Edinburgh German Yearbook 14

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Politics and Culture in Germany and Austria Today

Edinburgh German Yearbook
Volume 14

Edited by
Frauke Matthes, Dora Osborne,
Katya Krylova, and Myrto Aspioti

CAMDEN HOUSE
Rochester, New York

First published 2021
by Camden House

Camden House is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt. Hope Avenue, Rochester, NY 14620, USA
and of Boydell & Brewer Limited
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF, UK
www.boydellandbrewer.com

ISSN: 1937-0857

ISBN-13: 9781640140844 (hardcover)
ISBN-13: 9781787449466 (ePDF)

Cover image: Burschenschaft Hysteria march, Vienna,
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Edinburgh German Yearbook appears annually.

Please send orders and inquiries to Boydell & Brewer at the above address.
Edinburgh German Yearbook does not accept unsolicited submissions: a
Call for Papers for each volume is circulated widely in advance of publication.
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Acknowledgments

The essays in this volume are based on papers and roundtable contributions from the conference "The Politics of Contemporary German Culture," held at the University of St Andrews on April 26–27, 2019. The editors would like to thank the AHRC Open World Research Initiative "Cross-Language Dynamics: Reshaping Community," the Institute of Modern Languages Research at the University of London, the School of Modern Languages at the University of St Andrews, the Moray Endowment Fund of the University of Edinburgh, and the University of Aberdeen, whose generous support made this conference, and this volume, possible.

Introduction: Politics and Culture in Germany and Austria Today

Frauke Matthes, University of Edinburgh, Dora Osborne, University of St Andrews, and Katya Krylova, University of Aberdeen

The essays in this volume show the different ways in which cultural production in Germany and Austria engages with contemporary politics.[1] In their discussions of literature, film, theater, and art, they consider a number of interrelated topoi that are both political and subject to politicization: identity, memory, language, nationalism, Europe, transculturalism, globalization, and migration. They highlight how the relationship between culture and politics is marked by the movements and tensions between the national and the European, the local and the global, that define Germany and Austria today. While the eurozone crisis and Brexit have polarized opinion on the European Union and soured relations between European neighbors, both the belief in and abandonment of the European project as postwar legacy are shaped as much by events triggered beyond as within EU borders. The so-called migrant crisis that began in 2015 (the focus of two of the chapters in this volume) has provoked significant political change and division in Germany and Austria. This humanitarian crisis, the debates surrounding it, and the attendant polarization of political positions in both countries have all left their mark on cultural production, whose scope, influences, and reach extend consequently beyond a national paradigm.[2]

Politics and Culture in the Berlin Republic

The significance of transnational events and developments for German identity that is so striking today marks a shift from the 1990s, when, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the focus was on the emerging,

1 The authors would like to thank Myrto Aspioti for her careful reading of this introduction.

2 On the impact of globalization on German Studies, see James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield, eds., *German in the World: The Transnational and Global Contexts of German Studies* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2020).

unified, "normalized" nation.[3] The founding of the Berlin Republic also brought with it a profound challenge to the relationship between culture and politics that questioned the relevance of both East and West German legacies of political authorship across media. In 1990, a heated debate broke out in the cultural pages of leading German newspapers that came to be known as the *Literaturstreit* (literary feud) and criticized the political commitment that was typical of German authors on both sides of the Wall.[4] Influenced by the Gruppe 47 and the events of 1968, literature in West Germany had been resolutely "engaged" in its antifascism. For some, however, the "political contentiousness" of writers in the Federal Republic, to quote Stephen Brockmann, had resulted in a "Gesinnungsästhetik" (aesthetics of political conviction) that rendered literature staid.[5] In a broader sense, moreover, it compromised the autonomy of art. In East Germany, authors—and artists more broadly—had always trodden a fine line between endorsing a socialist vision and party-political dissent, as Evelyn Preuss points out in her chapter in this volume. For key figures in the *Literaturstreit*, GDR literature as inherently political could have no cultural or aesthetic value after 1989, and would serve only as a historical resource. As Paul Cooke and Andrew Plowman note, revelations of GDR authors' involvement with the Stasi were "the final nail in the coffin" of their literary careers: their work was divested of any remnants of authority it had as a political document.[6]

The end of the Cold War presented an opportunity, however, to produce what Brockmann calls a "new 'normal' literature" for a "new 'normal' Germany."[7] The *Literaturstreit* is thought to have driven the de-politicization of certain cultural forms in the years following the *Wende*, a trend culminating in the pop literature boom of the 1990s and 2000s. But the end of the Cold War also left many, in particular the

3 On the discourse and effects of "normalization" and its significance for recent German literature, see Stuart Taberner, ed., *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005); and Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke, *German Culture, Politics and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

4 For a discussion of the significance of the *Literaturstreit* and for more on the relationship between culture and politics in the broader context of the twentieth century, see William Niven and James Jordan, eds., *Politics and Culture in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003).

5 Stephen Brockmann, "The Politics of German Literature," *Monatshefte* 84, no. 1 (1992): 46–58, here 51.

6 Paul Cooke and Andrew Plowman, "Introduction," in *German Writers and the Politics of Culture: Dealing with the Stasi*, ed. Paul Cooke and Andrew Plowman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), xv–xxi, here xvi.

7 Brockmann, "The Politics of German Literature," 54.

so-called *Generation Golf*, lacking in political direction or cause. This sense of apolitical numbness can be seen, for example, in the films of the Berlin School, whose slow, lethargic protagonists struggle to care about much at all. The events of 9/11 brought an abrupt end to the so-called "Spaßgesellschaft" (fun society) of the 1990s on the one hand,[8] and brought global relations into sharp and urgent focus on the other, rapidly making politics relevant to culture again. Indeed, as Anke S. Biendarra writes, "the changing political situation globally" brought about a "new seriousness" and consequent "re-politicization" of literature.[9] Given the social and economic shifts that the twenty-first century has brought with it so far not just in Germany but across the world, it stands to reason that the relationship between politics and culture would now be different. For Stefan Neuhaus, recent changes in public life and the effects of mass media specifically have rendered the political import of literature in the 2000s and 2010s necessarily of a different order to that seen in and after 1968.[10]

In recent decades, the political has found expression in German culture in new ways. Before the *Literaturstreit* and the debates that it triggered, this might have happened through the public intellectual, but the status and relevance of this figure has been questioned to the extent that one can speak of (more often than not) *his* disappearance.[11] Perhaps now this disappearance has less to do with questioning the legitimacy of politicized cultural voices than the relevance and legitimacy of a certain type of public figure (historically white, male) in today's Germany, where artists and writers from diverse backgrounds can be heard, giving voice to new perspectives and addressing different audiences. The challenge to the traditional model of "engaged authorship" is central to Stephanie Gleißner's contribution to this volume on precarious narration in Anke Stelling's novel *Schäfchen im Trockenen* (Feather Your Own Nest, 2018). One might also think here of Sharon Dodua Otoo, the 2016 winner of the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize, who describes herself as a "Black British mother, activist, author, and editor."[12] Indeed, the fact that Otoo was

8 Margaret McCarthy, "Introduction," in *German Pop Literature: A Companion*, ed. Margaret McCarthy (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 1–27, here 1.

9 Anke S. Biendarra, *Germans Going Global: Contemporary Literature and Cultural Globalization* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 4.

10 Stefan Neuhaus and Immanuel Nover, "Einleitung: Aushandlungen des Politischen in der Gegenwartsliteratur," in *Das Politische in der Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Stefan Neuhaus and Immanuel Nover (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 1–18, here 5.

11 Neuhaus and Nover note "das Verschwinden *des öffentlichen Intellektuellen* in Deutschland" ("Einleitung," 3, emphasis added).

12 See Sharon Dodua Otoo, "About Me," https://about.me/sharonotoo (accessed September 17, 2020).

awarded one of the most prestigious prizes for German literature suggests that important questions are finally being asked about cultural authority and dominance, the canon and its decolonization, questions that are as urgent in the academic study of literary and other cultural texts as they are in the fields of their production, circulation, and reception. Burhan Qurbani's multi-award-winning film *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (2020) is a prime example of the kind of challenge to our understanding of what constitutes German—or Austrian—culture that arguably defines both cultural politics and political culture in these countries today. With his German-Dutch co-production featuring a Guinea-Bissauan-Portuguese actor as protagonist, Qurbani takes a canonical text of modern German literature, with its focus on Berlin as a primal scene of modern German life, and transposes it to a different medium and time to tell the story of an undocumented African migrant in the capital of the Berlin Republic.

Contemporary migrant flows have changed understandings of German, Austrian, and European identity that are defined through geo-political exclusions, a development that Linda Shortt and Teresa Ludden trace in their contributions to this volume. German chancellor Angela Merkel's decision to open her country's borders in 2015 produced clear evidence of a "Welcome culture" in some quarters while driving support for the right-wing party Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) in others. That this support paved the way for the AfD's success in the elections of 2017, in which it gained representation in the German parliament for the first time, was interpreted by some as a sign of the nation's return to fascism, despite the fact that remembering the crimes of National Socialism is central to the Berlin Republic. The AfD know all too well that this culture of memory (*Erinnerungskultur*) is also political, and that by challenging Germany's commitment to commemorating victims of fascism they can outrage their opponents and excite their supporters. In 2017, AfD politician Björn Höcke provoked a media frenzy by denouncing the Berlin Holocaust Memorial as a monument to German shame. The controversial art collective Zentrum für politische Schönheit (Center for Political Beauty, ZPS), whose more recent work is discussed in Mary Cosgrove's chapter in this volume, responded by erecting a replica memorial outside Höcke's home. Meanwhile, for the writer Max Czollek, whose work is discussed by Maria Roca Lizarazu in this volume, the politics of migration and integration in Germany expose the hypocrisy of the country's official memory culture and memory politics. Germany's philosemitism, he argues, is a grotesque "Gedächtnistheater" (theater of memory—a term coined by Y. Michael Bodemann) that obscures the nation's failure to accommodate the non-Jewish other. Those from other, often Muslim, minority communities are made to perform in a new "Integrationstheater" (theater of integration), where whoever is unable or unwilling to "integrate" into Germany's dominant Western culture

(*Leitkultur*) is cast in the role of "bad" migrant.[13] In response to ongoing debates about integration, Czollek proposes "de-integration," an act of cultural-political resistance that forces Germany to see that its obsession with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) has left the nation faced with a bigger challenge of *Gegenwartsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the present).[14] Czollek outlines this challenge in his contribution to a recent (2019) collection of essays that question a German society that insists on the unchallenged status of its cultural hegemony and on its power to grant or refuse others access to this. As the title of the collection, *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum* (Your Homeland is Our Nightmare), suggests, the contributing authors view the archetypal German utopia as a menacing vision. While the essays in that volume constitute polemical interventions to debates about migration and integration, other German-language authors with experience of migration have estranged and exposed the idiosyncrasies of the German and Austrian *Heimat* in a more playful mode. A notable recent example of this is *Sisi, Sex und Semmelknödel: Ein Araber ergründet die österreichische Seele* (Sissi, Sex, and Dumplings: An Arab Explores the Austrian Soul, 2020), by best-selling author and poet Omar Khir Alanam, who came to Austria from Syria in late 2014.

Politics and Culture in Austria's Second Republic

In matters of *Heimat* and national identity, Austria presents both similarities to and, owing to its specific historical and political development, distinct differences from its larger neighbor Germany. In the postwar era, both countries have had to live with the consequences of National Socialism, but the pervasiveness of the "first victim" myth in Austria, despite the country having been a willing partner in the Nazi war machine,[15] has brought forth overtly political responses from the nation's writers, filmmakers, and artists. Cultural practitioners have played a key role in engaging with the country's history (especially the National Socialist legacy) and contemporary politics. In the years after the war, writers such as Ingeborg Bachmann, Thomas Bernhard, Gerhard Fritsch, and Hans Lebert drew attention to a traumatic past that was barely acknowledged in Austrian society at the time. The Austrian Nobel laureate Elfriede

13 Max Czollek, "Gegenwartsbewältigung," in *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Berlin: Ullstein, 2019), 167–81, here 171.

14 Czollek, "Gegenwartsbewältigung," 178–81.

15 For a discussion of the Austrian "first victim" myth, see Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249–62.

Jelinek spoke about this in an interview published in 2010, arguing that in Austria, where "das Denken ist von den Nazis ausgetrieben worden" (thought was driven out by the Nazis), artists have stepped in to fill the shoes of philosophers, theorists, and "die Wissenschaft" (academia) more generally.[16] She asserts that the work of examining Austria's past has been taken on almost exclusively by cultural practitioners: "Im Österreich der Nachkriegszeit haben fast nur die KünstlerInnen auf die Vergangenheit reagiert" (In postwar Austria, it was almost exclusively the artists who have responded to the past).[17] Moreover, in a country whose culture industry receives generous state subsidies, culture is political. Nowhere was this more evident than in the controversy surrounding the premiere of Thomas Bernhard's last play, *Heldenplatz*, in November 1988. The play, written in part for the 1988 *Bedenkjahr* (year of reflection) marking the 1938 *Anschluss* (annexation by Nazi Germany), addressed the omnipresence of the Nazi past for a Viennese Jewish family. Leaked quotations taken out of context prompted politicians to condemn the play and members of the public to unload manure in front of the Burgtheater on the day of the premiere. Bernhard's supporters, who held up placards calling for the freedom of artistic expression, ultimately prevailed.

Heldenplatz was political because it addressed the omnipresent past at a political turning point, or *Wende*. The year 1986 had seen the controversial candidacy and election of former UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim to the Austrian presidency, which had precipitated a long-overdue confrontation with the country's National Socialist past. As Joseph W. Moser discusses in his chapter in this volume, Waldheim's covering up of his wartime past drew especially heavy criticism from a new generation of writers, filmmakers, and artists—among them Robert Menasse, Isolde Charim (discussed in Teresa Ludden's chapter), Doron Rabinovici, Ruth Beckermann, and Robert Schindel. In contrast to Jelinek's assessment of postwar Austria, what is striking about this post-Waldheim generation is how many of these cultural practitioners not only address the past and present politics in their creative work, but also are involved in political activism. Doron Rabinovici, for example, is a trained historian and political activist, as well as a highly regarded writer of fiction. Robert Menasse is known for both his polemical political essays and his fiction, which also repeatedly turns to political issues: his novel *Die Hauptstadt* (2017; *The Capital*, 2019), which won the German Book Prize, is set amongst

16 Elfriede Jelinek, "'Diese falsche und verlogene Unschuldigkeit Österreichs ist wirklich immer mein Thema gewesen': Elfriede Jelinek im Gespräch mit Pia Janke," in *"Die endlose Unschuldigkeit": Elfriede Jelineks Rechnitz (Der Würgeengel)*, ed. Pia Janke, Teresa Kovacs, and Christian Schenkermayr (Vienna: Praesens, 2010), 17–23, here 22–23.

17 Jelinek, "'Diese falsche und verlogene Unschuldigkeit Österreichs,'" 22.

European Union officials in Brussels. It appears that, in the contemporary era in Austria at least, writers and artists synthesize political engagement and cultural production.

As Dagmar Lorenz has shown, the generation of artists and intellectuals that emerged into the cultural arena at the time of Waldheim was crucial in the formation of a civil society and oppositional culture in Austria.[18] The same artists and authors played a key role in protesting the first "blue-black" coalition (2000–2005) of the Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) and the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ). The substantial protest movement that arose as a reaction to the entry of the FPÖ, then led by Jörg Haider, into government, has been well-documented, for example, in Ruth Beckermann's film *Homemad(e)* (2001) and the late Frederick Baker's documentary *Widerstand in Haiderland* (Resistance in Haider Country, 2010). The broad protest movement staged weekly *Donnerstagsdemos* (Thursday demonstrations). As Allyson Fiddler traces in her study *The Art of Resistance*, these protests and demonstrations were accompanied by specially composed songs, performances, and texts written in response to contemporary political events, such as Elfriede Jelinek's readings as part of the *Botschaft besorgter Bürger und Bürgerinnen* (Embassy of Concerned Citizens) installation in front of the chancellery on Vienna's Ballhausplatz.[19]

If the protesters against the 2000 political *Wende* were drawing on the precedent set by the demonstrations against Waldheim of the late 1980s, those protesting the most recent ÖVP-FPÖ coalition of 2017–2019 in turn drew inspiration from the protests against the first ÖVP-FPÖ coalition of 2000–2005. This was explicitly signaled by the protest slogan "Es ist wieder Donnerstag" (It's Thursday again), alluding to the protests of the early 2000s. Indeed, there is now a generation of writers and artists in Austria who have contributed to the protest culture against Waldheim, the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition of the early 2000s, and the most recent 2017–19 ÖVP-FPÖ coalition. Among these is Jelinek, who has written political literary texts satirizing Waldheim, Haider, and current FPÖ chairman and 2016 Austrian presidential candidate Norbert Hofer.[20] Yet a new generation of politically engaged writers and artists has also emerged in the wake of the resurgence of far-right Austrian politics in the late 2010s,

18 Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, "The Struggle for a Civil Society and Beyond: Austrian Writers and Intellectuals Confronting the Political Right," *New German Critique* 93 (2004), 19–41.

19 Allyson Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance: Cultural Protest against the Austrian Far Right in the Early Twenty-First Century* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019).

20 For a comparative discussion of Jelinek's political texts about Waldheim, Haider, and Hofer, see Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance*, 149–55 and 189.

underlining the continuing inextricable connection of culture and politics for Austrian writers, filmmakers, and artists today. Burschenschaft Hysteria (Hysteria fraternity), the political protest group discussed here in the chapter by Regine Klimpfinger and Elisabeth Koenigshofer, counts the writers Stefanie Sargnagel, Puneh Ansari, and Lydia Haider among its members.

The Politics of Culture

The contributions to this volume are not only interested in writers, filmmakers, and artists whose work engages with contemporary politics, but are also concerned with the ways in which cultural organizations are political, that is, with cultural politics. Cultural organizations are political both in the sense that they engage with and reflect broader political and social trends, and in the sense that they themselves are defined by structures of power and influence and deal in cultural capital. Recent controversies surrounding major cultural institutions reveal how the cultural sector is driven by politics, internal and external, and is made political through certain decisions and actions: the 2013/14 financial scandal at Vienna's Burgtheater; the call, led in 2017 by major German film directors, for new leadership of the Berlinale; the much-debated appointment and subsequent resignation of Chris Dercon as intendant of the Volksbühne. These controversies also concern a critical engagement with "the hierarchy of cultural values" that is central to Katie Hawthorne's essay about live performance at the Berliner Theatertreffen. A more protracted debate has accompanied the planning and realization of the Humboldt Forum, Berlin's flagship cultural center, built on a complex historical and cultural-political site in the heart of the city. This major project revives imperial history through its partial reconstruction of the Berlin Palace, but overwrites twentieth-century history and the memory of the Palast der Republik (Palace of the Republic) that stood on the site between 1973 and 2008 and, as the seat of the East German parliament and the GDR's cultural hub, brought together politics and culture in different ways. The museum housed in the new Humboldt Forum will bring together collections previously dispersed across Berlin, making evidence of Germany's colonial past visible in a new context and demanding a more explicit and public engagement with this problematic legacy. The global aspiration of the Humboldt Forum, with its commitment to "Weltverständnis," or understanding the world, is the inheritance of its namesakes, but the new institution also exposes the need for Germany to acknowledge its colonial history and, by doing so, to reflect on its role in global history and on the international stage today.

That cultural politics are driven increasingly not only by national, but also by international and transcultural dynamics is seen in exemplary

fashion in the way literature, and culture more broadly, is distributed, marketed, and perceived within as well as beyond Germany and Austria. Two factors play an important role in the dissemination and reception of literature in particular: literary prizes and language. While ostensibly recognizing literary talents, book prizes are inevitably political and long-lists, shortlists, and final selections often attract criticism. Yet it is undeniable that German-language literature would not have the same visibility if it were not for these prizes. Internationally recognized awards such as the German Book Prize, which is awarded on the eve of the annual Frankfurt Book Fair, contribute to the marketability of German literature not least because they accelerate the translation, and hence international sales, of their winners' works abroad. Indeed, one of the German Book Prize's explicit objectives is "to draw attention beyond national borders to authors writing in German."[21] The award fulfilled this aim in perhaps unexpected ways in 2019 when Saša Stanišić, whose novel *Herkunft* (Origins) won the prize, used his acceptance speech to comment on the Swedish Academy's earlier announcement that Austrian author Peter Handke was to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Handke's controversial views on the Yugoslav Wars led Stanišić, who himself fled the Bosnian War with his family in 1992, to voice, very publicly, his disbelief at the Nobel Committee's decision. Though widely applauded, Stanišić's political act in Frankfurt, which challenged the politics of remembrance in the context of the Yugoslav Wars, was also read against him as a derivative performance of generational rebellion within the tradition of German literature. Thus Alexander Cammann points out: "Auch wenn der Buchpreisträger es wohl gar nicht so gewollt hatte: Es lag ein Hauch von Denkmalsturz in der Luft—so wie vor 53 Jahren, als Handke in Princeton die arrivierten Heroen der Gruppe 47 attackierte" (Even if the winner of the Book Prize hadn't intended it, there was a whiff of iconoclasm in the air—just as there had been 53 years earlier, when Handke attacked the celebrated heroes of the Gruppe 47 in Princeton).[22] While this German literary historical connection can certainly be made, the transnational significance of Stanišić's words cannot be underestimated. This acceptance speech by an author whose winning novel directly engages with his (non-German) origins is much more than a rebellious act of a younger writer against the establishment; it is an invitation to that same establishment to reassess what constitutes German literature today.

21 German Book Prize, "About the Prize," https://www.deutscher-buchpreis.de/en/the-prize/ (accessed September 10, 2020).

22 Alexander Cammann, "Eine Frage der Wahrhaftigkeit," *Die Zeit*, no. 43, October 17, 2019, accessed online: https://www.zeit.de/2019/43/sasa-stanisic-peter-handke-kritik-literaturnobelpreis-buchpreis-herkunft (accessed September 10, 2020).

That Stanišić won the German Book Prize can also be read as a political statement placing the author at the center of the German literary scene. Stanišić was framed quite differently at the outset of his career when he won the 2008 Adelbert von Chamisso Prize. This prize, "awarded . . . to authors writing in the German language whose literature is affected by cultural changes,"[23] ran from 1985 until 2017, when the Robert Bosch Foundation, which sponsored it, considered its mission to have been accomplished. Since its inception, the Chamisso Prize had been criticized for pigeonholing authors of a non-German background.[24] Furthermore, by highlighting the winners' "unusual way of using the language in a manner which enriches German literature," the prize gave the impression that the literary achievements of the "Chamisso authors" were only honored as long they could add what can only be described as "exotic flavor" to German literature,[25] thereby assuming a homogenous German culture.[26] Such ideas are also critically discussed here in Myrto Aspioti's and Lizzie Stewart's essays. Interestingly, in 2018, the award was revived, renamed the Chamisso-Preis/Hellerau, to be awarded to "authors with a migrant story" by a consortium of enterprises, associations, and cultural institutions in Dresden,[27] thus suggesting a continuation in the practice of singling out authors of a non-German background, despite the objections that have been raised in the meantime. Having another German Book Prize-winner whose roots lie outside Germany's national borders (Stanišić is indeed not the only one) certainly questions the adequacy or even relevance of such separate literary categories, which are always inherently political.

23 Robert Bosch Stiftung, Adelbert von Chamisso Prize of the Robert Bosch Stiftung, "About the Project," http://www.bosch-stiftung.de/de/projekt/adelbert-von-chamisso-preis-der-robert-bosch-stiftung (accessed September 10, 2020).

24 See "'Ich bin Teil der deutschen Literatur, so deutsch wie Kafka': Ist Fremd-Sein ein Problem, ein Thema oder ein Markt-Vorteil? Vier nicht ganz deutsche Autoren—Terézia Mora, Imran Ayata, Wladimir Kaminer und Navid Kermani—im Literaturen-Gespräch," *Literaturen*, no. 4 (2005): 26–31.

25 See Frauke Matthes, "'Weltliteratur aus der Uckermark': Regionalism and Transnationalism in Saša Stanišić's *Vor dem Fest*," in *German in the World: A Culture in National, Transnational and Global Contexts*, ed. James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2020), 91–108, here 91–92.

26 See Brent O. Peterson, "*Peter Schlemihl*, the Chamisso Prize, and the Much Longer History of German Migration Narratives," *German Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (February 2018): 81–98.

27 See Chamisso Preis/Hellerau, "Über den Preis," https://www.chamisso-preishellerau.de/ (accessed September 10, 2020).

Chapter Overview

The recent cultural-political developments discussed above provide the backdrop for this volume, and contributions that engage with issues revolving around migration provide the starting point for its exploration of politics and culture in Germany and Austria today. Linda Shortt shows how a number of recent literary works have responded to and engaged with the so-called migrant crisis. While these texts consider the circumstances and experiences of migration from different perspectives, Timur Vermes's 2018 bestseller *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (The Hungry and the Fat) focuses on Germany's political, public, and media response. Shortt shows how this counterfactual novel uses future fiction to satirize the nation, which is exposed as self-interested, hypocritical, and violently opposed to the migrant other. Also focusing on the topic of migration, Teresa Ludden's chapter reads Austrian director Wolfgang Fischer's 2018 film *STYX*, which focuses on the migrant crisis, together with philosopher Isolde Charim's *Ich und die Anderen* (I and the Others, 2018). She highlights the focus, shared by Fischer's film and Charim's text, on pluralization, openness to alterity, and difference, and shows how this reflects contemporary political concerns. Ludden ultimately argues that what she calls the "postmigrant sublime" with relation to Fischer's film exposes the inequality of access to subject positions and problematizes ideas of pluralized identities.

The suffering of migrants has been highlighted in graphic fashion by the controversial collective ZPS, discussed briefly above, whose 2015 "action" "Die Toten kommen" (The Dead are Coming) involved moving the body of a Syrian refugee buried anonymously in Sicily to a Berlin cemetery. Human remains also figure in the collective's more recent project "Sucht nach uns!" (Search for Us!, 2019), which included the installation of a pillar allegedly containing the ash of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In her chapter, Mary Cosgrove situates the latter project in the context of a "forensic turn" in recent culture in order to show that, while the collective's use—and arguably abuse—of these remains and their connection to the Nazi past to contest the rise of the right-wing in contemporary mainstream politics was misjudged, the project bears scrutiny, nonetheless, as a challenge to mainstream *memory* politics. Maria Roca Lizarazu's essay sheds a different light on the politics of memory culture by focusing on the "bad feelings" (here: hatred, indignation, sadness, and depression) explored in recent texts by German Jewish writers. Using Sara Ahmed's work on (un)happiness and Audre Lourde's "uses of anger" as frameworks, she reads the negative emotions expressed in Maxim Biller's short novel *Harlem Holocaust* (1998), Max Czollek's polemic book-length essay *Desintegriert euch!* (De-integrate Yourselves, 2018), and Oliver Polak's text *Der jüdische Patient* (The Jewish Patient, 2014) "as a form

of political reaction and even action." Although Roca Lizarazu considers these emotions productive, in the sense that they reject what she calls a "reconciliation duty," she is also aware of their potential to perpetuate certain binary oppositions, especially as all three of the texts connect negative emotions with the ideal of the hard (Jewish) man.

The issue of binaries is also Myrto Aspioti's starting point for her essay on Saša Stanišić's novel *Vor dem Fest* (2014; *Before the Feast*, 2016). After discussing the contested label of *Migrationsliteratur* (literature of migration) and the reduction of writers with a so-called "background of migration" to their biographies alone, Aspioti takes a closer look at the construction of village community in the novel. In her reading of *Vor dem Fest* she highlights the arbitrariness of geography and the illusion of homogeneity and fixed belonging that are at the core of most of the villagers' collective and, by implication, political identity. It is these "geographical categories of identity" that allow her to take one step further and read *Vor dem Fest* as an implicit questioning of the separate categories of "migrant" and "national" literatures.

Stephanie Gleißner is also interested in the question of labels in her engagement with "precarious narration" in Anke Stelling's novel *Schäfchen im Trockenen* (Feather Your Own Nest, 2018). Her contribution focuses on how the main character, the author Resi, narrates her perceived social inequality and precarity in a neoliberal age. Gleißner reads Stelling's novel as a comment on engaged authorship whose narrator-author sees herself as a truth-telling *parrhesiastes*, that is, one who speaks truth to power. Through the figure of Resi, Gleißner demonstrates how narrating and writing in and about precarious circumstances is translated into a concept of precarious narration, that is, into a political discourse about writing itself.

Katie Hawthorne focuses on cultural and institutional politics in her contribution, examining the processes and practices that surround live-streaming at Germany's foremost theater festival, the Berliner Theatertreffen. Where "liveness" is still seen as a fundamental and distinguishing feature of theater (however much productions play with this), Hawthorne shows that the Theatertreffen has accommodated different modes of performance and transmission under different circumstances, but that their use is necessarily political, marking differences in (and between) audience and public and always affirming the festival's status as a stage for live theater.

Staying with theater, Lizzie Stewart takes a closer look at the cultural-symbolic capital that Fatih Akın's films, as well as his own status as a celebrity figure following the success of his 2004 film *Gegen die Wand* (*Head On*), have accrued for Turkish German cultural production. Stewart focuses on Akın's involvement in postmigrant theater, particularly the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Berlin, and the often-unexpected opportunities

Akın's cultural-symbolic capital has provided for other cultural practitioners with a so-called "background of migration." This "Akın effect" throws into relief the processes by which value is attributed to work by artists with a "background of migration": these are largely not based on neutral judgments of aesthetics and value, but are rooted in the politics of cultural production. Thus Stewart reads Akın's films not solely as political statements in themselves, but as cultural products whose material effects have had a major impact on the creative industries.

Evelyn Preuss's contribution similarly draws attention to marginalized narratives. Her chapter on Andreas Dresen's 2018 biopic *Gundermann*, about the East German singer-songwriter Gerhard Gundermann, traces the complex production history of the film, which took twelve years to make, and understands this as symptomatic of the marginalization of East German stories in post-1990 Germany. Reading *Gundermann* together with other mainstream films set in the former GDR, Preuss illustrates how Dresen's film minimizes the subversive potential of Gundermann's biographical person, ultimately allowing the specificity of individuals' experiences in the GDR to become submerged in a reductive universal narrative of East German lives.

Turning to the relationship between politics and culture in the Austrian context, Joseph W. Moser traces renowned Austrian documentary filmmaker Ruth Beckermann's long-standing engagement with the figure of the Austrian politician Kurt Waldheim, the unraveling of whose wartime past in his 1986 presidential election campaign inadvertently prompted a long overdue confrontation with the National Socialist legacy in Austria. Focusing primarily on a 1989 essay by the filmmaker, as well as on her award-winning 2018 documentary *Waldheims Walzer* (*The Waldheim Waltz*), Moser argues that the continuing focus of Beckermann and others on this now-historical period underlines the central importance that the figure of Waldheim holds for Austrian self-understanding and national identity. Regine Klimpfinger and Elisabeth Koenigshofer in turn foreground the continuing presence of far-right ideology in mainstream Austrian politics today. Their chapter discusses the Austrian protest group Burschenschaft Hysteria, which impersonates a traditional male student fraternity in order to satirize the worldview espoused by such groups. *Burschenschaften* have gained much attention in recent years due to their connection with the far-right Austrian Freedom Party, which was last in a coalition government in 2017–19. Drawing on the theories of Judith Butler and Amber Day, Klimpfinger and Koenigshofer show how Burschenschaft Hysteria's performative appropriation of German fraternity culture serves to subvert both the groups' gender stereotypes and their nationalist ideology.

Bringing together these wide-ranging discussions of literature and film, theater and polemical essays, art and activism, the present volume

seeks to illuminate how, in recent times, culture and politics can be seen and made to relate to each other. While each chapter offers a particular example of this relationship, the connections between the contributions highlight the contested but persistent significance of the national for the production and framing of culture, the growing significance of "value" for determining the shape of the cultural sector, and the changing significance of memory culture in the political context of migration. The contributions here show how these factors not only affect and are reflected in contemporary cultural works and performances, but also indicate trends that seem set to grow in prominence and influence.

Writing the European Refugee Crisis: Timur Vermes's *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (2018)

Linda Shortt, University of Warwick

This chapter explores the intersection of politics and culture by examining how German-language literature has tried to process and engage with the so-called European refugee crisis.[1] It offers a brief overview of, and identifies key trends in, these literary responses, before focusing on the political satire and *Der Spiegel* bestseller *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (2018; *The Hungry and the Fat*, 2020) by Timur Vermes.[2] Pulling Heinrich Heine's wandering rats from the nineteenth into the twenty-first century, Vermes's novel stages a violent border confrontation between the fat (Germans) who are eager to protect their privileges, and the hungry (refugees) who are attracted north by the dream

1 The "refugee crisis" is often also referred to as the "migrant crisis." While the use of the term "refugee" keeps the plight of those forced to leave in focus, this phrasing can also suggest that refugees are responsible for chaotic circumstances. The decision to opt instead for "migrant" is often an attempt to find a term which is more inclusive of the different reasons why people leave their homes. Academics such as Karina Horsti and Andrea Rea have suggested using the term "European refugee reception crisis" as it refocuses attention on Europe's role in creating crisis conditions. See Karina Horsti, "Introduction: Border Memories," in *The Politics of Public Memories of Forced Migration and Bordering in Europe*, ed. Karina Horsti (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019); and Andrea Rea, Marco Martinello, Alessandro Mazzola, and Bart Meuleman, eds., *The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe: Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2019).

2 Timur Vermes, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* (Cologne: Eichborn, 2018). Future references to this book will be given in the main body in parentheses using the abbreviation *HS*. Translations will be quoted from Timur Vermes, *The Hungry and the Fat*, trans. Jamie Bulloch (London: MacLehose Press, 2020). References to this translation will be given in the main body in parentheses using the abbreviation *HF*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of luxury and the prospect of personal and professional security.[3] While Heine advocates a redistribution of resources and privilege to eradicate the circumstances that produce these rats, Vermes updates the message for a neoliberal twenty-first century audience and violently eliminates the hungry on live TV, so that the fat can continue to prosper. This savage solution to the refugee crisis, which draws on anti-migrant rhetoric, sets Vermes's novel apart from other writerly attempts to respond to the refugee crisis. As will be shown, these other texts often try to make different facets of the crisis more comprehensible. In contrast, Vermes focuses on Germany's response, blending an attack on the media, politicians, and public discourse with entertainment to highlight inconsistencies and absurdities in socio-political attitudes to refugees. Concentrating on how Vermes helps readers to grasp the moral implications of mediating and consuming images of human vulnerability, while forcing them to witness the violence of the border, this chapter shows how *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* disrupts social and political norms and values to spark reflections that could generate change.

The European refugee crisis began in 2015 when conflicts in Syria and other fragile states like Afghanistan, Iraq, and different sub-Saharan African countries led large numbers of people to seek asylum in the European Union (EU). Since 2015, academics, politicians, journalists, and the wider public have been discussing and debating the nature and consequences of this crisis which has dominated the media and the political landscape. As political actors try to use the crisis to validate their own agendas and projects, different narratives have begun to compete for discursive space. Exactly what is perceived to be in crisis depends on the particular perspective adopted. For the forcibly displaced, the unstable situation in their homelands, their experiences of the dangers of their trek, the circumstances of their arrival, and their wait for asylum are all marked by crisis. For the receiving states, the crisis has a different nature. In light of the high numbers of people managing to illegally cross borders and arrive into the EU, member states have interpreted the refugee crisis as a border crisis.[4] They have responded to this by trying to control mobility through stricter controls and border management systems that protect their sovereign territories and prevent the Other arriving. As Nick Vaughan-Williams notes, this border-work, which sometimes takes

3 In "Die Wanderratten" (The Wandering Rats), Heine outlines a situation of fear sparked by asymmetries between the two types of rat, the hungry and the fat. While the fat rats try to repel the hungry with weapons, prayers, and reasoning, the poem suggests that only access to food will help deescalate the situation. Heinrich Heine, "Die Wanderratten," in *Gedichte von Heinrich Heine*, ed. Bernd Kortländer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2013), 237.

4 Nicholas De Genova, *The Borders of "Europe": Autonomy of Migration, Tactics of Bordering* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

the form of refusing entry without assessing protection needs (so-called "pushback" operations) or ignoring distress signals in the Mediterranean Sea, has a thanatopolitical drift.[5] It compromises the right to protection against *refoulement* and can even become a form of "governing migration through death," a bordering tactic which Vicki Squire sees as symptomatic of a crisis of modern humanism.[6]

The refugee crisis can also be seen to have generated a national and transnational crisis of infrastructure, as the high volume of arrivals into the EU overwhelmed the local systems in place to process them efficiently. This led to chaotic situations which polarized the European public and exposed divisions in the European project. Because of the EU's Dublin Regulation, refugees may only apply for protection in the country where they first enter EU territory. While some countries like Germany and Sweden initially welcomed migrants, others (such as Hungary) began to mount a strong opposition to new arrivals.[7] The reappearance of internal state borders and border fences to protect EU member states against unwanted entry after the long summer of migration in 2015[8]—for example, between Hungary and Croatia, Bulgaria and Turkey, and along the Austro-Slovenian and the Slovenian-Croatian borders[9]—suggested a

5 According to the 2019 Report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons for the Council of Europe, pushback policies and practice are an increasing phenomenon at Europe's borders. It notes that there are persistent reports and evidence of inhuman and degrading treatment by member states and their agencies. Tineke Strik, "Pushback Policies and Practice in Council of Europe Member States," Document 14909, June 8, 2019, http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-en.asp?fileid=27728&lang=en (accessed July 1, 2020). For information on thanatopolitical drift, see Nick Vaughan-Williams, *Europe's Border Crisis: Biopolitical Security and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 47.

6 Vicki Squire, "Governing Migration through Death in Europe and the US: Identification, Burial and the Crisis of Modern Humanism," *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2017): 513–32.

7 For an analysis of the practices deployed by the Hungarian government in relation to migration and borders, see Céline Cantat, "Governing Migrants and Refugees in Hungary: Politics of Spectacle, Negligence and Solidarity in a Securitising State," in *Politics of (Dis)Integration*, ed. Sophie Hinger and Reinhard Schweitzer (Cham: Springer Open, 2020), 183–99.

8 This term was first used in Sabine Hess et al., *Der lange Sommer der Migration: Grenzregime III* (Berlin: Association A, 2017).

9 Andrea Rea, Marco Martinello, Alessandro Mazzola, and Bart Meuleman, "Introduction: The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe; Polarized Opinions and Mobilizations," in Rea et al., eds. *The Refugee Reception Crisis in Europe*, 11–30, here 14.

breakdown in the post-Cold War project of a borderless Europe.[10] This was compounded by a crisis of cooperation, as member states were unable to agree on whether they should take in those fleeing war, violence, and other forms of destitution and, if so, whether these people should then be distributed across the EU.[11]

When a situation is declared a crisis, it suggests that there is an emergency and a departure from what is normal which requires an urgent and decisive response.[12] The language of crisis implies that this is unprecedented, a view that was embraced by European media. This perspective overlooks other large migratory waves which have taken place outside of Europe, and it also discounts historical waves of migration in post-war Europe.[13] Since 1945, Europe has been continuously faced with different kinds of migratory flows from the guest workers who helped to rebuild key industries, to those who arrived after the Cold War and the collapse of Communism, and those who fled during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s. As Peter Gatrell notes, disagreements over policy and practice have been an integral part of Europe's response to these migratory flows.[14] His study of post-war European migration history shows that new arrivals have always been accompanied by suspicion and tension and, generally, societies have been reluctant to take them in. Reflecting on this from a German perspective, Deniz Göktürk highlights the persistence of anti-migrant rhetoric throughout the history of the Federal Republic. In West Germany in the 1970s, citizens already expressed fears about rising rates of foreign nationals and metaphors of beleaguered boats and floods were in circulation as early as in the 1980s. In the early 1990s,

10 This had seemed to become more real after economic integration and the abolition of checks on movement at internal borders through the Schengen agreement. Schengen was also supposed to foster enhanced cooperation in asylum and immigration policy, policing, and information exchange. For a detailed analysis of Schengen, see William Walters, "Mapping Schengenland: Denaturalising the Border," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2000): 561–80.

11 Jürgen Gerhards, Holger Lengfeld, Zsófia Ignácz, Florain Kley, and Maximilian Priem, "Refugee Solidarity—Coping with High Numbers of Asylum Seekers," in *European Solidarity in Times of Crisis: Insights from a Thirteen-country Survey* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020), 180–230, here 181.

12 Andrew Simon Gilbert explores how crises can be used to define the contours of political discourse. For a detailed analysis of the crisis paradigm, see Andrew Simon Gilbert, *The Crisis Paradigm: Description and Prescription in Social and Political Theory* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

13 Peter Gatrell's recent history of migration in Europe tries to redress this. See Peter Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (New York: Basic Books, 2019).

14 Gatrell, *Unsettling*, 14.

anti-migrant hostilities led, on the one hand, to the outbreak of violence against foreigners in Rostock, Mölln, and Solingen. On the other hand, Germany already began to develop strategies to disqualify refugee claims on technicalities. In the 2000s, and particularly after 9/11, there was a rise of securitarian nationalist protectionism.[15]

Initially, Germany's welcoming response to the refugee crisis in 2015 seemed to break this pattern. When Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to open Germany's borders and admit more than one million people,[16] a citizen-volunteer movement sprang up to support the overworked state services and help refugees arriving in Germany by supplying them with food, clothes, and bureaucratic support. It soon became clear, however, that attitudes toward refugees were as divided in Germany as elsewhere in Europe. The lines of division can be drawn between those who defend open borders, international cooperation, and moral and/or ethical solidarity with the Other and those who favor a closed identity oriented around the nation-state and myths about racial homogeneity.[17] The shift in the German political landscape which has been taking place since 2015 can also be read along these lines.

After opening the borders, Merkel faced considerable backlash from her own party for her unilateral decision, which also created a rift between the Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and its sister party the Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern (Christian Social Union in Bavaria, CSU), and borders were reinstated within a few weeks. Nonetheless, the influx of refugees caused a surge in support for the anti-migrant protest group Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West, PEGIDA) and the Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) who stylize themselves as defenders of an

15 Deniz Göktürk, "*Germany in Transit* 10 Years On," in "Forum: Migration Studies," *The German Quarterly* 90, no. 2 (2017): 217–19, here 218.

16 In addition to humanitarian concerns, this decision may have been informed by Germany's obligation, after National Socialism, to offer shelter to those fleeing persecution; the dramatic scenes of the trek may have also sparked memories of the experiences of German refugees at the end of World War II. Equally, the decision may have been motivated by pragmatic concerns given Germany's aging population and the need to boost the workforce.

17 According to Yves Bizeul, this new political line of conflict can be seen in different European countries and in the USA. Yves Bizeul, "Ein neuer politischer Cleavage: die Konfliktlinie zwischen offener und geschlossener Identität," in *Offene oder geschlossene Kollektividentität: Von der Entstehung einer neuen Konfliktlinie*, ed. Yves Bizeul, Ludmila Lutz-Auras, and Jan Rohgalf (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2019), 1–22.

ethnically homogenous Germany.[18] Even though it is illusory to think that supranational and international relationships can be easily curtailed in today's interconnected world, right-wing populism has been gaining ground by re-nationalizing German identity and politics and blaming politicians, migrants, and refugees for globalizing processes. Since 2015, the AfD has increasingly gained electoral support and in September 2017 they won 12.6% of the vote and entered the Bundestag. German society has become more divided and the number of physical assaults on foreigners and attacks on refugee accommodation have increased.[19]

In March 2019 the European Commission declared the crisis over, citing an 89% decrease in the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe in 2018 compared to the figure in 2015. However, it is clear that the crisis situations that people are fleeing have not decreased in number, and that the historical, economic, and political structures that produce refugees and migrants have not changed. What has changed is that EU pacts with non-EU countries have led to detentions before people get to the EU. It thus seems fair to say that the problem with irregular migration has not gone away,[20] it has just disappeared from our view. As we shall see, literature can help to restore its visibility.

Literary Responses: Migration Narratives and the Refugee Crisis

Situated at the nexus of politics and aesthetics, literary texts that respond to the crisis can complement, query, and amend dominant political narratives. By offering readers detailed and personal descriptions of what it means to try to cross borders in search of refuge and/or a better quality of life in another country, these texts can educate non-experiential readers

18 Inken Rommel, "'We are the People.' Refugee 'Crisis,' and the Drag-Effects of Social Habitus in German Society," *Historical Social Research* 42, no. 4 (2017): 133–54, here 134.

19 For an analysis of this, see, for example, Jonas H. Rees, Yann P.M. Rees, Jens H. Hellmann, and Andreas Zick, "Climate of Hate: Similar Correlates of Far Right Electoral Support and Right-Wing Hate Crimes in Germany," *Frontiers in Psychology*, October 18, 2019, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02328. A chronicle of violence against refugees and asylum seekers since 2015, compiled by the Amadeu Antonio Foundation and PRO ASYL, is available on the "Mut gegen rechte Gewalt" website. "Chronik flüchtlingsfeindlicher Vorfälle," https://www.mut-gegen-rechte-gewalt.de/service/chronik-vorfaelle (accessed March 30, 2020).

20 The term "irregular migration" is used throughout to describe a form of unauthorized mobility which differs from authorized mobility by regular routes. The category includes people on the move who may meet the criteria for refugee status in the narrow sense of the 1951 Refugee Convention and others who may have to move for other—for example, economic or environmental—reasons.

about the experiences of the Other and raise questions about ideas of the nation, community, and what it means to belong in place. Zooming in on individual stories, they model how to imagine the Other across social and geographical borders and create opportunities for encounter, connection, and empathy. They write from and provide insights into different perspectives and encourage readers to switch viewpoints and locations.[21] This makes real and imaginary border crossings possible.[22]

Reflecting on how writing about migration has been classified and received in post-war Germany, Brent O. Peterson has proposed the category of "migration narratives" to replace other labels such as "migrant literature" or "Gastarbeiterliteratur" (guest worker literature).[23] This new term is adopted here because of its inclusivity. The broad term "migration" shifts the focus from the author's biography to the depiction of movement and the experience of migration in the literary text—in the way that "migrant writing," for example, does not. It creates space for works by authors who do not have a migrant background and for different experiences of regular and irregular migration. It also avoids establishing hierarchies between economic migrants and asylum seekers or refugees.

By thematizing and deconstructing prejudices, fears, and stereotypes, migration narratives can be an important tool of sociocultural criticism. As such, they build on engaged or committed literature that was practiced after the Second World War.[24] This mode of writing emphasized the author's obligation to be useful to society, that is: the author's responsibility to thematize and try to resolve social problems. Like engaged

21 While fiction generally allows authors and readers to inhabit the perspectives of others, the question of who writes about whose suffering and from which perspective can bring ethical and aesthetic problems to the fore. Telling stories that are not one's own can be understood as an act of discursive domination and invasive imagination that reproduces political, economic, and social asymmetries. For an analysis of this, see Shameem Black, *Fiction Across Borders: Imagining the Lives of Others in Late-Twentieth-Century Novels* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

22 Matthias Bauer, Martin Nies, and Ivo Theele, "Einleitung der Herausgeber: Grenz-Übergänge—Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil," in *Grenz-Übergänge: Zur ästhetischen Darstellung von Flucht und Exil in Literatur und Film*, ed. Matthias Bauer, Martin Nies, and Ivo Theele (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 7–15, here 8.

23 Brent O. Peterson, "*Peter Schlemihl*, the Chamisso Prize, and the Much Longer History of German Migration Narratives," *German Studies Review* 41, no. 1 (2018): 81–98, here 82.

24 For an overview of "engaged" literature, see Charles G. Whiting, "The Case for 'Engaged' Literature," *Yale French Studies* (1948): 84–89; and Amanda Crawley Jackson, "The Style of Engagement and the Engagement of Style: Sartre and the Literary Text," *Romance Studies* 26, no. 1 (2008): 21–31.

literature, contemporary migration narratives often also try to address social and political problems of the present. However, they do not generally propose solutions, but instead use narrative to influence political and sociocultural change. As Shameem Black notes, texts "cannot bring about new and enduring solidarity by themselves."[25] Nonetheless, they can still envision expansive forms of public culture, which means that "they may still work to enlarge their readers' horizons of possibility."[26]

If we look at recent German-language literature that engages with and responds to the refugee crisis and its wider themes, it is possible to identify at least six key focal points, even if some texts cross multiple categories. (1) The crisis features as a side topic. (2) Texts prioritize the subjective experience of leaving home and crossing borders illegally. (3) They concentrate on the problems that refugees and asylum seekers encounter when they arrive in the host country, including wrestling with the bureaucratic asylum process and being out of place. (4) The crisis is narrated from the perspective of the host community and how it has been affected by new arrivals. (5) Other historical migration flows are used as a way of reframing displacement in the twenty-first century. (6) The crisis is reframed through future fictions that depict a new migrant crisis.

In the first category, although the crisis is not the main focus, it is woven into the fabric of the narrative. This can be seen as a comment on how the crisis is often publicly marginalized or sidelined and it may reflect how it has become part of everyday life. Examples include Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis* (Encounter, 2016) and Robert Prosser's *Gemma Habibi* (Let's go, darling, 2019). While *Widerfahrnis* centers on the brief love affair between an aging couple, their escape to Italy brings them in contact with people desperately trying to flee north, highlighting their differences in privilege. In Prosser's novel, although the protagonist travels to Syria, is friends with a Syrian refugee, and participates in demonstrations, he is more interested in social bonds than politics. The novel mostly concentrates on his increasing obsession with boxing and his sense of belonging in the Viennese boxing community. Texts in the second category focus on the push factors and try to explain why people cannot stay. Set abroad, they explore the traumatic experience of clandestine border crossings and detail how this affects the border crosser's sense of self. Olga Grjasnowa's *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* (God is not shy, 2017; in English as *City of Jasmine*, 2019), which details the Syrian civil war and the experience of flight from male and female perspectives, is a good example of this. The novel slows down the story of the crossing, forcing readers to engage with risky border crossings and near-death experiences. Merle Kröger's multiperspectival crime thriller *Havarie*

25 Black, *Fiction Across Borders*, 253.
26 Black, *Fiction Across Borders*, 253.

(Lost at Sea, 2015) and Reinhard Kleist's graphic novel *Der Traum von Olympia* (2015; *An Olympic Dream*, 2016), which depicts the story of the Somalian sprinter Samia Yusef Omar who drowned off the Libyan coast while trying to cross to Italy, also fit this category.[27]

By drawing attention to the desperate and sometimes absurd situations that asylum seekers face, texts in the third category try to break down stereotypes and foster more understanding. Although they are based on earlier events, Abbas Khider's *Ohrfeige* (2016; *A Slap in the Face*, 2019) and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (2015; *Go, Went, Gone*, 2017), published at the height of the crisis, both engage with the administrative hurdles and uncertainties that people face as they seek asylum in Germany. *Ohrfeige* narrates the story of Karim, a young man from Iraq, who, frustrated by the system and facing deportation, fantasizes about tying up his caseworker and forcing her to listen to his story. This will now likely involve further displacement and another illegal crossing to Finland in order to avoid being sent back. Erpenbeck also shows the human fallout of bureaucratic systems and legal processes that increase the asylum seeker's psychological and existential precarity. *Gehen, ging, gegangen* details the experiences of some African asylum seekers in Berlin as they try to negotiate the asylum process. Through the story of one of them, Osarobo, Erpenbeck draws attention to dislocation through border control. Although Osarobo is free to leave Italy where he arrived from Libya, he is not free to arrive elsewhere in the EU, and he has to return to Italy regularly to renew his papers. He ends up zigzagging between legality and illegality and engaging in shady practices to secure an Italian address and finance his trips. This unsettling form of circular mobility between Germany and Italy prolongs his dislocation

27 In her analysis of these texts, Faye Stewart suggests that the category of migrant or asylum literature is not appropriate as the protagonists drown trying to enter the EU. She prefers to describe them more precisely as "boat refugee narratives," a category introduced by April Shemak. For Stewart, this category helps to emphasize the transience and liminality of flight and the absence of arrival. While it does force us to reflect on what happens at watery boundaries, it seems to create unnecessary divisions in experience. Even in stories where protagonists survive the crossing and apply for and receive asylum, they may not "arrive" in place but instead remain caught in this liminal space. For this reason, I prefer the category of migration narratives which is broad enough to include journeys where arrival is not possible. Although the term migration can obscure the threat under which people had to leave their homes, this term does allow flexibility to cover different kinds of push factors. Faye Stewart, "Mediterranean Travels and Travails: Optimism and Crisis in Boat Refugee Narratives at the Boundaries of Europe," in *Protest und Verweigerung / Protest and Refusal: Neue Tendenzen in der deutschen Literatur seit 1989 / New Trends in German Literature since 1989*, ed. Hans Adler and Sonja E. Klocke (Paderborn: Fink, 2019), 205–24, here 206.

and increases his vulnerability. In its focus on Richard, a retired Classics Professor from the former GDR, and his relationship to the asylum seekers from Africa that transforms him, this novel also sits easily in the fourth category, which contemplates the place of refugees and asylum seekers in the host country and their impact on the country's social, economic, and political wellbeing.[28]

By writing historical migration back into cultural memory through their narratives and connecting the past and the present, texts in the fifth category can help to counteract the aforementioned hyper-presentism in public debates on refugees and border crossing in Europe. They also flag up what Gatrell calls the "durability of refugee crises,"[29] as they make the medium- and longer-term legacy of displacement clear. Saša Stanišić's hybrid family story *Herkunft* (Origins, 2019), which mixes personal and political history, memory, and fantasy, illustrates this well. Stanišić links his own story of flight during the Yugoslav Wars and his experience of 1990s Germany to the present, where the flight routes of irregular migrants pass through the places from which he and his mother once fled. His story reminds readers that even when migration flows no longer command media attention, the experience of dislocation and flight still affect people and place.[30]

By drawing attention to the experiences of other migrant groups at different points in time, historical migrant narratives can remind readers

28 Erpenbeck's novel flags up some of the ethical and aesthetic problems that migration writing can present, namely: who speaks about whose experience of crossing borders, and how. While the novel weaves in the personal experience of flight through testimony, it focuses more on how Richard is changed through his encounter with the asylum seekers. For a critical account of *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* see, for example, Nicholas Courtman, "Seeing the Human in the (Queer) Migrant in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, Ging, Gegangen* and Terezia Mora's *Alle Tage*," in *Queering German Culture*, Edinburgh German Yearbook 10, ed. Leanne Dawson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018), 153–76. For alternative readings, see Anne Fuchs, *Precarious Times: Temporality and History in Modern German Culture* (New York: Cornell, 2019), 231–52, and Christiane Steckenbiller, "Futurity, Aging, and Personal Crises: Writing about Refugees in Jenny Erpenbeck's *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (2015) and Bodo Kirchhoff's *Widerfahrnis* (2016)," *The German Quarterly*, 92, no. 1 (2019): 68–86.

29 Peter Gatrell, "Refugees in Modern World History," in *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities*, ed. Emma Cox, Sam Durant, David Farried, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 18–35, here 30.

30 Ilija Trojanow's *Nach der Flucht* (After Flight, 2017) presents a different kind of migration narrative insofar as it does not situate the experience of flight in a particular historical context. Instead, the book discusses the challenges, disturbances, and new perspectives that this experience brings in generic, universalizing terms. Ilija Trojanow, *Nach der Flucht* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2017).

of their own biographical vulnerability and the interchangeability of positions. In the past, Europe has also been a place that groups have left to escape persecution, as well as poverty, disease, and famine. In her multiperspectival novel *Schlafgänger* (2015; *Shift Sleepers*, 2019), Dorothee Elmiger creates a genealogy of movement. She builds an intricate web of connection that links irregular migrants in the twenty-first century, Swiss precarious labor migration in the nineteenth century, economic migration, and European colonization and abrasive business practices abroad which have exacerbated the asymmetrical conditions between the global north and south. Through these connections, Elmiger raises questions about the West's historical and moral responsibility for the situation of the Other.

The novels in the sixth category use the play space of an imaginary future to refract the challenges presented by irregular migration in the present. Adopting the critical dystopian mode, these speculative fictions model different crisis scenarios that force people to leave their homelands, from political upheavals to economic crises and climate change. Current social fears and anxieties about high-tech surveillance, border militarization, increased xenophobia, and paranoid nationalism are amplified in these tales of dislocation and incarceration. As Eva Horn notes, these future catastrophes are not just a form of escape from a given reality, they actually reveal underlying structures in the present which they try to re-evaluate in order to circumvent catastrophe.[31] Klaus Oppitz's *Auswandertag* (Emigration Day, 2014) and Christian Torkler's *Der Platz an der Sonne* (2018; *The Place in the Sun*, 2018) offer two useful examples of this. Both novels foreground economic migration and invert the direction of unwanted traffic. In Oppitz's *Auswandertag*, the Putschek family flee an economically destitute Austria for Turkey, which, in this world, is one of the wealthiest EU countries. In *Der Platz an der Sonne*, the hero tries to secure a better life by leaving Europe for Africa. By depicting scenarios where western Europeans are trying to flee to other countries in search of better opportunities, the novels highlight the instability and contingency of current hierarchies. In Martin Schäuble's young adult fiction *Endland* (2018) and Max Annas's *Finsterwalde* (2018), Germany's dictatorial past ghosts the future. Germany is imagined as a police state where the unwanted are kept separate from German society and interned in camps.

Timur Vermes's *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* also fits this category of future fictions. Outlining a crisis scenario in the near future, the novel takes an original approach to the refugee crisis by reframing it as a specifically German problem. In an ironic wink to the reader, Vermes magnifies

31 Eva Horn, *The Future as Catastrophe: Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 10–11.

the lack of solidarity that has characterized the response of the European Union's member states, and forces Germany to stand alone. The scenario is as follows: one hundred and fifty thousand African refugees have decided to leave the camp where they are housed in sub-Saharan Africa and walk to Germany. They are accompanied by a TV crew which had been filming in the camp for the private German channel MyTV. Instead of wrapping up their program, the crew film the trek which is shown live on German television. Employing a form of what Gary Saul Morson calls "vortex time"[32] where the action converges on a single catastrophe, Vermes's novel counts down to a fictional border confrontation, offering an interpretation of what could happen if, this time, Germany decided to defend its borders with violence. The play space of fiction functions as a testing ground where the consequences of this decision for the refugees and for German civic and political life can be explored.

Imagining an Alternative for Germany? A Violent Solution and a New Beginning

Vermes unfolds a possible future for Germany by presenting readers with a counterfactual version of its past. This fictional event seems to echo the 2015 "march of hope" when refugees stranded in Viktor Orbán's Hungary circumvented the country's transport ban and walked to the Hungarian-Austrian border in a hyper-visible march which was accompanied by reporters and TV cameras. In order to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, Merkel and the then Austrian chancellor Werner Faymann temporarily suspended the Dublin Agreement for Syrian refugees and opened their borders. While this has been identified as an important if fleeting moment in the moral imagination of a progressive Europe, an analysis by *Die Zeit* suggests that Orbán orchestrated a situation where Merkel had practically no alternative.[33] This is the point where Vermes's political satire sets in. By creating an alternative history,[34] Vermes reminds

32 Gary Saul Morson, *Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 162–64.

33 Georg Blum, Marc Brost, Tina Hildebrandt, Alexej Hock, Sybille Klormann, Angela Köckritz, Matthias Krupa, Miriam Lau, Gero von Randow, Merlind Theile, Michael Thumann, and Heinrich Wefing, "Grenzöffnung für Flüchtlinge: Was geschah?," *ZEIT Online*, August 22, 2016, https://www.zeit.de/2016/35/grenzoeffnung-fluechtlinge-september-2015-wochenende-angela-merkel-ungarn-oesterreich (accessed May 30, 2020).

34 According to Michael Butter, alternative histories are narratives in which one or more past events are changed and the consequences are imagined. Michael Butter, *The Epitome of Evil: Hitler in American Fiction 1939–2002* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 13. For more information on this, see Christoph Rodiek,

readers that there were other possibilities that could have been realized. This foregrounds contingency and disturbs the illusion that the actual course of events was inevitable.

In Vermes's counterfactual Germany, Merkel has been pushed out of politics after the wave of sexual attacks on women reported in Cologne and other German cities on New Year's Eve 2015–16.[35] This ushers in a new political era with the CSU and Die Grünen (the Greens) in power. Located at the intersection of historical fiction and dystopian literature, counterfactual narratives combine real history and fiction in a way which creates a contrast effect.[36] This contrast relies on the reader's cultural knowledge and vigilance. As real events and ideas intrude under different guises, readers switch repeatedly between reality and fiction. This engages them in a dual process of identification and differentiation which in turn alienates them from both the fictional and real worlds, creating space for critique. Through the mental juxtaposition with the fictional world, the reader's awareness of actual events is sharpened, so that real events appear, by contrast, better or worse.[37]

In *Die Hungrigen und die Satten*, Vermes offers a satirical interpretation of some of the "solutions" to the problem of irregular migration proffered by German anti-migrant populists.[38] Repeated calls from PEGIDA and the AfD to close and harden borders—and even to defend them with weapons, as suggested in January 2016 by AfD's former

Erfundene Vergangenheit: Kontrafaktische Geschichtsdarstellung (Uchronie) in der Literatur (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1997); Karen Hellekson, *The Alternate History: Refiguring Historical Time* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001); and Hilary P. Dannenberg, *Coincidence and Counterfactuality: Plotting Time and Space in Narrative Fiction* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

35 For an analysis of how the reports of sexual attacks by migrant men on German women in Cologne and other German cities on New Year's Eve 2015–16 affected the media representation of male migrants, see Iris Wigger, "Anti-Muslim Racism and the Racialisation of Sexual Violence: 'Intersectional Stereotyping' in Mass Media Representations of Male Muslim Migrants in Germany," *Culture & Religion* 20 (2019): 248–71.

36 Michael Butter, Dorothee Birke, and Tilmann Köppe, "Introduction: England Win," in *Counterfactual Thinking—Counterfactual Writing* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 1–11, here 2.

37 Neal Roese and Mike Morrison, "The Psychology of Counterfactual Thinking," in *Historical Social Research* 34, no. 2 (2009): 16–26, here 19.

38 This seems to pick up on actual events in Germany. PEGIDA marches regularly called for a form of lynch justice against politicians whom they held responsible for jeopardizing Germany's wellbeing; Leubl's assassination in the text seems to be a fictional translation of this. It is worth noting that these calls were also unfortunately translated into reality in June 2019 when the CDU politician Walter Lübcke was shot in the head by a far-right extremist.

Co-chair Frauke Petry and Deputy Leader Beatrix von Storch—are realized in the story and given palpable shape to show why these suggestions are incompatible with a Germany that is historically aware. Through his staging of a renewed and fictional border confrontation, this time at an electrified border fence and in a way which culminates in the deliberate elimination of life through a coordinated drone attack, Vermes facilitates a retrospective re-evaluation of Merkel's decision in 2015. When faced, in this fictional version, with the prospect of large numbers of deaths at the German border, readers may feel relieved that Germany did not close its borders and create a human logjam in 2015. However, this downward counterfactual thinking has an added bite. The acts of lethal bordering that Vermes constructs at Germany's border stand in for the wider processes of governing migration through death that have become an established feature of contemporary migratory politics at the EU's external borders. As Germany supports these border practices, Germans are implicated in it, even if they are not directly confronted by it. By touching on questions about responsibility for and the toleration of deaths at the national border, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* encourages readers to consider the moral implications and to critically rethink the border practices they are willing to accept.

Vermes also uses satire to critically explore how irregular migrants are mediated and how this media portrayal is consumed. Focusing on television images and sensationalist reporting, he takes aim at a representational culture that trades in the spectacular in its bid to attract and entertain audiences. The TV program "Engel im Elend" (Angel in Adversity) which provides a pivot point for the story epitomizes this culture. This show is produced by Joachim Sensenbrink, the MyTV executive who also featured in Vermes's breakthrough novel *Er ist wieder da* (2012; *Look Who's Back*, 2014), a book that saw Hitler waking up and becoming a TV star in the twenty-first century. "Engel im Elend" is a reality documentary hybrid that thrives on shock tactics and the logic of a quick fix to hook audiences. In the show, the minor celebrity host, Nadeche Hackenbusch, is dispatched to decontextualized situations of need where she performs compassion and bestows superficial help. This changes when, after she is sent to film in the largest refugee camp in Africa, she decides to accompany Lionel, her fixer on the ground, on the long walk to Germany. Stylized as "das größte Live-Drama" (*HS*, 267; the greatest live drama, *HF*, 291) in the history of television, the countdown to the refugees' arrival spills over into different media, polarizing the public and dominating public discourse as the caravan moves closer. Exploring the interplay between the media, politics, and public life, Vermes's satire highlights the negative potential of what Roger Silverstone, building on Hannah Arendt, calls the "mediapolis." As "the mediated public space where contemporary political life increasingly finds

its place,"[39] the mediapolis could potentially be a social, civic, and moral space with a global reach. Vermes, however, shows its limitations. An irresponsible media environment that prioritizes profits and uses its control of appearances to satiate rather than educate or transform its audience can also be channeled to feed a moral panic that in turn affects political and public life. By educating the reader into a more critical engagement with the media, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* aims to disrupt this pattern of passive consumption and change the story of Germany's future.

Vermes's critique of the media operates on three different levels. Firstly and secondly, it targets the producers and the consumers of mediated realities, and thirdly, it explores the relationship between the media and politics. The producers of mediated realities are represented here by the MyTV executives and the EVANGELINE journalist Astrid von Roëll who accompanies Hackenbusch to Africa. By including the strategic discussions in the MyTV production offices, Vermes shows readers how events are framed to maximum effect and stylized so that they facilitate monetization, whether through the sale of licenses or advertising. Von Roëll's intrusive and gossipy articles which regularly interrupt the story offer readers a practical crash course in media literacy. Information and images are massaged into a sensational romantic adventure storyline—"10 000 Kilometer für die Liebe" (*HS*, 196; 10,000 kilometers for love, *HF*, 212)—which eclipses any information about the geopolitical situation or the global asymmetries that have caused the refugees to leave their homes. The journalistic essay included at the end of the novel which has been corrected and graded hammers this message home.[40] Here, the memory of Lionel disappears completely because of the focus on Nadeche Hackenbusch and German political practices. This is, according to Lilie Chouliaraki, one of the problems with celebrity humanitarianism.[41] The celebrity who tries to use cultural capital and fame to raise awareness of a particular cause can end up overshadowing and displacing the object of their concern. Audiences are more interested in the celebrity's performance of emotion and help than in the problem itself. By emphasizing the dissonance between how Hackenbusch behaves on and off camera, Vermes draws attention to her vain, selfish ambition and her performance of humanitarianism.

39 Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of the Mediapolis* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2013).

40 This essay, which is included at the end of the novel, has been written by a student five years after the border confrontation and submitted as an assignment to an academy for quality journalism set up in honor of Astrid von Roëll. It has been corrected and annotated by van Roëll's professional adversary Lou Grant.

41 Lilie Chouliariaki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (Cambridge and Malden, MA: Polity, 2016), 79.

The text also criticizes audiences who consume these mediated realities without interrogating their limitations. By failing to challenge or query media representations, these passive recipients are implicated in the process of selective mediation which they support. They are, in Roger Silverstone's words, "complicit, or even actively engaged, that is, collusive in a mediated culture that fails to deliver its promises of communication and connection."[42] Lohm's granddaughter Bine, who is enthralled by the YouTube influencer, Schminki Krawall, provides a negative example for the reader. When Schminki visits Africa as part of the wider celebrity activities to support the march, she treats audiences to images of her exotic safari, reminding them that "man darf bei alledem nicht vergessen, dass das hier eigentlich ein sehr schönes Land ist—und gar nicht teuer" (*HS*, 255; we shouldn't forget that this is actually a very beautiful country—and not at all expensive, *HF*, 278). Papering over violent conflicts and environmental devastation that generate suffering and cause flight, Schminki focuses on selling Africa as a tourist and shopping destination for thrifty German consumers and Bine falls for this manipulation. Her vision of a more equal world is a world "in der alle Urlaub machen können" (*HS*, 256; where everyone could go on holiday, *HF*, 279). Taking aim at what Chouliaraki calls "post-humanitarian solidarity," a form of thinned-out solidarity that is not motivated by the idea of a common humanity or an understanding of the fundamental interchangeability of us and them, but by self-oriented or narcissistic pleasures, the novel shows how limited this solidarity is. This in turn has consequences for the reader who also consumes mediated realities. Alert to the corrective criticism of satire, readers are encouraged to critically reflect upon their own complicity.

Thirdly, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* explores the interface between the media, politics, and everyday life, showing how the media is inscribed into political and cultural processes. By controlling how the world appears, these processes both shape and are shaped by the decisions and judgments of the people who consume them. The plot makes clear that an irresponsible media environment can unleash emotions that can be easily channeled into a moral panic. This in turn puts pressure on politicians who must appear to present solutions, even if the problem cannot be easily resolved. The satire is a comment on German public culture and civic space and their relationship to the media. It makes clear that a responsible and accountable media culture requires a critical and literate citizenry to engage with it, but also to fund it.

Just as TV is shown to manipulate stories and visual images, politicians also appear to be invested in a similar game of selectively revealing

42 Roger Silverstone, "Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life," *New Literary History* 33, no. 4 (2002): 761–80, here 762.

and concealing information in order to appease voters. Leubl and his Deputy Secretary of State Kevin Kruse represent two different political types. While Leubl is a realist whose neoliberal politics are shaped by an awareness of Germany's history and a refusal to use violence against the Other, Kruse has no such qualms. As the caravan advances, Leubl tries to safeguard Germany's wealth and wellbeing by strategically promoting an integration industry with hopes of setting up training facilities in eastern Germany and also in Africa to facilitate legal paths to Germany for better qualified migrants: "Das ist ein Deal: Wir bieten Schutz und Einkommen gegen Mitarbeit" (*HS*, 380; The deal is: we offer them protection and an income, and they help us out in return, *HF*, 413). "Integration" in this context is not a cultural process, but an assimilation into the workforce to protect German prosperity.[43] After he is assassinated for this approach on live TV, Kruse takes over his job and immediately sets about appeasing the anxious public by building a razor wire fence to secure Germany's border. Although the border is permeable, Kruse stages it as a hard border and opts to electrify it as an extra deterrent, relying on Germany's reputation to bolster his narrative. This border performance has a communicative function. Aimed at the caravan and future refugees, it suggests that Germany will not shy away from using violence to protect itself and they should turn back. It is also aimed at Germany's neighbors who should consider closing their own borders if they do not want to be left with the caravan in their country. As the countdown to the arrival of the caravan at the border has unleashed social and political turmoil in Germany, polarizing the public and causing some to take to the streets to protest that "Wir woll'n unser Land zurück" (*HS*, 345; We want our country back, *HF*, 374), the message is also directed at the civilian public: Germany is ready to protect itself.

Kruse is on site to witness the real consequences of his border strategy, namely the "Menschenbrei" (*HS*, 501; seething mass of people, *HF*, 549) which forms as people climb over each other to breach the fence. This chaotic catastrophe scenario is worsened by the arrival of violent German civilian vigilantes who attack other German civilians and security forces. The situation culminates when anonymously coordinated stealth drones descend as a deus ex machina to eliminate the problem by massacring three hundred thousand people, violently demonstrating the disposability of refugee lives. In this imagined solution to the crisis, Germany is doubly "rescued" by its mysterious ally. The problem that the caravan presented is completely eradicated and the border violence for

43 In *Desintegriert euch!*, Max Czollek attacks this German paradigm of integration which places migrants in a supplementary role to a monolithic German community. He calls instead for plurality and disintegration. See Max Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!* (Munich: Hanser, 2018).

which Germany was responsible is upstaged. Attention is focused instead on bringing the unknown perpetrator of this genocidal act to justice and Germany is able to stage itself as a moral witness. In short, the massacre presents, particularly for Kruse, a guilt-free form of wish fulfilment that the refugee problem be eradicated.[44]

There appears to be an authentic, if short-lived, moment of solidarity when Kruse, who presents himself as a cold strategist, sees people being crushed and burned to death. Becoming remorseful and feeling responsible, he helps a woman and a young girl to cross into Germany (*HS*, 503; *HF*, 552). This flash of common humanity is quickly absorbed by a self-oriented, profit-based approach to migrants after the genocidal act when Germany becomes involved in education and investment programs in Africa. This is a superficial German political reset—and a partial realization of Leubl's plan—that tries to maximize Germany's benefits. Kruse is instated as the Federal Commissioner for the Integration Industry and, under his watch, migrants now help resuscitate the former East where unemployment had been high, and services were in short supply. Engaged in exporting its own culture abroad, Germany creates more legal paths for migration and runs projects to make migrants more fit for German life, maintaining established hierarchies between "us" and "them." While upskilling locals has benefits for Germany and the prospective migrants, even if the scheme "fails" and the students decide to stay on in Africa after training, this is in fact also a "success" for German migration policies, since it keeps migrants out.

