

# Imaginary Runs

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Commissioned by Grazer Kunstverein on the occasion of  
*Grazer Kunstverein is moving!*

*Of course, ideally, I'd like to be a bird, but running is a close second.*

- Bernd Heinrich

## Innere Stadt

You wait for the moment, when everything goes quiet. When all becomes body. When you start feeling the swing of your arms, the length of your stride, the ground underneath your feet, your breath with every step - inhaling, exhaling - the sweat on your skin, the traction, the tweak of your muscles. Everything is pure sensation until it's in balance. This is when you open up. When your eyes start to trace the rails of the tramlines, the facades of the historic buildings, when you're immersed in the sounds and smells of the city. Graz, Innere Stadt is an accumulation of small alleyways and passages leading off the main boulevard, Herrengasse, a manifestation of permanent beginnings and openings. *Ghosts display a particular interest in doors and windows; (...) Roger Clarke writes in *Ghosts. A Natural History*. Walking, or running the oldest part of the city becomes a matter of moving with ghosts, dearest, I remember our promises written on the walls and windows of the city and I wish, I wish, I wish you were here to see it.*

## Geidorf

There are two ways that a trail reveals itself in running - either by just going along with your curiosity or by having a look at a map. Running is the most beautiful when it combines both - the structure of a map which gives you direction and an idea of what to expect, and the pure joy of curiously exploring contour lines and mileage become actual surface and surroundings. Sometimes you do look at the map again after a run and you find things you missed by just not looking close enough - like an unnamed trail through the forest between Zusertalgasse and Rosenhof, embedded in between the old manors on Rosenhain, historically an extension of the medieval city, later a vanishing point for part of the wealthy society of the Gründerzeit. Running through this part of the city - an accumulation of historic mansions and those newly built throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century - feels like running in and out of time, a field guide to getting lost. It is in those moments that running becomes a story, an imaginary telling, a dream of what could have been, of how it could have felt.

Gries

I still remember you sleep, dearest

## Liebenau

Running means carrying weight. A lot of weight. Weight becomes a force when you put it into motion, a force that works, that potentially wears on your body with time. With running, it's three times your own bodyweight a stride. To get an idea of the magnitude, numbers help: assuming a bodyweight of 70 kg means 276 tons of weight that work on your body over a distance of 2 km. A little bit less – 1,8 km – is what would bring you on a lap around the site of former forced labour camp *Lager Liebenau* or *Lager V* in the southern part of the city. The camp held up to 5000 people forced to work for the arm industry as well as in the later days of the war building the *Südostwall*, the defense wall against the approaching Soviet troops. In the final days *Lager Liebenau* served as a way station for the death marches to Mauthausen that saw people shot in the neck and thrown in mass graves. 1,8 km – that's 249 tons. There's always a breaking point, a point, where the body can't take any more of the load.

## Puntigam

Sometimes, places leave a memory. A memory even felt when standing still, caressing a silence. A body memory. Just like running. A memory ever-present. A memory of where you've been and how, of where you've come to, of where you desire to go. *Puntigam* was a family name before it was rendered onto a whole borough, that today harbours some of the most prominent of Graz's industries. From its southern edge, it's only minutes to the airport - a place of arrivals and departures, of appearing and vanishing, becoming ghosts.



## Andritz

When you go far enough, a place to get lost ultimately becomes a place to be found again. If you take the tram 3 or 5 to the end of the line, all the way to Andritz, the scenery changes from urban to rural, from meandering house facades and streets to fields and farms spread over the soft hills that surround the city from west to east. The view is an opening into a landscape that you seem to forget when you're immersed in the city. If you start moving along Pfeiferhofweg, you'll soon be ascending the Platte, one of the most familiar elevations around Graz with Stephanienwarte - an old observation deck, originally built in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century - waiting on top. The ascent brings you through Rettenbachklamm, Graz's only ravine, all the way to Mariatrost - a different place, a different borough. A beginning at an end, a possibility of telling a story differently, of telling a different story.

