

## A Drawing Book, Its Materiality, and Afterlife: Approaching Children's Lives in Hamburg through Children's Drawings from the Talmud Torah School

In 1934, seven-year-old Boas Popper mapped the area around his parents' house on Hansasträße in Hamburg in his school drawing book (Figure 1). As noted in faint writing on the cover, Popper was attending class 2b of the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* (Talmud Torah School) at Grindelhof 30 at the time. The school was located about one kilometer from his home in a building right next to the magnificent Bornplatz Synagogue. The building was specially built for the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* by the Jewish community of Hamburg and inaugurated in 1911. On another page of the drawing book (Figure 2), Popper draws the school building with the heading "Hamburg." It can be identified by its characteristic entrance with three doors and the clock on the roof above the entrance. A cactus is shown in one of the windows, with the class number inscribed above it. Popper occasionally confuses the letters "d" and "b", which is typical of novice writers. It is therefore possible that he is marking his own class 2b here.

Popper's drawing book is at the center of this article; in its eighteen pages, we find a material document of Jewish childhood in Hamburg in approximately 1934, authored by a child. The drawing book represents an artifact of the antisemitic exclusion and annihilation of Jewish life in Hamburg during National Socialism. Popper and his family left Germany for Palestine in 1936 due to the increasing threat to the family's lives. Two more drawing books from second grade, a copybook from first grade, and a geography notebook from third grade authored by Popper have been preserved.<sup>1</sup> They were all created between 1933 and 1935 at the

1 Archive of the *Israelitische Töchter Schule* Memorial and Educational Center Hamburg: o8:H22 (Zeichenheft von Boas P[...], Klasse 2b); o8:H12 (Zeichenheft von

*Talmud-Tora-Schule* in Hamburg. Today, they are part of the collection of the *Israelitische Töcherschule* (Jewish Girls' School) Memorial and Educational Center. This includes further writing and drawing books, as well as letters from former pupils of Jewish schools in Hamburg and photographs of school life, mainly from the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>2</sup>

In this contribution, I argue that the drawing books from the Hamburg Jewish schools are a valuable and neglected archival collection which hold enormous potential for researching Jewish children's lives in the 1930s in Hamburg and beyond. As mentioned, to illustrate my argument, I present a source commentary of Popper's drawing book from 1934. Particularly, I focus on methodological challenges associated with children's drawings as a historical source. I proceed in three steps. First, I consider children's drawings as sources within the history of children and childhood and its specifics. I then outline my methodological approach to the drawings of Popper in the context of analytical approaches to material culture. In the third part of the contribution, I present my analysis, unfolding multiple layers of meaning mediated by the artifact. I conclude with some thoughts on the value of children's drawings as a historical source.<sup>3</sup>

### *Approaching Children's Lives within the History of Children and Childhood with Drawings*

Children's drawings as sources for historical research have received relatively little attention as well as criticism, but they have also been associated with the hope of including marginalized voices in the historiography of children and childhood. Although numerous publications have appeared since the 1970s and the history of children and childhood has become a "vibrant, dynamic field," it still needs to assert its importance

Boas P[...], Klasse 2b); o8:H49 (Heimatkunde Boas P[...] 3b), o8:H50 (Zeichenheft für BOAS P[...] 1.); o8:H51 (Zeichenheft für BOAS P[...]TALMOTOR KISSE 2d), page numbers of the scan are given in brackets after the reference.

<sup>2</sup> Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule* Memorial and Educational Center Hamburg, Dokumentensammlung, o8, accessed on April 15, 2023. See also: <https://jewish-history-online.net/exhibition/childrens-worlds#home>, accessed September 14, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> I wish to thank Dr. Anna von Villiez, head of the *Israelitische Töcherschule* Memorial and Educational Center Hamburg, for her support. Many thanks also to Tova Harety for helping me with the Hebrew writing. I would especially like to thank Dr. Edel Sheridan-Quantz for the careful editing and her support in researching the biography.

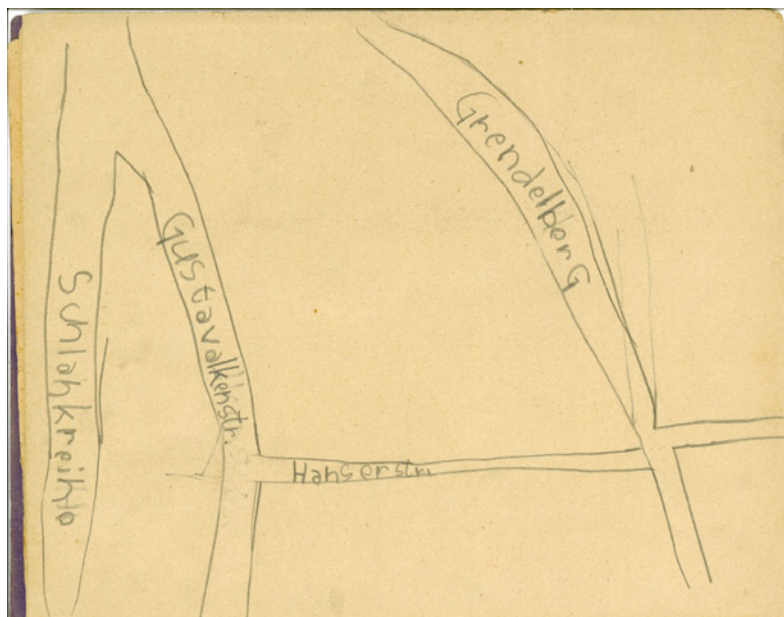


Figure 1 and 2: Source: Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H22 (scans 6 and 7).

for general history writing.<sup>4</sup> The complexity of this debate became evident in an exchange in the *American Historical Review* in 2020 prompted by Sarah Maza. In her article, Maza questioned the possibility of researching children's agency and the entanglement of children's history with broader historical themes.<sup>5</sup> Among the numerous convincing critical responses was that of Steven Mintz, who, under the title "Children's History Matters," advocated strongly for the possibility of children's history and pointed to a multitude of studies that already discussed Maza's "polemical" considerations in greater detail.<sup>6</sup> These studies on the history of children and childhood examine the construction of childhood embedded in its specific historical, cultural, and social constellations and thus provide an analytical approach to historical events and the development of society in general.<sup>7</sup> Several researchers especially emphasize the need to make children visible as social and historical agents in these constellations in order to obtain a multi-perspective picture of the past.<sup>8</sup> They also call for recognition of the complexity of children's lives, their agency embedded in power relations, and constellations of vulnerability.<sup>9</sup> This is all the more important when it comes to children's lives under

4 Steven Mintz, "Children's History Matters," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1286–92, 1286. See for example: Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2001); Meike Sophia Baader, Florian Eßer and Wolfgang Schröer (ed.), *Kindheiten in der Moderne. Eine Geschichte der Sorge* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2014); Martina Winkler, *Kindheitsgeschichte. Eine Einführung* (Göttingen: Vahlenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2017).

