Petra Hardt

Loving at a Distance

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LOVING AT A DISTANCE I

Berkeley

My favorite thing to do is playing with my grandchildren. They live in Berkeley and I live in Berlin. Two times a year I fly via Iceland, Greenland and Canada to see my family in San Francisco. My friends say: You're such a great fit for Berkeley. I disagree: I am neither an aging hippie nor a member of the Jewish or Hispanic community or associated with the university. Aside from my grandchildren I feel alone. For five years, the children lived in Menlo Park south of San Francisco. My friends said: You're such a great fit for Menlo Park. I disagreed: I'm over forty, I don't work for Google/Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, or Facebook, I don't drive a Tesla or a coupé and only occasionally eat vegan. Clichés all around. Structures that are foreign and remain foreign to me. Working equally perfectly both in Berkeley and in Menlo Park. Anyone who describes a unified global culture of the digital age probably never stayed in one place for very long. You need at least a decade to really arrive in a foreign city. I miss Ulrich Beck. »Love at a Distance. The Chaos of Global Relationships« was one of his research areas. In 2011, he and his wife Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim wrote a book by the same name. He died much too young. I would ask him to add to his book. Loving at a distance begins with Skype and continues at airports. The destination airport becomes a Mecca. In both directions. For the emigrants and the family remaining in the home country. Rarely have I experienced foreignness as strongly as in Stavanger, in Norway. In the evening, the natives retreat to their homes, having long had to give up their hospitality in the face of countless Asian and African oil rig workers, along with

the daily onslaught of around two thousand cruise ship passengers. The beautiful city, with Europe's largest and oldest settlement of wood houses, is being overwhelmed by two-hour tourism and the global oil industry. The African and Asian oil workers at the harbor look inward. Tragic scenes play out at Stavanger's airport, as parents say goodbye to their children who are flying back to Asia with their grandparents while the breadwinners stay in Norway. How can you bear it, I wonder. All it takes for me to get stressed out is an interruption in the digital communication with my grandchildren in California. Waiting for the next conversation on Skype or FaceTime, the expected parcel containing the grandchildren's drawings, the next WhatsApp message, the pictures uploaded to the private family Twitter account, the video on Marco Polo are all parts of my daily routine. The different time zones have long since been firmly anchored within the soul. The friends say: You're going to settle in California easily. For a member of my generation that grew up in West Germany I was late in reaching the West Coast of the United States. I was already fifty-six when I arrived in San Francisco for the first time. My friends few to California in the 1970s, hung around in San Francisco or Monterey and drove along Route 66. After graduating high school, I travelled Italy and France. Is there a connection between the personal sentiment of feeling strange in California and my age? Or do the students at UC Berkeley feel the same? On the morning of my arrival in Berkeley in February of 2018, I walk across the campus to the Charles Franklin Doe Library. An exhibition is advertised in the entrance hall: »Reframing aging«, photographs and stories of people between the ages of seventy and ninety-six. The exhibition is sponsored by Ashby Village, a non-profit that brings together elderly people with shared interests from Monday to Friday. I register my novel interest in the elderly with some skepticism. I suspect it is related to my nearing retirement. Only five years before, I had made fun of anti-aging products in a questionnaire for the *Börsenblatt*, the trade journal of the German book trade. Since then, I have watched all five seasons of *Grace and Frankie*, as well as both season of *The Kominski Method,* starring Michael Douglas and Alan Arkin, on Netflix. Looking at the exhibition, I remember my first visit to the campus of the world-famous UC Berkeley a few years ago. I had scheduled a three-hour-window to visit the campus and the campanile. I went to the visitor center, got the necessary maps for my visit, and enquired where I could find the philosophy department. I asked for traces of Adorno. Theodor W. Adorno had established a cooperation with the Berkeley Public Opinion Study Group when he lived in his Santa Monica exile in the 1940s and had travelled regularly from Los Angeles to the University of California in Berkeley. I admit, my wish to see plaques commemorating the Frankfurt School in the philosophy department was a little presumptuous. The friendly student working the reception desk was

unfamiliar with the name Theodor W. Adorno and asked casually: »You are interested in philosophy?«

