

ON LEISURE AND LIMBO

ADRIATIC NODES OF TOURISM AND MIGRATION

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary artworks re-envision the Adriatic littoral as a frictional arena where tourism and migration converge, disrupting commercial images of seamless global connectivity. In installations and photographs by Renata Poljak, Ilir Tsouko, and Šejla Kamerić, beaches, hotels, and pools appear as liminal infrastructures shaped by both mobility and stasis, presence and absence, pleasure and struggle, and gendered dynamics. These non-commercial visuals challenge harmonised leisure imagery and design – envisioned for fluid exchanges, short stays, communication, ease, and equal access – by revealing protracted waiting, invisibilities, and exclusions. Viewed through a dis:connective lens, the coastal sites emerge as dynamic nodes of voluntary and forced movements, questioning commodified maritime regions. Artistic and personal perspectives deconstruct dominant spatial conceptions and simplistic globalisation narratives, including binarised stereotypes of tourism and migration. This analysis contributes to a global art history that recognises the overlooked modern Adriatic Mediterranean as a micro-laboratory of complex globalisation processes.

KEYWORDS

Adriatic; Node; Tourism; Migration; Liminality; Infrastructure; Dis:connection; Globalisation; Mediterranean.

I. Introduction

The beach in Renata Poljak's multimedia work *Partenza* (2016) is clearly not a tourist destination [Fig. 1]. While postcards and guide-books have long depicted Croatia's *Zlatni Rat* as a global attraction, the artist deconstructs the image of the Dalmatian destination that promises seamless global exchanges. In promotional images, the beach on Brač is often shown either as an intimate, almost empty seashore¹ [Fig. 2a] or a lively spot for leisure activities, with vibrant colours enhancing the scene [Fig. 2b]. In contrast, Poljak depicts the beach in black and white, creating drama with light and shadow. She focuses on a small part of the beach, using a low perspective that barely hints at the sea. The motionless people depicted from behind and dressed in dark clothing seem to be waiting for someone or something, not relaxing or engaging with each other. Their presence conveys immobility, and a sense of isolation and unease. The idle group on the empty Boler beach represents those who stayed behind during the mass emigration around 1900, when hunger and economic instability drove thousands of Croatians to seek a better life in Argentina and Chile.² By 1939, nearly 15,000 men had emigrated, most never to return.³ Poljak's great-grandfather was among those who found death, not wealth, in South America.⁴ His absence, along with that of many others, left deep gaps in Adriatic communities.

Poljak's work introduces the central theme of this essay: beaches, hotels, and pools along the Adriatic littoral as sites of global dis:connection. The term "dis:connection", coined by Christopher Balme, Burcu Dogramaci, and Roland Wenzlhuemer, underscores that disruptions, gaps, and absences are not exceptions but constitutive of globalisation – highlighting the dynamic interplay of integration, disintegration, and missing links.⁵ Touristically imagined as a world of seamless flows, globalisation in the Adriatic reveals itself through uneven mobilities and their associated ambivalences. Pol-

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Eva Illouz, *Consuming the Romantic Utopia*, Berkeley, CA 1997, 95; Illouz draws attention to the marketing strategies of the tourist industry, which in advertising tends to detach the beach "from the crowded and highly commercialised vacation resorts".

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Renata Poljak (ed.), *Don't Turn Your Back on Me*, Vienna 2017, 11; Mario Bara, Snježana Gregurović, Simona Kuti, Dubravka Mlinarić and Drago Župarić-Iljić, *Croatian Migration History and the Challenges of Migrations Today*, 6 January 2015 (19 December 2024).

3

Bara et al., *Croatian Migration History*; Alaina Claire Feldman, *Islands of Displacement in Renata Poljak's Partenza*, in: Poljak, *Don't Turn Your Back on Me*, 2–5, here 4.

4

Poljak, *Don't Turn Your Back on Me*, 11.

5

Christopher Balme, Burcu Dogramaci, and Roland Wenzlhuemer, Introduction, in: eid. (eds.), *Dis:connectivity and Globalisation. Concepts, Terms, Practices*, Berlin/Munich/Boston 2025, 1–18.

jak's images reflect this tension: between circulation and standstill, presence and absence, activity and passivity.

In her video and photographs, the artist does not directly reference the tourism industry but frames scenes of historical exile within the modern view of beaches as popular holiday destinations that stand for easy global entanglements. By incorporating past migration experiences into a contemporary leisure setting, Poljak challenges the consumerist expectations of mass-tourism hubs as presented in globally circulated postcards, brochures, and websites. Through this multitemporal reading of the beach, she disrupts the one-dimensional imagery of the Adriatic beach. Unlike these adverts, she employs visual media to reveal fraught comings and goings. Rather than highlighting the pristine landscape, fluid movements, smooth exchanges, and harmonious interactions, the artist visualises spaces of simultaneous global connections and disconnections. *Zlatni Rat* appears to be a node where the pathways of tourism and migration intersect,⁶ creating dissonance in the understanding of leisure spaces. Drawing on the biological definition of nodes as points of new growth,⁷ this Adriatic node symbolises the emergence of new spatial and societal meanings, transforming the beach from a simple tourist attraction into a site of global tensions.

The varying visual representations of spaces in tourism show that their meanings are not fixed. They change over time, shaped by the media and the perspectives of creators and consumers within specific social, economic, and political contexts. By incorporating historical separations, absences, waiting, and loss into current tourism imagery, *Partenza* creates ambivalent spaces linked to global circulation. Such non-commercial visuals encourage us to recognise the interconnection between forced and voluntary movements, complicating the understandings of environments and global mobilities alike. Through evoking spaces charged with complexities of connections and disconnections, these visuals offer a more nuanced understanding of globalisation, particularly in relation to tourism and migration.

From an art-historical perspective, I examine contemporary installations, films, and photographs that critically engage with tourism-driven spaces in their encounters with migration. This analysis employs sociological and human geography frameworks to examine tourism as a globalised mobility regime, while migration (and its intersections with tourism) are explored through social anthropology, ethnology, and literary, media, and migration studies. The spatial dimension, including infrastructures, is approached via philosophy, history, anthropology, cultural and social theory, with particular emphasis on concepts such as liminality and relational

⁶
Oxford English Dictionary, s.v., *node, n., sense 9.a.*, June 2024 (20 December 2024). According to the dictionary, a node is a point of intersection or convergence.

⁷
Oxford English Dictionary, s.v., *node, n., sense 7*, June 2024 (20 December 2024).



[\[Fig. 1\]](#)
Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, film (still), 11 minutes, HD © Renata Poljak.



[Fig. 2a, Fig. 2b]
Zlatni Rat beach on the island of Brač, 2023. Photography: Ivo Biočina (top) © Ivo Biočina;
Somto Ugwueze (bottom) © Somto Ugwueze.

space. By applying a dis:connective perspective, I study artistic media, techniques, and styles that stage these sites, including the performances within them, which hint at disruptions of consumerist notions of spaces devoted to mobility, communication, and access. Rather than focusing on spaces conceptualised as built or natural leisure infrastructures ensuring smooth societal or commercial functioning,⁸ the Adriatic nodes of migration and tourism I discuss emerge as liminal infrastructures of physical, mental, and social in-betweens. The threshold – derived from *limen*, the Latin root of “liminality” – refers here not only to physical or metaphorical spaces of transition,⁹ but to spaces marked by disruption and change. The concept, as employed in this analysis, draws on the anthropological model of liminality introduced by Victor Turner (1967; 1969), following Arnold van Gennep (1909).¹⁰ Turner’s notion of a space of ambivalence, social tension, destabilisation, but also creativity and transformation in rites of passage, both individual and collective,¹¹ is expanded here into a global social condition. It encompasses the charged dynamic of connections and disconnections as fundamental to global interactions: comings and goings, movement and immobility, presence and absence, inclusion and exclusion, pleasure and pain. In line with Edward W. Soja’s “Thirdspace” (1996) – grounded in Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad (1974) and Homi Bhabha’s concept of the “Third Space” (1994) and resonating with Doreen Massey’s relational view of space (2005) – I understand the Adriatic nodes of tourism and migration as sites of transition that highlight ambiguity, difference, precarity, and resistance rather than synthesis and seamless integration.¹² As such, they hold emancipatory potential for the reconfiguration of spaces, entire regions and the understandings of worldwide interactions.

Artistic perspectives – grounded in local, personal, corporeal, and emotional sensing – along with the viewers’ embodied and affective engagement with visualised global frictions, are crucial here, showing how art can deconstruct dominant spatial conceptions and challenge oversimplified globalisation narratives, espe-

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Dirk van Laak, Infrastructures, in: *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 20 May 2021 (17 January 2025).

9

Dictionary.com, s.v., *liminality* (15 January 2024).

10

Victor Turner, Betwixt and Between. The Liminal Period in ‘Rites de passage’, in: id. (ed.), *The Forest of Symbols*, New York 1967; id., *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-structure*, Chicago 1969. In *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner expands and deepens the concept of liminality within a broader ritual and social framework; Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Chicago 1960, first published as *Les rites de passage*, Paris 1909.

11

Turner, Betwixt and Between; id., *The Ritual Process*.