Vermes presents an ugly reality to shock readers. The characters are two-dimensional and cartoonish, the media are greedy and irresponsible, and the public is impatient, unrealistic, and short-sighted. In its desire to be entertained, it refuses to see, and supports an irresponsible politics that simply hides problems. While the text makes border violence visible, it hides the perpetrator behind the drone attack and allows the world to keep turning, undisturbed by these deaths. After the massacre, Germany quickly falls into the familiar structures of memory that it developed to come terms with and manage the remembrance of the Holocaust. However, the speed and absence of any evidence of working through makes these new memorial acts seem cynical. After five years, anniversaries are already being celebrated and an information center has

44 According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, when *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* was published, it resonated positively with two right-wing bloggers. Misreading the satirical tone of the text, they accepted Vermes's depiction of the migrant threat at face value. Marie Schmidt, "Braun und weiß, so ist es richtig," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, September 15, 2018, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/gegenwartsliteratur-braun-und-weiss-so-ist-es-richtig-1.4129931 (accessed January 25, 2020).

been built, designed by star architect Daniel Libeskind who designed the extension for the Jewish Museum Berlin. An entire memory industry has been built up around Nadeche Hackenbusch and her acts of care that turns the refugees whose lives were lost into accessories of her memory. Facilitating self-reflection and strategic forgetting, these memorial acts are disconnected from ideas of empathy, regret, and responsibility. Instead, in their attempts to cover over this violent disruption, they reinforce a lack of solidarity with the vulnerable Other.

In *Die Hungrigen und die Satten*, the refugee crisis is used to take stock of the state of the German nation. Here, responsibility for shaping Germany's future lies in the hands of the media, the civilian public, and the politicians, and all three are parodied. By holding up a distorting mirror and playing with political problems and shocking solutions, Vermes tries to jolt readers out of any complacency or compassion fatigue that may have befallen them to encourage a critical reassessment of the values that determine social and political life. Through the negative example of MyTV's viewers, the novel actively encourages readers to rethink and re-evaluate how they engage with the media. At best, MyTV's viewers engage in pity at a distance, but often they do not even do that. If one of the strengths of the book is its ability to pinpoint problems in our media culture and consumption that are magnified by the refugee crisis, one of the problems is the limitations of the satirical mode. While the novel uses irony, humor, and exaggeration to make problems visible, it does not give readers any tools to develop an alternative way of representing or relating to the Other. Refugees are presented in a decontextualized way and their reasons for leaving are never really explained. Instead, the desire for western goods and lifestyles are presented as the only motivation.

If MyTV's depiction of suffering in the camp rendered it bearable and entertaining for the fictional viewers, the novel's graphic depiction of the sudden elimination of the refugees places readers in the position of witness to the pain of others while also slyly and implicitly posing a question about their own narcissistic pleasure and their desire to be rid of the problem that irregular migration presents. By violently resolving this problem for Germany, Vermes's fictional future presents readers with a horizon of the possible in the hope that this can still be averted. In its attempts to encourage more critical reflection and a more responsible media culture and consumption, *Die Hungrigen und die Satten* tries to intervene in and change the parameters of the public debate about refugees in Germany.

Pluralized Selves and the Postmigrant Sublime: Isolde Charim's *Ich und die Anderen* (2018) and Wolfgang Fischer's *STYX* (2018)

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In *Ich und die Anderen: wie die neue Pluralisierung uns alle verändert* (I and the Others: How New Pluralization Changes Us All, 2018), the Austrian philosopher Isolde Charim considers how the contemporary psycho-political moment in Austria, Germany, and Europe relates to notions of social diversification and pluralization. While immigration to Austria has been the topic of recent studies,[1] Charim illuminates in more conceptual ways what is at stake regarding contemporary identity in diverse communities. As the first section of this article shows, her philosophical treatment of the relation between self and other, similitude and difference, diversity and universals, opens up ways of interpreting contemporary visual culture as an arena for negotiating changing conceptions of identity. In the second section I link Wolfgang Fischer's film *STYX* (2018),[2] one of several recent Austrian and European films that take the so-called "migrant crisis" as their subject matter,[3] to Charim's philosophy to argue that both texts use notions of pluralization, openness to alterity, incommensurability, and difference to reflect contemporary political concerns.

Scholars in the social sciences have recently coined the term "postmigrant" to describe the specific characteristics of diverse European societies and some have hailed "postmigration" as a new turn in cultural

1 See, for example, Michał Krzyżanowski and Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Exclusion: Debating Migration in Austria* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017).

2 Wolfgang Fischer, *STYX* (Munich: Zorro Medien GmbH, 2019), DVD.

3 See, for example, Jakob Brossmann's 2015 film *Lampedusa im Winter* and *Those Who Jump* from 2016, co-directed by Moritz Siebert, Estephan Wagner, and Abou Bakar Sidibé.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

studies.[4] As a hermeneutic methodology "postmigrant studies" stresses the importance of renegotiating the norm/anomaly, majority/minority divide and re-thinking concepts of integration, belonging, *Heimat*, and identity to better reflect contemporary "postnational," "postcolonial," or "postracial" societies.[5] German sociologist Naika Foroutan coined the term "postmigrant *society*" to denote a society transformed by migration, the prefix "post" reflecting the state that comes "after the end" of predominant notions of homogeneity.[6] For Foroutan and other sociologists working in this field, contemporary Germany is a de facto plural nation wherein "minority groups" are part and parcel of society.[7] Neither Charim nor Fischer use the word "postmigrant,"[8] but here I use "postmigrant" as associated with Charim's term "pluralized" to read her philosophy and Fischer's film in terms of their explorations of the effects of heterogeneity and relationality on individual identity. The idea that differences cannot be assimilated into sameness, and thus require us to reconceptualize identity and modes of belonging, underpin both texts. In the context of postnational diversity, the questions of what "a German" or "an Austrian" is, and how a pluralized national and personal identity may be thought and represented, becomes critical. As Charim argues, we need to think through the implications of the effects of pluralization on identity in the light of there no longer being only one way of being "German" or "Austrian." As I explain below, this entails tracing the shifting notions of the individual from dominant modes of identity formation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to the specificities of contemporary modes, in what Charim terms the Third Age of the Individual.

4 Moritz Schramm, Sten Pultz Moslund, Anne Ring Petersen, Mirjam Gebauer, Hans Christian Post, Sabrina Vitting-Seerup, and Frauke Wiegand, *Reframing Migration: Diversity and the Arts; The Postmigrant Condition* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2019).

5 See Lizzie Stewart, "Postmigrant Theatre: The Ballhaus Naunynstraße Takes on Sexual Nationalism," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017): 56–68. As Stewart notes, the term is used in paradoxical ways as it moves between its origins in theater practice in Berlin and theory, between "normative descriptor and transformative lens": 58.

6 Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

7 Regina Römhild, "Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017): 69–75.

8 Charim quotes Faroutan only once, to concur with her point that in a postmigrant society old oppositions are replaced by new fault lines. In Western European societies riven with divisions the salient opposition is no longer between a majoritized allegedly homogeneous "we" and "foreigners"/"minorities," but between *attitudes* to pluralization. Isolde Charim, *Ich und die Anderen* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2018), 107–8.

One of the key characteristics of this Third Age is the predominance of differences and heterogeneity where previously differences were subordinated to similitude (the First Age) or utilized as identificatory rallying points (the Second Age). What distinguishes pluralized Third Age identities from those of the First and Second Ages is the sense that identity is not founded on recognition (the apprehension of ready-made similitudes) or assertion of difference. Third Age identities are instead fundamentally incomplete and uncertain, constituted through limitations and contingent relationality and based on the experience of not being able to take identity for granted. I link Charim and Fischer together through their ambivalence about pluralized relationality and avoidance of a simple celebration of difference. I evaluate this inconclusiveness positively and will show the political reasons for this attitude by examining how, for Charim, in our contemporary political and cultural moment, pluralization is always accompanied by aggressive, violent and exclusory forms of backlash against pluralization—the most prevalent being right-wing populism in Europe (and in the USA)—and for Fischer, difference is equated with unequal distribution of precarity and exclusion from a human universal.

STYX, a film by Austrian director Wolfgang Fischer and his German co-author Ika Künzel, avoids directly representing contemporary social divisions and political turmoil. Instead, it averts the gaze from the German/Austrian homeland and displaces psycho-political tensions onto the Atlantic Ocean, where a lone German yachtswoman encounters a wrecked boat carrying African migrants. Witnessing their deaths and the European failure to respond to the emergency leads to the breakdown of the German/European subject. I argue that the film re-works the Kantian and postmodern sublime in the encounter between the European self and the migrant African other in a space beyond the homeland and in ways that allude to a changed conception of European identity. This reconfigured self arguably echoes Charim's articulation of contingent, pluralistic, relational identities open to diversity and difference and where notions of solipsistic self-sufficiency are undermined. Set at sea, the film underscores that it does not represent the social realities of German and Austrian post-migrant societies, but I nevertheless read it as alluding to an un-homing of Austrian/German identity, and the ocean as a fittingly abstract and fluctuating canvas onto which currently unresolvable questions about a de-*Heimat*ized identity may be projected. While Fischer problematizes the European gaze, Charim is more radical in her arguments about the ungrounding of representational systems. The centrifugal force exerted by diversity interrupts the automatic functioning of traditionally hegemonic signifiers and disrupts the normative power of national signs, such as the *Tracht* (traditional folk costume). Crucially, the pluralization of the norm or universal is not just its re-negotiation (e.g., an ironic or playful treatment of the *Tracht* or other ethnic/national signs) but the eradication of

the notion of the norm or universal per se. If pluralization transforms not only societies and individuals but also disrupts cultural signification by making signs incomplete and ambiguous, the difficulties in finding fixed, inclusive, and consensual forms of representation need to be acknowledged. To take Charim on her radical trajectory, pluralization means self-differing, acknowledgment of a constitutive contingency and incompleteness. In what follows, I analyze the different ways that Charim's philosophy and Fischer's film search for a new pluralized universal in the face of its impossibility. For Charim, it is precisely diversity that ruptures the myth of the self-identical (nation or identity), because different cultures are located not "beyond" the nation on the other side of clearly defined borders, and therefore do not function as the "external other" in opposition to which an internal identity is consolidated. The proximity of "otherness" means that incommensurability or difference needs to be reconceptualized not as an undermining intrusion from outside, but as that which is at the heart of the self or the homeland. Using Immanuel Kant and Judith Butler, I argue that *STYX* evokes a decentered European self by reconceptualizing the self-other boundary and reworking the Kantian and postmodern sublime to conceive of a relational bodily subject of difference. I will argue that a "postmigrant sublime" displays the inequality of access to the position of subject while casting the African migrants not as unrepresentable excess but as that which falls through the European gaze.

Pluralization and Its Discontents: Isolde Charim's *Ich und die Anderen*

Go into any school classroom in Austria and you will find migrant and nonmigrant children sitting next to each other, in supermarkets you will hear five or six different languages, you can have a chat with your Muslim neighbor in the queue for the checkout; in urban and rural areas throughout Austria there are different ethnicities living side by side. It is on the basis of the concrete reality of quotidian relations with different cultures, and not as a thought experiment, that Charim founds her thesis which is neatly summarized by the book's subtitle: "Wie die neue Pluralisierung uns alle verändert" (how the new pluralization changes us all).[9] The terms pluralized/pluralization (*not* plural/plurality) connote the unplanned nature of the diversification that has occurred in the last twenty years or so, and emphasize a sense of unwilled relationality with difference that underpins today's identities. It is new because, according to Charim's thesis, living in heterogeneous societies is a relatively recent

9 All translations from German into English are the author's.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

experience. The other key terms in the subtitle are "change" and "all of us." The latter stresses the scale of change, which does not just affect minorities but the so-called "majority" culture and identity. Charim's main question concerns the effects of these changes on the "majority": what kinds of attitudes and reactions emerge as a result of these changes—do Austrians, and more broadly, Europeans acknowledge or disavow pluralization? Dominant discourses of integration, for instance, keep us from fully engaging with change by promoting the illusory idea that migrants are simply absorbed into "majority culture" without anything or anybody changing in the process. The reluctance to think change is an underlying theme in Charim's analysis of the current populist climate in the Western world. Right-wing populism in Austria and Germany are prime examples of a backlash against pluralization on the part of the majority culture. Charim's theory tends to put the onus not on "deterritorialized" migrants, but on the nonmigrant majority, those with no experience of displacement beyond national borders, to acknowledge that pluralization changes their own relations with their culture and themselves. Psychopolitically, the majority society today functions like a minority.[10] What has changed about majority identity and culture might be difficult to pin down—after all, there are still yodeling, mountains, and *Lederhosen* (traditional leather trousers that are part of the *Tracht*) in Austria—yet national, ethnic, and religious signs no longer function as they used to in the historically relatively homogeneous Austrian society. While there is still the notion of *Leitkultur* (dominant culture) in Austria and Germany, Charim argues that the very fact that there needs to be debate about what constitutes *Leitkultur* reveals the erosion of its *Selbstverständlichkeit* (self-evident nature, which does not need to be investigated or justified); a culture that is continually brought to question itself no longer automatically allows for complete identities and modes of belonging that can be taken for granted. Charim contrasts these contemporary modes of belonging and identity formation with those of the nineteenth century, and uses the work of Benedict Anderson to stress how a multitude of concrete practices reinforced the harmonizing effects of nation-building. The nation as a dominant narrative imposed an artificial unity on diversity and impinged upon individual identities. In Charim's eyes it created the functioning fiction of homogeneity. By and large, this fiction promoted a sense of commonality based on similarity. In contemporary pluralized Austria and Europe, however, the continual awareness of living alongside others who are non-identical to oneself means that diversity gets inscribed as contingency and limitation at the heart of individual identity, because identity formation is no longer unquestioned and automatic, but always related to the alterity of others. Charim insists that all pluralized identities are lesser

10 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 48.

identities (than those prevalent in homogeneous societies), more precarious, less complete, and more limited, based on a constitutive absence, that is, created by the withdrawal of a positive relation to "the whole" and to complete modes of belonging. Like all precarious states, pluralized contemporary identities require more effort to maintain: "Es bedeutet also mehr Aufwand, weniger Ich zu sein" (it's more work being less of an I).[11] While Charim never celebrates these pluralized identities, she goes on to formulate a powerful critique of the modes of defense against pluralization. It is in this rejection of the rejection of pluralization that Charim's position may be located as a double negative that does not amount to an affirmative. In the last chapter she argues for a new notion of the "whole" as "negative community," predicated on the idea of identity as limited, relational, and incomplete.

As a continental philosopher, Charim writes a text that differs from sociological studies of postmigration in at least three ways. Firstly, it traces a genealogy of the production of the "individual" between the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries through the changing relation between the universal and particulars, the general and specific differences. Secondly, Charim's text establishes a dialectics of pluralization that affirms pluralization even where it is negated (the lens through which she interprets contemporary right-wing populism). And thirdly, it tackles ontological and ethical questions such as what contemporary identities are, and how individual identity is affected by pluralization, and by modes of defense against pluralization. Straddling these three areas is the problem of representation, which becomes clear in Charim's brilliant philosophical analyses of Austrian visual culture.

In order to distinguish how contemporary identities and nations differ from their earlier counterparts, Charim delineates three ages of individualism, as briefly sketched above, that are roughly chronological. The First Age of Individualism lasted from approximately 1800 to the 1960s and entailed the creation of an abstract individualism based on similitude where the individual was produced through positive absorption into larger groups (the Church, political parties) and in the process was guaranteed a full identity and complete mode of belonging. The Second Age of Individualism (1960s–2000) was about expressing an authentic self and asserting one's own identity by not accommodating oneself within larger groups. This led to the formation of lifestyle enclaves that allowed the reciprocal confirmation and recognition of like-minded people. There was a pluralization of ways of life—new social movements such as feminist, gay, and minority movements emerged that opened up a politics of "the first person," articulating notions of sex, race, religion, and ethnicity. Identity politics had the double goal of becoming part of the abstraction

11 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 48.

of the citizen while also expanding the notion of the abstract norm of the citizen. The Third Age of Individualism describes our current pluralistic age since the turn of the millennium, and Charim compares it with the Second Age to delineate more clearly what has changed. While 1960s individualism was about a pluralization of lifestyles, today we have a pluralization of the population. Further, the pluralization of contemporary identities is not about the assertion of difference as a kind of currency as if identities were fixed and known; rather today's different difference is self-differing/self-deferring: identity is continually open to question and is never completed or coming to rest once and for all. The picture Charim paints, then, is that of the erosion of modes of identity and belonging based on similitude, which means we have to tackle the question "how can we be different and equal at the same time?"

There were of course differences amongst people in homogeneous societies but these differences were secondary, and the changing of relationships between differences, similitude, and equality is key to Charim's argument. She homes in on the split in the democratic subject between *bourgeois* (private citizen) and *citoyen* (citizen of the state). In order for equality to be produced, subjects are divested of all distinguishing characteristics. In other words, the abstract universal is created by casting aside difference. However, *national* identity is the polar opposite of democratic abstraction. The "national type" is a generalization *with* specific characteristics—"the Austrian," "the German." By allowing specific modes of belonging premised on resemblance and the illusion that you can know everyone in your larger community, national identity labels used to function as a kind of social glue. Charim's use of the term "nationaler Typus" (national type), discussed in Chapter Two of *Ich und die Anderen*, may be understood as illustrating what Jean-Luc Nancy calls immanence, the "creation of self-presence and harmonious milieu in which the community can play back to itself through its institutions, rituals and symbols the community's own immanent unity."[12] One of the effects of pluralization is that it interrupts the national community's myth of its own immanence and opens up a space in the community's identification with itself, giving us instead the idea of community as active incompleteness.

Charim embeds her philosophy in analyses of contemporary Austrian visual culture such as the poster *Der Bauch sagt: Respekt ist Kopfsache* (Gut feeling says: use your head—respect others; fig. 1).[13] The poster was widely displayed and well-known in Vienna in 2015. By showing four heads from behind, one wearing a Kippa, one a headscarf, one that

12 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. and trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

13 Thanks to Marielle Sutherland for her advice and help in translating the caption.

Fig. 1. *Der Bauch sagt: Respekt ist Kopfsache* (Gut feeling says: use your head—respect others) poster, Vienna, 2015. Reprinted with kind permission of Rainer Friedl, Friedl und Partner, Vienna.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.003 Published online by Cambridge University Press

is black, and one wearing the *Trachtenhut* (the traditional Austrian folk hat), it makes a powerful anti-racist statement that affirms Vienna's image as a multicultural, open, and diverse city. For Charim the poster illustrates the changes to identity and belonging that occur in a pluralized society and gives us an inkling as to why pluralization is rejected by right-wing populism. It suggests that pluralized individuals cannot live their identities as if they were absolute or *selbstverständlich* (self-evident) but rather continually experience relationality with diversity by sharing space and time with others who are different from them. This means that pluralized selfhood cannot be thought as anything other than relational, and this is, crucially, a relationality with alterity, not similitude. Further, individuals are brought to experience contingency through the awareness that they could have been born into a different religion or different ethnicity; individuals experience their own particular identity as a possibility that could have been otherwise. The stress here is not on freedom of choice and relativity but on pluralization as the exposure to the limits of natural similitude and the absence of a common measure. The erosion of a norm or universal is an experience of alterity that reveals the inability to translate difference into one's own terms. This relationality with unknowability dislocates a discrete, self-knowing subject. While the poster gives us an image of heterogeneous community in the *Nebeneinander* (juxtaposition) of the heads, it also displays the limits of recognition that might be usefully understood with reference to what Slavoj Žižek provocatively calls the "inhuman neighbour." This is a neighbor in whom we encounter not just the unfathomability of the other but also our own self-opacity. For Žižek, humanizing the other disavows the alterity of the other by reducing the other to someone we can empathize with.[14] On the other hand, exposure to the alterity of others is an encounter with the "abyss of the Neighbour" and the external experience of non-knowledge of the other is mirrored by our own internal alterity.[15]

Charim's argument shifts between ontology, ethics, and semiotics. Since there are no faces in the poster, Charim stresses that we are dealing not with individuals but with *signs*, ethnic, religious, and national signs, and we can see the effects of pluralization on representational systems. Two observations are central to her argument: firstly, that all four heads could be Austrian and secondly, that the *Trachtenhutträger* is only one sign amongst other signs in a row; that is, there is no hierarchy in which the traditional Austrian folk costume is privileged over "minority ethnic signs." Charim homes in on the *Trachtenhutträger*: that he has become just one sign amongst others suggests a real loss of hegemony. Without

14 Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009), 6.

15 Slavoj Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail: Refugees, Terror and Other Troubles with the Neighbours* (Milton Keynes: Penguin, 2016), 76–77.

Austrian traditions having changed, the context of heterogeneity transforms this traditional social milieu into just one of several different modes of being Austrian. Charim develops her argument about right-wing populist reactions later in the book. Here the focus is on what happens to the way signs function. Today, the image of what an Austrian or a German looks like has changed to become too diverse, too plural and this affects cultural signs; it puts considerable strain on the sign "*Trachtenhut* = Austrian," making it dysfunctional. Because all four heads in the poster could be Austrian there is no longer *a single* "nationaler Typus" (national type). As Charim puts it: "Es gibt den *einen* Typus nicht mehr, und das heißt: Es gibt den Typus nicht mehr" (*One single* type does not exist anymore and that means there is no type anymore).[16] In other words, the notion of the *Typus* (type) cannot support this degree of pluralization because, by definition, the type is a singular generalization with positive identity characteristics. The change we are seeing today does not just renegotiate the boundaries of the normative national type, it erases it altogether and, crucially, puts nothing in its place. We could also say that the *Typus/*sign is under erasure; that is, it has not disappeared or been erased completely but appears as if crossed out and thus displays itself as the remnant left by the erasure of itself (that is, by the withdrawal of a unifying figure or story of national identity). If the poster represents the erasure of the generalized type of the national figure (*Typus/nationale Gestalt*), then to a certain extent it represents the limitations to the representability of Austrian identity.

I will conclude this section by briefly analysing Charim's reading of Austrian attempts to recode traditional signs associated with *Heimat*. Charim's discussion of the rock-and-roll musician Andreas Gabalier on the one hand is a critique of right-wing populism in general and the far-right Austrian Freedom Party in particular. On the other hand, she views Alexander van der Bellen's election campaign as a well-meaning liberal attempt to make traditional signs of Austrianness inclusive. Gabalier is a divisive figure in Austria but his popularity is read as evidence of how populism channels the white majority's emotional reactions to pluralization into aggressive forms of identity formation. On the surface, Gabalier looks open and postmodern. His lyrics combine English with Austrian dialect, he mixes rock with traditional music, but strictly speaking he is "heimatizing" rock-and-roll, which can be read as an "hostile takeover of modernity by tradition."[17] When he extols his *Lederhose* in song, he suggests that full, unambiguous Austrian national identity is still possible. However, in the contemporary postnational, postmigrant context the

16 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 37, emphasis in the original.

17 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 80. This is the title of chapter 4 of *Ich und die Anderen*.

attempt to resurrect old identities can only be an aggressive and exclusive undertaking. Further, these identities necessarily appear as mere reconstructions, confirming that something previously there is now absent. Since reconstruction necessarily implies that something has been lost and needs to be rebuilt, any attempt to revive the "old" nation and the identity that goes with it merely underscores the absence of these very things that are supposedly brought back. Hence, any appeal to "how things used to be" in current pluralized societies can only evoke something that is missing. The putative national identities that Gabalier shows his fans are reconstructions of full and complete modes of belonging and identity, but because these were characterized by a predominantly positive association with the whole, and it is precisely this that has been lost, the populist reconstructions can only create exclusory and closed identities, which are pitted against others/"foreigners." These desperately shored-up identities are achieved only by keeping "the other" out. As we saw above, the sign (*Tracht* = Austrianness) is in effect under erasure; signs are themselves affected by pluralization to make them ambiguous and incomplete. Gabalier's "answer" to the dysfunction of national signs is to disavow the exchangeability and relationality inherent in the sign itself. Gabalier shows his fans that a *Lederhose* is, self-evidently, a *Lederhose*. There is no room for definition, questioning, or negotiation and this creates merely the tautology (*Tracht* = *Tracht*) or (Austrianness = Austrianness).[18] This is analogous to how populist politicians close down open categories such as "the people" with fixed, unambiguous, and homogeneous ideas of ethnicity. Rather than accepting the necessity of constant re-definition, populism uses equations like "das Volk ist das Volk" (the people are the people).

By contrast, Alexander van der Bellen, currently the President of Austria, attempted in his 2016 election campaign to recode the Tyrolean mountains as inclusive symbols of an identity that can be shared by all ethnicities. In attempting to wrest the language of *Heimat* from populists and open up traditional signs, Van der Bellen faced a more difficult task than Gabalier, who closes down such signs. The undertaking, while well-meaning and "inclusive," is problematic because it still treats old signs as if they were complete and unambiguous. It is tantamount to saying: "we know what Austrianness is, and we will share it with you." The point is not that a recoding of traditional signs is impossible, e.g., through playful or "camp" renegotiations (Charim writes at length about Conchita Wurst, the drag stage persona of Austrian singer Thomas Neuwirth, and winner of the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest), but rather that the context in which we all—including politicians and artists—operate, has changed. As we saw above, the norm has been eroded by pluralization and since the national type has been pluralized, it has also been placed

18 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 102–3.

under erasure and can no longer function as a unifying generalization. Hence attempts to gain some kind of mastery over precarious signs and identity disavow the erosion of control as the property of a discrete, self-knowing subject. Put simply, these old signs cannot reflect the scale of the changes caused by pluralization, and so are not adequate representations of a diverse, heterogeneous society. The question of what could constitute a new language and iconography of pluralization is left unanswered. Pluralized, contemporary Austria struggles to offer an all-encompassing identity that can include everyone, and thus, Charim argues, can only offer neutrality. This is a strange and inconclusive terminus of her argument since the very notion of neutrality crumbles under her critique. One trajectory would have been to end up affirming what Žižek terms "the universality of strangers, of individuals reduced to the abyss of impenetrability in relation not only to others but also to themselves,"[19] and find the new common ground in shared experiences of contingency, opacity, and incompleteness. That Charim avoids affirming the abyss, however, can best be understood with reference to her willingness to work with the abstraction of democracy as a kind of tool of deconstruction, as something that must perpetually be redefined. As we saw, in order to create universal equality, specificities and differences needed to be set aside. Hence, there is something intangible and invisible about this universal equality that is made possible only by the bracketing of positive specificities. If the salient feature of Austrian society today is its heterogeneity, which has placed the generalized national type under erasure, the abstraction of the democratic subject is laid bare as a double absence. The danger is that this abstraction—understood as the absence of difference—might not be deemed appealing or necessary by a populace that is defined by the very thing that the democratic subject must necessarily cast off—concrete differences. Charim calls therefore for a "Begegnungszone, die ein Raum der Unterschiede ist" (zone of encounter, which is a space of differences),[20] that is, non-abstract zones of public encounter where differences (different people) can meet as equals, which envisages a paradoxical materialization of the abstraction of democracy in everyday spaces. I understand this thought as Charim's attempt to hold onto the universal of equality by retaining, and not renouncing, differences. Rather than the abstraction of non-difference on which the democratic subject rests, this would be an equality of concrete differences, with the proviso that differences are understood as non-complete rather than wholeness being asserted. Thus, the true enemy of pluralism is similitude and not universal equality.

19 Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail*, 79.
20 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 56.

The European Self and the Migrant Others: *STYX* and the "Postmigrant Sublime"

It is easy to read the 2018 film *STYX*, which is about the chance encounter in the Atlantic Ocean between a solo German yachtswoman and African migrants on the wreck of a fishing boat carrying them to Europe, as a comment on current socio-political realities. It has been called a "work of the moment" for its ability to reflect the "turbulence we are currently navigating" and to pose moral questions about European attitudes to migration.[21] The film was shown in the European Parliament in 2018,[22] an event that itself symbolically relocated migrants' experiences from the periphery to the center of Europe. The director and co-writer stress the "authenticity" and documentary realism that characterize the film's style: not only is there no computer-generated imagery in it (remarkably, considering the storm sequences), but the makers also spent seven years researching and conducting fieldwork with psychologists, coastguards, people with experience of migration, NGOs, and military personnel with experience of rescue missions. This means that the idiom of the coastguards is accurately conveyed, the navy officers, into whose ship at the end of the film the fictional dead bodies of the migrants are transported in black plastic bags, really are members of the Maltese military and are often involved in real rescue missions in the Mediterranean. When director and writer promote their film by attending screenings, they have been placed in discussion groups with local immigration social workers, which cements the link between their feature film and existing social and political realities.[23] However, the film's politics are, strictly speaking, not located on the structural level of socioeconomic criticism (there is no representation of the role of global capitalism and only esoteric symbolic references to the legacy of colonialism, for instance), but rather center on questions of personal identity, ethics, and the self-other boundary which, as I will argue below, draw on a philosophical tradition of thinking the relationality between self and other through notions of the sublime. I link the sublime to the film and Charim's philosophy because I am reading the sublime as an experience of incommensurability that interrupts the self's normal ability to map the phenomenal world according to its spatiotemporal schema. For Immanuel Kant, the sublime is an exceptional and temporary moment in which the self is simultaneously

21 Mike McCahill, "*Styx* Review—Refugee Dilemma Tests Moral Compass," *The Guardian*, April 26, 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/apr/26/styx-review-wolfgang-fischer-susanne-wolff-yacht-refugee-dilemma (accessed December 16, 2019).

22 *STYX* won the LUX Prize, which is awarded for social-political relevance.

23 For instance, at the screening and Q&A at the Tyneside Cinema, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, April 23, 2019.

destabilized and consolidated as a result of seeing himself in relation to an indefinitely great power, like nature at its wildest. Hence, the key relation is that between the self and otherness (that which exceeds the self's capacity to categorize or reduce to the same as himself). Ultimately, in Kant's account, the relation reinforces the self-other boundary, as the sublime subject comes to see himself as independent and superior to nature.[24] We can read Charim as reconfiguring self-other relations in a kind of pluralized sublime which would be the quotidian encounter with otherness that arises from everyday exposure to material differences when living in diverse communities. That is, the sublime is reworked to be a permanent state of exception; in her philosophy the ongoing unsettlement and openness to heterogeneity for pluralized societies and selves suggest differently configured self-other boundaries. The film *STYX*, set almost entirely at sea, stages a long drawn-out encounter between a German and an African vessel separated and connected by a few hundred metres of ocean, an encounter that can be read as an allegory of the transformations of self-other relations at home. In other words, the encounter between self and otherness is displaced onto the oceanic setting and re-configured as a confrontation between a white middle-class non-migrant German woman and the "real bodies" of many African migrants. I will come back to the significance of the body below.

The film is careful to distinguish between the different traumas of the European protagonist and the migrants. The incommensurability between the two is highlighted through the emphasis on the spatiotemporal conditions of the European self. The space on the yacht is framed in a way that contrasts it with the immensity of the ocean and the way the protagonist inhabits time is evoked by her constant checking of her watch, which emits alarms at regular intervals to allow her to calculate distance, chart her speed, wake her up in order to make alterations to equipment, the sails, and so on. The problem with the dominant perspective being German/European is foregrounded by the repetition of shots of the protagonist looking at the migrants through binoculars, low-angled shots from the small window inside the yacht, and, of course, this looking is repeated on the level of the camera of the white Austrian director. The shots of the wrecked trawler, with people standing and shouting on top, are only held for a second or two and from such long distances that the viewer can barely make out the number of people on board. There is not one shot from the viewpoint of the wrecked trawler until right at the end when the protagonist climbs on board and waits for the

24 I am using male personal pronouns to express Kant's gendering of the sublime. For an extensive explanation and critique of the gendering of the sublime subject in Kant, see Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), especially chapter 4.

army to arrive, and even then the perspective is hers. However, despite the one-sidedness of point-of-view shots, self-other and subject-object are continually intertwined: through the story that is told from the perspective of the European self, the African migrants come into view as having different stories, which normally get overlooked, and who experience the double injustice of actual suffering and then of their accounts not being heard. Acknowledging the European bias, Fischer and Künzel devised a plot twist to shake up a fixed subject-object divide by having one of the migrants, a fourteen-year-old boy, swim the distance between the vessels and be brought aboard by the protagonist, who nurses him back to consciousness on her yacht; he is filmed in close-up and she converses with him in English, neither her nor his mother tongue. She reads his name, Kingsley, off a bracelet he is wearing and uses it repeatedly, whereas we never learn her name because when the coastguards address her, they call her "Asa Gray," the name of her yacht.[25] The effect is to humanize the migrant and this distinguishes him from the other anonymous group of migrants. Kingsley is presented as a subject in his own right through his bodily presence and becomes an active subject when he pushes the protagonist off her yacht in frustration about the rescue services not arriving. When she scrambles back on board and shouts at him, it is the only time she speaks German, the unsettlement having shocked her back into using her native tongue. At this point the use of the English language as common universal is suspended. Kingsley also recites a prayer in his native African language. However, these sentences, unlike the protagonist's German, are not subtitled.[26] The decision not to provide a translation of the Swahili works on the one hand to make his difference from the European visible/audible as the presumably predominantly European viewer is not supposed to understand the content of the speech. On the other hand, stressing alterity through non-translation runs the risk of othering the migrant boy, excluding him precisely at the moment his difference is highlighted. While we could argue that this is an illustration of incommensurable heterogeneity, not all differences are equal, and the question remains about the European bias, because there is a thin line between voyeuristic display of Kingsley's "difference" and difference coming to speak in its own idiom. Is this "the object" (of the European

25 This reference to the famous botanist, often referred to as the "American Darwin," links with the images of Darwin's book on the Ascension Island, which is filmed in close-up as the protagonist reads it on the yacht. These names evoke nineteenth-century Enlightenment scientific exploration, the exploration of new frontiers, and the voyage of reason.

26 I would like to thank Professor Chege Githiora (SOAS) for his help and for identifying the language as mostly Swahili with some code-switching with another related, (probably) coastal East African language. Some of the phrases the actor speaks include: "God, help me make the right choices."

gaze) turning the tables and speaking in his own voice on equal terms with the subject? Or the recontainment of difference through the projection of the European gaze onto the body of the black child?

The film both uses and productively troubles the alignment of the African migrant with the "other" of the European self in ways that rework the Kantian dynamic sublime to display the opacity of the subject position of the migrants as that which falls through the European gaze. The reconfigured relationality positions the perceiving European subject as something other than a unified, autonomous self and the objects of her gaze (the migrants) as something other than her conception of them. We can link these reconfigured self-other relations to the idea of a pluralized, postmigrant subject theorized by Charim, which in my reading sees heterogeneity as a condition that exposes the self to otherness/difference, but in ways that also position otherness as intrinsically part of the pluralized self. As Charim explains, in pluralized societies, the external perspective on identity has become part of the internal perspective.[27] That is, pluralization causes an interruption of self (conceived as self-same) and means that pluralized subjecthood is no longer constructed via the exclusion and othering of the other, nor through the incorporation of otherness, but through a relation with the alterity of differences that are not separate from, but incommensurable with the self.

In the early parts of the film the protagonist has to battle against a storm to stay afloat. Both the extreme weather and the discovery of the migrants' wrecked boat in the lull after the storm throw the German protagonist off (her) course, potentially aligning the storm/nature with "Africa" and "the migrant" as that which threatens a known, fixed European identity.[28] The "boundless ocean set into a rage"[29] is one of Kant's examples of the dynamic sublime, one of those colossal or uncontrollable natural phenomena that threaten to devastate the subject. The more fearful these are, the more attractive they become, because "as long as we find ourselves in safety, . . . they elevate the strength of our soul above its usual level, and allow us to discover within ourselves a capacity for resistance of quite another kind."[30] The encounter with the overwhelming power of nature enables a strengthening and ennobling of the subject because, within man, awe for nature is transformed into an appreciation of the sublimity of the mind. The sublime experience pivots on the

27 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 48.

28 She never reaches her destination, Ascension Island, although non-diegetic inserts of its plants in close-up (Darwin's constructed landscape) evoke her imaginative relation with the sublime as unreachable paradise.

29 Immanuel Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), section 28, 144.

30 Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," 145.

tension between reason and the imagination, fear and attraction, because man both encounters a sense of his limitations as a finite being that could be destroyed by nature and positions himself in connection with the infinite, in his imaginative relation with the unconceptualizable, to allow him to transcend his fear and become capable of imagining himself independent and superior to nature. Provided that we are not in immediate physical danger, we gain a sense of transcendence by imaginatively positioning ourselves in relation to the infinite and incommensurable, which makes "the strength of our soul" more than a match for nature's power. The dynamic sublime, then, hinges on a double movement of powerlessness and transcendence:

> just as we found in our own limitation in the immeasurability of nature . . . we at the same time found in our own faculty of reason another nonsensible standard which has that very infinity under itself as a unit against which everything in nature is small and thus found in our own mind a superiority over nature itself even in its immeasurability.[31]

That is, the feelings of *Achtung* (here, awe) aroused when man measures himself in relation to the "immeasurability" of nature are harnessed to allow him to imagine himself more than a merely natural, material being, because he possesses the faculty of reason. In other words, it is not nature that is sublime but the ways it reveals the sublimity of the human mind, because it "raises the imagination to the point of presenting those cases in which the mind can make palpable to itself the sublimity of its own vocation even over nature."[32] This means the "humanity in our person remains undemeaned even though the human being must submit to that dominion."[33]

Žižek alludes to the Kantian sublime in his book about the migrant crisis where he assesses the dominant oppositional mode of self-other relations, which requires the constant policing of the European self's border. The defining feature of contemporary Western middle-class ideology, he writes, is "an arrogant belief in the superiority of its values (universal human rights and freedoms)" as well as an obsession with:

> the fear that its limited domain will be invaded by billions who are outside, who do not count in global capitalism since they are neither producing commodities nor consuming them. The fear of the

31 Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," 145.
32 Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," 145.
33 Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," 145.

> members of this middle class is that they will end up in the ranks of those thus excluded.[34]

If we read *STYX* in the context of a postmigrant, non-binary relationality, the sublime is reframed as the moral dilemma that overwhelms the individual Western middle-class subject faced with "real" migrant bodies. Should she try to save as many lives as she can but risk her own life in the process, or should she heed the coastguards' instructions and sail on? She agrees to increase the distance between the two vessels but also insists that she waits and watches. As she turns away from the shouting migrants, the frontal close-up shot shows the viewer the dilemma etched on her face. However, bearing witness to the collective failure of Europe is not the same as finding solutions, and it is the lack of answers that distances the film from re-vivifying the sublimity of the human mind.[35] Surely, when the film is read through Kantian universal reason, the implication is that today the "humanity in our person" has been degraded, not elevated. The deaths of the migrants cannot become an occasion for the sublime: the film makes clear that, far from unrepresentable, the migrants and their deaths are palpable presences on screen and reflect instead the West's visible blind spot—they are deliberately not seen. In Kantian terms, they are not nonsensible, but solidly part of the phenomenal, material world. This is stressed when the protagonist radios other ships in the area, which she can see on her radar but not with the naked eye. The other ships must also be able to see the migrants' vessel on their screen, but they ignore it. One captain tells her he would lose his job if he came to the migrants' rescue. By reworking notions of the incommensurable, then, the film draws attention to the political dimension of the perception of phenomena, to the decisions that are made as to what counts and what is discounted. Further, the film questions the notion of a universal subject (of the sublime) and reveals what Žižek calls "the endangered commons of humanity itself, threatened by a global capitalism which generates new walls and other forms of apartheid."[36] This is underlined by intimating

34 Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail*, 85.

35 There are several different levels on which the sublime is relevant to the film, which for reasons of space I cannot address here. On the metatextual level, the creative and technical act of making the film, capturing the images during a real storm at sea, links the director and cinematographer to a tradition of Romantic genius which, while not on the same scale as Werner Herzog's *Fitzcaraldo*, can nevertheless be understood through the aesthetic of the sublime. The film's narrative places her yacht in the Atlantic Ocean near Cape Verde, but the location for filming was the Mediterranean between Sicily and Malta. In addition, the positioning of the viewer, who experiences the horror in a space of safety in the cinema, vis-à-vis the sublime, would also be pertinent here.

36 Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail*, 106.

the inequality of access to the sublime. As we have seen, Kant insists that sublimity lies not in nature but in the subject's capacity to register fear of nature and transcend it. The stricken migrants' ongoing terror does not lead to any transcendence. The migrant, the film suggests, is excluded from the category of the sublime subject.[37] The migrants are never in a space of security and their overloaded, unseaworthy trawler cannot withstand the storm, whereas the single yachtswoman manages to weather it with technology and skill. What Jean-François Lyotard terms the "ability to tolerate the incommensurable"[38] depends on people's individual circumstances, which are far from equal. When the protagonist realizes that the migrants from Africa do not "count" as humans in the same ways as Europeans, the sublime becomes an instrument to illustrate the collective failure of Europe. The film politicizes the sublime to use the decentered Western, European self as an ethical resource, to bear witness to real inequality and differences between subjects, rather than place an individual in relation with the infinite.

The mode of filming the body in *STYX* is central to how the film as a whole renegotiates the notion of the sublime. The body is downplayed in the Kantian sublime, but the female European's body is at the center of the film's narrative and productively emphasizes irresolvable conflict, by mirroring tensions inherent in her ambiguous positioning as a female subject of the sublime in ways that rework the Kantian model, which takes the male as the norm.[39] The way her body is almost constantly in the frame creates a sense of intimacy,[40] especially in the lengthy sections where she does not speak at all, and we watch her going about the work involved in sailing.[41] It is as if, through the uncoupling of lan-

37 For an excellent and extensive critique of the exclusions of the sublime, see Christine Battersby's reading of the "raced" sublime in Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2007), 39.

38 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), xxv.

39 For an analysis of Kant's account of the sublime in relation to gender, see Christine Battersby, "Stages on Kant's Way. Aesthetics, Morality and the Gendered Sublime," in *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, ed. Peggy Zeglin Brand and Carolyn Korsmeyer (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 88–114.

40 Fischer has said that the protagonist could only be female (there could not be a male lead), although he does not elaborate on the reasons. My reading here suggests it is to do with the positioning of the female vis-à-vis the sublime, nature, and others.

41 The protagonist has no interlocutor during the whole of the first day and a half at sea which means that there are about twenty minutes of screen time in which there is no speech at all.

guage and thought, we observe the pre-reflective body "thinking." As both subject of the action and object (impinged upon by the forces of nature and the cinematic gaze), her body complicates the subject-object and self-other divide by being on both sides of it. While the protagonist's solitude in the early parts of the film suggests self-sufficiency, her body also later reminds us that she is enmeshed in relations with others, dependent on and exposed to them in ways that critique the conception of an autonomous, self-contained individual. Her body is emphatically shown to be part of the natural world (we see her eating from foil pouches and loading the large number of bottles of water that take up so much space on board, and that Kingsley later throws overboard in the hope they will reach his fellow stranded migrants), but it is neither positioned as superior to, nor at one with, the elements. This places her asymmetrically in relation to the figure of the Romantic genius, which was so influenced by Kant's sublime. In a sequence at the beginning of the second day at sea she undresses and bathes in the ocean, tying a long piece of rope to her wrist to make sure she can get back to the yacht. She swims a considerable distance away from the yacht and stops and looks back at it. We get an impression of both her vulnerability and her connection with nature, but also a paradoxical out-of-body sensation, even while her body itself is emphasized; that is, she is naked and immersed in the water, which evokes corporeality and sensation, yet the camera is also positioned next to her head as she looks back at the yacht, as if seeing herself not there. It is a moment both of immersion in and dispossession of the self. Framed from behind before she jumps naked overboard, she presents a different kind of *Rückenfigur* (figure seen from the back) from Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (*The Wanderer Above the Sea Fog*, c. 1818), which is often celebrated as a representation of the Kantian sublime, with its intimation of control over nature and "dominion over sensibility,"[42] embodied in the stance of the man in the foreground in the severely-cut frock coat.[43] By contrast, the protagonist's head, tiny in the vastness of the ocean, evokes precarity, and the rope resembles an umbilical cord—literally a life-line to her yacht—which conjures up the sense of the ocean as watery womb and thus a sense of dependency and interrelation with otherness. The relation between human head and ocean is redolent not of alienation but of a shared space of difference, of separate but interlinked entities.[44] The way the protagonist is shown to be beside

42 Kant, "On the Dynamically Sublime in Nature," section 29, 151.

43 Battersby, *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference*, 146.

44 We could link this idea to Luce Irigaray's thinking on the placental economy as a way to envisage subject-subject relations. See Luce Irigaray, *je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), 37–45.

herself in the film here may be linked to Judith Butler's positioning of the body as a "socially ecstatic structure" and as the point of departure for thinking responsibility.[45] The bathing scene prepares us for the "unwilled proximity to others and circumstances beyond one's control,"[46] that the protagonist experiences when she encounters the migrants' boat. The body displays its social nature in its exposure to alterity and, as in Charim's discussion of the poster (fig.1), emphasizes selfhood as constituted through relationality with unknowable otherness.

This mode of filming the body, which mixes intimacy and respectful reticence with the awareness of the gaze from outside, continues when Kingsley's body is filmed. The materiality of the body weighs large: when the German woman tries to pull him out of the water, she cannot haul him up from above so she jumps into the ocean and pushes him from underneath onto a ledge at the bottom of the yacht. This takes several attempts and many minutes during which we follow the effort and appreciate the sheer bulk and awkwardness of the two bodies in the ocean. Kingsley vomits, his wounds bleed, his clothes are soiled. The effect of this emphasis on corporeality is to stress a shared vulnerability based on being an embodied human (*vulnus* is Latin for wound) through which, it would appear, the film inaugurates a new universal based, not on universal reason, but on the common embodiment of precarious selves. In *Precarious Life* Butler proposes that the capacity to empathize with the suffering of others is the foundation of a shared humanity based on a sense of precarity that we have in common.[47] Indeed, for Butler, it is the ungrounding of the self and the acknowledgement of self-opacity that are the conditions for the possibility of ethical responsibility.[48] In other words, this awareness of our vulnerability and precarity is the foundation of our sense of responsibility or obligation toward others. According to her account, empathy with others destabilizes the ground on which we define ourselves. The condition of ethical responsibility, therefore, is a kind of ungrounding of the self. In *STYX* we can discern a possible indirect expression of ethics in the breakdown and decentring of the European self. At the end of the film the German woman decides to make a false SOS call and says that Asa Gray is sinking, realizing that the emergency services will respond if she herself were in peril. The gesture of slowly turning off the many switches that link her to satellite and radio contact symbolizes not just the closing down of a bankrupt European subject

45 Judith Butler, *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2010), 33.

46 Butler, *Frames of War*, 34.

47 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

48 Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 77.

and morality, but indicates the global level of ethical collapse. Indeed, the very first short scene in Gibraltar evoked a posthuman, uncanny world out of kilter, as the streets are devoid of human inhabitants, given over to the monkeys who possess the gaze. This gives us a sense of inhabiting a world that remains after the end of a human subject. The film ends with a close-up of the protagonist's face while she is under arrest on board the army ship; unresponsive and apparently traumatized, she is unable to answer the questions addressed to her, which suggests both annihilation and, potentially, rebellion and protest as a wholescale rejection of the legal framework. The ambiguity prevents a revival of universal reason and autonomous subjecthood, but the question remains as to whether the posthuman abyss is being affirmed here as the condition of possibility for moral agency. As Mari Ruti has pointed out with regard to Butler, the emphasis on the heightened precarity of the Western "I" tends to uphold, rather than question, the power relation between active Western self and passive non-Western other.[49] In *STYX*, however, even while the empathy is directed one-way, from the European protagonist (and viewer) to the African protagonist, the body works in two different ways. While a natural and finite body is what the characters have in common, it is also that which makes them utterly different, unable to share the same space. Kingsley's body is filmed as equal (in its vulnerability), but different because it is not a white European body and is excluded on this basis from principles of human rights. That is, the difference rather than the similitude between the two bodies is stressed; there cannot be integration of the other into the self-same, not even through empathy. The recognition of the other as human is not simply an "entry of what has previously been excluded into an established ontology but an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the question 'what is real?,' 'whose lives are real?'"[50]

Conclusion

Just as the German protagonist tells Kingsley that she does not have any answers, so the film leaves many questions about the ongoing migrant crisis, first among them perhaps: what can a decentered, pluralized subject do beyond bear witness to irresolvable conflict? Both *STYX* and *Ich und die Anderen* thematize the lack of clear political solutions, lingering with the

49 Mari Ruti, "The Ethics of Precarity: Judith Butler's Reluctant Universalism," in *Remains of the Social: Desiring the Post-Apartheid*, ed. Maurits van Bever Donker, Ross Truscott, Gary Minkley, and Premesh Lalu (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 92–116, here 102.

50 Judith Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself," *Diacritics* 31, no. 4 (2001): 22–40, here 27.

tensions and "thinking to the end the deadlock of our predicament."[51] However, the film's predilection for ethical rejuvenation suggests greater willingness to instrumentalize the precarious self than Charim, who stresses the limitations and non-completion (of selves and signs), complicating simple notions of empowerment, although I would see pluralization in her philosophy as both an (as yet unrealized) opportunity and a crisis. Pluralization suggests disintegration, but is also the modus operandi of contemporary selves. Moreover, Charim's formulation of what, for her, is the central question of our times, that is the question of how we inhabit our identities—do we live our European identities as open non-identities, as contingent modes of being which do not exclude other possibilities, or as closed and sealed off?[52]—implies an ethical imperative at the heart of pluralized identities. The emphasis on identity, specifically the white, middle-class, non-migrant European *response* to the proximity and relationality with different others is shared by *STYX*. Zygmunt Bauman has stated that today we are required to solve global problems at the local level,[53] but here I have linked these texts to show that it is on the level of identity that the global problems and tensions are played out. For Charim, relationality with alterity in diverse communities means that difference interrupts self-closure, while *STYX* alludes to the ongoing quotidian emergency of migration through reconfigured self-other relations that are capable of recognizing the "other" as equal, but not the same, and allowing the European subject to acknowledge its own self-differing. In both the film and Charim's thought, the sublime is transformed from an exceptional aesthetic state or temporary moment of rupture into the permanent fabric of everyday experiences of incommensurability—a postmigrant sublime figured as the everyday relationality at the heart of a pluralized, bodily subject of difference. *STYX* allows us to read Charim's philosophy from a different angle, showing that the danger in her theorization of pluralized identities is that these become a new European norm that might not encompass African or non-European identities. It also highlights the problems with Charim's advocacy of neutrality. *STYX* shows that there is no neutrality: the ocean may be abstract but it is not a space of perpetual redefinition capable of sustaining "inclusory difference," but rather, it is governed by international law, which is shown to be far from neutral. The film alludes to a non-European subject, which is excluded from Western identities, to those outside who are possessed by

51 Žižek, *Against the Double Blackmail*, 108.

52 Charim, *Ich und die Anderen*, 214.

53 Zygmunt Bauman, "Leben in der Diaspora," in *Lebensmodell Diaspora: Über moderne Nomaden*, ed. Isolde Charim and Gertraud Auer Borea d'Olmo (Bielefeld: transcript, 2002), 95–104, here 98.

what Alain Badiou calls "*le desir d'Occident*."[54] If we take Charim's point on board about the pluralization of the norm, which erases the idea of the norm altogether, we could argue that the film shows that this does not translate into pluralism for everyone. There is an inequality of access to pluralized identities because of frameworks that exclude others from subjecthood per se.

If, conversely, we read the film through Charim, we can claim that it avoids direct representations of European (and African) societies, displacing the task of thinking through the implications of otherness at the heart of *Heimat* (the real contemporary questions about integration of different ethnicities in Austria, for instance) onto the elsewhere space of the turbulent, churning ocean as an abstract venue for raising ethical questions that have no obvious resolution. A postmigrant sublime opens up the way for pluralized identities to become a universal category (the radical shift from subject-object relations to subject-subject relations) but, as the defining feature of pluralized subjects is their lack of a full, complete identity, any way forward needs to be based on negative difference.

54 Alain Badiou, "Notre mal vient de plus loin," *Là-bas*, December 3, 2015, https://la-bas.org/la-bas-magazine/textes-a-l-appui/alain-badiou-penser-les-meurtres-de-masse-du-13-novembre-version-texte (accessed December 18, 2019).

"Never an innocent game": The Center for Political Beauty and "Search for us!"

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Political Beauty?

On Monday, December 2, 2019, the controversial German art collective "Zentrum für Politische Schönheit" (Center for Political Beauty, henceforth ZPS) erected a thick steel pillar in the center of Berlin's government district. The location on Heinrich von Gagern Street was the unmarked site between the Reichstag and the Federal Chancellery where the Kroll Opera House—badly damaged during the Second World War and eventually demolished in 1951—had once stood. Over two meters high and dark gray, the pillar's most immediately striking feature was its centerpiece: a glass "window" enclosing a display of ashes embedded in amber-colored synthetic resin. This was "Sucht nach uns!" (Search for us!), the ZPS's latest political-aesthetic intervention in the memory politics of the Berlin Republic. The installation was destined to be short-lived because of the controversy it created (more on which below); by January 2020 the local authorities had already removed it.[1]

1 See "Gedenkstätte mit 'Asche der Opfer' in Berlin errichtet," *RBB 24*, December 2, 2019, https://www.rbb24.de/politik/beitrag/2019/12/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-gedenkstaette-berlin.html?fbclid=IwAR0x2PD4CegU8M--1U4oYORyEC_6NBuKLYNoLjBPabKhL4ADUBiRdNC44MY; also Arno Widmann, "Asche von Nazi Opfern? Neue Aktion vom Zentrum für Politische Schönheit," *Berliner Zeitung*, December 2, 2019, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/politik-gesellschaft/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-errichtet-saeule-gegen-verrat-an-der-demokratie-li.2451; and "Künstlerkollektiv lässt umstrittene Säule vor Reichstag abbauen," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 16, 2020, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/kuenstlerkollektiv-laesst-umstrittene-saeule-vor-reichstag-abbauen-li.5032. The "Sucht nach uns!" project website can be viewed at: https://politicalbeauty.de/sucht-nach-uns.html (all accessed April 7, 2020). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the German in this chapter are the author's own.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The collective claimed in a press release and on their project website that the pillar contained the ashes of Jewish Holocaust victims. Over a two-year period, ZPS activists had reportedly taken around two hundred soil samples from twenty-three sites of atrocity near concentration camps in Germany, Poland, and Ukraine. The samples had then been tested in laboratories and were found in over seventy percent of cases to contain human remains. The remains that featured in the pillar came from the area surrounding Auschwitz, where members of the collective searched rivers, dams, and fields. This area is the subject of a forensic-historical analysis of body disposal techniques at Auschwitz-Birkenau commissioned by the collective and available on the project website, *Die Wege der Asche* (The Paths of the Ashes). The title of the campaign itself, "Sucht nach uns!," expressed an imperative from the Jewish victims of the Holocaust to posterity to "search for us." It was inspired by the few victim testimonies that Soviet soldiers had discovered in Auschwitz in 1945. These testimonies bore witness to body disposal by mass incineration and feature in a further document on the project website, *An die Nachwelt* (To Posterity), a compilation of Jewish victim accounts including the Auschwitz materials and other testimonies that the collective researched and assembled over a two-year period. The pillar was thus one element in a multimedia campaign with research, performative, and participatory dimensions: in the press release, the ZPS invited the public to join a "Zapfenstreich" (ceremonial march) the following Saturday, the participants in which were to congregate at the pillar, bring flowers for the dead, and swear to resist the emergence of the new "Hitler Germany" and its enablers. A crowdfunding call was also released to finance a concrete foundation for the pillar, which was to be poured in an act of civic disobedience at the "Zapfenstreich."[2]

As this overview suggests, the ZPS conceive of public space as an agonistic arena where political and social issues such as human rights abuses, inequality, and the memory and threat of fascism can be controversially staged in a theatrical manner.[3] ZPS founder and director Philip Ruch (b. 1981) argues that the task of thinking critically about the past with a sense of responsibility for the future has fallen to younger generations, as today's technocratic political class in Germany, and in Europe more broadly, has no vision for the future. For the ZPS, politics has become hollowed out, thus art—political action art, to be precise—must

2 Both documents are available in full on the project website: respectively https://politicalbeauty.de/Media/hera/Die%20Wege%20der%20Asche.pdf and https://politicalbeauty.de/Media/hera/An%20die%20Nachwelt.pdf (accessed June 8, 2020).

3 See Florian Malzacher, "Aktivismus als Aufführung: Das agonistische Theater des Zentrums für Politische Schönheit," in *Haltung als Handlung: Das Zentrum für Politische Schönheit*, ed. Miriam Rummel, Raimar Stange, and Florian Waldvogel (Munich: edition metzel, 2018), 344–56, here 346.

step into the breach to generate, perform, and disseminate moral ideals based on an idea of shared humanity and empathy for the suffering of others. This vision of universal empathy for and solidarity with the victim other comprises the ideal of "political beauty" that motivates the collective's various actions.[4]

The ZPS's value of universal empathy has a specifically German origin. They believe that Germans as descendants of National Socialism and inheritors of the legacy of perpetration have a moral duty to speak out on behalf of those whose human rights are being abused today. Ruch articulates this sense of the collective's transhistorical mission when he states that all ZPS actions, irrespective of political focus, are underpinned by a fundamental commitment to the memory of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust.[5] In this spirit, previous campaigns were national, transnational, and multidirectional in scope; they focused on the threat to Holocaust memory in Germany ("Holocaust-Mahnmal Bornhagen," The Holocaust Memorial in Bornhagen, 2017), the genocide of Bosnian Muslims at Srebrenica in 1995 ("Die Säulen der Schande," The Pillars of Shame, 2010), and the plight of refugees in the early twenty-first century ("Die Toten kommen," The Dead are Coming, 2015).[6]

The collective's term for the aesthetic means that should channel the ideal of political beauty is "aggressiver Humanismus" (aggressive humanism), a language and method of performative and participatory aesthetic-political action that controversially draws attention to human rights abuses past and present, and to the failings of political leadership and institutions in Germany and the EU.[7] Reminiscent of radical predecessors such as German performance artist Christoph Schlingensief and the Vienna Actionists of the 1960s, ZPS events fuse artistic intervention and activist practice to produce contemporary visual art forms, such as temporary urban installations and "happenings" that are also mediated

4 For more on this, see Philip Ruch, *Wenn nicht wir, wer dann? Ein politisches Manifest* (Munich: Ludwig Verlag, 2015), 16–21.

5 Ruch, *Wenn nicht wir, wer dann?*, 12–13.

6 See Julian Jestadt, "Die Toten kommen (2015)," in *Haltung als Handlung*, ed. Rummel, Stange, and Waldvogel, 126–45; Maggy Sperl, "Die Säulen der Schande (2010)," in *Haltung als Handlung*, ed. Rummel, Stange, and Waldvogel, 252–77; Alexander Kitterer, "Holocaust-Mahnmal Bornhagen (2017)," in *Haltung als Handlung*, ed. Rummel, Stange, and Waldvogel, 4–27. More details about each project can be viewed respectively at: https://politicalbeauty.de/toten.html; https://politicalbeauty.de/pillar.html; and https://politicalbeauty.de/mahnmal.html (all accessed June 7, 2020).

7 Ruch, *Wenn nicht wir, wer dann*, 27. See also "'Es braucht nicht viel Mut,'" *taz*, April 13, 2019, https://taz.de/Zentrum-fuer-politische-Schoenheit/!5585460/ (accessed April 7, 2020).

spectacles.[8] These place-based artist-activist forms of performance often situate the human body at the center of the spectacle; digital platforms that outlast the in-situ performative installations supplement the aesthetic representation of materiality in urban and other spaces. Alongside the aforementioned historical research and compilation of victim testimonies, the "Sucht nach uns!" webpage also features the ZPS's mission statement about the campaign, video art, photography, and links to press coverage.

Particularly notable about this campaign is its use of what Zuzanna Dziuban calls "forensic aesthetics" in which human remains and their mediation come to occupy a prominent position as evidence and memorial of atrocity. As a collective agent, the ZPS styled itself as "forensic expert."[9] The promotional film on the campaign website, for example, uses stock footage from archaeological excavations and photos of urban-guerilla-styled ZPS activists on digs near Auschwitz, as well as laboratory shots. A drill core was the forensic "reliquary" that held and displayed the ashes in the pillar (the website contains detailed diagrams and exploded images of pillar and drill core). As the material evidence of mass murder, the ashes and bone fragments on display referenced excavations and archaeological digs. While such an aesthetic approach indicates our growing reliance on material culture for commemorative practice as "the post-witness era" of Holocaust memory approaches, we could also ask whether it is ethically justifiable to aestheticize human remains as part of a politically charged urban artwork in order to make this point.

These issues become even more fraught when the remains in question are alleged to be the ashes of Jewish Holocaust victims. For notwithstanding the increasing importance of material memory as we move from a testimonial paradigm to the "paradigm of material evidence," in "Sucht nach uns!" such aestheticization of human remains arguably objectified and thus risked violating the victim other again.[10] I examine this tension in the next section, first contextualizing the installation and campaign against the background of contemporary German politics.

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8 See Hubert Klocker, ed., *Wiener Aktionisme, Wien 1960–1971: Der zertrümmerte Spiegel* (Klagenfurt: Ritter, 1988); also Pia Jancke and Teresa Kovacs, eds., *Der Gesamtkünstler: Christoph Schlingensief* (Vienna: Praesens, 2011). For more on the ZPS in the context of German action art, see Sarah Khan, "Acting Up: Action Art in Berlin's Government District, from Christoph Schlingenschief to the Center for Political Beauty," *Frieze*, November 25, 2015, https://frieze.com/article/acting-0 (accessed April 7, 2020).

9 Zuzanna Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," in *Mapping the "Forensic Turn": Engagement with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond*, ed. Zuzanna Dziuban (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2017), 7–35, here 13 and 20.

10 Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," 25.

The Failed Installation

The exhumation, transfer, and display of human remains has long been an established practice in different cultural, political, and religious contexts. However, "Sucht nach uns!" provoked immediate upset and criticism from within Jewish organizations in Germany and internationally, alongside condemnation from the German media and political establishment.[11] The outrage was driven by a number of factors, most predominantly the view that the ZPS had violated Halachic Jewish law by disturbing the resting place of the dead, removing their remains to a different location and displaying them where they should not be: "above ground."[12] A further reason for the upset was the interpretation of the "Aktion" (action) as a tasteless and insensitive *German* instrumentalization of *Jewish* victims to expose problems in German politics and culture

11 See, for example, Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Patrick J. Geary, *Furta Sacra: Thefts of Relics in the Central Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978). Prominent critics included Vice-President of the International Auschwitz Committee, Christoph Heubner; the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem; Poland's Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich; President of the German-Israeli Association, Uwe Becker; President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany; and also the Bundestag. See "'Skandalöse Störung der Totenruhe': Zentralrat der Juden und Bundesregierung kritisieren 'Kunstaktion' des Zentrums für Politische Schönheit," *Jüdische Allgemeine*, December 3, 2019, https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/skandaloese-stoerung-der-totenruhe/; also Kirsten Grieshaber, "Outrage After Activists Place Ashes of 'Auschwitz Victims' Outside Reichstag," *The Times of Israel*, December 3, 2019, https://www.timesofisrael.com/outrage-after-activists-place-ashes-of-auschwitz-victims-outside-reichstag/ (all accessed April 7, 2020).

12 Verdery, *Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 12. On the challenges posed to Jewish religious law by human remains of genocide, especially ashes, after the Second World War, see David Deutsch, "Exhumations in Post-war Rabbinical Responsas," in *Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass Violence*, ed. Jean-March Dreyfus and Élisabeth Anstett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 90–112. In response to "Sucht nach uns!" former Green Party politician, Volker Beck, has launched an investigation into the ZPS under paragraph 168 of the German Criminal Code, which defines and sets out punishment for the crime of disturbing the peace of the dead: "'Ein inakzeptables Spiel mit Gefühlen von Überlebenden': Volker Beck im Gespräch mit Änne Seidel," *Deutschlandfunk*, December 4, 2019, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/aktion-des-zentrums-fuer-politische-schoenheit-ein.691.de.html?dram:article_id=464995. See paragraph 168 at: https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html#p1582 (all accessed April 7, 2020).

rather than to commemorate the Holocaust victims themselves.[13] The installation indeed attempted to link, via the display of human biomatter, the memory of Jewish victims to the memory of how and where the descent into National Socialism began: namely with the vote to pass the "Ermächtigungsgesetz" (Enabling Act) of March 23, 1933 which helped transform Hitler's government into a legal dictatorship and took place in the Kroll Opera House, then the seat of the Reichstag.[14] The ZPS installation thus unambiguously juxtaposed "victim" and "perpetrator" categories—the pillar containing victim remains atop the toxic scene of momentous historical betrayal—as a provocative means through which to expose and address a memory deficit at the heart of the Berlin Republic: the missing commemoration of German political conservatism's betrayal of democracy in 1933. From this angle, the remains of the Jewish victims seemed to have been included in order to serve the wider objective of German memory politics.

Much of this was expressed through the strident language of aggressive humanism. For instance, the ZPS referred to the pillar as "das Denkmal gegen den Verrat an der Demokratie" (the monument against the betrayal of democracy), a title that omits explicit mention of Jewish victims. Underscoring the impression of instrumentalization, they also called it "die Säule des Widerstands" (the pillar of resistance), an inflection that inaugurates vigilant memories of the betrayal of 1933 and uses them to mobilize resistance against the erosion of democratic politics and society in present-day Germany. Indeed, the installation, which included an overarching banner proclaiming "Gedenken heißt kämpfen" (to commemorate is to fight), deliberately situated itself in the contemporary national context of the rise of the far right. On the project website, the ZPS specifically identified as the fascist threat the largest opposition party in the German Parliament currently, the "Alternative für Deutschland" (Alternative for Germany, henceforth AfD) which had enjoyed significant gains in the federal elections of September 2017 and thus achieved the unthinkable: the entry to parliament of a far-right political party with extremists among its ranks and links to neo-Nazi and other extremist

13 See Veronique Brüggemann, "Wieder zum Objekt gemacht," *Spiegel*, December 3, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-die-aktion-macht-holocaust-opfer-wieder-zum-objekt-a-1299431.html; also Christoph Twickel, "Diktatur der Anständigen: Das Zentrum für Politische Schönheit tarnt Ideologie als Humanismus," *Die Zeit*, December 17, 2017, https://www.zeit.de/2019/53/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-aktivismus-humanismus-ideologie (both accessed April 7, 2020).

14 On the Enabling Act, see Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2003), 349–54.

groups and networks.[15] As the location of the pillar in front of the Federal Chancellery suggests, the "Aktion" also explicitly targeted Chancellor Angela Merkel's party, the Christian Democrats (CDU), as the potentially treacherous "enablers" of the AfD's further ascent to power, implying a historical parallel between the people's party of the center right and the bourgeois parties that capitulated to the Nazis.[16]

The timing of the "Aktion" can be further contextualized with reference to events of autumn 2019. In the run-up to the installation, a cause for national consternation had been the uncertain outcome of local elections in late October in the eastern German state of Thuringia. No single party won an outright majority, and the once regionally dominant CDU lost ground to "Die Linke" (the left party), which narrowly topped the polls, and to the AfD, which placed second. Disastrously for the CDU, the AfD not only gained at the CDU's expense but significantly they did so under far-right regional leader Björn Höcke, who is also founder and head of the extreme-right movement within the AfD, "Der Flügel" (the wing). Höcke is renowned for his views on racial homogenization, the relativization of Nazi crimes, and the "Schande" (disgrace) of Germany's politics of Holocaust commemoration, as his notorious speech to the youth wing of the AfD in Dresden in January 2017 demonstrated (subsequently Höcke was the target of the ZPS's 2017 campaign, "Holocaust-Mahnmal Bornhagen"). He is currently under observation by the "Verfassungsschutz" (the intelligence service of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), and in September 2019 a court ruled that he may legally be called a fascist. More recently, "Der Flügel," to which nearly a third of AfD party members belong, has also been placed under observation and in March 2020 the "Verfassungsschutz" determined officially that it is an extreme right group.[17] This alarming profile did not deter several members of the CDU in Thuringia from demanding coalition negotiations with the AfD, a move that went against the federal

15 On the AfD, see Charles Lees, "The Alternative for Germany: The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe," *Politics* 38, no. 3 (2018): 295–310. For an interactive map of the AfD's networks, see https://taz.de/Schwerpunkt-AfD/!t5495296/ (accessed April 7, 2020).

16 See Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, 352–54.

17 "Der Flügel" was dissolved in May 2020; however, the "Verfassungsschutz" has no reliable proof that it has in fact disbanded. See "AFD-Flügel geht offline: Verfassungsschutzchef spricht von Scheinauflösung," *Die Welt*, May 1, 2020, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article207670791/AfD-Fluegel-geht-offline-Verfassungsschutzchef-spricht-von-Scheinaufloesung.html (accessed August 27, 2020).

party line that categorically ruled out collaboration with both the AfD and "Die Linke."[18]

In this context, it is hardly surprising that "Sucht nach uns!" came under fire for violating the ethical project of Holocaust memory. The point the ZPS wished to make about the weakening of the political middle ground in the face of the growing threat from Germany's far right did seem to eclipse the memory of Jewish victims, the cornerstone of German Holocaust memory. Worse still, the ZPS had instrumentalized victim remains in order to articulate this point. Granted, they had tried to re-inscribe the ashes in a register of subjecthood, insofar as the project imagined the victims as speaking subjects and agents of resistance ("Sucht nach uns!"; "Gedenken heißt kämpfen"). As Katherine Verdery observes in her analysis of the political lives of dead bodies in the post-socialist context, however, human remains as symbols "don't talk much on their own."[19] From this point of view, efforts to "subjectify" remains inevitably also "objectify" them to some degree. Despite their efforts to restore a sense of humanity to the ashes, then, the ZPS still stood accused of utilizing ashes and fragments of bone in a political-aesthetic, attention-grabbing stunt, and robbing Holocaust victims of their dignity once again.

In the course of the opening week of the installation, pressure on the collective mounted. One day after the pillar was erected, the ZPS published an explanatory FAQ sheet on Facebook; by the following day they had issued an apology to Jewish organizations and they also blacked out the window display on the pillar. Before the week's end, the Orthodox

18 On events in autumn 2019, see "Landtagswahl Thüringen: Mehrere CDU-Politiker wollen doch mit der AfD sprechen," *Die Zeit*, November 5, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-11/landtagswahl-thueringen-cdu-politiker-gespraeche-afd-koalition; also Martin Debes, "Die Selbstzerstörung der Thüringer CDU," *Die Zeit*, November 7, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2019-11/thueringen-landtagswahl-cdu-simbabwe-koalition-afd-mike-mohring. On Höcke, see "Björn Höcke darf als 'Faschist' bezeichnet werden," *Spiegel*, September 28, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bjoern-hoecke-darf-als-faschist-bezeichnet-werden-gerichtsurteil-zu-eisenach-a-1289131.html (accessed 7 April, 2020). On "Der Flügel" see "Verfassungsschutz zu AfD-'Flügel': Erwiesen rechtsextrem," *ARD Taggeschau*, April 1, 2020, https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/afd-fluegel-verfassungsschutz-101.html (accessed 12 April, 2020). The uncertainty in Thuringia rumbled on until March 2020 when the "Linke" politician Bodo Ramelow finally won back leadership of the state in a third uncontested round. These regional events had serious repercussions at the national level of CDU leadership. See https://www.dw.com/en/left-party-politician-bodo-ramelow-wins-key-german-state-vote/a-52635758. For a transcript of Höcke's speech, see https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/hoecke-rede-im-wortlaut-gemuetszustand-eines-total-besiegten-volkes/19273518.html (accessed April 7, 2020).

19 Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, 29.

