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Abstract

Over the last century, development projects implying the construction of great infrastructures have condemned places and disintegrated communities worldwide. Commonly threatened by water dams, highways, airports, mining or urban renewal; these places are simply wiped off the map as they disappear under water or concrete.

My doctoral research in Scenography interrogates how communities affected by development cope with the loss of place throughout the different stages of displacement and resettlement. It aims to investigate the emergence of creative processes together with the awakening of a political consciousness as the communities witness the wounding of their landscape, protest for their rights, recall their homes, and bear with the new.

In the last three years, I have traveled to four places affected by development in France and Portugal. These places were chosen to meet different stages of development and the schedule was organized to match celebrations, meetings or events that would bring the affected community together.

The Dordogne Valley, Vilarinho da Furna, Luz and Manchester are today linked to each other as an ethnographic terrain where I have met affected communities, attended celebrations and collected personal stories.

This paper intends to expand my ethnographic terrain into an artistic experiment. I propose to manipulate and re-arrange selected stories from lost places into a short text that will hopefully give us a sense of mapping the intangibilities of place.

Wounded Landscapes: Mapping the intangibilities of place

The construction of roads, ports, airports, canals, water dams and other sorts of large infrastructural projects are the most accountable for the displacement of entire communities. Until the first anthropologists' reports on development forced migration started to make a difference in the late 1980's, the enthusiasm for progress was enough to cover up large numbers of the displaced. In fact, to this day there are no accurate numbers of the worldwide displaced by development. In the year 2000, the world commission on dams evaluated that 40 to 80 million people had been displaced only by the construction of water dams in the second half of the 20th century (WCD, 2000, p.16). In a public declaration in 2005, the anthropologist and World Bank consultant Michael Cernea rectified that development projects were more likely to displace fifteen million people a year. Although my research is not based on quantitative methods, I think that numbers are important to get a sense of the field research magnitude.

As a scenographer, I became interested in the narratives of development and displacement in 1998 when I traveled to the region of Alentejo Portugal to participate in a four-day canoe expedition down the Guadiana River. As an inexperienced paddler and quite unadventurous person, I accepted my friend's invitation also as an opportunity to prove them and myself I could do it. The daily program was to canoe ten kilometers down the Guadiana River, stop for a short picnic on the shore at lunchtime and sleep in the surrounding villages at night. Only on the first day did I realize that the expedition was meant to reveal a landscape of regional patrimony that would be submerged in 2002 due to the construction of the Alqueva Dam. That same evening we visited the village of Luz condemned to disappear under the waters of the reservoir. The effect on me was immediate. The awareness of being there at that moment became very dense. The old men sitting on the bench in front of me, the children running after each other in the small playground at the edge of the square, the women chatting on the right sidewalk, the sound of echoing voices coming out of the café on my left... all this became part of a narrative that was about to be interrupted. Since that day, the idea of a disappearing place haunted me. Thirteen years later, I initiated my doctorate investigation on this topic.

The research began with a simple assumption and evolved into questions and considerations related to my field research in scenography and performance. Human beings are intrinsically connected to places. What happens when place is taken away from its people? How do people react, or act? How does a place disappear? How does that actually happen? Observing the effects of the transforming landscape and studying how the affected persons express the loss

of place through performative practices became the point of departure for my research, and traveling to affected sites became essential.

The sites I have been investigating were chosen for different reasons: They were geographically accessible, culturally familiar since I consider both France and Portugal as home, they responded to a coherent chronology of events from long-term to current processes of displacement and resettlement where I was able to meet with living witnesses. They all had a special event dedicated to the defense and/or to the memory of place. Most importantly, in each case they had very different modes of expressing the displacement and resettlement process. I will now introduce you to each site.

