindly follow.

## **Performing tourism in a gallery**

During my Trans-Siberian travel the persona I was performing could be easily labeled as ‘backpacker’ if for nothing else then for the huge backpack I was carrying with me; as well as for my limited budget and other related behavior. This was an unintentional and inevitable everyday performance, an enactment of a prescribed social script. Though the aim of the project being different I was not oblivious towards my ‘backpacker appearance’ and the way the trip was executed. Aside to my urban explorations, I was also presenting various more ‘traditionally’ framed performance works with me as a traveler being the central figure. For example, in galleries/universities of Kyiv, Ulaanbaatar or Irkutsk I have presented myself in my common traveling clothes while carrying the backpack and undertaking various actions.

In the lines which follow I am presenting, as examples, two of those ‘performances of the second-order’ (cf. Introduction) in which I diverted from the topic of urbanism and tried to articulate my own existence of being a tourist/traveler/backpacker/‘global nomad’/artist/researcher from the ‘West’ visiting the ‘East’.

### **З Дзиги у Детенпулу (From Dzyga to Detenpula)**

22/2/2018 Lviv (UA), Dzyga Gallery, Detenpula Gallery, Lviv public space

The first performance happened in Lviv, Ukraine, on my way to the first research city of Moscow. The core of this conceptual work is based on my communication error and my way of turning this into an art performance. As I had only a few days in Lviv, the performance *From Dzyga to Detenpula* had to be organized from a distance – similarly to many other performances, talks, and presentations I made on the way, not to mention even more crucial and seemingly never-ending searches for new ‘homes’ in each next destination.

While arranging the presentation in Lviv I got confused because I was simultaneously communicating also with performers in Kyiv and managed to agree on presenting my performance in Lviv at the same time in two different galleries – Dzyga and Detenpula. Were I working in any other art medium such

a situation would be quite hard to solve. But due to the flexibility of performance art, I simply altered my previous plans and decided to make a performance walk which would be connecting both Dzyga and Detenpula galleries. See the attached email in which I am trying to explain the situation to the Dzyga curator:

Email to the Dzyga Gallery 17/2/2018

Dear [xxx]<sup>41</sup>,

a funny thing has happened.

In the process of arranging my performance in Lviv, I was also trying to arrange a performance in Kyiv. Aside to you, I was talking to this other person, Богдан янчук- Зухер, thinking that he is from Kyiv. But no, it turned out he is from Lviv as well :-)

So in light of this confusion I have decided to follow this life situation, as performance art is an art of life, right...? -) For my piece I intend to do this: We will gather in Dzyga and from there we will walk to gallery Detenpyla [sic]<sup>42</sup> (which Bogdan is in touch with and which he told me is a befriended space to yours – nice coincidence..). During the walk, I will be reading my online conversation with [yyy], Bogdan and you (with your permission!) in which we are discussing arranging of my performance. So the end result will be a 'performance about making a performance' a sort of meta- performance. Finally, we will arrive at Detenpyla where we could all sit down for a while, have some tea and wine, chat... I could also screen some videos of my older works if people would be interested. That I will arrange with Bogdan/Detenpyla. [...]

The performance was executed exactly as planned and described in the email above. The audience gathered in the entrance corridor of the Dzyga gallery. I welcomed all and quickly proceeded to read a printed conversation from a chat with the curator of Detenpula gallery Bogdan Yanchuk-Zucher.<sup>43</sup>

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41 Persons mentioned in the email conversation did not want their names to be publicly displayed.

42 The correct name of the gallery is *Detenpula* (Детенпула) not *Detenpyla*. What confused me was, that the Cyrillic letter “y” is being pronounced as “u”.

43 In the preparation of the performance, there were three main people involved but only Bogdan permitted me to use our personal conversation.

I did not know the way from Dzyga to Detenpula and also I was focusing on reading the text so even though I was directing the (unexpectedly large) crowd I also needed members of the crowd to lead me to the other venue. Bogdan does not speak English or Russian and I do not speak Ukrainian. Our conversation and the whole arranging of – already quite confusing performance – had to happen with the help of the Google Translator. While reading I was struggling with Bogdan's messages written in Cyrillic and the content had to get incomprehensible for the audience at some points. Nevertheless, as the afterward discussion proved, the main idea of the (meta)performance was understandable.

The video documentation of the performance<sup>44</sup> displays at the beginning myself giving instructions to the audience inside of the Dzyga gallery and walking outside, where, after a short negotiation about the best direction to Detenpula, I proceed with reading the text and walking. The walk through romantic winter Lviv is concluded in front of Detenpula gallery where Bogdan asks me<sup>45</sup>: “Your performance is still happening or not anymore? If not, when did it end?” I reply:

Well, I would put it this way. There was one main situation that I wanted to do, and that was to read this text. It happened and after that the route was longer. But I think it was also interesting, for me, to just walk around the city and to look at what I didn't know. And maybe for other people too.

What the video recording reveals is that the piece was not only about (performance) art meta-discursive capabilities or difficulties which organization of an (performance) art presentation might bring but that the city of Lviv itself also played an important role in it. The evening time of the performance, the particular atmosphere of the post-socialist urban settlement and the omnipresence of heavy snow made Lviv more than just a setting but

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44 The video was recorded by Bogdan Yanchuk-Zucher and cut by myself. The edited version can be accessed here: <https://vimeo.com/257789610>

45 His question was in Ukrainian and my answer in Russian. In the following text I have translated both utterances to English.

rather another character, another actant, in the narrative of the piece. Cf. the still image from the video:



1.2 *From Dzyga to Detenpula*

Another, in a way similar case, was my collaborative performance in Ulaanbaatar.

### **Conflict Between Tradition and Progression**

19/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (MN), 976 Gallery

This was a duo performance I created in collaboration with the local performance artist Togmidshiirev Enkhbold in front of the 976 Gallery. The resulting work was based on our discussions on the issues which concerned us both: global and local mobility, tourism (in Mongolia), conflict between the tradition and progress.<sup>46</sup> Also, we spoke about living conditions in Ulaanbaatar, where, for example, the traffic jams paralyze the city constantly. All the elements used were referring to these topics.

Before the performance itself, we removed the back row of seats in Enkhbold's car and placed inside of it a box of a kind we previously built from wooden boards. We fought our way to the performance site through Ulaanbaatar traffic, Enkhbold driving, me sitting next to him in a front seat. After we arrived, we stepped out of the car, poured the sand inside of the

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<sup>46</sup> *Conflict Between the Tradition and Progression* happened to be also a title of the piece. At least this is what the Facebook event from the last April states, I do not recall any such naming.

wooden box and lied down on it. Both of us were focusing at the beginning on the execution of our own activities without paying that much attention to the other one yet we were sharing the same space and with the progression of the action eventually started to interact more. The whole performance ended by the two of us leaving the car again.

During the piece we were stacked inside of the car and surrounded by the audience:



1.3 *Conflict Between Tradition and Progression*

The photograph displays two ‘anonymous’ bodies evoking the resemblance to bodies of thousands of ‘anonymous’ migrants stuffed into boats, cars, trucks. With Enkhbold we did not discuss the topic of migration specifically, although the conflict between the nomadic way of life and migration<sup>47</sup> is strong in Mongolia: many Mongolian *nomads* are being forced to abandon their nomadism and to become economic *migrants* when they are exchanging their mobile lifestyle in the countryside for the sedentary life in a city. While the car might represent a movement and a (false) sense of freedom, the wooden box filled with Mongolian sand resembles a coffin (inside of a funeral car):

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. Deleuze and Guattari discussing the difference between the *nomad* and the *migrant*: “the migrant goes principally from one point to another, even if the second point is uncertain, unforeseen, or not well localized. But the nomad goes from point to point only as a consequence and as a factual necessity; in principle, points for him are relays along a trajectory.” (Deleuze and Guattari 2010: 44)



1.4 *Conflict Between Tradition and Progression*

The image of the casket is both very grim (i.e. evoking suffocated migrants) but also soothing - in the midst of chaotic globalizing processes, it brings to the forefront the importance of the relation of people to the land and the natural, unchangeable cycle of life and death.

During the performance itself, Enkhbold performed various ritualistic actions, worked with apples and water, made exercises of different sorts. Since the work was partially an improvisation, the meaning of some of my colleague's actions remained unclear to me until today. I equipped myself with various 'tourist' objects such as digital and analog cameras or postcards. I was engaging in discussion with audience members, inviting them to write postcards, take 'selfies' with me and also photographing and video-recording them.

The performance was documented by several photographers and also spectators were capturing the piece with their smartphones. By taking images of the audience I could regain back my agency - from being observed and documented to becoming *simultaneously* an observer. The double position of a 'subjectifying subject' was quite significant for the whole trip. Especially in China and Mongolia I often felt as how I imagine animals might feel in a zoo (in this understanding the car trunk might be seen as a zoo cage) for all the looks, hailings, and requests (for example, people wanted to take 'selfies' with me or to touch my hair). On the other hand, I came to these countries uninvited, equipped with several cameras and with an aim to capture as much material as

possible.

For me, especially the preparation of the performance was a strong experience. Enkhbold is one of not so many internationally successful (performance) artists from Mongolia. Yet, despite his reputation abroad he lives a very humble lifestyle in a traditional Mongolian yurt – or ‘ger’ in Mongolian – in a suburbs of Ulaanbaatar. To work on the project meant mainly to spend time together. Enkhbold took me by his car on a tour around the city and because of that I could see some suburban neighborhoods I would otherwise rather avoid (partially due to – more or less real – danger I might face there as well as because I did not want to be a Western ‘gapeseed’ peeping into poor people's homes). I visited Enkhbold's ger and met his family as well as his other artistic friends who showed me their studios.

It is quite difficult for me to describe this action and its meaning in detail as its preparation and also execution remained somewhat chaotic, despite all our effort. One of the main obstacles we had to fight with was Enkhbold's very limited knowledge of English (and my absolute lack of knowledge of Mongolian). As a result, many important topics were opened but it was hardly possible to explore them together in-depth. Yet, similarly as in the case of the Lviv performance, we still managed to overcome the language barrier somehow.

When communication through language is (almost) not possible this opens a door to connection on another level and through other senses. For example, one of the strong ‘extra-linguistic’ moments I have experienced with Enkhbold was when we were watching Ulaanbaatar from the top of a hill. He did not verbalize it but it was quite clear why he took me there: to share ‘his’ city with me. After a relatively long period of sitting, observing, thinking, all in silence, we understood that it is time to go elsewhere and left the hill. For me, the possibly most important meaning of our art performance was a simple message: a person from one part of the world (‘Europe/Czech’) came to visit Ulaanbaatar where he met a person from another part of the world (‘Mongolia’).

### ***East by Northeast as tourism research***

During the travel, it was relatively easy for me to create concepts for the mentioned ‘performances of the second-order’ as I did not have to go far for the

inspiration. What I was mostly portraying were simply thoughts and situations brought by the trip. The whole alternative project could be based on those ‘second-order performances’. But in the case of *East by Northeast*, they have been created rather as just a side product.

Throughout the whole trip, I was constantly facing situations of *non-understandings* and *misunderstandings*. As anthropologist Guido Sprenger explains, in his field, there is an important difference being made between the two. While the non-understanding in communication can be immediately recognized as such, the case of misunderstanding is more complex. It is at first evaluated as understanding and “only realized [as a misunderstanding] by the sender after at least one more communication, a reply.” (Sprenger 2016: 22)

The phenomenon typically occurs between representants of different cultures whose preconceptions of certain words and situations are not the same. It may, nevertheless, happen between members of the same culture as well. For Sprenger, there is “a strong current in the ideology of communication” (Sprenger 2016: 23) which prioritizes understanding over a misunderstanding. In his view, this is not the best approach as “any communication involves the production of differences” (Sprenger 2016: 23) and that misunderstanding “should be considered not only as inevitable but as productive.” (Sprenger 2016: 35). He advocates for the importance of both, the understanding as well as misunderstanding, though still favors the former (which he exemplifies by a beautiful performative sentence: “Even while I am arguing for the value of misunderstanding, I am trying to make myself understood.” (Sprenger 2016: 24)).

From the perspective of my ‘global nomad’ lifestyle, these ‘lost in translation’ situations became quite common for me. I no longer expected understanding in the sense of a clearly transmitted information, as I accepted that the non-understandings and misunderstandings are omnipresent in our globalized world. Following Sprenger, the ‘failure’ of communication (through language) does not have to be considered as such: “what appears as cultural misunderstanding from one point of view is transcultural production of communication from another.” (Sprenger 2016: 36)

Misunderstandings are almost inevitable between different cultures. They might be either embraced or, if for practical reasons necessary, diminished

by simply spending time together, getting to know each other. In that sense a 'global nomad', if acting respectably, might be considered as an intermediary, a figure in-between of 'known' and 'unknown'. With my specific case, as traveling artist researcher under the framework of *East by Northeast* project, performing of this intermediary function was happening both 'automatically', simply by myself being on the road, as well as when trying to articulate my experiences to the local audiences through performance art presentations.

As I have shown in this chapter, people travel for various reasons. The motivations and expected outcomes might differ, as well as the respective executions of the trips. Some travel rarely, for others, to be on the move is more than just a leisure activity but a lifestyle. For example, self-proclaimed 'global nomads' are seeking ways how to deal with the (obsolete) notion of nation-states by sustainable global travel. A very sensitive issue is that of travel as a privilege in comparison to forced travels. While some "are more in charge of" (Massey 1993: 61) mobility in globalised world, some other ones are "more on the receiving end of it" (Ibid). There are places where 'the others' might not be at all welcomed by the locals but also vice versa. Aside from figures such as migrants, tourists, nomads and 'nomads', also researchers and artists travel, sometimes turning their trips into works of research or art, sometimes not.

A thread interrelating all those on the move is the notion of travel as performance. This sphere of human behavior is in no way different to other ones in the sense that the traveling too has its (unwritten) scripts and that those engaging in it are expected to deliver certain performances.

In this thesis chapter, I have discussed *why* and partially also *how* people travel. Another key aspect influencing the traveling style is the choice of means of transport which also adds to the overall performance: backpackers hitchhike, take third-class trains and cheapest buses; migrants walk and are being smuggled; businessmen go with first-class flights. For my trip, it came to be the trains which carried me on, and specifically those running on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Will you follow me on board?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE RAILWAY**

#### **The arrival of the railway**

The humankind is entering the second quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As many times before, the technology is changing the world as we know it ‘beyond recognition’ as the common expression says. What has been until recently only a phantasy of science-fiction writers and filmmakers such as Philip K. Dick or Aldous Huxley is becoming a lived reality in the current digital world. The interconnectedness through digital media or the scale of the people's global mobility is on its provisional peak. Nevertheless, the current technological revolution has its precedent in a comparable situation with an arguably even higher impact on the way we live our lives nowadays. It was the industrial revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and many inventions which it brought such as that of a steam engine or a railway.

In 1830 possibly the first regularly operating railway for passengers was opened in Great Britain between Canterbury and Whitstable (Left 2002). Since then, this new means of transport expanded rapidly not only across the whole of Britain but globally. The invention of the railway and its wide implementation had a far broader impact than just the increase in mobility of people, even though that was, of course, also one of the essential changes it brought. The question of comfort put aside, the transport on a horseback or in horse-driven stagecoaches was significantly slower and inefficient in comparison to the railway.<sup>48</sup> For the small local producers of goods of all sorts, it was more profitable to sell their products locally. Hence, most of what people were eating, cooking on, wearing, living in, sleeping on and otherwise using in their everyday lives was being grown or manufactured relatively near their domicile.

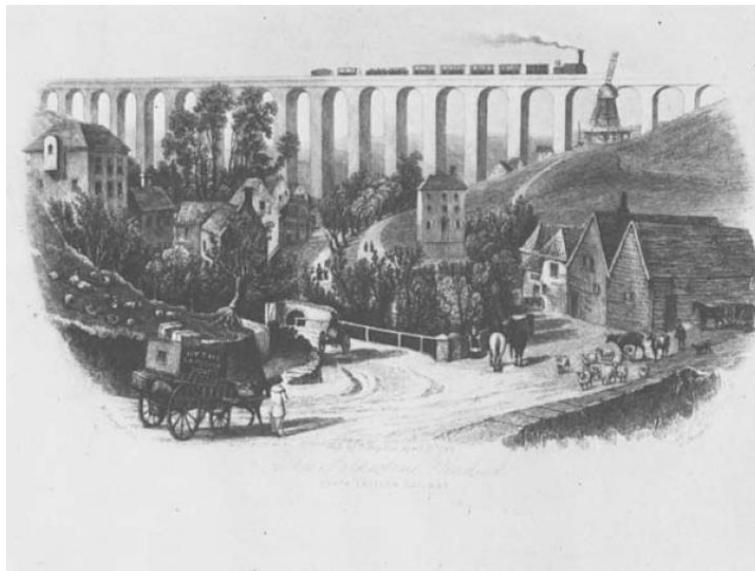
(Schivelbusch 1977: 59)

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48 “The average traveling speed of the early railways in England was twenty to thirty miles an hour, or roughly three times the speed previously achieved by the stagecoaches,” writes Wolfgang Schivelbusch (Schivelbusch 1977: 33-34). Human geographer Barney Warf provides even higher numbers: “the steam engine [...] reduced travel times and costs over land by as much as 95 percent.” (Warf 2011: 435)

The advent of the railway made it possible not only to shift goods more efficiently but as a consequence whole areas – towns, cities, and regions could get specialized in growing only certain types of crops or producing only certain types of goods in new mechanized factories. There was no longer a need to be self-sufficient - the goods missing in one region could be imported from another one with higher ease, and analogously the abundant resources and products could be exported. It had an enormous impact on the separation between the producer and the user. Products “lost its local identity, its spatial presence. Its concretely sensual properties, which were experienced at the place of production as a result of the labor process [...] appeared quite different in the distant market place,” as historian Wolfgang Schivelbusch puts it (Schivelbusch 1977: 59).<sup>49</sup>

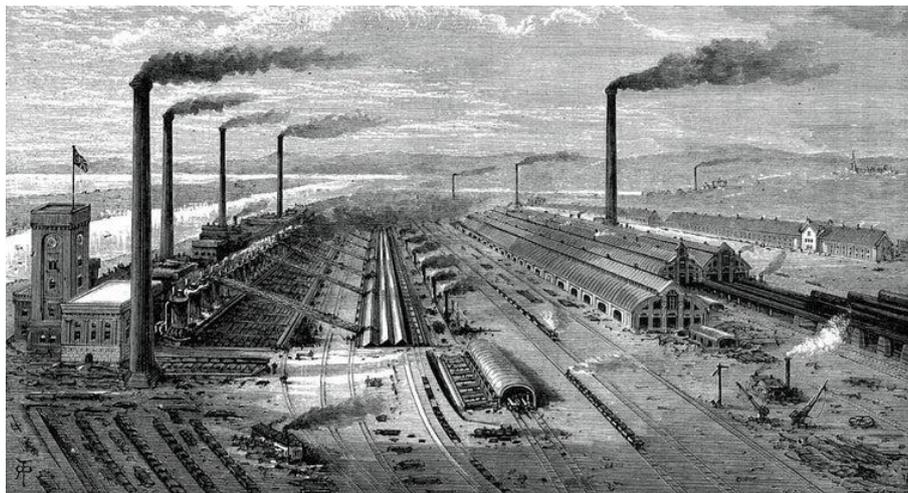
See the difference between drawing of a pre-industrial English village and the engraving of the Barrow Hematite Steel Company - steel and iron company operating in Barrow-in-Furness, England from 1859 to 1963 (Grace’s Guide Ltd 2019). Note the importance of the railway on both images - while in the first one it is being depicted as rather just a harbinger of the industrialization, the second one depicts the revolution in full power with trains playing a pivotal role:



2.1 Industrialization progressing in Great Britain

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49 An intriguing thought of Schivelbusch is also the usage of Walter Benjamin's concept of “aura” for the discussion on the loss of the “traditional spatial-temporal presence” of goods. (Schivelbusch 1977: 41)



2.2 Barrow Hematite Steel Company in 1878

As it was newly possible to transport the results of labor, it became also much easier to transport laborers themselves. Until then the non-existing figure of the commuter was born as well as “the epoch of the suburbs, of the amoebic proliferation of the formerly contained cities into the surrounding countryside.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 55). A new migrating working class which replaced the class of craftsmen working in small workshops and factories has emerged, together with the bourgeoisie class of the factory owners. The private capital of factory bosses often stood behind the development of transportation networks because those entrepreneurs saw it as a possibility for the maximalization of profit.

It was the combination of the aforementioned changes in transportation and production, enabled by the industrial revolution, that made it possible for the new strong economic system to emerge in its fullness: modern capitalism. This currently predominant model and the global game-changer, so to say, has its origins if not earlier, then in the industrial, not the digital revolution.

### **The machine ensemble**

In the global sociocultural change happening in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the railway played a crucial role: “it had introduced a new system of behavior: not only of travel and communication but of thought, of feeling, of expectation” (Trachtenberg 1977: 15). The understanding of transportation had changed - to travel by railway was comparable to “a visit to the theater or the

library - the purchase of a train ticket was equivalent to that of a theater ticket.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 58)

The environment between the departing and arriving point became incomprehensible for the traveling individuals, who had yet to get accustomed to the perception brought by the new velocity. The machine itself, the attraction which “shoots right through [the landscape] like a bullet” (Schivelbusch: 31) in which he or she was traveling became more important. Similarly, the role of the traveler had changed: the “travel [by railway] transformed the traveler into a parcel [...] one no longer felt like a person but like a commodity.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 191) It is important to think about a certain ‘cyborgian’ unity between those two “commodities” - a traveler and the means of transport, specifically the railway. To explain myself better let me outline Schivelbusch's concept of the railway as a *machine ensemble*.

“The wheels, rails, and carriages are only parts of one great machine,” (Greenhow 1846 In Schivelbusch 1977: 40) says a report on the railway construction from the 1840s. Schivelbusch goes even further and includes under the railway machine ensemble, as he calls it, not only the wheels, rails, and carriages but the whole “unified railway system, which appeared as one great machine covering the land” (Schivelbusch 1977: 47). There is something very organic about this notion of the railway as one monstrous “machine covering the land”. The idea of the unified railway as an interconnected organism reminds me of mycelium of mushrooms or my favorite metaphor of a city as a living entity. In this context railways and their adjustments - transportation networks within urban areas - could be seen as arteries and veins serving larger entities within which they operate - cities and countries.

Although, the relationship between a railway and a territory which it ‘serves’, i.e. supplies it, following the organic metaphor, with the nutrition in the form of people and goods, is two-sided. The railway network gives but not without a cost. As a French poet Stéphane Mallarmé wrote: “Normandy [...], like Brittany, is part of the Western Railway.” (Mallarmé 1874/75 In Schivelbusch 1977: 57) In other words, for Mallarmé both of the French regions are considered to have lost their independent, previously somewhat isolated status and became incorporated into the railway network.

The notion of the united railway network is well expressed in Tarik

Saleh's 2009 movie *Metropia*. See the fictional subway network on the still from the movie:



2.3 *Metropia*

The film is significantly localized in “Europe in 2024” as the title in the beginning informs. Europe, not for example Stockholm/Sweden where the plot begins or Paris/France where the development of the narrative brings us. In the universum of *Metropia* the concept of the nation-state is no longer relevant, what matters is the Metro, a unified transnational subway system. To paraphrase Mallarmé: ‘Sweden, as well as France, are both parts of the Metro.’ Saleh's dystopia is a fitting metaphor. It is vividly articulating the concurrent heritage of the industrial revolution: the process of globalization enabled by the development of the integrated international (railway) travel which is erasing differences between countries. Such could be understood the relation between the rail and the land on which it is built. But what about the unity between the machine ensemble and the passenger?

Schivelbusch speaks about the machine ensemble in a strictly technical sense as about a compound of different mechanical components. The traveler participates but is not unified with the machine.<sup>50</sup> I would want to propose the

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<sup>50</sup> For example: “machine ensemble [...] interjected itself *between* the traveler and the landscape. The traveler perceived the landscape as it was filtered through the machine ensemble.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 189, italics added)

expanded, 'cyborgian', notion of the machine ensemble incorporating also the human elements. To interact, collaborate, if you wish, with humans is anyway one of its essential functions. Although, of course, there are obvious differences in the nature of the organic and inorganic parts of such an understanding of the railway machine ensemble. One of them is the ability of people to disconnect, to leave the railway system.

The essential question here, applicable not only to the railway industry but to the other technological innovations brought by the industrial revolution as well, is the power relation between the human and the machine. Is it the train driver running the train, or the train which is using the service of its human particle? The question can be applied to various means of transportation but is especially significant in the case of the railway<sup>51</sup>: "because a train runs on a predetermined line an engine-driver could never aspire to the social role of a 'captain on dry land': the electric telegraph confirmed his true status, that of an industrial worker, an operator of a machine." (Schivelbusch 1977: 47) Similarly, who is in charge of the relation passenger-train is not as clear as it might seem.

Even though the rail is a service enabling transportation of humans, the train lets itself to be used only under certain specific conditions. "To get in, as always, there was a price to be paid" (de Certeau 1980: 113) and not only in a sense of money: "Inside [of the train carriage] there is the immobility of an order," (de Certeau 1980: 111) writes Michel de Certeau. "Immobile inside the train, seeing immobile things slip by." (Ibid) Inside of any means of transportation, the passenger is always more or less restricted. And if one is not driving his or her own vehicle enabling the individual to stop as they please<sup>52</sup> he or she is being temporarily 'imprisoned' by the machine. This experience was particularly strongly felt in the origins of the railway in Great Britain where once the passenger entered the compartment, he or she could not leave it until the next stop of the train.<sup>53</sup> During the first decades of the railway, there was no aisle connecting the respective compartments as we are used to it now. As a

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51 As well as subways, tramways, trolleybuses and the like machines in which the individual vehicles are inextricably connected to the united machine ensemble network.

52 With various notable exceptions such as the high-speed highways where to entirely stop the vehicle is often not possible.

53 Cf. with the open train carriages in the United States at the same time.

result, to escape the train ‘cell’ and take a quasi-walk inside of the carriage which is available to us nowadays or even to use the bathroom was impossible.

The photograph below shows a first-class traveler in 1900 France in one of such compartments, holding to his newspaper. Reading became a common strategy of how to overcome the situation in which the travelers were “forced” into “a relationship based no longer on living need but an embarrassment.”

(Schivelbusch 1977: 86)



2.4 First-class traveler

Together with the change of an individual's ‘function’ while being part of the transportation process his or her relationship with the landscape traveled was also altered significantly. I have already mentioned above that a new way of perception had to evolve after the invention of the railway - a type of vision that Schivelbusch calls “panoramic” and which is strongly mediated through the railway machine. No longer it was possible to see the surroundings by one's own eyes only but always through the (rectangular) frame of the windowpane, from a particular angle and on a route predetermined by the rail: “The windowpane is what allows us to *see*, and the rail, what allows us to *move through*.” (de Certeau 1980: 112, italics in original)

It is also the nature of the railway machine ensemble that it cuts through the landscape in a particular way - as straight as possible and if necessary even literally piercing through it as in the case of tunnels. There are also additional

elements of the railway which are further affecting the traveler's experience, such as masts bearing electrical wires running alongside the railroad. Aside from changing the landscape scenery, they are also rhythmising the travel: "the overhead line masts act as a metronome, where the rate of acceleration can be sensed from their frequency." (Bissell 2009: 48)

To sum up, for the duration of the travel, an individual becomes a part of the machine. He or she 'sees through its eyes', observes the surrounding environment created by it and for it, experiences its speedings up and slowings down, its rhythm of movement, etc. When I was traveling on the board of the Trans-Siberian railway from Moscow to Irkutsk (which was my longest single stretch on the journey, some three and half days) I made this note, on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018: "The whole situation reminds me a bit of myself being imprisoned in Dresden. [...] Life on the train is so strange. Similarly to prison, it *paralyzes*. A person lacks fresh air, movement, is sort of constantly tired. It's nice, though ... but it feels almost as if it is not real life."

Some eight years ago I spent two weeks in prison for drug smuggling when I was returning home from my hitch-hiking trip to Amsterdam. I was in my early twenties back then and stupid rather than really trying to make fortune on dealing drugs, somehow not realizing that what is legal in one European Union country does not necessarily have to be legal in another one. When in prison, in a truly artistic manner, I was keeping a diary based on which I afterward created a theatre performance. Unfortunately, the notes got lost over the years - it would be interesting to compare the two experiences, the days of imprisonment on the train and in the actual prison.

From both situations, I can clearly recall the aforementioned lack of energy. Also, even though the train is definitely more fun than the prison cell, when on board my wish to somehow 'kill the time' and to arrive where I was heading was comparable with the similar wish in Dresden. As a result, I was sleeping a lot, reading a lot, just sitting and doing nothing a lot. As another diary note from 23<sup>rd</sup> March shows: "It is [...] surprisingly easy to spend the whole day reading. I'm too tired and lazy to write a diary, I think I'm only doing it for the project. [...] I have a feeling I've had yesterday (?) some nice ideas before sleeping but I was lazy and didn't write it down." I like the expression from the previous diary note which well describes this laziness, this 'energy-saving mode'

– the (long) train travel feeling “as if it is not real life”. As a matter of fact, I feel quite alike also in this very moment of writing the lines you are reading.

My life during the last couple of weeks<sup>54</sup> - since I have started to work on the thesis more intensively - feels somehow surreal. The thesis writing became the core of my activities and the ‘real-life’ which includes the environment in which I live (the flat, the city) as well as relations with my friends and family, simply all that is not a thesis writing, is now until a certain extent being pushed away, temporarily suspended.

In prison, the suspension, the hibernation of life is being enforced through the architecture of the prison – the system of cells, halls, grids et cetera as well as by the guards operating the building cluster, the whole ensemble being backed by the legal system. My current hibernation is enabled by an intimate relationship with my portable personal computer, a ‘21<sup>st</sup>-century man's best friend’ on which I am writing. Yet, in this cyborg form, I am still at least maintaining my externality to the machine. It is not possible to have such a distant relationship with the train (or with the prison architecture). When on board, the hibernation is enabled through the incorporation of the human unit inside of the railway machine ensemble. More or less immobile passengers are encapsulated in the guts of a train.

Before the exploration of short-distance machine ensembles in cities, in the next chapter dedicated to public transport, let us take a closer look at a much longer one – the phenomenal Trans-Siberian Railway.

### **The Trans-Siberian Railway**

The Trans-Siberian Railway, 9289km long, operating between Moscow and Vladivostok is often being promoted as the longest *passenger* railway line on Earth with the Russian Federation owning the third-largest railway network (after the United States and China). (Lewandowski 2015: 89-91) The primacy of the Trans-Siberian is not entirely true considering that Moscow - Pyongyang

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<sup>54</sup> Over the process of writing and re-writing the thesis, months have already passed since I wrote this section. I find it nevertheless still suitable to present the thought in the form in which it was written.

line holds a Guinness Record for the “Longest train journey without changing trains” (Guinness World Records Limited 2019) although it is anyway just an extension of the Moscow – Vladivostok line.<sup>55</sup> Aside from the Pyongyang stretch, there are also several other railway lines related to the Trans-Siberian. See the map below:



2.5 The Trans-Siberian Railway and branching lines

The Trans-Mongolian Line is a branch of the Trans-Siberian uncoupling from the mainline in the city of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Russian Republic of Buryatia and heading to Mongolia. The final destination of the train running from Moscow via Ulaanbaatar is Beijing.

