

# static

thoughts and research from **global dis:connect**

# 2.1  
special issue:  
**dis:connected  
objects**



*Madrepora.....  
squarrosa (L.)*  
Rothes Meer: Tur am Sinai.  
1873. HAECKEL.

# static

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Madrepora (Acropora)  
squarrosa, collected 1873  
by Ernst Haeckel near El Tor,  
Phyletic Museum, Jena  
(photo: Bernhard Bock).

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# editorial

## Dis:connected objects

Burcu Dogramaci,  
Hanni Geiger & Anne Söll

This special issue of *static* is – in addition to other research and events at the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect – devoted to ‘dis:connected objects’. This was the title of a workshop held on 15 June 2022, organised by Anne Söll, an alumna fellow of global dis:connect and professor of art history at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, together with Burcu Dogramaci and Hanni Geiger from the Centre. At the same time, *Dis:connected objects* is the title of a series that has had a fixed place in *static* since its first issue and has dealt with (research) objects and archival finds as a starting point for reflection on dis:connectivity in globalisation processes. The term leads to contemplation of how objects represent ruptures in memory, in displacements, in incomplete, globally branching histories.

Various case studies in our special issue covering different epochs and geographies examine and exemplify these considerations. They simultaneously test the analytical possibilities of research in art history and cultural studies within the ambit of a dis:connective understanding of global contexts.

We start from the premise that objects play an ambivalent role in the process of globalisation, which develops not only as a form of intensifying networks and a compression of geographic connections but equally through missing or missed connections and disentanglements. On the one hand, objects are symbols and metaphors for a seemingly shrinking world (for example, through global IT connectivity). On the other, they stand for the severe breaks, absences, detours and interruptions that are intrinsically



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linked to processes of globalisation, migration and exile (such as beloved family photographs that are brought into exile but also lost, dispersed or destroyed en route). Building on and extending research on the provenance and restitution of objects, our special issue of *static* focusses on the objects themselves. How are they dealt with in private collections and museums? How do they reflect, change, challenge and deconstruct our understanding of globalisation?

Our special issue shifts attention to the dis:connectivities in globalisation and how they impress themselves onto individual objects, their uses (or non-use) and functions in aesthetic and/or social as well as historical domains. How do objects represent the disruptions and diversions that are also results of globalisation? How do (art) objects change when museumised, and what new contexts and relations to other objects, politics or the history of the museum itself come into view? How do objects incorporate memories or exclude them? Taking individual objects as our starting point, we discuss how objects and the discourses connected to them negotiate the reciprocal, tension-laden global relationships. How do objects provide a complex, ambivalent or even controversial interface for complex processes of globalisation?

Imperial and colonial power structures that allowed scientists to extract objects and living beings from colonised countries, their landscapes, habitats and seas were a prerequisite for globalisation. Petra Löffler presents a case study on the journey of Ernst Haeckel's corals and shows how Haeckel extracted a vast amount of corals from their original habitats with the help of colonial infrastructure, transporting them to German museums, where they are now archived and have been objects of research and display.

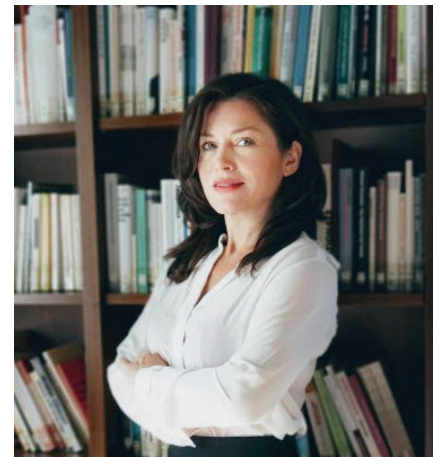
Displaying objects in museums and exhibitions and the ensuing narratives of dis:connectivity is also the topic of Hanni Geiger's essay on the work of Israeli potter Hanna Charag-Zuntz. She argues that the complex visions of the Mediterranean as a space of dis:connectivity are lost in exhibits and catalogues that show Charag-Zuntz's work in a narrow national narrative.

Museum narratives are also at the core of Änne Söll's essay, which brings attention to an 18th-century birdcage that was donated to the Frankfurt Historical Museum by the exiled Jewish art historian Yvonne Hackenbroch (1912-2012). In the current museum display, which situates the birdcage at the centre of life in Frankfurt during the Nazi regime, she argues that tensions between the object as family memorabilia, a symbol of Jewish life in Frankfurt and a signifier of forced emigration and dislocation arise.

Another contribution that addresses the issue of exile is that by Burcu Dogramaci. She deals with the book *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* (1932), in which the paths and histories of a writer in exile (Lili Körber) and an artist (John Heartfield) meet. The book itself was condemned to the flames during the National Socialist book burnings.

Similar to Dogramaci, Nadia von Maltzahn's essay deals with an object made of paper: a letter by the Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari exiled in Japan. Maltzahn shows how this letter, written on a McDonald's placemat, expresses the artist's struggles of living and working in a global world, forging ties and friendships under conditions of isolation and dis:connection.

Advancing research on dis:connectivity at global dis:connect, this special issue points the way for object-based research that explores questions of connections and non-connections in a global perspective as exemplified through works of art, natural objects, everyday objects and books.



Photos from top:  
**Burcu Dogramaci, Hanni Geiger,  
Anne Söll**



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# Haeckel's corals: On the extraction, collection and circulation of scientific objects

Petra Löffler

*'... scientific objects are elusive and hard-won.'*

(Lorraine Daston)

## Magical corals

When the natural scientist Ernst Haeckel visited the shores of the Red Sea in March 1873, a dream came true for him: to see 'the magical coral reefs'<sup>1</sup> with his own eyes. However, he went not only to admire the beauty and diversity of the abundant coral species that have fascinated naturalists and artists since antiquity,<sup>2</sup> but also to extract samples of his own from the sea. Corals are polyps (animals) that live in symbiosis with certain algae (plants), which they shelter in their calciferous exoskeletons, receiving nutrients in return. They live in colonies building the reefs that house many small species. Corals first have to be disconnected from their natural habitat to become collectible and classifiable scientific objects.<sup>3</sup> My aim is to reconstruct the migration routes

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1 Ernst Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen* (Berlin: Verlag von G. Reimer, 1875), 23. All translations from Haeckel's *Arabische Korallen* (Arabian Corals) are by the author.

2 Marion Endt-Jones, *Coral: Something Rich and Strange* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

3 On the making of scientific objects and their biographies, see: Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process', in *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge), 64–91 and Lorraine Daston, ed., *Biographies of Scientific Objects* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).



and transformations that the extracted corals had to undertake from their natural watery habitat in the shallows around the Sinai Peninsula to the dry natural history museums in Germany.

As I will show, Haeckel's corals have passed through all commonplaces of Western science: the field as a space of exploration, the laboratory as a space of manipulation, the museum as a space of presentation and the archive as a space of circulation.<sup>4</sup> In following their traces through inventory lists, correspondences and publications, I seek the 'waves of action' they are nevertheless able to release.<sup>5</sup> As collection items, each specimen has its own history and 'biography' of extraction

Fig. 01  
**Madrepora (Acropora) squarrosa,**  
**collected 1873 by Ernst Haeckel**  
**near El Tor, Phyletic Museum, Jena**  
**Image: Bernhard Bock**

4 See: David Livingstone, *Putting Science in Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

5 I draw here on Bruno Latour's claim that living and non-living entities are entangled in networks and able to act: Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 101. See also: Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays in the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1999).



and migration from their areas of origin to the natural-history collections and museum repositories in the global North.



Today, Haeckel's extensive collection of corals is distributed across various scientific institutions, such as Berlin's Natural History Museum and Jena's Phyletic Museum. While some samples are exhibited as showpieces (fig. 1), the majority of the impressive

stock of corals is stored in repositories and thus disentangled once again (fig. 2a/b). Seen in this light, 'his' corals are not only disconnected but undead objects that raise questions about the entanglements of Western natural science and colonial politics in their extraction and involuntary migration.

With his 1873 journey, Haeckel explicitly followed in the footsteps of the natural scientist Christian Gottfried Ehrenberg, who had already travelled to the Red Sea in 1832 and had taken up quarters in El Tor to study coral species in their natural habitat.<sup>6</sup> Haeckel returned to this village on the coast of the Gulf of Suez, which soon became a regional locus for coral research.



In his travel report, published in 1875, Haeckel complains about the 'many and great difficulties' of his journey to the scarcely populated Sinai Peninsula, which was, at least in the culturally biased eyes of the Western traveller, 'mostly inhabited only by poor, half-wild Muhammedans'. 'One must bring tents, servants, food and drinking water oneself in order to exist there. Nor is there any regular steamship connection between Suez and these wretched coastal places'.<sup>7</sup> The alternative overland route through the Sinai desert seemed to him equally arduous and time-consuming and, as he notes, 'the transport of the corals I wished to collect would have been very awkward on the camel'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Ehrenberg published his findings on the coral reef communities of the Red Sea in 1834. At the same time, from 1832 to 1836, Charles Darwin made his circumnavigation on the HMS Beagle and researched the formation and distribution of coral reefs around the world. See: Charles Darwin, *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs: Being the First Part of the Geology of the Voyage of the Beagle (1832-1836)* (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1842); He also collected coral specimens as evidence for his hypothesis of how the different reef types formed. They are now in the holdings of the Natural History Museum in London. See: Hayley Dunning, 'Charles Darwin's Coral Conundrum', Natural History Museum, 23 January 2023, <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/charles-darwin-coral-conundrum.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen*, 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Fig. 02a | 02b  
**Phyletic Museum, Jena, repository of Haeckel's coral specimens**  
Images: Bernhard Bock

Fortunately, the German naturalist could do without camels and servants because he could use the existing modern infrastructure of the country, which officially belonged to the Ottoman Empire. In his report, he describes hardships that were not too severe for a wealthy Western traveller. Haeckel could comfortably travel from Cairo to Suez with the railroad that opened in 1857, and he reached El Tor on board of an Egyptian navy steamship. These newly built imperial travel and transport routes, including the Suez Canal that opened in 1869, played an important part in the consolidation of colonial power.

## Extracting corals

Arriving in El Tor, the whole harbour appeared to Haeckel as ‘a charming coral garden’.<sup>9</sup> His report betrays how possessive he was of the local people, who built their houses and harbour facilities from dead stone corals: ‘Some of these wretched huts hold in a single wall a larger collection of beautiful coral blocks than can be found in many European museums. We would have loved to buy up the whole village, pack it up and send it home’.<sup>10</sup>

This did not happen, however, because the zoologist was even more excited about the abundance of coral communities living in the reefs fringing the village. In order to extract them from their natural habitat, he relied on local fishermen, who provided boats and were experienced pearl divers. As Haeckel reports, ‘[t]hey were neither equipped with diving bells nor with scaphander or other diving apparatus; but they swam so excellently, could stay under water so long and knew so skilfully how to detach even larger corals from their points of attachment that they never resurfaced without surprising us with new splendid gifts of coral’.<sup>11</sup>

I am not as concerned with Haeckel’s admiration for the skill of the local divers as with his remark on the magnificent corals as ‘splendid gifts’. As anthropologist Nicholas Thomas points out, gifts are always part of complex exchange relations, that is ‘a political process, one in which wider relationships are expressed and negotiated in a personal encounter’.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Haeckel describes the coral extraction as a fabulously successful treasure hunt: ‘As soon as we have indicated the desired object to our divers, they jump down. [...] In a few hours our boats are filled with the most precious treasures’.<sup>13</sup> Not only does he claim ownership of the corals, he extends this notion to those who did the work, whom he unhesitatingly refers to as ‘our divers’. In Haeckel’s rationalist Western worldview, the evocation of nature’s wealth

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 29.

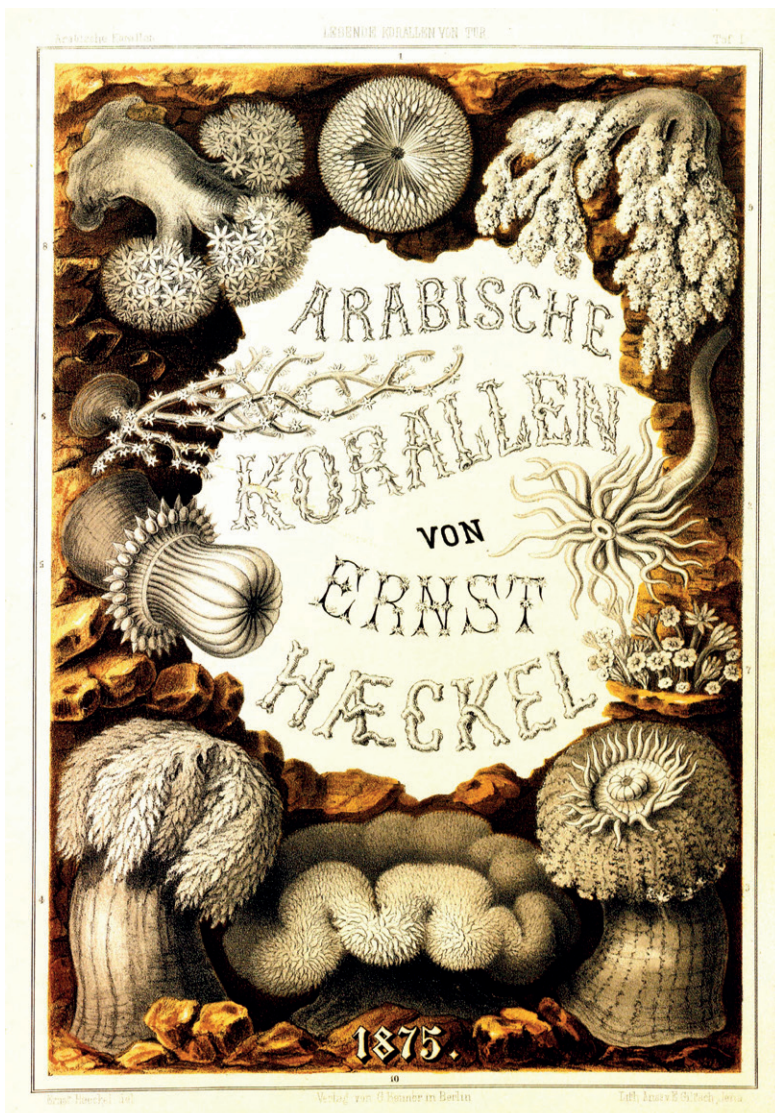
<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture, and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 7.

<sup>13</sup> Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen*, 31.

is the prerequisite of the ability to freely take possession of it. Claims of ownership overlap with ideas of the assumed superiority of Western economy, culture and science that are entangled with regimes of coloniality.<sup>14</sup> Haeckel's journey stood under the protection of the Egyptian regime, which also ruled over the Greek-Arab population of the Sinai. His travel report is dedicated to the Ottoman ruler Ismail Pasha for good reason. As a Western scientist, Haeckel undoubtedly profited from colonial power, even though he explicitly acknowledged the valuable support and hospitality of the local fishermen of El Tor.<sup>15</sup>



- 14 Walter D. Mignolo defines coloniality as ‘the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although down-played, dimension’: Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
- 15 In the 1880s, marine biologist Johannes Walther visited El Tor again to undertake a survey on the geological formation of the fringing-reef-rich Red Sea. From Suez, he took the route through the desert with camels. In his report, Walther thanked the German ‘consulate agent’ in El Tor, Hannén, and his sons for their assistance with coral diving: Johannes Walther, *Die Korallenriffe der Sinaihalbinsel: Geologische und biologische Betrachtungen* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1888), 471.

Fig. 03  
**Ernst Haeckel: Arabische Korallen (Arabian Corals), 1875, title page**  
Scan: Petra Löffler



## Collecting corals

Corals are a promising research object for the art-loving zoologist because of their immense diversity and their special way of living in colonies.<sup>16</sup> The title page of *Arabische Korallen* (Arabian Corals), designed by Haeckel himself, gives an impression of the richness of forms of these so-called anthozoans or floral animals (fig. 3). His admiration for these diverse species was partly ignited by their metabolism (each individual polyp has a stomach and is therefore a person in a strictly biological sense) and because these coral persons settle in large colonies on submarine rocks.

Haeckel, who promoted Darwin's theory of evolution and shared with the English naturalist the admiration for corals as reef architects,<sup>17</sup> coined the term 'ecology'.<sup>18</sup> He became especially interested in coral communities as habitats for various other small marine species that perform a kind of 'social democracy'.<sup>19</sup> With this metaphor, corals enter the realm of politics and become a model for a civil society with equal members. At the same time, these coral communities reminded Haeckel of a miniature 'zoological museum'.<sup>20</sup> Exactly this last notion turns living corals into a scientific object even before their extraction.

The illustrations in Haeckel's travelogue represent the richness of forms and the specific morphology of corals (fig. 4). What is particularly revealing, however, is how he transformed them into scientific objects and proceeded as a collector. To transport the removed coral specimens, Haeckel already made extensive arrangements before his arrival in El Tor and ordered a great quantity of wooden boxes and big glass jars. The transportation of marine species required special practices, logistics and knowledge of their needs.<sup>21</sup> The fact that in the end only twelve boxes with both wet and dry specimens arrived in his hometown of Jena, as he noted with regret,<sup>22</sup> shows the scale of his ambition as a collector.

16 At the time of the publication of *Arabian Corals*, 'more than one thousand different living coral species, and the fossilised skeletons of more than three thousand extinct species' were already known: Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen*, 3.

17 On the discovery of the reef-building activity of corals in the 18th century by explorers such as Johann Reinhold Forster or Louis-Antoine Bougainville, see: Alistair Sponsel, 'From Cook to Cousteau: The Many Lives of Coral Reefs', in *Fluid Frontiers: New Currents in Marine Environmental History*, ed. John R. Gillis and Franziska Torma (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2015), 137–61.

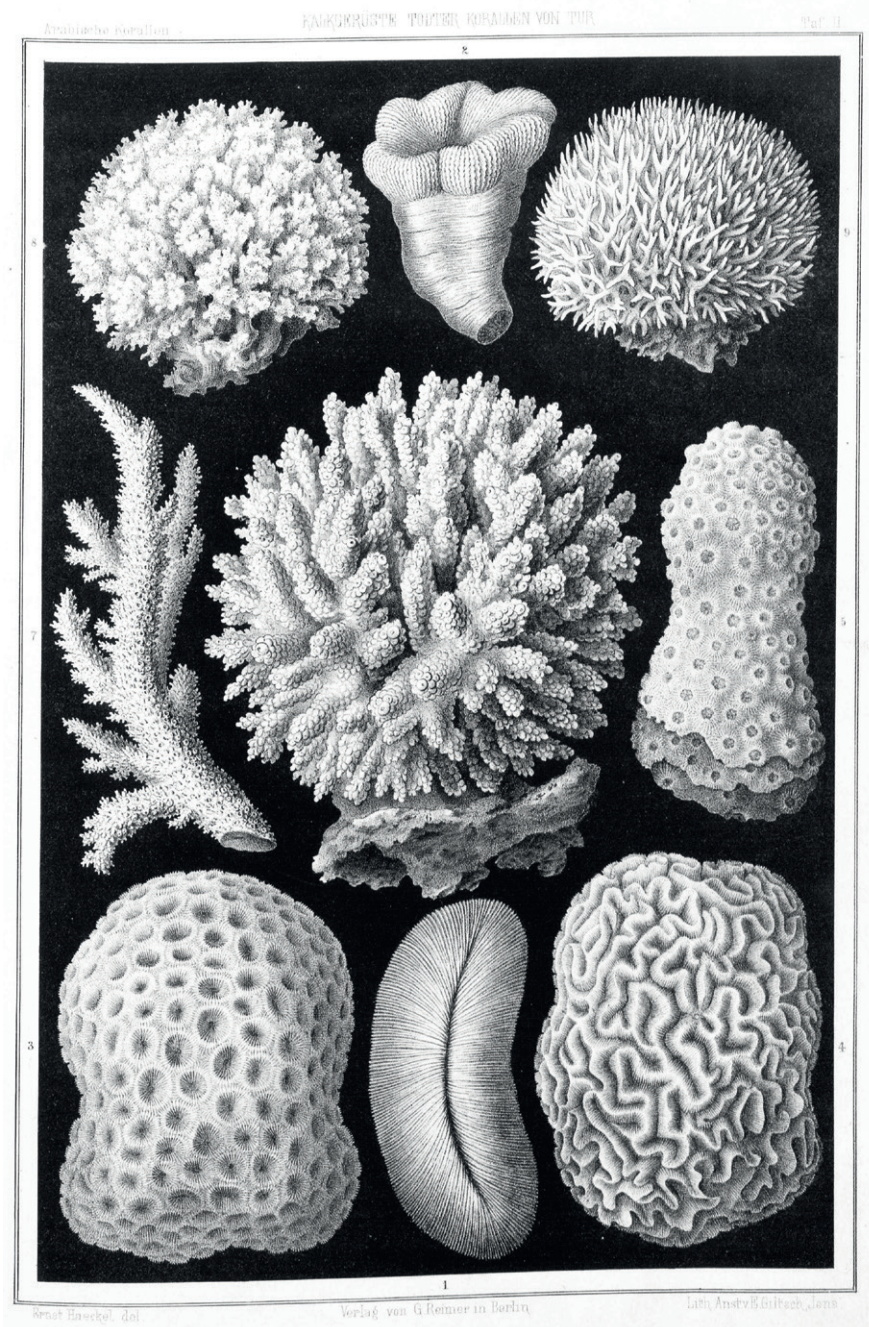
18 In his *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen* (General Morphology of Organisms), Haeckel defines ecology as 'the general science of the interdependence among organisms': Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen: Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formenwissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenztheorie*. Vol. II: Allgemeine Entwicklungsgeschichte der Organismen (Verlag von G. Reimer, 1866), 236. Author's translation.

