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Title
Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location, by Ginette Verstraete

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Book Review

Ginette Verstraete, *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Pp. 220. Cloth, $79.95. Paper, $22.95.

Ginette Verstraete's *Tracking Europe: Mobility, Diaspora, and the Politics of Location* provides a succinct analysis of a cross-section of the debate concerning the emergent "new European" identity and this identity's interplay with mobility both internal and external to Europe. Taking Derrida's *The Other Heading* as the basis of much of her theory, Verstraete argues that "the idea of Europe as a place of unlimited freedom and material progress is not just a powerful, popular conceptual figure but also a confusing, proliferating appearance that is as promising as worrisome, and that gives us no indication where it is going" (15). *Tracking Europe* attempts to "track"— that is, to delineate—as well as deconstruct these "promising," "worrisome" debates concerning the "new Europe" in light of the mobilities inscribed in the history of the idea of cosmopolitan Europe, practices of European tourism, and European Union policies concerning culture and border security. In the book's latter essays, Verstraete turns her focus to digital spaces and the multimedial art of Keith Piper, Angela Melitopolous, and Ursula Biemann concerning diaspora in order to suggest new means by which to apprehend her deconstructed concept of European identity.

In chapter one, Verstraete begins her analysis of European identity by returning to Kant's "Idea for a Universal History" (1784) and "Perpetual Peace" (1795), in which Kant argues that the route to European cosmopolitanism lies in the peaceful desire of European subjects to travel to and interchange with other places in Europe, mostly in search of "culture." Verstraete challenges this notion of cosmopolitanism by noting how the enlightened idea of European identity centers around the norm of a wealthy, white and male subject, the subject who would have had the means to travel in the 18th and 19th centuries and is inextricably linked with the logic of capitalist interchange and, thereby, exploitation.

Similarly, Verstraete criticizes the contemporary scholar Edgar Morin's argument that an historicized sense of European "unity-in-diversity" realized through international tourism and conferences would provide the key to a "new Europe" (from his *Penser l'Europe* (1988)) for its insistence on the transformative nature of the practice of capitalism. Taking Derrida as her interlocutor, Verstraete notes the paradoxical nature of the "exemplarity" of the European identity, a process by which one national culture comes to be understood as a primary example of a universalized identity, which Derrida referred to as "capitalization" or "heading" (*The Other Heading*). What is more, the process of "capitalization" is also linked to the expansion of power and capital (as well as with "de-capitation" in Derrida's mind), such that the act of placing anything under the heading of "Europe" also implies displacement and decentering. It is this deconstructed notion of European identity that Verstraete makes the guiding theoretical insight of the remainder of her study.

In chapters two through four of her study, Verstraete examines three discourses in which European identity and mobilities both internal and external to Europe interact, suggesting the conflicting nature of European identity. In chapter 2, Verstraete criticizes the development of the "European Grand Tour" in the 19th century and the continuing discourse on tourism in Europe for capitalizing on the idea of "unity-in-diversity" and thereby tacitly reinforcing the capitalist-colonialist exploitation of local

culture. Verstraete writes, "[…] pretending that the recognition of differences is equally empowering to everybody, maintains the status quo in the end: it offers a stable mooring for what is historically constructed and substitutes culture, and ultimately ideology, for irreducible divisions. Paradoxically, philosophies and policies oriented toward the promotion of a general European culture in the sense of European unity-in-diversity risk falling into the trap of naturalizing what is historically and differentially constituted, even full of conflicts" (58).

In chapter three, Verstraete expands her analysis of tourism and identity construction to the EU's European Capitals of Culture event in 2000 (the original impetus for Verstraete's study), with a particular focus on the ways in which digital spaces play into the representation of a "new Europe." With some reservation, Verstraete sees the potential in digital technology to suggest a new conception of Europe based on the notions of "decentralization and diversion" (79). Although she seems to support digitally based exhibitions about European identity such as the European Capitals of Culture events held in Santiago de Compostela in 2000, Verstraete also warns that digital spaces concerned with European identity often inadvertently fall victim to other hegemonic discourses (concerning class, gender, religion, etc.) that harm the process of European integration.