12

Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Oxford 1996; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford/Cambridge, MA 1991 (1974); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994; Doreen Massey, *For Space*, London 2005. The following sections explore Lefebvre’s spatial triad in greater detail.

cially around tourism and migration. Dis:connectively recoded, Croatian and Albanian beaches, hotels, and pools contribute to a global art history that recognises the overlooked modern Adriatic Mediterranean as a micro-laboratory of complex globalisation processes.

It is a space where what Roland Robertson has termed “glocalisation” becomes tangible: the co-constitution of the global and the local in specific sites, where universal flows are refracted through local histories, memories, and spatial practices.¹³ Adriatic beaches and hotels act as glocal micro-sites where global tourism imaginaries of seamless flow encounter layered, often concealed histories of migration, absence, and exclusion – shaped by volatile political and economic conditions. The same coastal location may serve at once as a site of emigration and a holiday destination; a retreat for the weary and a shelter for the displaced; a European border open to some, closed to others.

What is unique to the Adriatic is not the presence of globalisation’s tensions, but its spatial compression. The small sea, enclosed and bordered by states formed by divergent political systems, wars, and economic disparities, condenses tourism, forced migration, and economic flight within a compact physical setting. As Caterina Resta writes, building on Predrag Matvejević, the Mediterranean is an “internal sea” shaped by its coasts and their entanglements, unlike the Atlantic which surrounds land.¹⁴ In this way, the Adriatic becomes a Mediterranean microcosm of fraught globalisation manifesting within a small geography yet extending beyond geopolitical borders – where mobilities and their social, spatial, and emotional interstices spill across national and ideological divides.

This study is part of a broader project exploring the entire Adriatic through visual art and design, with particular attention to the long-overlooked so-called eastern coast and its aesthetic practices. Unlike historical or social science perspectives, art offers a situated, sensuous, and emotional lens on a region shaped not just by territorial and political legacies – whether capitalist or socialist – but by shared maritime experience as tied to shifting mobilities. To date, scholarly engagement with the Adriatic has often remained confined within national frameworks, reinforced by linguistic and geopolitical boundaries that discourage cross-border perspectives. This project instead approaches the Adriatic across spatial divides, acknowledging the entangled movements and imaginaries that extend throughout its shores. As a region shaped transnationally by ambivalent globalisation processes, the Adriatic may overcome its Cold War-induced split into a European core and its

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Roland Robertson, Glocalization. Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity, in: Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities*, London 1995, 25–44.

¹⁴

Caterina Resta, *Geofilosofia del mediterraneo*, Messina 2012, 1–3; Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterranean. A Cultural Landscape*, trans. Michael Henry Heim, Berkeley, CA 1999.

periphery. It emerges as a dis:connective entity – a holistic region defined by the complex interplay of global mobilities – that challenges stereotypes and binaries opposing a progressive West to a marginalised, “backward” Balkans. This perspective contributes to a non-hegemonic and inclusive art history that moves beyond national paradigms and embraces diverse visual forms.

Ultimately, the Adriatic as a micro-laboratory of globalisation resonates with other coastal regions shaped by maritime tourism. It invites a reframing of the Mediterranean – not as Braudel proposed, as a stable *longue durée* region shaped by enduring structures, but as a space continually transformed by tourism-driven global economies. Change itself becomes the region’s only constant. This perspective offers new insights for Mediterranean studies and beyond.

II. Deconstructing Space Construction

Before turning to specific sites of leisure and migratory dis:connections, I begin by examining how tourism shapes maritime spaces as seemingly smooth realms of global circulation. Building on Peter Eisenman’s architectural interpretation of “deconstruction” as a design strategy that exposes hidden spatial structures and contradictions, I engage with Jacques Derrida’s concept of deconstruction as introduced in *Of Grammatology* (1967) – not as destruction but as a method for uncovering dominant meanings, concepts, and practices.¹⁵

This section approaches tourism-driven spatial design as a visual and material practice that masks its own ideological foundations. Understood as such, deconstruction enables a re-evaluation of spaces, particularly along the Adriatic coast, where commodification under the leisure economy has long dominated both representation and use, concealing other global dynamics such as migration. It opens the possibility of understanding the coast and its infrastructures not merely as sites of seamless connectivity, but as liminal zones where mobilities and standstills, absences and presences, access and exclusion, and unequal power relations intersect – revealing the frictions and asymmetries embedded within seemingly harmonious landscapes.

Returning in *Partenza* to the artistic engagement with the construction of beach space and the exposure of its economic fabrication, it becomes evident that spaces are not determined solely by geological or environmental conditions but are social products.¹⁶

¹⁵

Peter Eisenmann, *Moving Arrows, Eros and Other Errors. An Architecture of Absence*, New York 1986; Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore 1976, first published as *De la grammatologie*, Paris 1967. See chapter 2, *Linguistics and Grammatology*, 27–73.

¹⁶

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

Lefebvre has shown that physical environments are shaped by human activity – by planning, power relations, everyday practices, relationships, and emotions – while also shaping them in return.¹⁷ This includes material interventions and performative acts across spaces such as tourism and migration.¹⁸ Yet not all global mobilities are equally visible: tourism is framed by visual regimes orchestrated by powerful economic interests. Specifically, the tourism industry – as a leading global industry rooted in visual culture – dominates the production of representations that both reflect and shape how coastal spaces are designed, consumed, and perceived. Since the mid-twentieth century, it has defined sun-and-sea destinations as smooth sites of global connectivity.¹⁹ By circulating advertising images of pristine beaches, “authentic” cultures, and beautiful resorts, it has transformed coastal landscapes into spaces of longing, easy consumption, and undisturbed comings and goings.²⁰ This also entails transforming maritime landscapes – materially, visually, and conceptually – into fundamental elements of tourism infrastructures.²¹ As natural attractions and recreational areas, beaches are indispensable components of the physical and organisational structures required for tourism.²² Under the influence of the leisure industry and its “development” of the littoral, the coast becomes what Lefebvre prominently calls a “conceived” or “abstract space” – part of a spatial triad introduced in *The Production of Space* (1974).²³ These are spaces professionally planned, systematically imagined, and shaped by policymakers, developers, and architects.²⁴ In contrast to the “lived” dimensions of space, which I explore in more

¹⁷

Ibid.; Mimi Sheller and John Urry, *Places to Play, Places in Play*, in: eid. (eds.), *Tourism Mobilities. Places to Play, Places in Play*, London/New York 2004, 1–10.

¹⁸

Karlheinz Wöhler, Andreas Pott, and Vera Denzer, *Formen und Konstruktionsweisen von Tourismusräumen*, in: eid. (eds.), *Tourismusräume. Zur soziokulturellen Konstruktion eines globalen Phänomens*, Bielefeld 2010, 11–19, here 15. The authors emphasise the importance of performances as ways to spatialise social practices.

¹⁹

Sibel Bozdoğan, Panayiota Pyla, and Petros Phokaides, Introduction, in: eid. (eds.), *Coastal Architectures and Politics of Tourism. Leisurescapes in the Global Sunbelt*, New York/London 2023, IX–XIII; John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London 1990.

²⁰

Bozdoğan, Pyla, and Phokaides, Introduction, IX–XIII; Krystian Woznicki, *Der Mensch als Tourist*, in: *Telepolis*, 4 December 2005 (26 January 2025).

²¹

Marian Burchardt and Dirk van Laak, *Making Spaces through Infrastructure – Introduction*, in: eid., *Making Spaces through Infrastructure. Visions, Technologies, and Tensions*, Oldenbourg 2023, 1–18, here 7. Van Laak points to spatial development and its recoding through the establishment of infrastructures.

²²

Ibid., 7.

²³

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38–41.

²⁴

Ibid.

detail in subsequent artistic case studies, the conceived littoral reflects dominant ideologies and consumerist logics embedded in spatial planning.²⁵ They ensure the Adriatic is staged and experienced as a region of effortless access, economic exchange, and mass tourist circulation.²⁶ But these images of leisure obscure the complexities of globalisation, often sidelining or omitting less marketable realities such as migration. While tourism is meticulously curated in media representations, migration is depicted, if at all, as a source of instability and unease. Such imagery tends to erase migration or reduce it to anonymous crowds in motion or immobilised figures in coastal border zones – reinforcing disorder in contrast to the smooth, regulated, and desirable spaces of tourism. This contrast reveals how visual regimes differentially frame global mobilities and spatial legitimacy, and how profoundly they shape our perception of coastal areas²⁷ – exposing a biased ambivalence between global connections and disconnections: the seamless tourist destinations and the spaces unsettled by displacement.

Sociologist and tourism researcher John Urry describes this standardised, streamlined, and frictionless view of destinations as the “tourist gaze” – a collective way of seeing shaped by the leisure industry’s pervasive visual presence.²⁸ The beach, in fact, is a tourism construct that features not only in travel marketing but also in everyday advertising for products like tobacco, cars, and fashion.²⁹ Because of this constant exposure, Pau Obrador Pons, Mike Crang, and Penny Travlou warn that we cannot reduce mass tourism to beach tourism or divorce it from everyday life in Northern Europe.³⁰ Karlheinz Wöhler, Andreas Pott, and Vera Denzer confirm this, linking the tourist gaze to the touristification of daily life.³¹ Meanwhile, Adrian Franklin sees tourism as a metaphor for living in a consumer society, and Krystian Woznicki even calls it a

²⁵

Ibid.