The Trans-Manchurian Line is a branch of the Trans-Siberian uncoupling from the mainline in the city of Chita and heading to China. The final destination of the train running from Moscow via Manzhouli and Harbin is,

<sup>55</sup> After Vladivostok, the train from Moscow continues south for some 1000km more and enters the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the Khasan/Tumangang crossing. It provides Russia with direct access to North Korea without the necessity of entering the Chinese territory.

again, Beijing. The essential difference to the Trans-Mongolian Line is that this branch does not at any moment enter the territory of Mongolia.

The Baikal-Amur Mainline (BAM) runs parallel north to the Trans-Siberian in the East Siberia uncoupling at Taishet and continuing eastwards to Sovetskaya Gavan.

There are also various other parallel or otherwise related lines such as the Ural Line in the West or the parallel branch running through Kazakhstan but all are less significant in comparison to the Trans-Mongolian, Trans-Manchurian and the Baikal-Amur Mainline.

The story behind the creation of the railway during the Russian Empire is a complex one and I do not intend to repeat it here. Yet, there are some events I would like to mention which I found important.<sup>56</sup>

The core part of the Trans-Siberian railway construction took part from 1891 to 1901: “By November 1901 it became possible, at last, to go by train from Moscow to Vladivostok, with the exception of the ferry or sled journey over Lake Baikal, and to reach Port Arthur by way of the South Manchuria Railway,” (Wolmar 2013: 129) writes the historian of the line, Christian Wolmar. The last smaller sections running solely on the Russian territory were finalized in 1916.

What is maybe the most fascinating about the entire line is the very fact it was built in the first place. And quickly<sup>57</sup>, given the poor conditions of the pre-industrial Russia which was at the time of the construction rural and undeveloped country.<sup>58</sup> The primitive setting of the railway construction can be

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56 If you are interested in the Trans-Siberian railway history I can direct you to Christian Wolmar's *To The Edge of The World: The Story of the Trans-Siberian Express, the World's Greatest Railway* which was also my main source of information on the topic and which includes an extensive bibliography.

57 As Christian Wolmar notes: “[...] the Trans-Siberian was built around fifty percent more quickly than the Canadian transcontinental which had inspired it.” (Wolmar 2013: 94)

58 “[...] day after day, week after week, tens of thousands of workers mostly armed with little more than pickaxes and shovels created this monumental railway.” (Wolmar 2013: 97) Due to the immense amount of the required workforce, depending on the respective section of the construction, workers were recruited not only from local inhabitants but also from i.e. European Russia, Turkey, Persia, Italy (Ibid. 74) or China (Ibid. 79). The Trans-Siberian is also infamously known for its employment of inmates: “at the peak, about 13,500 prisoners and exiles were employed on the railway, perhaps twenty per cent of the total workforce.”

seen on the following photograph depicting “workers carrying sleepers [...] through [...] *taiga*.” (Wonders of World Engineering 2019)



2.6 Workers carrying sleepers

In comparison, Great Britain, as well as other European nations, were already running complex railway networks at the end of the nineteenth century. In the United States, a cross-country railway was connecting the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. The Russian rail network was significantly smaller, contrasting with its competitors even more given the sheer size of the territory it should cover.

The main factor enabling the railway to be created was the authoritarian Tsarist regime itself: “[...] Russia – or rather the tsar – did decide to build the line. [...] The advantage of being an autocratic leader with no need to consider public opinion or pay too much regard to the parlous [sic] state of the Treasury, was that he had the power to make such things happen.” (Wolmar 2013: 2) It was viable for the tsar himself to support the project as a state enterprise as “a way of establishing and consolidating state power” (Wolmar 2013: 17). Quite the opposite in comparison with the situation in the pioneer railway land, Great Britain, where the progress of the network was determined by investments of entrepreneurial individuals.

Although, the Trans-Siberian too “was a great stimulus to the global

capitalism that was still establishing itself as the dominant economic ethos at the end of the nineteenth century” (Wolmar 2013: 95). Mainly the USA but also British or French provided the railway with supplies, engineers, capital and so on. As a result of the business partnership with Russia these foreign investors had profited significantly: “The Trans-Siberian Railway, it was calculated, was supporting no fewer than 128,000 American family members.” (Patrikeeff-Shukman 2007 In Wolmar 2013: 95)

A somewhat comparable process is currently to be seen in the People's Republic of China which is investing largely into its infrastructure development as well as into its cities (including the (in)famously known projects of building entirely new ones) and being one of the key players in the global economic scene. Aside from its economic strength it is also the centralization of power into the hands of the Communist Party of China and namely to its General Secretary and President Xi Jinping which enables enormous projects to be executed swiftly.

In democratic countries of the ‘West’, such rapid development which China was and still is experiencing today would not be possible precisely because of their democratic principles. There concerns of all the involved parties are - ideally - being taken into account, as well as human rights or ecological sides of the projects which often result in long negotiations and consequent adjustments. On the contrary, to build a Trans-Siberian railway or for example, an entirely new city in China faced/faces much fewer obstacles in that sense. The topic of power centralization is also crucial for the planning of socialist cities and I will return to this notion in Chapter 4.

Hence, in Russia, it was possible to build the line as part of a military strategy without thinking about its profitability. As a matter of fact, its construction was enormously expensive which, according to Wolmar, has been also one of the reasons leading to the 1917 revolution: “a seventh of one year's annual income was spent on building a line that was at the furthest end of the Russian Empire and which had little economic use [...] The enormous sums of money spent on these Far East ventures certainly contributed to opposition to the tsarist regime.” (Wolmar: 171)

The strategic aims of Tsar Alexander III and his successor and son Nicholas II were of two kinds. Firstly, to secure the position of Russia in the

colonial competition in East Asia, namely over Great Britain and Japan. Secondly, to suppress separatist tendencies of the native Siberians and to strengthen the incorporation of the region into the Russian Empire.

Significant evidence of the true imperialist motivations of the Tsar(s), which were nevertheless not articulated openly, was the construction of the Trans-Manchurian section connecting Chita and Vladivostok via Harbin. Most of the branch line runs across the Chinese territory of Manchuria. Indeed, the diagonal cut through China shortens significantly the travel time in comparison to the route which might be undertaken via Khabarovsk solely on the Russian territory. But even more important reason for building the line was the seizure of power over Manchuria, including the strategically important harbor Port Arthur, or its main city Harbin, which is today even being known also under its nickname “Oriental Moscow”. (China Daily Information Co (CDIC) From the personal experience it seems to me no coincidence that when I was traveling on the Trans-Manchurian and staying in Harbin I was hosted there by two Russian students.

The tactics of the power expansion facilitated by the railway construction is certainly not a phenomenon unique to the Trans-Siberian line only. Great Britain, for example, was using a comparable strategy for gaining control over India in the 1850s. (Wolmar 2013: 37) China follows the same pattern nowadays to tighten up the power over its Western regions – Tibet, and more recently Xinjiang, where the new highly unprofitable Lanzhou-Xinjiang high-speed railway opened in 2014.

Nevertheless, to see the Trans-Siberian machine ensemble only through lenses of imperialism would be quite one-sided. According to Wolmar, “the Trans-Siberian is, quite simply, the best thing that ever happened to Siberia, a region that has not been blessed with many other happy events throughout its history” (Wolmar 2013: 259). Even though this is an arguable statement for the reasons outlined above, the Trans-Siberian indeed brought, from a certain perspective, also a lot of good to the region. The “project was not just a matter of building a railway, but encompassed a host of other improvement schemes for Siberia, from clearing rivers and draining to creating new towns and erecting schools and churches.” (Wolmar 2013: 83) The increase of the population's general education (in Russian schools and according to the ‘Western’ standards)

or connecting unique native cultures from previously detached regions with the so-called civilized world (and with the global market) is not necessarily bad but it is also not unequivocally good.

Together with the railway development (and the abolition of serfdom in 1861) hundreds of thousands of migrants were coming to Siberia to seek for a better life. Between 1896 and 1921 its population doubled (Wolmar 2013: 143). The resettlement was largely promoted and subsidized by the government as it was seen “as the key to binding Siberia with European Russia; [...] bringing in vast numbers of Russian-speaking newcomers loyal to their Fatherland was the key to Russification.” (Wolmar 2013: 145). This massive influx of newcomers led to the rapid urbanization of the region which was interestingly “confined to a swathe of land about 125 miles either side of the tracks” (Wolmar 2013: 155). Almost as if the line would be a river nourishing its surroundings and enabling crops to grow. Only in this case, the river was made out of steel, which is probably why they were cities and factories that sprouted, not the grain.

The immigration and resulting urbanization of Siberia both increased population in already existing cities as well as fostered the construction of new ones such as the town Tayga near Tomsk. Urban planning was often inspired by Ebenezer Howard's concept of the garden city (read more about Howard's work in Chapter 4) bringing also new architecture which was “based more on plainer Russian designs than the more ornate traditional Siberian vernacular” (Wolmar 2013: 156). Hence, the urban planning too took part in the Christianization and ‘civilization’ process.

### **Dorothy in China**

To travel the Trans-Siberian was a unique experience, although sensationalized. The “one of life's greatest travel experiences” (cf Introduction) is not only ‘fascinating’ but also (at least for the third-class passengers) uncomfortable. The trains are old; there is no shower, so after few days people begin to smell and look (and feel) fatigued; the landscape is beautiful but monotonous; the poor diet negatively affects one's health. But those are no issues for us, ‘backpackers’, who, as discussed in Chapter 1, try to get as far “off

the beaten track” (Edensor 2001: 74) as it gets, and who measure the quality of the conducted travel by the experienced “degree of hardship”. (Ibid.)

To me, the travel by the Trans-Siberian gave an opportunity to think about the global interconnectedness and how these connections are affected by often invisible power relations. As I did not specifically play out my ‘global nomad’ or ‘backpacker’ identity during the travel itself, so I was not doing a project focusing mostly on the train journey. But taken into consideration that the (train) travel still represented a crucial background of the project, it seems to me useful to introduce a work of another artist from Finland who too was using the Trans-Siberian Railway in her art: Essi Kausalainen.

Her performance *Dorothy – traveling over the rainbow and back* (2002) was strongly inspired by Victor Fleming's 1939 movie *The Wizard of Oz* in which its main character, Dorothy, travels from the state of Kansas to the magical land of Oz and back. Kausalainen, dressed as Dorothy, went by the Trans-Siberian Railway from Helsinki via Moscow to Beijing (and back by the airplane). As her starting point was finding a way how to explore the character of Dorothy by artistic means, the choice to travel to China came out from the needs of this personal research. As Kausalainen writes in her BA thesis:

Dorothy is what she is because the tornado wipes her into the Land of Oz so I needed to find my own wonderland. This part was very easy: I knew I had to go somewhere far [...] The communist China seemed to be perfect wonderland for the Hollywood based fairytale to have adventures in. (Kausalainen 2002: 9)

On the way and while being in China, the artist was wearing the costume of Dorothy as often as possible. The resulting work was a long durational research/performance focusing on an autoethnographic observation of the interaction between Kausalainen and her portrayal of Dorothy. This was not achieved through means of acting but solely by wearing the costume.

(Kausalainen 2002: 28) The photography below shows Kausalainen dressed as Dorothy, performing her character even while sleeping (the person lying on a lower bed is an ordinary fellow traveler on the train):



2.7 Essi Kausalainen as Dorothy

At the same time, she was actively exploring the exposure of herself and her character to an unknown culture(s). As much as I could not erase my origins in *East by Northeast*, so could not Kausalainen “get away from the Home, which for [her] was and is the cultural background [she is] coming from. [Her] home was the Western culture and [she] was carrying it with [her] everywhere [she] went.” (Kausalainen 2002: 9).

Kausalainen seems to distort her origins by simplifying the notion of the ‘West’ as histories of Finland and the United States differ significantly. While the USA, once itself being a colony of Europe, emerged as one of the most powerful and aggressive neo-colonial powers, the history of Finland has been framed by more than 700 years of occupation by Swedes and then by Russians (although, Finns too have their share on colonizing others, as with Sámi people). On the other hand, it seems quite understandable why young Kausalainen - who herself acknowledges certain limitations of her thesis<sup>59</sup> - mixed together the two ‘Western’ cultures. The European society has been ‘under attack’ of Hollywood for decades - since my childhood I too learned to understand the American film industry as ‘part of my own culture’.

There is also one more issue related to ‘Dorothy’s’ travel to China - the project does not reflect the different privileges between the two nations. One

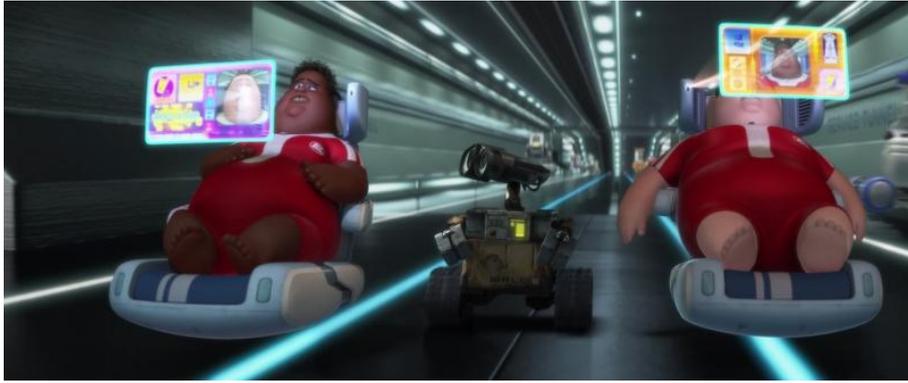
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<sup>59</sup> As she wrote me in a personal conversation on 3 February 2019.

does not have to go far to see possibly orientalist undertones of the work (cf. Introduction). But as much as, for example, the economic disparities between Finland and China are still vivid, who is the ‘exploitator’ here is becoming less clear given the colonialist attitude of China and its growing power in Europe (cf. Le Corre 2019) and elsewhere.

Although, our works are displaying many similarities (performance art project; the travel by Trans-Siberian Railway; European traveling to China; long durational work) there are also important differences. My work was more fragmented, as I was (usually) not performing all the time (cf. Chapter 1) and not using a costume. The whole piece of my Finnish colleague is much more concerned with the act of traveling itself and the question of the cultural clashes comes more to the forefront. For Kausalainen, it was crucial that she was exploring a *girl's* character as through Dorothy she was also observing her femininity. I was traveling by myself, Kausalainen with her friend and the project photographer Wilma Hurskainen. And maybe most importantly, in *East by Northeast* there was at first the wish to visit the research cities for themselves, in *Dorothy – traveling over the rainbow and back* the motivation to travel was based on the fiction unrelated to the visited places.

The emergence of the railway gave to our cities the suburbs and the commuter, as much as it played its role in giving to our world the circulation of goods and migrating population. When traveling, people are no longer dependant on powers of animals or own bodies, instead, are using - and are being used by - the machines. One is currently often being moved somewhere - i.e. by a commuter train to the city, on an escalator to the subway and up again to take a bus or by an own car squeezed with other vehicles in the dedicated line, waiting for the traffic lights to give a signal to go. Indeed, we are not that far from humans depicted in the animated dystopian movie *Wall-E* (2008). There, the obese population, firmly incorporated into urban machine ensemble of transfer, seems not ever leaving their levitating armchairs which are transporting them around the city while they are conversing through the emitted screens with their close ones, oblivious to the world which surrounds them:



2.8 *Wall-E*

Often what could be said about the dynamics significant for the international travel and that of cities is analogous. At the end, where the inter-city ends and the intra-city begins might be just a matter of wording. Otherwise, how comes that the 30km long train running from Helsinki to a nearby town Kerava is a “commuter” (VR GROUP 2019), while the train heading from Ostrava (the third-largest city in the Czech Republic), to my 30km distant hometown Příbor, is not? With the question in mind let us follow the concerned robot Wall-E and explore the notion of inter-city mobility.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **BIRTH OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION**

#### **Birth of public transport**

The phenomena of the public transport<sup>60</sup> in cities as an essential element of the urban fabric was introduced in Europe and the United States roughly in the second half of the nineteenth century, during the period of industrialization. As discussed in the previous chapter, the industrialization period was the time of the unprecedented growth of cities. “Metropolises” (Simmel 1903) were reaching sizes of 1 million inhabitants. New technologies, new habits, social classes and ways of perceiving emerged. For the city dwellers, it became necessary to adjust their overall behavior - it was a shift from ‘rural’ to urban’ perception. In the big urban environment, surrounded by crowds one had to tune oneself to different daily rhythms, different ways of communication in comparison to a small town. The majority of other humans in the ‘metropolis’ were (and remain today) strangers which one often encounters in a form of a (moving) crowd or a mass. What makes this city organism functional is the modern urban infrastructure, newly established “firmly fixed framework of time” (Simmel 1903: 13), the exchange of money, the constant flow of people. This chapter looks at one of the important means of the system which enables the whole flow of people, money, and goods to happen – public transport.

For a long time in the history of humankind, the usual way of traveling not only within the city limits but also between different cities was simple – most commonly people traveled by foot or the better-off on a horseback. As the sizes of the urban settlements were considerably smaller in, say, Middle Ages than in the period beginning with the industrial revolution there was no need for a public transport. Before industrialization “people had to live close to work, which stimulated development of small, functionally integrated cities that rarely exceeded 50.000 habitants.” (Uršič 2006: 181)

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60 In the following text I will make no difference between terms ‘public transport’ and ‘collective transport’ following authors of the book *Tourism, Public, Transport and Sustainable Mobility* C. Michael Hall, Diem-Trinh Le Klähn and Yael Ram who claim that the description “collective transport is widely used in the public transport literature [...], and often used interchangeably”. (Hall – Le-Klähn – Ram: 32)

The growth of cities created a demand for regularly operating collective transport systems. The introduction of intraurban transportation is part of the same narrative as the advancement of railways: “The need of urban expansion and development in the period of early urbanization was strongly advocated by merchants, bankers, and landowners or capitalists, who were primarily concerned about increase of profit [...]” (Uršič 2006: 181). As with the trains operating between urban settlements (and in their surroundings), the omnibuses (later buses), tramways, or the underground metro systems<sup>61</sup> within cities “were the key condition enabling separation of residential from working environments.” (Uršič 2006: 181)

As one can read in the Athens Charter, a document about urban planning issued by CIAM<sup>62</sup> (written in 1943 but commenting on the problematics emerging almost a century earlier): “the great ill of our time [is] the nomadism of the working population” (Le Corbusier 1973[1943]: 74) and in another place of the charter: “[the] unforeseen expansion of machinism [...] has transformed the character of cities, shattered the age-old traditions of the craftsman classes and given birth to a new, anonymous labor force, which drifts from place to place.” (Le Corbusier 1973[1943]: 74) Radical mid-nineteenth century rebuilding of the Paris city center, enabled by the “expansion of machinism”, is an often-quoted example of the urban planning drawing on the new commuting possibilities. I will shortly explore the Paris case after which another example will follow – an unrealized modernist proposal for Vienna created by the urbanist and architect Otto Wagner. My aim here is an exemplification of the relation between city growth and urban planning in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century.

### **Case study I: Paris**

The city planner Georges-Eugène Haussmann changed between 1853 and 1870 the face of historical Paris beyond recognition.<sup>63</sup> Aside from giving birth to

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61 First underground metro system opened in London in 1863 (Lin 2014).

62 Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne

63 “In a mere fifteen years, the physiognomy of that city underwent a complete transformation, a ‘regularisation’ (Haussmann) that is unique in European history.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 181)

new buildings, squares and parks probably the biggest intervention of Haussmann into the Paris structure was the demolition of a substantial part of the historical center. Centuries-old chaotic labyrinth of narrow streets in the city core was lacking proper sanitation and access to light and air. With the population growing and medieval standards of living no longer seen as satisfactory the city was calling for a change. As a response, new long and broad boulevards of Haussmann made their way through the central area with a goal to revitalize it – enable streets to be cleaned and products to be distributed faster to support the capitalist circulation of goods. Another aim of Haussmann was to use urban planning as a contra-revolutionary instrument. To create such wide corridors in the city on which the army could march freely and where to erect barricades<sup>64</sup> would be more laborious in comparison to the pre-Hausmannian historical streets of Paris.

Cf. the two photographs depict a site in central Paris, nowadays known as the Avenue de l'Opéra, before and after Haussmann's intervention. The lower photograph displays more clearly articulated urban space dominated by a wide, clean boulevard:



3.1 Avenue de l'Opéra before and after the renovation of Haussmann

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64 The usage of barricades was an important strategical tool of the anti-monarchical protesters in the French Revolution of 1848.

As a result, many of the previous inhabitants were forced to relocate to suburbs. As we have already seen with the railway, the distance between the working and living place could be now easily extended and since workers were forced on the periphery and to commute to their jobs, there was anymore no need for the bourgeoisie and workers to be cramped together. With the beautification of the Paris center rents went higher and even those from the working class whose houses were not destroyed had to eventually leave their space for the wealthier. By that was also diminished the potential for grouping of revolutionary crowds within the city.

The focus was given to the support of the traffic flow and the creation of an “overall network of arterial connections” (Choay In Schivelbusch 1977: 183) - or as Haussmann himself called it a “general circulatory system” (Schivelbusch 1977: 183) - instead of paying attention to the preservation of the historical heritage. Such an uncompromising city planning of course caused and actually is causing still today a big controversy. The “form and methodology of Hausmann's street plan” were labeled as “authoritarian and military”. (Schivelbusch 1977: 181) It might be also said, though, that such a development, or similar, was inevitable – for at least two reasons.

Firstly, Haussmann was backed from above by Napoleon III and through his planning followed “the overall intention of the Bonapartist regime [...], the advancement of the bourgeoisie's business interests”. (Schivelbusch 1977: 181) Although, other historians also made points such as this: “desire to make Paris [...] a more open, more healthy city, not only for the upper classes but also for the workers, cannot be denied, and should be recognized as the primary motivations.” (de Moncan 2002: 34) One way or another, for this thesis the case is important as an example of urban planning that has been made centrally, directly - “laid out on blank slate (by absolute monarchs)” (Hatherley 2015: 38, brackets added). This topic I will discuss more thoroughly in the following chapter. Secondly, problems with the ‘unhealthy’ historical cores, often squeezed inside of the old city walls, were common to many cities of the time and Haussmann surely was not exceptional with his destructive approach: “Introduction of new forms of transport also demanded necessary alterations of urban spaces, best illustrated by the demolishing of old city walls.” (Uršič 2006: 181)

## Case study II: Vienna

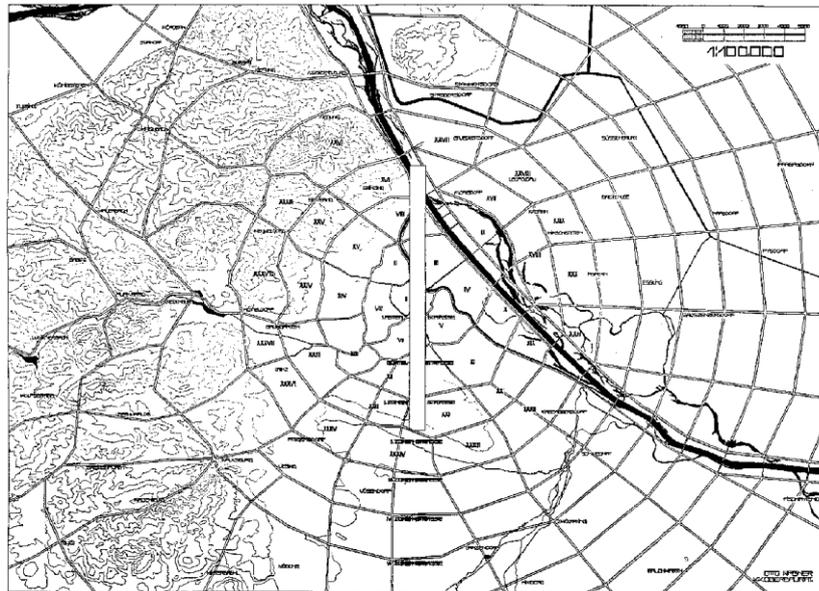
The modernism period of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century was also generated by changes brought by the industrial revolution. There was a whole panoply<sup>65</sup> of radical modernist urban planners who wished to build cities based on more efficient transportation systems. One of them was Otto Wagner who had created a total plan for the extension of Vienna. Wagner was an architect and urban planner related to Vienna Secession and an important figure in the spatial development of the Austrian capital. In 1912 he in his *The Development of a Great City* was well aware of the dangers the industrialization period imposed on growing cities:

great cities double in size in from thirty to fifty years. Hence their governing bodies are forced to take care that houses, public buildings, main streets, sanitary arrangements, etc., shall be properly located in advance; otherwise, instead of the hoped-for ideal, chaos would result which could be restored only at enormous expense. (Wagner 1912)

Unfortunately, the prophesied “chaos” is currently present in various megalopolises over the globe. Wagner’s plan on how to avoid it was to create an infinitely expansible system. Large (80 to 100 meters wide) boulevard-kind of streets would be emerging from the city core radially and leading as far as necessary: “in the light of our present experience the expansion of a city must be unlimited.” (Wagner 1912) This concept can be seen in Wagner’s map proposal (below). Vienna appears as a spider web with yet empty segments surrounding the built-in central city area, suggesting the expandability of the system:

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. for example works of Le Corbusier, Ludwig Hilbersheimer or Mikhail Okhitovich, to name but a few.



3.2 Otto Wagner's proposal for the expansion of Vienna

The whole city of the future would be more vehicular than pedestrian-oriented. That would be possible due to the separation of the traffic levels (elevated, street level, underground). What Simmel has observed – the domination of time and rationality in the modern metropolis – was exactly what Wagner was embracing. He advocated for the development of the “rapid transit” (Wagner 1912) which would provide a “constant circulation through the zones, and a constant movement to and from the radial streets so that any desired point [could] be reached with a single change of cars.” (Wagner 1912) Such adjustments would cause the “ominous ‘too late’ [to] vanish from the view” (Wagner 1912), meaning that the future Vienna was supposed to become an efficient trade-oriented machine, in which to save time means to save money.

Wagner's business oriented modern man with “little time, lots of money and a taste for the monumental” (Schorske 1967: 85) suffered from the “painful uncertainty” (Wagner In Schorske 1967: 85), “the need for direction” (Schorske 1967: 85). Hence, Wagner was including in both his architectural realizations as well as in his urban plans “defined lines for movement” (Schorske 1967: 85). In terms of planning, those lines were for Wagner streets, arteries of the city organism enabling the fast flow of dwellers. They were occasionally interrupted by squares so to provide a goal, a destination reachable at the end of each artery vector.

As an admirer of monumentality, Wagner understood streets as big, compact monuments defined by the uniform housing units placed in the rows aside them. By words of historian Carl E. Schorske: “Regulated as to the height and stripped of disturbing surface ornament, the houses made the street a monument itself.” (Schorske 1967: 97) Considering the uniformity of dwellings and the preference of the rapid public transport over the movement of pedestrians, the unique look of the street was no longer important or even desired. The focus was given to points of departure and arrival be it the dwelling and the workplace or different leisure facilities. There were also places for walking, such as parks, considered in Wagner's plan but one had nevertheless at first depart to those areas designed for the pedestrian movement. The space in-between was literally ‘space in-between’, a uniform, neutral space to be transferred.

It is no coincidence that such a concept originated in the period of (late) industrialization. Wagner's proposal at the beginning of the twentieth century might be read as a direct continuation of the thinking marking the shock from the development of the railway network in the first half of the 1800s. He was also interested only with “points of departure and destination” (Schivelbusch 1986: 38). Only this time the travel omitting its surroundings was not perceived with suspicion and criticism but cheerfully welcomed as a way to fight inequality by providing even access to the city facilities to all, and to deal with the rapid growth of cities.

### **Organized motion**

These two examples demonstrate several things significant for the epoch of the (late) industrialization and modernism. Firstly, the establishment of the whole phenomenon of modern urban planning as such. Although the urban design has its long history originating already in ancient empires, it was for the first time in 1867, when the actual term ‘urbanisation’ was coined in Ildefons Cerdà's *Teoría General de la Urbanización*<sup>66</sup>: “It was the first book in history in witch [sic] the process of designing and building cities was systematically

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66 The full text in English and Spanish can be accessed here:

<http://tgu.urbanization.org/index.html?lng=en>

analyzed and feigned as science.” (Instituto de Arquitectura Avanzada de Catalunya) There were different needs - and also possibilities - in the modern cities which enabled the profession of the urban planner to emerge. Across different societies and political systems, many plans for the cities of the future have been proposed often promoting either construction of new urban complexes or creation of the new on the ruins of the old. Sometimes quite literally – as we have seen in Paris in the case of Haussmann or for example as Le Corbusier was suggesting with his Plan Voisin for the same city<sup>67</sup> some half a century later.

No surprise that the proposal to replace the ‘outdated’ city with uniform high-rises came from Le Corbusier, a key proponent of functionalism. His, often utopian, proposals aimed at bettering of living conditions of masses through focus being given to standardization and simplification of the design. The beauty of architecture was to be emerging from its functionality, from its form.

Also, the scale and totality of the modern planning are important: “many urban planners [of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century] were architects, who understood themselves to be architects working on the scale of a town or a city.” (Paden 2003: 99) Due to economic and political reasons or simply due to their megalomaniac nature – once again Le Corbusier could serve as an example - only a limited amount of proposals could be realized and many stayed on paper. While Haussmann was given the power to build (and to destroy) by the absolutist monarch, Wagner was not so lucky and his *Grosstadt* was never realized. Many of his actual architectural realizations are innovative and of high quality though incomparable in the scale and radicality with his overall plan for the Vienna expansion. (Schorske 1967: 24-115)

Another symptom of modern urban planning was the changed spatio-temporal organization of cities and the idea of circulation. Not only in the meaning of the “metropolitan streams [of people, who] daily perpetuated along ordered paths” (Gleich 2017: 48) but also in relation to the flow of traffic and goods. As Schivelbusch notes (in a chapter of his book symptomatically named “Circulation”): “By the end of the nineteenth century, the capitalist world's recomposition on the basis of modern traffic had been completed. From then

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<sup>67</sup> For more information about the Plan Voisin see (Le Corbusier – Jeanneret 1925).

on, traffic determined what belonged where. The pre-industrial contexts of location and space-time relations were no longer valid.” (Schivelbusch 1977: 192) Although Schivelbusch speaks about capitalist cities, the same idea of the fluid mobility within urban environments could be as well applied to ‘socialist’ ones.<sup>68</sup>

I have already mentioned the importance of public transportation in the given context although not providing its definition. For the text which follows I would like to work with the one proposed by researchers C. Michael Hall, Diem-Trinh Le Klähn and Yael Ram: “the core element of public transport is that it is a service in which the passenger is transported and that it is open to everyone”. (Hall – Le-Klähn – Ram: 44) According to Hall, Le Klähn and Ram there exist four “bindings”, as they call it,

that influence how the traveler interacts with the system:

- (1) the network of roads, contact wires or tracks;
- (2) the lines, which use the road, track or contact wire network;
- (3) the stops; and
- (4) the timetable. (Hall – Le-Klähn – Ram: 42)

A “binding” is a good word. What the modern urban planning (of big cities) brought was a more precisely *organized* movement of people and commodities<sup>69</sup> enabled and supported by new technologies of mobility - the railway, the tramway, the car, the traffic lights, etc. So-called public transportation is a system, a network that consists of both physical elements like “roads, contact wires or tracks” as well as more abstract ones such as the predefined places where it is possible to enter the system (“the stops”). It is true that “the stops” do often have their own physical facilities i.e. signs and platforms but there might be also stops which have very limited designations or none at all and only the locals know that ‘this is the place where the bus stops’.

