An Aesthetics of Narrative Performance
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WHILE THEATRICALIZED comedies such as Sonnenallee and Good Bye, Lenin! dominated the national film charts, literary critics and audiences focused on a related—and yet poetically quite different—figuration at the turn of the twenty-first century. Identified, by both its adherents and its opponents, as “the key to the present condition,” this figuration was the “new German pop literature.” The designation underlines both its continuity with and its distance from the explicitly avant-garde–inflected, politically radical 1960s German pop of Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and Hubert Fichte that had been influenced by the beat generation and Andy Warhol; Leslie Fiedler’s 1968 plea for “the arrival of the ‘postmodern’” (quoted from Ernst, “German Pop Literature” 171); and the French nouveau roman and concrete poetry. In addition, the new pop also drew on contemporary English-language fiction (Bret Easton Ellis, Nick Hornby, ‘chick lit’) and intermedia art such as the poetry slam, which had only recently been imported to Germany (see Neumeister and Hartges; Preckwitz). Contended in the feuilleton circuit while successful with audiences (see Taberner, German Literature 10), the new pop revitalized the battles around ‘high’ vs. popular culture waged before in the

1. “der Schlüssel zur Gegenwart” (Assheuer, “Im Reich des Scheins”).
1960s. Simultaneously, Brinkmann and Fichte had achieved canonical status in German literature and had become the yardstick against which the new forms were charged, by some, with being depoliticized, if not politically conservative, and aesthetically inferior.²

The charges gain their significance against the background of broader debates on literary form and cultural identity. In the process of unification, conservative critics had launched wholesale attacks against the literature of the GDR, on the one hand (starting from the debate around Christa Wolf’s complicity with the state), and politically engaged, aesthetically (post)modernist literature in the West, on the other.³ Their antimodernist pleas for a return not just to ‘aesthetic criteria’ but also to ‘narrative’—read: relatively nonperformative forms of authoritative narration—drew on the historical significance of literature for creating German national identity. Faced with the legacy of the Holocaust, forty years of separation, and ongoing processes of globalization, these critics initiated a postunification quest for reaffirming the Kulturnation as a basis of collective identity. Against this backdrop, I am interested in the new pop literature for the ways in which its allegedly Americanized forms explore performative narrative.⁴ With its techniques of copying and its “detailed, precise phenomenologies” (Schumacher, Gerade 37), the new pop specifically develops highly scenic forms of writing. This difference from (dominantly theatrical) turn-of-the-twenty-first-century film aesthetics points to the ways in which literature’s traditional association with mediation continued to invest presence-oriented techniques with promises of radicality. Conceptually informed by the performative turn and the emergence of new media, the new pop presents contemporary variations—and in some respects radicalizations—of modernist quests for immediacy and presence. At a cultural moment overall significantly inflected by postmodernist theatricality paradigms, however, these texts simultaneously explore elements of self-reflexivity and epic distancing, resulting in intricate configurations of im/mediated intensity. In untangling these techniques, I am ultimately less interested in (any narrowly delimited concept of) pop as such than in the ways in which it, in fact, becomes a key to present forms of writing, insofar as the boundaries around the pop phenomenon are porous, and crucial elements of

². See, e.g., Ernst, Popliteratur; Liesegang. In subsequent publications, Ernst has distinguished mainstream from underground pop, to which he attributes “rudiments” of a “subversive” form (“German Pop Literature” 170).

³. Selected texts from the debate are documented in Köhler and Moritz; see also Taberner, German Literature 1–8.

⁴. On the charge of Americanization see Taberner, German Literature 16. The most substantial critical contribution on the performative aesthetics of pop literature is Schumacher, Gerade Eben Jetzt.
the pop “method” of writing are shared also by adjacent literary forms in the literary landscape around 2000.