5 See: the articles of Sarah Maza, Steven Mintz, Nara Milanich, Robin P. Chapdelaine, Ishita Pande, Bengt Sandin, in *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1260–322.

6 Mintz, "Children's History Matters," 1291.

7 See: Paula Fass (ed.), *The Routledge History of Childhood in the Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 9; Meike Sophia Baader, "Kindheit," in *Historische Bildungsforschung. Konzepte – Methoden – Forschungsfelder*, ed. Gerhard Kluchert et al. (Bad Heilbrunn: utb, 2021), 149–60.

8 See: Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. 2nd edition (Cambridge: Medford, 2018), 1–11; Mona Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap: Caveats for Historians of Children, Youth, and Education," *History of Education* 45, no. 4 (2016): 446–59.

9 See: Nara Milanich, "Comment on Sarah Maza's 'The Kids Aren't All Right,'" *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1293–95; Meike Sophia Baader, "Vulnerable Kinder in der Moderne in erziehungs- und emotionsgeschichtlicher Perspektive," in *Vulnerable Kinder. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen*, ed. Sabine Andresen et al. (Wiesbaden: VS, 2015), 79–101; Florian Esser, Meike S. Baader, Tanja Betz and Beatrice Hungerland (ed.), *Reconceptualising Agency and Childhood: New Perspectives in Childhood Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

persecution and during war and genocide because these extreme conditions affect sociality and humanity, as well as concepts about normative childhood, protection, and the care of children.<sup>10</sup>

Although the source problem can divert from other theoretical issues of the history of children and childhood, the difficulty remains that sources authored by children are limited, rather unconventional, and methods of interpretation are still underdeveloped.<sup>11</sup> Scholars already recapture children's lives and perspectives through a variety of materials authored by adults by "reading sources 'against the grain,'" a proven method in feminist analysis.<sup>12</sup> However, I am interested in documents authored by children themselves and their potential for researching historical children's lives. Young, marginalized children left few sources behind due to a lack of time, material, or skill. In situations like forced displacement and war, it is even more difficult for the youngest to create sources and leave them behind because their agency is particularly determined by violence.

One of these key sources authored by children is the drawings. Children's drawings were increasingly produced from 1800 onwards.<sup>13</sup> In research, they served as "historico-philosophical figure[s]" to form "a uniformly structured universal history" from prehistory to the modern day, or children's drawings were embedded in logics of pedagogical and psychological control of child development.<sup>14</sup> Less recognized so far is the significance of children's drawings as cultural products which shed light on broader

10 See, for example: Wiebke Hiemesch, "Witnessing Children's Lives in Nazi Concentration Camps: Oral Testimonies and Children's Drawings," in *Children and Youth at Risk In Times of Transition*, ed. Baard Herman Borge, Elke Kleinau, and Ingvill Constanze Ødegaard (Berlin and Boston: DeGruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 67–89; Wiebke Hiemesch, *(Über-)Lebenserinnerungen. Kinder im Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück* (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2017); Leora Auslander and Tara Zahra (eds.), *Objects of War: The Material Culture of Conflict and Displacement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018); Mischa Honeck and James Marten, *War and Childhood in the Era of the Two World Wars* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

11 Sarah Maza, "Getting Personal with Our Sources: A Response," *The American Historical Review* 125, no. 4 (2020): 1317–22; Nell Musgrove, Carla Pascoe Leahy, and Kristine Moruzi (eds.), *Children's Voices from the Past: New Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

12 Gleason, "Avoiding the Agency Trap," 452.

13 Barbara Wittmann, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien. Eine Kultur- und Wissensgeschichte der Kinderzeichnung, 1500–1950* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2018).

14 Barbara Wittmann and Christopher Barber, "A Neolithic Childhood: Children's Drawings as Prehistoric Sources," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 63/64 (Spring/Autumn 2013): 125–42, 128 and 141.

questions of society and history.<sup>15</sup> This also includes the fact that there are just a few systematized collections of children's drawings; they are far more frequently preserved unsystematically or even preserved through private initiative.<sup>16</sup> As Boas Popper's drawing book shows us, the fact that children's drawings are rarely found in public archives does not mean that they do not exist—undiscovered in boxes or private collections. This reminds us once again to be aware of hegemonic processes of archiving and normative judgments about what is considered to be a historical source.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us to some considerations about the researcher's interpretation. Children's drawings hold a special value for researching children's perspectives because as visual and aesthetic products, they do not rely on verbal expression; thus, they do not presuppose the skill of writing and language.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, as with other visual materials, drawings are elusive in a specific way. Images inspire varying interpretations and feature ambiguity and simultaneity. Moreover, the visual language of children differs from that of fine art, paintings, and photography. Visual Studies and Visual History methods have strengthened the understanding of images as sources and developed methodologies to analyze visual culture in the broadest sense; nonetheless, this has been centered on adults.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, such research is limited when analyzing children's drawings. Both scholars in the field of visual studies and scholars in the field of contemporary children's drawings emphasize the need to analyze visual sources in their historical and cultural context because of the ambiguity of visual material.<sup>20</sup>

15 Wittmann and Barber, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien*, 187.

16 See for an exception: the collection of 70,000 children's and youth's drawings at Stiftung Pestalozzianum (Zurich, Switzerland), accessed on April 12, 2023, <https://sammlungen.pestalozzianum.ch/index.php/informationobject/browse?view=table&sort=lastUpdated&repos=477&onlyMedia=1&topLod=0>. See also: Wittmann, *Bedeutungsvolle Kritzeleien*, 187 FN 1.

17 Rodney G.S. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria: The Journal of the Association of Canadian Archivists* 61 (2006): 215–33; Harry Hendrick, "The Child as Social Actor in Historical Sources: Problems of Identification and Interpretation," in *Research With Children: Perspectives and Practices*, 2nd edition, ed. Pia Christensen and Allison James (New York: Routledge, 2010), 36–61.

