

FELLOWSHIP REPORT

Name and affiliation: Dr. Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert, Cyprus University of Technology

Purpose of visit: Research at the photographic archive of the Stiftung Arp e.V. Library and Archive

Dates: June 2nd-29th

Main Location: Stiftung Arp e.V. Library and Archive, Wiebestr, 42, 10553, Berlin, Germany

Description of work:

Most archives are seen as independent entities, a “thing”, that might grow and evolve using a specific classificatory system. However, photographic archives, and other knowledge-related databases, are born from a human tendency to impose order and carve distinct areas of homogeneity upon chaos (Kopytoff, 1986). This makes archives a human construction which is governed by social and cultural conventions. These conventions often dictate what is deemed appropriate to preserve, hierarchies of value, and implied narratives through categorization and labeling. An investigation of the *social biography* of an archive – for example how it was created, why, by whom, with what purpose in mind, and how it moved in time and space – can uncover and explore these human conventions.

Furthermore, each photograph in these archives can also have a social biography. One can ask questions like: what was the photographic process like, who took the picture, why, how it was used or exhibited in the past and today, and by whom, how did its meaning shifted due to various “events” or in time and place?

As a case study, I am using the personal photographic albums of artists Jean Arp (1886-1966) and Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1886-1943), that are now kept at the Stiftung Hans Arp und Sophie Taeuber-Arp e.V. Foundation in Berlin. This photographic archive helped me explore not the life of the artists *per se*, but the *life of their photographs*. That is, how the meaning of vernacular photography owned by the artists has shifted over time when used in different social and art historical spheres as well as in various media. Questions about the indexicality (what is it that we see), materiality (printed vs digital) and meaning of photography (for various “actors”) are crucial in this examination.

Activities during the fellowship:

During my stay at the Stiftung Arp e.V. Library and Archive I had the chance to explore the photographic archive of the foundation, books and catalogues related to the work of Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp, and parts of the personal correspondence of Taeuber-Arp. The curator, Maike Steinkamp, was extremely helpful at every stage of this process.



Figure 1: Part of the photographic archive of the Stiftung Arp e.V. Library and Archive

Planned activities after the fellowship:

The results of this study will hopefully be published as a paper publication in a peer-reviewed journal. I have already started working on the paper and I hope to submit it to a journal by September 2016. The paper focuses on what Kopytoff (1986) names as “social biographies” of objects. The first part of the paper traces the social biographies of the Foundation’s archive while the second part focuses on the history, uses and meanings of one of the most popular photograph (actually set of three photographs) that feature Sophie Taeuber-Arp with one of her works (see Figure 2).

The personal correspondence of Sophie Taeuber-Arp shows that Figure 2 was created in 1920 for Tsara’s indented anthology (that never materialized at the time) titled “Dadaglobe”. I also plan to visit the current exhibition “Dadaglobe” at the Modern Museum of Art (MoMA) in New York to examine how the photograph is been used in this exhibition context.

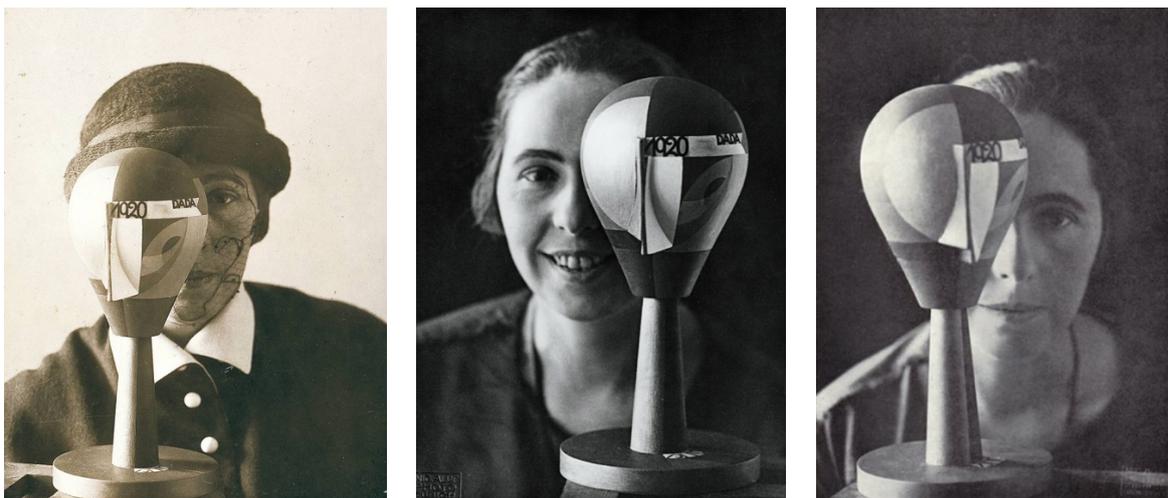


Figure 2: Sophie Taeuber-Arp with Dada Head, 1920, photograph by Nic Aluf. The first two photographs can be found in the archive of the foundation. The third can be found in the Bibliothèque Kandinsky.

References:

Kopytoff, Igor (1986). The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process. In A. Appadurai (ed.). The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective. (pp. 64-91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Acknowledgements:

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