

series of collages from 1968-69? This includes such sinister but strangely plausible predictions as 'control and command of the weather on economic basis' for 1989 but also 'perfect life artificially produced' for 2050. One wouldn't blame Filko for being more paranoid under capitalism.

'Star City' was co-curated by Nottingham Contemporary director Alex Farquharson and Lukasz Ronduda, based in Warsaw. As part of the very visible 'Polska! Year' programme, it demonstrates the richness of postwar culture under communism, which far exceeds preconceived notions of socialist realist art, which is itself slowly and deservedly being re-evaluated. If, as this exhibition shows, many artists living in the Eastern Bloc used sci-fi metaphors to voice their critiques and frustrations, it seems some western and post-communist artists are today employing these metaphors to expose the void in capitalist ideology. This exhibition also cleverly insists on a humorous side to the space race, even poking fun at the gullibility that sometimes accompanies human aspiration. 'Star City' does not look at contemporary aspirations for the future, but gently seems to suggest that we may need to recapture some of that intensity, exhilaration and philosophical debate of a time when the future looked very different from the present. ■

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## ■ Journeys With No Return

A Foundation London 18 February to 14 March

'Journeys With No Return' is a travelling exhibition of contemporary art from Turkey, Germany and the UK that aims to reflect on recent Turkish migration and to forge fresh links between three exhibition contexts: Istanbul, London and Berlin. Appropriately, Nasan Tur's *Backpacks*, 2006, and video documentation of them in use, playfully literalise the theme of the artist nomad, whom Nicolas Bourriaud dubbed the *homo viator* at last year's Tate Triennial. Tur's clattering *Speaker-Backpack*, *Cooking-Backpack*, *Demonstration-Backpack*, *Sabotage-Backpack* and *Fan-Backpack*, variations on the Beuysian emergency kit, come equipped with spray paint and a blank banner, challenging the political efficacy of contemporary art in public space.

If London reportedly now has more Turkish migrants than any other city in the world, many of these are recent arrivals from Germany, which, following its *Gastarbeiter* programme (1950s-70s), is now home to around 2.7m Turks. But anyone hoping to learn about the historical pattern of Turkish immigration or expecting insight into the life of Turkish immigrant communities may be disappointed. The three best works in the 16-artist show are poetic, deploying the video-essay format with varying degrees of narrative and visual licence, shifting between the documentary and the dream.

Adam Chodzko's *The Pickers*, 2009, is exquisite and bewitching. Four young Romanian strawberry pickers are filmed in an editing room discussing footage of themselves at work in a hothouse in Kent, comparing it with archival material of London hop pickers – families toiling harmoniously in an idyllic British landscape. Their conversation records their coming to consciousness ('we look much more grumpy'), revealing the experience of migrant labour and the changing pattern of British agriculture. The cold metal and glass of the hothouse is matched by the oversized electric-red fruits and their sharp green leaves; air pulses through plastic tubing that inflates and contracts as though it were a living organism blasting out heat; workers and their trolleys, joined at the hip,

glide methodically along purpose-designed tracks, each in a lane of their own. Sitting in a sterile room full of computers, one of the young men says: 'Imagine if they [the British] came to us ... if their economy collapsed.' 'Then they would see what it's like to be away from home,' replies a young woman. Chodzko presents the young people as agents of their own representation as well as objects of his study, but he does not pretend that this changes their status in the global scheme of things. 'I have an editing programme at home,' says one of the boys, 'but it's strange, it doesn't have a "save" option.' 'It must be the test version,' concludes another. Their comments highlight the unevenness of a global capitalism that dictates who migrates to work and who does not, who can afford to buy useable software and who cannot.

Ergin Çavuşoğlu's *Silent Glide*, 2008-09, considers labour as a source of poetic inspiration as well as income. A writer has moved into a room overlooking a factory and a cargo port with the intention of completing his book in two weeks. But, if we are to believe his frustrated ex-girlfriend, he is still there two years on, languishing in bed, reflecting on the nature of great romance, morality and labour. His lover remains caught up in his emotional world and we watch mutual accusations hurled across three screens, interspersed with extracts from Tolstoy.

The heroine of Clemens von Wedemeyer's unsubtitled Russian-language video *Otjest*, 2005, is trying to cross a national border located in some scrubland. A makeshift plywood security gate set up in the middle of the desolate winter landscape represents a symbolic point of no return, although there is no real way to distinguish between one side and the other in the atmosphere of disorientation produced by the many petty swindlers with sandwich boards advertising everything from a bus ride to a place in the queue or a visa. We encounter a series of ghostly figures, including a man reciting poems by Vladimir Mayakovsky. As the style lurches disconcertingly between Tarkovsky and Aernout Mik, we witness a reconstruction of the ordeal faced by Russian Jews seeking to claim their legal right to migrate to Germany. The looping video suggests the continuity into the present of only superficially concluded histories.

But what have Romanians in Kent to do with Turks in London, with Mayakovsky, with Russian Jews in Germany? Besides the obvious issue of globalisation, there is another link: the communist Turkish poet Nâzım Hikmet Ran (1902-63). 'Journeys with No Return' takes its title from a collection of his poems. A fervent member of the Turkish liberation movement, Hikmet travelled to the Soviet Republic of Georgia, inspired by the successful Russian Revolution of 1917, and thence to Moscow, where he spent the early 1920s studying economics and sociology at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Much of his adult life, however, was to be spent in prison.