18 See, for example: Sara Eldén, "Inviting the Messy: Drawing Methods and 'Children's Voices,'" *Childhood* 20, no. 1 (2012): 66–81.

19 See: Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); Gerhard Paul (ed.), *Visual History. Ein Studienbuch* (Göttingen: Vadenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006).

20 For approaches on children's drawings in qualitative research, see: Mirja Kekeritz and Melanie Kubandt (ed.), *Kinderzeichnungen in der qualitativen Forschung. Herangehensweisen, Potenziale, Grenzen* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2022).

With regard to the contextualization of children's drawings, I will highlight three key aspects: The *first aspect* is to shed light on the production context and the child as a drawing actor (for example, the stimulus to draw, the material provided, or any interaction while drawing, as well as art education and the social-cultural environment).<sup>21</sup> The *second aspect* is researchers posing questions about the artist's biography and their own interpretation of their drawings.<sup>22</sup> The *third aspect*, as some studies have emphasized, is that the drawings' presentation, reception, and preservation are of significance in their own right. This includes the drawings' involvement "as social objects" in intertextual entanglements, political discourse, and their contribution to the production of meaning.<sup>23</sup>

These three aspects are especially relevant to the study of historical drawings because we cannot control or observe the process of historical production. We can no longer ask the children. Often, even the identity of the author and the provenance of the drawings remain unclear. Researchers must therefore deal with gaps in the information available. As Margaret R. Higonnett stresses, "children's visual testimonies have been privileged as authentic and reliable. Icons of Innocence, children have been thought to be truth tellers..."<sup>24</sup> But, the reproduction of supposedly "authentic" children's voices is an illusion.<sup>25</sup> In conclusion, children's drawings are created and preserved in social and cultural environments, which is why they need contextualization and interpretation within source criticism.<sup>26</sup>

21 See: Bettina Uhlig, "Nele und das Krokodil. Die hermeneutische Bildanalyse als Methode zur Erforschung kindlichen Zeichens," in *Kinderzeichnungen in der qualitativen Forschung. Herangehensweisen, Potenziale, Grenzen*, ed. Mirja Kekeritz and Melanie Kubandt (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2022), 59–102.

22 See: Derek Bland, "Analysing Children's Drawings: Applied Imagination," *International Journal of Research and Method in Education* 35, no. 3 (2012): 235–42; Ioana Literat, "A Pencil for Your Thoughts': Participatory Drawing as a Visual Research Method with Children and Youth," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 12, no. 1 (2013): 84–98.

23 Claudia Aradau and Andrew Hill, "The Politics of Drawing: Children, Evidence, and the Darfur Conflict," *International Politics Sociology* 7 (2013): 368–87, 368.

24 Higonnet, "Child Witnesses: The Case of World War I and Dafur," *PMLA* 121, no. 5 (2006): 1565–76, 1574.

25 Spyros Spyrou, "The Limits of Children's Voices: From Authenticity to Critical, Reflexive Representation," *Childhood* 18, no. 2 (2011): 151–65; Sirkka Komulainen, "The Ambiguity of the Child's 'Voice' in Social Research," *Childhood* 14, no. 1 (2007): 11–28.

26 Jack Hodgson, "Accessing Children's Historical Experiences through Their Art: Four Drawings of Aerial Warfare from the Spanish Civil War," *Rethinking History* 25, no. 2 (2021): 145–65, 148.

Despite these challenges, there has been a growing body of studies on children's drawing collections from different constellations of oppression, war, and genocide from the twentieth century. Nicolas Stargardt's early work on the drawings from Theresienstadt Ghetto identifies what can be gained from engagement with children as "historical subjects."<sup>27</sup> Sarah Kass explores the Theresienstadt drawings' meaning for commemorative culture.<sup>28</sup> Another well-known collection of drawings made by school children from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) has been the subject of different historical publications.<sup>29</sup> Drawings made by children who survived the Darfur Conflict were accepted as contextual evidence in 2007 at the International Criminal Court. They form the subject of Claudia Aradeau and Andrew Hill's article focusing on "how children's drawings are both differentially produced, and productive of difference and ambivalence, in the 'truthfulness' of conflict."<sup>30</sup> Alexis Artaud de La Ferrière considers the use of children's drawings in propaganda and as testimonies of wars and conflicts, referring to the reporting of the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962). He points out once again that the drawings not only depict history but are "themselves historical traces."<sup>31</sup>

27 Nicholas Stargardt, "Children's Art of the Holocaust," *Past and Present* no. 161 (November 1998): 191–235, 228. Some 4,387 drawings and paintings created in art classes held by the artist and teacher Friedel Dicker-Brandeis in the children's homes of Theresienstadt Ghetto were recovered after liberation, accessed on September 8, 2023, <https://www.jewishmuseum.cz/en/collection-research/collections-funds/visual-arts/children-s-drawings-from-the-terezin-ghetto/>.

28 Sarah Kass, *Kinderzeichnungen aus dem Ghetto Theresienstadt (1941–1945): Ein Beitrag zur Erinnerungs- und Vermächtniskultur* (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2015).

29 Anthony L. Geist and Peter N. Carroll, *They Still Draw Pictures: Children's Art In Wartime From The Spanish Civil War to Kosovo* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Christian Roith, "Trotz allem zeichnen sie: Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg mit Kinderaugen gesehen," *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 1–2 (2009): 191–214; Hodgson, "Accessing Children's Historical Experiences."

30 Aradau and Hill, *The Politics of Drawing*, 368.

31 Alexis Artaud de La Ferrière, "The Voice of the Innocent: Propaganda and Childhood Testimonies of War," *History of Education* 43, no. 1 (2014): 105–123, 122.



## Methodology Notes

In the next section, I discuss Boas Popper's drawing book as a historical trace within an "object-driven" case study.<sup>32</sup> The interdisciplinary field of material culture provides me with a methodological reference.<sup>33</sup> Thus, I address the drawing book as a child's cultural artifact, as material remains of a past aesthetic practice of a child's engagement with the world.<sup>34</sup> The drawings reveal insights into the everyday life of the child, Boas Popper, and the way in which he related to the changing world of the 1930s through his drawings. My analysis is guided by the book's materiality and its eighteen colorful pages.

