



## INTRODUCTION: ON THE CONCEPT OF JOURNEYING

Travel invariably involves encounters with the impossible and the unpredictable. Whether these are tourist trips aimed at “consuming” the world (both symbolically and literally) or other types of mobility—driven by the requirements of professional work, curiosity, inner need, or necessity—different forms of journeying share certain traits in common. Business trips, artistic or religious peregrinations, scientific or exploratory expeditions, migrations compelled by economic pressures or fear—all entail leaving home, and—to a greater or lesser extent—involve taking risks, stepping out of one’s comfort zone, and facing potential logistical disasters, even in the world that is, seemingly, meticulously organized.

There is no doubt that mobility is a significant aspect of contemporary experience, the movement itself often overshadowing the very effort of exploring the world, or the risks taken to gain knowledge. It is true that the organized tourism of today aims to satisfy all the needs of the customers and focuses on delivering the promise of multisensory experience; it is also true that various types of business travel give individuals a sense of operating in a world that *can* be controlled—yet, the unexpected may still occur. On the other end of the spectrum of certainty is the refugee mobility—marked by trauma, further aggravated by the anxiety concerning what they leave behind, the fear of the loss of the beloved people and places, the severing of the physical connection with what is familiar, the disconcerting anticipation that the future may prove equally traumatic, and, last but not least, the lack of hope for a return home. The above notwithstanding, the unexpected may also bring relief, offer a sense of peace, and a happy conclusion to one’s escape.

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Travel, perhaps primarily so, involves encounters—meetings with the Stranger, the Other, the Unfamiliar, with which one may become close, but which can also evoke a whole range of emotions, negative and positive alike. These engagements contribute to our multifaceted experiences of intercultural communication: challenging stereotypes, they allow us to deconstruct them. Therefore, traveling creates opportunities to change our perspectives: journeying, we may see ourselves (and our lives) in the mirror of the Other’s existence, often very different from that of our own. Such encounters not infrequently give rise to profound cultural insights. Involving both observation and engagement, travel thus manifests itself as a vast field of self-reflection, potentially promoting the building of cultural competencies that shape future interactions.

Traces of these insights can be found in the literature of different eras, especially in travel diaries and reports, in non-fiction and fiction, but also in visual culture—in works of various generations and genres, ranging from cartography, through drawings in travelers’ sketchbooks, paintings (including panoramas), photographs (documenting acts of conquest, or the cultural diversity of the world), vacation snapshots in private albums and family collections, professional documentaries and amateur videos, YouTube travel vlogs or TikTok reels, to multimedia installations or VR, digitally reproducing the richness of landscapes or specific places. The media may vary, but as long as they allow one to tell a story or, at least, to capture the image of a moment, they are the means by which memories (or their simulations) may come alive. Irrespective of the medium, narratives, images, or recorded sounds become complex signs that allow us to *remember*. Hence, travel cannot be reduced to the merely physical, or merely intellectual experience of mobility; it necessitates, first and foremost, an intensive effort of our cognitive apparatus: the often strenuous perceptual processes involving continuous interpretation of multisensory stimuli and memory work.

Whether literary, visual, or audiovisual—records contain testimonies to the time in which they were created, bearing not only the mark of the author but also of the culture and intellectual environment that had shaped them. As such, they unavoidably carry traces of cultural prejudices, stereotypes, and the dominant discourse of the time. At the same time, narratives and images offer us a “magnifying glass,” allowing a close examination of a selected fragment of the world in a given era; authors representing different generations thus grant scholars a unique entry into a world seen through different eyes, and thereby access to “truths” about those who created the record, but also about the realities distant in space or time, or surprisingly

close. The authors of the texts collected in this issue reconstruct these worlds, offering the *RIAS* readers reflections on the hitherto underappreciated meanings of the travel, the traveler, and the host. The volume opens with three articles presenting new perspectives on journeys and journeying manifest in the works of 21<sup>st</sup>-century fiction and non-fiction.

