

Introduction

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This volume ventures into a new field of research: global *dis:connectivity*. The concept emphasises the role of delays and detours, of interruptions and resistances, of the ‘active absence’ (Denning 1998) of connections in global contexts and explores their significance. The new concept derives from the observation that past and present globalisation dynamics cannot be adequately understood without their inherent disconnective qualities. Such qualities fundamentally broaden the prevailing perspective on global processes of interconnection and enrich our understanding – and thus ultimately the tractability – of globalisation and its historiographies.

Globalisation processes profoundly shape our lives, but the common conceptions of these processes are inadequate and often simplistic. In both academic and public discourses, globalisation is understood as increasingly dense interconnections on a global scale: people migrate, markets intertwine, information spreads worldwide at a rapid pace. Since the 1990s, catchy metaphors for this include ‘the world is shrinking’, ‘a global village’ and ‘the world is flat’ (Friedman 2005). Science uses more sophisticated-sounding, but hardly more nuanced, concepts and speaks of space-time compression or ‘time-space distantiation’ (Harvey 1989). However, many current political and social developments contradict and undermine such a one-dimensional understanding of globalisation. ‘America First’, ‘Fortress Europe’, ‘Brexit’, and, most spectacularly, the recent COVID-19 pandemic defy a simple narrative of interdependence. Newspapers and journals, commentators and academics alike talk of a reversal of previous developments, of a global trend towards isolation and disengagement, of deglobalisation.

Such a binary understanding of globalisation, which only knows two directions – forward or backward – is misleading. It encourages simplistic interpretations and ultimately perplexes science and politics when they try to understand the social significance of globalisation processes and, if necessary, to shape them. The limitations of the current understanding of globalisation derive from the exclusive focus on processes of global compression and connection. This view confirms and reinforces an implicitly assumed dichotomy between globally interconnected and unconnected actors, regions and phenomena, between connections and their absence, and between globalisation and deglobalisation. It privileges a binary understanding of globalisation processes that either obtain or do not, are to be welcomed or rejected. Ultimately, connections and their absence are thus each assigned separate spheres of applicability.

This volume argues for a more complex and, at the same time, practical understanding of globalisation. Every process of interconnectedness bears elements of

disentanglement and disconnection. When people migrate, they encounter borders, confront obstacles, face discrimination. While markets for certain products and services are integrated, others remain regionally organised or shuttered behind trade barriers. While vast amounts of information are now available quickly and almost everywhere, its utility depends on language skills, education, gender, and the social and ethnic affiliations of the actors, among other factors. While artistic production is often related to transnational movement, this movement might at times be involuntary and entail artists' exclusion from national art histories. Disentanglement, unrealised connections and exclusion are not the opposite of interconnectedness, but central, formative components of it – these complex dialectics inhere in the concept of *dis:connectivity*.

The contributions in this book mark the first comprehensive effort to make this concept accessible and to place it in the wider framework of concepts linked to globalisation. We argue for a decidedly trans- and interdisciplinary engagement with the concept of *dis:connectivity* in globalisation processes. We call for the inclusion of the arts and their alternative forms of knowledge production and transmission, knowledge that 'acquires a force of its own, one unpredictable and incipient in any space and location' (Juneja 2019, 298), as art historian Monica Juneja emphasises.

From globalisation to deglobalisation?

To say that the world we share is thoroughly globalised is a truism. Already in the first half of the twentieth century, two world wars and the advent of the atomic age made the interconnectedness and interdependence of practically the entire globe painfully clear. Since then, the breath-taking increase of global trade, of the flows of capital and information, of intercontinental tourism, of the global art market, of the global division of labour and of voluntary and involuntary migration – to name but a few fields – have fundamentally changed how we live and work. The first photograph showing Earth from space appeared on the cover of Stewart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* in autumn 1968. The image shows continents and oceans, but not state borders or national territories. This image conveys like no other before it that the inhabitants of Earth are connected, that we occupy a shared space beyond borders or political boundaries. Four years later in 1972, the Apollo 17 mission took the iconic *Blue Marble* photograph. This mission, the end of the Cold War around 1991 and the rise of the World Wide Web and mobile communication technologies since the 1990s are but a few of the more prominent scenes in the well-known story of the 'shrinking of the world'.