The analysis proceeds in several steps. I begin by describing the drawings' materiality, signs, and representations. In doing so, I elaborate on assumptions about specific practices of their production and use, the conditions of origin as well as the books "biography," which are elaborated through further studies and documents.<sup>35</sup> Following the presentation of Boas Popper's *biographical fragments*, I illustrate three dimensions of historical contextualization using selected drawings created by the boy, as well as further material. I discuss the drawings focusing on the aspects of the *Living Space of an Urban Child*, *School Life between Tradition and Reform*, and *Testimonial Object*. I aim to unfold different layers of meaning through which children's drawings can be addressed. In doing so, I make no claim to completeness but rather understand this source commentary as a tentative movement in which more questions arise than can be answered.<sup>36</sup>

32 Karen Harvey, "Introduction: Historians, Material Culture and Materiality," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–26, 2–3.

33 See: Chris Tilley et al (eds.), *Handbook of Material Culture* (London: Sage, 2013).

34 Bettina Uhlig and Lis Kunst, "Kinder zeichnen: Einführung," in *IMAGO. Zeitschrift Für Kunstpädagogik* 7 (2018), 3–11; Wiebke Hiemesch, "Kinderkulturen und ihre Materialitäten Überlegungen zu Artefakten als Gegenstand von Forschung und historischem Lernen," in *Historisches Lernen und Materielle Kultur. Von Dingen und Objekten in der Geschichtsdidaktik*, ed. Sebastian Barsch and Jörg van Norden (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2020), 91–110.

35 With these steps I refer to: Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31, no. 2 (1999): 169–78; Manfred Lueger and Ulrike Froschauer, *Artefaktanalyse. Grundlagen und Verfahren* (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2018); Thomas Meier, Michael R. Ott, and Rebecca Saue (eds.), *Materiale Textkulturen. Konzepte – Materialien – Praktiken* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015).

36 This analysis follows an article examining two drawings of an eleven-year-old girl who attended the art classes of Julo Levin at the Private Jewish Primary School in

## *Layers of Meaning Bound within the Book*

### *Materiality*

Holding the drawing book in my hands in March 2023, I immediately noticed its yellowed and faded cover. The spine was broken. Decades of storage had left their mark on the material. The book, produced by the Peka company, reminded me of my own copybooks carried in my school-bag when I was young. The front cover reads “*Zeichenheft. Heft 2 mit Seiden für ... Klasse ...*” (Drawing book: Number 2 with interleaves for ... Class ...). Boas Popper probably did not fill in his name and class himself, the writing seems practiced and more likely to have been done by an adult hand: “Boas Popper”, “2b”, “1934.”

Within the covers (18.5 x 22 centimeters) are three double pages of unbleached paper with thread binding. A double page is also loosely inserted in the middle of the book. All of the pages are filled with drawings. Boas Popper drew contours in lead pencil, some of which he colored in. The use or absence of color directs my attention to the details. He obviously attached great importance to individual elements and used them to tell stories in his drawings. Objects and persons are represented with individualized details, and small scenes are illustrated. Boas Popper sometimes placed Hebrew or Latin script alongside the drawings to caption them or to mark objects. This writing seems less practiced and shadows of erased letters can occasionally be seen, indicating mistakes or incorrect placement. The motifs from Boas Popper’s drawings can be classified under the following themes: Urbanity and traffic, buildings and housing, Jewish culture and religion, children’s literature and fairy tales, biology and fauna, and everyday scenes and personal objects. Some of the drawings are reminiscent of cataloging, like those of fruits and ships which he labels in German and Hebrew. Other drawings depict buildings (school), spatial relationships from Boas Popper’s immediate surroundings (street maps), or scenes from urban life, Talmudic stories, or literature for children.

The material characteristics of Boas Popper’s drawing book indicate its institutional school context. It can be assumed that the choice of subject followed the teacher’s input. Some of the drawings seem to be guided in form or modeled on an example (for example, a chart of fruit or the street

Düsseldorf in 1937. Her fate was unknown, so I read the drawings as “traces” and followed them in the context of the deportation and murder of Jewish children in Düsseldorf and postwar remembrance: Wiebke Hiemesch, “Tracing the Absence of Children’s Voices – Artefacts of Children’s Persecution under the National Socialist Regime,” *Paedagogica Historica* 58, no. 3 (2022): 329–48.

map); others could have been created freely. This raises questions about the context and drawing practice of Boas Popper. Who was the boy? What inspired him to draw, and which choices did he make? Addressing his drawing book as a cultural artifact, what do we learn about his historical experience as a Jewish child in Hamburg in 1934? What is the drawings' history up to today? How did their uses and meanings change?

### *Biographical Fragments*

Boas Popper was born in 1927 as the third child of a middle-class Jewish family.<sup>37</sup> The family lived on Hansastrasse, which Boas mapped in one of his drawings.<sup>38</sup> His mother Charlotte Popper (born Lewinsky) was born in Preußisch-Stargard in 1898. She grew up in a religious parental home. Her father was a textile merchant. She studied mathematics in Königsberg and became involved in a Zionist youth association. In Hamburg, she worked as a mathematics teacher.<sup>39</sup> Here, Charlotte Lewinsky met Dr. Erich Benjamin Popper, who was born in Elmshorn in 1898. He was a dentist and took part in the First World War.<sup>40</sup> Charlotte and Erich married in 1923, one and two years later, Popper's two older sisters were born.<sup>41</sup> At least one of the sisters attended the *Israelitische Töchterchule* in Hamburg.<sup>42</sup> The family's life in Hamburg seems to have been influenced by Orthodox Judaism. Looking back, the father criticized himself for searching for emotional support in religion and requiring the same from his wife.<sup>43</sup> When Boas Popper created the drawings, his father had already made plans to leave Hamburg for Palestine, to escape the increasing antisemitic persecution in Germany. He emigrated at the latest in 1935, and Popper, his mother, and sisters followed in 1936.<sup>44</sup> Popper's

37 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 213-13 Landgericht Hamburg-Wiedergutmachung, Nr. 37766.

38 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 522-1 Jüdische Gemeinden, Nr. 992 b.

39 "Charlotte Popper geborene Lewinsky," in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland. Selbstzeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte im Kaiserreich*, ed. Monika Richarz (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1979), 427-34.

40 Anne Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration – Das Deutsch der 20er Jahre in Israel. Teil I: Transkripte und Tondokumente* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1995), 123.

41 Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 351-11 Amt für Wiedergutmachung, Nr. 20574.