The “Features” section begins with Wyn Kelley’s article “Gayl Jones and Travel No-Where.” In her writing, Kelly argues, Jones—a contemporary American writer (with distant African roots)—transcends the conventions of classic travel narratives. Her characters seem *radically homeless*: they travel, but usually neither to return home nor to find new homes. This allows Kelly to invoke insights regarding the genre of “migration fiction” (proposed by Rodrigo Lazo), where characters are always on the move but never complete their journeys. According to Kelly, defying traditional genre conventions, Gayl Jones accurately diagnoses the contemporary, unprecedented scale of travel-as-migration, as an endless journey to nowhere. Emphasizing the bleak truth about people as perpetual travelers toward an undefined, unpredictable future, the scholar focuses on the potential of Jones’s speculative fiction in *Palmares* (2021) and in her satirical travel narrative *The Birdcatcher* (2022), indicating how Jones’s work emphasizes the paradoxes of travel and of travel narratives alike.

Another—complementary—perspective is examined by Grażyna Zygadło in “Travelers by Necessity: Ruth Behar on the Way in Search of Roots or Home,” analyzing the autoethnographic narratives of Ruth Behar, raised in three cultures: Jewish (both Ashkenazi and Sephardic), Cuban, and American. Zygadło situates Behar’s self-analyses (including her journey to Cuba in search of roots and of a lost home) within the narrative model proposed by Gloria Anzaldúa, which focuses on the personal life of the individual but simultaneously tells the stories of others—the tribe, class, oppressed group—and emphasizes the autobiographical element through the frequent use of subjective (first-person) narrative. In Behar’s choices, the scholar sees acts of conscious transgression of the traditional Western assumptions of “scientific” ethnography, characterized by the objectivity of the post-Descartian paradigm. Behar describes herself as a “border woman,” listing all the symbolic thresholds she has crossed both in her life and in her ethnographic writing. Grażyna Zygadło interprets Ruth Behar’s “migrations” between places, identities, languages, cultures, yearnings, and illusions, between the university and life, as the state of “nepantla,” as described by Gloria Anzaldúa—the state of being-in-

between, in a space that is always unstable, unpredictable, uncertain, always lacking clear boundaries, and always transitory.

Adding to the observations offered by Kelley and Zygadlo, Elisa Pesce analyzes travel in Maggie Shipstead's novel *The Great Circle* (2022) as a movement in space that also entails a metaphorical dimension of an inner journey of self-discovery—a journey undertaken by two characters: the woman pilot Marian Graves and the Hollywood actress playing Marian, Hadley Baxter. Pesce points out that exploring various meanings of travel, Shipstead questions the fundamental premises of the traditional travel narratives following the patriarchal paradigm—emphasizing the dominance of the male protagonist and the male desire to achieve a set goal. The Italian scholar demonstrates that the novel engages the relation between travel writing and gender, revealing similarities and differences between past and present forms of female discrimination. Pesce's analysis demonstrates that by the end of the novel both Marian and Hadley conclude that complete knowledge cannot be attained, but the pursuit of it remains important: their understanding of the personal and cultural value of travel gradually shifts from the dominant, typically male paradigm of travel as a quest for wholeness or an epic search for some absolute truth to a more female epistemological framework, which remains inclusive, flexible, and open.

Adopting a different methodological position, in her article “Land of Heathens versus the Land of Liberty: Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* and Ubeydullah Efendi's *Travels*” Saniye Bilge Mutluay Çetintaş examines the American writer's 1869 literary travelogue documenting his journey through the Ottoman Empire. The scholar analyzes Twain's portrayal of the traveler (combining naivety and intelligence), the writer's characteristic language (replete with unique humor), and colonial stereotypes about the East and its people, juxtaposing them with the critical perspective of social behavior adopted by Ubeydullah Efendi, an Ottoman politician, who, having journeyed to the United States, created a compelling literary depiction of the West steeped in orientalist discourse. Efendi, endowed with rare observation skills and unmatched intellect, views the United States and the Americans with kindness. However, although he creates a positive image of the young Western country, a closer analysis reveals the presence of subtle critical undertones in Efendi's narrative, which, on the one hand, reflects broad cultural competencies of the Turkish author, and his political sensitivity on the other.

