

Meandering Stories

Exploring my connections with the Danube river.

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Abstract

With foundations in art and geography, Hydrofeminism, and Indigenous mapping, the research explores the journey of me leaving my home and then trying to reconnect, only not sure how. This thesis is all about the water as a connecting force. I am looking at my hometown, the river, and myself.

I wondered if it is a thing and how others are thinking about the subject. There was something about the river, but I had to find out what it was. I observed the river from a distanced bird's-eye view by working with paper, photographs, and maps. I began a journey of exploring, to me, a new and fascinating subject. Looking through the map archive but also mapping the place. As well as questioning what is the role of mapping in the current discussions. Since the connection with the river happened in the past I started to look at the memories I had. Maybe through depicting these events I could find my answer for what are the connections with the Danube. Through the memories, I found the meanings the river holds for me. It is an exercise of shifting the mind.

In the process, I become aware of the problem concerning the western way of mapping because of what they represent. This made me inspired by Indigenous thinking and their way of understanding place. Readings on these theories encouraged me to go on a field trip. Go and explore the place. Be there, touch it, smell it, witness it again and see what will happen next. I traveled, leaving myself open to intuition but at the same time keeping the theory close to myself, capturing the environment through sound recordings, videos, cyanotypes, and photographs. In the end, I realised the river can be one of the modes of connection to the place I come from.

Acknowledgement

The Meandering Stories project exists thanks to the great support of personal tutor Marton Kabai, that trusted me and allowed me to follow the natural flow of my research process, the support of my theory tutor Barbara Neves Alves and as well other tutors that helped to guide me.

Even though this project is highly personal and asks for a lot of self-work, I had people around me that listened to me and guided me with great care. In that case, I would like to thank Robin, Manon, my mother and my friends Mery, Silvia and Kristína.

Introduction

My project started from the work I was doing during the first year of this master's. I came to St. Joost with a calling to dive deeper into the concepts of home and a sense of belonging. Already during my bachelor's, I was trying to find out what relates me to the place I left behind in Slovakia, a connection that I had before was not there anymore. When returning to Bratislava I did not feel at home. After mentioning this subject to others, I found out that was not the only one with this feeling. That inspired me to have conversations with other international students, which evolved into a video essay. In the *Constellation of Home*¹, I attempt to unravel a multitude of interpretations and perspectives by interviewing fellow foreign students. During these sessions, I try to find differences and similarities when talking about concepts like home. What inspired me was the idea that there are certain energies around us that we may normally not pay attention to and what happens when we start to think about the feeling a place is portraying or maybe sending to us. I was asking my interview subjects if they have a certain place that they like to visit because it gives the feeling of home. By doing this I was trying to find a certain connection, an element that can maybe be found anywhere. Something familiar and universal that reminds them of the place they came from.

This thesis is not about these interviews and not about my video essay but the result that came out of this exercise of envisioning. Having these open conversations allowed me to explore and think about my connection that feels universal. This turned out to be a body of water in my hometown along the banks of the Danube where I grew up. Startled by this thought I was asking myself: *what is it about the river that makes me think about it as my home?* Why is this river significant to me? An intuitive adventure into sense and memory began: revisiting my memories involving the Danube, discovering what these connections are and what they meant to me.



¹ *Constellation of Home*. (2021, June 8). [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlwLTZNV96M>



The Danube

I was born near the river but it was not given to me naturally that it holds a special meaning. I had to (re)explore it and (re)learn what the Danube means to me and also which meanings it holds in broader sense of assumptions, theories, and practices. To give an overview for the readers that do not know the river, it is the second-longest river in Europe that springs in the Black Forest, and continues through Central and Eastern Europe into the Black Sea, the river crossing the largest amount of countries in the world. Before the Danube enters Slovakia, from the left side it runs across Germany and enters Austria, whose capital, Vienna is a river town. From the whole distance of 2,850 km, the Danube only travels around 200 km of its total length in Slovakia. Then it continues to Hungary with the capital Budapest on its banks.² I was interested too, how the river inspired other artists in the field. It was only through the readings that I discovered that the Danube has its place in arts and philosophy.³ Watersheds talks about the river as a unifying artery across culturally diverse countries and a motivation for artists and writers (Bozovic et al., 2016)⁴.

Readings about water

In the subject of rivers water is the core element. Water surrounds us, it is essential in our lives as we consume it and we are made of it. It may be seen as ordinary because there is a lot of it and in my opinion, water is viewed as a servant for our good. To think *about* water is to think about it as a resource, something that is there to be used.⁵ Once we start to think *with* the water, we place ourselves at the same level. I propose that once I start to think with the water instead of thinking about water it brings new light to the project. As a way of framing the concept of water in my research, I look into the possibilities of working with water by engaging with readings by Astrida Neimanis and her text on Hydrofeminism,⁶ the concept of thinking with watery places by Cecilia Chen,⁷ and the unique way of relating to the environment by Shawn Wilson in Research is Ceremony.⁸

² Chamberlain, J. P. & United States. Department of State. (1918). The Danube: In Five Parts. U.S. Government Printing Office.

³ The Ister, lecture by Martin Heidegger, The Ister, hymn by Hölderlin, By the Beautiful Blue Danube by Johann Strauss II

⁴ Bozovic, M., Miller, M. D., Arens, K., Baranello, M., Dassanowsky, R., Kujundžić, D., Labov, J., Lemon, R., Lerner, A., Longinović, T., Maxim, J., Nemes, R., Richardson, T., Solibakke, K., Stob, J., & Sussman, H. (2016). *Watersheds: Poetics and Politics of the Danube River (Studies in Russian and Slavic Literatures, Cultures, and History)* (Illustrated ed.). Academic Studies Press.

⁵ Chen, C., MacLeod, J., & Neimanis, A. (2013). Thinking with Water. Amsterdam University Press. Page 276

⁶ Neimanis, A. (2018, October 3). Bodies of Water. Interlalia Magazine. www.interlaliomag.org/interviews/astrida-neimanis/

⁷ Chen, C., MacLeod, J., & Neimanis, A. (2013). Thinking with Water. Amsterdam University Press.

⁸ Wilson, S. (2009). Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods. Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd.



A. Neimanis is an Australian cultural theorist and environmentalist. In her work, she focuses on how water can help us reimagine our relationships with the environment and bring a new perspective on connections to waterbodies.⁹ Her text on Hydrofeminism is a philosophical exploration of becoming bodies of water. Neimanis use the example of water as a conduit of connection, something that we, as humans, can find in common with nature and the environment, which makes us not separate but rather connected with it. Water is a communicator between humans and the environment. She argues we are all bodies of water, because we drink water, gestate it, remove it back to waterways, and shine new light on the notion of water embodiment.¹⁰ To talk about embodiment is to give a form to ideas that are not physical, like feelings, and to be embodied means to be connected.