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68 The next chapter will discuss the planning of socialist cities, in which some of the crucial thoughts of modernist urban planners, such as the focus on interconnectivity, circularity or overall accessibility, were put into praxis as masts of socialist urbanism.

69 Cf. with Simmel’s observation that metropolis operates in a “deep contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensorymental phase of small town and rural existence.” (Simmel 1903: 12)

Then there is an even more immaterial “timetable”, a plan based on which the respective vehicles run. Is it not somehow magical when the bus scheduled at 15:23 (‘15:23’ – what an abstraction!) arrives at 15:23 out of nowhere, being summoned by some invisible force, spits out a bunch of people, eats up another few and at so-called ‘15:24’ it is gone again?

For me, there is something disturbing while at the same time fascinating about the interconnected ordering system of public transport. A person participating in the transportation process is given certain privileges and opportunities but at the same time has to follow the prescribed rules or else is either punished and/or excluded from the use of the respective services. Similar words could be too used not only for the local but also for the international transportation system as well as for the cities in general (which contain in themselves the localized public transportation networks).

Remember Otto Wagner being very open in offering “defined lines for movement” for the citizens who are in “the need for direction“. There are some most obvious ordering tools to be seen in contemporary cities which would be probably in line with Wagner's thinking. Take for example the traffic lights giving pedestrians as well as the motorized traffic no less direct commands as “GO” or “STOP”. Or the more material obstacles such as the movement limiting tourniquets, whose original meaning, by the way, refers to a medical instrument being used to “temporarily restrict blood circulation”. (Gleich 2017: 56) A fitting metaphor indeed.

On the more subtle, yet still quite obvious, level one could think about the occasional segregation of a pavement dividing it to stripes for pedestrians and for cyclists. Which for example in Finland, where I was living, is being taken seriously – through the common unspoken agreement the painted line on the ground becomes a line not-to-be-crossed. In cities, there are many different vectors as well as various utilities such as means of transportation which are meant to be used in a particular way. Some of those orders might become life necessities hard to be avoided – imagine a suburban commuter without a monetary means to purchase an automobile working in the city center. Everyday suburban train travel is inevitable. Some other rules can be broken and as a matter of fact, they are being broken constantly.

Following Michel de Certeau I am aware of the “contradiction between

the collective mode of administration and an individual mode of reappropriation” (de Certeau 1984: 96) in the urban environment. De Certeau argues that the strategies of spatial governance are “fictional”:

the geometrical space of urbanists and architects seems to have the status of the ‘proper meaning’ [...] in reality, this faceless ‘proper’ meaning (*ce propre sans figure*) cannot be found in current use [...] it is merely the fiction [...] (de Certeau 1984: 100, italics in original)

But even though the ordering projects of urban and traffic planners (i.e. the ‘public transportation’ or the ‘city’) are not fully functional it does not yet mean that they are not functional at all. Those ordering systems have power over their users as much as the users have a certain freedom to explore their limits. In relation to that - let me stay for a while with Michel de Certeau and try to theorize the methodology I have chosen for the *East by Northeast* project.

### **Performing the fictional order**

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. (de Certeau 1984: 97)

This statement from Michel de Certeau stands at the core of his thinking about the relationship between walking and speaking (or writing). For de Certeau “the act of walking” (equaling “the speech act”) is an activity of spatializing, of practicing the place: the “*space is a practiced place*. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into space by walkers” (de Certeau 1984: 117, italics in original). The walking represents, hence, the expression of an individual - it is he or she him- or herself who makes the decisions where, in what speed and manner he or she does or does not go. The pedestrian's speech act is a poem (de Certeau 1984: 93) written over the city. It is quite a specific one, though, as “the ordinary practitioners of the city [...] whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ [...] write without being able to read it.” (de Certeau 1984: 93) The common passersby are part of “networks of these moving, intersecting writings [which] compose a manifold

story that has neither author nor spectator.” (de Certeau 1984: 93) The freedom of a random walker's speech act is always limited, possible only within the constraints of the given city environment (which can be compared to the discourse of language).

That, nonetheless, does not mean that ordinary city users have no agency. Quite the contrary, according to de Certeau's proposal they develop everyday individual “tactics” through which they are resisting the order imposed on them from above by “strategies” of a “subject of will and power (a proprietor, an enterprise, *a city*, a scientific institution).” (de Certeau 1984: xix, italics added, cf. Ibid.: xviii ff) Through their ‘erroneous’ behavior, everyday city users are discovering “their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality” (Ibid: xviii).

Consider, for example, the phenomena of a ‘desired path’, a human or non-human made pathway made by walking in nature or within an urban environment. While the urban design prescribes for walking sidewalks and streets, intuitive creators of ‘desired paths’ might break such order by simply choosing a way that feels more accurate.<sup>70</sup> The image below displays a slightly absurd ‘fight’ between the governors of a (unknown) park and its users. The ‘desired path’ originally made as a creative response to pavements built by the city is here ‘made inaccessible’. Not being able to acknowledge its fictional nature, the city tries to restore order:



3.3 A city tries to block access to the desired path

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<sup>70</sup> Such freedom to create an own pathway has, nevertheless, its limitations. I.e. it might not be possible to cross a busy street or a highway on other places than the prescribed ones.

In the *East by Northeast* project, I was expanding what most, if not all, of the urban inhabitants do just in my case more consciously and analytically: that is, to experiment with the disciplinary space of cities. My work differs in some respects from some other artists, let us say, Situationists who would try to find different strategies on how to ‘hack’ the city. Instead of finding new pathways, new ‘words’ how-to ‘speak’ the city through its transportation networks in many of my performances I decided to follow its ‘grammar’ as precisely as possible. Not to be a rebel but quite on the contrary to be the most passionate follower of the system, the ideal user worshipping the geometries, the timetables, the tracks, etc. ad nauseam. And by that to actually be a rebel because, if the order of things within the city is fictional, its rigorous following could be seen as inappropriate, subversive.

Similarly consider the work of Tehching Hsieh. In his *One Year Performance 1980-1981 (Time Clock Piece)*<sup>71</sup> he “punched a time clock every hour on the hour” for the duration of one year, recording the “breakdowns” in which he failed to do so. (Hsieh) To assure the legitimacy of the project (“to avoid any suspicion of cheating” Ibid) he issued several binding contracts, signed either by himself or by an invited witness. In this piece, Hsieh, like me, became a ‘worshipper of an order’. And also, a ‘perfect worker’, although one might add, absolutely useless. Despite the resemblance to the same activity of factory workers, after one year of punching the clock, Hsieh did not produce anything ‘useful’.

His strategy, which might be simplified as ‘maximum effort – minimum result’ (cf Introduction) is a strong message in our contemporary world obsessed with multiplicity and production. By his words: “I’m not doing object-style art but I like thinking. I’m working hard but I’m doing almost nothing. That’s the way I like it.” The nine to five working routine or our division of time into ‘minutes’, ‘hours’ or ‘years’ is as much a fiction as the urban order. Both Hsieh’s and my works address this fictionality.

Take my art performance *Performing 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (bus)* executed in Beijing as an example. In this bus ride performed on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2018, I took the

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<sup>71</sup> For more information about the work, please visit artist’s online portfolio:

<https://www.tehchinghsieh.com/oneyearperformance1980-1981>

bus特8 which runs along the Beijing's 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road highway. As it is a circular line it both begins and ends at the same station: Chengnanjiayuan Bei. The line has 49 stops and it took me approximately one hour to ride the full circle. To explore Beijing on board of this vehicle and following the circular highway, reminded me of touristic buses riding around different cities, such as the ones operated by the “City Sightseeing” franchise running their “Hop-On Hop-Off” double-deckers.<sup>72</sup> Possibly also because the line 特8 too is being served by a double-decker bus. There are nevertheless a few important differences between the two – mainly a bus tour such as the “Hop-On Hop-Off” is a service for tourists not used by locals for getting to their destinations. It is more expensive, makes fewer stops (certainly not 49 each few hundred meters) and rides around more ‘attractive’ areas such as the city center (not the highway).

The photograph below, taken by myself during the ride, shows the traffic jam on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road. No ‘extraordinary’ sights which might be offered to the view of a potential tourist can be seen:



3.4 Performing 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (bus)

What I did was to appropriate an initially practical utility – the public transportation bus –for my artistic/research goals. At the same time, it certainly satisfied my touristic desires (such as exploration of an unknown city), as most of my other walks and rides under the framework of *East by Northeast* did.

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. (City Sightseeing Worldwide 2018)

There are indeed many tourists, ‘backpackers’ like me who for various reasons prefer to avoid services designed ‘for tourists’. This disparate group prioritizes instead finding of their own individual ways of enjoying themselves during the travel and while spending their time in the desired destinations. From the conceptual point of view, there was nevertheless also a difference between me and an ‘ordinary alternative tourist’. As aside to my tourist agenda and identity I was visiting the respective places and undertaking different rides and walks also and especially as an artist with the aim of conducting artistic research.

As such, my practice could be labeled ‘heuristic’, i.e. “involving or serving as an aid to learning, discovery or problem-solving by experimental and especially trial-and-error methods.” (Merriam-Webster 2019a). The solutions everyday city users, as well as artist-researchers, are employing, are pragmatic, serving particular goals. The artistic heuristic differentiates in its goals going beyond the everyday, so not only to use the city and ‘be used’ by it but to unravel the principles on which the respective environments are functioning and to later *disseminate the gained knowledge through art and within the artistic context*.

My aim was not only to enjoy the ride but through my movement (or maybe more accurately through the movement of the bus inside of which I was sitting) to articulate the Third Ring Road. This act might be expressed in different poetic ways - it could be said I was ‘writing a poem’. ‘making a drawing’, ‘leaving a trace’, or similar. One way or another, this ride, let me stay with de Certeau's linguistic metaphor, this act of writing was a reappropriation but also a *reiteration*. Instead of writing a very original story like getting repeatedly on and off the bus, jumping out of the window, climbing on its roof or trying to persuade the driver to change the direction I was simply re-writing what has been already written – a line of bus 特8. In my ‘touristic practice’ I was unusually rigorous which gets even more obvious when other similar ‘performances’ (rides in buses, subways, trams, trains, various walks, etc.) are perceived together.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> However, this issue of the difference between so-called alternative tourism and art is more complex. I can easily imagine a subway lover who comes to Moscow only to ride all its lines - not a single one can be missed! It might be possible to label this exploration as a conceptual art piece, an ‘articulation of the subway system through the body’. Indeed, what the history of art teaches us, at least since Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* (1917), is that what is and what is

I do not want to claim that the bus 特8 was designed to be used in this way but to ride it from the beginning to its end meant for me to use its full potentiality (see the difference in pragmatic use of the line between myself and a ‘regular’ user and cf. Chapter 5). At the same time, and even more importantly, through this ride, I have used the full potentiality of Beijing's Third Ring Road which was the main reason I decided to use the services of this particular bus line in the first place. The majority of the ‘first-order performances’ were of this nature.

For example, in Beijing, I have similarly performed its North-South axis in the city center (by walking), 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road (by cycling), 4<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (by bus), Bus Rapid Transport lines 1, 2, 3 and 4 and so on. Some of the respective performances are discussed in closer detail in Chapter 5. Through the combination of those works in which I was ‘using the full potential’ of the main traffic lines and streets, I was trying to articulate them not as disparate phenomena but as segments forming together the overall layout of the city. As a result, the *East by Northeast* aspired to several goals:

-> **articulation of the city**; The chosen strategy served to the utilization of the main infrastructure channels of the respective city. It was more than a random visitation but a methodology in which the most significant geometrical features of the given urban environment were (heuristically) perceived, first-handedly experienced and articulated through my movement.

-> **critique of the urban transport infrastructure as a disciplinary space**; When in the researched city I did not have that much time for sightseeing in a more traditional sense or not that much of free time in general. I set myself for a mission to follow the most significant vectors and arteries of that particular urban environment. To be a perfect abstract user of this infrastructure which was ‘always already’ there – a power machine inscribing its rules on its inhabitants, awaiting those coming from outside to subject them under the same scrutiny. To be a *user*, one who uses the system – voluntarily chooses what, when and how to ‘articulate’ – but at the same time *to be used* – to follow those transport patterns which were *available*. To be a slave who is willingly submitting himself to his master and tries to fulfill his desires as

precisely as possible.

-> **city exploration**; On a lighter note, this was also a great adventure and even though I did not always (but often yes) enjoyed the tasks I have ordered myself to achieve, my methodology helped me a lot in the exploration of the respective cities. I spent hours and hours doing what I love - moving around cities. The fact that my activities were framed as an 'art research' motivated me to go out as much as possible, ideally to be constantly on the move, and allowed me to see places I would otherwise hardly visit. Although, in that sense stimulating, I would not recommend my strategy to be chosen for a tourist trip. Respectively – I would, but definitely not for the whole duration of a visit as it offers only a particular and limited experience. I was focusing on very specific segments of cities – mostly streets, highways, rails and public transportation running on these *lines*. Hence, I was performing the 'framework' of cities, their 'skeleton' which holds their bodies together. But a lot of juicy meat is to be found outside of the skeleton.

## **Cars**

What I have not yet discussed in this chapter and more generally in the whole thesis is the question of the individual motorized traffic. Yet the rise of an automobile in the first half of the twentieth century and especially after the Second World War had an enormous impact on the urban planning of cities. From the first car prototypes to their mass use, originating as an expensive hobby of the richest classes, the automobile became gradually a widespread phenomenon. The fastest development was in the United States where Henry Ford introduced the assembly line method of car production. It is also the United States that is infamously known for preferring car traffic over pedestrian mobility. As a result, many of its cities are extensive in the urban area, with low population density and contain inefficiently used space (cf. Bertaud 2004: 12).

Consider, for example, the Los Angeles Harbor 110 and Century 105 freeway interchange below. While L.A. is known as "the sprawling city of freeways" (Mogensen 2019) such an image would be less common in the European context:



3.5 Los Angeles 110 and 105 Freeway Interchange Ramps Aerial

The trend in the United States' cities is an extreme example of the influence of the individual motorized traffic on urban planning as well as more in general on the lifestyle of the whole society. There people are starting driving very early (14-17, depending on the respective state) (Witmer 2017). Due to insufficient public transportation connections (which might be tautologically missing because people are used to and are preferring cars) or streets being designed for cars an inaccessible for pedestrians, the ability to drive becomes not just an advantage but a necessity.

What turned out to be a way of living in the USA was rather just a 'period' in the city planning elsewhere. An urban researcher Peter Jones speaks about three different periods resulting from the 'car revolution' of the second half of the twentieth century. It should be noted that Jones does not provide a precise timeline for this periodization:

Stage One: Traffic containment policies - a vehicle-based perspective

Stage Two: Traffic containment policies - a person trip

Stage Three: liveable cities - activities and quality of life perspectives (Jones 2014)

To sum up Jones' observations. Stage one of the after-WWII situation is significant for its embrace of the car, building of infrastructure for cars (roads, highways, parking lots) and a decrease in public transport usage. Higher

mobility of car users led to the “fragmentation of urban space and the increasing separation of urban surfaces” (Uršič 2006: 183) or in other words, acceleration of suburbanization established earlier by collective modes of transport.

From roughly 1970s the policy prioritizing cars was evaluated as not functional in “larger urban areas with high to medium land development density [i.e. major cities in Europe] – a car-centered city requires a lower density Los Angeles/Houston style city infrastructure.” (Jones 2014: 8) Other practical concerns were those of “growing traffic congestion [...] effects on air pollution, traffic accidents [...] concerns about rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.” (Jones 2014: 8) As a result, an answer of the “Stage Two” to maladies brought by car traffic, was an embrace of collectivized public transportation.

Finally, the most recent stage gives a “greater emphasis on cities as centers of activity and on associated urban quality life issues” (Jones 2014: 9) while a person's overall mobility is considered secondary. Streets are being recognized “as an important part of urban public space” (cf. with Otto Wagner's modernistic thrill for the street as a utility whose sole purpose is the transportation). The more basic and ecological ways of moving around cities are being embraced: “a resurgence of interest in the role of cycling and walking in cities, as offering sustainable and healthy modes of transport, and in enhancing public space and providing footway space again for street activities.” (Jones 2014: 9) In relation to cars, “Stage Three” is often associated with relative and absolute reductions in car use (and sometimes car ownership), despite increasing incomes.” (Jones 2014: 9)

This categorization is certainly useful although it is also (deliberately) quite basic. The periodization of the three outlined paradigms (as Jones himself calls the respective shifts in thinking) can certainly not be applied in all the cases of modern urban and traffic development. One differentiating reason amongst others is that distinct cities and countries find themselves in various stages of economic development.

In China, for example, the often-repeated rise of the middle-class during the last decades (Iskryan 2016) led to an enormous increase in car ownership. (Wang – Teter – Sperling 2012) More cars require more roads but this strategy, typical for Jones' stage one, this “disease”, is “self-limiting, for the bare reason that in the final stage, it has to devour the beast that feeds it” (Mumford In Uršič

2006: 182). The response of the Chinese government is a massive investment into (high-speed) rails and encouragement of public transportation use (Liu 2011) - a strategy fitting the description of Jones' stage two. The path of supporting the non-car transportation which the Chinese are embracing nowadays - on an extraordinary scale - is half a century 'delayed' in comparison to the West. In this delay economic factors certainly played its role.

In the *East by Northeast* project, as well as in my preceding research, I was focusing more on the collective modes of transportation which is also why the discussion on cars and city planning comes only now as a sort of appendix of the chapter. I would say that this decision was more intuitive than anything else, supported by an idea of public transport being more restrictive than cars and as such being somehow more suitable for my goals, more worthy of my attention. For the analogous reason, I also constructed my argument from at first discussing the phenomenon of the (1) railway network in order to subsequently arrive at the elaboration of the (2) urban public transport and its impact on the (3) mobility in cities.

The core of my thought is that all those systems are ordering devices, the most restrictive of them being the railway, the so-called "machine ensemble" and an analogous urban means of collective transportation operating on tracks (i.e. tramways, subways). Less strictly bonded are services such as public buses. They surely have predefined "lines, stops, and timetable" but in case its conductor would decide not to follow the stops as he or she should, he or she would have a much wider field of opportunities where to take the vehicle than his or her colleagues operating trams or trains. This higher flexibility of buses is actually being used when the line has to be temporarily detoured. The final step on this restrictive scale from the most to the least controlling is a personal car that can be used 'anytime' and its driver can go 'anywhere'. However, car usage would require either a car which has to be purchased or a sufficient financial means to pay for taxis – which are usually more expensive than public transport.

This also means that the richer classes can utilize their wealth for using more expensive and less restricted services. Analogously, the poorer are much more dependent on the more restrictive travel means, such as public transportation. Also, in cases even the 'cheap' public transport might not be

accessible to all, as I can confirm from own experience of living in Helsinki, where I often ended up not paying for the transport as not being able to afford it (and by that exposing myself to a risk of being fined). Due to my vulnerable economical position of a student from the ‘second-world country’ (cf. Introduction) I ended up living in the city suburbs, where the rents are more affordable. But the public transport in Helsinki is far from cheap and for travel from more distant zones, the higher fare applies: in a city not to have money costs you money.

Still, even wealth does not make you totally free while moving around the city (unless you are so rich, that you are using a private helicopter instead of a car). The freedom of a car (and a bus) in comparison to the more confined vehicles running on rails is too significantly limited. As one point in Hall, Le-Klähn and Ram's definition of the public transportation states, in order to be operational, the transportation system needs “the network of roads, contact wires or tracks”. Indeed, the system of tracks and that of roads can be compared – the freedom of cars and buses (motorcycles, bicycles...) is always limited by the available road network. Not to mention that this structure is further limiting driver's freedom through its additional features: traffic lights and signs, pedestrian crossings, speed limits and similar. Finally, in line with the thinking of modernist urbanists, the whole city can be understood as a united - and restrictive - system. This was an important notion for my project, as I was focusing on both – the city as a *unity*, where common rules apply, and on embodying of those *rules*.

In my work, I was deliberately avoiding the usage of personal automobiles for various reasons:

Economical – to use the private form of transport would be more expensive.

Ecological – to use cars is presumably causing more ecological damage than to use buses or trains etc.

Practical – I would be either reliant on taxis (which is usually the most expensive form of city transfer) or on negotiations with locals willing to provide the car/give me a ride<sup>74</sup>. But to involve other people would mean to always

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74 An exception in my reluctance of using cars in the research was performance *Performing*

arrange the ride, and the project was from the organizational perspective already complicated enough.

Conceptual – in the research I was mostly concerned with the services of the collectively organized traffic (by municipalities), not private transport.

I was working with the most restrictive forms of urban transportation (public transportation on rails or on roads) as well as the least restrictive (walking, cycling). The car, which is somewhere in between those two poles, remained in a shadow. Although, as discussed in previous paragraphs, individualized motorized transport plays a very important role in the mobility within cities and I am not against the use of cars in art projects, i.e. my *The Car Performance* (2015) was all based on myself driving the audience around the city (Helsinki) in a car. Hence, I can well imagine that in a future project I might re-visit some ideas touched upon in this research and also employ the use of a car.

The next chapter speaks about ‘socialist cities’. Although, eventually not fulfilling its promises, socialism (and its cities) was originally hoping to bring happiness and good living conditions *for all*. Socialist urban planning was, similarly to Otto Wagner's plan for Vienna, radical and utopian, concentrating as much on control and governance of people as on egalitarianism. The resemblance to Wagner's work does not end in general comparisons. It was utopian proposals similar to his, in which transportation and mobility played a crucial role (i.e. the following text discusses the work of Ebenezer Howard), which made a strong influence on socialist urban planning. And, to repeat myself, the focus of socialist planning on interconnectivity, circularity or overall accessibility is also something which it shared with Wagner.

If now I have been discussing the question of (public) transportation in cities more generally, with the exploration of socialist urbanism we will get much closer to case studies of this research. Indeed, despite their different current development, Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and Beijing were at a time all part of the ambitious socialist experiment.

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*proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar Airport (car)*, where I have indeed used the help of local artists whom I convinced to conduct a car trip with me (cf. Chapter 5).

**CHAPTER 4**  
**SOCIALIST CITIES**

**I**

**Socialism: An uneasy territory**

Urban researcher Owen Hatherley begins his book *Landscapes of Communism: A History Through Buildings*, in which he discusses the architecture and urban planning of (post)socialist countries of East Europe, with an introductory chapter titled “Socialism Isn't”. In this introduction, the author considers the meaning of terms such as “communism”, “state socialism”, “state capitalism” or “non-capitalism” admitting (not only his) difficulties in defining them. Hatherley's “book uses the term ‘communism’ as a matter of convenience.” (Hatherley 2015: 29) A deeper explanation of his understanding of the word is deliberately missing and the usage of the general term ‘communism’ is being accepted for simplification. Even this expression the author chooses with a reservation stating that he “do[es] not consider that these societies [such societies which were proclaiming themselves ‘socialist’ or ‘communist’] fit the description in any meaningful sense.” (Hatherley 2015: 29)

Based on my personal life experience and acquired knowledge about the topic, I am instead giving preference to the term ‘socialism’ over ‘communism’ when discussing the political system in the former USSR and elsewhere, and cities of those societies. The relevant (urbanistic) literature I went through usually prefers this term as well.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, in line with Hatherley, I also do not wish to provide any definitive judgments on this particularly entangled issue.

A similar problem was facing speakers invited for the 2013 conference *Socialist and Post-Socialist Urbanizations: Architecture, Land and Property Right* which was taking place in Tallinn, Estonia. The author of the opening text for the conference, urban scholar Maroš Krivý, sees it difficult to speak about

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<sup>75</sup> The tendency confirms i.e. summarizing paper *Introduction: Post-socialist cities and urban theory* dedicated to the topic (Ferenčuhová – Gentile 2017: 11).

post-socialism: “one of the key weaknesses of the concept of post-socialism” being “the missing or poor definition of ‘socialism’.” (Krivý 2013) The issue of what is the socialist city is interdependent from what socialism is since the former was an ideological expression of the latter: “‘socialist cities’ [...] represented full-fledged instruments of a modernizing policy which ensured the promotion of new values, social practices and modes of behaviour.” (Ilchenko 2018: 31) But to define a socialist city seems to be an equally puzzling matter: “[we are] lacking not only a fully developed definition and understanding of ‘post-socialist city’ but also of what ‘the socialist city’ is.” (Krivý 2013)

(Post)socialist city is a label that could be applied to all three of my research cities, all being formerly the most prominent urban representations of the so-called ‘socialist’ ideologies of their respective countries – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Mongolian People's Republic and People's Republic of China. It is important to note that whilst Russia and Mongolia abandoned the socialist experiment with the fall of the Soviet Union, China maintains its socialist trajectory. Although, socialism in China is a “distinctly capitalistic ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’”.(Hatherley 2015: 208) The term ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ comes from Deng Xiaoping, the former ‘paramount leader’<sup>76</sup> of China. It represents a unique mixture of free-market economics (enabling private ownership or foreign investment) while at the same time rejecting capitalism: “capitalism would get China nowhere. [...] That is why we have repeatedly declared that we shall adhere to Marxism and keep to the socialist road.” (Xiaoping 1984)

Now, let us take a closer look at what could define socialist (and post-socialist) cities which were once seen as having “a special role in the building of socialism”, being considered the “epitomes of progress and the prime bulwarks for the new order.” (Kotkin 1996: 235)

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<sup>76</sup> In China an unofficial title for the most influential politician, used especially in relation to Deng Xiaoping.

## Socialist city

To comprehend the socialist city, it is important to understand the enormous power of the planning authorities: “the State ha[d] a power to determine the pace and the form of urban development far greater than that wielded by any Western government, central or local.” (French – Hamilton 1979: 4) The resulting shapes of cities (in a literal sense) came into being through the combination of this centralized power and the ideology supporting equal opportunities for people, including the equality in housing and job opportunities, quality of the living environment or access to public services.

One of the editors of the book *The Socialist City: Spatial structure and urban policy*, R. A. French, proposes nine points that characterize the “Soviet city”. Because the “Soviet city” is by definition one devised during the existence of the Soviet Union and subjugated to its socialist policy, ergo, French's analysis could be also applied with a certain degree of caution to the general notion of the socialist city. This is his proposition:

[Soviet cities can be defined for having (X) (in comparison to “Western city”)<sup>77</sup>]

- (1) a generally much higher population density;
- (2) a lack of a density gradient;
- (3) a lack of any surface of land values assessable in financial terms;
- (4) a lack of a determinable spatial differentiation in social groups;
- (5) a far-less marked spatial differentiation of function between one part of the town and another;
- (6) a relatively low order of service provision;
- (7) a distinctive employment structure, with a higher proportion of workers engaged in industry;
- (8) a high degree of reliance on public transport; and
- (9) as a framework to all the rest, the total concentration of decision-taking in the context of development and urban change into the hands of the planners, and the elimination of individual decision or competition (French 1979: 101-

102)

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<sup>77</sup> French's vague definition of the 'West' is certainly one of the gaps in his theory. At one point he clumps together Western Europe and North America (French 1979: 76) or elsewhere American and British (Ibid: 99) cities. But, as we have seen in the previous chapter, there is a significant difference between European and North American urbanism.

While useful, the list should not be seen as too determining. To compare on the one hand hundreds of cities of the Soviet Union, on the other cities of both Europe and North America is a very ambitious project. Due to a very (too?) broad focus of the study, some of the definition points could be applied interchangeably to both ‘socialist’ as well as ‘capitalist’ cities (cf. Cantell 1999). The author himself points out that “it is not suggested that [‘Soviet’ type of city] has no structural features in common with the Western [sic] city.” (French 1979: 78)

It should be also mentioned that the “theoretical norms and objectives” often differed from what has been actually built: “frequently quick and pragmatic solutions have been adopted in preference to a longer-term, more expensive optimum.” (French 1979: 74) This led to a paradox of some ‘Western’ countries, notably Nordic social democracies, being able to construct ‘more socialist’ urban environments than the self-proclaimed socialist countries. Owen Hatherley notices the same in relation to Vällingby, suburban neighborhood in Stockholm, which “due to the relative affluence of Swedish social democracy” was “much more truly ‘planned’ than that of the ‘planned economies’” (Hatherley 2015: 24)

With these remarks in mind, let us take a closer look at French’s nine points. Despite the drawbacks of the model, they will be still useful for my discussion on how a socialist city can be understood. In the table below I have tried to compare the points one by one with the *current* state in which the researched cities are to be found. Also, I added London as a representant of a ‘capitalist’, ‘Western’ (mega)city with which I had a personal physical experience and which will give an *example* of how similar or different the so-called post-socialist cities *could be* from the so-called capitalist ones. Data in the table comes both from the source research as well as from my direct observations in the respective cities.