²⁶

Burchardt and van Laak, *Making Spaces through Infrastructure*, 7.

²⁷

Wöhler, Pott, and Denzer, *Formen und Konstruktionsweisen*.

²⁸

John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Los Angeles 2011, first published as *The Tourist Gaze. Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, London 1990.

²⁹

Woznicki, *Der Mensch als Tourist*.

³⁰

Pau Obrador Pons, Mike Crang, and Penny Travlou, Introduction. Taking Mediterranean Tourists Seriously, in: eid. (eds.), *Cultures of Mass Tourism. Doing the Mediterranean in the Age of Banal Mobilities*, Farnham 2009, 1–20, here 2.

³¹

Wöhler, Pott, and Denzer, *Formen und Konstruktionsweisen*, 14.

strategic colonisation of reality.³² This aligns closely with Lefebvre's insights in *Critique of Everyday Life* (1948), the foundational work for his later spatial theory.³³ There, Lefebvre argues that everyday life is increasingly colonised by capitalist rhythms – into which the tourist gaze and commodified leisure clearly fall. These reflections expose the one-sidedness of tourism's ideological promise of smoothness, freedom, and ease, which masks deeper contradictions such as forced or restricted mobilities, the state-regulated (in)visibilities or denied social participations of migrants in the same coastal spaces.

The power of the tourist gaze lies not only in it being an economically imposed and learned collective perspective on uniformly perceived spaces of connection, but also in its deeply internalised nature. Operating unconsciously, it often goes unnoticed, leaving us largely unaware of how tourism commodifies our surroundings and shapes our views of smooth entanglements. We have absorbed the idea of infrastructure as described by Dirk van Laak – as systems that enable effortless access, communication, and mobility – rendering beaches and resorts integral to the fabric of everyday life.³⁴ Staged as leisure fantasies of global attraction – promising the connection of remote regions, cultural exchange, job creation, and prosperity – Adriatic sites appear as “Leitungswege” or conduits of a fluid globalisation.³⁵ Almost instinctively, we come to perceive these beaches, hotels, and amenities not as constructed or contested spaces, but as self-evident sites of smooth circulation.

Sibel Bozdoğan, Panayiota Pyla, and Petros Phokaidēs note that the standardised sun-and-sea imagery promoted by the leisure industry is fragile and incomplete.³⁶ Post-war mass travel generated visions of harmonious global connections, overshadowing the less fluid mobilities that preceded or accompanied the creation of consumer-oriented beaches.³⁷ Recognising Adriatic holiday sites as formed by both connections and disconnections underscores the interwoven nature of migration and tourism. The social sciences have emphasised this necessity. John Urry and Mimi Sheller describe global spaces as “criss-crossed by various mobilities and

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Adrian Franklin, *Tourism. An Introduction*, London 2003, 5; Woznicki, *Der Mensch als Tourist*.

³³

Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, vol. 1: *Introduction*, trans. John Moore, London 1991 (1947).

³⁴

Van Laak, *Infrastructures*.

³⁵

Bozdoğan, Pyla, and Phokaidēs, *Introduction*, IX–XIII; Van Laak, *Infrastructures*.

³⁶

Bozdoğan, Pyla, and Phokaidēs, *Introduction*, IX.

³⁷

Ibid., IX–XIII.

performances”, continuously remade by tourists and migrants.³⁸ Therefore, Adriatic tourism and migration nodes are perpetually “on the move”,³⁹ shifting their meanings and values as the dynamics of these diverse mobilities intersect. Researchers emphasise not only how space is (trans)formed by these intersections, but also how they shape one another, stressing the need to re-evaluate migration and tourism mobilities themselves.⁴⁰ In art history, Alexandra Karentzos, Alma-Elisa Kittner, and Julia Reuter’s *Topologies of Travel. Tourism – Imagination – Migration* (2010) offers valuable insights into how tourism and migration intersect in artistic spatial productions.⁴¹ Although it does not address liminal spaces between global connections and disconnections, it provides groundwork for exploring the complex interplay of leisure and flight in the Adriatic.

By visually relating migration and tourism, Poljak reveals the instable nature of Adriatic leisure sites, offering a more nuanced view than the productivist bias of economic planning. She subverts the tourist gaze – the consumerist mass perception of balanced global connections – by focusing on individual fates in a Dalmatian community affected by migration, rather than the usual collective beach scene. This subjective approach challenges internalised, habitual interpretations of spaces shaped by unhindered movements. Rather than passively consuming commodified tourism, the artist exposes hidden layers, contrasting expected tourist arrivals and their associated social stabilities with migratory departures, divisions, absences, and immobilities. Poljak opens a view onto a contested “physical” or “perceived space”, where contemporary and past spatial practices intersect – the material routines and corporeal engagements within spaces, in Lefebvre’s sense.⁴² The expected flows of tourism, marked by bodies that are usually mobile, recreational, and carefree, are disrupted by the static, emotional, and uncertain presence of Poljak’s immobile group. In doing so, the artist questions the dominant uses of the beach and highlights its “lived” or “representational” character, with spaces shaped by personal experiences, memories, and feelings.⁴³ She shows that migrants and locals inhabit and engage with the coast differently, their physical and affective experiences contrasting with the tour-

³⁸

Mimi Sheller and John Urry, Prologue, in: eid., *Tourism Mobilities*, [s.p.]; eid., *Places to Play, Places in Play*, 1.

³⁹

Eid., *Places to Play, Places in Play*, 1.

⁴⁰

Ibid.

⁴¹

Alexandra Karentzos, Alma-Elisa Kittner, and Julia Reuter (eds.), *Topologies of Travel. Tourism – Imagination – Migration*, Trier 2010.

⁴²

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 38–41.

⁴³

Ibid.

ist's idealised gaze. The beach emerges as a liminal zone, haunted alike by economic forces and personal loss.

Art thus exposes the complex globalisation processes underlying the pristine surfaces of tourist destinations. By deconstructing the tourist gaze and the spatial logic it produces, it advocates a critical unlearning of the assumptions that render these sites flawless. Instead of the social, imposed, learned, consumerist, standardised, and unconscious way of seeing, a dis:connective perspective reframes the Adriatic maritime locations as spatial condensations of a globalisation marked by frictions.

In the following, I examine Adriatic beaches, hotels, and pools in visual artworks whose scenes, motifs, and techniques reveal complex globalisation processes that transcend geopolitical borders and systems. I will shed light on the physical, mental, and social in-betweens among countries, memories, and future prospects, along with feelings of lightness and loss, and the interplay of visibility, invisibility, inclusion, and exclusion.

III. The Beach. On Comings and Goings

The tension between the dynamics of attraction and flight at *Zlatni Rat* can be thought of in relation to its natural liminality. The beach is described as “an indeterminate, ambiguous zone between earth and water, raked by sun and blasted by wind”,⁴⁴ constantly claimed and reclaimed by tides and waves. The sea's movements echo the human arrivals and departures that have taken place in the same setting throughout history. Poised between conflicting elements and human mobilities, it is considered “the ‘archetypal liminal landscape’”.⁴⁵

Partenza alludes to the beach's liminal properties as an unstable margin between land and sea, and human comings and goings. In the film, instead of music, we hear only the rhythmic sound of waves washing over the gravel, constantly setting it in motion. *Partenza* uses images and sounds to draw a sensory connection between the oscillating beach and the alternating movements of people, both past and present. Rob Shields highlights that not only tourists arrive as travellers to the seashore, but historically, in-shore fisherman and other locals also departed from beach landings.⁴⁶ Tom

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A. Martin, Beach, in: Stephen Coates and Alex Stetter (eds.), *Impossible Worlds*, Boston 2000; [Anonymous], *beach*, 18 February 2018 (16 January 2025).

⁴⁵

[Anonymous], beach; Bjørn Thomassen, Revisiting Liminality. The Danger of Empty Spaces, in: Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (eds.), *Liminal Landscapes. Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between*, London 2012, 21–35, here 21; see also Robert Preston-Whyte, The Beach as a Liminal Space, in: Alan A. Lew, C. Michael Hall, and Allan M. Williams (eds.), *A Companion to Tourism*, Oxford 2005, 349–359.

⁴⁶

Rob Shields, Surfing. Global Space or Dwelling in the Waves?, in: Sheller and Urry, *Tourism Mobilities*, 44–51, here 45.

Holert and Mark Terkessidis link twentieth- and twenty-first-century mobilities to modernity's push-and-pull mechanisms. Tourists seek holiday paradises like *Zlatni Rat* for freedom or an "anti-structure", escaping industrial society's constraints and impositions.⁴⁷ By contrast, Poljak's great-grandfather left the same beach nearly a century ago in search of economic and political security – mirroring those who leave Europe's Mediterranean margins today for its continental West. While one group is drawn to the Adriatic by the promise of leisure, play, and freedom, others depart the same setting in pursuit of stability and predictable modern structures.

