

Nomadic camera: photography, exile and dis:connectivity

Burcu Dogramaci

In 1939, 16-year-old Hans Günter Flieg took a final photo in his hometown of Chemnitz, before he and his family emigrated to Brazil due to anti-Semitic persecution. Upon his arrival in São Paulo, he captured the first photo of his exile home. Both pictures appear next to each other on a film strip. Here I focus on these photographs and bring together two concepts that are new to photography and exile research: the nomadic camera and dis:connectivity.

Flieg photographed with an Agfa roll film (Isopan F) suitable for 35mm cameras. He worked with Leica equipment that his parents had purchased in anticipation of his planned emigration to Brazil.¹ Flieg had been taking a photography course with Grete Kaplus at the Berlin Jewish Museum since March 1939. This enabled his family to justify the purchase of cameras for professional reasons and to prepare their son for a career as a photographer and a livelihood abroad.²

The film strip shows two black-and-white shots: on the left is a view from the window of a street with buildings in the *Gründerzeit* style. Multi-storey apartment buildings stand on a residential street densely planted with a row of trees. The view of the camera

Burcu Dogramaci

is Professor of Art History at the LMU Munich and co-director of *global dis:connect*. She earned her doctorate in 2000 and completed her habilitation in art history at the University of Hamburg in 2007 with a thesis on German-speaking architects and sculptors in Turkey after 1927. She received the fellowship of the Aby M. Warburg Prize, was awarded the Kurt-Hartwig-Siemers Research Prize and the Teaching Prize 2014 by the Bavarian State Ministry. She leads the ERC Consolidator Project, "Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile (METROMOD)" (2017–2023, <https://metromod.net>) at LMU Munich. Her research areas are: exile, migration, flight, dis:connectivity, art, urbanity and architecture, photography, textile modernism, live art.

¹ Michael Nungesser, 'Chemnitz liegt bei São Paulo. Der Fotograf Hans Günter Flieg', eds. Ingrid Mössinger and Katharina Metz, 2008.

² Agi Straus, Interview mit der Malerin Agi Straus, São Paulo, 15 April 2013, https://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Content/DE/Objekte/flieg-interview.html?cms_x=4&catalog=1; Nungesser, 'Chemnitz Liegt Bei São Paulo. Der Fotograf Hans Günter Flieg'.



– aimed from one of the upper floors of a building – leads past a residential building; on the left is a broad part with a cloudy sky.

Flieg was taking pictures from his parents' flat, which was located in the Kaßberg district of Chemnitz. Since the turn of the twentieth century, with the industrial boom in the city, the area was considered an upscale and exquisitely built residential district.³ Flieg's photo was taken in August 1939. The next photo on the right is dated December 1939 and shows a bright vase of white orchids. Here, too, one of the subjects, the vase, is cropped on the right, standing on a table. Four months separate the two adjacent shots.

This film strip is often shown when Flieg's photographic work is published.⁴ Flieg also spoke about this picture in an interview uploaded to the page of the digital exile museum *Künste im Exil* (Arts in Exile) of the Deutsches Exilarchiv (German Exile Archive) 1933–1945, which itself is a project of the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library).⁵ The fascination with this negative strip is due to the two photos and the narrow strip between them, which condense an emigration (hi)story. The narrow strip and the four months of time suspended in it both conceal and expose a difficult route that led from Chemnitz to Munich, over the Brenner Pass to Italy and from there by sea to São Paulo. Several thousand kilometres condense just as much on the narrow strip between two photographs as time accumulates on an in-between space.

3 Tilo Richter, ed., *Der Kassberg. Ein Chemnitzer Lese- und Bilderbuch* (Leipzig: Passage-Verlag, 1996).

4 Ingrid Mössinger and Katharina Metz, eds., *Hans Günter Flieg: Dokumentar fotografie aus Brasilien (1940–1970)* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2008), 48–49; Sylvia Asmus and Maren Eckl, eds., *...Mehr Vorwärts Als Rückwärts Schauen...* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013).

5 Hans Günter Flieg, Interview des Deutschen Exilarchivs 1933–1945 mit Hans Günter Flieg: São Paulo, 18.04.2013 / Interview und Bild: Sylvia Asmus und Jochanan Shelliem, 18 April 2013.