19 Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen*, 20.

20 *Ibid.*, 20,35.

21 See: Mareiken Vennen, *Das Aquarium: Praktiken, Techniken und Medien der Wissensproduktion* (1840 – 1910) (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2018), 235–63.

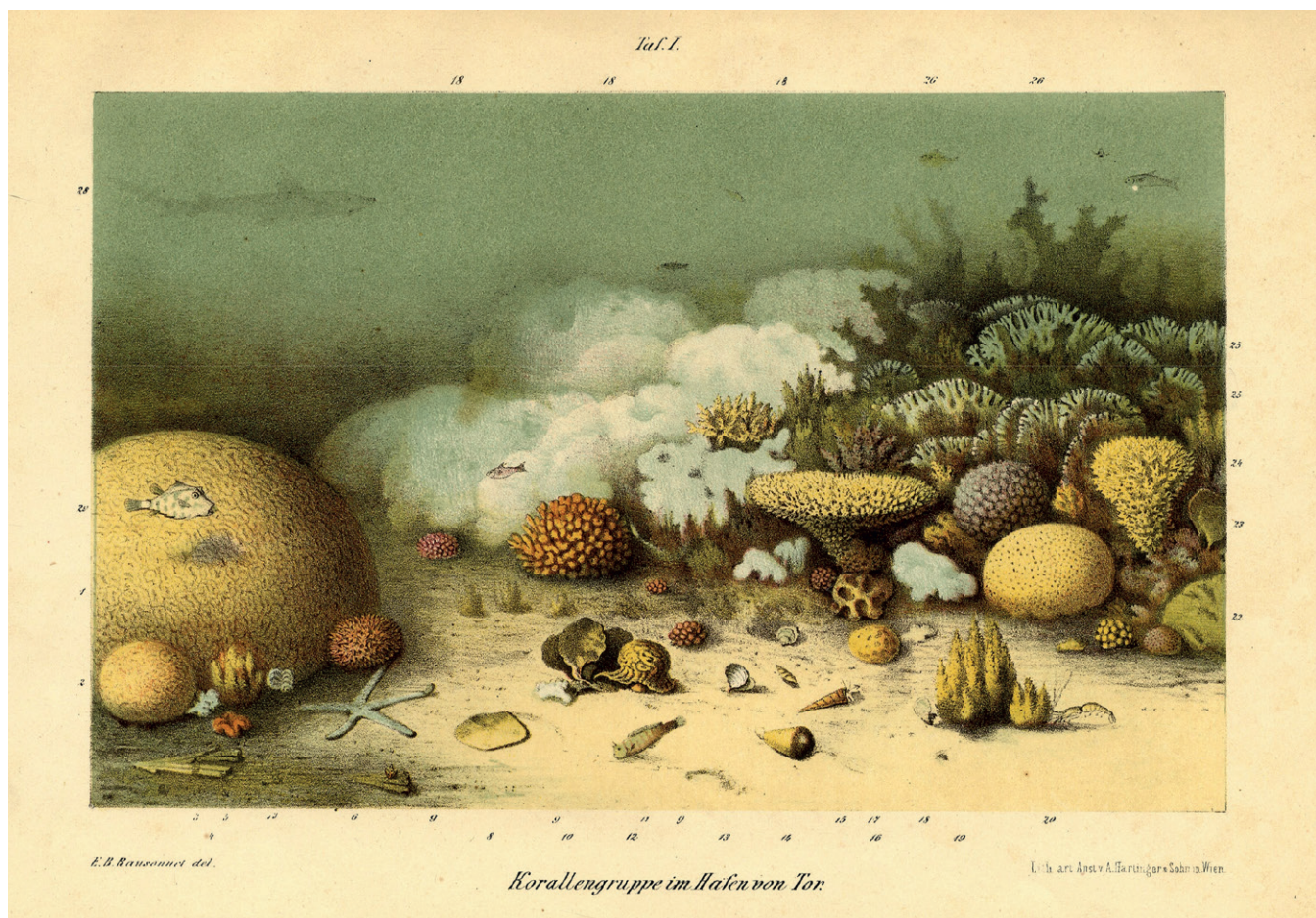
22 Haeckel, *Arabische Korallen*, 35.



Naturalists can prove themselves experts by collecting specific specimens and identifying new species. The zoologist Carl Benjamin Klunzinger, for instance, who also travelled to El Tor, praised professional collecting as a serious scientific activity. He documented his collecting activities in *Bilder aus Oberägypten, der Wüste und dem Rothen Meere* (*Images from Upper Egypt, the Desert and the Red Sea*), published in 1877 with 22 drawings. Extensive collecting of specimens was primarily intended to benefit scientific teaching and object lessons. But corals die quickly in the air and lose their colour. To depict their diverse forms and vivid colours, the explorer and painter Eugen Baron Ransonnet-Villez developed a special diving apparatus and made underwater drawings on site. Nevertheless, the colourful depictions of reef colonies that adorn the publications of

Fig. 04  
**Ernst Haeckel: *Kalkgerüste toter Korallen von Tur* (Calcareous scaffolds of dead corals from El Tor), *Arabian Corals*, 1875, plate II (scan: Petra Löffler).**





Ransonnet-Villez (1863) and Haeckel are idealised images that underline the necessity of visual representations to advance scientific knowledge (fig. 5).<sup>23</sup>

What did Haeckel do in Jena, where he had held a professorship in zoology since 1865, with all the corals he had appropriated? His collection was initially used for the morphological classification of a phylum whose diversity he had always admired. Some particularly splendid specimens became showpieces in his Villa Medusa. Some are also currently exhibited in the Haeckel Museum in Jena. Others ended up in the Phyletic Museum, which Haeckel founded in 1908. There, 128 coral specimens are still kept, among them 25 from El Tor.<sup>24</sup> He gave other pieces to the Natural History Museum in Berlin, which opened in 1889. Thereupon a lively correspondence began between the natural scientists, in which the exchange of collection objects was a recurring topic. On 25 November 1897, for instance, Karl Möbius, the director of its zoological collections at the time, thanked Haeckel in a short letter for sending corals and jellyfish to Berlin. Many such letters

Fig. 05  
**Eugen Baron Ransonnet-Villez:**  
*Reise von Kairo nach Tor zu den*  
*Korallenbänken des rothen Meeres*  
**(Journey from Cairo to Tor to the Coral**  
**Banks of the Red Sea), 1863, plate I.**

<sup>23</sup> For a deeper understanding of the importance of visual representations in Haeckel's work, see: Olaf Breidbach, *Ernst Haeckel. Bildwelten der Natur.* (Munich/Berlin/London/New York: Prestel, 2006), 187–94.

<sup>24</sup> For information on coral specimens in the Jena Phyletic Museum collected by Haeckel at the Red Sea coast, I thank the preparator Bernhard L. Bock, who also provided photographs.





## Regimes of circulation

In order to demonstrate the political significance of the natural sciences, large natural-history collections were important prestige projects for the newly founded scientific institutions, such as the aforementioned Berlin Museum of Natural History or the Phyletic Museum in Jena.<sup>26</sup> These collections were intended to illustrate nature's diversity and general order in detail. In short, they served to open the great book of nature and make it scientifically readable. To present the taxonomic order of species, it seemed necessary for biologists to collect as many specimens as possible and to exchange them with other researchers, even if this exchange dissolved the original collection. Haeckel's collection is only recognisable today through inventory lists.

As natural-history objects disconnected from their natural habitat, these specimens only attain scientific significance within the taxonomic scheme as developed by Carl von Linné in the 18th century, which remained the prevailing mode of ordering biological objects until the end of the 19th century.<sup>27</sup> Showcases in natural history museums and the storage system in their repositories still represent this Western 'order of things'. In addition, museum displays try to reanimate the vivid natural habitat of coral reefs by creating dioramas or VR experiences for their visitors. In times of anthropogenic climate change, however, coral reefs are suffering from the heating and acidification of the ocean and will soon be extinct, many marine scientists suspect.<sup>28</sup> The discovery of new species and variants has been a crucial task in biology as a discipline of Western science for hundreds of years and was, as I have demonstrated, intricately connected to colonial claims.

Now marine biologists search for corals that are more resistant to global warming and its effects and to extract them from their marine habitats to breed new species. Calling the invention of corals in the laboratory – in Darwin's footsteps – 'assisted

26 See: Susanne Köstering, *Natur zum Anschauen: Das Naturkundemuseum des deutschen Kaiserreichs 1871-1914* (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2003); and Carsten Kretschmann, *Räume öffnen sich: Naturhistorische Museen im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2006).

27 See: Kretschmann, *Räume öffnen sich*, 92. Since the middle of the century aquariums and dioramas of watery environments became an attraction of many natural history museums and zoological gardens in the global North (and of wealthy homes in the case of the former) seeking to mimic the lively and colorful natural habitat of marine species and their ecology. See: Natascha Adamowsky, *The Mysterious Science of the Sea, 1775-1943* (Abingdon/New York: Routledge, 2016); and Endt-Jones, *Coral: Something Rich and Strange*, 7–16.

28 See, for instance: J.E.N. Veron, *Corals in Space and Time: Biogeography and Evolution of the Scleractinia*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Sean D. Connell and Gillanders Bronwyn, eds., *Marine Ecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 328–49.

evolution', they involuntary add a new chapter to the marginalised colonial history of the natural sciences.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See: Petra Löffler, 'Colonizing the Ocean: Coral Reef Histories in the Anthropocene', in *Earth and beyond in Tumultuous Times. A Critical Atlas of the Anthropocene*, ed. Réka Patrícia Gál and Petra Löffler (Lüneburg: Meson Press, 2021), 185–213.





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# Hanna Charag-Zuntz's Levantine ceramics: dis:connecting objects through narratives<sup>1</sup>

Hanni Geiger

The ceramic works of Hanna Charag-Zuntz (1915–2007) in exhibitions throughout the world cannot be read in isolation from the nationally framed history of Israeli ceramics. The exhibition catalogues all address the creative and social connections between East and West in very different ways. Some exhibitions link the artist's vases, pots and bottles to the themes of exile and imported European modernism as an influence on Israeli ceramics since the state was founded in 1948. This contrasts with exhibitions that link the objects as representatives of a new Jewish pottery

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term 'narrative' goes back to the postmodern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who used it 1979 in *La condition postmoderne* to refer to a crisis that for him heralded an era succeeding optimistic modernity, when the meta-narratives of the Enlightenment and Idealism had become implausible. Recognising and naming a narrative as such thus means distancing oneself from it. In the social sciences of the last three decades, the term 'narrative' stands for 'meaningful storytelling': as regionally, culturally or nationally related narratives that are subject to change and are imbued with legitimacy. In my investigation, I refer to both concepts and use the term critically to denote how storytelling can influence the way the environment and thus art and design are perceived. In the following, the term relates to the creation of meaning in Charag-Zuntz's objects in the context of nationally framed exhibition catalogues on the one hand and the cultural concept of 'Levantinism' – a sort of counternarrative to the catalogues – on the other. See: 'Narrativ', Duden, 2023, [https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Narrativ\\_Erzaehlung\\_Geschichte](https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Narrativ_Erzaehlung_Geschichte); Matthias Heine, 'Hinz und Kunz schwafeln heutzutage vom "Narrativ"', *Die Welt*, 13 November 2016, <https://www.welt.de/debatte/kommentare/article159450529/Hinz-und-Kunz-schwafeln-heutzutage-vom-Narrativ.html>; Wolfgang Seibel, 'Hegemoniale Semantiken und radikale Gegenarrative. Beitrag zum Arbeitsgespräch des Kulturwissenschaftlichen Kollegs', Uni Konstanz, 22 January 2009, <https://www.exc16.uni-konstanz.de/fileadmin/all/downloads/veranstaltungen2009/Seibel-Heg-Semantiken-090122.pdf>.

(and identity) with archaeological finds in the Middle East and to the state's demand for cultural assimilation and national stability. In the postmodern-oriented exhibitions, the works are presented as transcultural objects that distance themselves from the early Zionist premises of social unification, but the exhibitions' frames hardly allow for any deviation.

As different as the programmes might appear, exhibitions framed or funded by national and/or religious institutions tend to conflate Orient and Occident. Favouring a state identity based on connection, these exhibitions and their catalogues fail to problematise the complex, politically charged entanglements of East and West.

By analysing three exhibitions and their catalogues with a local approach focused on the Levant, I decouple Charag-Zuntz's ceramics, mainly created in the 1950s–70s, from national narrative patterns of abbreviated connections between East and West. Drawing on Levantine cultural philosophy – a social concept linked to the Eastern Mediterranean – my aim is to reveal the artistic and social interruptions and absences that are usually blurred in nation-based frames.

I work with the concept of dis:connectivity, which emphasises the simultaneity and dynamic co-constitution of integrative and disintegrative elements in globalisation processes, which only become relevant in relation to each other.<sup>2</sup> I argue that the vessels, which were made on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean, should be interpreted relative to a dis:connective body of water and its local cultures. This means reading the objects in connection to a Levantine Mediterranean – a reading that contradicts geopolitical narratives as presented in the catalogues and as known from theories of the Mediterranean.<sup>3</sup> Although these theories survey many definitions of this sea and recognise the significance of regional cultures and fragmentations, they all emphasise connectivity, which – whether conceived nationally or otherwise – ultimately produces a certain degree of temporal and spatial stability as well as homogeneity.<sup>4</sup> What remains absent

2 This concept was coined by the Käthe Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect, see: 'Research', global dis:connect, 2023, <https://www.globaldisconnect.org/research/disconnectivity/>.

3 Among the basic theories of the Mediterranean are: Fernand Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le Monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1949); Peregrin Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

4 See Braudel's study on how the geographical and cultural consistency and uniformity of the Mediterranean has affected humanity and our perception of the natural world. Connectivity – a concept later adapted by Horden and Purcell – plays a major role. Although the latter refer to the fragmented nature of the micro-regions, the natural disposition of a larger inland sea implies a bond and an exchange that ultimately ensures unity in diversity – which is once again elevated to the specificity of the Mediterranean. See: Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen*; Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*; Mihran Dabag et al., "New Horizons" der Mittelmeerforschung. Einleitung', in *New Horizons. Mediterranean Research in the 21st Century*, eds. Mihran Dabag et al., Mittelmeerstudien, 10 (Paderborn: Fink/Schöningh, 2016).

in such representations is the predominantly North-Western perspective on the narrated Mediterranean and the structurally conditioned, asymmetrical relationship between the narrow ideas of the sea and its creators.

Recontextualising these objects in terms of a 'Levantine Sea', which appears unifying and stable only in terms of its physical characteristics and is in fact socially marked by ambivalent connections that coincide with migration, unbounded and fluid identities, constant change and subversion,<sup>5</sup> would mean recognising these characteristics as intrinsic to Charag-Zuntz's work. Relating the forms, colours, materials and techniques of her pieces to Mediterranean dis:connectivities could reveal past and present hegemonic structures that feign connectivity.

In order to disrupt the nationally constructed narratives, it is necessary to allow for other perspectives and agencies. I analyse the formal properties of the ceramics through a contemporary Mediterranean lens and reveal what these objects communicate when read as creations not only of the artist, but also of the sea and its coast. Doing so yields insights as to what objects connected to a specific locality but that elude anti-territoriality can tell us about design and ultimately about society. It uncovers how objects that are materially and narratively immobilised in exhibitions but that are in a constant state of cultural performativity tell stories about heterogeneity and entanglements as well as discrimination and exclusion. It describes how the Mediterranean relates to the global North and West or Europe. And it demonstrates how dis:connective objects help to reframe the sea and contribute to thinking globalisation from the eastern and southern Mediterranean.

## On becoming one: harmonising East-West disconnections

A photo from the online exhibition *Ton in Ton. Jüdische Keramikerinnen aus Deutschland nach 1933* at the Jewish Museum Berlin in 2013 shows the young Charag-Zuntz in Siegfried Möller's studio (fig. 01), where she apprenticed in pottery, before she fled to Palestine in 1940.<sup>6</sup> At the wheel, she is shaping an object with a narrow base and voluminous belly that tapers toward the opening.

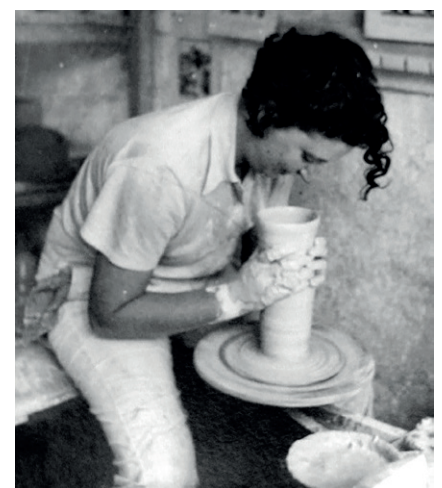


Fig. 01  
Hanna Charag-Zuntz, Stuttgart, 1936,  
family collection Hanna Charag-Zuntz  
(from: Jüdisches Museum Berlin, *Ton in Ton. Jüdische Keramikerinnen aus Deutschland nach 1933*,  
online exhibition, 2013,  
<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/IQVBfUHgPN-sLA?hl=de>).

5 Rachel S. Harris, 'Israel. Finding the Levant within the Mediterranean', review of *The Place of the Mediterranean in Modern Israeli Identity* by Alexandra Nocke, *The Levantine Review*, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 107-8.

6 Jüdisches Museum Berlin. *Ton in Ton. Jüdische Keramikerinnen aus Deutschland nach 1933*. Online exhibition 2013, Google Arts and Culture, 2013, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/IQVBfUHgPN-sLA?hl=de>.

In its simplicity and progressiveness, the piece can be associated with the Bauhaus, to which Charag-Zuntz was indirectly exposed.<sup>7</sup>

The influence of exile, the design teachings from Germany and their imputed superiority over Middle Eastern material, techniques, forms and designs are evident in the text accompanying the exhibition.<sup>8</sup> In it, Michal Friedlander describes the confluence of the East and West in the foundation of Jewish craft, but at the same time allows for criticism of the inhospitable geographic environment and the limitations of indigenous Arab pottery. Although following a long tradition, and though early Israeli ceramic production also draws on the knowledge of Arab potters and collaboration with them, the text depicts 'underdeveloped Palestine', with its aridity and heat that prohibited Western glazes, tints and kilns, as an impediment to the establishment of serious ceramic art in Israel.

Nevertheless, according to Friedlander, Charag-Zuntz succeeds in fusing European purism with Middle Eastern experiments with clay, resulting in a seemingly universal aesthetic. This creative connection of purportedly universal validity can be read as a reference to the social unity and stability to which the newly founded nation of Israel aspired. In fact, though, it was caught between cultures. This exhibition, like numerous others, effaces the tensions that attended the simultaneous selection and rejection of West and East in society and the arts.

The exhibition *Forms from Israel*, sponsored by the Government of Israel in cooperation with the America-Israel Cultural Foundation & Crafts From Israel, and shown at the New York Museum of Contemporary Crafts, chose a different context for Charag-Zuntz's objects as mediators among the cultures of Israel exactly a decade after its founding in 1948.<sup>9</sup> Under the heading *Continuities*, her works are flanked on the following page of the accompanying catalogue by a basalt bowl from the biblical site of Beersheba dating to 4000 BCE (fig. 02a + 02b).<sup>10</sup>

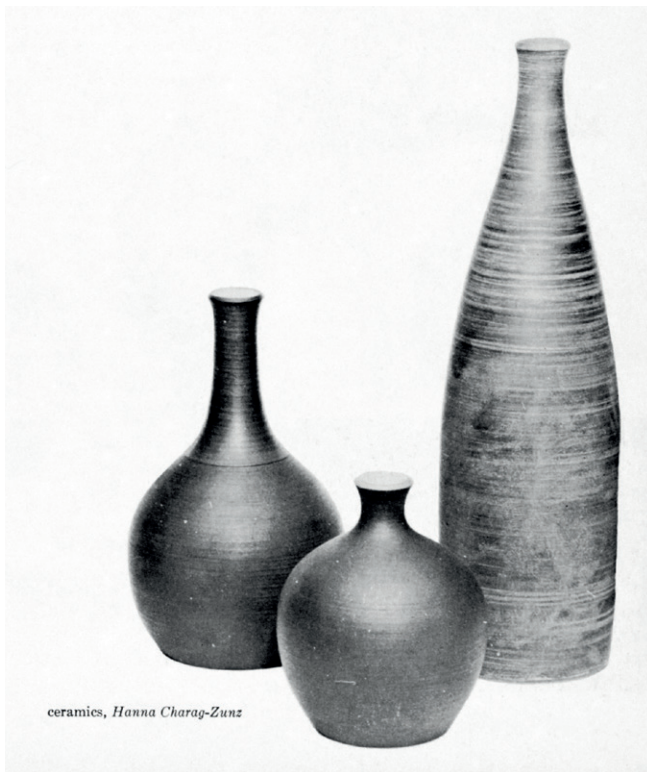
7 Even though Charag-Zuntz, like colleagues of hers, such as Hedwig Grossmann, had not attended the famous art school, she attests in an interview with Antje Soléau to growing up in 'the artistic atmosphere of the Bauhaus' and emphasises its tangible influence on the ceramic attitudes of the young ceramicists in Germany in the 1920s. Cf.: Antje Soléau, 'Zwei Leben – Zwei Schicksale: Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein und Hanna Charag-Zuntz', *Neue Keramik*, no. 1 (2016): 33.