Rabbinical Conference of Germany had taken the ashes for burial in order to restore "Totenruhe" (the peace of the dead) in accordance with Halacha. The ZPS cancelled the Saturday resistance march and shut down the crowdfunding page. As mentioned above, in January the local authorities finally removed the pillar.[20]

In early 2020 Ruch conceded that the installation had been a failure and that while the Holocaust would remain the collective's underpinning ethical motivation, the ZPS would not feature it in any of its future campaigns.[21] For him, in the public debate the means—the "aggressive-humanist" use of human remains in the display at the Kroll Opera site—had obscured the ends of the project, which had been to warn the conservative middle ground about the dangers of collaboration with the far right. But if we take it that promoting the ideal of political beauty was the ultimate goal of this campaign—and let us recall that this ideal is based on universal empathy for the victim other's suffering—then the campaign was compromised from the outset. It conflated the turbulent state of present-day German politics with the memory of victims of a past regime, which reinforced the impression that the ashes of the Holocaust dead were being instrumentalized to speak out against the threat of fascism in the early twenty-first century. In other words, the other's suffering was not being commemorated on its own terms. The installation thus substantiated Rob van der Laarse's point that "playing with the dead is never an innocent game."[22]

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20 See the FAQ sheet at https://www.facebook.com/politische.schoenheit/photos/pcb.2525148620873507/2525145330873836/?type=3&theater and the apology at https://politicalbeauty.de/Media/hera/Stellungnahme.pdf; and "Künstlerkollektiv lässt umstrittene Säule vor Reichstag abbauen," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 16, 2020, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/mensch-metropole/kuenstlerkollektiv-laesst-umstrittene-saeule-vor-reichstag-abbauen-li.5032 (all accessed April 7, 2020).

21 See Julius Betschka, "'Deshalb wird es keine Aktionen zum Holocaust mehr geben': Philip Ruch, Leiter des ZPS, über Aktionen zum Holocaust, Aufträge aus der Geschichte und den Schulterschluss zwischen Konservatismus und Faschismus," *Tagesspiegel*, January 9, 2020, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-deshalb-wird-es-keine-aktionen-zum-holocaust-mehr-geben/25400880.html; and Annika Leister, "'Der Holocaust ist immer unser Ankerpunkt': Philip Ruch vom Zentrum für politische Schönheit spricht über das Scheitern der jüngsten Aktion, verletzte Gefühle und Pläne für die Zukunft," *Berliner Zeitung*, January 13, 2020, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/es-ist-unmoeglich-das-richtige-zu-tun-li.4767?fbclid=IwAR3AkDYOnmqDwjeMZ3DXeeGORcSeTYFD7CWUCYhnv2yt4eoNh3k6Pc_Tkk4 (all accessed April 7, 2020).

22 Rob van der Laarse, "Bones Never Lie? Unearthing Europe's Age of Terror in the Age of Memory," in *Mapping the "Forensic Turn,"* ed. Dziuban, 143–68, here 167. Critical responses from the media include: Claudia Schwartz,

The ZPS knew of the risks: their 2015 campaign "Die Toten kommen" had generated much controversy for featuring a human corpse. The collective exhumed the body of a Syrian refugee who drowned in the Mediterranean and was buried anonymously in Sicily. With the permission of her relatives, the ZPS brought her remains to Berlin for a reburial ceremony in a Muslim cemetery, which was livestreamed. The target of this "Aktion" was Europe's hostility to refugees, especially the maltreatment of migrant corpses recovered from sea, which in many cases were not identified by EU authorities or given a proper burial. Even though the collective consulted the refugee's relatives, public criticism of the instrumentalization of human remains in this "Aktion" was vehement and can be compared to the criticism levelled against "Sucht nach uns!"[23]

The comparison with "Die Toten kommen" reveals a further weakness of "Sucht nach uns!": in the latter case the ZPS did not consult Jewish organizations and communities about the exhumation, transfer, and display of the ashes, which suggests that the collective feared objections on religious grounds that may well have prevented the "Aktion" from taking place. This lack of inclusion of the descendants of Jewish Holocaust victims is a serious ethical flaw of the overall campaign, and the collective's public apology acknowledges this.[24] After all, they might have drawn on current inclusive methodologies in the field of forensic archaeology: Caroline Sturdy Colls (whose work is referenced in *Die Wege der Asche*) uses non-invasive forensic and archaeological approaches, including consultation with Jewish religious leaders, to locate new evidence and body-disposal sites in extermination camps such as Treblinka. This

"Zentrum für politische Schönheit: Der Vogelschiss kommt jetzt von links," *NZZ*, December 3, 2019, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-der-vogelschiss-kommt-jetzt-von-links-ld.1526076?reduced=true; and Carlotta Wald, "Die Kunst, keine Kunst zu sein: Das Zentrum für Politische Schönheit überschreitet Grenzen," *Die Zeit*, December 7, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2019-12/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-kunst-aktivismus (all accessed August 27, 2020). See also Twickel, "Diktatur der Anständigen."

23 For an account of the critical public response to "Die Toten kommen" (The Dead Are Coming), see Alice von Bieberstein and Erdem Evren, "From Aggressive Humanism to Improper Mourning: Burying the Victims of Europe's Border Regime in Berlin," *Social Research* 83, no. 2 (2016): 453–79. For overview and analysis of all previous ZPS campaigns, see Rummel, Stange, and Waldvogel, eds., *Haltung als Handlung*.

24 In their apology the ZPS states: "Wir bedauern aufrichtig, dass wir den zentralen Wirkungsaspekt unserer Arbeit nicht im Vorfeld erkannt haben" (We sincerely regret that we did not preempt the central impact of our work). See https://politicalbeauty.de/Media/hera/Stellungnahme.pdf (accessed April 12, 2020). A hallmark of ZPS campaigns is that the collective tends to act alone. See von Bieberstein and Evren, "From Aggressive Humanism to Improper Mourning," 464–65.

approach is not always free of controversy, but it has produced results that have been welcomed by Jewish organizations, such as the ability to identify, mark, and honor previously unknown mass graves.[25]

On top of the ZPS's decision not to consult Jewish organizations and individuals is a formal problem: the number of stories the installation and its ashes were tasked with telling. These included the contemporary resurgence of fascism and the decay of democracy, the uncommemorated betrayal of democracy in 1933, the danger of political betrayal today, as well as the stories of the forgotten victims that recount underrecognized methods of violence such as mass body disposal and the trauma of victimization. One would be justified in asking what formal language could feasibly connect these threads in a legible idiom that would also avoid charges of objectification and instrumentalization.

Despite all of these difficulties, however, some observers viewed the installation positively as a critical commentary on normalized, even complacent German memory culture, perceived to be losing relevance for younger generations and more recently coming under attack from elements of the far right that are now part of the political mainstream.[26] This suggests a concern that the foundations of Holocaust memory in Germany are no longer as solid as they once may have been, which resonates with the earlier campaign "Holocaust-Mahnmal Bornhagen." From this angle, the ZPS via "Sucht nach uns!" pierced what Wulf Kansteiner describes as a "robust sense of pride anchored . . . in a widely shared belief in Germany's extraordinary accomplishments in the arena

25 Caroline Sturdy Colls, "'Earth conceal not my blood': Forensic and Archaeological Approaches to Locating the Remains of Holocaust Victims," in *Human Remains in Society*, ed. Dreyfus and Anstett, 163–96. Hinnerk Höfling, *Die Wege der Asche: Eine quellenkritische Chronologie für das Interessengebiet Auschwitz*. This research was first published as part of the ZPS project. Full text available at: https://politicalbeauty.de/Media/hera/Die%20Wege%20der%20Asche.pdf (accessed June 8, 2020).

26 See Jan Kedves, "'Hier liegt die deutsche Diktatur im Frieden,'" *SZ*, December 2, 2019, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/zps-zentrum-auschwitz-mahnmal-1.4706218; also Arno Widmann, "Asche von Nazi-Opfern?" and Patrick Wildermans, "Holocaust-Asche vor dem Reichstag: Das Mahnmal des Zentrums für Politische Schönheit ist drastisch—und notwendig," *Tagesspiegel*, December 2, 2019, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/holocaust-asche-vor-dem-reichstag-das-mahnmal-des-zentrums-fuer-politische-schoenheit-ist-drastisch-und-notwendig/25290712.html. On the threat to Germany's Holocaust memorials in the context of the rise of the AfD, see Derek Scally, "Holocaust Deniers Targeting German Concentration Camp Memorials," *The Irish Times*, February 4, 2020, https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/holocaust-deniers-targeting-german-concentration-camp-memorials-1.4161791 (all accessed April 7, 2020).

of memory politics."[27] The point concerning the fragility of institutionalized Holocaust memory is important, and the project's problematic take on material memory indeed resonates loudly in the context of the current historical shift to a post-witness era that necessitates "a reorientation from evidentiary logic based on eyewitness accounts to one based on forensic evidence."[28] The problem of the instrumentalization of the victim other and the related issue of the mediation of multiple narratives that pervade "Sucht nach uns!" demonstrated some of the challenges that arise with this reorientation.

And yet for all its "aggressive-humanist" attack on mainstream German politics that, as detailed above, ultimately objectified victim remains, "Sucht nach uns!" did also foreground the story of these victims who witnessed the murder and incineration of others and faced extermination themselves—through the eyewitness accounts as well as the ashes in the installation. Despite its evident flaws, it arguably succeeded in creating a space for the empathic memory of victims. This insight is paradoxical in that it is premised on the project's most controversial element: the inclusion of human remains. For analytical purposes only I thus shift the emphasis in the next section from the instrumentalization of remains in the context of contemporary politics to the story of the victims as mediated by forensic aesthetics.

Forensic Aesthetics and the Forensic Turn

As a project that self-consciously employs forensic aesthetics, "Sucht nach uns!" must be situated within the wider context of the "forensic turn." This term describes a development in train since the 1980s: a "globally unfolding turn towards forensics as a means of unearthing, addressing, collecting, preserving, and presenting the evidence of war crimes, genocide and human rights violations."[29] In the context of the forensic turn, mass graves, extermination camps, and other sites of atrocity are viewed as "epistemic resources" from which details of crimes can be reconstructed.[30] This is especially important as the era of the witness draws to a close and in the context of revisionism and Holocaust denial. But these epistemic resources are not only significant in a scientific and legal context; they are also meaningful as a material basis for ongoing practices of

27 Wulf Kansteiner, "Transnational Holocaust Memory, Digital Culture and the End of Reception Studies," in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory: Transcultural Mediation and Reception*, ed. Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (London: Brill, 2017), 305–43, here 307.

28 Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," 18.

29 Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," 10.

30 Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," 13.

commemoration. Forensic aesthetics in which human remains and their mediation function as both evidence and memorial of atrocity are thus part of the forensic turn.

Sturdy Colls points out that the Holocaust dead have not been searched for in the same way as the victims of other genocides have—an overlooked fact that gives "Sucht nach uns!" a relevance beyond the more local concerns of contemporary German politics. The sheer scale of the massacre, Nazi efforts to conceal evidence by burning bodies, and the passage of time are some of the reasons why so few Holocaust burial sites have been located. The dominant iconography of the Holocaust—corpses, gas chambers, camps, and crematoria—is thus paradoxical, and to an extent misleading, because it creates the impression that all is known about what happened to the victims. Sturdy Colls suggests that this iconography is in fact premised on an epistemic lack, that of the forgotten Holocaust remains which have never been sought and found. She argues that despite inevitable controversy, non-invasive forensic and archaeological approaches can help locate new evidence and body-disposal sites, opening up the possibility of proper burial for the forgotten dead. Forensic science thus has an important ethical role to play in Holocaust commemoration and mourning. Through search, location, and marking of the last resting place of the anonymous victims, it can restore their human dignity, while at the same time expanding our historical knowledge about the mass disposal of corpses, thereby reaffirming our empathy for the victims.

"Sucht nach uns!" should be seen also against this backdrop. The scientific framing of the remains—the drill core and other performative references to forensic expertise—suggested that one powerful medium for the future of Holocaust memory, as we move away in time from a testimonial paradigm, is human matter, "the paradigm of material evidence."[31] The work of scholarship that underpinned the installation, *Die Wege der Asche*, is also performative in that it strains to hear the voices of the dead and to reconstruct their experiences. It recounts how few of the prisoner testimonies were found by the Soviets in Auschwitz in 1945, suggesting that many more may still be buried there and at other locations across Europe. Its author, historian Hinnerk Höfling, argues that in accordance with the wishes of the prisoner-chroniclers it is now our duty, seventy-five years later, to seek and find these testimonies, to locate the ashes and bone fragments of the forgotten dead, and to disseminate knowledge of the violence not just of mass murder but also of the methods—and trauma—of mass body disposal that were carried out by other prisoners, who themselves faced the same end.[32] From this angle, the ashes in

31 Dziuban, "Introduction: Forensics in the Expanded Field," 25.

32 Höfling, *Die Wege der Asche: Eine quellenkritische Chronologie für das Interessengebiet Auschwitz*, 49.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conjunction with the testimonies are an important epistemic resource for the present centered on retrieving and telling the missing stories of the victims and displaying their forgotten remains.

That the ZPS ultimately could not confirm whether the remains in the pillar were in fact the remains of *Jewish* victims underscores the sense of epistemic lack the project thematized. It highlights the uncomfortable but overlooked fact that the comingling of ash and bone in the camps and their surrounding territories made it very difficult, even in the early years after the end of the war, to identify individuals or to ascertain their ethnicity. It also brings to the fore the fact that the earth around camps such as Auschwitz even today still offers up victim remains as a matter of course, such is the sheer quantity of ash and bone in these territories. This last point is not recognized widely enough in our understanding of what the Holocaust was: not just a genocidal project, but within that also a mass body disposal project on an unprecedented scale.[33] The use of forensic aesthetics across urban and virtual locations thus illuminates the significance of material remains and their mediation for sustaining our empathic and epistemic understanding in the post-witness era of the violence at work in the Holocaust.

The spatial aesthetics of the project reinforced this message concerning the forgotten incinerated Holocaust dead. Space in "Sucht nach uns!" encompassed several different locations in Germany and Central and Eastern Europe and included a virtual location beyond these terrains. This already made it quite complex, involving multiple places across different countries and significant geographical distances. Furthermore, in removing forgotten victim remains from these far-off atrocity sites and putting them on display at an underrecognized historical site of political betrayal in today's Berlin, the installation effectively spatialized and thereby embodied a number of traumatic temporalities—betrayal and several subsequent annihilations—in visual-aesthetic form. Different histories from different spaces and times were made to dramatically converge on one site.

The ZPS thereby presented the public with possible evidence of the Nazi genocide that is abundantly scattered across Central and Eastern Europe even today. While controversial, this approach shines a light on European as well as German neglect of the remains of incinerated victims. It also presents ashes, bone, and earth as eloquent symbols for the dangers of complacency about Holocaust memory. From this angle, the "ugly" aesthetics of "aggressive humanism" acquire a function beyond controversy and shock: as forensic-aesthetic props, the pillar, its contents, and the materials on the website are also metonymical ciphers for the vast,

33 Sturdy Colls, "'Earth conceal not my blood'," in *Human Remains in Society*, ed. Dreyfus and Anstett, 163–96.

unrecognized, and unconsecrated "land of open graves" that is Central and Eastern Europe.[34] The ambiguity concerning the evidentiary status of the remains performatively reinforces this epistemic deficit.

Conclusion

"Sucht nach uns!" was an uneven campaign that—in Ruch's words—"failed" because it violated Jewish religious law, disturbed the resting place of the dead, and offended the living. And yet, confusingly, alongside these errors was a commitment to the memory of victims, as demonstrated in the works of research *Die Wege der Asche* and *An die Nachwelt*, as well as by the collective's general engagement with forensic aesthetics in the post-witness era. Divided between the objectification of human remains in an aesthetic display and the effort to re-imagine the individual subjects to whom these remains might belong, the project was conceptually at odds with itself from the start. It articulated two rather different modes of memory work in parallel. On the one hand, the forensic-historical research and testimonies available on the website might be considered to be an expression of empathic unsettlement, Dominick LaCapra's term for commemoration of the victim other's suffering that does not confuse the self that commemorates with the other's trauma.[35] This critical memory work is especially important when descendants of National Socialism attempt to engage with the experience and suffering of Jewish Holocaust victims. Through the compilation of testimonies *An die Nachwelt*, the collective made space for the victims' voices, for their experience in their own words. Similarly, *Die Wege der Asche* gives a forensic-historical account of body disposal methods based on witness testimony as well as historical records. The ZPS's efforts to piece together what the victims went through in this research-intensive manner could be viewed as memory work in the form of empathic unsettlement. On the other hand, the decision to transfer and display human remains of victims is what LaCapra might call excessive; arguably it is the visible and visceral conflation of history with trauma.[36]

I have made a limited case for the display's significance in terms of the epistemic deficit it exposes in the context of normalized memory culture: the ubiquity of the remains of Holocaust victims in Central and Eastern Europe, the impossibility of identifying the individual victims, the related

34 Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015).

35 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014 [2001]).

36 See LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xxxi.

impossibility of their proper burial, and the violence not just of genocide but of the destruction of the remains of the victims of genocide. But this case can only be made if we put aside the fact that the ZPS linked the remains to political issues that have little to do with the suffering of victims, such as the rise of the far right in contemporary Germany, and also that the collective, acting on an imagined moral mandate from the victims of history, determined that it was ethically justifiable to excavate and move remains without consulting the descendants of victims. Referencing LaCapra again, we might characterize this decision as appropriation of the victim other: the victims' command to "search for us" becomes a cornerstone of the descendants' identity to the point that the distinction between non-victim self and victim other becomes unclear. The following mission statement from the project website is revealing in this regard:

> Die Asche der Opfer des National Sozialismus ist das Erbe dieser Republik. Ein Erbe, das nicht bewältigt werden kann. Es gibt nicht nur eine Schuld am Holocaust. Es gibt auch einen Auftrag: was tun wir, um Faschismus zu bekämpfen? Gedenken heißt nicht diskutieren. Gedenken heißt handeln. Gedenken heißt kämpfen.
>
> [This Republic has inherited the ashes of the victims of National Socialism. A legacy that cannot be overcome. There is not just guilt for the Holocaust. There is also a mandate: what are we doing to fight against fascism? To commemorate is not to discuss. To commemorate is to act. To commemorate is to fight.]

Striking here is the collective's self-positioning as descendants who imagine the legacy of National Socialism in visceral terms as ashes, ashes that they must appropriate to process the problem of inherited guilt. Ashes are inseparable from perpetrator guilt here, and also from a redemptive mandate imagined to issue from the victims. Commemoration of the victims and the continuing fight against fascism are thus premised on an intimate, embodied connection between Jewish victims and the descendants of National Socialism that suggests a lack of critical judgment on the part of the ZPS. The use of forensic aesthetics here moves away from performance and empathic unsettlement to affect and trauma. From this angle, the ashes of victims symbolize less the paradigm shift to material memory in the post-witness era and more the founding trauma of Nazi perpetration for Germans born after the Holocaust. In this respect, the display of remains transcended the historical register evident in the research on the website.

This shows that the project was uneven not only in terms of how it used forensic aesthetics, but also in terms of its understanding of time: it wavered between a commitment to historical understanding and a

reverence for traumatic time, the traumatic time of the burdened younger generations of Germans today as much as the traumatic time of the victims. The collective states on the website that the Holocaust is not a mythical pre-history but was carried out by humans in historical time. And yet on the same page they also state: "Es gibt kein 'damals,' es gibt nur ein 'dort.' Einen Ort, an dem der Abgrund klafft und zwar für immer" (There is no "back then," there is only a "there." A place where the abyss gapes—forever). Taking the ZPS at their word, one might suggest that the language of "aggressive humanism" stands in a direct relation to the above expressed sense of traumatic time; the latter gives expression to the former, and both are extreme. Both also risk displacing the memory of victims, which undermines the values of political beauty and universal empathy. The controversy caused by "Sucht nach uns!" can be illuminated from this wider angle; it also reveals how the generations born after can struggle to meet the responsibility and challenge of working through the past in a post-witness era increasingly reliant on material memory, the material traces, objects, and human remains that invariably become "markers of a time in conflict."[37]

37 Van der Laarse, "Bones Never Lie?," 168.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.004 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Irreconcilable Differences: The Politics of Bad Feelings in Contemporary German Jewish Culture

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Introduction: Beyond the Reconciliation Paradigm

To mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2020, the renowned sociologist Natan Sznaider published a reflection in the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* in which he stresses the fundamental difference and irreconcilability between German and Jewish memories of the Holocaust.[1] He even wonders whether joint memory rituals, intended to bring victims and perpetrators together, actually expose an "Abgrund . . ., wo nichts mehr gutgemacht werden kann" (an abyss . . . where nothing can ever be made good again).[2] This stance clashes with established traditions in German Jewish memory culture, premised on reconciliation and *Wiedergutmachung*, which implies material compensation as well as the possibility of atonement. Sznaider is not, however, a complete outlier in contemporary German Jewish culture; several contemporary authors are beginning not only to question the reconciliation paradigm, but also to vent their negative emotions vis-à-vis the German Jewish status quo. One example that comes to mind is Maxim Biller, who has long been renowned for portraying angry and resentful Jewish characters in his fiction, while also presenting himself as a contemptuous commentator on past and present-day Germany and German-Jewish relations. Biller has recently been joined by a generation of younger authors who also voice their discontent with the state of German Jewish affairs: the poet, essayist, political commentator, and curator Max Czollek has called on Jews and

1 Natan Sznaider, "Die Konflikte zwischen Juden und Deutschen nach 1945 bleiben bestehen," *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, January 30, 2020, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/auch-75-jahre-nach-der-befreiung-von-auschwitz-bleiben-die-konflikte-zwischen-deutschen-und-juden-bestehen-ld.1536774 (accessed March 17, 2020).

2 All translations from German into English are the author's.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.005 Published online by Cambridge University Press

other minority groups to "de-integrate" from the German mainstream culture,[3] while the comedian and writer Oliver Polak has denounced both the commodification of Jewishness and the renewed acceptability of anti-Semitism in today's Germany.[4]

These contemporary bad feelings are embedded in an affective genealogy that harks back to earlier expressions and discussions of "Jewish rage,"[5] mainly in relation to the survivor generation.[6] I intend to show, however, that these younger, second- or third-generation Jewish authors bring new issues to the fore that, through the use of more recent theoretical frameworks, also allow us to interpret these negative sentiments in novel ways. These changes have to do with generational and historical distance, while also reflecting the shifting sociopolitical and memory discourses surrounding these younger writers. Most scholarly engagement with Jewish rage and resentment focuses on the survivor generation, often stressing the scandalous, repressed, and taboo character of these negative emotions.[7] By contrast, my analysis of the works of Biller, Czollek, and Polak will demonstrate that these contemporary authors

3 Max Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!* (Munich: Hanser, 2018). Henceforth cited in the text as *DE!*.

4 Oliver Polak, *Ich darf das, ich bin Jude* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008). Henceforth cited in the text as *Idd*; Oliver Polak, *Der jüdische Patient* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014). Henceforth cited as *DjP*; Oliver Polak, *Gegen Judenhass* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2018).

5 Naomi Seidman, "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage," *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 1–19.

6 See Susan Derwin, *Rage is the Subtext: Readings in Holocaust Literature and Film* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012); and more recently Margarete Myers Feinstein, "Reconsidering Jewish Rage after the Holocaust," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Holocaust Literature and Culture*, ed. Victoria Aarons and Phyllis Lassner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 743–60. On the related issue of resentment, see Helen Finch, "Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment: Edgar Hilsenrath's and Ruth Klüger's Late Writings as Holocaust Metatestimony," in *German-Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2018), 60–79; and Dania Hückmann, "Beyond Law and Justice: Revenge in Jean Améry," *The Germanic Review* 89, no. 2 (2014): 233–48.

7 Seidman for example argues that in Wiesel's famous memoir *Night*, the Jewish rage that still permeated his earlier, Yiddish memoir *Un di velt hot geshvign* (And the World Remained Silent) has been sublimated in an effort to gain a "ticket into the literature of non-Jewish Europe," see Seidman, "Elie Wiesel and the Scandal of Jewish Rage," 15. Derwin's more psychoanalytically inspired study makes the point that survivor-writers such as Robert Antelme, Jean Améry, and Primo Levi had to contain their rage through "narrative-making," so as to protect "both the survivor and the community from an upsurge of nonprocessable emotion." See Derwin, *Rage is the Subtext*, 11.

do not feel compelled to contain their contentious affects. This has to do with the fact that their rage stems from different sources—the experiences of the traumatized survivors in the postwar period, who often struggled to find words and make themselves heard, are very different from the frustrations of the "generation after."[8] At the same time, the revitalization of Jewish communities and cultures in the postunification period has also led to "neue Möglichkeiten der Selbstdefinition" (*DE!*, 145; new possibilities for self-definition) and less dependence on "die Anerkennung durch eine deutsche Dominanzkultur" (*DE!*, 187; recognition by German hegemonic culture) for this generation, as Czollek has noted.[9] This more established, self-assured position comes with its own set of issues, however, for as Jewish voices have gained a more central and secure position in German culture and memory debates, they also run a higher risk of being commodified, instrumentalized, and typecast. The exploration of negative emotions in this article is thus necessarily riddled with "Selbstwidersprüche" (*DE!,* 187; internal contradictions), as Czollek contends.

What sets these writers apart from earlier engagements with Jewish rage, furthermore, is their exploration of a broader spectrum of bad feelings, which range from anger, frustration, and (self-)hatred to indignation, melancholy, and sadness. These different emotional states entail different sets of issues, which encompass "negative symbiosis" and normalization, indignation and intersectionality, as well as questions of masculinity and gender.[10] Yet, the authors under consideration here all frame their negative emotions as both a reaction and a possible antidote to the state of contemporary Germany and German Jewish memory culture. Their affects thus exceed the bounds of the personal and become political, prompting an exploration of the kind of political work they do and what their "use" might be, to quote Sara Ahmed.[11] Inspired by Ahmed and by Audre Lorde, I will investigate the "uses of anger,"[12] that is, the pro-

8 This term was coined by Efraim Sicher to denote both the second- and the third generations of Jews after the Holocaust. See Efraim Sicher, "'Tancred's Wound': From Repression to Symbolization of the Holocaust in Second-Generation Narratives," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 5, no. 2 (2006): 189–201.

9 On the major shifts in German Jewish culture after 1990, see *German-Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. Garloff and Mueller.

10 On "negative symbiosis," see Dan Diner, "Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz," in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987), 185–97.

11 Sara Ahmed, *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2019).

12 Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," in *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, with a preface by Reni Eddo-Lodge and an introduction by Sara Ahmed (London:

posal that anger—and other bad feelings—can be creative, transformative, and a basis for change, specifically for Jewish and other minority subjects. Drawing on Ahmed's work in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*[13] and, more specifically, her thinking on happiness and unhappiness,[14] I want to examine these emotions as a form of political reaction and even action in texts by Biller, Czollek, and Polak. In her work, Ahmed propagates both "the sociality of emotions,"[15] and their circulating character, which allows them to move around but also attach to certain beings and objects. Emotions are thus what allows us to relate to others and the world, while also conditioning our relationships with the world. As such, emotions are an instrument of power, a form of doing and undoing, that enables us to perceive things in a certain way or not, become invested in things or not, do things or not; they are a "form of cultural politics and world-making."[16]

This basic argument becomes clearer in Ahmed's exploration of happiness and unhappiness in *The Promise of Happiness*. Ahmed here critically engages with the widespread notion that happiness is a "good," irrevocably positive emotion, mainly because this assumption bolsters the belief that what makes us happy is also always good and should be "promoted as goods."[17] Instead, Ahmed investigates how happiness can also become an instrument of coercion, when it is employed for the purpose of "the reorientation of individual desire toward a common good" or a norm.[18] This is when happiness becomes a "duty,"[19] in the sense that certain life choices are made out to be "good" and necessarily happiness-inducing, so that an unhappy reaction to them becomes pathological—what is wrong with us to not be happy with something that makes everyone else happy and therefore must be "right"? By contrast, Ahmed seeks to vindicate unhappy feelings by demonstrating that they fulfil an important political function. She dedicates the majority of her book to several "unhappy" figures, as in types, arguing that their bad feelings can teach us something about how norms come into existence and are sustained through affect, while also highlighting the costs of questioning or living outside those norms. Ahmed is convinced that the bad feelings experienced by these figures are not personal but political, in that they are the expression of a

Silver Press, 2017), 107–18.

13 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

14 Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

15 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.

16 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 12.

17 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 6.

18 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 59.

19 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 7.

"discomfort" caused by feeling "out of place, awkward, unsettled" or "at odds with the world."[20] These unhappy feelings thereby question both the universality and inclusivity of the norms that our world rests on, as well as their naturalness—they alienate the subject from the world and the norm, which makes the norm visible as a norm and thus as something that is constructed and historical, and hence changeable. This alienating force is also what makes them useful, in Lorde's sense, as they enable the subject to expose the oppressive power of certain norms, to question them and, potentially, to change them.

Particularly relevant for this essay is the unhappy figure of the "melancholic migrant" who refuses to let go of the injury caused by, for example, the experience of racist discrimination,[21] thereby becoming alienated from the world surrounding them—they become "affect aliens" due to their "alien affects," to use Ahmed's terminology.[22] While not all Jews in present-day Germany are migrants, they seem to be trapped in a similar dynamic, in that their refusal to "get over" the Holocaust and/or the ongoing reality of anti-Semitism is perceived as a threat to the German desire for normalization, alienating Jewish subjects from a re-discovered positive national feeling or pride. The unhappiness of the melancholic migrant, and that of the Jewish figures and writers portrayed in this essay, is therefore deeply political—and a form of action: "[T]he act of saying no or of pointing out injuries as an ongoing present affirms something, right from the beginning."[23]

In the following, I will probe how minority subjects use the alienating force of their bad feelings to complicate certain assumptions, stereotypes, and power relations and to affirm an alternative politics. I have deliberately chosen the term "bad feelings," as the adjective "bad" carries several connotations: it describes negative feelings, such as anger, hatred, revenge, and sadness, but it also designates emotions that are unwelcome, "uncultivated[,] or unruly."[24] This is because these feelings complicate some of the core assumptions underpinning German Jewish discourse, such as the reconciliation paradigm. As such, these bad feelings question and oppose the politics of normalization that has shaped Germany at least since the postunification period.[25] By refusing to let go of their negative emotions and "get over" them, these authors point to the shortcomings of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which they connect to ongoing

20 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 148; Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 168.

21 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 121–59.

22 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 158.

23 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 207.

24 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 3.

25 Helen Finch argues along similar lines with regard to Edgar Hilsenrath and Ruth Klüger, see Finch, "Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment."

instances of stereotyping, anti-Semitism, and other forms of racism and exclusion. Their bad feelings can thus become the basis for a different memory politics in which the crimes of the past command an ongoing responsibility and critical self-examination in the present and the future.

The adjective "bad," however, also signifies the more problematic underpinnings of Jewish rage and its contemporary reincarnations that this essay seeks to uncover. Already among the survivor generation, gender expectations played a crucial role in how Jewish subjects expressed and enacted vengeful thoughts, as noted by Margarete Myers Feinstein.[26] Female revenge acts were often of a different, less "violent" quality, but they were also less speakable or visible, thus constituting a taboo within the taboo. Drawing on these observations, I will demonstrate that, in the writings of Biller, Czollek and Polak, the emancipatory trajectory of their reclamations of Jewish rage is somewhat thwarted by an unconscious continuation of its gendered heritage. All three authors, albeit to different degrees, perpetuate the aforementioned taboo by constructing the politics of bad feelings as hypermasculine and hence not equally accessible to all subjects.[27] For two of them, the espousal of hypermasculinity connects with a denigration of the feminine and a revival of misogynistic stereotypes. The construction of alternative, emancipatory Jewish subjectivities by way of bad feelings thus not only coexists with but also contributes to the exclusion and marginalization of Jewish and non-Jewish women.

Maxim Biller: Hatred and Hard Masculinity

Maxim Biller serves as an inspiration for both Czollek and Polak, who regard him as *the* role model for angry Jewishness in German culture. Scholars have reflected extensively on both the performative dimension of Biller's negative feelings, especially his hatred,[28] and their "usefulness," in Lorde's and Ahmed's sense, for dissecting post-Holocaust German Jewish discourse.[29] I want to focus here on how Biller both differs from

26 Feinstein, "Reconsidering Jewish Rage," 748–50.

27 Apart from gender, the issue of race might also be worth exploring, particularly the question whether bad feelings were equally acceptable if they came from other, non-white and/or "migrantized," to quote Fatima El-Tayeb, populations in Germany. See Fatima El Taybeb, *Undeutsch: Die Konstruktion des Anderen in der postmigrantischen Gesellschaft* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016).

28 See on this Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, "Hass als kritische Haltung? Maxim Billers Kolumnen," in *Hass/Literatur. Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zu einer Theorie- und Diskursgeschichte*, ed. Jürgen Brokoff and Robert Walter-Jochum (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 379–96.

29 See on this for example Norbert Otto Eke, "'Was wollen sie? Die Absolution?': Opfer- und Täterprojektionen bei Maxim Biller," in *Deutsch-jüdische Literatur der neunziger Jahre: Die Generation nach der Shoah*, ed. Sander L. Gilman

and connects to the younger authors examined in this article through an analysis of his very first short story collection *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin* (Someday When I'm Rich and Dead).[30] Although Biller's oeuvre has grown considerably since, this is still the work that grapples most palpably with issues of Jewish survival and resentment as well as the conundrums of being a Jew in post-Holocaust Germany. I will examine how the sentiment that is so central to Biller's writing, that is, hatred, leads him to embrace a more black-and-white, binary stance than is found in Czollek's and Polak's work. At the same time, I will show how Biller connects to these younger writers via the notion and espousal of hard masculinity.

In the introduction to their recent volume *Hass/Literatur*, Jürgen Brokoff and Robert Walter-Jochum describe hatred as an emotion that entrenches divisions rather than bridging them, since it entails a "Verfestigung der Ablehnung des gehassten Gegenstandes bzw. dessen Zerstörung" (a hardening of the rejection of the hated object or its destruction).[31] It is thus a fundamentally non-dialogical emotional state, and as such not aimed at opening up the conversation or resolving conflict. Although Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf stresses that the emotions expressed in Biller's texts are part of a carefully crafted strategy that has ethical underpinnings, she at the same time concedes that Biller's writing is marked by a "konfrontativen 'Wir/ihr'-Rhetorik" (a confrontational rhetoric of us vs. them).[32] This rhetoric can be observed in the longest short story in *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin*, which, at a later point, was published separately as a short novel entitled *Harlem Holocaust*.[33] This darkly grotesque portrayal of postwar German-Jewish relationships centers on the sadomasochistic ménage à trois between the Germans Efraim Rosenhain and Ina Polarker and the American Jewish linguistics professor turned writer Gerhard "Gary" Warszawski. Much of the story details how Warszawski tortures not only these two Germans but also the German public more broadly, building a career on the German "Gier nach Schuld und Entsöhnung" (*HH*, 9; craving for guilt and atonement). Warszawski seems to draw considerable sadistic joy from demeaning the two Germans, while also openly exploiting what Rosenhain calls his

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and Hartmut Steinecke (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2002), 89–107; and Jefferson Chase, "Shoah Business: Maxim Biller and the Problem of Contemporary German-Jewish Literature," *The German Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (2001): 111–31.

30 Maxim Biller, *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin* (Colgone: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1990). Henceforth cited in the text as *Wie*.

31 Jürgen Brokoff and Robert Walter-Jochum, "Hass/Literatur. Zur Einleitung," in *Hass/Literatur*, ed. Brokoff and Walter-Jochum, 9–26, here 13.

32 Wagner-Egelhaaf, "Hass als kritische Haltung?," 391.

33 Maxim Biller, *Harlem Holocaust*, with an afterword by Gustav Seibt (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998). Henceforth I will quote from this short novel which will be cited in the text as *HH*.

"Auschwitz-Bonus" (*HH*, 52), which is why the reader cannot help but sympathize with the victimized Germans. The reader's sentiment is called into question, however, by the story's ending: "Harlem Holocaust" finishes with a note written by a man called Hermann Warschauer, which uncovers the entire narrative as the posthumously released manuscript of a certain Friedrich—not Efraim!—Rosenhain, who, he claims, was mentally ill. It remains unclear whether Friedrich imagined the entire story—along with his hyper-Jewish name—or whether Warszawski/Warschauer, in a final masterstroke, added this note to permanently discredit the (by then dead) Rosenhain. Biller's literary sleight of hand forces readers into a critical self-examination as to why they took the distorted image of Warszawski at face value, especially since Rosenhain is presented as an unreliable narrator from the start. The disturbing relationship between Rosenhain and Warszawski and the reader's reaction to it serve as illustrations of what Dan Diner has identified as the "negative Symbiose" (negative symbiosis) between Germans and Jews after the Holocaust—an unsolvable, unintended, and mostly undesirable bond between perpetrators and victims.[34] As "eine Art gegensätzlicher Gemeinsamkeit" (a form of uncommon commonness),[35] the workings of negative symbiosis in the story provoke a situation where neither Rosenhain nor Ina can free themselves of their obsession with Warszawski and their feeling of perpetrator guilt, while Warszawski—at least according to Rosenhain—cannot stop tormenting them. The central characters are unable to construct an identity that is not grounded in the Holocaust, which gridlocks each of them in the roles of either perpetrator or victim.

While offering a deeply satirical portrait of German-Jewish relations in the immediate postunification period, Biller's grotesque exaggerations rest on a genuine belief in the impossibility of meaningful and "positive" German-Jewish relationships after the Holocaust. According to Biller, after the attempted extermination of an entire people, Jews and Germans are "für immer geschiedene Leute" (forever separated).[36] The semantics of love and intimate relationships used here also feature in other stories, which often negotiate the "negative Symbiose" through the breakdown and eventual failure of German-Jewish love relationships. In extreme cases, these end in the death of the Jewish character, as is exemplified in the short story "Cilly." Although Biller's hateful writing thus deconstructs certain stereotypes, such as "das deutsche Bild vom 'guten Juden'" (the German image of the "good Jew"),[37] it at the same time entrenches

34 Diner "Negative Symbiose."

35 Diner "Negative Symbiose," 185.

36 Maxim Biller, *Der gebrauchte Jude* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2009), 107. Henceforth cited in the text as *DgJ*.

37 Wagner-Egelhaaf, "Hass als kritische Haltung?," 391.

binary thinking in the categories Germans vs. Jews, us vs. them, thus echoing Brokoff's and Walter-Jochum's assessment that hatred consolidates rather than dissolves lines of conflict.[38]

Biller's unforgiving stance also finds expression through several of the Jewish survivor figures that populate *Wenn ich einmal reich und tot bin*. These characters are portrayed as deeply unsympathetic, unscrupulous, full of hatred, and, in some cases, themselves complicit in acts of perpetration. Many of these survivors are also involved in questionable and semi-legal business enterprises. While thus playing with, and potentially into, the anti-Semitic trope of the Jewish crook or fraudster, Biller's stories propose that these characters and their activities are also manifestations of Jewish hatred and revenge. The frantic and ruthless business activity of these survivor figures is not only a form of symbolic procreation and thus defiant survival, but also an expression of hatred and revenge, based on a refusal to forgive and forget. These characters unflinchingly exploit the German desire for atonement and normality, along with the false philosemitism this has bred, while joyfully breaking the moral codes of a society that, in their view, has lost all legitimacy.

Breaking with what Czollek denounces as the stereotype of the "friedliche[s] und wehrlose[s] jüdische[s] Opfer" (*DE!*, 157; peaceful and helpless Jewish victim),[39] the characters provide a counter-model to what Biller, in his self-portrait *Der gebrauchte Jude* (The Needed Jew),[40] condemns as the "Reich-Ranicki-Syndrom" (*DgJ*, 117; Reich-Ranicki Syndrome). With this, he refers to an assimilationist Jewishness, epitomized by the famous German Jewish critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, that even after the crimes of the Holocaust cannot let go of its love of German culture and the desire for a German-Jewish symbiosis.[41] Biller contrasts this position with that of the so-called Frankfurt Jews, a group of Jewish survivors epitomized by the influential chairman and eventual president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Ignatz Bubis, who settled in

38 Brokoff and Walter-Jochum, "Hass/Literatur."

39 This has also been noted by Eke, "'Was wollen sie?'"

40 The German word "gebraucht" means both "needed," as in required, and "used," as in utilized or exploited. Biller's title plays with both of these meanings, arguing that, as a Jew, he is being both exploited by and required for what Bodemann and Czollek call the German Jewish "Gedächtnistheater."

41 For a more detailed exploration of this argument and the problem of the German Jewish symbiosis in Biller's writing, see my own essay on sadomasochism and negative symbiosis in two of his works: Maria Roca Lizarazu, "Thomas Mann in Furs: Remediations of Sadomasochism in Maxim Biller's *Im Kopf von Bruno Schulz* and *Harlem Holocaust*," in *Love, Eros, and Desire in Contemporary German-Language Literature and Culture*, Edinburgh German Yearbook 11, ed. Helmut Schmitz and Peter Davies (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017), 113–31.

Frankfurt after the war and became a leading figure in business and society. Framed as "starke und harte jüdische Männer" (*DgJ*, 88; strong and tough Jewish men), these survivors conduct business mainly to quench their thirst for revenge:

> Keiner konnte mir erzählen, dass es Baumbach und Bubis nur um das Geld ging. Sie, die polnischen Straßenkinder, die erst in den deutschen Gettos und Lagern Deutsch gelernt hatten, standen meistens daneben, als ihre Mütter wie Fliegen totgeklatscht wurden, und dies war ihre Stunde. Sie subtrahierten nicht wie Reich-Ranicki, Freund und Domin. Sie addierten: Deutschland plus Hitler, Goebbels und Auschwitz ist gleich Rache, gleich Selbsthass, den man nur mit Hass vergelten kann. (*DgJ*, 89)
>
> [I did not believe for a second that Baumbach and Bubis were only after the money. These Polish strays, who only had learned German in German ghettos and camps, more often than not witnessed their mothers being killed off like flies, and this was their moment. Unlike Reich-Ranicki, Freund, and Domin they did not subtract. Rather, they added together: Germany plus Hitler, Goebbels, and Auschwitz equals revenge, equals self-hatred that can only be repaid with hatred.]

These survivors are thus figures of emancipation in that they deconstruct certain discursive patterns to reintroduce Jewish agency. Bad feelings, such as hatred, rage, and revenge, thus emerge as a critical and creative political tool, opening up space for alternative expressions of Jewish subjectivity. At the same time, these strategies of emancipation are reserved for males in Biller's writing, who furthermore need to be "starke und harte," that is, hypermasculine, men. Biller openly admires this type of masculinity, as can also be seen in his portrayal of Henryk M. Broder, another renegade Jew, who is characterized as "sicher zum Fürchten . . ., aber auch ein bisschen zum Anhimmeln" (*DgJ*, 118; Someone like him certainly instilled fear . . ., but also a degree of admiration).[42] This reverence for tough and unforgiving men coexists with a denigration in Biller's oeuvre of female characters, who seldom feature as anything other than mothers, lovers, or hypersexualized objects. The aforementioned character of Ina Polarker in *Harlem Holocaust* is subjected to numerous degrading sex acts and even pimped out to Warszawski by her boyfriend

42 I cannot, unfortunately, go into more detail about the complicated theme of masculinity, which is central to Biller's writing. For a more extended and nuanced analysis, see Frauke Matthes, "'Echter Südländer—Reb Motke—Deutschmann?' Debating Jewish Masculinity in Maxim Biller's *Die Tochter*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 48, no. 3 (2012): 323–35.

Rosenhain. Some of the Jewish female characters, such as the aforementioned Cilly or the character of Lea Sonnenson in "Verrat" (Treason), are described as either physically abject (Cilly) or as a "bequeme und geile Schlampe" (*Wie*, 189; lazy and horny slut: Lea). I cannot engage here in more detail with the oftentimes misogynistic depictions of female characters in Biller's writing. Rather, I want to make the argument that the politics of bad feelings in Biller's oeuvre continue and reinforce the gendered dynamics underlying Jewish rage, as identified by Feinstein in the survivor accounts.[43] Biller's writing continues a tradition that stresses the desirability of male acts of violence while discouraging or even rendering unspeakable female rage as a means of emancipation. The enabling potential of Biller's reclamation of Jewish bad feelings thus cannot be separated from its disabling consequences for all those who do not fit the norm of hard masculinity.

Max Czollek: Indignation and Intersectionality

Max Czollek's recent book-length polemic essay *Desintegriert Euch!* (De-integrate Yourselves!) showcases a different sentiment altogether, as already implied in the book's title, which in all likelihood alludes to Stéphane Hessel's 2010 publication *Indignez-vous!* (Time for Outrage!).[44] As noted in a recent book entitled *The Politics of Affective Societies*,[45] indignation is a "moral emotion" in that it "responds to and addresses some form of injustice or immorality."[46] As such, it has a mobilizing quality aimed at bringing people together around a common cause to create alliances and effect change. In Czollek's work, this mobilizing force produces an intersectional stance that looks for connections across difference and new forms of solidarity. This sets him apart from Biller's binary and divisive thinking, but the two still connect, perhaps surprisingly, around the issue of hard masculinity. The differences between Czollek and Biller might arise from the different emotions they work with, which, in Ahmed's sense, "do" different things. Their differing approaches might, however, also reflect a generational divide, with younger German Jews increasingly moving beyond the binarisms of the

43 Feinstein, "Reconsidering Jewish Rage."

44 Stéphane Hessel, *Indignez-Vous!* (Montpellier: Indigène, 2010).

45 Jonas Bens, Aletta Diefenbach, Thomas John, Antje Kahl, Hauke Lehmann, Matthias Lüthjohann, Friederike Oberkrome, Hans Roth, Gabriel Scheidecker, Gerhard Thonhauser, Nur Yasemin Ural, Dina Wahba, Robert Walter-Jochum, and M. Ragip Zik, *The Politics of Affective Societies: An Interdisciplinary Essay* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019).

46 Bens et al., *The Politics of Affective Societies*, 50.

"negative Symbiose" and toward more diverse, intersectional, and inclusive notions of Jewishness and Germanness.[47]

The object of Czollek's outrage is what he, inspired by the sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann, describes as the post-Holocaust, German Jewish "Gedächtnistheater" (*DE!*, 19–33; theater of memory). Czollek argues that the Jewish position after 1945 has been defined and limited by a German desire for normalization and "Erlösung" (*DE!*, 21; redemption). Echoing Biller's stance on the "gebrauchte[r] Jude," Czollek contends that Jews living in Germany are continually forced to affirm and stabilize the German nation's "Selbstbild" (*DE!*, 23; self-image) as a country that has successfully dealt with the Nazi past and redeemed itself. Inspired by Ahmed, we could say that Jews have a "reconciliation duty" in past and present Germany, which is of course also a "happiness duty," since they are not allowed to express negative sentiments toward the Germans or the German status quo. This duty is performed, both literally and figuratively, most visibly through public memory rituals, in which Germans atone for their crimes and Jews need to be present to legitimate and sanction this process. If Jews accept their prescribed role—if they "go along" with the performance[48]—they will be rewarded with not only cultural and social but also financial capital. These rituals unavoidably turn the Jewish population into mere extras on the stage of the German "Gedächtnistheater," a position that severely limits its expression and agency.

Czollek's program of "Desintegration" intends to reintroduce agency by preparing the ground for a Jewish refusal to "go along" with the performance of "Gedächtnistheater." As such, "Desintegration" is an attempt to enable Jewish emancipation and self-determination. By demolishing the roles that they have been playing or have been asked to play, "Desintegration" enables present-day Jews in Germany to explore their identities "außerhalb eines deutschen Begehrens nach jüdischen Opfern" (beyond a German desire for Jewish victims).[49] This

47 Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller, for example, argue that, for German Jewish literature after 1990, "Dan Diner's often-cited idea of a 'negative symbiosis' between Germans and Jews—and the binary opposition implied therein—no longer holds. Instead, the relationship between Jews and Germans has become more complicated and reflective of the multiple ways in which especially younger generations are self-fashioning their ethnicity and national identity in more complex and ambiguous ways." See Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller, "Introduction," in *German-Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. Garloff and Mueller, 1–16, here 5.

48 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 69.

49 This is a quotation from the program that accompanied the 2016 "Desintegrationskongress" at the Maxim Gorki theater in Berlin, a mix of artistic and political interventions organized by Czollek and playwright and literary author Sasha Marianna Salzmann, see Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann, eds.,

agenda, however, has repercussions that reach beyond Jewish emancipation. Apart from the "Gedächtnistheater," Czollek also criticizes the "Integrationstheater" (*DE!*, 63; theater of integration) that distinguishes between "good" and "bad" non-Jewish migrants, based on their willingness to assimilate to a white, Christian norm. "Desintegration" thus exceeds the bounds of German-Jewish relations, calling for a "grundlegende Reflexion des Verhältnisses zwischen deutscher Dominanzkultur and ihren Minderheiten" (*DE!*, 45; fundamental reflection of the relationship between the German hegemonic culture and its minorities) and a questioning of the white, Christian subject as the German norm.

The intersectional thrust of Czollek's project also becomes apparent in his recourse to bad feelings. The emancipatory trajectory of "Desintegration" entails the revitalization and invention of alternative notions and traditions of Jewishness, which may include negative sentiments such as rage, resentment, and revenge. As such, the project tells "eine andere, jüdische Nachkriegsgeschichte des Widerstands und der Rache" (*DE!*, 156; a different, Jewish postwar history of resistance and revenge); this history encompasses "Nakam," a little-known group of Jewish partisans and Holocaust survivors, who planned to kill Germans in acts of revenge in the immediate postwar period,[50] as well as re-readings of established German Jewish figures such as Hannah Arendt, Paul Celan, or Nelly Sachs and references to Quentin Tarantino's 2009 film *Inglourious Basterds*. Inspiration also comes from non-Jewish sources though, such as the anti-racist struggles of early 1990s German hip-hop (*DE!*, 123–37), or Kanak Attack, a loose association of individuals who, also in the 1990s, were active in combatting othering and racist stereotypes by means of cultural and often humoristic interventions.[51] The connection to Kanak Attack in particular demonstrates that "Desintegration" draws on intersectional and anti-racist theories and praxes from the realms of both queer and postcolonial studies, which are often concerned with

Desintegration: Ein Kongress zeitgenössischer jüdischer Positionen (Bielefeld and Berlin: Kerber Verlag, 2017). For the full program of events see: https://gorki.de/en/node/1502 (accessed February 4, 2020).

50 Berel Lang also notes the scarcity of information about this historical group, reading it as symptomatic of a larger suppression of Jewish revenge in Holocaust scholarship and memory, see Berel Lang, "Holocaust Memory and Revenge: The Presence of the Past," *Jewish Social Studies*, 2, no. 2 (1996): 1–20.

51 In their 1998 manifesto, *Kanak Attack* indeed make many points that are very similar to Czollek's program of "Desintegration," see https://www.kanak-attak.de/ka/about.html (accessed February 4, 2020).

the "resignification," to quote Judith Butler,[52] or, in Stuart Hall's words, "recoding,"[53] of existing norms, stereotypes, and power relations.

Rage and revenge are framed as such resignifying or recoding strategies for Jewish emancipation, as they allow Jewish minority subjects to reassess, reappropriate, and potentially even break with stereotypes, "weil sie eine Gegenfigur zum friedlichen und wehrlosen jüdischen Opfer erzeugen" (*DE!*, 157; because they produce a counter-model to the peaceful and helpless Jewish victim). Moreover, these "alien affects" enable a productive alienation from the dynamics of the "Gedächtnistheater" that "make[s] room for possibility":[54] "Desintegration bedeutet, die *deutsche* Perspektive sichtbar zu machen, die einem immer nur die Entscheidung zwischen gemeinsamer Erinnerung oder Erinnerungsverweigerung aufdrängt" (*DE!,* 105–6, italics in original; De-integration implies exposing the *German* perspective, which forces one to choose between either a shared memory culture or a rejection of that culture). This includes a reexamination of the Jewish complicity in these dynamics, as the "Gedächtnistheater" offers a "stabile und eindeutige Position" (*DE!*, 171; stable and straightforward position) for Germans and Jews alike.

Far from being solely destructive or unproductive, bad feelings thus become the precondition for developing new perspectives, positionalities, and horizons of possibility. In the German Jewish context, this is so not least because an exploration and revitalization of these negative sentiments counters the dominant politics of normalization in present-day Germany. As Czollek points out, his and other people's anger and discomfort are actually an understandable reaction to a country in which anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and "völkisch" thinking are on the rise again. For him, these developments can, in part, be explained by the politics of normalization, which, in its insistence on the "Abgrenzung der eigenen Gegenwart von der Vergangenheit" (*DE!,* 54; the separation between the past and one's own present), is bound to overlook "wie sehr sich die Widersprüche der Gegenwart aus dem Nationalsozialismus und seiner Kontinuität im Nachkriegsdeutschland ergeben" (*DE!*, 55; the extent to which the contradictions of the present moment result from National Socialism and its continuity in postwar Germany). By refusing to "go along" with and share in the "happy objects" of the "Gedächtnistheater," of normalization, and of a rediscovered sense of German national pride,[55] Czollek's

52 Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

53 Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 469–78.

54 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 20.

55 On the concept of "happy objects," see Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 21–49.

killjoy attitude points to the necessity of "Gegenwartsbewältigung" (*DE!*, 54; coming to terms with the present, a play on words with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* or coming to terms with the past), that is, a critical examination of how present-day Germany is still shaped by the legacy of National Socialism.[56] This includes a consideration of how various forms of exclusion, such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other manifestations of racism relate to one another, and how they can be countered via the formations of new and intersectional alliances.[57]

While thus generally championing a more progressive narrative than Biller, Czollek's thoughts are also haunted by the specter of hard masculinity. The positive examples presented by Czollek—be they Jewish or from other minority backgrounds—are predominantly male, although he also cites female writers and thinkers, such as Hannah Arendt and Nelly Sachs, and biblical figures, such as Debora, Delilah, and Esther, as potential role models. The role models that prove the most inspiring, however, subscribe to the ideal of hypermasculinity: this is clearly the case for Aldo Raine, the hyperviolent and hypervirile leader of Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*, who is quoted as length in *Desintegriert Euch!* (*DE!*, 168–70). We can, moreover, find traces of hypermasculinity in the male-dominated culture of 1990s hip-hop that deeply inspired Czollek. That culture's search for alternative, non-racist notions of nationhood often coincided with "a policing of nonnormative expressions of gender and sexuality as violating norms of authenticity and 'realness'," as noted by Fatima El-Tayeb.[58] Emphasizing the gendered dimensions of Jewish rage and revenge after the Holocaust, Feinstein suggests a link between the permissibility—and even desirability—of acts of revenge by Jewish males and Zionist ideals of masculinity that "expected the new Jewish man to be strong, physical, and to take up arms in defense of the community."[59] It appears as though the specter of this new Jewish man as tough, strong, and able to defend himself haunts both Biller's and Czollek's affective imaginaries. By—potentially unwittingly—referring back to this tradition, both perpetuate the silencing and marginalization of women's voices, thereby jeopardizing the emancipatory thrust of their politics of bad feelings.

56 On the topic of "Gegenwartsbewältigung," see also Czollek's more recent essay "Gegenwartsbewältigung," in *Eure Heimat ist unser Albtraum*, ed. Fatma Aydemir and Hengameh Yaghoobifarah (Berlin: Ullstein, 2019), 167–81.

57 The theme of alliances is further explored in one of the special issues of *Jalta*, a journal that is co-edited by Czollek; see Max Czollek, Hannah Peaceman, and Leah Wohl von Haselberg, "Allianzen: In die Offensive!," *Jalta* 1 (2018): 5–7.

58 Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 41.

59 Feinstein, "Reconsidering Jewish Rage," 749.

Oliver Polak: Low Mood and Loserdom

Oliver Polak in many ways appears as the antipode to the ideal of the hard Jewish man, in that his oeuvre discusses feelings of sadness and depression and their connection to "Schwächling" (*DjP*, 12; weakling) or "Loser" (*Idd*, 24) masculinities. Already his first, autobiographically inspired publication *Ich darf das, ich bin Jude* (I Am Allowed to Do That, I Am Jewish) mixes juvenile humor and funny anecdotes with more serious reflections on transgenerational trauma, dysfunctional family dynamics, isolation, anti-Semitism, and racism. These also inform Polak's much darker second book *Der jüdische Patient* (The Jewish Patient), which traces his personal battle with clinical depression.

Depression usefully complements the bad feelings explored so far, since this condition is less violent, but also less mobilizing, than hatred and indignation or outrage. While hatred and indignation, as portrayed by Biller and Czollek, kick the subject into action, depression, as represented by Polak, is a passive state in which the individual primarily suffers. *Der jüdische Patient*, however, illustrates Ahmed's argument that "suffering"—although generally regarded as passive—"is a kind of activity, a way of doing something. To suffer can mean to feel your disagreement with what has been judged as good."[60] Although the text initially presents depression as an individualized problem and failure of the "Schwächling" Polak, it soon transpires that the Jewish patient's bad feelings are much more multilayered. Apart from a personal family history that involves transgenerational trauma (Polak's father is a Holocaust survivor), the position of the Jewish comedian in postwar Germany has contributed substantially to Polak's dis-ease:

> Was ist es nur, was mich so abfuckt und in diese tiefe Melancholie treibt? Die Geschichte meiner zum Teil ermordeten Familie, die heute eine sehr kleine ist? Die Odyssee meines Vaters während des Zweiten Weltkriegs? Deutschland? Oder, dass ich als jüdischer Stand-Up-Comedian in den letzten Jahren feststellen musste, dass Deutschland humorbehindert ist? (*DjP*, 43)

> [I wonder what it is that is messing with me like this, pushing me into this deep melancholy. Is it the story of my murdered family, which is very small these days? Is it my father's odyssey during the Second World War in Germany? Is it Germany? Or is it the fact that, over the past years, I, as a Jewish stand-up comedian, had to realize that Germany is humor-challenged?]

60 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 210.

Arguing against the privatization of suffering, and of mental health conditions in particular, Polak's book suggests a politicization of depression and other bad feeling states, as has also been noted by Caspar Battegay, who reads Polak's patient as a "general image of the contemporary Jewish condition in Germany."[61] When reading suffering as a "disagreement with what has been judged as good,"[62] the seemingly individualized problem of depression can become a tool for critically engaging with a broader social norm. What kinds of "goods," norms, or "happy objects" is the Jewish patient disagreeing with, though? I would argue that, just like Czollek and Biller, Polak rejects the notion of a normalized Germany that claims to have successfully dealt with the past while at the same time it experiences a rise of right-wing populism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. Paradoxically, Polak's exceptional emotional state is thus a "normal" (in the sense of adequate) reaction to a German environment that is actually a "madhouse":

> Und vielleicht bin ich nicht nur der Patient, der in einer Klinik ist und an Depressionen leidet, sondern auch ein Patient an der kranken deutschen Seele. Deutschland, ein Irrenheim? Ich, einer der wenigen Normalen in diesem Irrenhaus? Die Pfleger wollen mir erklären, dass ich der Verrückte bin, damit sie sich besser und normal fühlen können. (*DjP*, 119–20)
>
> [Perhaps I am not only a patient who is in a clinic, suffering from depression, but also a patient who is suffering from the malady of the German soul. Is Germany an insane asylum? Am I one of the few normal people in this madhouse? The nurses are trying to convince me that I am the crazy one, so that they can feel better and normal.]

Polak's text implies that the behavior of the nurses also applies to German majority society as a whole, which makes the angry or sad Jew into the problem when actually the latter's bad feelings are a reaction to Germany's pathological lack of "Gegenwartsbewältigung." In a similar vein to Ahmed's "melancholic migrant," the Jewish patient's refusal to comply is seen "as an obstacle not only to his own happiness but also to the happiness of the generation to come, and even to national happiness."[63] When the melancholic migrant or the Jewish patient refuse to attach to happier objects, such as, for example, the project of normalization, they therefore become the problem, rather than the society whose

61 Caspar Battegay, "German Psycho: The Language of Depression in Oliver Polak's *Der jüdische Patient*," in *German-Jewish Literature after 1990*, ed. Garloff and Mueller, 187–205, here 187.

62 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 210.

63 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 144.

unwillingness to confront the past has caused their issues in the first place. This distortion of the facts makes their suffering virtually interminable: "Doch vielleicht kann man die Ursache auch nicht thematisieren, wenn die Ursache der Status quo, das Hier und Jetzt ist" (*DjP*, 14–15; Maybe it is impossible to tackle the cause if the cause is the status quo, the here and now). The only pathway to real happiness is a radical change of the underlying conditions, making Polak's subsequent manifesto *Gegen Judenhass* (Against Anti-Semitism),[64] which promotes personal and societal transformation, a logical sequel to *Der jüdische Patient*.

Although sharing many of the concerns driving Czollek and Biller, Polak's "language of depression" diverges from their more belligerent,[65] tough, and, in Biller's case, openly hypermasculine stance. Polak, by contrast, links his explorations of bad feelings to a reflection on failing or fraught masculinities.[66] Already in *Ich darf das, ich bin Jude*, Polak's engagement with post-Holocaust German Jewishness ties in with a probing of masculinity via the figure of the "jüdische[r] Loser" (*Idd*, 24; Jewish loser). The protagonist Oliver's loserdom finds expression in his inability to be academically successful—he consistently struggles at school and is expelled from his secondary school. As a last resort, and to enable him to graduate at all, his parents decide to send him to a private, Jewish-orthodox boarding school in England. In his adult life, Oliver struggles to find a permanent job and financial security. While thus failing in the stereotypical role of the male provider, Oliver's loserdom is also reflected via his emasculating relationship with his mother, who dominates his life. Polak here plays with both the stereotype of the suffocating Jewish mother and of the effeminate Jew,[67] often with comical effects. This effeminacy comes out particularly strongly in the relationship with Oliver's German Turkish friend "Macho Man Cem" (*Idd*, 105): "In seiner Welt war er

64 Polak's book literally translates as "Against Hatred of Jews," thus, interestingly, framing anti-Semitism as a matter of bad feelings.

65 Battegay, "German Psycho," 187.

66 Biller also reflects more explicitly on these themes of failing or fraught masculinity in some of his other texts, as demonstrated by Matthes, "'Echter Südländer—Reb Motke—Deutschmann?'"

67 On the stereotype of the Jewish mother, which is particularly popular in US-American culture, see Gladys Rothbell, "The Jewish Mother: Social Construction of a Popular Image," in *The Jewish Family: Myths and Realities*, ed. Steven M. Cohen and Paula E. Hyman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 118–28; on the effeminate Jew and Jewish masculinity more broadly, see the seminal studies by Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Sander L. Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

der Mann und ich der Typ mit den femininen Zügen" (*Idd*, 107; In his world, he was the man and I was the guy with the feminine traits).[68]

These themes are developed further in *Der jüdische Patient*, which presents the experience of depression as deeply emasculating:

> Aber wie unmännlich ist das? Männlichkeit, diese neue, seltsame Männlichkeit.. . . Ich weiß gar nicht so genau, was männlich ist. Bin ich männlich—I do not know. *Boys don't cry*. Männlichkeit kann so unmännlich sein. Oder ist Unmännlichkeit männlich? Hauptsache kein Frauenparfüm . . . (*DjP*, 29, italics in original)

> [How unmanly is this though? Manliness, this new strange manliness.. . . I am not entirely sure what it means to be a man. Am I a man—I do not know. *Boys don't cry*. Manliness can be so unmanly. Or is unmanliness manly? Stay away from the women's perfume though.. . .]

While the quotation initially suggests a critical engagement with hypermasculinity, the last sentence, "Hauptsache kein Frauenparfüm," reinstates a tough, bounded, non-feminine masculinity as the ideal. Polak's reflections on failing masculinity are thus interspersed with reassertions of hypermasculinity. In *Ich darf das, ich bin Jude*, these explain the focus on various sexual exploits (*Idd*, 121 and 145), while *Der jüdische Patient* provides insights into Polak's masturbation habits and his fantasies of rape (*DjP*, 34–35). Not unlike Biller, Polak's writing also features remarkably unsophisticated and, at times, misogynistic portrayals of his female characters, who are cast as either manifestations of the domineering Jewish mother stereotype or as idealized yet voiceless female saints, as is the case for Sunny in *Der jüdische Patient*. It almost appears as though Polak projects his own experience of Jewish anxiety, difference, and self-hatred onto some of his female characters, thus "transfer[ring] abjection from the male Jewish body onto woman,"[69] a dynamic that, according to Anne Fuchs, also drove earlier Jewish writers, such as Franz Kafka, Joseph Roth, or Edgar Hilsenrath.[70] Although Polak, echoing Biller and Czollek, thus uses his bad feelings effectively to question the German politics of normalization, he fails to develop the figure of the

68 It would be interesting to consider more how race/migrantization plays into the dynamic between Oliver and Cem, and whether Cem is here cast in the role of the hypervirile and hypersexual non-white/migrantized Other.

69 Anne Fuchs, *A Space of Anxiety: Dislocation and Abjection in Modern German-Jewish Literature* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), 8.

70 Helen Finch also problematizes the gender politics in Hilsenrath's writing, and finds a similar tension between the productive potential of bad feelings and a misogynistic gender politics. See Finch, "Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment."

Jewish loser toward a critical engagement with gender norms: "starke und harte jüdische Männer" remain the ideal, which Polak might fail to achieve, but nonetheless still upholds.

Conclusion: Alternative Memory Politics and Affective Genealogies

This essay has examined how the bad feelings expressed by three contemporary German Jewish authors relate to existing discussions and traditions of Jewish rage by reading them as manifestations of what Ahmed calls "alien affects."[71] These affects are "alien" because they go against certain norms that are regarded as happiness-inducing and thus "good." In the case of Czollek, Biller, and Polak, the "goods" that are being rejected are the notion of a normalized Germany that has successfully dealt with the Nazi past, a rediscovered national pride, and what, in analogy to Ahmed's "happiness duty," I call the German Jewish reconciliation duty.[72] In their refusal to let the past go, these authors do not share in these "happy objects," while also questioning their happiness-inducing qualities for larger parts of the contemporary German population. Equally importantly, these authors' bad feelings are also a call to tackle ongoing injustices of the present, such as, for example, the reality of German right-wing populism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. By rebuffing "affective conversion,"[73] that is, the abandonment of their negative feelings in favor of "happier" sentiments such as national pride, these authors kill the joy associated with the politics of normalization that, however, has failed to deliver either a *Vergangenheits-* or a "Gegenwartsbewältigung."

While the emotions explored here are certainly negative, they are not necessarily destructive or unproductive. The aim of this essay was to demonstrate the "usefulness" of bad feelings, which Audre Lorde saw as "a powerful source of energy serving progress and change."[74] Bad feelings can be transformative and creative in relation to the past, the present, and the future. I therefore suggest that we read these feelings of anger, rage, hatred, resentment, revenge, outrage, and sadness as expressions of a different, un- or anti-normalized Jewish memory politics. Drawing on Berel Lang, we can establish links between these authors' negative sentiments and an alternative memory: "Unlike forgiveness [*sic*] which erases the past, revenge preserves it; rather than seeing individual acts as

71 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 148.
72 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 7.
73 Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, 145.
74 Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," 115 and 110.

(sometimes) finite and redeemable, revenge sounds an indefinite echo."[75] Czollek's notion of "Gegenwartsbewältigung" insinuates exactly this, advocating for an "implicated" memory culture in Michael Rothberg's sense,[76] that is, a memory that sees the past as something that one can never get over, since it is enmeshed with the present through a myriad of aftereffects or "indefinite echo[s]."[77] This type of memory also aims to address, but not redress, the injustices of the past through an engagement with their aftereffects in the present, as is evidenced by the fact that both Czollek and Polak have written political manifestos that tackle anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and other forms of racism. As Lorde has noted, these transformations in the present may become the basis for different futures. This forward-looking approach underpins Czollek's project of "Desintegration," which is aimed not only at destruction but also at the creation of new "Allianzen" (alliances),[78] for example between Jewish and other minority subjects. In a similar vein, the friendship between Oliver and Cem in *Ich darf das, ich bin Jude* (*Idd*, 85–92) points to possible solidarities that might arise from shared experiences of exclusion.

The politics of bad feelings explored here rely on conscious and unconscious affective genealogies, which reclaim older traditions of Jewish rage and free them from their taboo nature to bring out their emancipatory potential. I have aimed to demonstrate, however, that the deliberate references to various angry precursors are flanked by a far less conscious recourse to hypermasculine ideals and a politics of female exclusion, which, at least according to Feinstein, has accompanied discussions of Jewish rage at least since the postwar period. This second, hidden or spectral affective genealogy unites all three authors, even though the particular feelings they negotiate are very different. Biller's hatred tends to consolidate binaries, whereas Czollek's indignation results in a more intersectional approach that seeks to establish new alliances. Polak's sadness, finally, expresses a sense of discomfort that makes visible—and questionable—the implicit norms of a society.

Yet, they all converge around the ideal of the hard (Jewish) man, thereby casting Jewish bad feelings and non-compliance as a domain that is not only hypermasculine but also accessible only to men, it seems. In the case of Biller and Polak, this espousal of hypermasculinity ties in with a misogynistic portrayal and denigration of some of their female characters.

75 Lang, "Holocaust Memory and Revenge," 15. Helen Finch proposes a similar argument in relation to Hilsenrath und Klüger, as does Dania Hückmann in the case of Jean Améry; see Finch, "Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment" and Hückmann, "Beyond Law and Justice."

76 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

77 Lang, "Holocaust Memory and Revenge," 15.

78 Czollek, Peaceman, and Wohl von Haselberg, "Allianzen."

The emancipatory and enabling potential of the politics of bad feelings thus coexists with, or even contributes to, the reinforcement of stereotypes in the domain of gender, which potentially calls into question the entire project. This observation reminds us that, when we speak of the usefulness of certain feelings, we need to ask: useful for whom? Similarly, when we speak of emancipation, we need to ask whether anyone can truly be free when others remain in "shackles," to again quote Audre Lorde.[79] The taboo surrounding Jewish rage, and Jewish and other minority bad feelings more broadly, thus cannot be fully lifted unless we also do away with the invisibilities and silences surrounding angry, hateful, or sad Jewish and non-Jewish women.[80]

79 I am referring to the famous quote "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own." See Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," 117.

80 Some examples of contemporary angry Jewesses include Ruth Klüger, as pointed out by Helen Finch, and the German Jewish writer and playwright Sasha Marianna Salzmann, as noted by Olivia Landry. See Finch, "Revenge, Restitution, Ressentiment"; and Olivia Landry, "Anger as Theatrical Form in Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Zucken*," in *Postdramatisches Theater als transkulturelles Theater: Eine transdisziplinäre Annäherung*, ed. Teresa Kovacs and Koku G. Nonoa (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempo, 2018), 335–48. For an example of a non-Jewish angry and violent female from a minority background, see Fatma Aydemir, *Ellbogen* (Munich: Hanser, 2017).

Geography, Identity, and Politics in Saša Stanišić's *Vor dem Fest* (2014)

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Saša Stanišić as a "Migrant" Author

Saša Stanišić's personal experience as a migrant from former Yugoslavia in Germany continues to play an important role in how critics map his work onto the German literary landscape. From his debut *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* (2006; *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*, 2009) to his most recent autobiographical work *Herkunft* (Origins, 2019), for which he was awarded the German Book Prize in October 2019, his work is often read by reviewers as *Migrationsliteratur*, "migrant" literature.[1] Most reviewers admittedly only mention his Serbo-Bosnian roots in passing, as an interesting, "exotic" fact about him, or to praise how quickly and seamlessly he became a "selbstverständlicher Teil der deutschsprachigen Literatur" (a natural part of German-language literature).[2] Yet even such well-intentioned praise is often counterproductive: pointing out how well he has integrated into the contemporary literary landscape only reiterates and implicitly reinforces his status as a familiar "other," a "good" migrant, and by extension the status of his work as *Migrationsliteratur*.

It is worth noting that the term *Migrationsliteratur* is rarely used anymore in scholarship, which favors the much broader and more nuanced term "transnational literature." As Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner note in their introduction to the 2015 volume *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, the notion of the "transnational" "prompts us to move our focus away from the movement of *some*—migrants, refugees, exiles, or trafficked

1 Saša Stanišić, *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* [2006] (Munich: btb, 2010); *How the Soldier Repairs the Grammophone*, trans. Anthea Bell (New York: Grove Atlantic, 2009); *Herkunft* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2019).