More recently, the global financial crisis of 2008, the aggravation of the global climate crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war against Ukraine remind us of the degree of global interconnection that we have built. The subprime mort-

gage crisis in the USA in 2008 permeated global capital markets along countless reciprocal ties. A regional real-estate bubble rapidly induced a global banking crisis, while the global art market seemed decoupled from the crash and continued to diversify globally, with art prices at auction remaining persistently high (Herchenröder 2018).¹ Human-induced climate change is inseparable from the history of industrialisation and consumerism. Rapid growth, interregional mobility and the global division of labour fuel it. Climate change pays no heed to human boundaries, national or otherwise. Likewise COVID-19. In early 2020, the virus spread around the entire planet along global mobility networks.² And the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only brought death and suffering to millions, it has also led to a massive increase in the global arms trade and unsettled the global energy regime and food supplies (International Energy Agency 2022). All these developments would have been unthinkable without the dense, interconnected, global networks that have grown over the last 200 years. These few examples from the past two decades make the scope and depth of global connectivity and the resulting mutual dependence uniquely palpable.

These recent examples also allow us to trace a change in how we perceive and talk about globalisation and its histories. Besides highlighting interconnectedness, they all exhibit unmistakable elements of disruption and disconnection, although the latter aspects seldom feature prominently in the conceptualisation of globalisation. The global financial crisis began when the US real-estate bubble burst in 2008, when mutual trust – a primal type of connection – evaporated, and this rippled throughout the dense network of capital flows. Attempts to combat climate change have been thwarted principally by a lack of will and the ineffectuality of international cooperation that arguably also goes back to a lack of trust that everyone is going to pull together in the same direction. Despite the inherently global, even planetary, character of climate change, parochial interests and structures have largely trumped global initiatives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, international borders were closed, and tight regulations were imposed on interregional travel. Curfews and access restrictions became common. Quarantine rules massively curtailed the production and transportation sectors, which derailed global supply chains. And Russia's war against Ukraine has closed borders, prompted energy and other embargos, created new ruptures in numerous domains, including academia

1 A comprehensive overview on the globalisation of art (markets) is given in Belting, Buddensieg and Weibel 2013.

2 For the connection between the spread of the virus and flight routes, see "Tracking the Spread of COVID-19 with Air Travel Data." Rand National Security Research Division, August 4, 2023, <https://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/cat-v.html>. Accessed 8 April 2025.

and the art world, and thereby accelerated the pre-existing political polarisation of the world.

These examples highlight the dynamics of global disruptions and disconnections. They stand *pars pro toto* for a more general diagnosis that has coalesced around the term ‘deglobalisation’. Deglobalisation has rapidly gained popularity in recent years. The World Economic Forum’s *Global Risks Report 2023* sees the world facing ‘a new era of low growth, low global investment and de-globalisation’ (World Economic Forum 2023, 6). Leading scholarly journals have published or are currently soliciting special issues on the topic (International Affairs 2021); researchers are reviewing the genesis of the term (Pryke 2022); and historians have already started to offer advice on how ‘to read the deglobalisation debate’ (Tooze 2023). The upsurge of interest in deglobalisation can be seen as evidence that there is undoubtedly an increasing awareness of the disruptive and disconnective elements of globalisation processes.

And this is not just a contemporary diagnosis. While the current ‘polycrisis’ (Whiting and Park 2023) has laid such global disruptions and disconnections utterly bare, a closer look at history reveals that they have always been part of globalisation processes. Revisiting our first examples, the two world wars and, in particular, the invention of the nuclear bomb were not only developments bearing truly global consequences – they were also highly disruptive for many forms of global connectivity. Reduced global trade, forced mass migration, strict border regimes and, ultimately, the emergence of an ideologically, politically, culturally, artistically, and militarily divided world were among the direct consequences. Other global incidents, such as the Suez Crisis or the 1973 oil crisis were also deeply disruptive. The latter, for instance, directly affected the legal status of migrant workers in Western Europe. Thus, the 1973 oil crisis and trade unions’ criticism of programmes to recruit ‘guest workers’ (*Gastarbeiter*) in the Federal Republic of Germany halted recruitment of migrant labour (Berlinghoff 2021). Even developments that are generally regarded as keystones of globalisation, such as the expansion of global transport and communication infrastructures, evince obviously disruptive aspects. Examples include the vulnerability of much global infrastructure, such as pipelines, airplanes and submarine cables, or even the differential access to it, which varies by wealth and geography.³

The term ‘deglobalisation’ has also been employed in reference to historical disruptions, in particular the interwar period and the Great Depression when com-

