

“My old Mother” – Therese Graf in New York

Exile, the Transatlantic Itinerary of a Photographic Portrait, and Strong History “from below”

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A Provincial Photograph and a Migrant’s Mind- map

Among the holdings of the Monacensia Literaturarchiv in Munich is a framed black-and-white photographic portrait, a close-up of an old woman in three-quarter profile (fig. 1). Probably taken during the 1920s or early '30s, this photograph shows Therese Graf, née Heimrath, born as a peasant’s daughter in a small Bavarian village near lake Starnberg in 1857, and deceased in that same village in 1934. Of her eleven children, four migrated to the United States—three of them did so while she was still alive, for economic reasons shortly before or after the First World War, and they were to become mineworkers or bakers in the new world.

The fourth, her son Oskar (1894–1967), was to follow in 1938. His exile was both politically and personally motivated, and it is a prominent and perhaps also one of the best documented cases of migration from Germany to the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Therese’s youngest son, Oskar, is the well-known German novelist Oskar Maria Graf. Her portrait was among his possessions, kept in his New York apartment, and came back home when parts of his estate were given to the city of Munich posthumously, on the occasion of what would have been his ninetieth birthday.¹ Taking its cue from this

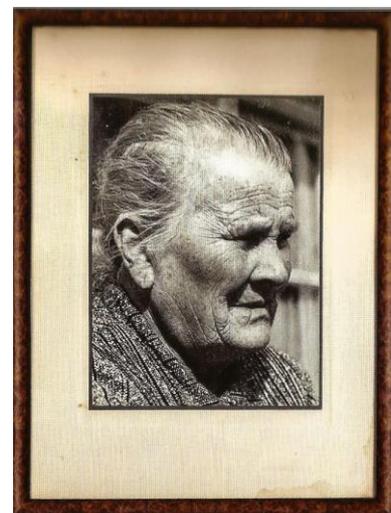


Fig. 1. Photographic portrait of
Therese Graf, ca.
1920s/early '30s, collection
Münchner
Stadtbibliothek/Monacensia,
Dd 41.

constellation, in the following I will focus on the photograph of Therese Graf and its itinerary, which was set in motion through migration. As a tangible, traveling object, the photograph points exemplarily to the material aspects which become manifest in photographic archives of migration. As an iconographic motive, it reappears again and again in relation to the exile-biography of her son. This essay thus seeks to tell a history of migration through the case study of a visual document and its itinerary. Taking its cue from the current location of the photograph in a Munich archive, my analysis will trace both its own “journey” and its iconographic context. While scholarship on the literary oeuvre of Oskar Maria Graf has dealt with the narratives of vernacular history “from below,” my focus on the portrait of his mother will open a complementary visual perspective.

The relevance of Oskar Maria Graf lies not only in his literary oeuvre, but in his identity between a regional, national, and international figure. At the time of writing this article, the Deutsches Exilarchiv in Frankfurt am Main, for instance, prominently hosts an exhibition on Graf, presenting both the specifics of his Bavarian origins and the experience of exile, which he shared with many contemporaries as a paradigmatic experience of the twentieth century.² While literary narratives and visual traces of exile are usually considered separately, the image of Therese Graf provides us with an exemplary interface between these realms.

After leaving the rural village where he grew up in a family of farmers and bakers, Oskar Maria Graf had first spent his young adult years in the communist and anarchist circles of the Munich Bohème. In his autobiographical novel *Prisoners All*, he describes how he mingled with writers and artists in this atmosphere. He was particularly close with the painter Georg Schrimpf, who was to become a leading figure of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement, and later developed an ambivalent relation to *völkisch* art.³ In 1918 Schrimpf portrayed Graf as a young writer, rendered in expressive colors and set against a gloomy urban background, thus marking him as a protagonist of a new, modernist style (fig. 2).