The trajectory of my close readings in this chapter unfolds this claim. Rainald Goetz’s Internet diary Abfall für alle (Trash for all) is generally seen as one of the key texts of the new pop movement, although it is hardly representative for all of it in that Goetz belongs to the new pop faction that remains closest to the politics and aesthetics of the previous, avant-garde–associated generation. The status of Feridun Zaimoğlu’s Kanak Sprak is more ambiguous in that the work of the Turkish-German author became associated with pop literature only in the years following Kanak Sprak’s release in 1995. This was also the year in which Christian Kracht’s Faserland was published, the text usually credited with launching the new pop—as well as representing its mainstream, that is, white, male, upper middle-class, more or less depoliticized faction. Through its primary reference to the model of rap, Kanak Sprak provides the new pop literature with an alternative—or supplementary—genealogy. My third and fourth example, Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde (Strange Stars are Staring to Earth) and Juli Zeh’s Adler und Engel (Eagles and Angels) are not generally categorized as pop literature at all; as I show, however, their performative aesthetics of memory can be productively conceptualized in terms of a broader aesthetic configuration of which the pop hype around 2000 perhaps presents but a glimpse.

Managing New Media Snapshots

GOETZ’S ABFALL FÜR ALLE

A blog avant la lettre later published as a print novel, Goetz’s Abfall für alle is the diary of—a little less than—a year, February 1998 through January 1999. The title announces a gift of worthless refuse (‘trash,’ ‘garbage,’ ‘scrap’) as a gesture of refusal. Presumably casual output (see 45), the production of Abfall is introduced by the diarist as an everyday task like that of walking one’s dog, in opposition to the writer’s “proper” work on other projects (129). For the German high modernist Arno Schmidt, whom Elke Siegel quotes in her read-

5. Schumacher, Gerade 10, quoting Thomas Meinecke.

6. Baßler disagrees (147), arguing that Goetz’s epistemology remains pre-postmodern (153). My reading instead positions new pop literature in general as a configuration of modernisms and postmodernisms.

7. While Abfall für alle was not yet explicitly called a blog, Goetz later used the concept for another online ‘diary,’ published from February 2007 to June 2008 by Vanity Fair (and later as a book as well: Klage).
The diary as a genre was “einer der Abörter der Literatur” (Siegel 240), literally ‘off-place,’ and a ‘toilet of literature.’ Goetz’s pop project receives its dehierarchizing contours by working through these cultural gestures of abjection. Drawing on the defiant gestures of the twentieth-century avant-gardes—from Marcel Duchamp’s 1917 “Fountain” urinal to the literary scraps of Hubert Fichte, who receives an explicit opening “Salut” (14)—Abfall transforms the “Abort” of literature into the very Ort (place) of post–avant-garde art: early on, the diarist finds himself taking notes for the consequently no longer casual Abfall output (50).

Starting from the very oppositions that delineate the sphere of ‘high’ art in the German Kulturnation, however, the diarist distinguishes the genre from “literature” in terms of its less ‘mediated’ way of writing (627; see also 14). While his poetological reflections privilege the scenic forms of modernism (see, e.g., 485, 489–90, 522), the diary itself radicalizes their challenge to narrative coherence by assembling heterogeneous materials bound together simply by a date. The diarist protocols the completion of shopping tasks, the neighbor’s disgusting smoke fumes invading his apartment in the lower-class district of Berlin Wedding, and bits and pieces of daily news (including the Monica Lewinsky scandal in Clinton’s America and the year’s Iraq bombings), along with reflections on his literary projects and a series of poetological lectures he is invited to give at the University of Frankfurt during the spring of that year. As he records untagged store dialogues (e.g., 68) or his—characteristically nervous, if not panicky—thoughts (e.g., 84), much of the text in fact radically performs the ‘exit’ of the narrator through the exclusive reliance on direct speech and interior monologue. Qua genre, the diary “speaks in the present of present emotions” (Abbott 16) rather than creating overview from a past tense angle. Scribbling things down even in public, at what seems to be the very moment of observation (each entry begins with the exact time of day), our diarist strives to maximize “the effect of immediacy: that is, the illusion of being there, of no gap in time between the event and the rendering of it” (28).

Goetz conceptualizes this procedure of writing as recording through intermedia metaphors. Drawing, in part, on the reservoir of older electronic media, he employs the notion of the “snapshot,” which was used by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann before (see Schumacher 126): the diarist is producing “a kind of Polaroid” of be it the outside world or “a mental state” (Abfall 200). Indirectly, he references Roland Barthes’s indexical theory of photography as a technol-

8. The notion was also used very prominently in the Nazi period in an effort to rid German language of French influences (Toilette).