³ See, for instance, the international conference *Roads to Exclusion* organised jointly by the German Historical Institute Washington and the Käte Hamburger Research Centre global dis:connect in September 2022 and the recent themed issue of the *Journal of Transport History* that emerged from it (Greiner, Liebisch-Gümüş, Peters and Wenzlhuemer 2024).

mercial integration and trade sank much lower than in the 19th century and in the post-war years (Williamson 1996; Obstfeld and Taylor 1998). Ultimately, however, such historical interpretations and most current applications of the term ‘deglobalisation’ only highlight the deficiencies of our current conceptual understanding of globalisation. For instance, those who see the interwar years as a phase of deglobalisation assess globalisation primarily in terms of trade, the integration of global markets and price convergence, which are cyclical. Like a pendulum, periods of retarded integration or even deglobalisation follow periods of intense globalisation (Link 2018).

Current talk of deglobalisation often falls into a similar trap. Writing for Chatham House, Markus Kornprobst and Jon Wallace neatly define deglobalisation as ‘a movement towards a less connected world’ (Kornprobst and Wallace 2021), juxtaposing it with globalisation. As so often, deglobalisation is interpreted as the reversal of globalisation or at least as its deceleration or cessation, which, in a frame of interpretation driven by growth, virtually amounts to a reversal. Kornprobst and Wallace continue that ‘it would be wrong to say the world is definitively in a period of deglobalisation’ and that ‘[i]t is better to understand the question as one of balance between globalising and deglobalising forces’. While they acknowledge the coexistence of globalising and deglobalising processes, they still juxtapose them and ultimately reproduce a widespread binary understanding of globalisation that falls short of the complexity and incongruence of the phenomenon. Slumps, disruptions, detours, hiatuses and other forms of disconnection are and have always been integral elements of globalisation processes. They are not the opposite of globalisation and certainly do not herald its undoing. They are not harbingers of deglobalisation but, as we argue, part of all global entanglements and shape their sociocultural significance.

Beyond connection, integration, convergence

The common conceptual understanding of globalisation, however, generally omits this integral relationship of connection and disconnection. It remains firmly focused on ideas like global connectivity, integration and convergence. To a certain degree, such ideas reflect our daily experiences of global interdependence. The notion that the consumption of a raccoon dog in Wuhan (Mallapaty 2023) might have led to worldwide border closures or that the tweet of a tech billionaire can throw global financial markets into turmoil is no longer bewildering. Global interdependence has long since become a fact of life. We know that distant occurrences have constant and direct impacts on our own local lives. This is what the term ‘globalisation’ – both in scholarly and more colloquial parlance – usually attempts to capture and operationalise: increasing connectivity over space and time.

The study of globalisation is awash with attempts to define the object of study – most of which paraphrase the early conceptualisations of the late 1980s and 1990s. David Harvey's idea of 'time-space distanciation' (Harvey 2010), Anthony Giddens's claim that globalisation is 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa' (Giddens 1990, 64), or the definition by David Held, Anthony McGrew, David Goldblatt and Jonathan Perraton that sees globalisation as 'the quickening and intensifying over time and space of the flows of commodities, of currencies, of words, images and people' (1999, 27–28) have been paraphrased countless times in the last three decades with little conceptual gain. The term still generally refers to increasing global connections and integration.

The push to pluralise the term and to analytically speak of 'globalisations' or 'processes of globalisation' is among the few substantial advancements of the concept (Epple 2012). Historian Jürgen Osterhammel argues that the plural 'politically defuses' the term and tempers the 'drive towards holism in the contemporary discussion' about globalisation. 'The plural simplifies the historians' lives by letting us preserve our attention to detail and scepticism towards generalisations without forcing us to evade the big questions' (Osterhammel 2017, 12–13).⁴ While this initiative to pluralise the term has mostly come from the field of history and, thus, emphasises the conditions of historical research, its principal arguments can be extended to a broader, transdisciplinary understanding of globalisation.

However, as Osterhammel continues, 'the idea of singular (and unique) megaglobalisation would remain lurking in the background' despite processes of integration being framed in the plural (Osterhammel 2017, 13). Thus, the terminology of globalisation studies is still replete with metaphors that emphasise 'connections', 'integration' and 'convergence'. Each is employed in different semantic and institutional contexts, as when 'integration' appears in economic and political language, whereas we find 'convergence' frequently in legal discourse. Underpinning all three is an epistemology of connections, the observation or identification of which implies that something has been learned about a teleological progression towards ever increasing 'connectivity'.