Graf himself started to gain prominence as a literary figure just briefly before the National Socialist rise to power. The new regime soon began with its measures to bring all cultural and artistic work in line with the party’s ideology. Oskar Maria Graf’s narrations were firmly grounded in the texture and style of his Bavarian homeland—the term *Heimat* was not foreign to his language—however, his books were strongly informed by a critical leftist and anarchist spirit. When the National Socialist party started to burn and ban books by Jewish and politically disagreeable authors, Graf famously demanded that his works should be burned too, and explicitly spoke out against National Socialist norms and institutions in order to avoid any affiliation as a *Heimatschriftsteller* (folklorist) by them.



Fig. 2. Georg Schrimpf, *Portrait of Oskar Maria Graf*, 1918, collection Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau München, acquired with support of Kulturstiftung der Länder. Creative Commons License CC BY-SA 4.0.

During a trip to Vienna, he wrote his famous manifesto “Verbrennt mich!” (“Burn me!”), and this marks the actual beginning of his exile, as it became impossible for him to return to Germany afterward.⁴ He would not see his homeland again until the 1950s, and his mother passed away during the early years of his exile, in 1934. Together with his Jewish life companion Mirjam Sachs, Graf had already thought about emigration very early on after January 1933. Now they traveled to the Soviet Union, stayed in Czechoslovakia until the end of the 1930s, and then finally moved on to the United States, where they settled in New York City. While Mirjam Sachs earned the couple’s living as a secretary for the Jewish journal *Aufbau*, Oskar Maria Graf worked from his study in their modest apartment on Hillside Avenue in Washington Heights (fig. 3): a small room with a simple, modernist wooden desk perched against a wall, which is covered in a collection of image-objects.⁵



Fig. 3. Oskar Maria Graf’s study in his apartment on Hillside Avenue, New York City, ca. in/after 1967, collection Münchner Stadtbibliothek/Monacensia, Bre-0146-1.

This is where we meet Therese Graf again, his mother—or rather, her photograph, set in large format on the left upper part of the wall. As a physical object, the photograph followed her son on the successive steps of migration halfway across the globe. Set into a geographic and cultural environment far from her homeland, her portrait became part of a very personal and idiosyncratic image archive. This archive contains some items of graphic arts, some documents, but mostly photographs or photographic reproductions that relate on the one hand to Graf’s very individual background. On the other hand, they are combined with artwork, memorabilia, and with photographic images of, for instance, Karl Marx, Thomas Mann, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and George Washington, but also with some other family photographs. Understood as a specific—or even idiosyncratic—place where a narrative is produced,⁶ this archive can thus be read as a visual mind-map, or an atlas, that personifies and connects different stages and places of the migrant’s life across the globe, both in terms of ideas and materiality. It betrays the non-hierarchical, anarchist world view of Graf, but nevertheless it also shows him as a member of a generation which is used to thinking about history as embodied by “great men.” The portrait of his mother, set in large format in the left upper corner, appears as an outstandingly female agency within this assembly. The photograph which records this constellation in Graf’s study adds another layer in itself; it is part of a series of photographs which were probably taken for the purpose of documentation, before the room was dismantled after Graf had passed away in 1967.⁷ This may also explain the prominent presence of his own photographic portrait on the wooden shelf that stands on the tabletop. It creates a kind of dialogue with the image of his mother, and it confirms him as the central agent for the creation of this mind-map, which connects his local, provincial origin with the cosmopolitan, globalized existence of the migrant he had become later in life.

In the Monacensia Literaturarchiv, Therese Graf’s photograph is kept in its original frame, a simple, vernacular mass product (fig. 1). The paper passe-partout is worn-out,

yellowed, with some stains. On the reverse, it shows signs of tinkered mounting and remounting; altogether, its state of preservation betrays its history as a household object, of little material value, but appreciated and carefully maintained through the years by its owner. The photograph itself shows Therese Graf's head in a three-quarter profile, looking to the left. It is placed in a closely cropped frame, leaving just enough space for a hint of background. This background is deliberately out of focus, but gives us a sense of location. Apparently, Therese Graf was captured while sitting outside, in front of a characteristic southern Bavarian farmhouse window. Her hairdo and costume are simple and show no trace of staging for the photograph, yet the image is not a mere snapshot. I have not found any hint as to the authorship of the photograph, but it may well have been taken by a professional or at least semi-professional photographer.⁸ Her facial features are rendered with sharp precision, the play of light and shadow of what must have been a sunny day lending expression to her profile, to her low-lying eyes which seem slightly squinted, as if blinded by the sunlight. An impressive topography of wrinkles, most accentuated on her forehead, on her chin, and around her eyes, appear almost as a leitmotif of the photograph. While it is clearly the portrait of an individual, captured at a certain place and time, it is also an image which speaks about the passing of time on a more abstract level.