For viewers, this scene foregrounds the complex interplay of past and present global mobilities. The shifting beach, shaped by the sea's movements,⁴⁸ underscores how a natural tourism infrastructure can embody ever-changing meanings and values. As a "host to various forms of [...] human mobilities",⁴⁹ the artistically reevaluated beach becomes a transient space between comings and goings. *Zlatni Rat* thus emerges as a hotspot of instable globalisation processes, shaped by connections and disconnections likewise.

In the following sections, I explore the beach as a site of overlapping global movements, focusing on the fraught dynamics of comings and goings. Visual representations highlight (im)mobilities, presences and absences, and gender-related disruptions, revealing both harmony and disturbance in spaces shaped by global entanglements.

III.1 (Im)mobility

The immobile people on *Zlatni Rat* do not appear to be absorbed in nature or in each other [see Fig. 1].⁵⁰ Their stillness conveys a sense of remoteness and loneliness. The Dalmatian title *Partenza*, borrowed from Italian, denotes "departure" as a movement from the place one is.⁵¹ Yet the rigidly standing figures on Bol's beach suggest that leaving the Adriatic coast is inseparable from moments of stasis. This immobile group, dressed in dark clothing on a beach known for leisure and socialising, creates a palpable tension – something feels off. As van Laak notes, infrastructures only become visible when habitual expectations of unhindered connections are distur-

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Tom Holert and Mark Terkessidis, *Fliehkraft. Gesellschaft in Bewegung – von Migranten und Touristen*, Cologne 2006, 242–243.

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[Anonymous], beach.

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Shields, *Surfing*, 45.

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Illouz, *Consuming*, 137–145.

⁵¹

Collins Dictionaries, s.v., *partenza*, f., 2025 (17 January 2025).

bed.⁵² While he defines infrastructure as “the stable or immobile elements that are necessary to enable fluidity, movement, and communication”,⁵³ Poljak depicts a rupture in the modern world’s circular imperative. Instead of relaxing, surfboarding, strolling, fishing, or sunbathing tourists, she presents frozen figures stayed behind exile movements and caught up in a state of persistent expectation for those who are gone. Placing them in what today is a tourist setting evokes unease. Their rigid, column-like stance and turned backs defy the consumerist imagery of holidays, which thrives on allure and the fluidity of action.

Poljak questions the ingrained perception that modern societies, shaped by global economies, rely on unhindered mobility.⁵⁴ She disrupts the fluid concept of globalisation mainly built on the simplistic notion of “rapid flows of travellers, migrants, and tourists physically moving from place to place, from time to time”⁵⁵ underlying the ideal of smooth and democratic global movements that emerged from the 1990s mobility turn. The turn romanticised travel as a mobility opportunity for all, with the tourist or even the migrant as a postmodern nomad becoming its metaphor. Focusing on the stasis of the remaining vulnerable population – women, children, and elderly islanders – and their day-to-day use of the beach built on the experience of exile and displacement, she draws a space marked by deeper ambivalences that challenges the internalised image of uninterrupted movements for all. The Dalmatian beach emerges as a dissonant space of both forced and voluntary mobility, shaped by the interplay between global circulation and local standstill. By doing so, *Partenza* also weakens dominant media stereotypes of migration as persistent, threatening refugee flows. Liquid metaphors like “flood”, “wave”, and “tsunami” – which imply constant mobility, as well as magnitude and danger – become obsolete.⁵⁶

III.2 Presences and Absences

The sea’s movements, alternately exposing and concealing the land, suggest another form of liminality that mirrors the presences and absences inherent in the comings and goings of tourists and migrants in the Adriatic. This is particularly evident in one of the

⁵²

Van Laak, Infrastructures.

⁵³

Ibid.

⁵⁴

Ibid.

⁵⁵

Sheller and Urry, Places to Play, Places in Play, 3. Refers to the following paragraph.

⁵⁶

Burcu Dogramaci, Bilder der Migration – Migration der Bilder?, in: *kritische berichte. Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaft* 50/2, 2022, 37–47.

cutout collages featured in the installation *Partenza*, where the number of people on the beach is drastically reduced [Fig. 3]. The few remaining figures give *Zlatni Rat* a spacious quality, emphasising its emptiness.

Seemingly lost in the vast, black-and-white seascape that dominates the image, they personify the absence of entire families and groups. The beach, symbolically “washed free” by the waves of the leaving ships, reveals an emptiness that reflects the exodus of Croatian coastal communities at the turn of the twentieth century. The almost deserted shoreline with a few remaining individuals symbolises the social gaps that migration engenders on a large scale, making it clear that globalisation does not run smoothly, and that the comings and goings of people are accompanied by both connections and separations.

Beyond the usual focus on host societies’ issues, art can redirect migration research towards regions marked by the absence of entire communities due to exile. This often applies to countries on Europe’s so-called border, including the Adriatic coast, which today is more recognised as a holiday destination than as an area affected by migration.

By visualising absence and a lingering sense of farewell and loss, the artist constructs a liminal space in which lived experiences of desolation intersect with the conceived spaces of economic promise, allure, and vibrancy. With this, she highlights distance as a crucial spatial category between the few people on Bol’s beach and the emigrants in South America. This seems to contradict the idea of a “time-space compression” that emerged with the idealisation of physical movement across the globe since the 1990s.⁵⁷ Instead of endorsing Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of a fluid, accelerated “liquid modernity” that heralded the “death of distance”,⁵⁸ and the “elimination of space”, Poljak depicts individuals who sense the division between countries and continents as a tangible obstacle in their attempts to reconnect with loved ones. Her work demonstrates that globalisation processes not only bring people closer together – both physically and virtually through technology and transport⁵⁹ – but also create absences marked by distance. In this way, movement is not about eliminating spaces, but experiencing, forming, and negotiating them as physical entities – underscoring that human mobility and its associated “turn” cannot be understood without material spaces.

⁵⁷

Sheller and Urry, *Places to Play, Places in Play*, 3.

⁵⁸

Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge 2000; Sheller and Urry, *Places to Play, Places in Play*, 3.

⁵⁹

Eid., *Places to Play, Places in Play*, 3.



[Fig. 3]

Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, cutout collage © Renata Poljak.

III.3 Challenging Active and Passive Dimensions of Gendered Movements

In another scene of the stationary, waiting people, we recognise a group of sitting or standing women, gazing at the sea or turning away from it [Fig. 4].⁶⁰ Poljak draws our attention to a beach that reveals a female facet of both migration and tourism – a side that research has often overlooked.⁶¹ Mobility studies traditionally assume male actors – both emigres and consumers⁶² – a view that can be traced back to the dominant idea of the postmodern tourist or migratory nomad as essentially male, which has one-sidedly shaped the mobility turn and the imagination of its travelling actors.⁶³ Typically, women are cast in a passive role within mobility performances, serving as waiting or decorative figures.

Poljak, however, does not depict her female protagonists in line with aesthetic models of commercial tourism brochures or the one-sided media portrayals of migration circulating in the media. Instead of presenting “beach babes” posed lasciviously in skimpy bikinis against an attractive seaside backdrop, or women who surrender themselves to idle waiting, she visualises powerful female protagonists. This is particularly evident in the penultimate film scene, when one woman interrupts the initial waiting on the shore by diving into the sea [Fig. 5]. She opens our view onto a now-colourful underwater world, the flowing garments evoking the many lives lost in contemporary Mediterranean migrations.⁶⁴ With her plunge into another space and time within the same basin, she connects the migration experiences of a Dalmatian micro-locality from the early twentieth century with current migrations from Africa and

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For a more detailed discussion of waiting in art and its relation to dis:connectivity – an aspect of globalisation that I touch on in various sections of this text – see my essay: Hanni Geiger, Waiting, in: Christopher Balme, Burcu Dogramaci, and Roland Wenzlhuemer (eds.), *Dis:connectivity and Globalisation. Concepts, Terms, Practices*, Berlin 2025, 295–304. There, I examine waiting as a central, yet often overlooked dimension of migration. Drawing on case studies by photographers Thana Farooq and Renata Poljak, I analyse how waiting informs aesthetic practices that challenge dominant narratives of migration and globalisation.

⁶¹

Female migration has been on the rise since the 1970s, but it is perceived as economically insignificant compared to male migration and has been underexamined in research. The same applies to the experiences of family members, mostly women, who remained behind in the context of migration, which is only slowly attracting academic interest. Ahsan Ullah, Male Migration and “Left-Behind” Women. Bane or Boon?, in: *Environment and Urbanization ASIA* 8/1, 2017, 1–15.

⁶²

Johanna Rolshoven, Mobilitäten. Für einen Paradigmenwechsel in der Tourismusforschung, in: ead. et al. (eds.), *Mobilitäten!*, Berlin 2014, 11–24, here 14–17.

⁶³

Sheller and Urry, Places to Play, Places in Play, 3; Ramona Lenz, Von der Metaphorisierung der Mobilität zum “Mobility Turn”, in: *mobileculturestudies*, 4 April 2013, cited after Rolshoven, Mobilitäten, 14–17.

⁶⁴

Mladen Lučić, Don’t Turn Your Back on Me, in: Poljak, Don’t Turn Your Back on Me, 50–53, here 52.