To some extent, this prevailing focus on increasing connectivity is a legacy of how economics understood the term 'globalisation'. Economists were among the first to regularly employ the term to describe the increasing integration of commodity and capital markets and the global convergence of prices in the commodity and service sectors fuelled by falling transport and communication costs. Such a purely economic interpretation captures only one – admittedly important – aspect

⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the authors'.

of globalisation, tracing only global commodity prices, the flow of goods and capital and, to a certain degree, the global division of labour. It has little to say about other forms of entanglements, about the global circulation of ideas and ideologies, of cultural practices, about tourism or the spread of pathogens.

Economic globalisation also seldom reflects on its own history and conceptual metaphors. Yet the market, where commodity exchange is enacted, is (or was at one time) both a concrete space and a spatial metaphor, although its precise workings eschew spatial visualisation. Its ubiquity is such that we forget that the market was once a foreign and mysterious concept that had to be ‘learned’, and, as Jean-Christophe Agnew has argued, in the early modern period, theatre and the market both learned from one another, eventually separating as concepts while remaining intertwined as practices (Agnew 1986). Conceptions of the market, especially a globalised one, are still suspended discursively between depicting it as the source of all evil and a panacea for all ills (the invisible hand is ever benevolent). Neoclassical economics sees in the market a domain of utility-maximising agents (from individuals to companies), Marxian economics the precondition for the rise of bourgeois social relations and ultimately global capitalism.⁵

Theatre history provides a good example of how the arts react to and reflect on dis:connectivities of global trade. Shakespeare’s ‘comedy’ *The Merchant of Venice* instructed early modern audiences about the emerging globalised market predicated on shipping and its attendant risks. Shylock warns Bassanio that Antonio’s business ventures are little more than ‘supposition’:

Yet his means are in supposition. He hath an argosy bound to Tripolis, another to the Indies. I understand moreover upon the Rialto he hath a third at Mexico, a fourth for England, and other ventures he hath squandered abroad. (*MV*, 1.3.17–21)

Shylock’s comment to Bassanio regarding Antonio’s investment in goods transported by four ships from almost all corners of the then known world captures a key moment in Western thinking: it is a moment of risk management in early modern globalisation, the hubris that one can wager ‘against the Gods’ and still hope to turn a profit (Bernstein 1996). Shylock’s disparaging comment about ‘ventures he hath squandered abroad’ contrasts the money-lender’s more traditional business model of face-to-face transactions on the Rialto, Venice’s fabled market, with the new ‘invisible’ and risky market of global commodities.

⁵ The first chapter of the Communist Manifesto states this relationship with globalisation very clearly: ‘The need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere.’ (Marx and Engels 1848, chapter I).

Shakespeare's play is in one sense a *Lehrstück* (didactic exercise) about a globalised market lacking robust risk insurance. The bond Antonio commits to (a pound of his flesh as security for Shylock's loan) is an allegory of the capitalist market and draws on the same metaphorical language as David Harvey's critique of capitalism: 'Capital is the lifeblood that flows through the body politic'.⁶ The ships lost at sea signify a minor disturbance of global trade, but mean for Antonio a life-threatening non-fulfilment of contractual obligations. The market itself is represented in two ways: as the Rialto, a place of face-to-face trading and information exchange, and as the more abstract realm of 'means in supposition', financial transactions predicated on the future. Each ship is an edge in a network consisting of nodes from the four corners of the known world, a potential connection, which in his case is severed. He breaks his bond and only narrowly escapes with his life thanks to some legal trickery by a cross-dressing woman, Portia.

Just as Shakespeare alerts his audience to the simultaneous and interwoven character of connection and disruption in early modern global trade and investment, other authors and playwrights point to similar constellations, albeit in different historical and practical contexts. The eruption of the Icelandic volcano Eyjafjallajökull in spring 2010 resulted in a seven-day shutdown of much of Europe's air traffic (Perkins 2011), with artistic aftermaths. The play commissioned by the Munich Residenztheater and written by Helmut Krausser, *Eyjafjallajökull-Tam-Tam*, revolves around 55 people in a departure lounge whom a natural event condemned to wait (Krausser 2011). The connection between disasters and literary production is not new: in 1815, the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora caused a change in meteorological conditions on the other side of the globe as well (Wood 2015). The darkened sky, a summer that turned into winter, and continuous rain in Europe probably moved Mary Shelley to write her novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) (Feldhaus 2022). These connections between an event as a global rupture, weather conditions, climate and artistic production were less obvious at the time of these creations, but in retrospect their connective and disconnective effects become apparent.