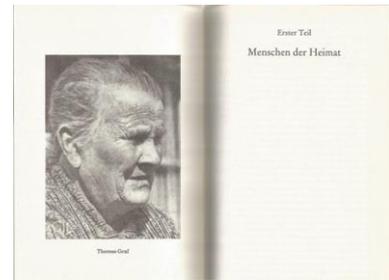


Fig. 4. Frontispiece page of Oskar Maria Graf, *Das Leben meiner Mutter*, 8th paperback edition, (Berlin: List/Ullstein Buchverlage, 2016).

Weimar Photography, the Experience of Exile, and the Agency of the Modern Condition

Oskar Maria Graf possessed a number of photographs of his mother, but it is probably no coincidence that he chose this iconic image to place prominently among the other images on the wall of his New York study. The early years of Graf's exile were exactly the years in which he wrote what was to become his *chef d'oeuvre*. He began to work on his monumental biographical novel, entitled *Das Leben meiner Mutter*, in the Czechoslovakian town of Brünn in 1938, and finished it after moving to New York City in 1940. While written in German, the book was first published in English translation as *The Life of My Mother* with a New York publishing house. The first German edition appeared in 1946.⁹ While the book never became a "resounding success"¹⁰ in the sense of a true best seller, it has founded Graf's international reputation. Thomas Mann, for instance, elevated it to the rank of a "classic" piece of literature.¹¹ The career of author and novel is closely related to the prominence of Therese Graf's portrait: up to the most recent edition of the book, a reproduction of the photo has regularly appeared as a frontispiece motive for *The Life of My Mother*, not only making it a globally circulating image (fig. 4), but also hinting at its multilayered meaning for Graf and his audience.¹²

In style and subject, the book is deeply rooted in the upper Bavarian tone and landscape of the author's origin, drawing the portrait of an era which is still informed by the sometimes archaic traditions of country life, but where modernity gains

increasing ground between the 1860s and 1930s. Both the utopian and dystopian potentials of social, technical, and political progress appear intertwined with the life cycle of Therese Graf, whom he describes emphatically as passive, uneducated, simple, but with a strong intuition for justice and decency. Graf draws this literary picture without any sentimentality or romanticizing attitude. Rather, it is a realist's endeavor to maintain—or rather salvage—the increasingly charged and politically occupied concepts of tradition and home. He achieves this by way of telling the story of an unremarkable rural life which is characterized by steady resilience, but nevertheless mirrors the changes of modernity. Much like the photograph, the narrative thus also oscillates between an individual story and universal relevance.¹³ In a short preliminary note to the novel, written after finishing the book in New York City in August 1940, Graf emphasizes, “Possibly, this [book] has narrated the life of mothers in all countries.”¹⁴ This statement clearly implies the cosmopolitan mindset of the migrant.

The condition of migration and exile is not only the factual biographical background to the genesis of the book—it also becomes tangible in the narrative itself, when Graf reveals, for instance, how earlier generations of his father's family had migrated to Bavaria from South Tyrol in the first place. This adds another circular level to the account, and of course links to his very personal situation at the moment of writing. Against this background, the vernacular portrait of Therese Graf, as part of her son's image archive, is not only a mere illustration to a book and its history. Seizing the possibilities of the age of mechanical reproduction, as a frontispiece to the book, it becomes an iconic trace, a code for the passing of time which connects lost local ties and global movements in a period of migration. The experience of migration, though absent in the photograph as such, is central to the understanding of both the novel's and the image's place in modernity. One is almost tempted to consider this image of a mother as next of kin with Roland Barthes's famous elaboration over a childhood photograph of his mother, Henriette, which resulted in one of the most paradigmatic texts on photography.¹⁵ The fundamental nexus between death, memory, and the photographic capturing of a moment which runs through Barthes's *Camera Lucida* can certainly be connected to the exile experience of loss that lies in both geographic and historical distance. If, according to Barthes, the historical moment of taking a photograph is always directly related to the moment of the photograph's perception, then Therese Graf's portrait on a wall in New York City becomes a measure for this distance.¹⁶

