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Chapter Author(s): Anna Sophia Messner and Helene Roth

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Book Editor(s): Burcu Dogramaci, Ekaterina Aygün, Mareike Hetschold, Laura Karp Lugo, Rachel Lee and Helene Roth

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Photographic Practices in Cities of Exile: Camera Views on Tel Aviv and New York

Anna Sophia Messner and Helene Roth

Encountering the city in exile

Exile has specific temporal and spatial components, which in turn affect photographic practices.¹ On the one hand, émigré photographers attempt to re-establish the photographic methods and aesthetics they had already applied in their home countries; on the other hand, the new surroundings and cityscapes of their exile countries inspire them to experiment with new techniques and practices. Against this background, this paper argues that the act of photographing and encountering the city in exile can be understood as an urban practice and as a method that articulates a specific photographic language: in this chapter, we are consequently activating a double perspective to examine the transformations and implementations of style, techniques and aesthetics proliferating in exile photography.

By taking Ellen Auerbach's photographs of her two cities of exile, Tel Aviv and New York, as a point of departure, and by then moving towards other émigré photographers such as Rudy Burckhardt, Liselotte Grschebina and Fritz Henle, this paper analyses and discusses manifold perspectives on camera work in the two metropolises.² Trained in and shaped by the avant-garde photography movements of the Weimar Republic, such as 'New Vision' and 'New Objectivity', these photographers escaped the Nazi-Regime in the 1930s and 1940s and arrived in Tel Aviv and New York. With them, they brought their modes of artistic expression and photographic practices and translated them into their new surroundings. Through the perspectives of these photographers and by means of a close reading of exemplary photographs, the analyses in this chapter understand the photographers as (en)actors of urban practices: they used their camera as a tool and instrument to encounter, explore,

appropriate and familiarize themselves with the city, their new and foreign home in exile.

In his book *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, the philosopher Vilém Flusser proposes a new way of looking at photography by focusing on photographers as actors and by closely examining their handling of the camera. He considers the camera as an extension of the human eye and as “a tool whose intention is to produce photographs” and to make the world visible (Flusser 2000, 22). According to Flusser, photographers utilize their cameras and all its technical innovative possibilities not only to discover the world but also to create new modes of viewing and visualizing:

They handle the camera, turn it this way and that, look into it and through it. If they look through the camera out into the world, this is not because the world interests them but because they are pursuing new possibilities of producing information and evaluating the photographic program. Their interest is concentrated on the camera; for them, the world is purely a pretext for the realization of camera possibilities. In short: They are not working, they do not want to change the world, but they are in search of information.

(ibid., 26f.)

Working with Vilém Flusser’s conceptualization of photographer/photography, the examples we have chosen for this chapter represent selected photographers’ specific urban practices with regard to their interaction with the camera in their respective cities of exile. Such an interaction can be marked by a view from above onto the city, as is the case with Ellen Auerbach, it can evoke the view from below, as adopted by Liselotte Grschebina and Rudy Burckhardt, or it can express the way Ellen Auerbach and Fritz Henle encountered and engaged with socio-cultural urban spaces in Tel Aviv and New York. Often the act of photographing went hand in hand with a specific handling of the camera, such as the raising and lowering of the apparatus which then could also be differentiated depending on the camera type (such as miniature or middle format cameras). Ellen Auerbach and Liselotte Grschebina photographed with the miniature camera Leica, whereas Rudy Burckhardt and Fritz Henle used the middle format camera Rolleiflex for their images. While the viewfinder of the Rolleiflex is on the top of the camera and the camera must thus be held in front of the upper body, the viewfinder of the Leica camera is located on the back of the camera and can be placed directly before the eye. The two-camera models entered the German market around 1900 and developed quickly as a highly appreciated medium that enabled intimate photographic encounters in urban space. With the emigration movements of photographers, these new camera

models began to circulate globally. New technologies accelerated the image-making process and the camera could thus be used as a mobile and portable medium to capture the many visual impressions of and in urban environments (*New York Photography* 2012; Dogramaci/Roth 2019; Hofmann-Johnson 2018, 136).