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WORKING AT A DISTANCE

There are sociological reflections on migration and on tourism. I'm not aware of any noteworthy scientific publications on the nature of business travel. I would like to know more about that, read more about how the perception of distance changes with travelling privately and for business. My visits to my family in California don't fall into the category of migration and are but an indirect participation in it. Therefore, I differentiate between three kinds of travel that I have experienced and that are downright incommensurable to one another: travels to be with family living abroad, for business, and because one would like to get to know a country or relax. I never understood travelling to another country for the sole purpose of relaxation. Which is why I was grateful for having a reason to travel. My job can be summarized as »disseminating contents from literature and science on the global market«. I conducted my first sale of translation rights—the right to translate a book originally written in German into another language and publish it—to the French publisher Gallimard in 1980, as a young employee at a publishing house. The book in question was *Preussische Profile* by journalists Sebastian Haffner and Wolfgang Venohr, which had been published in the non-fiction programme of Athenäum Verlag in Königstein im Taunus. The fact that this important book, which became a bestseller, was published in my first week at the publishing house after graduating university was typical beginner's luck. My open-ended contract of employment at Athenäum and AutorenEdition was for a job in the rights and press departments. AutorenEdition was a collective of authors, »authors publishing authors,« which Athenäum had acquired from the Bertelsmann Group in 1978. It was shut down in 1982. Between 1979 and 1981 it published works by Heinar Kipphardt, Peter Turrini, Uwe Timm and Peter Chotjewitz. On my first day, the publisher put an electric typewriter and two card index boxes on my desk. One box, which was almost twice as long as the other, contained addresses of daily newspapers and broadcasting companies in Germany along with the respective contact persons who were supposed to receive review copies. It contained names like Rudolf Augstein, Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Fritz Raddatz and Joachim Kaiser. The smaller box held names of foreign publishers who were supposed to receive books for review and possible translation into the various languages. I was delighted to

discover the names of the French and Italian publishing houses that published the authors whose works I had studied at university: Gallimard, Grasset, Seuil, Feltrinelli, Einaudi, Mondadori. But on the cards were also handwritten addresses and contact persons of the famous New York-based publishers Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Alfred Knopf, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and Pantheon. They were the American publishers of Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Anna Seghers, and Hermann Hesse. I had just turned twenty-six and thought, now I can write to the editors who work at those renowned houses and offer them books for translation into French or Italian or English! And that was the second time that I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

I had told my classmates at the Frankfurt-Bornheim elementary school: I am going to be a writer, only to experience my outing as a publishing industry employee a year later in third grade. The teacher had explained that Astrid Lindgren took her manuscript to a house—she did not mention the word publisher, let alone the name Rabén & Sjögren—and that there were people at that house who helped her turn that manuscript into a book. That was it! That was what I wanted to do. I ran home and told my mother that I wanted to become a person who helps Astrid Lindgren make a book. With her very own blend of interest in her only child and total incomprehension of its manic reading, she confirmed: »Yes, that's what you shall do.« With that, the question was resolved once and for all. I never thought of becoming a writer again after that. Helping writers publish their works, that was the most exciting thing I had ever heard of. I realized this in third grade.

Since my success wasn't limited to the authors Haffner and Venohr and I was able to conclude numerous other contracts with foreign publishers at the 1980 Frankfurt Book Fair, the publisher relented and expanded the rights department to include the drafting of contracts with authors, translators, and editors, sent me on a training course on copyright law and liberated me from the unloved work in the press department. This also happened for reasons of self-preservation, because I had mailed the debut novel by African author Nuruddin Farah, *Sweet and Sour Milk,* which had been translated from the English by Inge M. Artl and published under the German title *Staatseigentum* (today: *Bruder Zwilling*) by AutorenEdition in the fall of 1980, to every media outlet nationwide with the result that every supplement had printed a short review or at least mentioned the title. Subsequently, the publisher was forced to print a second edition immediately after the book's initial publication and before the bookstores had sold even a single copy. The first print run was 300 copies and the newbie had posted 150 review copies. No one had told me how many copies the first edition consisted of and explained that only a certain percentage of the printed copies could be sent out for review. I was relieved to be losing the press job. It's very tiring work. You talk to a journalist about the respective program for

about sixty minutes and in the end, you still might get bad reviews. You don't have any influence over it. Things are different in the rights department. The translation is made on the basis of a contract that governs the royalties and conditions of the license. A license can be a translation into another language, a film adaptation, a different print edition, an audio book. In 1980, we had no idea of licenses into digital formats. The allure of this craft that is dedicated to the worldwide dissemination of contents has accompanied me throughout the subsequent forty years of my career. The craft appears discreet, most people don't know much about it, but it can have a great global effect. All you need is a text and at best you can sell licenses for translations into one hundred languages, for various film, theater and game formats: A good example to demonstrate the market power of licenses is Joanne K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series. But that didn't exist yet when I first started out in my profession. What has always fascinated me about the work with rights and licenses is the strategic task connected to it. There is content that is only suitable to a certain period of time and there are topics and motifs within literature and the humanities that are timeless. Serving those works and placing them in such a way that they are available in the short or long term, depending on their nature—I felt distinguished by carrying out this special craft. France was—due to my university studies and my very early love for our neighboring country—my favorite market.

