



Estelle Ihász *Home Document Displacement*

www.ihasz.com

Canberra Contemporary Arts Space (CCAS) 21 September–19 October 2002.

List of works

Home Document Displacement 2002 screen-grabs of web-based work for CCAS
exhibition *Urban Projects 1999-2002: Cul de Sac*

Wherever I Lay My Hat

Estelle Ihász's work details the journey towards Canberra of her migrant grandparents—Julia and Sandor Ihász. The Ihász's takes us on a journey from Hungary, through to Austria and Italy, to Sydney and finally Canberra. We travel by the wealth of documents kept by her grandmother Julia Ihász—postcards, passports, identity cards, tickets and photographs. We begin by and return to a postcard portrait of Julia as a girl. The trip between is mainly a linear passage, with only a few byways which, when explored, returns to the main road. This predetermined arrangement of the material is a necessary structure that allows us to understand and follow the Ihász's path.

The documents are viewed in chronological order but they are presented with no translation or explanation. Instead, these objects are reproduced in sufficient detail to allow a virtually tactile encounter with the old and treasured family records. This allows us to 'feel' the embossed cover of a leather bound passport, or the brittle cracked cloth binding of another. The sensation of handling is enhanced by being able to 'turn' a page over: when we roll the mouse across its surface, the reverse side is shown. Every sign of wear is evident: the scratches and creases on photographs, the remnants of paper that were previously stuck on the back, the curling edges of stamps; and the stains of rusty staples.

By emphasising the materiality of the objects, Ihász allows us to get closer to the people she represents. We are encouraged to observe carefully, to note the signs of age appearing on the faces in the later photographs, to see that her grandmother has been fastidious keeping her papers—her grandfather rougher. Or is that because his documents are folded so that he could carry them in his pocket, whereas hers have been kept in a handbag? In being able to 'touch' the Ihászs' personal things, we are touched by their story.

This work reminds us that the current generation of globally mobile workers is not the first to trade nationalities in search of home. Previous generations may not have always had the luxury of choosing to do so. In tracking the Ihászs' shifts between countries and nationalities the user may become anxiously aware of the ultimate homelessness of a stateless person. A strong desire for home emanates from this work, not so much from the snapshots of the house in suburban Australia, but from the evidence of time spent in transition.

It brings to mind stories of people who ended up in Australia simply because it was somewhere other than war torn Europe. People who took what they could get, or at least the next ship out, people whose fate was determined by an arbitrary authority or set of circumstances. One of the main characters in this drama of post-war migration, Estelle's grandfather, changes his name between Hungary and Austria then back before reaching Australia. This reminds me of a story of a friend's father who is known in Australia by his middle instead of his first name. His name was accidentally transposed on wartime identification papers and he was afraid of spoiling his chances of being relocated by revealing his papers were not correct. So to his family he is one name and to his new friends in Australia he is another. The Ihász journey underlines a dilemma common to migrants, their children and other displaced people—that home is neither where they are or where they came from.

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