Introducing the way waters are seen in eyes of Cecilia Chen, she brings attention to situated waters. She argues waters take place and the movements of waters in our lives link us to places and each other. Chen sees water as a conduit of connection too but in a more situated way.¹¹ According to her, we identify with water through experiences, and situating with the water requires being aware of the repeated encounters through which we can locate ourselves to water. It is her that proposes to think with the waters, to understand where we live.

The source for all my readings about the Indigenous research paradigm is a book written by Shawn Wilson, a Canadian professor of Indigenist Methodologies. His book *Research is Ceremony*¹² brings the indigenous view on research processes, a useful tool of bringing voice beneficial to indigenous communities and bringing awareness for non-indigenous researchers on their views on the land and environment. This book is not per se about waters but it is the way the indigenous communities relate to the land that brought inspiration to my project. He argues that the environment is knowledge, making the place where we are situated important. Because knowing the place means we also know ourselves better.

In my practice, I see certain elements of embodied sense with water as is proposed by Neimanis. Her text sparked the first thought of seeing the Danube as potentially something else than an ordinary river. Moreover, thinking with the water that is situated, in my case in my hometown, gives me a constraint on how to view the subject, in a useful way. It made me zoom into the subject and focus on specific places that are connected with my life. The indigenous view of the environment helped me in conducting a field trip and encouraged me to be engaged with the location and the things I was seeing there.

⁹ Astrida Neimanis. (2021). <https://ccgs.ok.ubc.ca>. <https://ccgs.ok.ubc.ca/about/contact/astrida-neimanis/>

¹⁰ Astrida, Neimanis. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water." In *Undutiful Daughters*, New York: 2021, page 96

¹¹ Chen, C., MacLeod, J., & Neimanis, A. (2013). *Thinking with Water*. Amsterdam University Press. Page 274

¹² Wilson, S. (2009). *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Fernwood Publishing Co., Ltd. Page 86

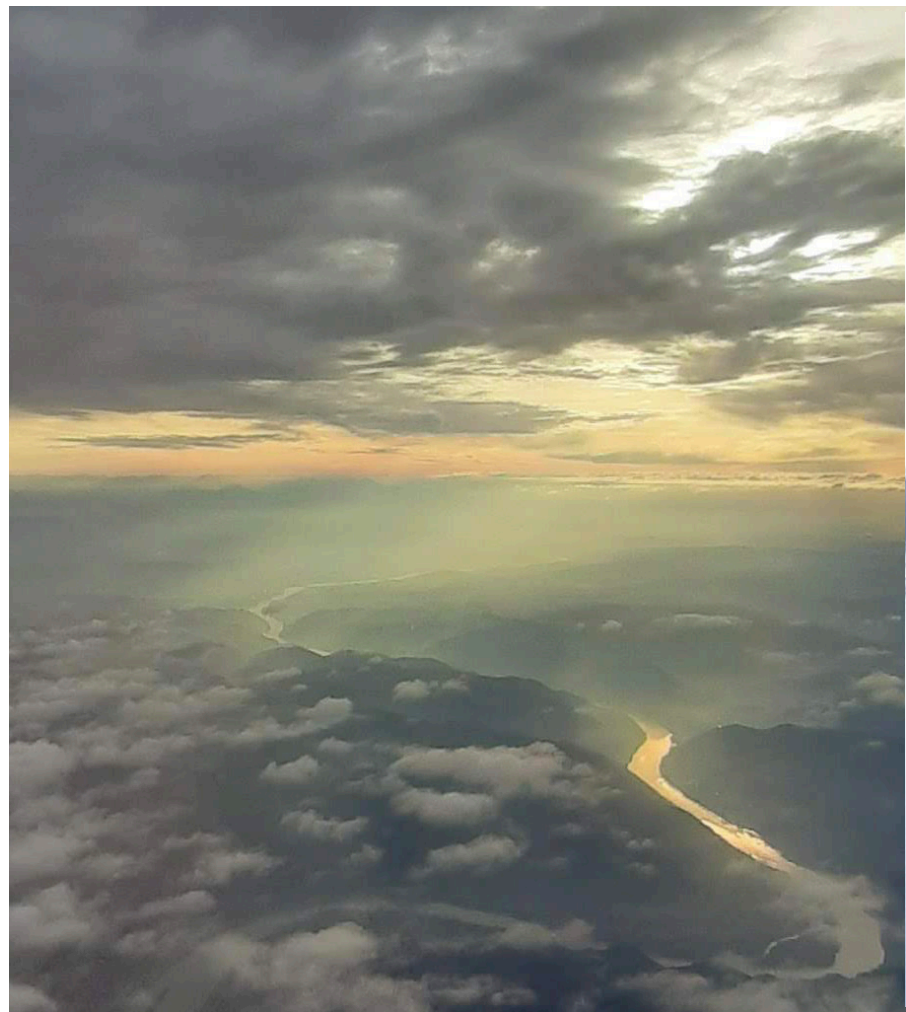
These theories are complex to grasp and throughout my project, I tried to interpret them more understandably and simply. The theory in my practice is visible via assumptions and interpretations. Because of the time limitation, I could not engage deeply with the proposed readings, but use them as an inspiration, which made me produce work.

Knowing that I feel inspired and touched by the Indigenous mapping discourse and research paradigm, it is important to acknowledge that I am not Indigenous and that brings me to a privileged position, that I am speaking from. I am aware, that I can not come any close to the experience of Indigenous people who for centuries were being deprived of their land and culture. The source for all my readings about the indigenous research paradigm was a book written by Shawn Wilson, professor of Indigenist Methodologies. Wilson (2009) describes, that Indigenous communities are more researched by outside groups than owning their research, which makes them excluded from the research process. The term Indigenous is being reclaimed by Indigenous people, therefore when using the term Indigenous research, I do only refer specifically to research done by or for Indigenous people. I am aware of problems by “outside” researchers, which I am too, that even though they claim to be objective they bring their own biases and often create a comparison between the culture of "studied" and "the studier".