2 See, for example, Juliane Liebert, "Herkunft ist Zufall," review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Spiegel Online*, April 5, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/plus/herkunft-von-sasa-stanisic-das-buch-zur-zeit-herkunft-ist-zufall-a-00000000-0002-0001-0000-000163279571 (accessed August 14, 2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.006 Published online by Cambridge University Press

people—across borders towards the implication of *all.*"[3] It implies, they continue, that "*all* are impacted by the flows of people, products, and ideas across borders, including those who do not themselves move." Yet this broader scholarly view, through the lens of the "transnational," of how mobility and border crossings shape individual and collective lives, identities, and experiences in the twenty-first century has by no means eclipsed the narrower focus on migrants and migration in public discourse. The term *Migrationsliteratur* still seems to be widely used in public discourse surrounding literature, especially in *Feuilleton* (German-language newspapers' arts section) writing. Whether we talk about "migrant" or "transnational" literature, however, we are implicitly thinking in categories of identity defined by reference to political and geographical borders. On a very fundamental level, a "migrant" is "a person who changes their place of usual residence by moving across a political or administrative boundary."[4] "Migrant" literature, by extension, is writing that is implicitly or explicitly informed by its author's own crossing of geographical and cultural boundaries.

Commentators' focus on Stanišić's credentials as a "migrant" author is partly justified by the fact that Stanišić himself frequently refers to the geographical, political, and cultural border crossings that shaped his identity as an author. In other words, Stanišić performatively assumes the role of the "migrant" author. In interviews and at readings, for instance, he openly talks about his childhood in Višegrad, later one of the epicenters of the Bosnian genocide, his flight to Germany in the 1990s, and his teenage years in a multicultural suburb of Heidelberg. In fact, it would be more accurate to say that he not only performatively assumes the role of an author "mit Migrationshintergrund" (with a background of migration) but of an author with his *specific*, mixed Serbo-Bosnian "migrant" background, in full awareness of its political implications and the expectations that come with it. This became amply clear with his acceptance speech for the German Book Prize in October 2019. Stanišić's speech, along with multiple posts on his Twitter account both before and after the

3 Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner, "Introduction: Contemporary German-Language Literature and Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*, ed. Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), 1–16, here 4, emphasis in the original. See also Stuart Taberner, *Transnationalism and German-Language Literature in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 287; and "Transnationalism," in *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. Alisdair Rogers, Noel Castree, and Rob Kitchin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Online Version 2013), 97.

4 "Migrant" in *A Dictionary of Human Geography*, ed. Rogers, Castree, and Kitchin, 60.

award ceremony,[5] criticized the Swedish Academy's decision, announced earlier that month, to select Peter Handke for that year's Nobel Prize in Literature. From the mid-1990s onwards, Handke has repeatedly played devil's advocate not only for Serbian aggressions in the Yugoslav wars but also the actions of Yugoslav president and accused war criminal Slobodan Milošević.[6] In his acceptance speech for the German Book Prize, Stanišić expresses his indignation that, by rewarding Handke, the international community celebrates literary writing that obscures and distorts the historical circumstances that led to his own and his family's displacement.[7] This overtly political and yet also very personal speech caused media reports on Stanišić's winning the book prize to once again reiterate Stanišić's story of migration and thus reinforce his role as contemporary German literature's "migrant" wunderkind.[8]

In this article, I will discuss how Stanišić's work engages with its own reception and reflects on notions of identity and belonging anchored, above all, in geography—both physical and political. I will focus mainly

5 See, for example, related posts from October 11 onwards. At the time of writing, the latest related original post is from December 6, 2019. Saša Stanišić (@sasa_s), Posts on Twitter, https://twitter.com/sasa_s?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor (accessed August 14, 2020).

6 For an overview of the controversy surrounding Handke from 1996 onwards, see Robert Weninger, *Streitbare Literaten: Kontroversen und Eklats in der deutschen Literatur von Adorno bis Walser* (Munich: Beck, 2004), 165–85.

7 "Die Wut-Dankesrede von Buchpreis-Gewinner Stanišić im Wortlaut," *Hessenschau.de*, October 15, 2019, https://www.hessenschau.de/kultur/buchmesse/buecher-autoren/die-wut-dankesrede-von-buchpreis-gewinner-stanii-im-wortlaut,stanisic-rede-100.html (accessed August 14, 2020).

8 See, for example, "Saša Stanišić erhält Deutschen Buchpreis," *Zeit Online*, October 14, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2019-10/frankfurter-buchmesse-deutscher-buchpreis-herkunft; "Saša Stanišić gewinnt den deutschen Buchpreis," *Spiegel Online*, October 14, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/deutscher-buchpreis-2019-sasa-stanisic-hat-den-roman-des-jahres-geschrieben-a-1291540.html; Gerrit Bartels, "Mit Geschichten der Wahrheit auf der Spur," *Der Tagesspiegel*, October 15, 2019, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/deutscher-buchpreis-fuer-saa-stanii-mit-geschichten-der-wahrheit-auf-der-spur/25116570.html; Karin Janker, "Saša Stanišić, der Zeitgenosse," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 15, 2019, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/sasa-stanisic-peter-handke-buchpreis-portrait-1.4641188; Andreas Platthaus, "'Ich feiere eine Literatur, die die Zeit beschreibt,'" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 14, 2019, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/autoren/deutscher-buchpreis-fuer-den-schriftsteller-sa-a-stani-i-16433382.html; and Johannes Schneider, "Dieser Preis war nie politischer," *Zeit Online*, October 15, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2019-10/sasa-stanisic-deutscher-buchpreis-rede-kritik-peter-handke (all of the above last accessed on August 14, 2020).

on his second novel, *Vor dem Fest* (2014; *Before the Feast*, 2016),[9] which imagines a community that is, in some ways, the complete opposite of "migrant": that of a village in a rural area of northeastern Germany whose identity is premised on its geographical seclusion and an illusory sense of homogeneity. My main argument is that *Vor dem Fest* marks a pause in Stanišić's direct engagement with autobiographical themes, reflecting on and questioning on a more fundamental level how definitive a "sense of place" is for contemporary identities. Underlying my approach to Stanišić's novel from the perspective of geography is the idea, forcefully proposed amongst others by Doreen Massey, that space is inherently political because it is relational, that is, because it enables, produces, and circumscribes multiple heterogeneous encounters and relations.[10] Indeed, the emphasis in *Vor dem Fest* is invariably on encounters and relations produced, but also limited, by the physical space of the village. The novel reflects on how the village's geography shapes its inhabitants' self-understanding as a collective, that is, their political identity. By extension, I argue, it also implicitly reflects on geographical categories of identity in the abstract: it questions the very notion that "migrant" authors constitute a distinct group within the German literary community and that "migrant" literature is a separate region both within and separate from "national" literature. In other words, while the novel's geographical setting raises political questions including those of community, diversity, and belonging, the novel itself as a whole questions the politically laden categories of "migrant" and "national" literature.

I will begin with a short discussion of Stanišić's *Herkunft*, which will help me contextualize *Vor dem Fest* in relation to his other work. With *Herkunft*, Stanišić abandons the efforts he began in *Vor dem Fest* to distance himself from autobiographical themes. Yet as I will show, *Vor dem Fest* too came to be discussed in terms of Stanišić's biography against his own intentions, following a controversial review by Maxim Biller. Biller's argument exemplifies how politically prescriptive, and by extension how restrictive for authorial practices, the very idea of *Migrationsliteratur* is. In a cultural-political landscape that still holds on to categories of the "migrant" and "national," *Vor dem Fest*'s ambivalence about the ways in which geography unites and divides communities is politically significant. By portraying a rural, close-knit village collective that is

9 Saša Stanišić, *Vor dem Fest* (Munich: btb, 2015), abbreviated henceforth as *VF*; in English: *Before the Feast*, trans. Anthea Bell (Portland, OR and Brooklyn, NY: Tin House Books, 2016). Unless otherwise stated, all English versions of quotations from *Vor dem Fest* are taken from Bell's translation, hereafter abbreviated as *BF*.

10 See Doreen B. Massey, *For Space* (Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publishing, 2005), especially 33 and 44.

nonetheless heterogeneous and fraught with contradictions, it challenges the geographically circumscribed and politically laden notions of "us" and "them" that also underlie the idea of *Migrationsliteratur*.

Vor dem Fest within Stanišić's Body of Work

Given that the attention Stanišić received in 2019 has to some extent overshadowed the controversy that surrounded *Vor dem Fest* upon its publication, it seems important to frame my discussion of this novel with a few remarks on the reception of *Herkunft*. Admittedly, it is no surprise that reviewers discuss *Herkunft* with reference to Stanišić's biography, his own personal and family history of migration.[11] Though it straddles different genres and can be read simultaneously as a collection of personal and political essays, a memoir, a novel, and a reflection on the author's own writing practice, *Herkunft* is indeed overtly autobiographical, or at least, as Stanišić commented, tongue-in-cheek, in one interview, about "68,75 Prozent Wirklichkeit" (about 68.75 per cent true).[12] It questions what it means, personally and politically, to come from somewhere: "Was ist einem, qua Abstammung oder Hervorbringung, gegeben und vergönnt?" (What is one given and granted by virtue of one's descent or ancestry?), the author asks, under the guise of a conventional autobiographical narrator, "Und genauso: Was bleibt einem qua Abstammung vorenthalten?" (And similarly: What is one denied because of one's descent?).[13] These

11 See, for example, Helmut Böttiger, "Die Erfindung des Lebens," review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, March 10, 2019, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/sasa-stanisic-herkunft-die-erfindung-des-lebens.1270.de.html?dram:article_id=444138; Cornelia Geißler, "'Herkunft' von Saša Stanišić ist ein feines Abenteuer-Buch," review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Berliner Zeitung*, April 1, 2019, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/herkunft-von-sasa-stanisi-ist-ein-feines-abenteuer-buch-li.15495; Richard Kämmerlings, "Warum das Schicksal Jugoslawiens un seine Warnung sein sollte," review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Die Welt*, March 23, 2019, https://www.welt.de/kultur/literarischewelt/article190665023/Herkunft-von-Sasa-Stanisic-Von-Bosnien-nach-Deutschland.html; Ijoma Mangold, "Die Deutschen überholen," review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Zeit Online*, March 13, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/2019/12/herkunft-sasa-stanisic-roman-autobiografie; and Volker Weidermann, "Ein Superbuch!" review of *Herkunft*, by Saša Stanišić, *Spiegel Online*, 20 March 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/herkunft-von-sasa-stanisic-ein-superbuch-a-1258440.html (all of the above last accessed on August 14, 2020).

12 Saša Stanišić, "68,75 Prozent Wirklichkeit," interview by Michael Roesler-Graichen, *Börsenblatt*, October 19, 2019, https://www.boersenblatt.net/archiv/1746432.html (accessed August 14, 2020).

13 Stanišić, *Herkunft*, 63.

questions run through his work after 2009, he writes, the year he visited Oskoruša, the mountain village of his ancestors close to the Serbian border.[14] Indeed, in a radio interview from 2014, Stanišić reveals that Oskoruša inspired the fictional East German village featured in *Vor dem Fest*.[15] The author's visit to Oskoruša is also central to *Herkunft*, in which it is interlaced, on the one hand, with narratives of a childhood in pre-war Višegrad and in Emmertsgrund, south of Heidelberg (both of which were home to ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse communities),[16] and on the other hand, with the author's reflections on life with his young family in present-day Hamburg. By anchoring family and childhood narratives past and present in specific places, Stanišić reflects on how geographical contingencies continuously shape our identities. Yet his emphasis is less on the places themselves—"Identitätsstress schert sich nicht um Breitengrade" (anxiety about identity does not concern itself with latitude), he writes[17]—than on how arbitrary the geography of one's life is. At times, his tone suggests a certain weariness of the subject: "Wie man es dreht," he writes, "Herkunft bleibt doch ein Konstrukt! Eine Art Kostüm, das man ewig tragen soll, nachdem es einem übergestülpt worden ist. Als solches ein Fluch! Oder, mit etwas Glück, ein Vermögen, das keinem Talent sich verdankt, aber Vorteile und Privilegien schafft" (However you look at it, your origins are just a construct! A kind of costume that you must wear forever once it's been put on you. Because of this, a curse! Or, if you're lucky, an asset, one which has nothing to do with talent, but which gives you advantages and privileges).[18]

But in order to understand Stanišić's attempt to reappropriate his story of migration in *Herkunft* I suggest we now look back at the discussions surrounding *Vor dem Fest* and his effort, with the latter, to distance himself from the autobiographical themes of his debut novel. *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* tells the story of a young Serbo-Bosnian boy who flees his hometown Višegrad during the Yugoslav wars to settle in Germany, and who then visits Višegrad as an adult in search

14 Stanišić had previously documented this trip in a 2009 photo essay for *Die Zeit*, see Saša Stanišić, "'Ich sehe immer Sommer,'" *Zeit Online*, November 19, 2009, https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2009-11/bg-oskorusa (accessed August 14, 2020).

15 Saša Stanišić, "'Vor dem Fest' von Saša Stanišic," radio interview by Nicola Steiner, *52 Beste Bücher*, Radio SRF 2 Kultur, September 14, 2014, http://m.srf.ch/sendungen/52-beste-buecher/vor-dem-fest-von-sasa-stanisic (accessed August 14, 2020).

16 See Stanišić, *Herkunft*, 111–12 and 122–24.

17 Stanišić, *Herkunft*, 63. As there is no published English translation of *Herkunft* at the time of writing, all translations of quotations from this work are my own.

18 Stanišić, *Herkunft*, 32.

of a childhood friend. The debut novel is, like *Herkunft*, autobiographically inspired, but structured in a more linear way than the latter and narrated by a relatively conventional first-person child narrator. In the case of the debut novel, as also in the case of *Herkunft*, the similarities between the novel's plot and author's biography are, to some extent, helpful in discussing how Balkan history and family trauma are fictionalized in the novel.[19] Yet commentators' emphasis on these similarities contributed to Stanišić being pigeonholed in the German *Feuilleton* as a stereotypical author "mit Migrationshintergrund."

When viewed in this context, as both preceded and followed by more or less overtly autobiographical works, *Vor dem Fest* is clearly a deliberately anti-autobiographical novel. In terms of its subject matter, structure, and narrative voice, it could not be further away from either the debut novel or the autobiographical collection of essays. For the most part, it features a collective narrative voice, a first-person-plural narrator.[20] This "wir" (we) tells stories from the daily life and history of Fürstenfelde, an imaginary village in the Uckermark, a deeply rural northeastern region of Germany that borders Poland. Throughout the novel, this "wir" describes how the villagers prepare for an annual celebration they call the "Annenfest" (Anna Feast). Though most chapters are narrated by this

19 For relevant studies see the following: Annette Bühler-Dietrich, "Verlusterfahrungen in den Romanen von Melinda Nadj Abonji und Saša Stanišić," *Germanica* 51 (2012): 1–10; Brigid Haines, "Saša Stanišić, *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert*: Reinscribing Bosnia, or: Sad Things, Positively," in *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lyn Marven and Stuart Taberner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013), 105–18; Diana Hitzke and Charlton Payne, "Verbalizing Silence and Sorting Garbage: Archiving Experiences of Displacement in Recent Post-Yugoslav Fictions of Migration by Saša Stanišić and Adriana Altaras," in *Archive and Memory in German Literature and Visual Culture*, Edinburgh German Yearbook 9, ed. Dora Osborne (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 195–212; Frauke Matthes and David Williams, "Displacement, Self-Reconstruction and Writing the Bosnian War: Aleksandar Hemon and Saša Stanišić," *Comparative Critical Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 27–45; Charlton Payne, "How the Exiled Writer Makes Refugee Stories Legible: Saša Stanišić's *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert*," *Gegenwartsliteratur* 13 (2014): 321–39; and Norbert Wichard, "Mitteleuropäische Blickrichtungen: Geschichtsdarstellung bei Jan Faktor und Saša Stanišić," in *National—post-national—transnational? Neuere Perspektiven auf die deutschsprachige Gegenwartsliteratur aus Mittel- und Osteuropa*, Aussiger Beiträge 6, ed. Renata Cornejo, Sławomir Piontek, and Sandra Vlasta (Ústí nad Labem: Univerzita J. E. Purkyně v Ústí nad Labem, 2012), 159–76.

20 Though one chapter is narrated entirely in the first-person singular by Johann, one of the central figures in the village (see *VF*, 130–35), and several others are written mostly in the third-person singular, with a female fox, or vixen, as focalizer.

collective voice, most are focalized through individual characters, such as the village painter Frau Kranz, the suicidal pensioner Herr Schramm, or a young woman named Anna, who will soon leave Fürstenfelde to study shipbuilding in Rostock. The narratives of these characters are interspersed with excerpts from the village's secret archive, which is exclusively accessed and selectively released to the public by the depressive Frau Schwermuth. Other chapters, narrated from the perspective of a vixen from the neighboring forest who regularly ventures into the villagers' hen coops in order to feed her cubs, challenge the monopoly of the "wir" over the narrative.

The novel ends with the titular feast, though neither the reader nor the villagers themselves are any the wiser as to the actual purpose of the celebrations than they were at the beginning. "Was wir feiern," the narrator admits early on, "weiß niemand so recht. Nichts jährt sich, nichts endet oder hat genau an diesem Tag begonnen. Die Heilige Anna ist irgendwann im Sommer, und die Heiligen sind uns heilig nicht mehr. Vielleicht feiern wir einfach, dass es das gibt: Fürstenfelde. Und was wir uns davon erzählen." (*VF*, 30; No one really knows what we're celebrating. It's not the anniversary of anything, nothing ends or began on exactly that day. St Anne has her own saint's day sometime in the summer, and the saints aren't saintly to us anymore. Perhaps we're simply celebrating the existence of the village. Fürstenfelde. And the stories that we tell about it, *BF*, 31). This passage is characteristic of the distinctive first-person-plural narrative voice in the novel, whose identity is premised on a sense of geographical belonging as well as of historical continuity: it is the voice of a formerly East German, historically homogeneous community deeply rooted in the unspoiled landscape of rural Brandenburg and at a safe distance from the bustling melting pot of Berlin. The villagers of *Vor dem Fest* define themselves precisely by reference to the continuity of their origins, their *Herkunft*, in ways the novel ultimately reveals to be questionable and provisional.

Vor dem Fest as *Migrationsliteratur*?

Despite the fact that both the first and second novels feature Stanišić's distinctive sense of whimsy, the reviewers of *Vor dem Fest* had trouble reconciling its author with that of *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert*, a "migrant" author writing more or less directly about his own "migrant" experience. As already touched on above, a deliberately provocative review by the Czech-born Jewish author and journalist Maxim Biller in the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* played a key role in steering the discussion of the second novel's complex take on geographically anchored, rural, and formerly socialist collective identities back into a debate about *Migrationsliteratur*. In his review, entitled "Letzte Ausfahrt

Uckermark" (Last Exit: Uckermark) Biller argues that as an author "mit Migrationshintergrund" Stanišić would do better to write about experiences that he can relate to himself rather than about East German "Folklore."[21] In Biller's view, contemporary German literature is conformist and stagnant. Since the death of canonical German Jewish literary figures like Peter Weiss, Elias Canetti, and Marcel Reich-Ranicki, he claims, it has been "autochthonous" Germans who set the tone, with a compliant, well-adapted "migrant" literature following suit. "Migrant" authors, he argues, are only tolerated if they reduce their cultural difference to a kind of "szenische Beilage" (scenic garnish) with the result that they produce "meist nur süße, naïve Gastarbeitergeschichten" (mostly sugary, naïve guest-worker tales).[22]

Vor dem Fest, Biller argues, with its focus on a village that is supposedly profoundly, authentically German, is Stanišić's corrective to what some of the critics of his first novel viewed as the author's penchant for Balkan kitsch:[23]

> Als Saša Stanišić' erster, grandioser, weil universell verständlicher Roman über das Lieben, Leben und Töten im Bosnien der neunziger Jahre erschien, musste sich Stanišić von vielen unserer Kritiker anhören, das alles sei zu verspielt, zu kitschig, na ja, eben irgendwie zu orientalisch. . . . Inzwischen wurde *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert* aus dem Deutschen in 27 Sprachen übersetzt, Stanišić ist in den USA und England einer der Stars der neuen Weltliteratur . . .—doch sein neuer Roman spielt in einem Dorf in der Uckermark, unter ehemaligen Ossis, von denen Stanišić so viel versteht wie seine Kritiker vom jugoslawischen Bürgerkrieg, vor dem er mit 14 Jahren nach Deutschland fliehen musste. Ist dieser radikale, antibiografische Themenwechsel nur Zufall? Hat den ehemaligen Leipziger Literaturstudenten Saša Stanišić der Mut verlassen? Ist es ihm wichtiger, *als Neudeutscher über Urdeutsche zu schreiben* als über Leute wie sich selbst?[24]
>
> [When Saša Stanišić's debut novel came out, a great, universally relatable novel about love, life, and death in 1990s Bosnia, Stanišić

21 Maxim Biller, "Letzte Ausfahrt Uckermark," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Zeit Online*, February 20, 2014, https://www.zeit.de/2014/09/deutsche-gegenwartsliteratur-maxim-biller (accessed August 14, 2020).

22 Biller, "Letzte Ausfahrt Uckermark."

23 To my knowledge, however, only one reviewer, Iris Radisch, made this argument in "Der Krieg trägt Kittelschürze," review of *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert*, by Saša Stanišić, *Zeit Online*, October 5, 2006, https://www.zeit.de/2006/41/L-Stanisic (accessed August 14, 2020).

24 Biller, "Letzte Ausfahrt Uckermark," my emphasis.

> had to bear with reviewers complaining that it was too childish, tacky, oriental even. . . . *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* has since been translated into 27 languages, in the US and UK Stanišić is seen as one of the rising stars of world literature . . .—and yet his new novel is set in a village in the Uckermark, amongst former East Germans, which Stanišić knows as little about as his critics know of the Yugoslav civil wars that led to his flight to Germany aged fourteen. Is this radical anti-biographical change of subject just a coincidence? Has Stanišić, the former student of the Leipzig German Institute for Literature, lost his nerve? Does he, *as a new German*, think it's more important to write *about old-school Germans* than about people like himself?]

Admittedly, most other reviewers of *Vor dem Fest* disagreed with Biller's argument, and for good reason.[25] Still, rather than dismissing his argument out of hand, I think it is worth looking more closely at its fault lines, for two reasons: on the one hand, because they reveal some of the counterproductive ways in which *Migrationsliteratur* is debated in the *Feuilleton* pages, and on the other, because they make more visible how the novel's use of a collective narrative voice questions, rather than simply evokes, a supposedly "urdeutsch" (essentially German) village community.

The categories of "Urdeutscher" and "Neudeutscher" to which Biller refers are clearly artificial and unhelpful. But the very fact that he makes this distinction at all is more interesting than the tenuous distinction itself: behind it, we find a concern with how collective identities are defined in opposition to one another, not least within the contemporary literary and cultural landscape. Yet one of the main problems with his article is that he tries to argue for more diversity and transnational perspectives in contemporary German literature by reasserting the outdated notion of a majority or "national" culture as something static and oppressive. That he conceives of majority culture in this way becomes evident, for example,

25 See, for example, Jörg Magenau, "Saša Stanišić: Ein Vertreter der Migrationskultur erfindet sich neu," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Cicero*, March 13, 2014, https://www.cicero.de/kultur/heimatroman-vertreter-der-migrationskultur-erfindet-sich-neu/57201; Lothar Müller, "'Wir fahren übern See, übern See,'" review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, March 13, 2014, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/vor-dem-fest-von-sasa-stanisic-wir-fahren-uebern-see-uebern-see-1.1911969; Thomas Pletzinger, "Jetzt kommt der Sturm," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 9, 2014, available at https://www.buecher.de/shop/doeblin-alfred/vor-dem-fest/stanisic-sasa/products_products/detail/prod_id/42686151/; and Christoph Schröder, "Die Füchsin von Fürstenfelde," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Die Tageszeitung*, March 10, 2014, https://taz.de/!381383/ (all last accessed on August 14, 2020).

when he compares the contemporary cultural landscape in Germany to the uniform and repressive one of the Wilhelmine era:

> Hier [in Deutschland], wo der Gemeinschaftswille alles bedeutet und das exzentrische Ich unter dauerndem Pathologieverdacht steht, hier, wo dieselbe stumme, repressive und aggressive Stille herrscht wie in Michael Hanekes Jahrhundertfilm *Das weiße Band,* ist längst wieder wie zu Kaisers Zeiten jeder Gedanke eine Uniform, jeder Satz klingt wie der andere.[26]
>
> [Here [in Germany], where the communal will reigns supreme and whoever stands out is always suspected of some pathology or other, where the same dumb, oppressive, and aggressive silence prevails as in Michael Haneke's film of the century, *The White Ribbon*, every thought is a kind of uniform again, every phrase sounds like the next, just like in the days of the empire.]

What German literature needs in order to counteract this conservative and conformist spirit, Biller suggests, is an "ethnische Dickköpfigkeit" (ethnic stubbornness) on the part of "migrant" authors. He wishes to see more work by authors "mit Migrationshintergrund" that proudly addresses, rather than effaces, cultural differences from the majority culture. Roman Bucheli rightly points out the contradictions in Biller's "Ruf nach bis ins Mark ethnischen Texten" (call for texts that are ethnic to their core), which would lead to the very "Folklorisierung der Literatur, die gerade das Gegenteil bedeutet der von ihm treuherzig beschwörenen Authentizität. Vor allem aber," Bucheli continues, "[Biller] reinstalliert und konstruiert Polaritäten, wo längst alle Schranken niedergerissen sind, wo die schönste unübersichtliche Pluralität herrscht" (folklorization of literature that he so ingenuously tries to counter with his idea of authenticity. Above all, however, [Biller] reinstates and constructs polarities where all walls have long been torn down and where there is only a most beautiful, messy pluralism).[27] Bucheli's claim that the German literary landscape is now free from divisions is arguably too optimistic: the debates surrounding the make-up of the 2019 German Book Prize jury, for example, suggest that sparring factions with competing interests, such as booksellers and newspaper critics, for example, continue to shape the German literary marketplace.[28] Yet Bucheli is right to point out that the

26 Biller, "Letzte Ausfahrt Uckermark."

27 Roman Bucheli, "Mit der Nazi-Keule," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, February 28, 2014, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/mit-der-nazi-keule-1.18253430 (accessed August 14, 2020).

28 See, for example, Klaus Karstberger, "Deutscher Buchpreis: Roman des Jahres, ach, das kann vieles heißen," *Zeit Online*, October 14, 2019, https://

participants in today's literary landscape cannot be as straightforwardly divided into "migrants" and "Urdeutsche" as Biller would have liked.

More troubling still than Biller's reductive take on the diverse twenty-first century literary landscape, however, is his prescriptive conception of authorship "mit Migrationshintergrund." As Ijoma Mangold argues, Biller's article calls for a kind of positive discrimination that traps authors "mit Migrationshintergrund" into an imperative to write autobiographically.[29] In fact, however, most arguments about what "migrant" literature should be and do are similarly prescriptive. In an interview from the mid-2000s, for instance, Feridun Zaimoglu, who by that time had moved on from his 1990s role as *the* voice of Turkish German literature to become a fixture of mainstream German literature, argued that "migrant" literature is uninteresting and irrelevant to its cultural context because it is *too* focused on authors' own biographies and their difference from the majority.[30] In diametrical opposition to Biller, Zaimoglu calls on authors "mit Migrationshintergrund" to distance themselves from autobiographical themes in favor of more universally relevant narratives.

I would argue that Zaimoglu and Biller understand *Migrationsliteratur* in equally problematic ways. Both of their arguments trap German-language authors with a "migrant" background in a double bind between writing autobiographically and writing against their own biographies. Yet the fact that both arguments falter for the same reason—that is, because they become prescriptive—reveals a broader problem with literary categories such as *Migrationsliteratur*. Like other literary categories that derive from the authors' personal biographies, especially from contingent but politically laden elements of those biographies, such as their geographical and cultural origins, the category of "migrant" literature is frequently more reductive than helpful. Of course, categories such as "migrant," "transnational," "diasporic," or even "formerly East German" literature can alert both reviewers and scholars to intertextual connections between heterogeneous texts and give them a sense of orientation within the staggering diversity of contemporary literary production. When used with attention to the nuance of specific authors'

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www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2019-10/deutscher-buchpreis-shortlist-jury-debatte-kritik/komplettansicht; and Andreas Platthaus, "Deutscher Buchpreis: Buchverhinderer," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, October 11, 2019, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/themen/petra-hartlieb-setzt-den-deutschen-buchpreis-ins-zwielicht-16423327.html (both accessed on August 14, 2020).

29 Ijoma Mangold, "Literaturdebatte: Fremdling, erlöse uns!," *Zeit Online*, February 17, 2014, https://www.zeit.de/2014/10/erwiderung-maxim-biller-deutsche-gegenwartsliteratur/komplettansicht (accessed August 14, 2020).

30 Feridun Zaimoglu, "'Migrationsliteratur ist ein toter Kadaver': Ein Gespräch," interview by Julia Abel, in *Literatur und Migration*, ed. Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: text + kritik, 2006), 159–66.

experiences and the biographical contingencies reflected in their writing, such categories indeed help us contextualize and compare the work of different authors. In some instances, *Feuilleton* debates surrounding the "migrant" identities of literary authors or the credentials of a publication as *Migrationsliteratur* can even help spike book sales or bring critical acclaim to new work by minority authors. This also helps explain, to some extent, why the suspension of the Adalbert-von-Chamisso Prize, which had been set up to reward literary achievements by *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) in Germany in the mid-1980s and led to the broad recognition of many non-native writers of German in subsequent decades, was met with disappointment by authors who identify as "migrant" today.[31]

Such benefits of the term *Migrationsliteratur*, however, cannot outweigh the fact that it remains a reductive, intellectually and ethically prescriptive category. Indeed, more often than not, reading a text in the shadow of its author's *Migrationshintergrund* closes down, rather than opens up, possibilities for interpretation by forcing the all-too-general analytical framework of *Migrationsliteratur* upon it and thus obscuring what is unique and uncategorizable about it. In other words, labels such as *Migrationsliteratur* or literature by authors "mit Migrationshintergrund" that draw primarily on the authors' own identities rather than on features of their work encourage generalizations and culture-political prescriptions on literary works.

Geography and Collective Identity in Fürstenfelde

In the remainder of this article, I will argue in more detail that *Vor dem Fest* implicitly questions the label *Migrationsliteratur* that is attached to it by virtue of its author's own background. By highlighting the contradictions and conflicts within a supposedly close-knit rural community, the novel suggests that collective identities, especially those anchored in something as arbitrary as geography, are forced and fragile. Both political and physical geography are shown to play an important role in how the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde understand themselves. On the one hand, the location of Fürstenfelde in a remote corner of former GDR territory suggests that its inhabitants' collective identity is shaped by a set of historical experiences and traumas unique to the geographical region, as well as by an experience of the present historical moment that differs from that of more affluent areas of the country. On the other hand, Fürstenfelde's location between two lakes and in proximity to the woods further

31 See, for example, Ilja Trojanow and José F.A. Oliver, "Kritik an Bosch-Stiftung: Ade, Chamisso-Preis?," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 29, 2016, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/debatten/kritik-an-bosch-stiftung-ade-chamisso-preis-14443175.html (accessed August 14, 2020).

strengthens the inhabitants' self-perception as a community in isolation and on the defensive. In the course of the novel, however, and in its unofficial sequel, the short story "Fallensteller" (Trapper[s]) in the 2016 collection of the same name,[32] the community of Fürstenfelde is revealed to be less isolated and externally threatened, but also less united, than it perceives itself to be. In other words, Fürstenfelde is revealed to be no more of an "urdeutsch" village, as Biller imagines it, than *Vor dem Fest* itself can be described as "migrant" literature.

As mentioned above, Fürstenfelde is set in the Uckermark, a rural region in Brandenburg and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. These are two of the five so-called *neue Bundesländer* (new German states) often associated in the rest of the country with what Verena Auffermann describes as "eine vernachlässigte deutsche Gegenwart, die in den Städten niemand für möglich hält" (a neglected German present that no one in the cities would think possible).[33] The shrinking of the local population and the village's general sense of decline are repeatedly mentioned in the novel. Already in the first chapter the narrative voice states that "es gehen mehr tot, als geboren werden. Wir hören die Alten vereinsamen. Sehen den Jungen beim Schmieden zu von keinem Plan. Oder vom Plan, wegzugehen" (*VF*, 12–13; more people die than are born. We hear the old folk as they grow lonely and the young as they fail to make any plans. Or make plans to go away, *BF*, 12). It is clear that the village's sorry state is, in the villagers' eyes, a direct consequence of the *Wende*, of the politically and financially asymmetrical reunification of the two former German states. Instead of the flourishing "ostdeutsche Industrie" (East German industry) the region had known in the past, there are now only "brandenburgische Industrieruinen" (*VF*, 84; industrial ruins in Brandenburg, *BF*, 85) around Fürstenfelde. The Federal Republic's increasingly globalized economy, meanwhile, makes the few local businesses that still survive in the area vulnerable to foreign buyouts. We learn, for instance, that Dutch investors offered Gölow, one of the most important figures in the village, half a million Euros for his pig farm, an opportunity he regrets passing up.

The region's economic decline creates social pressures that are keenly felt by the village's inhabitants. Herr Schramm, for example, cannot live off his lieutenant-colonel's pension from the Nationale Volksarmee, the GDR's National People's Army, and has to work off the books for the local farm machine factory. The village priest, Uwe Hirtentäschel, is a born-again former junkie, whereas Meerrettich-Micha, one of the village's young men, is constantly in and out of prison. His friends, Lada,

32 Saša Stanišić, *Fallensteller* (Munich: Luchterhand, 2016).

33 Verena Auffermann, "Eineinhalb Neonazis," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Zeit Online*, March 6, 2014, https://www.zeit.de/2014/11/sasa-stanisic-vor-dem-fest-roman (accessed August 14, 2020).

Johann, and "der stumme Suzi" (*VF*, 15; silent Suzi, *BF*, 15), hang around Ulli's petrol station, the only place in the village that stays open until midnight. The village also has "1 ½ Nazis," Rico and his girlfriend Luise, who is actually only "ein Halbnazi, weil sie den ganzen Scheiß nur Rico zuliebe macht" (*VF*, 85; a half Nazi because she goes along with all that shit only for love of Rico, *BF*, 86). By citing this number, the narrative ironically winks at the common urban prejudice that the *neue Bundesländer* are hotbeds of neo-Nazism. "Demographisch gesehen," as Johann puts it, his and his friends' hobbies should be "Ego-Shooter und rechtes Gedankengut," rather than tabletop role-playing games, "beides ist aber gar nicht so geil" (*VF*, 130; Demographically . . . first person-shooter games and right-minded [*sic*] ideas, but neither of those is as cool as the role-playing, *BF*, 130).

However, even though they boast only "one and a half" Nazis amongst them, the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde are shown to be prone to a politically questionable rhetoric of exceptionalism. Accustomed to neglect and decay in the present—as the narrative voice claims at one point, "Verwahrlosung ist uns nicht fremd" (*VF*, 179; we've seen dilapidation before, *BF*, 179)—they try to counter their insecurity about their collective identity by looking to the past for legitimation. As Dora Osborne writes, "the community of Fürstenfelde oscillates between painful awareness of its own precariousness and pride in its endurance."[34] Indeed, as a whole, *Vor dem Fest* suggests that there is a causal connection between, on the one hand, the villagers' sense of being neglected by central authorities and excluded from the prosperity of the country as a whole, and on the other hand, their sense of being a close-knit and closed community, a community made resourceful and resilient by its remoteness and isolation. This is reflected above all in the way the plural narrative voice refers to the villagers and to outsiders. The "wir" is clearly identified with the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde, whom it also sometimes refers to as the "Volk" (e.g., *VF*, 116, 159, and 277; the people) the "Dorf" (*VF*, 28, 169, and *passim*; village) or the "Alteingesessene" (*VF*, 238; old inhabitants). But it also explicitly defines itself by contrast to both "Zugezogene" (*VF*, 238; newcomers) and "Touris" (*VF*, 133; tourists), whether "Berliner" (*VF,* 31) or other "Städter" (*VF,* 174; city-folk), "auswärtige Besucher" (*VF*, 161 and 251; foreign visitors), or "Fremde" (*VF*, 253 and 302; foreigners).[35] Apart from late settlers and visitors, the "wir" also eyes external economic

34 Dora Osborne, "'Irgendwie wird es gehen': Trauma, Survival, and Creativity in Saša Stanišić's *Vor dem Fest*," *German Life and Letters* 72, no. 4 (2019): 469–83, here 471.

35 As Anthea Bell translates some of these terms differently in different passages, depending on the context, my translations of individual terms here do not follow the published translation.

and cultural influences on the village's culture with skepticism, though the villagers' every-day life is clearly already traversed in complex ways by both German and global pop culture. For example, the village archivist Frau Schwermuth "guckt . . . *Buffy – The Vampire Slayer* . . . ohne Unterbrechung" (*VF*, 32; is watching *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* . . . right the way through, *BF*, 33), her son Johann "liebt Internet-Foren zu abstrusen Hobbys" (*VF*, 51; likes Internet forums on abstruse hobbies, *BF*, 52) while Herr Schramm daydreams of a "Fürstenfelder *Tatort*" (*VF*, 137; an episode of *Crime Scene* . . . set in Fürstenfelde, *BF*, 137). The "Annenfest," too, is increasingly culturally diverse, or at least increasingly open to new, "exotic" things. One of the villagers offers classes in Raku ware, a type of Japanese pottery, for instance, while others organize a concert of African music from Stuttgart.

With his characteristically gentle irony, Stanišić also shows the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde embracing a kind of cosmopolitan, twenty-first-century political correctness. Frau Schwermuth's antifascist bike tour of the village, for instance, initially planned for twenty people, unexpectedly (and arguably unrealistically) attracts eighty on the day of the feast, while Hirtentäschel teaches his fellow villagers "wie man Israel-Kritik üben kann, *ohne*—gewollt oder ungewollt—antisemitische Äußerungen zu treffen" (*VF,* 301; how to criticize Israel *without*—intentionally or unintentionally—saying anything anti-Semitic: *BF*, 299). Yet the success of these initiatives also worryingly suggests that they are, to some extent, necessary, and that latent fascist and anti-Semitic attitudes still exist in Fürstenfelde. While these are not explicitly addressed, the villagers are shown to be generally skeptical about developments in global politics and worried about how they impact their region. Gölow, for example, expresses a clear preference for Bill Clinton over Barack Obama, whom he sees as a "Dampfplauderer" (*VF*, 36; [someone who] talk[s] a lot of hot air, *BF*, 37), because of the former's stance during the Bosnian war. Gölow had two employees at the time, we read, a Bosnian and a Serb. While the two got along well with one another and with Gölow, however, the narrator comments that "uns war das nicht ganz recht gewesen mit den Jugoslawen. So kurz nach der Wende. Arbeitsmangel und Wut, und der stellt sie ein. . . . Alle hatten Gölow für jemanden gehalten, der lokal dachte" (*VF*, 37; we hadn't been too happy about the Yugoslavians. So soon after the fall of the Wall. Lack of work, and anger, and he goes giving them jobs . . . they'd always taken Gölow for a man who thought locally, *BF*, 38). In a later chapter, Frau Kranz, the village painter, paints the cheap container set up to accommodate the "Rumänische Erntehelfer" (*VF,* 290; Romanian harvest workers, *BF*, 289) working Fürstenfelde's fields, seasonal workers who function as reminders of how the eastward expansion of the EU economically impacts the area. In this case, however, it is not the "wir" as a whole who object to the foreign workers,

but rather "Neonazis aus der Gegend, bis auf unsere anderthalb, Rico und Luise . . . und, irgendwann in den Morgenstunden, schon auch die Polizei" (*VF*, 290; neo-Nazis from this area except for our own two, Rico and Luise . . . and at some point in the small hours of the morning the police, *BF*, 289).

Despite their internet-savvy youth, their taste for "world" music, and their efforts to show a certain open-mindedness and sensitivity to different cultures, the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde as a collective are indeed still unable to shake off their age-old suspicion of outsiders and ultimately remain attached to their self-understanding as a homogeneous, historically and geographically continuous community. As the first-person plural narrative voice is given historical depth, it functions as a constant reminder of the community's supposed continuity. At one poignant moment, the "wir" describes photos of an "Annenfest" from the 1930s. Their color is "ein Schwarzweiß so schwarzweiß, dass es fast *braun* aussieht" (*VF*, 275; a black-and-white so black-and-white that it almost looks *brown* [my translation and emphasis; sentence missing from the published translation]). Without spelling out its allusion to the Nazi era here, the "wir" reflects fondly on this time: "Es sind gute Jahre. Wir sind vierhundert mehr als heute. Wir fahren von zwei Bahnhöfen ab und mit fünfzehn Automobilen herum. Der Optimismus zeugt Kinder. . . . Wir sind städtisch für die Umgebung. Glauben an Arbeit und ans Vaterland, haben Arbeit und Vaterland, tragen Schleifen an den Hüten" (*VF*, 275–76; These are good years. There are 400 more of us than today. We leave the village from two railway stations and drive around in fifteen motor cars. Optimism procreates children. . . . The country people nearby regard us as townies. We believe in work and the Fatherland, we wear bows in our hats, *BF*, 275). It soon relativizes this fond memory by adding: "Die wohltuende Ahnungslosigkeit. Nach dem Krieg werden wir barfuß herumlaufen" (*VF,* 276; We are living in a condition of blissful ignorance. After the war we'll be going around barefoot, *BF*, 275–76). Yet this comment only further highlights how historically problematic the collective memory voiced by the "wir" is. By evoking memories of how prosperous the village was during the Third Reich and how it suffered after its fall, it echoes the revisionist narratives of German victimhood under Nazi rule that grew louder after the *Wende*.[36] References to the *Wende* itself and to the GDR also reinforce the community's problematic narrative of a historically continuous identity. In several instances it becomes clear that

36 This is, however, only one of the many implications of the village's attempt to come to terms with its traumatic past. As Dora Osborne has shown in her 2019 article referenced above, the novel's characters attempt to deal with their troubled collective history and individual traumas in a number of creative ways but with varying degrees of success.

even twenty-five years after the *Wende*, the villagers still see themselves as East German, identifying with the "normale Ossis wie dich und uns" (*VF,* 148; normal Ossis like you and us, *BF*, 148) they occasionally see on television.

Besides being incorporated in the plural narrative voice, however, the rhetoric of ancestry and historical continuity is also made explicit through a recurring pop intertext, the song "On the Edge of a Cliff" by the Birmingham alternative hip-hop band The Streets. Lyrics from the song, which Johann listens to early on, are also the novel's epigraph. The song's chorus is about the unlikelihood of one's ancestors having survived, "successfully looked after and passed on to you life." Taken by the idea of his own ancestry surviving "seit Anbeginn der Menschheitsgeschichte" (*VF,* 51; since the beginning of human history, *BF*, 52), Johann imagines his ancestors proudly listening to him practice his bell-ringing. More than the idea of historical continuity, in fact, it is an ideal of genealogical continuity that, coupled with the villagers' geographical situation, cements their self-perception as a homogeneous collective.

References to the village's physical geography contribute just as much as references to the region's political, historical, and economic geography do to the way that the village community of Fürstenfelde is portrayed. The natural landscape surrounding the village affects the very structure of the village community: because the village is lodged in the flatlands between two lakes and borders on a forest, its inhabitants historically relied on a ferryman for the transport of goods and people between Fürstenfelde and settlements across the shore from it. The figure of the ferryman thus still holds considerable authority in the villagers' eyes, even though Fürstenfelde's last ferryman is pronounced dead in the novel's opening.[37] At the same time, the village's remote rural location makes it vulnerable to intruding wildlife, specifically the aforementioned female fox, or vixen, who narrates several chapters and whose elusive perspective is the only one that challenges the villagers' collective voice. The vixen is particularly important in the narrative, as she is the archetypal outsider figure that helps sustain the collective's illusion of homogeneity. A fox or vixen indeed seems to have been present at all key moments in Fürstenfelde's history. In the excerpts from the village archive describing the preparations for the "Annenfest" that are interspersed amongst

37 Frauke Matthes discusses the significance of the ferryman for the village community in detail in "'Weltliteratur aus der Uckermark': Regionalism and Transnationalism in Saša Stanišić's *Vor dem Fest*," in *German in the World: A Culture in National, Transnational and Global Contexts*, ed. James Hodkinson and Benedict Schofield (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2020), 91–108, here 96–98. I am grateful to the author for sharing the manuscript of her article with me in May 2019.

the chapters, she often appears together with the village's most notorious human outcasts, the seventeenth-century thieves Hinnerk Lievenmaul and Kunibert Schivelbein. In the narrative present, the thieves return reincarnated as two young men, Henry and Q, who always speak in rhyme and who save the vixen when the chicken farmer Ditzsche tries to trap her. Significantly, however, only the vixen recognizes that the men are really the ghosts of the historical thieves: unlike the other villagers, they are, uncannily, "ohne jedes Aroma" (*VF*, 245; without any aroma [my translation]).

Indeed, the vixen's perspective is completely "other" to that of the village collective, and tellingly, the "wir" is mostly silent in the chapters that are focalized through her. Because of this, these chapters provide a defamiliarizing vantage point on the human community of the villagers. Unlike the chatty world of the "wir," the vixen's world is silent and consists of sensations and perceptions. She is guided by taste and smell, hunger, fatigue, and a strong maternal instinct. As Gerrit Bartels points out, "die Fähe . . . verkörpert gewissermaßen das überzeitliche Prinzip, die Ewigkeit, mit all ihren Sinnen" (with all her senses, the vixen . . . to some extent embodies a timeless principle, eternity itself).[38] Indeed, from the start, "die Fähe ahnt die Zeit, da die Seen noch nicht existierten und keine Menschen hier ihr Revier hatten" (*VF*, 22; the vixen senses the time when the lakes did not yet exist, and no humans had their game preserves here, *BF*, 23). The vixen, in other words, functions as a constant reminder of the natural landscape that circumscribes and isolates the villagers' territory, a territory that, as we saw above, is also cut off from the centers of political decision-making and funding.

The short story "Fallensteller," which continues the characteristic first-person plural narrative of Fürstenfelde a few years down the line, most clearly illustrates how the village's physical and political geography converge.[39] The story invests the village's exposure to intruding wildlife with symbolic meaning, drawing parallels between the villagers' defensive stance toward animal intruders and its ambivalence toward human newcomers. In "Fallensteller" the villagers are united not against the vixen, but against the threat of approaching wolves. Implicitly, these are the very wolves that two of the village's young men, Lada and Suzi, had smuggled into the region in *Vor dem Fest* (see *VF*, 17). The villagers agree that "direkte Maßnahmen gegen den Wolf" (direct measures against the

38 Gerrit Bartels, "Die wertvollste Gabe ist die Erfindung," review of *Vor dem Fest*, by Saša Stanišić, *Der Tagesspiegel*, March 14, 2014, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/sasa-stanisics-roman-vor-dem-fest-die-wertvollste-gabe-ist-die-erfindung/9617570.html (accessed August 14, 2020).

39 For a discussion of the short story, see also Matthes, "'Weltliteratur aus der Uckermark,'" 103–4.

wolf) are "[den Tierhaltern] viel wichtiger als die Maßnahmen für den Herdenschutz" (much more important to the animal keepers than measures for the protection of their herds).[40] To this end, they commission a "Fallensteller," or trapper, to deal directly with the problem of the wolves. However, with his questionable trapping methods and, like Henry and Q in *Vor dem Fest*, his rhyming idiolect, the Fallensteller is himself a suspicious figure. Increasingly, the inhabitants of Fürstenfelde come to see him as a threat as well, part of the wolf problem he was hired to solve: "Er roch nach Raubtier" (he smelled of predator) we read at one point, "Lada wusste gleich, nach welchem" (Lada knew straight away which one).[41]

Both the villagers' heated debate about the threat of the wolves and their suspicion of the Fallensteller are telling of the defensive way the community of Fürstenfelde is constituted. The villagers' defensiveness is also suggested by how ambivalently they view the refugees arriving in the area between 2014 and 2016. While the "syrische Flüchtlinge" (Syrian refugees)[42] are officially welcomed, they are also clearly "othered," not least because the suspicious figure of the Fallensteller implicitly sides with them. The refugees thus tacitly function as both the unwelcome wolves' counterparts and, because they are similarly unknown and to some extent feared by the villagers, as akin to them.[43] The threat of wolves in the village and the contemporaneous arrival of the Europe-wide refugee crisis in the region put new pressures on the community of Fürstenfelde, allowing the villagers' age-old conflicts, secrets, and grievances to surface.

40 Stanišić, *Fallensteller*, 212. As there is no published English translation of *Fallensteller* at the time of writing, all translations of quotations from this work are my own.

41 Stanišić, *Fallensteller*, 189.

42 Stanišić, *Fallensteller*, 175.

43 In a seminar at the University of Zurich on November 24, 2017 that accompanied the last of Stanišić's *Zürcher Poetikvorlesungen*, the author himself suggested that the wolves in "Fallensteller" can be read both literally (given that farmers in northeast Germany are reportedly often threatened by wild predators), and metaphorically, as ersatz figures for migrants, who are viewed with ambivalence by the locals in the German provinces. Following this statement, however, the author and seminar participants discussed the role of animals as "slippery" textual figures in both *Vor dem Fest* and in "Fallensteller," that is, as figures that feature both as metaphors for the human community and in their literal function as animals. See Sebastian Meixner, "Zürcher Poetikvorlesungen mit Saša Stanišić," Universität Zürich Homepage, May 3, 2017, https://www.media.uzh.ch/de/medienmitteilungen/2017/Poetikvorlesung.html (accessed August 14, 2020).

The Deceptive Uniformity of the "Wir"

Reading more closely, however, we realize that the cracks in the community of Fürstenfelde do not suddenly appear with external challenges, whether real or imagined. Rather, they are audible in the plural narrative voice from the beginning of *Vor dem Fest*. In trying to impose a party line on the villagers, the "wir" ends up drawing lines of division and exclusion amongst them. Variations in focalization and, to a lesser extent, narrative voice indicate how attached, or detached, individual villagers are from the group, and whether they are welcomed or implicitly excluded by others. For instance, in chapters where the focalizer is a central figure in the village, such as the pig farmer Gölow or the pensioner Herr Schramm, the "wir" almost imperceptibly gives way to more conventional free indirect speech.[44] The narratives of more marginal characters, however, are usually mediated entirely through the "wir." For example, we read at one point that the village postman, purveyor of pedigree chickens, and suspected one-time Stasi informant Dietmar Dietz (known as Ditzsche) "macht uns ratlos" (we don't know what to make of him). "Was findet die Nacht interessant an ihm? Sein beständiges Einzelgängertum? Die Einsamkeit des alten Mannes? Dafür haben wir Herrn Schramm . . . Dietmar Dietz ist wie ein Ohrwurm von einem Lied, das du kaum kennst" (*VF*, 233; What is it that the night finds interesting about him? The fact that he's always a loner? The loneliness of an old man? But we have Herr Schramm for that . . . Dietmar Dietz is like an earworm, a catchy phrase from a song you hardly know, *BF*, 232). Indeed, marginalizing outsider figures such as Ditzsche, or singling out of foreigners such as Frau Reiff, who is originally from Düsseldorf, "aber auch sonst: . . . keine von uns" (*VF*, 238; but in other respects as well . . . is not one of us, *BF*, 237), seems to be essential for the survival of the collective and its ability to articulate itself as a subject by saying "wir."

Besides such differences in the narrative modes used to evoke different characters, the "wir" also implies a gendered division within the village community. More specifically, the "wir" at times seems to stand exclusively for a community of (heterosexual) men: "wir trinken in Ullis Garage," it says, "weil nirgends sonst Sitzgelegenheiten und Lügen und ein Kühlschrank so zusammenkommen, dass es für die Männer miteinander und mit Alkohol schön und gleichzeitig nicht *zu* schön ist" (*VF*, 19, emphasis in the original; we drink in Ulli's garage because you don't get a place to sit and tell tales and a fridge all together like that anywhere else, which makes it a good spot for guys to be at ease with each other over a drink, but at the same time not *too* much at ease, *BF*, 20). And indeed, the "wir" is sometimes substituted with "die Garage," the

44 See, for example, *VF*, 25, 34, 41, and *passim*.

collective of men who gather to drink at Ulli's repair shop. Yet there is never any exclusively female "wir" to counterbalance it. The women who play a key role in Fürstenfelde's life, Frau Schwermuth the archivist, Frau Kranz the painter, and Anna the student-to-be, are all shown to be highly individual,[45] strong-willed, and as though distanced from the village collective in much the same way as the vixen, the village's familiar "other." Though a common trope in the kind of nineteenth-century *Dorfgeschichten* (village tales) that *Vor dem Fest* frequently references,[46] the "othering" of key women in the novel is what reveals most clearly how deceptive the uniformity voiced by the first-person plural narrator really is.

Looking more closely at these three female figures, however, we also notice differences in how they are narrated. While Frau Schwermuth, for example, never actually functions as a focalizer, Frau Kranz does on three occasions, briefly displacing the totalizing perspective of the "wir" (*VF*, 92, 99, and 287). The latter's individuality and role as familiar outsider is also accentuated in different ways. As Frauke Matthes points out, because of her identity as a former migrant a "Donauschwäbin" ("Danube Swabian") or "Jugoslawiendeutsche" ("Yugoslavian German") (*VF*, 55; *BF,* 56), Frau Kranz "also serves as a mediator of key questions concerning 'the other,' namely: who really is the stranger, the other; how do we recognize them; and how can they belong?"[47] Arguably, Frau Schwermuth, who despite her unworldliness is the most central figure in the village, mediates questions of belonging and otherness just as much as Frau Kranz does. Frau Schwermuth is respected by the villagers for her historical knowledge but is granted no perspective of her own in the novel. She is primarily represented through her teenage son Johann's perspective, who tenderly yet bluntly describes her as hopelessly obese, depressive, and delusional. One of the victims of her pathological inability to tell reality from fiction, history from myth, is Anna: at one point,

45 Though these three main female characters are also aligned, on some level, through the similarity of their names: Frau Kranz's name is also Ana, albeit with only one *n*, and Frau Schwermuth's first name is Joh*anna.* See Osborne, "'Irgendwie wird es gehen,'" 471.

46 Josephine Donovan suggests that women in *Dorfgeschichten* often stood for pre- or anti-modern modes of thinking and were cast as guardians of age-old traditions against the onslaught of modern industry: "A dominant theme in local-color literature is the exploration of . . . 'feminine' otherness—this different way of doing things—often affirming it in opposition to standard (masculine) ways of thinking and behaving, which under modernity meant the abstract universalizing modes of Enlightenment rationalism." Josephine Donovan, *European Local-Color Literature: National Tales, Dorfgeschichten, Romans Champêtres* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 12.

47 Matthes, "'Weltliteratur aus der Uckermark,'" 100–101.

for instance, Frau Schwermuth mistakes Anna and Herr Schramm, whom Anna tries to keep from committing suicide, for two figures from one of the archive stories, a woman (also) called Anna and a man called Lutz. Anna and Lutz had manned the city walls during an attack on the village in the seventeenth century and by doing so had given away the villagers' hiding place (*VF*, 220–21). Finding (the present-day) Anna and Herr Schramm sitting on a wall, Frau Schwermuth forces them down by pointing her gun at them (*VF*, 217; *BF*, 217). Yet, as Osborne points out, Anna and Frau Schwermuth are not only pitted against each other but also implicitly aligned in the narrative in that they are both burdened by memories of the past, though Frau Schwermuth views her connection to the village's collective past as unique.[48] Yet Anna, too, is "othered" through her hauntedness: like Frau Kranz, she has lost her family early; she lives alone in the dilapidated family house, and cannot wait to leave Fürstenfelde behind. Above all, however, it is her name itself, the name that, as we saw previously, she shares with both Ana Kranz and Johanna Schwermuth, which gives her the ambivalent status of the community's familiar "other."

What this status entails is suggested in a baffling passage early on in the narrative:

> Wir sind froh, Anna wird verbrannt. Morgen Abend beim Fest wird das Urteil vollstreckt. Die Kinder werden zu den Kälbern ins Heu gelegt, aber sie schlafen nicht, sie lugen zwischen den Brettern nach dem, wovor sie im Schlaf Angst haben möchten, und wenn in den Flammen nichts mehr kocht und zischt und weint, stöpselt der Bäcker die Geige an seinen mobilen Verstärker, und dann wird gegeigt, dann wird gesungen, auf dem Grill brät Raubfisch weich. (*VF*, 28)
>
> [We are glad. Anna is going to be burnt. The sentence will be carried out at the Feast tomorrow evening. The children are put to bed in the hay with the calves, but they don't sleep, they peer through the boards at what they'd like to be scared of in their sleep, and when there's no more boiling and hissing and crying in the flames the baker connects up his fiddle to his portable amplifier and then there's fiddling, then there's dancing, predatory fish are grilled until they're cooked and soft. (*BF*, 29)]

An even more mystifying passage shortly afterwards refers to a little girl and boy keeping the fire going overnight in the oven where their mother dries the flax to bake bread for the feast (*VF*, 31–32; *BF*, 32–33). This reference is only clarified much later through the description in one of

48 Osborne, "'Irgendwie wird es gehen,'" 479.

the excerpts from the village archive of a "schrecklicher casus tragicus" (*VF*, 181; a most terrible tragedy, *BF*, 181) from 1722, which involved a child named Anna. When she and her brother were forced to tend to their mother's flax oven overnight, Anna burned to death and her brother was severely injured. The present-day Anna's burning announced in the passage cited above, we can only assume, is a ritual sacrifice to commemorate the incident and celebrate the continuity of the village community; it will be a joyous occasion, we are told, the main event of the annual feast. And yet it is at precisely this point, so early on in the narrative, that it becomes obvious that the "wir," the voice of the collective, the will of the many, keeps the villagers together through the promise (or threat) of a kind of violence, or at least by adhering to violent, atavistic traditions that single out and victimize individual members of the community.

Though at the very end of the novel the "wir" off-handedly states, "Anna wird vermutlich doch nicht verbrannt" (*VF,* 314; Anna probably won't be burnt, *BF*, 313), it can no longer shake off its early association with violence. This violence, the violence of the community itself, is, it turns out, not physical, but rather discursive and ideological: it is the violence with which the "wir" divides, excludes, and discriminates just as it pretends to unify and bind. More than confirming the village's genealogical and geographical continuity, the excerpts from the archive only confirm the tenacity of its superstitions, its record of exclusion and prejudice, its history of violence. It becomes clear, then, that the "wir" is far from a natural, unanimous collective: it is forced and forceful, and yet precarious precisely because of this.

Even though the authority of the collective is constantly reasserted and undermined in *Vor dem Fest*, the novel crucially does not dismiss the possibility of a functioning community altogether. Rather, it reveals the true possibility of the community to be not in the "wir," but rather in its cracks, in the moments when the collective narrative is complicated and challenged by discontinuities, the integration of newcomers and outsiders, or the stories of the individuals it encompasses. The perspective the novel opens up on the notion of community also offers a final comment on the discussion of "migrant" literature that surrounded the novel (as also Stanišić's other work) upon its publication. When Maxim Biller calls for authors "mit Migrationshintergrund" to honor the experiences that distinguish them from "autochthonous" German authors, he is referring to experiences that he himself, as a Czech-born Jewish author writing in German, also shares. Biller thus invests the idea of "migrant" literature with an implicit "wir" that he pits against the "wir" of another imaginary literary community, that of the "autochthonous" German literary establishment. With a plural narrative voice that is often sinister, discriminatory, and divisive rather than unifying and consensual, *Vor dem Fest* shows that a community that is overly attached to its roots, that is, to its

own geographical specificity and genealogical continuity, is in some ways an ideologically violent construct. By extension, any minority or majority community that makes much of contingencies such as geographical belonging is bound to be divisive and exclusive of difference. The minority community implied by the notion of *Migrationsliteratur*, therefore, makes as little sense as the notion of a majority culture that expresses itself as a homogeneous and unified "wir."

Precarious Narration in Anke Stelling's *Schäfchen im Trockenen* (2018)

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When Anke Stelling's novel *Schäfchen im Trockenen* (Feather Your Own Nest, 2018) was awarded the Leipzig Book Fair Prize in 2019, the jury praised the pugnacious spirit of the text, describing it as a "scharfkantiger, harscher Roman, der wehtun will und wehtun muss, der protestiert gegen den beständigen Versuch des Besänftigtwerdens, der etwas aufreißt in unserem sicher geglaubten Selbstverständnis" (sharp-edged, harsh novel that wants and needs to hurt, that protests against the incessant attempt at appeasement, that tears something open in the self-image we believe to be so secure).[1] However, not all literary critics were quite so willing to be unsettled by Stelling's novel and to recognize something enlightening in this uncertainty. Volker Weidermann is one of them: the writer and literary critic was infuriated by this "öde Geschichte in einer öden Sprache über öde Leute" (dull story in dull language about dull people) and was repulsed by the "Selbstmitleid von der ersten Seite bis zur letzten Seite" (self-pity from the first page to the last).[2] Weidermann's conclusion: the novel simply has no character and it fails to speak to us. In Saša Stanišić's latest novel *Herkunft* (Origins), by contrast, he finds everything he is missing from every page of Anke Stelling's book: optimism, poetry, and images that allow the broken story to be pieced back together.[3]

Touching images and beautiful harmony are nowhere to be found in Stelling's novel; instead, the presence of everyday items like lunch boxes, Doodle lists, bank statements, and compost bins dominates here. According to literary critic Iris Radisch in *Die Zeit*, the tone of the content

1 Wiebke Porombka (on behalf of the jury), *Leipzig Book Prize 2019 Presentation Speech*, March 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/embed/YZuadUiFtYo (accessed May 15, 2020). Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations of German quotations in this chapter are the work of the translator, Isabel Adey.

2 Volker Weidermann, *Das Literarische Quartett*, April 12, 2019, https://www.zdf.de/kultur/das-literarische-quartett/das-literarische-quartett-vom-12-april-2019-100.html (accessed February 1, 2020).

3 See Weidermann, *Das Literarische Quartett*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conforms to "den Niederungen des 'alltäglichen Wahnsinns'" (the lowlands and depressions of "everyday madness"), dispensing with any claim to "anspruchsvolle Literarizität" (sophisticated literariness).[4] Radisch's critique of the language used in the novel is ambivalent. Interpreted in the most well-meaning sense, her words suggest that rather than simply "conforming" to the nature of the content, a novel that claims to have literary qualities should reflect on and rise above "the lowlands and depressions" of its subject matter through its language and formal aesthetics. However, rather than using neutral descriptors to express what is essentially a reasonable expectation, this critique is couched in terms that imply social distinction and exclusivity, such as "anspruchsvoll" (sophisticated) and "Niederungen" (lowlands and depressions). Her suggestion is therefore that the "literariness" of the text hinges on the social status of the milieu it portrays. According to Radisch, the book basically revolves around the question of "ob 40-Jährige sich von ihren Eltern eine schöne Eigentumswohnung im Stadtzentrum kaufen lassen können" (whether 40-year-olds can own a nice apartment in the city center on the strength of their parents' finances). And the only way Radisch can explain how such a book is so well-regarded and has even won a prestigious award is to assume that "vulgar sociology" is at play, which, of course, is a nod to the novel's thematic proximity to pressing social-political debates around affordable urban housing, gentrification, and what she refers to as the "gehobene Selbstverwirklichungsmilieu" (elite self-fulfilment milieu).[5]

Schäfchen im Trockenen has been the subject of intense media attention in Germany. During the first half of 2019, the novel was reviewed in several major newspapers and discussed on national radio. And in addition to receiving the Leipzig Book Fair Prize, it was also awarded the Friedrich Hölderlin Prize. Much of this attention was indeed tied in with readings focusing on the experiences of social inequality and precarity informing the plot and the treatment of characters, with many reviewers interpreting these experiences as paradigms of the prevailing neoliberal circumstances. In her foreword to Isabell Lorey's *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious (Futures)*, Judith Butler stresses that Lorey conceives of precarity as "a new form of regulation that distinguishes this historical time." According to Butler, "precarity has itself become a regime, a hegemonic way of being governed, and governing ourselves" under the conditions of neoliberalism.[6] However, as I intend to illustrate in this chapter, the expe-

4 Iris Radisch, "Im Höllenkreis der Baugruppe," *Die Zeit*, March 28, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/2019/14/schaefchen-im-trockenen-leipziger-buchmesse-buchpreis (accessed July 15, 2020).

5 Radisch, "Im Höllenkreis der Baugruppe."

6 Judith Butler, "Foreword," in Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious (Futures)*, trans. Aileen Derieg (New York: Verso, 2015), vii–xi, here vii.

rience of precarity portrayed by Resi in Stelling's novel does not bear the tell-tale neoliberal marks of self-regulation. Rather, the protagonist's process of self-understanding as a writer follows the binary logic of the class struggle, complete with clearly identifiable oppositions and dividing lines. The aesthetic agenda of the novel also conforms to this logic: as I intend to show in the following, the end goal of the novel is engaged authorship, not subversion. At the core of this model is a sovereign author who sees herself as a *parrhesiastes*, that is, someone who knows and speaks the truth and is able to clearly distinguish between friend and foe.

While the superficial references to topical political issues have been the subject of much discussion, the aesthetics and poetics of Stelling's writing have either been ignored or at the very most dismissed, as exemplified by Iris Radisch's ironic reference to the "superschlaue Erzählerin" (super-smart narrator) and the novel's lack of "anspruchsvolle Literarizität" (sophisticated literariness).[7] The only reviewer to point out the importance of the writing is Jens Bisky. He notes: "Das Schreiben löst in diesem Roman die Krise aus und ist das Mittel, sich ihr zu stellen, eine Subjektposition zu erobern" (Writing sparks the crisis in this novel and serves as a means of confronting this crisis and gaining a subject position).[8] However, this reference to writing as "Mittel" (a means) is somewhat misleading: it implies that sovereignty is a given in *Schäfchen im Trockenen*, but as the following shows, sovereignty is something that must instead be claimed and appropriated. The protagonist witnesses her living conditions, social status, and friendships crumbling as a result of her actions, and as her place in society is compromised, these precarious circumstances also impact on her self-conception as an author. In a series of reflections in the novel, Resi tries to understand how material conditions and social status determine who gets to tell which stories and how. She realizes that the apparent equal footing she shares with her friends, at least in terms of education and matters of taste, only serves to mask the disparate distribution of material and economic security and prospects within her friendship group. It is this insight into the "real" social conditions that inspires Resi to aesthetically convey her own experience of precarity without essentializing, categorizing, or reproducing this precarity itself. In the following, I intend to demonstrate how in *Schäfchen im Trockenen* Stelling attempts to incorporate the process of writing in and about precarious circumstances into a concept of precarious narration. Based on a close reading of the novel, this chapter aims to extrapolate the

7 Radisch, "Im Höllenkreis der Baugruppe."

8 Jens Bisky, "Nehmt das, naive Freunde der Mittelklasse!," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 29, 2018, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/anke-stelling-schaefchen-im-trockenen-rezension-1.4232312 (accessed September 4, 2020).

formal and aesthetic characteristics of the novel, investigating how socio-economic precarity is addressed as a problem in writing and narration, as well as demonstrating how this precarity is incorporated into a discourse about writing itself.

This chapter is formed of three sections, the first of which will show how a poetics of precarious narration becomes a desideratum in the novel. In the writing scene at the very start of the novel,[9] we learn that the protagonist and narrator Resi has decided to use the precarious circumstances surrounding her life and her writing as the inspiration for a creative project, the primary objective being to expose and deconstruct the narratives and narrative strategies that prevent writing from a position of disadvantage being an act of self-empowerment. In the second section, I will then pull together the different features of precarious narration encountered in the analysis of the different forms of narrative material used in the novel, demonstrating how these different elements tie in with existing traditions of political literature. Finally, the third section will focus on the elements of strong authorship as a possible connection between the concept of *parrhesia*—i.e., "telling the truth"—and the traditional model of engaged literature. In this context, I will also consider the suitability of these two models for the desideratum mentioned above, that is, the pressing need for a poetics of precarious narration.

The Elements of Precarious Narration

The various paradigms of writing and narration presented at the start of the novel differ considerably in terms of their impact and potency. In the first instance, the protagonist accuses her mother of withholding information, for failing to tell her own story: Resi says that by concealing the "mangelnden Alternativen [und] schlimmen Voraussetzungen" (lack of options [and] poor conditions)[10] at the root of her failed social advance-

9 See Jennifer Clare, "Textspuren und Schreibumgebungen: Schreiben, Schreib-Szene und Schrift als kulturpoetologischer Perspektive," *Textpraxis: Digitales Journal für Philologie* 13 (2017): 1–9, here 3, http://dx.doi.org/10.17879/22259716617. In the first part of her article, Jennifer Clare provides an overview of the current research into the "Schreibszene" (writing scene) and discusses the differences between the terms "Schreibszene" and "Schreib-szene": *Schreibszene* refers to the "(nicht immer rekonstruierbaren, aber jedem Schreibprozess zugrundeliegenden) sprachlichen, raumzeitlichen, technischen und sozialen Kontext" (linguistic, spatiotemporal, technical, and social context, which is not always possible to reconstruct, but which underpins every writing process), whereas in a *Schreib-Szene*, the "Reibungen an diesem Kontext" (tensions at play in this context) are visible in the text itself.

10 Anke Stelling, *Schäfchen im Trockenen* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2018), 10. Abbreviated henceforth as *ST*.

ment, her mother deprived her early on of the opportunity to realize the "größereren Zusammenhänge[ ], Strukturen oder Machtverhältnisse[ ]" (*ST*, 7; bigger context, structures, or balance of power) at play. The "potent" letter written by her friend contrasts with the impotence of her mother's silence: the anonymous, impersonal eviction letter addressed to Resi's letting agent by her former friend Frank, the main leaseholder, which she then receives with the stamp "Zur Kenntnis" (*ST*, 13; for your information) is enough to pose a threat to Resi and her family's survival. Resi makes a distinction between her own writing and the potent anonymous letter penned by her friend or her mother's impotent silence. She sets herself a definite aim: to write directly to her daughter Bea and educate her about class relations, "die Welt der Küchenboden, Arbeitsteilung, Arbeitsverteilung, Putzjobs, . . . das große Auf- und Abrechnen, monetär wie emotional" (*ST*, 12; the world of kitchen floors, division of labor, distribution of tasks, cleaning jobs, . . . the general settling of accounts, both financial and emotional).

There is nothing grand about the room in which this exercise in enlightenment takes place: Resi pens the letter to her daughter from a desk she has managed to squeeze into her former pantry with the aid of a few straddling dowels. In "diesen zwei Quadratmetern neben der Berliner Altbauküche" (*ST*, 13; these two square meters next to the kitchen of her old apartment building in Berlin), various factors intensify the dynamics of Resi's writing: the makeshift nature of the workspace; the noises carrying through from the kitchen; her children's voices; questions from her husband. This temporary space in Resi's repurposed pantry is paradigmatic of her writing, which cannot escape the constant interruptions or her everyday chores and responsibilities. As a kind of writing that is forced to keep asserting itself in literary reflections about the self-empowering potency of narration, this is precisely where the precarity of the writing process comes to the fore. Just as the pantry must be established and appropriated as a place in which to write—"Ich kann das Brett, das ich mir mithilfe von Spreizdübeln zwischen die bröckeligen Altbauwände meiner Kammer geschraubt habe, als 'Schreibtisch' bezeichnen, kann immer weiter von 'meiner' Kammer reden und sie damit zu meiner machen" (*ST*, 41–42; I can call the board I've screwed between the crumbling old walls of my pantry a "desk," I can keep talking about "my" little room and, by doing so, [I can] make it mine)—Resi also says that her identity as a narrator and an author is a status she ascribes to herself: "[I]ch bin die Protagonistin der Geschichte, außerdem noch die Erzählerin und obendrein Schriftstellerin von Beruf!" (*ST*, 42; I am the protagonist of the story, as well as the narrator and, to boot, a writer by trade!).

The first chapter thus exposes the precarious circumstances in which the protagonist lives, and this precarity characterizes not only the subject matter of Resi's work but also its aesthetics. Provoked by the impending

loss of her Berlin apartment, Resi's writing qualifies as a form of "homeless" writing both in a literal and a metaphorical sense: no longer at home in the bourgeois narrative tradition, her writing has been forced to reflect on itself. At the same time, the protagonist's mission to inform and educate her daughter about class relations also becomes the aesthetic agenda of her project. Resi needs to find a form that will do justice to her personal experiences; the kind of storytelling that owns its vulnerability and susceptibility to errors and turns these into aesthetically productive conditions.