These are just three works of fiction that exemplify that connecting and disconnecting processes are deeply interwoven. There is an interdependence between the connected and the unconnected. As more places, regions and people around the globe integrate, the corollary is that others cannot (or don't want to) participate in those integrative processes to the same degree, and they will be left behind, rel-

⁶ The full quote is: 'Capital is the lifeblood that flows through the body politic of all those societies we call capitalist, spreading out, sometimes as a trickle and other times as a flood, into every nook and cranny of the inhabited world' (Harvey 2010, vi).

actively speaking. Global networks are lumpy; some branches are especially dense. The denser they are, the more conspicuous the patchy and empty areas become. To adapt another beloved metaphor of globalisation research, the world is not ‘shrinking’ uniformly; it’s warping.

The assumption introduced above that, in comparison to the late nineteenth century, the diminished flows of goods and capital during the interwar years constituted a period of deglobalisation also deserves closer inspection. This period certainly saw a contraction of the global theatre business that never recovered its pre-1914 levels due to a doubling of transport costs and competition from cinema (Balme 2020; Leonhardt 2021). This is but a small part of a larger picture and sorely lacks context. The fact that the global economic crisis of the late 1920s and ’30s progressed outward from the USA to grip the entire world is a strong indication of the degree of global integration at the time. The global history of crisis-management techniques (Patel 2016), the simultaneous proliferation of international organisations (Herren 2009; Sluga and Clavin 2017) and the global dissemination of fascist thought (Hedinger 2019) are further examples. The spread of the ‘Spanish flu’ was certainly accelerated by the unprecedented movement of people, mainly troops, to and from the theatres of the First World War. The quarantine measures led to severe disruptions comparable to those experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic but were briefer, although mortality was significantly higher. At the same time, the movement of millions of troops also created unprecedented opportunities for cultural contacts, as soldiers and support personnel from around the world converged on (mainly) Europe as occupying forces, hospital staff and numerous other professions found themselves in unexpected locales (Spinney 2017). Using the example of the interwar years, Jörn Leonhard flagged precisely this simultaneity of integration and disintegration: ‘Historically speaking, structural globalisation has often coincided with sectoral deglobalisation, with the two often reinforcing each other’ (Leonhard 2020, 413), which applies to processes of global integration in general. Globalisation is not a ratchet mechanism, nor is it a reversible macro process. It consists, rather, of many small, interrelated, complementary processes.

‘Deglobalisation’ is not a suitable term to capture the interplay of these processes. Any understanding of deglobalisation assumes the pre-existence of some degree of globalisation and its attendant forces. Deglobalisation is, therefore, a temporal concept on a timeline charting the expansion of forces commonly associated with globalisation and their putative reversal. Recent attempts in economics and international relations to theorise ‘reglobalisation’, which means globalisation minus its more extreme neoliberal manifestations (Bishop and Payne 2021), seem similarly unfit.

Global *dis:connectivity*: new approaches and connected concepts

The actors and places of globalisation are always embedded in connecting and disconnecting circumstances simultaneously (Biedermann 2021, 25), and they must be studied in that state of tension. Connections and non-connections converge in particular places and in the experiences of historical actors, revealing their significance in their interrelations. The history of global infrastructures provides us with many instructive examples in this regard. The Suez Canal, for instance, was one such place where connecting and disconnecting phenomena converged and collided. The canal did not merely connect the Mediterranean with the Red Sea, inaugurating a new sea route of global significance; it also bisected ancient caravan routes, requiring travellers and camels to wait for gaps in canal traffic so they could ferry across (Huber 2010, 340). When the canal opened in 1869, it greatly facilitated and shortened the journey between Europe and Asia and rerouted much maritime traffic. Valeska Huber, who has carefully studied the significance of the Suez Canal to the history of mobility, has stated that the canal transformed the Mediterranean ‘from a lake to a lane’ (Huber 2012, 141). Other routes – in this case the long route around the Cape of Good Hope – saw less traffic and were then used primarily by freighters. As one region grew more tightly coupled with the globe, another became (relatively) decoupled. More recently, the blockage of the Suez Canal by the container ship *Ever Given* revealed how quickly large portions of global trade can come to a standstill (Troelenberg 2021).

