

## Reconsidering the Travel Ideal: Freedom, Belonging and a Philosophy of Difference

*Adam Doering - Graduated 2013*

### Abstract

How does belonging fit into the Western travel ideal? When one reflects on the discourses of travel in the West the initial response seems simple: there is no belonging. From colonial expansion to modern tourism, from the binaries of home-abroad, self-other, moving-staying, and free-unfree that marked colonial modernity to contemporary claims of global citizenry, travel in the West has been built upon Enlightenment ideals of freedom, universality and displacement. In the Western travel ideal one often 'belongs' *nowhere* (alienation/away/displaced) or *everywhere* (at-home-in-the-world). Do we really live in such a lonely planet?

*Reconsidering the Travel Ideal* is a philosophical discussion that strives to challenge these conventional understandings of travel, freedom and belonging through a two-part thesis. Part I, entitled 'Moving Ideas: Tourism, Mobilities and Travel', examines the creative and productive potential of critically engaging with the clichés, discourses and ideals that move through and by us rather than trying to transcend or move beyond them. It offers a critical account of the ways a 'new' discipline (tourism in chapter 1), 'novel' paradigm (mobilities in chapter 2) and an 'old' narrative (travel in chapter 3), have shaped the way many in the West have come to think about the relationship between travel, freedom and belonging. Instead of theorising from a new discipline or novel paradigm, I trace my return to the Western travel ideal in order to address three interrelated concerns: What has historically been absent, silenced, and/or privileged in the pursuit of the Western travel ideal? How might this nuanced understanding open a space for those of us who have been moved by 'travel' to engage with life differently in the present? Or, is it finally time to abandon the heavily burdened concept of travel once and for all?

Part II, 'Travelling with Difference: Deleuze, Derrida and Nancy', develops one of the central arguments of the thesis, namely, *travel is an expression of belonging rather than an escape or displacement from it*. In order to make this philosophical shift I maintain that our commonsense notions of belonging must also be reconsidered. With the help of three philosophers of difference - Derrida, Deleuze and Nancy - I rework the relationship between travel, freedom and belonging in a way that challenges the Enlightenment ideals of self-autonomy, identity and (un)belonging that continue to pervade the contemporary travel debates. By deconstructing the problematic and asocial Western travel 'ideals', *Reconsidering the Travel Ideal* develops a singular understanding of freedom, belonging and difference that argues no matter how or where we travel, *we always already belong*.

There is one caveat to this conceptual shift however. Although an engagement with a philosophy of difference opens up a destabilising understanding of belonging that requires one to continually reconnect with and reconsider the lines, clichés and texts that mediate the social world, Derrida, Deleuze and Nancy offer no final reconciliation. The conventional ideals of travel and freedom are unavoidably retained even as they are transformed. Written within this tension of retaining the past as it shifts, the thesis raises more questions than answers, and concludes by asking

the reader to reflect on one of the more perplexing issues of contemporary travel discourse and practice: how do *you* always already belong?

**Keywords:** travel ideals, freedom, escape, belonging, difference, continental philosophy, tourism, mobilities, Derrida, Deleuze, Nancy