	<b>Moscow</b>	<b>Ulaanbaatar</b>	<b>Beijing</b>	<b>London</b>
1	YES/NO <sup>78</sup> 2900/km <sup>2</sup>	YES/NO <sup>79</sup> 4200/km <sup>2</sup>	YES/NO <sup>80</sup> 4700/km <sup>2</sup>	5600/km <sup>2</sup> <sup>81</sup>
2	NO – positive gradient <sup>82</sup>	NO – negative gradient <sup>83</sup>	NO – negative gradient <sup>84</sup>	NO - negative gradient <sup>85</sup>
3	NO – anybody can own the land	NO <sup>86</sup> - only Mongolians can own the land	YES/NO <sup>87</sup> – people can lease the land for max 70 years	NO - anybody can own the land
4	NO <sup>88</sup>	NO	NO	NO <sup>89</sup>
5	NO	NO	NO	NO
6	YES (suburbs)/NO	YES (ger districts)/NO	NO	NO
7	NO <sup>90</sup>	NO <sup>91</sup>	NO <sup>92</sup>	NO <sup>93</sup>
8	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
9	NO	NO	YES/NO	NO

Table 1: R.A.French's nine points applied to contemporary Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, Beijing, and London by the author of the thesis

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78 (Demographia 2019)

79 (Demographia 2019)

80 (Demographia 2019)

81 (Demographia 2019)

82 (Bertaud 2001)

83 (Brinkhoff 2018)

84 (Zhang, Nan et al. 2014), (Zhang, An et al. 2013)

85 (Bertaud 2001)

86 (Lehmanlaw Mongolia L.L.P. 2016)

87 (SinoMedia Group Limited 2013)

88 (Gunko et al. 2018)

89 (Vizard 2019)

90 (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019a)

91 (Plecher 2019, InterNation GO! 2015)

92 (Hong Kong Trade Development Council 2019)

93 (Davison 2017)

### **(1) a generally much higher population density**

The key question here is, what kind of “Western cities”, with which he was comparing socialist cities, had French in mind in his analysis. Wide and dispersed cities of the United States, which are largely dependent on the automobiles (cf Chapter 3), have indeed a significantly lower density when compared to post-socialist cities. But if I would stick in my comparison to London and other cities which are more familiar to me, such as cities in Western Europe, then there is no such difference. Densities of post-socialist and capitalist cities of Western Europe are more similar to each other than densities of post-socialist cities and American cities or West European and American cities. (Demographia 2019)

### **(2) a lack of a density gradient**

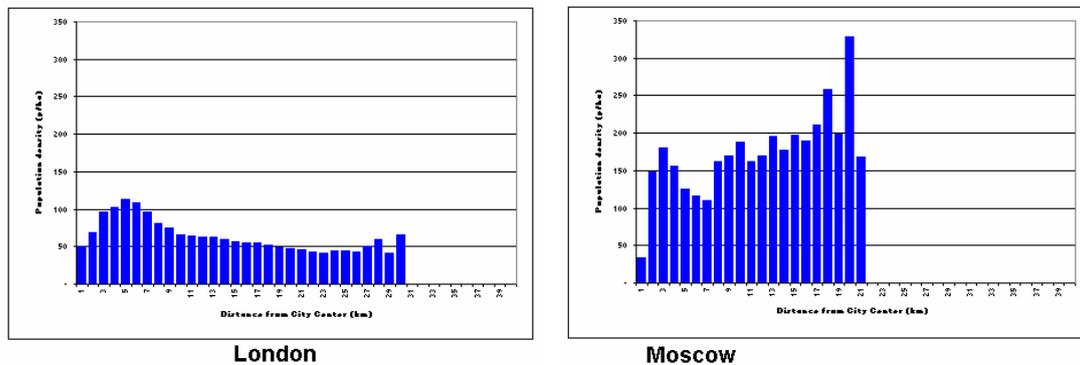
The density gradient represents a difference in densities within the urban area. It is being evaluated in relation to the city center, hence if the gradient is negative, it means that in the direction from the center the density of population decreases and vice versa. When the densities are “market driven” they “tend to follow the price of land” (Bertaud 2001: 3), meaning that the city core and its surroundings in the free market economy tend to be more expensive but also more desirable and more densely populated. Each case is of course different.

For example, London's gradient (cf. the chart below)<sup>94</sup> is for the first few kilometers from the center positive – the very core of the city is not the most populated – but after it reaches its peak at 5km it starts to gradually descend almost to the very edges of the city. (Bertaud 2001: 15) Its overall density gradient is negative, similarly to other typical ‘Western’ cities. Ulaanbaatar and Beijing also display negative gradients, contrary to Moscow where the slope is positive (cf. the chart below). The reason for Moscow's opposite tendency, despite nowadays embracing the free market economy, as other cities on the list and their respective countries do, is its socialist legacy summarized in French's next (3) point. Due to “a lack of any surface of land values assessable in financial terms” it was easier and cheaper to built on a periphery, rather than to renew

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<sup>94</sup> I am attaching for illustration gradient density charts of London and Moscow taken from Alan Bertaud's *The costs of Utopia: Brasilia, Johannesburg, and Moscow* (Bertaud 2001). The charts of Beijing and Ulaanbaatar are unfortunately not included in Bertaud's study.

the already built-up areas: “while the city expanded outward, land use in already developed areas remained unchanged [...] Once land was allocated, it was almost never recycled.” (Bertaud – Renaud 1995: 2-3)



5.1 Density gradients of London and Moscow

Ulaanbaatar, though also post-socialist, is a very different case. Despite the largest amount of its inhabitants also living in suburbs, UB's outer periphery is not composed of endless high-rises like Moscow. There is a significant portion of such buildings too, but the largest and most populated area of the city consists of people living in traditional houses of nomadic Mongolians - gers. In terms of density, those are comparable to family houses with gardens and as such, the density of the lots is very low.

The Beijing case is arguably the most complex. It is important to understand that Beijing is a rather new *megacity* with the history of its great expansion dated to the new 1978 economic policy of Deng Xiaoping (when i.e. the foreign investment was allowed on the Chinese market). On the city level, this could be related to the similarly important year 1988, when the local governments “were granted the right to transfer land to private investors. Since that year, the spatial expansion of cities has exploded all over the country.” (Tang – Kunzmann 2008: 458) So, even though there was an important history of Soviet-inspired urban planning in the first decades of People's Republic (1949 onwards), “after 1978, market forces, as well as contemporary Western planning ideas and methodologies, started to have an effect on the planning of Beijing.” (Sit 1996: 457) Rather than socialist or post-socialist, Beijing's density gradient shows patterns of a ‘Western’ city. The direction of the slope is equal to Ulaanbaatar, yet the reasons are quite different.

Finally, no matter if positive or negative, there is certainly no *lack* of density gradients in any of the case cities.

### **(3) a lack of any surface of land values assessable in financial terms**

Point (3) is closely related to the preceding one. Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and London display clearly the opposite tendency than that of a socialist city. The land is available on the free market and its prices might vary significantly which results in it being very much “assessable in financial terms”. With Beijing the case is similar, the land is subjected to all the market contingencies, but very importantly “*the government continues to own all of the country's urban land*” (SinoMedia Group Limited 2013, own emphasis). It is not being sold to anyone, only leased. The duration of the lease differs in accordance with its purposes, for residency it lasts 70 years. Once again, Beijing is a strange one in our group of cities but the financial value of land still differs throughout the Chinese capital – even though it is not for sale. As such, Beijing too does not match with the (3) requirement.

### **(4) a lack of a determinable spatial differentiation in social groups**

To assess this category, I focused my evaluation on one type of social group differentiation - the socioeconomic one - as the amount of wealth is an important criterion for social and spatial stratification. None of the cities performed well - considerable wealth disparities were present within all of the researched urban environments.<sup>95</sup> It can be generalized, that no matter if in Ulaanbaatar or Beijing or London or Moscow, there exist areas reserved for rich (including hardly accessible, gated communities) and for their poorer, sometimes much poorer, counterparts. In that sense, all the evaluated cities, be they post-socialist or not, are similarly stratified as were capitalist cities of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>95</sup> The (spatial) wealth disparities in the respective cities are possible to observe by eye and even quick online search confirms such observations.

**(5) a far-less marked spatial differentiation of function  
between one part of the town and another**

Here it is possible to generalize again: in all four cities, there is significant differentiation between its various parts. Some are serving residential purposes, elsewhere are situated industries, administrative or business districts and so forth. As much as the free market (and other factors) contributes to spatial disparities of social groups, it is also one of the causes of an uneven function distribution within the urban environment.

**(6) a relatively low order of service provision**

In this case, it might be best to speak briefly about each city:

Moscow YES/NO

Moscow is a big city and also a big Potemkin village. Not only does it try to deceive foreign visitors about the wealth and quality of life in the Russian Federation, but even about the ‘true nature’ of Moscow itself. According to The Guardian (Michael, Chris, et al. 2015), some 85% of Muscovites live in its suburbs<sup>96</sup>. And while central Moscow provides an abundance of services, the service provision in its ‘sleeping districts’ is significantly lower.

Ulaanbaatar YES/NO

Ulaanbaatar is a similar case. The inhabitants of the center can “inch along the gridlocked traffic in four-wheel drives, shop in Louis Vuitton and Swarovski or go to work in gleaming glass-fronted office towers.” (Geoghegan 2014) On the contrary, those living in ger districts “lack access to drinking water and sewerage; [...] in winter, when temperatures can drop to -40C, raw coal, rubber, and even plastics are thrown onto the stove.” (Geoghegan 2014) Where one has to almost struggle for survival, there is no place for quality services. Ulaanbaatar residents, as well as suburban Muscovites, if they wish to enjoy the ‘big city life’, have to leave their neighborhoods and travel to the center.

Beijing NO

What shocked me in Beijing and in China more in general, was the overwhelming quantity and omnipresence of shops, restaurants, malls,

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<sup>96</sup> Although, as a borderline for ‘the suburbs’ is chosen the Garden Ring. I would argue that it is not the right way of measurement as it contains only the center of the city (cf Chapter 5).

recreation facilities. No matter, if it was in the Beijing center, in its distant suburbs or even in small (in Chinese terms) border cities like Erenhot or Manzhouli. Especially, the difference between Erenhot and Zamyn-Üüd (its counterpart on Mongolian side of borders) or Manzhouli and Zabaykalsk (its counterpart on Russian side of borders) was striking. While in Zamyn-Üüd and Zabaykalsk I really felt as ‘in the middle of nowhere’, which is what I would have imagined from a small border town, Erenhot and Manzhouli were both full of life, traffic, shops, attractions.

I was able to witness only a very small portion of China but if I should comment only on the difference between its capital and other case cities, Beijing as a whole has much more to offer in terms of (quantity of) service provision.

London NO

Finally, London is a specific example of a ‘Western city’. Although, the center (with its plentitude of services and opportunities) is distinguishable from the periphery, I would argue that its respective neighborhoods also provide a sufficient number of services. Especially, if we would discuss the city in general, it could hardly be labeled as having a “low order of service provision”.

### **(7) a distinctive employment structure, with a higher proportion of workers engaged in the industry**

Focus on a (heavy) industry was one of typical features of Soviet economy, with new “company districts” (Reiner – Wilson 1979: 58) being built in existing cities as well as entirely new ‘factory towns’<sup>97</sup>. But such times are long gone, and generally speaking, it is the tertiary sector where the majority of the population of the case cities is employed. Mongolia is for some years now experiencing a mining boom (CEE Bankwatch Network), yet more than half of the country's population was still working within the service sector in 2018 (Plecher 2019). Also, the main mining area in the Gobi Desert is located far from the city of Ulaanbaatar. In other words, the definition point (7) is not valid even for Mongolia and Ulaanbaatar. Also, none of the other cities overall (the situation differs significantly in the respective industrial districts) has a “higher

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<sup>97</sup> Examples of the cities built ‘from scratch’ might be Zaporozhje, Magnitogorsk, Komsomolsk on the Amur or Novokuznetsk. (Shkvarikov, V – Haucke, M. - Smirnova, O. 1964: 307)

proportion of workers engaged in industry”.

### **(8) a high degree of reliance on public transport**

The importance of public transportation in Soviet cities was related to principles of equality and accessibility within the urban environment. At the end of the 1970s Soviet cities displayed “very heavy and still-rising dependence on public transport” (French 1979: 100). Other reasons for choosing this path were at the time “very low” car ownership in comparison to Western Europe and the United States and “lack of choice in residential location” (French 1979: 100). Even nowadays, the public transport network in Moscow is extensive and cheap, and the city indeed highly relies on it. In his 1979 article R.A. French warns against increasing car ownership which will “undoubtedly [...] cause traffic problems.” (French 1979: 101) And indeed, Moscow was rated as the “world capital of traffic jams in 2018” (The Moscow Times 2019)<sup>98</sup>, according to the annual report of the INRIX automotive analytics company.

From one point of view, the dysfunctional private transport is a testimony of the city's high reliance on public transportation. But I would also like to introduce an opposing good opinion: that a city with such massive traffic jams is obviously highly dependent on cars. Despite the congestion and hours of wasted time, drivers are still not abandoning the car usage. This is possibly because they still prefer to travel on their own, but, for some, it might not be a matter of choice but of necessity. That is why I would like to argue, that Moscow is highly “reliant on public transport” as it is on privately owned cars.

Beijing (Hong 2018) and London (O'Sullivan 2016) are similar cases as Moscow, also facing extreme car congestion while providing an excellent, extensive public transportation.

In Ulaanbaatar, “it's a tricky question whether cars or tortoises can go faster through Ulaanbaatar's roads,” writes Unuudur, an editor of The UB Post. (The UB Post 2015) It is, once again, due to the severe congestion. The majority of passengers in UB (60%) were using public transportation in 2014 (Tsevegjav 2014) but when it comes to the share of vehicles on the city roads, only 2% of the stock consisted of public transport vehicles and the remaining 98% were

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<sup>98</sup> It is quite irrelevant if Moscow is ‘the worst’, but such a label should be an indicator that the situation is certainly not good.

privately owned. Provided data also does not include the population, that does not use any motorized traffic, which might be in cases the fastest way of transfer. So, even though, the majority of passengers are dependent on public transport, it does not seem appropriate to label UB simply as highly reliant on it. Its much lower quality in comparison to other research cities (which is caused largely by the missing underground system and the resulting impossibility of avoiding the congested roads) is also a significant drawback.

**(9) as a framework to all the rest, the total concentration of decision-taking in the context of development and urban change into the hands of the planners, and the elimination of individual decision or competition**

In Russia (Golubchikov 2004), in Mongolia (Chinzorig), and in the United Kingdom (Husain 2018), there can be no doubt that “the total concentration of decision taking” in the sphere of urban development *is not* in hands of planners and that the “individual decision or competition” is widespread within the respective market environments. Although, even in the United Kingdom “ownership alone [does not confer] the right to develop the land [...], the planning permission [is] essential for land development.” (Husain 2018) Various laws, restrictions, master plans, simply the top-down planning, have a profound effect on constructions and city design in many countries in post-socialist as well as within the ‘Western’ world. But the state is not the only player in the urban development game.

In China, the hybridity of its system complicates the evaluation. Urban scholars Yan Tang and Klaus R. Kunzmann summarizes the situation well:

The Central Government is very powerful. A large number of political and administrative institutions, with thousands of administrative and technical employees, manage the *highly centralized planning* and decision-making processes. *When the political leadership feels it necessary, the central government can intervene directly in local affairs as it sees fit.*

Nevertheless, mayors of big cities and governors of provinces have a high degree of independence, *as long as they orchestrate their actions in line with the political directives handed down from above.*“ (Tang – Kunzmann 2008: 460, own emphasis)

As a result, there still exists a large space for “individual decision” making and “competition” within the Chinese urban development, yet at the same time, the dominance of the Central Government is indisputable. The impact of the government is more direct on the country and regional levels, as well as on the biggest urban development projects, and more indirect lower on the administrative scale.

To summarize the findings, I will cite an article of urban scholars Luděk Sýkora and Stefan Bouzarovski *Multiple Transformations: Conceptualising the Post-communist Urban Transition*. The application of French's nine points to the research cities showed, that most of them are not valid, or if they are, their validity is always questionable/two-sided. Indeed, Sýkora and Bouzarovski confirm this observation stating that “cities in former communist countries can no longer be seen as socialist cities.” (Sýkora – Bouzarovski 2012: 44) Post-socialism brought to Moscow, Ulaanbaatar and elsewhere the “re-emergence of [certain] pre-socialist patterns”, such as “residential differentiation”, “income disparities” or “social polarisation”. (Sýkora – Bouzarovski 2012: 50) The figure of the planner “who governed the allocation of investments in the socialist city has been supplanted by investors who steer politicians and planners in a direction favourable to capital.” (Sýkora – Bouzarovski 2012: 50) The mixture of socialist urban heritage and the subsequent post-socialist planning results in “typically capitalist areas and districts, while sections of urban landscapes resemble frozen mirrors of socialism.” (Sýkora – Bouzarovski 2012: 45)

Even though, having a significantly different experience, both London and Beijing performed surprisingly similar to their post-socialist colleagues. It can be concluded, that the current development of all, Moscow, Ulaanbaatar and Beijing, do not any longer display the typical socialist trait, but follows either ‘post-socialist patterns’ (i.e. Sýkora and Bouzarovski argue that “the nature of urban restructuring in post-communist countries has a common logic” (Sýkora – Bouzarovski 2012: 44)), or in case of Beijing its own hybrid ‘socialist-capitalist’ pattern.

## II

### Utopian legacy

The notion of a socialist or better to say simply social, egalitarian city, certainly did not appear out of nowhere together with the October Revolution. Throughout history, there were many concepts of equality-focused cities, be they only imagined, or actually constructed. Umberto Eco in his *The Books of Legendary Lands* (2013) introduces some of classical utopian *fictions* which feature detailed descriptions of the respective societies and their settlements, such as *Utopia* (1516) of Thomas More, *The City of the Sun* (1602) of Tommaso Campanella or *New Atlantis* (1624) of Francis Bacon (Eco 2013: 305-307). Eco argues, that the repetitious descriptions of utopian cities have been unconsciously inspired by the *Revelation to John* (Eco 2013: 310) where presumably first of such utopias, the New Jerusalem, has been described.

The stream of utopian imagination had, in cases, also a direct and profound influence on the urban planning of actual cities. Eco mentions Palmanova in Italy and the outer walls of Nicosia in Cyprus as examples. (Eco 2013: 310) Cf. a contemporary satellite image of Palmanova with its late-Renaissance blueprint: the plan and the actual realization display a strong similarity. Note the symmetry and geometrical nature of the project typical for the Utopian urbanism based on egalitarianism.



4.2 Renaissance plan of Palmanova



4.3 Satellite image of contemporary Palmanova

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the movement was enriched by a new stream represented by the so-called Utopian Socialists, such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier or Robert Owen. While inspirational and occasionally also practically realized, plans of Utopian Socialists had never impacted the whole society. They, nevertheless, represent an important part of the genealogy, eventually bringing the important movement of garden cities which has its deal of influence on Soviet planning.<sup>99</sup>

What all the “detailed utopian blueprints [designed for] future communities” (Paden 2003: 101) have in common is their orderly structure, usage of clear geometrical shapes (line, square, circle), repetitiveness, the specific distribution of functions throughout the city or a limited number of inhabitants. Garden city movement and socialist cities are certainly of no exception, although, they display one significant update not foreseen in times of classical Utopias: the influential role of the private and public transportation.

### **Garden city**

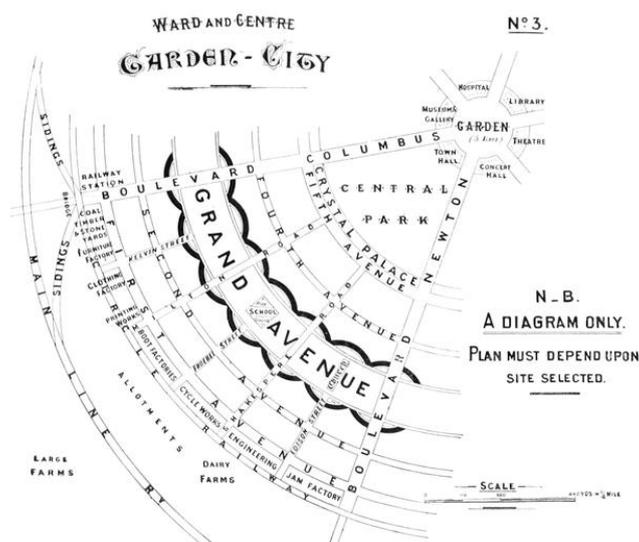
There was a wide range of other influential proposals (cf. French 1995: 32) but it was Sir Ebenezer Howard from the United Kingdom, and the garden city movement, who had arguably the biggest influence on Soviet planners. (French 1995: 31) Howard was a key figure not only for the socialist urbanism but for the modern urban planning more in general. As sociologist and philosopher Lewis Mumford stated, Howard's *Garden Cities of To-morrow* written in 1898 “has done more than any other single book to guide the modern town planning movement and to alter its objectives.” (Mumford in Paden 2003: 83) Howard was quite certainly influenced by works of Utopian Socialists (Paden 2003: 90) when designing his “garden cities”. For him, as well as for Utopians, the proximity of citizens to ‘nature’ was crucial. As he introduced in his famous “three magnets” diagram (Howard 1902: 16), instead of maintaining

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99 Let me emphasize here that I do not consider the relation between Utopian Socialists → garden city → Soviet planning as a straightforward evolution. Instead, those movements represent various versions of socialist thought, sometimes even contradictory. Still, they come chronologically after each other, and the older propositions formed a base for the newer ones.

the division between the “town” and the “country”, the two should merge into one “town-country”: exceptionally<sup>100</sup> quite in accordance with both Utopian Socialists, as well as Marx and Engels (who advocated that “communism should obliterate the division between the city and country” (Hatherley 2015: 11)).

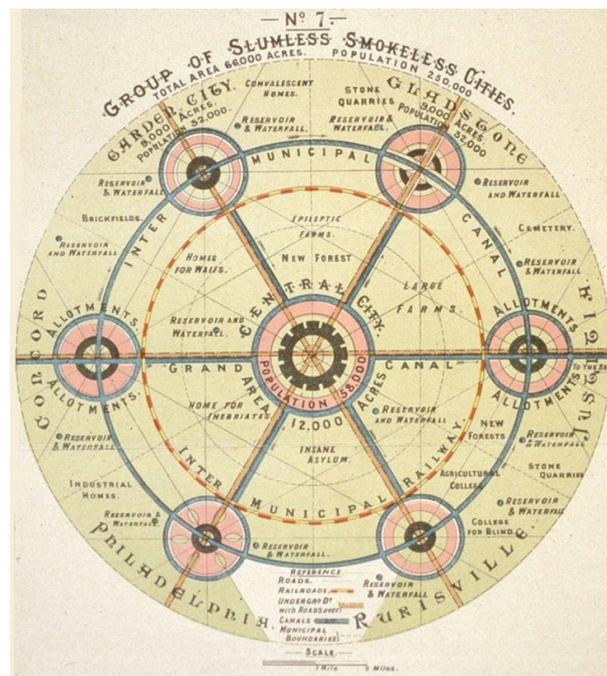
Howard proposed a precise spatial structure for his garden cities, although he was wise enough to emphasize, that the submitted plans were “diagram[s] only”, for exact “plan cannot be drawn until site [is] selected” (Howard 1902: 16). Howard's city would have a population of some 32,000 and “was to be zoned in such a way as to segregate various activities while, at the same time, ensuring that they all are easily accessible.” (Paden 2003: 87) The proximity of services would be achieved through their equal allocation throughout the city and supported by efficient public transportation, as well as by the small size of the settlement. The distribution of services according to Howard, as well as the interconnectivity and orderliness of the imagined city can be seen on his diagram:



4.4 Ward and Centre Garden City

Once the town would reach its designed proportion, instead of growing as an uncontrolled sprawl, it would expand in a form of another town, eventually creating a belt of cities surrounding the “central city”, as it is displayed on another diagram below:

<sup>100</sup> Cf. i.e. (Engels [1880])



4.5 Group of Slumless Smokeless Cities

The central area would be allowed to have a higher population of 58,000. This would be easily achieved, as the land inside and around the garden city would be collectively owned, so its expansion could be made accordingly to the master plan and would not be subjected to the contingencies of the free market. This network of cities would together form an integrated “social city” (Howard 1902: 126). As Howard comments, the “open country [would be] ever near at hand and rapid communication between off-shoots” (Howard 1902: 128) would secure that “the people of the two towns [and other towns included in the network] would in reality represent one community.” (Howard 1902: 130) The interconnectedness of the respective segments through the means of transport was essential to Howard's proposition.

The aim of the “inter-municipal railway” was to connect “all the towns of the outer ring – 20 miles in circumference – so that to get from any town to its most distant neighbour requires one to cover a distance of only 10 miles, which could be accomplished in, say, 12 minutes.” (Howard 1902: 130) Further, each town was supposed to be “connected with every other town in the group by a direct route” served by “electric tramways which traverse the high-roads, of which [...] there are a number.” (Howard 1902: 131) Finally, “there is also a system of railways by which each town is placed in direct communication with

Central City. The distance from any town to the heart of Central City is only 3 ¼ miles, and this could be readily covered in 5 minutes.” (Howard 1902: 131)

All this efficiency would be achieved due to the specific geometrical nature of the project (in practice adjustable in accordance with the case). Notwithstanding the satellites, already on the level of the basic unit, the town was supposed to be circular. It would be defined by the central area (central park surrounded by the “crystal palace”) with six main arteries originating in the city core, and cutting through the city outwards while being interconnected by the series of circumferent avenues.

### **The geometry of the socialist city**

One of my interests in the research of socialist cities was the geometry of the respective settlements. There are always multitudes of various geometries present in each and every city, but due to the ideological reasons discussed, the geometry in socialist cities plays an even more significant role. I was trying to find ways, how to articulate the most fundamental of researched (post)socialist cities in their totality, and to explore their main geometrical patterns seemed like a way to go.

Let me take Moscow, as an example of the city, where the decisive role of the geometry and the resemblance with Howard's proposal is striking. Owen Hatherley confirms my common sense observation of this similarity: “Post-revolutionary Moscow, Leningrad and Berlin favoured a modernized version of the planning of the English garden city movement.” (Hatherley 2015: 13) For comparison see a map of (the core of) 2019 Moscow:



4.6 Map of Moscow

Almost directly from the center, wide arteries are shooting off outwards, some of them stopping at the city's edge, while other ones astonishingly continuing for hundreds of kilometers and transforming from boulevards into the major highways of Western Russia. Those “prospekts” and “shosees” are interconnected by series of what Howard in his diagram called “avenues” - concentric boulevards, which I was mainly working with, when being in Moscow (“Boulevard Ring”, “Garden Ring”, “Third Ring Road”, ...).

On the map not very well visible Moscow Central Circle (metro line 14), is an orbital railway line connecting suburban neighborhoods of Moscow in the same way, as Howard's “inter-urban railway” was supposed to do. Also, it has a ‘smaller brother’ – the Koltsevaya (“Circular”) metro line 5, operating the inner city. The Moscow Automobile Ring Road (MKAD [МКАД]) encircling the city, is a megalomaniac highway twist of the same idea.

Instead of the central park and the Crystal Palace - a “wide glass arcade” enclosing the park (Howard 1902: 23) - there is a Red Square and Kremlin to be found in the center of Moscow. A place with the mausoleum of Lenin, where people are nailing their scrotum to the pavement out of despair (Walker 2014) and where the seat of the “new tsar” (Myers 2015) Vladimir Putin is located. Though, its original meaning being put upside down, the Moscow center is still “one of the favourite resorts of the people” (Howard 1902: 23), this time mainly of tourists from both outside and inside of the Russian Federation. As well as it maintains its geometrical significance of a point, from which the rest of the city expands.

In its practical realization in socialist countries, a lot of the garden city movement ideas turned out not quite as intended, similarly to the degradation of socialist thought in general. Urban scholar Lloyd Rodwin points out several paradoxes, which the application of Howard's ideas to cities in sizes of metropolis brings. He sees as one of the essential fallacies the adoption of planning meant for maximally tens of thousands, and its introduction to the cities inhabited by millions. Instead of establishing new functional communities of small sizes, Howard's plan “ironically enough, has become the basis of programs for decentralizing our large urban agglomerations.” (Rodwin 1945: 272) The result was not the town-country utopia but suburban sprawl, “basically a version of the garden city on a massive scale, with huge collective blocks

dispersed across the countryside.” (Hatherley 2008: 58) And even “though bigness is not a curse, amorphous sprawl certainly is.” (Rodwin 1945: 280)

Functional or not, the impact of Howard’s plans and those of other (pre)socialists, some of whom were discussed in this chapter, are here to stay, both as concepts and also as actual physical imprints. Moscow is notorious for its target-like structure. To somehow ‘eradicate’ this shape (and by that to alter the related flow of traffic) would require tremendous effort. Indeed, the Moscow metro line 14 or Leningradskoye Highway and so on, are more than just a railway or a road, they are containers of a (socialist) ideology, of a history. That is also why I claim that by ‘performing’ the major (circular) highways and means of traffic in Moscow, I was articulating something fundamental about the city, that I was performing the (remnants of) socialist planning, the (remnants of) socialism. Let me introduce you to the selection from the mentioned performances.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**EAST BY NORTHEAST**

**I**

**Overview**

In the key chapter of the thesis, you are about to read, I am describing some of my ‘first-order’ performances.<sup>101</sup> Due to the number of works (cf. Appendix), I made a selection instead of describing all or even most of the performances. The chapter is structured as follows: (I) this overview is followed by an introductory section, (II) each city and the selected works conducted in it are discussed separately. The aspiration of the final section (III) is to be a brief conclusion of the chapter leading to the Conclusion closing the whole thesis.

Sub-chapters on Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and Beijing all open with an outline of their basic characteristics and histories. In all the cities I would always begin my research in their cores, the oldest and historically most relevant parts. That is also why each of the respective city sub-chapters continues with a description of walks<sup>102</sup> executed within the urban cores. Sections following after these focus on my other performances of various significant travel means and networks. Discussions on each case city are concluded by one ‘flagship performance,’ realized always towards the end of my stay and in which I tried to articulate what I considered the most significant feature of the given urban environment’s layout. These were *Performing 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (walking)* in Moscow, *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)* in Ulaanbaatar and *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)* in Beijing. The presented material is being complemented by discussions on the works of other artists relevant to the project.

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<sup>101</sup> It contains a selection of figures, mostly my photographic documentation or the maps depicting the respective walks and rides. Most of the maps were downloaded from the website OpenStreetMap, which operates under the Open Data Commons Open Database Licence (ODbL). The license, unlike, for example, that of Google Maps, enables the user to copy, distribute, as well as to adjust the data. All the map alterations were done by myself.

<sup>102</sup> Walks particularly as the public transportation does not operate within the respective central sections.

## Borders of research

In Chapter 1 I have discussed some issues related to travel/tourism research into vague borders between the examined subject and the act of traveling itself. Is everything from the commencement to the end of the trip part of the research? In one way yes as all that happens during that period somehow adds up to the consequent elaboration. Yet, not all the material is being consciously evaluated, as my research focuses on a specific subject of the experience.<sup>103</sup>

This leads me to a particularity of my research methodology: from the beginning of this project I have tried to minimize the influence of extra-artistic, unexpected performances on the research. I wished to conduct the project according to the system I have devised, while the external actants preventing me from doing so seemed as obstacles on my mission. *East by Northeast* was not supposed to be an “improvisational” tourist performance (cf. Edensor 2001: 76-77) in which I would *deliberately* expose myself to inconveniences and contingencies of travel. I anyway had my deal of the unexpected and of discomfort even without asking for it. Practically, this meant, for example, that I made sure all my documents and visas were in order (so to resist unwanted performances of the State) or that I got the necessary vaccinations and equipped myself with the medicine for travel (so to resist unwanted performances of bacteria).

I am aware that this made me possibly less sensitive towards the visited environments. On the other hand, only because of such limitation was I able to execute the project more or less as planned. There were, however, cases when the influences of external factors were so strong, so persistent, that their performances affected the research to the extent when I could not ignore them anymore. One such situation happened to me in the capital of Mongolia.

In Ulaanbaatar were my working conditions certainly the worst which is also why in this city I have generated the least of material. I have arrived in Mongolia without having a place where to live and with an ear inflammation

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<sup>103</sup> To remind, I aimed to explore “how to perform (mega)cities through the movement of the body through their transportation networks”.

which made approximately half of my stay there very difficult. Luckily enough, after the first few days of moving chaotically around the city, and trying to solve my current situation, very weak and half-deaf, I managed to fix myself a cheap room at the periphery of the city.

