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Caught in the Loophole: Film Aesthetics and the (Im)mobilisation of Migrant Dreams in Xavier Koller's *Journey of Hope* (1990)

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Introduction: Steamrolled by Modernity

- ¹ At the beginning of Xavier Koller's film *Journey of Hope* (*Reise der Hoffnung*, Switzerland/Turkey, 1990), we see the young protagonist, a Turkish boy named Mehmet Ali, running onto a railway line with his friends to play a game of chicken.¹ The scene begins as a shot/reverse shot exchange between the children and the train, whose approach is aesthetically slowed down by the use of a telephoto lens. The gliding movement of the train therefore appears as if it were filmed in slow motion, and its muted sounds further accentuate this impression. After this initial exchange, mostly shown in the angled views characteristic of shot/reverse shot constellations, we also see several frontal shots of both the train and the boys. This creates a visual effect of collision as the train approaches Mehmet Ali, who remains on the track even when the other children run away.



Figure 1. Steamrolled by modernity. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope*, 1990.

- 2 Just before we see the train rolling over the boy, the film cuts back and forth between point-of-view shots of Mehmet Ali and the train, which is thereby personified and turned into an antagonistic force. In what follows, we see mostly lateral shots of the train from both sides, interrupted by one brief point-of-view shot of the boy from underneath the train. In the last of several close-ups of the wheels, we see Mehmet Ali's father through the gaps, filmed from the other side of the train, before he runs to the boy, who is unscathed.
- 3 The scene encapsulates the links between mobility, technological modernity, migration, and film aesthetics that interest us in this article. The intrusion of technology into rural Turkey is signalled by the train, an icon of Western modernity and the regimes of mobility connected to it.² The classic diagonal, familiar from countless films from the Lumière brothers' *L'arrivée d'un train* (France, 1895) to train shots in action films such as *From Russia with Love* (UK/USA, 1963), foregrounds the speed of the train after its deceptively slow first appearance.³ The young protagonist is here literally steamrolled by the train, and the frontal perspective emphasises the violence of the assault. It also places the viewer in the same position, but only briefly: the association between the viewer, the camera, and the protagonist is broken as the camera returns the viewer (along with the father) to the position of a bystander. Mehmet Ali becomes part of what Wolfgang Schivelbusch calls the "machine ensemble" of the railroad, the fusion of train, rails, landscape, and people into a machine-like order: "the railroad was merely an expression of the rail's technological requirements, and the rail itself was a constituent part of the machine ensemble that was the system. It was, in other words, that machine ensemble that interjected itself between the traveler and the landscape."⁴ While Schivelbusch is mainly interested in the machine ensemble as the central manifestation of how technological modernity reconfigured historical experiences of space and time in the nineteenth century, railway cinema commonly attaches ideological and figurative meanings to the machine ensemble. These meanings are frequently based on the cultural and political associations between the train and the nation state as discussed, among others, by George Revill.⁵
- 4 The scene at the beginning of *Journey of Hope* thus draws on the function of the train as an icon of mobility that is figuratively connected to both the modern state and the

cinema – a modern machine of movement, like the train.⁶ From its opening minutes, then, the film draws attention to cinema’s potential to reflect on questions of (im)mobility and migration. Indeed, the scene follows right after an exchange between Mehmet Ali’s father and his brother, who successfully emigrated to Switzerland with the help of a middleman. The boy’s close encounter with the train thus announces his role as the film’s most mobile subject who can insert himself into the loopholes of various systems of mobility without being detected. At the same time, his position in the gaps of larger systems – literally the machine ensemble of the train, figuratively the modern state apparatus – also immobilises him. The scene thus already foreshadows his death during the attempt to reach Switzerland illegally with his parents at the end of the film, where he is radically immobilised as he freezes to death in the Swiss Alps. Indeed, the white steam of the train that obfuscates the image after the passing of the train points forward to the fog and snow that dominate the frame when Mehmet Ali and his father get lost in the Alps. The train scene thus encapsulates the boy’s complex relation to the modern routes and networks of mobility. William Walters, Charler Heller, and Lorenzo Pezzani’s concept of *viapolitics* serves as a useful frame for understanding the entanglement of migrants, infrastructure, state power, and physical geography that the film dramatises as it engages with “the lively and at times violent interaction between people on the move and the vehicles, networked infrastructures, and geophysical environments across which they travel.”⁷ However, Koller’s film invites reflection not only on the socio-political discussions surrounding different forms of mobility but also on what we might term a form of *viapoetics*, an exploration of the possibilities of film to think about these mobilities through its own moving images. As we will demonstrate, *Journey of Hope* draws on the aesthetic possibilities of the medium to juxtapose two opposing forms of mobility. The first is that of the straight line, epitomised by the train; this is the regulated mobility that serves the modern nation state. The film juxtaposes this mobility associated with the straight line with diverging, stray mobilities, the mobilities of clandestine immigration that are sacrificed in the interest of the former.