The Dordogne Valley is situated in the very center of France between the departments of Cantal, Auvergne and Limousin. It was submerged consequently by a series of water dams, four of which were responsible for the displacement and relocation of many villages, farms and households between 1945 and 1957. At that time, there was not really a resettlement policy apart from a financial compensation from the national electric company. For this reason, the various communities were dispersed and their social tissue broken. Most of the dwellers have suffered from isolation and the traumatic loss of their territory has often been responsible for long-term illnesses or depression. A few years ago, anthropologist and World Bank consultant for development Armelle Faure initiated the long and arduous work to collect all the memories from the living witnesses of the Dordogne valley. Part of this work concerning the dam of Bort les Orgues has been published in 2012.¹ While the rest of the witnesses are still being interviewed I spent five days with Armelle Faure in May 2013 traveling on her terrain and meeting with some of her most charismatic witnesses. Because of technical emptying operations of the dam, the Dordogne Valley reappears approximately every ten to fifteen years, giving former inhabitants an opportunity to set foot again on their land. While Michèle Gatiniolle has been photographing the landscape changes over the years, Ginette Aubert still collects small pieces of debris that she integrates in her art pieces, and others have re-planted their gardens.

¹ Faure, A. (ed.) (2012). *Bort les Orgues. Les Mots sous le Lac*. Privat



1. Michèle Gatiniolle's Album.

On top, we see a postcard picture of the Port-Dieu Railway station before the submersion, on the bottom we see Michèle's photograph taken from the same angle in 1995 during an emptying of the reservoir. Source: Carolina E. Santo. April 2014.



2. *Ginette Aubert.*

One of Ginette Aubert's art piece collages with debris from the site of her grandparents' house. Source: Carolina E. Santo. April 2014.

The village of Vilarinho da Furna is situated in the North of Portugal. With approximately sixty households, the village was submerged undestroyed for the completion of a dam in 1972 during the fascist Salazar Regime. At that time, in that context, there was no resettlement

policy, the financial compensation was very poor and the inhabitants were dispersed in a radius of fifty kilometers. Even though and due to a strong communitarian tradition of shared property and task division, the community of Vilarinho remained very united through an active associative network led by former inhabitant Manuel Antunes who is today professor of Anthropology at the Lusíada University in Lisbon. The village of Vilarinho da Furna also resurfaces when the waters of the reservoir are low. The association often organizes gatherings at the picnic spot they have purposely oriented towards the village. When the water level is high, some divers also like to explore the underwater village.



3. *Vilarinho da Furna.*

View of the remains of Vilarinho da Furna from the picnic spot. Source: Carolina E. Santo. December 2012.

The village of Luz was situated in the region of Alentejo. It had approximately 250 households before its submersion due to the construction of the Alqueva dam in 2002. The case of Luz is still vivid to all Portuguese nationals and to many researchers who studied the process of displacement and relocation. Luz was meant to be an example of a how a successful resettlement should be done. Upon previous consultation with the affected community, the old village was destroyed and a new village was entirely rebuilt two kilometers away from the old site in order to maintain the community's social structure. Anthropologist Clara Saraiva reported the resettlement process ². A museum of memory was built in the new village where a program of activities tries to involve the former community in performative processes of memory ³.



4. Luz Museum

Picture taken during the activity program: 'Conversations at the Remembrance table' with a former inhabitant of Luz and children from a local school. Source: Carolina E. Santo. April 2011.

² Saraiva, C. (ed.) (2005) *Luz e Água. Etnografia de um Processo de Mudança*. EDIA

³ *Conversas à Mesa da Memória* is an ongoing research project of the museum where 'The establishment of an open dialogue with the community in the museum being a central aim, these conversations focus mainly on everyday as well as ceremonial practices, on the adjustment to the new village, emotions, the concerns of today, and the encounter of generations. Themes and scripts are established in advance, conversation then being led by the museum professionals. Interveners are approached by the museum, and all active stages are video-recorded.' Luz Museum

Manchester is situated in the outskirts of Charleville Mezière in the North of France. 242 households are now being evacuated before the complete destruction of the buildings due in October 2014 for a plan of urban renewal. As the neighborhood is being gradually deserted, the Manchester Social Center has occupied 2 empty flats on the same floor of a building to be destroyed. The project's title '*Memories of a neighborhood to come*' encapsulates the whole meaning of the project, which aims to celebrate the memory of place along the transformation process. These two apartments are used for cultural activities such as creative writing workshops, film projections or cooking classes. They also serve as exhibition space for artistic works related to the neighborhood in transformation.