Despite the differences in the practical and technical use of cameras in urban space, it can be assumed that most émigré photographers walked through their new city as a creative practice. We, therefore, propose a triangulated approach to mine the critical potential of exile photography: how and in how far do (1) the exile situation of the emigrated photographers, (2) the practice of walking through the city and (3) the act of photographing (in) the city interrelate and depend on one another? Strolling the streets of a new exile city can be understood as a method and practice to render urban structures and relations not only experienceable in their specific spatial and temporal conditions but also to accentuate the experience itself visually – via the mobile medium of the camera. Contrary to the figure of the *flâneur* who is portrayed (and in the 19th century saw himself) as the observer of the industrialized and modern life of European cities, we argue that the practice of walking through the city is closely linked to the social and historical developments of global cities during the 19th and 20th centuries.³ Thus, strolling through the city can be understood as an active method of visually perceiving one's urban environment (Certeau 1984; Neumeyer 1999; Solnit 2001; Adolphs 2018). In his book *Spazieren in Berlin. Ein Lehrbuch der Kunst in Berlin spazieren zu gehen* (Walking in Berlin. A textbook of the art of walking in Berlin, translation by the authors), 1929, the German writer Franz Hessel, who was a contemporary of the photographers discussed in this chapter, declared the need for historical and social awareness while walking through the city (Hessel 1929, 13). He thought of walking through the city as “a lecture of the street” (ibid., 274, translation by the authors). This is also the focus of Annemarie and Lucius Burckhardt, who founded the research field ‘Strollology’ in the 1980s in order to re-experience the conscious perception of the environment through walking:

Strollology's task, therefore, is to gather impressions and string them together, to create impressive image sequences without renouncing traditional metaphors [...]. Strollology is hence a tool with which previously unseen parts of the environment can be made visible as well as an effective means of criticizing conventional perception itself.

(Burckhardt 2015, 238)

Contrary to Franz Hessel or Annemarie and Lucius Burckhardt who focus on re-experiencing an already familiar city space, most of the émigré photographers

experienced their cities of arrival for the first time. And the artists came to use walking as a specific photographic research method and photographic practice: it enabled them to find spaces and places which corresponded to their respective artistic and aesthetic visual languages, and it helped them visualize the temporal, spatial, social and cultural dimensions and dynamics of their new city of exile (Hesse/Weisshaar 2013, 205). By strolling through the city with their cameras, the émigré photographers also engaged with different methods, concepts and urban practices themselves, instead of merely capturing them within their work. If we understand photographers as actors of their own image, it is important for us as photo-researchers to find and discuss methods to analyze these images as urban practice. Through close re-reading and reconstruction of how and where the images were taken by the émigré photographers in their exilic city, we will activate different categories and layers of urban photographic practice. In addition to analyzing walking as an urban practice and method, and next to our interest in how photographers actively employed their camera apparatuses in the city, we also took recourse to Tel Aviv and New York city maps, city guides and different historical and cultural urban patterns to reconstruct the creation of the photographs.

The city from above: Overviews of Tel Aviv and New York

Taken from an elevated standpoint, a photograph by Ellen Auerbach shows a scenery of the cityscape of Tel Aviv (c.1934) (fig. 8.1). By standing on the rooftop of one of the houses of Ahuzat Bayit, one of the first Jewish settlements established in Tel Aviv from 1909 on, Ellen Auerbach directs her gaze through her Leica camera over the roofs of the historical buildings of the city's old part, towards the horizon where the white international Bauhaus-style buildings of new modern neighbourhoods under construction rise up. Modulated in a play of glaring sunlight and shadows, the houses appear like architectural sculptures. They form an almost abstract cityscape in which architectural structures and urban patterns disperse in geometrical forms. Besides these experimental and aesthetic elements of the visual language of 'New Vision', Ellen Auerbach also creates and follows a specific narrative structure. As a German-Jewish emigrant, she escaped Nazi-Germany in 1933 and arrived in Palestine the same year, where she settled in Tel Aviv (Graeve Ingelmann 2006, 49; Messner 2023, 178). In 1936, she left Palestine: she never felt at home there due to the harsh living conditions and due to the political and ideological circumstances which she could not identify with (Messner 2023, 204f.).