9. See Baßler on sampling and archiving as the aesthetic signatures of new German pop.
ogy transmitting “literal reality” without intermediary (“The Photographic Message” 17) in describing his writing as a predominantly passive process of “reception,” coded as feminine along the lines of the modern European order of gender (Abfall 232; see 352). Of course, Barthes himself freely admitted that the “common sense–” based ascription of “objectivity” to the photograph “has every chance of being mythical” (“The Photographic Message” 19). Like him, the diarist is fully aware of the “FICTION” dimension of realist representation (685; he uses capitalization for emphasis and affective charge). Furthermore, the very opposition between immediacy and active mediation breaks down where direct thought or speech functions as self-reflexive commentary. Precisely his obsession with immediate recording turns Goetz’s diary also into a space of heightened self-reflexivity (see 622) when he decides to include the text of his poetological lectures as part of the assembled scraps of life, in the place where “the text happened for real” (621), if—in the reality of the writing process—retrospectively and apparently in corrected form (see 375).

As self-reflexivity is thus folded back into the diary’s programmatic “materialism of the real” (477), however, the project remains focused on the notion of the ‘present,’ a central category not only in Goetz’s aesthetics but more generally in the 1990s pop movement.10 As Schumacher spells out, the notion attains its significance in the play between three layers of meaning: the present tense as a temporal form (Präsenz), the present (moment) as a point in time (Jetztzeit), and the idea of (physical or metaphysical) presence (Präsenz, 16, 127). If a photograph, as suggested by its indexical theory, always “carries its referent with itself” (Barthes, Camera 5), the snapshot metaphor not only outlines a realist representational project (see Abfall 234, also 268) but also promises “a certificate of presence,” radiations from “a real body . . . touch[ing me]” (Camera Lucida 87, 80). In Goetz’s text, the reproduction of the lectures is significant also as a recording of oral speech, which, according to its romantic conceptualization, has not yet “lost all connection with things as things” (Ong 91).11 The diarist entangles himself in what Derrida would diagnose as phonocentrism when he opposes “dead TEXT” to “the life of words in oral speech” (255);12 reminiscent of Fischer-Lichte, he praises the theater, in contradistinc tion to the other arts, as a space of bodily presence (270). However, Goetz also shares the concerns vis-à-vis such presence articulated in poststructuralist

10. Schumacher 10, linking back also to Andy Warhol; see Abfall, e.g., 654. Abfall was also published as part of Goetz’s five-volume, intergenre and intermedia project Heute Morgen (the title translates ambiguously as Today Tomorrow or This Morning).
11. On the historical genealogy of these immediacy mythologies as an effect of media technology see Koschorke.
12. See also 271, 549; compare Ong 81–82; Derrida, Speech and Phenomena.
scholarship. In particular, he posits the “authoritarian structure” of speech as opposed to writing: in the asymmetrical power configuration of the university lecture, for example, he suspects that physical presence serves to authorize the speaker’s words and to mediate collective affirmation (518–19; see also 327, 463).

It is the new media dimension of the diary project that is to reconcile these contrary charges of presence and im/mediacy. Part of the new media discourses of the 1990s, which variously conceptualized electronic literature with reference to experimental print literature and philosophical deconstruction,\(^\text{13}\) the diarist translates medial properties into poetological promise. Reminiscent of Ong’s discussion of “secondary orality,” that is, an orality sustained by “electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (11), he describes the practice of writing on the Internet as “typed speech” or “talk.”\(^\text{14}\) On the one hand, the Internet promises heightened immediacy (Siegel 241; see *Abfall* 357) by extending the diary’s writing principle of relative contemporaneity to the process of publication; on the other hand, presence is “Möglichkeit” (possibility, virtuality) only here in that the “specific publicity form of the Internet” consists in an “almost abstract availability” actualized only “at the request of an interest” (*Abfall* 357): in an interactive process of communication with the reader.\(^\text{15}\) On the writer’s side, the ‘fluid’ (see 315) mode of ‘typed speech’ accommodates a “testing, fumbling, but also impulsively explosive kind of utterance and notation that corrects, revokes itself the next day in case of doubt” (357; see Chafe on speech vs. writing): words, it seems, are ‘alive’ in a less authoritarian way in the realm of ‘secondary orality.’ Importantly, this realm is not primarily imagined as a hybrid “third space” (Bhabha; see Kacandes xx on talk fiction) in which divergent elements clash, be it to the effect that the force of simulated orality undoes

\(^{13}\) See Hayles 17, 32, specifically on Loss Pequeño Glazier, J. David Bolter, and George P. Landow.