Ergin Çavuşoğlu  
*Silent Glide* 2008-09  
video installation



His eventual escape from Turkey to settle as a political exile in Moscow turned out to be a journey with no return, by way of the Black Sea and Romania. His poem *Angina Pectoris*, 1948, reproduced in the catalogue, evokes the brutality of his situation: 'If half my heart is here, doctor,/ the other half is in China/ with the army flowing/ toward the Yellow River./ And, every morning, doctor,/ every morning at sunrise my heart/ is shot in Greece.' The last line of the poem reads 'my heart still beats with the most distant stars'. Given Hikmet's thematic centrality to the exhibition, it is a great shame that no material relating to his life or work is presented at A Foundation. The story of Hikmet's journey would lend what otherwise appears to be a fairly depoliticised exhibition a historical point of reference, explicitly grounding the themes of labour and migration in political discourse rather than merely in personal experience, thereby offering a conceptual framework for the poetic links we are invited to make as we journey through the exhibition. ■

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## ■ Eija-Liisa Ahtila

Parasol unit London 26 February to 25 April

How does the spatialisation of narrative alter the cinematic address of the viewer? The narrative of Eija-Liisa Ahtila's latest moving image installation *Where is Where?*, 2008, is dispersed across four central screens which form the 'walls' of the piece, with a further two screens being located at the entrance and exit of this enclosure. The latter two screens show an animated film and digitised archival footage of the Algerian War and act almost like a trailer and a coda to the main event of the four-screen 53-minute film. Although there is nothing to stop viewers from ambulating distractedly through the darkened space, the seven-minute gap between hourly screenings sets up an estranged cinematic experience in which, given that there is no position from which to see all screens at once, expectation is combined with the frustration of where to position oneself to get the best possible viewpoint. This spatial dislocation uncannily echoes the narrative of the film itself, which meditates on the complexity of positioning oneself, especially as an artist, in relation to horrific events – such as war and genocide – whose contagious effects seep across time and place in a globalised world. The installation stages this dilemma both temporally and spatially, as two diegetic worlds unfold simultaneously and disjunctively across the four screens.

Eija-Liisa Ahtila  
*Where is Where?* 2008  
video installation



One diegesis focuses on a contemporary poet in her suburban house in Helsinki – although this could be any European city – as she is researching an event that happened in the 1950s during the Algerian War where two young teenage Algerians murdered their European playmate. Ahtila's own research for the film partly centres on Franz Fanon's account of this incident in his 1961 book *The Wretched of the Earth*, where it surfaces as a traumatic counterpoint to his calls for revolutionary insurrection. Ahtila aligns Fanon's case study with Arthur Rimbaud's poem 'L'Enfance', which connects childhood and death, and links to the filmic poet's search for words to understand the incident. The poet is visited in her home by Death, a character who looks as if he just stepped out of an Ingmar Bergman film, who mediates between the present and the past and the worlds of here and there, ie Europe and Algeria.

The other diegesis follows a re-enactment of the boys' act of violence, their revenge for the massacre at Meftah of 40 Algerian men dragged from their beds and executed in 1956. The contagion of violence, which turns children into murderers and friends into sacrificial scapegoats, is staged in the installation using a variety of genres, including the theatrical, the documentary, docu-drama and science-fiction. It is hard to keep pace with the speed of the editing and difficult to join the fragments together, especially in what can only be a partial view anyway, given that some images will always be to one's back or out of one's field of vision. While these breaks in continuity are frustrating on one level, they are also the means by which this story physically affects the viewer. Ahtila effectively uses the tropes of Bertholt Brecht's epic theatre where the 'text' leaves gaps and spaces for the spectator to enter and piece the work together, but rather than this being heavy-handed and humourless, Ahtila adopts Brecht's approach to combining disjunction with 'lightness and ease, quickness and wit' (as Sylvia Harvey described it) to ensure the work's popular appeal. Added to the narrational gaps and the humour in *Where is Where?* – which includes a levitating priest as well as a funnily animated handshake from Death – the physical gaps between the corners of the screens also increase the reality effect of the installation. Unlike cinema, the off-screen is not another image but space itself, the cut of montage transformed into an asynchronous sequence of edits, the apparatus of spectacle used to produce real effects that impinge on and implicate the viewer in their unfolding.

Echoing the horrific narrative content of the contagion of colonial violence, the two diegetic spaces begin to contaminate one another at one point: soldiers run between screens and places, disconcertingly appearing in the poet's house to re-enact the massacre. Archival footage also disrupts our sense of temporality, especially when the poet comes to stand in front of these archival images which appear on screens within the screen, thereby linking the documented past with the space in the gallery. One of the few times where all four screens are in some kind of synchrony is towards the end of the film when a team of psychiatrists are questioning the boys. Our location as viewers, surrounded by their questioning gazes, means that we too become witnesses compelled to understand the event and the boys' matter-of-factness about their crime. In a non-didactic way, the film is showing us that we are all responsible and found guilty. Ahtila has spoken of how multi-screen installation prevents the viewer from taking sides as it becomes difficult to identify with any one character. It will be curious to see whether this ethical register is maintained in relation to the single-screen version of *Where is Where?* that will be premiered at the Prince Charles Cinema in April.

The other multi-screen installation in the exhibition, *The Hour of Prayer*, 2005, pales in comparison. The narrative, which centres on an artist who goes on a residency in Africa to deal