[Fig. 4]
Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, film (still), 11 minutes, HD © Renata Poljak.



[\[Fig. 5\]](#)
Renata Poljak, *Partenza*, 2016, film (still), 11 minutes, HD © Renata Poljak.

Asia in the Mediterranean. The piece serves as a homage to the contemporary tragedies of migrants, while simultaneously linking them to Croatia's similar past – and even present – experiences.⁶⁵ By forging this connection, the work becomes a reminder of how refugee stories repeat throughout history.⁶⁶ In doing so, she reveals the enduring patterns of migration that are constitutive of the Mediterranean. As a proactive bearer and transmitter of alternative knowledge, she resists the portrayal of women in literature and art as seductive, sunbathing beauties or as abandoned, passively waiting figures on the seaside.⁶⁷ As an empowered “remained-behind” rather than “left-behind”,⁶⁸ she redefines the historically feminised notion of impotent waiting which Roland Barthes drew attention to⁶⁹ and challenges gender binaries. This involves rethinking the categories and the opposing forces and dependencies between those who leave and those who stay in the context of exile,⁷⁰ as well as between those who act and those who attract in tourism.

Drawing on a local perspective and personal, embodied experience, Poljak replaces rigid conceptions of globalisation with a more nuanced understanding of individual agency in relation to reconfigured spaces and the dissonant mobilities of global movement. This example shows how art can help the world learn from the particular.

IV. The Hotel (Pool). From Fluid Spaces to Frictional Places

Non-commercial images can expose the visual strategies used to stage hotels and pools as fluid, seamless spaces, redefining them as sites of physical, emotional, and social liminality – balancing uniformity and particularity, impermanence and permanence, joy and loss, visibility and invisibility, as well as inclusion and exclusion.

First, I examine the classic infrastructures of tourism in the Albanian Adriatic, which are not merely spaces of standardisation,

⁶⁵

Ibid., 52.

⁶⁶

Ibid.

⁶⁷

The image of waiting women on the shore has been a poignant motif in literature and art since antiquity, often symbolising themes of longing, isolation, and the passage of time. It is also perceived as a feminine archetype, embodying themes of patience, sacrifice, or devotion.

⁶⁸

Ullah argues in favour of renaming women that stayed behind exile movements “remained behinds” instead of “left behinds” to undermine migration narratives of female passivity and dependency. Ullah, *Male Migration*, 4.

⁶⁹

Roland Barthes, *Fragmente einer Sprache der Liebe*, trans. Hans-Horst Henschen, Frankfurt am Main 1984 (1977), 4, 27–28.

⁷⁰

Geneviève Cortes, *Women and Migrations. Those Who Stay*, in: *EchoGéo* 37, 2016, 1–17, here 8–9 (7 July 2025).

abstraction, and mass transition but also function as nodes where tourism and migration intersect, generating spaces of differentiation marked by the traces of waiting individuals' "temporary permanence".

Furthermore, I explore how migrants experience hotels differently from tourists. Rather than on the ease and lightness conveyed in adverts and brochures, I focus on visualised spaces of affective liminality that evoke the agonising state of migratory waiting amidst a harmonious and cheerful leisure setting. I trace the emotional dimensions of physical dis:connections, as previously addressed in *Partenza*, where I highlighted Adriatic nodes of (im)mobilities, absences, and presences, as well as performative resistances to stereotypes surrounding passivity or activity, particularly in relation to gendered roles in migration and tourism.

In two further sub-sections, I discuss hotels in the Adriatic as hotspots of power asymmetries. Visual media serve to reveal social inequalities by either concealing or highlighting certain groups and individuals, alluding to their (in)visibility as well as to their social exclusion or participation. I analyse how the staging of individual refugees and their personal stories in a setting devoted to mass tourism ultimately transforms anonymous spaces of fluid, impersonal movements into a site of friction that points to disturbed global connections.

IV.1 "Mummy, Why Does This Holiday Never End?"⁷¹ Differentiating Spaces of Impermanence

Looking at commercial hotel photos alongside images by visual storyteller Ilir Tsouko,⁷² captured through a dis:connective lens, we easily identify a difference. In his photo series *Life in Limbo* (2021–2022), Tsouko confronts the smooth aesthetics of tourist architecture with spaces marked by waiting migrants [Fig. 6]. Rather than erasing signs of human presence, he accentuates them. In one image, a room in poor daylight does not immediately evoke a hotel: two single beds have been merged into a double bed – evident from the differing headrests and varied mattress heights. The bed linen is crumpled, the pillows still deformed from the previous night, and prayer mats lie on the beds while a black rucksack leans against the right-hand cushion.

Although the same beds appear in one of the resort's website photos, Tsouko's work hardly resembles the digitally reworked

⁷¹

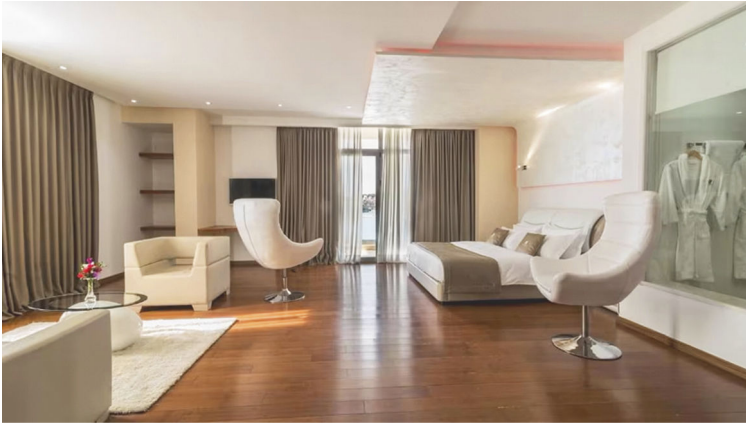
Franziska Tschinderle, Geflüchtete aus Afghanistan. Ein Jahr am Strand, in: *Zeit Online* 29, 2022 (21 January 2025). *Die Zeit* accompanied the refugees in the resort for a year and spoke to numerous Afghans who commented on the unexpectedly long stay in the Rafaelo, sometimes referring to their children's perspectives on a space that over time transformed from a hotel into housing. My translation of the German quote.

⁷²

Adela Demetja, Life in Limbo, Ilir Tsouko, in: *Les Nouveaux Riches*, 10 April 2023 (20 January 2025). Ilir Tsouko is described as a visual storyteller who deals with the human condition in his photography, which transcends the categories of art and documentary photography.



[Fig. 6]
Ilir Tsouko, photography from the series *Life in Limbo*, 2021–2022, Maritim Rafaelo
Resort, Shëngjin, Albania © Ilir Tsouko.



[Fig. 7a, Fig. 7b, Fig. 7c]

Advertising photos of the Maritim Rafaelo Resort on lastminute.com (2025) and hotel-mix.de (2007–2025) (25 February 2025).

hotel images [Fig. 7a, Fig. 7b, Fig. 7c]. Technically, the first striking difference is the brightness and colourfulness of the promotional images compared with Tsouko's subdued palette. Regardless of the category, all presented rooms are very similar: they range from simple to lush, classic to modern, with decorative pictures on the walls and balconies or windows overlooking the sea. They are clearly clean and tidy, with freshly made beds. The same furnishings and staging techniques used in hotels worldwide epitomise the standardisation and abstraction – principles inherent in the capitalist mode of production and the commodification⁷³ of environments, including their infrastructures and spaces. The room designs aim to attract the masses while ensuring a quick turnover of guests, so they must be appealing yet impersonal. Thus, the hotel operates as a connectively conceived infrastructure, “designed for the anonymous population at large”.⁷⁴ This is further demonstrated by the principle of the ever-new: design rejects individual inscriptions on objects and surroundings – despite heavy use, no traces of previous guests should be visible on the ostensibly untouched items.⁷⁵ In light of these design principles, the fleeting and transitional hotel space can hardly ever become “one's ‘own’ place”.⁷⁶ The carefully structured daily routines in hotels reinforce the idea of standardised holiday spaces, designed for a perpetually exchanging crowd. Although hotels market themselves as intimate, temporary “substitute homes”,⁷⁷ they ultimately rely on anonymity, interchangeability, and flux.

Tsouko disturbs the fluid hotel concept [see Fig. 6]. He undermines it as a space that draws in and continually circulates masses by drawing attention to the inconsistent furniture arrangement and the personal inscriptions found in the room. With this, the photographer reveals disruptions in the homogenised, flawless leisure spaces of promotional adverts, suggesting that hotels are meant for short, transitory stays, while his image implies a sense of permanence. This is underscored by the context: Tsouko spent a year photographing Afghan refugees brought to Shëngjin on Albania's

73

Conny Eiberweiser, Zur Phänomenologie eines Hotelbettes, in: Johannes Moser and Daniella Seidl (eds.), *Dinge auf Reisen. Materielle Kultur und Tourismus*, Münster/New York 2009, 211–223, here 213; Michael Edema Leary-Owhin, *Exploring the Production of Urban Space. Differential Space in Three Post-Industrial Cities*, Bristol 2016, 265–310.

74

Van Laak, Infrastructures.