8 For the following paragraph see: Michal Friedlander, 'Vasen statt Milchflaschen – Eva Samuel, Hedwig Grossmann und Hanna Charag-Zuntz: Die Töpferpionierinnen in Palästina nach 1932', in *Avantgarde für den Alltag. Jüdische Keramikerinnen in Deutschland 1919–1933. Marguerite Friedlaender-Wildenhain, Margarete Heymann-Marks, Eva Stricker-Zeisel*, Berlin, Bröhan-Museum, 2013, 104–11. Exhibition catalogue, [https://www.jmberlin.de/sites/default/files/katalogbeitrag\\_friedlander\\_0.pdf](https://www.jmberlin.de/sites/default/files/katalogbeitrag_friedlander_0.pdf).

9 The Israel Institute of Industrial Design in consultation with The American Federation of Arts, eds., *Forms from Israel*, New York, Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York City, 1958–1960. Exhibition catalogue, <https://digital.craftcouncil.org/digital/collection/p15785coll5/id/4735/rec/2>.

10 Ibid., 44ff.





Despite a certain formal resemblance between the longer vessel shown here and the early pieces she had created in Germany (see fig. 01), the narratives about her objects in this exhibition, which celebrates the formation of Israeli identity, focus less on European modernity than on the archetypes of the territorially delimited landscape of the Middle East. The juxtaposition of contemporary Israeli handicrafts and purportedly Jewish-Canaanite archaeological finds in the catalogue is intended to emphasise the continuity of biblical Palestine and to restore its authenticity, which had been thought lost.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the 'renaissance of a Hebrew civilisation' is linguistically affirmed by employing the words 'convergence', 'mixing' and the 'melting pot' of carefully selected cultural elements.<sup>12</sup> This hybridisation of particular set pieces – traditional and contemporary – is noticeable in the juxtaposition of Turkish coffee sets, Arab drums, poster design and modern wooden toys.

Charag-Zuntz's work here is marshalled to reinforce a national ceramic tradition based in multicultural assimilation of excavated finds as markers of genuine Jewish culture and diverse immigrant cultures into the Middle Eastern landscape. What remains invisible, however, is a fusion restricted to selected art pieces,

Fig. 02a (left)  
**Hanna Charag-Zuntz, various ceramic vessels, undated.**

Fig. 02b  
**Basalt bowl, Bersheeba, 4000 BCE  
(© American Federation of Arts /  
Courtesy American Craft Council  
Library & Archives).**

11 Friedlander, 'Vasen statt Milchflaschen', 108-9. On roots of Jewish pottery in ancient Canaanite finds, see: Gidon Ofrat, 'The Beginnings of Israeli Ceramics', *Ariel* 90 (1992): 79. The authors of the exhibition catalogues largely dismiss the influence of the 'small' and 'little' Arab pots, especially since they produced the porous earthenware disdained by German ceramists. Cf.: Soleá, 'Zwei Leben – Zwei Schicksale', 33.

12 The Israel Institute of Industrial Design et. al., *Forms from Israel*, 6-7.

styles, elements and cultural groups.<sup>13</sup> As Rachel S. Harris argues, connecting with the new landscape economically and physically meant simultaneously remaining intellectually and socially distinct from the Middle Eastern ‘Other’. The catalogue erases the exclusion of any unreformed groups, namely Muslim communities, Sephardic and Mizrahi Jews, that blurred identities and disrupted hybridisation.

My next example is the 2018 exhibition in San Diego, entitled *Israel. 70 Years of Craft and Design*, that reckoned with the Zionists’ previously lauded notions of hybridisation. According to the catalogue’s authors: ‘[...] it did not result in forming the collective unified identity of the “New Jew” dreamt of by Israel’s first leaders. Instead the Israeli melting pot sizzled with a vast array of ideologies, vigorously contradicting and swiftly replacing one another but never cohering into one entity’.<sup>14</sup> The exhibition was a collaboration between the House of Israel, which professes emphatically to be ‘non-profit’, ‘non-political’ and ‘non-sectarian’ at the beginning of the catalogue, and the Mingei International Museum, whose programme is dedicated to the collection, preservation and exhibition of arts of daily life ‘from all eras and cultures of the world’.<sup>15</sup>

Although the catalogue distances itself from Israel’s early policy of unification, the exhibition recalls *Form from Israel*. It includes a selection of diverse objects from different times and cultures that have shaped Israel. Traditional Bedouin textiles and Yemeni jewellery were shown alongside contemporary industrial products, furniture and ceramics, notably Charag-Zuntz’s.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to what the museum claims on its webpage, the objects do not ‘[...] speak for themselves – in line, form, and color – the universal language of art’.<sup>17</sup> Instead, they are contextualised by Smadar Samson’s introduction, who relates the multidisciplinary and stylistic heterogeneity of the vessels to a pluralistic Israel, open to differences and deviations. But, by emphasising the connection of diverse creative set pieces within one object – without referring to social gaps, segregation and isolation – the objects are once again truncated as symbols of cultural reconciliation,<sup>18</sup> at which point we must return to the exhibition’s title. The artefacts are employed to commemorate the founding of a state that geopolitically subsumes its cultures, religions and languages under an all-encompassing category. The curators’ critique of Israel’s

13 For the following paragraph see: Harris, ‘Israel’, 106–11.

14 Samson Smadar, ‘Introduction’, in *Israel. 70 Years of Craft and Design*, Mingei International Museum, 2018–2021, ed. Jean Patterson, San Diego, House of Israel, 2018, 12–13. Exhibition catalogue.

15 Jean Patterson, ed., *Israel. 70 Years of Craft and Design*, San Diego, Mingei International Museum, 2018–2021, San Diego, House of Israel, 2018, exhibition catalogue. Mingei International Museum, ‘About: Mission and Vision,’ accessed 9 February 2023. <https://mingei.org/about/mission>.

16 Patterson, *Israel*, 92ff.

17 Mingei International Museum, ‘About’.

18 Patterson, *Israel*, 92–3.

unity policy and the museum's pacifist programme thus seem committed to an imaginary postmodern dissolution of artistic and social classifications that never manifests in (national) reality.

## Levantine disruptions or detours to connection

The émigré and philosopher Vilém Flusser observed that 'visual languages' '[...] run across the boundaries of national languages [...]'.<sup>19</sup> So what do Charag-Zuntz's ceramics reveal when decoupled from geopolitical narratives? What happens when we focus instead on their formal properties from a local perspective that would, unlike previous exhibitions, view the Mediterranean as the objects' co-designer?

Upon moving to Haifa in 1943, Charag-Zuntz specialised in Terra Sigillata, an ancient Mediterranean technique.<sup>20</sup> In this process, the pieces are fired at high temperatures and usually obtain a shimmering red surface without glazing. This technique was practiced throughout the Mediterranean 2500 years ago and suggests that people and their products were moving across historical and political boundaries.<sup>21</sup>

Nationally framed exhibitions mention Terra Sigillata in Charag-Zuntz's work as one of her many design tools. These exhibitions invoke this technique to symbolise Israel's unitary ideal of interconnected cultures. In the context of the philosophy of Levantinism, however, the objects' core message changes.

'Levantine' stands for a diverse society of immigrants from different places in the Mediterranean, including descendants of Genoese and Venetian merchants and of Jews who fled to the Ottoman Empire from Spain since antiquity.<sup>22</sup> They are migrants, refugees and dissidents who mixed with other minorities in the coastal countries of the eastern Mediterranean: Christian Arabs, Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Marked by their place of arrival rather than their origins, even Jewish immigrants from North Africa and Arabic groups were called Levantines. They were branded as non-conformist, partly Eastern in the West and partly European in the East, subject neither to the colonial dictum of imitating

19 Vilém Flusser, 'Nationalsprachen', in *Von der Freiheit des Migranten. Einsprüche gegen den Nationalismus* (Hamburg: CEP Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2013), 12.

20 The term dates to the 18th century. A name from antiquity is not certain. Cf.: Verena Hasenbach, 'Terra Sigillata', *Historisches Lexikon*, 31 December 2011, [https://historisches-lexikon.li/Terra\\_sigillata](https://historisches-lexikon.li/Terra_sigillata).

21 Ofrat, 'The Beginnings of Israeli Ceramics', 87.

22 For the following paragraph, see: Eva Meyer and Eran Schaerf, 'Kahanoff's Levantinism: The Anachronic Possibilities of a Concept', BAK, accessed 3 February 2022, <https://www.bakonline.org/prospections/kahanoffs-levantinism-the-anachronic-possibilities-of-a-concept/>.

the West nor to the later Israeli orientation towards Europe.<sup>23</sup> This diverse group of people were perceived as a threat to national identity and security, presumably because they were ‘not all of a piece’ and refusing to be ‘contained’ in geopolitical categories.<sup>24</sup> In their territorially and culturally indeterminate existence on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, as ‘cross-breeds’ despised by Israel’s early assimilating forces,<sup>25</sup> they de-stabilised territories and interrupted political narratives of connection.

Prompted by the politically negated diaspora and the collective memory of Jews of European and Islamic origins in the 1950s and 60s, Jaqueline Kahanoff dared to revitalise Levantinism as a social option for the young state.<sup>26</sup> In a 1959 article entitled *Israel: Ambivalent Levantine*, she called for a transcultural society that would include Arab and other minorities on an equal footing.<sup>27</sup> She referred to the absence of all the rejected, discriminated and geographically and socially excluded groups in slums, refugee camps of the Occupied Territories and marginal development town,<sup>28</sup> especially those marked by centuries of migration along the eastern Mediterranean coastline, which actually means half the population of Israel.<sup>29</sup>

Linking Charag-Zuntz’s objects to the contested waters off Israel’s coast exposes ambiguities and tensions that are constitutive of social entanglements. It reveals constant change, disturbing expectations of rootedness that coincide with residence and indicating the simultaneous identification with and disavowal of both East and West. In short, it subverts spaces and disrupts singularities.<sup>30</sup> Also, the vessels narrated through this Mediterranean-Levantine lens disclose absences caused by the (neo-)colonial and imperialist programme of connections limited to selected decorative facets<sup>31</sup> of the Middle East that become equally evident in most exhibitions of Charag-Zuntz’s pieces. The narratively excluded elements of the cultural ‘Other’ remain invisible. Therefore, the works’ interruptions and absences in form and content demand interrogation.

23 Jaqueline Kahanoff, ‘Reflections of a Levantine Jew’, *Jewish Frontier*, April 1958, 7, cited in Meyer and Schaerf, ‘Kahanoff’s Levantinism’.

24 Meyer and Schaerf, ‘Kahanoff’s Levantinism’; Harris, ‘Israel’, 107-8.

25 Harris, ‘Israel’, 108.

26 Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff, ‘Ambivalent Levantine’, in *Mongrels or Marvels: The Levantine Writings of Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff*, eds. Deborah A. Starr and Sasson Somekh (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 193-212.

27 Ibid.

28 Karen Grumberg, *Place and Ideology in Contemporary Hebrew Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010), 243, cited in Harris, ‘Israel’, 116.

29 Abraham B. Yehoshúa, ‘Beyond Folklore: The Identity of the Sephardic Jew’, *Quaderns de La Mediterrània*, no. 14 (2010), <https://www.iemed.org/publication/beyond-folklore-the-identity-of-the-sephardic-jew-2/>.

30 Ronit Matalon, *The One Facing Us* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 214, cited in Harris, ‘Israel’, 116.

31 Harris, ‘Israel’, 107.





This becomes evident not only in Charag-Zuntz's use of Terra Sigillata, which is a politically discarded symbol of cultural non-fixation and ambivalence in the eastern Mediterranean, but also through the ceramic's shadings (fig. 03). Apart from the numerous reddish, yellow and brown objects, such as those in *Forms from Israel*, she also uses turquoise, blue and green nuances, which the exhibitions omit and fail to associate with the Oriental and Mediterranean ceramics known for these hues.<sup>32</sup>

The absence of the 'Other' in design also becomes apparent in the objects' material. Charag-Zuntz finds sand and brine for the firing process off the 'impure' coast of Israel and clay in the formerly Arab Negev Desert, since absorbed into Israel.<sup>33</sup> This becomes relevant considering that the ascendance of Israeli ceramics and their national promotion to the status of art rests on the allegorical creation of 'Adam' and 'Adamah', referring to Israeli society, which actually arose from local – most recently Muslim – earths.<sup>34</sup>

The catalogues' description of the vessels as predominantly 'calm', 'clear', 'simple', 'balanced' and 'unifying' is also disputable.<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the exhibitions, one could equally focus on the tension between the pots' protruding bellies and narrow openings, which interrupts Israeli rhetoric of cultural

32 The objects were shown in an Israeli exhibition in 2019, which dealt with inter-generational dialogue among the artists. Cf.: Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Centre, *Type of a Dialogue – Hanna Charag-Zuntz, Michal Alon*, exhibition, Tel Aviv-Jaffa, 2019, <https://www.benyaminiceramics.org/en/ceramic-galleries/past-exhibitions/2019-2/type-if-a-dialogue/>.

33 Ofrat, 'The Beginnings of Israeli Ceramics', 76.

34 From a quote by the ceramist Hedwig Grossmann-Lehmann on the beginnings of Israeli ceramics. Cf.: Maika Korfmacher, 'Hanna Charag-Zuntz und Varda Yatom', in *Hanna Charag-Zuntz und Varda Yatom. Gefäße und Skulpturen aus Israel*, ed. Bernd Hakenjos, Düsseldorf, Hetjens Museum, 1998, 6. Exhibition catalogue.

35 *Ibid.*, 7, as well as Tadmor, *Tova Berlinski*.

Fig. 03  
Hanna Charag-Zuntz, various ceramic vessels, late 1960s and 1970–'76s, image: Shay Ben Efraim (© The Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Centre / © Shay Ben Efraim).



harmonisation. The objects' doubtful functionality, which is a product of this formal disparity, further reinforces the impression of disruption: as in design, so in society.

The references some exhibitions make to ostensibly Jewish archaeological finds can also be disrupted. Round artefacts with shapes that merge almost seamlessly into the opening and elongated forms that expand in the middle are also found among Levantine cultures from Cyprus and Muslims from Syria and Palestine (fig. 04a + 04b).<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the horizontal lines are also a common design element in ancient Levantine ceramics.<sup>37</sup> Charag-Zuntz's brushstrokes, interpreted as Japanese in some exhibitions,<sup>38</sup> exemplify such Levantine characteristics.

Thus, if we consider Charag-Zuntz's works to be shaped by the eastern Mediterranean, a double dis:connectivity emerges. First, the detachment of the vessels from national narratives and their simultaneous coupling with a Levantine local culture is a methodological dis:connectivity, which reveals absent maritime narratives. Second, these maritime narratives frame the pieces as products of complex connections that go along with interruptions and absences. They are bound to a specific location but subvert the ideas of a settled territory and singular religions, languages and identities; they perform culture without possessing it.<sup>39</sup> A 'neither-nor' supplants and interrupts the

Fig. 04a (left)

**Jar with geometric designs, Levantine, ca. 585 BCE, h. 10,2 cm, terracotta, The William D. and Jane Welsh Collection at Fordham University, (from: Barbara Cavaliere and Jennifer Udell, eds., *Ancient Mediterranean Art. The William D. and Jane Welsh Collection at Fordham University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 334.)**

Fig. 04b

**Bottle with pouring spout for water transport, mid-4th millennium BCE, Habuba Kabira, Syria, clay, pottery wheel ceramics, h. 69 cm, Prähistorische Staatssammlung, München, inv. nr. 1985, 701; (from: Gisela Zahlhaas, *Prähistorische Staatssammlung. Keramiken des Vorderen Orients im internationalen Keramik-Museum Weiden*, collection catalogue, Weiden, Keramik-Museum, 1990, 65.)**

36 For an overview of Levantine jars from the ancient Mediterranean region, see: Barbara Cavaliere and Jennifer Udell, eds., *Ancient Mediterranean Art. The William D. and Jane Welsh Collection at Fordham University* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012). For Syrian or Palestinian traditional pottery, see: Gisela Zahlhaas, *Prähistorische Staatssammlung. Keramiken des Vorderen Orients im internationalen Keramik-Museum Weiden*, (1990). Collection catalogue; John Landgraf and Owen Rye, 'Introduction', in *Palestinian Traditional Pottery. A Contribution to Palestinian Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Burr et al. (Leuven/Paris/Bristol: Peeters, 2021), XXVII-XXX.

37 Cavaliere and Udell, *Ancient Mediterranean Art*, especially 334.

38 For example, in the exhibition *Israel. 70 Years of Craft and Design*. Cf.: Patterson, *Israel*, 92.

39 Gil Hochberg, "'Permanent Immigration': Jacqueline Kahanoff, Ronit Matalon, and the Impetus of Levantinism", *Boundary 31*, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 220-21, cited in Harris, 'Israel', 107.

narrow national vision of a 'both-and'.<sup>40</sup> Interpreting the objects through this local cultural lens exposes the politically constructed absences that the nationally framed narratives of the exhibitions manage to circumvent. Instead of connection, harmony, and stability, analysing the works through an expanded Levantine perspective unveils past and present hegemonic mechanisms that segregate and exclude unwanted groups. The objects testify to the multidimensional interconnections in a space whose natural characteristics seem stable, all-encompassing and unifying, but whose social and political changes connote instability. These pieces echo the understanding of globalisation Deleuze and Guattari described as '[...] an effect of the multitudes of forces that coalesce, concatenate, and collapse at local, provisional sites.'<sup>41</sup>

In this light, the Mediterranean and the understanding of the ceramics produced along its shores are more complicated than most theories (and exhibitions) permit. By revealing the interruptions and absences – in research and society – dis:connected objects read in contemporary Levantine terms present an alternative to the simplistic rhetoric of national connectivity. Extending the point, this new perspective and the visualisation of excluded artefact narratives and groups can even reintroduce previously erased themes and agents in art and society. For the history of art, craft and design, regionally influenced approaches can complicate object-bound narratives by generating more creative, institutional and personal participation and contribute to non-hegemonic research and theorisation. Locally framed objects represent a detour to a social and artistic presence and inclusion that national narratives only imagine.

By extension, dis:connective Mediterranean artefacts could interrupt the dominant Northern and Western narratives of the Mediterranean, de-nationalising its past for its future perception.<sup>42</sup> New (trans-)local perspectives, images, ideas and representations would help to reconceive the global impact of the Mediterranean and the discursive absences of the manifold influences, which it has always exerted on modern Europe and its identity.

40 Ibid.

41 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. First published 1980 by Éd. de Minuit, Paris), cited in: Cavan Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek, 'Introduction: A New Connectivity for the Twenty-First Century,' in *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*, eds. Cavan W. Concannon and Lindsey A. Mazurek (London: Routledge, 2016), 14.

42 Matthew D'Auria and Fernanda Gallo, 'Introduction. Ideas of Europe and the (Modern) Mediterranean', in *Mediterranean Europe(s). Rethinking Europe from its Southern Shores*, eds. Matthew D'Auria and Fernanda Gallo (London/New York: Routledge, 2023).



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# Yvonne Hackenbroch's birdcage: the experience of Jewish exile and the return as object

Änne Söll



Yvonne Hackenbroch

Two years after receiving her doctorate from the University of Munich in 1936, the Jewish art historian Yvonne Hackenbroch (1912 – 2012) was compelled to leave Germany and emigrate to London in 1938, where her older sister and mother were already residing. Yvonne Hackenbroch's father, a prominent and prosperous art and antiques dealer, had passed away the year before. This photo

portrait shows Hackenbroch with the family dog 'Racker' (Rascal) in her native city, Frankfurt am Main, near her parents' house in 34 Untermainkai. It is from this house, Yvonne Hackenbroch's childhood home in Frankfurt, that the birdcage in question originates.