Fig. 01
Hans Günter Flieg,
Last photograph taken in Chemnitz
and first photograph in São Paulo,
1939, credit: Hans Gunter Flieg /
Instituto Moreira Salles Collection.

Based on this (arguably enlarged) contact print of the film strip, I offer reflections in two directions. One is about the concept of the nomadic camera. The other is about the adaptation of the term *dis:connectivity* to photography and exile.

With *nomadic camera*, I refer to the camera and photography as the central medium to visualise cross-border changes of place. Included in the term *nomadic* are forms of forced or voluntary relocation, i.e. migration, flight, displacement, exile. Etymologically, 'nomadic' derives from the Latin *nomas*/Greek *nomás*. *Nomás* alludes to non-sedentary forms of existence that historically developed in the Old World dry belt – from West Africa, across the Arabian Peninsula to East Asia – of those who spend their lives wandering, adapting to living conditions with scarce resources spread over a wide area.⁶ This archaic nomadism of migratory ethnic groups, which persists, has its revenant and related figures in post-industrial societies – in commuters, labour migrants, political refugees, in employees of globally oriented companies, students, global travellers, in artists who are globally present as visiting scholars and exhibitors.⁷

With these diverse connotations of nomadism in mind, I would like to refer to Caren Kaplan, who recognises 'continuities and discontinuities between terms such as "travel", "displacement" and "location" as well as between the particularized practices and identities of "exile", "tourist" and "nomad". All displacements are not the same.'⁸ But precisely the often-one-dimensional reception and connotations of these different transitive forms of existence – migration as alienation, travel as experience, nomadism and vagabonding as (artistic) freedom – problematise perceptions of them as sharply delineated possibilities of existence. The point is to focus instead on the intersections that emerge from them and how they catalyse new thoughts and perceptions.

Nomads, migrants and travellers are united by change and movement, the potentially temporary instability of their existence, their experience of new spaces, societies and languages. Sometimes, as the history of emigration in the 1930s and 1940s shows, the transitions between tourism and exile were fluid. Examples include transalpine border crossings disguised as ski tours, and exhibition and reading tour by artists and writers

6 Alfred Hendricks, 'Menschen unterwegs. Mobilität als Erfolgsstrategie', in *Unterwegs. Nomaden früher und heute*, ed. Alfred Hendricks (Gütersloh: Linnemann, 2003), 8–11.

7 Birgit Haehnel, in *Regelwerk und Umgestaltung. Nomadistische Denkweisen in der Kunstwahrnehmung nach 1945* (Berlin: Reimer, 2007), 29; T. J. Demos, in *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Verona: Electa, 2017), 18–26.

8 Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1996).

becoming exile because political circumstances no longer permitted their return.⁹

As a concept, the nomadic camera connotes a non-settled and nomadic ‘meta-figure’ or ‘general metaphor’¹⁰ and denotes a transitory state that proceeds from the technical apparatus, the camera, to include the act of photographing, the camera operator(s), the resulting photographs and their circulation as well as the objects photographed. With the accent on the camera, the research interest centres on the complex interconnections of photography, mobility and technology. It extends to touch on the photographic form and aesthetics. Photography can find different languages for forced and voluntary displacements, so the question of a specific pictorial aesthetic, the formal and compositional parameters of the photography of exile, migration and flight, arises.

Already in the early days of photography since its introduction in 1839, photographers travelled even with heavy-plate and large-format cameras. Throughout its existence, photography has served as a means of visualising displacements. In 1852, the French writer Victor Hugo went into exile on the Channel Islands of Jersey and Guernsey, where he composed autobiographical texts as well as drawings and photographs that pictorially recorded his escape. Hugo’s portraits in the island’s natural environment, taken in cooperation with his son Charles and the journalist Auguste Vaquerie, are perhaps the earliest exile photographs.¹¹ From Hugo’s exile, widely branching lines extend to current migration, flight and displacement. The 150 years of photographic migration history – or migrant photographic history – is closely connected with technical innovations that can only be traced coarsely here.