Displaced Subjects: The Cinema of Migration

- 5 The joint focus on human and cinematic mobilities in our reading of *Journey of Hope*, as well as throughout this special issue, is justified by the fact that the history of the cinema and the history of migration intersect in various ways. Giorgio Bertellini argues that “[t]he emergence of motion pictures and the phenomenon of world migrations are profoundly interrelated: their threads span from social and economic history to racial politics and film aesthetics.”⁸ As Bertellini explains, the links between migration and cinema range from the central role of immigrant filmmakers and audiences in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century to the prominence of “[d]isplaced and mobile subjects”⁹ alongside transnational stories and productions in recent European cinemas.¹⁰ Since the late twentieth century, “new migrations – from the Balkans, northern Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia to both Western and non-Western locations” have been combined “with new modalities of media production and distribution – independent, nonhegemonic, parainstitutional – that have greatly complicated traditional practices of cinematic narratives and reception.”¹¹ Indeed, as Angelica Fenner argues, the making of and response to *Journey of Hope* “coincided with a critical juncture in history” that saw the beginning of new mass migrations from East

to West in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and conflicts in the Middle East.¹² Koller's film was based on a true story that the director had read about in the newspaper, the story of a Kurdish boy dying from cold and exhaustion in the Swiss Alps while attempting to illegally enter Switzerland with his parents.¹³ A Swiss-Turkish coproduction that won the Oscar for best foreign language film in 1991, *Journey of Hope* is furthermore a prime example not only of "new transcultural experiences", but also of new modes of transnational film production.¹⁴ Indeed, the film was one of the first films funded by a new European funding scheme for international co-productions, Eurimages, that was established in 1988.¹⁵

- 6 Filmed in four languages (Turkish, Swiss German, Italian, and German) and three countries (Turkey, Italy, and Switzerland), *Journey of Hope* also explores the (im)mobilities of exile and diaspora. Hamid Naficy briefly refers to the film in his classic book *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*¹⁶; in fact, his account of the spatial figures of mobility characteristic of such "accented films" reads like a plot summary of Koller's film: "transitional and transnational places and spaces, such as borders, tunnels, seaports, airports, and hotels and vehicles of mobility, such as trains, buses, and suitcases [are] frequently inscribed in the accented films."¹⁷ All of these (with the exception of airports) appear in *Journey of Hope*. The first part of the film is set in rural Anatolia, where Mehmet Ali's parents decide to sell their belongings and follow his uncle Cemal to Switzerland; the utopian fantasy of Switzerland is signalled by a repeatedly shown postcard of the Swiss Alps that was sent by Cemal.¹⁸ The ensuing journey takes the family through various transitional spaces and vehicles, starting with the bus on which they travel from their rural home to the coast, where they secretly board a ship via its freight hold, which makes them appear like human cargo. After arriving in the harbour of Genua, another middleman gets them onto a truck that should take them to Switzerland. At the border, however, the Swiss authorities send them back to Milan by train, where they prepare for their clandestine journey across the Alps. The interruption of their planned journey, which would have taken them through the Gotthard tunnel, is visually signalled by a cut from a view of the truck as it crosses the border to a point-of-view shot of the migrants' train arriving back in Milan. In both shots, the mobile camera moves along the north-south axis in the direction of the truck and the train, respectively. The match cut creates a visual illusion of spatial continuity, but the viewer is aware that the camera actually moves in opposite directions - first north, then south. The sequence of shots thus emphasises the gap between the ideal linear journey and the migrants' non-linear trajectory. The impossibility of smooth progress is also emphasised by a shot of the train arriving in Milan. The use of a telephoto lens visually slows down the train, echoing the opening scene of the film discussed initially and making it clear that the migrants cannot benefit from the train's promise of mobility.¹⁹

Historicising Mobility: Crossing the Alps in Swiss Political Rhetoric

- 7 Viewed in the context of political debates in Switzerland around 1990, the train with its straight line has specific associations. In 1990, the Swiss government lobbied for the construction of a new tunnel through the Alps to facilitate the integration of Switzerland into the European market and relocate goods traffic from the road to the

railroad. This resulted in the construction of the NEAT (*Neue Eisenbahn-Alpentransversale*), a major extension of the railway system to improve traffic on the North-South axis throughout Switzerland. The core component of the NEAT is the new Gotthard tunnel, currently the longest railway tunnel of the world. The discussions around the NEAT connect with a long history of myths and fantasies around the conquest of the Gotthard massif via road and rail.²⁰ Some of them associate the Gotthard with the building of the Swiss nation. In World War II and beyond, the Gotthard played an important role in the so-called *geistige Landesverteidigung* (“intellectual defense of the nation”) through images of the Alps as home and fortress that imagined Switzerland as a *Willensnation* (“nation by/of will”) by combining a mythical, historical past rooted in close-knit rural communities with a strong belief in technological progress.²¹ Others imagine the crossing of the Gotthard as an image of Switzerland’s internationalisation. In 1947, for instance, the Swiss engineer Eduard Gruner presented his vision for an *Europa-Afrika-Expresß* with a new Gotthard tunnel at its heart in the magazine *Prisma* in the form of a fictional article from the year 2000; the text ends with the writer describing political leaders honouring “the old relations from the Po to the Rhine and the new ones from the equator to the frozen ocean”.²² Later in the century, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the 1989 reunification of Germany marked the start of an increasing inter-European integration; the Swiss Federal Council announced in 1990 that a new railway tunnel through the Alps would not only better connect Switzerland with its neighbours in the North and South, but also allow the country to maintain its pivotal position within European politics with regard to transport.²³