However, there is also something much more immediate and “aboriginal” in Graf's use and implicit interpretation of his mother's photograph. *The Life of My Mother* is a history of modernization from below, from its margins, and it is a story that runs almost parallel to the rise of photography as an increasingly professionalized but also democratic medium.¹⁷ At the same time, the itinerary of Graf—with his mother's photograph literally in his baggage—is marked by

the experience of migration and exile. While this experience was specific to the twentieth century, according to Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, it also became a central and defining element of the modern condition per se.¹⁸ In his study on *The Migrant Image*, T. J. Demos connects this with an understanding of migration as an active, downright avant-gardist motion which can be culturally productive, yet without denying the contingency, trauma, and loss of this experience.¹⁹ In such a context, the complex of photography is not only to be understood as the practice of taking photographs; rather, it includes a wider field of handling, placing, and looking at photographs, to be considered as part of the cultural techniques of migrants and migration.²⁰ We may thus consider our exemplary itinerary of a photograph at an intersection, creating a triangular constellation which is formed between a “history from below,” exile, and the rise of photography as visual medium which has the potential for both political instrumentalization and social agency.

One condition of this triangular constellation is the truly “global” character of photography, which became increasingly portable as a medium with the invention of compact cameras, and which produced images ready to be disseminated, multiplied, and circulated on a previously unknown scale. This effect fully kicked in during the first half of the twentieth century, turning photography into an omnipresent social medium, one that was often claimed as an almost universal cultural practice, transportable and translatable between cultures, geographies, and social layers. Recent scholarship on colonial and global photography has shown how much this claim of universalism was, however, connected to a teleological Western concept of progress and modernity.²¹

Yet, even if we remain within the canonically modernist framework of Euro-American history of the twentieth century with Oskar Maria Graf and his mother’s photograph, it remains clear that this example is thoroughly rooted in the specific photographic culture which developed during the interwar period in Germany, as part of the so-called “Weimar culture.” Portrait photography was a central genre, and has for a long time played a major role in scholarly research on Weimar photography. Indeed, Therese Graf’s portrait appears immediately reminiscent of the iconographic formulas developed by photographers such as August Sander or Erna Lendvai-Dircksen (figs. 5 and 6).

Lendvai-Dircksen was a technically conservative photographer who started her career in the first decade of the twentieth century. During the 1920s and '30s, she worked mostly as an independent photographer out of her own studio, specializing in portraiture.²² During the same period, she started working on a documentary project entitled *Das deutsche Volksgesicht (The Face of the German Folk)*. Based on the assumption of typically German features, this project looked for an original and “pure” expression of rural life in Germany. The compliance with



Fig. 5. August Sander, *Westerwald Farming Woman*, 1913, later included in *Antlitz der Zeit*. © Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, August Sander Archiv, Cologne, courtesy of Pictoright Amsterdam 2019.



Fig. 6. Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Bäuerin (Ötztal) (Farming Woman (Ötztal))*, date unknown, included in: *Das Deutsche Volksgesicht. Tirol and Vorarlberg (Bayreuth: Gauverlag Bayerische Ostmark, 1941)*.

National Socialist blood and soil ideology is already discernible here, and Lendvai-Dircksen confirmed her affinity to this ideology when the *Volksgesicht* was published in its first book version in 1932 (with many more iterations to come), including an introductory text authored by the photographer herself.²³ Though reactionary and conservative in tone and technique, she employed a modern image-language for her type-portraits, seizing the achievements of the seemingly objective style of *Neue Sachlichkeit*: the sharp rendition of facial features, modulated by light and shadow, set into narrow-cut frames and against blurred backgrounds, which sometimes provide a hint of rural location. It may appear irritating at first sight that Oskar Maria Graf's most venerated picture of his mother largely follows this visual syntax—one that is closely associated with the notorious, exclusionary, regressive notion of *Heimat*, the predicament at the very heart of the political ideology which ultimately led to his migration.