75

Eiberweiser, Zur Phänomenologie eines Hotelbettes, 212. My translation of the German quote.

76

Asta Vonderau, *Geographie sozialer Beziehungen. Ortserfahrungen in der mobilen Welt*, Münster 2003, 35–36, after Eiberweiser, Zur Phänomenologie eines Hotelbettes, 212.

77

Eiberweiser, Zur Phänomenologie eines Hotelbettes, 212–213.

Adriatic coast in August 2021.⁷⁸ They were housed at the Rafaelo – a local manifestation of global holiday industry principles during the rise of tourism in Albania since the 2000s. The five-building, three-pool resort temporarily housed refugees awaiting immigration approval to Canada or the USA.⁷⁹ The hotel had been taken over by Western NGOs, who needed safe shelter for their Afghan colleagues and families.⁸⁰ For almost a year the Rafaelo hosted nearly 2,000 Afghans fleeing the Taliban,⁸¹ intended as a transit centre to be temporary but evolving into an unexpected long-term residence. Originally meant as a brief stopover, the resort was repurposed into an improvised residential complex with a kindergarten replacing the pub, a library in the conference room, and a classroom in the former security office.⁸² The resort transformed into an ambivalent site for refugees: a seemingly eternal vacation space, mimicking permanent housing, yet without the promise of becoming anyone's home.⁸³ Obviously, the only lasting factor in this altered hotel setting is the migrants' enduring state of waiting for evacuation, or, as Cathrine Brun describes it, their "permanent impermanence"⁸⁴.

Depicting the Albanian hotel room as a space where design and function aimed at mass circulation are disrupted, Tsouko creates an Adriatic node of flight and leisure that challenges the idea of smooth globalisation. His photographs resist dominant images of twentieth-century consumerist uniformity and abstract infrastructures designed for short stays.⁸⁵ Instead, they foreground personal presence and particularities that suggest a fragile stability, often suppressed by homogenous, profit-oriented spatial logics. The traces left by refugees who lived there for a year do not vanish but solidify and persist in both the space and its images, challenging the prominent idea of the hotel as a purely transient "non-place" in

⁷⁸

Abigail Hauslohner, The Wrong Plane Out of Afghanistan, in: *The Washington Post*, 21 August 2022 (20 January 2025).

⁷⁹

Ibid.

⁸⁰

Amanda Coakley, The Albanian Tourist Town That Welcomed Afghan Refugees, in: *Aljazeera* 21 December 2021 (20 January 2025).

⁸¹

Ibid.

⁸²

Tschinderle, Geflüchtete aus Afghanistan.

⁸³

Ibid. In conversation with the reporter, one of the evacuees emphasises: "A hotel can never be a home." My translation of the German quote.

⁸⁴

Cathrine Brun, Active Waiting and Changing Hopes. Toward a Time Perspective on Protracted Displacement, in: *Social Analysis* 59/1, 2015, 19–37, here 19.

⁸⁵

Leary-Owhin, Exploring the Production of Urban Space, 265–310.

Marc Augé's sense – one that lacks the conditions for dwellings or connection.⁸⁶

Tsouko's hotel environments are not defined by functionality, circulation, or anonymity, but by individual physical presence and emotional inscription.⁸⁷ Personal belongings and visible signs of use mark the space. These settings carry memories, dreams, and subjective meanings, suggesting a sense of duration – a temporary yet grounded inhabitation. By foregrounding personal traces against market-driven abstraction, Tsouko not only uncovers lived spaces but accentuates their layered, heterogeneous nature shaped by overlapping logics of individually experienced migration and mass tourism – an aspect already present in Poljak's work but here more explicitly expressed. Drawing on the anatomical concept of a "node", which refers to the growth of new stems in botany, the Adriatic hotel appears as "differentiated tissue"⁸⁸ – an unconventional formation that intensifies the disruption of the uniform, fluid system from which it emerged. Perceived as such, this space aligns with Lefebvre's notion of "differential space":⁸⁹ one that deepens the resistance, complication, and redefinition of dominant spatial meanings beyond what lived spaces alone reveal.

Tsouko transforms the rationally planned Albanian resort into a liminal infrastructure, marked by standardisation and singularity, impersonality and intimacy, transience and unexpected permanence. By presenting the Rafaelo as a lived space for migrants within a leisure environment, his images create Adriatic nodes of tourism and migration that counter the dominant visual narratives of globalisation shaped by state-driven coastal development.

IV.2 Spaces of Affective Liminality

Thus far, I have highlighted Adriatic nodes of tourism and migration that create physical tensions between connection and disconnection – arrivals and departures, presences and voids, mobilities and standstills, masculine and feminine aspects of global movement, and impermanence versus permanence rooted in both designed uniformity and individuality. Next, I will examine hotel rooms and pools as spaces of affective liminality between lightness and loss. Unlike commercial images that emphasise an effortless tourist environment, Tsouko's photos expose the discomfort of migratory waiting in a hotel. Set within a classic vacation context, the lim-

⁸⁶

Marc Augé, *Non-places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, London 2008 (Paris 1992).

⁸⁷

Ibid.

⁸⁸

Oxford English Dictionary, s.v., *node*, *n.*, 1989 (9 January 2025).

⁸⁹

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 352–400.

bic state of the evacuees caught between gratitude, hope, longing, uncertainty, and despair becomes strikingly palpable.

In a dim scene with little daylight, we see a figure from behind [Fig. 8]. Seated on a bed still rumpled from sleep, the person gazes at the concrete wall of the hotel façade, denied a view of the sea – unlike the resort’s advertising, which boasts a “panoramic view of the Adriatic”⁹⁰ [see Fig. 7b]. Here, the wall symbolises the material and legal barrier faced by those fleeing. The image suggests a deceptive tranquillity: rather than waiting for the next meal, swim, or dance, this waiting is imposed, out of one’s control, interminable, and fraught with uncertainty. This sharply contrasts with the temporary immobility of hotel tourists, whose holiday duration is fixed and self-determined. Tourists experience their stays through a sense of freedom, safety, and ease – a sentiment echoed in holiday industry images on social media, adverts, and prospectuses that create bright, positive spaces of joy and relaxation.

In a setting driven by the commercial promise of selling “good feelings”, Tsouko portrays migrant waiting as a limbo – an uncertain or undecided state, where what is hoped for may or may not occur.⁹¹ He contrasts the uneasy immobility of those awaiting the *next message* with the relaxed inertia of holidaymakers expecting their *next massage*. By capturing “frozen movements”,⁹² Tsouko reveals the paradox of migrants whose rigid bodies hide an intense emotional vigilance, always alert for updates on their past and future lives.⁹³ Waiting visually becomes an affective threshold that both connects and divides origin and destination, as well as “what was” and “what’s next”.⁹⁴ This evokes the broader social concept of liminality grounded in anthropology – the transitional phase in a rite of passage, where one’s status is suspended between separation and incorporation.⁹⁵ Turner described it as a state of flux, but its “betwixt and between” quality of “belonging neither here nor there” imbues it with emotional tension.⁹⁶ Marked by doubt, ambivalence,

⁹⁰

Albania-hotel.com, *Rafaelo Resort*, 2025 (22 January 2025). My translation of the German quote.

⁹¹

Andreas Bandak and Manpreet K. Janeja, Introduction. Worth the Wait, in: eid. (eds.), *Ethnographies of Waiting. Doubt, Hope and Uncertainty*, London 2018, 1–39, here 16.

⁹²

Holert and Terkessidis, *Fliehkraft*, 247. My translation of the German quote.

⁹³

Ghassan Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism. Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society*, London 2003.

⁹⁴

David Crotty, *Life in a Liminal Space; Or, The Journey Shapes the Destination*, 13 January 2022 (22 January 2025).

⁹⁵

Turner, *Betwixt and Between*, 93–97.

⁹⁶

Ibid.



[Fig. 8]

Ilir Tsouko, photography from the series *Life in Limbo*, 2021–2022, Maritim Rafaelo Resort, Shëngjin, Albania © Ilir Tsouko.

and disorientation,⁹⁷ the migrant's liminality stands in stark contrast to the holidaymaker's certainty of return. Tsouko extends this concept into a global social context: his work disrupts the idealised image of a nonchalant leisure, revealing a deeper affective unrest within global connectivity. The spaces he depicts become ambiguous sites of encounter, where connections may arise but rarely succeed.⁹⁸

The pool images particularly capture the emotional ambivalence of spaces shaped by both tourism and migration. In one of the works, Tsouko presents bright, light-filled photos of Afghan children playing in the basin – scenes typical of everyday tourism [Fig. 9]. The warmth of the sun, the refreshing water, and the care-free moment are palpable. As Tsouko, himself a migrant, observes, even in the pain of flight, children can find beauty.⁹⁹ In these snapshots, a migrant's daily life appears strikingly similar to those of ordinary vacationers – an impression not seen in images featuring adults. In one such adult-focused photograph, Tsouko depicts the pool in the off-season [Fig. 10]. Now empty, the basin becomes a stage for a young, warmly dressed refugee holding his face up to the autumn sun. The cyclical change of seasons, implied by the deserted pool and the bare trees in the background, evokes a sense of personal stagnation in the waiting person.

