



Notes of a Roadsider

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No You Can

Through the years, I began to encounter those littered cans of that sickly sweet energy drink along the roadside – countless of them, literally everywhere I went. At some point I started to document them, just where they interfered with my hitchhiking journeys. As reminders of the sometimes uncanny interplay between the local and the global, I thought they might deserve a closer look. And perhaps even an exhibition.

48°09'45.5"N 16°43'09.1"E



This is so nowhere, was my thought when I visited this place for the first time. But somehow this suburbia captured me. and soon I find myself immersed in a Ballardian cityscape of large scale retail infrastructure, post-industrial brownfields, and shops that used to be, all nerved by the tentacles of commuter corridors. Standing in front of a former secessionist cinema, now inviting to *bet and win*, I decide to set out for faraway elsewheres, to chase the *sense of the possible*, as described by the writer Robert Musil:

Whoever has it does not say, for instance: Here this or that has happened, will happen, must happen; but he invents: Here this or that might, could, or ought to happen. If he is told that something is the way it is, he will think: Well, it could probably just as well be otherwise.

49°13'58.6"N 18°44'09.2"E



Luckily, it was right after the thunderstorm, when the trucker dropped me at the road junction at the outskirts of the city. It was a vast tangle of overpasses and railway tracks, flanked by sheds and social housing, all intermingled by an urban wilderness with scattered contents of luggage, reluctantly revealing traces of life.

The polyphonic hauling of stray dogs cutting through the moist air made me hesitant about making it to the other side walking, when all of a sudden a young Roma guy crossed my way. *I thought you were Jesus, when I spotted you*, he said gently. Slightly bewildered, I asked him whether he could show me a safe way to reach the road to the border. *Sure*, he responded, and guided me towards the other side, showing a genuine sense of place and enabling me to continue my journey with a transcendental experience.

50°05'50.6"N 21°13'27.8"E



Shortly after I arrived at that spot, I get picked up by five construction workers, the wind blowing through the open windows of their car. They tell me they work on construction sites all across the country, but usually spend their weekends back home, at the other side of the border. Over here, they earn six times more than what they would get back home.

As we approach the border, they show me photos on their mobiles: them posing with different machines on construction sites, having fun riding a rollercoaster in an amusement park, drinking vodka and singing around a campfire in front of their lodging, posing with a goulash kettle they converted to smoke fish. Then they pass me another mobile with a video showing them having fun blowing up airbags they removed from car wrecks. *In our home country we appreciate all the rubbish from Europe*, one of them jokes.

48°57'02.7"N 22°36'27.9"E



It didn't take long, until a white cargo van pulls in. A guy shouts towards me in language I don't understand, but I jump in without hesitation. He seems exhausted, probably he has been driving his van for hundreds of kilometers without a rest, obviously kept awake only by coffee, cigarettes, and a surreal music mix between trance and Eurodance coming from the speakers.

We drive along a congested road, mastering anarchic traffic situations, passing crumbling industrial structures, low-cost hypermarket architecture, and an abundance of street vendors specialising in an odd selection between gas cookers and chess boards, rustic wood carvings and life-size plastic storks - their vans bearing faded labels like *Getränkemarkt Barth* or *Gebäudereinigung Stark*, parked beneath the concrete structure of a city's unfinished bypass road, already halfway reclaimed by nature.

44°57'56.4"N 24°54'36.1"E



We enter the country's first motorway, allegedly intended by the former despot as a backup airport runway from his palace in the capital. An hour later we find ourselves in a sprawl of logistic infrastructure and warehouses, a mix of generic crates made of sheet metal and glass, interspersed with a few built remains of the communist days now covered by billboards.

As the motorway turns into a tangle of dusty roads and roundabouts, the driver picks up the mic and tries to ask for his destination via the CB radio. An answer was not long in coming, and we continue through the slow-moving traffic along the ring road around the capital, an uneven patchwork of roadworks, while at a distance loom the towers of housing estates for an emerging upper middle class under construction.

41°44'09.5"N 26°16'46.2"E



It feels quite like a relief to enter the cabin of truck, after almost two hours spent at a parking area. A few kilometres further, we stop at a vast roadside premise offering everything people in transit could desire before returning to their homecountry – ranging from a micro-mosque to alcohol. My trucker buys a tray of meat and bread.

Back on the motorway, we soon reach the long queue of trucks waiting at the border, the latter discernable only as distant lights. We get out of the cabin, and my driver opens the flap of a storage space at the back of his semi trailer, puts a gas cooker on it, seasons the pieces of meat, and puts them in a frying pan. Looking around us, this is what all the truck drivers seem to do. And as the queue moves on towards the border, the whole thing feels like a wondrously illuminated caravan in the middle of this nightly nowhere.

41°03'42.6"N 28°48'09.9"E



Facing the gigantic complex of a mall, I find myself near a toll booth along a congested major highway leading through the megalopolis. The countless business and shopping high-rises are occasionally accompanied by modern mosques, appearing like mimics of the latter.

I'm not sure if rush hour is an appropriate term over here, as it probably all melts down into a never-ending flow of traffic feeding the city's boundless growth. Occasionally, I spot vendors selling sesame rings and mineral water, adventurously circumnavigating around the vehicles.

A few older trucks stand out of the traffic, as they seem crammed beneath their limits, carrying bundles, crates, sacks of somethings, making them appear like huge cocoons from an archaic world, just like me lost in the middle of this glittering boom zone.