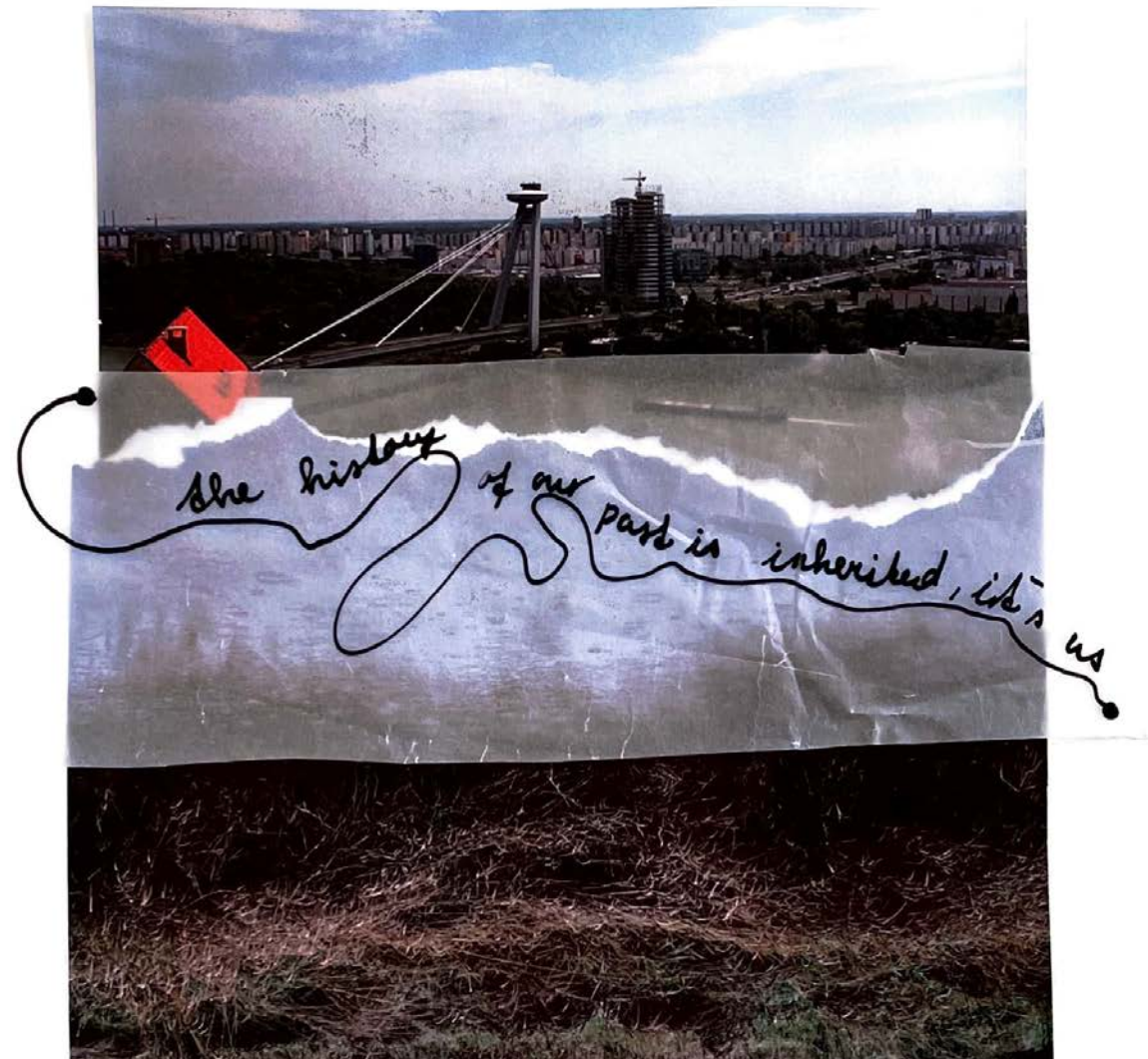
I must say, that I by any means do not intend to compare the Indigenous research paradigm to the western one in a way that would make it look “less” or “worse”. On the contrary, I admire and find a big inspiration in their unique way of relating to nature. S. Wilson states that his study is also important for non-Indigenous people, as it will assist in the understanding of Indigenous issues, cultures, and values.

Brief introduction to practice

How to go about the subject of a river is a challenging process that goes through a series of different exercises. My work is divided into two parts, one is working from a distance and the second is working in a close encounter. This resulted in creating a section about my practice I call the bird's-eye view. In words of Jim Enote¹³, Zuni farmer and director of A:shiwi A:wan Museum, looking down from the top is disorienting, that is not how we look at things. At the beginning of my project, this was the only way available to me, even though the bird's-eye view confuses us because it is not the natural way for humans to view the surroundings. The bird's-eye view, also called aerial view, is typical for maps, which I used during the process but it is also a metaphor for only being able to look at a location from far. The limitation of not being able to be present at the location of the river, because I live in the Netherlands, made me focused on memories and personal interpretations. The second part is based on a close-up encounter with the Danube situated in Bratislava. I describe my experience during a field trip through texts from a diary, photographs, or illustrations. There, I am not limited, but encouraged to explore my relationships with the river in embodied sense of landscape.



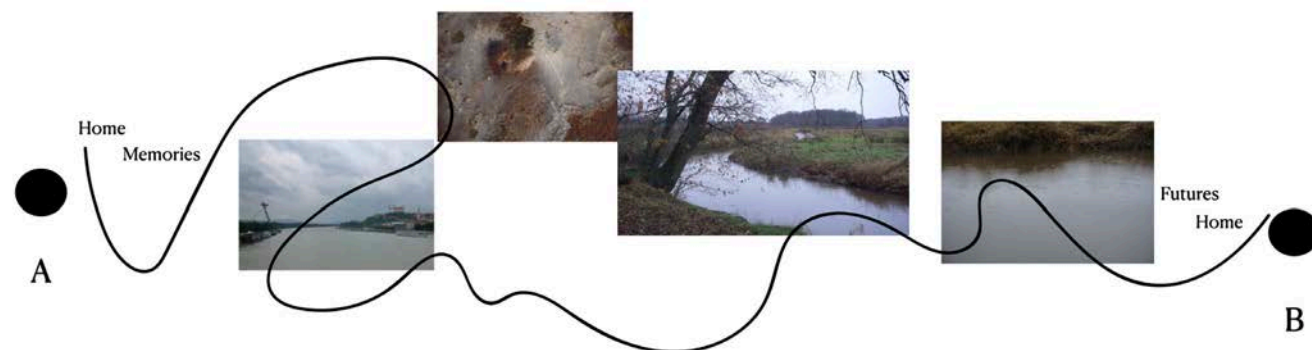
¹³ Counter-mapping. (2021). emergencemagazine.org. <https://emergencemagazine.org/film/counter-mapping/>