Camera techniques like the plate camera and the daguerrotype or calotype favoured mainly professional photographers, as these techniques and transporting the large cameras were expensive and time-consuming. The introduction of the Kodak box camera in the late nineteenth century fuelled the market for amateur photography, which burgeoned globally with the miniature 35-mm cameras of the 1920s.¹²

9 Thomas Oellermann, ‘Wenzel Jaksch und die Seliger-Gemeinde’, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 27 November 2021, <https://www.fes.de/themenportal-geschichte-kultur-medien-netz/artikelseite/wenzel-jaksch>.

10 Peter Gross, ‘Der Nomade’, in *Diven, Hacker, Spekulanten. Sozialfiguren der Gegenwart*, eds. Stephan Moebius and Markus Schroer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 316–25.

11 Denis Canguilhem, ‘En collaboration avec le soleil. Victor Hugo, photographies de l’exil’ exh. cat., *Textes de F. Heilbrun, Q. Bajac, P. Néagu, N. Savy, S. Rouleau, F. Rodari*, (Paris: Musée d’Orsay et Maison de Victor Hugo, 1998) n.d., <https://journals.openedition.org/etudesphotographiques//200>.

12 Todd Gustavson, *Camera: A History of Photography from Daguerrotype to Digital* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2009); Erich Stenger, *Die Geschichte der Kleinbildkamera bis zur Leica* (Frankfurt am Main, 1949).

Hans Günter Flieg’s film strips, the Agfa Isopan F film and the Leica miniature camera indicate photography’s unprecedented mobility in the 1920s and 1930s. Photography with film rolls was a democratic medium of images whose affordability and user-friendly technology made it broadly accessible. In addition, shops sprang up all over the world as service facilities where film had to be deposited for processing, with the negatives and prints to be collected later. Outsourcing the development process promoted the global use of photography by amateurs. Not only was the technology portable, but the photographic prints – the result of the technical process – were also available on the road.

Since the massive introduction of miniature cameras in the 1920s at the latest, photography became *the* technical and artistic medium of migration, exile and flight. Handheld cameras accompanied their owners along their migrations, leaving their homeland either voluntarily and, after 1933, often forcibly. Photographs taken on passages into exile tell of the outward routes and modes of transport.¹³ Thus, images created in emigration or reflecting migration phenomena themselves have inherently nomadic qualities.

For me, photography is part of a history of migration and mobility. Flieg’s negative strip highlights this in an unusual way, as the movement of the photographer, his camera and the film manifests itself through the photographs in Chemnitz on the left, the narrow strip in the middle and the shot in São Paulo on the right. The localisation in a specific environment as the starting point of the flight is clearly recognisable on the left in the Chemnitz cityscape. São Paulo as the terminus of the escape, meanwhile, is marked by the vase with the white orchids – in Brazil there are about 3,000 species from the Orchidaceae family.¹⁴ The passage itself, as already explained, remains hidden in the dark strip.

The negative strip also offers access to, or an adaptation of, the concept of dis:connectivity in the context of global flight movements and their mediatisation in photography. Dis:connectivity overcomes a binary approach and has already been applied in, for example, sociological media theory, to capture digital (dis)connectivity, media consumption and media abstinence.¹⁵ Dis:connectivity is a new approach to global history, which we at *global dis:connect* have already used productively and which focuses neither on interconnectedness nor on deglobalisation exclusively. Rather, as Roland Wenzlhuemer writes, it is about a ‘tension between processes of entanglement

13 Burcu Dogramaci, *Fotografieren und Forschen: Wissenschaftliche Expeditionen* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2013).

14 ‘Orchideen S.O.S.’, 20 December 2021, <https://brasilienportal.ch/wissen/brasilien-report/kurz-reportagen/orchideen-sos>.

15 Pepita Hesselberth, ‘Discourses on Disconnectivity and the Right to Disconnect’, *New Media & Society* 20, no. 5 (2018): 1994–2010.

and disentanglement',¹⁶ which means that global connections always contain interruptions, detours and voids, be they transport routes, communication channels, escape routes or capital flows. For exile research, the concept of dis:connectivity can illuminate both the actors (persons) and actants (objects). That is precisely the purpose behind examining Flieg's photographs, which are connected to each other as successive images on a negative strip. Yet, there is an interstice, a gap between them.