- 8 This Gotthard transit route, however, is closed to Mehmet Ali and his family in *Journey of Hope*; instead, they enter Switzerland from Italy via an older route, the Splügenpass. As one of the oldest transalpine routes, the Splügenpass was already used in Roman times, and the film explicitly refers to an old Roman road that the protagonists travel on.²⁴ From the thirteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Splügenpass was one of the main trade routes from Italy to the European North. Mule tracks and different state-sanctioned systems of transportation across the Alps provided the valley communities on both sides of the Splügenpass with income through taxes collected for transportation services.²⁵ In 1822, the construction of the *Commercialstrassen* – roads funded by the Austrian emperor to improve trade connections between its kingdoms – enabled carts and carriages, and later cars, to cross the pass, which led to an increase in traffic.²⁶ The road was fitted with a state-of-the-art gallery and mountain inn in 1843 to protect it from avalanches, making the street passable in the wintertime. This economic boom, however, was cut short with the construction of three railway tunnels through the Alps (the Brenner in 1867, the Mont Cenis in 1872, and the Gotthard in 1882), and the Splügenpass lost its status as a European cargo transit route.²⁷ Mostly reduced to touristic and private automobile traffic to Italy and as a regional connection between the valleys, the Splügenpass lost even more of its significance with the opening of the San Bernardino motorway tunnel in 1967.²⁸ Since the Second World War, the road over the Splügenpass has been closed in the wintertime and the gallery that plays an important role in the film (see below) has been decommissioned with a summer bypass and fallen largely into disrepair.²⁹ At the time when *Journey of Hope* was made, the Splügenpass had thus largely become a relic of the past.

- 9 Koller's migrants thus move in the shadows of the Gotthard and of the monumental routes of modern transportation as they not only revert back to an ancient trail but also to pre-modern modes of transportation. As Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli highlight, a migrant viapolitics is characterised by "the forcefully fragmented and decelerated nature of migrant journeys [...], which include different means of mechanized transport [...] and walking long distances."³⁰ Being forced to cross the border on foot in the dead of night, the protagonists' violent encounter with the alpine landscape is not solely a result of the harsh landscape but also a consequence of the "weaponization of the migratory path"³¹ by nation states, epitomised in the film by the Swiss border guard that forces them back to Milan and the closed border-checkpoint guarded by a snarling German shepherd that will hunt down one of the refugees. The threatening alpine landscapes can thus also be read as a sublimation of the threatening forces of state control that limit the migrants' mobility. Interestingly, the Splügenpass region has seen a revival in the twenty-first century: the gallery, in which the protagonists seek initial shelter from the snow storm, has been restored and declared a building of national historical relevance; its lower part now functions as a showroom highlighting the history of the building and the mountain pass. The old mule tracks have been restored and are now an international hiking trail for tourists. The hiking route Via Spluga advertises its trails with the slogan "hiking without borders," which highlights the vastness of the area and the touristic experience, suggesting the possibility of unhindered mobility for the hiker. Yet the slogan addresses recreational walkers with privileged mobilities: their journey happens in broad daylight with appropriate mountain gear, while their citizen status allows them to move freely between the Schengen states. Koller's migrants, in contrast, lack proper equipment like hiking boots or winter jackets and are forced to carry their belongings in bulky suitcases through the night to avoid detection.
- 10 The two routes through/across the Alps with their specific (im)mobilities correspond to two political debates, both of which *Reise der Hoffnung* evokes: while the Alp Transit debate is linked to the Gotthard, the second one is linked to fierce debates around immigration. As a reputedly politically neutral country, Switzerland has historically been a popular destination for political refugees and economic migrants. However, during the twentieth century, there were lasting political debates concerning the perceived *Überfremdung* ('over-foreignisation') of Switzerland and the country increasingly implemented restrictive immigration policies, which culminated in the 1940s. During the Second World War, immigration into Switzerland was heavily restricted as part of the appeasement politics towards Nazi Germany, which resulted in the stamped "J" in passports of German Jews and the rejection of most Jewish refugees at the Swiss borders. After the Second World War, however, immigration policies and sentiments shifted somewhat. The recovering economy led to rising prosperity among the Swiss population and an increasing demand for foreign workforce. After 1945, Switzerland implemented a system of recruiting workers from Italy, yet limited their permits to a maximum of ten years and severely restricted family reunification rules; known as Italian "guest workers," they were therefore being rotated in and out of the country without being able to settle there.³² While Italians made up more than half of the immigrants in 1970, by the end of the 1970s these "guest workers" came increasingly also from countries such as Spain, Portugal, and Turkey.³³ Yet fears of *Überfremdung* persisted and reached a high point in the failed Schwarzenbach-Initiative (1970), which sought to enshrine into the Swiss constitution a fixed upper limit of