Her photographic work in Germany from 1929 to 1933 was dedicated to commercial and portrait photography. She ran the studio ringl+pit together with



FIGURE 8.1: Ellen Auerbach, *View over Tel Aviv*, c.1934, KS-Auerbach 284, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021).

her friend and colleague Grete Stern (Graeve Ingelmann 2006, 27–57; Messner 2023, 179). Her photographic practice during her stay in Palestine, the first station of her exilic journey, required new modes of expression. Ellen Auerbach used the miniature camera as an instrument to discover and familiarize herself with these new and foreign environments. Due to its flexible handling, the camera could easily be taken along on her explorations. This is why a large part of the photographic corpus created during her two-year stay in Palestine revolves around her new hometown Tel Aviv.⁴ The view from above onto the cityscape of Tel Aviv allowed Ellen Auerbach to construct an overview of her new hometown and to familiarize herself with the structures and patterns of the city by using her camera as an instrument and mediator. Simultaneously, as an artist, she experimented with the medium with regards to modes of expressions and aesthetics which were both familiar and unfamiliar to her. By using the visual language of the Weimar Republic's avant-garde photography movements, which she had helped shape significantly during her time in Berlin, most of her photographic work in Palestine was created outside the studio on journeys through the country and on forays through Tel Aviv. During the latter, she focused on the inhabitants of the city, on the variety of cultural differences, on the burgeoning city life and on the newly developing construction sites of the city (Messner 2023, 202f.). The construction of Tel Aviv was in full swing at the time of Ellen Auerbach's arrival, not least because of the

quickly increasing number of new emigrants from Europe who escaped Nazi-Germany and settled in Tel Aviv in the course of the 1930s and 1940s (Schlör 1996, 27). In the image mentioned above, Ellen Auerbach stands on the rooftop of a historic building in Tel Aviv, from where her gaze is directed towards the modern part of the city, still under construction. She familiarizes herself with the current history and the structure of her new hometown, by connecting familiar and new aesthetics and modes of expression.

The interest in and the photographic imagination of urban patterns and structures is a continuous topic also in Ellen Auerbach's third exile in New York City. Leaving Palestine for London in 1936, Ellen and Walter Auerbach emigrated to New York in 1937. After a stay at the Hotel Latham (4 East 28th Street), they lived in Brooklyn on 211 Clermont Street during the summer of 1937, before moving to Elkins Park in Philadelphia (Graeve Ingelmann 2006, 59). One of her first photos in New York was taken from Brooklyn Bridge (fig. 8.2). The letters on the roof on the left side and on the house front in the middle of the image, "COAL CO Inc." and "Abeel Brothers IRON & STEEL", give clues about the location. Research on the company "Abeel Brothers" with the help of historic images allows a detailed reconstruction of Ellen Auerbach's position and the direction of her focus: the company building in the photograph was located on 190 South Street. Auerbach



FIGURE 8.2: Ellen Auerbach, *Untitled* (view from the north side of Brooklyn Bridge towards the northwest), 1937, KS-Auerbach 652, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021).

consequently must have positioned herself on the northside of Brooklyn Bridge and directed her camera towards the North-East of the Lower East Side.⁵ This is the area where the East River landing docks of the coal and steel industry were located. Behind this industrial area, there were 19th-century brick buildings that formed the historic ‘old’ district of Manhattan. Towards the right, the buildings rise up to meet Tenement Houses, constructed due to the increasing population in the early 20th century. In the background, the skyscrapers of Midtown Manhattan gleam on the horizon. Auerbach chose a specific viewpoint, focussing on the staggering of the houses which become denser and rise up towards the background. The composition of the houses seems like a montage in which the houses merge into a large mosaic – it is no longer discernible where one house begins and another ends. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that Auerbach cut off the skyscrapers in the background: she was apparently more interested in the abundance and dense development of Brooklyn than in the landmark icons of contemporary New York.

Just like in the image taken of Tel Aviv described above (fig. 8.1), Ellen Auerbach chose a higher viewpoint to orientate herself in New York’s cityscape, soon after her arrival. By using her camera as an instrument and mediator, she placed herself in a position from above to survey the city and to familiarize herself with its structure. In comparison to the photographs of other emigrated colleagues (like Andreas Feininger or Ilse Bing), she did not take her picture from the rooftops of newly erected skyscrapers in Midtown Manhattan, such as the Empire State Building or the RCA Building, but instead stood on Brooklyn Bridge. To view the city from New York’s tallest buildings, you had to pay an admittance fee, but the bridges linking Brooklyn to Manhattan were not only a free and accessible urban space, available to everyone, but also an important connecting point between New York’s disparate parts.⁶ Since Ellen Auerbach had settled in Brooklyn, her photographs seem to narrate her first encounters with her new neighbourhood in the vicinity of her apartment.