In the two photos, the pool oscillates between lightness and freedom on the one side, and the burden of being trapped in migration on the other, which is accompanied by an incapacity to act and by despair.¹⁰⁰ The feeling of being stuck is symbolised by the empty basin acting as a prison-like space – the hotel and its sparkling mosaic pool turn into a golden cage¹⁰¹ that provides life's essentials but blocks further progress. Despite being called “luxury refugees”

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Lothar Pikulik, *Warten, Erwartung. Eine Lebensform in End- und Übergangszeiten. An Beispielen aus der Geistesgeschichte, Literatur und Kunst*, Göttingen 1997; Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*.

⁹⁸

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction. An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton, NJ 2005. Tsing describes global space not as a smooth network, but as a field of frictions, misunderstandings, liminal states, and ambiguities.

⁹⁹

From a conversation with Ilir Tsouko in July 2024.

¹⁰⁰

Hage, *Against Paranoid Nationalism*; Anna Wyss, *Stuck in Mobility? Interrupted Journeys of Migrants with Precarious Legal Status in Europe*, in: *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 17/1, 2019, 77–93.

¹⁰¹

Hauslohner, *The Wrong Plane Out of Afghanistan*. The Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama commented on the ambivalent situation of the migrants staying in a “great hotel [...] [that is] still a golden prison for them”. In an interview with *The Washington Post*, the evacuees themselves report that their stay in a hotel resembles a “psychological prison” that creates uncertainty.



[Fig. 9]

Illir Tsouko, photography from the series *Life in Limbo*, 2021–2022, Maritim Rafaelo Resort, Shëngjin, Albania © Illir Tsouko.



[Fig. 10]

Ilir Tsouko, photography from the series *Life in Limbo*, 2021–2022, Maritim Rafaelo Resort, Shëngjin, Albania © Ilir Tsouko.

with little sympathy for their wait in a seaside resort, these people remain migrants whose lives have been disrupted by flight.¹⁰²

The resort's rooms and pools, where ease and heaviness intersect, serve as liminal Adriatic infrastructures within a Mediterranean microcosm shaped by diverse transnational mobilities. As spaces straddling between sensations of leisure and limbo, they challenge the binary between tourism and migration movements. By highlighting the intense emotional productivity experienced during enforced waiting, Tsouko further counters mass-media portrayals of idle border or camp dwellers and undermines the notion of migrants as passive.

IV.3 Hotspots of Power Asymmetries

While tourists enjoy freedom, time control, and independence, the forced, unpredictably long waits faced by migrants in the same spaces create a social imbalance. They endure inequality, dependency, and a sense of being at the mercy of others,¹⁰³ leading to powerlessness. According to Pierre Bourdieu, waiting is an experience of dominance¹⁰⁴ that limits some from fully participating in globalisation processes. The overlapping dynamics of flight and leisure in the resort reveal that the opportunities promised by infrastructure are not equally available.¹⁰⁵ Despite hotels aiming to attract mass tourism – that is, everyone – they do not operate democratically but rather reinforce inequity.

In the following, I analyse the maritime hotel as an Adriatic node of migration and tourism that exposes social tensions. I highlight power asymmetries that control not only bodily performances and feelings but also the visibility and participation of certain groups. Analysed through a dis:connective lens, the hotel emerges as a liminal infrastructure that simultaneously offers prospects and imposes restrictions on a global scale.

IV.3.1 (In)visibility

Power asymmetries manifest in the invisibility of certain resort guests. Unlike tourists, whose presence is actively promoted by national and global economies, migrants are hidden from view, confined to camps, containers, or other temporary structures outside city centres. They become “social zombies” living a ghostly exis-

¹⁰²

Coakley, *The Albanian Tourist Town*.

¹⁰³

Ibid.

¹⁰⁴

Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, trans. Richard Nice, Stanford, CA 2000, 227–229.

¹⁰⁵

Van Laak, *Infrastructures*.

tence on societies' margins.¹⁰⁶ Through legislation, political institutions, and the mass media, refugees are reduced to "non-persons" that do not exist on a social level,¹⁰⁷ unlikely to feature in tourist brochures or on resort homepages.

In a subtle, gentle manner, Ilir Tsouko brings Afghan refugees at the Rafaelo into the spotlight, giving them visibility [see Fig. 8, Fig. 9, Fig. 10]. Representing migrants in a space usually reserved for the privileged already creates tension. Yet Tsouko not only depicts the fleeing protagonists in Shěngjin's central hotel but also highlights their personal waiting experiences [Fig. 11a, Fig. 11b, Fig. 11c]. His close-up shots – capturing a young man's worried face at an empty pool, tear-filled eyes, and hands sifting through shells – sensitively probe the refugees' intimate experiences of waiting in an anonymous setting. While hotels, as conceived by national and global economies, are planned and organised as empty, unrelational non-places,¹⁰⁸ Tsouko infuses these leisure spaces with individual life stories. By fuelling these shallow rooms with "meaning, 'personality' and a connection to a cultural or personal identity", he not only evades homogenised hotel spaces, but also makes them true "places" in an anthropological sense.¹⁰⁹ Rather than representing mere nothingness, Tsouko's frictional places reveal subjectivities, destinies, relationships, and stories.¹¹⁰ His reluctance to depict faceless migrants may stem partly from his own background; as the child of exiled parents, he recalls the reports surrounding the 1991 Albanian diaspora after the collapse of communism [Fig. 12].¹¹¹ The container ship Vlora, packed with people, left a lasting impression as a mass invasion to Italy, with desperate people fleeing isolation and a lack of prospects in their own country.¹¹²

By visualising refugees and their personal stories in a tourist-dominated setting, Tsouko achieves two aims. Firstly, he challenges

¹⁰⁶

Holert and Terkessidis, Fliehkraft, 91–92. My translation of the German quote.

¹⁰⁷

Ibid., 92. See also Alessandro Dal Lago, *Non-persone, L'esclusione dei migranti in una società globale*, Milan 2004.

¹⁰⁸

Holert and Terkessidis, Fliehkraft, 93.

¹⁰⁹

Michel Foucault, *Of Other Spaces. The Affair of the Heterotopia*, Graz 1998 (Paris 1967); Madeline Fink, *Everyday Anthropology: Space vs. Place*, 22 February 2019 (19 July 2025).

¹¹⁰

Lars Wilhelmer, *Besser als nichts. Transit-Orte und Nicht-Orte*, 7 March 2016 (10 January 2025).

¹¹¹

From a conversation with Ilir Tsouko in July 2024.

¹¹²

Tschinderle, Geflüchtete aus Afghanistan; Matthias Bertsch, Als das albanische Flüchtlingsschiff "Vlora" Italien erreichte, in: *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 8 August 2021 (21 January 2025). Nearly 27,000 migrants were initially barred from disembarking and were then taken by the police to a football stadium in Bari, where they were locked in and kept away from the public until most were returned to Albania by ship or plane within a few days.



[Fig. 11a, Fig. 11b, Fig. 11c]

Ilir Tsouko, photography from the series *Life in Limbo*, 2021–2022, Maritim Rafaelo Resort, Shëngjin, Albania © Ilir Tsouko.



[Fig. 12]

Luca Turi, The ship *Vlora* docked to a quay in the port of Bari, with Albanian immigrants, on 8 August 1991, Bari, Italy © Luca Turi.

political tactics that erase refugees by integrating them visually into spaces reserved for a privileged few, enabling them to emerge from their imposed shadows. Secondly, he counteracts media stereotypes of a threatening “undifferentiated mass” of migrants.¹¹³ Commissioned by *The Washington Post* and *Die Zeit*, his photo series attains significant visibility, rivalling commercial images that promote the notion of a dangerous migrant invasion. In this environment of tensions between visibility and invisibility, Tsouko grants refugees a political subjectivity¹¹⁴ – and thus a measure of social influence – that even mass tourists cannot claim in anonymous leisure spaces.

Although Tsouko’s series is commissioned, the visual storyteller works from his own perspective. The magazines, known for their incisive political storytelling, required his personal perspective on the hotel situation, drawing on his thoughtful approach informed by his experience as a migrant. Tsouko rejects the market-driven distancing that comes with commodification of places and people, instead forging an intimate connection with the migrants. While national and global economies take a hierarchical approach, he meets the migrants at eye level, contributing his lived experience. In doing so, he reminds us that infrastructures are inherently liminal systems shaped by practices both “from above” and “from below”, pointing to top-down policies and grassroots practices.¹¹⁵ Societal environments are thus shaped not only by commercial images from hotels, travel agencies, and global corporations, but also by authorial works emerging from within society.

Tsouko draws on his personal experience and his artistic perspective towards the manifold global migrations in the Adriatic to expose social imbalances in vacation settings, showing that globalisation is far from democratic. By visualising migrants and their individual fates in the salesrooms of tourism, he disrupts the myth of infrastructures that promise equity for all. Instead, he reveals the power asymmetries at work and reimagines these spaces as liminal infrastructures offering both opportunities and restrictions, thereby bringing the invisible and underprivileged into view.