In her fourth chapter, Verstraete turns her attention to the borders of Europe, where she sees one of the fundamental contradictions in the logic of the EU played out: namely, although the project of the "new Europe" (following the Schengen Agreement) is supposed to entail the erasure of borders and the opening of space within Europe, those people who are not European citizens are being increasingly excluded from the territory of the EU by surveillance and border control practices, such that the 'unlimited' mobility of the new European citizen implies limiting the mobilities of non-European subjects. However, Verstraete also notes how European nations benefit economically from the influx of immigrants, creating a system in which Europe's borders become contradictory and negotiable, "[passing] for containment and identification, but [giving] way to alterities and unpredictable transnational intermingling" (109).

In the final chapter of her book, Verstraete expands her theoretical discussion of the problematics of European identity formation to the works of Arjun Appadurai and John Durham Peters concerning the role of the imaginary—particularly that born of digital media—in the process of integration, before she goes on to explore the effect that the multimedial art projects of three artists working on diaspora can have on this imaginary. Borrowing from Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996), Verstraete agrees with Appadurai's diagnosis of a shift to an imagined world of eminent uncertainty and displacement in the transition from early to late capitalism with its digital technology. However, as she notes, this shift can at times result in the recoding of uncertainty as racialized violence. In Peters's "Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon" (1999), Verstraete similarly embraces the development of a new imaginary defined by displacement as well as the linkage Peters sees between the diasporas of people and the "diasporas" of images through telecommunication (in addition to digital media), which "[rethinks] belonging through displacement as a mode of sociabilty at a distance through telecommunication" (118).

Using this metaphorical linkage between diasporas of people and the "diasporic" nature of informational organization in digital media, Verstraete analyzes how the multimedial artists Keith Piper, Angela Melitopolous, and Ursula Biemann "open up and give access to a meandering order in which every move is entangled with other

moves far away, in which every incident points to a string of local histories […] full of coincidences, encounters, resonance, and divergence" (148). Inspired by the work of these artists, Verstraete takes as her ultimate ideal the Derridean concept of "capillarity," a realization of the hidden intersections of power that, on the one hand, structure European identity and that, on the other, open it up to redefinition through the recognition of the displacement inherent in this identity.

Verstraete's *Tracking Europe* presents a theoretical analysis of the issues underlying the contemporary debate on the emergent "new Europe" by submitting the construct of "Europe" to post-structuralist criticism. For Verstraete, Europe is not anchored in any time or place, but rather is diffuse; the concept of "Europe" exists in the interplay between the concepts of singular identity and universal identity, as well as privileged and limited mobilities, with the result that "[Europe] implies the space to bring about an interaction between, if not a critical alteration of, the different stories and images produced at various times and places in order to let those uneasy and surprising linkages generate a multiple viewpoint, a multiple atlas, of this thing called Europe" (153). In this questioning of the limits of European identity, Verstraete is participating in a discourse with writers such as Étienne Balibar, Demetris Papadopolous, Sabine Hess, Vassilis Tsianos, and Serhat Karakayali, who have been working to redefine Europe as a "borderland" (Balibar's term) marked by "porosity" in order to problematize and deconstruct the emergent idea of a "new Europe." Verstraete's contributions to this discourse are her clear theoretical explanation of the aporia of a "European" identity and her exploration of the significance digital media can have in the restructuring of this identity. In all, Verstraete's study is not an exhaustive look at the issues of identity and mobility in Europe; rather, *Tracking Europe* presents essayistic analyses of contemporary debates surrounding the "new Europe," while suggesting possibilities for overcoming the inconsistencies in this identity.

—Alex Lambrow (University of California, Berkeley)