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Kolkata

On one of the many transatlantic flights, I read the article »The planet fights back« by David Wallace-Wells in *New York Magazine*. The article says that cities like Kolkata are going to become uninhabitable within the next fifty years. That would be a catastrophe because it is a lovely city. When we were children, we sang the song *Kalkutta liegt am Ganges* by Vico Torriani, in which he sings about his love for a woman named Madeleine and about many rivers, the Ganges, the Nile, and the Congo being the ones outside of Europe. Between 2008 and 2017, I visited Calcutta, which has been known by its Bengali name »Kolkata« since 2001, for business four times. My first impression corresponded to my longing and the resulting expectations. You either flee or you love. I loved. I learned that Kolkata does not lie on the Ganges but on the Hooghly, an estuary arm of the Western Ganges Delta. This confused me. If you have assumed that Kolkata lied on the Ganges for nearly fifty years only to learn that it lies on the Hooghly, which sounds Swiss but is hard to say both in German and in English, you find

yourself disappointed. During the 2007 Book Fair, my colleague Ulrich Breth and I had met the Kolkata-based publisher Naveen Kishore, who was planning on establishing a literary series of German-speaking authors at his publishing house Seagull Books, at the Suhrkamp House in Frankfurt. To that end, he intended to buy translation rights from Suhrkamp. We were thinking of rights for the Hindi and Bengali languages. He wanted world rights for the English language. This was in direct competition with the publishing houses in New York and London and did not attract our interest initially until Naveen Kishore invited us to visit Kolkata and get to know the market and the situation for ourselves. We flew to Kolkata via Delhi and landed at thirty minutes past midnight. Naveen picked us up in his car. That first drive from the airport to the hotel has since become one of the iconic moments of my life. It is the space between what you expect and what you see. That's the nature of traveling and that's why it is so valuable. In 2008, many of the city's poor families were living on the streets. This has changed considerably over the past decade. Sometimes I think that in Kolkata people move from the streets and into houses, while in San Francisco they move out of the houses and onto the streets. The bustle of the Bengali metropolis with the overcrowded busses, the throngs of people on the streets, the open kitchens, and the thousands of smells contrasts with the intense calm found in elsewhere in the city: the house of the great Bengali poet, painter, and composer Rabindranath Tagore, who was the first Asian writer to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Botanic Garden along the Hooghly, and the park surrounding the Victoria Memorial. Time passes more slowly in those places and you can give yourself up to the interplay of light and shadow in the warmth of January. The purpose of this first visit to Kolkata and Delhi was for us get to know the market and the planning of a series of books translated from the German, which was subsequently established in a cooperation between Seagull Books, the Goethe Institute, and Suhrkamp Verlag. Later, other German-language publishers would be joining the cooperation. The Indian book market, with the dominance of the British and American media conglomerates and the many small, independent publishing houses whose productions concern at least 120 different languages, is unique in the world. Yet there are only a handful of translators for Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, languages that have the potential to connect millions of readers, who are able to translate from German. Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddharta* is one of the few works by German authors that have been translated into more than ten Indian languages. There are few European-style bookstores in Kolkata; bookselling mainly happens in stalls by the streets and in College Street, in the university neighborhood in the north of the city. I buy a book whose cover sports the likeness of Thomas Mann. From the copyright I learn that this is a Bengali translation of *Tonio Kröger* and other early stories. The book stalls are lined up along the

university buildings like the stalls of the Parisian bouquinistes along the Seine. Translator Subroto Saha takes me to the famous Indian Coffee House, which has played host to at least as many authors and philosophers as the Café de Flore and the Deux-Magots in Paris. The expected dominance of the British when it comes to architecture, garden design, club life, and sports aside, I am surprised by the diversity of connections between Kolkata and Paris.

A friend, who teaches at the Indian Institute of Management in Kolkata, invites me to dinner at the elegant Bengal Club that used to only admit men as members in the past. Women were allowed when accompanied by men. The Bengal Club was founded in 1927, from 1959 it also admitted Indian citizens as members. We sit in the club and talk about the generational arc. Varun regularly travels from Kolkata to Hyderabad, where his mother lives. He has worked out a system with his siblings whereby they take turns caring for their mother. From Hyderabad he flies to Delhi, where his wife, originally from Kolkata, waits for him. They look after their grandchildren while their children are at work. Like many of my friends my age, I, too, live in between the generations. The multigenerational house of my great-grandparents stood in Wiesloch in Northern Baden, now it floats between Berlin and San Francisco. A cloud in which we love.

Four years after business relations between Suhrkamp Verlag and Seagull Books were established, publisher Naveen Kishore founded the Seagull School of Publishing on April 2, 2012. Every year, about fifty students receive training in editing, production, and sales over the course of three months. International publishing professionals are hired as lecturers. I flew out at the beginning of July, an unfortunate time climate-wise, to give my first lessons. As I sat at the Heineken Bar in transit at Abu Dhabi airport, I thought, why are you doing this to yourself. Surely there is someone in India who can explain contract negotiation and rights selling to the students. But now it was too late to ask this question, because I was sitting at the bar, waiting for my connecting flight to Kolkata, with other itinerant and migrant laborers and a few tourists, drinking a large beer in a country where the locals don't drink alcohol. After landing in Kolkata the driver took me to my hotel, the Tollygunge Golf Club. Created as a facility for equestrian sport by the British in 1895, the club is situated in a very large, green, and quiet park in Kolkata's south. I welcomed the relative freshness. The next morning, I was woken up at 4 a.m. by shouting on the green. A golf tournament had begun this early in the morning, since it became impossible to play sports after eight o'clock. I watched on with interest, even though I didn't know anything about golf. But the dry green, the nocturnal hour, the men dressed in white, the rising sun, the jackal at the edge of the park, the first sounds from the hotel kitchen made me feel cheery and confident that my journey to the school made sense and that I could