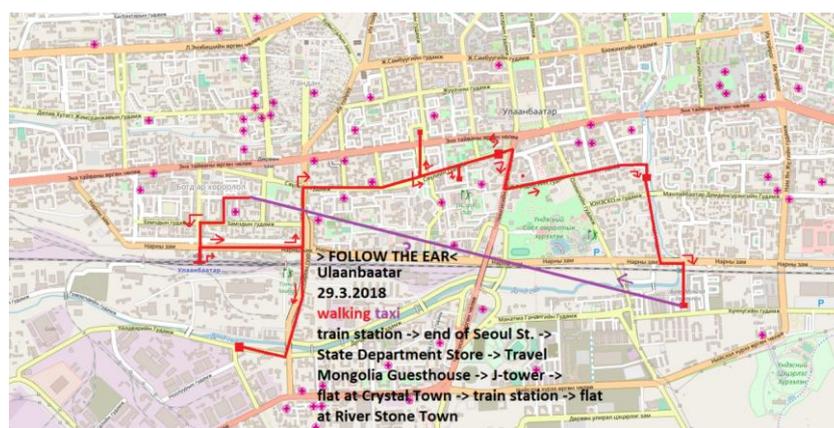
Most of my energy went towards my survival. As I was desperate for not only not having a place to live and being sick but also of not progressing with the research at all, I was at least documenting my movements in the city dictated by the sickness and a search for a new home. For the time being, this activity temporarily replaced the previously planned ‘real’ research. Although, the situation might be also approached as a legitimate continuation of the work, similarly as when Hsieh was recording himself breaking his contract (cf. Chapter 3). In my travel diary, I have labeled this unexpected ‘project’ as “Follow the ear”. The outcoming documentation was diary notes<sup>104</sup> and maps. Two of them can be seen below:

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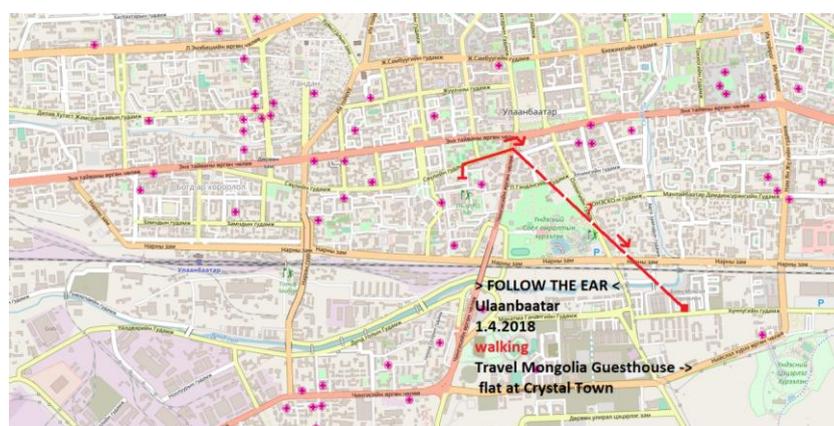
104 Cf. this personal diary report capturing my initial struggles in Ulaanbaatar:

“29.3. 2018

[about searching for a hostel] [...] I feel like I'm dying. Due to my problems with sleeping, I did not sleep almost at all the previous night. The big backpack I left in the station. Ganba warns me I should watch for pickpockets. I am trying to find Guesthouse Mongolia. It is ‘well hidden’. When people from the 50m distant hotel send me 1km away to another street I'm losing hope. The simplest tasks start to be very difficult. I purchase a sim card which doesn't work, in pain I'm negotiating with the seller who speaks ZERO English. I find the hostel. It is an disorganized, ‘under-the-construction’ place. I get my own room for USD5, though, which is nice. [...] [about renting the room in a flat] The whole visit was very confusing and I felt awkward. Surprisingly the result was positive, the room relatively big, with a beautiful floor and equipped with furniture. Only the chair and a BED was missing. I have pointed that out, Jenny responded with an argument that I have a sleeping bag. I have kindly answered that I think to sleep for one month on the hard floor doesn't sound good to me. We agreed I will purchase for myself a mattress. Jenny and I walked back, find out there are no buses for us. Jenny caught us a ‘cab’. She made a comment about my beard (‘Why do you have it? We don't like it.’). [...]”



5.1 Follow the Ear map 1



5.2 Follow the Ear map 2

Both of the maps are displaying all my movements in the public space of Ulaanbaatar within the given days and the means of transport chosen. These non-conceptual, everyday actions were kind of *East by Northeast's* meta-performance layer as they were revealing and commenting on difficulties related to the project's execution caused by the external factors. In other words, they had an unintended self-referential quality of being performances about performance research (cf. Chapter 1 and my performance *From Dzyga to Detenpula*).

An example of what this experience revealed (or confirmed) was an advantage that is sometimes part of the identity of a traveler as discussed in Chapter 1. What I have in mind is that I could utilize my travel insurance to bypass Mongolian's public health care system and to go instead to a high-quality private clinic with English speaking doctors.

Inasmuch, as I acknowledge that "stasis, immobility, disease is an

important part of travel too”<sup>105</sup> I did not use this opportunity to investigate the medical system of Mongolia’s state institutions. I decided not to alter (or possibly enrich) the aim of the project and keep my focus rather on the more consciously planned research of urban transport infrastructure. Conversation with the thesis supervisor Ray Langenbach made me nevertheless consider possible future openings of my work. What would happen when the same project would become more open towards the random, including also (or especially) documentation of moments when the research did not go as intended?

For now, let me leave this thought open, to be revisited in the Conclusion and in some possible future performances, before entering Moscow to contemplate for a bit over the notion of circularity which is an important aspect of Moscow and Beijing, and partially of Ulaanbaatar as well.

### **On circularity**

In Moscow, I decided not to perform its radial lines even though they together with its circular streets, highways, metro, and train lines, etc. form its significant ring and radial pattern (more below). I could easily imagine such a performance on my list but I got more interested in the rings and decided to focus on them. There is something very powerful in the shape of a circle - it encapsulates, protects, but also constraints. When one follows the circular path there is the soothing knowledge that in the end he or she arrives back to where he or she started from. Yet, that is at the same time also its disturbing feature - it implies that it is not possible to leave the circle and that despite a person moving, he or she is not progressing as it is expressed by the idiom “running in circles”. It is fitting indeed, that Moscow (and analogously Beijing) is a circular city as it always wanted to at the same time protect as well as to rule its inhabitants.

The motive of the circle was also a key feature of the performance I would now like to shortly introduce. In their collaborative work, *Relation in Movement*

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<sup>105</sup> As the thesis supervisor, Ray Langenbach, wrote to me in our personal email conversation 6.10.2019.

(1977), presented under the framework of 10<sup>th</sup> Paris Biennale, performance artists Marina Abramović and Ulay gave themselves tasks to drive a “car round in circles for an unspecified period of time” (by Ulay) (Abramović - Ulay 1977), and to be “driven around in a circle for an indeterminate period of time and broadcast through a megaphone the number of circles turned” (by Abramović) (Ibid.) The performance was supposed to end when either the car or its users would “collapse” (Abramović 2010). After 16 hours it turned out to be the machine that broke. A crucial element here which gives the work its strength was an extreme physical involvement of the two human bodies - and the body of the car. Artists were testing their stamina (and the strength of will) in competition with the machine. Cf. the photography below depicting the circulating car. The distinctive shape of the ring is an imprint of the car tires on the pavement.



5.3 Marina Abramović - Ulay: *Relation in Movement* (1977), video still

The work could be as well understood as a “symbolic of turning in circles around each other in a relationship or always moving around in the same small-minded circle of thought.” (LIMA) Certainly, even more associations could be developed. When reading the statement of Abramović about the work (cf. Abramović 2010) it seems that the motivations of the authors were rather intuitive and open for multiple interpretations than rational or unidirectional. What is important for me is that Abramović and Ulay utilized the powerful

multi-meaning symbol of the circle and combined it with the endurance exploration typical for their performances.

Let me compare some features of this performance with what I created for the *East by Northeast*. Various cities were for practical, ideological or cosmological (see below) reasons built in circular patterns and in my task of performing dominant features of a city the notion of circularity was coming repeatedly. As Abramović and Ulay, I was conducting long durational rides (and walks) in which the physical exhaustion became an important part of the experience. Unlike them, I was never using the strategy of defining the duration of the performance by the limits of the body (until its “collapse”). Rather, in most cases the performance would end after the respective segment of the urban layout would be articulated through my movement (i.e. by making a full circle around a square) or after a given period would be over (as with the two all day long performances inside of the metro systems).

Another important similarity with the *Relation in Movement* was a seemingly ‘improper’ use of the respective travel means in our works. *Raison d’être* of cars or public buses seems to be to transport (people) from somewhere to somewhere *else*. And as much as all, Abramović, Ulay and I, were indeed transported<sup>106</sup> by the respective vehicles, those rides were not bringing us ‘anywhere’. It may be better, then, to say that we were *in transport*, rather than being *transported*, as even after riding many kilometers we still did not arrive *there*.

I would like to propose a working construct that the ‘true aim’ of a vehicle’s performance is functionality and the smoothness in operation (cf. with the *Metro III: Moscow* below) not the transport of people. Analogically, i.e. a gun does not ‘want to’ shoot people, it only ‘wants to’ perform efficiently the task of shooting. Seen this way, by not utilizing their vehicle for what is usually expected from it (to transport somewhere), Abramović and Ulay used its full potentiality (to operate, to perform the act of movement) to the extent of its termination.

If the city itself is considered as a machine (cf. Chapter 3 and 4), then

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<sup>106</sup> Notwithstanding who was the driver as one would be still transported (or be *in transport* as my following text suggests) *by* the machine despite the possible control of the driver over the conditions (route, speed, etc.) under which the transport would happen.

the argument can be extended from vehicles to the whole transport network. It might be said, then, that the *raison d'être* of a highway is to perform a smooth operability within its limits - in case of an orbital highway within its circular pattern. Such a road performs most efficiently when its full circle is in use. With my actions in the *East by Northeast*, I was not undertaking only sections of certain lines, as would be more common between the city inhabitants (who would wish to get *somewhere*) but utilizing their full potentiality, i.e. by going around a full circle. Thus, through my simple actions, I was experiencing the ultimate performance of a respective segment of the urban network determined not by the human particle but by the machine ensemble itself.

Finally, what might be said about the circular parts of the network could be applied to other segments of different shapes too. While the round patterns 'want to' be expressed in their circularity, i.e. linear ones 'want' the same by their own means (cf. *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)* below). With this statement, I conclude the discussion on the role of circularity in the *East by Northeast* and invite you to explore Moscow with me, a city particularly famous for its roundness.



cathedrals” (French 1995: 10) - at their centers. This is “nowhere [...] seen more clearly than in Moscow, where two ring roads – the inner semi-circle of the Boulevard Ring and the outer full circle of the Sadovaya (Garden) Ring – have been laid out on the lines of the successive medieval fortifications” (French 1995: 10).

Later, during the baroque and neoclassical periods, under the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great, respectively, the element of planning in the design of towns became crucial. The classical ancient city has been seen as an ideal and elements such as “rectangular street pattern, with focal squares linked by diagonals, the whole enclosed by an oval of massive fortifications” (French 1995: 15), were introduced. On the grounds of the original Russian settlements, new plans were laid out, which were significantly influenced by foreign architects from Europe and “inevitably the planned geometries of classical city design began to appear more widely in Russian cities.” (French 1995: 16) Not only was Saint Petersburg (new capital of Imperial Russia developed under “Peter's strict personal control” (French 1995: 15)) a planned city, but it was also expressing a “fascination with absolutist and triumphal grandeur.” (French 1995: 17).

In this respect, the way imperial Saint Petersburg was constructed is akin to what Haussmann (also backed, to remind, by an absolutist monarch - Napoleon III) did in Paris. The dominant position of the planner, geometrically clear street patterns or broad boulevards for which Haussmann was so praised - and criticized - were key elements already in the design of Saint Petersburg, more than a hundred years before rebuilding of Paris.

Moving approximately a century forward from Haussmann, the continuity with the Russian Imperial period had to be seen under the reign of yet another ‘absolutist monarch’ - Joseph Stalin. But it was not only during Stalinism when the urban design in the USSR followed the legacy of its past:

For the present-day city in the former Soviet Union (as for cities throughout the world) few elements of the past have proved more stubbornly enduring than the street patterns of inner areas, whether the ring and radial layout of medieval times or the geometric patterns of the baroque city. (French 1995: 24)

**1 28/2/2018 Moscow<sup>107</sup>**

***Performing the Red Square and the Central Squares of Moscow (walking)***

**2 1/3/2018 Moscow**

***Performing the Boulevard Ring (Bulvarnoye Koltso) (walking)***

In the two very first performances of the *East by Northeast* project, which belong under the ‘first-order’ category (cf. Introduction), I have (1) walked around the Red Square and the Central Squares of Moscow and (2) walked around the Boulevard Ring (Bulvarnoye Koltso). It seemed fitting, to begin the research on Moscow’s circularity ‘in the beginning’ - in the place from where its successive ring roads emerge: the Red Square. This old market square was the focal center not only of the medieval but also and maybe even more importantly, of the socialist Moscow as “the supreme shrine of the regime, not just for the city but for the entire country and for the communist system worldwide.” (French 1995: 12) In my performance, I did nothing spectacular – in no way unusually dressed, without being too fast or too slow, without any special expression, I once walked around the square.

The same strategy I followed with the first two rings, which are encircling the very center of the city: Central Squares of Moscow and the Boulevard Ring. Even though, the Central Squares of Moscow is truly the innermost ring of Moscow, a more common understanding of the sequence is rather this (Yegorov 2019): 1<sup>st</sup> Ring Road = The Boulevard Ring  
2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road = The Garden Ring  
3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road = The Third Ring Road  
The Moscow Automobile Ring Road (MKAD)

I chose to *walk* around the Central Squares and Boulevard Ring, as there

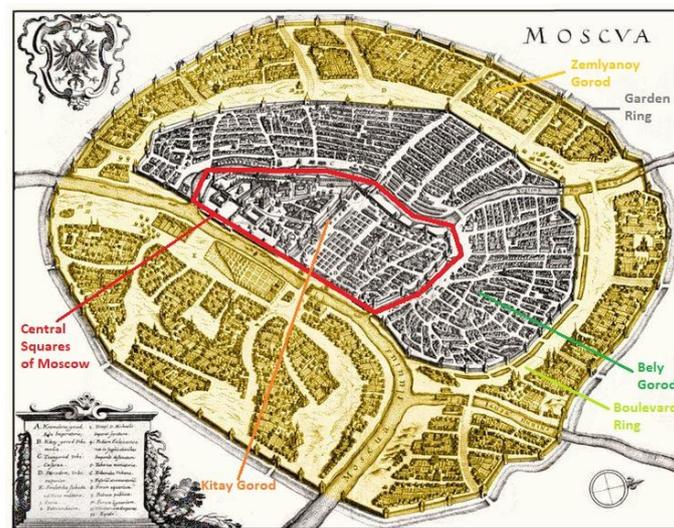
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<sup>107</sup> If you wish to imagine my experience better, I invite you to listen to my audio diary from the travel:

27.2. 2018: <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/27-2-2018-moscow/s-Rlv4Q>,

28.2.2018: <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/28-2-2018-moscow/s-ukaMD>

was no possibility to use public transport for the two innermost rings. In both cases, the roads were laid out on the location of the former city walls. Central Squares encapsulate the historical part of Moscow called Kitay-Gorod. Beyond the Central Squares, the historical area of Bely Gorod is located, having the Boulevard Ring as its opposite border. And even behind this ring, one finds another such a strip, originally called Zemlyanoy Gorod, bounded by the Garden Ring, which also was once a city edge surrounded by a rampant. Cf. the historical plan of Moscow made by Matthäus Merian in 1638, and adjusted by myself, below, as well as my record of the walk around the Boulevard Ring:



5.5 Plan of Central Moscow



5.6 Performing the Boulevard Ring (Bulvarnoye Koltso) (walking)

A simple act of walking around and inside of these historical quarters was an embodiment of historically essential borders and fortifications, of an important division between districts and their concurrent adaptation and implementation into 21<sup>st</sup> century Moscow. See below a video still image from my walk around the Boulevard Ring in which the very center of the busy megacity displays calmness:



5.7 *Performing the Boulevard Ring (Bulvarnoye Koltso) (walking)*

In another circular walking performance, Belgian artist Francis Alÿs walked for 7 days in 2014 from 9 am to 7 pm the distance of 118km inside of his studio in Mexico City. The distance walked was chosen so to copy the length of the so-called “English Way” (CaminoWays 2019), one of the traditional pilgrimage paths to Santiago de Compostela. The title of the piece *Albert’s Way* was yet another reference to a rumor about the Nazi architect Albert Speer, who “walked in circles in the prison patio, pacing the exact distance from one city to another, and imagining the places he’d be passing through on his virtual tour around the globe.” (Alÿs 2014a)<sup>108</sup>

What is important for me in this multilayered performance is its relation to walk(s) of Speer. Alÿs walking in circles was *reenacting* (re-“doing of a thing” (Merriam-Webster 2019b), as is one of the possible definitions of an “act”) Speer. Or *reperforming* him - considering that he was also “showing his doing”

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108 Cf. the video documentation from the *Albert’s Way* here: <https://francisalys.com/alberts-way/>

(cf. Introduction) to others, i.e. to the viewers of the video.

In my actions (in central Moscow), I was doing a similar thing, although I was not linking it to one person in particular. Instead, I was reperforming past performances of various people: of the city planners who built - and torn down - the fortifications. Of the soldiers who were possibly guarding the walls and walked on and around them. Of those strolling on the Boulevard Ring. Of those marching on and around the Red Square in parades of the socialist regime. Hence, when embodying the (history of) urban design, this did not mean for me to interact only with i.e. the physical layout of the streets but also with the ghosts of all who built them and walked on them. On that note, I was at the same time walking together with those present at the given moment, and, finally, adding my performative imprint for all who will be coming after.

→ **3 2/3/2018 Moscow**

***Performing the Garden Ring (Sadovoye Koltso) (walking)***

→ **4 3/3/2018 Moscow**

***Performing the Garden Ring (Sadovoye Koltso) part II (walking)***

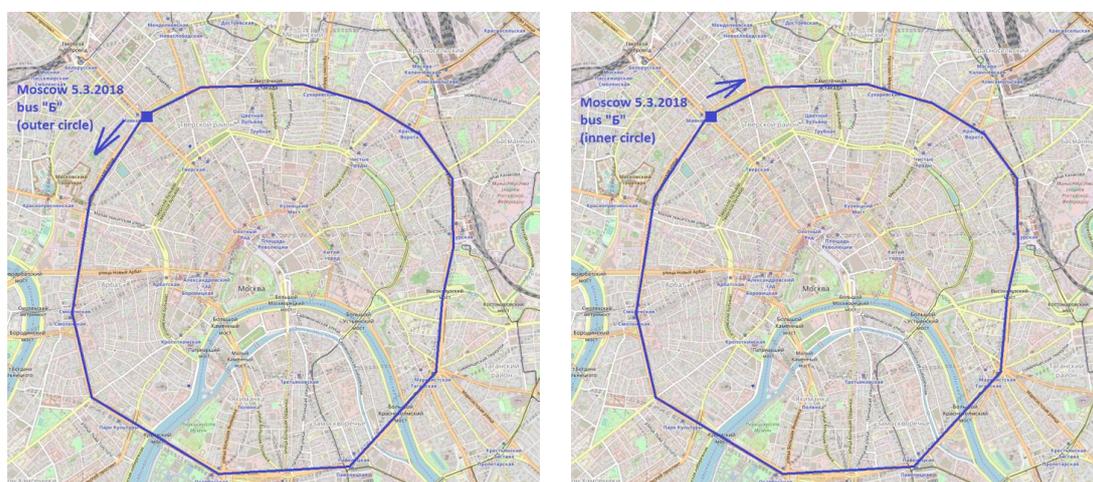
→ **5 5/3/2018 Moscow**

***Performing the Garden Ring/bus B (Б) (bus)***

The next three performances were focusing on and around the Garden Ring, which was some time ago indeed containing a lot of greenery, as its name suggests. Twentieth-century socialist planning turned the Garden Ring into in parts 16 lanes wide highway. (Walker 2016) The decision to adapt the original ring-road for the modern development might be noted as an example of Soviet continuity with the circularity present in Moscow planning history, although with a strange twist. While historically, “the ring road's wide expanse was home to verdant foliage and impressive gardens”, after its rebuilding following 1935 Moscow Master Plan (during the rule of Stalin) (Sigrist 2010), until today, “fumes waft from traffic jams a dozen lanes thick, while at night boy racers drive their sports cars at truly terrifying speeds.” (Walker 2016) The current tendency is to alter some of the maladies of socialist planning and to return greenery to this road which “features hardly a blade of grass or a single flower for almost 10 miles of length.” (Walker 2016)

When I decided to encircle the 15km street, the outside temperature fluctuated between  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$ . I do not recall if that was my initial plan but after walking approximately half of the circle, I found myself too exhausted by the weather conditions and returned home by the metro. The next day, I started from the same spot, where I left previously and finished the walk. Such a decision brings a question of interruptions in similar task-oriented performances: how the pauses in the execution of long durational works influence their meaning? Is one 'allowed' to take breaks or do they decrease the validity of the work? Considering the piece discussed from the point of view of a larger research, I do not see any good or bad in executing the walk in two parts. But from the perspective of a single performance, a sole, uninterrupted action feels more 'clean', somehow stronger.

Important difference between the Garden Ring and the preceding two roads was the presence of a circular bus line, with which it is possible to go around the ring, in both, clockwise as well as counterclockwise, directions. I took rides on board of this bus line "B" ("Б") around the ring in both directions. Inside the bus, I was either standing or sitting, while occasionally documenting my ride.<sup>109</sup> Cf. the maps from the two respective rides below:



5.8-5.9 *Performing the Garden Ring/bus B (Б) (bus)*

<sup>109</sup> In general, when inside vehicles, I usually preferred to use a video camera instead of a photo camera, as I do not have the courage and impudence of a photographer, and I did not want to bother other users of the transport.

The Garden Ring, in comparison for example to the Boulevard Ring, is not an environment inviting for a pleasant stroll. But it is a fascinating place, with a complex historical value and while not featuring the same peaceful qualities as Boulevard Ring, it conveys another narrative – that of a *megacity*. And even more specifically, a *socialist megacity*. The road is in accord with socialist ideas absurdly wide and full of traffic – giving an impression of a modern, busy metropolis. Though nowadays, the fascination with machines, industry and the traffic, which may be traced back to futurism and the beginning of the previous century (cf. Otto Wagner in Chapter 3), is not as celebrated as it once was. When walking on the Garden Ring, one can still be fascinated with the flow of the traffic, but even the city leadership itself acknowledges, that this centrally-planned monster is for the 21<sup>st</sup> century Moscow somewhat inappropriate (while at the same time being indisputably one of its key features).

Similarly, the architecture surrounding the Garden Ring, is certainly impressive – i.e. Stalin's 'Seven Sisters'<sup>110</sup> are located either directly on the Ring or nearby. Other lodgings, administrative and commercial facilities display often the same neoclassical grandeur. But is not all this greatness also a permanent reminder of unscrupulous destruction of historical heritage, of horrors of Stalinism, of Moscow being one big 'Potemkin village' (cf. Chapter 4)? In Moscow, there is an expression "it's a problem of people inside the Garden Ring" (Yegorov 2019). It means about the same as 'it is the first-world problem', as the districts inside the Ring are "the most expensive neighborhoods of the most expensive city in the country." (Yegorov 2019) If one adds that on the political level, Russia still did not manage to get rid of its autocratic legacy of 'socialism' (or even tsarism), it makes sense, that the center of its wealth and

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110 Seven monumental buildings erected in Moscow between 1947 and 1957 by Stalin. According to Hatherley, these buildings are paradoxically the prove of "the refutation of Stalin's claims to 'communism'" (Hatherley 2015: 20), despite one of them, "the pyramidal Palace of Soviets" planned to be "topped by a colossal gesturing figure of Lenin," (Hatherley 2015: 20) as the communism was originally supposed to be an egalitarian ideology. Or in the words of political theorist Bruno Rizzi: "Instead of a State which dissolves itself into an economic administration from below, there is a State which has been inflated by the bureaucratization of the economy controlled from above. The Palace of the Soviets, 360 meters high, will remain a symbol of this period and the 'Bastille' of the bureaucratic world." (Rizzi in Hatherley 2015: 20)

power is symbolically sealed with such a place as Garden Ring. The video still below, taken from inside of the bus, depicts 21<sup>st</sup> century Garden Ring: noisy, busy, the bus window dirty from the road, one of Stalin's 'Seven Sisters' in the right-back of the image:



5.10 *Performing the Garden Ring/bus B (Б) (bus)*

In a way, both of my chosen movement strategies – walking and using a bus – were similar but the experience of walking is much less limited, allows to stop, to cross the street, to change the pace, to purchase a food, to use a restroom, etc. The price for this (limited) freedom is a lack of protection against the weather conditions (which I could feel strongly during my walks in Moscow) or a direct exposition to the noises and smells of the highway. When one walks, he or she is also slower and the body gets more exhausted. Yet, I look positively on the element of exhaustion being present in my work, as this is the way how one can interact with the respective environment not only on the mental level but with the whole body involved. Indeed, I still remember the snow, the tiredness and the metro station, where I have finished the first half of my walk, and that served as a gate leading back to my (warm) temporary home.

I am wondering, what could be considered as a more 'socialist' way of transfer - walking or rapid transport? I would think the latter. It is more *efficient* and socialism was all about efficiency and progress. It is more *social*, as one does not walk by him- or herself but together with fellow

citizens, united inside of one vehicle. And of course, there is much more of *order* in it. Even though one might be just enjoying him- or herself inside of the public transportation and traveling randomly, the order of stops and routes is inescapable, as well as the system of ticket machines, controllers, fines and similar.

If to perform the Central Squares or the Boulevard Ring was rather about embodying the ‘old’ Moscow, to walk and ride in buses around the Garden Ring was more related to the socialist heritage. But as much as the post-socialist State Apparatus would want me to indulge in admiration of one of its hallmarks, I was not only admiring it but also cynically observing it. Similarly was Iain Sinclair, a British writer, filmmaker, and walker, “not the first to hate” (Lezard 2002) the M25 or London Orbital Motorway, an almost 190km long highway encapsulating most of the Greater London. This did not, nevertheless, prevent him from walking all the way around the ring and even writing a thick book about it. (Sinclair 2003)

Such an approach might be labeled with the motto “know your enemy”. As in a homeopathy which promises to cure the body through the introduction of small portions of poison to it; or as in a Greek tragedy where the spectator is purified of her negative emotions, like the “terror and pity”, by not avoiding them but, on the contrary, experiencing them intensively while perceiving the performance and going through the *catharsis* (from the Greek “purgation” or “purification”). (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019b) So was I not distancing myself from the literally and metaphorically toxic<sup>111</sup> Garden Ring but with both fascination and a certain amount of reluctance circling it, ‘celebrating it’.

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111 Indeed, there is ‘something smelly’ about the Garden Ring. Note, that Schechner regards feelings related to senses of smell, taste, and touch to the notion of performativity. For example, a sentence such as “I smell something funny” is considered as one of “ways of apprehending the performative.” (Schechner 2013: 169)

→ **10 15/3/2018 Moscow**<sup>112</sup>

***Metro III: Moscow (metro)***

The Moscow Metro could almost be called an underground city with its own rules, rhythms, and landmarks. It functions as a separate organism, but is, no matter what, an irreplaceable part of the city. (Moscow Mayor and Moscow Government 2017)

Since May 1935, the metro system operates in Moscow. It has received a well-deserved international attention for its architectural qualities and it is possible to gain detailed information about the system through various sources, such as in the chapter “Metro” of Hatherley's *Landscapes of Communism* (Hatherley 2015: 250-309) For me, it was important that the Moscow metro followed and still follows the circular traffic patterns significant for the whole city. That is why I took rides on line 5 (Circle line or Koltsevaya) and line 14 (the Moscow Central Circle) as independent performances. Though, what I wish to discuss here is yet another action I executed inside of the Moscow metro.

Owen Hatherley gives his high opinion on the quality of the metro systems in Moscow and throughout the USSR (Hatherley 2015: 250 – 251). But quite like the Garden Ring or the ‘Seven Sisters’, the metro is also one of the outcomes of socialist urbanism, which can not be approached unambiguously: “Metros, however ‘useful’, were bread and circuses, designed to dazzle, while basic human needs remained unmet” (Hatherley 2015: 307). Not to mention the horrible conditions under which its most beautiful segments were built: “The Metro was constructed with a combination of shocking brutality and uncoerced enthusiasm. [...] prisoners were conscripted into the building [...] the Metro became a branch of the Gulag [...] Metro lines and stations built from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950 used prison labour extensively, and surely had high casualties.” (Hatherley 2015: 259) During the Moscow metro development, human rights were violated, and it played its role in the Soviet' ‘carrot and stick’ policy.

To twist the perspective once again - the underground public

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112 Watch the video excerpt from my *Metro III: Moscow* performance. The video displays the view on the megacity in the night, from inside of the metro train, with my body being reflected on the glass. It can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5O3-OSxMR9Y&feature=youtu.be>

transportation was not only intended but also truly made for ‘all the people’ and especially for the working class. Hatherley discusses the metro system in Gorky (now Nizhny Novgorod) as an example of how the Soviet planning “was oriented completely around the needs of industrial workers rather than, as today, those of white-collar workers and tourists.” (Hatherley 2015: 288) In Gorky, the metro was for a long time serving only the working-class areas, connecting factories and residency districts and it “did not, at first, enter the administrative and touristic historic ‘upper’ city”. (Hatherley 2015: 289)

The case of Gorky is standing out, but metros throughout the whole USSR were constructed so “that workers could get to work and to town quickly and comfortably” (Hatherley 2015: 302) which is an essential difference to London, for example, where “connecting manual workers to their factories was never a major priority.” (Hatherley 2015: 302) Hatherley does not discuss, from this point of view, the Moscow metro specifically, but it can be assumed that it was no different.

The *Metro III: Moscow* was a continuation of my performance-research series (preceding were Prague and London and following Beijing). In these works, I was not acting as a specialized metro analyst. I was not making detailed records about the efficiency or appearance of the metro or analyzing in detail people in it, or if so, these were only sidenotes, small observations as part of my flow of thoughts in the diary. Rather, this was my personal adventure, an invisible urban game, an attempt to merge my body with the *machine ensemble* (cf. Chapter 2) of the metro system. Each of the project installments had slightly different rules but there were some basics: to enter the system at the beginning of the day and leave it with the last train (biological needs put aside), to write notes in the notebook, not to use the phone.