However, this is only part of the ambivalent story of modernism during this period. Allan Sekula has argued that “these techniques for reading the body's signs seemed to promise both egalitarian and authoritarian results.”²⁴ This indeed becomes clear when we look at the second prominent example of portrait photography of the Weimar years, at first glance similar in concept and aesthetics, yet very different in intention. August Sander also started his portrait series, *Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts (People of the 20th Century)*, in the 1910s. It was a long-term and large-scale project, aiming at the production of over forty photographic portfolios containing photographs which were to present different walks of life, ultimately to be understood as a cross-section through a contemporary reality shaped by social conditions, not by racial or biological determinism.²⁵ Sander's work is characterized by the gaze of a comparative, taxonomically categorizing physiognomy and ethnography, and thus not free from ambivalence.²⁶ But Sander understood it explicitly as an instrument of liberal social education. Highly estimated by contemporaries such as Walter Benjamin and Alfred Döblin, Sander's work later came into conflict with National Socialist ideology. Andy Jones has provided a reading of Sander's portraits which supports my observation that they are very close in spirit to the narrative work of Oskar Maria Graf. According to Jones, Sander wants to show social truth, yet this truth is not a fixed, unchangeable entity: “Crucially, Sander's peasants clearly do not conform to the Nazi mythologization of them as eternal and unchanging. [...] these are images of change.”²⁷ Accordingly, his “sitters are not objectified, but retain their status as subjects.”²⁸ They maintain an active agency within the photographic project's overall aim to spell out differences of class and life experience.

Conceptually, they thus show an even closer relation to the vernacular portrait of Therese Graf. This portrait's author must have been aware of the photographic state-of-the-art.²⁹ In style, it clearly speaks to the period eye of the 1920s and '30s. Yet its significance only fully unfolds when considered together with its perception history. This history includes its

journey as part of Oskar Maria Graf's migration, its relation to and function for the novel he wrote, and its position within his larger image archive and mind-map. It is this context of handling it, placing it, and looking at it through the lens of the migratory experience which activates the potential of the image within a history of modern connectivity.

Histories from Below as "Strong History"?

Roughly twenty years after the publication of *The Life of My Mother*, more than twenty-five years after her death and the beginning of his exile, Oskar Maria Graf posed for a set of author's photographs in his New York study (fig. 7). In three of these photos, he seems to hint at the ambivalent, yet still strong connection to his origins by putting himself—his own portrait—in relation to his mother's. The framed photograph of Therese Graf appears again here; in fact, it may even have been deliberately moved to a particular spot on the wall, next to a portrait of Leo Tolstoy, in order to feature prominently as an image within the image. The moment is crucial for Graf, as it is around the time of his first postwar visit to his home country, when he decided for good not to move back to Bavaria, but to remain the somewhat reluctant New Yorker he had become in the meantime. By that time he had become an American citizen, and an exponent of the postwar literary scene in Germany. Since 1956, for instance, he was a member of the Academy of Arts in West Berlin. However, as a convinced pacifist, he also remained disenchanted by the postwar world order, and by the German failure to come to terms with the past.³⁰ It was in this late period of his life, when it became clear that he would be an émigré for life, that he also underlined how the memories of his homeland began to fade, all but those related to his mother, which, as he claimed, remained as colorful and tangible as ever.³¹ It can be assumed that much of this is owed to the very tangible presence of her portrait as an object which had persisted through the years, and thus continued to embody an encounter between the first and the second life of a migrant, as it were.