5. *Manchester.*

Neighborhood in transformation. Source: Carolina E. Santo. November 2013.

These four examples constitute my research terrain. As a scenographer doing fieldwork, I gradually came to consider myself as an ethno-scenographer looking for clues that are relevant to my discipline. I do not write reports on the social, economic, political or religious organization of a community that is threatened by development. I use ethnographic methods to pursue my investigation on the spatial relations of a community threatened by development and I observe the creative expressions that come out of this particular spatial relation.

As an artist, my interest lies in the multiple narratives of the disappearance of place and how these narratives can map the intangibilities of place. When I travel to sites, meeting people

and collecting data I use tangible instruments like the sound recorder, the camera, the pen and notebook; and I also try to use my artistic sense, or as Kathleen Irwin as called it my ‘third ear’.

The text I am about to read is an artistic experiment where I have edited a collection of excerpts taken from conversations, recordings and from specialized or autobiographical literature. I have deliberately erased all references to the specificity of place in order to let your imagination work.

SOMEWHERE

Where will my house be?

How will my neighborhood be like?

My everyday paths are going to change.

I feel good in my neighborhood. People recognize me; they cry out for me, they call me on the phone...

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Everyone was talking about the project of a dam since before I was born.... But nobody believed it, nobody believed it, nobody.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

We saw this dam being built but we didn’t accept it. We saw the first mine shots and then we started to understand. But I think in life there are things we see and things we don’t want to see. It’s just that simple. We didn’t want to see.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

The architects and engineers came into the houses; they counted and measured everything that could be measured.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

My mother always hated these shed houses: as cold as ice in winter, always damp and most of all too small for a family of six to fit in. It was always said that these so called houses were not meant to last, that they were built to face the 1950’s housing crisis and then the rumour of the destruction ran for over thirty year. Until today apparently... Still, it does feel funny.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

In all the media one could see: “The village will disappear! “

Filmmakers made films about the village, the photographers printed books and made exhibitions, the anthropologists and sociologists inquired on the process of change. Tourists started invading the village especially on the last year before the displacement. During the summer weekends, it was usual to see up to thirty buses driving in and out of the old village everyday.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

My uncle was the vice-president of the association for the expropriated.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

I want a happier and nicer neighbourhood for the young people.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Protest... nobody protested. Everyone said it was not enough money... this and that... but in the end there were no protests. People just bear with things. Everyone was praying but no one was protesting.

Some men, they tried to boycott the construction but they didn't manage. I remember a man there on the fields when the caterpillars appeared, these huge machines. And the man started shouting and swearing.

'I am not leaving! Our lady of the conception will make a miracle not to let the dam come'

That man, I think he is the one who suffered the most. Everyday he went to see the dam.

Everyday, he walked up the cliff to see the village from there and then he saw the water. He didn't last much. He didn't last much since he had to leave. Maybe one year or two.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

He locked himself in his house. He wanted to die in his house and it was his son who could convince him at the last moment. Oh yes, I saw it falling apart, I saw it smashed down and my grand father was still inside. Well not inside... he came out but at the very last moment just before the collapse.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

What do people carry when they leave? The deceased. And also their objects, the tiles from the roof, the windows, the doors, the balconies...

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Pack the objects, prepare everything before the moving company arrives – from the small items on the shelves to the garden plants-; For the very last time, close the door of the old house, open the one from the new house and unpack everything, re-arrange things again. Clean the furniture, make the beds, and bring food for the first meals in the new space. The new village is not a village- it has no soul.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

People left and were dispersed to a radius of 50 km.