Theoretically, two images on 35-mm film could be separated by only a few moments, as it was possible to take up to 36 images in succession with the Leica camera. Flieg, however, took the photographs and put the camera aside, not using it while in transit. Therefore, no photograph exists of this passage into exile, at least not on this film and not with this camera. It can be assumed that he did not want to draw attention to himself, at least towards the beginning of his journey, which led to Italy over the Brenner Pass. On the ship – I sadly don't know the exact route – no photographs were taken with the Leica either. Absence, the blank space marked in black on the strip, thus stands for a journey that was not visually documented. Absence, as Ulrike Lehmann writes, refers to a former presence and what has now disappeared: 'The absent presupposes the present.'¹⁷

But the space in-between also evidences the dis:connective relationship between home and abroad, between the origin and the terminus of the journey that was to separate Flieg almost permanently from the city of Chemnitz and from Germany. He only returned on the occasion of his first solo exhibition in Germany at the Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz in 2008, almost 70 years after he had emigrated.¹⁸

The film strip can also be understood as a timeline in which the direction runs from left to right, corresponding to the numbering of the images from 10 (Chemnitz) to 11 (São Paulo). Timelines are culturally bound. Where Latin script predominates, they run from left to right (i.e. as one reads), and where Arabic prevails, they are ordered from right to left (again according to the direction of reading). In everyday life, time is perceived as a trajectory that always runs irreversibly in one direction towards a final state.¹⁹ This negative strip, however, also allows for another interpretation, namely time as something that runs from exile in two directions

¹⁶ Roland Wenzlhuemer, 'Dis:Konnektivität und Krise', (blog) 12 November 2020, <https://www.blog.cas.uni-muenchen.de/topics/global-worlds/dis-konnektivitaet-und-krise>.

¹⁷ Ulrike Lehmann, 'Ästhetik der Absenz. Ihre Rituale des Verbergens und der Verweigerung. Eine Kunstgeschichtliche Betrachtung', in *Ästhetik der Absenz. Bilder zwischen Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit*, eds. Ulrike Lehmann and Peter Weibel (München/Berlin: Klinckschardt & Biermann, 1994), 42–74.

¹⁸ Hans Günter Flieg, in *Hans Günter Flieg: Dokumentarfotografie aus Brasilien (1940–1970)*, ed. Ingrid Mössinger (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2008), 8.

¹⁹ Erhard Keppler, *Zeitliches. Vom Umgang mit der Zeit seit der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Katlenburg-Lindau: Copernicus, 2007).

separated by the dividing space. There is a time before exile and a time of exile or post-exile. These times are not characterised by succession, but by the difference and divergence of experiences and of cultural and linguistic spaces.

Time and space – the latter as a variable often used for flight, exile and migration – form an important connection. One could equally speak of dis:connective times and dis:connective spaces. Incidentally, Hans Günter Flieg found the film strip with the two photos from Chemnitz and São Paulo among his early photos only many decades later, when he was preparing a retrospective of his works for the Museu da Imagem de do Som in São Paulo in 1981. Through this find, he was able to recall the time of his emigration with temporal distance, thus creating connectivity.