be useful. This sensation intensified five hours later in the classroom: mainly women who were dreaming of founding their own publishing house. I gave everything to nurture this dream. »What ideal conditions for publishing you have,« I said to the listeners. »Two languages in any case, English and at least one other Indian language. What a huge market for print and digital content and products!« Together we started to dream about how the young publishers would buy licenses on the global market. How they would turn their own contents into books and eBooks and sell rights to Bollywood and Netflix. Nothing seemed impossible during those two days and my doubts had dissipated. My last night in Kolkata was July 14, Bastille Day. I learned that this was also an important day for Kolkata's society. Gratefully I accepted Naveen Kishore's invitation to accompany him to the French consulate. I knew no one there apart from my host. I thought about the Bastille Day receptions at the French embassy in Berlin and at the consulate in Frankfurt am Main. In both cities I had the home-turf advantage in regard to the bilateral relations between France and Germany. I had worked for that. I had sung the Marseillaise, the German national anthem, and the European Anthem with confidence along with the other guests in Berlin. In Kolkata I didn't know a single line of the Indian national anthem. There were quite a few speeches and Bengali music was played and it took a long time until the delicious buffets were finally opened. I had taken up a strategically advantageous position close to the buffet, which was laden with Indian specialties, earlier in the evening. Since the room we were standing in crammed together was very big, I had failed to notice that the other heavily surrounded buffets were offering a plethora of French cheeses. My worry that I wouldn't be able to put enough on my plate was unfounded, since all the Bengalis who were present pounced on the Camembert, the goat's cheese, the Gruyère, and the other twenty varieties that had been flown in from Paris with no expense spared. A cheese frenzy on July 14. An exception, a feast for the palate, because most supermarkets in Kolkata don't stock cheese from France. Transporting the temperamental goods is too expensive and appropriate storage on site too complicated. The guests with whom I had ended up at a table looked at my lentils and my chicken with pity. They couldn't understand that I hadn't taken any cheese and asked sympathetically if I was lactose intolerant. It was and will be my only Bastille Day in India, due to the climate. On the flight back to Europe, this time via Delhi, I looked out of the airplane window about forty minutes after take-off in Kolkata. I couldn't believe my eyes: snow-covered peaks were protruding from the clouds. I had to look up to the mountain ranges, not down like when flying over the Alps. I sat there, paralyzed, and whispered to my neighbor. »Are those the Himalayas?« He looked up from his laptop briefly and a little irritated. »Of course.« I pressed my face to the window for the next thirty minutes. I had never seen anything more moving.

In March 2017 I taught at the Seagull Publishing School for the last time. I no longer questioned the long flight there. In my mind's eye I saw several generations of publishers dedicating their lives to literary and scientific content and its dissemination. On my granddaughter's birthday, I strolled through the Botanic Garden along the Hooghly with Subroto Saha. He took a video of me in which I congratulated the child. In Kolkata, you are definitely far from California. The many Indian grandparents who flew from Frankfurt to San Francisco with me had to travel for twenty-four hours. I asked some of them why they hadn't taken the route over the Pacific and flown from Delhi to San Francisco directly. They replied that there were no direct flights and explained how cumbersome it was to change planes twice in Asia or take the longer route via Melbourne or Wellington. No, Europe was better. In the video I pretend that I was very close—»close at heart« is the code when loving at a distance.

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Beijing, Shanghai

In the summer of 2004, I touched down in Beijing for the second time in my life. In 1981 I had been allowed to accompany a Hessian delegation from the fur industry, to which my father belonged. Smugly, I had intended to compare my impressions with those of Simone de Beauvoir from 1957. I didn't write a single sentence after my return to Frankfurt am Main. No one had even expected me to, and unlike Simone de Beauvoir I hadn't understood anything about China and had only visited the Forbidden City, the Great Wall, the European city center of Shanghai, and finished the trip in Hong Kong, where the members of the delegation indulged in a consumption binge after ten days of abstinence in the People's Republic of China. During the three days we stayed in Hong Kong we counted the Rolls-Royces that made the colonial character of the metropolis even more blatant.

In 2004, I arrived in a completely different country. Shanghai looked like Manhattan and Beijing, like Los Angeles, was traversed by six-lane highways. The retail chains and luxury boutiques that dominated the city centers were the same as in the big European cities and there was a lively party scene with live music in the evenings. The Chinese government had joined the Universal Copyright Convention in 1995. Now, there was nothing to impede the selling of translation rights in publishing. I went to the book fair on an official mission to represent Suhrkamp's German authors and had a lot of appointments. In addition, I had been invited by Cao Weidong, translator and colleague of Jürgen Habermas, to give a presentation on the

