

'The clearing within' - migration and its effects on the city

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From its beginnings, migration has been fundamental, central to human experience. Migration, the movement from one place to another, to seek out a better place, so to survive, to thrive, perhaps to take root, defines human history. There have been those who stopped, defining settlements and *heres*, ordering the territories around them. There were those who were obliged to move on, either because of inadequate resources, displacement by conflict or circumstances beyond their control. They went elsewhere and became strangers. There were, too, those who were always on the move, and still do. 'They' found themselves in a place where others were settled, and among these were those who also came from other places. All had, in truth, had come from *elsewheres*. The settlement, the *here*, was a place where one mostly arrived. It was only established once, and derived its myth from that moment that no one experienced or remembered. There was a story of beginning. In one such story, the original occupants of Venice arrived in the lagoon from the mainland, escaping Visigoths, and brought their stones with them as they established an unlikely refuge of islets. And now there were others. For all humankind, there was only one place of beginning, before the time humans either in isolation, groups, tribes, or nations were obliged to move. They migrated across the world with what they had, what they knew and who they were into places that were unknown, and later, to places occupied by others, and there would have to re-enact beginnings in the midst of *somewheres* and others that did not know or accept them, and adapt, and so change themselves and, in those cases where there were others already, change those others as they changed themselves. As they began to become altered selves elsewhere, they changed those elsewheres into new *heres* and could speak of new beginnings.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we have witnessed migration as consequences, often intermingled, of war, famine, politics or persecution. The movements of humanity in our time are regarded as exceptional, yet they are a constant. They are ignored, until their approach becomes imminent, when borders are 'threatened', migrants are treated as invaders, reviled, scorned, and upon arrival, brutalised, caged, humiliated. The settlement, the city and the nation place walls around themselves, isolating their space, interiors, ideas, identities, from the world without, and others. The migrant does not choose to enter this hostile environment with any other motive than finding a place to exist, and perhaps, after time, a space to grow. In past and present, one such space has been the Market and its relatives, which have offered clearings, often sheltered, where the migrant can disappear and mix with those from other places and those of the settlement, then find themselves in a space of appearance, through in the meetings, commerce and intercourse germane to them. The Market, in its many guises, is the pre-eminent accommodating place in the body of the city. Through its welcome, despite all the resistance that the settlement might put up and the abuse it might spit out, the settlement's citizens and culture are gradually changed by the migrant, and so adapt, and move, a movement that can be regarded as the continuous and natural unfolding of the human World.

Reading

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