In an attempt to shed light on the prevailing class relations, the narrator and protagonist scrutinizes and interprets the stories she encounters in everyday life against the grain. For example, in her subsequent analyses of disagreements with her friends about experiences from their youth, she exposes certain narrative structures and patterns of argumentation which she believes offer misleading explanations of the reasons for inequality in society. The potency of these narratives becomes particularly apparent in cases where they are disseminated as established and generally accepted truths or embedded in common phrases and sayings—as is the case with the eviction notice, which does not even require that the recipient be addressed directly. Resi questions the "Leitsätze[ ] einer angeblich gesellschaftlichen Übereinkunft, die sich—plump plausibilisierend—'gesunder Menschenverstand' nennt" (*ST*, 24; principles of a so-called social compact which—in a clumsy attempt to gain credibility—is referred to as "common sense"). She picks up on a number of deceptively potent "Wörter, Sprüche und Geschichten" (*ST*, 19; words, sayings, and narratives) that are uttered in throwaway remarks and circulate in what Iris Radisch scornfully refers to as the "Niederungen des Alltags" (lowlands and depressions of everyday life), generally flying under the radar of supposedly "literature-worthy" material. These particular narratives are exposed in chapter headings such as "Weiß man doch" (what did you think would happen?), "Selbst schuld" (it's your fault), and "Wie man's macht" (how it's done), providing the focal point of the narrative attention. The ideological point at which these sayings intersect is the alleged choice with which differences in living standards and social status are declared as mere options. The throwaway remark "Weiß man doch" (*ST*, 7; what did you think would happen?) uttered by her friend, the finger-pointing at nursery (see *ST*, 39) with the phrase "Selbst schuld" (*ST*, 30; it's your fault) or the expression "Tja. Ein kurzes griffiges Synonym für 'Weiß man doch'. Ein Wort wie eine Ohrfeige" (*ST*, 179; "Oh well": a short, pithy synonym for "what did you think would happen?" A phrase like a slap in the face) are all examples of the "Verschleierungstaktiken" (*ST*, 159; cover-up tactics) her friends employ to deflect any mention of their privileged status, along with everyday snippets of wisdom like "Beim Geld hört die Freundschaft auf" (*ST*, 40; short reckonings

make long friends) or religious adages like "Man darf sein Haus nicht auf Sand bauen!" (*ST*, 53; . . . like a foolish man who built his house on the sand).

Distinct ideological viewpoints also come to the fore in the friends' discussion of options. Resi's former friends reprimand her for publicly disrespecting them when they had actually offered to loan her the money to get on board with the *Baugruppe* (a construction group comprised of small-scale investors who pool their resources to commission a cohousing project in which they will occupy a flat). Resi, by contrast, sees her friends' offer as nothing but an attempt to conceal the fundamental financial differences they have inherited so that they "[sich nicht] mehr schämen müssen angesichts ungerechter Verteilung" (*ST*, 94; no longer have to feel ashamed because of the unequal distribution) of wealth.[11] "Mitmachen" (joining in) is not an option for Resi; in her opinion, this would be tantamount to endorsing a project which, "in mildem Beige gehalten[en]" (*ST*, 94; with its beige-colored) façade and "den durchscheinenden Materialien, die dennoch der Abschottung dienen" (*ST*, 91; transparent materials, which nevertheless serve as a partition), symbolizes the very circumstances she is trying to expose to her daughter. Rather than concealing these differences, Resi insists on bringing them to light.

In the third category of narratives, which I will refer to here as "appeasement stories" based on the effect they produce, Resi also demonstrates how less privileged individuals strive to identify with certain potent narratives. The focus here is on the element of choice, obscuring

11 The shame experienced by those who have broken away from their background milieu but never really "arrive" in their new environment despite apparently managing to improve their social rank is a central theme in stories of social advancement. However, the shame experienced by members of the left-leaning bourgeois milieu who are forced to confront their own position of privilege through their encounters with the upwardly mobile is rarely addressed in literature. This is probably because in Germany widely discussed autofiction by authors such as Didier Eribon, Annie Ernaux, or Édouard Louis usually takes the perspective of the upwardly mobile individual rather than that of their more privileged counterparts. By creating a conflict that results in the upwardly mobile protagonist being ousted from her circle of friends, Anke Stelling pulls off the task of addressing the shame experienced by the left-leaning members of the middle class without resorting to what Resi views as an ideologically suspect hermeneutic of empathy. Consider Resi's outbursts against her mother's willingness to understand the "adversary": "Wenn meine Mutter nur im Ansatz ihre eigene Anwältin gewesen wäre—anstatt durch Plädoyers und Verständnis für die Gegenseite ihren eigene Schmerz zu betäuben—dann hätte ich als Kind vielleicht eine Chance gehabt, *sie* zu verstehen." (*ST*, 88, emphasis in the original; If only my mother had stood up for herself just a little bit—instead of dulling her own pain by pleading the case for the opposition and understanding [where they are coming from]—then perhaps as a child I would have had a chance to understand *her*).

certain structurally determined conditions of privilege and allowing the "underdogs" to come to terms with meritocratic "winner narratives" in order to dodge the stigma of victimhood. Such stories include the fable of the fox who placates himself by telling himself the grapes that are dangling out of his reach are too sour for his taste (*ST*, 25). Other examples include simple formulaic phrases used for reassurance—the counterparts to the "Weiß man doch" (what did you think would happen) of those with power—such as "'Ich versteh schon' oder 'Wird schon' oder 'Halb so wild,' 'Alles ist gut'" (*ST*, 37; "I get it" or "it'll be okay" or "never mind, "everything's fine"), but which also express "Verständnis für die Gegenseite" (*ST*, 88; an understanding for the opposition), which is something that both strikes and disgusts Resi. These "Geschichten voll ungesühnter Ungerechtigkeit" (ST, 85; stories full of unatoned injustice) illustrate the myriad ways in which humiliation and powerlessness are experienced by those with a lower economic and social standing. At the same time, Resi insists that she has "alles, vor allem die Gegenseite, durchschaut und verstanden" (*ST*, 85; seen through and understood it all, especially the opposition). Resi criticizes this attitude and the supposed moral superiority that feeds on this understanding for the privileged members of society. She calls this as an "Abwehrverständnis" (*ST*, 84; defensive understanding) that suppresses and stands in the way of the "gerechten Zorn[ ] und schneidende[ ] Erkenntnis" (*ST*, 84; righteous anger and cutting realization) that could actually bring about a change in the prevailing circumstances.

Returning to the desideratum mentioned in the first chapter, that is, the need for a kind of narration that takes its own precarious circumstances into account, the use of various kinds of narrative material in the novel's construction could be construed as an attempt to circumnavigate the prevailing power narratives with a polyphonic aesthetic. But in view of the above, this would appear not to be the case. Resi deconstructs the deceptively potent sayings, words, and stories, using them as set pieces and variants of a narrative "Verschleierungstaktik" (*ST*, 159; concealment tactic). The variety to be found here is not an example of a polyphonic aesthetic. Rather, it is clear from Resi's analysis of these sayings, words, and stories that they are all merely different manifestations of the same dominant meritocratic narrative. A poetics of precarious narration whose primary process consists in deconstructing existing formulations merely serves to expose the narratives that stand in the way of autonomous, independent narration. Rather than overcoming the dominant discourse, this approach instead remains tied to the narratives controlled by those in power. That said, the project of precarious narration does come to the fore in discussions of the status and social significance of art in relation to Resi's publications. The narrative features articulated and discussed in this context are the focal point of this next section.

Elements of a Poetics of Precarious Narration

Repeated references are made to Resi's previous publications throughout *Schäfchen im Trockenen*; most notably, the "böse Buch" (*ST*, 104; evil book) is present from start to finish. This wrathful book plays a key role in the breakdown of Resi's friendship, and it is also indirectly to blame for the impending loss of her apartment in Prenzlauer Berg. This crisis then fuels the narrator's mission to educate her daughter and gain a deeper understanding of herself as a person through her work. Various concepts of literature are presented in the dispute that ensues between Resi and her friends when the "böse Buch" is published, and these concepts provide insights into various elements of a poetics of precarious narration.

The genesis of the "böse Buch" brings us back to the question of how it is possible to critically describe and circumvent the dominant narratives and their aesthetic conventions from a minority position. Resi comes face to face with the irresolvable internal contradictions of the concept of subversion when she reluctantly accepts an assignment for a Friday night television program. The producer tells her the film is about a mother "die ihre Armut vor ihrer Tochter verbirgt" (*ST*, 104; who hides her poverty from her daughter). When Resi expresses her doubts as to whether the theme makes for a relaxed start to the weekend, the producer tries to reassure her by saying "Das soll nichts Schweres werden" (we'll keep it light) and stressing that the "komödiantische Versteckspiel" (hiding act) is the "Kern der Geschichte" (*ST*, 104; heart of the story). Working within the constraints of the feelgood movie formula, Resi tries to come up with a parodical idea that goes against the dominant ideology. She creates a mother figure who "wie bekloppt Do it Yourself betreibt, damit ihre Tochter alles hat, was sie sich wünscht" (*ST*, 105; runs around like a madwoman doing everything herself so that her daughter can have everything she wants), but when her daughter says she wants a tablet, "gerät die Mutter dann doch an ihre Grenze und behauptet, dass eine Laterna Magica aus Tonpapier so ungefähr dasselbe sei, und die Tochter meint: Na ja" (*ST*, 105; the mother reaches her limits and claims that a *laterna magica* made from sugar paper is more or less the same thing, to which her daughter replies: oh well). Resi's suggestion is rejected, of course. The producer prefers the story of a mother who succeeds against all odds: "[Wäre es nicht] schöner, wenn die Mutter zum Beispiel Cupcakes backen und damit dann doch Geld verdienen würde, wovon sie der Tochter zum Schluss ein echtes Tablet kauft" (*ST*, 105; wouldn't it be nicer if, for example, the mother were to bake cupcakes and make money from it so that she could buy her daughter a real tablet with it at the end?). As Resi sees it, this would turn the film itself into an act of hiding, since it "privatisiert" (privatizes) the mother's poverty and obscures the "gesellschaftliche[] Unrecht" (*ST*, 56; social injustice) at the root of

her disadvantage. Resi turns her back on the project and decides to write her own evil book: "[D]as war das Ende der Zusammenarbeit mit der Produzentin und das Ende dieses Auftrags und der Anfang der Arbeit an meinem bösen Buch" (*ST*, 106; that was the end of the cooperation with the producer and the end of that job. It was also the beginning of my work on my evil book).

Resi's account of her failed television project is another example of how social injustice is portrayed as a conciliatory tale of self-improvement that celebrates personal effort and individual determination, that is, another variation of the dominant meritocratic narrative. Another matter is the rejection of Resi's suggestion for the plot and her subsequent decision to write her own book, which could arguably be interpreted as a refusal of the opportunity to navigate these lucrative formats and their conventions through ironic appropriation and subversion without losing artistic integrity.

The connection between aesthetic principles and class-specific ideology is also addressed in the portrayal of the reception of Resi's "evil" book, in the anger it provokes and the debates that ensue with her friends. As the following exchange illustrates, Resi and her friends—represented by Ulf—possess different ideas about what literature should and can do:

> "Stell dir vor, über dich würde geschrieben."
> "Ja."
> "Und wie gefällt dir das?"
> "Das muss mir nicht gefallen."
> "Du hast Intimsphären verletzt!"
> "Das tut mir leid."
> "Das kommt mir aber nicht so vor. Du siehst so aus, als würdest du es jederzeit wieder tun."
> "Ja, das stimmt. Weil ich glaube, dass es notwendig ist."
> "Es ist notwendig, andere zu verletzen?"
> "Ja, ich fürchte schon."
> "Und dann wunderst du dich, dass sie nicht mehr mit dir reden?"
> "Ja. Dass sie nicht sehen können, was der Anlass ist. Dass sie nur Beispiele sind, dass es um mehr geht."
> "Um dich."
> "Ja, natürlich um mich! Ich leide darunter, zum Schweigen verdammt zu sein!" (*ST*, 21)

> ["Imagine someone were to write about you."
> "Okay."
> "How would you like that?"
> "I wouldn't have to like it."
> "What you did was a violation of privacy!"
> "I'm sorry."

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> "Doesn't seem like it to me. You look as though you'd do it again in an instant."
>
> "Yes, you're right. Because I think it's necessary."
>
> "[You think] it's necessary to hurt others?"
>
> "Yes, I'm afraid so."
>
> "And you're surprised they won't speak to you anymore?"
>
> "Yes! [I'm surprised] they can't see what it's really about, that they're just examples and it's about more [than them]."
>
> "About you, you mean."
>
> "Yes, of course it's about me! I'm damned to stay quiet, and that's the problem!"]

Ulf believes that protecting their privacy is the biggest issue, whereas Resi insists that they're just examples and that it is about more than them, that it was necessary to write the book. But to Ulf's mind, Resi has violated her friends' privacy with her book and has gone against "die Regeln" (the rules). Discretion is another unwritten rule in their friendship group: "Schmutzige Wäsche wird nicht in der Öffentlichkeit gewaschen" (*ST*, 14; you don't air your dirty laundry in public). But as far as Resi is concerned, her friend's insistence on being perceived and respected as distinct individuals is another sign of their privilege. In her view, her friends' recourse to their supposed right to privacy merely serves to protect the privileges they have inherited. By publicly highlighting her friends' head start in life—something she herself never had—she believes that she is questioning the prevailing (social) conditions. "[E]twas zu wissen und darüber zu reden—oder gar noch darüber zu schreiben und es dann zu veröffentlichen—ist zweierlei. Indem es in der Zeitung stand, stand es zur Debatte" (*ST*, 93; knowing something and talking about it—or even writing about it and then publishing it—are two different things. When it appeared in the newspaper, it was [suddenly] up for debate).

Another aspect that Resi views with equal suspicion as her friends' claim to discretion and privacy, thus protecting their privileges, is their preference for "echte Literatur":

> Echte Literatur hat Personal. Leute, die sich dafür hergeben, erzählt zu werden—und einem damit das eigene Erzähltwerden vom Leibe halten. Dienstleister sind das, Handlanger. . . . Man kann sich an Personal gewöhnen. Wo Neureiche noch vor ihren Putzfrauen herputzen und sich vor den Blicken ihrer Au-Pair-Mädchen genieren, sind für Adlige die Butler ein Teil ihrer selbst. (*ST*, 182–83)

> [Real literature has its own personnel. People who sell themselves to be part of a story—so that others can keep their lives private. Service providers, manual workers, that kind of thing. . . . You can get used to staff. While the nouveau riche still can't help but clean up before

> their cleaner arrives and are embarrassed to look their au-pair girl in the eyes, aristocrats see their butlers as part of who they are.]

By making this comparison between the "personnel" in literature and the staff in upper-class and aristocratic households, Resi gives us an insight into certain elements and connections which, in her view, have enabled the bourgeois literary tradition to impose and establish its own categories of perception and value as the markers of "real literature." The domestic staff take care of reproductive work: things like cooking, washing, cleaning, and providing care. Nothing new comes from their work; their tasks are repetitive and transitory. The creative work is left to those who are freed from the daily grind: these privileged few can dedicate their time to making "real literature" because other people are taking care of the essential day-to-day tasks.

Resi's understanding of what is generally regarded as "echte Literatur" (real literature) is different. According to this common conception, "echte Literatur" is not "tainted" by the unjust conditions of its production; rather, this literature has a certain "Stringenz, eine erkennbare Einheit" (*ST*, 41; rigor, a recognizable whole); it is "gut gebaut[] [und] elegant komponiert[]" (*ST*, 42; well-formed and elegantly composed). Pleasure seems to be the predominant mode of reception in this understanding of art: it is best enjoyed "am Feierabend, bei einem Glas Wein" (*ST*, 183; in the evening with a glass of wine).

Resi regards her own writing and narration not as a kind of literature "mit Hauspersonal" (with domestic staff), rather as the literature *of the* domestic staff, the "sogenannten einfachen Leute" (so-called simple folk) that have long served as protagonists but have always struggled to tell their stories on their own authority. In contrast to those elegant compositions conceived as a result of unbridled creativity, her writing process bears all the marks of mechanical labor: "Sammeln und Wuseln, Abwägen und Aufnehmen" (*ST*, 183; gathering [things] and scurrying about, making adjustments and picking [things] up). Much like these vital yet repetitive tasks, an existential significance is attached to art and literature here: in Resi's view, this effort is necessary "um zu verstehen, zu werden, zu überleben" (*ST*, 183; to understand, to be, to survive). Truth, rather than aesthetic enjoyment, is the key to this understanding of art.

Authorial Poetics: *Engaged Literature* as *Parrhesia*

The narrator offers a possible interpretation of her writing in the penultimate chapter of the novel. As mentioned at the start of this essay, Resi identifies herself as a *parrhesiastes*, that is, someone who speaks the truth. Whether the concept of *parrhesia* allows the characteristics of precarious narration to be incorporated into an independent poetics without

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

potentially reproducing the categories on which the processes of minoritization are based[12] is something I will consider in the final section. But for now, I would like to focus on pulling together the categories and characteristics of precarious narration that Resi extracts in her analysis of the "Verschleierungstaktik[en]" (*ST*, 159; concealment tactics) used by her friends. Here, I aim to demonstrate the points at which precarious narration connects with existing traditions and discourses of the political in literature.

First of all, it should be noted that despite the novel's obvious references to topical political themes, *Schäfchen im Trockenen* gains its "politische[] Semantik nicht aufgrund [seiner] *Erzählung der Politik, sondern aufgrund* [seiner] *Erzählung des Politischen*" (political semantics not based its *narration of politics, but based on [its] narration of the political*).[13] Stelling's novel is not concerned with "konkrete[] Institutionen oder Fragen des Politikbetriebs" (specific institutions or matters of political business). Instead of focusing on the characters and their actions, the book is more interested in narratives and narrative strategies, or what Thomas Ernst refers to as the "Aushandlungen des Politischen durch die Gesellschaft" (societal negotiations of the political).[14] The social structures underpinning the novel come to light through the narrator's analysis of words, sayings, and stories as a result of various processes of narrative negotiation. "[D]ie Sichtbarmachung des Imaginären/Fiktionalen [ist] produktiv für das Politische" (the process of making the imaginary/fictitious visible [is] productive for the political),[15] but this is only the case in an indirect sense when it comes to the goal of

12 The paradox of disassociation is one of the irresolvable internal contradictions of the subversion discourse. In this connection, Thomas Ernst discusses the German social beat movement, whose texts are "durchdrungen . . . von *zahlreichen dichotomischen Distinktionsbewegungen gegen die Regularien und Repräsentanten des Literaturbetriebs*" (brimming with *dichotomous distinctions that rail against the rules and representatives of the literary industry*). Here, he describes the same paradoxical movement: "Die *affirmative Konstruktion einer starken Eigengruppe* führt jedoch zugleich zur problematischen Rekonstruktion jener Kategorien, die den Minorisierungsprozessen zugrunde liegen" (However, the *affirmative construction of a strong in-group* leads to a problematic reconstruction of the categories on which the processes of minoritization are based." Thomas Ernst, *Literatur und Subversion: Politisches Schreiben in der Gegenwart* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 484, emphasis in the original.

13 Stefan Neuhaus and Immanuel Nover, "Einleitung: Aushandlungen des Politischen in der Gegenwartsliteratur," in *Das Politische in der Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Stefan Neuhaus and Immanuel Nover (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 3–18, here 5–6, emphasis in the original.

14 Neuhaus and Nover, "Aushandlungen des Politischen," 6.

15 Neuhaus and Nover, "Aushandlungen des Politischen," 9, footnote 32.

developing a poetics of precarious narration. A storytelling exercise whose sole aim is to expose the concealment tactics in the dominant narratives and aesthetic forms will inevitably remain trapped in these same narratives and forms. The very idea that social injustice is obscured by certain narratives, and that all that is needed to "lift the veil" is for a critical narrative voice to come along and question the ideology, so that another story and a different reality can come to and people in minoritized positions can speak for themselves, is based on an outdated concept of the capitalist economic system. According to Thomas Ernst: "Während es früher . . . möglich war, . . . klare Gegnerschaften zu benennen und die Körper der Feinde zu bezeichnen, haben sich die klaren Dichotomien" (Whereas it used to be . . . possible to identify clear oppositions and identify the enemy . . ., clear dichotomies have been) increasingly disintegrating under the "Bedingungen der ökonomischen Globalisierung" (conditions of economic globalization). Consequently, the "gegenwärtigen Herrschaftsverhältnisse" (present power structures) stem from a series of complex strategies of internalization.[16] The traditional forms of resistance no longer apply here because the neoliberal order is flexible and supplies contradictions and caveats. Any criticism of the system must therefore "auf einen 'Standpunkt' verzichten und so flexibel werden wie ihre Gegenstände" (dispense with a "standpoint" and be as flexible as its objects).[17] This form of intra-system subversion is rejected in *Schäfchen im Trockenen* based on the example of Resi's abandoned television film project. Resi's preferred mode of narration—i.e., the allegedly enlightening sort—does not try to mimic the "Windungen der Schlange" (serpent's coils);[18] rather it is marked by an attitude of disassociation and generates the binary patterns typically found in traditional models of engaged literature:[19] private life versus public life; highlighting collaboration ("joining in") over difference; telling the stories of others (the

16 Ernst, *Literatur und Subversion*, 35.

17 Ernst, *Literatur und Subversion*, 36. Here, Ernst is quoting from Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, "Einleitung," in *Glossar der Gegenwart*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004), 9–16, here 14.

18 Ernst, *Literatur und Subversion*, 36.

19 In a later essay, Ernst writes that his study *Literatur und Subversion* describes a paradigmatic shift "von einer *engagierten Literatur* der öffentlichen Intellektuellen und politischen Inhalte zu einer *subversiven Literatur* . . ., die auf die relativierte gesellschaftliche Bedeutung der Literatur und ihrer Autor*innen mit anderen ästhetischen und inhaltlichen Formen reagiert" (from [the kind of] *engaged literature* that deals with intellectual and political issues in society to a *subversive literature* . . . that reacts to the relativized social significance of the literature and its authors with different aesthetic forms and content). Thomas Ernst, "Engagement oder Subversion? Neue Modelle zur Analyse politischer

"personnel") versus talking about oneself; the aesthetics of self-government versus aesthetics of the other ("gathering and scurrying about"). Furthermore, the strong narrative voice—which is repeatedly characterized and asserted in the novel, filtering the various voices and narratives in the novel through her own political attitudes—is very much in keeping with an aesthetics and poetics of engaged literature.[20] One might now conclude that the novel attempts to achieve its desideratum of developing a poetics of precarious narration by reviving the obsolete concept of engaged literature, focusing on the authorial voice and its representation. This assumption is reinforced by Resi's invocation of the concept of *parrhesia* along the same lines as Michel Foucault, as the following demonstrates.[21]

The book that has caused Resi so much trouble earns her a literary prize. But when the award ceremony comes around, Resi struggles with the goodwill that is "zwangsläufig" (inevitably) shown toward "Worte für Wut" (*ST*, 256; words of rage) in literary institutions. She also grapples with her own willingness to accept this favorable treatment. Later, when she is standing on the street after the ceremony, she has the feeling that prizes are merely a form of ritualized defense: "Jetzt hat sie doch ihren Preis, die olle Resi, also muss niemand mehr bemerken, dass ihr Name nicht auf Theresia, sondern auf Parrhesia zurückgeht" (*ST*, 259; Now good old Resi finally has her prize; now nobody will notice that her name comes from parrhesia, not Theresia).

The word *parrhesia* describes "the activity that consists in saying everything: *pan rema*. Parrhesiazesthai is 'telling all.'"[22] In view of the etymology of the term, it is clear that Resi's decision "alles zu erzählen" (*ST*, 11; to tell all) and "ununterbrochen die Wahrheit [zu sagen]" (*ST*,

Gegenwartsliteraturen," in *Das Politische in der Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Neuhaus and Nover, 21–44, here 21, emphasis in the original.

20 See Immanuel Nover's essay on Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Schutzbefohlenen*, where Jelinek's text is described as an example of political literature that goes beyond "littérature engagée." Immanuel Nover, "Wer darf sprechen? Stimme und Handlungsmacht in Aischylos' *Die Schutzflehende*n und Elfriede Jelineks *Die Schutzbefohlenen*," in *Das Politische in der Literatur der Gegenwart*, ed. Neuhaus and Nover, 323–39, here 338.

21 The idea that Resi's understanding of *parrhesia* is based on Foucault seems plausible based on the biographic information in the novel: we know from the descriptions of the experiences she shared with her friends that Resi studied humanities in Berlin during the nineties—she could hardly have avoided Foucault in her milieu at this time. Even Resi's husband, Sven, references Foucault; the name serves as an intertextual reference in the novel (see *ST*, 135).

22 Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France 1983/84*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 9.

37; to perpetually speak the truth) would characterize her as a *parrhesiastes*. Her decision to directly address her daughter to enlighten her on the prevailing circumstances also tallies with her self-conception as a truth-teller. The act of communication established here is typical of *parrhesia*, in that the truth-telling exercise takes the form of "spiritual guidance"[23] with the aim of helping the "pupil being addressed" gain his or her "own sovereignty."[24]

Parrhesia can take various forms. According to Foucault, the most important prerequisite for the act of telling the truth is the "fundamental bond between the truth spoken and the thought of the person who spoke it."[25] This is also the common thread between concepts of engaged literature and authorship: the truth spoken must conform to the behavior and lifestyle of the person telling the story. Another essential aspect of the act of truth-telling is the risk involved, or indeed the courage required from the *parrhesiastes*. The risk, of course, is that the truth spoken could undermine the relationship between the two interlocutors, calling into question the very relationship that made the act of truth-telling possible in the first place.[26] In extreme cases, the truth may even "put the very life of the person who speaks at risk, at least if his interlocutor has power over him and cannot bear being told the truth."[27] The conflict Resi sparks with the book she has written as an exercise in telling the truth, a conflict that definitely puts her survival at risk, is subsequently declared a parrhesiastic primal scene when the etymological roots of her name and thus her true identity are revealed at the end of the book. And in the same chapter, as if to reiterate and validate Resi's status as a truth-teller, she also presents herself as a modern Cynic[28] who—albeit after accepting the prize for her book, hence having "mitgemacht" (joined in)—urinates between two cars and resolves to stop "[sich] dem Betrieb zu empfehlen" (*ST*, 259; serving the establishment).[29]

23 See Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981/82*, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

24 Michael Ruoff, *Foucault-Lexikon: Entwicklung—Kernbegriffe—Zusammenhänge* (Paderborn: Fink, 2013), 222.

25 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 11.

26 See Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 11.

27 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 12.

28 Because of their unconcealed life—they urinate and masturbate in public—Foucault describes the Cynics as the prototypical truth-tellers (see Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 243).

29 Resi's act of relieving herself in public is also preceded by her encounter with a homeless woman: the woman, portrayed by Resi as a Cynic, urinates with her trousers down in full view in Friedrichstraße subway station: "Alles war zu sehen, ihr Poloch, ihre Vulva." (You could see everything, her butthole, her

As the examples above show, the references to *parrhesia* in *Schäfchen im Trockenen* are embedded in the construction of the text and come to light in the action and the narrator's reflections on her own work. She takes the concept of *parrhesia* and adapts it to create her own model of authorship. The emphasis on the narrator's position, the fundamental importance attached to the individual playing this role and the interest in her way of life, guaranteeing the credibility and value of the things she says, and finally, the *ethos* of truthfulness are all typical features of the act of truth-telling, and they are also integral to the objectives of engaged literature as described by Thomas Ernst.[30] The focus here is on the real author and her engagement with public life. Aesthetic processes at text level either have no place or only play a very minor role in this model of political literature.

The concept of truth-telling categorically rules out the possibility for an intermediary, since it involves a face-to-face exchange: "So Diogenes and Alexander are face to face and, from that point of view, completely symmetrical."[31] Through *parrhesia*, existence (bios) is constituted "as an object of aesthetic elaboration and perception: *bios* as a beautiful work."[32] The act of truth-telling itself rules out any desire to create an aesthetic form, at least at a conceptual level. Of course, this claim to truthfulness in *parrhesia* gives rise to suspicion against the possibility of any form of composition that is intentionally aesthetic in its approach. Aesthetic techniques like rhetoric, suspicious processes "which enable the person speaking to say something which may not be what he thinks at all"[33] could break the "bond between the person speaking and what he says,"[34] a bond which—as mentioned above—is integral to the act of *parrhesia*.

Even if one does not share Foucault's opinion of rhetoric in terms how it relates to *parrhesia*,[35] it is true that the person speaking must identify with what is being said—regardless of *how* it is being said—in order

vulva.) The sight is an "Offenbarung" (*ST* 174; revelation) for Resi; she "will die Frau neben dem Fahrstuhl werden" (*ST*, 175; wants to be the woman by the elevator), she wants to be "derart frei" (*ST*, 175; free like that).

30 See Ernst, *Literatur und Subversion*, 26–29.

31 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 276.

32 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 162.

33 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 13.

34 Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth*, 14.

35 Foucault's conception of rhetoric and *parrhesia* as irreconcilable opposites has been described as flawed and ahistorical, particularly from the perspective of the classical rhetorical tradition: "Foucault programmatically conceives of *parrēsia* as conceptually opposed to rhetoric, and his genealogy ignores the treatment of *parrēsia* within the rhetorical tradition." Arthur E. Walzer, "Parrēsia, Foucault, and the Classical Rhetorical Tradition," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 43, no. 1 (2013): 1–21, here 2.

for the act of *parrhesia* to take place. The truthfulness of the act of *parrhesia* is not due to its aesthetics, rather it lies in the figure of the *parrhesiastes*. A poetics of precarious narration that invokes the concept of *parrhesia* casts the author figure in the role of the *parrhesiastes*. Hence, the author tells the truth about the precarious circumstances and the people exposed to these conditions, which may include himself or—in Resi's case—herself. However, an authorial poetics of *parrhesia* which materializes in the socially engaged advocacy of an author figure is not conducive to the desideratum of a precarious narrative form that conveys precarious circumstances in an aesthetic sense without essentializing, categorizing, or reproducing this precarity: for the sheep to find their place under the shelter of strong authorship, they must remain sheep.

—Translated by Isabel Adey

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Limited Editions: Politics of Liveness at the Berliner Theatertreffen, 2017–19

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Introduction

The history of liveness is contentious, and particularly so in the theater. There is no definitive consensus on what "liveness" is exactly, but the term is most often used as a shorthand to describe the ephemeral quality attributed to a so-called live play. This usage suggests spontaneity or uniqueness, the idea of a performance existing for a limited time only, as well as the opportunity for error, surprise, or interaction with an audience, all within a shared time and space. However, in the last thirty years, competing and often contradictory definitions of liveness have provoked fierce debate within the field of theater studies, particularly as digital tools, platforms, and cultures have become increasingly commonplace in performance-making practices across the world. During the COVID-19 crisis, which began shortly before the completion of this article, many theaters and other traditionally live performance venues responded creatively to lockdown and social distancing policies by broadcasting livestreamed performances on social media platforms or digging into their archives to share recordings made of past productions. This response has, unsurprisingly, received mixed reviews: for some, these digitally mediated forms of live performance are an acceptable substitute in times of necessity; for others, they are a valuable, enjoyable mode of performance in their own right; and there are also many audience members who consider these digital modes of performance to be wholly unsuccessful.

In this article, I examine the use of digitally mediated performances as a replacement or substitute for traditionally live performances at the Berliner Theatertreffen in the years 2017–19 and argue that liveness is contextual, contingent, and often a socio-political tool, rather than a fixed, ontological state. Matthew Reason and Anja Mølle Lindelof write that "the status and significance of the live in contemporary performance has become contested: perceived variously as a marker of ontological difference, a promotional slogan or a mystical evocation of cultural value," and propose that it is more important to ask how liveness matters, and

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.008 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to whom, rather than to focus upon what precisely liveness *is*.[1] In this spirit, I consider the ways in which the Theatertreffen confers value upon different forms of liveness, and argue that the hierarchy of cultural values created in this way is explicitly political.

Scholarly approaches to liveness as a phenomenon are often based on performance scholar Peggy Phelan's and media scholar Phillip Auslander's contrasting ontological definitions of the term. However, as Gary Peters explains in his essay "What is a live event?," their "somewhat entrenched" definitions share the suggestion that liveness is defined by its relation to mediating technologies:[2] Phelan proposes that liveness exists only in the complete absence of mediation or documentation, while Auslander argues that liveness is "historical and contingent"—that its meaning continues to change as mediating technologies continue to evolve. Although I explore the work of both Auslander and Phelan in greater detail in this article, I avoid analyzing liveness in purely ontological or binary terms. Instead, I demonstrate how forms of liveness can be created, marketed, and sold—and that it is more productive to examine the political and cultural contexts for different forms of liveness, in this case, the divergent forms of liveness presented within the programming of the Berliner Theatertreffen over a three-year period. These divergent forms range from the fully intentional, planned digital broadcasting of pre-recorded performances to instances when unforeseen circumstances required digital intervention. Throughout, I propose that using a fluid, contextually-driven understanding of liveness to examine non-conventional modes of performance at the Theatertreffen can offer new insights into the hierarchy of theater experiences at the prestigious festival, and that such an understanding of liveness reveals the ramifications of this hierarchy for the festival's public.

The Berliner Theatertreffen is the foremost annual celebration of German-language theater, and it has functioned as a microcosm of the broader German-speaking theater industries since its inception in 1964. Each year a panel of judges selects the ten most "bemerkenswert," or noteworthy, productions from the previous theater seasons in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and invites these productions to be restaged in Berlin. As a selection criterion, "noteworthy" often proves controversial, but it is designed to present a cross-section of timely, innovative work. Alongside the main program, the Theatertreffen often showcases performances by emerging theater-makers, as well as public talks, workshops, and prize-giving ceremonies. One of eight "cultural beacons" that

1 Anja Mølle Lindelof and Matthew Reason, *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies 47 (New York: Routlege, 2016), 1.

2 Lindelof and Reason, *Experiencing Liveness in Contemporary Performance*, 164.

receives regular funding from the German Federal Cultural Foundation, the festival has received €1.9 million annually since 2016, a sum that is fixed until further review in 2022. As a publicly-funded festival that typically promotes and honors the work of similarly well-funded state theaters (as opposed to theaters of the "Freie Szene," Germany's independent arts scene), the Theatertreffen is fertile ground for examinations of the intersections of politics, finance, and sociocultural capital within German-language performing arts.

Theater historian William Grange writes that the Theatertreffen has always been a product of sociopolitical circumstances, noting that at the time of its inception West German theater attendance was shrinking, despite public funding for theaters increasing by 215% over the same period. He describes the festival's launch as part of "an effort to stimulate public opinion and interest in live theater," and judges that it has "proved to be extraordinarily successful, at least in terms of keeping theater in the public consciousness and helping theaters maintain their subsidies."[3] Grange's evaluation contains within it the premise of this paper: that the Theatertreffen is political in both its public-facing role and its broader, financial role within the industry—and that these politics are best revealed by an investigation of the different kinds of, and contexts for, live theater within its programming. While there is a considerable body of existing scholarship concerned with the ten "noteworthy" productions staged at the Theatertreffen each year, the field is yet to investigate the presentation and valuation of liveness within the festival's programming.[4] To do this, I examine digitally distributed forms of liveness found at the Theatertreffen between 2017 and 2019; these examples range from the livestreaming of plays as they are performed at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, the festival's main venue, to the screenings of pre-recorded performances.

I use the term "digital distribution" to refer to performances that are made available to audiences by means of digital infrastructure. This includes livestreams—a simultaneous broadcast of a performance—and the online streaming of pre-recorded material, as well as the distribution of recorded performances in brick-and-mortar venues such as cinemas

3 William Grange, *Historical Dictionary of German Theater* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 22.

4 For instance, Marvin Carlson contributed academic reports of the festival's main program to the *Western European Stages* journal from 2000 to 2012. Other scholars have researched the function of the "noteworthy" criterion, such as Urska Brodar in "The Great Ten and the Interrogation of New Theatre Forms," *Maska* 29 (2014): 200–13. The Theatertreffen also features in many historical studies of German theater, including David Barnett's *A History of the Berliner Ensemble* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Matt Cornish's *Performing Unification: History and Nation in German Theater after 1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017).

or theaters. Daisy Abbott and Claire Read address this phenomenon in the edited collection *Documenting Performance*, and argue for a "notion of unity" between performances and their documentation. They write that "[w]hilst the cinematic version of the performance may be seen as a document, in reality played seconds behind the theater due to streaming delays, its live performative qualities, and significantly its labeling as *live*, mark it as a hybrid working between performance and performance documentation."[5] Their argument for a more fluid relationship between performance and documentation indicates that a strict, ideological binary between live and not-live performance is reductive, rather than productive. Moreover, they establish the importance of analyzing liveness as a label rather than as a strict, ontological state. That a livestream, so-called because of its synchronicity with the on-stage performance, is likely to be received a split-second or more "after" the performance reveals that the market is flexible in its use of the term "live" as a label, and that there is a greater fluidity to the labeling and attribution of liveness than the supposed binary between live and not-live performance would suggest. Auslander's influential 1999 monograph *Liveness* argues that to rely on a divorce between the live and the not-live, or between a performance and its reproductions, is to rely on a binary divide that does not necessarily exist in practice, and to deny that performances of many kinds rely on mutually beneficial relationships with digital reproduction and distribution strategies. He writes that it is "reductive" to insist that any kind of contemporary art should "stand outside the ideologies and capital and reproduction that define a mediatized culture, or should be expected to do so, even in order to form an oppositional stance."[6] Yet Auslander still defines liveness in relation to mediation. Abbott and Read, meanwhile, argue for the liveness found *within* certain forms of mediation; a suggestion that this article takes up within its case studies.

My first case study discusses the so-called public viewings held by the Theatertreffen at a square in the city center and the relationship between these publicized outdoor screenings and the un-publicized, and in many ways nonpublic, livestreams sequestered within the festival's main venue. Then, I explore the case of *Die Räuber* (The Robbers), a production unable to accept its invitation to perform at the 2017 festival, and the film premiere organized to take its place. Lastly, and by way of conclusion, I examine the solutions found for *Nationaltheater Reinickendorf* (National

5 Daisy Abbott and Claire Read, "Paradocumentation and NT Live's 'Cumberhamlet,'" in *Documenting Performance: The Context and Processes of Digital Curation and Archiving*, ed. Toni Slant (London and New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 165–88, here 165.

6 Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 40.

Theater Reinickendorf) and *Das Internat* (The Boarding School), two further productions unable to attend the festival in 2018 and 2019, respectively, and question what these alternatives could mean for the future of the Theatertreffen and the theater industry more broadly.

Public Viewings, Private Stagings

The Theatertreffen's notion of a public event is most clearly illustrated by its so-called public viewing initiative. Since 2011 the Theatertreffen has produced open-air events in collaboration with television broadcaster 3sat, using the public space outside the Sony Center at Potsdamer Platz, a famous square in the west of the city center that draws tourists to its IMAX cinema and Lego World shop. The square has no reputation as a venue for theater; instead, it is home to Berlin's Film and Television Museum and the German Film Archive and the annual Berlinale Film Festival takes place just a short walk away. The square is flanked by cafés, bars, and high-end hotel chains and it is a noisy thoroughfare to choose for an outdoor screening. Potsdamer Platz is roughly 2.5 miles from the Theatertreffen's home at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele, a journey that takes around thirty minutes by public transport.

The viewings, usually held in the afternoons of one weekend within the festival's program, consist of three pre-recorded, high-quality multi-camera recordings of performances participating in the Theatertreffen that year. These recordings are then broadcast by 3sat at a later date. The viewings make use of a large, preexisting screen that hangs on the external wall of the Film and Television Museum and colorful deck chairs are arranged to create a seating area for roughly 150 audience members, although the area is open to passers-by without tickets, pre-booking, or other restrictions. Due to this open access, there are no definitive data on the number of people who participate in these screenings, but anecdotally—based upon the three years that I attended these screenings—it is extremely rare to see the seating used to its full capacity.

The Potsdamer Platz viewings are marketed with a heavy emphasis on their public nature. The phrase "Public Viewing" is displayed in bold lettering on advertising posters distributed throughout the city, alongside reminders that these events are free to attend. It is a separate advertising campaign to that used for the rest of the festival's program and this, in turn, implies that the festival's ticketed, indoor events are in some way *less* public. This is truer than perhaps the festival intends. The Festspiele building has a fixed capacity of 999 seats in its main auditorium, and each of the ten invited productions are usually staged two or three times during the festival's two-week duration. This results in an estimated thirty thousand seats available for the main program, with the most expensive priced at around fifty euro or more. The inherent limitations in terms

of seating and pricing combined with the festival's tendency to sell out within minutes of going on sale means that the public Potsdamer Platz viewings are unlikely to generate any further ticket sales for that year's festival. The Theatertreffen's committed, returning audience, with prior knowledge of the high competition for attendance, make it a slim possibility that any new audience member inspired by the public viewings could spontaneously attend the festival's main program. This goes some way toward explaining the separate advertising campaigns and even suggests that the festival and the public viewings, although linked by content, are almost entirely separate events.

It explains, too, why there is little at the public viewings to encourage an attendee to explore the rest of the Theatertreffen. There is no sense of ceremony at the screenings: no introductions, welcoming addresses, or post-show discussions as there are for the main, traditionally live program. Moreover, this ceremony is arguably a contributing factor to the sense of liveness surrounding the main program. By contrast, there is plenty of information about the public screenings at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. A screen displays promotional videos for the screenings in the foyer, advertising the public viewings as an alternative means of watching the productions to the Theatertreffen's ticket-holding audience. The times and locations of the screenings are also printed within the festival's program. This internal marketing strategy is directly targeted at the Theatertreffen's preexisting audience rather than Berlin's broader populace and suggests that the persistent framing of these literally distanced events as public is merely a half-hearted attempt at broader outreach. It could also be part of an intentional strategy to maintain the sense of exclusivity surrounding the Theatertreffen's main program.

By Phelan's understanding, audiences that access performances via digital distribution methods are not participating in a live performance experience at all. In her 1994 monograph *Unmarked*, she makes one of the most frequently cited arguments within theater studies:

> Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. . . . Performance honors the idea that a limited number of people in a specific time/space frame can have an experience of value which leaves no visible trace afterward. . . . Performance's independence from mass reproduction, technologically, economically, and linguistically, is its greatest strength.[7]

7 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 146– 47, emphasis in the original.

For Phelan, the liveness of a performance is born of limitation and ephemerality. She specifically locates cultural value within these limitations, arguing that a restricted capacity for spectatorship in terms of the time and space of the performance is integral to the valuation of an audience's experience. Phelan suggests that this value would evaporate, should that experience become in some way reproducible and, moreover, that the same value cannot be attributed to the reproduction.

In the twenty-five years since *Unmarked* was published, the relationship between digital technologies and the performing arts has changed dramatically, but in some contexts Phelan's calculations of value remain accurate. At the Theatertreffen, the logic holds: the productions invited to the Theatertreffen may never again be performed in Berlin and may even have fully completed their run at their home theater, often making it the last opportunity to watch them. Each of the productions is performed around three times at the festival, and such is the demand to see these critically acclaimed plays that they often sell out within minutes of tickets going on sale. This pressure in terms of time and money creates barriers to access and thus a system of limitation and ephemerality that functions to increase the cultural value of a production appearing at the Theatertreffen.

A similar system of cultural value is present in the event cinema industry in the United Kingdom, which presents livestreams and pre-recorded theater performances in cinemas and was valued at a reported £30 million in 2014.[8] Dominated by London's National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, it is common within the industry for the livestreamed version of a performance to be priced higher than a recorded version of that same livestream, which is regularly screened at later dates and referred to as an "encore." This clear-cut, market-based valuation of the supposed differences between the liveness of these modes of performance distribution both proves and disproves Phelan's theory: some representations of performance *can* carry a similar (financial) value to that of the live performance, provided that the representation has its own system of limitation and ephemerality that deems it "more live" than another mode of representation.

The Theatertreffen does, in fact, offer a form of livestreaming at the festival, but it is sequestered from the general public. Rather than capitalizing upon the sense that a livestream is somehow more live than a pre-recorded film in order to reach a broader audience or to generate income, as in the UK example, the Theatertreffen uses livestreaming to maintain

8 Charles Gant, "Future Looks Positive for Event Cinema after Growing Pains," *Screen Daily*, June 16, 2019, https://www.screendaily.com/features/future-looks-positive-for-event-cinema-after-growing-pains/5140382.article (accessed August 28, 2020).

the sense of exclusivity surrounding its traditionally live performances. In the Haus der Berliner Festspiele's upstairs area, known as the Bornemann Bar, there is often a simultaneous livestream of the production on stage in the adjacent auditorium, freely available to anyone present. The livestream is either projected onto the back wall of the bar, or viewable from a large screen set up for this purpose. This viewing opportunity is not advertised anywhere within the Theatertreffen's marketing materials: this decision not to advertise it could be viewed as economically driven, in the sense that a free livestream might detract from ticket sales, were it not for the festival's well-established ability to sell out its performances far in advance. Moreover, as the next case study will establish, the festival's audience (as opposed to its public) has historically lacked interest in screenings over traditionally live performances.[9] The festival could, theoretically, safely advertise these Bornemann Bar livestreams to would-be attendees unable to get a seat in the auditorium as a result of sold-out runs or price points, without concern that interest in these livestreams would supersede ticket sales. To broadcast the existence of these streams might even feel appropriately public-spirited for a state-funded festival, but instead their secretive nature makes these livestreams feel private and exclusive; they are an event open only to those with certain insider knowledge that can only be gained by visiting the venue in person, which someone without a ticket to the festival is unlikely to do.

In ontological terms, these livestreams are very different to the films produced by 3sat for the public viewings. Livestreaming is often described as a simultaneous broadcast as also in the paragraph above—and is perceived to be a direct transmission from camera to screen. "Simultaneous," however, is a slight misnomer: it is almost impossible to avoid a delay of at least a fraction of a second in the transmission from the recording equipment to a recipient's screen. Still, this near-simultaneity imbues the medium with a valuable sense of proximity to the production being streamed, in terms of a shared time and (digital) space with the performance, as Abbott and Read have established.[10] Moreover, it is common for some forms of livestreams to have less directorial input than the detailed, filmic recordings made by 3sat, due to the complex and potentially expensive nature of live video mixing: the high-quality, multi-camera livestreams presented by the United Kingdom's National Theatre, for example, cost around £250,000 each to produce. As such, the livestream facility offered by the Theatertreffen uses a format common to less

9 It is possible, however, that the prevalence of digitally distributed performances during the COVID-19 pandemic could change this for audiences attending iterations of the Theatertreffen in the future.

10 Abbott and Read, "Paradocumentation and NT Live's 'Cumberhamlet,'" 165.

expensive modes of livestreaming: a single, immovable camera, fixed at the back of the performance space.

The Theatertreffen's style of fixed-camera livestreaming always provides a full view of the stage, with several rows of the audience within frame. In some ways, this mode of digitally distributing a performance might feel more familiar to a theatergoer unused to the interventions of film editing within their theater experiences: given an unrestricted view of the entire stage, an audience member can choose where to focus their attention, as opposed to the close-ups and panning shots utilized in the National Theatre London's complex, choreographed livestreams. I return to this line of argument in the following case study, but it is important to note here that the lack of conspicuous film editing and the perception of immediate, simultaneous transmission in a livestream of this kind can convey the notion of an interference-free, almost entirely unmediated experience for the audience of the streamed production. J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin address this in *Remediation*, in their discussion of the awareness of "the new medium as a medium." They argue that each new medium "promises to reform its predecessors by offering a *more immediate or authentic experience*" but mediation, or remediation, is always an "oscillation . . . between transparency and opacity."[11] So although in ontological terms these modes of livestreaming—multiple cameras or a single, fixed gaze—do not change the live status of the stream, the visibility of the means of mediation can have a major impact on the reception of the stream and the *experience* of liveness, in a phenomenological sense.

In the last three years of the Theatertreffen, the in-house Bornemann Bar livestreams discussed above have been promoted actively only once, for the Volksbühne's production of *Faust*, directed by Frank Castorf, at the 2018 festival. A notification on the Theatertreffen's website read: "The performances will be broadcast live into the Bornemann Bar. If any seats are no longer used by the ticket holders in the second half of the show, these can be made available to successors."[12] This supposedly egalitarian approach to seat sharing reveals that the festival considers the livestream to be a means of queuing for the "real" event, rather than a performance event in its own right. There is an explicit hierarchy of value and access built into the statement: the term "successors" suggests that audience members have the possibility of *upgrading* their experience from the livestream in the bar to a seat in the auditorium, provided they are willing to wait all evening for the single, brief interval. It clearly positions the livestream as a secondary option, of less value than a seat on the other

11 J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 19, emphasis in the original.

12 Interestingly, this statement no longer remains on the archived version of this web page.

side of the wall, but the unusual advertising of the livestream facility in this instance is also embedded within a complex, industry-wide scandal.

Faust was Castorf's final production as Intendant of the Volksbühne, after taking up the post in 1992. The Volksbühne is one of Berlin's most prestigious theater houses and is funded predominantly by the city of Berlin. This funding scheme allows the Staatssekretär für Kultur (secretary of the federal state of Berlin for cultural affairs) to manage key hiring positions, and it was then-Staatssekretär Tim Renner who hired well-known Belgian curator Chris Dercon to replace Castorf in 2017 to the well-publicized outrage of the venue's staff. The controversy and protest that colored the beginning of Dercon's ill-fated and ultimately brief leadership of the Volksbühne undoubtedly prevented *Faust* from being restaged in its original venue for the Theatertreffen, which is common practice for Berlin-based productions invited to the festival, and particularly for those with a set as complicated as *Faust*'s. Instead, the full three floors of stage designer Aleksander Denic's set, replete with an underground metro station built into the revolving stage, were relocated to the Festspiele at the reported cost of five hundred thousand euro,[13] resulting in the equivalent of a publicly-funded subsidy of one hundred euro per ticket sold.[14] The investigation that followed into this enormous cost by several of the city's journalists is surely an explanation for why the Theatertreffen was suddenly eager to promote its livestreaming facilities as a viable alternative to the on-stage performances. Still, despite this unusual advertising, when the re-located *Faust* opened the festival on May 4, only eleven people were present to watch the Bornemann Bar livestream, myself included.[15]

Die Räuber: Alive or Dead?

Since an invitation to perform at the Theatertreffen is highly sought after, only serious logistical complications or ill health of the cast or crew will prevent an invited production from attending. This section takes *Die Räuber* as a case study of such exceptional circumstances: the production was quite literally too large to be restaged in Berlin for the 2017 Theatertreffen.[16] The play depends upon the use of two fully functional metal treadmills, roughly two floors in height, which are set on a

13 Martina Kaden, "B.Z. traf Castorf und Schlöndorff zum Regie-Gipfel," *B.Z. Berlin*, March 10, 2015, https://www.bz-berlin.de/kultur/b-z-traf-castorf-und-schloendorff-zum-regie-gipfel (accessed August 28, 2020).

14 Kaden, "B.Z. traf Castorf und Schlöndorff zum Regie-Gipfel."

15 Some livestream attendees were indeed "upgraded," but the system seemed unclear. I opted to watch the livestream for the entire evening.

16 "'Die Räuber' aus München nicht beim Berliner Theatertreffen," *Nachtkritik*, March 9, 2017 https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_cont

revolve. The cast are then strapped to these treadmills and march into a metaphorical void for over three hours without pause. The mass of the set was certainly unusual, but more unusual still was the solution to its absence decided upon by the Theatertreffen's organizers: a premiere for a 3sat-produced film of *Die Räuber* was held to celebrate the production. Similar in style and purpose to the films of Theatertreffen plays that 3sat creates for the Potsdamer Platz public screenings, which are then screened on TV as part of 3sat's "Starke Stücke" (Strong Plays) series, the film of *Die Räuber* was similarly screened on 3sat some months after the festival. There is no ontological difference between this film and the other 3sat productions for the Theatertreffen, but the way in which the Theatertreffen attempted to invoke a sense of liveness around the premiere makes this case unusual for the festival. Rather than being screened at Potsdamer Platz with the other 3sat recordings, the premiere for the film of *Die Räuber* was held in the main theater at the Haus der Berliner Festspiele. The event followed a hybrid model: the filming techniques were those used for the "Starke Stücke" productions, but the film was broadcast to a screen on the stage usually reserved for traditionally live performances. The cast and creative team were present at the premiere, too, making the event similar to the prize-giving ceremonies that usually accompany each production performed at the festival.

The first public announcement made about the premiere was sent via the Haus der Berliner Festspiele's Twitter account on March 9, 2017. It read: "Aufzeichnung statt Aufführung: 'Die Räuber' @residenztheater aus technischen Gründen nur als @3sat-Preview beim #theatertreffen in Berlin!" (Screening instead of staging: The Robbers @residenztheater only as @3sat-Preview due to technical reasons at #theatertreffen in Berlin!)[17] This statement contains key elements of the central debate surrounding liveness, reproduction, and digital technologies in the theater. The alliterative, oppositional phrasing of "Aufzeichnung statt Aufführung" constructs an oppositional relationship between (live) performance and (non-live) documentation, precisely in the manner used by Phelan and warned against by Auslander. This binary is then weighted with value judgments implicit within the apologetic language—"nur"—as if anticipating disappointment on the part of Theatertreffen attendees. The uneasy tone positions the preview as a secondary option, less valuable

ent&view=article&id=13720&catid=126&Itemid=100089 (accessed August 28, 2020).

17 Berliner Festspiele (@blnfestspiele), "Aufzeichnung statt Aufführung: 'Die Räuber' @residenztheater aus technischen Gründen nur als @3sat-Preview beim #theatertreffen in Berlin! https://T.Co/Cco9f8blva," Twitter, March 9, 2017, https://twitter.com/blnfestspiele/status/839794234764976128 (accessed August 28, 2020). All German to English translations are my own, unless otherwise referenced.

than the literal restaging of the play at the Festspiele would have been. There is a tension, then, between this regretful, apologetic statement and the purpose of the tweet, which is to advertise that, in some capacity, *Die Räuber* will in fact be present at the Theatertreffen, albeit in an unexpected form.

Many of the newspapers and arts publications that reported on the Festspiele's announcement mimicked the language and tone of this tweet, as well as the value judgments encoded within it. Daily newspapers *Die Welt*, the *Schwäbische Zeitung*, and news magazine *FOCUS* each published the same headline, based on reporting by the Deutsche Presse-Agentur: "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht live beim Berliner Theatertreffen" (Munich "Robbers" won't be live at the Berliner Theatertreffen).[18] More explicitly than the Theaterteffen's original tweet, this headline draws a direct connection between a supposed state of non-liveness and performance documentation, indicating that the Festspiele's use of "Aufzeichnung" is commonly interpreted as an event *without* a sense of liveness. The following day, the *Berliner Morgenpost* and *Hamburger Abendblatt* offered a slight variation: "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht wie geplant live beim Theatertreffen" (Munich "Robbers" not performing live as planned at the Theatertreffen), emphasizing the nature of the screening as a solution to a problem rather than a deliberate, stand-alone event.[19] Influential German theater criticism website *Nachtkritik* found a somewhat blunter description for the news: "Die Räuber aus München nicht beim Berliner Theatertreffen" (The Robbers from Munich, not at Berliner Theatertreffen).[20] This headline ignores the screening entirely,

18 "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht live beim Berliner Theatertreffen," *Die Welt*, March 9, 2017 https://www.welt.de/regionales/bayern/article162702030/Muenchner-Raeuber-nicht-live-beim-Berliner-Theatertreffen.html; "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht live beim Berliner Theatertreffen," *Schwäbische Zeitung*, March 9, 2017, https://www.schwaebische.de/sueden/bayern_artikel,-m%C3%BCnchner-r%C3%A4uber-nicht-live-beim-berliner-theatertreffen-_arid,10628551.html; and "Theater: Münchner 'Räuber' nicht live beim Berliner Theatertreffen," *Focus Online*, March 9, 2017, https://www.focus.de/regional/bayern/theater-muenchner-raeuber-nicht-live-beim-berliner-theatertreffen_id_6762288.html (all accessed August 28, 2020).

19 "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht wie geplant live beim Theatertreffen," *Berliner Morgenpost*, March 10, 2017, https://www.morgenpost.de/kultur/article209885333/Muenchner-Raeuber-nicht-wie-geplant-live-beim-Theatertreffen.html; and "Münchner 'Räuber' nicht wie geplant live beim Theatertreffen," *Hamburger Abendblatt*, March 10, 2017, https://www.abendblatt.de/kultur-live/article209885933/Muenchner-Raeuber-nicht-wie-geplant-live-beim-Theatertreffen.html (both accessed August 28, 2020).

20 "'Die Räuber' aus München nicht beim Berliner Theatertreffen," *Nachtkritik*, March 9, 2017, https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&

instead focusing on a supposed total absence of the play from the festival: the screening is considered to be a "no-show." A later *Nachtkritik* article on May 4 reported on Hamburg's Thalia theater withdrawing from the Theatertreffen due to a leading actor's poor health and conflated the two events: "Noch eine Absage" (yet another cancellation).[21] These three approaches to reporting on *Die Räuber* indicate the degrees of uncertainty toward the precise live-status of the screening, but find agreement in their judgment that the event is not live, or present, in the same way that a restaging of the Munich production in a Berlin theater would have been.

This verdict by the press is complicated by the insistent promotion of the screening as a "preview" by the organizers of the Theatertreffen, a description that gained even greater gravitas as a "premiere" within the event's official marketing material.[22] Calling the screening a "preview" suggested that it was exclusive and prioritized similar to the manner in which Phelan advocates for a notion of liveness based on limitation and exclusivity. Certainly the Theatertreffen used these techniques to imbue the event with a sense of liveness: the event was ticketed, which immediately limits the size of the audience, and the presence of the cast and crew at the screening was advertised far in advance. Tickets cost just five euro and included a free drink, however, and were sold online next to a text notification somewhat nervously reminding the attendee that "Diese Inszenierung kann nicht beim Theatertreffen gezeigt werden" (the production cannot not be shown at the festival). This disclaimer, within a program of otherwise traditionally "present" live performances, is a clear apology and a literal financial discount for a production perceived to be absent. Evidently the festival's audiences picked up on this unease as the screening did not come close to selling out, an unusual occurrence for a Theatertreffen event.

The disinterest in the screening from the Theatertreffen's audience could have been due to the lack of clarity around the status of the preview. The performances recorded by 3sat for the Potsdamer Platz public viewings could equally be considered previews or premieres; the films are broadcast on the 3sat channel and are available to watch in 3sat's Mediathek online archive after their presentation at the Theatertreffen. The same was true for *Die Räuber*. The only difference was in the length

view=article&id=13720:die-raeuber-aus-muenchen-nicht-beim-berliner-theatertreffen&catid=126&Itemid=100089 (accessed August 28, 2020).

21 "Berliner Theatertreffen ohne Hamburger Gastspiel," *Nachtkritik*, May 4, 2017, https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=13941&catid=126&Itemid=100089 (accessed August 28, 2020).

22 "Theatertreffen—Die Räuber," Berliner Festspiele, https://www.berliner-festspiele.de/en/berliner-festspiele/programm/bfs-gesamtprogramm/programmdetail_206952.html (accessed June 15, 2020).

of time between the films' appearances at the festival and when they became available to watch elsewhere. The recording of director Thomas Luz's play *Traurige Zauberer* (Sad Magicians), for instance, was one of the three productions presented at the public viewing in Potsdamer Platz in May 2017. It was available to watch on the online Mediathek that same weekend. *Die Räuber*, however, was not available to watch on television or via the Mediathek until November that same year. It is unclear if this delay was intended to promote interest in the premiere event, but it is the only marked difference between 3sat's treatment of *Die Räuber* and the other performances they recorded for the Theatertreffen that year.

At the premiere event, the play's director Ulrich Rasche and the film's director Peter Schönhofer were both introduced and applauded. This contributed to the ceremonial, exclusive framing of the event, but it also worked to reinforce a separation between the production and the screening. Moreover, the Theatertreffen and 3sat had invited journalists to attend and write about the filming process of *Die Räuber*, offering behind-the-scenes insights on the creation of the recording that, to date, have not been provided for the screenings presented at the public viewings. Melanie Brandl was one such journalist, and for her article "Filmreifes Theater" (Cinematic Theater) she tellingly interviewed the film's director Schönhofer, rather than Rasche. In the article, she reflects that "eine Theaterverfilmung eine Art 'Regie der Regie' sei" (that the process of filming theater is a sort of "directing of the directing") and Schönhofer describes his artistic relationship with Rasche:

> Die eigentliche Inszenierung und Kreativität ist und bleibt das Werk von Ulrich Rasche. Ich versuche, das, was ihm wichtig ist, rüberzubringen und so viel Theatergefühl wie möglich zu transportieren. Theater ist Theater, Fernsehen ist Fernsehen. Eine zweidimensionale Verfilmung wird nie das Theatererlebnis ersetzen—aber sie soll ihm nahekommen.[23]
>
> [The actual staging and creativity are, and remain, the work of Ulrich Rasche. I am trying to convey the elements of the production that are important to him, and to carry over as much of that theater feeling as possible. Theater is theater and television is television. A two-dimensional recording will never replace the theater experience, but it should come close.]

He appears eager to emphasize, on this public platform, how his own directorial process is purely in the service of Rasche's directorial vision, in

23 Melanie Brandl, "Filmreifes Theater," *Merkur*, May 19, 2017, https://www.merkur.de/kultur/in-berlin-wird-am-sonntag-eine-aufzeichnung-raeuber-gezeigt-8327413.html (accessed August 28, 2020).

a manner in keeping with the Theatertreffen's marketing of the relationship between the screening and the production. Schönhofer quite bluntly describes his role as a mediator rather than a creator, someone to convey the essence of Rasche's production across media and contexts. This is, however, at odds with the tone of the article, which focuses primarily on Schönhofer's creative process in both the interview and the photos accompanying the article, all of which are visibly behind-the-scenes shots of the filming process.

Brandl explains that the filming process required two full performances of *Die Räuber*: one with an audience present and one without, so that the cameras could be as intrusive as necessary without disrupting an audience's experience. She describes the cast's performance of the highly physical four-hour play twice in one day as a "marathon," and details how the theatrical structure of the play—the constant movement on stage without clearly demarcated scenes or intervals—complicated the filming process further.[24] Schönhofer's directorial input was required to decide when to switch between cameras and perspectives while the play is in process, "wie bei einer Live-Show" (like at a live show), she comments. She notes, too, that drummer Fabian Löbhard was required to clean his music stand prior to each filming session, as the cameras could pick up specks of dust that otherwise would not be visible to an audience.

In the interview, Schönhofer reflects in greater detail on how, paradoxically, the filming of a performance can create a sensation of even greater proximity to it for its audiences than established modes of theater spectatorship, yet this greater sense of intimacy is simultaneously a distancing from the idea of the original live performance. He says to Brandl, "jede Nahaufname fokussiert die jeweilige Person, setzt sie für den Fernsehzuschauer ins Zentrum. Da nehme ich als Regisseur also direkt Einfluss. Der Theaterzuschauer hingegen entscheidet selbst, wen er fokussiert" (each close-up focuses on an individual person and places them center-stage for the viewer. As a film director I take that as a direct influence. The theater audience, however, chooses for themselves upon whom they focus).[25] Moving on from the simple binaries of theater versus film or performance versus documentation, Schönhofer claims that he attempted to replicate the supposed autonomy of a theatergoer's gaze in his filmmaking in order to replicate a kind of "Theatergefühl," or sense of theater, within the film. Although an audience member's individual focal point is not necessarily the same as a camera's close-up, this discussion reveals an apparent desire to render his own directorial input invisible in the film of *Die Räuber*. This aligns both with Phelan's suggestion that documentation is interference, rather than performance, and Bolter and

24 Brandl, "Filmreifes Theater."
25 Brandl, "Filmreifes Theater."

Grusin's observation that innovations in mediation often seek invisibility in order to claim greater authenticity and proximity to the subject.

Schönhofer's comments and Brandl's observation of the dust on the music stand are reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's analysis of technological enhancements and the human eye in his seminal 1935 essay "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit" (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction). Unsurprisingly, the essay is central to both Auslander's and Phelan's arguments on systems of value and reproduction. Benjamin's central thesis that the presence, or "aura," of an artwork is tied to "das Hier und Jetzt des Kunstwerks—sein einmaliges Dasein an dem Orte, an dem es sich befindet" (its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be),[26] an idea that could be seen as supporting Auslander's argument for the contextual nature of liveness, or Phelan's suggestion that the removal of an artwork from its limited existence in time and space rids it of its liveness.

However, Benjamin also writes that some technologies can surpass the human eye or hand and that processes like the enlargement of an image can "Ansichten des Originals hervorheben" ("bring out those aspects of the original")[27] that would otherwise be inaccessible or even completely invisible to an onlooker; much like specks of dust on a music stand. He uses the example of an analog photograph to explain how technological reproduction "kann . . . das Abbild des Originals in Situationen bringen, die dem Original selbst nicht erreichbar sind" (can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself).[28] For instance, the substitution of *Die Räuber*, an original artwork physically unable to "reach" Berlin, with Schönhofer's film seems to be a case of a copy being *present* where the original cannot. Benjamin argues of technological reproduction, that "vor allem macht sie ihm möglich, dem Aufnehmenden entgegenzukommen" (Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway),[29] where halfway can be understood as a mediatized space between the subject of the photograph, the photograph itself, and the viewer. For Benjamin, the ability to create a seemingly un-human perspective on a work of art and the ability to distribute a copy of that work within contexts otherwise inaccessible to the original create a sense of liminality. His language suggests compromise as well

26 Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963), 11. English translation: Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2019), 169.

27 Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, 12; *Illuminations*, 170.

28 Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, 12; *Illuminations*, 170.

29 Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk*, 12–13; *Illuminations*, 170.

as a mappable relationship between an "original artwork" and its reproductions, rather than the complete divorce between the two to which Phelan, the Theatertreffen, and the media's response to the premiere of *Die Räuber* allude. Rather than representing an absence, the film of *Die Räuber* is an alternative mode of presence.

The film of *Die Räuber* functioned as a hybrid document that shifted the "here and now" of the play in ways literal and metaphorical: it drew together footage from two separate performances to create a single representation of the play in a context physically impossible for the play to reach. Moreover, the film provided visual perspectives on the play that would otherwise be physically impossible for its audiences to obtain: as the actors marched, solemnly, toward the unreachable brink of their treadmills, slow tracking shots permitted the viewer to take in the full extent of the set's imposing bulk. The possibility of intimate close-ups invited the viewer to observe otherwise invisible minutiae, particularly audience members in the most distant, cheapest seats. When Katja Bürkle, performing as Franz Moor, delivered a monologue she spat with such venom that saliva trickled from her chin: such grotesque character detail would be otherwise unobservable, were it not revealed and documented by Schönhofer's lens.

At the culmination of the premiere there was lengthy, enthusiastic applause and the cast and crew took the stage, standing in front of the screen to give a bow. In the three years that I have attended the Potsdamer Platz public viewings and watched the livestreams in the Bornemann Bar, there has been no applause at the culmination of these digitally distributed performances; *Die Räuber*'s film premiere has been the only exception to this admittedly anecdotal rule. By contrast, it is common practice for the on-stage live performances to receive extended bouts of applause, often lasting upwards of ten minutes. The hearty applause at the premiere is therefore a possible indication that the Theatertreffen organizers were, in some way, successful in their efforts to persuade their audience of the screening's liveness. Certainly the context of the premiere, set within the prestigious auditorium, and the commitment on the part of 3sat and the Theatertreffen to reveal the complexities of the filming process, as well as the literal presence of *Die Räuber*'s creative team, were all factors in this recontextualizing of a digitally distributed performance.

In contrast to the "no-show" headlines garnered by *Die Räuber*'s perceived absence from the Theatertreffen, the audience at the premiere appeared to be celebrating the performance's presence at the festival after all, despite the complicated logistical difficulties. Moreover, in 2017 the Theatertreffen used the hashtag #TT17 to organize its online presence, with audiences encouraged to use the hashtag in their social media posts when discussing the festival. The screening of *Die Räuber* inspired one fifth of the tweets posted about the ten invited productions, a remarkable

online presence for a supposedly absent performance. The live presence of *Die Räuber* at the Theatertreffen complicates the clear divide that the festival usually draws between the pre-recorded public viewing screenings and the live (in a traditional sense) performances on stage.

The case of *Die Räuber* suggests that liveness, in this case, is an experiential device and marketing tool employed by the Theatertreffen rather than a quality inherent to some forms of performance and absent in others. It also undermines the hierarchical value system that attributes sociocultural, economic, and political value to certain performances (and the audiences of these performances) over others: the *Faust* livestream discussed above became public largely because of enquiries into the public cost of staging the performance for the inner-circle audience who had already purchased tickets, while the other Bornemann Bar livestreams remain unpromoted and thus inaccessible to those outside the festival's regular audiences. The sense of ceremony and exclusivity built around *Die Räuber*'s film premiere proves that the other pre-recorded 3sat films, screened at the public viewings, could similarly have a quality of liveness to them if only they were contextualized differently. This reveals a certain level of attention paid toward the festival's ticket-buying audience that is absent from their so-called "public" programming, all despite the festival's publicly funded status.

Futures

Since *Die Räuber*'s film premiere in 2017 several other productions have been unable to be re-performed at the Theatertreffen. Vegard Vinge and Ida Müller's play *Nationaltheater Reinickendorf* was unable to attend the festival due to a conflicting schedule; an early press release suggested that an alternative event would be held and *Nachtkritik* reported that a "Video-Dokumentation" (video documentary) of the production would be shown, but no such event materialized. It is possible that the complete lack of presence, physically or otherwise, of *Nationaltheater Reinickendorf* was a consequence of the divisive response to the premiere event the previous year.[30]

In contrast to *Nationaltheater Reinickendorf*, a new solution was found for *Das Internat* in 2019. The Schauspiel Dortmund production directed by Ersan Mondtag had closed the previous year, in July 2018. The complications of rebuilding the intricate set, reuniting the now

30 "Theatertreffen 2018 ohne 'Nationaltheater Reinickendorf,'" *Nachtkritik*, March 9, 2018, https://www.nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=15112:nationaltheater-reinickendorf-von-vinge-mueller-nicht-beim-theatertreffen-2018&catid=126:meldungen-k&Itemid=100089 (accessed August 28, 2020).

otherwise engaged creative team, and finding any theater space in Berlin that could allow for a build-time of five days, proved insurmountable, as the theater's Intendant Kay Voges explained to *Nachtkritik*.[31] Such incompatibility between the Theatertreffen's curation of performances and the availability of those performances is a surprisingly rare occurrence, largely because the prevalence of publicly funded repertoire theaters in Germany extends the likelihood that a production will still be ongoing, even a year or more after its opening night. The popularity of repertoire, ensemble theaters in Germany, and the possibility of repeat performances and repeat viewing over extended periods of time that this system allows, goes some way toward explaining why livestreaming and other modes of digitally distributed performances are not as lucrative a market in Germany as in countries without an active repertoire tradition. The fact that *Das Internat* could not be physically resurrected also meant that 3sat could not film and broadcast the production in a premiere event, public screening, or on television. Instead, a recording of a rehearsal of *Das Internat* was broadcast via *Nachtkritik* from 6 p.m. on May 17 until 11 p.m. on May 20. The choice of these dates and times was intended to replicate the three-night run the performance would have had at the Theatertreffen, but it nonetheless placed a curious viewing restriction upon a recording and a production no longer tied to any obvious form of capital.

Interestingly, the discussion that surrounded the rehearsal broadcast of *Das Internat* revealed a shift in the discourse. In the comment section below the broadcast on *Nachtkritik* users complained not about the perceived absence of the production from the Theatertreffen, but about the quality of the play itself. Once such commenter, using the pen name Berstscheibe, made the cutting remark that "Ohne Stream hätte man die Legende aufrecht erhalten können, das dieser Abend was besonderes war" (without this stream, people might have mistakenly believed that the play was something special).[32] Rather than the means of its distribution, it was the form and content of the performance itself that was at the forefront of public discussion. That said, the filming of the production was unsteady and often out of focus, with extremely tight close-ups on seemingly unimportant aspects of the production; it provided a compromised viewing experience in comparison to 3sat's purpose-made films, but this

31 Simone Kaempf, "Ersan Mondtags Dortmunder Inszenierung 'Das Internat' kann beim Berliner Theatertreffen 2019 nicht gezeigt werden," *Nachtkritik*, March 29, 2019, https://nachtkritik.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=16575&catid=1725&Itemid=100089 (accessed August 28, 2020).