\(^{14}\) “getippte[s] Sprechen,” *Abfall*, 185. On contemporary *Talk Fiction* in general—as “a particular trend in contemporary prose fiction” that can be positioned as “responding to secondary orality”—see, again, Kacandes (here xii). From this angle, the diarist’s practices of capitalization reproduce patterns of speech (see Weingart 59; more generally Kacandes 21–23, drawing on Robin Tolmach Lakov).

\(^{15}\) See Hayles 31 on the significance of interactivity in early hypertext theory, e.g., with Landow and Bolter; also Ryan, *Narrative as Virtual Reality*, part III; Kacandes on interactivity as the most radical form of talk fiction, as defined through its revealed “‘addressivity’” (xiii, with Bakhtin, xvii). While incorporating the concept into his university lectures (*Abfall* 351), the diarist, however, does not unconditionally share the early hypertext theorists’ hopes for democratization through interactivity. Repeatedly, he also conceptualizes virtual space as one that interpellates the user into a world policed by, e.g., demands for password identification and, more generally, technological obedience (see 747, 764).
written literature, or, vice versa, that the resistance of writing undermines orality’s authenticity pathos (see Schumacher 137–39, 23). Working through the oppositions he started out with, the diarist instead conceptualizes a syncretistic space in which the blurring of media boundaries (see Schäfer and Siegel 196) allows for the emergence of new forms of literature. Looking for “textual equivalence[s]” to the features of oral speech and ways of “TRANS-LATING” them into, rather than simply reproducing them in, writing, the diarist hopes to create the “Real-Lebendigkeit” (‘real-liveliness’) associated with the oral “in the text itself, directly, in the realm of mediation” (457, 668). More generally, he imagines that the “collective practice” of typed online speech will slowly change “printed speech” as well, resulting in new convergences of speaking and writing—convergences he already observes in the nonelectronic literature of, for example, the Austrian postmodernist Thomas Bernhard (185–86).¹⁶

This merging of utopian immediacy with explicitly endorsed mediation (see Schumacher 32; Weingart 58) also inflects the ways in which the diarist unfolds his concept of realism in the process of writing. Supplementing his thoughts on the passivity of recording, he discusses the importance of critically revising one’s text afterward, in a process of “active, almost furious, ruthless and radical”—in short, he underlines, ‘masculine’—editing (352–53). More generally, such “energy of abjection” (53) as a force of creative production forms the other side of the diarist’s avant-garde–inflected poetological coin (see also 201, 339). In analogy to deconstructive concepts of performance, the recording (snap)shot finds its remediated contours as a hypertextual act¹⁷ through the ways it is conceptualized as the “rupture of narrative” (Hayles 84). In the tradition of beat generation “Cut-Up” techniques as well as modernist shock aesthetics more generally (Schumacher 121), Abfall develops a theory and practice of “Diskurszerreißung,” of “ripping up discourse” with its radical reference to the “now” (330, 328). The electronic diarist resolves to write in a ‘more jumpy’ way, in “[b]its and pieces” (312, English in original) even in his poetological lectures, and this commitment to fragmentary organization is supported—although not invented—by the digital medium (see Aarseth, “Narrative Literature” 857–58): his hopes for the webpage design include that readers will be able to “BOUNCE in time” (97).

¹⁶. See, again, Kacandes; also Tabbi and Wutz, on the ways in which modern literatures have responded to changing media ecologies throughout the twentieth century.