Interestingly, there is another literary testimony to the portrait of Therese Graf which directly addresses this experience of rupture, of a gap, in which the presence of the photograph becomes a linking element. In the 1953 poem *Mein Zimmer (My Room)*, Graf speaks about the "decoration" on his wall, the portraits of Marx, Mann, Goethe, Lincoln, and Lenin, and "in between, commonplace and without much ado, and yet the crowning thing, hangs my old mother."³² He continues to emphasize how he now understands his mother (respectively, her photograph) as the key that connects the diverse, often seemingly arbitrary elements of his life, and puts everything into a larger, "eternal" perspective of humanity. While this lyrical statement is not free from sentimental idealization of motherhood's metaphorical "fertility," its main point is the connection between his "commonplace" mother and the larger fabric of history.³³



Fig. 7. Contact prints for an author's portrait of Oskar Maria Graf, taken in his New York study, ca. 1960, collection Münchner Stadtbibliothek/Monacensia.

In her considerations on “photography as strong history,” Elizabeth Edwards explains that the “work of photographs within the authentic, emotional, instructive or symbolic is premised in the power of the indexical trace... the sense of ‘it was there.’”³⁴ Edwards looks at photographs and their function for nation-building in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, thus she is mainly interested in the functions and rhetoric of institutionalized archives and images which can be interpreted as a “dominant force in the visual politics” of national grand narratives.³⁵ The example of Oskar Maria Graf and his mother’s photograph directs our attention towards the vernacular power of photographs for the biographies and narratives of those who are driven out of the nation, become displaced. In fact, as Edwards also emphasizes, “It is important to remember that these histories and their photographs exist not only in public spaces and in overtly instrumental relationships, but also... in private spaces, consumed in albums, magazines, lantern slides, and even postcards—banal markers of wider public discourses.”³⁶

It is exactly in this sense that Therese Graf’s portrait has come a long way since the day it was taken, probably while she was sitting on a bench in front of her house near Lake Starnberg—an insignificant, random moment in the life of a woman who, by all the usual standards of historical importance, was not invested with much agency beyond her immediate local environment. The photograph is the portrait of an individual set against a particular local background, and thus it captures a person, a moment, a location “as it existed” at a certain point in time. In this respect, its indexicality may of course seem obvious on the surface: Oskar Maria Graf certainly did not need a reminder of the existence of his mother. However, the further we move away from this moment of taking the photograph, passing through the exile history which was to follow, and even beyond this, up to present, the photograph also gains meaning on a more abstract level. In the sense of “strong history,” it is the visual proof not only for the existence but also for the experiences of a certain social layer, a generation and a notion of passing of time. The photograph is thus a strong, not only illustrative, indicator for a history of migration. This history is not only iconographically embodied in the face of the aged woman; it is also conveyed in the itinerary and perception of the photograph as an image and as an object: as much as the wrinkles on her face are traces of her lifespan, the photography itself remains a trace of her existence. As an object, once placed on a wall in New York City, now wrapped up in an archive box in Munich (fig. 8), it speaks of an itinerary of both loss and change. This is how Therese Graf’s photographic portrait became entangled with a history of modernity and migration, and thus gained its global agency. It makes a point for the function of photographs constituting “strong histories” of migration.

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Fig. 8. Portrait of Therese Graf, as kept in the Monacensia Literaturarchiv. Photos: Eva-Maria Troelenberg.

migration, and the global history of museums and collections. She has taught transcultural and Islamic art history as a visiting professor at LMU Munich and at the University of Zurich. From 2011 to 2018 she was head of the Max Planck Research Group “Objects in the Contact Zone – The Cross-Cultural Lives of Things” at Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – MPI. Her work has been awarded with the Heinrich Wölfflin Prize and the Hochschulpreis der Landeshauptstadt München, and she was a fellow of the Munich Centre for Global History.