German publishing sector at Beijing Normal University. After the book fair, I visited the publishing houses in Shanghai. I continued this work schedule every other year until 2010, until the rights trade between the Chinese and German publishers was established, business relations were consolidated, and Chinese publishers and editors regularly visited the book fairs in Frankfurt and London. To this day, I find it difficult to define the book market in China in its bipolarity between private industry and state economy. On the one hand, there is censorship on the part of the cultural institutions while on the other there is the Chinese publishers' openness for and interest in European philosophy and literature in conjunction with extraordinary hospitality. This brings the visitor in a certain defensive position. As a trade partner selling rights to German-language works of philosophy and literature in China, I always struggled with commenting on the political system of my host country. The Chinese publishers publish works by European and American philosophers that have enlightening characteristics. The contradiction of complete editions of Critical Theory being available in large print runs and the works of Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rainer Forst being an integral part of the curricula at China's faculties of arts and social sciences in totalitarianism has been with me, fascinated and challenged me all throughout my professional life in the rights trade. The departments of German studies and philosophy at Chinese universities are competency clusters. Together with their students the scholars form teams to translate from other languages. The language competence of those translators is excellent, similar to that at many universities in the United States, at the Sorbonne, in Oxford and Cambridge. Outside of the publishing houses and the universities, however, the understanding for the societal and political connections in China remains a challenge for the trading visitor.

The Chinese publishers have a fortunate penchant for complete editions which is also due to the fact that the length of a text is shortened by about a third when it is translated from German to Mandarin. This rather technical reason is complemented by the care with which the individual work is put into the context of the entire oeuvre. During my time in the rights trade, complete editions of the works of Thomas Bernhard, Paul Celan, Peter Handke, Volker Braun, Hermann Hesse, and Jürgen Habermas were published in China. The deals for the respective collected works were celebrated in style. The dinners were a feast for the senses: Various delicacies were placed on a huge revolving plate at the center of the table. Eight courses à ten plates. I was usually the publisher's dinner partner and with his chopsticks he would place dishes on my plate that I had certainly not been familiar with at the beginning of this millennium. The order of courses and the drinks served alongside them changed from traditionally Chinese to variations of globalization. Where live crabs had stared me in the face when we celebrated

the complete editions of the works by Thomas Bernhard, my Chinese hosts stayed away from anything that could disturb the European guest when it came to the works of Paul Celan. Where there had been copious quantities of Chinese spirits instead of wine as we celebrated the complete editions of the works by Jürgen Habermas, I was offered an excellent red wine of the label »The Great Wall« years later, when it came to the works of Volker Braun. The interior design of the hotels changed as well: from traditional Chinese to an international, exchangeable look. The younger generation in the big cities discovered designer fashion, established their own successful labels, such as Li-Ning, adopted lap dogs and very quickly caught up to the Silicon Valley and artificial intelligence. I don't know any other society that achieved such a transformation in the first two decades of the new century. After the formal dinners, we danced to live music on the hotels' roof terraces.

Beirut, Cairo, United Arab Emirates

The cooperation with the Arab countries began towards in the late 1990s. Except for Libya, the governments of the different Arab countries had joined the Universal Copyright Convention. Frankfurt Book Fair had invited me to the book fair in Beirut. On March 26, 1998 I arrived in the capital of Lebanon. Fifteen years of civil war had ended eight years ago, and I hadn't prepared myself for seeing so many destroyed buildings. I was surprised by the city that was still in the process of being rebuilt and was scared that shots could be fired from any one of the ruins on my drive from the airport to the city center. In the elegant hotel at Beirut's seaside promenade, the Corniche, I stood, a little sheepishly, in the elevator next to women wearing burkas. We couldn't talk to one another. But I also found it difficult to get along with the secular Lebanese women, who all looked like Françoise Hardy and stubbed out their cigarettes on lettuce leaves with an air of nonchalance or elegance. On first glance, there seemed to be insurmountable societal differences to me. On the first night the German guests had been invited to dine with the media tycoon, diplomate, and author Ghassan Tueni. I met the law professor and human rights activist Chibli Mallat, who I am friends with to this day. Sitting at my table were also two philosophy professors from the Christian city of Zahlé in the Beqaa Valley. They knew Suhrkamp's academic non-fiction list better than I did. I was ashamed. But not for long, because the evening was buoyant and sophisticated and outstanding in every regard. The hosts made sure to recommend the Lebanese red wines. In the early hours of the next morning I looked down from the hotel's roof terrace onto the mountains covered in cedars and the snow-covered peaks and the Mediterranean on the other side and thought, Where have I ever seen