immigrants (ten percent of the population). When the number of asylum applicants started to rise exponentially in the 1980s and 1990s,³⁴ legal and illegal immigration once again became a highly contested topic in politics and the media, leading to a series of attempts to regulate migration into Switzerland as international agreements such as the Schengen Agreement (1985) and the Dublin Convention (1990) created a pan-European migration regime. The first-ever Asylum Law came into force in 1981 and has been revised and tightened multiple times. The right-conservative SVP has launched multiple initiatives to limit migration, such as the failed initiatives “gegen die illegale Einwanderung” (against illegal immigration) of 1996 and “Begrenzungs-Initiative” (restriction initiative) of 2020, or the successful “Ausschaffungs-Initiative” (deportation initiative) of 2010 and the initiative “Gegen Masseneinwanderung” (against mass immigration) of 2014. In the run-up to the vote of 2010, for example, the campaign posters (where a white sheep kicks a black sheep off its red pasture shaped like Switzerland) and the media coverage were controversial and polarising.³⁵ The debate mirrored the population’s divided sentiments, which ranged from a policy of open doors to isolationist and xenophobic voices calling for exclusion and closed borders. As part of the *zeitgeist* of post-war Switzerland, the contested nature of immigration also found a variety of cultural expressions, and Koller’s film is part of a by now long tradition of Swiss films that critically examine immigration and the public debates connected to it. Films such as *Bäckerei Zürrer* (1957), *Die Schweizermacher* (1978), *Das Boot ist voll* (1981), or *Heimatland* (2015) respond to these debates, and their success at the box office speaks to the public’s continued interest in the topic. Indeed, Rolf Lyssy’s immigration comedy *Die Schweizermacher* is the highest-grossing Swiss film to date, while *Journey of Hope* won, as already mentioned, an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1991.³⁶

- 11 In Koller’s film, the contradictory attitudes to immigration politics are mirrored in the clear division of the Swiss characters into coldhearted state officials whose only aim is the detention and deportation of the refugees and supportive citizens who take pity on the freezing migrants such as the plough drivers and doctors. The Swiss truck driver Ramser, who takes the Turkish family from Naples to the Swiss border, embodies this duality. His work for a logistics firm makes him an enabler of mobility, of easily moving in and out of the country with a full truck. A family man himself, he is charmed by Mehmet Ali and willingly helps. As he gets stopped at the border, however, his willingness to smuggle the family into Switzerland ceases. His statement “ich wott doch kei Lämpä wäge däne” (“I don’t want to get into trouble because of them”) underscores that he is a law-abiding citizen. Yet it is arguably exactly his failure to help at a personal risk that makes him a morally ambivalent character.
- 12 The references to Swiss geography in Ramser’s attempts to talk to the migrants during the journey underscore the film’s exploration of borders, crossings, and the (im)mobilities of transit. The truck driver tells the boy about his home town Schaffhausen (pronounced as Schaffusä in Swiss German), which is situated at the northern tip of Switzerland. Schaffhausen is located just north of the Rhine, which in most other places marks the border between Switzerland and Germany. The reference to a border zone of historical significance underscores the film’s interest in the complexity of borders, which is further accentuated by Ramser’s multilayered pun on the name of Schaffhausen, “Schaff inä, schaff usä.” In Swiss German, this means “to transport something in or out” as well as “to make [it] in or out.” As such, the pun refers not only to the truck driver’s profession of importing and exporting goods but

also to the movements of people in and out of the country. “Schaff usä” further inverts the two parts of the Swiss composite verb “usschaffä”, which refers to the deportation of illegal immigrants. Finally, Ramser’s pun can also be read as “Schaf inä/usä” (i.e. “sheep in/sheep out”), linking the deportation of immigrants to the herding of sheep (indeed, we repeatedly see flocks of sheep at the beginning of the film). This metaphorical association ties in with political ideas about “good and bad immigrants” (or “white and black sheep”), pointing forward to the infamous 2007 campaign by the right-wing party SVP, which advocated for restricting immigration. “Schaffhausen” here becomes part of an imaginative geography that is oriented along the North-South axis and spans Switzerland from the southern gateway in Ticino (where Ramser enters the country) to the country’s northernmost point. This geographical expansion is also performed by the multidialectal Swiss cast: though the dramatic climax of the film takes place in a specific locality, the supposedly local characters not only have very different responses to the migrants but also speak an impossible mix of various Swiss dialects. In this way, they synecdochally stand in for the entire Swiss nation.