Bird's-eye view

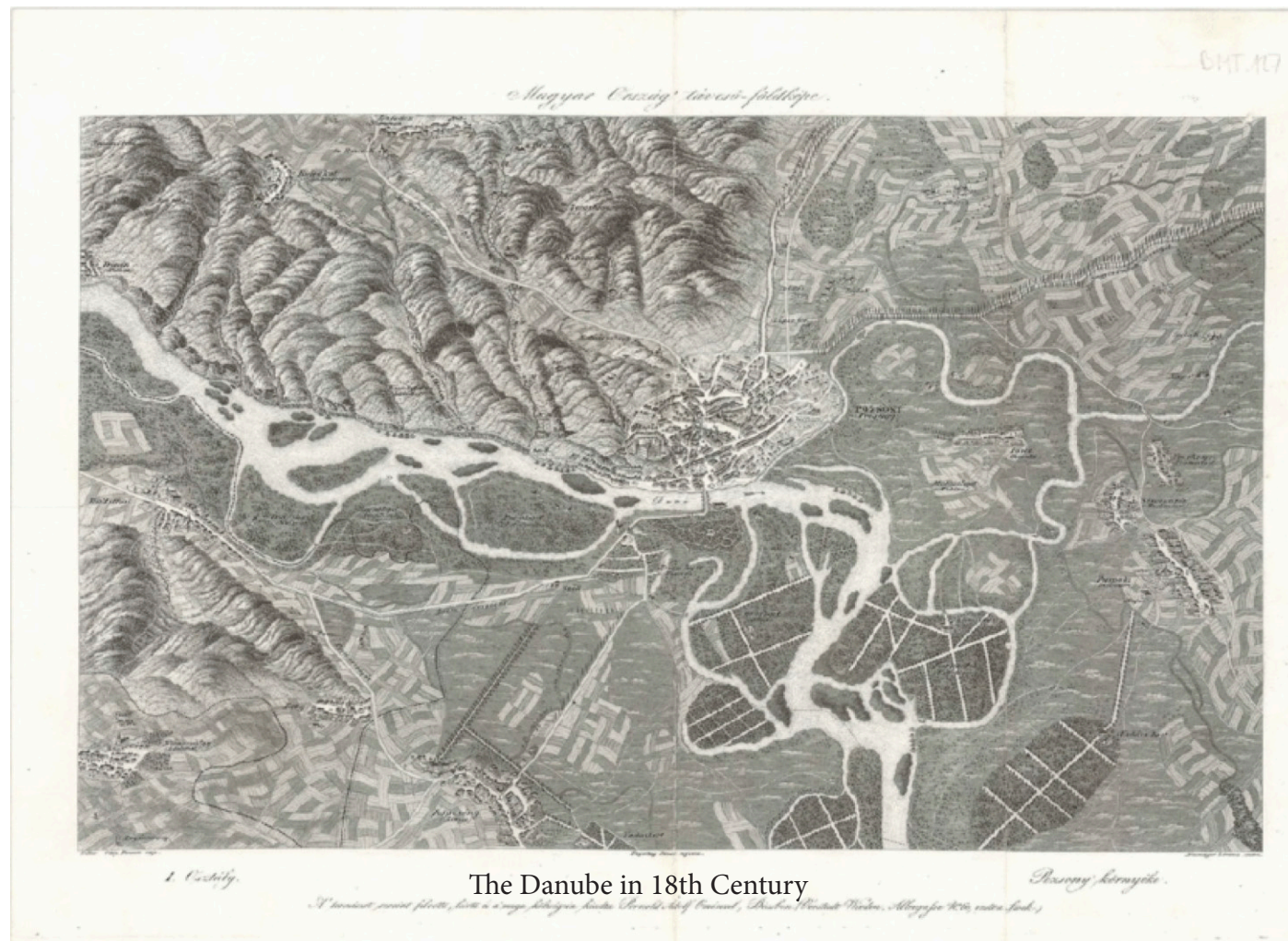
I started with a method that is very natural to me, creating photo collages. In my practice, I use collage to combine or juxtapose images to transfer them into a new perspective. That creates a sort of mixed and new reality. The snippets I was using or the way I was placing them were not anchored logically or intentionally. I just followed my intuition. By placing images next to each other, I could explore new and different ways of looking at the river.

Soon after I began to move from collage images to placing images on a timeline. This idea sparked to me by watching a documentary called Rivers and Tides.¹⁴ This film focuses on working with sculptures and installations made with natural materials and leaving them exposed to time and nature itself. I was interested in Goldsworthy's intention to choose the river as a subject of his work. He describes the river as something that is not dependent on water but on flow. Based on his explanation, a river can be anything and it is not necessary that it is made of water but can be constructed with a variety of materials. I asked myself: what would the river of my home look like? River of my journey and memories. I was wondering what I would see if I construct the river timeline and imaginative flows. The element of looking at practice around the river was there, but relating to a specific location was still missing.