The composition of the image follows a similar structure as her photograph of Tel Aviv, and we can read the city’s history vis-à-vis the different architectural styles captured in the photograph. The older, more traditional housings in the foreground merge with the newer Tenement Houses until the gaze meets the super modern International Style high-rise buildings in the background (Stern 1987). Ellen Auerbach used her camera in New York with a similar artistic strategy in mind: she managed to obtain an overview of her new city by emphasizing the urban changes in a visual sequence. If we take another look at the industrial area in the foreground of the image, the street and the docks seem to be deserted. We do not know whether Auerbach deliberately chose a less frequented time for taking the photograph or whether the area was indeed more or less abandoned in 1937. During the 1930s the piers on South Street lost in importance as instead huge

piers for bigger cargo ships were erected on the Hudson River (Federal Writers Project 1938, 331; Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration 1939, 81). Ellen Auerbach's image thus enables us to draw even further and more wide-ranging conclusions as to New York's industrial, architectural developments.

The view on the city from above was a common photographic and aesthetic practice of 'New Vision' avant-garde photography which took shape in the artistic upheaval of the Weimar Republic. The city in all its facets became a focus of artistic interest and a popular photographic motif (Breuer 2010). As an important representative of avant-garde photography in Berlin, Ellen Auerbach was familiar with these aesthetic conventions. In 1929, Ellen Auerbach begun her studies at Walter Peterhans' studio in Berlin and was an integral part of the new aesthetics photographic movements of the 1920s (Graeve Ingelmann 2006, 26). In the same year, Peterhans was appointed professor at the newly founded department of photography at the Bauhaus in Dessau, where teachers and students trained their eyes by experimenting with new photographic perspectives. Here, a novel avant-garde way of photographing and filming the city was developed, using the possibilities of the photographic apparatus in a creative way (*Bauhaus und die Fotografie* 2019; Rössler/Otto 2019; Herzogenrath 2020). It is during this time and in this context that Ellen Auerbach trained her photographic imagination and eye. Her photographic practices in exile in Tel Aviv and New York show a dynamic transfer of these artistic and aesthetic modes of expression when encountering, exploring and familiarizing herself with her new hometowns. Her innovations in form and medium illustrate a translation to and appropriation of the urban, social, cultural, political and historical conditions of new and foreign environments, especially in the cities Tel Aviv and New York.

Looking from below: Experiments on pavements

While the camera was used by the émigré photographers to obtain an overview of the city, it was also a tool to highlight the different architectural styles in close-up and more detailed shots of certain buildings. Returning to Tel Aviv and New York, examples by Liselotte Grschebina and Rudy Burckhardt further exemplify how exiled photographers experimented with their cameras and how they focussed on architectural fragments in the context of the city's historical layers. Taken from a view from below and in an oblique perspective, a photograph by Liselotte Grschebina, who escaped the threat of the Nazi-Regime in 1934 and settled in Tel Aviv (*Woman with a Camera* 2008, 151; Messner 2023, 253), shows the cut out of a Tel Aviv Bauhaus building (fig. 8.3). The curves of the round balconies are staged and modulated as



FIGURE. 8.3: Liselotte Grschebina, *Tel Aviv II*, 1940, The Israel Museum Jerusalem (© The Israel Museum Jerusalem).

architectural sculptural fragments through a play of light and shadow. The power lines which build diagonals in opposition to the curves of the balconies support the aesthetic claim of the image composition with its clear and sharp lines and its stark light-dark contrast. The flexible handling of the camera, the exceptional perspectives, the cut outs as well as the avant-garde and experimental visual language of her photographs, suggest that Grschebina was probably working with a Leica camera, as did her close friend and colleague Ellen Auerbach. The former student friends from the Art Academy in Karlsruhe met again in Tel Aviv and opened the studio *Ishon* where they worked together (Messner 2023, 253ff.).

Besides the artistic and experimental strategies evident in the image and its references to the photography of the Weimar Republic's 'New Objectivity', the Bauhaus architecture as well as the power lines present in Grschebina's photograph can also be read as ideological symbols of modernity with regard to its context, the city of Tel Aviv and its construction within the Zionist nation-building process. Tel Aviv was built in 1909 by Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe and supposed to be the 'first Jewish city'. In the course of its construction, emigrants, mainly from Europe,

brought different architectural styles from their home countries to Tel Aviv. This architectural eclecticism is reflected in the urban pattern of the city. Thus, in the course of the 1930s, the architectural style of Tel Aviv was dominated by International Style and Bauhaus architecture, imported to the city mainly by emigrants who had escaped Nazi-Germany. Consequently, this modern architectural style was adapted and appropriated by ideological Zionist claims in the context of the nation-building process: modern and new buildings for ‘new people’ should arise in a new country, and in this ‘first Jewish city’ of Tel Aviv (Levin 1984; Schlör 1996; Heinze-Greenberg 2003, 87–100; Rotbard 2015; Klei 2019). Grschebina’s photograph of the architecture of the Bauhaus buildings reflects this ideological and aesthetic narrative. It shows a cut out, a snapshot of a certain moment in time and in history: the moment of a break with the past and a new beginning in a new and modern homestead for ‘new people’. Liselotte Grschebina used the modern and avant-garde aesthetic language available to her in order to underline these ideological claims. But the photograph can be also read as an artistic experimentation with familiar modes of expression and as an approach to the novel conditions and architectural pattern of her new hometown Tel Aviv.