Seen from the technological point of view, a metro might be decorated and praised for its design, such as the one in Moscow, yet its aesthetics will always be secondary after the efficiency. The metro is considered to perform well when it does what it was built for - transport humans and non-humans.<sup>113</sup>

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113 Even though, as discussed in the sub-chapter “On circularity” above, this is how *people* measure the efficiency of the performance of a machine - that it serves well the purposes for which they constructed it. But the metro itself might be more ‘interested’ in the efficient running of its carriages on all its lines. Transporting its human users to their desired

While people require this efficiency they tend to forget about the performative nature of the metro in Austin's (or better yet, Butler's) sense - that its high functionality is not 'natural', not always present. A glitch in the system, a delay, a derail, a bomb attack, all that makes the metro temporarily dysfunctional demystifies its obviousness. One starts to think about the mechanism of the whole apparatus and the 'actors and directors' of the performance: i.e those operating the trains; or the ones above them who are controlling the smoothness and orderliness of it all.

Then there are passengers. The specificity of the metro is that it runs often under the ground without the possibility for people to look out, hence one has to find a way how to deal with his or her *gaze* (cf. Chapter 1). Passengers in public transport, notably the ones in the metro, are, consciously or intuitively, aware of the power of their gaze. That is why they carefully adapt their performances. Not looking at each other in such a situation is not 'inhuman', as is the common sigh,<sup>114</sup> but rather very human.

To deal with the multiplicity of interfering gazes inside of the metro one learns to utilize a whole set of 'metro-performances' with reading a book or scrolling down the phone being the most obvious ones (cf. the footnote just above). There are also more subtle ones. The penetrating strength of one's gaze might be diminished by putting on a 'soft look'. I have been often wondering how successful am I when trying to achieve this state of being, a sort of Kant's "disinterested affection", only false, as in fact, interested. Another effect one might want to create could be that of a 'just an ordinary metro traveler' (cf. Schechner's "an ordinary Joe like me" (Schechner 2013: 210)) being a constructed role) or, on the opposite end, of a rebel by i.e. listening to a loud music or spraying graffiti on the train walls.

When being inside of the Moscow metro system, I perceived it no longer

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destinations could be considered as just a side product of that activity.

114 Cf. for example the ironical signs inside of the London Underground which were in 2012 bringing the attention to the issue of metro travelers not willing to engage with each other. Some signs were announcing: "Don't acknowledge fellow passengers or sustain eye contact beyond 2 seconds. Please respect urban solitude," and other ones: "iPods must be worn at all the times. If you don't have an iPod then play with your phone, read a newspaper or pretend to be asleep." (Franceschi-Bicchierai 2012)

(only) as a means, a technology, which was supposed to get me somewhere as I was not on a way anywhere. As a result, my performance somewhat inconspicuously changed in relation to the respective machine ensemble. I did not provoke anybody, paid my ticket so to avoid any unwanted attention from the ticket controllers, did not wear unusual clothes, etc. On the other hand, within the constraints of my 'good metro user' persona, I cared less about my performative character. I did not mind to sleep in carriages, lazily stroll on platforms amidst the rushing crowds<sup>115</sup> or to enjoy my lunch there.

The rules of the whole day art performance (see above) created the notion of safety - I knew I will be staying inside of the system until it closes, that I did not have to worry about the food and water (as I took it with me), that I could sit or sleep almost anytime I wanted. It was a similar feeling - though still different - as being at home which is also why my way of performing myself slightly changed from my public space character into a one I would present rather in a private space. This feeling I had with other urban performances too but it was especially strong inside of the metro.

I shall return to the discussion on the metro apparatus with the description of the *Metro IV: Beijing* where this feeling of 'homeness' was a little bit different. To conclude my thinking on the Moscow underground system, let me leave you with a few lines from my metro diary, so you could imagine my experience better:

[...] People at Krasnoselskaya in hibernation for a moment. Too early/half-empty train and the train waiting in a station because probably too fast/ahead of the schedule. Tarkovsky moment. [...] I am remembering the last summer. What an exciting, exhausting, beautiful period. A summer which has ended for me only in mid-October, already in the very middle of Estonian autumn ... Biblioteka Lenina ... tudumtudum ... so sleepy, maybe I should take a nap or something.

[...] It is more cold in line (2) than (1), maybe it has something ... Vodny Stadion ... to do with carriages. [...] It's the cold air coming from above which is the most annoying part. So it's like some kind of old aircon or something. [...]

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<sup>115</sup> Although, to my surprise, despite the influx of passengers and its speed, the Moscow metro is also a place for meetings, if not directly for hanging out.

Have I mentioned yet that it gets always significantly warmer in the centre than in the outskirts? I am not really positive about the reason. More people=higher density in the centre? And even somewhat 'denser' web of stations and lines. [...] We got out from the tube! It's pure white. And it's gently snowing. Also inside the carriage. The air is very FRESH.

[...] By the way oyoyoy ... it is around 6 pm, the crazy peak hours are coming. Or maybe they have actually already begun, I have just not noticed it in my total slowness and 'hypnosis'. Is it just me who is *under the spell* or are everybody in such a slow, mellow mood today?

[...] I have just had a conversation with a man in his 40s about the nature of humanity, God, religion, poetry. He was even reciting his own poem about love and egoism. I didn't understand all, he spoke in quick Russian and was quite intense, though seemed kind.

[...] 8 very last stops. I think I should put on some countdown or something soon. 8 ... 7 ... 6 ...5 ... 4 ... 3 ... 2 ... 1. But if I will be coming from Belorusskaya ... I might need to walk a little bit extra so to buy myself a beer... nah, annoying. Maybe I will meet some other non-stop shop.

→ **11 18-19/3/2018 Moscow**

***Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)***<sup>116</sup>

While to all the performances above, I am referring as to the performances of the second-order, *Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)* I label as a combination of the first (announced) and the second (unannounced) type. In this action, I walked around yet another and an even wider ring of Moscow. This was the largest ring which it was still possible to walk on, taking into account the scale and conditions of my research. The record from my walk can be seen below:

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116 If you wish, you can listen to the audio diary from my Third Ring Road walk here:

18.3.2018 I <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/18-3-2018-moscow/s-SgZz8>

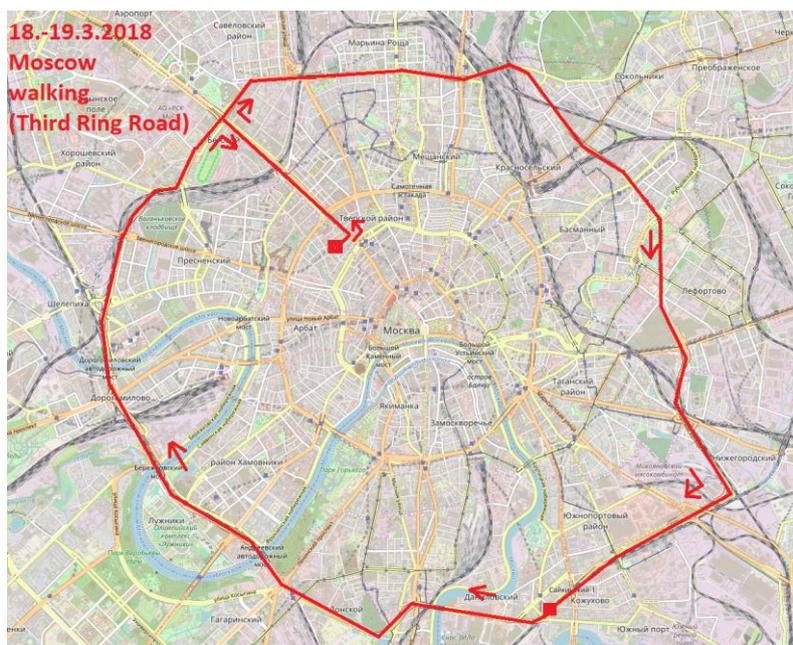
18.3.2018 II <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/18-3-2018-ii-moscow/s-K7xB6>

19.3.2018 I <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/19-3-2018-moscow/s-ypmpC>

19.3.2018 II <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/19-3-2018-ii-moscow/s-VRqZx>

For the video excerpt from the performance please refer to this link:

<https://youtu.be/mLstt4UOqhY>



5.11 *Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)*

The Third Ring Road (Tretye Transportnoye Kolco, TTC) is a 35km long orbital highway dedicated even more for the cars than the Garden Ring. There is often no pathway for pedestrians and in segments, the beltway also disappears in tunnels under the ground. In comparison to the Garden Ring, there is no public transport service which operates all the way around. Once again, the origins of the Ring dates back to the Moscow 1935 General Plan (Chernishev - Semenov [1935]) with construction beginning in 1960. It was fully completed only in 2005.

Urban geographer Robert Argenbright calls the TTC a “state-sponsored obsession with the automobile” (Argenbright 2003), pointing out its negative impact on the appearance of the city and the environment. The TTC “reduces the amount of public space available” and “endangers civil society”. (Ibid.) From this perspective, my walk could be also seen symbolically, as a kind of a march for healthier/more pedestrian-oriented cities.

A recent example from the long tradition of protest walks can be the march of self-proclaimed shaman Alexander Gabyshev from the city of Yakutsk, Sakha Republic, Russia to Moscow. He aimed to “cast out” the “demon” (Luhn 2019): Russian president Vladimir Putin. The long walk of Gabyshev has ended near the city of Ulan-Ude<sup>117</sup> this September 2019 when he was seized by a group

<sup>117</sup> In Ulan-Ude, I have presented one of my performances of the second-order which I called

of armed, masked men. Gabyshev has been marked “insane” (Stitching 2 October) and is currently being detained, facing criminal charges “of calling for extremism” (Ibid.): unfortunately not at all an uncommon response of the concurrent Russian regime against its critics.

In comparison to Gabyshev, my actions were certainly much less courageous, dangerous or exhausting. Still, in their respect, they were similar. Walking around Moscow’s Third Ring Road might be perceived as an act of disobedience and a call for change. My body was getting exhausted and I was suffering (mildly, though) as various martyrs were when advocating for their ideas. Throughout the thesis, I am discussing my role in the project as the companion or a servant of the city, a realizer of its desires. The perspective I am proposing now differs for its more critical standpoint as being an expression of discontent, of a complaint. Nevertheless, let it be clear that such a point of view is just an association rather than a reflection of myself consciously and systematically performing this type of resistance.

*Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)* took two full days - 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018. I tried to stay as close to the beltway as possible, but in many cases, I had to make detours. At times, I lost the highway totally and had to search for it again. In other cases, the corridor for pedestrians got so narrow that to walk on it next to several lanes of non-stopping traffic was still possible but it felt just absurd. Although, I noticed that I was not alone in my venture – sometimes, I could spot fellow pedestrians even in the most unpleasant sections of the road.

The ‘lesson’ I have learned previously from the Garden Ring was, that it is important to not to interrupt the walk, so to maintain the energy and the consistency of the performance. For that purpose, I have found myself a hostel located next to the TTC, where I have spent the night after the first day of walking. It was a strange feeling to pay extra money for lodging in a shabby hostel (as ordered by the budget) located not more than 20 minutes metro ride from my usual accommodation. If one is used to travel by public transport, especially by the metro running in the darkness of the underground, it may be

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*Lenin*. Its topic was, fittingly, a clash between the bureaucratic apparatus of the post-socialist Russia and the Buddhist tradition of the local Buryat people.

difficult to acknowledge the actual distances within the city. But often to walk from one part of the big city to another might be comparable to a day or several days long trek.

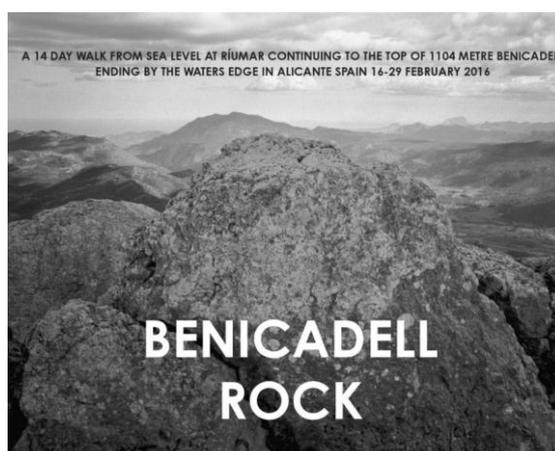
This specific 'hike' was in many ways very similar to the walk on the Garden Ring just on a bigger scale. It was longer, more exhausting and I could observe larger portions of the city – i.e. while following the Third Ring I have crossed the river Moskva several times, I saw brownfields, the International Business Center, garages and high-rises, construction sites, trains, and shopping malls; I walked on rails, through a cemetery, next to the stream, on bridges and under them and much more. To be able to imagine my walk better, see several selected photographs depicting the diversity of the environment around the highway:



*5.12-5.17 Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)*

For *Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)*, I decided to experiment and invite the audience to take part as well. I was offering people to witness the performance through the WhatsApp mobile application and to contact me any time daytime during the two days of the walk. This opportunity I advertised through email and open Facebook event. With whoever would contact me, I was ready to have an audio or video call or to use the WhatsApp's function of “location sharing”, where the receiver could observe my movements on a digital map in real-time. And few people have indeed contacted me. This way I tried to provide more direct experience than through an online diary or subsequent gallery exhibition. The tactic gave the walk some ‘spice’ but it did not seem to add anything that much significant. After *Performing Third Ring Road (walking)* I did not repeat the same strategy during the *East by Northeast* again.<sup>118</sup> It nevertheless brings me to the notion of the role of witnesses in the *East by Northeast* as the project was also an exploration of what could be the most adequate documentation methods for this type of work.

In that respect, it might worth to take a look at the difference between the approach of Hamish Fulton - British walking artist - and Roberth Smithson - an American land artist - to the role of the audience in their work (as discussed by walking art researcher Casey Curry). Fulton’s (long) walks often materialize in forms of short textual and graphical records, possibly accompanied by their photographic documentation which is rather sparse, if there even is any. Cf. one such a typical record from his 14 days walk in Spain below:



5.18 Benicadell Rock

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<sup>118</sup> But it was useful some one year later for my one day walk *East and West of Sofia* (2019) commissioned for the Sofia Underground performance art festival in Bulgaria.

Despite the length of the performance, the presented outcome is minimalist and simple. In the tradition of conceptual art such work and its form of documentation “elevate[s] process over form”. (Curry) His artifacts, such as the photograph with the text above, “are not autonomous objects but constructed contexts that others must activate.” (Ibid). As much as these documents have their visual qualities what really matters is the unseen which has to be imagined by the viewer. A higher importance Fulton gives to the walks themselves is clearly expressed by his statement that “a walk has a life of its own and does not need to be materialised into an artwork.” (Fulton 2019).<sup>119</sup>

In comparison, according to Curry, “artists like Smithson were interested in permanence on a geological scale, and thus a human audience was by no means necessary for the work to be complete.” (Curry) Curry gives as an example Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a monumental installation in nature which appears to her as “not even made for human viewers” (Ibid). The difference between the two artists is also significant more in general for the two streams of land art, the first one being more subtle and invisible (cf. Fulton’s motto: “Leave no trace”)<sup>120</sup> (Fulton 2019), the other being monumental and having an immense impact on the environment<sup>121</sup>.

In the *East by Northeast*, my personal experience of a walk or a ride was for me more important than its visual representation - similarly to Fulton.<sup>122</sup> But I did not want to do all this just for myself. I wanted to somehow share what I did which is why I have created the online diary, why the final exhibition happened or why I was inviting people to be part of my walk through WhatsApp.

The *East by Northeast* was indeed an ultimate closing of my preceding research in LAPS as involving a multitude of documentation techniques developed previously. In the online presentation of the project itself, I mostly prioritized showing maps over the multiplicity of the audiovisual material so to engage the viewer in the active imaginative process. Yet, I acknowledge now that

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119 Notwithstanding, that this is what he is, in the end, doing - materializing walks into artworks that can be presented and sold.

120 More prominent in Europe are examples of walks by Richard Long.

121 More prominent in the United States are for example works by Michael Heizer.

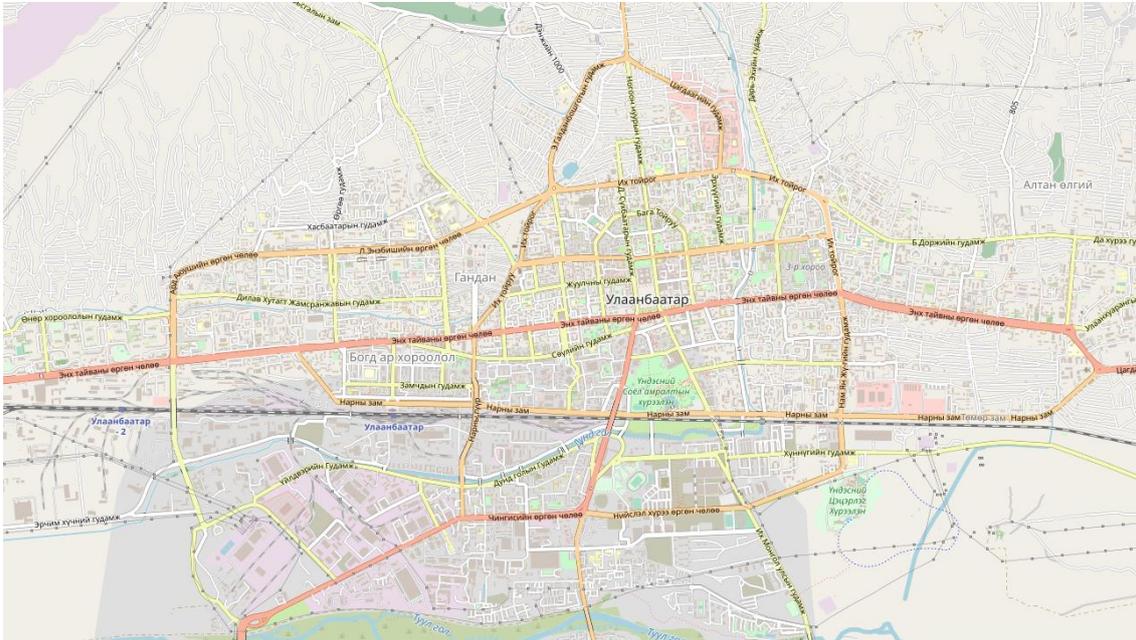
122 Despite the amount of the data I have collected, often I did not even know exactly why I am collecting it. I was just trying things out, gathering as much as possible, ‘researching’.

this strategy seems to work better if combined with at least a minimum of additional visual documentation as otherwise an important starting point for the thought process might be missing. That is also why for my final exhibition I chose to present also selected audiovisual materials (cf. Introduction).

Previous paragraphs discussed briefly the topic of documentation in relation to ephemeral urban walks and rides. The following sub-chapter introduces my work in the city of Ulaanbaatar where the notion of immateriality and ephemerality was present in yet another way. While in Moscow, I was focusing mostly on the past and its reminiscence in the present, the Ulaanbaatar experience was for me more about the future - the planned but yet missing, the unrealized.

## ULAANBAATAR

See the map of Ulaanbaatar below, notice its linear shape:



5.19 Map of Ulaanbaatar

Socialist legacy put aside, the story of Ulaanbaatar is quite different in comparison to Moscow and Beijing. An important part of Mongolian culture is its *nomadism*. Since a long time, Mongolian people's life is related to herding of animals, the traditional five “jewels”: horses, sheep, goats, cows/yaks, and camels (Yee). People are moving together with their animals searching for the pasture. That is also why its capital was historically relocated twenty-five (!) times (Lonely Planet 2018) as well as it was often changing its names (some of them being Örgöö, Khuree, Ikh Khuree or Niislel Khuree and finally Ulaanbaatar - meaning “Red Hero” - in 1924 as an expression of its affiliation with the socialist political regime and the USSR). It was only in 1639 when the city has finally stopped moving when the Da Khure Monastery has been built. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019c)

After a long period under the Chinese reign (Qing dynasty, 1635-1911), the country announced independence. The Chinese tried to gain their power over it once again in 1919 but were forced back by the Soviets. Shortly later, in 1924, independent Mongolia changed its political system following the example

of the USSR, and installed the socialist regime and renamed itself the *Mongolian People's Republic*. Throughout its socialist history it kept close ties with the Soviet Union and became one of its satellites. The country shared this particular unofficial status with others, including the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (1948-1990).<sup>123</sup>

As in the case of Moscow and Beijing, also and especially for Ulaanbaatar, it was the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries when it was experiencing rapid growth. “Before the forties, the city was not much of a city at all, but rather a sleepy camp in the Tuul river valley that claimed less than 5 percent of the total population of the country.” (The Mongolist 2014) Recently, the situation is much different – with over 1.3 million (2017 census) the city is inhabited by almost half of Mongolia's population. In this process of growth, Soviet urban planners were the key players, rather than Mongolians themselves (this history shares Ulaanbaatar with Beijing). Since the 1950s it was the experts from the ‘Giprogor’ Institute in Moscow who produced all the Ulaanbaatar's master plans (1954, 1961, 1975, 1986) which had an essential impact on the shape of the city. (Byambadorj – Amati – Ruming 2011: 171) The break with this process was brought by another political change in 1990 when the country abandoned socialism and embraced democracy as well as the free market economy.

Today, the city of Ulaanbaatar is unfortunately quite dysfunctional in various respects.<sup>124</sup> One of the causes of the situation relates to a constant underestimation of the population growth in the period of Soviet-produced master plans (see Byambadorj – Amati – Ruming: 171-176 and Yan 2016). In the second half of the twentieth century, many Mongolians were (and nowadays still are) moving to Ulaanbaatar in search for a job as well as to benefit from its healthcare and education systems. And while “the first plan [...] set out a

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123 I have never thought about this relation yet it is a particular similarity. Even though, post-socialist countries share all together a common socialist history there still was a difference if the country was part of the Soviet Union or ‘just’ its satellite. The latter were, at least formally, more independent than the respective republics in the USSR. From this specific point of view an important part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Czech and Slovak Republics is more related to that of Mongolia than to that of – geographically and culturally much closer – Belarus or Ukraine (who were both parts of the USSR).

124 As one can read in the article on The Mongolist blog: “the city today is a treasure trove of examples of urban planning and civil engineering gone horribly wrong.” (The Mongolist 2013)

framework for Ulaanbaatar to grow as a city like Moscow and Beijing” (Yan 2016), the situation went out of hands with uncontrolled sprawl of unofficial settlements – ger districts. It got only worse during the chaotic period of the 1990s, when the country experienced a transition to the free market economy: “between 1990 and 2002 there was, in essence, no regulation of urban planning” (Byambadorj – Amati – Ruming 2011: 171) and until now this did not significantly change (cf. Byambadorj – Amati – Ruming 2011: 171-174).

Ulaanbaatar's core displays a version of a traditional ring and radial pattern with its *Baga Toiruu* (Little Ring Road) and *Ikh Toiruu* (Big Ring Road) (The Mongolist 2014) circling around the main *Sükhbaatar Square* – named after Mongolian People's Party founder, Damdin Sükhbaatar. Another key feature of the city is the *Peace Avenue*, a major east-west boulevard that cuts the city in two halves. Aside from a relatively small city center, most of the present-day Ulaanbaatar consists either of ger districts or of similarly sprawling multi-storey blocks. Byambadorj, Amati, and Ruming fittingly summarise that the shape of modern Ulaanbaatar is a result of “an intersection of post-soviet and post-nomadic” (Byambadorj – Amati – Ruming 2011: 168) traditions.

→ **13 7/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***Performing Chinggis Ave – Worker's St – Ard Ayush Ave – Tasgan Rd - Ikh Toiruu – Ikh Khuree (walking)***<sup>125</sup>

→ **15 10/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***Performing Baga Toiruu (walking)***<sup>126</sup>

As in Ulaanbaatar I was focusing on other aspects than the circularity I did not pay that much attention to the central Soviet-shaped city. Still, I

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125 I did not make an audio recording during the walk on 7<sup>th</sup> April but I made one the following day when I visited the city suburbs and encountered there a group of aggressive dogs. You may listen to that piece of the audio diary here:

8.4.2018: <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/8-4-2018-ulaanbaatar/s-wXEUK>

126 A piece of the audio diary depicting my walk on *Baga Toiruu* and my feelings that day can be accessed here:

10.4.2018 <https://soundcloud.com/east-northeast/10-4-2018-ulaanbaatar>

As part of the recording, I am fittingly expressing my state of mind through singing: “I’m never gonna graduate from Live Art and Performance Studies programme. [...] just wasting Finnish money for being sick in Ulaanbaatar...”

dedicated two days to walking articulation of the Baga Toiruu or Little Ring Road and extended<sup>127</sup> Ikh Toiruu or Big Ring Road. If I would have the opportunity to alter the past I would wish to add the walk around the Sükhbaatar Square and the original Ikh Toiruu so to work more with the idea of the Soviet core and its similarity to Moscow and Beijing. The whole project would be then more coherent. On the other hand, if the aim was to perform the most significant features of the city, in case of Ulaanbaatar this was definitely not its rings. See the map of my walk around the ‘extended’ Ikh Toiruu below:



5.20 *Performing Chinggis Ave – Worker's St – Ard Ayush Ave – Tasgan Rd - Ikh Toiruu – Ikh Khuree (walking)*

The walk around the ‘extended’ Ikh Toiruu gave me a good idea about the current state of the city. I could witness the uncoordinated construction of blocks in the inner periphery, ger settlements mostly outside the ring, mountains limiting the growth of the city on the north and south as well as factory districts and fading parks for recreation covered in the ever-present dust. I did not realize it back then but when retrospectively looking at the map I found out that this was a 20km walk. If I take into account, that it was executed while I was still ill (I was getting impatient due to my indisposition and began to work again before my full recovery), I consider it as both a not very wise decision as well as evidence of my dedication to the project. Selected photos

<sup>127</sup> By ‘extended’ I mean, that I walked around the road based on the original shape of Ikh Toiruu which has been enlarged, forming thus a bigger rectangular containing in itself most of the ‘officially built’ (non-ger district) area of the city.

from my circular walk are displayed below. Note the new block house buildings being constructed rather uncontrollably around the city, contrasting with traditional ger houses and the pristine Mongolian nature:



5.21-5.24 *Performing Chinggis Ave – Worker's St – Ard Ayush Ave – Tasgan Rd - Ikh Toiruu – Ikh Khuree (walking)*

→ **14 8/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***Performing BRT N-S Ext South (walking)***

→ **17 12/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***Performing proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar International Airport (car)***

Most of the key performances I conducted in Ulaanbaatar relate to a lack of its (public transport) infrastructure. While the city works on improving its conditions, it is still difficult to successfully implement even major projects. Postponements of important decisions related to infrastructure development make the city incapable to deal with its traffic issues.

Introduction of the BRT – Bus Rapid Transport – is supposed to solve some of the problems: “while in 2011 the city officials were only lukewarm about the possibility of BRT, by 2016 conditions had worsened so much that officials were very keen to act to improve the situation.” (Far East BRT Planning Co.

2019b) This form of urban transport development is common in cities of developing countries (i.e. Bangkok, Istanbul, Beijing, Jakarta) (Far East BRT Planning Co. 2019a). One of its main features are lines of traffic dedicated for the BRT buses only or an off-board fare collection. (ITDP 2019) As a result, the Bus Rapid Transport is an efficient form of transportation, “contains features similar to a light rail or metro system [and] is much more reliable, convenient and faster than regular bus services.” (ITDP 2019) Very importantly, to construct it is much less costly than the metro.

According to one of the previous proposals, three main BRT corridors were suggested to be built in the period 2012-2018. (Gerelchuluun 2013: 19) Despite some minor improvements, the possibly most important element – bus lanes separated from the car traffic – were still not to be seen in Ulaanbaatar during my stay in 2018. I decided to articulate this immaterial infrastructure by using means of transport which were available – walking and ‘classical’ buses. I knew that it would not be possible for me to perform all the proposed lines and hence I chose to focus (more or less randomly) only on certain segments.

Non-existing BRT “N-S Ext South” corridor would, if constructed, lead one to a Zaisan Memorial, a monument on the top of a hill commemorating the Mongolian-USSR friendship and complemented by a tank displayed nearby. In a sharp (and symptomatic) contrast there is a great statue of Buddha located just below the hill in the so-called Buddha Garden/Park which it is “harder to appreciate these days since the construction of a high-rise, commercial development that encompasses the 23m-high Sakyamuni statue.” (Lonely Planet 2017) The area at the end of the missing BRT line displays many of the dynamics significant for the contemporary Ulaanbaatar be it its socialist heritage, the influence of tradition or neoliberalism. Cf. the photograph below:



5.25 *Performing BRT N-S Ext South (walking)*

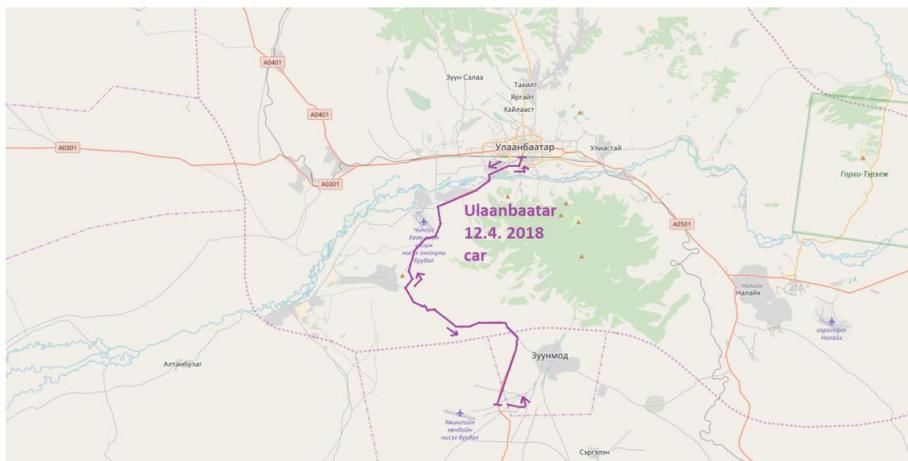
Quite similar performance as the *Performing BRT N-S Ext South (walking)* was the *Performing proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar International Airport (car)*, although at this time it was not the BRT which is planned to operate on this route. The new airport is being built some 50km outside of the city and was supposed to be open by 2016. Due to delays the current opening date should be in 2020. The Aeroexpress train connecting the airport to the city is supposed to commence its operation in 2030. (Sosorbaram 2016) As of now, it is not possible to reach the airport in construction by any means of public transport.

