

editorial

Hanni Geiger & Tom Menger

This special issue of *static* is dedicated to Mediterranean absences. Among other work, it contains contributions from the 2023 gd:c summer school. The event focused on the Mediterranean – particularly on migration and (post)coloniality – in the past, present and future. This issue reflects manifold negotiations of absences including invisibilities, erasures, voids, exclusions and disappearances and their relations to global dis:connectivity.

Mediterranean absences, entanglements and disentanglements are fruitful research objects. They are not simply absent in the sense of invisible. Rather, absences have spatiality, materiality and agency, and, as Derrida noted, leave traces. They are also a perspective; they necessitate their own methodologies, combining different disciplines, theories and practices. The arts have proven particularly fruitful in illuminating absences.

This special issue reflects how our summer school participants engaged with Mediterranean absences last year. Dis:connections as absences can refer to places and social systems, personal and collective affects and memories, narratives and methodologies. Perceiving the sea as a border, a migration route, a transitory space of waiting and loss, a symbol or place of refuge, and a place of gender-related dis:connections, as the authors in this section do, reveals the range of how absences can be instantiated. The contributions to the special section treat absences in terms of forced migration and (post)colonialism. These two (interrelated) global forces derive from the Mediterranean's status as a site of



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complex social and environmental dynamics related to power asymmetries.

Samira Yildirim introduces the Mediterranean as a border. Far from an idealised holiday destination, she points to the sea's geopolitical relevance for the EU's external border regime. She examines Heinrich Völkel's photographs of the demilitarised zone on Cyprus, showing how art reflects the Mediterranean as a place of exclusion.

In her photo essay, Rim Harmessi discusses the Kerkennah Islands as a transit zone of illegal immigration to Europe. With subtle, personal poetry, she follows the material and emotional traces of refugees who died or were trapped on the archipelago.

Absences related to Mediterranean migration also captivated Florian Bachmeier. In his aesthetically refined photographs, the omission of certain motifs in visual media is a potent stylistic tool to draw attention to what the image omits. He points to the absence of people in usually crowded places and the lack of security and stability at borders and in refugee camps.

Jonathan Jonsson engages with the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, especially relating to his experiences of exile around the Mediterranean. He negotiates the sea as a symbol of exile and displacement in a region long marked by colonialism.

Colonialism also motivates Tal Hafner's contribution. She uncovers the history of the Ajami neighbourhood in Tel Aviv and how Israel has colonised an Arab neighbourhood over several decades. Her photography explores the agency of a sea that washes traces of former dwellings and their materials to shore, revealing the absences of the former Palestinian inhabitants.

Shaul Marmari tackles absent narratives about the Mediterranean. He explores its place in relation to the Red Sea in the Israeli imagination, noting the conspicuous absence of the latter. Contrary to the widespread perception that the Red Sea and the Mediterranean are considered two distinct bodies of water, Israel has always thought of them together, strategically and in the broader culture.

The contributions from (art) history, cultural studies, literary studies and photography reflect the range of approaches required to research global absences. This entails recognising local perspectives as well as intimate and experimental approaches that recast dominant discourses on globalisation.

Beyond the special section, this issue also contains two further insightful essays. Sabrina Moura revisits the exhibition she held at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich, which reframed 19th-century transfers between Munich and Brazil. She highlights

Fig. 01
Tom Menger
(Photo: Lambert Strehlke)

the colonial practices of Bavarian scientists, which included kidnapping Amazonian children. Moura sheds light on the dis:connections behind these scientific endeavours.

Peter Seeland examines Justin Brice Guariglia's landscape photography through an ecocritical lens, situating his work in the discourse on the Anthropocene. He underscores how Guariglia elicits reflection on contemporary relationships between human and nature, encouraging deeper critical engagement with ecological concerns.

The Latin etymology of *mediterranean* suggests that it is something in the middle of the land, implying a gap between things of greater substance. This issue presents a variety of perspectives on absences, but for all their coverage, gaps will always remain. As ever, there can be no connection without disconnection, whether across the globe, a sea or the pages of a journal.

Hanni Geiger & Tom Menger, November 2024



Fig. 02
Hanni Geiger
(Photo: Lambert Strehlke)