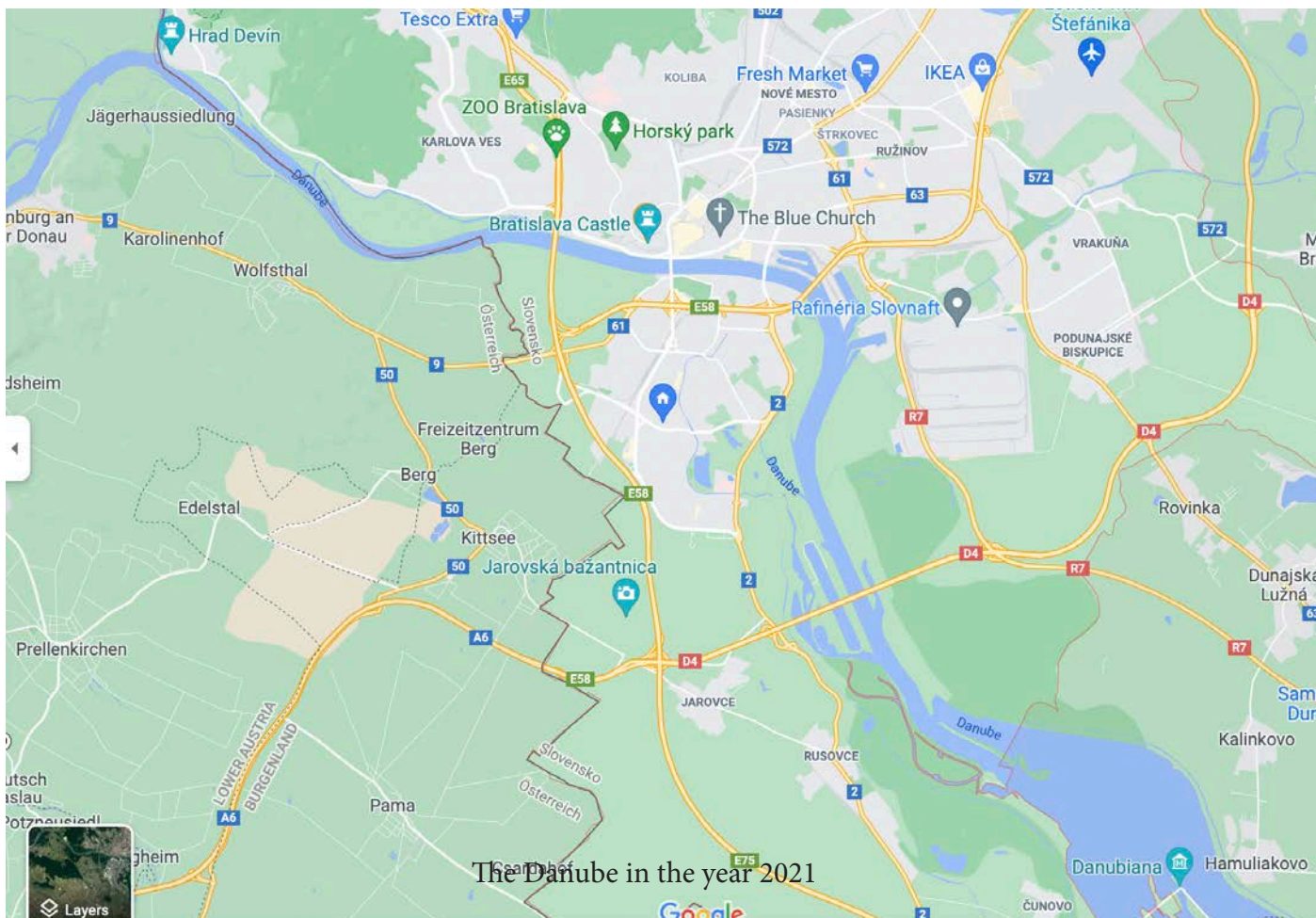


Constant flows with bodies of water.

¹⁴ Riedelsheimer, T., Donop, A., Goldsworthy, A., Davies, T., Hills, L., Frith, F., Mediopolis (Firm), ... New Video Group. (2004). Rivers and tides: Andy Goldsworthy working with time. Burlington, VT: Docurama.



The Danube in 18th Century



The Danube in the year 2021

To zoom in closer into my hometown I first began exploring by looking at the maps. Mostly I was interested in the bird's eye view of the river like you see on Google Maps. This came to me from the experience of seeing the Danube from an airplane while traveling back to Bratislava. That was also one of the first moments I began to see the river as a waterway that leads to my home. The curved shape of the river is present in other visual experiments in my practice too. My first attempt to work with mapping was by looking at old maps from archives juxtaposed with the current maps of the Danube. I was aiming to layer the maps to find traces of how the river changed through time. The plan was to find a clue on what the river represented in the past compared to how it is utilised in the present.

I was inspired by the work of Mississippi. An Anthropocene River¹⁵ is an interdisciplinary research project based on a collaboration of artists. The Anthropocene is a current geological age, that is typical for human activity heavily influencing the environment and climate. The artists were focused on the human changes on the Mississippi River and trying to search for the traces of a reformed river by humans. Through listening to sound or layering images, historical and social transformations of the river were discovered. I was hoping that through this exercise I would become more aware of what way I became alienated from life at the river and see how can I become closer to the river, perhaps by looking at these images to understand it better.

Based on my assumption following the collected material, I can see that nowadays, we became alienated from the waters that surround us and look at them as purely a resource and that also limits our ways of understanding what the river can be or mean. Looking at old images involving the Danube, my attention was caught by how the river become reshaped and tamed by humans over the years. Compared to the image from the 18th century, the river lost its natural shape and meander and the Danube became an isolated water body with dead arms. I aimed to move away from creating an isolated mind around an isolated water body and go back to the free movement, metaphorically, which is a reason for naming my project Meandering Stories. A meander is a regular curve of the river following a winding course. I want to embrace the meander and let my stories be flowing and winding, going from one place to the other, freely exploring.

Mapping is a very old technique that comes with its baggage of long history. Current discussions around using maps are critical to the notion of western mapping. As described in Thinking With Water¹⁶, European cartographic practices imposed an instrumental understanding of waters and lands. Unfortunately, inventory-like mapping continues to appropriate and constitute territories. When sharing my thoughts with a tutor, I got advised to look into the Indigenous mapping paradigm. De-colonising, and reclaiming represented by Indigenous communities and their unique

¹⁵ der Welt, H. D. K. (2020, February 4). *Mississippi. An Anthropocene River*. HKW. Retrieved January 10, 2022, from https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2018/mississippi_an_anthropocene_river/mississippi_an_anthropocene_river_start.php

¹⁶ Chen, C., MacLeod, J., & Neimanis, A. (2013). *Thinking with Water*. Amsterdam University Press.



way of mapping are visible in counter-mapping projects by Zuni artists.¹⁷ These Indigenous artists create maps to bring an indigenous voice and perspective back to the land, countering the western notions of place and geography and challenging the borders. I felt inspired by the indigenous way of relating to land. Zuni artists go back to nature to produce knowledge and create maps. Their way of understanding their surroundings is through prayers, songs, oral exchange, and image-making. The ability to navigate is not dependent on an object that they need to hold in their hands and follow its instructions.

Come back to the idea of mapping, it's a process that involves gathering, presenting, and articulating an imagined understanding of a place. At that stage, my imagined understanding of the Danube and the only available set of actions was through revisiting my memories and depicting the moments in which I felt connected with the river. While reading a text written by A. Neimanis,¹⁸ I noticed there is something different about the way she describes the water. She gives the water many attributes, seeing the water as a communicator, a body, a course, an entity, a medium. Her conscious use of language inspired me to think with what words I would describe the Danube with my experience.

I imagined the Danube as a Migration, because during the Soviet times, people tried to escape the regime by swimming to the other, safer Austrian side of the Danube. Home, because my father would walk with me around the riverside and taught me important lessons. Mother, because the river nurtures and creates life. Secret, because as a youngster the river served as a hideout from the rest of the world. Morph, because it constantly changes and evolves just like me, growing up. Connection, because the Danube connects countries resulting in a flow of cultures and traditions. Journey, because I grew up on one side but every day I had to cross it over the bridge. Flow, because the stream of the Danube continues. Embodiment, because the river surrounds my life, makes me feel fully present and separation, because it has a force that can be tragic.

