

editorial

Christopher Balme

November 2023 sees the 85th anniversary of the infamous *Kristallnacht*, when the Nazi state coordinated and organised pogroms against Germany's Jewish population. It is only fitting then that this issue of *static* features a 'historical drama' directly connected to this event. *The Singer of Shanghai* dramatises experiences of German-Jewish refugees who survived the war in the Jewish community in Shanghai under Japanese occupation. It is thanks to the tireless research by our research fellow Kevin Ostoyich and his colleague Kari-Anne Innes that this largely forgotten chapter of the Jewish exile experience can be re-experienced through the drama, or even better, through a performance of it. As Kevin explains in his introduction, the term 'historical drama', refers more to a pedagogical tool than to a literary genre, and it is designed to bring history alive and make it palpable in the classroom. We are very proud to have hosted Kevin and this project and to have been able to provide a venue for his work, which embodies our philosophy in so many ways. Not only is the exile experience a demonstration of dis:connectivity as a concept, but it also provides an example of how we seek to harness artistic idioms to explore what is often seen as a fairly abstract concept.

The special contribution that artists can make to exploring and visualising dis:connectivity, which is one of the core assumptions of the project, can be seen in the article by Andrea Frohne, an alumna fellow who discusses work by the artist Dawit L. Petros. Originally from Eritrea, he moved first to Ethiopia and then to Canada while still a child. The main image featured here



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creates, as Frohne argues, an abstract field of colour, in the best modernist tradition (pace Greenberg), although it is composed in an actual Kansas wheatfield, in which stands an East African *barella* (a handcart and 'gift' of Italian colonialism in the region) and is framed by the artist's hands. Although the image could be anywhere in the expanses of the American corn basket, it was taken in Osborne, Kansas, which 'designated by geographers as the geodetic centre of North America'. The mapping of the world is another modernist project and a precondition of colonial domination.

Colonialism is also front and centre in Katharina Wilkens discussion of the relationship between religion, African socialism and pan-Africanism. This leads both to a reflection on the place of traditional African religions, which were largely dismissed or even actively combatted in the colonial scheme, and to how African interpretations of socialism led to a reconciliation of a putative secular ideology with both traditional and imported religions (Islam and Christianity). Wilkens shows how this realignment has its roots in the first generation of postcolonial leaders, and it continues into the present with a massive resurgence of various kinds of religiosity in Africa.

Decolonisation in Africa, specifically Mozambique, is the subject of Nikolai Brandes's reflection on a slim volume, a Mozambican translation of a Japanese treatise on architecture, *In Praise of Shadows*, by the novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, first published in the 1930s. The author's critique of Western architecture, and technology more broadly, evidently resonated with the newly established architecture faculty in the former Portuguese colony. The need to critically interrogate Western modularity and reflect on local solutions clearly has a broader relevance to globalisation processes more broadly because it demonstrates how local needs can find creative solutions, including which books to translate.

Sometimes forms of connection inhere in displays dis:connectivity, as Peter Seeland makes clear in his reflections on a performance event at the documenta 15 exhibition. Atis Rezistans, a Haitian artist collective, combined sculpture, music and dance in St Kunigundis, a Catholic church in Kassel. The event brought several elements of Haitian Voodoo to life, and the setting was a vital component, as it simultaneously highlighted certain iconographic similarities between Voodoo and Catholicism as well as stark divergences. As a relatively 'new' religion, Voodoo did not emerge in a vacuum; rather, it borrowed from the Catholic ideas and images that the African slave diaspora encountered abroad and combined these with its adherents' West African roots. Peter's writing and photography, with Atis Rezistans's art as their subject, brilliantly capture the alienation and new forms of community that result from globalisation processes and how they echo through history.

Our thanks to Ben Kamis and the editorial team at global dis:connect for shepherding this issue of *static* to press.

Christopher Balme, September 2023