42 Anne Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration – Das Deutsch der 20er Jahre in Israel. Teil II: Analysen und Dokumente* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000), 69.

43 Anne Betten and Miryam Du-nour (eds.), *Wir sind die letzten fragt uns aus. Gespräch mit den Emigranten der dreißiger Jahre in Israel* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1995), 237-38.

44 Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration*, 123-34. Erich Popper was officially deregistered from his residence in Hamburg in April 1936, the rest of the family in May 1936, Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 522-1 Jüdische Gemeinden, Nr. 992 b.

mother, father, and one of his sisters gave an interview in 1990 for a research project on the German language of emigrants of the 1930s in Israel.<sup>45</sup> Around 1955, his mother wrote a report about Jewish life in her hometown, Preußisch-Stargard.<sup>46</sup>

Popper's everyday life in Hamburg was evidently characterized by Orthodox communal Jewish life, as well as by middle-class life in the Hanseatic city. One of his drawings from 1934 is titled "*Wie bei meinem Vater [...] Kinderarzt*" (As in my father's [...] paediatric practice), showing a dentist attending to a patient in the dentist's chair.<sup>47</sup> He captioned another drawing "*Meine Ren Uhr*" (My Ren Clock) and depicted the clock's front and mechanism in all its detail.<sup>48</sup> This was a potential foreshadowing of Popper's later educational career—he became a successful engineer and registered numerous patents.<sup>49</sup> As I elaborate in the following paragraphs, motifs of Hanseatic urban life, middle-class childhood, and Jewish religion coexist in his drawings.

### *The Life Space of an Urban Child*

In his 1934 drawing book, Popper draws scenes of urban Hanseatic children's worlds that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. In particular, he seems to focus on industrialization, technification, the density of space, as well as increased mobility due to the expansion of transport routes and vehicles. This can be illustrated by Popper's drawing of the Hamburg electric tram (Figure 3). The first Hamburg tramline opened at the end of the nineteenth century, and the system was expanded in the early twentieth century. A map from 1910 shows that an over-ground line was also planned near the Poppers' home on Hansastrasse.<sup>50</sup> It can therefore be assumed that the tram was part of the boy's everyday life. He draws it with a variety of details, both as a technical object (for example, the overhead power line, the coupling) and as a scene of public life. Two uniformed conductors are standing on the boarding platform.

45 Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration*.

46 "Charlotte Popper geborene Lewinsky," in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland*, 427–32.

47 Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H12 (5).

48 Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H12 (10).

49 Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration*, 76–77.

50 Railway and tramway map of Hamburg and Altona, about 1910, University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin, accessed on April 5, 2023, [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/baedeker\\_n\\_germany\\_1910/hamburg\\_rail\\_1910.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/historical/baedeker_n_germany_1910/hamburg_rail_1910.jpg).

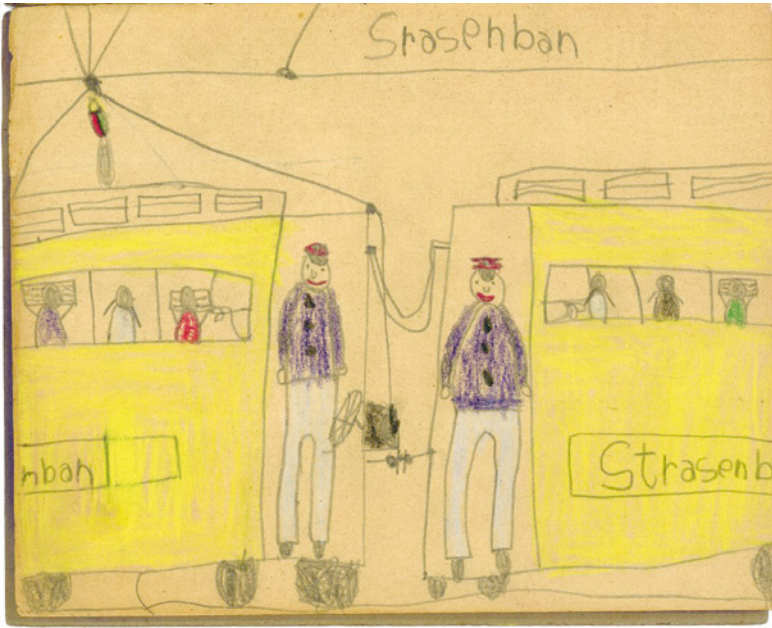


Figure 3: Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H22 (3)

Inside the tram, people are seated, probably on their way to work, reading newspapers. The tram also appears in other drawings and written sources by children from the collection of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*. Esther Wigderowitsch, a student at the girls' school in 1930, writes about her experience of the dense "crowds" on the tram and the busy conductors.<sup>51</sup> She was particularly impressed by the advertisements on it, an expression of the expanding consumer culture. Metropolitan traffic and the urban infrastructure evidently also held a high attraction for Popper; there are further drawings in his drawing book of various vehicles, boats, and street maps. A comparative analysis with other boys' and girls' drawings from the collection could give indications of general or more gender-specific motifs. Referring to school documents, it could be questioned whether these motifs were inspired by a specific curriculum covering the subject of technology in both the girls' and boys' schools.

Another possible connection could be that the motifs arose in a pedagogical setting inspired by the so-called "*Großstadtpädagogik*" (metropolis

51 "Niederschriften Esther Wigderowitsch 7a," H48, Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*.

pedagogy), as similar motifs also appear in other drawing books in the collection.<sup>52</sup> Contrary to the pessimistic view of big cities as specifically threatening and harmful for children, at the beginning of the twentieth century, educators in Germany and Austria integrated the urban environment into their pedagogical thinking and emphasized the value of the city as a learning environment. Teachers took up themes like technical progress, consumption, and traffic and aimed at autonomous and thus democratic participation in the city as a public space. It is thus possible that the drawings were created with reference to learning materials or after excursions. Such excursions to urban sites had taken place at the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* during the Weimar Republic and in the years immediately after 1933.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, excursions to the nearby rural area of the Luneburger Heath were carried out. Popper could have taken part in such excursions, thereby gaining inspiration for his drawings of typical northern German rural housing, in addition to the portrayals of his urban surroundings.<sup>54</sup> These drawings could thus give indications of both a pedagogical program at the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* which valued nature and urban life in the city as a pedagogical environment. The former might also be seen in the context of a reform of pedagogical ideas at the beginning of the twentieth century, where the retreat from urbanity into nature was advocated.<sup>55</sup> It would be worthwhile to differentiate initial assumptions made here about (gender-specific) teaching concepts by drawing on further sources from children's and school documents in the future in order to place them in the context of a history of pedagogical concepts and Jewish education in Germany in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup>

52 For this paragraph, see: Håkan Forsell, "Die großstädtische Kindheit," in *Kindheiten in der Moderne. Eine Geschichte der Sorge*, ed. Meike S. Baader, Florian Eßer and Wolfgang Schröer (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2014), 190–225. Among them is a copybook book with a short text and a drawing of the Hamburg tramway by Popper's sister, Briefheft an Lili Traumann, Archive of the *Israelitische Töchter-schule*, 02:Ho1.