At the time of the dismantlement people were worried about their things. I was taking pictures of every possible thing. These are the most beautiful pictures I have ever taken without knowing anything about photography. Never did I take such beautiful photographs again in my life... Because there was so much emotion behind. And I knew that it was the last opportunity to take those shots. If I hadn't done it, the memory would be lost forever. I also did interviews, I archived songs, recorded stories... But the pictures are very beautiful.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

From the top of my building, I can see the construction site spreading around me. I see everything, everything!

SOMEWHERE ELSE

And here, we see mom watching... The bulldozer arrives and she watches the family barn fall apart.

The mill was dynamited. They had to do it three times to smash it down. My father went there, came back. He sat on a chair and started crying. They had to do it three times, he said. Three times!

The submersion was in 1951

I saw the water rise very slowly. As the reservoir was filling up one could see the snakes, rats and bugs coming out. As the terrain was flooding, all the creatures came out of one after the other. It was really impressive to see pieces of wood floating with snails and slugs. When the fields are submerged for the first time, it's really impressive to see the vermin come out. After that, the fish were completely aimless. They arrived from the rivers ... they were lost.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Now I can't seem to orient myself. I look for things that are already under the water... things that I knew so well before.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

This was taken during the flooding. So, this is it, the water arrives to the family house. Can you see the traces of the river starting to get flooded? As I say it starts to sink itself. And this is me. My sister took this photo. I am twelve.

On march the 16th. The house is flooded.

I feel swallowed, sunken...

Submersion 51. First emptying 52. The second emptying was in 63. By then we could drive with cars and motorcycles in the valley again. The third one is in 73 but for a short period only from mars until June for the works and then in 86 there is a big emptying again. It was in 95 when I most worked on it.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

Shortly after the submersion in 71, when the electric company brought down the water level, we had a canoe for the summer holidays and we went there to explore the walls. We were looking for coins and as teenagers we were convinced that we could find some kind of treasure. When the waters were down, people used to go there and explore. My brother and me we would go there to play and catch some fruit on the trees. Because on the first years, the trees still grew a lot of fruit.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

When they emptied the dam here in 2008, I found my landscape again. And something extraordinary happened. We came here. I was with my cousin and we went for a walk on the site. There was no water and it was quite clean so we could walk around and then we saw the tomato plant from my grandparent's garden grow again. 50 years after. Nature never dies. I don't remember exactly when, in 63 maybe, the valley was not so damaged and people started planting their gardens again. They were happy to grow their garden again but at the same time it was painful.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

I like it when we can see the houses. I have been there a few times. And I like going there with my sons. Well, now they have grown. But one of them he wants to go there. He is always in there. Now I don't go so often but when my children were small, I liked going there for them to remember.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

This was during an emptying in 95. I was gone everyday, everyday, everyday. The one from 95 lasted for about 2 months. It takes time for the water level to lower.

As soon as the newspapers announce the end of the emptying, I don't go there anymore. Not anymore. I am unable to go down there. It becomes my flooded valley all over again.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

From that time on people really wanted to dive there to visit the subaquatic Museum.

The diver who goes there for the fish will be disappointed and will not want to return. But we dive there paying attention to granitic forms built by the hands of men, in other words, for ruins.

Our village disappeared and both the association and the museum are ways of keeping this memory alive

We have an immaterial patrimony, which tends to disappear because the ways of seeing the village have completely changed. Well culture also changes. Culture is not static it's dynamic.

SOMEWHERE ELSE

What I cannot understand is that whenever I am on the ruins, all I see is the family house. I might be crazy but I don't see the ruins, I see the house again, I see my cousins again. All that comes back to life. And when you look, it's sad, it's gloomy, it's stones, and it's mud. But me no, no, no...

I can still remember the house. I was 12 but it doesn't matter. More precisely, a raven that belonged to my cousin; I see that raven in its cage behind the house. I don't know why I guess it struck me. There is also this cherry tree that had excellent cherries. Along the railway, there was a pear tree. I see my family orchard again, the barn, this little corner with ducks and geoses, I see my father's sawmill precise location.

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