Fig. 01  
Yvonne Hackenbroch with family dog 'Racker', Frankfurt on the Main, c. 1935/36 (from: Jörg Rasmussen: *Festschrift: Studien zum europäischen Kunsthandwerk*, München 1983, cover).





Fig. 02  
**Birdcage, 1757, 26,3 x 35,5 x 21,2 cm, carved, partly coloured and gilded oak and coniferous wood, metal wire covering, tray, Historisches Museum Frankfurt am Main, donated by Yvonne Hackenbroch 2012 (© Horst Ziegenfusz).**

Hackenbroch took the cage with her to London. In fact, it accompanied her throughout her exile spanning decades. The two went first to Toronto, where she worked from around 1945 until 1949 as a curator for the Fareham Collection at the University of Toronto, then to New York, where she curated the Irwin Untermyer Collection, even moving with the collection when it was relocated to the Metropolitan Museum. When she returned to London after her retirement in 1982, the birdcage was again among her belongings and remained in her apartment near Hyde Park until her death in 2012. At her behest, the wooden cage was then donated to the Historical Museum in Frankfurt as a 'token of reconciliation'<sup>1</sup> by her great-nephew Adam Hills. The cage is thus both a gift and a legacy. In its current presentation at the museum, as will become clear, it is as much a gesture of reconciliation as it is an object of admonition. The birdcage as museum object also produces a contradiction: it is simultaneously

<sup>1</sup> 'Zeichen der Versöhnung' as worded in the object description of the museum: <https://historisches-museum-frankfurt.de/de/node/34467>, accessed on 3 February, 2023, and: Jan Gerchow and Nina Gorgius, eds., *100 \* Frankfurt: Geschichten aus (mehr als) 1000 Jahren* (Frankfurt: Societäts Verlag, 2017), 274–75.

a symbol of incarceration as well as a reminder of Hackenbroch's endurance and dignity in the face of persecution turning it into a truly dis:connected object.

With this bequest, Hackenbroch has (re-)inscribed herself and her displaced family into the history of the city of Frankfurt and sent what initially appears to be a reconciliatory message to the post-war generation. This gift can also be seen as the symbolic 'return' of Hackenbroch to the city of Frankfurt, which she had visited sporadically after the war, even delivering a lecture at the Historical Museum in 1990, but from which she was to remain permanently exiled, though it was the place she first called home.

Since incorporating the birdcage into its collection in 2013, the Historical Museum in Frankfurt has preserved it and, since 2017, displayed it not only in its permanent exhibit on the history of the city, specifically as part of the display on National Socialism, but also shown it online as an item in the digital collection. Within the museum, the birdcage thus leads a double life, for, as will become clear, its physical presentation in the collection and its presentation on the museum's online platform are significantly different.

## **Bird/human/enlightenment: history, function and the symbolism of the cage**

The birdcage presumably dates from 1757, as the year is emblazoned – prominently – along with Frankfurt's eagle emblem on its front. Why the year 1757 was so conspicuously positioned on the front of the cage, however, remains a mystery.<sup>2</sup> 1757 is not connected with any significant event in Frankfurt's history. Was the year an important turning point in the life of the person or family who owned it? A marriage or a birth perhaps? Or maybe it had not belonged to a family at all, and 1757 marks the founding of a bird breeders' association? Was the date inscribed on the cage retroactively, or does it denote the year of its manufacture? It is also impossible to determine whether the cage is a family heirloom that had belonged to the Hackenbroch family since the 18th century. After all, her mother's side had resided in Frankfurt from the late Middle Ages. Might the cage not have come from Zaccharias Hackenbroch's antique business afterall?

In short, there is no reliable information about the first 250 years of the birdcage's 'biography'. What is certain, however, is that the birdcage with its eagle, the emblem of the city of Frankfurt, reminded Yvonne Hackenbroch of her origins and that she valued the object immensely for that reason.<sup>3</sup> Thus, following Tilmann

2 Neither the Hackenbroch family nor the museum curators were able to provide any information in this regard.

3 Adam Hills, Email to author, 21 February 2022.

Habermas, the birdcage's function for Hackenbroch was to integrate and symbolise her life story in exile.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the cage can also be called a *Verlustsouvenir*,<sup>5</sup> 'a souvenir of loss' that reminded Hackenbroch of the hometown that she had to leave behind and of her father, who most likely acquired it.

In addition to the imposing eagle on the outside, the cage also contained a bird: when it was delivered to the museum, there was a small wooden bird inside. It is not a mechanical songbird in a cage of the kind that was popular in the salons of the early 18th century, but a simple, modern wooden toy, likely manufactured in the 20th century. Its greenish-yellow colouring resembles a canary. It is, therefore, a 'modern' inhabitant of an 'old', richly decorated and stately birdcage.

In addition to its two bays, where the food dish and water bowl can be placed, the cage is made of partially gilded oak, softwood and iron rods.<sup>6</sup> Measuring 26 x 25 x 21 cm, the cage is quite small and was most likely intended for a delicate, domestic songbird or canary. Canaries had been bred in Tyrol as early as the 18th century and sold in large European cities by traders organised in guilds.<sup>7</sup> Birdcages of the 18th and 19th centuries featured a variety of designs from simple wood and wire models to elaborate, ornate versions made with costly materials.<sup>8</sup> This range indicates that bird keeping was a common activity across (almost) all social classes.

Small pets, such as dogs and squirrels and birds, grew increasingly popular in the 18th century as 'luxury objects of the "better circles" and social climbers'.<sup>9</sup> Birds were thus 'the means and locus of social distinction and the representation of power'.<sup>10</sup> They were relevant to the starkly segregated social classes for different reasons. The nobility kept birds for reasons of status, including falconry birds and expensive birds imported from overseas. Learned, bourgeois circles – largely men – were interested in birds as objects of study. Bourgeois women, on the other hand, kept birds as companions and amusements, sometimes training them.<sup>11</sup> In the course of the 18th century, according to Julia Breitruck, there was a "bourgeoisification" of the bird. Songbirds were no longer just a noble, elite accessory, but became a bourgeois cultural asset.<sup>12</sup> Especially in genre paintings of the 18th century,

4 Tilman Habermas, *Geliebte Objekte. Symbole und Instrumente der Identitätsbildung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996), 281.

5 *Ibid.*, 278.

6 Julia Breitruck, *Ein Flügelschlag in der Pariser Aufklärung: Zur Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und ihren Vögeln* (Munich: University Library LMU, 2021).

7 Breitruck, 3–39.

8 This is based on research in the image library of the European Cultural Heritage Database, which I cannot discuss here due to space limitations: <https://www.europeana.eu/de>.

9 Breitruck, *Ein Flügelschlag in der Pariser Aufklärung*, 40.

10 *Ibid.*, 53–54.

11 *Ibid.*, 40ff.

12 *Ibid.*, 41.





birds are more frequently depicted as the domesticated pets of bourgeois ladies. For example, in this painting by Jean Simeon Chardin, a lady plays a melody to her canary on a serinette – a small organ made especially for this purpose.

According to Julia Breittruck, the motif of the bourgeois lady with a bird she has trained was very popular in the mid-18th century. Breittruck sees this as enjoining bourgeois women to engage in the rearing not only of birds but also, of course, of their own children. In contrast to the aristocracy, bourgeois women were encouraged to see child-rearing as their intrinsically 'female' duty. The preoccupation with parlour birds was thus gender coded. While women were expected to educate, men were assigned the role of scientist, and their attention to birds became part of an experiment.

Pet birds also developed into objects of bourgeois entertainment for 'convivial circles' and in salons over the course of the 18th century. They became domestic companions, kept in the private rooms reserved for family and close friends.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, 'domesticated birds became more and more the private leisure companions of their respective owners, even co-constituents of the kind and manner of private leisure'.<sup>14</sup> In paintings and prints, the bird functions, according to Julia Breittruck, 'as the imagined and real double, the eyes and ears of its owner'. Hackenbroch's birdcage, then, transports us to a time when songbirds had become a leisure activity of the middle classes and the object of

Fig. 03a (left)

**Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin: La Serinette, also called Lady varying her amusements, 1751, 50 x 43 cm, oil on canvas, Musée du Louvre, Paris (© 2010 RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre) / René-Gabriel Ojéda).**

Fig. 03b

**Jean-François Colson: Portrait of the chemist Balthazar Sage, 1777, 100,5 x 81 cm, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux-arts, Dijon (© Musée des Beaux-Arts de Dijon/ François Jay, from: Julia Breittruck, Ein Flügelschlag in der Pariser Aufklärung, Zur Geschichte der Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und ihren Vögeln, Dortmund 2020, 64).**

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 87.





scientific investigation and educational ambitions. So how did these factors impact museum's presentation of its newly acquired object?

## Semiophores: the twofold contextualisation of the birdcage in the museum

One of the fundamental tenets of museology is that objects stored or displayed in museums trade their original meaning and use value for a new one. They become what are known as 'semiophores',<sup>15</sup> a term coined by the Polish historian Krzysztof Pomian to describe objects whose purpose, meaning or value is transformed with their relocation to the museum. In this vein,

Fig. 04  
Birdcage as shown within the  
Historische Museum Frankfurt's  
permanent collection (© 2022 the  
author).

15 Krzysztof Pomian, *Der Ursprung des Museums: Vom Sammeln* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1988).

Hackenbroch's birdcage loses its function as an 18th-century animal enclosure and the historical connotations discussed above. As a sort of 'prison', the old birdcage in the new context of the Historical Museum may allude to forced emigration and the ambiguous 'freedom' of exile. If we then see the wooden bird in the cage as representing the cage's owner (and her persecuted family), we soon grasp the birdcage as a visual metaphor for the persecution of Jews in the Third Reich.

Hackenbroch's cage, however, is not displayed in isolation but gains a special inflection from the objects around it, evoking a host of significations from which the historical background of 18th century fades entirely. Standing in the Historical Museum before the display case containing the birdcage, which forms part of the exhibit on National Socialism in Frankfurt,<sup>16</sup> the visitor sees diagonally below it a broken Biedermeier chair. The chair likely originates from the Museum of Jewish Antiquities that opened in 1922 in the former house of the Rothschild banking family in Frankfurt, which was looted and destroyed in 1938.<sup>17</sup> To the left of the cage is a can of Zyklon B, the poison manufactured in Frankfurt and used for mass murder in concentration camps. Walking around this 'island' of glass display cases, the visitor sees behind the bird cage objects ranging from a silver swastika once used as a Christmas tree ornament in a Frankfurt household to silver teapots and cutlery that once belonged to Frankfurt Jews that were confiscated and forcibly sold by the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 40s.

In this arrangement, where the tools of destruction clash with bourgeois Jewish urban and commemorative culture – a composition designed deliberately by the museum's curators to create contradictions and startling object constellations – the dainty birdcage with its Frankfurt eagle naturally signifies the annihilated Jewish urban culture of Frankfurt. That Hackenbroch took this cage into exile and donated it to the museum posthumously as a gesture of reconciliation is only revealed through the inscription on the display case. In light of the juxtapositions, the repatriation of the birdcage and the concomitant reconciliation recedes into the background.

Nevertheless, the cage as gift also signals an intrinsic dialectic. After all, the cage as 'prison' refers to internment, execution and, with respect to exile, the forced escape from persecution, internment and death. The cage is thus not only a gesture of reconciliation and a symbolic return, but also an object of admonition.

While the birdcage in the museum is presented in the context

<sup>16</sup> My visit to the Historical Museum in Frankfurt took place in May 2022. I thank the curators Nina Gorgus and Anne Gemeinhardt for their help and cooperation in my research.

<sup>17</sup> Gerchow and Gorgius, *100 \* Frankfurt, 277-79*, on the can of Zyklon B, 291- 93.



- [🔍](#) Objekt suchen
- [📄](#) Bilder herunterladen
- [📄](#) PDF herunterladen
- [💬](#) Kommentar verfassen

Unbekannt ▷▷  
1757

Vogelkäfig ▷▷  
geschnitztes, z.T. farbig gefasstes und vergoldetes Eichen- und Nadelholz, Metalldrahtbespannung, Blechwanne  
Objektmaß: Tiefe rechteckiger Kasten 17,5 cm  
Objektmaß: 26,3 x 35,5 x 21,2 cm

Alltagskultur und Haushalt I (vor 1880)  
Dauerausstellung Frankfurt Einst?  
Neubau, Ebene 1, 100 x Frankfurt

Historisches Museum Frankfurt  
Inv. X.2013.073

CC-BY-SA: Historisches Museum Frankfurt,  
Foto: Horst Ziegenfusz

## Objekt empfehlen



of the threat to and annihilation of Jewish culture in Frankfurt, assuming various, sometimes contradictory levels of meaning, the website depicts it as an isolated object. It is displayed there with an inventory number, object data and the text of the panel on the display case, which informs visitors about the donor, her history of exile and her gift as a sign of reconciliation. The question, then, is which presentation better does justice to the object, its only partially reconstructable history and to the exile of its previous owner?

Having first become acquainted with the birdcage virtually due to the pandemic, and only later being able to view it physically exhibited, I was initially surprised by the museum's perceptual

Fig. 05  
**Birdcage as shown on the Historische Museum Frankfurt's website, Screenshot (<https://historisches-museum-frankfurt.de/de/node/34467?language=de>, 07.02.2023).**

arrangement (*Wahrnehmungsordnung*).<sup>18</sup> The juxtaposition of the birdcage with the objects described above disturbed me, as I had not expected to see it next to a can of Zyklon B. In the words of Gottfried Korff, the placement of the birdcage in the museum put me, the visitor, 'in a state of heightened, imagination-enhancing self-awareness'.<sup>19</sup> The objects are arranged to place the birdcage visually and conceptually in the context of National Socialism and its extermination machine, subordinated or eliminating other associations. According to Korff, 'the subject [through museum arrangements, in the best case] should be freed of pragmatic references and become porous in the "performative" process of perception'.<sup>20</sup> Korff is highlighting the fact that visitors can become more receptive, permeable, 'porous' to historical, social and emotional entanglements through such provocative arrangements. In the case of the birdcage, however, it also means that we are not only reminded of the object's connections to the period of National Socialism in Frankfurt, but are also reminded of the ruptures, detours, stations of exile – the *dis:connections* – contained in the fragmentary history of the birdcage.

Thus, the birdcage does not function exclusively as a symbol or memento. As a multi-dimensional object, it resists clear-cut interpretation and integration into discourses of exile or National Socialism. This is complicated further by the fact that, as Doerte Bischoff and Joachim Schlör argue, objects of exile retain a 'minimal power [...] to preserve human dignity'.<sup>21</sup> The birdcage as a symbol of incarceration (and therefore inhumanity) on the one hand and as the symbol of Hackenbroch's endurance and dignity on the other combines in itself contradictions that cannot be easily resolved, transforming the birdcage into a truly *dis:connected* object.

## Dis:connectivities in the museum: exile, return, reconciliation?

As Burcu Dogramaci and her colleagues aptly describe in their preface to an edition of the *Jahrbuch Exilforschung* devoted to archives and museums of exile, the 'placement of such materials in archives and museums [confronts us] with a tension between a delimiting situatedness, on the one hand, and a portability and boundarylessness to which they themselves bear witness'.<sup>22</sup> With respect to Yvonne Hackenbroch's birdcage, this tension arises

18 Gottfried Korff, ed., 'Speichern und/oder Generator: Zum Verhältnis von Deponieren und Exponieren Im Museum', in *Museumsdinge, Deponieren/Exponieren*, 2nd ed. (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007), 172.

19 Ibid., 173.

20 Ibid., 172.

21 Doerte Bischoff and Joachim Schlör, 'Dinge des Exils. Zur Einleitung', in *Dinge des Exils, Jahrbuch Exilforschung 31*, (2013): 9-22. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 18.

22 Sylvia Asmus, Doerte Bischoff, and Burcu Dogramaci, eds., *Archive und Museen des Exils, Jahrbuch Exilforschung 37* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 2.



not only from the object's placement in the museum, but from the cage itself, which, as a movable thing, paradoxically exists to restrict the bird's freedom of movement. The birdcage embodies the indissoluble dialectic of exile as 'liberation' from persecution, on the one hand, and captivity in a foreign land on the other. It symbolises an intermediate state best described by Rafael Cardoso: 'Exile, in the broad sense of the term, is a condition. One that involves simultaneous absence and presence [...]. There is a liminality to this condition, an essential in-betweenness, that precludes ever arriving at anything so clear cut and unambiguous as freedom of the past.'<sup>23</sup> The return of the birdcage to the Historical Museum in Frankfurt is not an unequivocal gesture of reconciliation. Instead, the birdcage carries Hackenbroch's exile experience within it and affects us, as Arjun Appadurai argues, through 'the force of [its] histories, journeys, accidents and adventures'.<sup>24</sup> Hackenbroch's birdcage, then, is an ambivalent signifier of forced emigration and 'dislocation' that challenges us to see the experience of exile as a 'cage perspective' rooted in violent displacement from which there can be no liberation, not even for those standing outside the cage.

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23 Rafael Cardoso, 'The Living Archive: On Hugo Simon's Posthumous Return to Germany', in *Archive Und Museen Des Exils*, Jahrbuch Exilforschung 37 (Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 106.

24 Arjun Appadurai, 'Museum Objects as Accidental Refugees', *Historische Anthropologie* 25, no. 3 (November 2017): 406.

# ***Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* written by Lili Körber and designed by John Heartfield (cover): burnt books, exiled authors and dis:connective memories?**

Burcu Dogramaci



In her work *Die Bücher* (2019/20, fig. 1 + 2), the artist Annette Kelm compiled photographs of book covers of volumes that were destroyed in the ritual book burnings of the National-Socialist era. In the campaign *Wider den undeutschen Geist* (Against the Un-German Spirit) promoted by the German Student Union, book pyres were erected and set alight in numerous German cities on 10 May 1933.

Fig. 01  
Kunsthalle zu Kiel, exhibition view  
Annette Kelm. *Die Bücher*, 2022 (©  
Kunsthalle zu Kiel, photo: Helmut  
Kunde). Lili Körber's *Eine Frau erlebt  
den roten Alltag* on the far left.



The published lists of books ‘worthy of burning’<sup>1</sup> also included those photographed by Annette Kelm. Her photographs show the covers of 50 first editions of the publications that were burned in the *auto-da-fé*.<sup>2</sup> The inkjet prints, measuring 52 x 70 cm, show these books in the same bright illumination, with a drop shadow visible that emphasises their three-dimensionality, indicating that these are photographs of objects (not just of the front cover, for example). The photographs show the absent real object, whose contents remain illegible, as Robert Kehl points out in his review in the journal *Texte zur Kunst*. This shifts the accent from the book as an object of remembrance to the aesthetic diversity of book design, referring to the network of artists and designers of the Weimar Republic and thus problematising the never-linear act of

- 1 On such *verbrennungswürdiger Bücher*, see: Angela Graf, ‘April/Mai 1933 – Die “Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist” und die Bücherverbrennungen, 9–22. Bonn: Bibliothek der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2003’, in *Verbrannt, geraubt, gerettet! Bücherverbrennungen in Deutschland. Eine Ausstellung der Bibliothek der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung anlässlich des 70. Jahrestages* (Bonn: Bibliothek der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2003), 12. All translations from German are by the author.
- 2 The project was produced in 2019 as part of the exhibition *Tell me yesterday tomorrow* at the NS-Dokumentationszentrum Munich. Cf.: Udo Kittelmann, Nicolaus Schafhausen, and Mirjam Zadoff, ‘Probleme in Die Zukunft Retten’, in *Annette Kelm – Die Bücher*, ed. Udo Kittelmann, Nicolaus Schafhausen, and Mirjam Zadoff (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, 2022), 139–40.

Fig. 02  
**Kunsthalle zu Kiel, exhibition view**  
**Annette Kelm. Die Bücher, 2022** (©  
**Kunsthalle zu Kiel, photo: Helmut**  
**Kunde).**





commemoration.<sup>3</sup> In his argumentation, Kehl contrasts the factual and conceptual colour photography with the black and white of the historical photographs of the book burnings.<sup>4</sup> However, Annette Kelm's expandable series contains more complicated implications that apply equally to Nazi book burning, persecuted writers and destroyed books as well as to the displacement of people and objects. I argue that, through Kelm's photographic conceptual art, a contemporary audience can re-connect to the dis:connected publications and designs that were dispersed and therefore lost to a German audience due to Nazi persecution.

Among the photographs (and, thus, also among the burned books) are several covers designed by John Heartfield: F.C. Weiskopf's *Umsteigen ins 21. Jahrhundert* (1937) and Upton Sinclair's *Das Geld schreibt* (1930), both published by Malik publishers in Berlin. Also tossed upon the pyre was Lili Körber's *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* from 1932, which was published by Rowohlt Verlag with a book cover by Heartfield and is the starting point for my reflections (fig. 3).