Similarly, as in *Rovaniemi Urban Project* (cf. Introduction) I decided to use a car: two Mongolian artists drove me to the site. After a drive through the empty steppe we have arrived at an endpoint of our short journey – a closed road protected by a guard. While in theory, since 2016, the road was supposed to be an entry point from Ulaanbaatar city to the hub of Mongolia's international traffic, in praxis to travel to the airport felt just absurd and futile. It is, nevertheless, very likely that within a few years the trip we have conducted will become a very common one be it in a car or on a board of some rapid transport means. The following photograph shows the end of our journey: the blocked road, the airport in construction barely visible in the back, a small booth of the guard on the left:



5.26 Performing proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar International Airport (car)

Cf. also the map of the route we have taken:



5.27 Performing proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar International Airport (car)

A few paragraphs above I used the project of Marina Abramović and Ulay, which was concluded by the malfunction of their vehicle, as an entry point to the discussion on the performance of the technology. The other work which ended by the destruction of a car was *Lada Kopeika Project (2014)* of already discussed Francis Aljys. Let it be another opening, this time leading to the discussion on the (un)realized. This is a project description provided by the author himself:

When we were young, my brother and I shared a 1981 Lada Riva. One day we decided to escape our bourgeois Belgian society and drive to Leningrad. But the car broke down and soon after our lives parted. 30 years later I invite my brother to drive from Belgium to St Petersburg, now in a 1977 Lada Kopeika. Upon arrival we'll crash the car into a tree in the courtyard of the Winter Palace, together with the illusions of our youth. Without an ending there is no beginning. (Alÿs 2014b)

The video documentation provided by Alÿs<sup>128</sup> indeed shows himself driving an old Lada in the central Saint Petersburg, entering the Winter Palace courtyard and crashing the car into a tree. But in no shot, is his brother Frédéric seen. Visible evidence of the mentioned travel from Belgium to Russia is missing too, almost as if the artist himself would want his audience to question the truthfulness of his narrative. The ambiguity of not knowing with certainty if Alÿs reunited with his brother or if that was just his wish adds a meta-layer to the project.

To imagine the work better, see a still image from the video depicting the car after the crash:



5.28 *Lada Kopeika Project*

What the artist was (or pretended to be) performing was an *unrealized* history, a promised travel which was not fulfilled only until 30 years later when

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<sup>128</sup> The video documentation from the *Lada Kopeika Project* can be accessed here:

<https://francisalys.com/lada-kopeika-project/>

its context and purpose were quite different. The adventure of the two young men in 1984 did not happen due to the dysfunction of the machine apparatus which failed in its expected performance of operationality and smoothness. As did the (ones in charge of the) city of Ulaanbaatar which promised to build the bus lines, the metro system, the airport and so on but whose apparatus was/is similarly dysfunctional as was the car of Alÿs. Said with de Certeau this is where the city order reveals itself being a fiction. Indeed, the less the system is working the more our attention driven to it (as when the operation of the metro is disrupted, cf. above).

The dream of Alÿs was that of the utopia of functionality, be it of the technology (materialized by the car which did not work in the past but was ‘summoned’ back, this time operational, if not for the whole trip from Belgium then at least for the ride in the city of Saint Petersburg) or of relationships (between him and his brother before their “lives parted”). I too was dreaming about this functionality of the perfectly running city when following the unrealized transport routes and other proposed projects in Ulaanbaatar. And not only me. Various cities try to perform, to present themselves, like utopias, though they are not, like (central)<sup>129</sup> Moscow or (central) Beijing. The strive for the ideality is strong even if it should take only a form of a façade.

But *utopia* is a *non topos*, not a place, a fiction. Which was also clear to Alÿs when he was presenting the *Lada Kopeika Project*. He knew that his trip in 2014, realized or not, was/would be a different one than in 1984, that the past cannot be altered, that the machines and relationships break. Inevitably, the car had to crash in the end.

I did not have to conclude my ventures around the city of Ulaanbaatar by ‘crashing into a tree’ - by identifying the fictionality of the utopian image and destroying it. Ulaanbaatar is hardly a utopia<sup>130</sup> and it does not (yet) perform itself as being so. It was ‘stuck in that tree’ of unrealized promises already since

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129 I put “central” in brackets as the more you go to the suburbs the more the carefully constructed performance breaks.

130 As I am repeatedly mentioning what is not working in Ulaanbaatar, I feel an urge to also say something in its defense. I consider it a unique, fascinating place with strong energy. Like any other city, it is more successful in tackling some of its problems and less successful with some other ones.

the time I have arrived. But like any other city, it would still want to be as efficient as possible, as ‘utopian’ as possible, if not in practice then at least in its imagination.

The unrealized paths I followed in the city were not generated by my visions and wishes as when Alÿs made a personal choice to drive (or at least constructed such a narrative) to Saint Petersburg<sup>131</sup>. Rather, I was articulating the dreams of Ulaanbaatar as it wants to be constructed and how it wants to perform itself. For example, not being seen as dysfunctional and backward but as a modern city, a capital interconnected with the rest of the world through a new international airport, on the intracity level operating smoothly with its BRT lanes and the new underground system. The next section introduces my articulation of the two of Ulaanbaatar’s ‘dreams’: the (missing) metro and the (closed) sub-urban rail line.

→ **18 15/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)***

→ **19 17/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar**

***The Bus Is the Train (or Performing canceled intraurban train connection) (bus+walking)***

The two of my key works in Ulaanbaatar were *The Bus Is the Train (or Performing canceled intraurban train connection) (bus+walking)* and *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)*. Let me begin with *The Bus Is the Train* piece.

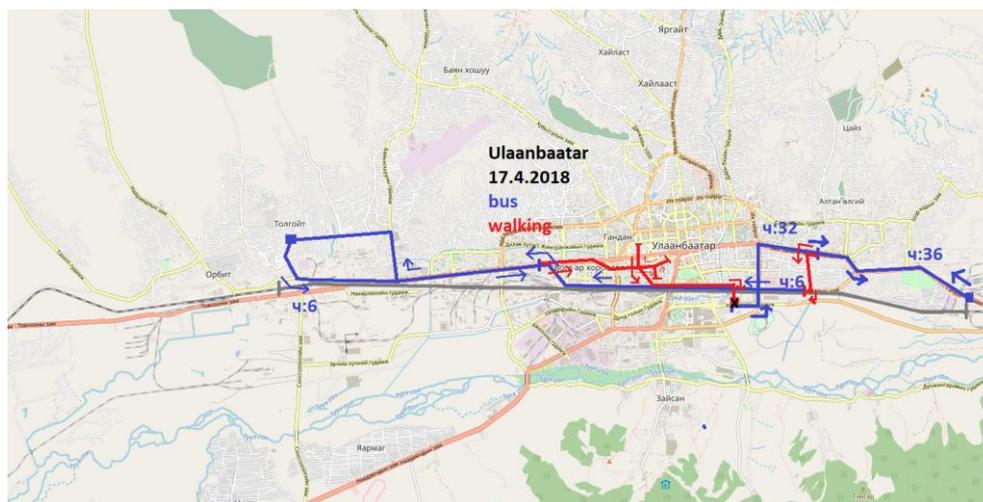
Parallel to the Peace Avenue, the most significant artery of the city, there is a linear railway line running through Ulaanbaatar. As of nowadays, the non-ger area of the city displays a strongly linear structure. Thus, to provide effective transportation from the West part to the East is a crucial factor for the functioning of the city. The railway line could serve as this efficient means of transfer if being adapted for the passengers.<sup>132</sup> As I have been told by locals (unfortunately, I did not succeed in finding the relevant official data), there was

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<sup>131</sup> Although, on the larger scale of the whole *East by Northeast* project my travel desires made an important influence on the selection of the route and sites of the research.

<sup>132</sup> Similarly as it happened, for example, with the Moscow Central Circle (metro line 14).

a time a few years ago, when the line indeed served as a passenger suburban connection. But the project did not prove to be sustainable for some reason and currently the only trains running on the line are transporting cargo. I decided to explore how could I substitute the closed rail line by other means of public transport. From the limited array of options I was able to design myself an alternative route by public buses. See below the alternative path I have taken. The closed railway line I was substituting is marked with a grey color:



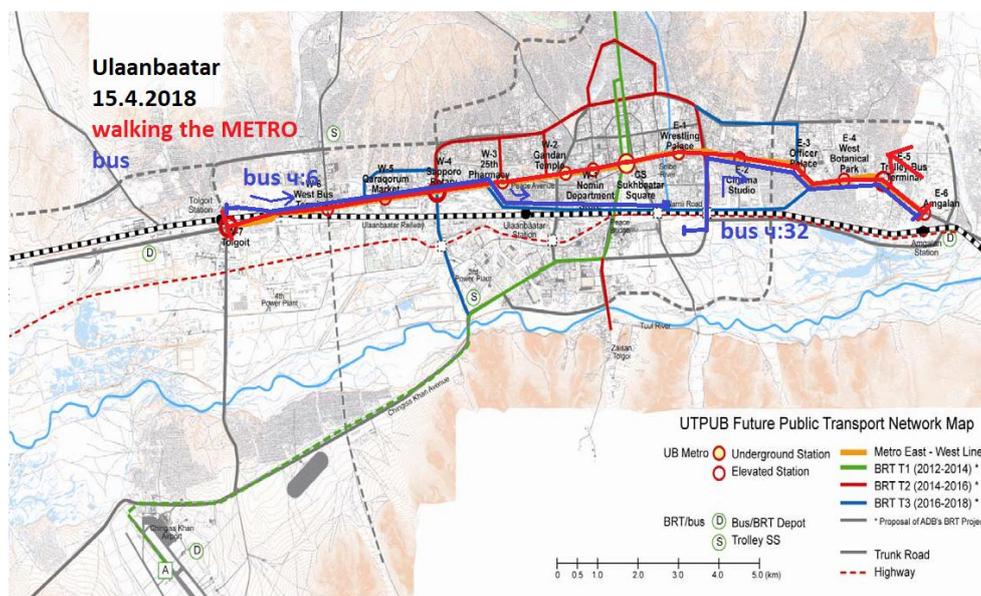
5.29 *The Bus Is the Train (or Performing canceled intraurban train connection) (bus+walking)*

For the beginning and end of my ‘substitute ride’ I chose the train stations of the discussed railway line in the city suburbs: Amgалан (on the East, where I have begun) and Tolgoit (on the West, where I have finished). For a foreigner it is not at all easy to get oriented in the bus schedules of Ulaanbaatar. Not only to discover the way from Amgалан to Tolgoit was difficult for me but evenly challenging was to find a way from my home to and from the two peripheral areas. If I would count only the time which it took me to arrive from one part of the city suburbs to the opposite side it would be around one hour and forty minutes. In Moscow or Beijing that would not be anything strange but in a significantly smaller Ulaanbaatar this is a very long duration taken into account the distance traveled (some 20km). But maybe I was still lucky considering that (as shows data from 2011) the travel speed of bus traffic in UB can drop to 5-8 km/h during peak hours. (Tsevegjav 2014)

At one point in the travel, I had to switch buses, and to arrive at my ‘transfer station’ I had to walk through the ger area. Corrugated iron fences,

dust, garbage, unpaved roads, dogs, half-dried water stream, people pushing trolleys with water canisters, no street or direction signs – that is the atmosphere of being inside one of the ger districts. When using public transportation in Ulaanbaatar, instead of a smooth transfer, the experience is confusing, challenging and in cases leads one into the labyrinthine neighborhoods where the presence of foreigners might not be very appreciated.

The second performance I wish to discuss in this section is *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)*. The two relate to each other as in both of the works I have covered approximately the same territory, and in some segments, I was even moving on the same major boulevard (Peace Avenue). Still, this second performance followed a slightly different aim and route. Similarly, as in the previous action, also for *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)* I decided to perform a hypothetically very important yet missing part of the city's transport infrastructure – the metro system of Ulaanbaatar. See the map depicting the walk:



### 5.30 *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)*

This time, I came up with a slightly new strategy. Instead of walking (more or less) without interruptions I decided to make fourteen stops on my way corresponding to the proposed fourteen metro stations. By a strange coincidence, this is the same number as is in Christian mythology the number of Jesus Christ's stops on his Procession to Calvary. They are even called *Stations*

of the Cross (cf. i.e. (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica 2019d)). At the time of its realization, I did not play out this analogy in my performance but I was aware of it. If the work would have taken a more straightforward political stance, as I have discussed it above concerning Alexander Gabyshev, here it could have a nice opening.

When performing the missing metro I decided to materialize my bodily presence more than usual and to include myself in the recorded material, so as to visualize an image of the struggling individual. The resulting documentation portrays myself being still, sitting or standing, in the respective locations.<sup>133</sup> As it can be observed through some of the video material I was wearing sunglasses (as a protection against often sharp Mongolian sun), filter mask (protection against the polluted air – commonly used in Ulaanbaatar, although not as much as in Beijing) and a hat (even though, at that time I have almost healed my ear infection I was still taking an extra care of my ears for the rest of my stay in Mongolia). The video also displays my gradually rising tiredness and shifts in mood. Cf. video-stills from the selected ‘stations’. Note my using of the mentioned protection tools on the third image and the body exhausted by the all-day walk posing for the video camera at the final stop of the planned metro line (fourth image):



5.31-5.34 *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)*

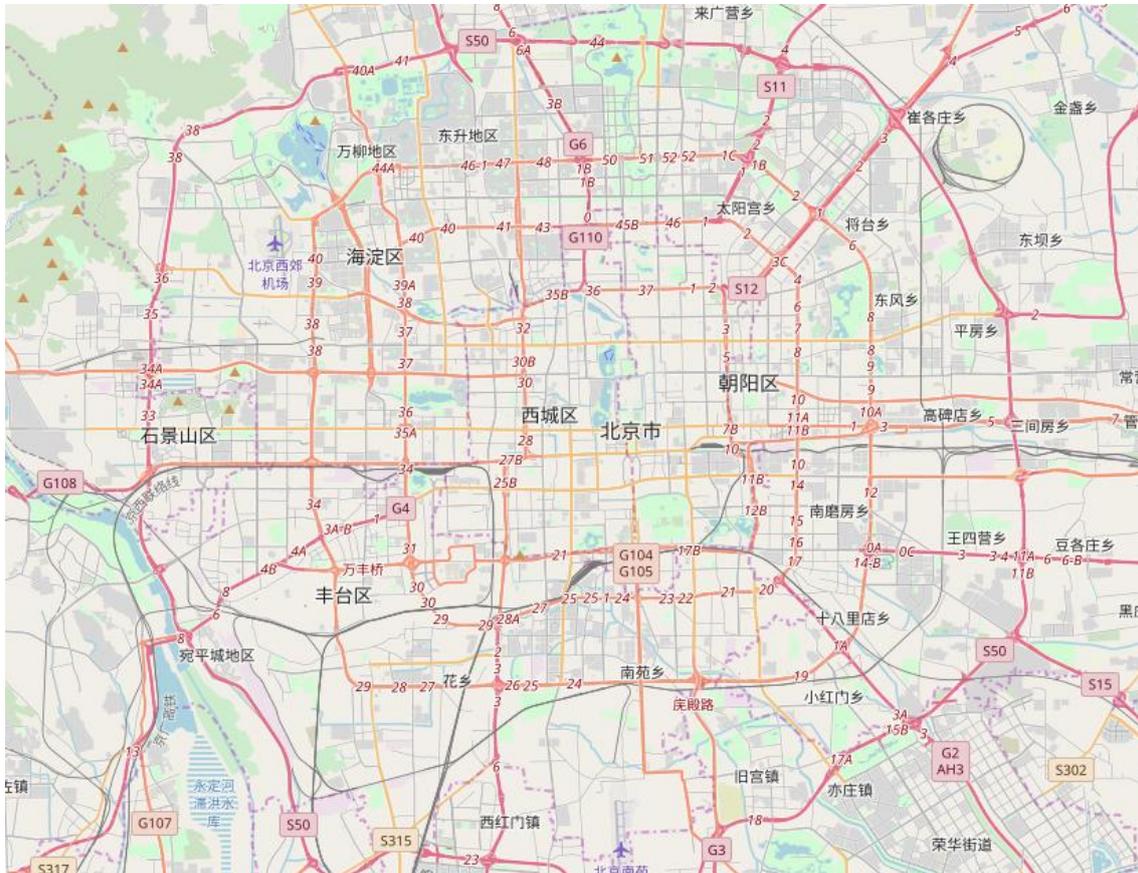
133 See the video documentation from the performance here: <https://youtu.be/Zkx4HMvIVOs>

This way of self-documenting proved to be efficient but I did not start to use it more frequently in the project. One of the reasons was my reluctance to mimic the widespread ‘selfie-videos’ in which people travel abroad equipped with a smartphone and the so-called ‘selfie-stick’, position themselves in the center of the frame and provide often overly enthusiastic opinions regarding their explorations. Secondly, due to my distaste towards this format as well as because of not having a colleague documenting my actions, my possibilities for the self-documentation were quite limited. The recording of *Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking)* turned out fine as the concept to stop repeatedly and shoot videos was already incorporated into the framework of the performance itself. Still, I had to always search for the right spot where to position myself and the recording device (I was traveling without a tripod) and also, at the same time, perform for the video and pay attention that nobody is stealing the camera.

That much I would like to say about my activities in the biggest city of once an enormous empire of Mongolia. The following sub-chapter leads us into Beijing, the capital of one of the most important ‘players’ on the global political scene of today, the People’s Republic of China.

## BEIJING

See the map of Beijing below, notice its rectangular shape:



5.35 Map of Beijing

The pre-modern development of Beijing and Moscow has more in common with each other than with the history of nomadic Ulaanbaatar. While Mongolians have been traditionally a nation in motion, Russians, as I have discussed, tended to fortify their settlements. Also, the Chinese “seem to have been a wall-building people” (Chang 1970: 63), possibly more than the Russians: “China possesses the world's longest tradition of fortified buildings and settlements,” (Turnbull 2009: 4) claims historian Stephen Turnbull.

The Chinese culture has a long history in urban planning, according to urban geographer Victor F. S. Sit dating back to the beginning of the Zhou dynasty (771-221 BC) (Sit 1996: 458). Traditional Chinese cities were walled, ordered and rigidly planned: “The city is square and orderly, representing the need to conform with the orderliness of nature to avoid mishaps.” (Sit 1996:

459) The shape is of a square with the palace being located in the center so to “symbolise centralization of power as well as the mandate from Heaven to rule.” (Sit 1996: 459) Cities played a much more important role than just of a settlement, they were considered to be “the embodiment of the ruling philosophy as well as of the social and cultural norms of the entire nation.” (Sit 1996: 461)

Quite like in Russia, also the Chinese modern urban planning shows an interesting continuity with its past, although it does not mean that the modernization is always considerate towards its history in China: “The rise of the new Beijing has meant the destruction of the old.” (Strebe 2017) Traditional Chinese houses, *hutongs*, are being “razed and replaced almost instantly, making way for soaring skyscrapers.” (Strebe 2017) In the same way, even the historical fortification of the old city, at the time of its demolition “probably the largest and most complete city wall” (The Economist Newspaper Limited 2002), was destroyed in the 1960s so it could give a way to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road and a rectangular metro line 2. So what kind of continuity am I talking about?

First, even though the Chinese communist party ruling since 1949 was very keen on industrialization and fostering the economic role of traditionally cultural and political capital this did not mean total neglect of Beijing's historical heritage and its original urban planning. While some memorable parts of the city were eradicated others remained and are well preserved until today, such as its rectangular historical core – the Forbidden City and its surroundings. If Moscow grew in circles with the Kremlin and the Red Square being not only the center of the city but also symbolically of the whole nation, so did Beijing. As one can read in the 1953 master plan of Beijing: “the central part of the city [...] should be the center of the city as well as the focus of the whole country.” (Sit 1996: 467) Only, in the case of Chinese capital the ring and radial pattern took slightly different shape – that of succeeding *squares/rectangles* intersected by horizontal and vertical lines. It is indeed less rounded and more based on symmetry and right angles.

In the past, Chinese cities were supposed to express cosmological symbolism, i.e. representing the “belief that Heaven is round and Earth square.” (China Daily 2013) And indeed, while the former center of the secular power – the Forbidden City – manifests itself in a square/rectangular shape, places

dedicated to “sacrifices to Heaven” (Ibid.), such as the Temple of Heaven located a bit south of the Forbidden City, are circular. Thus, while walking around them (below), and performing them, I was expressing this duality present within the ancient Chinese society and in its urban planning.

While being historically strong in planning, during the beginning of their socialist period, the Chinese, analogously to Mongolians, took a great deal of inspiration from Soviets, especially from the 1950s to early 1980s. At this time the city followed the slogan “Learn everything from the Soviet Union” (Sit 1996: 465), meaning that the “key objective was rapid industrialisation with priority being given to heavy industry, following the model of Soviet construction methods and the accompanying administrative structure.” (Sit 1996: 465) The focus on industrialization was nevertheless later (from 1980s reform policies of Deng Xiaoping) rejected as harmful and unsuitable for Beijing. Although, other principles adopted from the USSR remained, such as the importance of the public transportation, interconnectedness of the city, sufficient amount of greenery and living space for the inhabitants or construction of neighborhoods inspired by Soviet ‘microrayons’. It was quite strange indeed, to travel some 7.600km by train from Moscow to Beijing to eventually witness the ‘same’ multistorey blocks.

Notwithstanding, the previous impact of the USSR, the Chinese urban planning of today is, for better or worse, in the spotlight for its own radical projects. In Beijing, after more than 50 years of concentric expansion (Tang – Kunzmann 2008: 466), “the accumulation of urban problems [...] called for a paradigm shift to break up the monocentric spatial system.” (Tang – Kunzmann 2008: 466) Some of these problems are immense motorization of the Chinese society leading to congestion and air pollution, as well as overpopulation. As a result, the contemporary planning of Beijing embraces polycentricity and spatial expansion on a larger territory as well as wishes to limit the city population growth. I will get back to discussing the plans for the decentralization of Beijing a few paragraphs below when describing my *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)* performance.

It will be very interesting to see how will the population cap – set in 2017 to be 23 million in Beijing and 25 million people in Shanghai (Roxburgh 2018) – work out for China. In comparison to many other (mostly Third World)

countries dealing with the uncontrolled urban growth China has the wealth and political power to implement large-scale projects. It might be that it will be this country that will bring answers to some of the pressing megacity issues the world is facing today. And just a side note – the planned control of population expansion was present already in ancient China (Sit 1996: 460) as well as it was one of the characteristics of planning throughout the socialist world, not just in China (Sit 1996: 463).

→ **22 3/5/2018 Beijing**

***Performing Tiananmen Square and Forbidden City (walking)***

→ **23 3-4/5/2018 Beijing**

***Performing the central North-South axis (walking)***

→ **24 4/5/2018 Beijing**

***Performing Temple of Heaven (walking)***

For my work in Beijing, I wanted again to come up with a distinguished strategy and to articulate its specific layout unique to this particular place. But the similarity of its overall shape to its Soviet/Russian counterpart was so striking and so significant that I ended up often, though not always, repeating strategies I have developed for Moscow. But although my practice was similar, what I have encountered was of course not entirely the same.

My initial steps led me again to the ‘base’ of the city – the center. One of its historical features is the 8km long north-south Central Axis of Beijing, which, following the traditional preference for symmetry, divided the city into two halves. Major ancient buildings are concentrated around the line, and as of today, it is still in “full vigor and of historical significance”. (China.org.cn 2018) In the near future, the line should serve not only as an important reminder of the past but “in the new urban planning blueprint of Beijing, this spectacular urban landscape will extend further to both the north and south. [...] it will become a new axis that witnesses the conservation of the old city and the development of Beijing.” (China.org.cn 2018) To walk this path was for me a pleasant experience and a sign of Beijing authorities paying attention to (selected parts) of its historical heritage. Of course, one has to get used to the constant presence of crowds of people and the omnipresence of the CCTV cameras and police which are elements quite characteristic for the whole city.

(cf. the image below displaying a structure I photographed in the center of Beijing. It is a multifunctional device, half a lamp, half a sophisticated monitoring station):



5.36 *Performing Tiananmen Square and Forbidden City (walking)*

Much less sensitive was the extension of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Tiananmen Square ('Gate of Heavenly Peace' Square) in the 1950s, during the reign of Mao Zedong. It was enlarged four times, making it the new center of the socialist Beijing, replacing the adjacent Forbidden City and paying very little attention to the cosmological order of the ancient city. According to architecture scholar Adrian Hornsby, Mao's initial idea was to make the square fit for a billion people. (Hornsby 2015) Even though, this was not the outcome, Tiananmen remains one of the largest urban squares on the planet. See the map depicting my walks around various segments of the Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Unfortunately, I can not provide photographs directly from the square as I did not feel comfortable taking them, not to mention that I wanted to give my full attention to the act of walking itself:



5.37 *Performing Tiananmen Square and Forbidden City (walking)*

Very much as in other socialist cities (including Moscow and Ulaanbaatar), the central square of Beijing has “became a stage of rallies, celebrations and often brutal theatre of politics.” (Hornsby 2015) The history of Tiananmen Square since the 1950s is a gloomy one, from its initial ruthless expansion and mentioned repeated demonstrations of power in various rallies, to notoriously known and very sensitive events of June 4, 1989. In 1989 hundreds to thousands of students and other peaceful protesters were murdered on and around the square by the Chinese army. It is both outraging and highly disturbing that even during the recent 30th anniversary of the incident the Chinese authorities still refuse to take any responsibility for what has happened and even more – they are forbidding its commemorations and censoring those who report on it (Waterson 2019).

The contemporary outlook of the square speaks significantly about the whole society. Long gone is the uncovered terror of Mao, instead, the citizens of the PRC are being tamed by a very efficient ‘stick and carrot’ policy (more below). Also, Tiananmen of today “has been physically softened.” (Hornsby 2015) It contains various “‘soft monuments’: temporary displays of flowers, lanterns, giant expanded polystyrene pandas giving thumbs-up to the crowds and suchlike. Today it’s really a pretty, cheery, holiday kind of place, where visitors set their shopping bags down to take snaps of themselves ‘On Tiananmen!’” (Hornsby 2015) But to enter this highly guarded touristic attraction, one has to at first make his or her way through the security scanners and a passport control (just so to get an access to a public square!). And despite the presence of “soft monuments”, the ‘hard ones’ certainly did not go away.

One can still observe a large portrait of Mao Zedong at the top of the square or watch his corpse exhibited in the mausoleum, look at the Monument to the People's Heroes or at the huge Great Hall of the People where the Communist Party of China holds diplomatic and ceremonial meetings until today.

To walk around the Tiananmen Square was both a chilling, as well as confusing experience exactly for the reasons outlined above. I could strongly feel, that this is no ordinary square, if for nothing else, then for its size and the security measures. Nevertheless, the checkups and limitation of access (the square can be entered only through specified gates) exist also for very practical reasons – so to control the flow of tourists pouring onto the square. The atmosphere is indeed full of (loud) and cheerful people making pictures. From similar places I have witnessed, Tiananmen and indeed the whole Beijing could be positioned somewhere between the totalitarian-feeling of Minsk in Belarus and the *Truman Show* (Peter Weir, 1998) kind of dystopia found in Singapore.

If previously, I have discussed the impact of the city-apparatus/city-machine ensemble on its citizens, this can be strongly felt in Moscow and especially in Beijing. Ulaanbaatar is fighting for functionality. Moscow remains a powerful city but is no longer in a spotlight as a carrier of the global ideology once competing with capitalism and significantly influencing the construction of other cities from Central Europe to East Asia. Beijing knows its identity of the prominent global megacity representing the so-called socialist regime and wishes to perform this character within as well as beyond its city limits. One of the ways how to achieve this goal is through intensification of control over its human particles be it through the repression or ideology.

In this thesis, I have been using the concept of Louis Althusser of the Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatuses. What if the word “State” would be replaced for the word “City”?<sup>134</sup> If it can be said about states that they are assigning their citizens the proper place within the society and teaching them what should be their ‘adequate’ behavior through repressive and ideological tools, the same could be said about cities. Such was my experience at Tiananmen Square.

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134 The “State” and the “City” can be sometimes the same thing as in the case of city-states such as Monaco, Singapore, Vatican City or semi-autonomous regions of Macau and Hong Kong.

Depicted restrictions might be seen as expressions of the ‘Repressive City Apparatus’: all visitors are being supervised by the armed forces and cameras, their official documents controlled, their movements limited. But, importantly, the repressive elements are being supplemented by the power of ‘Ideological City Apparatuses’ which make those visiting the square conforming to their roles of astonished visitors, happy tourists. The Repressive is being naturalized - presented as common - together with the Ideological, and thus being seen as part of the anticipated joyful experience. As suggested above, Tiananmen is more than just a square, it is a synecdoche, a part representing and mirroring the whole city (or even country).

The confluence of the repressive and ideological took recently a new disconcerting appearance in China in form of the “social credit” system (Kuo 2019) which is for the last several years in a testing stage and should be fully implemented on a nation-wide scale during the next year 2020. With the support of its mass-surveillance system (cf. i.e. Jiaquan 2018), China wishes to keep a record of each and every one of its citizens and to assign them a numerical score. To have a lower score will have various negative impacts on an individual’s life, one of them being a limitation of the freedom to travel (which will be important for my discussion on the *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)* performance below). The project aims to “allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step”, (Kuo 2019) as the official government statement from 2014 put it quite straightforwardly. For example in 2018 millions of flight and high-speed rail tickets were banned to sell to the “untrustworthy” citizens, (Ibid.) according to the report of the Chinese National Public Information Centre. The social credit system both punishes as well as honors, the whole project resembling a strange game in which the players are both forced *and* encouraged to ‘play’.<sup>135</sup>

The frustration caused by the constant surveillance lead Chinese artist Ai Weiwei to reply with his own ‘online game’. In 2012 he installed several surveillance cameras in his apartment and streamed the content online non-

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135 Cf. the article of journalist Katie Jones discussing the Chinese “Game of Life” and concluding her text by an urging question: “will [the benefits of the Chinese social credit system] worth the social cost of gamifying human life?” (Jones 2019)

stop as a “gift not only to the public, but to the Public Security Bureau, because they are so eager about me. I wanted them to know what I’m doing in the office, who I meet in this garden, and how I’ve been sleeping.” (T.P. 2012) His statement is clearly ironical taken into consideration that the “WeiweiCam” was launched as a response to artist’s preceding imprisonment and his life being intensively monitored against his will. The Repressive State - or if you wish, City (Beijing) - Apparatus was quick to comprehend the critical aspect of Weiwei’s “gift” and the artist was ordered to shut down the streaming after only 46 hours by the Chinese authorities. (Wade 2012) See the still image from the WeiweiCam capturing sleeping Ai Weiwei:



5.38 *WeiweiCam*

Weiwei’s project was both funny and provocative reperformance of the City/State Apparatus’ utilities of power. The question which arises is what (other) strategies can be developed so to resist the influence of the Repressive and Ideological (City) Apparatuses in the age of digital surveillance and information warfare. Maybe invisible performances similar to mine could be helpful for the analysis and critique of the environment which is being heavily censored and monitored. On the other hand, if the work is not recognized when it is happening and can be perceived and appreciated only ex-post in a different context (out of the sight of authorities), what is the meaning of such ‘protest’ and for whom is it intended? Maybe to share its content through a personal conversation (which I was doing often during my travel) could be an answer. Or

through an invitation to participation, as I did in the *Metro IV: Beijing*.

→ **31 14/5/2018 Beijing**

***Metro IV: Beijing (metro)***

Unlike, the third installment of the *Metro* series in Moscow, the *Metro IV: Beijing* was a performance of the third order: it was happening rather invisibly, without a possibility for random passersby to identify the work as a performance but the audience was invited beforehand to witness the piece.