32 There is no way to verify the identity of any commenter on the *Nachtkritik* site, so these usernames must be taken as pennames only.

behind-the-scenes insight into the rehearsal process also imbued it with a kind of authenticity and vulnerability.

Returning to Abbott and Read's argument that it is often the "labelling as *live*" that results in a "hybrid working between performance and performance documentation,"[33] the recording of *Das Internat* can be seen as a "working" performance document that was temporarily labelled as live (under Phelan's notion of liveness that prioritizes limited, ephemeral experiences) when *Nachtkritik* restricted the viewing time to replicate a performance run. That the discussions on *Nachtkritik* focused upon *Das Internat* itself, rather than the medium by which it was distributed, reflects the rapid normalization and acceptance of digitally mediated forms of live performance, and suggests an expanding and more flexible industry-wide understanding of what live performance can be, where it takes place, and to whom it is accessible.

The contexts created for varying modes of liveness at the Theatertreffen have important sociocultural and political repercussions. These case studies have clarified that the Theatertreffen prioritizes traditional modes of live performance over digitally distributed ones, and that this prioritization stems from the notion that exclusivity and limitation are integral to the creation of a sense of liveness. However, the limited screening of *Das Internat* suggests that the festival is embracing digital modes of replicating these practices of exclusivity and limitation, rather than using digital tools to expand their audience base or generate alternative forms of income. We have seen, too, how the festival's hierarchy of access, a hierarchy built upon traditional, conservative notions of liveness, is used to distinguish returning audiences from broader "publics." This is evident in the literally distanced, so-called *public* viewings of pre-recorded films that are kept separate from the festival's main program, and the livestreams of the festival's main program that are guarded from the general public. It is visible, also, in the efforts made to confer a sense of liveness upon *Die Räuber*'s film premiere, which was framed as an exclusive, ticketed, ceremonial event distinguished from the rest of 3sat's pre-recorded material. The use of the premiere as a form of compensation for a perceived *absence* of the production set a precedent for the broadcasting of the rehearsal for *Das Internat* and the planning of an entirely digital program for the Theatertreffen during the COVID-19 crisis.

At the time of writing, the Theatertreffen's 2020 festival will be a fully virtual program. I cannot yet analyze the extent of the festival's digital response, but it is clear that the Theatertreffen could not take place at all in 2020 without the digital broadcasting of pre-recorded plays. Of these planned broadcasts, some will be films recorded by 3sat, made in

33 Abbott and Read, "Paradocumentation and NT Live's 'Cumberhamlet,'" 165.

advance and presumably intended to have been used for the Potsdamer Platz screenings, had the festival taken place as usual. Others will consist of footage from rehearsals, as with *Das Internat*, filmed without any expectation that they would one day be made public. The impact of the crisis on the long-term future of the performing arts is unclear, but the politics of liveness have become immediately urgent across the entire theater industry. The case studies discussed here, however, taken from just three years of the Berliner Theatertreffen, reveal that questions of liveness were already at the center of vital issues pertaining to the funding, public accessibility, and infrastructure that shape any audience member's access to the theater. Moreover, embracing modes of digitally distributed performance alongside traditional modes of performance, rather than casting digital modes as secondary, could ensure the future resilience of the Theatertreffen and its relationship with a theatergoing public.

The Akın Effect: Fatih Akın's Cultural-Symbolic Capital and the Postmigrant Theater

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From the moment Fatih Akın began to garner substantial public acclaim for his work as a filmmaker, cultural commentators and academic studies have drawn attention to the symbolic and cultural capital his films have brought the Turkish German community within Germany, as well as the ways in which his work has boosted the cultural profile of both Germany and Turkey on an international level.[1] On the occasion of Akın's victory at the Berlin Film Festival, the Berlinale, in 2004, when his film *Gegen die Wand* (*Head On*) won the prestigious Golden Bear award, for example, the author, playwright, and cultural commentator Feridun Zaimoglu described scenes of Turkish German celebration engaged in by individuals from across the political and religious spectrum. In Zaimoglu's account these ranged from retired Turkish men toasting each other in Berlin's bars to young orthodox Muslim bachelors getting carried away in the excitement of Akın's win.[2] The rapper and singer Sengul Boral's reaction articulated the cultural political implications

1 On his reception via the national press in Germany and Turkey, see Nezih Erdoğan, "Star Director as Symptom: Reflections on the Reception of Fatih Akın in the Turkish Media," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 7, no. 1 (2009): 27–38; Ayça Tunç Cox, "Hyphenated Identities: The Reception of Turkish German Cinema in the Turkish Daily Press," in *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium: Sites, Sounds, and Screens*, ed. Sabine Hake and Barbara Mennel (New York: Berghahn, 2014), 161–72; and Karolin Machtans, "The Perception and Marketing of Fatih Akın in the German Press," in *Turkish German Cinema in the New Millennium*, ed. Hake and Mennel, 149–60.

2 Feridun Zaimoglu, "Sex, Drogen und die Schocks der Moderne," *Tagesspiegel*, March 10, 2004; repr. in Faith Akın, *Gegen die Wand: Das Buch zum Film mit Dokumenten, Materialien und Interviews* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2004), 209–13, here 209. N. B. as Zaimoglu appears to actively use the Germanized spelling of Zaimoğlu this is the spelling used here. As Akın appears not to use the Germanized spelling of Akin, I retain this within the chapter only within quotations and article titles where this is the spelling used in the source cited.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.009 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of this moment of artistic recognition very clearly in an interview for the *tageszeitung*: "Ich freue mich. Ich finde es ziemlich geil—für uns, die türkische Community. Das ist definitiv etwas Politisches: Ein Türke holt einen Preis für Deutschland" (I'm delighted. I find it pretty cool—for us, the Turkish community. It's definitely something political: a Turk bags a prize for Germany).[3]

The success of the film was widely interpreted as signaling the arrival of Turkish German culture in the mainstream of German society, and the acceptance of cultural production by Turkish German artists as part of the culture of the Berlin Republic.[4] As Daniela Berghahn summarizes, the public success of the film functioned "to move Turkish-German cinema out the niche assigned to the culture of migrants and guest workers and to make it an integral part of German culture."[5] This cultural political moment became an assertion of belonging that simultaneously refused the demands of assimilation and celebrated the Turkish presence in Germany. The film itself provided a widely-circulated image of contemporary life which refused to be bound by a political discourse predicated on binary views of identity and citizenship, "imagin[ing] a complicated condition of community in which alterity itself is a principle of belonging within the community."[6] Moreover, as Ayşe Çağlar highlights, in the film's reception, "contrary to the hegemonic discourse in the 1970s and 1980s, his [Akın's] German 'Turkishness' was not conceived of as a problem, or a pathology to be explained, but taken as one of the sources of his creativity."[7] The decision to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the

3 Sengül Boral, quoted in Daniel Bax and Uwe Rada, "Wenn Türken für Deutschland siegen," *die tageszeitung*, February 16, 2004, https://taz.de/!789327/ (accessed May 5, 2020). Unless otherwise indicated all translations from the German throughout are my own.

4 See, for example, Daniela Berghahn, "No Place Like Home? Or Impossible Homecomings in the Films of Fatih Akin," *New Cinemas* 4, no. 3 (2006): 141–57, here 141; Petra Fachinger, "A New Kind of Creative Energy: Yadé Kara's *Selam Berlin* and Fatih Akin's *Kurz und Schmerzlos* and *Gegen die Wand*," *German Life and Letters* 60, no. 2 (2007): 243–60, here 245; and Daniela Berghahn, "'Seeing Everything with Different Eyes': The Diasporic Optic of Fatih Akin's *Head On* (2004)," in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 239–56, here 239–40 and 255. For a critical discussion of the narrative of the arrival and acceptance of Turkish German culture into the mainstream, see Nanna Heidenreich, *V/Erkennungsdienste, das Kino und die Perspektive der Migration* (Bielefeld, transcript, 2015), 293–94.

5 Berghahn, "No Place," 144.

6 Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 167.

7 Ayşe Çağlar, "On the Shores of Power. The Cultural Diversity Turn, Cultural Policies and the Location of Migrants," in *Anthropology Now and Next:*

Berlinale in February 2020 with a special screening of *Gegen die Wand* attests to the lasting effects this cultural political moment is considered to have had in the film world and on the profile of German national cinema. At the same time, Akın's profile as a director whose biography, practices, and aesthetics actively connect between "location Germany"[8] and the rest of the world would seem to fit providentially with the assertion that "[t]he 70th Berlinale should be the beginning of an increased exchange with other cultural locations and institutions."[9]

As this chapter will argue, the "cultural capital" that Akın's work has won for Turkish German cultural production in particular also extends beyond the film world and has had a role to play in the development and recognition of Turkish German production in the other arts in Germany. This is a role that, as this essay will show, can at times be traced very materially. In 2008, for example, Akın became the patron of a new forum for postmigrant theater, the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin. As Christel Weiler and Wiebke Sievers highlight, the early Ballhaus' repertoire of quality provocative theater and its programmatic advocacy for an ethnically diverse German theatrical landscape has significantly altered theatrical discourse and practice in the Federal Republic of Germany far beyond the Berlin neighborhood of Kreuzberg in which the small theater is situated.[10] Focusing on the relationship between Akın and this theater, this chapter will explore the ways in which Akın's filmic success has provided a series of unexpected opportunities for artists with a so-called "background of migration" in the other arts in Germany.[11]

Essays in Honor of Ulf Hannerz, ed. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Christina Garsten, and Shalini Randeria (London: Berghahn, 2014), 181–204, here 181.

8 Randall Halle, "German Film, European Film: Transnational Production, Distribution and Reception," *Screen* 47, no. 2 (2006): 251–59, here 252.

9 "On the 70th Anniversary of the Berlinale," Berlinale Website, https://www.berlinale.de/en/archive-2020/berlinale-topics/berlinale-70.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

10 Christel Weiler, "Theatre and Diversity," in *The Routledge Handbook of German Politics & Culture*, ed. Sarah Colvin (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 218–29; and Wiebke Sievers, "Mainstage Theatre and Immigration: The Long History of Exclusion and Recent Attempts at Diversification in Berlin and Vienna," *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* 8, no. 1 (2017): 67–83.

11 The term "Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund" (people with a background of migration) is the official term used in demographic censuses carried out in Germany to refer to individuals who were not born with German citizenship or who have at least one parent who was not born with German citizenship. The definition used by the Office for Statistics altered in 2016. The new definition replaces that used in the 2011 census that encompassed all foreign residents of Germany, as well as those who themselves migrated, or who have at least one parent who migrated *after* 1955 to the geographical area currently occupied by the Federal Republic of Germany ("Glossar," Entry in the German Glossary

In doing so, this essay enters into conversation with scholarship on Akın's films that explores the politics of his work by looking, on one hand, at the aesthetics and narratives of the films themselves, and, on the other, at what Akın's work can tell us about the film industry in a globalized context. The connection between aesthetic and political representation is a concern which has long shaped academic engagement with Akın's films. While earlier films such as *Gegen die Wand* might have been considered political simply in their existence, in recent years Akın has made increasingly political statements in his choice of subject matter. *The Cut* (2014), for example, addresses the Armenian genocide, a genocide officially denied within Turkey and disputed in the Turkish diaspora. Moving from historical to contemporary injustice, *Aus dem Nichts* (Out of Nowhere; in English as *Into the Fade*, 2017) draws attention to institutionalized racism in Germany by taking as its subject matter a fictionalized account of the NSU murders.[12] In addressing such subjects, and particularly in casting Hollywood actress Diane Kruger in a main role in *Aus dem Nichts*, Akın draws the attention of international cinema audiences to contested and underrepresented instances of state-enabled violence.

Meanwhile, the titles of publications such as Özkan Ezli's edited volume on *The Edge of Heaven*, *Kultur als Ereignis* (Culture as Event) and Claudia Breger's article on the same film, "Configuring Affect: Complex World Making in Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*)," continue to point to the cultural political impact of Akın's less overtly political films.[13] Breger, for example, draws on affect theory to

provided by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, page last updated 2017, https://www.bamf.de/DE/Service/Left/Glossary/_function/glossar.html [accessed April 2, 2017]). In repeating it here my aim is not to validate it, but rather to highlight it as the framework through which the German state continues to migrantize particular citizens and residents.

12 These were racially motivated murders of people of color in Germany perpetrated by right-wing group the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (Nationalist Socialist Underground or NSU) from 1998 onwards. German state investigators failed to investigate these murders and associated attacks as racially motivated until the NSU revealed itself in 2011 and focused their criminal investigations instead largely on the victims, their friends, and families.

13 See Claudia Breger, "Configuring Affect: Complex World Making in Fatih Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite* (*The Edge of Heaven*)," *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 1 (2014): 65–87; and Özkan Ezli, ed., *Kultur als Ereignis: Fatih Akins Film "Auf der anderen Seite" als transkulturelle Narration* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010). *Auf der anderen Seite* does include the character of Ayten, an anti-Government activist who flees persecution by the state in Turkey, and the film is clearly concerned with the ways in which differential power relations are embedded in the citizenship and passport regimes which differentially restrict and enable mobility within and across the borders of the EU, and also seep into and may shape interpersonal relationships. However, these narrative strands support and intertwine a more

emphasize the intervention Akın's cinema makes into "the contemporary European politics of hatred" as it "configures affects among its diegetic actors, their environments, and its audiences,"[14] while Berna Gueneli argues that such films have "a decidedly political dimension," in that they mark an intervention into the sights and sounds of what constitutes European cinema.[15]

This understanding of films as "world-making" can also be taken further. Randal Halle has drawn attention to the ways in which investigating the "complex connectivity" of Turkish German cinema, including that of Akın, involves "not only the representations of cinema, the image projected onto the screen, but also the apparatus that produces those images."[16] Halle's insight suggests not simply that the aesthetics of a film might be shaped by or even reflect the conditions of production, but rather that the images one wishes to make using the cinematic apparatus might produce new working conditions within the production context:

> Cinema is more than the images projected onto the screen. Cinema is the full apparatus of production, distribution, and reception that brings the image into motion. And that apparatus is part of the

"universalist" narrative of the complexities of love, loss, and kinship, whether biological or chosen, in a subtler manner than the more overt political statements made by the core subject matter of *The Cut* and *Aus dem Nichts*.

14 Breger, "Configuring Affect," 67 and 71.

15 Berna Gueneli, *Fatih Akin's Cinema and the New Sound of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 7–8. Such readings are not uncontested, and for critics such as Barbara Mennel, the very same film "ultimately privileges humanist values over radical politics," falling short precisely in its politics: Barbara Mennel, "Criss-Crossing in Global Space and Time: Fatih Akın's *The Edge of Heaven* (2007)," *Transit* 5, no. 1 (2009): 1–28, here 22. Also quoted in Breger, "Configuring Affect," 67. The argument seems to shift here from a question of whether the film is political to the type of politics at work. Equally with regard to Akın's music documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005), scholarly approaches are split between concerns that "the film [may be] vulnerable to accusations of creating orientalist images that are easily digested by the West (and Europe particular)," and the conviction that "by foregrounding a shared feeling of loss that evaporates from experiences of conflict, change and globalized flows of culture, ideas and people, the film envisions these frictions as bonding forces, affectively gluing politically complex collective imaginaries." See Jenny Stümer and Janus Currie, "Aziz Istanbul, Postcards from the City: Cultural Imaginaries in Fatih Akin's *Crossing the Bridge*," *Studies in European Cinema* (2019): 1–18, here 16.

16 Randall Halle, "The Europeanization of Turkish/German Cinema: Complex Connectivity and Imaginative Communities," *Jahrbuch Deutsch-Türkische Studien* 6 (2015): 15–38, here 17. Nanna Heidenreich also argues for the need to look more closely at production in *V/Erkennungsdienste*, 300.

> larger socio-political base. The effect of cinema is not only its images but also the ways in which cinema draws together productive forces into a particular formation.[17]

This approach extends engagement with the politics of Akın's films beyond a focus on the film-text, and even beyond a focus on the ways in which the affective dimensions of the film-text might reach out and reconfigure the world of the spectator. Without leaving these important aspects behind, it connects them to the concrete, material effect which the production of these films can have on the creative industries: a shift in perspective which links the interventions the films make on an aesthetic and affective level to the politics of industry practice.

In this essay, then, my aim is to draw Halle's work out further to explore where the cinematic apparatus connects into the apparatus of other arts, using the example of the postmigrant theater movement as developed at the Ballhaus. I am not the first to highlight that Akın's films have triggered material change beyond the film industry. In a 2015 article for the *Geographische Zeitschrift* (Geographical Journal), Anke Strüver explores the interactions between Akın's comedy film *Soul Kitchen* (2009) and the establishment of a real-world arts space, the Soulkitchenhalle (Soul Kitchen Hall) run by Mathias Lintl, that both recuperated the site of the film and emulated the transformation of the space that happened on-screen. The "old storage hall in Hamburg-Wilhelmsburg" that was

17 Halle, "The Europeanization of Turkish/German Cinema," 22. Elsewhere Halle notes that in film theory, "the term *apparatus* has taken on an almost anachronistic quality," and my use of it here responds to Halle's revision of the apparatus theory of 1960s and 70s Film Studies as a means to "turn to the *socius* and take up this question of social configuration" via film, and so to "describe real conditions and elucidate material practice," particularly with regard to European Cinema. Randal Halle, *The Europeanization of Cinema: Interzones and Imaginative Communities* (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 34, 36, and 49, emphasis in the original. It is worth noting here that the term apparatus also makes a contemporary appearance in the work of New Materialists such as Karen Barad—in this work the term has a more expanded sense than in its usage by Halle, and is understood "as referring to . . . material-discursive dynamics, modalities of groupings of agencies, of composition of power, which generate different histories, states of affairs and future possibilities." Mirko Nikolić, "Apparatus x Assemblage," Almanac section of NewMaterialisms.eu, March 28, 2018, https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/a/apparatus-x-assemblage.html (accessed May 23, 2020). Both Halle's revision of apparatus theory within film studies and New Materialist reconsiderations of "how matter comes to matter" from beyond film studies share epistemological roots, terminology, and a concern with entanglements of human and non-human agency. They might productively be thought together further, and this essay can be considered a tentative step in that direction.

used as the setting for Akın's *Soul Kitchen* and was due for demolition thus became "a noncommercial cultural and arts center, surrounded by a revitalizing neighborhood."[18] As Strüver highlights, this development allows for an exploration of the ways in which "film images and imaginations constitute actual places and spaces—and the ways this materialization is capable of resulting in political activities."[19] Drawing on work by Judith Butler, Strüver focuses on the performative effect of image-making and viewing as practices with the potential to bring new actions into being, that is, as performative processes with a material role to play in the production of space.[20] However, while *Soul Kitchen* had a local effect in the city of Hamburg in terms of creating physical space for artistic and cultural events, and in terms of the city's own self-marketing, the demographics of engagement with that space are unclear.[21] Here I want to focus on the ways in which the symbolic and cultural capital generated through Akın's work as a whole has facilitated the possibilities of artistic practice for established and aspiring cultural practitioners with a so-called background of migration.

In joining the discussion of the cultural politics of Akın's work, and focusing on the ways in which this relates to the development of the post-migrant theater movement in Germany, this essay aims not only to further this conversation with respect to Akın as star figure. It also aims to explore the ways in which cultural political shifts for artists identified as Turkish German in one artistic field, such as cinema, connect to cultural political shifts for Turkish German artists and "migrantized" artists more generally in another, such as theater. In doing so it hopes to contribute to work done by cultural practitioners themselves to counter claims that exclusion from the theatrical field is a simple or neutral matter of aesthetics and talent, and to draw attention to the ways in which value comes to be attributed to work by artists with a background of migration at a national level in Germany.[22]

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18 Anke Strüver, "Performative Raumproduktionen und ihre Materialisierungen: 'soul kitchen'—der Film—und Soulkitchen—die Halle," *Geographische Zeitschrift* 103, no. 4 (2015): 231–44, here 231. English as provided in article abstract.

19 Strüver, "Performative Raumproduktionen und ihre Materialisierungen," 231. English as provided in article abstract.

20 Strüver, "Performative Raumproduktionen und ihre Materialisierungen," 238–40.

21 So, while the space was inspired by an assertively postmigrant film, it is unclear to what extent migrantized subjects were amongst the creatives and audiences who took on the Soulkitchenhalle.

22 For a useful discussion of the ways in which debates over quality often mask the role of cultural, social, and economic capital in shaping what we value

Akın's own actions will form just one part of the analysis here. As Berna Gueneli argues, by way of his "self-presentation as auteur through interviews and documentaries, Akın creates a particular form of authorial power over his filmic product."[23] However, the filmic product can also be said to act on its creator, insofar as its circulation and success in turn produces the director as public persona and celebrity figure. In Gueneli's terms, the director also emerges as a "construct that was born together with his or her film."[24] I will therefore also consider his films as objects that come to act in and on the world in ways beyond those determined by Akın himself. This approach also responds to interventions made by Strüver, Breger, and, with regard to Turkish German cinema more broadly, Gozde Naiboglu that suggest we ask "what film images can *do*, rather than what they mean."[25] All three draw on New Materialist frameworks to move beyond an analysis of representation in ways I greatly admire. My primary aim, however, is to extend this mode of thinking to explore what these films do to the conditions of artistic production.

A key step in this process will be to trace the transfer of the cultural and symbolic capital that accumulates around Akın as celebrity figure, and around his films as cinematic successes, to other creative practitioners and cultural products. Rebecca Braun's work on literary celebrity in the German-speaking world is also very helpful to consider in this regard. Braun "considers how the author's physical body relates to her literary corpus" and draws on "celebrity theory and the work of Pierre Bourdieu to show how a literary author who is subject to sudden and sustained media attention ('celebrification') repeatedly finds one body substituted for the other in the multiple value systems into which she is inserted."[26]

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and how in theatrical context, specifically with reference to postmigrant theater, see also Sievers, "Mainstage Theatre and Immigration," 69.

23 Gueneli, *New Sound*, 17.

24 Gueneli, *New Sound*, 14.

25 Gozde Naiboglu, *Post-Unification Turkish German Cinema: Work, Globalisation and Politics Beyond Representation* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 12, emphasis in original. A non-representational approach is also advocated for in: Heidenreich, *V/Erkennungsdienste*; and Nazlı Kilerci and Hauke Lehmann, "Beyond Turkish-German Cinema: Affective Experience and Generic Relationality," in *Affect in Relation: Families, Places, Technologies*, ed. Birgitt Röttger-Rössler and Jan Slaby (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 259–80.

26 Rebecca Braun, "Famously Literary? The Nobel Prize and Herta Müller's Authorial Body," in *Herta Müller*, ed. Brigid Haines and Lyn Marven (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 224–41, here 224. For further development of the question of how to "conceptualise literary agency in a way that accounts for both this fundamental belief in the independent actions of the individual writer and her obvious functionalization through the structural processes of the literary industry" via New Materialist approaches, specifically Actor-Network-Theory,

Considering this point in combination with Gueneli's discussion of the celebrification of the director as auteur and with the New Materialist approaches to agency brought into the discussion by Strüver, Breger, and Naiboglu, allows for differentiation between what Akın as cinematic auteur does within his films and what is done *with* the symbolic capital generated through this auteur-status beyond them.[27] Drawing on ideas of cultural capital and an understanding of the generative potential of cinema as apparatus in Halle's sense of the term, the chapter will make use of publicly available online advertising materials and project websites to outline the publicly visible relationship between Akın and the Ballhaus Naunynstraße. It will highlight how the artistic directors of the Ballhaus drew symbolic capital, personal networks, and working practices familiar from the film industry into their theatrical work. In doing so, it argues that while Akın's films should not be read reductively as political statements, they can be considered political not only in the affects, but also the material effects, they help awaken in the broader cultural sphere, and the creative industries in particular.

What Does Fatih Want on Naunyn Street?[28]

The Ballhaus Naunynstraße famously opened as a forum for postmigrant theater in 2008. It aimed to find new narratives for theatrical engagement

see also Rebecca Braun, "The World Author in Us All: Conceptualising Fame and Agency in the Global Literary Market," *Celebrity Studies* 7, no. 4 (2016): 457–75, here 458. Braun explores the relationship between "national success as a writer and the promotional structures of world literature in the West" (457), while here I explore the ways in which national and international success of a filmmaker comes to play a role in the promotional structures of a field outside the field of his success.

27 See also the discussion of Akın's auteurship in Barbara Mennel, "Fatih Akın—Global auteur?," in *The German Cinema Book*, 2nd rev. edition, ed. Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, Deniz Göktürk, and Claudia Sandberg (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 242–51. Mennel also highlights the gendered dimension of Akın's uptake as auteur (here 243), a dimension which also undoubtedly plays into the fact that it is the symbolic capital of Akın in particular that has become available for transfer in the ways detailed in this article.

28 This is a reference to Aras Ören's seminal epic poem about Turkish life in Berlin, *Niyazi'nin Naunyn Sokağında İşi Ne?*, translated and published as *Was will Niyazi in der Naunynstraße* (What does Niyazi want on Naunynstreet?) by Rotbuch in 1973. The Ballhaus Naunynstraße itself put up banners with quotations from the poem on the Naunynstraße, and held a performance of the poem as a chamber opera (adapted by Alper Maral) as part of its 2011 festival celebrating the anniversary of the signing of bilateral recruitment agreements between Turkey and Germany in 1961. A "performative parcours" based on the poem was also advertised by the Ballhaus in 2009.

with migration and postmigrant life in Germany, and to support and promote artists with a background of migration, in order to redress the lack of postmigrant representation on German stages at that time.[29] At first glance, the history of the postmigrant theater movement might seem easy to tell. The term first gained a degree of media attention when it was used in a short festival entitled Beyond Belonging: Migration^2, which took place at the HAU theater in Berlin in 2006. As the festival name suggests, this event aimed to move aesthetic engagement and debate around postmigrant life in Germany beyond simple assertions of national belonging. The festival staged theater about migration by people who themselves or whose families had migrated to Germany. In doing so, it also aimed to counter decades of unequal access to professional training and the failure of the theatrical institutions to engage the expertise of, for example, earlier left-wing Turkish theater professionals who had migrated to Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. The success of this first festival led to a second in 2007, and in 2008 to the opening of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße. This was established as a longer-term home for the theatrical work trialled in Beyond Belonging, and would go on to have an impact on the German theatrical scene disproportionate to its size and resources.[30]

A discussion of Fatih Akın in relation to this movement may initially seem somewhat tenuous or tangential. The persona most often associated with this movement is Shermin Langhoff, who was artistic director of the theater from 2008 until 2013, when she moved to take up the artistic directorship of the much larger Maxim Gorki theater, one of Berlin's most prestigious theatrical institutions. Akın, in contrast, generally enters the narrative of postmigrant theater only obliquely. Prior to her work in theater, Langhoff also worked in film, including as an assistant on Akın's *Gegen die Wand*—a fact mentioned in the majority of biographical blurbs introducing Langhoff on webpages of institutions such as the Ballhaus and the Gorki, as well as in most overviews of Langhoff's career in newspaper reports. In 2012, for example, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* described her as follows: "Die 1969 in der Türkei geborene Shermin Langhoff kommt mit neun Jahren nach Nürnberg, wo ihre Mutter bei der Firma AEG arbeitet. Sie wird Verlagskauffrau, organisiert deutsch-türkische Veranstaltungen und arbeitet als Aufnahmeleiterin und Produktionsassistentin für Fernsehen und Film, etwa bei Fatih Akin

29 See, for example, Tunçay Kulaoğlu, "Das kulturelle Kapital der Postmigranten ist riesig," in *Kultur mit allen! Wie öffentliche deutsche Kultureinrichtungen Migranten als Publikum gewinnen*, ed. Vera Allmanritter and Klaus Siebenhaar (Berlin: B&S Siebenhaar, 2010), 159– 80, here 162.

30 See Onur Suzan Kömürcü Nobrega, "'We Bark from the Third Row': The Position of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße in Berlin's Cultural Landscape and the Funding of Cultural Diversity Work," *Türkisch-deutsche Studien* 2 (2011): 91–112.

[*sic*]." (Shermin Langhoff, born 1969 in Turkey, comes to Nuremburg aged nine, where her mother works for the company AEG. She becomes a salesperson, organizes German-Turkish events and works as producer or floor manager and production assistant for television and film, for example, with Fatih Akin).[31] Similarly, six years later, a *New York Times* profile piece mentions, "Ms. Langhoff emigrated to Germany as a child and made her start in the film industry, working as an assistant to the now international director Fatih Akin [*sic*]."[32] The omnipresence of this fact about Langhoff in the German- and English-language media narrative surrounding postmigrant theater is indicative of the power that association with Akın can have in boosting an individual's cultural credentials, that is, the symbolic capital this can bring into play in the German cultural sphere and beyond.[33]

This reiterated piece of information positions Langhoff as networked individual, someone with the social and cultural capital to make things happen. Indeed, despite Langhoff's counter capitalist roots, paradoxically (and perhaps strategically), this also has the effect of presenting her as what Richard Sennett might consider the exemplary subject in the new economy.[34] Here, though, I want to move beyond the media narrative of

31 Section titled "Zur Person" in: Irene Bazinger, "Wozu postmigrantisches Theater?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 15, 2012, https://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buehne-und-konzert/gespraech-mit-shermin-langhoff-wozu-postmigrantisches-theater-11605050-p3.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

32 Rebecca Schmid, "Bringing Her Turkish Background to German Theater," *New York Times*, March 7, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/07/arts/bringing-her-turkish-background-to-german-theater.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

33 As Langhoff herself highlights, her connection with a further network with high symbolic capital in the German theatrical establishment may also have been of benefit here. Shermin Langhoff at this point was connected to the German theatrical dynasty, the Langhoffs, in a personal capacity via her marriage to Lukas Langhoff, whose grandfather, Wolfgang, father, Thomas, and uncle, Matthias, are renowned directors. Both Wolfgang and Thomas were artistic directors of the Deutsches Theater, while Matthias directed to acclaim at the Berliner Ensemble and Volksbühne before moving to West Germany in 1978. As Langhoff herself has noted, "Einer Shermin Özel hätte man gewiss nicht so viel zugetraut wie einer Shermin Langhoff, ungeachtet meiner Erfahrungen als Kuratorin, Dramaturgin, Produzentin und trotz meines hervorragenden Netzwerkes, das ich schon vor meiner Ehe hatte" (A Shermin Özel would likely not have attracted the same confidence as a Shermin Langhoff, despite my experiences as a curator, dramaturge, producer and despite my excellent network, which I already had prior to my marriage). Langhoff, quoted in Bazinger, "Wozu postmigrantisches Theater."

34 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1998). As

the individual and their remarkable talents. This is not in order to minimize the immense labor and creativity of individuals such as Langhoff. Rather my aim is to explore the presence of Akın within that narrative as indicative of one of the many factors that enabled a positive reception of postmigrant theater by funding bodies, already established theater professionals, audiences, and reviewers in the mid-2000s.[35] Discussing the success of postmigrant theater, Wiebke Sievers also draws on Pierre Bourdieu to contextualize the barriers that can impede access to state-funded stages for artists with a so-called background of migration in Germany: "With regard to theatre, this habitus [necessary to access] includes the incorporated knowledge of theatrical traditions and of how to speak and move onstage (cultural capital), personal acquaintance with the relevant gatekeepers (social capital) and the money to survive the often precarious beginnings of artistic careers (economic capital)."[36] Here I focus on the role that the symbolic capital accumulating around Akın in the early 2000s played during the early phases of the postmigrant theater movement at the Ballhaus.

Akın first becomes visible in the early story of the postmigrant theater movement at two key points: in the initial event run by a network called kulturSPRÜNGE, and as part of an immersive theater event titled "X-Wohnungen" (X-Apartments) both of which took place at the HAU theater Berlin in 2004. KulturSPRÜNGE is a term that means both cultural cracks and cultural leaps. The network, which would later be a driving force behind the Ballhaus Naunynstraße theater, was founded by Shermin Langhoff, Tuncay Kulaoğlu, a filmmaker, journalist, writer, and dramaturg with whom she had run several film festivals in Nuremberg, and Martina Priessner, also a filmmaker, dramaturg, and curator. In their own words:

> kulturSPRÜNGE e.V., founded in Berlin in 2003, is an interdisciplinary network joining arts and politics. An initiative of people working in artistic, academic and political contexts, kulturSPRÜNGE e.V. aims at supporting and making visible the artistic and cultural achievements of migrants and postmigrants, as well as initiating an

Rebecca Braun highlights, Fred Turner and Christine Larson have also developed the idea of "the networked intellectual" (Braun, "World Author," 459–60). The work of Langhoff could productively be considered further in these terms.

35 On further factors such as policy and funding shifts, see Lizzie Stewart, "'The Future Market and the Current Reality': Zaimoglu/Senkel's *Black Virgins* and Interculturalism in the German Context," in *Interculturalism and Performance Now: New Directions?*, ed. Charlotte MacIvor and Jason King (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), 311–42.

36 Sievers, "Mainstage Theatre and Immigration," 69.

> exchange and dialogue between artists, political activists and academics about the topics of migration and urban culture.[37]

This first event listed on the network's website was "Europe in Motion: Moving Images, Shifting Perspectives in Transcultural Cinema," a three-day workshop on film with associated screenings that took place in December 2004. The event drew on support from various academic partners, funding from Hauptstadtkulturfonds Berlin and the British Council, and used the HAU theater in Berlin as a venue. Among the speakers, showing two feature films and two shorts with Q&A, and also DJ-ing at the opening party at the HAU, was Fatih Akın.[38]

This is not what we might expect the beginning of a theater movement to look like. Theater at first plays a role in the activities this network formally supports as the venue for a film-focused event and as the "other" job of film actors and directors invited to participate. Tuncel Kurtiz, for example, who had also acted in the theater in West Germany in the 1980s and who would later star in Akın's *Auf der anderen Seite*, was one of the speakers at the event.[39] As will shortly become clear though, the film-world was to prove important in the development of the postmigrant theater movement that for some Turkish-origin artists in particular would provide a path from film to theater.

Indeed, while not formally supported by the kulturSPRÜNGE network, there is notable crossover between the filmmakers and curators involved in the Europe in Motion film events and a theatrical project which in some ways laid the groundwork for postmigrant theater, "X-Wohnungen" at the HAU (June 2004). Unusually for an artistic director of a large theater with a significant profile at that time, the artistic director of the HAU, Matthias Lilienthal, had placed a focus on theater by and for a public with a background of migration in his concept for the theater.[40] Once in post, he engaged Shermin Langhoff who drew practitioners of other art forms, such as film, into the theater for the "X-Wohnungen" project. The filmmakers involved as first-time theater directors included independent filmmakers such as Neco Çelik and

37 "Über uns," Webpage of Kultursprünge e.v., http://www.kulturspruenge.net/de/03/0301en.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

38 "Europe In Motion," Webpages of Kultursprünge e.v., http://www.kulturspruenge.net/europeinmotion/english/english.html; http://www.kulturspruenge.net/europeinmotion/english/film_1.html; http://www.kulturspruenge.net/europeinmotion/english/film_2.html (all accessed May 5, 2020).

39 The author Emine Sevgi Özdamar who has worked as an actress and director's assistant in theaters in the former East Germany, West Germany, France, and Turkey was also present as an invited speaker.

40 Lilienthal quoted in Frank Raddatz, "HAU 1, 2, 3: Matthias Lilienthal im Gespräch," *Theater der Zeit* 63, no. 2 (2008): 16–20, here 18.

Ayşe Polat, who were also be present at the initial film event, Europe in Motion in December of the same year. They were joined also by Fatih Akın, who staged an extract from "Gotteskrieger" (God's Warriors) by Feridun Zaimoglu, from the short story volume *Zwölf Gramm Glück* (Twelve Grams of Happiness, 2004).

Taking place only a few months after Akın's win of the Golden Bear,[41] this performance piece contained a similar demand for "feiern, ficken und frei sein" (partying, fucking, and being free)[42] to that articulated by Sibel, the main character in *Gegen die Wand*. The piece would clearly have been attractive to reviewers and audiences familiar with Akın's filmic work and thus more likely to be positively predisposed to his theatrical experiment. In their book on the HAU theater, Mumford and Garde suggest that Akın's piece "invited spectators to explore power relations between the audience and the performers" by "deliberately setting up false expectations and destabilizing them by creating surprise."[43] This relationship to the audience is consistent with the provocateur role that both Zaimoglu and Akın played in their previous works, and which Nora Haakh suggests was to also become a dominant element of the early dramaturgy of postmigrant theater as it would later develop at the Ballhaus.[44] With "X-Wohnungen," then, the HAU provided a prestigious platform for many of the same individuals who would be involved in that initial film event to engage in their first work in another medium: theater. While for Akın this was to represent a one-off experiment, for other filmmakers such as Çelik, it marked a transition into a career in theater.

Beyond Belonging and *Crossing the Bridge*: Akın, Mediation, Marketing

As theatrical work began to be actively supported by kulturSPRÜNGE, the role of Fatih Akın in particular changed in interesting ways: he seems to have become simultaneously more publicly visible in events and advertising associated with this theatrical work and less artistically involved. The Beyond Belonging festivals of 2006 and 2007, for example, repeated

41 Ulrike Garde and Meg Mumford, *Theatre of Real People: Diverse Encounters at Berlin's Hebbel am Ufer and Beyond* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2016), 136.

42 Feridun Zaimoglu, *Zwölf Gramm Glück* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 139, quoted in Garde and Mumford, *Theatre of Real People*, 137.

43 Garde and Mumford, *Theatre of Real People*, 100–101. A more detailed discussion of the production takes place on 136–38.

44 Nora Haakh, "Bände bilden, Räume schaffen, Diskurse durchkreuzen: Politisch Theater machen wie am Ballhaus Naunynstraße," *Freitext* 22 (2013): 36–42.

several aspects of the "X-Wohnungen" program. The HAU was again the venue, Langhoff was again curator, and again filmmakers and artists active in other media were invited to create theater, which was staged alongside other multi-media events. Here Akın remained a presence but, it seems, at one remove. While he did not direct another piece of theater or performance himself, stills from *Gegen die Wand* featured prominently in the program flyer advertising the first festival in 2006 and Akın's films were the subject of an evening discussion event.[45]

The 2006 program also included a performance by musicians Baba Zula, Alexander Hacke of Einstürzende Neubauten, Brenna MacCrimmon, and the Selim Sesler band. As the program descriptor in German and Turkish explicitly highlighted, each of these musicians had featured heavily in Akın's documentary film on the Istanbul music scene, *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* (2005) and some had also provided key elements of the soundtrack to *Gegen die Wand*.[46] Brenna MacCrimmon and the Selim Sesler band also appeared on the program of the 2007 Beyond Belonging festival. There again their links to Akın's films were explicitly highlighted: "Heute ist Selim Sesler ein Virtuose auf der Klarinette, der in Europa besonders durch die Filme 'Gegen die Wand' und 'Crossing the Bridge' von Fatih Akın bekannt wurde" (Today Selim Sesler is a virtuoso on the clarinet who became known in Europe particularly through the films *Head On* and *Crossing the Bridge* by Fatih Akın).[47] In the 2007 festival an event titled "Berlin Arabesk: ein szenischer Liederabend" (Berlin Arabesque: A scenic evening of song) evoked further associations with *Gegen die Wand*, as it included performances by İdil Üner, the actress who performs the songs in the picture postcard Brechtian intervals which famously interrupt and structure the film.[48] As both *Gegen die Wand* and *Crossing the Bridge* were films that

45 "Beyond Belonging: Migration^2," seventeen-page program of events taking place at the HAU, Berlin, 2006.

46 These are the musicians Deniz Göktürk identifies as being "most prominently" introduced in *Crossing the Bridge*. *Deniz Göktürk*, "Projecting Polyphony: Moving Images, Travelling Sounds," in *Orienting Istanbul: Cultural Capital of Europe?*, ed. Deniz Göktürk, Levent Soysal, and Ipek Türeli (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 178–200, here 189. As Göktürk highlights, "*Crossing the Bridge* pays belated tribute to Brenna MacCrimmon, who had not been credited in *Head On*, although all the interlude songs and arrangements were chosen from her compilation [compiled from records found in Bulgarian villages], but rerecorded with actress İdil Üner as singer." "Projecting Polyphony," 190.

47 "Beyond Belonging: Autoput Avrupa," seventeen-page program of events taking place at the HAU, Berlin, 2007.

48 "Beyond Belonging: Autoput Avrupa." The 2006 program also advertises a play under İdil Üner's direction in the section on what is coming up in the wake of the festival.

Langhoff herself also worked on, it is of course possible that the invitation to the musicians may have come directly from her rather than via Akın. The advertising material, however, clearly and consciously highlighted the festivals' connections to Akın and his cinematic successes, creating a conceptual association between the two.

Analyses of *Crossing the Bridge* itself have also highlighted the ways in which Akın's own fame and symbolic capital has transferred, at least in part, to the musicians he features in the documentary. For example, Deniz Göktürk writes:

> the film as a whole provides an international stage for some previously unknown musicians alongside big stars who were only known to a Turkish audience. Subsequently, the music of many of these performers became readily available on CDs in stores across Istanbul and globally on the Internet. Like Alexander Hacke and Brenna MacCrimmon, Fatih Akın himself is a mediator who valorizes and amplifies local culture in global circuits.[49]

When the musicians "sanctified" by Akın in his role as cultural gatekeeper[50] were included in the Beyond Belonging programming, we might suggest that they brought this sanctification with them as capital to the new performance context. The fame these musicians thus accrued on the metaphorical global stage via their roles in Akın's film arguably in turn helped mediate and propagate experiments on the actual theatrical stage in Germany. In the case of the Beyond Belonging program, Akın's symbolic capital—embodied at one remove by the musicians—seems to have had the potential to work in several directions at once. On the one hand, audiences who might not otherwise go to the theater in general, or to the HAU theater in particular, may have been attracted by the implicit promise of theatrical performances as entertaining and provocative as a contemporary hit film. The suggestion of musical performances that engaged with heritage in a non-reductive and artistically innovative way may also have been a draw. On the other hand, Akın's cultural cachet may well have helped draw in cultural gatekeepers from the theatrical world who might otherwise not have attended so carefully to this program of work.

As already noted, the success of these two festivals in 2006 and 2007 led to the opening of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße as a more permanent venue in 2008, the productions of which generally continued to be

49 Göktürk, "Projecting Polyphony," 192.

50 The role of Hacke as mediating narrator is also significant here. See Göktürk, "Projecting Polyphony"; and Evren Özselçuk, "Unsettling the metaphor: The failure of liberal hybridity in Fatih Akin's *Crossing the Bridge*," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 12, no. 3 (2014): 173–89.

supported through the kulturSPRÜNGE network.[51] Fatih Akın appeared here, too,—this time in person—as the patron at the opening festival of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße. Several publicity images from the opening framed him and Langhoff together, dressed in matching white shirts and black trousers. Mirroring one another's posture, in these images both Langhoff and Akın lean back, seemingly casually, against a white wall. Each has one hand tucked into a jean pocket, and in the other hand holds the logo of the newly established Ballhaus Naunynstraße in front of their faces.[52] While the logo replaced the expected shot of their faces, suggesting the theater's identity as more significant than the two individuals featured in the publicity shots, the knowledge that this was also an image of Langhoff and Akın is clearly important in terms of the marketing at work here. Notably, the composition and exactly mirrored postures present Akın and Langhoff as figures of equal significance. This image could thus be read as visualizing a shift in the dynamics of symbolic and cultural capital surrounding the Ballhaus at that time. As seen above, the cultural capital of Akın's films seems to have helped make space for (i.e., interest in) Turkish German cultural production more broadly in Germany: an interest that kulturSPRÜNGE skilfully exploited to create new opportunities for postmigrant theater practitioners. As the profile of postmigrant theater and of Langhoff as its figurehead or spokesperson grew, arguably the need for close association with an already established figure such as Akın waned. Instead, as critical mass grew further around the Ballhaus, this celebrity seemed primarily to attach rather to Langhoff, the artistic director.[53]

51 On the challenges of the funding situation and for a detailed discussion of the ways in which Langhoff and her team peddled furiously beneath the surface to manage the economic capital for this theatrical work, see Kömürcü Nobrega, "'We Bark from the Third Row.'"

52 Image on the following webpage: "Dogland," webpage advertising 2009 festival of that title, website of the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, https://p106499.typo3server.info/index.php?id=21&evt=13 (accessed May 5, 2020).

53 Shermin Langhoff, Tuncay Kulaoğlu, and the team around them at the Ballhaus were hardly unaware of the ways in which capital circulates in the theatrical and broader cultural sphere. Indeed, it is their canny navigation and steering of that capital (both financial and symbolic) that did so much to put the Ballhaus and the postmigrant theater practiced there on the map. In an interview in 2010, Tuncay Kulaoğlu, who has been co-artistic director, curator, and dramaturge at the Ballhaus, made reference to this brand value when he stated, "Das kulturelle Kapital der Postmigranten ist riesig" (the cultural capital of postmigrants is enormous). Kulaoğlu, "Das kulturelle Kapital." In this quotation we see the way in which a perceived lack of culture projected on to migrants to Germany and their children through their association with the so-called "uneducated classes" is transformed into a perception of abundance of culture and creativity, following

In 2009, a third Beyond Belonging festival took place, this time at the Ballhaus rather than the HAU. Interestingly, in contrast to the 2006 and 2007 festivals, this time there was no mention or inclusion of either Akın or the musicians from his films in the program in Berlin, further supporting the suggestion that a transfer of cultural capital had taken place from Akın to his former collaborators. This was also the year the festival travelled to Turkey, however. In the Istanbul iteration, in contrast to Berlin, Akın's name and individuals connected to him were once again returned to in the advertising material. The program included a screening of one of his films, this time his early made-for-television documentary *Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren* (We Forgot to Go Back, 2001) which explores Akın's own family history and their experience of migration from Turkey.[54] For the Istanbul festival this screening included a post-screening conversation with Fatih Akın's parents, Hadiye Akın and Mustafa Enver Akın, and the possibility of Akın himself DJ-ing at the opening party.[55] The work that Akın's success in the film industry had done for Turkish German representation in Germany is also highlighted in this program: "Nicht zuletzt seit Fatih Akıns internationalem Erfolg hat sich das Bild des Almancı verschoben" (Not least since Fatih Akın's international success, the image of the Almanci has shifted).[56] Nezih Erdoğan and Ayça Tunç Cox have detailed the ways in which the Turkish media has attempted to capitalize on Akın's success,[57] while Göktürk has noted that Akın's films have even been put to work in official Turkish tourism marketing: "Akın's films are readily incorporated by the Ministry for Culture and Tourism in their showcasing of eleven films 'made in Turkey,' which include *Gegen die Wand* (the German title!) and *The Edge of Heaven* (English title!), both German productions."[58] The discrepancy between Akın's involvement in the 2009 Istanbul festival and his absence from the Berlin festival may simply have been an issue of scheduling. However, at the point that increased recognition for the newly established postmigrant theater in

a similar dynamic to that which Ayşe Çağlar suggests is at work in Akın's public reception (see note 7 of this essay).

54 For a close reading of this film, see Dagmar Brunow, "Mediated Memories of Migration and the National Visual Archive: Fatih Akın's Wir haben vergessen zurückzukehren," in *The Autobiographical Turn in Germanophone Documentary and Experimental Film*, ed. Robin Curtis and Angelica Fenner (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), 173–93.

55 "Programme," webpage advertising the program for 2009 festival titled Beyond Belonging III: ALMANCI—DEUTSCHLÄNDER!, website of Kulturspränge e.V., http://almanci.kulturspruenge.net/de/05.html (accessed May 5, 2020).

56 "Programme."

57 Erdoğan, "Star director"; and Cox, "Hyphenated Identities."

58 Göktürk, "Projecting Polyphony," 193.

Germany enabled the theater to begin to present its work internationally, notably Akın was no longer a key figure in the domestic advertising of the festival. Rather he acted as mediator figure to help "sell" the concept in Turkey. Notably, the advertising there did not take the easy route of simply repatriating and repackaging Akın as a Turkish success story for a Turkish audience. The term used in the advertising material cited above, *Almanci*, is a Turkish term designating someone of Turkish origin who has lived or been socialized in Germany and is often used within Turkey in a somewhat derogatory way. Reappropriating the term in this context subtly positions both the theater festival and Akın's work as critical interventions into ethno-nationalist discourses of binary belonging in Turkey as well as Germany.

From 2009 on Akın fades out of the public profile of the postmigrant theater, although Deniz Gökturk does highlight references to *Gegen die Wand* in the title of a 2011 film program curated by Kulaoğlu: *Gegen die Leinwände* (Against the Screens, a wordplay on the German compound noun "projection screen" and the title of Akın's film).[59] However, the tendency to bring theater very firmly into conversation with other media was retained throughout the postmigrant theater as produced at the Ballhaus under Langhoff: not only filmmakers, but also musicians, visual artists, actors, and authors have all been invited into the theatrical space there. As was the case with Akın, these artists often shifted roles, going from speaking at events to writing or directing their own plays. While for some individuals such role shifts were one-off or occasional experiments, for others theater has since become a significant element of their artistic practice and career. As I have argued elsewhere, paying attention to the filmic training of directors such as Neco Çelik helps us critically engage with the aesthetics developed at the Ballhaus, aesthetics that incorporate not only transnational references that go beyond the binary of "Turkish vs. German," but also include cross-media references to film, music, and popular culture. The fact that Langhoff and her colleagues turned to filmmakers, musicians, and visual artists in an effort to bring more artists with a background of migration into the theater itself highlights a complex legacy of exclusion that saw earlier generations of experienced artists who migrated to Germany struggle to establish a foothold in the German theater scene.[60]

59 Deniz Göktürk, "Paternalism Revisited: Turkish German Traffic in Cinema," in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Bergfelder, Carter, Göktürk, and Sandberg, 494–512, here 496. It would also be possible to discuss Akın's role in providing the laudation for Langhoff's award of the Cairo prize in 2011 here as documented on the following webpage: "KAIROS Prize 2011," Website of the Alfred Toepfer Stiftung, https://www.toepfer-stiftung.de/en/kairos-prize/kairos-preis-2011/ (accessed May 5, 2020).

60 See Stewart, "The Future Market."

Given Langhoff's experience in film production, a closer focus on the presence of Akın within the Ballhaus/KulturSPRÜNGE network also raises the question of whether practices of flexible project work common in the film industry could have had a role to play in the success of Langhoff, Kulaoğlu, Priessner, and the network around them, in developing the postmigrant theater practiced there. As Sonja Moghaddari discusses in her chapter on the role of social capital and networks in Iranian German experiences in the film industry in Hamburg, "filmmaking mostly takes place in specific time-restricted projects, for which a team of professionals is constituted and works together intensively, only to be dissolved after the task is finalized."[61] The working structures described by Moghaddari bear a strong resemblance to those used at the HAU at the time the X-Wohnungen and Beyond Belonging festivals were initiated,[62] and which seem to have been continued at the Ballhaus Naunynstraße via kulturSPRÜNGE as "production company."

From Politics of Affect to Cultural Political Effect

In highlighting the sporadic and often symbolic ways in which Akın has made appearances in the story of postmigrant theater my aim is absolutely not to direct attention *away* from the individuals who have labored for years to the establish this theater. Nor is it to suggest that Akın himself had a bigger role to play in the development of the aesthetics and structures of this theater than he did. Elsewhere I and others such as Onur Nobrega and Azadeh Sharifi have discussed the role of funding and policy changes, and I am currently looking at the kulturSPRÜNGE network and the relations between the various actors within it further.[63] Rather, my aim with this essay has been to explore the ways in which Akın's symbolic and cultural capital were cannily engaged to cultural political effect in a broader project. Berna Gueneli argues for the subtle politics of Akın's filmic aesthetics: "By projecting images and sounds of a normalized

61 Sonja Moghaddari, *Internal Diversity: Iranian Germans Between Local Boundaries and Transnational Capital* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 165. Moghaddari also references Birgit Apitzsch here who discusses the prevalence of flexible working conditions in the film industry and the role of social networks within these more broadly: Birgit Apitzsch, "Flexible Beschäftigung und soziale Netzwerke. Der Einfluss von Professionalisierung," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Special issue 49 (2009): 409–27.

62 "Wir haben kein festes Ensemble, sondern arbeiten mit einem Kreis von 40 oder 50 Gruppen. Das gibt uns die Freiheit, jedes Mal das System neu zu erfinden" (We have no fixed ensemble but work with a circle of 40 or 50 groups. That gives us the freedom to reinvent the system anew every time). Lilienthal, quoted in Raddatz, "HAU," 17.

63 On funding, see Stewart, "The Future Market."

diversity—that is, of a normalized multiethnicity and multilingualism—that can include 'Turkishness'—without celebrating, lamenting, or fearing it—Akın subtly counters racism and challenges existing, simplistic notions of a cosmopolitan 'New Europe' and a xenophobic 'Fortress Europe.'"[64] I am interested in how the affective dimensions of Akın's filmic work make association with his cinema available to unexpected material and political effect in the cultural industries.[65]

In the processes outlined above, we have seen symbolic capital, which accumulated around Akın's films and stuck to Akın as auteur figure, used to bolster and promote the postmigrant theater as it attempted to counter a reductive discourse of belonging and create new spaces in an establishment that had tended to put theater and migration on either side of a class-cultural divide. Earlier studies of Akin's reception have highlighted the ways in which his celebrity has at times been utilized in both Germany and Turkey to shore up the national boundaries that the narrative, aesthetic, and affective dimensions of his films, as well as the working practices which produce them, often work to disrupt. Critics such as Hito Steyerl have also highlighted the danger that "the enthusiasm displayed by numerous cultural institutions at the turn of the twenty-first century for artistic production of minority communities, as well as the invocation of cultural theory that celebrated the creative potential of the deterritorialized individual, constituted a German self-fashioning that promoted 'a marketable brand of facade cosmopolitanism' in lieu of political debates about civil rights and migration policy."[66] The affective dimensions of Akın's films can certainly be considered to gather symbolic and cultural capital which can at times co-opt Akın to national agendas of cultural prestige or distract from state-supported inequalities. When this capital and the affective dimension of celebrity are mobilized consciously and actively alongside other aesthetic interventions into political debates and policy, however, the potential for such capital to be brought to act on and in the world can also be used to challenge and intervene in structures of exclusion, as the case of the Ballhaus has shown.

While the political promise of Akın's films from the 2000s seemed primarily to be the promise of an intervention into the cultural imagination and particularly into the affect surrounding migration and nation, his films also created economic, cultural, and symbolic capital that was

64 Gueneli, *New Sound*, 164–65.

65 For a detailed theoretical discussion of affect in one of Akın's films in particular (*Auf der anderen Seite / The Edge of Heaven*), see Breger, "Configuring Affect." For a consideration of the emotional attachment generated through his films with regard to Akın as auteur, see Mennel, "Global Auteur," 246–47.

66 Hito Steyerl, as paraphrased in Christina Kraenzle, "At Home in the New Germany? Local Stories and Global Concerns in Yüksel Yavuz's *Aprilkinder* and *Kleine Freiheit*," *The German Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2009): 90–108, here 91.

then available for transfer to other figures and cultural productions in unanticipated ways. This transfer, as we have seen, was actively steered and supported by the Ballhaus team and Akın himself. Nonetheless, the resultant cultural political effects bring different realities into being than those imagined within the films. Debates will continue about Akın's personal politics, the representational politics within his cinema, the politics of representational readings of his cinema, and whether he is, or needs to be, a political filmmaker at all. What I want to suggest here, though, is that the symbolic and cultural capital that has accrued around these films and around Akın as their director has also had a role to play in generating new possibilities and thus material new realities for practitioners with a so-called background of migration in other cultural industries.[67] The example of how the Ballhaus connects to the broader apparatus of Akın's cinema suggests that his films have a strong cultural political effect that is often overlooked. Doing justice to Akın's filmmaking means not only taking into account the representational and affective politics of his films, but also extending the analysis to the ways in which these films create new conditions of production within the cultural industries.

67 Such interactions and transfers continue. As I was finishing the revisions for this article, Akın and Langhoff together started a campaign to use their public position to draw attention to the imprisonment of Osman Kavala in Turkey. The campaign details can be found on the following webpage: https://artistsunited-forosmankavala.com/ (accessed June 9, 2020). See also the following interview with Langhoff and Akın about the campaign: Maximillian Popp, "Die türkische Regierung begeht jeden Tag ein entsetzliches Justizverbrechen," *Der Spiegel Online*, June 3, 2020, https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/fall-osman-kavala-die-tuerkische-regierung-begeht-ein-entsetzliches-justizverbrechen-a-3748784c-f64a-4932-ac68-10715578e386 (accessed June 9, 2020).

Goodbye, Sonnenallee, Or How *Gundermann* (2018) Got Lost in the Cinema of Others

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Where are reference points, senses of belonging, and the loci of memory anchored in the liquidized maps of global neoliberalism?[1] The placeholder of national identity, the nation state, rapidly loses power to supranational entities. Political and economic developments thereby extend into the cultural sphere, as the increasingly globalized commercialization of the image economy renders the national a media affect. In turn, national institutions are eager to project a competitive image in the global market. As they use the formulas of global media for their purposes, they further dissolve the coordinates of the local. Supranational marketization redefines the national by way of global media aesthetics, narrative conventions, and amortization-driven politics. As a result, culture loses its local specificity and its capacity to offer alternative histories and, with that, alternative projections of the future.

Andreas Dresen's 2018 feature film about the East German singer-songwriter Gerhard Gundermann, simply titled *Gundermann*, is one of many examples for the neoliberal paradigm shift. While it ostensibly promotes a local, minority culture, it sidelines that very culture for the chance of an "Oscar." At the same time, it also pivots Dresen's career from locally specific artistic legacy and its implied political program to a commercially driven cinema that aims at the widest market reach possible. Affecting the grammar of the filmic language itself, it turns a formerly art-driven medium into a marketing device. *Gundermann* thus highlights with particular salience what is at stake in the globalized financialization of the film industry. Contrary to Dresen's original intentions, the project turned into an Orientalizing biopic over the course of the twelve years he had to fight for funding. As it evolved into a piece that the German

1 For the notion of liquidity associated with the operation of neoliberalist globalization, see Zygmunt Bauman's prolific writing on the topic, for example, Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003); *Liquid Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005); and *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.010 Published online by Cambridge University Press

state and industry eventually promoted, winning the 2019 German Film Award in six categories, the film has, to turn Dresen's own words on their head, more to do with Hollywood than Hoyerswerda.[2]

Dresen's *Gundermann* follows a series of successful mainstream films set in East Germany. Starting with Leander Haußmann's *Sonnenallee* (Sun Avenue; in English as *Sun Alley*, 1999),[3] followed by Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003) and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* (*The Lives of Others*, 2009), they span the twenty years that have brought, according to Martin Scorsese, the death of cinema as a film art.[4] During that time, Scorsese notes, "the movie business has changed on all fronts."[5] Germany's most popular films reflect this development. Georg Seeßlen and Fernand Jung note, with regard to funding politics, a shift from cultural forms of support to economic incentivizing.[6] From *Sonnenallee* to *Gundermann*, the dialectic of German-German division and unity, global-facing to begin with, dissolves into the facile, feel-good formulas of global cinema. In order to understand the ideological effect of these global aesthetics in a closer reading of *Gundermann*, it is helpful to zoom out and consider the global context of German-German identity politics.

2 Dresen had criticized Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Das Leben der Anderen* as having "mit der DDR so viel zu tun wie Hollywood mit Hoyerswerda" (as much to do with the GDR as Hollywood with Hoyerswerda). Andreas Dresen, "Der falsche Kino-Osten," *Die Zeit*, April 16, 2009, https://www.zeit.de/2009/17/Dresen (accessed July 23, 2020). All translations from German into English are the author's.

3 The film did not have a regular release in the US and the UK, but only ran at a few film festivals there under the title *Sun Alley*. This translation does not capture the title's mislabeling joke, which provides the key for understanding the film. The dinky, narrow street depicted in the film is a very far cry from the majestic *Allee* announced in the title; this mismatch hints at the film's Romantic idea that nothing and nobody is what he, she, or it seems or pretends to be. In addition, it also references reality, as the actual Sonnenallee in Berlin is indeed a far cry from the sunny image of wealth the name conjures up. Despite the film's ostensible overdrawing and ironizing, the film's set resembles the actual Sonnenallee in Berlin.

4 Martin Scorsese, "The Dying Art of Filmmaking," *The New York Times*, November 5, 2019, A27.

5 Scorsese, "The Dying Art of Filmmaking."

6 Georg Seeßlen and Fernand Jung, "Das Kino der Autoren ist tot. Glauben wir an ein neues? Eine Polemik zum deutschen Film," *epd Film* 9 (1997): 18–21, here 18.

The National Is Not the Opposite of the Global, But Its Multiplication

As globalization destabilizes the mental and emotional as much as the more tangible socioeconomic grids of belonging, fractures and fissures connect Germany with similar developments worldwide. By demarcating who, or what, it is not, Germany's projections of national identity relay and mitigate global pressure in multiple directions. Answering global demand, Germany applies notions of supranationally defined Otherness to intranational, or domestic, groups, which determines its identity, inflects its self-understanding, and abstracts from its special experience and unique provenance. As a result, the global-facing definition of "nationality, . . . nation-ness, as well as nationalism" dislodges more parochial notions of belonging.[7]

The post-1990 Federal Republic manages this multidirectional relay with remarkable efficacy through the public sponsorship of influential media, much of it interlinked. Its film politics connect with its publicly sponsored broadcasting as well as with its more explicitly political education arms and its cultural missions abroad. Projecting the nation's global image, they simultaneously arbitrate the identities of intra-German minorities. By catering to familiar stereotypes, classic colonialism facilitates international sales. Hence, the global market provides an incentive to depict East Germans as exoticized Others. International success, in turn, validates the films' representations. In this way, the increasingly globalized media landscape reinforces the back-coupling of global-faced legitimation with the definition of local and minority Others.

Since hitherto primarily national production has, over the last twenty years, become geared toward international sales, state-sponsored institutions can project Germany's national image onto the global screen, while at the same time redressing more local histories and politics that, with alternative trajectories, threaten to subvert dominant power structures. By providing critical support in terms of threshold financing, distribution, and marketing, public sponsors become gatekeepers. Andreas Dresen sums up German film financing: "Man kann ja im Prinzip kaum noch einen Kinofilm ohne Fernsehbeteiligung produzieren" (Essentially, you can hardly make a film anymore without TV participation).[8] Given "the unprecedentedly active role," which the post-1990 German state has

7 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 1991), 4.

8 Andreas Dresen, "'Ein bisschen Kunst ohne Risiko geht nicht . . .': Werkstattgespräch mit Andreas Dresen and der HFF Konrad Wolf Potsdam-Babelsberg," in *Kino in Bewegung: Perspektiven des deutschen Gegenwartsfilms*, ed. Thomas Schick and Tobias Ebbrecht (Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag für Fachmedien, 2011), 343–63, here 347.

played in shaping East German memory,[9] globalized film emerges as an especially potent influence in national impression management as well as political control.[10]

While the co-production of culture by national institutions, international markets, and filmmakers seems salient, since sales data, industry awards, political endorsement, and authorial commentary clearly serve to promote reception, the social and political impact of this interplay between economics, politics, and the artistic voice remains largely ignored.[11] "Culture has become a profound, and ubiquitous, weapon," according to Nato Thompson, who observes that it has been deployed "as a global strategy . . . at every level."[12] Conversely, to retain local identity means to assert alternative trajectories vis-à-vis global colonization. A prerequisite to self-determination, this closely correlates with political agency, which builds on the ability to formulate one's own provenance, experience, and perspective. Images and narratives empower or disempower, entrapping the disempowered in a circuitous logic. The cultural "weapon" sidelines populations by what Joseph Stiglitz has called, before the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic accented the term differently, "the creation of social distance."[13] Instead of contributing to social understanding and consensus, it deprives constituents of voice. Such diminishing of democracy through government or commercial interference in arts and mass media calls for attention.

Andreas Dresen's film *Gundermann* speaks to the degree in which local self-determination vis-à-vis state- and market-mandated interests is possible in the global era.[14] With the only other exception of Andreas

9 David Clarke and Ute Wölfel, "Remembering the German Democratic Republic in a United Germany," in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic: Divided Memory in a United Germany*, ed. David Clarke and Ute Wölfel (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3–22, here 21. See also Paul Cooke, *Contemporary German Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

10 For an explanation of "impression management" as a sociological concept see Erving Goffmann, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956).

11 Felix Ringel renders pioneering work here, as he shows the impact of state-mandated memory as well as grass-roots projects in his investigation of several projects in Gerhard Gundermann's hometown of Hoyerswerda. Felix Ringel, "Neue Gegenwärtigkeiten in Hoyerswerda: Zur Anthropologie und Zukunft Ostdeutschlands," in *Der Osten: Neue sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven auf einen komplexen Gegenstand jenseits von Verurteilung und Verklärung*, ed. Sandra Matthäus and Daniel Kubiak (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 141–67, here 144–52.

12 Nato Thompson, *Culture as Weapon: The Art of Influence in Everyday Life* (New York: Melville House, 2017), viii.

13 Joseph Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality* (New York: Norton, 2013), 200.

14 I am using here Andrew Beattie's term of "state-mandated memory" denoting a system in which "state organs subsidize or otherwise endorse the

Kleinert, Dresen is the last DEFA-trained East German director still working in the Federal Republic's mainstream cinema. Over the years, he has remained remarkably true to his background and training.[15] As he resists an Othering of the East German past, he upholds an Eastern aesthetic that asserts parallels to the present. Instead of readily consumable feel-good stories, he, in DEFA tradition, seeks to posit points of inquiry.[16] Together with his predominantly East German production team, he even maintains a working style that closely resembles the equitable and participatory approach of DEFA's film units.[17] Finally, he endorses DEFA's legacy not only through his films, but even courts controversy by outspokenly defending it in the press, where his appreciation for East German filmmaking stands against Westerners' wholesale condemnations.[18] Consistently identified with his East German minority status, he has to negotiate the political charge the label implies.

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activities of third parties." Andrew Beattie, "The Politics of Remembering the GDR: Official and State-Mandated Memory Since 1990," in *Remembering the German Democratic Republic*, ed. Clarke and Wölfel, 23–35, here 25. For further analysis and description of the ways in which the Federal Republic actively shapes and uses historiography for ideological purposes, see, for instance, Patricia Hogwood, "Selective Memory: Channelling the Past in Post-GDR Society," in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR: Multiple Perspectives and Plural Authenticities*, ed. Anna Saunders and Debbie Pinfold (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 34–48, here 42.

15 Julian Preece, "Introduction," in *Andreas Dresen*, ed. Julian Preece and Nick Hodgin (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 1–12, here 2. Starting with *Timm Thaler oder Das Verkaufte Lachen* (*The Legend of Timm Thaler or The Boy Who Sold His Laughter*, 2017), Dresen adopts a more commercial approach. Apparently trying to tag onto the success of *Die Unendliche Geschichte* (*The Neverending Story*, dir. Wolfgang Petersen, 1984), also produced by Bernd Eichinger, the film is made with a global market in mind.

16 This theme resurfaces again and again in his interviews: "Wenn ich frage, was war, dann bewegt mich die Frage: Was ist? Geschichte als Impuls für heutiges Zurechtfinden in der Welt" (If I ask what was, I am motivated by the question, what is? History as an impulse to orient oneself today in the world). Andreas Dresen, *Glücks Spiel*, ed. Hans-Dieter Schütt (Berlin: Bebra, 2013), 167. Similarly, see Dresen, "'Ein bisschen Kunst ohne Risiko geht nicht . . .,'" 352. For an outline of DEFA's aesthetic, see Evelyn Preuss, "'You Say You Want a Revolution': East German Cinema at the Crossroads between the Cinemas," *Celluloid Revolt: German Screen Cultures and the Long 1968* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2019), 218–36.

17 Dresen, "'Ein bisschen Kunst ohne Risiko geht nicht . . .,'" 351.

18 Dresen, "Der falsche Kino-Osten"; and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, as cited in Brian Brooks, "Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Director of *The Lives of Others*," *IndieWire*, February 8, 2007, https://www.indiewire.com/2007/02/indiewire-interview-florian-henckel-von-donnersmarck-director-of-the-lives-of-others-75172/ (accessed July 23, 2020).

Against this background, the subject of Dresen's latest feature film, the East German singer-songwriter Gerhard Gundermann, seems a political choice to give East German perspectives a voice in the national and global discourse. Gundermann is perhaps East Germany's most idiosyncratic and most representative intellectual. He had become a spokesperson for the underrepresented East German minority in the 1990s,[19] and his popularity continued to grow unabatedly after his premature death, at the age of forty-three, in 1998. A backhoe driver in one of East Germany's iconic soft coal mines, a popular singer-songwriter who defied appropriation before and after 1990, and as well acquainted with various theatrical traditions as with Marxist theory, he effortlessly bridged high and low culture, casting sophisticated dialectics into poignant puns on folksy proverbs and poeticizing quotidian experience with philosophical eloquence. While he advocated a grassroots globalization, he conveyed a strong sense of attachment, even interwovenness, to a local landscape that was changing rapidly beneath him. Additionally, as both perpetrator and victim of the former State Security, he sought to moderate the sensationalist 1990s witch hunts of former informants. Contravening the state-mandated image of the *Staatssicherheit* (East Germany's secret service, known informally as the *Stasi*) as a pervasive, fear-inspiring instrument of terror, he dismissed the agency as misguided and ineffective, stating it had produced nothing but "Kinderkacke" (children's poo), a bon mot quoted in the German press.[20]

Dresen uses Gundermann's involvement with the secret service as a frame story, narrating his life in flashbacks from the perspective of the 1990s. As his seemingly lost past refuses to come to mind, his quest for remembrance motivates the often seamless intercutting of scenes that illuminate his life in the GDR, as he struggles at work, with the party and his music group, winning his love interest as a wife and building a career as a musician along the way. Showing both *DDR-Alltag* (GDR quotidian life) and its shadowy underside of secret service surveillance, the film combines the two topics that have dominated, and often polarized, the

19 Steve Körner, "Mir hat's doch jeder angesehen," *Tageszeitung*, May 8, 1995, https://taz.de/!1509868/ (accessed July 23, 2020).

20 See, for example, Körner, "Mir hat's doch jeder angesehen"; Alexander Osang, "Wie der Musiker Gerhard Gundermann vom informellen Mitarbeiter zum Kontrollvorgang der Staatssicherheit wurde: Eines Tages wollte Grigori Egon Krenz verbrennen," *Berliner Zeitung*, April 28, 1995, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/wie-der-musiker-gerhard-gundermann-vom-informellen-mitarbeiter-zum-kontrollvorgang-der-staatssicherheit-wurde-eines-tages-wollte-grigori-egon-krenz-verbrennen-li.55550 (accessed August 3, 2020); and Gerhard Gundermann, "Wie ich IM Grigori wurde," *Kludge: Notizen aus Halle an der Saale*, September 3, 1995, https://www.koenau.de/2015/09/gerhard-gundermann-wie-ich-im-grigori.html (all accessed August 3, 2020).

post-1990 discourse on the GDR.[21] If a globalized medium such as film can convey local identity, Dresen's *Gundermann* should be able to do this. Hence, the film presents a conclusive test for "was man erzählen darf und was nicht" (what one can and can't tell) with regard to alternative perspectives on a post-1990 Germany, which is marketing itself globally.[22] Comparing the film's fiction with Gundermann's biography, texts, and songs, as well as his reception in the East, gives insight into what globalization processes put at risk.

How East Is the East in (West) German Film? *Gundermann*'s Trajectory

Sonnenallee, *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Das Leben der Anderen*, and *Gundermann* all capitalize on East German history and Otherness.[23] Each film inspired the next and, by the same token, profited from the publicity that their predecessors generated, including the criticism. In particular, the controversy surrounding the authenticity with which the films rendered the East German past raised the films' public profile.[24] Historical accuracy in a fiction film, however, proved difficult to define.[25] More often than

21 Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, 112.

22 Grit Lemke and Knut Elstermann, Interview, "Gundermann Revier: Grit Lemke über Gundermann und die 'übersprungene Generation' des Ostens," *mdr KULTUR*, October 30, 2019, https://www.mdr.de/kultur/gundermanns-revier-grit-lemke-interview-100.html (accessed August 3, 2020).