3 Robert Kehl, 'Überlebende Bücher', *Texte zur Kunst*, 28 August 2020, <https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/robert-kehl-uberlebende-bucher/>; see also: Jan-Holger Kirsch, "'Das Buch wird Bild'. Annette Kelms Fotoausstellung 'Die Bücher' Im Museum Frieder Burda, Salon Berlin', *Visual History*, 17 August 2020, <https://visual-history.de/2020/08/17/das-buch-wird-bild/>.

4 Robert Kehl, 'Überlebende Bücher'.

Fig. 03  
Lili Körber. *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932, cover design by John Heartfield, cover, spine and back (Archive Burcu Dogramaci, © The Heartfield Community of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023).



## An author, a graphic designer and a book — entangled histories

The literary scholar and writer Lili Körber was born in Moscow in 1897 as the daughter of an Austrian merchant family, and she later lived in Vienna. She was a member of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, the Union of Socialist Writers and the League of Austrian Proletarian Revolutionary Writers. This political commitment was also expressed in her journalism; Lili Körber wrote for leftist print media, such as the *Wiener Arbeiter-Zeitung*, the *Rote Fahne* and the *Arbeiter-Illustrierte-Zeitung* (AIZ).<sup>5</sup> Together with Anna Seghers and Johannes R. Becher, she accepted an invitation from the Moscow state publishing house to travel to the Soviet Union in 1930. Fluent in Russian, she decided to get to know the living and working conditions of the people by serving as a driller in the Putilov tractor works in Leningrad for several months. It was a factory with a 'well-known history of revolutionary resistance during the tsarist era'.<sup>6</sup> Körber published her experiences as *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* (A woman experiences the everyday life of the Reds), a book published by Rowohlt Berlin in 1932 that runs to 239 pages. The author worked in the genre of documentary novels by reproducing documents such as pay slips and pages from her work logbook in addition to passages from her diary, which convey authentic and personal experiences (fig. 4). The book was a bestseller and was reviewed in the press by, for example, Siegfried Kracauer in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and the run of 6000 copies was sold out in four weeks.<sup>7</sup> No further editions were ever published.<sup>8</sup>

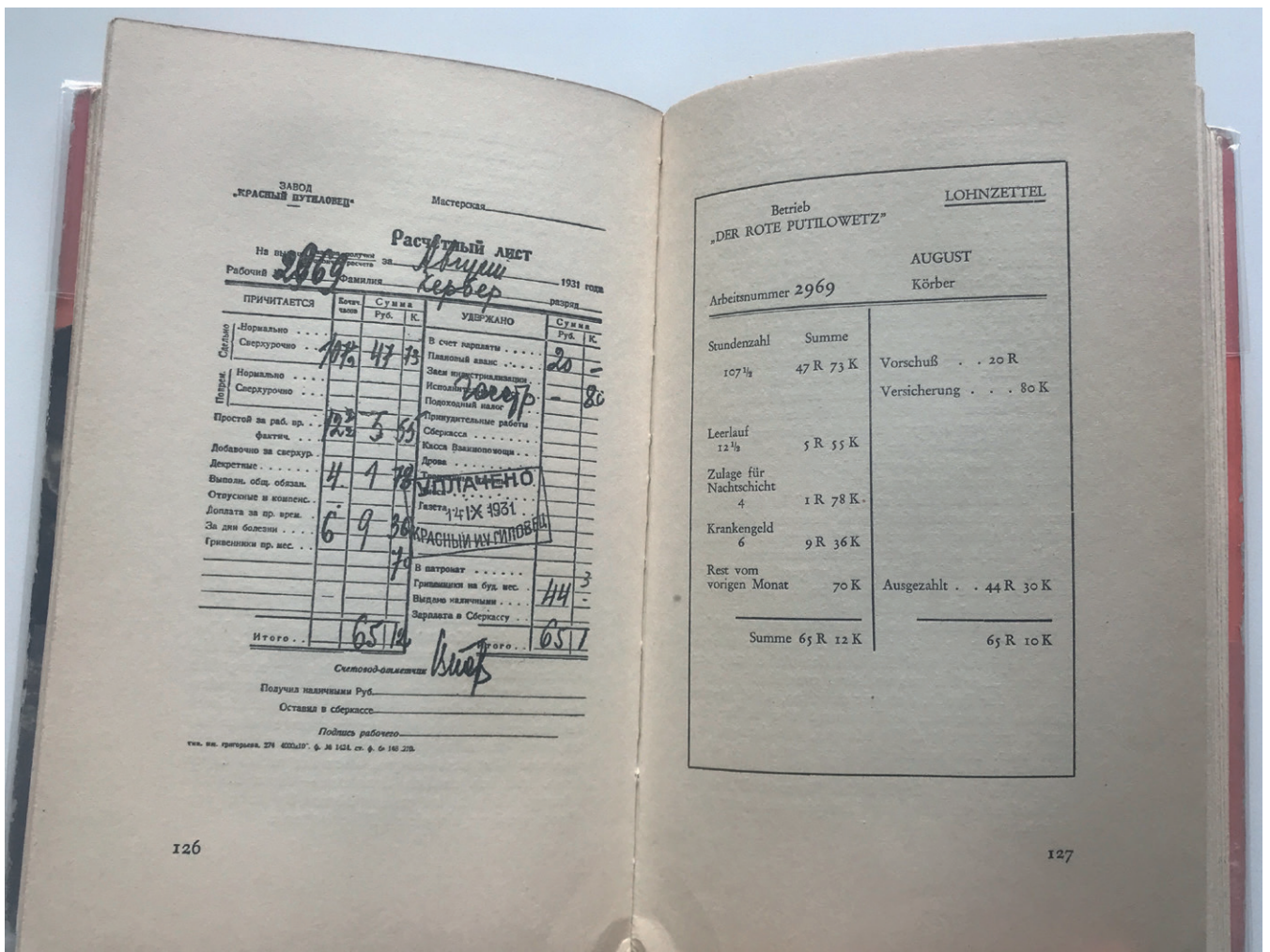
The book cover was designed by the artist John Heartfield. The volume was published as a paperback with a dust jacket. Heartfield used three photographs for the cover, spine and back (fig. 3): at the front are two women with short haircuts measuring a milled steel piston. The photograph is cropped against a coral background that connects the three outer edges of the cover. The spine displays a square, with people walking in groups in the same direction (downwards in the picture) towards a common goal that lies outside the field of

5 Cf.: Walter Fähnders, 'Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag. Lili Körbers Tagebuch-Roman über die Putilow-Werke', in *Der lange Schatten des 'Roten Oktober'. Zur Relevanz und Rezeption sowjet-russischer Literatur in Österreich 1918–1938*, ed. Primus-Heinz Kucher and Rebecca Unterberger, Wechselwirkungen. Österreichische Literatur im internationalen Kontext, 22 (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 118–19.

6 Viktoria Hertling, *Quer durch: Von Dwinger bis Kisch: Berichte und Reportagen über die Sowjetunion aus der Epoche der Weimarer Republik* (Königstein: Forum Academicum, 1982), 95.

7 Siegfried Kracauer, 'Aus dem roten Alltag', *Frankfurter Zeitung*, 24 July 1932, 2. Morgenblatt, 5; see also: Fähnders, 'Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag', 120; Hertling, *Quer durch*, 93.

8 The book has also been translated into English, Bulgarian and Japanese. Cf.: Viktoria Hertling, 'Nachwort', in *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluss*, by Lili Körber (Vienna: Christian Brandstätter, 1988), 151–57.



view. It could be a factory gate. On the back cover workers are erecting a large Soviet star and painting it with white Cyrillic letters; the lettering ‘There is metal’ refers to the accelerated construction of the metalworking industry in the Stalinist five-year plan.<sup>9</sup> Stalin’s likeness is presumably attached to the top.

The three photographs work with dynamic lines. In front, the women look downwards, while tools and processed material point from the left to the top right. The crowd strides towards the bottom of the picture, the workers and the star are dynamically arranged from bottom left to top right. Heartfield’s design alludes to the content of the book: Körber’s experiences as a driller are echoed in the motifs of the workers, with the Soviet context on the back of the book. The dynamic composition again refers to the author and heroine’s constant struggle with social and political circumstances as described in the blurb, which reads: ‘In workshops and hospitals, in furnished rooms and on the street, she fights day after day, with pleasure and agony, the heated lovers’ quarrel between the individual with the collective. Again and again balance is restored, and again and again the quarrel resumes.’<sup>10</sup> In addition, the cover

Fig. 04  
Lili Körber. *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag*. Berlin: Rowohlt, 1932 (Archive Burcu Dogramaci).

9 Cf.: Fähnders, ‘Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag’, 122–23.  
10 Lili Körber, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* (Rowohlt, 1932), Blurb.

in particular conveys an image of contemporary women and female workers in the Soviet Union, who outwardly resemble the New Women of the Weimar Republic.<sup>11</sup>

For his book and magazine covers, John Heartfield worked with the technique of photomontage, combining existing and specially taken photographs such that new meanings emerged. On the title page and in the pictures inside the *AIZ*, Heartfield brought together photographs from different contexts in one pictorial space. Through ‘the aesthetic closure of the cuts between the different photographic parts’<sup>12</sup> a new pictorial logic emerged, as Vera Chiquet notes. Heartfield’s photomontages for the *AIZ* used artistic means and pictorial constellations to expose the economic entanglements of National Socialism, the viciousness, the aggressiveness, the anti-Semitism of Nazi ideology. In his book covers, produced from 1920 onwards for publishers such as Malik (the publishing house run by Wieland Herzfelde, Heartfield’s brother), Neuer Deutscher Verlag and Rowohlt, Heartfield used photographic material to translate books’ contents into artistic forms.<sup>13</sup> The ‘seductive aesthetic’<sup>14</sup> attracted attention on display tables and bookshop windows, and it drove sales along with the content, which was advertised via blurbs and reviews.

## Dispersion — John Heartfield and Lili Körber in exile

Due to his political work, Heartfield had to flee to Prague as early as 1933, before continuing his artistic work for the *AIZ*. Like Heartfield, Körber, as a political author, quickly found herself in the crosshairs of the new rulers. Her 1934 novel *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* (A Jewess Experiences the New Germany) ‘one of the first anti-fascist books’,<sup>15</sup> takes place in the transitional period between the end of the Weimar Republic and the establishment of the Nazi state, incisively observing the ideological suffusion of society. The list of harmful and undesirable literature (here as of October 1935), contains ‘Sämtliche Schriften’ (all writings) by Lili

<sup>11</sup> Cf.: Hertling, *Quer durch*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> Vera Chiquet, *Fake Fotos. John Heartfields Fotomontagen in populären Illustrierten*, Edition Medienwissenschaft, 47 (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2018), 19.

<sup>13</sup> On the book covers see above all: Lux Rettej, *John Heartfield. Buchgestaltung und Fotomontage. Eine Sammlung*, ed. Friedrich Haufe (Berlin: Rotes Antiquariat and Galerie C. Bartsch, 2014). On the website <https://heartfield.adk.de> all book covers kept in the estate are available, often also different versions.

<sup>14</sup> Chiquet, *Fake Fotos*, 123.

<sup>15</sup> Hertling, ‘Nachwort’, 154; Lili Körber, *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* (Vienna: Verlag der Buchhandlung Richard Lanyi, 1934).





Körber.<sup>16</sup> In 1933, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* was among the books burned.<sup>17</sup> A trip to Japan and China in 1934 found literary expression in the travelogue *Begegnungen im Fernen Osten* (Encounters in the Far East, Biblos publishers, Budapest, 1936, fig. 5) and in *Sato-San, ein japanischer Held. Ein satyrischer Zeitroman* (Sato-San, a Japanese Hero. A contemporary satirical novel, Wiener Lesegilde, Vienna, 1936), which is a reflection on Japanese fascism that can also be read as a parody of Hitler. It thus becomes clear that the burning and banning of her books under National Socialism did not deter Körber from publishing political works.

16 Reichsschrifttumskammer, ed., *Liste 1 des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums. Gemäß §1 der Anordnung des Präsidenten der Reichsschrifttumskammer vom 25. April 1935.* (Berlin: Reichsdruckerei, 1935), 67, <https://digitale-sammlungen.ulb.uni-bonn.de/periodical/pageview/6670278>.

17 'Bibliothek verbrannter Bücher', accessed 13 February 2023. <http://www.verbrannte-buecher.de/>.

Fig. 05

**Lili Körber. *Begegnungen im Fernen Osten*. Budapest: Biblos publishers, 1936. Cover. (Archive Burcu Dogramaci).**



Shortly after the annexation of Austria, Körber fled Vienna to Paris via Zurich, where she wrote for Swiss newspapers and the *Pariser Tageblatt*.<sup>18</sup> From April 1938 onwards, the social-democratic newspaper *Volksrecht* in Zurich published the serial novel *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* (An Austrian woman experiences the annexation), in which Körber, under the pseudonym Agnes Muth, processed her observations in the proven form of an autobiographic novel. Finally, in June 1941, with the support of the Emergency Rescue Committee, she emigrated via Lisbon to New York, where Körber worked in a factory worker and as a nurse.<sup>19</sup> In addition to a few newspaper articles in, for example, the émigré newspaper *Das andere Deutschland* (The other Germany) published in Buenos Aires, she also published the serial novel *Ein Amerikaner in Russland* (An American in Russia) in the New York 'Anti-Nazi Newspaper' *Neue Volks-Zeitung* in 1942/43.<sup>20</sup> Körber fell off the radar in Germany and Austria; her disappearance was the result of political persecution, the confiscation and destruction of her books and her emigration.<sup>21</sup>

On the occasion of her 125th birthday, Lili Körber, who died in exile in New York in 1982, was described in a February 2022 newspaper article as 'not forgotten, but today even a virtual unknown'.<sup>22</sup> This radical judgement must read in the context of the growing scholarly attention paid to her work in recent years. In the 1980s, two of her books were reissued in the wake of ascendant research on women writers and a burgeoning interest in exiled women. In 1984, persona publishers in Mannheim released *Die Ehe der Ruth Gomperz* (The Marriage of Ruth Gomperz), a re-edition of *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* under a new title, and in 1988 the Brandstätter Verlag in Vienna reprinted *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß*.<sup>23</sup> Körber's book *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* has not been re-published to date, but it has been discussed in a number of academic papers.<sup>24</sup> This attention to Körber's book can be attributed to the fact that male perspectives dominated reports on Russia until 1933, among other reasons.

18 Gabriele Kreis, 'Lili Körber. Leben und Werk', in *Die Ehe der Ruth Gomperz. Roman*, by Lili Körber (Mannheim: Persona, 1984), 10.

19 For a description of route Lili Körber and her partner Erich Grave took into exile, see: Viktoria Hertling, 'Farewell to Yesterday. Lili Körbers Exil in New York zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit', *Dachauer Hefte. Special Issue 'Überleben und Spätfolgen'* 8, no. 8 (1992): 205–7.

20 I thank Silke Wehrle for making this serial novel accessible to me.

21 Cf.: Hertling, 'Farewell to Yesterday', 208.

22 Christiana Puschak, 'Eine von ihnen. Auf Entdeckungsfahrt in die Wirklichkeit. Vor 125 Jahren wurde Lili Körber geboren', *Junge Welt*, accessed 4 April 2023, <https://www.jungewelt.de/artikel/print.php?id=421489>.

23 Lili Körber, *Die Ehe der Ruth Gomperz* (Mannheim: Persona, 1984); Lili Körber, *Eine Österreicherin erlebt den Anschluß* (Vienna: Brandstätter, 1988).

24 See: Hertling, *Quer durch*, 285–98; Herta Wolf, 'Lili Körber. Eine Emigration in die Vergessenheit', in *Eine schwierige Heimkehr. Österreichische Literatur im Exil 1939–1945*, ed. Johann Holzner, Sigurd Paul Scheichl and Wolfgang Wiesmüller (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, 1991), 285–298; Fähnders, 'Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag'; Katharina Schätz, *Alltag im Arbeiterviertel. Österreichisch-Russische Tagebuchrealitäten* bei Alja Rachmanowa und Lili Körber (Vienna: Paesens Verlag, 2019).

In the approximately 100 German-language reports published on Russia, there were only five other women besides Körber.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the 1991 essay by the art historian Herta Wolf is entitled ‘Lili Körber – An Emigration into Oblivion’,<sup>26</sup> and the literary scholar Gabriele Kreis, who knew Körber personally, stated in 1993: ‘For the Austrian Lili Körber, exile meant the end of her existence as a writer. It turned her into a writing nurse. [...] When I asked her why she became a nurse, she answered: “It was the feeling that you can really do something in this profession, that you are needed.” As a writer, Lili Körber was no longer needed in Germany and Austria’.<sup>27</sup>

As for John Heartfield, art history has undoubtedly not forgotten him. Rather, he is especially popular exponent of the Weimar Republic. His exile work, on the other hand, long received less notice. It was seen as subordinate and less political. John Heartfield fled from Prague to London in 1938, where he continued his work in various fields, as a member of the Free German League of Culture for example, composing title pages for magazines such as *Picture Post*, but above all as a designer for book covers. Heartfield designed numerous book covers between 1941 and 1949, especially for the publishing house Lindsay Drummond. These display both the continuation of his artistic means as well as the political orientation in his work.<sup>28</sup> The Lindsay Drummond publishing house, founded in 1937, had an anti-fascist programme that included books by politically active émigré authors. Not every book Heartfield designed for Drummond had a political impetus, but numerous publications were directed against the Nazi regime and its expansionist policies; they were devoted to wartime England and the *Future of the Jews*.<sup>29</sup> The book jacket of Wilhelm Necker’s *Hitler’s War Machine and the Invasion of Britain* (1941) shows a tank driving away from the viewpoint. The soldiers are captured from behind; parachutists and an aeroplane can be seen in the sky above. Soldiers in ranks, tanks and uniformed men marching are visible on the reverse. The visual symbolism depicts

25 Cf.: Fähnders, ‘Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag’, 121. See also: Matthias Heeke, *Reise zu den Sowjets. Der ausländische Tourismus in Russland 1921–1941. Mit einem bio-bibliographischen Anhang zu 96 deutschen Reiseautoren* (Münster et al.: LIT Verlag, 2003), 561–637.

26 Wolf, ‘Lili Körber’, 285–98.

27 Gabriele Kreis, ‘“Schreiben aus eigener Erfahrung...” Drei Schriftstellerinnen im Exil: Lili Körber, Irmgard Keun, Adrienne Thomas’, in *Zwischen Aufbruch und Verfolgung. Künstlerinnen der zwanziger und dreißiger Jahre*, ed. Denny Hirschbach and Sonia Nowoselsky (Bremen: Zeichen+Spuren, 1993), 67–71.

28 Anna Schultz, ‘Uncompromising Mimicry. Heartfield’s Exile in London’, in *John Heartfield. Photography Plus Dynamyte*, ed. Angela Lammert, Rosa von der Schulenburg, and Anna Schultz (Exh. Cat. Akademie der Künste, 2020), 76–71. For John Heartfield’s work in London, see also: Burcu Dogramaci, ‘John Heartfield’, *Metromod*, accessed 14 February 2023, <https://archive.metromod.net/viewer.p/69/1470/object/5138-9615821>.

29 The exiled Norwegian historian Jacob S. Worm-Müller published *Norway revolts against the Nazis* (1941, 2nd ed.) with Lindsay Drummond. The Austrian writer Felix Langer, who had lived in exile in London since 1939, published *Stepping Stones to Peace. On the problems of post-war relations with Germany* (1943). The volume *The Future of the Jews* was edited by J. J. Lynx in 1945.

the Nazi army as technically advanced and disciplined; man and machine converge in this logic.

*A Year and a Day* by Paul Duner (1942, fig. 6), on the other hand, is dedicated to the author's escape from occupied Belgium in October 1940 and the subsequent passage until his arrival in England in October 1941. Heartfield, who signed the cover with his name, juxtaposed photographs from the countries on Duner's escape route to form a mosaic. On it is a circular map, with Paul Duner's route into exile drawn in red. Heartfield's work for Lindsay Drummond in particular contradicts the view widely held by art historians that the artist was less noticed in English exile because his work was too modern or radical.<sup>30</sup> That view ignores the fact that the book, like the magazine, was a mobile medium that was bought, read, shared and mailed. Even during the Second World War alone, Lindsay Drummond published 157 books, many of which were designed by Heartfield.<sup>31</sup> Heartfield's work for the publisher gave him visibility and allowed his work to circulate in the public domain, often with Heartfield's signature on the covers.<sup>32</sup> Heartfield's last published work for Lindsay Drummond dates to 1949, and he relocated to East Germany a year later.<sup>33</sup> Though all too often devalued in the literature as him just earning a paycheque, Heartfield cherished his work for Lindsay Drummond, as proven by the many framed covers and motifs adorning the walls of his Berlin flat in Friedrichstraße after his remigration.<sup>34</sup>

## Dis:connected objects and actors: reframing exile history

Lili Körber's book *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* thus opens up two exile stories that stand for dispersion, dislocation and new beginnings. Although the book fell victim to Nazi book burning and was confiscated from German libraries, a few copies can still be found in used-book shops. My search was also successful, even

30 See among others: Jutta Vinzent, *Identity and Image. Refugee Artists from Nazi Germany in Britain (1933–1945)*, Schriften der Guernica-Gesellschaft, 16 (Weimar: VDG, 2006), 134; Barbara Copeland Buenger, 'John Heartfield in London. 1938–45', in *Exil. Flucht und Emigration europäischer Künstler 1933–1945*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Sabine Eckmann (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 74.