Instead of focussing on the construction of new buildings, as was the case with émigré photographers in Tel Aviv, emigrated photographers in New York paid attention to the many different architectural styles that could be discovered throughout the city. The exaggeration of urban eclecticism and simultaneous experiments in unusual perspectives and radical close-ups can be exemplarily seen in an image by Rudy Burckhardt (fig. 8.4). He had arrived in New York in 1935 and initially approached his new environment via film. In the years 1938 and 1939, however, he explored his Chelsea neighbourhood by photographing house facades and entrances on foot (Burckhardt 2008; Eklund 2008). He placed a 9 × 12 cm view camera on a tripod and took plain, direct photos of walls, building entrances, ornaments, drain pipes, advertisement signs and shop windows (Burckhardt 1998, 194). The intense and intimate focus on details, for example a house entrance, turns strange this everyday motif and offers unexpected perspectives and insights. By focussing on a close-up detail, Burckhardt could highlight the juxtaposition of different styles that he had discovered in only one architectural fragment of a house facade. The architect and photographer Erich Mendelsohn had already traced New York’s architectural eclecticism on 5th Avenue in a series of four printed photographs in his 1926 photobook *Amerika. Bilderbuch eines Architekten* (*Picture Book of an Architect*, translation by the authors). He had added the description: “All styles of history close together: castle romanticism, church gothic, renaissance palace and skyscraper. Disorderly, wild growth, in just 100 years pumped up from the immigration port to the business centre of the world” (Mendelsohn 1926, 6).⁷ Contrary to Mendelsohn’s images, Burckhardt comprised the parallel existence of different architectural styles into one image, while



FIGURE 8.4: Rudy Burckhardt, *Building Front Detail with Acanthus Molding in Doorway*, New York City, 1938 (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021).

also abstracting the house facade as an entity of different structures and surfaces. In contrast to the idealistic and modern visions of New York's buildings cultivated by US-American and European photographers in the 1920s and early 1930s, Burckhardt photographed the everyday life on the streets in response to new urban developments. He did not use an external perspective, but focused his gaze directly on everyday urban infrastructures as well as on inhabitants on the streets. Other US-American photographers such as Walker Evans and Helen Levit, as well as the German emigrant Lisette Model, followed this approach in their photographs during the late 1930s (Kozloff 2002; Lopate 2004; *New York Photography 1890–1950* 2012; Bajac 2016). This photographic and urban practice significantly differs from Liselotte Grschebina's. Grschebina took her photographs with a flexible Leica camera, which allowed exceptional perspectives – for example by pointing the camera steeply upwards and by aesthetically producing architectural cut outs and fragments. Nevertheless, both emigrants tried to envision the architectural styles of their exile cities by experimenting with their cameras in urban space and by referring to the different historic, ideological and aesthetic narratives of both Tel Aviv and New York.

The active and dynamic handling of the camera in urban space shows that the photographers – as actors of the city – engaged in high degrees of experimentation. Certain aesthetic practices, such as the raising and lowering of the camera to unusual perspectives, the cropping out and focussing on urban patterns and forms, were transferred and translated to the new environments in exile or adapted to photographic developments in these cities of exile. The photographs discussed here thus not only serve as historic sources but also can be read as aesthetic photo-objects which illustrate artistic strategies, creative principles and photographic practices in urban space. By focussing on detailed architectural fragments, the photographers were able to emphasize specific architectural developments and styles and to bring to light formerly hidden urban narratives. Paying close attention to the physical changes of a city and the process of visually discovering a new urban environment takes on particular valence and significance in exile. Émigré photographers, then, are uniquely positioned to engage with and highlight the urban and architectural specificities of their new hometowns.