53 Randt, *Talmud-Tora-Schule*, 131–34.

54 Archive of the *Israelitische Töchter-schule*, 08:H12 (12/14).

55 Forsell, *Großstädtische Kindheit*, 194–5; Meike Sophia Baader, *Erziehung als Erlösung. Transformation des Religiösen in der Reformpädagogik* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2004).

56 See: Ingrid Lohmann, *Erziehung und Bildung*, in *Hamburger Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte*, (September 22, 2016), accessed June 12, 2023, <https://dx.doi.org/10.23691/jgo:article-215.de.vi>; Andreas Hoffmann, *Schule und Akkulturation. Geschlechtsdifferente Erziehung von Knaben und Mädchen der Hamburger jüdisch liberalen Oberschicht, 1848–1939* (Münster: Waxmann, 2001); Elke Kleinau, *Bildung und Geschlecht. Eine Sozialgeschichte des höheren Mädchenschulwesens in Deutschland vom Vormärz bis zum Dritten Reich* (Weinheim: Deutscher Studienverlag, 1997).



Figure 4: Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H22 (8)

On another page (Figure 4), Popper draws a street scene. We see the fronts of multi-story houses. Doorsigns indicate that several families live here. Another sign points to the entrance of the toy shop, whose display can be seen through the open door. In another open window, a person is airing textiles. People are walking on the street, perhaps they are in a rush to catch the train waiting between the houses. Here, Popper draws a condensed panorama of urban life which we also know from the study *Der Lebensraum des Großstadtkindes* (The Life Space of the Urban Child) by Martha Muchow.<sup>57</sup> Muchow's pioneering work from the 1930s describes the everyday life of working-class children in the Barmbek district of Hamburg.<sup>58</sup> She gives a dense picture of how children moved in urban

<sup>57</sup> Martha Muchow was a Hamburg psychologist and educator. She obtained her doctorate at Hamburg University and worked with William Stern. After Stern's exclusion from the University in April 1933, Muchow was also expelled. She committed suicide in September 1933. The study was published posthumously in 1935 by her brother. Martha Muchow and Hans Heinrich Muchow, *Der Lebensraum des Großstadtkindes*, new edition (Weinheim: Juventa, 2012).

<sup>58</sup> Further studies followed: Imbke Behnken, *Urbane Spiel- und Straßenswelten. Zeitzeugen und Dokumente über Kindheit am Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Wein-

space and adopted it through play. Some places are quite similar to those of Popper's motifs: the harbor, traffic, and the shopping mall (*Warenhaus*). Again, these first vague and sketchy connections with broader historical changes, which I can only roughly outline here, should be elaborated further in future research. Building on Muchow's work, Popper's drawings could be read as an artifact of middle-class childhood. The street appears in his work less as the place of the playing child and more as sketched from an observer's perspective. A comparative analysis of various drawings could be carried out to question whether the drawings illustrate the shift of middle-class children's places to private and pedagogical places at the beginning of the twentieth century, as described by Jürgen Zinnecker.<sup>59</sup>

The urban space must have changed fundamentally for Popper as a Jewish child when the National Socialist regime began in 1933. However, at first glance, it can hardly be seen explicitly in his drawings that the seven-year-old was threatened by antisemitic persecution. In his 1935 "*Heimatkunde*" (local studies) copybook, there is a (remarkably accurate) drawing of Hamburg's town hall.<sup>60</sup> On the second page, Popper adds a sketch of the square in front of the town hall, which he labels "Adolf Hitler Platz." Indeed the City Hall square was renamed as early as 1933 by the city administration to honor Hitler. Such infringements on public space were part of the National Socialists' penetration of public life which aimed at the "*Führerkult*" (cult of personality of the Führer). The boy's mapping can be read as a document of the exclusion of Hamburg's Jews from the public sphere which affected Popper's everyday life in his hometown. The streets and public buildings, even schools, became increasingly dangerous for Jewish children, so they avoided them for their own safety. In addition to the antisemitic order to wear a yellow star from September 1941, in February 1942 Jews were banned from public transport—one of Popper's frequent motifs.

heim: Juventa, 2006); Helge Zeiher and Hartmut Zeiher, *Orte und Zeiten der Kinder. Soziales Leben im Alltag von Großstadtkindern* (Weinheim: Juventa, 1994); Imbke Behnken, Manuela du Bois Raymond and Jürgen Zinnecker, *Stadtgeschichte als Kindheitsgeschichte. Lebensräume von Großstadtkindern in Deutschland und Holland um 1900* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1989).

59 Jürgen Zinnecker, "Vom Straßenkind zum verhäuslichten Kind," in *Kindheitsgeschichte im Prozeß der Zivilisation. Konfigurationen städtischer Lebensweise zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Imbke Behnken (Opladen: Leske und Budrich, 1990), 142–62.