Mariatrost

I still remember you saying *The world ends after Mariatrost*

## Wetzelsdorf

With the rise of Strava, a GPS based tracking app, running became an image, colored lines on a surface, a screen. In his introduction to the *The Stone Art Theory Institutes: Volume Two. What is an image?* James Elkins proposes a *disordered and (...) potentially infinite* list of image theories. They revolve around semiotics as well as sensations like love or the touch of flowers. Using Strava, each run creates a new topography of a place, and it is through connecting dots and lines that images turn into stories - those never heard and new, those forgotten and those silenced. Like the othering of the members of the 2<sup>nd</sup> infantry regiment of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Stationed in different barracks in Wetzelsdorf - Graz's 15<sup>th</sup> borough in the very west of the city - as a direct consequence of the Berlin Congress 1878 - a congress that saw the states of the Balkans re-devided amongst the ruling imperial powers of Europe at the time - the members of the regiment were despised unless marching in a parade showing their colours and sounds, an othering that can be traced all the way into the present, where a specific type of rye biscuits is still called *Bosniakerl*. Or the executions of members of the resistance, dissidents, partisans, Jews, i.a. until the very last minutes of WWII at Feliferhof, a story that was concealed until 40 years later, and was still rejected to be remembered by the federal ministry of defence in the 90s.

## Ries

There is a scene in *Run for the Arctic*, a short film by the outdoor company *North Face* that tries to raise awareness for climate change, where the protagonist - Spanish ultra runner Pau Capell, who decided to cover 250 km in the arctic climate of Norway's most northern county Troms og Finnmark or Romsa ja Finnmárku in Sami or Tromssa ja Finmarkku in Kven, a distance that equals the distance that by now polar bears have to travel to find food - talks about the difference of running on snow. *You have to run slower*, he says. Each surface changes the way you move, your steps, the length of your strides, your pace. The borough of Ries stretches along its eponymous hill range - in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century famous for its car races up RIESstraße, an event that was abandoned shortly after the Second World War - before it fades into the surrounding region of Graz. Following the ridge finds you running on gravel, concrete, country lanes and forest floor, changing your pace, your rhythm, your breath every step along the way, dearest, one of the questions always remains whether you run away from something or towards it.

## Gösting

The borough of Gösting, on the northwestern tip of Graz, is synonymous with Alt-Gösting. After the castle burned down in 1723, only a ruin remained, nowadays a landmark not only of the borough, but the whole of Graz. It became a popular destination for an easy escape from the city. And it is. If you follow the trails that lead off the castle ruin long enough, all the way to Flösserkogel, Raacher Kogel, Steinkogel, there is a section, when all of a sudden everything goes quiet, and you're immersed in complete silence. Nothing is heard. And everything.

## Eggenberg

Upon entering the extensive grounds of Eggenberg Palace, you are greeted by colourful peacocks that move freely through the estate. Their presence just adds to the enchantment of the place. First erected in the Middle Ages and continued to be envisioned and constructed until the 17th century, Eggenberg Palace is an embodiment of the natural philosophy of its period, partly rational, partly metaphysical thinking. The architecture displays the universe, its formation and function. Everything is aligned with the Gregorian calendar - the number of windows, rooms, corner-towers, each symbolising a different aspect of the cosmological order, creating a grand cosmology of its own. While almost synonymous with the palace and its founding family, the borough of Eggenberg simultaneously carries another history, a history quite at the opposite end of the social spectrum. Deeply rooted in social democratic traditions, remnants of its past and present can still be found all over the district, like the memorial stone, commemorating the victims of the February Uprising 1934 in front of the former Konsum building, a consumers' cooperative, or the sports and recreational facilities of the ASKÖ just opposite the palace gates, the headquarters of the Styrian Social Democratic Party at Eggenberger Allee. All these tell different stories of a place that manifests itself primarily in the décor of long gone aristocracy and feudal ordinance, stories that initially carry different ideas of society, some nevertheless flawed, some failing, some only flashlights of political speech, but, one likes to think, stories of care and community after all.