Living in the city: Discovering socio-cultural urban spaces

Following Rudy Burckhardt, who stood on the streets with his camera and who captured the small architectural fragments that surround everyday life in the city, or adopting Liselotte Grschebina's practices, who aesthetically modulated architectural sculptural fragments through a play of light and shadow, other émigré photographers similarly used their cameras to draw attention to the variety of socio-cultural urban spaces in Tel Aviv and New York. By strolling through the city, Auerbach and Henle encountered and visually perceived the cultural differences and diversity of the inhabitants of their cities of exile with their cameras. In her article, "Looking at Photographs: Between Contemplation, Curiosity and Gaze", Elizabeth Edwards suggests the concept of curiosity as an alternative form of the gaze; she defines it as a "world-openness, even wonderment, a form of epistemic and conceptual inquisitiveness which opens up multiple meanings that stem from a consciousness of ignorance and the capacity for interest" (2013, 49). The concept of curiosity allows a more open space with regards to the visual representation of cultural difference and power relations, as it grants an active agency to the subject (ibid., 48–54).

Against this background, both Auerbach's and Henle's interest in the diverse socio-cultural urban environments and inhabitants of their new homes can be understood in the context of their curiosity: a curiosity expressed by interacting and familiarizing themselves with their novel surroundings. This curiosity can also be found in their photographs and in the way they handled their cameras, which contradicts colonial power relations, all too often expressed by asymmetries, hier-

archies of gazes and the objectification of the ‘other’. The way the photographers employ their cameras and meet the photographed subject on eye level, we argue, enables these subjects to gain active agency: they often return the photographic gaze and thus draw the exiled photographer into their world.

Ellen Auerbach’s photograph *Tel Aviv* portrays two Arab boys playing together near a swing in a sandy environment in Jaffa (c.1935) (fig. 8.5). Taken from a perspective from slightly above, the narrow picture section is focused on the two boys at the swing, wearing traditional clothes with their bare feet in the sand. Their gazes are directed towards the camera and they smile at the photographer. The scenery is visually and aesthetically composed and arranged through elements such as the diagonals created by the ropes of the swing and the play of light and shadow. The slightly oblique perspective from above and the smiling gazes of the boys, who return the photographer’s curiosity, convey the impression of a spontaneous image that the photographer might have taken in passing. Ellen Auerbach must have bent her knees to meet the boys with her camera at eye level. The photograph, which was probably taken on a foray through her new hometown Tel Aviv and the neighbouring Arab town Jaffa, illustrates Ellen Auerbach’s interest in the levels of cultural difference and the different social structures and urban spaces of her place of exile. Furthermore, it shows her handling of the camera as an instrument of artistic experimentation which enabled and influences the way she took in her new surroundings in all their facets.

In New York, too, émigré photographers such as Fritz Henle understood the camera as a medium to visualize the everyday cultural and ethnic diversity on the



FIGURE 8.5: Ellen Auerbach, *Tel Aviv*, c.1935, Akademie der Künste, Berlin (© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2021).

streets. In a series of 40 pictures, Fritz Henle captured the diverse cultural and ethnic life on 52nd Street. The photo series was published in the *Life* magazine as a response to the film *52nd Street* which was produced by Walter Wagner in 1937 (Anonymous 1937, 64–67) (fig. 8.6). The article clarifies that even though the movie is called *52nd Street* it only focused on one block – between the 5th and the 6th Avenue – as this was where the night clubs were: the film, therefore, provides only a one-dimensional, one-sided portrait of the neighbourhood. The street, which is about three kilometres long, reaches from the East River across Manhattan to the Hudson River and therefore crosses different neighbourhoods and areas of the city.

At the East River end it is very, very toney, a little island of fashionability set in a sera of slums. [...] When you cross First Avenue, going west, you run right into a tenement district. Block by block, the street changes, like a fancy layer cake, from luxury to tenements to smart shops to night clubs and back to tenements.

(Anonymous 1937, 64)