Spatiality, (Im)mobility, and the Language of Cinema

- 13 The film’s thematic interest in the North-South axis is connected to an exploration of mobility and immobility through the language of cinema. Tim Cresswell argues that modernity and mobility cannot be separated from each other but also that modern regimes of mobility go hand in hand with various immobilities, with the hierarchical regulation and ordering of space.³⁷ Film lends itself to an exploration of these modern mobilities and immobilities because it is a medium founded on movement – and itself the product of modern machines. To cite Cresswell and Deborah Dixon: “Film viewing involves the observer taking a mobile view on a mobile world.”³⁸ For Cresswell and Dixon, then, film itself is tied to journeying, spatial displacement, and fluid identities: “As we watch the film we travel – we become somewhere else. In addition, the images on the screen move, as does the camera, producing the effect of a mobile gaze.”³⁹
- 14 *Journey of Hope* makes complex use of the mobile possibilities of the medium and explores the mobilities and immobilisations of the characters through the language of cinema. This becomes clear in the contrast between the open spaces of the opening sequences and the increasingly claustrophobic frames during the crossing of the Alps. The spatiality in the scenes in Turkey is one of open horizons, panoramic shots, and horizontal surfaces. These shots often include observers placed in the landscape and looking into the distance, which signals the possibility of unhindered movement. In one shot, for instance, we see the father crouched on a boulder, looking hopefully into the flat land that lies below him; in another, the camera is similarly placed in an elevated position, looking down on a pastoral scene where the father guards his sheep above his village, with the landscape extending far into the distance. A similar composition shows Mehmet Ali and his father during a break on the bus journey. Filmed from behind, they look into the landscape, which seems to stretch into infinity as the colours merge with those of the sky. In contrast, the spatiality during the journey in the Alps is one of increasing narrowness, encompassing mountains, and darkness.



Figure 2. Open horizons in Turkey vs. claustrophobic spaces in the Alps. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope*, 1990.

- 15 The open horizons of Anatolia are replaced with constrained views, for instance when we see the refugees crawl up the side of a mountain diagonally. In these scenes, the protagonists are time and again hidden behind rocks, bushes, and other features of the landscape. Their increasingly restricted mobility is thereby emphasised by low- and high-angle shots that limit the spectator's view. Similarly, the camera repeatedly pans and tracks nervously across an increasingly darkening landscape, further accentuated by the encroaching fog. Both characters and viewers are thus denied spatial orientation. This lack of orientation culminates in the group's dispersal as they attempt to cross over into Switzerland in smaller groups, leading to a corresponding fragmentation of storylines, which further disorients the viewer as well.
- 16 The protagonists' increasing invisibility reveals their precarious position in a literally and figuratively hostile environment even while it points to their agency in bypassing immigration laws by moving in the interstices of the state apparatus. Thus, as the protagonists struggle to cross the mountain at night, the darkness increasingly obstructs their orientation but also masks them from vigilant Swiss customs officers. Mehmet Ali stays with his father, who eventually has to carry the exhausted boy. As the new day breaks, they are no longer hidden by darkness but remain lost in the whiteness of the snow and the dense fog – they cannot see and are themselves invisible even in broad daylight. This is encapsulated by a shot in which the father collapses behind a small ridge with Mehmet Ali in his arms so that they are visually and metaphorically swallowed by the snowy landscape. In this and other shots, the near whiteout literally erases the migrants from the Swiss landscape, just as various scenes in tunnels and galleries make them disappear in blackness. When the migrants hide in the historic Splügen gallery, for instance, they are barely visible as silhouettes on the almost entirely black screen. In this way, the representation of the migrants' journey

gravitates towards the two extremes of the filmic spectrum of light – the blackout of tunnel scenes and the whiteout of snow and fog.



Figure 3. Blackout and whiteout. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope*, 1990.

- 17 These scenes in which the protagonists are visually swallowed foreshadow the end of their journey, where they are apprehended by the Swiss border guard and the father is imprisoned after the death of his son; he is immobilised, made invisible, and swallowed by the Swiss legal system. When he is transported from the scene of tragedy to the prison, the film comments on this immobilisation with yet another symbolically charged tunnel scene. After the police van has entered the tunnel, the camera is placed behind the policemen in the front, showing the artificially lit road ahead. A pan to the right reveals another detained migrant, before the camera crosses the axis of action and shows Mehmet Ali's father on the same side of the image, though he is presumably sitting on the opposite bench. As the camera follows the father's gaze to the rear window of the car, the shot turns into a point-of-view shot of the road, which recedes into a seemingly endless tunnel, echoing the earlier view through the front window and further violating continuity as the two directions of the road are visually conflated into one. This sequence of shots figuratively imprisons the migrants in the tunnel; the circular movements of the camera and the visual collapse of the two directions lead to a spatio-temporal stillstand where forward movement seems suspended. This figurative imprisonment is literalised in a match cut from the road to the prison.



Figure 4. From tunnel to prison. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope*, 1990.