Lend

Dearest, do you wish we would have been someone else?

Someplace else



## St. Peter

Running is an expansion. An expansion of breath, of prospect, of body. An expansion of environments. Your perception widens and it is through your motion that you encounter a place's history and the stories that it tells, and sometimes, sometimes these stories take an unexpected turn, a turn into the magical. The district of St. Peter, located on the southeastern tip of the city, harbours a jungle. Located at Messendorfberg, on the grounds of a former arboretum that was abandoned with the downfall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a wild forest grows and blooms under the guiding hands of the Youth for Nature Conservation Styria. Himalayan pine, bamboo, full moon maple, sequoia trees, amongst others, create a breathing and living organism that tells not only of cohabitation and -existence, but of findings and being found in the most unexpected of places at the most unexpected of times. Just like a glance through the telescope further up the hill at the Lustbühel Observatory into the sky, the stars. The gaze outward becomes a gaze towards the inside, dearest, who are you and where do you wanna go?

St. Leonhard

Sometimes a forest grows close to my window, dearest, do  
you hear it creaking, clicking, crackling?

## Straßgang

Outdoor swimming pools are an invention of the interwar period. Thought not only as a strategy to create jobs again but also as means of health care, they rapidly became the recreational highlights of small countryside towns and cities alike. The Straßganger Bad, located in the district of the same name in the southwestern part of Graz, is not only one of the most prominent but also one of the most peculiar ones. The pool evolved from a clay pit that was used for brick-making – one of the main industries in the surrounding towns of Graz in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Towns that later became boroughs, like St. Peter or Straßgang. Today the pool stretches over 11 000 m<sup>2</sup>, with natural rocks covering its floor. Plunging into the water feels like entering a different world, *a world you cannot judge by the rules you have learned. (...) To dive beneath the surface feels like entering the earth's vast dreaming subconscious*, writes Sy Montgomery in *The Soul of an Octopus*. While she is referring to the ocean as the natural habitat of the invertebrate, the description might very well also be true for Straßganger Bad, which is itself an imitation of a lake or the ocean. Swimming, or diving, is an immersion. Your body becomes fluid, all movement. Your senses are heightened being folded into water, similar to running, being folded into your surroundings, becoming all gravel, all forest, all mountain.

Jakomini

We hid our fears and frenzies in moonlight, dear.  
I wonder, do you still call them by their name?

## Waltendorf

Running begins with desire. A desire to move. A desire for being moved, being touched. Every step creates a sound that resonates through your body, echoing stories – your own and those of the places you travel through. It is when desire meets curiosity that running becomes a tool, a tool for exploration, for engagement, empowerment, for an encounter with these stories. *To be looking at this human hive of cars and business and churches and airplanes and boats coming and going and with all the noise, all the insanity, poverty, the wealth, and so many different cultures and languages (...) I mean how can you look at that and not be a little bit curious. (...)* reflects ultrarunner and writer Rickey Gates tenderly about his endeavor of running every single street in San Francisco. *I really want to get to know my neighbourhood, my area (...), and it's hard to really do that unless you are out moving amongst people and talking to them. It's such a great way to get to know a place. (...)* Sometimes it's places closest to you that are the most unfamiliar. Waltendorf dates back to as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century when it wasn't more than a few hides, vineyards and ponds. Located between St. Peter and Ries, Waltendorf stretches from Plüddemanngasse – one of the main traffic routes into the city – to the very outskirts of Graz. A run across the borough brings you from one of its beating arteries to the mounds and meadows of the surrounding towns – Hohenrain, Hart and further, passing remnants of old wine taverns that have been socialising places for people from different classes since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hidden between newly built family homes, estates and colonies that characterise Waltendorf. To encounter a place through running, you just follow streets, corners and your curiosity, and eventually you will get somewhere. You will always get somewhere.