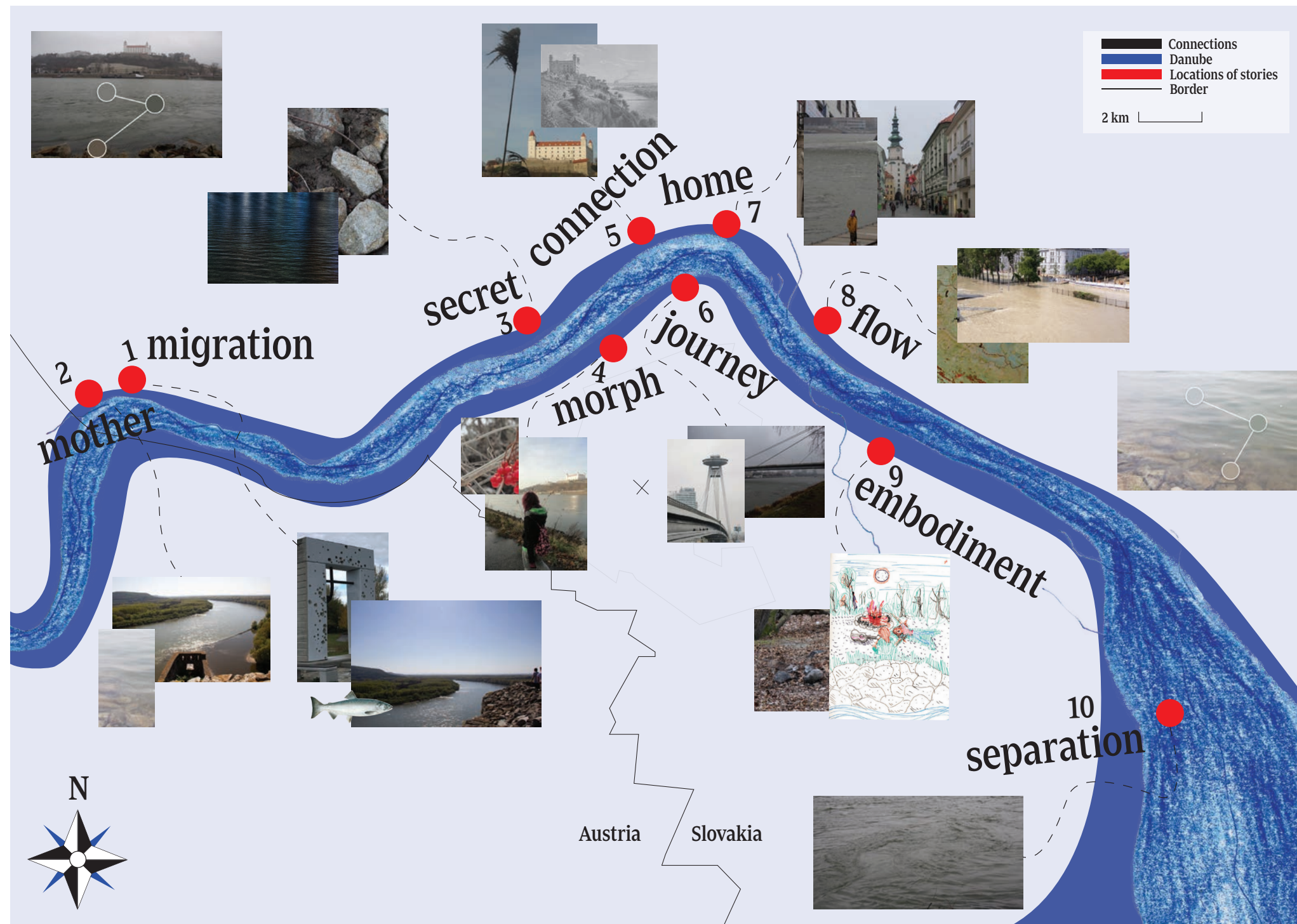
These ten connections inspired me to create a map that depicted all of the collected memories in one image inspired by Zuni artists. The process begun with a format of a large sized paper collage where I drew the line in the shape of which the Danube flows through my hometown. I used a bird's-eye view, where I intended to relate to my experience of seeing the river from an airplane. On the line I marked the accurate location where each of the stories happened and combined them with photographs and illustrations coming from this specific location. What I was hoping to see in this map is a discovery of how I formed the relationship with the river and what can I further learn from this experience.

¹⁷ Counter-mapping. (2021). *emergencemagazine.org*. <https://emergencemagazine.org/film/counter-mapping/>

¹⁸ ¹⁸ Astrida, Neimanis. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water." In *Undutiful Daughters*, New York: 2021, page 97

Combining with the map I made a booklet consisting of short stories based on my memories, to have an analytical overview of the locations. For this map I aimed to visually create a feeling of investigative aesthetics, that would fit the idea of being in a research process.

In my work, the influence of western mapping was still present. I did not see the engagement with the place I was aiming for and I felt the urge to engage more with the theory of Hydrofeminism and Indigenous mapping and as well engage in more embodied sense of landscape with the actual space and that was the reason I moved my research from the Netherlands to Slovakia, to be more situated.





Close encounter

Coming back to the writings by Astrida Neimanis (2019) and Shawn Wilson (2009) I began my journey to the Danube. As mentioned before, situating with the water requires being aware of the repeated encounters through which we can locate ourselves in water. In the course of a week, I traveled back to the river to revisit the locations of my stories and look at the place again after requiring new knowledge of the subject.

I visited three locations alongside the river; the west part where it enters Bratislava, and the middle part where the river flows through the city centre, where most of the human life is situated. The third, eastern part is closest to my heart because it's near my house. It is more remote and that allowed me to be in deeper connection with my thought, my presence, and the Danube. I noticed, that each of these locations had a different setting, which influenced the exercises I was doing. In this chapter, I would like to introduce some texts from my diary, because I believe they summarise the aim and development of thinking about my home and the river.

Before starting the field trip I created a small script of things I feel I need to think about and include. I intended to think again about what I understand as a connection and maybe connect with the river through touch or swimming. I wanted to be with both feet in the research, whatever that would mean, and observe with awareness. I was aware that the story with the Danube and the city can't be separated. However, the biggest question for me was how to become more embodied with the space and how to reduce the gap between me and the river.

First Location

I have never conducted field research before. It was the knowledge I gained about this subject that inspired me to travel to this location. And as a result of that, I was not sure how to begin. My tutor advised me to take a few books and read some chapters over and over. I sat on a bench next to the Danube and began to record a video of what I was seeing and as well record the sounds while looking at the text. At the first location, what you can see is the Danube merging with its left tributary, the Morava. It is quite a spectacle, watching two different streams collide and resulting in a barrier of two colours.

The chapter I chose to read was Relations with the Environment/Land (Wilson, 2009) because it is connected with my research on the relation with the Danube. I started to read out loud; "But it's our relationship to the land that's a spiritual connection to the land. The environment is the knowledge. So place is important, and how we describe it. Knowledge itself is held in the relationships and connections formed with the environment that surrounds us. There is no distinction between relationships that are made with other people and those that are made with

our environment. The only difference between human beings and four legged and plants is the shadow they cast.” (Wilson, 2009, p. 87).