1. Ulrich Dittmann and Waldemar Fromm, *Oskar Maria Graf. Rebellerischer Weltbürger, kein bayerischer Nationaldichter* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2017), 134–135. For the biography and context of Oskar Maria Graf, see also Ulrich Kaufmann, *O.M. Graf. Rebell – Erzähler – Weltbürger. Studien und Materialien*. Unter Mitarbeit von Detlef Ignasiak (Munich: P. Kirchheim, 1994); Stiftung Buch-, Medien- und Literaturhaus München, ed., *Oskar Maria Graf: Rebell, Weltbürger, Erzähler* (Munich: Stiftung Buch-, Medien- und Literaturhaus, 2017).
2. “Oskar Maria Graf: “Rebel, Global Citizen, Storyteller,” accessed August 15, 2019, https://www.dnb.de/EN/Uebers/Presse/ArchivPM2019/20190327_OskarMariaGraf.html.
3. Oskar Maria Graf, *Wir sind Gefangene. Ein Bekenntnis* (Munich: dtv, 1988).
4. Stiftung Literaturhaus, *Oskar Maria Graf*, 36.
5. *Ibid.*, 72–73.
6. My use of the term “archive” in this context is related to the concept of “archive thinking” as it has been critically expounded in Knut Ebeling and Stephan Günzel, eds., *Archivologie. Theorien des Archivs in Wissenschaft, Medien und Künsten* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2009). However, it does not remain focused on the notion of institutionalized archives, but rather takes into account a more general relation between cultural memory and visual practices of storage and compilation (on this aspect, see Ebeling and Günzel, *Archivologie*, 10–13).
7. Graf’s estate and related documents (as well as his mortal remains) subsequently returned to the city of Munich. The desk, along with a few items from this study, is currently on display in the Monacensia Literaturarchiv’s exhibition, while the archive itself preserves the largest part of his literary legacy. For the purpose of this essay, I have consulted the entire photographic collection as well as archive numbers Bre-OMG1, Dd 41, Dd42, Dd 43, Dd 45, Dd 46. Complimentary to this, I have looked at photographic archive material related to Graf in the Bavarian State Library. These photographs mostly refer to the first visit Graf paid to his home country after the war, yet they also contain a series of photographs which document his New York study: NL Oskar Maria Graf, BSB Handschriftenabteilung, ANA 440. This essay is a first venture into this material, which is partly familiar to readers and biographers of Oskar Maria Graf, but to my knowledge has never been looked at systematically from the point of view of visual studies.
8. The archive material in the Bavarian State Library provides some hints that the Graf family had photographs taken by the Munich studio of Lucian Reiser around this time, yet this is a trace which needs to be followed in a larger study.
9. Oskar Maria Graf, *The Life of My Mother* (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1940); 1st German edition: Oskar Maria Graf, *Das Leben meiner Mutter* (Munich: Verlag Kurt Desch, 1946).
10. Kaufmann, *O.M. Graf*, 41
11. *Ibid.*
12. See, for example, Oskar Maria Graf, *Das Leben meiner Mutter*, 8th ed. (Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage, 2017).
13. It would be an interesting project to look into the relation between Graf’s literary realism and notions of reality and narrative-making as negotiated in the larger photographic archive of his estate; however, this would go beyond the limits of this short essay.