In capturing not only the bars and the night clubs but also the entire character of the street in all its cultural and ethnic diversity, Fritz Henle put himself on an equal footing. When we analyze Fritz Henle's position from which he photographed the citizens living on the street, we can see that he put himself, and his Rolleiflex camera, on the same level as his protagonists. Instead of judging what was happening, he observed 52nd Street from a neutral perspective. In close-ups of people, as for example in figs. 20 or 22, we can see that he directed his camera upwards at the people: to do so, he would have had to squat down. In very dynamic movements, he wanted to reproduce an equal and versatile image of the residents and protagonists on the street, who actively participated in and shaped the life of the city. This photo series can thus be read as a sequence of images with a filmic character. In comparison to the *52nd Street* movie, however, Fritz Henle's sequences show a completely different view of this street. Transferred from this micro perspective on the street level to a macro perspective of the whole city, the photo series of 52nd Street can be regarded as a symbol for New York's cultural and ethnic diversity, shaping and forming the metropolis. This is a dynamic we can, in turn, transfer to Tel Aviv. As German emigrants, both Fritz Henle and Ellen Auerbach were part of diverse socio-cultural atmospheres and urban spaces in their cities of exile New York and Tel Aviv which they – as active agents and participants – likewise shaped with their cameras. They perceived themselves, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the other city dwellers and their socio-cultural environments as creative and living parts of the city. This understanding is visually expressed in their photographs and in the manifold ways they operated their cameras.

MEMO TO: *Walter Wanger*
 SUBJECT: *52nd Street*

Photographs for LIFE by Fritz Henle

Your studio, Mr. Wanger, has made a movie called *52nd Street*. It is all about a New York street and its fine old houses, now turned into night clubs, and the daughter of an old family who becomes a hot-cha singer. The critics didn't like it at all and frankly, Mr. Wanger, they were right.

You're a big, important producer and we wouldn't try to tell you how to make movies, but there are a few things about *52nd Street* that you ought to know. Your movie covered only one block—between 5th and 6th Avenues, where the night clubs are. "Swing Alley" they call it, on account of the hot swing bands at places like the Oxy Club and Leon & Eddie's. Visiting firemen go to Broadway for night life but *52nd Street* between 5th and 6th is where native New Yorkers spend their big evenings.

Maybe you had a good idea in doing a movie about this one block. But maybe you could do a better movie on the whole street. It's only two miles long but worth \$50,000,000, which is more than you could get for, say, the city of Galveston. You can do almost anything you think of on *52nd Street*; eat, drink (in 62 bars), get a beauty treatment, shop, swim, go to school, get Federal relief or sail for Europe.

Nowhere else in the world will you find the amazing stratification that exists on a New York crosstown street. Fifty-second begins in one river (the East) and ends in another (the Hudson). At the East River end it is very, very toney, a little island of fashionability set in a sea of slums. You must know about this district because *Dead End* was laid there. When you cross First Avenue, going west, you run right into a tenement district. Block by block, the street changes, like a fancy layer cake, from luxury to tenements to smart shops to night clubs and back to tenements. We've taken pictures all along the way, so that you can see what you missed.



1 *52nd Street* begins snobbishly on a platform above the East River. On its right, snobbish River House with private dock. To right of River House, the *Dead End* slums.



2 River House courtyard. A three-room apartment here costs \$3,000 a year.



3 Dogs east of 1st Ave. are aired by doormen. Mrs. E. L. Cashman's wolfhound.



4 Dogs between 1st and 2nd Aves. see life from tenements with their masters.



5 Boys pitch pennies on the corner of 1st Ave. *52nd Street* is a dead end.



6 This is the view from a rear window of No 301, looking toward 1st Ave.



7 Sidewalks and streets are the playgrounds for children of the tenements.



8 Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones gossip on brownstone stoops between 2nd & 3rd.



9 Around 3rd Ave., garages. A Rolls Royce with driver rents for \$25 a day.

FIGURE 8.6: Reportage "Memo to: Walter Wanger, Subject: 52nd Street". Photographs by Fritz Henle. *Life*, 1937, vol. 3, no. 22, pp. 64–67.



10 Corner of Lexington: Mrs. Wanger could swim at YWCA; you couldn't.



11 Corner of Park: Hotel Ambassador (good room: \$8) and sleek businessmen.



12 Between Park and Madison, Viola's sells "chapeaux." One good hat: \$40.



13 Fifth Ave: traffic, two-deck buses, Officer "Good-boy Dan" Sullivan.



14 West of 5th, the night clubs begin. Jack White's has a \$2.50 minimum.



15 One attraction at Jack White's "118" is Pat Harrington, funny drummer.



16 A Rolls Royce's radiator insolently reflects the "No Parking" sign.



17 "21" is the most fashionable. You get in only if they like your looks.