23 In this respect Stuart Parkes notes that the East German topic brings a bonus, for instance, in terms of literary prizes. Stuart Parkes, "Literary Portrayals of the GDR by Non-GDR Citizens," in *The GDR Remembered: Representations of the East German State since 1989*, ed. Nick Hodgin and Caroline Pearce (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 54–68, here 66.

24 Nick Hodgin, "Aiming to please? Consensus und Consciousness-raising in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003)," in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. Paul Cooke and Chris Homewood (London: Tauris, 2011), 94–112, here 104; and Silke Arnold-de Simine and Susannah Radstone, "The GDR and the Memory Debate," in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR*, ed. Saunders and Pinfold, 19–33, here 19.

25 Donnersmarck, for example, brings out the contradictoriness of the concept's application by claiming in the same interview that the characters and events portrayed in his *Das Leben der Anderen* are carefully researched and backed by documentary evidence, that these same characters and events are highly unlikely constructs, but that, ultimately, fiction is closer to the truth than history as it actually unfolded. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, "*Das Leben der Anderen/ The Lives of Others*," interview with Michael Guillen, *ScreenAnarchy*, January 24, 2007, https://screenanarchy.com/2007/01/das-leben-der-anderen-the-lives-of-othersinterview-with-florian-henckel-von.html (accessed August 3, 2020).

not, Western critics mistook it for adherence to the memory mandated by the post-1990 Federal Republic. It characterized the former GDR as a totalitarian *Unrechtsstaat* (a state not based on the rule of law), which suppressed its citizens in every possible way.[26] The historical Othering of the East German past legitimized the Federal Republic as a democratic *Rechtsstaat* (state based on the rule of law) that grants its citizens personal sovereignty and freedom.[27]

Alternatively, critics fixed authenticity on commodities. As their ever-faster production and disposal propels the economy and the prosperity of the West, they have come to define Western society and culture.[28] By contrast, commodities remained of secondary importance in the East. Neither an economic driver nor a tool for social stratification, here they had distinct political meanings. Failing to understand East German culture on its own terms, the critics' misconception foreshortened the losses of East Germans. It eclipsed from public discourse that East Germans had, despite some shortcomings, also experienced the advantages of socioeconomics that emphasized stakeholdership, existential security, and work-life balance, and that this experience continued to inform their political attitudes and social expectations after 1990.[29]

Conversely, the films' presumed nostalgia for the former East also provoked censure, as *Ostalgie* (ostalgia) had become a highly contested notion by the end of the 1990s. Encompassing a wide range of phenomena,

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26 Christiane Wilke, "Östlich des Rechtsstaats: Vergangenheitspolitik, Recht und Identitätsbildung," in *Der Osten*, ed. Matthäus and Kubiak, 169–93; and Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 27–59.

27 Perceptions and experiences regarding political agency and civil liberty in the Federal Republic differ decidedly in the Eastern part of the country. See Martin Machowecz and Heinrich Wefing, "Jetzt hör mal zu!," *Die Zeit*, October 2, 2019, https://www.zeit.de/2019/41/mauerfall-deutsche-wiedervereinigung-ostdeutschland-skepsis (accessed August 3, 2020).

28 For example, "Kleenex" for a cellulose handkerchief, "Q-Tips" for cotton-tipped ear cleaners, and "googling" for using an internet search engine. For the way in which consumerism defines Western culture see, for instance, Zygmunt Bauman, *Consuming Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Benjamin Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* (New York: Norton, 2007); and Jean Baudrillard, *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (London: Sage, 2017).

29 Mattias Frey, "'Ostalgie', Historical Ownership, and Material Authenticity: *Good Bye, Lenin!* and *Das Leben der Anderen*," in *Postwall German Cinema: History, Film History, and Cinephilia* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 107–38; Oana Godeanu-Kenworthy, "Deconstructing Ostalgia—the National Past between Commodity and Simulacra in Wolfgang Becker's *Good Bye, Lenin!* (2003)," *Journal of European Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 161–77; and Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, 103–75.

from private TV stations that presented the former GDR as a zoo-like exhibit of Otherness, to highly differentiated reminiscences by East Germans, it incited political rancor on all sides.[30] Reading the films as part of this "memory contest" further raised their profile, while defining them along the lines of Western discourse.[31] By the same token, the question of whether the films reflect experiences and mindsets that escape Western parameters remained secondary or even overlooked. As a result, the films, their marketing, and also much of their critical reception cast East Germany into Western precepts, surmising that the only aspects of the GDR that East Germans could possibly miss were *Spreewald* gherkins, *MoccaFix* coffee, and *Tempo* beans.[32]

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30 For a summary of scholarly approaches and *Good Bye, Lenin!*'s engagement with (n)Ostalgia, see Jennifer Kapczynski, "Negotiating Nostalgia: The GDR Past in *Berlin Is in Germany* and *Good Bye, Lenin!*," *Germanic Review* 82, no. 1 (2007): 78–100, here 83–89. For a broader overview of the cultural phenomenon, see Cooke, *Representing East Germany*, 103–75. For an assessment of the applicability and cultural relevance of the term, see Claire Hyland, "'Ostalgie doesn't fit': Individual Interpretations of and Interaction with Ostalgie," in *Remembering and Rethinking the GDR*, ed. Saunders and Pinfold, 101–15.

31 Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove define "memory contests" in contradistinction to the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), which in their perception connotes a more monolithic approach to memory. The concept of "memory contest" hence stresses the pluralistic and personal character of post-1990 memory culture. Mary Cosgrove and Anne Fuchs, "Introduction," *German Life and Letters* 59, no. 2 (2006), special issue *Memory Contests*, ed. Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove: 3–10, here 4. Conceiving memory contests as "highly dynamic public engagements with the past," however, does not account for the fact that they can take on a hegemonic character, especially through government interference. Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and Management of the Past," in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990*, ed. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and George Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 1–24, here 2. As a result, groups with little or no influence find their own memory contested rather than part of a dynamic democratic discourse. I am suggesting here that broader definition of the term.

32 See Patricia Hogwood, "After the GDR: Reconstructing Identity in Post-Communist Germany," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16, no. 4 (2000): 45–67; and Martin Blum, "Remaking the East German Past: Ostalgie, Identity, and Material Culture," *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 3 (2000): 229–53. Paul Cooke notes that, in *Sonnenallee*, the product placement is "overcoded," pointing to "the artificiality of seeing such products as a means of recapturing the past," and that in *Good Bye, Lenin!*, the "political dream is given expression, allowing the spectator a moment to reflect on what might have been, and consider the limitations of the materialism of contemporary Western capitalist democracies," but a memory of East German achievements, marked in the very way in which people lived their lives, remains unreflected. Paul Cooke, "Watching

More subtly and also more effectively, the films' pitch to global cinema realigned the East with Western coordinates. Like von Donnersmarck with respect to *Das Leben der Anderen* and Wolfgang Becker with respect to *Good Bye, Lenin!*,[33] Dresen emphatically denies that his films have a specifically Eastern relevance.[34] Instead, he insists that all of his films are "universal" stories, "merely narrated over an East German foil."[35] Becker, von Donnersmarck, and Dresen all characterize their stories as not being specifically about East German society, East German history, or East German savoir-vivre, but following an abstract pattern presumedly imprinted on all of humanity. The East German past merely enhances the suspense, "die großen Gefühle" (the great emotions), and the entertainment value.[36]

Such universality is a prerequisite for global marketability. For a film to sell everywhere, it has to be understood everywhere. According to Seán Allan, such "'universal' stories within specifically East German settings . . . open up a new perspective on the East for audiences with little or no firsthand experience of the GDR."[37] But to what extent can a "universal story" capture Eastern specificity, idiosyncrasy, and innovation? Can

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the Stasi: Authenticity, Ostalgie and History in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006)," in *New Directions in German Cinema*, ed. Cooke and Homewood, 111–27, here 120–21.

33 Birk Meinhardt, "Dich muss man rütteln und schütteln! Katrin Saß in *Good Bye Lenin!*, und das unverhoffte Glück in einem Leben, das schon fast zu Ende war," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 12, 2003; and Gisa Funck, "Im Auge des Sturms wird ein Autor entdeckt: Bernd Lichtenberg's *Good Bye, Lenin!*," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 15, 2003, https://www.genios.de/document/FAZ__6b71b04ade5767ab982ab52d9039a09620825be7 (accessed August 3, 2020).

34 Andreas Dresen and Axel Prahl, "Es war klar, dass wir miteinander weitergehen werden," interview by Markus Decker, in *Was ich dir schon immer mal sagen wollte: Ost-West-Gespräche*, ed. Markus Decker (Berlin: Links, 2015), 91–110, here 103.

35 Dresen and Prahl, "Es war klar," 98.

36 "Letztlich ist es ein Setting, das sicherlich authentisch und einfühlsam geschildert sein muss. Hauptsächlich geht es aber um Spannung, um Angst, Liebe und die großen Gefühle und um Unterhaltung" (In the end, it is a setting that of course has to be rendered authentically and sensitively. But the main concerns are to create suspense, to talk about fear, love, and the great emotions and to entertain). Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, "Viele Stasi-Leute sind noch davon überzeugt, das Richtige getan zu haben," *Planet*, March 28, 2006, http://www.planet-interview.de/interviews/florian-henckel-von-donnersmarck/34135/ (accessed July 23, 2020).

37 Seán Allan, "*Ostalgie*, Fantasy and the Normalization of East-West Relations in Post-Unification Comedy," in *German Cinema since Unification*, ed. David Clarke (London: Continuum, 2006), 105–26, here 124.

spectators gain new perspectives if they only find what they already know instead of being invited, or provoked, to explore alternative possibilities and meanings? While presenting the familiar in an unfamiliar context could produce a Brechtian alienation effect and thus add hermeneutic value, the "new" or "unfamiliar" in films such as *Good Bye, Lenin!*, *Das Leben der Anderen*, and *Gundermann* just reproduces the old and familiar colonialism. "The universal story" affirms the notion that mankind has reached the "end of history,"[38] instead of questioning it. Presumed universality eliminates local alterity and thereby corroborates the neoliberalist historiography that forecloses the possibility of social change and political alternative. Having dominated political, if not scholarly, debates since the 1990s, it has become accepted currency in the global cultural market.[39] Finally, Brechtian technique would register in the films' aesthetics, inviting the audience's active judgment; but all three films cater to convention, resolving conflicts according to the formulas of the familiar.

Of the mainstream films on the East German topic, only *Sonnenallee* referred to Eastern aesthetic traditions.[40] Despite Dresen's outspoken commitment to the East German legacy, similar references are absent in his 2018 film *Gundermann*. While Haußmann taught his actors East German body language, Dresen had even Gundermann's music rearranged and West German actors play his still performing East German band in order to suit Western tastes. While the Westernization smooths over the rawness, playfulness, and participatory folk character of Gundermann's original music and performance style, it also undercuts what Dresen himself values most in Gundermann's art, namely that he "bestach nicht durch Virtuosität und Schöngesang, sondern durch seine Glaubwürdigkeit" (did not impress with virtuosity or singing nicely, but with credibility).[41] Given that Dresen surmised that Gundermann's authenticity "viel damit zu tun hatte, wo er hergekommen ist" (had a lot to do with where he is from),[42] his translation of Gundermann into universality cuts the ties to the local and undermines the credibility which he originally valued. The universal is as much everywhere as it is nowhere.

Another change over the twenty years from *Sonnenallee* to *Gundermann* concerns the way in which the films employ Western models.

38 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

39 Philipp Ther, for instance, analyzes the concrete political effect of this neoliberalist thinking: Philipp Ther, *Die neue Ordnung auf dem alten Kontinent* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 31, 81, and 304.

40 See Preuss, "'You Say You Want a Revolution.'"

41 Andreas Dresen, "Regisseur Andreas Dresen über Ostsänger: 'Seine Songs haben einfach Seele,'" *Tageszeitung*, August 18, 2018, https://taz.de/Regisseur-Andreas-Dresen-ueber-Ostsaenger/!5525422/ (accessed August 3, 2020).

42 Dresen, "Regisseur Andreas Dresen über Ostsänger."

Whereas later films use Western film and culture merely to guarantee international sales, *Sonnenallee* quotes films such as Sergio Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968), Peter Bogdanovich's *Last Picture Show* (1971), George Lucas's *American Graffiti* (1973), Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), Franc Roddam's *Quadrophenia* (1979), and Wim Wenders's *Paris, Texas* (1984)[43] to counter the exoticization of the East as Other and challenge East-West perceptions. Rather than presenting a model to emulate, they add to the palimpsest of references that comments, ambiguates, and, thus, amplifies the audience's agency in determining the meaning of the film. While *Sonnenallee* draws on Western models for a specifically Eastern aesthetic aiming to emancipate the audience, *Gundermann* applies global cinema's biopic mold neither with a critical charge nor with an Eastern emancipatory agenda. Instead, the film uses the Western model to draw audiences into the narrative through a Western lack/suture structure. With the same pattern as Bryan Singer's *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) and Dexter Fletcher's *Rocketman* (2019), Dresen's film stylizes the East German singer-songwriter as a Western-style star like the British singers Freddie Mercury and Elton John. As in *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Rocketman*, *Gundermann*'s frame story sets the protagonist out on a quest for redemption that strings together bits of biography in order to motivate, explain, and, ultimately, sell the songs. All three films feed into a feel-good story about an artist's problems, which are fixable and, according to the films' Hollywood-type happy end, ultimately fixed. In all three films, adverse conditions compromise the protagonist, who eventually overcomes his difficulties with his art. The filmic episodes show the artists' trials and errors to compensate for social inadequacy, first leading to a deeper crisis before the final recovery and wholesome integration of the character into the social fabric. The enthusiastic acclaim of the diegetic audience establishes a community inspired by the singers' personas and music and, for the artists, a sense of purpose that redeems their failings.

With *Gundermann*, Dresen not only subscribes to the "cinema of consensus,"[44] but even models the consensus through diegetic acclaim as well as through narrative structure. The showcased music resolves the narrative tension built up by the film sequences, just as an advertisement spot uses the dramatic suspense built up by the preceding segment of a TV show. The structural analogy shows the commodification of Gundermann's songs, which the film sells, like a TV ad, as the means to

43 Andrea Rinke, "*Sonnenallee*—'Ostalgie' as a Comical Conspiracy," *German as a Foreign Language* 3, no. 1 (2006): 24–45, here 26, 27, and 39.

44 Eric Rentschler, "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London: Routledge, 2000), 260–77, here 264.

life improvement. As in an advertisement spot, the protagonist's role is to model the redemptive qualities of the commodity, that is, the music. Likewise employing advertisements' narrative tools, the reactions of the diegetic audience pre-formulate what the spectators of the film are supposed to emulate. While Haußmann applied the aesthetic of Western advertisements with tongue-and-cheek humor, Dresen's use of global cinema formulas enhances the commodification of Gundermann's persona and art, while increasing the film's international marketability.

The economic and critical success promised by the global cinema formula also explains the recasting of Steven Spielberg's 1993 film *Schindler's List* in both *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Gundermann*. The German films emulate the prize-winning blockbuster in portraying a character compromised by a scandalous German history, or to use Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove's formulation, "an event that is perceived as a massive disturbance of [the] community's self-understanding."[45] Von Donnersmarck and Dresen mutate Spielberg's good Nazi into a good *Stasi* operative. Like Spielberg's Schindler, the *Stasi* men corroborate for a higher purpose with a deeply flawed political system only to be redeemed by the forgiveness of their victims. In a questionable logic that remains unquestioned, the gratitude of the victims vindicates the protagonists' accommodation with the regime and, thus, soothes the disturbance to the community's self-understanding.[46] While Dresen attacked *Das Leben der Anderen* in the press for its facile formulas that had won the film an "Oscar" for Best Foreign Language Film as well as substantial economic return,[47] funding pressures and the promise of box office appeal ultimately outweighed Dresen's original concerns.[48] The fact that Dresen

45 Fuchs and Cosgrove, "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests," 2. Henckel von Donnersmarck follows the post-1990 state-mandated narrative that, with the concept of totalitarianism, draws a direct line from the Nazi regime to the GDR, stating that "after that first dictatorship, which was something we were just coming to terms with, and lasted for 12 years, from '33 to '45, came a second dictatorship, which lasted not 12 but 40 years. And we need to acknowledge that." Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, "An Interview with Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck," interviewed by Annie Wagner, *The Stranger*, February 15, 2007, https://www.thestranger.com/seattle/an-interview-with-florian-henckel-von-donnersmarck/Content?oid=160117 (accessed August 3, 2020).

46 Dresen qualifies the ethics by introducing, with the puppet player, a character who does not corroborate this pattern.

47 Dresen, "Der falsche Kino-Osten."

48 "[T]he director cited *Schindler's List* as justification for what he planned to do." Anna Funder, "Tyranny of Terror," *The Guardian*, May 5, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/may/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview12 (accessed August 3, 2020). See also Daniela Berghahn's analysis of the film in "DEFA's Afterimages: Looking back at the East from the West in *Das Leben der*

adopted the Hollywood model with little modification and no critical reflection despite his earlier criticism, underscores the clout of institutional and market influence on filmmaking.

In summary, the series of mainstream German films that have portrayed East Germany over the last twenty years market the local by surrendering its conflicts, its alterity, and its subversive potential to the Hollywood happy end, which confirms the status quo.[49] As a result, the films also reiterate dominant Western stereotypes, which, as Edward Said has shown, legitimize colonialization.[50] Since the "national narratives for international consumption," according to Randall Halle's characterization of such films,[51] are also consumed locally, they not only attempt to rewrite history, but also wash away the reference points for local identity. While the German-German dialectic of division and unity was global-facing from the outset, the country's most popular films have dissolved it into global cinema's safe strategy for investment return. If *Das Leben der Anderen* fastidiously following the Hollywood formula represents, according to one of its lead actors, "ein deutscher Stoff durch und durch" (German material through and through),[52] the national has become a commercially produced global media affect.

"What You Can and Can't Say": *Gundermann* Takes Twelve Years to Make

How decisively the mutual reinforcing of national agenda and global marketization shapes German film production can be seen in Dresen's *Gundermann*. To make a film on the subject at all, Dresen threw away his original artistic intentions into the bargain.[53] As one of the East's most

Anderen (2006) and *Barbara* (2012)," in *Reimagining DEFA: East German Cinema in its National and Transnational Contexts*, ed. Seán Allan and Sebastian Heiduschke (New York: Berghahn, 2016), 312–34, here 320–21.

49 Preuss, "'You Say You Want a Revolution,'" 230.

50 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

51 Randall Halle, *German Film after Germany: Toward a Transnational Aesthetic* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 94.

52 Sebastian Koch, "Warum ich erst jetzt eine Kinohauptrolle in Deutschland spiele," in *Das Leben der anderen: Filmbuch*, ed. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), 171–81, here 171.

53 The funding bodies for *Gundermann* included both regional institutions, such as Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg, Leuchtstoff (a cooperation between Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg and Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg), Film- und Medienstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Mitteldeutsche Filmförderung, as well as several federal film funds, such as Deutscher Filmförderfonds, Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien and the Filmförderungsanstalt. Arte, which is financed by French and

recalcitrant, archetypal, and popular artists, Gundermann hardly fit the Western stereotype of Eastern Oriental and hence failed to find the sponsors' approval. "Manchmal hat man das Gefühl, wenn man Geschichten aus der eigenen, ostdeutschen Lebenserfahrung erzählen möchte, dass man noch mal extra eine eigene Begründung dafür abliefern muss. Das hat mich schon geärgert" (What made me angry was that as an East German, one often had the feeling of having to justify why one wanted to tell a story from one's own life experience), Dresen notes in an interview with an Eastern TV station upon the film's release.[54] While Dresen surmised that a film about the West German singer Rio Reiser would have received financing on the spot, *Gundermann* required more than a decade worth of revisions, deliberations, and delay.[55]

Dresen's difficulties with the subject echo Richard Engel's, whose 1999 documentary *Gundermann: Ende der Eisenzeit* (Gundermann: The End of the Ice Age) continued be censored by the cosponsoring public TV station Radio Berlin-Brandenburg (RBB): "Ein guter Film, aber der falsche Mann" (A good film, but the wrong man).[56] Like Dresen, an East German who had already made films in the GDR, Engel eventually cancelled the cooperation on account of the station's unrelenting intervention.[57] "Bei dem, was möglich ist oder nicht möglich ist, verstehen die jeweils Herrschenden keinen Spaß" (With respect to what is possible and what is not, the respective rulers understand no jokes), he

German TV license taxes and calls itself "Der öffentlich-rechtliche europäische Kulturkanal" (https://www.arte.tv/sites/de/corporate/wer-wir-sind/?lang=de) in its German version, abbreviated to "The European culture channel" (https://www.arte.tv/sites/en/corporate/who-we-are/?lang=en), also contributed to the film. The only non-public sponsors are the Ch. Links and the BuschFunk publishing houses. Even the distributor, Pandora Film, is co-funded by the Creative Europe MEDIA program of the European Union, see https://www.pandorafilm.de/ (accessed August 3, 2020).

54 "Conny Gundermann: 'Andreas Dresen verletzt Gundi nicht, der liebt den auch,'" *MDR Kultur*, last modified June 28, 2019, https://www.mdr.de/kultur/andreas-dresen-conny-gundermann-mdr-kultur-trifft-100.html (accessed August 3, 2020). Here I am using Mariana Ivanova's abbreviating translation, in *Cinema of Collaboration: DEFA Coproductions and International Exchange in Cold War Europe* (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 237. Dresen uses the word "ärgert," which can also mean "annoyed," and hence carries less emotional charge.

55 Laila Stieler, "Meine Reue kriegt ihr nicht," interviewed by Maxi Leinkauf, in *Gundermann: Von jedem Tag will ich was haben, was ich nicht vergesse*, ed. Andreas Leusink (Berlin: Links, 2018), 109–21, here 121; and Dresen, "Regisseur Andreas Dresen über Ostsänger."

56 Richard Engel, "Ereignis Gundermann," in *Gundermann: 2 Filme aus 2 Gesellschaften* (Berlin: BuschFunk, 2016), unpaginated.

57 Given its initial investment, the public TV station RBB is still listed as a sponsor for the film.

notes in his essay that accompanies the documentary's DVD release.[58] As Engel parallels his post-1990 experiences with the difficulties that his 1982 documentary about the singer-songwriter, *Gundi Gundermann*, had encountered in the GDR, he points out the continuity between censorship in the former German Democratic Republic and in the contemporary Federal Republic. The fact that Engel's GDR-era documentary had sparked Dresen's interest in Gundermann attests to the political poignancy of media politics and corroborates popular East German sentiment: Dresen's own film shows little of the recalcitrant, revolutionary spirit that had compelled him in Engel's GDR-made film.[59]

While Engel's comparatively low budget allowed him to forgo a public sponsor, Dresen's feature film stalled without funding and distribution in place. Open criticism of the process would have risked damaging Dresen's future prospects to pursue major German feature film projects. By contrast, Engel's reduced need for public money allowed him to rebuke media politics more openly. He addresses directly what Dresen only vaguely hints at with his repeated "Das ist heute nicht so anders" (That is not so different today) comparison between pre- and post-1990 political accommodation.[60] While Dresen approaches the topic of censorship gingerly, claiming cumbersomely with regard to his *Gundermann* project, "Wir dachten: Es muss auch die originäre Ostsicht geben dürfen" (We thought that an original Eastern perspective also has to be allowed),[61] Engel attacks outright the sidelining of the Eastern legacy by citing the contradiction between Gundermann's popular success and his marginalization in German media: "Fernsehen, Rundfunk und Presse wurden vor dem Virus Gundermann geschützt" (TV, radio, and the print media have been protected against the virus Gundermann).[62] Highlighting the disconnect between audience demand and public programming, Engel mocks state-mandated ideology. The Western market ideology, with which the Federal Republic legitimized the privatization of the East's public resources, apparently does not apply to the media. Again, he diagnoses a continuity in the (West) German state with the

58 Engel, *Gundermann: 2 Filme aus 2 Gesellschaften*, unpaginated.

59 Dresen, "Regisseur Andreas Dresen über Ostsänger."

60 See, for example, "*Gundermann*—Ein Abend über Musik, die DDR und ostdeutsches Lebensgefühl: Die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung und das Haus der Geschichte präsentieren Film, Gespräch und Konzert in Bonn," Facebook video, 1:05:28, posted by Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, November 27, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/bpb.de/videos/gundermann-ein-abend-%C3%BCber-musik-die-ddr-und-ostdeutsches-lebensgef%C3%BChl/307550976517007/ (accessed August 3, 2020).

61 "Conny Gundermann: 'Andreas Dresen verletzt Gundi nicht, der liebt den auch.'"

62 Engel, "Ereignis Gundermann," unpaginated.

control of the public sphere in the GDR. Here, the state had also guarded its major distribution channels and denied Gundermann himself access.[63] Additionally, both before and after 1990, the singer-songwriter's penchant for refusing to toe the line spread through the grapevine, often faster than his songs, revealing continuities that seemingly contradict the (West) German legitimation as a free and democratic country where, in fair competition, the product best serving consumers or the politics supported by most wins out.[64]

Orient and Orientation: *Gundermann* and Gundermann

This parallel between the East German regime and post-1990 Germany unravels the Othering of the East. Since the man behind Dresen's protagonist had resisted both regimes for similar reasons and in similar ways, Western-dominated institutions regarded him as a political threat that could unhinge their dual global-facing legitimation. Yet, it is precisely Gundermann's persistent political stance post-1990 that led many East Germans to identify with his art. His songs valorize his East German audience's legacy, especially as it has been derogated, censored, and, to a great extent, outrightly criminalized by the state that had taken over their country. Accompanied by a melodic folk rock that, with its changing instrumentation and playful improvisation, invites participation, his texts poeticize the profound and powerful contingencies of the quotidian with the larger social and political sphere. Capturing a deeply dialectical thinking and political dissidence in the metaphors of life as it is lived—with concrete references to work, family, and the shifting landscape of his home—he maintained a distinctly East German aesthetic, value system, and perspective.

"Brigitta," for instance, is a song about the eponymous mine where Gundermann worked and where he had dug up soft coal atop an

63 Exceptions were Richard Engel's above-mentioned 1982 film *Gundi Gundermann*, which was screened on East German television, as well as the 1988 AMIGA-record *Männer, Frauen und Maschinen*.

64 See, for example, Dresen, "Regisseur Andreas Dresen über Ostsänger." Here, the virulence of his poetics fomented—and may still foment—socioeconomic change. The metaphors that Engel uses to describe Gundermann's popularity match Robert Shiller's metaphor of contagion and virulence to describe the spread of stories that precipitate major economic change. Robert Shiller, *Narrative Economics: How Stories Go Viral and Drive Major Economic Events* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019).

enormous excavator for most of his career.[65] As the mine faces closure, he reflects on how it has shaped family histories and individual life perspectives; indeed, the woman's name and the direct address suggest that the mine itself is a maternal member of the family. Refraining from value judgments, Gundermann instead relies on his listeners to recognize what is important to them and to formulate his song's message themselves. "Christiane" similarly associates work with human connection. But while "Brigitta" is included in Dresen's film, "Christiane," sharply contrasting East-West relationships and questioning the desirability of the Western model, is not.[66] Gundermann's dystopic "Engel über dem Revier" (Angels above the Mine) is similarly not included in Dresen's film. In the song, Gundermann tells his listeners to catch the guardian angel who is leaving him as he leaves the mine. While "angels in the sky" evoke an idyllic, universal trope, Gundermann contrasts it with the local dystopia of his deserted hometown Hoyerswerda below.[67] In the end, even the angels have to depart "inne andre welt nen andern ort so wie viele hier / so wie wir" (into a different world a different place like many here / like us). The "wir," as the last word of the song stresses, is the community that, in its absence, has become a utopia. A vacuum remains.

As Gundermann's songs associate the GDR past with "better 'relationships between people' ('zwischenmenschliche Beziehungen') and more 'togetherness' ('Miteinander,' 'Füreinander,' 'Zusammensein,' 'Zusammengehörigkeit'),"[68] they express what Mary Fulbrook discerned in her field research as a "deeper yearning" for the East German past. "Intimately bound up with a sense of social relations, and hence a sense of an 'east German self',"[69] East German identity carries a sense of entitlement to political voice and social equity, as well as the Eastern sense of responsibility to intervene in matters of the commonwealth.

65 Gerhard Gundermann, "Brigitta," *BuschFunk: Musikverlag und Direktversand*, https://verlag.buschfunk.com/kuenstler/liedtexte/14_Gerhard_Gundermann/57_Brigitta (accessed August 3, 2020).

66 Gerhard Gundermann, "Christiane," *BuschFunk: Musikverlag und Direktversand* https://verlag.buschfunk.com/kuenstler/liedtexte/14_Gerhard_Gundermann/1343_Christiane (accessed August 3, 2020).

67 For the socio-economic situation in Gundermann's hometown, once the epicenter of East German energy production, see Ringel, "Neue Gegenwärtigkeiten," 153–65.

68 I am using here Mary Fulbrook's words to show the close correspondence between Gundermann's texts and the empirical findings of her field work. Mary Fulbrook, "Living through the GDR: History, Life Stories, and Generations in East Germany," in *The GDR Remembered*, ed. Hodgin and Pearce, 201–20, here 217.

69 Fulbrook, "Living through the GDR," 218.

The way Gundermann articulated the Eastern self-understanding—and implicit right to self-determination—in the face of unfettered neoliberalism, made him an identificatory figure in the East. In "Ossi-Reservation" (Eastie Reservation), for instance, he likens the relationship between East and West Germans to that between Native Americans and their European colonizers.[70] The East emerges as a holding place for the new precariat. In the same way, "Strasse nach Norden" (Road to the North) paints a chillingly dystopic picture of the landscape beneath the new Western glitz. A flashy trash disposal site has replaced East Germany's most iconic power station, Schwarze Pumpe (Black Pump): "heut verheizen sie ihr giftmüll und das gift das sieht man nicht" (today, they burn poisonous trash here, and the poison you don't see).[71] Likewise, the landscape of the Oderbruch, once dubbed "the Garden of Berlin" on account of its fertility and agricultural significance, has been reduced to wasteland on which NATO rehearses war. Gundermann's systematic survey of the East does not register any of the "blühende Landschaften" (blooming landscapes), which the West German government had promised East Germans to win their pro-unification vote in 1990.[72] Reporting on what post-1990 mainstream media suppresses, his art surrogates for unbiased journalism just as it had done in the GDR: it provides information and commentary that rebukes the master narrative. Both pre- and post-1990, it opens up a site for *Gegenöffentlichkeit*, an alternative public sphere.[73] Thereby, the melancholia of Gundermann's songs does not mourn a GDR that failed on its promises and forsook its citizens; it laments the loss of its utopian potential. Arguably, this combination of voicing dystopic experience along with the memory of hope makes for the virulently potent mix that drove Gundermann's popularity despite his deliberate eschewing of the music industry's public relations machinery.[74]

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70 Sung at concerts, for example, but unreleased on CD. Gerhard Gundermann, "Ossi-Reservation," *Alphazalpha*, http://www.alphazalpha.de/musik/gundermann/texte/ossi.html (accessed August 3, 2020).

71 Gerhard Gundermann, "Strasse nach Norden" (*Krams: Das letzte Konzert*, 1998) https://www.lyrix.at/t/gerhard-gundermann-strae-nach-norden-d99 (accessed August 3, 2020).

72 For a discussion of the term, see, for example, Diethelm Prowe, "Kohl and the German Reunification Era," *The Journal of Modern History* 74, no. 1 (2002): 120–38, here 131–32.

73 Further pointing toward continuities between Eastern and Western political systems, the term "Gegenöffentlichkeit" was coined as part of the 1968 movement's critique of Western hegemonic discourse. See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Öffentlichkeit und Erfahrung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, [1972] 1976), 8.

74 Summarizing research, Felix Ringel notes, "Es ist nicht die DDR-Vergangenheit, nach der sich [Daphne Berdahls and Dominic Boyers] ostdeutschen

Projecting the *vox populi* to contest (West) German legitimation, Gundermann's song "Krieg" (War) rebuts the master narrative of the Western takeover of the East. Contrary to the state-mandated account of the "reunification" process, according to which the superior West benefitted the inferior East through an eastward transfer of expertise and funds, Gundermann characterizes the East's incorporation into the West as a surrender on unequal terms and a transfer westward: "du gabst mir die hand und ich gab dir mein gewehr" (you gave me your hand, I gave you my gun).[75] Deceived and disadvantaged, the East has been demoted to the new underdog. According to Gundermann, this socioeconomic stratification forces the conflict between East and West. In the same way in which Gundermann had, in his pre-1990 interviews with Engel, likened his guitar to a gun, it again, or still, serves him post-1990: "doch ich singe und bringe nicht um / obwohl ich nun wüsste, warum" (still I sing and don't kill, although I now know why I would).[76] His music may give his songs a melancholic tone, but their texts' militancy belies resignation.

Gundermann's systemic critique of the East's colonization flies in the face of Western self-identity. Neither the inferior, uncivilized, and backward Other of the West nor the grateful subject liberated from the dungeon of the Stalinist Dark Ages by the Western White Knight, the East in Gundermann's songs is one of unresolved contradictions that pose equally unresolved tasks. Although reunification resulted from the 1989 East German revolution, it did not emancipate East Germans. Instead, it suppressed precisely the most emancipatory aspects of East German society: agency, commitment, and stakeholdership. The Western colonization also purged the vision of a more equitable society that the GDR had projected. Highlighting these aspects, Gundermann reverses the terms of the West's self-legitimizing Orientalism. Western condescension camouflages the savageness that it exteriorizes onto the East. Instead of advancing civility, the Western takeover turns East Germans into "ein Volk der kalten Barbaren" (a people of cold barbarians).[77]

Informanten sehnen, sondern die Zukunft, die diese DDR-Vergangenheit hatte und die der ostdeutschen Gegenwart in den Jahren nach der Wende abhanden gekommen zu sein scheint" (It is not the GDR past for which [Daphne Berdahl's and Dominic Boyer's] East German informants long, but the future, which this GDR past had and which seemed to have gotten lost in the years since the *Wende*). Ringel, "Neue Gegenwärtigkeiten," 152.

75 Gerhard Gundermann, "Krieg" (*Frühstück für immer*, 1995), *Songtexte*, https://www.songtexte.com/songtext/gerhard-gundermann/krieg-4bcf035a.html (accessed August 3, 2020).

76 Gundermann, "Krieg."

77 Gundermann, "Ossi Reservation," *AlphaZalpha*, http://www.alphazalpha.de/musik/gundermann/texte/ossi.html (accessed August 3, 2020).

Since Gundermann's politics blatantly contradict (West) German self-legitimation, Dresen had to eclipse or transfigure aspects that jar with the mandate of state-funded institutions. Yet, the same aspects made Gundermann virulently popular in the East. Consequently, none of Gundermann's songs that thematize East-West relations features in Dresen's film. Nor does the film transport Gundermann's scathing critique of East Germany's colonization by the West in any other way. While the film's title promises a comprehensive account of the man, it conveys only aspects congruent with Western ideology. The select emphasis distorts his political legacy, casting Gundermann into an image that fits the Federal Republic's master narratives.

One Screen, Two Films

Like Gundermann's post-1990 politics, Dresen's film also downplays the subversive tendencies of his pre-1990 art. Only marginally does the film mention the dangers he courted in campaigning for a more liberal and equitable GDR. Almost omitting his persecution by the East German secret service, it diminishes the engagement and courage with which Gundermann sought to advance a more just and sustainable society. If the film would have emphasized the price he paid for his uncompromising stance, it would have underscored both his beliefs in the better future that the GDR espoused and in his post-1990 critique of Western colonialism. It would also have complicated the Hollywood-style redemption tale, since the length of Gundermann's respective *Stasi* files ultimately characterizes him more as a victim than as a perpetrator. Rather than presenting a tale that ultimately legitimates collaboration, such a *Gundermann* would have been a story about its dangers.

Although foregrounding the *Stasi* theme, the film alludes only in two instances to the repercussions Gundermann suffered from the East German secret service. The film's failure to account for, let alone narrate, the risks and consequences of Gundermann's pre-1990 politics facilitates an interpretation of the character as an unprincipled opportunist to whom the advancement of his musical career mattered more than basic ethics, or even friendship. As a result, Dresen's main protagonist indulges the Orientalist stereotypes of irrational contrarian and unprincipled opportunist.[78] Showing his persecution would have cast him as the very opposite of the colonial Other, namely, as a man willing to sacrifice for the greater social good and for moral principle. In narratological terms, his character would gain heroic dimensions and even a sense of martyrdom.

78 See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 165–68.

In addition to toning down the politicality of his character and bringing it into line with Western master narratives, the omission of his persecution decides the interpretation of the film. Depending on whether or not spectators can fill in the pieces left out or merely hinted at in the diegesis, they associate Gundermann either first and foremost with a continued social and political critique and perhaps even regard the singer-songwriter as their mouthpiece, or they see the film as an affirmation of state-mandated ideology. Through the sparse references to Gundermann's recalcitrance and his persecution, Eastern spectators may put the rest of the film into perspective. After all, his views correspond closely to the prevailing Eastern sentiments;[79] and comments on platforms such as YouTube attest to his closeness to "the people," to his "truth-telling" and even to his prophetic power.[80]

To the majority of the audience, however, that larger rest of the film will be the only meaning available: a somewhat exotic zealot made a Faustian deal with the devil *Stasi* to pursue his career as a singer and his love interest. Here, *Gundermann* renders the colonialist portrayal of the

79 Machowecz and Wefing, "Jetzt hör mal zu!"

80 The reception of Gundermann deserves special scholarly attention. A few examples from *YouTube* may serve as an indication to what extent Gundermann crystallized the East German experience: "EHRLICHER Song! Alles Platt gemacht, Millionen Arbeitsplätze vernichtet! Die Revolution hatte nicht nur Sieger! Gundi Du warst großartig! Wir vergessen Dich nie!!!!!!/!!!!!/!" (Honest song! Everything flattened, millions of jobs destroyed! The revolution didn't only have winners! Gundi, you were great! We will never forget you!!!!!!/!!!!!/!), comment by Uwe Friedrich; "Worte, die die Republik heute nicht mehr hören will" (Words that the Republic does not want to hear anymore today), comment by Wilhelm Stock; "Zeitlose Wahrheiten!" (Timeless truths!), comment by Thomas S.; "Schöner Song der ausdrückt wie der Feind in unser Land kam und rücksichtlos unser Lebensgefühl zerstörte" (Nice Song that expresses how the enemy came into our country and heedlessly destroyed our lifestyle), comment by shuk. Gerhard Gundermann, "Strasse nach Norden," YouTube video, 3:35, posted by 5Kurze2Euro, June 5, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPOFv4tb2kA (accessed August 3, 2020); "Er war ein Hellseher" (He was a clairvoyant), comment by Thomas Jacob; "Er hatte einen unwahrscheinlichen Weitblick" (He had incredible foresight), comment by Wolfgang Meier. Gerhard Gundermann, "Ossi Reservation," YouTube video, 2:52, posted by Edgar, November 5, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI9iUdt3C20 (accessed August 3, 2020); "Diese Nähe zu den Menschen aus dem Volk hat ihn vorangebracht" (The closeness to the people drove him forward), comment by Dietmar Feldtner; "so herrlich ehrlich!" (so wonderfully honest), comment by TrixiausNebra. Gerhard Gundermann, "Hier bin ich geboren," YouTube video, 4:53, posted by onycro, May 25, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8s4VLC5WULk (accessed August 3, 2020).

Other as the "Oriental" lacking a moral core and civil virtues.[81] Contrary to Dresen's intention, his focus on the Eastern artist precludes an inquiry of the same or similar behavior and attitudes in Western society. While Western artists, intellectuals, and other public figures, from Ronald Reagan to Gloria Steinem, have cooperated with their country's secret services apparently without moral pangs, but with splendid careers, this problematic stance is offloaded onto the Orientalized Other.[82] Dresen falls short of his original intent to question Western stereotypes of the East and invite self-reflection. Instead, he ends up showing the East and West two different movies, reinscribing German-German duality.

Conclusion

As global neoliberalism liquidizes the maps—to use once again Bauman's metaphor—with international money flows, supranational entities, and an increasingly borderless public sphere, the nation state effectively uses its traditional resources—tax payer funds—to define itself in the global market. By providing baseline financing as well as distribution and marketing support, it can effectively channel and censor production. Dresen's *Gundermann* project shows how an original intention to present a local perspective and question dominant ideology is thwarted in the process. Although attempting to redress (West) Germany's master narrative, the East German filmmaker needed (West) German funding to do so. The local turns into a selling point that exoticizes its specific references into Oriental Otherness, thereby at the same time allowing the national to broadcast an identity globally as well as vis-à-vis domestic minorities.

81 See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 165–68.

82 N. N., "Hollywood: Unmasking T-10," *Time*, September 9, 1985, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,959749,00.html (accessed August 3, 2020); Scott Herhold, "Reagan Played Informant Role for FBI in 40s," *The Chicago Tribune*, August 26, 1985, https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1985-08-26-8502250710-story.html (accessed August 3, 2020); and Markos Kounalakis, "The Feminist Was a Spook," *The Chicago Tribune*, October 25, 2015, https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-gloria-steinem-cia-20151025-story.html (accessed August 3, 2020). Despina Lalaki concludes that "foremost intellectuals and artists directly collaborated with the CCF," that is, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, a CIA front organization. Despina Lalaki, "The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The CIA and the Congress of Cultural Freedom," *Marginalia*, March 6, 2018, https://marginalia.gr/arthro/politics-apolitical-culture-cia-congress-cultural-freedom/ (accessed August 3, 2020). See also Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Political Economy of American Hegemony, 1945–1955* (London: Routledge, 2001).

While Dresen asserts a specifically Eastern perspective, he maintains that there is nothing particularly Eastern about his films, even claiming that his stories are so universal they could play anywhere in the world:

> Man müsste sie aber nur ein bisschen umbauen, dann könnten sie auch in Montreal stattfinden. . . . [Ich] finde . . . die Filme nur deshalb gut, weil sie so universal sind. . . . Das ist das Entscheidende. Meine Geschichten spielen im Osten. Sie handeln aber nicht vom Osten.[83]
>
> [One would have to change them just a little, then they could also take place in Montreal. . . . I find . . . films only good if they are universal. . . . That is the decisive point. My stories are set in the East. They don't deal with the East.]

Axel Prahl, a West German actor and musician, with whom Dresen has worked closely over the years and who plays the State Security officer in *Gundermann*, even goes further in dissociating story from local specificity: "Die Geschichten haben nichts mehr mit dem Ort zu tun, an dem sie stattfinden" (The stories no longer have anything to do with the place in which they happen).[84] And yet, they do, since they are narratives about the former East and they have an effect there. Dresen's contorted formulation about the possibility of an original Eastern perspective in film may, in its contortion, betray some knowledge about its impossibility. Considering Dresen's identification as an East German director and, with it, his categorization as belonging to a minority, he has to escape the pigeonhole in order to take flight. And yet, that departure is just one side of the story. What is left behind when a perspective such as Gundermann's becomes uncommunicable because it cannot be pressed into the formulas of global media? Grit Lemke tried to answer this question with her documentary *Gundermann Revier* (Gundermann Territory; in English as *Coal Country Song*, 2019). In a direct response to Dresen's film, she reverts back to Engel's documentaries, which had originally inspired Dresen. Having herself grown up in Hoyerswerda, she adds her own perspective and recounts Gundermann's reception in the East. She relates Gundermann's life and art through those with whom and for whom he worked. She lets his audience speak. With little heed to commercializing her subject, she anchors Gundermann's story in the local, hoping perhaps that her film will travel through the global grapevine just like its subject did, for authenticity in the end may be more universal than the "universal stories" of global cinema.

83 Dresen and Prahl, "Es war klar," 98 and 103.
84 Dresen and Prahl, "Es war klar," 98.

Ruth Beckermann's Reckoning with Kurt Waldheim: *Unzugehörig: Österreicher und Juden nach 1945* (1989) and *Waldheims Walzer* (2018)

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The election of Kurt Waldheim as president of Austria in 1986 functioned as a political and cultural *Wende* (turning point) in the country's history.[1] The developments that followed Waldheim's election transformed Austrian society, which had refused to confront its own past and believed itself to have been Hitler's first victim for forty years, into a society ready to critically examine its own history. A number of Austrian texts and films have since examined the phenomenon of Waldheim's election and the public debate that ensued. Today these texts, whether on film or on the page, are especially important in light of the rise of the far-right Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ) under Jörg Haider. The success of the FPÖ began in parallel to Waldheim's election in the late 1980s, and continued with the coalition between the FPÖ and Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) from 2000 to 2006, and then with the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition that governed Austria from 2017 until its demise following the so-called Ibiza scandal in May 2019. Under its new leader Sebastian Kurz, the ÖVP co-opted many of the FPÖ's extreme right-wing ideas on migration and Islam, thus vying for FPÖ voters and bringing these ideas into the political mainstream. These recent political developments are in part the reactions of Austrians who were displeased by the unraveling of the post-war founding myth in the 1980s and who, despite generational shifts, have come to embrace extreme right-wing nationalist ideas currently circulating in Austria, as elsewhere in Europe. Thus, a further consequence of the 1986 *Wende* in Austria was the stratification of political divisions in the country between the right and the left, which began with the radicalization of the FPÖ under Jörg Haider in that same year.[2]

1 All translations from German into English are the author's.

2 Oliver Rathkolb, *Die paradoxe Republik: Österreich 1945 bis 2015* (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2015), 204.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.011 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The Historical Lie of the Second Republic of Austria in Ruth Beckermann's Oeuvre

In her 2018 documentary film *Waldheims Walzer* (The Waldheim Waltz), Ruth Beckermann refers to the "österreichische Lebenslüge" (Austrian life lie), which I shall refer to as Austria's historical lie—the founding myth of the Second Republic that turned Austria into a nation of victims rather than a nation of perpetrators. In 1943 the Allied forces agreed at the Moscow conference to restore the Republic of Austria. They described its 1938 annexation by Nazi Germany as an occupation, thus making Austria into Hitler's first victim. The Austrian-born British journalist Hella Pick emphasizes that "the Allies in 1943 could not have envisaged that their seal of approval for Austria's perception of itself as Hitler's victim would determine the image that Austrians were to cultivate both for their own peace of mind and for defining the thrust of their foreign relations for decades to come."[3] Historian Oliver Rathkolb sees the victim myth as a construct that helped Austrians who had served in the German armed forces and those who were active on the home front to overcome the political divisions of the interwar period. According to Rathkolb, this myth became internationally unsustainable after the election of Waldheim as the country's president in 1986.[4]

Ruth Beckermann's film *Waldheims Walzer* is the first to specifically examine this political turning point in 1986. Beckermann asserted that the waltz in the title of the film refers to the dance of self-deception, as it were, that Waldheim encouraged the Austrian people into, as they went along with this historical myth of Austria's victimhood in the Nazi period.[5] The Waldheim years, of course, ultimately helped Austrians scrap this myth from their national identity. Beckermann's film combines television footage from the time before and after Waldheim's election with interviews and stills from Waldheim's campaign stops. Beckermann refers to her film as a post-production film, as it draws on previously-shot footage, some of it from her own 1987 film *Die papierene Brücke* (The Paper Bridge). The challenge for the filmmaker was to construct a compelling narrative from a multitude of preexisting, heterogeneous sources.[6] The footage from the time before Waldheim was elected allows the filmmaker

3 Hella Pick, *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 18.

4 Rathkolb, *Die paradoxe Republik*, 50.

5 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)," YouTube video, 42:46, posted by the University of Aberdeen, November 5, 2019, https://youtu.be/W9DbITD_xkw (accessed June 28, 2020).

6 Ruth Beckermann as cited in Alexander Horwath and Michael Omasta, eds., *Ruth Beckermann* (Vienna: Synema, 2016), 125.

to expose his wartime record, while the variety of Austrian and international sources she draws on provides her viewers with a multiplicity of angles on the Austrian election. Beckermann had to search for these sources, as the Austrian television broadcaster ORF only archived footage that had actually been screened.[7] By showing Waldheim through the lens of these different sources, Beckermann emphasizes the broad interest that television reporters from all over the world showed in Waldheim and consequently in Austria in 1986. *Waldheims Walzer* was screened at film festivals around the world, where it immediately resonated with international audiences, and was selected as the Austrian entry for the Best Foreign Language Film at the ninety-first Academy Awards. Beckermann has emphasized that the film was particularly well received in Israel, amongst other places.[8]

Katya Krylova writes about Beckermann as a filmmaker: "Most of her films deal in some way with Austrian Jewish culture following the Holocaust."[9] The Holocaust is central to the Waldheim affair, as it was the allegations of Waldheim's participation in "war crimes" that stirred the international interest.[10] Krylova further asserts, citing Christina Guenther, that in "forging a link to an Austrian Jewish culture and tradition destroyed in the Holocaust . . . [Beckermann establishes] a counter-memory to the dominant narrative of Austrian history and national identity."[11] Beckermann's works, some of which will be discussed later on in this chapter, stand out among all other literary and film works on the 1986 *Wende* brought on by the election of Waldheim, because her work, given her perspective as an Austrian Jewish woman, has always striven to counter the majority culture's national myths, and her second-generation Holocaust survivor status provides an important alternative perspective on Austrian life. It is also noteworthy that her work on Waldheim's impact on Austrian history spans decades, from her 1987 film *Die papierene Brücke* and her 1989 essay *Unzugehörig: Österreicher und Juden nach 1945* (Not Belonging Together: Austrians and Jews after 1945) to her 2018 film *Waldheims Walzer*. Andrea Reiter writes about *Unzugehörig*: "This essay, in which she renounces her association with the Austrian people, was

7 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)."

8 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)."

9 Katya Krylova, *The Long Shadow of the Past: Contemporary Austrian Literature, Film, and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017), 25.

10 In 1986, the allegations against Waldheim referred to war crimes (*Kriegsverbrechen*), since the word Holocaust had not become established as a term yet, but it accurately reflected crimes against Jews and non-Jews in Greece and Yugoslavia.

11 Krylova, *The Long Shadow of the Past*, 27.

her response to the Waldheim affair and to Alfred Hrdlicka's *Memorial Against Fascism* two years later."[12] Beckermann, in other words, spent the three decades between her publication of *Unzugehörig* and the release of her film *Waldheims Walzer* analyzing the Waldheim years.

Before examining Beckermann's *Waldheims Walzer*, it is important to understand first the historical lie on which Austria's Second Republic was built and then how Beckermann analyzed this phenomenon within the context of Kurt Waldheim's election to the presidency of Austria more than three decades ago. The First Republic of Austria ceased to exist on March 11, 1938, when Austria joined Hitler's Germany in what the Nazis referred to as the *Anschluss*. The majority of Austrians welcomed the German troops that annexed the country, and the celebrations reached their climax when Hitler announced Austria's return "Heim ins Reich" (home into the empire) on Vienna's Heldenplatz on March 15. Austria's Jews and the remnant of Austria's intellectual elite and opponents of the Third Reich immediately suffered the consequences of the invasion. They, not their jubilant compatriots who later claimed the label, were Hitler's victims. Very few people belonging to the aforementioned groups actually survived the Nazi era, unless they were able to emigrate.[13] Most non-Jewish Austrians, however, were excited to give up their small independent successor state to the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, for a place in Hitler's Greater Germany. For most, the fact that the Nazis' hateful anti-Semitic policies posed an immediate and serious threat to the country's Jewish population was of little concern.

The historical lie of Austrians' victimhood brought the country many advantages after the war. If, as they claimed, they were themselves victims, Austrians could not be held responsible for any Nazi crimes, unlike the Germans who could not escape this responsibility. Austrians consequently felt that they did not deserve the punishment that the Germans received and saw no reason to compensate the victims of the atrocities committed by the German armed forces, which, however, included a proportionately high number of Austrians. Austria was indeed never punished in the same way Germany was. It received its own government and currency in 1945, four years before Germany was split into two states. The narrative of Austrian victimhood held strong for decades after the departure of the Allied forces in 1955 and the signing of the *Staatsvertrag* (State Treaty) the same year. This image of Austria as an innocent, independent nation

12 Andrea Reiter, *Contemporary Jewish Writing: Austria After Waldheim* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 176.

13 According to Jonny Moser, there were 191,481 Jews in Austria before the Nazis annexed Austria in 1938. On April 4, 1945, 5,512 Jews remained in Austria. Jonny Moser, *Demographie der jüdischen Bevölkerung Österreichs 1938–1945* (Vienna: DÖW, 1999), 7 and 56.

was also accepted and propagated abroad, as exemplified by Robert Wise's 1965 film adaptation of Rodgers and Hammerstein's 1959 musical *The Sound of Music*, which depicts a peaceful Austria overrun by the Nazis. The historical lie remained unquestioned in Austria and abroad.

When Kurt Waldheim ran for the presidency in 1986, he was accused of war crimes while he was an officer in the Wehrmacht in Yugoslavia and Greece. Waldheim pretended that he could not remember. This excuse had been well tolerated in the previous four decades, but in 1986 Austria's demographic had shifted to a majority of people born after the war, who were willing to question the past. The international media attention and the pressure from US governmental and private agencies reminded the entire world for a brief moment that Austrians had participated in the crimes of National Socialism. Waldheim was elected regardless, not so much despite international pressure, but as a reaction to it that can be seen as symptomatic of a developing political stratification in the country. For Austria the year 1986 was "a previous Wende," as Allyson Fiddler writes in *The Art of Resistance*, it was a turning point in the country's history, which unraveled the country's founding myth and broke the political peace.[14]

During Waldheim's presidency, Thomas Bernhard's 1988 play *Heldenplatz* (in English as *Heroes' Square*, 2010) most prominently contributed to a public and an intellectual discussion about the tenacity of Austrian anti-Semitism, which also exposed the anti-Semitism and hypocrisy of Waldheim's campaign. Robert Schindel's 1992 novel *Gebürtig* (*Born-Where*, 1995),[15] Robert Menasse's 1993 essay "Land ohne Eigenschaften" (The Land without Qualities) and Doron Rabinovici's 1994 short story "Der richtige Riecher" (The Right Nose) continued an examination of the Waldheim years in the first half of the 1990s. To this day, the election of Kurt Waldheim as president of Austria in 1986 is a lingering, if not reemerging topic in Austrian literature and film, as can be seen in Robert Schindel's 2013 novel *Der Kalte* (The Cold One), the sequel to his 1992 novel *Gebürtig*, and Ruth Beckermann's *Waldheims Walzer*, released in 2018. But why, we might ask, do *Der Kalte* and *Waldheims Walzer* reexamine the Waldheim years more than three decades later? To what extent can Austria's move to the political right in the past decade, where the ÖVP, in a coalition government since the 2019 election, continues to draw extreme right-wing ideas into the political mainstream, explain the recent interest in reexamining the Waldheim years?

14 Allyson Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 16–17.

15 Robert Schindel, *Born-Where*, trans. Michael Roloff (Riverside, CA: Ariadne, 1995).

Before drawing any conclusions, one has to be mindful of the fact that all texts and films on Waldheim, whether written in the 1980s or more recently, have sought an immediate reaction from their readers or viewers and attempted to reflect on current events. However, generational shifts over the course of the last thirty years have profoundly influenced the reception of works that deal with pre-1945 history, which was still *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history) in the 1980s, but was no longer a part of living memory in the 2010s. Likewise, while Thomas Bernhard was still able to provoke in 1988, the fiftieth anniversary of the *Anschluss* to Nazi Germany, when anyone over the age of fifty was born before the Nazi takeover of Austria, audiences in the 2010s were either born after the Second World War or have no meaningful adult recollections of the time before 1945. In an interview, Beckermann explained that she decided to make *Waldheims Walzer* about five years before she began working on it, after viewing footage from her film *Die papierene Brücke* with her son. Her son was intrigued by the events surrounding Waldheim's election, which had occurred before he was born, and so Beckermann made this film in part to help her son and a younger generation understand this time period.[16] Beckermann claims that she was initially reluctant to make this "compilation film," since she had lived through the events herself and did not want to present herself merely as a "veteran" of this time, but she claims that a younger generation demanded to learn about this part of history.[17]

The deep-seated prejudices of the Austrian electorate that became apparent in the Waldheim years may have shifted over the last three decades, but they have not disappeared. The overt anti-Semitism the ÖVP espoused during the Waldheim election campaign in 1986 would be unthinkable today. Yet the political rhetoric in Austria today is often openly xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and islamophobic. This is in stark contrast to the situation in Germany: until the recent successes of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD)—whose membership, however, is still less than half the size of the Austrian FPÖ before the Ibiza scandal in 2019—German politicians were generally reluctant to resort to populist xenophobic rhetoric and more careful to exercise political correctness when referring to the Holocaust and the Nazi past. German politicians were also more likely than their Austrian counterparts to take responsibility for their actions and resign. Hans Filbinger, the CDU Minister President of Baden-Württemberg, who resigned in 1978 after information about his Nazi past went public, is

16 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)."

17 Beckermann, as cited in Horwath and Omasta, eds., *Ruth Beckermann*, 123.

a case in point. The continued success of the FPÖ since Jörg Haider's takeover of the party in 1986, parallel to Waldheim's election, and following Haider's death in 2008, is evidence that the problem of far-right extremism in Austria has evolved, but has not been resolved. Even the 2019 Ibiza scandal, which revealed that H. C. Strache, the leader of the FPÖ, had been conspiring with a woman posing as the niece of a Russian oligarch, and which ended the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, is no indicator of the end of right-wing extremism in Austria.

In *Waldheims Walzer,* which has most recently drawn the public's attention back to this important period in the political development of the Second Austrian Republic, Beckermann films from the perspective of a second-generation Holocaust survivor. She was born in Vienna in 1952, only seven years removed from the end of the Holocaust, and in the heyday of Austria's historical lie. This was a time when neither Jews nor non-Jews talked about the genocide. It was not until the post-war generation came of age that the war and post-war history were reexamined. Dagmar Lorenz writes: Beckermann "evokes the trauma of cultural loss directly through her chosen topics, the legacy of European Jewish culture and the Holocaust."[18] While some of Beckermann's thoughts on being Jewish in Austria have since become mainstream, they were groundbreaking in 1989, when her essay *Unzugehörig: Österreicher und Juden nach 1945* was first published. She writes from the perspective of a post-war Austrian Jew who tried to fit into contemporary Austrian society, only to realize that the Holocaust creates an unbridgeable gap between Jews and non-Jews, and returns Jews to their position as outsiders in Austrian society, now an even smaller and more marginalized minority. As the title of Beckermann's essay suggests, she believes that Austria's post-war history, and consequently the historical lie, kept Jewish and non-Jewish Austrians separated. The author writes at the beginning of her essay: "Unsere Gefühle und Gedanken, unsere Identität als Kinder der Überlebenden, werden in diesem Land ignoriert und beleidigt" (Our feelings and thoughts, our identity as children of survivors are ignored and insulted in this country).[19] Anti-Semitism and Austria's false claim to innocence in the Shoah, she writes, are major problems that Jewish children growing up in the post-war era had to face. Her parents had a difficult time adapting to Austria after the mass killings. As Beckermann writes: "Eine Welt war für sie zerbrochen, während rundherum die *nationalsozialistische Volksgemeinschaft* ziemlich bruchlos in das Nachkriegsvolk überging" (A world had shattered for them, while around them the National

18 Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, "Post-Shoah Positions of Displacement in the Films of Ruth Beckermann," *Austrian Studies* 11 (2003): 154–70, here 155.

19 Ruth Beckermann, *Unzugehörig: Österreicher und Juden nach 1945* (Vienna: Löcker, 1989), 10.

Socialist racial community quite seamlessly transitioned into the post-war people).[20] In her essay, Beckermann sets out to disprove the historical lie of the continuity of Austrian innocence. She believes that Nazi ideology did not come to an end with the founding of the Second Republic. She writes that every Jewish child in the 1950s was a miracle for their parents. The children represented the parents' hope for a better future.[21]

Beckermann also argues that when Waldheim ran for president, he believed that his past in the German Wehrmacht would be of no consequence. In her view Waldheim received the people's sympathy only because the whole country had a stake in keeping the historical lie in place. "Seine paradoxe Ehrlichkeit," she writes, "besteht im Festhalten an der perfekten Irrealisierung" (His paradoxical honesty consists in holding on to a perfect derealization).[22] Waldheim could not understand that it was not acceptable for an Austrian president to have been a loyal officer in the Wehrmacht. Many Austrians felt complicit with Waldheim. One might even consider this to be an indirect admission of guilt.

Waldheim's and many other Austrians' problems with the past stem from the fact that the historical lie made it impossible for them to understand their role as Austrians from 1938 to 1945. Austria did not officially exist in these years. Its citizens and resources belonged to Germany. Many tried to pick up where they had left off in 1938, and they decided to forget the pogroms and killings of Jews. Some tried to resume friendly relationships with Jews. Beckermann gives the example of a Jew who is greeted in a friendly manner by a former Nazi. The Jew responds politely, since the person he greeted was a gentleman before 1938 and after 1945, "nur dazwischen nicht" (just not in between).[23] In this case one sees that both Austrian Jews and especially non-Jews managed to achieve "die Irrealisierung des Dazwischen" (the derealization of the time in between).

Waldheims Walzer as a Reexamination of the Past

Waldheims Walzer is an extraordinary film that seeks to emotionally (re) connect the viewer with the events that unfolded in Austria in 1986. Unlike a TV documentary that narrates and introduces its viewers to an historical event, Beckermann created a film that draws its viewers into events that challenged and ultimately changed Austria's national identity after 1945. Using footage from television interviews and news reels, as well as Beckermann's own footage of demonstrations against Waldheim from the election year 1986, which she had first included in her 1987

20 Beckermann, *Unzugehörig*, 10.
21 Beckermann, *Unzugehörig*, 10.
22 Beckermann, *Unzugehörig*, 29.
23 Beckermann, *Unzugehörig*, 27.

film *Die papierene Brücke*, *Waldheims Walzer* encourages its viewers to confront both the national debate within Austria and the international reaction that ensued. Even from a distance of more than thirty years, the montage of footage creates a tension that demands viewers to reexamine the effect that Waldheim had on Austria. The film shows an Austria divided over Waldheim's candidacy, a country in which competing voices and perspectives are messily pitted against each other. But more than that, it shows an entire world watching an otherwise relatively insignificant European election aghast. *Waldheims Walzer* allows viewers to experience this multiplicity of voices and perspectives: it reflects both the puzzlement of contemporary international audiences at Austria's ignorance of its own past and the way the election polarized the Austrian public. The film departs from Beckermann's previous work in that it does not so much focus on a site of memory, but rather on a person.[24] Of course, Waldheim was not just any person; he was a person whose election fundamentally changed the course of Austrian politics. The film reflects this, focusing less on Waldheim's alleged war crimes and election campaign than on citizens' reactions to them. In other words, *Waldheims Walzer* is above all about Austria as a nation. The question of whether or not Waldheim was to blame for his past split the country along generational lines but also into opposing moral camps. Older generations of Austrians who had lived through the Nazi period did not want to see Waldheim's career as UN Secretary General, prior to his election to the Austrian presidency, undermined by too much prodding into crimes he committed or participated in while in the German armed forces during the Second World War. Waldheim's defense against his accusers, "Ich habe nur meine Pflicht erfüllt" (I only fulfilled my duty), epitomized the views of the older generations of Austrians, most of whom lived in dread of having to reckon with their own pasts. In an interview, Beckermann argued that Waldheim's defense that he had only done his duty marked a departure from the formulaic excuses with which Austrian politicians sought to justify their actions during the war.[25] As a ceremonial head of state, Waldheim's past raised ethical questions about the standards that a potential candidate for this office might have, especially amongst younger Austrians, who tended to be more critical than those who had lived through the war. These questions persisted even as it became clear that, while Waldheim was not legally guilty of any war crimes, he was certainly

24 See Karen Remmler, "Geographies of Memory: Ruth Beckermann's Film Aesthetics," *Studies in Twentieth & Twenty-First Century Literature* 31, no.1 (2007): 206–35. Remmler provides a detailed analysis of how Beckermann's previous films focused on places of memory.

25 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)."

guilty of not telling the truth and not recounting his personal history as he remembered it.

Beckermann's film includes many clips showing Waldheim presenting himself favorably to his electorate. In a clip from an interview that he gave at the UN headquarters in New York in the 1970s, Waldheim gleefully explains the role of his office and the fact that there is "no one above him," no one superior to the Secretary General within the UN. Running for the Austrian presidency was the strategic move of a sixty-eight-year-old man who was not ready to retire from politics, even though the role promised less international significance than he had held in his previous position. Beckermann zooms in on Waldheim's hands in footage from his various campaign stops, as she narrates "Ich erinnere mich an seine Hände, sein Lächeln, er schien sein Volk umgreifen, umschlingen zu wollen" (I remember his hands, his smile, he seemed to want to wrap them around his little finger). Waldheim's political campaign was indeed different from those of his opponents and predecessors, as he had hired an American advertising agency for it, and had learned from his time in the US that smiling was an effective way for a political candidate to engage with his voters. Yet his hands, which Beckermann describes as trying to envelop everything, were symptomatic of his desire for political power and influence. In his 2020 crime novel *Schatten aus Stein* (Shadows of Stone) Andreas Pittler likens Waldheim's physique in 1986 to that of the film character Nosferatu (from the eponymous 1922 German film by F. W. Murnau), "lang, dünn, leicht gebückt und mit einer großen Krummnase" (long, thin, slightly bent with a large crooked nose).[26] This recent literary reference to Waldheim is a further testament to the fact that the Waldheim years still resonate in contemporary Austrian culture. Waldheim still stands for an older generation of Austrians that resisted change and an honest reckoning with their past.

An important aim of Beckermann's film is to show how Waldheim, arguably Austria's most experienced politician on an international stage at the time, remained relatable to average Austrians of a similar age with his insistence on ignoring the past. When Ronald Reagan put Waldheim on the US watch list on April 28, 1987, barring his entry into the United States, it was certainly an impactful blow to him, because he had seen himself as being connected to America. This raises the question of what had changed in the United States since Waldheim had served as UN Secretary General and the issue of Waldheim's wartime record had not been raised during his service for the UN in the 1970s. It is indicative of an increased awareness in the mid-1980s of the crimes committed in the Holocaust. Beckermann suggests in her film that Claude Lanzmann's

26 Andreas Pittler, *Schatten aus Stein: Ein Fall für Paul Zedlnitzky* (Vienna: Ueberreuter, 2020), 100.

film *Shoah*, which had been released in 1985, only a year before the election in Austria, had brought an awareness of the Holocaust to the educated public, which made it impossible for Waldheim to completely dismiss questions about his wartime service. That Waldheim was elected regardless suggests that this film's audience was only very limited.[27] Still, Lanzmann's film marked the beginning of the Austrian public's engagement with the Holocaust and the shared responsibility that Austria and Germany have for this past.

Beckermann shows Waldheim's son Gerhard appearing on US television, cluelessly defending his father after a hearing in the US Senate on April 23, 1986. This is incredibly important footage, since this was the only time in the history of the Second Republic of Austria that the country was the focus of a hearing of the US Senate. In speaking to the Senate, Gerhard Waldheim uses the same rhetoric his father was using in Austria and seems tone-deaf to the US audience's expectation of clear answers to the questions on his father's wartime service. The Waldheim family may have spent many years in the US in the 1970s, but by including Waldheim's son's pitiful defense on American television, Beckermann illustrates how clueless Waldheim junior was about the changes underway in American society. He did not realize that a generational shift had occurred that no longer allowed evasive platitudes on the Nazi past, but rather demanded credible answers. Beckermann shows Congressman Tom Lantos asking Gerhard Waldheim about his father in the hearing. Lantos was born in Budapest in 1928 and survived the Holocaust with the help of Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg. He emigrated to the US after the Second World War and, in the 1980s, played an instrumental role in establishing memorials to the Holocaust in the US, sponsoring a bill to make Wallenberg an Honorary Citizen of the US. To Gerhard Waldheim's refusal to acknowledge his father's responsibility Lantos responds that, while it is very honorable for Gerhard to try to defend his father, "the American people know that your father [Waldheim] is a liar." While, in the 1970s, US officials had not attempted to investigate the Austrian diplomat's wartime record, in the 1980s, with the increased global awareness of the Holocaust, Waldheim's wartime history was the metaphorical elephant in the room.

The narrative that Waldheim and his supporters in 1986 spun about the past was often blatantly fabricated. Beckermann provides evidence that Waldheim publicly lied about his past in Yugoslavia as early as 1968, when he was Foreign Minister under President Franz Jonas. She presents footage of Waldheim talking to the Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito during a state visit in Belgrade. Anton Kolendic, a member of the Yugoslav military

27 "The Director's Cut: Ruth Beckermann Interviewed by Dr Katya Krylova (25.05.2019)."

commission, recounts hearing Waldheim remarking to Tito that he was amazed at the beauty of the Yugoslav landscape. Tito asked Waldheim if he had ever been to Yugoslavia and Waldheim responds, falsely, that he had not. Why was Waldheim afraid of mentioning his wartime service in the country during his visit in 1968? In her film, Beckermann explains that Waldheim served in Yugoslavia in the Heeresgruppe E (army group E) under Luftwaffe General Alexander Löhr, who was hanged in Belgrade in 1947 for the bombing of the city in 1941, and had also been implicated in the deportation of Jews from Greece and Albania. Clearly, Waldheim did not want to be associated with Löhr during the state visit in 1968. As Beckermann mentions in voiceover, there was a commemorative plaque to Löhr in Vienna's Stiftskirche that was removed following Waldheim's election, as the wartime atrocities committed by Löhr began to emerge during the Waldheim investigation. However, the plaque returned to its place in the church a few years later until it was finally removed again in 2015, following the inquiry of an Austrian Green Party MP. The way Austrians commemorated Löhr as Commander of the Austrian Air Forces during the First World War and in the interwar period, while neglecting his role in genocide and war crimes under the Nazis in the Second World War, was symptomatic of the nation's selective memory and dishonest reckoning with its past. The plaque being removed and then reinstated, before being removed again, is indicative of the stratified views on how to commemorate this history.

Beckermann points out in the film that the 1968 trip was not the first instance in which Waldheim concealed his wartime experiences. While on a visit to Israel as UN Secretary General in the 1970s, he refused to cover his head during a religious ceremony at Yad Vashem commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. Israeli journalists questioned him, but the incident went largely unnoticed by the international public. Beckermann also shows Waldheim at the time of his campaign, speaking to a large audience on a market square somewhere in rural Austria. Waldheim and his wife patriotically sing the Austrian anthem and then, in his speech, he defends himself with the words: "Ich war ein anständiger Soldat" (I was an honorable soldier). Twenty years later, H. C. Strache would copy Waldheim's Austrian flag-waving and anthem-singing style at political rallies, a thoroughly unusual display of nationalism in post-1945 German-language culture, mostly associated with the extreme right-wing. Waldheim's patriotic theatrics resonated above all with the generation of war veterans, their wives, as well as that generation's children, who did not want to confront the war crimes committed by their relatives.

This is where the film shows footage from the campaign, thus turning the focus onto Waldheim's voters, but also to Austrians opposing Waldheim. In trying to downplay the American response to his election campaign, Waldheim resorted to anti-Semitic stereotypes: Beckermann

shows him saying, for instance, "es handelt sich hier [in the objections to his campaign] um eine groß angelegte Verleumdungskampagne einer ganz kleinen allerdings auf die Medien sehr einflussreichen Gruppe" (This is about a large-scale slander campaign of a very small group, but one which is very influential on the media). This small but very influential group on the media were supposedly American Jews, also euphemized as the East Coast of America, where Waldheim perceived the majority of American Jews to be living. What is striking about this, however, is the relative evasiveness of Waldheim's language; other ÖVP politicians were even more explicit in their scorn for American Jews. The ÖVP General Secretary Michael Graff is shown in the film referring to "die ehrlosen Gesellen vom jüdischen Weltkongress" (the dishonorable fellows of the Jewish World Congress). His reference to the Jewish World Congress, instead of the World Jewish Congress, is itself laden with the anti-Semitic fear of Jewish world domination. Graff had to resign a year after Waldheim was elected when he said, "so lange nicht bewiesen ist, dass er [Waldheim] eigenhändig sechs Juden erwürgt hat, gibt es kein Problem" (As long as it is not proven that he [Waldheim] has not single-handedly strangled six Jews, there is no problem). Even Waldheim condemned Graff's words, releasing a statement saying that "die Würde des Menschen [müsse] an oberster Stelle bleiben" (the dignity of man [must] remain a priority).[28] This illustrates that Waldheim shook up politics within the right-wing ÖVP to the extent that the party had to realize that there was a need for introspection and to become aware that anti-Semitism had no place in post-Holocaust Austria. Beckermann shows, in her own footage of demonstrations on Vienna's Graben and Stephansplatz during the run-up to the election in 1986, that average people overwhelmingly defended Waldheim and themselves engaged in overt anti-Semitic rhetoric, blaming Jews for world domination, or defending Waldheim for being a good Catholic. However, Waldheim's allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church was also a difficult topic, as he and his wife Elisabeth had left the Church in 1938 and promptly rejoined in 1945.[29]

Waldheim's ostensible inability to remember whether or not he had joined the Nazi SA became the object of satire by other Austrian politicians. Of course, Waldheim's reluctance to remember the past, which was emblematic of his generation, deepened the generational divide between the war generations and younger generations that had no recollections of the war. SPÖ Chancellor Fred Sinowatz tellingly commented on Waldheim's apparent amnesia in spring 1986, "wir nehmen zur Kenntnis,

28 "Rücktritts-Chronik," *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, November 19, 1987.