Bibliography

- Asmus, Sylvia, and Marlen Eckl, editors, '... mehr vorwärts als rückwärts schauen ...'. Das deutschsprachige Exil in Brasilien 1933–1945 / '... olhando mais para frente do que para trás ...'. O exílio de língua alemã no Brasil 1933–1945 (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013).
- Demos, T.J. 'Charting a Course. Exile, Diaspora, Nomads, Refugees. A Genealogy of Art and Migration', in *The Restless Earth*, exh. cat. Fondazione La Triennale di Milano. Fondazione Nicola Trussardi, Milan (Verona: Mondadori Electa, 2017), 18–26.
- Dogramaci, Burcu, *Fotografieren und Forschen. Wissenschaftliche Expeditionen mit der Kamera im türkischen Exil nach 1933* (Marburg: Jonas, 2013).
- En collaboration avec le soleil. Victor Hugo. Photographies de l'exil*, exh. cat. Musée d'Orsay et Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris, 1998.
- Flieg, Hans Günter. 'Interview on 18 April 2013, video, https://kuenste-im-exil.de/KIE/Content/DE/Objekte/flieg-interview.html?cms_x=4&catalog=1, accessed 3 April 2022.
- Gross, Peter, 'Der Nomade', in *Diven, Hacker, Spekulanten. Sozialfiguren der Gegenwart*, edited by Stephan Moebius and Markus Schroer (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 316–25.
- Gustavson, Todd, *Camera. A History of Photography from Daguerreotype to Digital* (New York: Sterling Publishing, 2009).
- Haehnel, Birgit, *Regelwerk und Umgestaltung. Nomadistische Denkweisen in der Kunstwahrnehmung nach 1945* (Berlin: Reimer, 2006).
- Hans Günter Flieg. *Dokumentarfotografie aus Brasilien*, edited by Ingrid Mössinger and Katharina Metz, exh. cat. Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Chemnitz (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2008).
- Hendricks, Alfred, 'Menschen unterwegs. Mobilität als Erfolgsstrategie', in idem, editor, *Unterwegs. Nomaden früher und heute* (Gütersloh: Siegbert Linnemann, 2003), 8–11.
- Hesselberth, Pepita, 'Discourses on Disconnectivity and the Right to Disconnect', in *New Media & Society* 20, no. 5 (2018): 1994–2010.
- Kaplan, Caren, *Questions of Travel. Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1996).
- Keppler, Erhard, *Zeitliches. Vom Umgang mit der Zeit seit der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Katlenburg-Lindau: Projekte-Verlag Cornelius, 2007).
- Lehmann, Ulrike, 'Ästhetik der Absenz. Ihre Rituale des Verbergens und der Verweigerung. Eine kunstgeschichtliche Betrachtung', in *Ästhetik der Absenz. Bilder zwischen Anwesenheit und Abwesenheit*, edited by Ulrike Lehmann and Peter Weibel (Munich/Berlin: Klinckschardt & Biermann, 1994), 42–74.
- Nungesser, Michael. 'Chemnitz liegt bei São Paulo. Der Fotograf Hans Günter Flieg', in: *Hans Günter Flieg. Dokumentarfotografie aus Brasilien*, edited by Ingrid Mössinger and Katharina Metz, Ausst.-Kat. Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz, Chemnitz 2008, 10–14.
- Oellermann, Thomas, 'Wenzel Jaksch und die Seliger-Gemeinde', 27.11.2021, <https://www.fes.de/themenportal-geschichte-kultur-medien-netz/artikelseite/wenzel-jaksch>, accessed 3 April 2022.

Richter, Tilo, editor, *Der Kaßberg. Ein Chemnitzer Lese- und Bilderbuch* (Leipzig: Passage-Verlag, 1996).
 Stenger, Erich, *Die Geschichte der Kleinbildkamera bis zur Leica* (Frankfurt/Main: Umschau 1949).
 Wenzlhuemer, Roland. 'Dis:konnektivität und Krise', *CAS LMU Blog*, 12 November 2020, <https://www.blog.cas.uni-muenchen.de/topics/global-worlds/dis-konnektivitaet-und-krise>, accessed 4 April 2022.

Mars and the urge to connect around 1900

Anna Nübling



What do you think this drawing depicts?

It might seem a strange question. Isn't the answer obvious? We see a cloudy sky. The viewer's gaze is drawn to the horizon where the sun is either rising or setting. The mood is calm and peaceful. In the foreground, we see a marshland

streaked with channels, though seemingly untouched and natural. Something is peeking into the immediate foreground. It could be rocks or a wooden fence, imparting the impression of looking down on the lonely landscape from a hill.

But the motif is very different from what it appears to be. It is no peaceful marshland. Rather, it's Marsland: a depiction of the surface of Mars. And it is by no means as untouched and unspectacular as it may appear.

Anna Nübling

is a postdoctoral researcher at *global dis:connect*. In addition to philosophies of history (especially notions of evolution and progress), her research interests include the history of preservation and the idea of transmission and legacy, the history of notions of the global as well as pseudoscience and conspiracy theories. They all merge in her current research project about the search for extraterrestrials.

Fig. 01

Taken from the book titled *Les Terres du Ciel*, published in 1884 by the French astronomer *Camille Flammarion*.