The metro in Beijing was the first metro system opened in China. It commenced its operation in 1969 at first only for people with credentials and since 1972 also for the general public. (Peking Metro Company 2009a, 2009b) Beijing Subway was introduced late in comparison to the metros of the Soviet Union (such as the one in Moscow in 1935) which, as with the overall city layout, were sources of inspiration for the Chinese. (Beijing-travels.com) In 2001 there were still only two (!) lines operating in the whole city of Beijing. Now, less than two decades later, there are more than twenty. The expansion of the Moscow metro is indeed a magnificent project. But the development of Beijing Subway is happening on an a different scale, being currently the second longest metro system in the world after Shanghai. The staggering speed of subway construction is less surprising when the overall urban and infrastructure development of the PRC is considered.

Yet, the length of tracks or the annual ridership is not all that matters. Unlike, the Moscow metro, the system in Beijing is much less appealing. Instead of craftsmanship, the metro in the Chinese capital often displays a rather cold beauty and repetitive modern design. The main focus is being given to fast construction and accessibility throughout the city to quickly reduce the car traffic within the city limits.

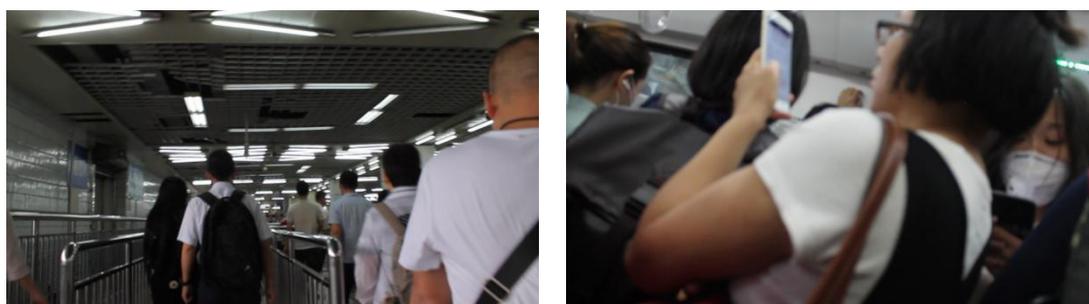
In the Beijing metro I have taken rides on its inner circular (rectangular) line (2) which runs for most of its length under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road; larger circular (rectangular) line (10) which runs under the 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road; and line (14) which forms a full circle (rectangle) with a help of line (2). I have also spent one full day in the Beijing metro system as I did in Moscow.

In the fourth installment of my metro series I made an important adjustment in one of its main rules and equipped myself with a smartphone. In

*Metro I-III* I would always deliberately avoid using this piece of technology considering it as a too distracting element. But I wanted to experiment with the series and this felt like a logical step as Beijingers and the Chinese more in general seem to be obsessed with smartphone technology. (Sun 2018) Unlike metro systems I have encountered elsewhere, in Beijing, there is always a mobile phone signal which enables one to stay connected to the internet even inside of running carriages.

The subway tends to be overcrowded, users are being squeezed inside of trains and in stations navigated through fenced corridors like a cattle. Once you make sure you are on the right line or in the right corridor, you can switch off your thinking - the subway machine ensemble thinks for you and will lead you where you need to get. Also, there is often not much to be seen, other than the mass of (slowly moving) bodies. To escape into a virtual world provided by the personal phone seems like a quite meaningful solution. Because of this 'habit', I also decided to implement the usage of the phone into my project. The involvement of the mobile technology gave the work a new dimension but at the same time, as expected, my experience was much more fragmented. I was less focused, more 'elsewhere' and less 'in the metro'.

See two video stills below, the first one shows crowd of people moving in the dedicated corridors inside of the Beijing Subway, the second one an overcrowded train carriage and passengers using their portable electronic gadgets:



5.39-5.40 *Metro IV: Beijing*

In my previous exploration inside of the Moscow metro, after few hours, I have become somewhat relaxed about spending my time inside of the system, embracing the feeling of 'homeness' caused by the metro being a closed circuit.

Similarly, the internet can be considered as such a familiar safe zone. Its user is given an opportunity to instantly reach her close ones as well as it is a source of information and entertainment.

But as much as it can be a source of enlightenment and safeness, the world wide web is just another performance. It tries to present itself as an unrestricted and unbiased platform, despite it is not. In China, this can be felt with especially high intensity. The Chinese government is clear about its influence on the internet, its infamous “great firewall” blocking the Chinese users from accessing Google, Facebook, YouTube or even watching images of Winnie the Pooh. (McDonell 2017)

The world wide web could be compared to the metro as being a bounded system that can be accessed via various entry points. Beijing Subway users try to escape the impact of the metro machine apparatus on their traveling experience by dwelling in the virtual reality. But it is a false escapement in which one performance (of the endless smoothness of operationality, of a neutral travel means) is exchanged for another - that of virtual freedom.

Above, I have concluded the conversation on my performances in central Beijing by a question of how useful could be invisible art performances. As suggested, one of the possible answers could be the direct involvement of others in the project. In *Metro IV: Beijing* I have utilized the Chinese communication application WeChat for inviting people to join me inside of the metro system. Eventually, I met two in the metro. Our encounters happened on the grounds ruled by the multiplicity of State/City Apparatuses. We were observed by CCTV cameras, our WeChat accounts monitored while we negotiated the meeting time and place. (cf. McDonell 2019) Still, under given conditions, this could be seen as a minor act of civil disobedience. Although we were not breaking the system, at least we were enjoying together the ‘misuse’ of the metro machine ensemble.

To close up the section, I wish to give you few lines from my diary, so to enable you to imagine my Beijing metro experience better:

[...] It is incomparable to Moscow's majesty.

[...] I can say only very little about the first three hours. I was sleeping a lot. [...] One way or another the tiredness won't go away so easily. I mean. I doubt it will go away at all. [...] FANGSHAN line! On my way to Yancun East. Dabaotai →

Daotian ... we are just going through some hills and forests ... long long time nothing and then ... bum ... the usual blocks.

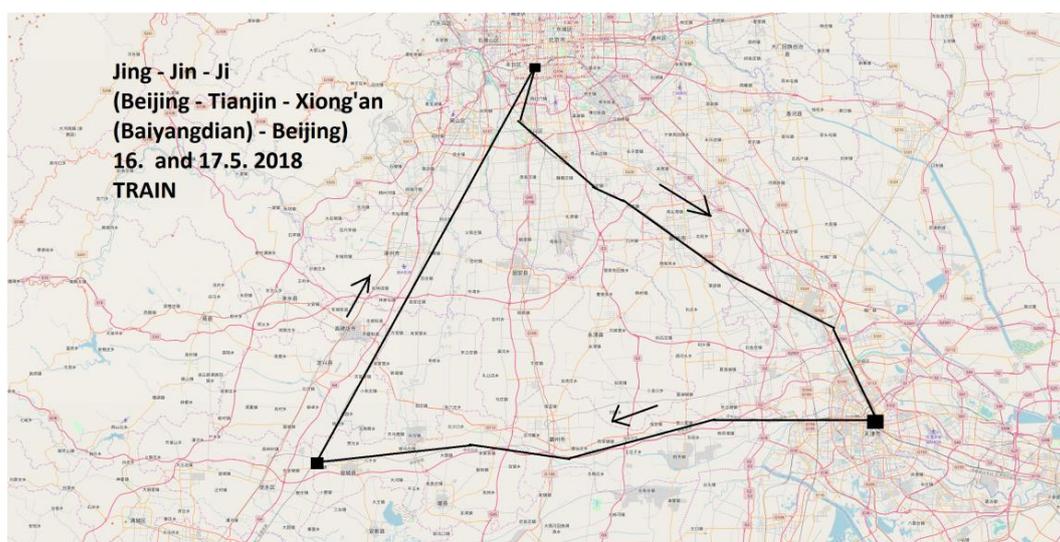
[...] Today's pollution is like what the fuck. Not that yesterday it would be that much better... Dagobah system...

[...] Našel jsem tu fixku, takže můžu zase pokračovat v psaní, z toho mám velkou radost. [...] čas ubíhá velice rychle. Možná je to i tím, že monotónnost dnes přerušuji chatováním s lidmi.

[...] Zkrátka to bylo tentokrát s trochu jinačím nábojem ... less survival style maybe ... OH-OH last metro is approaching and I have to catch it!

→ **32 16-17/5/2018 Beijing, Tianjin, Xiong'an (Baiyangdian)  
Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)**<sup>136</sup>

The work in Beijing, which was for me the most important would certainly be *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)*. It might be, in a way, reminiscent to most of my actions in Ulaanbaatar as it focuses more on the future, on what is yet to be created, rather than on what is already available. The important difference was that, despite its exorbitancy, the Jing-Jin-Ji project in China is very likely going to be realized in a near future which can not be said with the same certainty about, for example, Ulaanbaatar's metro. See the map recording from the performance:



5.41 *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)*

<sup>136</sup> See the video documentation of the performance here: [https://youtu.be/elggiqG\\_zCY](https://youtu.be/elggiqG_zCY)

Jing-Jin-Ji will be what some call a ‘supercity’ (Johnson 2015) or a ‘megaregion’ (Shepard 2016). The shortcut stands for cities of *Beijing*, nearby megacity *Tianjin* and the surrounding province of Hebei. The goal of the project is to interconnect the three places into one giant urban environment with over 100 million inhabitants. The inspiration can be found in similar agglomeration developments in South China such as the Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta, one of the aims being the boost of the region's economy. There are also other advantages which building the Jing-Jin-Ji hopes to offer – decentralization should alleviate some of the most pressing Beijing's maladies such as the overpopulation, pollution, traffic jams, water shortages and ideally raise the quality of living for the region's inhabitants. Importantly for my project, for such an urban environment to function a high level of interconnectivity is crucial. That is why new highways are being constructed, as well as high-speed railways and even a brand new Daxing International Airport. (China Briefing 2018)

In my articulation of the growing megaregion I decided to travel from Beijing to Tianjin, from Tianjin to the Xiong'an New Area, which is one of the key developing sites in Hebei province (China Briefing 2019) and back to Beijing. I have chosen to use (high speed) trains which shall soon become a crucial means of transportation of the region. I divided the trip into two days – at first, I stayed in and explored Tianjin, an important Chinese port of 15 million which nevertheless felt rather like a big big village.<sup>137</sup> The second day I continued to Xiong'an.

While to arrive at Tianjin was – relatively – easy, to get to (and from) Xiong'an, “President Xi's Dream City” (China Briefing 2019), was quite a different story. I came by train to the nearby city Baiyangdian, walked from the train station to its center and tried to find the way from there. As not being able to find any other means of transport in Baiyangdian, I eventually decided to use the services of an auto-rickshaw taxi – a shaky small vehicle on three

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<sup>137</sup> Despite its size, I did not have a feeling of a ‘bustling metropolis’ I was used to, for example, from considerably less populated European cities. It was of course only a short visit but my Czech host Ivana also confirmed that Tianjin is for her a rather industry and business-oriented and quite boring city. Aside from allowing me to stay at her home, Ivana was also very helpful in my preparation for the trip to Xiong'an the next day.

wheels.

I expected to encounter a land devastated by the rapid urban construction. But to my big surprise, I have arrived at the entrance of a water amusement park. Instead of skyscrapers, I ended up observing the Chinese tourists chewing on ice lollies and enjoying rides on boats. Throughout my whole trip, I did not encounter any visible signs of the coming megaproject other than a (closed) office in Baiyangdian with a sign “ENN Coordination Services Center Of Xiongan New Area” on its facade. At least this was the evidence that I was not in a totally wrong place. My return was not very smooth either and I ended up, for the first and last time in China, to even hitchhike back to Baiyangdian train station.

See the video still displaying a peaceful Lake Baiyangdian:



5.42 Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)

And on the two photographs below, compare the difference in atmosphere between the megacity of Tianjin and the significantly smaller city of Baiyangdian:



5.43-5.44 Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)

For this final section of the chapter, let me return to Marina Abramović and Ulay and speak briefly about their last common artwork. *The Lovers* (1988) was three months long walk on the Great Wall of China. Their march from the opposite ends of the Wall was originally supposed to be an act of an ultimate connection as when they would meet in the middle they were supposed to get married. But over the eight years when they negotiated the permission from the Chinese government, that idea shifted from marrying to breakup. And as the story goes this is also what happened.

In their walk, Abramović and Ulay utilized the wall for giving their relationship an epic ending. As they marched on the leftovers of once a solid, magnificent structure, they were likely evaluating the fade of their own common narrative, an intense 12 years work, and love affair. This powerful performative gesture marked the end of one period in their lives and the beginning of a new one.

In *Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)* I was marking the future expansion of the megaregion through the movement of my body, thinking about its past and how the upcoming development could change it. As in *The Lovers*, I was performing a shift from one state of being to another. The performance of Abramović and Ulay was direct, crucial for their personal life and their performative gesture had an immediate impact. My trip was more abstract, not playing such an important role in my personal life and my gesture did not have the same power to alter reality. But through my presence I was announcing, anteceding the physical realization of other performative proclamations - that of the Beijing City/China State Apparatus which promised to construct in the area new railways, highways, even the new city.

Once again, I became the most passionate “servant of the city, a realizer of its desires”, although as passionate as being also its critic - a servant of an irony. The piece could be seen as an articulation of a path which maybe should not be taken, a commemoration of the soon-to-be-lost environment. Through my incapacity to travel to the ‘glorious’ Xiong’an, I was celebrating the opposite of what the PRC is so proud of: the dysfunctional interconnectivity and the related decrease of individual control.

With the “supercity” expanding in size, the efficient travel connection between its nodes will soon become more important. Together with the

implementation of the new social credit system, such expansion might only increase the gap between the prosperous-prospective and the ‘untrustworthy’ or poor. Not only might be some inhabitants of Jing-Jin-Ji unable to afford to travel from one of its parts to another but, if on the ‘blacklist’, to be even excluded from the transportation. Who knows what can be the next step if already today there are Chinese who can not travel by high-speed trains and airplanes (see above)? A ban to travel by metro? Or by public buses? A prohibition to enter certain parts of the city? One thing could be said with certainty: due to the growing influence of China worldwide, its ambitious urban and infrastructural projects should be observed closely for both, the inspiration, as well as for dead ends one should better avoid.

### III

My performances were as simple and as neutral (in a sense of not intentionally emphasizing my personal characteristics or political beliefs), as possible. But there was much more material being expressed through these actions - from different stages of urban development of the respective cities, to my individual history and origins, to the way how I arrived to and left from the research sites, to the history of ways of moving around cities (i.e. the development of public transportation), to the heritage of socialist ideology inserted into the way how the city is organized and how does it function, and so forth.

I am not saying that this work is exceptionally complex. Rather, I am suggesting that this is a quality inherited in each and every performance and that an artist decides to what extent he or she wishes to express this quality. It is quite significant for the theatre, for example, to eliminate many of those naturally present layers to be able to express a fictional narrative. For the *East by Northeast*, I have chosen to follow the path of simplicity, everydayness, neutrality, and routine. One of the reasons behind this strategy was a belief, that the projects of such nature might be in cases more successful in expressing the complexities of our existence. They provide only the basic guidelines for the recipients, hence stimulating the thought and imaginative processes, instead of being prescriptive and limiting. Less is sometimes more.

In the paragraphs above, I have outlined some of the possible lenses through which my minimalist expressions could be understood. The following conclusion revisits the introduced proposals, evaluates the whole project and outlines possible ways for its continuation.

## CONCLUSION

### **Two sides of research**

The first thing I would do, before arriving at each one of the three cities, was to open an online map and to study its shape from the bird's perspective. This preparation was always related to other research, such as reading about its history and that of its country, or contacting locals and questioning them about their experiences with the city. But at the very beginning, there was always the map and the basic pattern. The actions which I eventually conducted were always 'half-cooked' in the sense that I came with basic ideas which were modified by the realities of the respective places.

Upon my arrival, I would encounter the city shape resulting from centuries of development. Such as in Moscow, where in a simple 'ring and radial' form one could read many layers of history. It is not only the architecture, buildings, sculptures and other physical heritage which is a container of the past but also the overall structure of cities, the layout of their quarters or shapes of their streets. When being in Moscow and other cities, I was focusing on performing those larger containers. At the same time, I was both experiencing as well as expressing them, being *inside* of them and trying to articulate them *from within*.

There is no neutral 'just a city' as well as there is no neutral ideology or discourse. For Butler, there is even "no 'I' who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse." (Butler 1993: 225, italics JB) It is not us who perform ourselves through it but almost the other way around, the discourse materializes itself through us. Yet, there exist "*discursive occasion[s]* for a resistance" (Ibid.: 109, italics JB). Examples provided by Butler include the word 'queer' which was originally used as an oppressive term and was re-used positively, newly uniting those against whom it was first targeted. Or the phenomenon of 'drag' in which artificially installed requirements for (woman's) appearance are exaggerated, played out, twisted and ridiculed while at the same time embraced with joy. (Cf. i.e. (Butler 1993: 121-142)) The normative is being reappropriated, rearticulated, deformed. In that process, doing is being shown (= performed) in new ways which might eventually lead to changes influencing

the whole discourse. The same needs to be done so to better understand, describe and eventually resist the complex (oppressive)<sup>138</sup> machine ensembles we live in nowadays - the cities.

My form of resistance turned out to be a passive one, similar to Hsieh's "doing almost nothing" (Inside the Arts 12-1: Hsieh Tehching's Doing Time. 1.1.2018), despite both his as well as my works were often physically challenging. To offer another point of view, Tim Edensor's notion of "resistant performances" (Edensor 2001: 76) of tourists could be useful. Tourists might be in cases unwilling "to play particular roles" as they are "prepared to trade self-expression" only for "the benefits of consistency, reliability and comfort". (Ibid) Edensor's example is a group on an organized bus tour who is dissatisfied with too short a stop assigned for the visitation of the Taj Mahal, against which they revolt. As repeatedly mentioned, my strategy was to be "the most passionate follower of the system". This could be also said by other words with Edensor: when conducting my art performances in a city, my actions were *the opposite* of the resistant type of a tourist performance.<sup>139</sup>

Not only were I not resisting the respective segments of an urban infrastructure but I was even celebrating and embracing them: I walked two days on a circular highway just to experience it - ending where I began; I entered the metro system immediately when it opened and left it only when it was closing; when there was no metro built yet, I made a march in which I visited all its planned stations. But as I tried to outline in the previous chapter, one way of reading these celebrations should be ironical, i.e. "having a different or opposite result from what is expected." (Cambridge University Press 2019)

On the other hand, I truly am an urban enthusiast and to undertake the respective rides and walks was for me a very valuable experience. Criticism and

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138 "Oppressive" in brackets, as even though cities are apparatuses of power, it is useful to approach such proclamations with a reservation. Because, aside from being tools of oppression, cities are also sophisticated tools of survival on which human civilizations are based.

139 Although, it depends on what is being evaluated - if my respective 'artistic' walks and rides by themselves or the whole trip. I was very obedient when following the most apparent patterns of the respective cities. But generally speaking, as a tourist, I was actually rather 'resistant' as I did not - intentionally - go for the common sights.

the discussion on ideology and discourse put aside, I genuinely wanted to understand and embody what is the most significant for the given urban environments. I have voluntarily offered myself to cities so they could ‘speak through me’ (cf. the conversation on discourse above), to perform (in a sense of ‘to realize’, to manifest their ‘inner selves’) themselves through my performances.

**To sum up, with my methodology I was at the same time admiring as well as criticizing cities.** Like two lovers, we were intertwined in a mutual connection, in a simultaneous agreement and disagreement, me performing cities, they performing themselves *through* me.<sup>140</sup>

### **Cities and performance**

During the process of thesis writing, my understanding of the word “performance” expanded. Initially, I was considering it mostly in two ways: as an (rather unconscious, inevitable) expression of an individual self and as an (more conscious, deliberate) artistic presentation (nourished by one’s everyday performance). What the thesis opened for me was the notion of the performance of technology which I would be curious to explore deeper in future projects. If the city is considered as a machine - i.e. as either a “machine ensemble” or a “City Apparatus” - the same understanding of performance can be as well applied to it and its respective segments. Questions which the notion of a city as a performing machine brings might be:

When does it perform efficiently? What is the intention behind a city’s performance? How does it want to perform itself (= appear)? What are its expectations towards its human and non-human particles? In other words, what do cities want from us, how do they want us to perform (=behave)? To what extent should people accept the normative ways of behavior prescribed by cities and to what extent should they resist with their counter-performances? What form could these rebelling performances take?

Such inquiries generate another, more substantial one: what do I mean

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<sup>140</sup> An analogy with the two actual lovers - Abramović and Ulay - also comes to mind. Through their movement on the Great Wall of China the two artists included the Wall itself in their love affair as the third actant in the relationship.

under the term “city” when I am discussing its wishes and performances? It is not a mysterious creature with its own unpredictable will. The City Apparatus is run by bureaucrats, designed by city planners, its public transportation means run by drivers, the order assured by policemen. In other words, it is people who are in charge of the city. But this is true only to a certain extent, as we have seen with an example of a train and its driver in Chapter 2.

The cities are usually older than the people who run them as their basic structures might exist for centuries. Thus, each new mayor, each new city council or an urban planner, etc. has to work with the city which others have built, and the regulations others have established, before her.<sup>141</sup> The city-machine does not exist always-already only for the visitors (cf. Chapter 3) but also for its rulers. To give a simple example, it would be very difficult to alter the ring and radial pattern of Moscow.

Therefore, the notion of a “city” is a phenomenon in which the power of its governors is confronted and negotiated with the power of the ‘city itself’, of the sophisticated and complex mechanism whose current character is a result of its previous development. If following the analogy of a city being as discourse, it might be difficult to delineate a border between what the city-discourse wants and what the ones ‘ruling it’ want. Seen this way, for example, the expansion of overpopulated Beijing might be considered as a result of not only planners’ decision but also of the metropolis itself which ‘wants to grow’.

Cities - in a sense of the whole apparatuses including their physical structures and those operating them - perform their “strategies” (cf. Chapter 3) and the city dwellers respond with their performances of “tactics”. But what about the temporary visitors - tourists, travelers, migrants, passers-through?

### **Performing passing-through or How to perform (mega)cities through the movement of the body through their transportation networks**

Indeed, how to perform, in the artistic sense of the word, unknown environments? And is it even meaningful to perform (in) such places one is

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<sup>141</sup> Unless the city is being built anew - but even in such a case there would exist certain limitations given by the respective context of its construction (historical period, political regime, geography, etc.).

barely familiar with? In the thesis Introduction, I have argued that an incomer might be bringing a fresh perspective on the situations and places that are rather unknown to her. I still stand for this opinion, although the outcome of such work will be always inevitably based on limited knowledge. Also, in this project, I was able to materialize only what seemed to be standing out the most in the visited cities.

A decision to approach my *artistic* project as almost a scientific research of a kind, instead of articulating more my vulnerable identity of an outsider, visitor, observer, led the project into a certain direction. It was a hard task for me as a solo traveler to analyze three metropolises in three distinct countries; without an adequate budget, while searching for places where to sleep, equipped with one analog and one digital camera<sup>142</sup> - both rather old and of average quality. Despite, the amount of conducted walks, rides, executed lectures and performances in galleries, etc., it maybe might have been better to focus more on my own position of the passing-through traveler than to try to be a scientist 'mapping the city'. This brings me to the evaluation of the chosen method of performing the basic features of an urban layout.

Its advantage is that it provides a framework, a starting point for research of an urban environment. Also, the cities are shaped as they are for particular reasons and to acknowledge their structures on the physical level allows one to explore them better than when only reading about them or - arguably - just moving within them randomly. Nevertheless, this approach also displays certain drawbacks.

The first one could be that it significantly limits the area which is being explored. I could spend much more than one month, which was the length of my stay in Moscow, by moving around its multiple rings inside and outside of its urban territory. And it would certainly generate valuable data. But what about all the spaces between the rings?

The first objection leads to the second one. The reason why, for example, I decided to omit radial lines from my research in Moscow was not only caused by the lack of time. But also, I did not want to 'contaminate' my concept which

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<sup>142</sup> Photographic cameras were a representational technology of late industrialism, thus appearing around the same time as when railways were expanding and modern cities shaped. I am indebted to Ray Langenbach for pointing out this relation.

was to *perform* its circles. And here comes the issue. For me, all the respective walks and rides were performances in the artistic sense of the word: pieces of art with a given duration and a title, together being part of a *cycle* (like a cycle of paintings). That is why all of them had to be ‘meaningful’ works for the series. But what if I would label them not *performances* but *explorations* or *rehearsals*?

This might seem marginal but if reworded like that, I would be able to approach my respective movings around the city with less scrutiny. Then, I could allow myself to move around in a much freer way, to explore places not designated by the respective city shapes and possibly discover something which is even more significant for the respective sites. These various *researches/explorations* could then lead to one or more of the final *performances*. Actually, when looking back at my original research plan, this is closer to what I have initially intended.

On the other hand, with the alterations described above, I might not discover the theoretical framework of my twofold relationship with the City Apparatus (or other material which resulted from this research). Shortly, it would have been a different work. In projects to come, I do expect to build on what I have developed during *East by Northeast* but not to repeat the chosen strategy exactly.

My task might have been a bit easier if the aim would be slightly altered from ‘trying to understand the researched cities’ to ‘trying to understand my performance(s) (in a sense of ‘everyday behavior’) within the researched cities’. For my future works, I hope to deepen the confluence between the performance of a city - in a sense of the whole apparatus including its physical structure and those operating it - and that of my own self.

An example of such a tighter conflux might be Ai Weiwei’s *WeiweiCam* in which the artist performed his own life through surveillance cameras as a response to analogous performances of the City Apparatus. Or *Lada Kopeika Project* of Francis Alÿs where his (announced) travel from Belgium to Russia was strongly motivated by the artist’s preceding life experience. Especially, the works of Alÿs - in which he combines personal and political in poetic ways - as well as his personal life story (leaving “bourgeois” (Alÿs 2014b) Belgian society for Mexico City) became for me an important source of inspiration during the

writing.

By not avoiding to be displayed as confused, tired, misinterpreted, lost, angry, passionate, enthusiastic, ill, etc. when visiting or living<sup>143</sup> in cities and while traveling might help me in my efforts. Because, I am not an urban planner or an actor, I am a performer, an artist of life.

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143 When it comes to the ‘traveling at home’, cf. these excerpts from the manifesto of the Metropolitan Trails, NGO focusing on the development of hiking trails within urban environments:

“4. We believe that our metropolitan areas have developed beyond recognition, so that we need now to explore these intimate *terra incognita*. [...]

6. We believe in itinerant hiking through urban ranges and in tourism at home.”

(Metropolitan Trails 2016, italics in original)

## **APPENDIX**

This list of performances considers my departure from Příbor on 18th February 2018, as the beginning of the project, and my return to Helsinki on 11th June 2018, and the subsequent execution of the final exhibition, as the project's end.

### **Performances in a public space (not announced publicly) / performances of the 'first-order':**

→ 1 28/2/2018 Moscow

Performing the Red Square and the Central Squares of Moscow ring road (walking)

→ 2 1/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Boulevard Ring (Bulvarnoye Koltso) (walking)

→ 3 2/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Garden Ring/metro line 5 (Sadovoye Koltso) (walking/metro)

→ 4 3/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Garden Ring/metro line 5 part (Sadovoye Koltso) part II (metro/walking)

→ 5 5/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Garden Ring/bus B (Б) (bus)

→ 6 6/3/2018 Moscow

Performing metro line 5 (metro)

→ 7 7/3/2018 Moscow

Performing tram A (tram)

→ 8 10/3/2018 Moscow

Performing metro line 14 (metro)

→ 9 11-13/3/2018 Moscow

Performing circular tram lines (tram)

→ 10 15/3/2018 Moscow

Metro III: Moscow

→ 11 18-19/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)

→ 12 29/3-2/4/(13/4) Ulaanbaatar

Follow the Ear (walking/bus/taxi)

→ 13 7/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing Chinggis Ave – Worker's St – Ard Ayush Ave – Tasgan Rd - Ikh

Toiruu – Ikh Khuree (walking)

→ 14 8/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing BRT N-S Ext South (walking)

→ 15 10/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing Baga Toiruu (walking)

→ 16 11/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing BRT N-S Airport Ext (bus)

→ 17 12/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing proposed connection to the New Ulaanbaatar International Airport  
(car)

→ 18 15/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

Performing planned Ulaanbaatar metro and Peace Avenue (walking / bus)

→ 19 17/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar

The Bus Is the Train (or Performing cancelled intraurban train connection)  
(bus+walking)

→ 20 30/4/2018 Beijing

Performing metro lines 2 and 10 (metro)

→ 21 1/5/2018 Beijing

Performing metro line 14 (metro)

→ 22 3/5/2018 Beijing

Performing Tiananmen Square and Forbidden City (walking)

→ 23 3-4/5/2018 Beijing

Performing central North-South axis (walking)

→ 24 4/5/2018 Beijing

Performing Temple of Heaven (walking)

→ 25 5-6/5/2018 Beijing

Performing 2<sup>nd</sup> Ring Road (cycling)

→ 26 7/5/2018 Beijing

Performing 3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (bus)

→ 27 8/5/2018 Beijing

Performing 4<sup>rd</sup> Ring Road (bus)

→ 28 9/5/2018 Beijing

Performing BRT lines 1 and 2 (bus)

→ 29 11/5/2018 Beijing

Performing BRT line 3 (bus)

→ 30 13/5/2018 Beijing

Performing BRT line 4 (bus)

→ 31 14/5/2018 Beijing

Metro IV: Beijing

→ 32 16-17/5/2018 Beijing, Tianjin, Xiong'an (Baiyangdian)

Performing Jing-Jin-Ji (train)

### **Performances (publicly announced) / performances of the ‘second order’: 9**

→ I 22/2/2018 Lviv (From Dzyga to Detenpula [З Дзиги у Детенпулу])

→ II 24/2/2018 Kyiv (Live Art Lab Kyiv)

→ III 16/3/2018 Moscow (Artefix)

→ IV 27/6/2018 Irkutsk (North by Northeast [Восток к северо-востоку])

→ V 7/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Union of Mongolian Artists Art Gallery)

→ VI 19/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (976 Gallery)

→ VII 20/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Anima Art Design School)

→ VIII 23/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture)

→ IX 29(?) /5/2018 Ulan-Ude (public space)

### **Performance belonging to both categories (of the ‘third order’): 3**

→ 1 18-19/3/2018 Moscow

Performing the Third Ring Road (walking)

→ 2 20/3/2018 Moscow

(The Master and Margarita)

→ 3 14/5/2018 Beijing

Metro IV: Beijing

**Lectures and artist talks: 10**

- 1 22/2/2018 Lviv (Detenpula Gallery)
- 2 16/3/2018 Moscow (Artefix)
- 3 17/3/2018 Moscow (Czech language club)
- 4 27/6/2018 Irkutsk (Black Square)
- 5 7/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Union of Mongolian Artists Art Gallery)
- 6 19/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (976 Gallery)
- 7 20/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Anima Art Design School)
- 8 23/4/2018 Ulaanbaatar (Mongolian State University of Arts and Culture)
- 9 28/5/2018 Ulan-Ude (Union of Artists of Russia)
- 10 7/6/2018 Moscow (Czech Centre Moscow)

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