anything more beautiful. My misgivings of having to come to Lebanon too early took a step back but only to appear once more when I entered the room at the book fair where I was meant to give my lecture on rights and foreign rights. Fifteen publishers from Lebanon and Egypt had taken seats there and it immediately became clear that they had only come to show reverence to the Frankfurt Book Fair, which was trying to boost business for the German publishing industry after the civil war and to establish a bilateral dialogue with a big collective stand. The publishers listened to me politely, but I got the impression that they would have preferred it had I been a man – as would I have in that moment. The discussion revolved mainly around the implementation of copyright measures, because the publishers reported pirate copies of their productions in other Arab countries. The Arab book market that includes many countries that speak one language is the opposite of the European market with its multilingualism. One could imagine great print runs in the Arab-speaking world but there is a lack of qualified translators from the German, just as there is in other parts of the world. In the discussion that followed the lecture we developed several points for cooperation over the following years for both sides despite a certain gender confusion. The attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 disrupted trade relations in the publishing industries of the Arab and the European countries. They didn't come to a complete standstill, but close. It was only from 2005 and then after 2007, when the Arab countries were the Guests of Honor at the Frankfurt Book Fair, that the number of translations on both sides increased again. In addition, there were invitations to the United Arab Emirates to attend conferences for publishers, authors, and translators in Dubai and to the Abu Dhabi Book Fair, awards with large prize moneys were established for translations into Arabic. I visited several fairs and conferences, since an exchange with the Arab countries was important to me. Getting to know one another takes decades. The hospitality in the Middle East is legendary. I never knew how to reciprocate the hospitality I, as a representative of a medium-sized, independent German publishing house, was met with in the Arab countries. Translator, poet, and cultural mediator Mustafa Al-Slaiman, who works at the Embassy of the UAE in Berlin, is one of the intermediaries who have been advocating for a cultural exchange between Europe and the Arab countries for twenty-five years. It will succeed some time. Exchange programs, I think, more governmental and private exchange programs: for teenagers and older people.

In Cairo, you can't avoid seeing the city's sights, the Nile, and the Giza pyramid complex. After the workshop at the Goethe-Institut in Cairo I took two days off to see the city and the pyramids. This also included a ride on camelback through the nearby desert. While the driver took me to the camel driver and the two men arranged the place where the car would

pick me up again, the camel was kneeling in the sand and ate. I thought that it looked rather old. It was not excited about getting up for just one person. Only when the owner said: »Hey, Champion, it’s business time,« did it let me get in the saddle and stood up. I was the camel’s business time. That’s not something you get to be every day. The camel driver led the animal through the sand and I understood why many people feel drawn to desert landscapes. »This is just like being at the Pacific,« I thought in this floating state. After three hours, we reached the road where the driver was waiting for me. The men exchanged some information, then the owner mounted the camel, which immediately underwent a metamorphosis from a slow and elderly to a young and exceedingly fast animal. I followed them with my eyes for a long time.

LOVING AT A DISTANCE II

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Why is my role as a migrating grandmother constantly occupying my mind? I'm insecure. Try as I might, I can't make up for the sixty years of a grandmother who was born in California. No one expects that. But I want to belong. I'm embarrassed that my grandchildren have a grandmother who wasn't born in California. Even though that is the case for seventy-five percent of their class mates, my wish to blend in seems to be bigger than that of grandparents from all around the world. The two Indian grandmothers who I got to know a bit better, both originally from my beloved Kolkata, are more relaxed about it. They aren't trying to assimilate into American society. Some of the mothers aren't planning on doing so either. Every time I pick up my granddaughter, I meet a mother from the Arabic world. She speaks very little English, but we are able to exchange a few words. She arrives at the school before me every day. She is always the first and watches Arabic movies on her smartphone. She talks to no one but me, because I, as the older, approached her one time. When I said that I was from Germany, she yelled out »Inshallah«, loudly on the playground, which unnecessarily attracted the attention of the other parents. Two outsiders.

The afternoon group of the kindergarteners at the Berkeley Arts Magnet School had a meeting with the mayor of Berkeley, Jesse Arreguín (Democrat), who was born in 1984, in early March 2020. The children ask questions about the Corona virus and about the presidential election. The various departments of the mayor's office introduce themselves briefly. Basically, everyone is concerned with keeping the apartments and houses in Berkeley affordable for the teachers, the hospital employees and to spare them the fate of the people in Mission and Castro. The visionaries in the Silicon Valley design socially relevant products while the people around them are fighting for a suitable cave like in the Stone Age. Machines will only be intelligent once basic human needs are firmly anchored within the global economic cycle and become inalienable. Which shouldn't be all that hard with the ability of artificial intelligence to detect patterns.

The complexity of the Bay Area with the Silicon Valley, with the vast beaches along the Pacific, the redwood forests, the city of San Francisco with the winners of the digital age, their suppliers, the army of service providers, and the smaller cities like Sausalito, Berkeley, Richmond, Oakland, all of which have their very own characters, is confusing and fascinating every time anew. There are millions of individual cases. For ten years, I have been tracing and discarding. It's a constant state of rapprochement.

SARS-CoV-2 has now reached California as well. A cruise ship is held in quarantine in Oakland. I had decided not to go to the Patti Smith concert that is scheduled to take place on March 9, 2020 at Fillmore Hall. I have been looking forward to the concert for months. I wanted to see Patti Smith in San Francisco and not in Berlin, where she performs once a year at the Spandauer Zitadelle. The concert goes ahead, without me. My friend Barbara Katz Mendes, who had booked the tickets for us, is undeterred. Once more, I envy her nonchalance. I take the advice from Germany saying that we can all do something against the Corona virus if we avoid mass events. In Berkeley, events are starting to be cancelled in mid-March 2020, such as the »Career Day« at the Berkeley Arts Magnet School, where I had registered to give courses on careers in publishing in January but was unsure on how to interest students aged between ten and fourteen for those matters. Now the call that relieves me.