29 According to Richard Mitten, Elisabeth Waldheim left the Catholic Church in 1938 and rejoined just before their marriage in August 1944. Richard Mitten, *The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 207.

dass er [Waldheim] nicht bei der SA war, sondern nur sein Pferd" (We acknowledge that he [Waldheim] was not in the SA, but merely his horse). Waldheim had asserted that his membership in the SA may have happened because he was involved in equestrian pursuits connected to the SA. Of course, this is where his credibility faltered, and yet there was a whole generation alongside Waldheim that was terrified of questions surrounding their own pasts and they felt sympathetic to his poor excuses. A group of Austrian artists (including, notably, playwright Peter Turrini, caricaturist Manfred Deix, and sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka) put together a wooden trojan horse that they decorated as Waldheim's horse, symbolizing his lies. The horse is now in Vienna's newly opened Haus der Geschichte (House of History) museum, which, in turn, shows that the historical opposition and response to Waldheim's mendacious statements is now a historic piece of art.

The Waldheim years were an emotional period in Austrian politics for proponents and critics of Waldheim alike. Beckermann's film helps older Austrians reexamine this period and younger Austrians, who have no experience or memory of the period, to learn about an important part of Austrian and global *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history). The Waldheim years had consequences on the country's political life. The historical lie of Austria being Hitler's first victim fell into disuse. In 1991, Chancellor Franz Vranitzky officially stated that Austrians had been both victims and perpetrators of Nazi crimes. Today's ÖVP is more politically correct when it comes to issues of anti-Semitism and the Nazi past, which is the result of an historical awareness of the Holocaust that started to develop from 1986 onward. Chancellor Sebastian Kurz regularly attends Holocaust commemorations and has sought contact with Jewish agencies, as well as with the State of Israel. But today's Austrian extreme right-wing is no longer concerned with Jews. Islamophobia and opposition to foreign immigration are the political concerns of the far right. Beckermann's film does not address the parallel rise of Jörg Haider. Haider's FPÖ renewed right-wing extremism in Austria among generations that are not personally connected to the Nazi past, but who remain uncritical about the Nazi past.

Austria's Second Republic is defined by three pivotal years: the founding of the republic in 1945; the signing of the State Treaty and the consequent neutrality of Austria in 1955; and the "Wende" year of 1986. *Waldheims Walzer* has contributed to a reexamination of the Austrian "Wende" year of 1986, which will continue to be a topic of discussion for years to come. This reexamination of 1986 is also the focus of Robert Schindel's *Der Kalte* (2013), where Johann Wais, a fictionalized version of Waldheim, resigns on December 23, 1989. Schindel entertains the fantasy that Waldheim learned something out of the experience of public exposure and resigned half-way through his term, rather than stubbornly

sitting out his six-year term in international political isolation, as he did in reality. The issues his presidency brought to the fore linger to this day. This is not to say that things have not changed. In a 2009 interview, Beckermann argued that Vienna has changed and become more open to discussing its Jewish past. Yet, she argues, Austrians still view the Holocaust as a Jewish issue,[30] and will likely continue to do so for as long as the majority still fail to acknowledge that the crimes committed under the Nazis are part of their own past. Soon, the events of 1986 will stand halfway between the founding of the republic and the present day. *Waldheims Walzer* has created an engaging memory of this shift in Austria's national identity that occurred because of the Waldheim years, and this memory is essential to understanding Austria's contemporary national identity, which has been forged out of the events unfolding in 1986.

30 Julia K. Baker and Imelda Rohrbacher, "'E/Motion Pictures': Conversations with Austrian Documentary Filmmakers Mirjam Unger and Ruth Beckermann," *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture* 25 (2009): 234–51, here 244.

Burschenschaft Hysteria: Exposing Nationalist Gender Roles in Contemporary Austrian Politics

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Burschenschaft Hysteria (the Hysteria fraternity), an Austrian political protest group, impersonates a traditional all-male student fraternity not only to subvert the gender stereotypes and ideology that prevail in nationalist groups like the *Burschenschaften* (male student fraternities), but also to expose the restrictions that these essentialist gender roles impose on individuals, men, and women alike.[1] Their particular strain of political activism is located alongside a history of initiatives against the political right—specifically the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria, FPÖ).[2] Since the FPÖ's founding in 1956, *Burschenschaft* groups have found support for their political interests, expanding their influence within the party's political elite.[3] This chapter

1 All translations from German into English are the authors'.

2 The Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ for short, is Austria's largest right-wing populist, national-conservative, national-liberal party. The party is the successor of the Verein der Unabhängigen (Federation of Independents, VdU). It was founded in 1956 and retained Pan-German tendencies. Since Jörg Haider became party leader in 1986, the party gravitated toward right-wing populism. Time and again, party members have been found to voice anti-Semitic, anti-Islamic, and national socialist sentiments. In 1999, the FPÖ came second in the legislative election and entered a coalition with the Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) in 2000, as well as in 2003, and from 2017 to 2019. After a temporary decline, a party split, and Jörg Haider's exit in 2005, the FPÖ regained popularity under the leadership of Heinz-Christian Strache (2005–19) but suffered massive electoral losses in the wake of a corruption affair in 2019.

3 Bernhard Weidinger, *Im nationalen Abwehrkampf der Grenzlanddeutschen: Akademische Burschenschaften und Politik in Österreich nach 1945* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2015), 433. Matthias Lunznig, "Von Treue und Verrat, Bannflüchen und Vernichtungsstößen. Das Verhältnis von FPÖ und völkischen Verbindungen: Eine Wagneriade," in *Völkische Verbindungen. Beiträge zum deutschnationalen*

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781787449466.012 Published online by Cambridge University Press

seeks to demonstrate how Hysteria's parody of a *Burschenschaft* fraternity raises awareness of the link between nationalism and the exercise of patriarchy, highlighting the endangerment of women's rights when the extreme right gain political power. Furthermore, it will be suggested that Hysteria's act of impersonation is an example of "identity nabbing"—engaging with Amber Day's description of political activism as a form of parodic impersonation.[4] In this spirit, Hysteria takes on the guise of a *Burschenschaft* through a series of performative gestures: affirming their identity through traditional dress, the performance of rituals, adopting a name in the *Burschenschaften*-style, using a heraldic animal, and inventing a founding myth explicitly mocking the *Burschenschaften*'s origin story. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of "gender parody" as an act of political dissent,[5] we show that Hysteria's "drag" act, serving as an all-female *Burschenschaft*, redefines attributes of masculinity as feminine and vice versa. By making gender the focal point of their parody, Hysteria's activism ironically mocks the *Burschenschaften*'s traditionalist views on gender, radically inverting stable gender roles and mocking their ideal of the submissive, family-oriented pan-Germanic woman. Taking as our focus the *Burschenschaften*'s alarm at extreme feminism, or the so-called "femocracy,"[6] we argue that Hysteria can be seen as successful political activism, confirming their discursive group's (i.e., their followers') sentiments toward FPÖ politics, and encouraging followers with a similar disposition to become politically active themselves. In terms outlined by Linda Hutcheon, Hysteria's parodic activism establishes a "discursive community,"[7] producing shared assumptions which also allow

Korporationswesen in Österreich, ed. HochschülerInnenschaft an der Universität Wien (Vienna: HochschülerInnenschaft an der Universität Wien, 2009), 34–57, here 39–43 and 51.

4 Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 146 and 147.

5 Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

6 For a discussion of antifeminism in *Burschenschaften*, see Judith Goetz, "Vergemeinschaftet durch das Abverlangen von Standhalten und Beherrschung. Männerbund, Mensur und Antifeminismus bei deutschnationalen Burschenschaften," in *Antifeminismus in Bewegung: Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt*, ed. Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters (Hamburg: Marta Press, 2018), 189–209. For the term "femocracy" in this context, see Alva Träbert, "At the Mercy of *Femocracy*? Networks and Ideological Links Between Far-Right Movements and the Antifeminist Men's Rights Movement," in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, ed. Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 273–88, here 275.

7 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 90–92.

for the interpretation of irony. Simultaneously an act of disguise and communication, the ironic performances of Hysteria require an audience to deploy their knowledge of contextual information regarding nationalist politics and gender in contemporary Austria. As the subsequent discussion will show, with the traditional male cohort of *Burschenschaften* excluded from this "discursive community," Hysteria effectively reveals the fragility of restrictive gender expectations proliferating in the Austrian far right.

Gender, Nationalism, and Protest in Contemporary Austria

Within the specific context of anti-gender debates in the far-right in Austria, the establishment of Burschenschaft Hysteria represents a key moment. Hysteria became active on Facebook in January 2016 in the wake of the Austrian presidential election.[8] Registered as a *Verein* (society) in Vienna, it is a solidarity platform for all who are still underrepresented in politics and the arts, with the exception of men. It offers its members an opportunity to connect in discussion, concerts, and public performance.[9] For this reason, the political significance of Hysteria needs to be contextualized and analyzed as a part of a wider protest movement, and in light of recent political events.

Research on the nexus between gender and nationalism has, according to Judith Goetz, recently entered a "fourth phase."[10] Notably, Paula-Irene Villa, Sabine Hark, and Renate Bitzan have examined anti-feminism and anti-gender political sentiment in Germany and other European

8 See Verena Bogner, "Ehre, Freiheit, Vatermord—Die Burschenschaft Hysteria," *Vice*, July 7, 2016, https://www.vice.com/de/article/gq3484/die-burschenschaft-hysteria; Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Seitentransparenz," last modified January 10, 2016, https://www.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

9 In 2017, Burschenschaft Hysteria received a €100,000 grant under the Shift sponsorship scheme. Shift promotes innovative, interdisciplinary art projects that work closely with residents over the course of a year. Hysteria members used the grant to renovate their club house and to organize various events, for example a street festival. "Siegerprojekte Shift II," *Basis.Kultur.Wien*, https://basiskultur.at/shift/siegerprojekte-shift-2/ (accessed April 27, 2020).

10 Judith Goetz, "Gender und Rechtsextremismus: Ein Überblick über die Geschlechterreflektierte Rechtsextremismusforschung in Österreich," in *Rechtsextremismus*, ed. Forschungsgruppe Ideologien und Politiken der Ungleichheit, vol. 3, *Geschlechterreflektierte Perspektiven* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2019), 24–57, here 45.

countries.[11] The discourse in Austria has also been examined extensively.[12] Birgit Sauer has published work on anti-feminist and anti-gender movements,[13] as well as gender policies in the populist-nationalist right in Austria and Europe. Stefanie Mayer and Edma Ajanovic work on the intersectionality of right-wing populism, racism, feminist policies, and anti-gender discourses in Austria.[14] Judith Goetz additionally engages with the gender discourse in right-wing groups such as the Identitären (Identitarian movement) and anti-feminism in the *Burschenschaften*.[15] Oliver Geden's 2006 book *Diskursstrategien im Rechtspopulismus* (Discourse Strategies in Right-wing Populism) is the most important precursor of this fourth phase.[16] He concludes that women's politics in the FPÖ are synonymous with the family and a return to traditional family values, while racially coded violence against women and men's issues became more relevant when the FPÖ entered into a coalition with the Österreichische Volkspartei (Austrian People's Party, ÖVP) in the early 2000s.[17] Crucially, his as well as Sauer's, Ajanovic's, and Mayer's research shows the inseparability of sex and gender roles that dominate FPÖ policies today. It is this confluence of gender traditionalism and nationalist politics that are the focal point of *Hysteria*'s political activism. Alongside this, Bernhard Weidinger's book *Im nationalen Abwehrkampf der Grenzlanddeutschen* (In the National Defensive Battle of the Borderland Germans, 2015) on *Burschenschaften* and *Männerbünde*

11 Paula-Irene Villa and Sabine Hark, eds., *Anti-Genderismus: Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015); Michaela Köttig, Renate Bitzan, and Andrea Petö, eds., *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); Renate Bitzan, "Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse in der extremen Rechten," in *Handbuch Rechtsextremismus*, ed. Fabian Virchow, Martin Langebach, and Alexander Häusler (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2016), 325–73.

12 Goetz, "Gender und Rechtsextremismus," 46–48.

13 For example Birgit Sauer, "Anti-Feministische Mobilisierung in Europa: Kampf um eine neue politische Hegemonie?," *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 13, no. 3 (2019): 339–52.

14 See, for example, Judith Goetz and Stefanie Mayer, "Mit Gott und Natur gegen geschlechterpolitischen Wandel: Ideologie und Rhetoriken des rechten Antifeminismus," in *Geschlechterreflektierte Perspektiven*, 205–47.

15 See, for example, Judith Goetz, Joseph Maria Sedlacek, and Alexander Winkler, eds., *Untergangster des Abendlandes: Ideologie und Rezeption der rechtsextremen "Identitären"* (Hamburg: Marta Press, 2018).

16 See Oliver Geden, *Diskursstrategien im Rechtspopulismus: Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs und Schweizerische Volkspartei zwischen Opposition und Regierungsbeteiligung* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006).

17 Goetz, "Gender und Rechtsextremismus," 39; Oliver Geden, "The Discursive Representation of Masculinity in the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO)," *Journal of Language and Politics* 4, no. 3 (2005): 397–420, here 403.

(men's associations) discusses the historical and political relevance of *Burschenschaften* in Austria. After Hans-Christian Strache became FPÖ party chairman in 2005, the *Burschenschaften* gained influence in the FPÖ,[18] culminating in the nomination of Norbert Hofer, member of the German nationalist Burschenschaft Marko-Germania zu Pinkafeld, as their candidate for the presidency in 2016. Although he narrowly lost the election, his nomination led to heated discussions about the possibility of a far-right Austrian president, and media attention from the foreign press.[19] Less than a year later, Sebastian Kurz rebranded the conservative ÖVP, culminating in a coalition government with the far-right FPÖ between 2017 and 2019. Kurz's chairmanship of the ÖVP marked a clear shift to the right for the party,[20] with the 2017 parliamentary election campaign dominated by the refugee crisis and typical FPÖ anti-immigration rhetoric. As a result, the FPÖ ran an advertising campaign which insisted on the party as being the original anti-immigration force—with Kurz characterized as a "Spätzünder" (latecomer).[21]

While the 2000–2007 ÖVP-FPÖ coalition under Wolfgang Schüssel led to diplomatic sanctions by several countries as well as the EU, which was outraged by the ÖVP's role in enabling the far-right to enter government, this second *Wende* (turning point) to the right was met with no calls for sanctions nor a similar sense of outrage within Austria or by the international community. Rather, Ruth Wodak points out that in 2017 it was the civic society which voiced its concerns about FPÖ *Burschenschafter* (members of male student fraternities) and extreme-right members of parliament and government.[22] As Allyson Fiddler demonstrates,[23] the 2000 *Wende* led not only to a civic protest movement, most prominently

18 See Weidinger, *Im nationalen Abwehrkampf der Grenzlanddeutschen*, 546; Lunznig, "Von Treue und Verrat, Bannflüchen und Vernichtungsstößen," 44.

19 See Philip Oltermann, "Norbert Hofer: Is Austria's Presidential Hopeful a 'Wolf in Sheep's Clothing'?," *The Guardian*, May 29, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/19/norbert-hofer-austria-presidential-hopeful-rightwing (accessed June 26, 2020); Sara Velert, "La ultraderecha europea mide su fuerza en las presidenciales de Austria," *El País*, May 21, 2016, https://elpais.com/internacional/2016/05/21/actualidad/1463844162_735244.html (accessed June 26, 2020).

20 Anita Bodlos and Carolina Plescia, "The 2017 Austrian Snap Election: A Shift Rightward," *West European Politics* 41, no. 6 (2018): 1354–63; Ruth Wodak, "Vom Rand in die Mitte— 'Schamlose Normalisierung,'" *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 59, no. 2 (2018): 323–35.

21 Allyson Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance: Cultural Protest against the Austrian Far Right in the Early Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2018), 187.

22 Wodak, "Vom Rand in Die Mitte—'Schamlose Normalisierung,'" 326.

23 See Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance*.

the weekly *Donnerstagsdemos* (Thursday demonstrations), but also to the immense output of protest art under the banner of *Widerstand* (resistance) against the rise of Jörg Haider's FPÖ and the participation of his party in the coalition government. Fiddler shows how new protest movements and protest art, which reacted to the political events of 2016 onwards, made explicit or implicit references to the *Wende* protests of 2000: Elfriede Jelinek's *Das Kommen* (The Arrival, 2016), a text which refers to, among others, Norbert Hofer, clearly draws on her protest monologue *Das Lebewohl* (The Farewell, 2000),[24] written from Jörg Haider's perspective.[25] Moreover, the Offensive gegen Rechts (Campaign against the Right) organized its first protest against Norbert Hofer using the slogan "Kein rechtsextremer Burschenschafter als Bundespräsident" (No far-right *Burschenschafter* for President) on a Thursday (May 19, 2016), an event that "echoed the Thursday demonstrations,"[26] and which was taken up again on a more regular basis following the 2018 legislative election, starting on October 4, 2018, under the maxim "Es ist wieder Donnerstag" (It's Thursday again).[27]

Within these protest movements, some highlighted the correlation of nationalist tendencies and gender issues in the political right. Examples that address the suppression of women include feminist performance collective Dolce after Ghana's wrestling performance *The End of Feminism (as we knew it)* in 2012, which saw the performer and female wrestler Heidi Hitler assert feminine dictatorship by proclaiming the "Diktatur der Titte" (Dictatorship of the Boob).[28] Since 2012, rap duo Klitclique (Clitclique) have also denounced the sexualization of women in rap culture through queered Dadaistic performance;[29] Klitclique have played a role in supporting Hysteria founding member Stefanie Sargnagel's nomination

24 Katya Krylova, *The Long Shadow of the Past: Contemporary Austrian Literature, Film, and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2017), 13.

25 Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance*, 189.

26 Fiddler, *The Art of Resistance*, 185.

27 Aaron Brüstle, "Die Rückkehr der Donnerstagsdemos," *Der Standard*, October 4, 2018, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000088614075/die-rueckkehr-der-donnerstagsdemos; "Es ist wieder Donnerstag," Do! Es ist wieder Donnerstag, https://wiederdonnerstag.at/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

28 Siobhán Geets, "Dolce after Ghana: Die geile Freiheit," *Die Presse*, May 2, 2012, https://www.diepresse.com/754276/dolce-after-ghana-die-geile-freiheit (accessed June 26, 2020).

29 Magdalena Fürnkranz, "'Klitclique und 'Der Feminist F€m1n1$t': Konzeptuelle Desorientierung als Empowerment," in *(Dis-)Orienting Sounds—Machtkritische Perspektiven auf populäre Musik*, ed. Ralf von Appen and Mario Dunkel (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 79–104, here 79–82 and 90.

for the Bachmannpreis, the prestigious Austrian literary award, in 2016.[30] Similar to visual artist Verena Dengler and writer Lydia Haider,[31] who are also members of Hysteria,[32] Sargnagel's performance activism critically engages with the links between patriarchal gender roles and nationalism.

Burschenschaften Culture and Gender Ideologies

The *Burschenschaften* are, as Carina Klammer and Judith Goetz note, a *wertkonservatives* (socially-conservative) collective and share "the same ideological background, based on nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, sexist and pan-German ideas."[33] This ideological background is based on a hegemonic, normative masculinity, originating in the early nineteenth century,[34] and the masculine values and morals of an emerging powerful middle class in this era. The "ideal man's" masculinity is essentially based on the physical nature of the male,[35] which should be soldier-like, courageous, competitive, and heterosexual. This translates into manly virtues like "willpower, honour, courage, discipline, competitiveness, quiet strength, stoicism, sang-froid, persistence, adventurousness, independence, sexual virility tempered with restraint, and dignity"[36] reflected in the *Burschenschaften* motto "Ehre, Freiheit, Vaterland" (honor, freedom, fatherland). This normative masculinity evolved alongside and co-opted the insurgent nationalism of the middle classes[37]—giving "a

30 Fürnkranz, "Klitclique und 'Der Feminist F€m1n1$t'," 96 and 97. Stefanie Sargnagel dedicated her 2017 book *Statusmeldungen* to Hysteria.

31 See, for example, Lydia Haider's text *Wahrlich fuck you du Sau, bist du komplett zugeschissen in deinem Leib drin oder: Zehrung Reiser Rosi* (Vienna: redelsteiner dahimène edition, 2018), and her 2019 novel *Am Ball: Wider erbliche Schwachsinnigkeit* (Vienna: redelsteiner dahimène edition, 2019), which alludes to the Akademikerball.

32 Fürnkranz, "Klitclique und 'Der Feminist F€m1n1$t'," 96 and 97.

33 Carina Klammer and Judith Goetz, "Between German Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Racism: Representations of Gender in the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)," in *Gender and Far Right Politics in Europe*, ed. Köttig, Bitzan, and Petö, 79–94, here 83.

34 For further discussion of the development of this masculinity, see George Mosse, *The Image of Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

35 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 5.

36 Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no.2 (2018): 242–69, here 245.

37 In the twentieth century, fascism co-opted the defense of the fatherland until death as an essential masculine virtue. Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 156.

distinctly masculine stamp to German national character."[38] It opposed those perceived as sensitive or effeminate,[39] and dismissed groups that threatened middle-class morality as inferior, such as Jews or the physically infirm. Women and their accompanying femininity would complement the masculine ideal that elevated manliness to a normative force.[40]

The formation of this martial masculine stereotype coincides with the founding of the first fraternity, the Urburschenschaft or "original *Burschenschaft*," in Jena in 1815. As the prototype for German-nationalist *Burschenschaften,*[41] it trained fraternity members, promoted elitist values, and engaged in revolutionary activity to justify German unification after the Napoleonic wars. As a result, the French were presented as an opposing negative stereotype; German men were portrayed as heroic warriors while the French were effeminate and impotent. The *Urburschenschaft* (and subsequent *Burschenschaften*) adopted the principles of the *Männerbund* (association of men) and *Lebensbundprinzip* (Principle of the Bond for Life), enshrined in brotherhood for life, and values of hegemonic masculinity as the basic bonds of national community. Women in this context often embody restrictive symbolic roles "as icons of nationhood, to be elevated and defended, or as the booty or spoils of war, to be denigrated and disgraced. In either case, the real actors are men who are defending their freedom, their honor, their homeland and their women."[42] In this regard, terms like "honor," "patriotism," and "duty" become gendered as masculine tropes in a nationalist context.[43]

For the *Burschenschaften*, women—as well as those, such as Jews, who do not fulfil the expectations of hegemonic masculinity[44]—cannot be part of the elite that defends the nation. They are excluded from the *Burschenschaften* because they are not *satisfaktionsfähig* (capable of giving satisfaction in a duel)[45]—they neither possess, nor are able to defend their honor. Following the circular argument that those who lack honor cannot

38 Karin Breuer, "Competing Masculinities: Fraternities, Gender and Nationality in the German Confederation, 1815–30," *Gender & History* 20, no. 2 (August 2008): 270–87, here 277.

39 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 7.

40 Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 12.

41 Alexander Czech and Burkhard Mötz, *Leitmotive der Deutschen Burschenschaft—Langtexte* (n.p.: Deutsche Burschenschaft, 2013), 9. Available at https://www.burschenschaft.de/fileadmin/user_upload/DB_Grundsatzbroschuere-LANGTEXTE-KA3__08.01.15.pdf (accessed June 26, 2020).

42 Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism," 244.

43 Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism," 252.

44 See R.W. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 76–78.

45 Judith Goetz, "Die Wiener Burschenschaft Hysteria fordert rechtsextreme Männerbünde heraus," interview by Mariella Sterra, *Missy Magazine*, August 29, 2018, https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2018/08/29/

defend it, this logic is used to justify not only anti-Semitism but also the misogyny and heteronormative gender binary that is prevalent in the *Burschenschaften*. Instead, a man must be able defend his honor to prove himself as a man: for example, by partaking in ritual fencing, known as the *Mensur* (students' duel).[46]

Despite the importance of "male bonding and gender segregation" within the *Burschenschaft*,[47] the union of men and women is believed to be essential to guarantee the stability of society. In nationalist *Burschenschaft* discourse, women, by giving birth to children, subsequently help to maintain the *Volk* (people, nation). If the heterosexual nuclear family fails to fulfil its purpose as a site of reproduction for the German race, this failure will inevitably lead to the *Volkstod* (death of the nation).[48] The same understanding of the heterosexual family as the nucleus of society is promoted by the FPÖ—excluding same-sex relationships from this world view.[49] Hans-Henning Scharsach argues that the *Burschenschaften* regained influence over the FPÖ under Heinz-Christian Strache (chairman 2006–2019) and Norbert Hofer.[50] While German nationalist student fraternities in Austria have only a few thousand members (including graduates),[51] the number of FPÖ party members who belong to a student fraternity is disproportionally high. According to the Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstandes (Documentation Center of Austrian Resistance, DÖW), twenty out of fifty-one FPÖ members of parliament in 2017 were *völkisch-korporiert* (belonging to a nationalist student or pupil fraternity)—more than ever before.[52] This change sidelined women in the party,[53] and promoted an essentialist gender view predicated on masculine domination, according to the *Burschenschaften*'s gender ideal. Indeed, Oliver Geden notes that the FPÖ understands the family primarily

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die-wiener-burschenschaft-hysteria-fordert-rechtsextreme-maennerbuende-heraus/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

46 Not all *Burschenschaften* practice ritual fencing, but it is a common initiation rite in the German-nationalist *Burschenschaften* discussed in this chapter.

47 Klammer and Goetz, "Between German Nationalism," 83.

48 Träbert, "At the Mercy of Femocracy?," 280.

49 FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik: Ein Leitfaden für Führungsfunktionäre und Mandatsträger der Freiheitlichen Partei Österreichs*, 4th edition (Vienna: FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, 2013), 140–43.

50 Hans-Henning Scharsach, *Stille Machtergreifung: Hofer, Strache und die Burschenschaften* (Vienna: Kremayr & Scheriau, 2017).

51 Weidinger, *Im Nationalen Abwehrkampf der Grenzlanddeutschen*, 16.

52 Peter Drexler, "So national wird der Nationalrat," *Kurier*, October 25, 2017, https://kurier.at/politik/inland/fpoe-und-die-burschenschaften-so-national-wird-der-neue-nationalrat/294.000.877 (accessed June 26, 2020).

53 As discussed in the section "Männliche Weltordnung: Frauen als Opfer der 'Burschenpartei,'" in Scharsach, *Stille Machtergreifung*.

as a feminine sphere.[54] Scharsach supports this view, with women's issues, for the political party, subsumed under the family and the racist concept of *Volk*. Understood in this way, women's main role becomes the production of Austrian (or, in a German-nationalist view, German) offspring, in competition with foreigners who are seen to infiltrate the country, reproducing at a higher rate.[55]

The restrictive perception of feminine gender roles also informs the anti-feminist sensibility of FPÖ discourse. Under the current dispensation, women who do not conform to gender norms are stigmatized as radicals, with politicians and organizations who argue for gender equality seen as participants of a conspiracy to abolish the natural gender order, as well as historically distinct roles for men and women. This is exemplified by the FPÖ politician Barbara Rosenkranz's 2008 publication *MenschInnen. Gender-Mainstreaming. Auf dem Weg zum geschlechtslosen Menschen* (Wo/menkind. Gender-Mainstreaming. On the way to genderless mankind),[56] with the title clearly mocking gender-sensitive spelling. In this case, we support Birgit Sauer's argument that it is exactly this biologically essentialist concept of a natural gender order which enables a similarly essentialist view of *Volk*.[57]

Hysteria's Ironic Appropriation of *Burschenschaft* Culture

Clearly distinguishing between biological sex and gender identity, Hysteria exposes the ideology of *Burschenschaft*-FPÖ as reliant upon a false foundation of biological essentialism. Their performances disrupt the female role as preserver of the nation with their own narrative, which prescribes men as responsible for preserving the people and the nation, and women as the protectors of the nation and their men. As we will go on to argue, this reveals in striking ways how assumed gendered attributes like aggression and submission are performative.[58] We refer here to Butler's concept of gender and "gender parody." According to Butler,

54 Geden, "The Discursive Representation," 401 and 403.

55 Scharsach, "Männliche Weltordnung: Frauen als Opfer der 'Burschenpartei,'" in *Stille Machtergreifung*.

56 Scharsach, "Männliche Weltordnung: Frauen als Opfer der 'Burschenpartei,'" in *Stille Machtergreifung*.

57 Sauer, "Anti-Feministische Mobilisierung in Europa," 349.

58 Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Nentwich et al. "Change agency," 239–42. Julia C. Nentwich, Mustafa F. Ozbilgin, and Ahu Tatli, "Change Agency as Performance and Embeddedness: Exploring the Possibilities and Limits of Butler and Bourdieu," *Culture and Organization* 21, no. 3 (2015): 239–42.

sex, gender, and desire are regulated by the heterosexual matrix.[59] Butler sees "gender parody" as a way of disrupting the seemingly natural alignment of sex, gender identity, gender performance, and heterosexual desire, thus destabilizing the heteronormative gender order. Her concept of "gender parody" places special emphasis on drag.[60] Butler sees drag as potentially subversive because the performer's assumed sex does not align with the gender he or she performs.[61] Thus, "drag fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model of gender and the notion of a true gender identity."[62] The obvious performative character of the drag act reveals that all gender is performative rather than an essence of the sex, which is expressed in corresponding gendered behavior.[63] According to Butler: "*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency.*"[64] We maintain that Hysteria's parodic impersonation of a *Burschenschaft* is a form of "gender parody" which operates on a similar level to drag. By co-opting military masculinity, a set of behaviors, rituals, and values clearly linked to a male body and masculine gender, and reassigning these to a female body and marking these as female gender expression, Hysteria disturbs the traditional alignment of sex and gender. The appropriation of masculine values and symbols, the wearing of a military-style uniform with masculine connotations but tailored to the female body, makes the performative character of gender and the arbitrary attribution of feminine and masculine characteristics visible and opens them up to criticism. By appropriating masculine values, behaviors, and rituals as essentially feminine (and vice versa), Hysteria exposes both the arbitrariness of gender attributes and the essentialist assumptions about innate or natural femininity and masculinity propagated by the *Burschenschaften*. In her theory of performativity, Butler notes that the ability to "do" gender requires repetition, generating associations and links between groups of people and their sex.[65] Similarly, *Burschenschaften*, with their gender ideology inscribed in performative acts such as their clothes, speech, and rituals, have circumscribed honor, courage, and independence as essentially masculine attributes. In response, members of Hysteria may be said to advocate "a turn against this constitutive historicity,"[66] in Butler's terms, by repeatedly

59 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 23 and 24.

60 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 163–80; Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 81–97, 175–85.

61 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175.

62 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 174.

63 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 178.

64 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 175; emphasis in the original.

65 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 172.

66 Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 172.

representing themselves as a *Burschenschaft* and so revealing the way this form of masculinity has been created historically. The way they imitate and exaggerate *Burschenschaften* reinforces Butler's notion that gender, because it is socially and culturally constructed, is an imitation without an original; therefore, whatever is attributed to gender is always performative. Taking on the role of an idealized version of the *Burschenschaften*, Hysteria remains in character and insists that they are not only a "proper" *Burschenschaft* but the actual original *Urburschenschaft* and all other men-only *Burschenschaften* are mere copies.

Furthermore, performances are never discussed on a meta-level, neither in interviews,[67] nor on their social media profiles. Instead, their semiotic appropriation helps to convey their authenticity, encouraging audience members who engage with them to participate in their performances. Amber Day defines this act of symbolic intervention as "identity nabbing": a practice "in which participants pretend to be people they are not and appear in public as exaggerated caricatures of their opponents."[68] Drawing on Day's argumentation, we propose that the embodied irony of Hysteria is threefold;[69] firstly, the members of Hysteria present themselves as an authentic *Burschenschaft* through their costumes, their use of particular linguistic codes, and their rituals; secondly, they present themselves as the protectors and superiors of men; thirdly, they convey an implied meaning behind their performance, in this case the archaic gender roles and anti-feminism of the political right. In our analysis of their performance and presentation, we draw on insights by Day and Hutcheon that highlight how satire, parody, and irony can be powerful tools challenging dominant, far-right, discourse through ridicule, mockery, and shared communities of ironic understanding.[70] We argue that Hysteria's "identity nabbing" and ironic acts of gender inversion are effective vehicles of performative satire—which Day reads as significant traits of "ironic activist groups."[71] Moreover, to recognize Hysteria as an authentic student fraternity and to read their performances as acts of subversion, the audience needs to be part of a "discursive community,"[72] instantiated through shared knowledge and an awareness of irony.

As Day has noted, the discursive community shares a set of cultural cues,[73] which enable them to understand irony by inferring a different meaning to the stated one. However, as Hutcheon has traced, even in

67 See Schmidt, "Im goldenen Matriarchat."
68 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 146 and 147.
69 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 147.
70 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 12; and Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 29–31.
71 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 7.
72 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 89.
73 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 40.

a group that can decipher irony due to shared assumptions, irony is an unstable communication process because of the responses it provokes in those who understand it and those who do not.[74] One cannot anticipate "who will join the audience and with what preexisting ideas."[75] Therefore, Day continues, the ability to understand irony is also a sign of elitism, because the understanding of irony is learned and requires access to knowledge which is a form of cultural capital.[76] As for Hysteria's irony, those who "get it" need to have the educational background to infer meaning beyond the imitation of the *Burschenschaften* which is perceived by a broader audience. As Judith Goetz notes, an audience that cannot situate Hysteria in the context of German-nationalist fraternities reacts with irritation because it is unable to infer the ironic meaning.[77] Thus, while an audience that does not "get it" may hardly be motivated to become politically active, those who share cultural cues can enjoy the "discursive community" and partake in Hysteria's activism. As the analysis of Hysteria's *Männerschutzball* (Ball for the Protection of Men) will suggest, this sense of collectivity is reinforced through social networks online, with some of the members, such as Sargnagel, already cultivating a large social media following before Hysteria emerged. As a vital component of the "discursive community," Hysteria uses their social media presence to promote their activism, document offline activism, and interact with the followers of their movement.

In line with all-male fraternities, Burschenschaft Hysteria's name engages its discursive community both on social media and offline. While the *Burschenschaften* use names which allude to Germanic tribes, such as Teutonia or Markomannia, which evoke associations of manly Germanic warriors and the Germanic invasion of the Roman Empire, Hysteria's name refers to a pejorative term which has long been used to describe what were considered to be women's illnesses and non-conforming female behavior.[78] Throughout history, the negative term *hysterisch* (hysteric) collocates frequently with the word *Frau* (woman).[79] However, Hysteria toys with the irony of its own name: they are a female collective but they defy the misogynist associations of the helpless madwoman. As

74 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 2.

75 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 40.

76 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 40. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 234.

77 Goetz, "Die Wiener Burschenschaft Hysteria fordert rechtsextreme Männerbünde heraus."

78 For an overview, see Sander L. Gilman, Helen King, Roy Porter, G.S. Rousseau, and Elaine Showalter, *Hysteria beyond Freud* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

79 "hysterisch," *Duden*, https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/hysterisch (accessed April 13, 2020).

Andrew Scull has mused, "hysteria" may constitute "an unspoken idiom of protest, a symbolic voice of the silenced sex, who were forbidden to verbalize their discontents, and so created a language of the body."[80]

Moreover, the group reinvents hysteria as a feminine voice of protest by adopting the hyena as its heraldic animal. While the *Burschenschaften* use traditional heraldic animals like eagles, Hysteria chooses an animal fraught with complicated historical connotations concerning female behavior and anatomy.[81] Female hyenas' genitals resemble those of their male counterparts, and they live in polyandrous groups with one dominant reproductive female.[82] Furthermore, when Horace Walpole disparagingly called Mary Wollstonecraft a "hyena in petticoats,"[83] the hyena took on a symbolic association with women's suffrage. As such, Hysteria adopts the hyena's female dominance and aggression as positive feminine attributes. The kind of explosive laughter suggested by both hysteria and the hyena can also be seen to represent Hysteria's modus operandi. The group employs irony and parody as explosives, to undermine and then subvert the traditional signifiers of *Burschenschaft* culture.

"Mein Mann bleibt daham": Gender Inversion in Hysteria's 2017 Pre-election Campaign

Hysteria's 2017 pre-election campaign *Mein Mann bleibt daham—Nein zum Männerwahlrecht*[84] (My husband stays at home—no to men's suffrage) is a vital example of how the Hysteria collective uses gender parody, identity nabbing, and irony. Hysteria launched their campaign against

80 Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

81 Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, 15, 408–10, ed. Hugo Magnus. Perseus Digital Library https://scaife.perseus.org/reader/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0959.phi006.perseus-lat2:15.410 (accessed June 26, 2020). Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis historiae*, 8.30.44, ed. Karl Friedrich Theodor Mayhoff. Perseus Digital Library https://scaife.perseus.org/reader/urn:cts:latinLit:phi0978.phi001.perseus-lat2:8.30/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

82 Aaron Wagner, Laurence G. Frank, Scott Creel, and Elizabeth M. Coscia, "Transient Genital Abnormalities in Striped Hyenas (Hyaena hyaena)," *Hormones and Behavior* 51, no. 5 (2007): 626–32.

83 Helen O'Neill, "Hyenas in Petticoats and The Man in a Dress: Women and the Vote," *London Library blog*, last modified February 8, 2018, http://blog.londonlibrary.co.uk/?p=17765 (accessed June 26, 2020). Friedrich Schiller also uses the term hyena as a slur against women's behavior during the French revolution in his poem *Lied von der Glocke* (Song of the Bell, 1798), in which he praises the middle-class virtues of humble, motherly women.

84 *daham* is an Austrianism meaning "at home." The term clearly refers to an Austrian discourse.

men's suffrage in the run-up to Austria's twenty-sixth national elections, at the University of Vienna's main entrance. The two picture posts of the rally on Hysteria's Facebook page (October 13 and 14, 2017) together received over 3,500 positive reactions from the community. Most comments welcomed the event and supported their demands.[85] This campaign serves as a prime example of Hysteria's critique of traditional gender roles as an accessory to nationalist politics by alluding to the anti-women's suffrage movement in the early twentieth century. In order for their subversive gender parody to expose the disdain for gender equality in the *Burschenschaften*, Burschenschaft Hysteria needs to maintain the *Burschenschaften*'s strict heteronormative gender binary. This way, Hysteria's discursive community can understand their ironic gender parody.

Hysteria's *Nein zum Männerwahlrecht* (No to men's suffrage) campaign called on women to prevent their husbands, brothers, and sons from participating in the 2017 national election. They claimed that men needed to be stopped from voting to maintain their purity and to be able to fulfill their purpose of being fathers. Hysteria used vocabulary associated with femininity to reinscribe feminine gender stereotypes of helplessness and innocence as masculine. At the same time, however, femininity was redefined through masculine attributes, because women became the defenders of their men's purity and the decision makers. They became the defenders of the *Volk*'s nurturers and consequently of the *Vaterland* (fatherland). This subversion of gender roles exposes the performativity of gender and gender inequality as the consequence of a strict gender binary determined by sex.[86]

Hysteria's performance included flyers and embodied irony. Their flyers ironically criticized *Burschenschaften* and the FPÖ politics by emphasizing the link between nationalism and gender roles which Hans-Henning Scharsach, Judith Goetz, Renate Bitzan, and Herbert Auinger have pointed out.[87] Hysteria exposes the notion, elucidated by Bitzan, that

85 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Wahlinformation," Facebook, October 13, 2017, https://de-de.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/posts/497324057308688 (accessed June 26, 2020); Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Vor diesem Wahlsonntag möchte Sie die Burschenschaft Hysteria bei Ihrer Entscheidung mit Bildern unserer Verteilaktion und dem anschließenden Umtrunk daran erinnern: Das Matriachat bringt uns allen Freude," Facebook, October 14, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/posts/497862173921543 (accessed June 26, 2020).

86 Bitzan, "Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse," 341. A person's sex is inevitably linked to gender and thus to specific attributes and characteristics that bear the connotation feminine or masculine.

87 See Hans-Henning Scharsach, *Strache: Im braunen Sumpf* (Vienna: Kremayr & Scheriau, 2012); Scharsach, *Stille Machtergreifung*; Goetz, "Gender und

women's purity requires men's protection and guidance to fulfill their purpose as mothers to the German *Volk* and guardians of its virtues.[88] Their flyers emphasize the corruption of masculine attractiveness through political activity and the neglect of family, putting child-caring duties under jeopardy. These warnings imitate the narrative of the anti-suffragette and anti-feminist sentiments of the early twentieth century. Groups such as the Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation (German Association for the Combatting of Women's Liberation), founded in 1912, demanded that the gender and power relations that suppressed women should be maintained and called for "echte Männlichkeit für den Mann" (real masculinity for men) and "echte Weiblichkeit für die Frau" (real femininity for women), virtues of a conservative, nationalist middle class.[89] These demands fostered gender inequality and confined women to the domestic sphere.[90] Misogynist scientists like Paul Möbius[91] and Otto Weininger[92] declared this confinement to hearth and motherhood as an essentialist female disposition that would ensure the continuance of the German race.

Echoing this, Hysteria encouraged women to safeguard their men: "Frauen! Haltet den Mann fern vom Wahlzettel . . . NEIN zum Männerwahlrecht = JA zum Männerschutz" (Women! Keep your men away from ballot papers . . . NO to men's suffrage = YES to men's safety). Instead, men must be encouraged to fulfill their "angestammte Aufgabe" (traditional role): their "Pflichten und Freude liegen in der Sphäre des Privaten" (men's duty and happiness lie in the private sphere). In 1913, at the height of the anti-feminist movement in Germany, Paula Mueller expressed similar strong reservations against women's suffrage and an equality of the sexes: these posed a threat to nationalism and the wellbeing

Rechtsextremismus"; Klammer and Goetz, "Between German Nationalism"; Bitzan, "Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse"; and Herbert Auinger, *Die FPÖ—Blaupause der neuen Rechten in Europa* (Vienna: Promedia Verlag, 2017).

88 Bitzan, "Geschlechterkonstruktionen und Geschlechterverhältnisse," 342.

89 Ute Planert, "Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern: Die Frauenbewegung und ihre Gegner im Kaiserreich," *Feministische Studien* 18, no. 1 (2000): 22–35, here 22.

90 Planert, "Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern," 24.

91 In his *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (1903) Möbius not only asserted that women's brains are smaller than men's and thus unable to cope with complex intellectual demands, but also maintained that women's characters are similar to those of children and that women are therefore easily excited, upset, and incapable of rational thought. Intellectual training would lead to a reduction in reproductive ability, thus disrupting women's purpose in life.

92 See Planert, "Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern," 23.

of the family.[93] Hysteria's inversion was paired with gender associations that dominate the misogynist discourse: men were called "emotionsgeleitet" (led by their emotions) and "unbesonnen" (irrational), which were considered feminine attributes in Paul Möbius's *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (On the Physiological Feeble-Mindedness of Women, 1903).[94] In Hysteria's treatment, rationality, reasoning, and the public sphere become feminine traits. Finally, in the flyer's bottom right-hand corner, the members of Hysteria repurposed the early-twentieth-century postcard to ironically hint at anti-feminist ideas. *Mummy's a Suffragette* pictured a baby crying for its absent mother,[95] but now the plea reads "Vati, bleib zu Hause!" (Daddy, stay at home!), thus putting men in place of the negligent suffragette.

Hysteria also parodies the corruption of women's purity through intellectual enterprise. Men's intellectual capability is irrelevant, while their physical attractiveness and child-caring duties are the qualities that are foregrounded. The flyer states that political engagement results in men becoming physically repulsive, "Durch Politik: ein schircher Ratz" (because of politics: an ugly rat), accompanied by a grumpy-looking caricature in classic formal attire, a representation of how traditional politics can ruin a man's mind. Additionally, the flyer boasts the physically fit naked torso of a young, white man as a sexualized eye-catcher, designed to attract the passerby's attention. Devoid of any individualized features, men are reduced to a submissive "schönes Beiwerk" (pretty add-on), placed in the traditional role of women for the *Burschenschaften*.[96] The torso is juxtaposed with the warning that this immaculate body needs a woman's protection from corrupting intellectual exertion. Thus, the feminine need to be safeguarded is transformed into a masculine one. Furthermore, the male torso links gender and nationalism on an aesthetic level: he represents the ideal of the fit male youth that complies with the *Burschenschaften*'s racial hegemony: he is the ideal white, German man. To connect the flyer even more clearly to a nationalist context, the text is written in *Fraktur*, a Gothic type. *Fraktur* was considered the Germanic font in the early twentieth century and used for early National Socialist

93 Mueller, cited in Planert, "Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern," 28.

94 Paul Julius Möbius, *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes* (Halle an der Saale: Carl Marhold, 1903), 22. Möbius asserted that women are led by affect and are emotional, not rational.

95 Catherine Palczewski, "Mummy's a Suffragette," Palczewski Suffrage Postcard Archive, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, https://scholarworks.uni.edu/suffrage_images/1408/thumbnail.jpg (accessed April 28, 2020).

96 See Alexandra Kurth, "Männer—Bünde—Rituale: Studentenverbindungen," in *Rechtsextremismus und Gender*, ed. Ursula Birsl (Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 2011), 281–94, here 286.

propaganda material.[97] The bold colors red, black, and white also link the flyer to a German nationalist subtext, because these are the colors of swastika flags as well as earlier flags of the Weimar Republic and of some *Burschenschaften*, such as the Quercus-Markomannia zu Linz.

By exaggerating supposedly natural dispositions within the set gender binary, Hysteria criticizes the exclusive family policy propagated by the strict heteronormative gender binary of the *Burschenschaften* and the FPÖ. The *Grundsatzbroschüre* of the *Deutsche Burschenschaften* (the manifesto of the German *Burschenschaften*) proclaims that "Die klassischen Rollen des Ehemannes als Vater und Ernährer der Familie und der Ehefrau als Hausfrau und Mutter müssen in der Gesellschaft wieder den Stellenwert erhalten, der ihnen zusteht" (the classic roles of the husband as father and breadwinner of the family and of the wife as housewife and mother should regain the status that they once commanded) and excludes non-heterosexual family forms from these privileges.[98] Similarly, the FPÖ expresses a preference for heterosexual families and promotes (financial) support for Austrian women who opt for motherhood.[99] Hysteria radically appropriates the *Burschenschaften*'s biologically essentialist concept of gender in their flyers, calling men's suffrage "widernatürlich" (against nature). Again, this term is historically part of an anti-gender nationalist discourse: firstly, because Möbius described women's ambitions outside the family as "widernatürlich,"[100] and secondly, because "widernatürlich" was used in the oldest version of the former Paragraph 175 in the German Criminal Code (1872–1935) to criminalize homosexuality.[101] In this underlying ideology, the heterosexual gender binary is normative, fixing men and women's gender roles by their sex. Hysteria's radical exposure of the heteronormative gender binary reveals the performativity of gender and the political right's biologically essentialist approach as a pillar of nationalist ideology.

An audience that understands Burschenschaft Hysteria's ironic take on men's suffrage must be aware of gender stereotypes to enjoy the visual and verbal cues on the flyers. However, the full spectrum of irony is reserved for the educated discursive community that shares knowledge

97 *Fraktur* was used in official communication until 1941. Then the font was deemed to be made of so-called *Schwabacher Judenlettern* (Jewish type from Schwabach) and ceased to be used. Wolfgang Beinert, "Fraktur," *Typologielexikon*, last updated August 1, 2019, https://www.typolexikon.de/fraktur-schrift/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

98 Czech and Mötz, *Leitmotive*, 41.

99 FPÖ-Bildungsinstitut, *Handbuch freiheitlicher Politik*, 142 and 143.

100 Möbius, *Über den physiologischen Schwachsinn des Weibes*, 28.

101 "1. Januar 1982—1. September 1935, § 175," Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich vom 15. Mai 1871, Thomas Fuchs, Lexetius.com, https://lexetius.com/StGB/175,7 (accessed March 25, 2020).

about the historical references. This way, Hysteria does not only parody the *Burschenschaften*'s gender binary, but they also "nab" their identity, in Day's terms, by imitating their elitist exclusivity. Hysteria's performance of naming and shaming proponents of gender inequality relies on maintaining the heterosexual gender binary, but the parody of the *Burschenschaften* as exclusive networks relies on their discursive community's ability to interpret the irony in their actions.

At the same time, however, by "nabbing" the identity of a *Burschenschaft* and rejecting men's suffrage, Hysteria threatens the *Burschenschaften*'s claim to power in the political right. In the early twentieth century, the national-liberal, German conservative, and anti-Semitic parties of the time opposed women's suffrage not only because of shifts in power relations between men and women. They also feared that female voter participation would bring about an electoral victory for the socialist parties.[102] In the context of Hysteria's flyer, a hypothetical end to men's suffrage would pose a threat to the success of the FPÖ in the 2017 election. This was an election, in which the FPÖ saw one of their best results so far, gaining more than twenty-five percent of the overall votes. Surveys by SORA show that significantly more men than women voted for the FPÖ.[103] Thus, preventing men from voting would significantly change an election outcome and present a real threat to the FPÖ's claim to power, which resulted in a coalition with the ÖVP.[104]

The success of Hysteria's performance as ironic political activism depends on the relationship of place, time, and context, which help the audience to interpret the irony. Embodied irony is created "through the dissonance between their performed identities in the moment, their actual statements, and the implied meaning behind them."[105] As Hariman notes, the object of a parody becomes ridiculous when the parody exaggerating its distinct features is placed directly beside this object.[106] During the *Nein zum Männerwahlrecht* campaign, Hysteria

102 See Planert, "Mannweiber, Urniden und sterile Jungfern," 24.

103 SORA/ISA, "Wahlverhalten in ausgewählten Gruppen," *Wahlanalyse Nationalratswahl 2017*, https://www.sora.at/fileadmin/downloads/wahlen/2017_NRW_Wahlanalyse.pdf, 5 (accessed June 26, 2020). For a historic overview of the FPÖ as a men's party, see Matthias Lunznig, "Von Treue und Verrat, Bannflüchen und Vernichtungsstößen: Das Verhältnis von FPÖ und völkischen Verbindungen," in *Völkische Verbindungen*, ed. HochschülerInnenschaft an der Universität Wien, 34–58, here 36 and 37.

104 Despite coming third, the ÖVP chose the FPÖ over the SPÖ as junior partner in their coalition. The coalition ended in May 2019 with the so-called Ibiza affair that also saw the end of Heinz-Christian Strache as FPÖ party leader.

105 Day, *Satire and Dissent*, 147.

106 Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 3 (2008): 247–72, here 249.

performed an exaggerated version of a student fraternity at the university, the place associated with German-nationalist *Burschenschaften*. Members of Hysteria handed out their flyers in *Burschenschaften* attire.[107] Black trousers and coats, white shirts, sashes in coleur, and red caps replicated the *Burschenschaften*'s quasi-military uniforms.[108] Hysteria created dissonance between their appearance and message by contrasting the *Burschenschaften*'s military masculinity with their demand for an end to men's suffrage. By exaggerating distinct features, they point to the "transferability of the attribute" that is independent of biological sex.[109] First, Hysteria shows that being a masculine quasi-military *Burschenschafter* is not tied to a male body. Second, Hysteria historicize their alternative version of the *Burschenschaften* by frequently placing themselves in contexts that are associated with the *Burschenschaften*. Hysteria's identity nabbing gains authenticity by reclaiming *Burschenschaften* spaces like the university and rituals like the *Mittwochsbummel* (Wednesday stroll).[110] These repetitive performances of associated rituals in spaces associated with the *Burschenschaften* enable their discursive community to reinforce Hysteria's ironic symbolism, because it is placed alongside and overshadows that of the *Burschenschaften*.

Hysteria's *Nein zum Männerwahlrecht* campaign shows how their gender parody exposes the FPÖ and *Burschenschaften*'s anti-gender discourse. Set in the *Burschenschaften*'s heteronormative gender binary framework, Hysteria's performative act shows that gender attributes like masculine agency and dominance, allegedly feminine defenselessness and nurturing qualities are detached from biological sex. These gender attributes require constant repetition to become historicized. Hysteria's "subversive performance, as repetition with a difference" mocks the stable reference point,[111] as well as mocking the attributes that are perceived as effects of the cultural matrix of heteronormativity. For *Burschenschaften*, their rituals and rites of fraternity legitimize their masculine habitus and

107 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Vor diesem Wahlsonntag."

108 The *Burschenschaft* attire resembles a military uniform and each *Burschenschaft* has its specific color combination, the coleur. The *Urburschenschaft* in Jena modelled their uniform on the Lützower Freikorps (Lützow Free Corps). Peter Kaupp, "Von den Farben der Jenaischen Urburschenschaft zu den deutschen Farben—Ein Beitrag zur Frühgeschichte der Entstehung von Schwarz-Rot-Gold," in *Für Burschenschaft und Vaterland: Festschrift für den Burschenschafter und Studentenhistoriker Prof. (FH) Dr. Peter Kaupp*, ed. Bernhard Schroeter (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2006), 63–98, here 79.

109 Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 213.

110 A ceremonial walk that *Burschenschafter* undertake every Wednesday, which ends on the steps of the University of Vienna with speeches.

111 See Eva von Redecker, "Gender Parody," in *Gender: Laughter*, ed. Bettina Pappenburg (Farmington Hills: Macmillan, 2017), 279–92, here 283.

historicize their masculinity. For Hysteria to legitimize themselves as a *Burschenschaft*, they need to impersonate the same rituals and rites and recode the attributes of masculinity as femininity. What is more, Hysteria creates a sense of authenticity by consistently remaining in character. There is no discussion about the actions from a meta-textual perspective with their discursive groups or a general public, and media outlets do not treat them as impersonators.[112] Therefore, they seem as authentic as *Burschenschaft* members who are FPÖ party members. However, because of their radical ironic exaggeration, Burschenschaft Hysteria parodies the elitist members of the FPÖ, such as former presidential candidate Norbert Hofer (member of the Marko-Germania zu Pinkafeld fraternity) and party chairman Norbert Nemeth (member of the Olympia Wien fraternity).[113] This way, their irony exposes both the backwardness of the FPÖ gender and family policy that party members champion and the performativity of the reactionary gender discourse.

Hysteria's *Männerschutzball* and Social Media Activism

The annual Wiener Korporationsring Ball (Vienna Corporation Ring Ball) has become one of the most visible and contested *Burschenschafter* events. The ball's guests have consisted of not only Austrian and German *Burschenschafter,* but also a long list of far-right politicians including Marine Le Pen and members of the far-right Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany). Critics of the ball have found it problematic that the event is held in the Hofburg, the Habsburgs' principal imperial palace, part of which still serves as the residence of the Austrian president, as this historic location suggests that the ball is a representative, politically sanctioned event. The Wiener Korporationsring (WKR) has organized its annual ball there since the 1950s, but publicly visible protests against the event only started in 2008 with an organized protest called *DekaDance* (DecaDance) and the formation of the protest organization NOWKR (no WKR). After four

112 For example, "Die Burschenschaft Hysteria," 3sat Mediathek, last modified December 15, 2017, https://www.3sat.de/kultur/kulturzeit/die-burschenschaft-hysteria-100.html. Christine Bazalka, "Burschenschaft Hysteria übernimmt Ottakringer 'Fritz-Stüber-Heim'," *Mein Bezirksblatt*, March 3, 2017, https://www.meinbezirk.at/waehring/c-lokales/burschenschaft-hysteria-uebernimmt-ottakringer-fritz-stueber-heim_a2041204 (accessed June 26, 2020).

113 For a discussion of FPÖ members' fraternity membership, see the section entitled "Agitation: Gegen 'Kampfemanzen' und 'Quotenfrauen,'" in Scharsach, *Strache: Im Braunen Sumpf*.

years of protests, Casinos Austria finally dissolved its contract with the WKR in 2011, and the last ball under the WKR banner was held in 2012. However, this victory was short-lived. The FPÖ took over the organization and patronage of the ball, guaranteeing its continuation under a different name: the *Akademikerball* (academics' ball).[114]

Protests against the ball have continued with the formation of the Offensive gegen Rechts in 2011,[115] and Hysteria's protest against the event can be seen in a wider context of activism. What makes it stand out is that while other protesters often managed to disrupt guests outside the venue, Hysteria successfully entered the venue and disrupted the actual event. Members of the *Burschenschaft* purchased tickets and entered the ball in gowns and remained undetected until they unfurled banners to "rebrand" the ball *Hysteria Ball* during the opening ceremony. Hysteria's symbolic "dance"—unrolling a banner—on the actual ballroom dance floor can be seen as a reference to the 2008 *DekaDance* protest, which invited protesters to enjoy a party or to dance outside the venue.[116] To use Day's concept of "identity nabbing" here again, Hysteria was not only nabbing the *Burschenschafter*'s identity, they were actually "nabbing" their event.

Hysteria's infiltration of the ball by disguising themselves as guests adds another layer to the "identity nabbing" and drag performance and functions as a double disguise. In order to enter the ball, Hysteria members had to dress in a conventional feminine ball gown. The fake ball guests needed to pass as "real" traditional, conservative women. Members of Hysteria, usually dressed-up as *Burschenschafter* in order to be recognized, now dressed in a gender-conforming way to appear as traditional female guests at the *Akademikerball.* If we keep in mind that Hysteria's *Burschenschafter* uniforms are essential for their "identity nabbing," we

114 For an overview of the *Akademikerball* and related protest movements, see Judith Goetz, "Ausgetanzt! Eine kritische Bilanz der Proteste gegen den WKR-Ball," in *Rechtsextremismus*, Forschungsgruppe Ideologien und Politiken der Ungleichheit, vol. 1, *Entwicklungen und Analysen* (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2014), 200–225. See also Sabine Knierbein and Angelika Gabauer, "Worlded Resistance as 'Alter' Politics: Train of Hope and the Protest Against the Akademikerball in Vienna," in *City Unsilenced: Urban Resistance and Public Space in the Age of Shrinking Democracy*, ed. Jeffrey Hou and Sabine Knierbein (New York: Routledge, 2017), 214–27.

115 See Birgit Sauer, "The (Im)Possibility of Creating Counter Hegemony Against the Radical Right: The Case of Austria," in *Citizens' Activism and Solidarity Movements*, ed. Birte Siim, Anna Krasteva, and Aino Saarinen (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 111–36.

116 Paul Donnerbauer, "Die Geschichte des Akademikerballs und seiner Proteste," *Vice*, January 30, 2017, https://www.vice.com/de/article/vvvdpm/die-geschichte-des-akademikerballs-und-seiner-proteste (accessed June 26, 2020).

can see the ball gown disguise as a second layer on top of an invisible *Burschenschafter* uniform. Hysteria's fake *Burschenschafter* identity is so closely linked to their wearing of *Burschenschafter* uniforms that these uniforms are associated with Hysteria members even when they dress up as something else. The ball gown functions as an invisibility cloak, which hides the feminist activist beneath a feminine dress. This raises the question: which of these costumes is the drag now? For the Hysteria member as well as their audience, the fake *Burschenschafter* uniform might feel less a form of drag than a dress she puts on in order to be able to attend the *Akademikerball*. We maintain that the female Hysteria member in a gown does not symbolically take off her *Burschenschafter* uniform and realign her sex with the appropriate gender performance, but rather covers her actual (political, activist) identity as a (female) *Burschenschafter* with a gender-conforming dress. The Hysteria member does not simply conform to gender norms and become a "proper" woman again, but she uses the disguise as a woman to conceal her "true" identity as a Hysteria *Burschenschafter* and political activist, in order to enter and disrupt the ball. Not the female body, but the female nonconformity is both veiled (on entry) and unveiled (by unveiling the banner). Hysteria's "identity nabbing" shows that drag does not necessarily involve a disruption of the axis between sex and gender, but that the performance of an idealized femininity by feminist activists who do not subscribe to such a femininity can constitute a form of drag.

This second disguise also highlights the restrictive dress codes of both the *Burschenschafter* and traditional Viennese balls which will refuse entry even for minor violations of the dress code; for example, wearing a tie instead of a bow tie or a woman's dress being an inch too short, let alone guests showing up in gender non-conforming clothes. The ball is also an environment that is associated with highly ritualized behavior, just like a *Burschenschafter-Kommers* (Burschenschaften Ceremonial Party) or a *Mensur*. On top of that, the ritualized behavior at balls is—like the dress code—very gender-stereotypical: for example, the man leads the dance and invites the woman to join the dance, unless it is *Damenwahl* (ladies' choice), a special occasion when women get to choose their dance partner. Hysteria's infiltration of the ball opens up criticism of gender roles that extends beyond the extremely conservative and traditional views of the *Burschenschafter*. Hysteria's successful infiltration of the ball also highlights how one gains entry into a certain society by conforming to gender norms. Their entry by conformity raises a wider criticism of gender roles and draws attention to the fact that Viennese balls in general uphold outdated traditions related to gender.

The rebranding of the *Akademikerball* marked the beginning of Hysteria's presence on Twitter: on February 3, 2017, the night of the

ball, Hysteria posted two pictures of the successful rebranding, with banners calling it the "Hysteria Ball" and featuring a hyena. Hashtags included #HeilHysteria, #nowkr, #vaterlandsverrat (betrayal of the fatherland) and #Männerschutz (protection of men).[117] On the day after the ball, Hysteria added a short video clip showing the unfurling of the banner on the balcony and an image of the unfurling of the second banner on the dancefloor.[118] The caption above the image reads "Hysteria tanzt unbeeindruckt trotz Störaktion des Krawall-Aktivisten Norbert Hofer am Männerschutzball" (Hysteria dances, unphased by the disturbance of the riot-activist Norbert Hofer at the Ball for the Protection of Men).[119] In a reversal of the actual events, Norbert Hofer, the FPÖ's presidential candidate, is accused of disrupting Hysteria's ball. This quotation does not only refer to the disruption or even violent forms of protest which surrounded the WKR or *Akademiker* balls in the past; it can also be read as a reference to the ball guests' and the FPÖ's insistence on being victims of the protesters, culminating in a 2012 reference by Heinz-Christian Strache (then leader of the FPÖ and patron of the ball) to the ball guests and the FPÖ as the "new Jews" and comparing attacks on *Burschenschafter-Buden* (fraternity houses) with the 1938 November Pogroms.[120] Analogous to the extreme right's view of men and boys as the actual victims of gender disparity and of measures against gender disparity,[121] Strache—like other FPÖ politicians before him—presents the *Burschenschaften* and the FPÖ as today's real victims. Protesters who criticize the FPÖ and the *Burschenschaften* for their anti-Semitism are portrayed as perpetrators in a complete reversal of and disregard for Holocaust remembrance.[122]

117 Burschenschaft Hysteria (@bs_hysteria), "Hysteria rettet 'Akademikerball'," Twitter Post, February 3, 2017, https://twitter.com/bs_hysteria/status/827642652736778240 (accessed June 26, 2020).

118 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "'Alte Herren' freuen sich auf das goldene Matriarchat. Alles Walzer!," Facebook Video, February 4, 2017, https://de-de.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/videos/381862312188197 (accessed June 26, 2020).

119 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Hysteria tanzt trotz Störaktion des Krawall-Aktivisten Norbert Hofer am Männerschutzball," Facebook, February 4, 2017, https://de-de.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/posts/382085965499165 (accessed June 26, 2020).

120 Karin Stoegner, "'We are the New Jews!' and 'The Jewish Lobby'—Anti-semitism and the Construction of a National Identity by the Austrian Freedom Party," *Nations and Nationalism* 22, no. 3 (2016): 484–504, here 492.

121 Christa Hämmerle, "Genderforschung aus neuer Perspektive? Erste und noch fragende Anmerkungen zum neuen Maskuli(ni)smus," *L'Homme* 23, no. 2 (2012): 111–20, here 114.

122 Stoegner, "'We are the New Jews!'," 492–95.

Hysteria satirizes the FPÖ's victim mentality and their victim-perpetrator reversal by simply copying it.

The above also underlines Hysteria's fictional appropriation of the ball as their own event. Hysteria posted the same images and video on Facebook together as a longer post. In it, Hysteria takes their appropriation further by stating that such an "unglückselige Nachbildung unserer traditionsreichen Burschenschaft" (unfortunate replica of our traditional fraternity) will be a thing of the past, again presenting the *Burschenschaften* as the fake and insisting on Hysteria being the original.[123] In the same post, they declare the ball the "*Hysteria Ball* zur Erziehung und Schutz des Mannes" (Hysteria ball for the education and protection of men), or "*Männerschutzball*" (Ball for the Protection of Men) for short.[124]

The rebranding of the event as a *Männerschutzball* is worth a closer look. Firstly, it refers to the protest events that had surrounded the ball in the years before, and criticism from both sides about the police safeguarding ball guests from the protesters (too well according to the protesters, not well enough according to the organizers). Secondly, the rebranding is an appropriation of the FPÖ's own rebranding of the WKR ball. While the *Akademikerball* disguises the link to the *Burschenschaften*, the *Männerschutzball* emphasizes it. Hysteria used all three words as hashtags when they created content for their discursive community. This highlights the link between the FPÖ and the *Burschenschaften*, and the continuity between the WKR ball and *Akademikerball*. Thirdly, it is an obvious reversal of traditional gender roles—men are the ones who need to be protected, not women. What adds another layer of irony to the idea of a *Männerschutzball* is that Hysteria seemingly takes the FPÖ's and the *Burschenschafter*'s afore-mentioned victim mentality seriously and pretends to protect the "poor," white, heterosexual men who cannot seem to cope with the feminist and pluralist *Zeitgeist* and thus feel marginalized and threatened. Strache reacted to Hysteria's protest event on February 5, 2017 on Facebook, apparently using Hysteria's pictures in his own post. He used his post to point out the tolerance of the *Burschenschaften*—since Hysteria was allowed entry and they did not have to fear any violence—and portrayed the ball guests as victims by saying that they had to endure violent attacks by left-wing extremists,[125] inadvertently amplifying

123 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Hysteria rettet 'Akademikerball,'" Facebook, February 3, 2017, https://de-de.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/photos/381553335552428 (accessed June 26, 2020).

124 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "Hysteria rettet 'Akademikerball.'"

125 Burschenschaft Hysteria, "HC Strache," Facebook repost (February 5, 2017), January 16, 2018, https://www.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/photos/537005583340535/ (accessed June 26, 2020).

the message that the ball guests needed protection which Hysteria was happy to offer. By declaring the *Akademikerball* a *Männerschutzball*, Hysteria managed to ironically use the *Burschenschaften*'s and the FPÖ's victim mentality against them. The concept of a *Männerschutzball* questions the *Burschenschafter*'s traditional masculinity and emphasizes that the *Burschenschafter*'s victim mentality contradicts their own idealized self-image as the last "real" men.

The use of hashtags increased Hysteria's range of visibility and engagement and expanded the discursive community that understood the irony and interacted with the post. Hashtags like #nowkr also place Hysteria in a tradition of political protest. Reactions to Hysteria's protest event were not limited to social media and the *Männerschutzballaktion* also gained considerable media attention, more so in liberal and left-wing media (e.g., *Der Standard*, *Vice*). The online newspaper *dieStandard*, the feminist section of *derStandard*, even named Hysteria "Heldin des Monats" (heroine of the month).[126] The media used the pictures and footage published by Hysteria on Twitter and Facebook. The protest is thus an example of a publicity stunt which led to reporting in print and broadcasting media beyond Hysteria's immediate followers or sympathizers. Hysteria's documentation of their action and the publication of the video on social media were crucial for disseminating their protest event, because the rebranding of the ball only worked properly via the image of covering the original banner with Hysteria's. Since the whole audience was the object of the protest, it is unlikely that they would have disseminated the event coverage themselves.[127]

Due to the documentation on social media, the protest had two distinct audiences: the first one being the ball guests and organizers who experienced the protest live, with the video capturing their surprised reactions. The second audience consists of Hysteria's followers on social media and Hysteria members who did not take part in the protest themselves. While the first audience most likely experienced the event as a disruption or nuisance, the second audience experienced it as a victorious gesture and a successful protest. The engagement and many positive comments also show that using social media platforms helped to not only disseminate but also validate events, which received approval from a community that understood the irony. Hysteria as the *Urburschenschaft* (original fraternity) have motivated others to set up their own *Burschenschaften*

126 Brigitte Theißl, "'Hysteria': Feministische Burschenschaft persifliert rechte Männerbünde," *dieStandard*, February 27, 2017, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000053259895/hysteria-feministische-burschenschaft-persifliert-rechte-maennerbuende (accessed June 26, 2020).

127 Mainstream media exclusively used Hysteria's own pictures and videos.

without men. These *Burschenschaften* similarly demand the abolishment of men's suffrage and call for the establishment of a matriarchy, and imitate Hysteria's gender parody aesthetics. They, like Hysteria, dress uniformly and have named themselves in allusion to disreputable or misogynist terms, such as Molestia zu München (Molestia of Munich) or Furia zu Innsbruck (Furia of Innsbruck). Similarly, some of their heraldic animals, such as Furia's anglerfish, signify female superiority. These sophisticated choices show that members of the discursive community who form new *Burschenschaften* can decode Hysteria's complex ironic approach to gender parody and aim to copy their strategies.

Conclusion

Our analysis of two of Hysteria's most distinct performances shows that their subversion of gender stereotypes prevailing in the *Burschenschaften* and in the right-wing political context can successfully expose the absurdity of essentialist worldviews in the twenty-first century. By inverting supposedly masculine qualities as inherently feminine, these are made to seem doubly ridiculous and outdated. Hysteria's ability to credibly "nab" the *Burschenschaft* identity, following Day, neatly allows them to satirize gender stereotypes and historicize recoded gender attributes. The members of Hysteria lay claim to attributions of gender stereotypes by setting themselves in the historic context of the suffragette movement and the biologically essentialist gender notions of their adversaries.

We have also shown that Hysteria's political activism can be read as ironic by their discursive community. On the one hand, they need to reiterate the *Burschenschaften*'s essentialist discourse and refer to the political relevance of the FPÖ in order to be perceived as a credible *Burschenschaft* and to make the connection between gender and nationalism visible. On the other hand, when we analyze the *Nein zum Männerwahlrecht* flyers, including their distribution, and the *Männerschutzball* both offline and online, it is clear that a discursive community needs to share an understanding of the gender roles that the *Burschenschaften* and the FPÖ family policy promote. This discursive community, which is built offline and online, reacts to Hysteria. Their reactions validate Hysteria not only as authentic but also as ironic, with comments that recognize the manufactured nature of gender and nationalism. Although the FPÖ and also the *Burschenschaften* have seen a decline of their power in Austrian politics with the so-called Ibiza scandal and the collapse of the ÖVP-FPÖ coalition in 2019, Hysteria continues to target the FPÖ and the *Burschenschaften* and remains relevant in the discourse of anti-far-right activism. The success of Hysteria's political activism is reflected in the number of successor

groups. As of 2020, nine other groups are operating in various German and Austrian cities, and together they have formed a new network, the Korporationsring (Corporation Ring).[128] Both Hysteria and its successors continue to engage with current political events, for example the gendered experience of the COVID-19 pandemic,[129] addressing gender issues both within and beyond the far right.

128 A list of new *Burschenschaften* can be found on the Korporationsring homepage https://www.korporationsring.org (accessed June 26, 2020).

129 A satirical take on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the division of household labor can be seen in this Facebook post heralding the welcome return of men to their "traditional" role as homemakers and caregivers: Burschenschaft Hysteria, "I bleib daham," Facebook, March 26, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/BurschenschaftHysteria/photos/a.223580038016426/1072132503161171 (accessed June 26, 2020).

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