60 Archive of the Israelitische Töcherschule 08:H49.



## *School Life between Tradition and Reform*

The history of the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* exemplifies the dissolution of the Jewish school system in Hamburg and Germany by the National Socialist regime. The school was founded in 1805 by members of the Orthodox Jewish community as a welfare institution for poor children in Elbstraße.<sup>61</sup> In the following hundred years, the school underwent various reforms, the number of pupils grew, affluent pupils began to attend, and the range of school subjects became broader. The school was approved as a *Höhere Bürgerschule* in 1870.<sup>62</sup> In 1911, the school moved to its new building at Grindelhof 30, next to the Bornplatz Synagogue (inaugurated in 1906). Popper probably entered the school via its characteristic portal with three doors and a clock on the roof above, which he also drew. In another map, he sketched the surroundings “*Rund um die Schule*” (around the school) including the school and the synagogue.<sup>63</sup> In 1932, shortly before Popper started school there, the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* was approved to prepare pupils for university entrance (*Oberrealschule*). Among the graduates in 1934 were also five females.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the beginning of the National Socialist regime in 1933 was accompanied by profound changes, including the cancellation of funding. More than one hundred students had already left Germany, and just as many left state schools to escape isolation and discrimination.<sup>65</sup>

As its director, Rabbi Joseph Carlebach had begun the modernization of the school in 1921. In particular, the hierarchies between pupils and teachers were reduced.<sup>66</sup> The staff was rejuvenated, and art, music, and sport took on more importance in the life of the school.<sup>67</sup> Albert Spier, who became director in 1926, described the educational task of the school as the:

Development of all the dormant powers in the child and youth for the education of self-aware Jewish individuals, whose worldview is firmly rooted in Jewish tradition and Jewish culture, but who, at the same

61 Ursula Randt, “Die Talmud-Tora-Schule in Hamburg. Bildungseinrichtung und Stätte sozialer Fürsorge,” in *Verloren und Un-Vergessen. Jüdische Heilpädagogik in Deutschland*, ed. Sieglind Ellger-Rüttgardt (Weinheim: Deutscher Studien Verlag, 1996), 139–57, 140.

62 Randt, *Stätte sozialer Fürsorge*, 151.

63 Archive of the Israelitische Töcherschule 08:H22 (loose side).

64 Ursula Randt, *Die Talmud Tora Schule in Hamburg 1805 bis 1942* (Munich: Dölling und Garlitz, 2005), 145.

65 Randt, *Talmud Tora Schule*, 146.

66 Randt, *Talmud Tora Schule*, 124, 137.

67 Randt, *Talmud Tora Schule*, 129, 131.

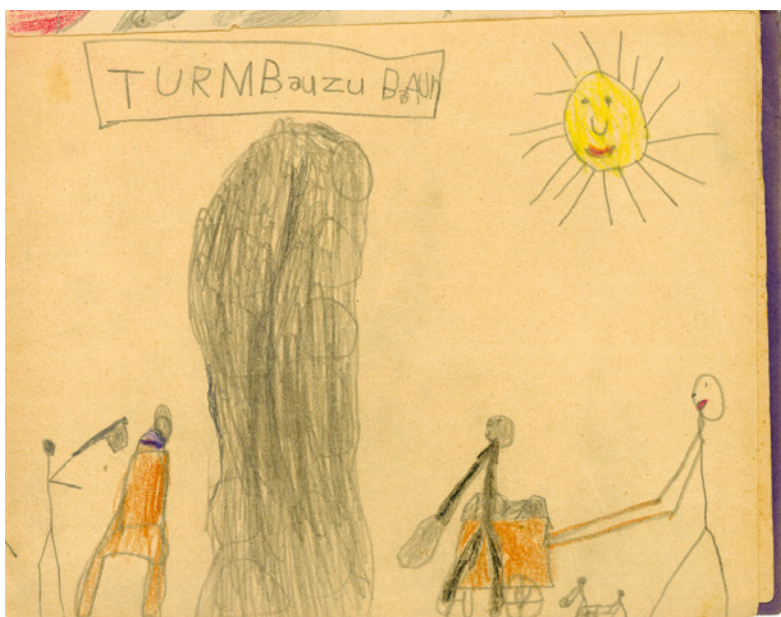


Figure 5: Probably "Tower of Babel" ("TURMBau zu BAUN"). Source: Archive of the *Israelitische Töcherschule*, 08:H22 (6).

time, strives for harmony of their whole personality through empathy and a grasp of all the values of German culture and its relations to the European and general educational heritage.<sup>68</sup>

Popper's drawings can be read in light of this pedagogical program, where art also became an important part of the curriculum. He, for example, draws Talmudic stories (Tower of Babel, Paradise) and Jewish rituals (*Shabbat* and *Sukkot*) right next to the Hamburg cityscape.<sup>69</sup> The school's corridors were decorated with pictures from Jewish history and culture, including one of the Western Wall.<sup>70</sup> These surroundings could have

68 Albert Spier, 1932/34, quoted in Ursula Randt, *Stätte sozialer Fürsorge*, 154. Author's translation of the German original: "Entfaltung aller im Kind und Jugendlichen schlummernden Kräfte zur Heranbildung des bewußten jüdischen Menschen, dessen Weltanschauung fest verwurzelt ist in der jüdischen Tradition und den jüdischen Kulturgütern, der aber zugleich durch Einfühlung und Erfassen aller Werte deutscher Kultur und ihrer Beziehungen zu dem europäischen und allgemeinen Bildungsgut die Harmonie der Gesamtpersönlichkeit erstrebt."

69 Here I refer to all four of Boas Popper's booklets.

70 Randt, *Talmud Tora Schule*, 128–29.

inspired Popper's drawings, like the one of the Western Wall in Jerusalem.<sup>71</sup> Hugo Mandelbaum, who had been teaching the junior classes since 1925, decorated the classroom with pictures of the Hamburg port and biblical stories of Joseph, designed by art teacher Kallmann Rothschild II. The two teachers also published an illustrated Hebrew primer together.<sup>72</sup> Popper uses Hebrew script in his drawings too.<sup>73</sup> A list of former teachers indicates that Mandelbaum and Rothschild may still have been at the school in 1936, but it is uncertain whether Popper was taught by them.<sup>74</sup> The boy seems to have been free in his choice of materials, colours, and motifs, though most of his motifs seem to be directly related to his immediate surroundings. Using supplementary children's drawings, school documents, and teachers' biographies, it would be worthwhile to examine whether the art education at the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* was related to the *Kunsterziehungsbewegung* (art education movement) of that time in Hamburg, which was also part of the reform pedagogical movement.<sup>75</sup>

By 1937, the number of students at the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* had continued to grow, and the school had gained a reputation as an exceptional Jewish educational institution throughout Germany. It also became a place of refuge and preparation for emigration.<sup>76</sup> During the night of November 9–10, 1938, the entire teaching staff and older pupils were arrested. In 1939, the school was forcibly merged with the Jewish girls' school on Karolinenstraße and renamed "*Volks- und Oberschule für Juden*" (Primary and Secondary School for Jews). Jewish children were already banned from attending state schools in November 1938 and, consequently, Karolinenstraße became the last Jewish place of refuge. On

71 Archive of the Israelitische Töchterschule, 08:H12 (9).

72 Randt, *Talmud Tora Schule*, 135–36.

73 Archive of the Israelitische Töchterschule, 08:H22.

74 H. Mandelbaum and K. Rothschild are not listed as teachers at the *Talmud-Tora-Schule* in 1940. In another list, possibly from 1942, their names appear as former teachers. It is unclear, however, to which period the list refers. An address list without a date indicates that H. Mandelbaum emigrated to England. Staatsarchiv Hamburg, 362-6/10 Talmud-Tora-Schule, Nr. 49.