18 Taxi drivers playing hot-foot (lighting matches in victims' shoe-soles).



19 Leon Enken (left) is the co-proprietor of Leon & Eddie's at No. 38.



20 Eddie Davis, the other half of Leon & Eddie's, entertains with dirty songs.



21 Unloading barrels of beer for Onyx Club, "Home of Swing" at No. 62.



22 Pete Brown, Onyx saxophonist, belongs to the street's hottest band.



23 This old fellow sells morning papers to late travelers in "Swing Alley."



24 Above the night clubs are apartments. One has an illegal rifle range.



25 Outside the Club 52nd St., as the night gets old, tired heads find rest.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

FIGURE 8.6: (Continued)

Conclusion

By encountering the city with their cameras, émigré photographers discovered, visualized, appropriated and familiarized themselves with the different urban, social, cultural, ethnical and architectural patterns of their new hometowns. As illustrated by analyzing the works of Ellen Auerbach, Liselotte Grschebina, Rudy Burckhardt and Fritz Henle, who all emigrated from Nazi-Germany to New York and Tel Aviv during the 1930s and 1940s, the photographers applied a wide range of photographic urban practices: practices that enabled them to survey their new hometowns through the camera lens from below or above, to experiment with new artistic and aesthetic formats in urban space and to visualize the cultural and ethnic diversities of these cities of exile. As has become clear, the émigré photographers walked, or strolled, through the city in order to articulate the temporal, social and cultural dimensions and dynamics of the surrounding urban space. This could take form in either one single photograph, taken as a first step of orientation in a city (figs. 8.1 and 8.2), in experiments on the street with new camera views (figs. 8.3 and 8.4), in expressing a sense of the fugitive or passing-by (fig. 8.5), in a series of photographs visually internalizing the walk through the city or, as with Fritz Henle, portraying a street (fig. 8.6).

According to Vilém Flusser, the camera can be understood as an instrument and a medium to articulate new and creative urban visions. The émigré photographers can thus be regarded as actors of their images behind the camera, developing specific aesthetic practices and methods to photograph and visualize the city in exile. As demonstrated in the course of this chapter, these photographers referred to artistic languages and methods of avant-garde photography they were already familiar with and had practiced in Germany pre-exile. In Tel Aviv and New York, they translated and implemented these aesthetics and techniques into their new surroundings. They familiarized themselves with and appropriated the specific urban, architectural, historical, social, cultural and ethnical patterns of their exile cities and created new ways of visual expressions. Against this background, the handling of the camera and the act of photographing can be read as an urban practice of encountering the city in exile, articulating and developing a new and specific photographic and aesthetic language.

NOTES

1. Recent publications have shed light on the interdependencies between exile/migration and photography. See for example Perez (2013), Umbach/Sulzener (2018), Dogramaci/Roth (2019), Ashkenazi (2019), Troelenberg et al. (2020), Messner (2023).
2. Blog and archive entries in the digital database and the virtual walking tour on the homepage of the METROMOD project allow further insights into the work of Ellen Auerbach,

- Rudy Burckhardt, Fritz Henle and many other émigré photographers living and working in New York. See more on: metromod.net.
3. This also links to recent work in the field of gender and urban studies regarding possible reconfigurations of the *flâneur*: such studies have focussed on feminist/female city walking (as expressed in and through the figure of the *flâneuse*), and on contested urban spatiality and questions on mobility in this context. See, for example: D'Souza/McDonough (2006), Dreyer/McDowall (2012), Elkin (2016).
 4. In 1934, together with her partner Walter Auerbach, Ellen Auerbach made a film about Tel Aviv which promoted the Zionist project on behalf of the Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (KKL). By using the aesthetic and visual language of 'New Vision' and referring to Zionist iconographies, the film visualizes Tel Aviv as a modern Jewish city in the context of the Zionist nation-building process. On *Tel Aviv* by Ellen Auerbach, see Messner 2023, 191–200.
 5. With the help of historic images and city maps, it was possible to reconstruct that the description on the photograph in the archive of the Akademie der Künste Berlin does not correspond to Ellen Auerbach's position. She looked towards North-East and not towards North-West.
 6. According to the WPA Guide Book, admission to the Empire State platform in 1939 cost \$ 1.10 (corresponding to about \$ 20 in 2021) and 40 ¢ for the RCA Building (corresponding to about \$ 7.57 in 2021). In comparison, the entry fee for the Museum of Modern Art or the New York Zoo was 25 ¢ (Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration 1939, 319, 333, 347).
 7. "Alle Stile der Geschichte dicht nebeneinander: Schloßromantik, Kirchengotik, Renaissancepalast und Wolkenkratzer. Ungeordnetes, wildes Wachstum, in eben 100 Jahren aufgepumpt vom Einwanderhafen zum Geschäftszentrum der Welt" (English translation by the authors).

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