The history of the Suez Canal exemplifies the frictions between exchange and isolation, between connectivity and disconnectivity far beyond a single epoch, or – to adapt a formulation by historian Jörn Leonhard – the ‘tension between globality and deglobalisation’ (Leonhard 2020, 413), touching on one of the most important points of an adequate conception of globalisation. The tension that derives from the simultaneity and mutual constitution of connecting and disconnecting elements crucially influences how processes of globalisation develop and are shaped, experienced and categorised. Its importance for the study of globalisation processes can hardly be overstated. From this perspective, the term *dis:connectivity* is invaluable because it captures this mutually constitutive, tense relationship between global integration, disintegration and the absence of connections whose relevance is only apparent in the context they collectively constitute. *Dis:connectivity* captures the dynamic relationship of connections and disconnections, of the local and the global, of enmeshment and friction. *Dis:connective* phenomena should not be understood and studied as the opposite of interconnectedness, but as integral components of it. The term privileges neither connecting nor disconnecting processes, but focuses instead on their turbulent interplay, which is the decisive factor in grasping the social significance of globalisation.

Our thesis is that *dis:connectivity* presents an alternative epistemology to the binary logic of connection/disconnection. The colon, the [:], signifies quite literally either a *passage* (through the body), or grammatically, the *separation* of clauses that are ‘independent and discontinuous, but between which there is an apposition or *similar relation of sense*’.⁷ Both inflections indicate movement and relations, apertures and pathways rather than blockages. As a grammatical term, *apposition* means similarity or parallelism, and figuratively, suitability or aptness. In other words, there is more movement through the colon, between the ‘dis’ and the ‘connection’ than meets the eye.

The alternative epistemology suggested by the term *dis:connectivity* blurs and dismantles the binary logic of a connection-based understanding of globalisation, where the instantiation of the connection (the on-off switch) represents the new insight, the learning. Much research in globalisation studies follows this binary logic, where documenting and proving the establishment of a freeport, a trading route, the laying of a telegraph line represents (new) knowledge. *Dis:connectivity* transcends the binary. It allows us to examine globalisation processes, attending to *dis:connective* elements to better understand the effects of tension in bundles of connections.

The approach is directly related to the object of investigation: by identifying situations, contexts and developments in which *dis:connectivity* becomes observable and that cannot otherwise be explained, a level of empirical observation emerges that requires either new or redefined concepts. Both the study of the arts and artistic practice can help here by opening up new methodologies. Exile, flight and migration not only shaped (art) history, but are also centrally related to phenomena of *dis:connectivity*. Experiences of displacements situate people in new contexts in that their private and professional networks and the conditions of their work change. Artists who fled Nazi Germany and the states it occupied in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, were unable to return at first, so their works contain both contexts: their geography of origin and new relationships. This is apparent in the ‘first pictures’ by photographers and painters after arriving in the country of exile and in their reflections on their routes and passages (Dogramaci 2017; Roth 2021). While these relocations do not necessarily have to be negotiated in the work, they play a role in the analysis as they point to the narrow path between belonging and place-making, between yesterday’s experiences and those to come.

Artistic practice is, thus, an important research object in globalisation studies and *dis:connectivity*, as it simultaneously builds on and creates global connections

7 “Colon.” In *Oxford English Dictionary*. n.d. <https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=colon>. Accessed January 17, 2025. Emphasis added.