IV.3.2 “Place to Stay”. Negotiating In- and Exclusions

Adriatic nodes of unequal power relations involve not just visibility, but the inclusion or exclusion of certain groups. Artist Šejla Kamerić shows that infrastructures like resorts – designed to “connect, network, travel, ‘surf’, open up new horizons” – also isolate segments

¹¹³

Rebecca Rotter, *Waiting in the Asylum Determination Process. Just an Empty Interlude?*, in: *Time & Society* 25/1, 2016, 80–101, here 86.

¹¹⁴

Holert and Terkessidis, *Fliehkraft*, 93. Refers to the political subjectivity of migrants.

¹¹⁵

Van Laak, *Infrastructures*.

of the population, leaving them disconnected [Fig. 13].¹¹⁶ In northern Istria, she transforms Tsouko's call for migrant awareness into a demand for their social participation.

Her work, *Place to Stay* (2020), is a collage of inactive flat signs for various tourist accommodations in different languages and characters, anchored by a glowing neon sign reading "refugees welcome".¹¹⁷ She employs advertising aesthetics of (tourism) economy, featuring striking neon signs with soft, curved and appealing lettering, to allude to migration – thereby provoking the viewer. Created in collaboration with local community initiatives, the piece criticises the EU's restrictive integration policies. Located in the Adriatic, her work reflects on the Mediterranean, which since at least 2015 has become not merely a beach destination but also a geopolitical border.¹¹⁸ While Europe's coasts welcome a limited global population, others are ruled out. Like Poljak's and Tsouko's works, *Place to Stay* presents an Adriatic that is not only a region for global vacationers or a traditional emigration area,¹¹⁹ but also a longstanding refuge. During the 1992–1995 phase of the Yugoslav Wars – a broader conflict that spanned the entire decade – hundreds of thousands sought protection in Istria, where tourist accommodations initially served as a first asylum for many who later settled there permanently. Drawing on the Adriatic's history as a refuge, Kamerić argues that, despite temporal and geographical differences, today's migrations in the Mediterranean share the fundamental trait of forced flight. Refugee "crises", she suggests, cannot be resolved through prohibition and coercion, but only through inclusive practices.

Kamerić exposes the dis:connect in tourism infrastructures that create both opportunities and segregation, and she advocates turning them into spaces for social participation. She does so through artistic means: the neon sign saying "refugees welcome" doesn't invite migrants to linger in a hotel-like limbo, nor does *Place to Stay* imply a final destination that merely promotes passive integration. The hotel does more than serve as a conventional infrastructure that incorporates different groups and harmonises living conditions in a society.¹²⁰ The installation's sequential signs on tourism and migration evoke Lefebvre's idea of space as "being

¹¹⁶

Ibid.

¹¹⁷

Šejla Kamerić, [Homepage. *Place to Stay*](#) (22 January 2025).

¹¹⁸

Samira Yildirim, *De Facto Border. The Division of Cyprus in Contemporary Photography* by Heinrich Völkel, in: *static* 3/2, 2024, 9–17, here 9.

¹¹⁹

Tihomir Milovac, [Place to Stay](#) (22 January 2025). As seen also in Renata Poljaks's installation *Partenza*.

¹²⁰

Van Laak, *Infrastructures*.



[Fig. 13]

Šejla Kamerić, *Place to Stay*, installation, project *Invisible Savičenta – Translating Tradition into Culture* and *Apoteka – Space for Contemporary Art*, August 2020, Savičenta, Croatia.
Photography: Andi Bančić © Šejla Kamerić / Andi Bančić.

close to each other”, implying active societal engagement.¹²¹ Kamberić’s “place to stay” is not only accessible to all but is shaped by all. The artist champions socially effective spaces that do more than expose dominant societal norms which perpetuate imbalanced power structures.¹²² Unlike Foucault’s “other spaces” or “heterotopias”, which merely illustrate or describe how societies organise divisions, Kamberić’s fusion of leisure and flight aligns with Lefebvre’s “counter-space” – a strategy using differential spaces to dynamically challenge prevailing hegemonic structures.¹²³ Rooted in the lived experiences and desires of marginalised groups, her envisioned counter-space between tourism and migration embodies creativity to fight and ultimately break dominant spatial configurations in order to fundamentally reshape society, rather than merely hinting at its discrepancies.¹²⁴

Having fled Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s conflict, Kamberić, like Tsouko, has been affected by migration. This experience informs her politically subversive work, which questions governmental and economic power structures.¹²⁵ In *Place to Stay*, she creates a counter-space that overturns the abstract or conceived realm of market-driven and statal forces, envisioning emancipatory practices for those segregated or oppressed.¹²⁶ The installation fiercely opposes the logic of efficiency, commodification, and control that upholds social hierarchies, instead proposing alternative spaces that prioritise human agency and empower the underprivileged.¹²⁷ With infrastructure designed for both holidaymakers and refugees, Kamberić establishes an Adriatic nexus between global belonging and omission that fosters social transformation.

However, a re-created society of active participation requires rethinking dominant social categories. Distinguishing tourism from migration is challenging.¹²⁸ Consider the early days of Adriatic mass

¹²¹

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹²²

Foucault, *Of Other Spaces*.

¹²³

Ibid.; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹²⁴

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹²⁵

Kamberić, Homepage. *Place to Stay*; Milovac, *Place to Stay*.

¹²⁶

Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

¹²⁷

Ibid.

¹²⁸

Holert and Terkessidis, *Fliehkraft*. The authors describe how people move increasingly in a globalised world – both physically and culturally – and how this movement challenges existing structures. They also examine the relationship between migration and tourism, since both involve mobility, crossing borders, and encountering the “other”. Alongside their differences, they highlight the overlaps, for instance in how these movements redefine identities and spaces.

tourism, which was inseparable from the contributions of regional or global labour migrants, guest workers, and seasonal returnees.¹²⁹ Their human and financial investments were vital in expanding the Mediterranean holiday industry, with their seasonal comings and goings mirroring those of vacationers.¹³⁰ A closer look at Tsouko's work reveals a similar ambiguity: both tourists and Afghan migrants are "paying guests". As former Afghan elites, including politicians, athletes, civil servants, presenters, and journalists, these individuals were brought to Shěngjīn and accommodated at the expense of US NGOs.¹³¹ Economically, they are no less significant than global holidaymakers.

This illustrates that the artistic exposure of liminal infrastructures of power asymmetries, and its demand for a society shaped by active participants, ultimately helps to dissolve hegemonic social categories and binary stereotypes.

V. Conclusion

The non-commercial visuals explored in this article depict Adriatic beaches, hotel rooms, and pools as nodes of both forced and voluntary movements, highlighting their intricate, dynamic relationships. They challenge the predominantly idyllic and harmonised portrayals of tourist infrastructures and their associated spaces, offering a critical perspective on these mediated environments and the social relations they shape.

By examining Adriatic leisure sites through a lens of dis:connection, these artistically negotiated hubs of migration and tourism reveal underlying instabilities. Rather than reinforcing commodified spaces of smooth access, undisturbed communication, freedom, and opportunity, non-commercial visuals introduce liminal infrastructures of global dis:connection. They reframe beaches, hotels, and pools as arenas of physical, emotional, and social unease – spaces caught between arrivals and departures, marked by (im)mobility, absence and presence, and active and passive dynamics of (gendered) global movements. These depictions also engage with the (im)permanence of global travellers' stays within tourism settings, and illuminate sites of both affection and struggle, where joy intertwines with loss and power dynamics expose inequalities. Moreover, the Adriatic littoral emerges in art as a zone of resistance against prevailing structures of social asymmetry. Viewed this way,

¹²⁹

Ibid., 115–119; Ramona Lenz, Migration and Tourism as the Subject Matter of Research and Artistic Projects, in: Karentzos, Kittner, and Reuter, *Topologies of Travel*, 237–249, here 240–241.

¹³⁰

Lenz, *Migration and Tourism*, 240–241.

¹³¹

Tschinderle, *Geflüchtete aus Afghanistan*. The nonprofit organisations covered the refugees' overnight costs in the Rafaelo, which amounted to \$25 per person.

it becomes a site where creative, individual and local forces bring visibility and agency to the unseen and excluded.

Art disrupts simplistic spatial narratives and counters dominant perspectives on globalisation as a force of homogenisation, abstraction, seamless functionality and the incorporation of all. In these maritime spaces, where the tensions between tourism and migration converge, art enhances the awareness of exile and displacement while challenging stereotypes of leisure and flight. Non-commercial visuals prompt us to complicate globalisation and consider global mobilities in their interconnectedness, bridging the often separate or dualistic approaches of migration and tourism research.

By introducing the frictional spaces of the Adriatic – a compact maritime zone where different global movements intersect within condensed, divergent economic and political systems throughout history – art foregrounds a region that has too often been viewed either as ideologically divided or nationally confined. It redirects attention to an overlooked modern Mediterranean: a space shaped by the legacy of mass tourism and the ambivalences brought by sustained migratory movements. It advocates for a global art history that transcends national categories while addressing regional exclusions in Europe. The Adriatic emerges as a microcosm of globalisation's contradictions and prompts a re-examination of the Mediterranean and other maritime regions shaped by tourism and migration. This focus invites a more nuanced understanding and rethinking of global connections, their disruptions, and the spaces where they unfold.

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