- 18 The road through the mountain with its economic promises is thereby metaphorically aligned with the walk down the corridor of the prison, where the father has to wait for deportation. The cut reframes the road to freedom as a road to incarceration; the tunnel seems to lead directly into a prison cell.
- 19 This immobilisation finds its apex in the very last shot of the film, when the truck driver Ramser visits the father in prison to express his condolences. As Ramser offers him some money, the father responds by saying “Ich wäre gern dein Freund geworden” (“I would have liked to be your friend”). This impossible friendship is followed by an abrupt freeze frame, which not only interrupts the downward movement of the father’s head but also the movement of (the) film itself, effectively ending both the journey and the film. The viewer is placed on the other side of the glass, looking at the Turkish man from the “Swiss” side. Implicating the viewer, the abrupt ending produces a sense of discomfort and presents an unresolved situation.
- 20 The mediated view through the glass echoes many similar shots where transparent surfaces separate the viewer from the migrating protagonists, highlighting the conjunction of mediation and migration as theorised by Arjun Appadurai.⁴⁰ In Turkey, for instance, we see the father through a shop window as he buys Swiss chocolate for his family. Later, as the children gather around the individually wrapped chocolates with their picturesque touristic images of Switzerland, the children’s admiring gaze echoes their earlier response to the postcard from Switzerland sent by their uncle Cemal. In her reading of the postcard, Fenner argues that it posits “Switzerland [...] within the gaze of the rural Turkish peasant as a utopian site, invested with the aspiration for prosperity and a life less defined by physical hardship.”⁴¹ Yosefa Loshitzky similarly argues that “[t]he postcard motif, which runs throughout the film, deconstructs and subverts the picture-postcard image of Switzerland, bred from

generations of paintings, photographs, postcards, and calendars, and underscores the important role of mass-produced representations in generating fantasies that become driving forces in global geographical mobility.”⁴² The film thereby participates in the mediation of migration, including these “mass-produced representations” of Switzerland, and interrupts them through its own mediation of an unsuccessful migration story. Indeed, the scene in which we see Haider buying chocolate is visually echoed and inverted in a striking composition in Switzerland. After the alpine crossing, we see some of the migrants through the windows of a luxurious spa as they frantically knock on the glass, which visually evokes zombie films.⁴³



Figure 5. Migrants seen through the windows of a spa. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope*, 1990.

- 21 In these moments, the film uncomfortably reminds us not only of the barrier between the migrants and the Swiss characters, but also of our own detached position as passive viewers and our disconnection from the migrant stories that most viewers of the film experience only in mediated form.

Conclusion: Spectral Mobilities

- 22 As we have seen, then, the film marks a trajectory from the hope of unhindered mobility to various forms of immobilisation – death, imprisonment, and deportation. These physical (im)mobilities are explored through the film’s own mobile possibilities. Moving towards a conclusion, we will therefore discuss a last example that condenses the film’s division of mobility into official, state-sanctioned, state-serving mobilities on the one hand and deviant migrant mobilities on the other. When the truck driver offers to take the family into Switzerland, the film shows them trying to communicate with the help of multiple languages and gestures. In a striking moment, both Ramser and the father describe the journey into Switzerland with a hand gesture that mimics a straight line, mirroring the South-North axis through the Gotthard tunnel. Immediately after that, the camera merges with this movement: we see a point-of-view shot through the front of the truck as they are in a gallery so that the vehicle and the migrants are aligned. However, the camera soon disengages itself from this line and swerves off the road. For a moment, it looks as though they are about to crash into the abyss, but then we see the side mirror of the truck, which reveals that it was merely the camera that

veered off course. The viewer is thus returned to the safe position of a passenger who looks out the window and keeps out of harm's way. This optical diverging from the straight line already points forward to the indirect route that the migrants will attempt to reach northern Switzerland. The veering of the camera cinematically links the official route through the tunnel with the clandestine route of the Splügenpass. While it foreshadows catastrophe and death for the protagonists, the scene also juxtaposes the different political and filmic mobilities into which the film inscribes itself.

- 23 The almost completely black shot of a tunnel right after the swerve thereby resonates with many other tunnel shots that recur in the film. Though none of these tunnels are the Gotthard tunnel, they nonetheless evoke it; we could go as far as to say that they are the spectre of the NEAT, the new, monumental tunnel that was everywhere in political debates around 1990. Like the many tunnels in the film, the migrants' journey takes place in the shadow of the official North-South transit across the Alps. The film's depiction of transalpine mobility is thus poised between state-sanctioned border crossings and clandestine international movement, between direct lines and stray mobilities, between high technological feats of millennial engineering and perilous alpine hikes on ancient paths, between the globalism of mobility infrastructure and its planetary alternatives. As such, *Journey of Hope* produces a viapoetics that relies on a variety of spectral mobilities; as literal spectres, the protagonists attempt to illegally cross the border at night. The socio-political context of the early 1990s further positions their journey as the dark flipside of the Gotthard-NEAT and its promise of prestigious mobility. Ultimately, Koller's film also reverses the (in)visibility of transalpine mobility as the vast majority of screentime focuses on the Mehmet Ali and the other migrants' journey and relegates the state-sanctioned mobility to minor characters and plotlines, also in visual terms, as the Gotthard route is only ever seen in glimpses.
- 24 Given its critical and commercial success, the film thereby intervenes into the hypervisibility of the Gotthard-NEAT and the contentious socio-political debates over immigration that were omnipresent at the time, asking its viewers to renegotiate modern mobilities at the turn of the twentieth century through its own participation in a global economy of images about migration. Cinematically, *Journey of Hopes* draws on long-standing associations between moving images, displacement, and migration. In the film's aesthetics of (im)mobility, the camera aligns itself with the migrant subject, but also, notably in the final scene, with the position of the citizen observing the former in mediated form. The tension between movement and stillness that lies at the basis of all film is deployed for a reflection on the mutual implication of mobility and immobilisation in Western modernity, epitomised by the train in the film's opening scene. Yet while *Journey of Hope* depicts migrant subjects steamrolled by state-sanctioned mobility infrastructure, its cinematic viapoetics also partly counteracts the violence of viapolitics, if only in the realm of the imagination.