and disconnections. Moreover, artistic practice also provides additional and fruitful methods to examine dis:connectivity. Art opens topics of discussion that are denied to or ignored by science. The arts can engage with the fluidity and volatility of dis:connective phenomena with heuristic privilege – not only with the many gaps of knowledge connected to (forced) migratory artistic experiences, when goods, personal documents and artistic works often have to be left behind. Interruptions, absences and delays leave hardly any traces in archives. The arts have already demonstrated their potential to examine fleeting, absent phenomena analytically and aesthetically (Kamper 1999; Siegmund 2006), offering productive approaches to analysing dis:connectivity as an aesthetics of omissions. This is particularly striking in the fields of postcolonial and post-migrant art and theatre. Examples include the post-migrant productions of the Berlin Gorki Theatre under the direction of Shermin Langhoff, the plays of Nuran David Calis on migration and the radical right, and the current work of artists such as Cana Bilir-Meier, Sofia Dona and Emeka Ogboh, who use artistic research to negotiate displacements, place-making (transforming public space) in migration and experiences of structural and institutional racism.⁸ Elke Bippus describes the productivity of seeing (and not recognising seeing) as a process and result of artistic research; artistic research works with contradictions, irritations and ambivalences, and ambiguities at the borders of knowledge (Bippus 2015, 68). As one of the contributions to this volume points out, artist Francis Alÿs worked in *The Loop* with the aesthetic dimension of detours in the context of migration processes, but also refers to the paradoxical meaning of borders as ‘hard/not crossable’ or ‘soft/traversable’ – depending on a person’s passport and nationality (→ **Detours**). As the essay on ‘Blackout’ by Fabienne Liptay in this book emphasizes, the photograph *The Great White Way Goes Black* by Katharina Sieverding not only referred to the blackout in New York City during a summer night in 1977, but also shed light on the colonial histories of Broadway as a former trade route (→ **Blackout**).

Rethinking globalisation with the term *dis:connectivity*, as we propose, demands re-examining and, in some cases, radically refining the vocabulary we use to describe it and the methodology we use to analyse it. This collection of essays constitutes our proposal for a new vocabulary of concepts for globalisation research, some cases of which are not new but critical to the development of the field.

⁸ For the program of Gorki Theatre, see “Gorki.” n.d. <https://www.gorki.de/de>. On Nuran David Calis, see “Nuran David Calis” [nacht kritik.de](https://nacht kritik.de/index.php?option=com_seoglossary&view=glossary&catid=78&id=277&Itemid=67). n.d. https://nacht kritik.de/index.php?option=com_seoglossary&view=glossary&catid=78&id=277&Itemid=67. For projects of Cana Bilir-Meier, see Cana Bilir-Meier, “Projects.” <http://www.canabilirmeier.com/> n.d., http://www.canabilirmeier.com/?page_id=225. For works of Sofia Dona, see “Sofia Dona.” n.d. <https://sofiadona.com>. On Emeka Ogboh, see “Emeka Ogboh.” n.d. <http://emekaogboh.art>.

The contours of the concept of dis:connectivity become apparent in interaction with other concepts and reveal trans- and interdisciplinary connectivity. Our selection of lemmas relates dis:connectivity to adjacent phenomena and concepts in order to show the multiple valences of dis:connectivity and to enrich new perspectives on globalisation phenomena in other disciplines, whose research and engagement with the concept we seek to encourage. Each lemma in this book is set in relation to the concept of dis:connectivity.

The breaking of once-intact bonds, whether commercial, familial or ritual, renders dis:connectivity a study of rupture, fracture and absences. But what do digressions and absence mean? What kind of knowledge can be produced by identifying breakages? What is the epistemological gain of studying detours/deviations and disruptions? How are exile, migration and flight in their spatiality and temporality connected to the concept of dis:connectivity? Delay, waiting and (temporary) standstill are fundamental components of migratory movements. How can multiple belongings also be described as a complicated relation to geographies of origin and ‘arrival’ in the destination of migration?

The selection of lemmas embraces both familiar terms defined in a new way (→ **Feminism**, → **Infrastructure**, → **Postmigration/Migration**, → **Communication Technologies**, → **Ecologies**, → **Queer**) as well as concepts that have seldom featured in glossaries of keywords (→ **Absences**, → **Blockages**, → **Detours**, → **Im/mobility**, → **Interruptions**, → **Unsettlement**) but are fundamental to understanding a dis:connective perspective on globalisation. Both groups of terms are necessary to encompass the multi-faceted nature of dis:connectivity. To give just some examples from the articles, ‘infrastructure’ is, as Tom Menger notes, a ‘basic enabler of globalisation processes’ while ‘simultaneously entrench(ing) our vulnerability to disruptions in those same systems’ (→ **Infrastructure**), and while ‘communication technologies’ are usually heralded as integral to globalisation, Heidi Tworek emphasizes that the implantation of such technologies is highly selective and can ‘also disconnect by building networks that only integrate certain places, cater to certain types of users, or facilitate certain sorts of interactions’ (→ **Communication Technologies**). Similarly, an ecological approach to globalisation foregrounds the feedback loops of resource use at a local level. However, as Corey Ross demonstrates, ‘when trade enables people to draw on resources from far away, the drawbacks are displaced and the feedback is disrupted’ (→ **Ecologies**).