14. Graf, *Leben meiner Mutter* (2017), no page.
15. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1981).
16. On this aspect, see also Peter Geimer, *Theorien der Fotografie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 2009), 136.
17. Sabine Friese-Oertmann shows the nexus between social realism and worker's photography as a transnational phenomenon of rising importance since the mid-nineteenth century; see Sabine Friese-Oertmann: *Arbeiter in Malerei und Fotografie des 19. Jahrhunderts. Deutschland, Großbritannien, USA* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2017), on photography esp. 205–231.
18. Giorgio Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights," *Open 15* (2008 [Italian original 1993]): 90–95; Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," *Menorah Journal* 1 (1943): 69–77.
19. T. J. Demos, *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2013), esp. 3–4.
20. This was the underlying premise of the conference "Encounters: Handling, Placing and Looking at Photographs in Relation to Migration," which I co-organized with Costanza Caraffa and Anna Sophia Messner at Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut in 2017. Results of this conference will be published as a special issue of the *Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*, and as an online exhibition of the Photothek of Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence: "Encounters: Migrants * Photographers * Artists * Activists," accessed September 9, 2019, <https://www.khi.fi.it/en/aktuelles/ausstellungen/2019-06-encounters.php>. This conference was very much premised on the idea of the materiality of photographic images, as put forward in Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds., *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London/New York: Routledge, 2004).
21. See, for instance, Sissy Helff and Stephanie Michels, eds., *Global Photographies: Memory, history, archives* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2018). On the myth of photography as a "universal language," see also Allan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs," *Art Journal* 41, no. 1 (1981): 15–25, esp. 16.
22. For some comprehensive positions on the oeuvre of Lendvai-Dircksen in the context of her time, see Frank Blask and Thomas Friedrich, eds., *Menschenbild und Volksgesicht. Positionen zur Porträtfotografie im Nationalsozialismus* (Berliner Blätter Ethnographische und ethnologische Beiträge, Sonderheft 36, 2005); Franziska Schmidt, "Die Fotobücher von Erna Lendvai-Dircksen zwischen 1931 und 1944," in *Fotogeschichte* 116, no. 30 (2010): 45–58. For her biography and further involvement in racist and eugenicist image-politics, see esp. the contribution by Maureen Grimm, "Leben und Werk," in Blask and Friedrich, *Menschenbild*, 39–48.
23. Erna Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Berlin: Drei Masken Verlag, [1932]).
24. Sekula, *Traffic in Photographs*, 18. See also Andy Jones, "Reading August Sander's Archive," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 4.
25. An early version of the numerous published iterations of this project is August Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit. Sechzig Aufnahmen deutscher Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, with a preface by Alfred Döblin (Munich: Transmare Verlag, 1929). Exemplarily for the vast literature on Sander, see Jones, *Reading August Sander's Archive*; George Baker, "Photography between Narrativity and Stasis: August Sander, Degeneration, and the Decay of the Portrait," *October* 76 (1996): 72–113.
26. Sekula, *Traffic in Photographs*, esp. 18–19. Sekula also puts the work of Sander in relation to other, similar photographic survey projects of the twentieth century, showing that the resonance of Sander's work may be specifically linked to German history, but that its pictorial mode has parallels in other national frameworks.
27. Jones, *Reading August Sander's Archive*, with a reference to John Berger, 5.

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28. Ibid.
 29. On the trickle-down of aesthetic principles of portrait photography into amateur photography of the 1930s and '40s, see Katharina Berger, "Das Porträtfoto zwischen Tradition und Moderne. Lehrbücher für Amateurfotografen in den 1930er bis 1940er Jahren," in Blask and Friedrich, *Volksgeist*, 201–208.
 30. Dittmann and Fromm, *Oskar Maria Graf*, 118–129.
 31. Stiftung Literaturhaus, *Oskar Maria Graf*, 78.
 32. Quoted after Dittman and Fromm, *Oskar Maria Graf* 135–136: "Dazwischen, werktätlich und ohne Drum und Dran und dennoch wie das Krönende schlechthin, hängt meine alte Mutter, und mit ihr vollenden sich gleichsam nach geheimnisvollen Sinn, Zusammenhänge, die mir erst nach schweren Jahren und wie durch einen Zufall offenbar geworden sind" (my translation).
 33. Dittmann and Fromm, *Oskar Maria Graf*, 136.
 34. Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Strong History," in Costanza Caraffa and Tiziana Serena, eds., *Photo Archives and the Idea of Nation* (Berlin/Munich/Boston: DeGruyter, 2015), 321–329, esp. 323.
 35. Edwards, *Strong History*, 321.
 36. Ibid., 325. Anna Sophia Messner's study on German-Jewish female photographers who migrated to Israel/Palestine in the 1930s and '40s works with this notion of nation-building, yet connects it to personal, individual biographies and agencies. While not directly related to the topic of this essay, Messner's work has been an important inspiration for my perspective on photography and migration. See, for instance, Anna Sophia Messner, "Visual Constructions of Otherness in Pre-State Palestine and the early State of Israel: A Female Perspective through the Camera," in Ivana Prijatelj Pavičić, Marina Vicelja Matijašić et al., eds., *Liminal Spaces of Art between Europe and the Middle East* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Publishing, 2018), 114–129.