The situation is heating up by the day. President Trump has decided to no longer let Europeans into the country. In Europe the situation worsens every day due to the pandemic. We fear that the airlines are going to stop flying to Europe on a regular basis. I am going to leave the USA one month earlier than planned. While we deliberate my return flight, we receive the message that the schools in the Bay Area are going to close. We explain to my granddaughter that we will have to reschedule her sixth birthday party, which she had been looking forward to tremendously. I tell her how I, too, once had to postpone my birthday.

My mother said, we're going to have to reschedule your birthday party, President John F. Kennedy is going to visit Germany. President Kennedy came to Frakfurt am Main on June 25, 1963—the day of my ninth birthday—before going on to make his historic speech in Berlin one day later. He was driven in an open-top Mercedes accompanied by Ludwig Erhard and the Minister-President of Hesse, Georg August Zinn, from Hanau to Frankfurt. My parents and I stood at the riverbank of the Main near the cathedral for two hours before the convoy finally arrived. Then it took about ten seconds and he had moved past the cheering crowd. I didn't really see him, even though my father had lifted me up. My parents, particularly my mother, were enthusiastic fans of the USA and the American way of life. After the war my mother had worked as a nanny for an American family in Heidelberg (unfortunately, she had to quit that job in 1949 due to her illness). That's why she spoke English very well, which was atypical for her generation. »We owe the Americans everything, absolutely everything,« she said. »And De Gaulle and Churchill,« added my father. But my parents were not just enthralled with American politics: the music, the lifestyle—everything was better there, they said. When they were finally to take long holidays in the USA, they were in their mid-forties, and they hung up a large map of the United States in the living room. Every year they added further colorful pins. We ended

up celebrating my birthday on June 26. Like every year, we had strawberry cake, hedgehog slice, Frankfurters, and potato salad, and my father did magic tricks for my six guests and me. My friends gave me crayons and a game called Deutschlandreise, which we then played without pause. The GDR didn't exist in the game, but Lake Titi did. The lake on the board was lined by dark firs. On the evening of November 22, 1963, my mother cried after she learned of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas. »At least you saw him,« she said. I hadn't, but that wasn't important considering the prevailing grief.

We are uncertain. We go into fight mode. We encourage one another. We paint the virus as a monster and my grandson gets out his Star Wars sword. The universe fights back.

That which I have feared the most has happened. The pandemic creates an involuntary separation from those I love. We don't live on the same continent. We can't walk towards each other to so much as wave at each other. We need the help of technology to see one another. Even when we can control it ourselves, loving at a distance is a challenge. When we are being controlled by others, the inventory of approaches one has created fails. I had made experiences with painful separations as a child. That is of no help now. There are 60 years between the separation from my mother then and from the grandchildren now.

Until the age of six I was raised by my father, aunt and grandparents, very rarely would my mother, who had fallen ill with tuberculosis, be present, she was usually at the sanatorium. When she was there, there was crying, and my mother had to sleep a lot and I had to be quiet: a quiet, reading child. Before I learned to read I had, in addition to my many picture books, consumed my parents' illustrated volumes on Naples and Sicily, bibliophilic editions published by the Büchergilde book club. My favorite image was that of a Neapolitan family sitting at the table together, twenty people of different generations. I sat at the table with only my father. My father and the books. Those were the pillars of my childhood. My father was an entertainer, a squanderer of emotions and money. Some days, that compensated for an entire Neapolitan clan. He worked for the trade magazine of an auto club and on the weekends he got to test drive various makes and models. In summer, the two of us would drive to Heidelberg with the top down to see my mother's parents, refugees from Gdansk. Her father had gone mute on account of two world wars and the loss of his homeland and only spoke a few sentences in the evening after enjoying some sweet Rhine wine or Danziger Goldwasser. My grandmother on the other hand exclaimed »the poor child« every time we arrived. My aunt Anita ranged from cheerful to traumatized. She smoked and drank and had a long-term fiancé, whom my mother called a Nazi. I had lived with my grandparents and aunt for one whole year and only seen my father on the weekends until he took me back to Frankfurt. I had almost forgotten my mother during that time.

During the so-called Heidelberg Year the grandparents sent my aunt, who had just turned thirty, and me to church every Sunday. They had already been to early mass. While we were supposed to be attending the service, my grandmother prepared the family lunch. Usually duck, goose, carp or pike, like in Gdansk. Later I was surprised that other families only had these dishes for Christmas. We never made it to the church, as one of my aunt's older colleagues resided on route from Albert-Mays-Strasse to St. Boniface. The ladies drank sparkling wine and smoked cigarettes. I drank orange juice and got to play with the cat. Since the cat didn't like me, I observed the son of Anita's friend from the corner of my eye instead, a medical student who was always immersed in his books. Our non-attendance at mass remained unnoticed, until grandmother and I ran into the chaplain at the weekly market and he expressed surprise at my presence in Heidelberg. When Anita, who had found work as a store clerk at a shop on Heidelberg's main street, which sold expensive furniture and trinkets, came home, there was a heated exchange of words between mother and daughter and I heard my aunt say »Bible thumpers« and grandmother mention the »wrath of God.« The following Sunday, the four of us went to main mass at ten in the morning and lunch was served later. We did not, however, continue this, since one has to be sober to receive communion and my grandfather was unable to stay sober until then on account of his physical and emotional injuries.