The less familiar terms also highlight the ambivalences inherent in globalisation. For example, Constance DeGourcy shows in her article that ‘absences’ are central to understanding migration because absences can be seen ‘as a way of maintaining a link’ with people left behind, giving rise to what she terms ‘attachment techniques’ (→ **Absences**). Absence can turn into disappearance, when refugees, for example, ‘disappear’ on their journeys and remain forever unaccounted for.

Equally ambivalent, if not downright paradoxical, is the role played by ‘blockages’, which are, as Shane Boyle argues, ‘integral’ to international trade and capital flows by being deployed to control the flow of goods (→ **Blockages**). Also integral to a dis:connective understanding of globalisation are ‘detours’, which contain, as Burcu Dogramaci argues, not only a spatial but also a temporal dimension as they imply ‘stagnation, delay, waiting, rethinking’ (→ **Detours**). Detours lead almost ineluctably to ‘im/mobility’ (Kerilyn Schewel) and ‘waiting’ (Hanni Geiger). Both these terms are linked to migration, one of the key drivers of globalisation, but scarcely feature in analysis of it. The ‘mobility bias in migration research’ (Schewel) has prevented a differentiated examination of immobility, whether it pertains to those voluntarily or involuntarily ‘left behind’ or migrants stuck behind borders or caught up in the bureaucratically induced stasis of asylum procedures (→ **Im/mobility**). The latter form of im/mobility is usually designated a form of ‘waiting’, which Hanni Geiger shows has already generated an aesthetic dimension in photography or theatre productions that that ‘disturb the dominant narratives of migration’ (→ **Waiting**).

As the individual articles highlight, dis:connectivity can also be applied to transport, protest, knowledge production and dissemination. Concepts such as ‘unsettlement’ or ‘turbulence’, which are semantically linked, can contribute to an analysis of the imaginary of globalisation: the real or imagined feelings of disorientation and anxiety regarding distant events that appear to affect one directly. The lemmas collected in this volume show how dis:connectivity relates to both academic research and artistic work.

Concluding remarks

Dis:connectivity is a ‘travelling concept’, as defined by Mieke Bal (Bal 2002). It is more than a purely theoretical construct; it may open new avenues for research and analysis with dis:connective phenomena, either in geographical breadth or historical depth.⁹ Travelling concepts display adaptability to changing cultural, disciplinary and historical contexts. Dis:connectivity can outline research practice, as research also takes place under dis:connective conditions. Examples include exceptional research situations, such as the COVID-induced closures of international archives as well as restricted access to archives (as in the case of authoritarian states). However, the increasing digitisation of literature and archive holdings can also increase connectivity to the sources. Topics such as global migration and flight can result in dis:connective research practices that become major challenges for

⁹ Dis:connective global narratives of ‘origins’, such as the reference back to the Paleolithic and Neolithic by modernist authors like Carl Einstein and artists of Surrealism, exemplify historical depth. See Franke and Holert 2018.

researchers, be they language-related (relocating often requires traversing several states) or due to private papers and archival records (address books, passports, letters, diaries) being scattered, destroyed in transit or simply left behind. Research into the biographies of artistic works produced in exile can usually only proceed indirectly, absences are the rule, and interruptions due, for example, to a lack of linearity in exile biographies or to the fact that the works created on the routes of exile were left behind are common.

A dis:connective approach can also entail counter-intuitive observations, especially when dealing with phenomena like ‘absence’, which inheres in processes associated with globalisation. Certain people, regions and ideas can be actively absent as participants in processes of globalisation. While the four freedoms of the EU facilitate the movement of goods, services, capital and people, they also leave gaps in domestic labour markets, in medical care (i.e. brain drain) and in family structures. Absences can also manifest themselves as genuine losses. While the physical presence of refugees, which some in Western countries perceive to be threatening, may have politically destabilising effects, they coincide with virtually unfathomable absences. In seeking refuge, people die of thirst in the desert, drown at sea and are missed by their families and communities of origin. Such losses defy statistical analysis and are therefore omitted in quantitative assessments of globalisation processes.

The significance of interruptions, absences and detours for processes of globalisation is difficult to grasp and interpret with conventional scholarly methods. It requires a particular methodological approach combining methods from the humanities with those from the study and practice of art, bringing these into dialogue with each other. We hope that the concepts presented in the volume will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the dis:connective processes underlying globalisation.

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