75 See: Wolfgang Lefler, *Geschichte des Zeichen- und Kunstunterrichts von der Renaissance bis zum Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Oberhausen: Athena, 2013), 161–90; Rolf Laven, *Franz Čížek und die Wiener Jugendkunst* (Vienna: Schlebrügge, Editor, 2006). On the context of drawing, education, reform pedagogy, and emigration in the 1930s, see: Meike Sophia Baader, "Die Schule am Mittelmeer," *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte* XVI/2 (2022): 31–1; Hiemesch, "Tracing the Absence of Children's Voices."

76 Randt, *Talmud-Tora-Schule*, 150–56.

June 30, 1942, the school was closed. Around 300 pupils were unable to escape and were murdered in the Shoah.<sup>77</sup>

### *The Drawing Book as a Testimonial Object*

Popper emigrated to Palestine in 1936 and did not experience the last phase of the existence of *Talmud-Tora-Schule*. His father later recalled that he had begun to prepare for his family's emigration just after the boycott of Jewish businesses and practices on April 1, 1933, which threatened his existence as a dentist. Popper's father emigrated to Palestine in 1935 at the latest; his mother followed in 1936 together with her children.<sup>78</sup> The drawing book, along with the other three copybooks authored by Popper, could have been brought by him to Palestine. However, the story of their further preservation is mostly unclear. They may have come back to Hamburg in the context of the work of Ursula Randt, who studied the history of the *Israelitische Töchter Schule* and other Jewish schools in Hamburg from the 1970s onwards. She was in contact with survivors' families and a former teacher of the girls' school, Lili Traumann, and collected materials from them.<sup>79</sup> Later she donated her private archive to the memorial center for the *Israelitische Töchter Schule* (founded in 1989), where the copybooks remained undiscovered and unsystematically stored in boxes for years.

Through this archiving story, Popper's drawing books and copybooks found their way into the context of the culture of remembrance. Today, they are part of the collection of an institution that simultaneously commemorates the history of Jewish life in Hamburg, as well as remembers its destruction due to persecution, displacement, and the murder of Hamburg's Jews with a special focus on the school's pupils and teachers. Thus, Popper's drawing books can be framed as "testimonial objects" which in their present material existence "carry memory traces from the

77 "Children's Worlds: New Perspectives on the History of Jewish School Life in Hamburg," *Key Documents of German-Jewish History: A Digital Source Edition*, accessed on April 16, 2023, <https://jewish-history-online.net/exhibition/childrens-worlds>.

78 Anne Betten, *Sprachbewahrung nach der Emigration*, 123–24.

79 Author's mail correspondence with Dr. Anna von Villiez, Head of the *Israelitische Töchter Schule* Memorial and Educational Center, (14 December 2022); Ursula Randt, *Carolinenstrasse 35. Geschichte der Mädchenschule der Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeinde in Hamburg 1884–1942* (Hamburg: Verein für Hamburgische Geschichte, 1984).

past [...] but they [also] *embody* the very process of its transmission.”<sup>80</sup> Read as “traces” of Jewish children’s past worlds and Jewish school life in Hamburg, and their destruction, their multiple layers of meaning need to be unfolded.<sup>81</sup> This process of reading and interpreting Popper’s drawings presented here is colored by my research position as a historian of childhood and education, as well as the research field of children during war and genocide.

### *Tentative Conclusion*

In this article, I explored the different layers of meaning bound together in Popper’s drawing book. As a material product of a children’s cultural practice created in a school setting, the drawing book provides insights into the everyday life of a Jewish boy and the way he related to the rapidly changing world around him in 1930s Hamburg through his drawings. These show us that Popper’s everyday life was affected by the urban architecture and geography of Hamburg, as well as by scenes and practices of the Jewish upper middle class. They point to a Jewish school between reform and tradition which cultivated the teachings of the Talmud and Jewish rituals, as well as pedagogical work referring to reform concepts. These first preliminary lines of contextualization need to be elaborated by further research referring to wider materials. So far, however, we can state that the small drawing book is linked to broader historical themes like urbanity, mobility, and mechanization but also changing educational methods and vibrant Jewish life in early twentieth-century Hamburg. At the same time, Popper’s drawings are colored paper traces of children’s worlds and school lives destroyed by antisemitic persecution. Popper’s drawings do not explicitly show scenes of oppression, and the family left Germany before the violence came to a head. However, it is for this very reason that the drawing book stands in its material existence, kept in the Education and Memorial Centre as a “testimonial object” of a threatened Jewish childhood in Hamburg immediately before and during displacement, destruction, and the Shoah.

80 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, “Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission,” in *Poetics Today* 27, no. 2 (2006): 353–83, 355, emphasis in original. See also: Laura Levitt, *The Objects That Remain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020).

81 See: Sybille Krämer, *Medium, Messenger, Transmission: An Approach to Media Philosophy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 174. For a study of children’s drawings as traces, see: Hiemesch, “Tracing the Absence of Children’s Voices.”

In my article, I argued for considering children's drawings as a historical source and critically questioning hegemonic processes of their use and archiving, which tend to pay little attention to children's drawings. I have shown that it is valuable to take children's drawings as a starting point to explore history through the artifacts of children. My approach highlights a small selection of drawings at the center of its case study to tackle the practices of the drawing child. Nevertheless, the drawings can not be considered as individual expressions of a child but as artifacts embedded in complex cultural and historical contexts. Moreover, in terms of material culture, I consider it necessary to include both the creation and the afterlife of the drawings in the analysis, thus shedding light on the changing interpretive contexts over time. As my approach demonstrates here, it is also important that interpretation always contains gaps in knowledge and may well enter the field of speculation. These gaps may not all be filled, but interpretation must be validated as much as possible by contextual information. In doing so, children's drawings can provide insight into history from the child's social position and contribute to a multi-perspective historiography.