In the article “A.K. Ramanujan's Observations on Various Aspects of the United States of America: Looking Briefly at the Diary Entries,”

Jolly Das analyzes the *Travel Diary, 2 to 27 July 1959, Bombay to New York* (included in the anthology *Journeys: A Poet's Diary*, 2018) written by Indian folklore and language scholar Attipata Krishnaswamy Ramanujan. In her study, the researcher emphasizes the emotions of the traveler, who, leaving his country forever to emigrate to the USA, experiences “a transition from the familiar world (his interior landscape, *akam*) to the unfamiliar country (the world outside his self, *puram*).” The article focuses on the previously unpublished work of Ramanujan’s, revealing the complexity of the traveler’s experiences and shedding light on his original cultural observations prompting self-reflection in the face of the concurrence of a variety of influences.

Addressing an altogether different type of narrative, Daniel Esteban Unigarro’s article “Amazonas de tres viajeros cartógrafos: entre la experiencia y la imaginación geográfica” explores the transformations of European cartographic imagination over the centuries, beginning with the 1542 Spanish expedition along the Amazon (from Quito to the Atlantic) and the Portuguese journeys of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries from the river’s mouth to its source in the Andes. The author uncovers elements of the cultural imagination of the cartographers, combining their projections of the mythical world with the geographical, cultural, and topographical knowledge, and transformed into visual and functional representation of the terrain—the map of the Amazon basin. In Unigarro’s perspective, cartography becomes not only an embodiment of the order of knowledge and power—“the vision machine” of the era—but also a way of narrating the world.

The “Features” section ends with Maxime McKenna’s article “From Superhighway to Hyperreality: The Infrastructure of ‘Astral America,’” which sheds new light on Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the hyperreality culture. The researcher focuses on the technical aspects of traveling, considering in particular “the connections between postmodern theory and the infrastructure of automobility.” He relates Baudrillard’s *America* to the unique circumstances of the time of the oil embargo imposed by OPEC countries, which necessitated the turn toward the possibility of internal fuel production. Analyzing the French philosopher’s insights through such a lens, McKenna argues that the “hyperreal America”—saturated with media images—is a phenomenon directly correlated to the economic crisis and affecting the reorientation of the US economy.

The present issue of the *Review of International American Studies* offers the reader a comprehensive examination of travel as a dynamic interplay between cultural narratives, identity, and the ongoing quest for understanding the self and the world. Even though no single publi-

cation may aspire to completeness, we strongly believe that the insights offered by the scholars whose work we present will prove fruitful in generating further research. With such a goal in mind, concluding our “Introduction,” we wish you an inspiring reading experience.

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*Abstract:* The plethora of existing concepts of journeying, as explored by the authors of articles collected in the present issue of *RIAS*, reveals the multifaceted nature of travel, irreducible to physical mobility alone. Despite their differences, all forms of travel share common elements, including leaving home, facing risks, stepping out of comfort zones, and encountering logistical challenges, which renders journeying a significant component of existential experience. Involving aporetic encounters with the unfamiliar, travels allow for the deconstruction of stereotypes, offering not only opportunities for the revision of ossified perspectives, but also opening space for philosophical self-exploration. Literature and visual culture throughout different eras have captured these insights, from travel diaries and reports to cartographic works, paintings, photographs, and modern digital media such as travel vlogs and virtual reality. These records reflect the multidimensionality of the “truth” of their times, testifying to the material reality of a given time and place, but also revealing cultural prejudices and the particularities of the dominant discourse of the time. The authors of the texts in this volume reconstruct historical worlds, uncovering new aspects of literature and cultural artifacts, and offering fresh perspectives on travel and journeys as depicted in literary and visual narratives of the Americas since the Spanish Conquest until the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century.

*Keywords:* *RIAS*, introduction, travel, journey, travel writing, the Americas, media, narratives, images, identity

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