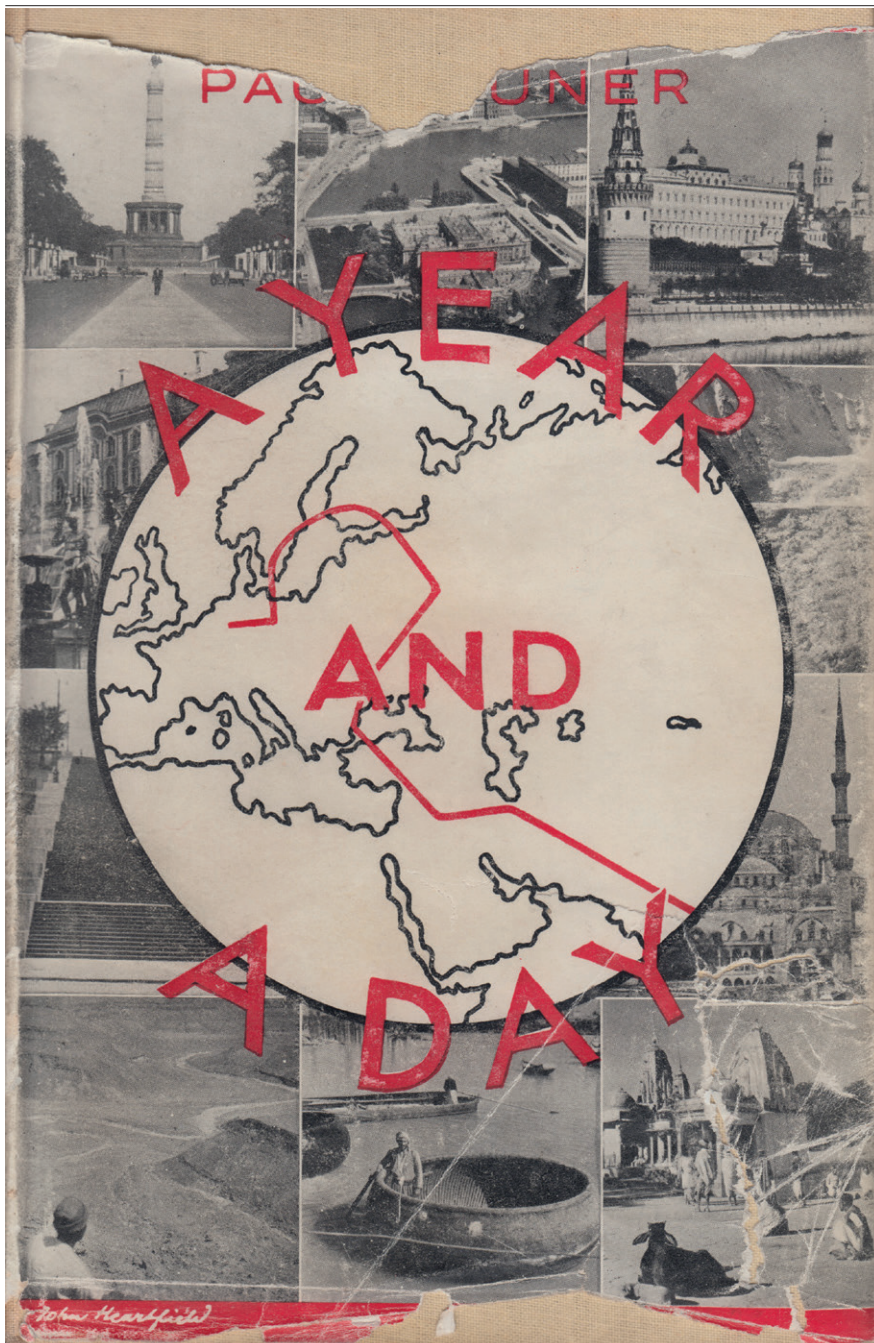
31 See entries in the catalogue of British Library: <http://explore.bl.uk/>, accessed 14 February 2023.

32 Anna Schultz writes in 'Uncompromising Mimicry. Heartfield's Exile in London', 197: 'The firm's (Lindsay Drummond) directors clearly wished to capitalize on Heartfield's reputation, and his name was prominently displayed on the covers he designed.'

33 Almost no information can be found about Drummond. On the one hand, it is said that he founded his publishing house in 1938 and died in 1949: John Krygier, 'Russian Literature Library', A Series of a Series: 20th-Century Publishers Book Series, accessed 14 February 2023, <https://seriesofseries.owu.edu/russian-literature-library/>. On the Wikipedia entry of his father, see 'Laurence Drummond', Wikipedia, accessed 14 February 2023, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence\\_Drummond](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laurence_Drummond).

34 Anna Schultz, 'Uncompromising Mimicry', 202, footnote 23.





ending in a rare copy with a preserved dust jacket. By the way, Lili Körber carried the book with her on her various exile stops. When Gabriele Kreis visited her in New York in May 1980, Körber showed her a copy of *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag*, but distanced herself from the book because her view of the Soviet Union had long since changed.<sup>35</sup> In a questionnaire sent to emigrant writers in 1959 by the publicist Wilhelm Sternfeld, Körber listed her book *Eine Jüdin erlebt das neue Deutschland* (1934) as her first publication.<sup>36</sup> She had thus broken with her burnt first work during her exile.

Incidentally, *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* can also be

<sup>35</sup> Gabriele Kreis, 'Lili Körber. Leben und Werk', 7.  
<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 7.

Fig. 06  
Paul Duner. *A Year and a Day*. London: Lindsay Drummond, 1942, cover design by John Hearfield (Archive Burcu Dogramaci, © The Heartfield Community of Heirs / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023).



found in John Heartfield's estate.<sup>37</sup> The artist thus took it into exile and carried the book with him when he remigrated to the SBZ. This makes it a book with its own history of exile, a moving object, reproductions of which have been repeatedly shown in reproduction at various exhibitions in recent years as part of Annette Kelm's work *Die Bücher* (2019/20).

In conclusion, this also allows us to reflect on the connective and dis:connective. Lili Körber's book *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* is connected to the publication landscape of the Weimar Republic, to the book burnings in National Socialism (and thus denied literary reception in Germany after 1933 and from 1938 onwards in Austria) and to histories of emigration. It is disconnected, though, from the local literary landscape in New York and London, because Körber's books were not known there and were not available in translation. The book is connected to two actors who remained unconnected/dis:connected due to their global dispersion. Annette Kelm, in turn, has reacquainted the contemporary art scene and a contemporary art audience with *Eine Frau erlebt den roten Alltag* – an audience that gains its own access to the dis:connected objects through Kelm's photographic conceptual art.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See <https://heartfield.adk.de/node/4466>, accessed 14 February 2023.

<sup>38</sup> This research on John Heartfield was conducted with the support of the author's ERC Consolidator Grant project 'Relocating Modernism: Global Metropolises, Modern Art and Exile (METROMOD)' (European Research Council (ERC) under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme, 2016), grant agreement No 724649 – METROMOD.

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# Dear Tutu: a letter by Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari on exile, friendship and globalisation

Nadia von Maltzahn

Dear Tutu,

Hello! How are you. At home your letter is hidden under a pile of books, papers, tools & a thousand other things – in our unconditioned house my desk which faces southish is too hot to work at – so I’m writing in this dubious oasis of Western civilization. It is cool & predictable & has a non-smoking floor, – also soft Hawaiian music – did you read Melville’s “Typee” on south sea island – at that (mid 19th c.) time Hawaii was known as the Sandwich islands & its destruction culturally was well underway – it’s all heartrending in a way because Palestine too was a kind of primeval lagoon forgotten for a few centuries by history (Napoleon in Jaffa does not count, too brief!) Your absent-minded & hurried letter was welcome – glad all my vague & precious fulminations about the state of my life & art slid over your head. Let me restate it in simpler terms. I’m too scared, broke, lazy, confused & perhaps am unable to move from this tinsel & transistor paradise where I’ve very uncomfortably & awkwardly parked!<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Vladimir Tamari to Soraya Antonius (Tutu), 2-13 August 1991, 5 pages. Private archives, France. All subsequent quotations that are not separately referenced are from this letter.



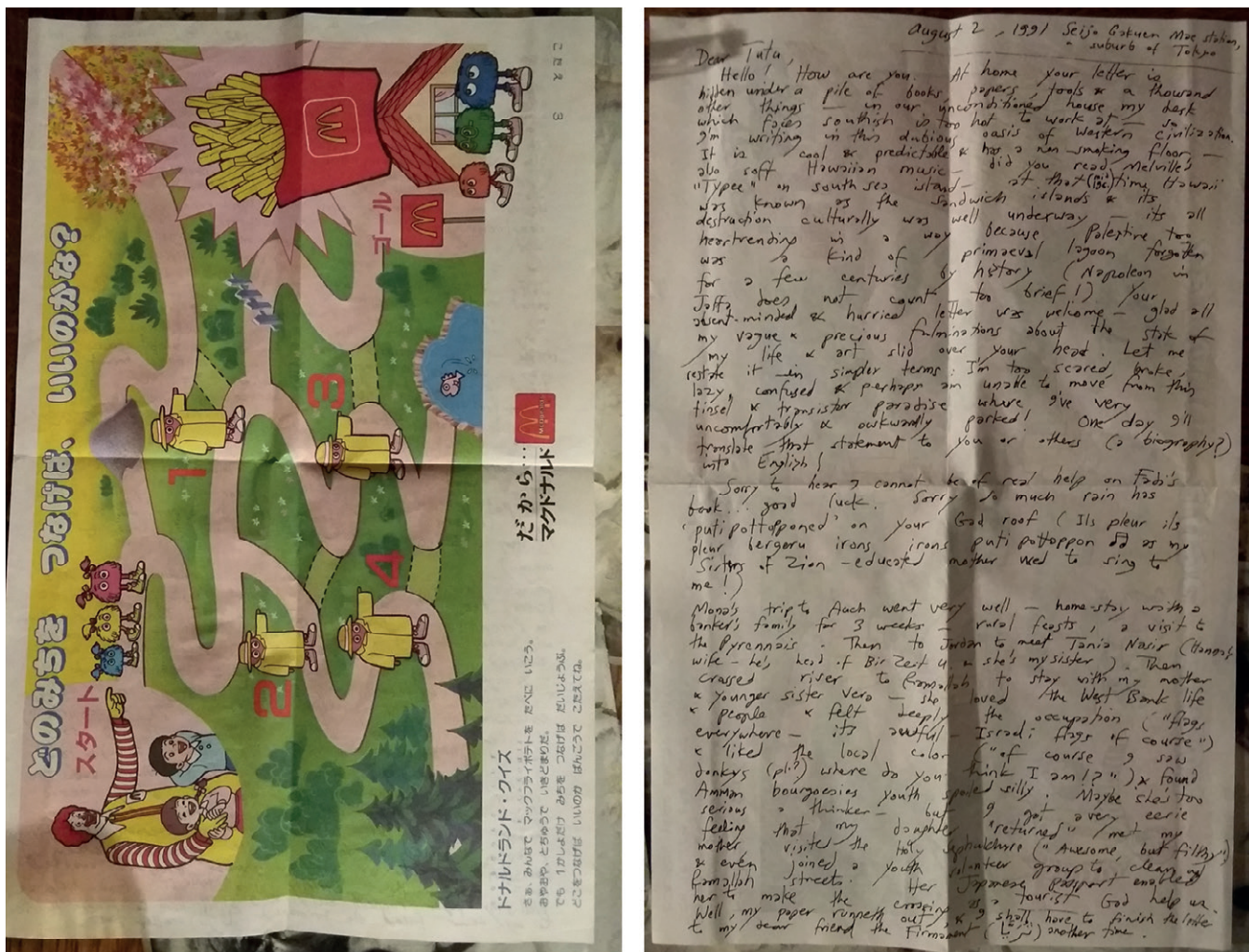


Fig. 01  
**Vladimir Tamari: Letter to Tutu, 2 August 1991, cover page recto and verso.**

This is how the Tokyo-based Palestinian artist Vladimir Tamari (1942-2017) starts his letter to his friend Tutu, aka Soraya Antonius (1932-2017), who was in Normandy at the time. Written over several days between 2 and 13 August 1991 in suburban Tokyo from a McDonald's, using a branded paper placemat as stationery for the opening page, the letter addresses questions of exile, friendship and globalisation (fig. 1). It demonstrates what ephemera such as this correspondence can teach us about networks, relationships and dis:connectivities in the frame of artistic production.

Dis:connectivities here denote the contextual connections and ruptures in which artists create. Dis:connectivity also relates to physical ephemera, their locations, accessibility, fragility, languages and the references they contain. Tamari's letter could easily have been lost to oblivion, and it has only surfaced by chance.<sup>2</sup>

Here the questions arise: what role do ephemera such as this letter play in (art) history? Who should be responsible for preserving them? Should they be considered private objects that belong in

2 The letter is part of the collection of Soraya Antonius's private papers that I manage.

private archives?<sup>3</sup> Or should they be archived as part of an artist's biography and trajectory – classifiable scientific objects? These are questions we are dealing with in the LAWHA research project (Lebanon's Art World at Home and Abroad), which investigates the trajectories of artists and their works in and from Lebanon since 1943.<sup>4</sup> Let us examine Vladimir Tamari and his letter to Tutu as a case in point.

## The artist: cultural references and networks

Who was Vladimir Tamari? In an autobiographical essay published in the same year as the letter, Tamari describes himself as a Palestinian Arab artist, inventor and physicist, born 1942 in Jerusalem and educated at a Quaker school in his hometown of Ramallah, before studying physics and art at the American University of Beirut. He completed his formal education at Saint Martin's School of Art in London and the Pendle Hill Center of Study and Contemplation, a Quaker institution near Philadelphia. Between 1966 and 1970 he worked with the United Nations in Beirut until he moved with his Japanese wife to Tokyo, where he lived and worked until his death in 2017.

In the essay, he emphasises four main influences on his thinking: (1) church life and rituals (coming from an Orthodox Christian family), (2) the culture of Islam that surrounded him in Ramallah and Jerusalem, (3) Palestinian and Arab nationalism and (4) what he calls 'a veneer of European "modern" culture and values'.<sup>5</sup> The cultural references Tamari makes in his letter to Tutu recall these influences. He speaks of the 'Christian concept of suffering', the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the ascetic St Simeon in Northern Syria. The impact of European 'modern' culture and history on his writing is obvious, with references to d'Artagnan, Pablo Picasso, Napoleon, William Wordsworth and Richard Wagner. 'Global' classics such as the work of Herman Melville, the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos and Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* are mentioned in the letter with the same familiarity as the contemporary Palestinian poet and author Mahmoud Darwish, the classical Persian poet and scholar Omar Khayyam and the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf.

While the cultural references and his language – he writes in English – are testament to his Western-oriented missionary education and his cultural environment, the people he mentions

3 Compare to: Sherene Seikaly, 'How I Met My Great-Grandfather. Archives and the Writing of History', *CSSAAME* 38, no. 1 (2018): 6–20.  
4 This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. 850760). See <https://lawha.hypotheses.org>.  
5 Vladimir Tamari, 'Influences and Motivations in the Work of a Palestinian Artist/Inventor', *Leonardo* 24, no. 1 (1991): 7–14.

in his letter show what social circles he shares with its recipient: his family, closely linked to the intellectual and cultural scene of the West Bank (his sister Tania and her husband Hanna Nasir, long-time president of Ramallah's Birzeit University; his other sister Vera, also an artist); Jordanian artist and pro-Palestinian activist Mona Saudi (1945-2022), who spent a large part of her life in Beirut; John Carswell (b. 1931), artist and professor of fine arts at the American University of Beirut; Lebanese artist Fadi Barrage (1939-1988), and Yuzo Itagaki, professor of Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at the University of Tokyo and 'one of those rare individuals who is all friendship & love for one & all' and 'has followed closely Palestinian affairs', whom he wanted to put in touch with Tutu for a potential Japanese translation of her latest novel. The partial reduction of family names to their first letter shows the mutual familiarity of Tamari and Tutu with each other's networks.

## The predictability of globalisation

In Tamari's life and letter, globalisation is a double-edged sword. It is represented by McDonald's, which runs through the five-page letter like a red thread. Most notable is the stationery of the first page; Ronald McDonald and the unmistakable golden arches immediately allow one to locate the paper visually, but Tamari also directly references this symbol of globalisation as an expression of Western civilisation. Without initially calling it by name – it needs no further explanation – he dubs it a 'dubious oasis of Western civilisation' as well as 'dubious paradise'. McDonald's embodies his frustration and tense relationship with the globalised Western world. On the one hand, it is questionable, on the other it is a refuge for him – cool and predictable, he knows what to expect and keeps returning to it.<sup>6</sup>

While global brands are easily found in Japan, this does not translate into an openness to the world. The account of an Egyptian journalist traveling to Japan in 1963 accentuates this disjuncture. He writes that 'in Japan, one finds all of Europe and all of America. (...) But at the same time, one observes that Japan lives in total isolation. Or rather, it is concerned only with itself and pays almost no attention to the existence of others'.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the first McDonald's had opened in Japan in 1971, as stated on its official website, the country did not boast a large expat community in the early 1990s. Globalisation in Japan might thus heighten the sense of isolation, as it only provides superficial connectivity. Being a Palestinian in Tokyo was a solitary affair, especially if one was not looking for formal political activism. The Palestine Liberation

6 I am grateful to Peggy Levitt, Cresa Pugh, Andreja Siliunas, Kwok Kian Chow and Joanna Jurkiewicz for their precious comments while we looked at this letter collectively as part of the Global (De)Centre platform.

7 Anis Mansour as quoted in: Alain Roussillon, *Identité et Modernité : Les Voyageurs Égyptiens Au Japon (XIXe-XXe Siècle)* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2005), 149. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

Organization (PLO) operated a Japan office from 1977 to 1995,<sup>8</sup> but having left Beirut for Japan ‘in a spirit of disillusionment’;<sup>9</sup> Tamari limited his pro-Palestinian activities mainly to designing posters on relevant occasions, such as PLO-leader Yasser Arafat’s visit to Japan and the third anniversary of the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, with reference to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>10</sup>

## Exile and friendship

In his letter, Tamari openly voices his discomfort with life in exile in Japan. He speaks of being ‘scared, broke, lazy, confused’ and of his wish ‘to compress the 20 years in Japan to a few representative years.’<sup>11</sup> He feels isolated and misses what he calls a ‘community of the faithful’ – a local network of like-minded friends, with whom he can digest the news from his home country (‘For me – in my imaginations, the very news became a pain & I’ve stopped reading magazines & newspapers lest I be offended by yet another word of misunderstanding of our cause or, yet read of another facet of American official stupidity! Without the shield of a “community of the faithful” in which I can quench the flaming darts of the smug West, I feel every barb deep in my bones, so out of a sense of survival I rejected a lot of what I heard of’).<sup>12</sup> He struggles with himself and the skin he was born in, with all the baggage he perceives goes along with being a Palestinian, which he cannot let go of despite his efforts (‘What am I trying to say to you, to myself ... nothing perhaps but just another feeble attempt to take off this hair shirt I was born with’).

In this sense, there are clear limitations to his integration in a country in which he has ‘very uncomfortably and awkwardly parked’. At the same time, he sees the irony that his daughter’s Japanese passport allows her to visit his birth town of Jerusalem as a tourist (‘God help us’). Tamari clearly expresses his loneliness and lack of a network of solidarity in Japan.

Tamari emphasises the importance of a network of likeminded people, even in a globalised world that supposedly facilitates circulation, the role of friendships and a form of continuity that one can rely on (‘you too, too too, have also created a shell of comfort & friendship & silence in your French retreat’), the ‘capstan on shore’ as he refers to Tutu’s presence in France ‘while

8 ‘Japan Palestine Relations (Basic Data)’; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, June 2015, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle\\_e/palestine/data.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/palestine/data.html).