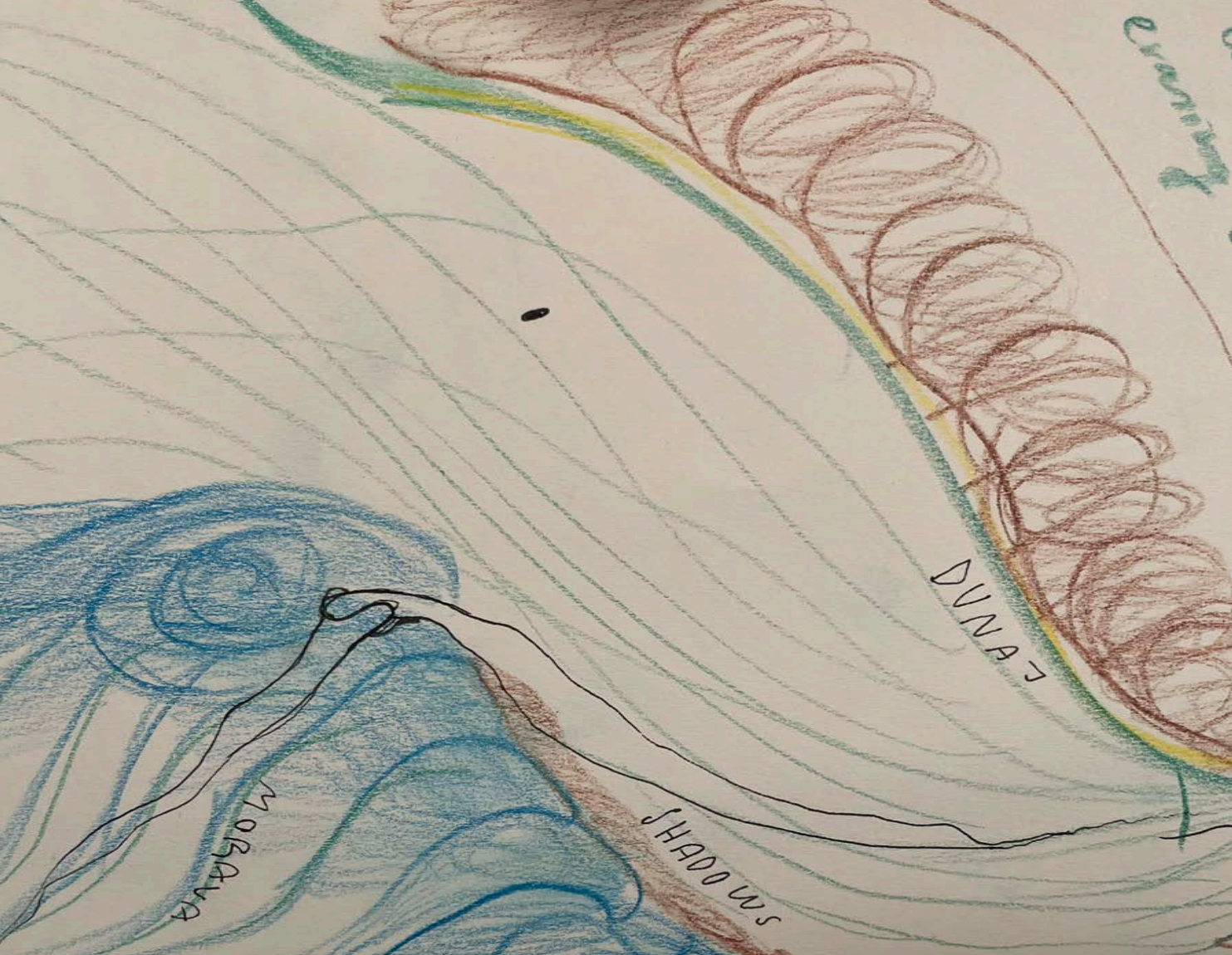
After reading this text I felt more aware of the environment around me. I started to feel more present and I was thinking; How can the relationship between me and the Danube erase the distance between us? While I had this question in the back of my head, I tried to draw a map. In this map, I focused on what I am seeing. As in Indigenous mapping, the importance is put on the natural landmarks, shadows, and shapes that can help us orientate in space. I was thinking about how would look a map of my emotions and how to depict the feeling of grounding and slowness I was feeling. I had a sudden urge to go closer to the Danube, which was also a result of my companion talking at me. I was visiting my hometown, so my mother insisted that she wants to go to the Danube with me. Her presence made me a little insecure and shy. Once I got close to the water I took some photographs. One of the images became the favoured moment I depicted during the field trip. It shows the river in a certain extraterrestrial light. The closer I get to the Danube the more uncanny it seems, but in a positive way, which makes me want to explore it more. Having more questions than answers I moved to the second location.

Second Location

At the second location, I used to visit it with my friends and enjoy a campfire, sing songs, eat and laugh. Even though I never really went down the shore right to the Danube while I was living in Bratislava, this time I felt attracted to do so. I took with me papers dipped in a Cyanotype liquid. I used this technique as a way of producing copies of objects I found on the spot; stones, leaves, plants, and wood. Cyanotype is a photographic printing process, named after the cyan-blue colour of a print. I took a piece of paper, placed the objects on top, and let it develop in a sun. After 20 minutes I dipped this paper in the river water and waited for a result.

While waiting, I continued recording myself, in a way, as a sort of performance, reading out loud the notes I made that day. I continued to read the same text (Wilson, 2009), but this time focusing on spirituality and space. “Indigenous peoples and their traditions and customs are shaped by the land and their spiritual, emotional, and physical relationship to the land.” (Wilson, 2009, p. 88). I started to think about what kind of spirituality I am feeling at the Danube. In my diary I wrote; “I sit here but it’s not necessarily like this is exactly where I belong. I think I lost the feeling of being grounded some time ago. But I must be connected, or else this project would not exist. Maybe because in all my stories about the Danube, I’m never alone. And now this contrast of thinking about a connection with a place while being alone. The Danube is the people, the countries, the stories, the memories. What is this feeling of being scared of something but still attracted to it?”.

At the same time, I was focusing on the feeling of embodiment and I wrote; “I climbed down the stones and I’m sitting on one of them, on a blanket, that my mother gave me when I was a baby.



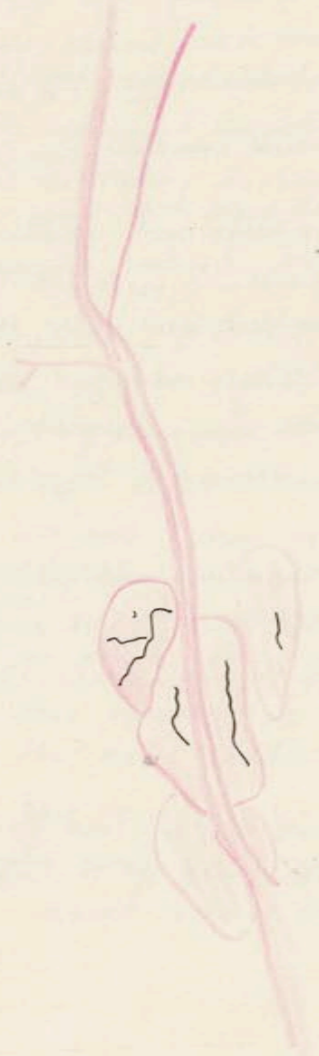


Danube is special. It connects countries, it is a connection transport wise. But it connects culture too and histories.