After church, my father would come. On Saturdays, he drove to the Black Forest to visit his wife at the sanatorium, and on his way back the next day he stopped to see his child. He stayed the entire day and did not leave for Frankfurt until late, when I was asleep. On Monday mornings, I would stare at my picture books. Sometimes I cried, and when I did, Anita, who had Mondays off because she worked Saturdays, would say: »Don't cry, I'll buy you some chocolate cigarettes.« We went to the bakery and smoked. Anita her Stuyvesants and I my chocolate cigarettes. Which was more difficult than smoking the Stuyvesants, as the paper dissolved in my mouth. I swallowed it along with the chocolate.

After a year of weekend trips my father had had enough and took me back to Frankfurt and my mother to a sanatorium in Bad Homburg. Then Anita came to Frankfurt every Saturday to visit us. After I had gone back to live with my father, she had moved in with her fiancé in Manheim. At four o'clock she stepped off the train onto platform 8. In the summer, she would wear a white skirt suit, a carton of Peter Stuyvesant sticking out of her white leather purse. My father and I would drive to the station an hour before her train arrived. First, we ate Frankfurters, then we went to the AKI. The AKI was a movie theater with continuous showings that changed every twenty-four hours. News and American serials, in which policemen with German shepherds arrested thieves and sex criminals. It was very dark and eerie, the usher

used her flashlight to show the patrons to their unnumbered seats. Homeless people, prostitutes and travelers were sitting in the theater. It smelled like urine and nicotine. I was happy. I had my father all to myself, I had yet to learn to share him with someone else. I had been waiting for my mother for years. When she was finally back for good, she wasn't the mother I had been waiting for. Once, as we were walking to platform 8 after going to the cinema, a steam locomotive was arriving on platform 1. People with a lot of luggage got off that train. My father bent down towards me and whispered: »That's the train from East Germany.« I thought that it was a country where only old people live, since I didn't know that only older citizens were given a travel permit. This impression was intensified by our yearly visit to the parents of my aunt's fiancé, whom my mother also called Nazis. Hilde and Egon were old. At Christmas, they came from Hoyerswerda to Mannheim, where their son worked at a Ford dealership. The fact that they had been Nazis was disclosed only through my mother, but the fact that they looked like everyone who had just gotten off the train on platform 1 was obvious. They were nice to me. Egon had the survived the various political systems as head accountant of a coal mine in the Lausitz region. Hilde sang Christmas songs in a high soprano. At Christmas, they were all with us in Frankfurt: the grandparents from Heidelberg, Anita and Ehrenfried with his parents. I was the only child. And there I sat, among these traumatized people and thought that all of this was completely normal. The quarreling between Hilde and my grandmother Agnes, their husbands' futile attempts at placating them, and my mother's constant blaming of everything on the Nazis. My uncle retreated as often as possible from the group and visited every branch of Ford/General Motors in Frankfurt and Offenbach. First, he took his own Ford to the Americans in Adickesallee, then he drove on to the Gallus neighborhood and to Fechenheim. My mother said to his parents: »That's because you raised him like a Nazi, instead of listening to the Pope's ›Urbi et Orbi‹ blessing on the radio, he goes to see his cars.« My mother didn't really notice that my uncle's family was Protestant and thus didn't put too much importance on the Pope's blessing. For her, it was only for the Nazis or against the Nazis. I withdrew with my new book. My uncle had given me an illustrated children's book edition of the Odyssey. *Penelope became the shining light of my first year of school. Waiting for something, for mother and father, was something I had learned. Waiting twenty years for a man seemed completely reasonable to me. At Christmas 1961, I couldn't know that I would have to access that skill decades later.*

The last four days before my flight back to Germany, which I had chosen myself but which had still come far too early, are sad and hectic. The adults are trying to put on a brave face. It's not just schools that are closing in the Bay Area but also the libraries, the Lawrence

Hall of Science, the children's theater, the playgrounds. My grandchildren and I take back all the books to Contra Costa County Library. »See you soon and stay healthy,« call the librarians. Afterwards, we go to our favorite shop in Berkeley: Mr Mopps' Toy Shop. They sell toys and books. I buy far too much for the grandchildren: eight books, Legos, necklaces, and knickknacks from the cash register à la *»May I have this too?«* Before we say goodbye, they may anything. I would take the whole shop with us if I could. The evening before and the morning of my flight we read all the books aloud, again and again. I'm miserable. I read loudly and with exaggerated cheerfulness.