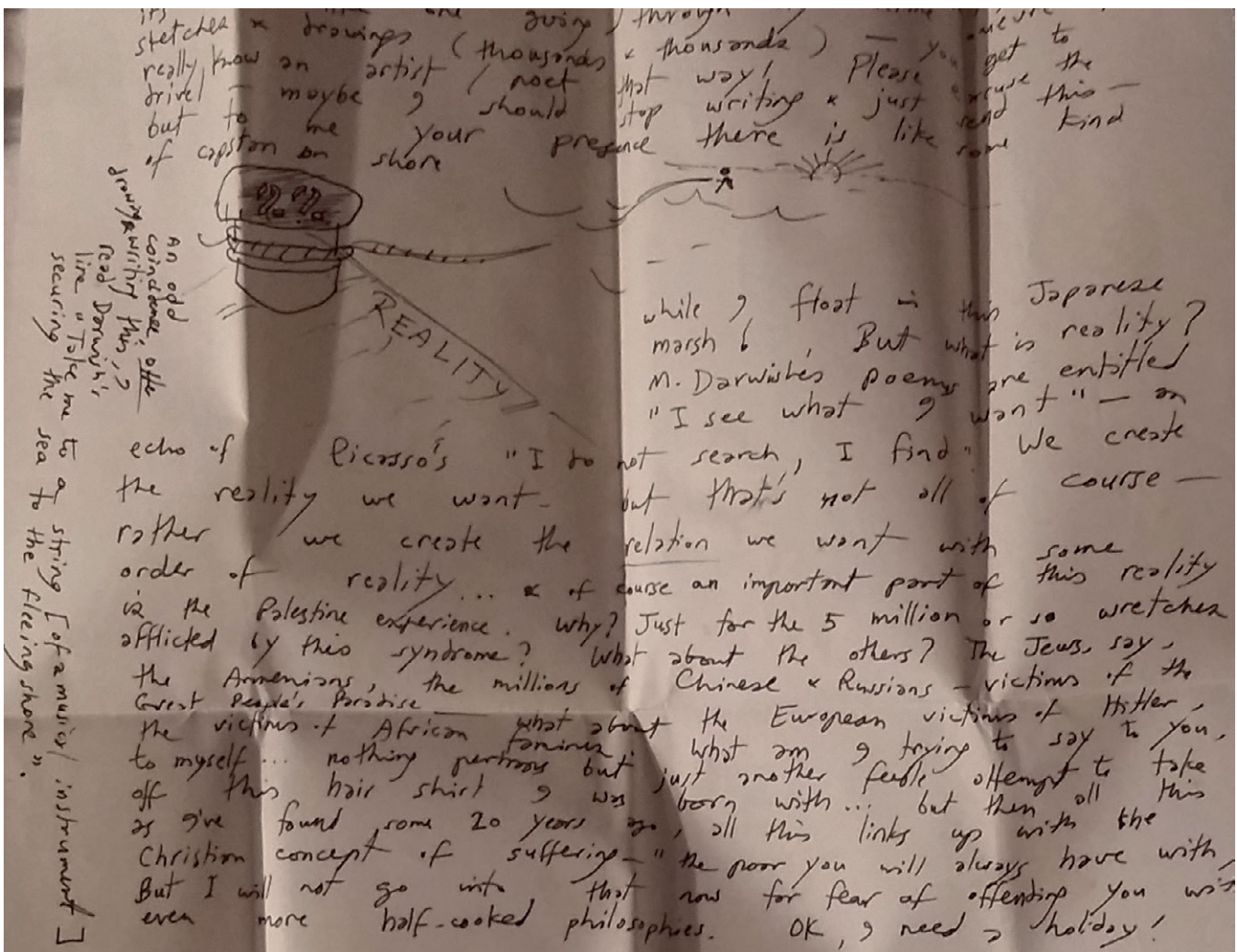
9 Vladimir Tamari, ‘The Birth of the Logo for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine’, Vladimir Tamari, August 2016, <http://vladimirtamari.com/pflp-logo.html>.

10 These and other political posters are available from the Palestine Poster Project Archives at <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/artist/vladimir-tamari>.

11 Interestingly, he longs for some Polynesian paradise to spend the rest of his life in, rather than wishing to be back in the Middle East.

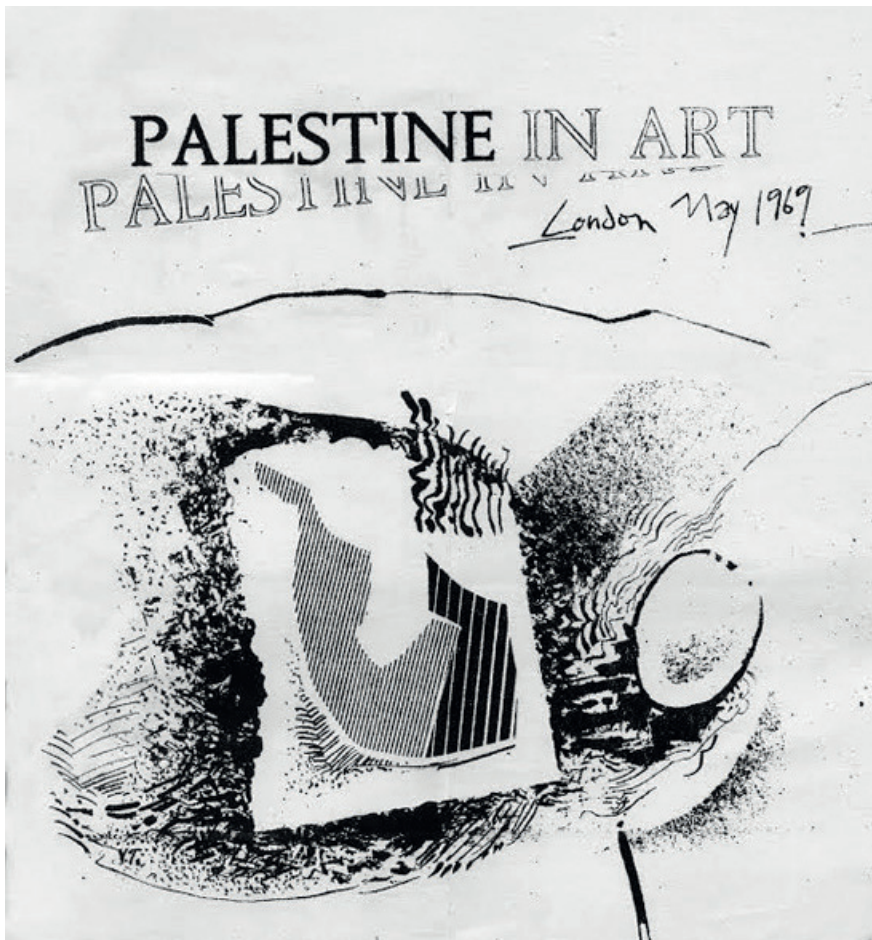
12 Like subsequent quotes set in brackets, this quotation comes from Tamari’s letter to Tutu.





[he] floats in this Japanese marsh!' (fig. 2). Imagining her in her house in Normandy comforts him in a world in which he perceives many obstacles to friendship. He knows that his addressee understands him and that she is in a similar situation. They share part of their trajectory – like him, she was born in Jerusalem, British-educated and spent a long time in Beirut, where they consolidated their friendship. Both were fighting for the Palestinian cause to varying degrees and were interested in the arts (fig. 3). The correspondence between Vladimir and Tutu presents a form of connectivity that also has its limits. The immediate experience of life in Tokyo can be described, but cannot be lived from a distance. Their friendship helps him to express his loneliness, but not to surpass the perceived and real disconnectivity that separates Tamari from his network and 'community of the faithful'.

Fig. 02  
 Vladimir Tamari: Letter to Tutu,  
 8 August 1991 (excerpt).



## Being a Palestinian artist in Japan

In his letter, Vladimir Tamari keeps returning to his artistic practice and discloses how he works and archives. He seems to share copies of his artworks with his correspondent regularly, and it is important to him to discuss his technique and the content of his work ('there is much, technically & thematically, of interest to the discerning observer (you)'). He refers to the quantity of his sketches and drawings ('thousands & thousands'), through which one can really get to know an artist, and hints at material for a possible biography that could be written one day.

What I find particularly insightful is his description towards the end of the letter about a painting of Jerusalem that he 'juiced up', although he considered the simple drawing a better work ('The other day I made a really nice painting, based on a pencil drawing I probably sent you a copy of – stones roughly arranged to say in Arabic *سردق* AL-QUDS [Jerusalem] – anyway I juiced it up with color & gold foil, but the pencil drawing remains better'). The subject of much of his oeuvre remained Jerusalem, even after years of exile (fig. 4).

In this he was not alone, nor in depicting a symbolic version of his birthplace. As Makhoul and Hon write about the Palestinian

Fig. 03  
**Vladimir Tamari: Poster designed for the Palestinian novelist Soraya Antonius for the exhibition *Palestine in Art*, London May 1969.** (from: **The Palestine Poster Project Archives (PPPA)**, accessible at <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/palestine-in-art-catalog-cover>)





artist and art historian Kamal Boullata, for example, the latter's representation of Jerusalem as geometric is 'understandable as an exile's idealization of a place of origin, but we are left with the feeling that this idealized origin has not only replaced the lost place of his birth but that it also eclipses the present city as a Palestinian urban centre'.<sup>13</sup> Taking this further, the authors suggest that 'the representation of Jerusalem as a place that can somehow be dislodged from the land, or as a place that is already an image of itself' is found throughout Palestinian art, exemplified by Sliman Mansour's *Jamal al Mohamel* (1973), in which the homeland is being carried as a kind of burden.<sup>14</sup>

This connects back to Tamari's futile attempts to 'take off this hair shirt [he] was born with'. While his place of birth remained very present in his art works, the use of bright colours and gold foil that one can see increasingly after he moved to Japan suggests an influence of his surroundings in Japan, a place he refers to as 'tinsel and transistor paradise' in his letter. Although he considered the simple version the better work, he felt a need to embellish it.

<sup>13</sup> Bashir Makhoul and Hon Gordon, *The Origins of Palestinian Art* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 111; Kamal Boullata, *Palestinian Art. From 1850 to the Present*, London (Saqi, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Makhoul and Gordon, *The Origins of Palestinian Art*, 115.

## The role of ephemera in writing art history

The letter reveals a range of connections, connectivities and disconnectivities. It transports the reader into 19th-century Hawaii and Napoleon's France, takes the author back to Palestine of the 1950s and 1960s, connects to Beirut and Ramallah and testifies to the author's ambivalent relationship to his place of exile and, on another level, to Western civilisation. It bears witness to the entanglements that Tamari shared with his correspondent, and at the same time it shows the limits of its medium – a letter cannot replace the physical presence of a community of like-minded friends.

Another aspect of the letter as an object relates to its locality and its potential for dis:connectivity. The letter-as-object embodies dis:connectivity in that it can be displaced, lost, found, sent away and travel long distances. It can end up in an archive, where it becomes part of a larger narrative and subject to scholarly investigation if made accessible. Correspondence, diary entries, notebooks, sketches and other ephemera can divulge the context of artistic production and allow us to see the artists and their works in relation to aesthetic and political discourses, personal encounters and their socio-political and cultural surroundings. As this letter has shown, ephemera provide clues to the personal side of artistic production and bridge gaps in our understanding. To conclude in the words of Vladimir Tamari, 'perhaps human progress may only be measured by how much each one of us can contribute to shorten the distance between two poles'.<sup>15</sup>

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15 Vladimir Tamari, 'Al-Rasm Bi-l Ab'ad al-Thalatha' (Drawing in Three Dimensions), *Mawaqif* 16 (1971): 269.

Fig. 04  
**Vladimir Tamari: Arab Jerusalem, 1982, 528 x 728 mm (from: The Palestine Poster Project Archives (PPPA), accessible here <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/jerusalem-rock-original-painting>)**



**interview**

# ‘The question is whether there are even two modes of working?’

## A conversation about cooperation between the arts and humanities with Ayşe Güngör and Enis Maci

Encouraging dialogue between the arts and the humanities is one of the principal goals of global dis:connect, so we asked two of our fellows about their experiences and what they would like to see at an institution like gd:c. We wanted to know what they think about this relationship in light of their current projects and to what extent this relationship is relevant to their work.

**AN:** To start, could you both tell us a bit about what you’re currently working on? And given the subject of this conversation, we are especially interested in how you, as an author-playwright and curator, approach your topics considering that you both keep one foot in academia.

**EM:** My current project started from a piece of pop culture: the early 90s high-school sci-fi movie *Habitat*, which is set in a near future where the ozone layer is irreversibly damaged. Earth has become extremely hot, and people mostly go out at night. The teenage protagonist, who has all kinds of teenager problems, is the son of two rogue scientists who have stolen an inexplicable, gnostic, slimy life form from a government lab. It escapes from its container and kind of eats or absorbs the father. However, this artificial life form is then somehow supposed to save the irreversibly doomed Earth.

These themes lead to questions about multiplicity, about what life is exactly and what cooperation and interconnectedness could mean. And then, on another level, the teenage protagonist finds out that his parents have genetically engineered him to



Nikolai Brandes and Anna Sophia Nübling of gd:c conducted the interview



**Ayşe Güngör** is a curator and art historian with a background in art theory, anthropology and curation. She researches the confluence of art and anthropology in the work of contemporary Turkish artists, broadening narratives of global art, cultural exchange and eco-art practices. She investigates theories of artistic representation and institutional frameworks.

dampen the high temperatures. He thinks that's terrible and kind of embarrassing, but it turns out to be a superpower. Watching the movie today shows how the near future was imagined not too far in the past, while some of the parameters of this dystopic vision have vanished simply because there is not really a hole in the ozone anymore.

The mysterious life form – the gnostic slime – interested me greatly. Something communal, but not collective. One cell with many nuclei, maybe. I explored that in an event at Lenbachhaus<sup>1</sup> and an accompanying anthology under the title *Filamentous Magic Carpets* (März, 2022). It turned out that the Lenbachhaus was planning an exhibition on Rosemarie Meyer, an American feminist artist of the 1970s who worked mostly in textiles. Rosemary's work often dealt with unexpected connections between points in space and between materials. Loose threads everywhere.

Her sister, Bernadette Meyer, is a poet. I've always loved her work. So, I turned to her book *Utopia*. Here, again, questions of communality, of a better future and the everyday life surrounding it. In *Utopia*, there is a chapter titled *Filamentous Magic Carpets*, where everything comes together. And then I invited five writers and two scholars to think about these things and write about them. It was an experiment and, eerily, their different ways of thinking did in fact intertwine into a slimy sort of tapestry.

**AN:** As I was one of the two scholars you invited to think and about those things, I might add that it was fruitful to approach the topic as you suggested. To think with those 'loose threads' and to see what they unravelled. But let's turn to you, Ayşe: what can you tell us about your current project?

**AG:** My project is about a series of exhibitions on representations of Istanbul in Germany since 2000. By exploring this as a complex relationship of global interconnectivity, I identify gaps and limitations in the globalisation of contemporary Turkish art by considering art and cultural politics in Europe. These exhibitions featured Turkish artists entangled in representational forms of the international art scene's global agenda. Exhibitions of 'Turkish art' in Germany were often supported by big institutions that supported cultural exchange following Turkey's application for EU membership. I focus on the ideas of connectedness and disconnectedness that evolved around those exhibitions, considering exhibition strategies and artistic forms of resistance. The goal is to decolonise the globalisation of contemporary Turkish art. I ask how we can represent without reductively constructing, defining, restricting, disintegrating or silencing artists' autonomy.

<sup>1</sup> Maci's event "Filamentous Magic Carpets" took place at the Lenbachhaus on 14 August 2022 and included readings, talks, a concert, a film and the launch of the book of the same title, see: <https://www.globaldisconnect.org/10/18/ruminating-on-a-hunch-at-filamentous-magic-carpets/>.

**EM:** If this is about being a Turkish artist in a global space, or maybe just outside the country, what is 'being Turkish'? How can people be Turkish apart from their citizenship?

**AG:** I think the designation 'Turkish' allows outsiders to starkly limit who counts as 'Turkish'. Everything was being related to Turkey in very restricted ways that didn't acknowledge many identities.

**EM:** That's why I'm asking – people could relate to Turkey because they have lived there or they have citizenship, but still refuse the notion of being Turkish, which is a highly political question.

**AG:** Definitely. But cultural identity is often instrumentalised while cultural diversity is supposedly celebrated. Turkish artists were also stereotyped in Germany. That was part of the cultural strategies that always relate to identity. I would love a term that denoted 'from Turkey' without implying 'Turkish'. But I am also interested in how several exhibitions instrumentalised 'Turkishness' as a tool of cultural politics.

**AN:** Returning to the matter at hand, do you consider artistic practice a process of cognition and knowledge production? It might, for example, offer freedoms denied to scholarship. And to what extent is what we learn from art different from what we learn from research?

**EM:** I don't think writing yields cognition or insight. The poetry of my work has a lot to do with finding something out. It is about having a hunch and trying to get to the bottom of it, or maybe having an itch, but not knowing where to scratch. So writing would be getting to the bottom of the hunch. Or maybe it's as if I were trying to write directions to my itch. A lot is about *finding out*, like a detective or a scientist, maybe a mad scientist. And then I also think in terms of method, research, however you frame it, which is often finding the truth in something as much as discovering something useful. In my first book, for example, there's one essay on the identitarian movement. Not until I started compiling my artistic research did I realise that I had this huge database, which led me to write my master's thesis about them. So, the question of knowledge production kind of started with literature and evolved into scholarship.

**NB:** I like the idea that the starting point is the itch...

**EM:** Isn't that the case for you too? You go into the office, it's a nice day in Munich, you drink your coffee, you do some paperwork, things that need to be done, but then there's something else, right? There is this one thing you need to find out about. Or maybe some asshole wrote an article, and he was like 80% correct, but 20% of it was wrong. You are so sure of that, so you need to, you know, understand it, prove it, get the truth out there.



**Enis Maci** studied sociology and creative writing. She is the author of an anthology, *Eiscafé Europa* (Suhrkamp 2018), and a number of plays, including *WUNDER* (Suhrkamp 2021). She has (co-)edited *A Fascinating Plan* (Spector 2021) and *Filamentous Magic Carpets* (März 2022). Most recently, her play *LORBEER* premiered at Schauspiel Stuttgart.



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**NB:** Could you expand on switching between working artistically and academically?

**EM:** The question is whether there are even two modes of working? Both methods have their limitations. In academia we are committed to objectifiable truths. But literary writing also seeks truths that need to be protected, truths in the slipstream of objectifiable truth. Both these commitments, in literature and in scholarship, come with certain ethics. But in the end, for my work at least, the distinction boils down to something esoteric, something small that resists enclosure. It's even more blatant in the visual arts, because they resist the logic of language-based narration.

**AN:** You described the process of digesting material. You leave things out, you add things, you have something in the 'slipstream' of the objectifiable ...

**EM:** You try to produce conclusions that are kind of necessary. But I don't think they would always meet the criteria of a necessary conclusion in the academic world. But there is a necessity to them somehow. It always depends on the work at hand. It always depends on what you're trying to find out and where the itch is or what the hunch was ...

**NB:** Ayşe, maybe you could also expand on how you combine your research and curation. Is curating just another form of scholarship?

**AG:** There is a negative impression that science always needs to keep a distance from society to remain objective. And today, artists are becoming more engaged with society as a research topic, which shows how research and art are joining forces. As Enis mentioned, she also digests material in many different ways. From my point of view, working as a curator and as a social scientist, artistic and scholarly approaches complement each other. In curation, research results might appear directly when organising an exhibition, which goes far quicker than research. Research and artistic practices cannot be distinguished from one another anymore. Therefore, I think in terms of 'knowledge-making', which we need to integrate into the social sciences. They need to be 'flatter' in engaging with arts.

**NB:** Artistic thinking as a means of producing knowledge has become a very popular topic recently. It's a popular topic in art history and in curation too. If your own approach to art and artistic thinking is a means of knowledge production, can you think of any role models? Enis, have any writers inspired your way of learning through creative writing? You said that you sometimes find fine arts more interesting than literature because of what you called the visual arts' 'resistance towards language-based narration'. Are there any artists that you find particularly interesting?

**EM:** That's very difficult to answer. Artistic learning, maybe academic learning and maybe everyday learning (like you shouldn't touch the hot stove and such) don't really seem separate to me. I think the separation happens in methods and in the mutually agreed limitations of speech, maybe. So, I'm interested in finding out where these limitations lie and making that fertile for my work. I'm more interested in finding out how other people find things out and how that relates to me. But that, of course, is a sort of writing that is very research based, that is kind of essayistic. Maybe you would find very different answers if you talked to novelists, which also requires research that is similar but not identical to the research my writing is based on.

**NB:** I asked that question because when I began my current research on the architectural history of modernism in Africa, I first looked into the literature on the topic, which was interesting. But then I found a photo book by Guy Tillim, a South African photographer. He took pictures of late-colonial and early post-colonial architecture in southern Africa. Those pictures said so much. I felt there was not much to add academically. I had the feeling that everything was already there in the pictures.

**EM:** That's so interesting because if I saw that myself, as a writer, I would be like, 'Okay, there is nothing to add; good luck to you; you did it'. But some things don't 'exist' until you've researched them. Academia is oblivious to them. And you as an academic want to change that. I mean, this architecture exists to the people who live there, who see it every day, and to the people who built it, and to the people who know these photographs. But it does not exist to academics. So basically, you bring something that already exists into existence for other people. And that is an undertaking that goes beyond getting to objective truth. So, you were on a different kind of mission, which I find extremely interesting.