I'm sitting at this peaceful place but around me are quite loud noises from surrounding industries. In front of me is this beautiful sparkling peaceful stream and behind me smoke, chimneys, noises of trucks and trains, factory alarm. It is this strange contrast. The industrial, heavy noises immediately triggers in me the situation in Ukraine. There was also Danube part of news reports.

I think first time I'm smelling Danube. It is good soil, fishy but very subtle smell. Danube looks from distance really blue & but from near light green

When you look at the stream of Danube it doesn't appear going from left to right. It looks like collection of millions streams that all together negate the stream and are putting static.



I am thinking now about all the books and literature that went through my hands before sitting here. I'm trying to find the connection, not with the Danube, but with all the words I've read so far. How can I be connected with my hometown through the water? I did not sail on a boat, I did not swim in there, I did not drink from it. Not now but not ever before and still, it is a symbol of my home.”.

With these observations, I was referring to the words of A. Neimanis (2019) and the fact that we are all connected through the water. Which made me think about, if I never really touched the water, how can be also connected with it? Soon after, I experienced a strange encounter with the river. I was recording a video of the stream when suddenly the water level rose and my feet were covered with water. I thought to myself, maybe the river tried to touch me and it evoked a certain sense of vulnerability in me. I wondered, how often is the river deeply observed and thought about. I realised I situated myself in the ecotone of the Danube. According to Neimanis,¹⁹ an ecotone is a space that is right between the waterbody and the land. It is space that has a quality of both worlds, the space of in-between. These places are shores, coasts, wetlands, or river valleys and it is in these places that unexpected things can happen.

I began to register as well the sensual qualities of the Danube, the colour, the smell, and the touch, as a part of mapping. I realised it is probably the first time I am consciously smelling the water. It reminded me of soil and fish but it was a very subtle fragrance. The colour of the river appears blue from a distance but from up close it has a light green shade. Strangely, the stream of the Danube doesn't appear as going from left to right but rather as a collection of millions of streams that creates an illusion of being static.

After a few hours, I became surprisingly comfortable with sitting in the ecotone of the river and I felt at peace with being alone. It gave me a strange comfort to not be with all the distractions of ordinary life like my phone, news, emails, people, or voices. I felt like I used to sit there my whole life even though I never sat there before. I started to experience a level of intimacy with the water, and began to speak to it out loud saying; I wonder, dear Danube, how can I show you to the world? How to describe you to people that do not understand? Is it my memories that represent who you are? I was thinking about how can I map the river, saying that the river is already very mapped. I asked myself; “What is there left to see?”. With this open question, I moved to the last location.

Third location

In the city centre, we can see how the Danube divides the city into two parts. I grew up on the southern shore, but the rest of the town lies on the northern. There are many bridges connecting these two worlds. Third part of the river is full of noises from the surrounding traffic; cars, trams,

¹⁹ Astrida, Neimanis. “Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water.” In *Undutiful Daughters*, New York: 2021, page 107



buses, boats, and people busy trying to get from one place to another. The colour of the Danube differs in all three parts of the river. In the centre the water looks very different, the colour is deep green and the stream is wild.

I found a spot well known to me from my youth, a promenade following the left side of the water. I started to record a video to depict exactly what I am seeing. At that moment I felt like in a movie scene and I remembered something my friend told me. I often struggle with the occasional feeling of doubting myself. Being unsure if what I am doing is good and if I am on the right path. I noted in my diary; “Robin told me, everywhere I am in Bratislava, I am near the Danube. Because it is close to me, and I believe that’s true. My memories of the Danube are not about sitting with my feet in the water. It is simply the life itself that is happening around it. Being with family, friends, and loved ones is the Danube to me. As was said in the Research Is Ceremony (2009), the land, and the people, it’s not separate, it’s one. I am standing by the river and I’m hearing the sounds of the water thanks to the boat that disturbed the flow. Without it, the river would continue its peaceful and silent journey. Behind me are sounds of life, in front of me is a huge waterbody, that separates us, but I never think about it in that way. I think it connects us more. The feeling to map here is like a gentle hand touching my hair.”.

I have collected sound recordings, video recordings, photographs, drawings, mappings, and writings. I want to encourage the diversity of the Danube and the experience of visiting three different locations which resulted in three different approaches. In one place I engaged with the readings, and made drawings, in the second place I made prints, long voice, and video recordings, and in the third one I collected city sounds, photographs, and videos.

The experience of being up close, instead of looking from a bird's eye perspective allowed me to engage with the theory on a deeper level and let me open up and explore what the Danube means to me resulting in operationalised and situated way. The whole project is about realising what the river means to me while being moved by forces I am not aware of.

Continuing my practice is creating a video essay that illustrates the theory I collected, and personal touch on the learning, resulting in a video poem. The video will consist of sounds, voices, images, and texts I collected alongside the Danube.

For the graduation exhibition, the project will be an experience in a public space. I find inspiration in a video and sound installation “Water Drawing” (Chen et al., 2013, p. 23), which explores water’s materiality and vulnerability, exposing the uncanny view of water closeups. In my photographs, I naturally aimed to capture and engage the Danube from a close-up view, as it made me feel more connected with the waters.

Conclusion

My research was and is a process of me questioning and relating to the place I come from. The discovery I made is, that it can be done through the water, through the Danube. Water can be a conduit of connection and as the Indigenous research paradigm describes, there are no distinctions between relationships made with people and those made with our environment. It is still an ongoing process, but I feel like at least partially I have the answer to the question I asked at the beginning of my Master's study; what means home to me and where do I belong? Water or specifically the Danube is one of the modes of how I can be connected to the place I come from. It made me go beyond my regular thinking about my hometown and enabled me to be more open, honest, and vulnerable.

In a conclusion, I will show a text I wrote on the last day of my field trip;

The Danube is life. Like a vein, like a heart that pumps the whole body, the organism that lies around it. The connection to the Danube is my life. Because my life is built around it. The first trees we climbed, friends I made, family, streets everything is powered by it. Nature is nurtured by it and our lives too.

The Danube is like a border that removes borders.

The Danube is like a slide that you take and you know on its end it is safe, it is home.

Today is my birthday. I was not home for my birthday maybe even since I moved to the Netherlands. I could not celebrate with my mum and brother for years and I think it is a special day situated in special times. I feel so sorry I am a bit tough on my mum but it is because I feel a bit vulnerable while working on the field research. It makes me a bit anxious, that she is looking at me, but I hope she thinks it is fine. I don't want to go on a different slide, a slide of my negative thoughts which often happens to me. I think my brother is such a positive person he can turn every moment into a smile and that is special too. I hope we can all be happy and healthy and maybe the whole point of the research was just to be back with my family, sleeping alone in my room again where I lived for twenty years. These moments before so ordinary became so precious. Because what is happening in this world and my world never stops.

We are being tried every - single - day and here we are. Still going. Like the river.

Good night.

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