NOTES

1. Xavier Koller (dir.), *Journey of Hope (Reise der Hoffnung)*, Catpics AG and Condor Films AG, 1990.
2. See, among others, Matthew Beaumont and Michael Freeman (eds.), *The Railway and Modernity: Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble*, Oxford, Peter Lang, 2007.
3. In his article on the famous film by the Lumière brothers, Martin Loiperdinger cites early film theorist Rudolf Arnheim, who in 1932 attested that “[e]verybody has seen a railway engine rushing on the scene in a film,” arguing that the movement of the train is aesthetically doubled by the cinematography in these scenes: “The effect is most vivid because the dynamic power of the forward-rushing movement is enhanced by another source of dynamics that has no inherent connection with the object itself, that is, with the locomotive, but depends on the position of the spectator, or - in other words - of the camera.” Quoted in Martin Loiperdinger, “Lumière’s *Arrival of the Train*: Cinema’s Founding Myth”, in Martin Loiperdinger and Bernd Elzer (eds.), *The Moving Image*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 103.
On the train in *From Russia with Love*, see Johannes Riquet and Anna Zdrenyk, “Between Progress and Nostalgia: Technology, Geopolitics, and James Bond’s Railway Journeys”, *The International Journal of James Bond Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2018, pp. 4-10.
4. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, Leamington Spa, Berg, 1986, p. 24.
5. George Revill, *Railway*, London, Reaktion Books, 2012.
6. As Lynne Kirby argues in *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, the train was a privileged subject for early filmmakers partly because it functioned as an analogue of cinema itself: “As a machine of vision and an instrument for conquering space and time, the train is a mechanical double for the cinema and or the transport of the spectator into fiction, fantasy, and dream.” Lynne Kirby, *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Durham, Duke UP, 1997, p. 2. See also Rebecca Harrison, *From Steam to Screen: Cinema, the Railways and Modernity*, London, Bloomsbury, 2022.
7. William Walters, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani, “Viapolitics: An Introduction”, in William Walters, Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani (eds.), *Viapolitics: Borders, Migration, and the Power of Locomotion*, Durham, Duke UP, 2022, p. 7.
8. Giorgio Bertellini, “Film, National Cinema, and Migration”, in Immanuel Ness (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Global Human Migration*, Hoboken, Blackwell, 2013, p. 1.
9. Bertellini, “Film, National Cinema, and Migration”, p. 2.
10. Bertellini, “Film, National Cinema, and Migration”, pp. 2-4.
11. Bertellini, “Film, National Cinema, and Migration”, p. 3.
12. Angelika Fenner, “Traversing the Screen Politics of Migration. Xavier Koller’s ‘Journey of Hope’”, in Eva Rueschmann (ed.) *Moving Pictures, Migrating Identities*, University Press of Mississippi, 2003, p. 19.
13. Koller quoted in Kadir Albayrak and Ali Osman Öztürk, “Wertorientierung bei Herta Müller am Beispiel des Filmes ‘Reise der Hoffnung’ von Xavier Koller”, *Alman Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi / Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur* vol. 41, 2019, p. 13.
14. Bertellini, “Film, National Cinema, and Migration”, p. 5.
15. Fenner, “Traversing”, pp. 26-8 ; Anne Jäckel, “State and Other Funding for Migrant, Diasporic and World Cinemas in Europe”, in Daniel Berghahn and Claudia Sternberg (eds.), *European Cinema in Motion : Migrant and Diasporic Film in Contemporary Europe*, Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2010, p. 85.

16. Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 2001, pp. 265-6.
17. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 5.
18. The postcard is a good example of what Naficy refers to as the “epistolarity” of accented films, i.e. the use of letters, phone calls, and other narrative devices that disseminate and exchange meanings across spatial and temporal distances. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 5.
19. The migrants’ return to Milan creates an irony for anyone familiar with train routes in and out of Switzerland as Milan is the starting point for the only high-speed train from Italy to Switzerland (Milan-Zurich).
20. Boris Previšić’s edited collection of essays *Gotthardfantasien* (2016), which was published in the year that saw the opening of the new Gotthard tunnel, offers fascinating perspectives on these various discourses. Previšić, Boris, *Gotthardfantasien: Eine Blütenlese aus Wissenschaft und Literatur*, Zürich, Hier und Jetzt, 2016.
21. Previšić, *Gotthardfantasien*, p. 11.
22. Eduard Gruner, “Der Europa-Afrika-Express”, *Prisma*, 1 August 1947, p. 104 (authors’ translation).
23. Swiss Federal Council, “Botschaft über den Bau der Schweizerischen Eisenbahn-Alpenstransversale (Alpentransit-Beschluss) vom 23. Mai 1990”, *Bundesblatt*, vol. 2, no. 25, 1990, p. 1081. Integration into a pan-European traffic and transit system was of central concern especially in the early stages of the Neat project: as Kreis describes, in the late 1980s, the two main concerns discussed in the Swiss media with relation to the NEAT were the fear of being driven around and the fear of being overrun (“das NEAT-Projekt [war] zwischen zwei Hauptsorgen eingeklemmt: zwischen der Sorge, umfahren, und der Sorge, überrollt zu werden”). Georg Kreis, “Ein neuer Weg für eine alte Passage. Zur Geschichte der NEAT”, in Kilian T. Elsasser, Ueli Habegger and Georg Kreis (eds.), *Eine Zukunft für die historische Verkehrslandschaft Gotthard*, Bern, Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften, 2016, p. 53.
24. Georg Jäger, “Einleitung”, in Georg Jäger (ed.), *Der Splügenpass. Zur langen Geschichte einer kurzen Transitroute*, Chur, Verlag Bündner Monatsblatt und Institut für Kulturforschung Graubünden, 2016, p. 5.
25. Guglielmo Scaramellini, “Die Porten in der Valchiavenna seit dem Mittelalter. Fakten und Mutmassungen”, in Jäger (ed.), *Der Splügenpass*; Hansjürg Gredig, “Die Saumwege am Splügenpass vor 1817”, in Jäger (ed.), *Der Splügenpass*, p. 84.
26. Jäger, “Einleitung”, p. 6.
27. Jäger, “Einleitung”, p. 6.
28. Jäger, “Einleitung”, p. 8.
29. Pablo Mantovani, “Die Galerie am Splügenpass”, in Jäger (ed.), *Der Splügenpass*, p. 115.
30. Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli, “When the ‘Via’ is Fragmented and Disrupted: Migrants Walking along the Alpine Route”, in Walters, Heller and Pezzani (eds.), *Viapolitics*, Durham, Duke UP, 2022, p. 236.
31. Garelli and Tazzioli, “Migrants Walking”, p. 252.
32. Gianni D’Amato, Gianni, “Historische und soziologische Übersicht über die Migration in der Schweiz”, in *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Entwicklungspolitik*, Genève, Institut de hautes études internationales et du développement, 2008, p. 179.
33. D’Amato, “Migration in der Schweiz”, p. 180.
34. D’Amato, “Migration in der Schweiz”, pp. 186-8.
35. Linards Udris, *Schweizerische Medien im Wahlkampf: Qualität der Medienberichterstattung vor den Eidgenössischen Wahlen 2011*, Basel, Schwabe Verlag, 2013.
36. “Schweizer Film”, Bundesamt für Statistik (The Swiss Federal Statistical Office). <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/kultur-medien-informationsgesellschaft-sport/kultur/film-kino/schweizer.html>, accessed 9 September 2022.

37. Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World*, New York, Routledge, 2006.
38. Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon, "Introduction: Engaging Film", in Tim Cresswell and Deborah Dixon (eds.), *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, p. 4.
39. Cresswell and Dixon, "Introduction", p. 5.
40. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
41. Fenner, "Traversing", p. 37.
42. Yosefa Loshitzky, *Screening Strangers: Migration and Diaspora in Contemporary European Cinema*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2010.
43. We thank Maria Zinfert for pointing this out.

ABSTRACTS

This article explores the shifting mobilities that structure the portrayal of a Turkish refugee family's attempt to reach Switzerland illegally through various means of transportation in Xavier Koller's multilingual Swiss-Turkish film *Reise der Hoffnung (Journey of Hope)*, 1990). It traces how the film outlines a trajectory from hypermobile possibilities to an increasing restriction of mobility both on the level of the story and on the level of cinematic form. Combining recent perspectives on the politics of (im)mobility (see Cresswell 2006) with an attention to the spatial and mobile poetics of cinema (Cresswell and Dixon 2002, Naficy 2002), we show that the film critically engages with the role of geography (notably mountains) in Swiss political and national identity discourses. Ultimately, however, we argue that the film not only contributes to (still ongoing) political discussions about Switzerland's problematic position in relation to European migration policies (Fenner 2003, Laws 2011), but also opens up broader questions about the narrative and aesthetic dimensions of cultural imaginaries pertaining to the entanglement of migration and (im)mobility.

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