**AN:** Ayşe, do you feel the same? That you can't really answer whether there are any role models for your curation?

**AG:** Not for curation, but I can think of role models for my research. My work focuses on the confluence of art and anthropology. I'm really influenced by the way Tim Ingold thinks in terms of the integration of anthropology, archaeology, art and architecture, by the way he thinks of 'Making' as transformative knowledge production, and how he advocates practicing inquiry rather than the conventional practice of ethnography, the way he argues that conventional ethnography does not lead anywhere.

**AN:** Maybe you could say what you would expect from global dis:connect in the future? How can global dis:connect provide an environment for interdisciplinary cooperation?

**AG:** You are already. I'd like a bit more collaboration with artists, because, 'science' has a bad reputation, it's loaded



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with objectivity, which distances academia from other forms of research. So more artistic engagement could expand our understanding of academic research. Artistic research, visual representations and experimental practices could supplement text-based academic research.

**NB:** But how do we avoid including artists as mere ornaments in projects like global dis:connect? You know, scholars doing the 'serious' stuff, and then including some artists who kind of illustrate the academics' findings.

**EM:** I didn't feel like an ornament. Maybe because I don't really regard my own research as substantially different from academic research. I expected exchange between fellows, I expected to connect with the city at large. And I am happy to report that both those things happened. So that's nice. I'm curious to see where I stand with this work after my fellowship. Will it feel like a wrap or will it lead to more questions? We will see!



**past  
events**

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# Looking back on global dis:connect's first annual conference: Dis:connectivity in processes of globalisation: theories, methodologies, explorations

Peter Seeland

The *global:disconnect* annual conference took place from 20 to 21 October 2022, and it sought to clarify methodological and theoretical questions as well as to reflect on our research in general.

By investigating global dis:connections, the Centre is inaugurating a new research programme. It emphasises the roles of delays and detours, of interruptions and resistances, of the active absence of connections in globalisation processes and investigates their social significance. One of the starting premises is that connectivity and disconnectivity are not dichotomous; they are, rather, mutually constitutive in a relationship we call 'dis:connectivity'.

Fundamental methodological questions about how to research dis:connectivity remain to be answered. The central terms and how to apply them also demand attention. Multi-perspectival research on dis:connectivity fosters interdisciplinary dialogue on these questions. The conference also served as a space for just such a dialogue.

Artists and scholars interacted, with each side gaining the benefit of exposure to the other. The conference comprised three thematic panels – absences, detours and interruptions – to structure and concretise the discourse.

Richard M. Kabiito opened the event with the panel on absences. With a paper on *Globalising Ugandan art: remixing the contest*



between tradition and modernity, Kabiito posed the question of absence and dis:connectivity in postcolonial Uganda and its culture. He described the estrangement and absence from African tradition left behind by colonialism. He construed the dis:connective relationship between tradition and modernity, between the indigenous and the foreign, as an identity crisis that a new African art of a 'New Africa' is facing. Moreover, Kabiito contributed artistic methods to the methodological discourse. Through art from Uganda, which is 'a living modern art deeply rooted in tradition', this absence and estrangement can be uncovered and overcome. Thus, artistic practice contributes to cultural decolonisation and functions as a method of dealing with absence and dis:connectivity. Kabiito connected art and research conclusively with a transdisciplinary method, one able to profoundly affect the culture of a 'New Africa'.

Gabriele Klein continued with a talk about *The dancing body is absent/present. Methodological and theoretical aspects of digitalisation in dance*. She described the approach to dance in dance studies as intrinsically dis:connected. Dance fades in its physicality after the performance. It seems simultaneously absent and present in the memories of the spectators, but it also appears transformed and present in other media. Questions about the absence of corporeality especially in relation to digital media pose epistemological problems for dance studies. Here, Klein focused on social media platforms such as TikTok, in which dance is represented in many forms and can be accessed globally. She proposed a praxeological method that respects the differences between dance and dance studies and includes the new, young generation of digitally influenced choreographers with a global reach. She concluded that digital media can partially overcome absences, but researchers need to reflect more than ever on their use of medium and methods.

The ensuing discussion revealed changes in dance through digital and global social media. Contrary to the expectation that more possibilities for participation would flourish on digital media, Klein observed a standardisation of dance in the digital and thus a dwindling of diversity.

Later, the artist Aleksandra Domanović spoke about cultural dislocation in her presentation *From you to me to turbo culture: presence and absence in internet technology and culture in the former Yugoslavia*. The absence of a state that has dissolved with all its institutions but is present in the past of its former citizens results in a crisis of identity. They are simultaneously connected and disconnected to Yugoslavia and its culture. The identity crisis is especially apparent in the phenomenon of *Turbo Culture*, in which Yugoslavian architecture, public sculpture and cultural assets have been rapidly replaced by non-local structures. Thus, Turbo Culture erected monuments of Bill Clinton as well as Hollywood figures like Rocky Balboa in the former Yugoslavia. In

Fig. 01  
Photo: Ben Kamis

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her art, Domanović deals with these aspects of the disconnected and the absent. She sees her art as a means of pointing out this identity crisis marked by absence and dis:connectivity.

Meha Priyadarshini then spoke about *Fashion and its absent histories: the case of Madras fabric in the Caribbean*. She notes aspects of absence in the history of Madras fabric, which colonial powers exported from India to Euro-American and African-diasporic markets. The importers never reflected on its foreign cultural heritage and traditional Indian origins. Madras fabric, with its specific colour and pattern, revolutionised the fashion industry but is dis:connected from its origins. To this day, the fashion industry is largely unaware of the origins of Madras textiles and profits uncritically from other cultures. The research of Madras fabric is complicated by this absence and dis:connectivity. No original Madras fabric has survived. Methodologically, Priyadarshini addressed this absence of historical consciousness through the open-access textile research project *Subaltern Histories of Global Textiles: Connecting Collections*. So, it is one aim to regrow historical connection of Madras textile to its origins, which could draw attention beyond academia to what patterns we wear our shirts and skirts.

The first panel ended with the artist lecture by Parastou Forouhar and Cathrine Bublitzky. Bublitzky provided the theoretical framework and led the talk with her questions. Forouhar's art deals with the absence and deracination of home. Her artwork *Butterflies* (2008) shows a butterfly collection, with each butterfly representing memories of her native Iran. The poetic encoding of memories of a changed homeland can thus be understood as an artistic method of facing absence and dis:connectivity. In her installation *Written Rooms*, Forouhar writes illegible Farsi texts with which Iranians are connected and disconnected at the same time; they are in familiar script but illegible nonetheless. The absences and dis:connectivity in relation to one's homeland thus become clear. Her art is a method of facing and experiencing absences and dis:connectivity.

Sujit Sivasundaram opened the second panel on detours. He talked about *Detours in the history of Islam in the Indian Ocean: Muslim Colombo*. Originally a Muslim port city, Colombo has been a junction of cultural and economic connections for centuries. In such a globally connected city, the Muslim minority has been repressed, and their history has been erased since colonial occupation. Sivasundaram chose detours as a method of coming to terms with this marginalisation. Through the detour of material remains, such as architecture, clothes and artefacts, he explored the lives of minorities. The Colombo Grand Mosque served to demonstrate his method. Detour, as a methodological supplement, yields insights into dis:connectivity.

Kerstin Schankweiler spoke about *Global contexts of art in the GDR*, in which detours played a decisive role. The German



Democratic Republic (i.e. East Germany), where mobility was strongly controlled, opened up culturally to its so-called 'brother nations' via the detour of socialist internationalism. Bureaucracy and regulations extended this ideologically conditioned detour. Mail art, which overcame the Iron Curtain via the postal service, also dealt with dis:connectivity through postal diversions. The artistic relics of socialist internationalism and mail art depict detours as a way of dealing with dis: connectivity in the history of the GDR and in German-German history.

Promona Sengupta talked about *Time travel for all: decolonising the time-space continuum*. She understands the idea of space that can be traversed and conquered as a colonial concept that shapes today's understanding. Similarly, Sengupta understands the linear concept of time as a colonial idea that supports capitalist productivity and is thus kept alive. These concepts lead to estrangement from the natural flow of space and time through colonialism and capitalism. New methods are needed to overcome them, methods that allow a non-capitalistic and non-colonial approach to space and time. Time travel, which reverses such understandings of time and space, is one example. In her conclusion, Sengupta recommended methods that question all-embracing concepts and open research to new perspectives.

The lecture *Rethinking urban materiality: time as a resource* by Anupama Kundoo opened the third panel on the topic of interruptions. Her presentation revealed the interruptions in industrialisation, which replaced hitherto dominant local building traditions in local economies with local materials, with foreign experts and materials. Such changes actually reduce efficiency in many cases and uproot people from their buildings. Indeed, the building becomes a consumer in the global economy. She concluded by arguing for local industries and economies to create efficient architecture.

Valeska Huber presented a paper entitled *The Limits of my Language mean the Limits of my World: language barriers and ideas of global communication in the 1920s*, in which she reflected critically on English as a global lingua franca and thought about more inclusive alternatives to overcome linguistic barriers in global communication. Huber introduced the Vienna Circle of the 1920s, in which Maria and Otto Neurath, among others, developed *Isotype*, a pictorial language that is supposed to function across cultures and languages. Marie Neurath's own projects were primarily responsible for *Isotype's* global dissemination. Huber proposed that extending this idea could disrupt the Anglosphere and lead to more inclusive global communication and research. Thus, interruptions and dis:connectivity in global communication could be overcome.

Peter W. Marx closed the panel by addressing *The elephant in the room: (dis:)connecting encounters in the early modern period*. Marx established dis:connectivity as the proverbial elephant in the



room of global history studies. This was followed by a genealogy of the presence of elephants (and how it was documented by contemporary artists) in northern Europe from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. Marx's genealogy showed historical interruptions and connections in the complex discourse around the elephants. From humanisation and fantasy to a symbol of power and violence, the discourse around elephants in Europe has also represented transcultural military and dialogical contact since Hannibal.

Fabienne Liptay closed the conference with a screening of *Atlantiques* (2009, Mati Diop) and *Atlantique* (2019, Mati Diop). Across an interval of 10 years, the films deal with the topic of migration from Senegal across the Mediterranean to Europe. Characters meet their fates in transit. They are uprooted from their homeland and at the same time bound to it. Dis:connectivity is not just an abstract research topic, but it touches people's lives directly and concretely.

The speakers introduced new perspectives on dis:connective research on globalisation, including some methodological suggestions and approaches. Artistic practice uncovered dis:connectivity in several aspects, making it tangible and offering ways to deal with it. On a theoretical level, several participants emphasised the importance of critical reflection on one's own perspective and situatedness as a researcher. There were also proposals without a ripe, ready method, but set out demands, priorities and innovations for a methodology of global dis:connectivity. Indeed, this could be an initial step towards more developed methods.

The 'elephant in the room' was certainly methodology. The dialogue and interplay between art and research invigorated the conference, resulting in a special climate of interdisciplinarity and multi-perspectivity. Minds open to novelty and awareness of the lack of a full-fledged methodology are a fine basis for further research. Facing this elephant in the room was perhaps one of the main achievements of the conference.

Fig. 02

**A portion of the global dis:connect team. Back row from left to right: David Grillenberger, Annelena Labrenz, Clemens Wagner, Roland Wenzlhuemer, Anna Sophia Nübling, Nikolai Brandes, Laura Ritter, Peter Seeland (author), Aglaja Weindl; front row: Sophie Eisenried, Christian Steinau, Hanni Geiger and Tom Menger**

**up-  
coming  
events**

## 13–15 June 2023 Nomadic camera: photography, displacement and dis:connectivities

A hybrid workshop by the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect at the LMU, Munich in cooperation with Brandenburgisches Zentrum für Medienwissenschaften (ZeM), Potsdam.



**Organisers:** Burcu Dogramaci (Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect, LMU, Munich), Winfried Gerling (European Media Studies – University of Applied Sciences Potsdam/University Potsdam and Brandenburg Centre for Media Studies (ZeM), Potsdam), Jens Jäger (University of Cologne) and Birgit Mersmann (University of Bonn)

(Participants, times and titles subject to change)



Processes of migration and flight after 2015 and their depiction, perception and distribution through photography are the starting point of Nomadic Camera. We seek to investigate the relationship of photography and contemporary migration in technology, the media and aesthetics in addition to historical exile and flight as the pivotal discursive setting in which specific forms of mobility extending from the

mid-19th century to today have been negotiated. The concept adapts the term ‘nomadic’ – a transitory form of existence – beyond static concepts of being and national boundaries (Demos 2017). ‘Nomadism’ refers to a form of mobility that converges with and diverges from other terms, such as ‘travel’, ‘displacement’ and ‘exile’ (Kaplan 1996). At the same time, displacements are intrinsically related to connective and disconnective experiences, including place-making and belonging, ruptures between life and work in the past and present, experiences of loss and challenges of beginnings. Nomadic Camera will centre around the following questions: how do dislocations interconnect with the technical evolution of photography as a mobile medium? How do camera technologies presuppose and affect the visual formulation of exile, migration and flight experiences? What modifications in aesthetics and style, methods and practices of photography do temporary mobility, geographical relocation and resettlement imply?

### Preliminary Workshop Program

**Tuesday, 13 June 2023** (venue: Historisches Kolleg, Munich)  
18:00 Annual lecture of the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect:

T.J. Demos, Globalisation, dis/connection and migration: critical visual cultures and climates of capital

Fig. 01  
Erich Stenger, *Die Geschichte der Kleinbildkamera bis zur Leica*, Wetzlar 1949, S. 16





# Ecology, aesthetics and everyday cultures of modernity

Concept and organisation:  
**Siddharth Pandey**

Käte Hamburger  
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global dis:connect  
LMU Munich  
Maria-Theresia-Straße 21  
81675 Munich  
gdc@lrz.uni-muenchen.de

**10-11  
July  
2023**



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**Wednesday, 14 June 2023** (venue: global dis:connect)

9:30 Welcome address and introduction (Burcu Dogramaci, Winfried Gerling, Jens Jäger, Birgit Mersmann)

## **Panel 1: Techniques and technologies**

10:00 Svea Bräunert, Photography with a little bit of motion, film at a standstill: the stream of migrant images

10:45 Fabienne Liptay, The camera in the service of humanism and the legacies of neorealism

12:00 Noemi Quagliati, Reflections on photography and flight

12:45 Florian Krautkrämer, The given camera. Contemporary documentary concepts in the context of flight and migration

## **Panel 2: Body, agents and performativity**

14:45 Lara Bourdin, 'I am not migrating to the USA': performing migrancy in Paulo Nazareth's Notícias de América

15:30 Sabrina Moura (remote), Albert Frisch's representations of the body in early Amazonian photography

16:45 Evelyn Runge, The nomadic camera and digital visual journalism: ethical considerations in the making

17:30 Mette Sandbye, Acting for those we left behind: the performance and exchange of family photographs by guest workers in Denmark in the 1970s

19:00 Film Screening and Reception

**Thursday, 15 June 2023** (venue: global dis:connect)

## **Panel 3: Media narrations and narratives**

9:30 Anna Messner, 'Nowhere in Africa'? German-Jewish experiences of migration and exile in Kenya. A family photo album

10:15 Sandra Mooser, Nomadic Nollywood – re-narrating migrant stories

11:30 Ainslie Murray, The registry of itinerant architectures

12:15 Christina Tente, Nomads and spectres. Framing homelessness in pandemic photography

## **Panel 4: Circulation, archive and memory**

14:30 Helene Roth, A living archive of émigré photographers in New York

15:15 Zeynep Gürsel (remote), Portraits of unbelonging: photographing never and policing return

16:30 Estelle Blaschke, Travelling images, disrupted innovation: Emanuel Goldberg's contribution to the modern history of photography

17:15 Elizabeth Edwards, Moving archives and liquid times: the work of photographs in an age of decomposition

global dis:connect summer school  
2023

# Sea of absence? Globalisation, the Mediterranean and beyond

Concept and organisation by  
Hanni Geiger and Tom Menger

**24–27  
July  
2023**

Käte Hamburger  
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## 11–13. Oct. 2023 All stories at least are not the same': dis:connectivites in global knowledge production

Annual conference of the Käte  
Hamburger Research Centre  
global dis:connect

**Venue:**

Maria-Theresia-Str. 21, 81675  
Munich

**Organisers:**

Burcu Dogramaci (gd:c)  
Nikolai Brandes (gd:c)

The creation, provision and application of knowledge depends on subjects, geographies, events and wider contexts. 'All stories at least are not the same', noted the writer Bernadette Meyer in 1968 in her volume *Story*, in which various novellas intertwine. Taking stories as diverse and non-hierarchical forms of producing and transferring knowledge, Meyer's statement could be adapted as follows: knowledge as the totality of one's abilities moves and is moved – between continents, regions, countries and societal contexts. Educational institutions, publishing houses, companies and state institutions, as well as social groups and individuals, organise and archive knowledge stocks, and they translate, convey and re-contextualise them in (global) transfers.

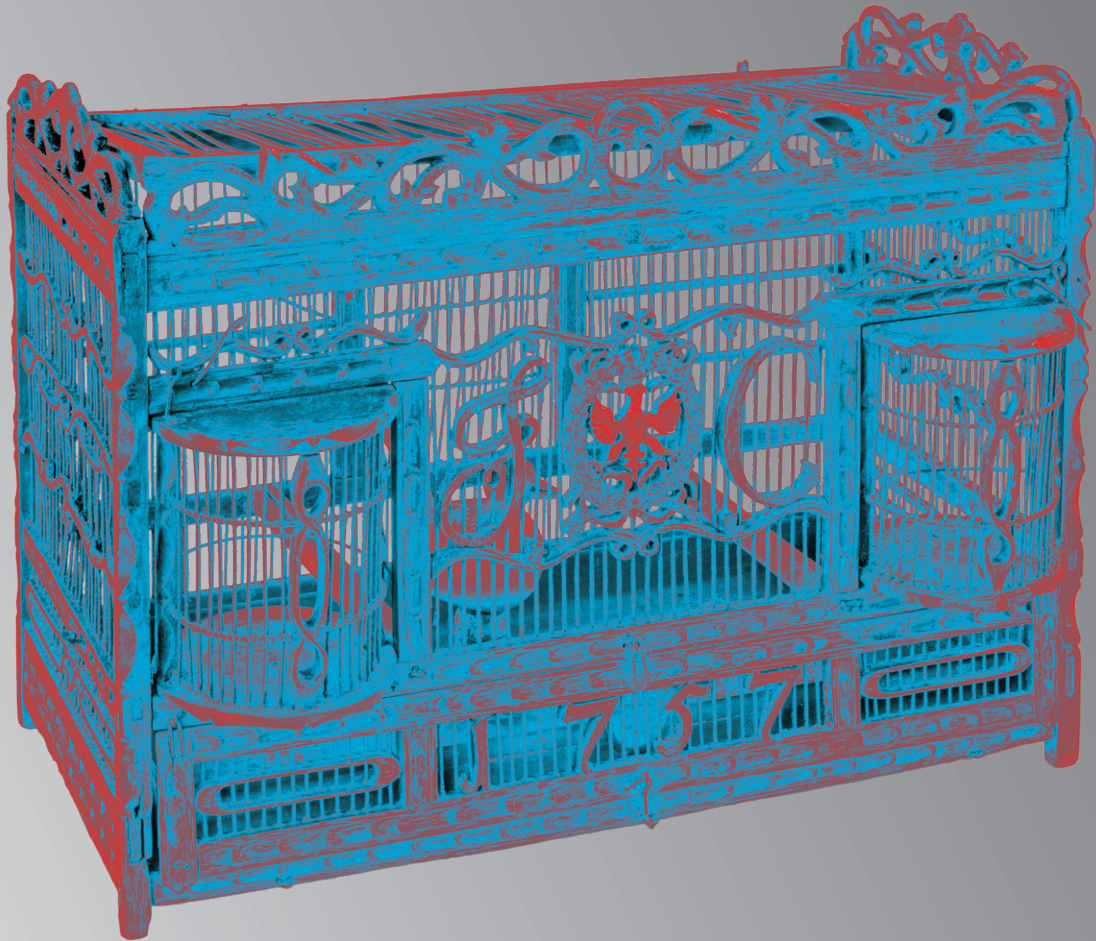
These processes cannot be reduced to a linear narrative of boundless, irrevocable epistemic globalisation of permanently increased interconnectedness and universal availability. Rather, transnational and transcultural knowledge production is articulated precisely in dissonant registers as, for example, through interruption, absence and digression.

These dis:connective conditions of global knowledge production are the starting point for the second annual conference of our centre. The annual conference is one of our flagship events and explores key questions of our research, expanding conceptual repertoires and methodological toolboxes, bringing together established and newer positions. As an interdisciplinary conference, it also serves to promote dialogue between artistic and scholarly forms of knowledge production.

This year, for the first time, the conference will take place on our premises. Most of the event is open to the public. Further information on the dates, contributions and registration procedures will be posted on our website in due course.

We plan to make select panels open to remote participation.





***static: thoughts and research  
from global dis:connect***

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