¹⁷. With reference to Mike Sandbothe, Wirth postulates the (necessary) theatricality of digital linking practice in poststructural terms, i.e., qua performativity of editorial arrangement (“Performative Rahmung” 403, 424). In Goetz’s text, this latent theatricality is actualized when the diarist, e.g., stages a metacritical dialogue between “Ich” and the personified voice of Abfall (182).
The critical horizon of these conceptualizations is indicated when the diarist elaborates on his “BROKEN relationship” to narrative (245) by commenting, reminiscent of Hayden White, on the “POLITICS OF FORM” (717). Necessarily doing violence to its object (737), “the formal ideal of narrative” conceals the “dispersed” side of reality perception, suturing every “rupture of reality” with a “fiction of continuity.”\(^\text{18}\) The novel specifically, he suspects (with implicit reference to the German apprenticeship novel), fulfills an affirmative function in that its typical plot interpellates the reader into the hero’s “sad story” of learning to accept his place in the world upon returning home from his adventures (351; see also 670). Vis-à-vis such impositions of social order, the diarist experiments with forms reminiscent of the medieval annals and chronicles that White analyzes as alternatives to full narrativity, recording ‘empty’ moments of time—or inassimilable experiences?—as a column of data without corresponding entries (616).

Strictly as formal play, however, such “experimental buffooneries” quickly bore the diarist (833). Like his quest for presence, his critique of narrative constitutes merely one pole of his poetological universe: \textit{Abfall für alle} finds its own way of working through the antinarrativity of avant-garde performance concepts. Thus, the diarist’s rejection of narrative is complicated not only by the analytical insight that the practice of \textit{Diskurszerreiβung} necessarily operates in the “echo chambers” of words spoken earlier, that is, a field of meanings constituted through their usage (290),\(^\text{19}\) but also by the political concern that the radical gesture of undoing narrative does not necessarily have progressive implications. Aware that \textit{Diskurszerreiβung} happens also on the right-wing end of the political spectrum (432), the diarist comments rather cynically on the rhetoric of subversion advanced by cultural practice and theory in the avant-garde tradition.\(^\text{20}\) Furthermore, he finds himself psychologically challenged by the modes of the ‘fragmentary’ that he conceptually champions; “humans,” he suspects, may need “narratives, feelings, roles and dreams” (746, 219). Consequently, he supplements the model of the subversive performative breaking up narrative, discourse, and society with a plea for making “Echtgeschichten und Realerfahrungen”\(^\text{21}\) the basis of political art. Dignified by the

\(^{18}\) “zersprengte Wahrnehmungsseite der Realitätserfahrung”; “Rißstelle von Wirklichkeit” (787).

\(^{19}\) The very first diary entry marks the tension by contextualizing the programmatic gesture of “ABREISSEN” (RIPPING UP) with the writer’s simultaneous entry into “this institution—see Foucault—of everything said so far” (13; see Schumacher 128–31).

\(^{20}\) For example, he ironically muses whether the live techno acts of “Underground Resistance” would have had any impact whatsoever under the name of “OVERGROUND ACCEPTANCE” (141). See also 334, 357.

\(^{21}\) The phrase roughly translates as “authentic narratives and real experiences,” but this
authenticity modifier, it seems, narrative itself may operate in excess vis-à-vis ideology by creating productive “disorder” (450). Although the diarist’s argument is not fully developed here, it resonates with the notions of critical reconfiguration developed in chapter I: as the recording of the present rearranges oppositions in generating metonymic and metaphoric connections, ideological system is transformed into (open-ended) ideological process.22

More than just an amendment to the radical projects of performance, the diarist’s revised concept of narrative integrates the promise of performance itself, as indicated by the emphasis on ‘real’ disorder. Challenging continuity and coherence requirements, such narrative operates through the arrangement—or, with another intermedial metaphor that seems highly apt here, montage—of disruptive performative gestures of presencing; in short, as a management of leaps: “To set in [Einsetzen]. To break off. When, where, how. That is what narrative is about. . . . Narrative bounces. In the way it moves, in where it pauses [verharrt], omits, insists and finally breaks off, and sets in again, etc., it shows most strongly, both completely abstractly and in concretely visible form, how it sees the world” (188).

Virtually, this reconceptualization of narrative (as performance) also collapses the opposition between Abfall and literature. Later in the year, the diarist makes the connection: “Abfall—I suddenly think—is, strictly speaking, my second novel. . . . Characters [Personal], adventure, world, hero, life” (648). Thus, it may not be exclusively for the sake of his bank account and status with the literary establishment that the diarist retrospectively publishes a print version of his programmatically transient and dispersed web diary with his usual publisher, the renowned Frankfurt-based Suhrkamp Verlag. Subtitled, in fact, Roman eines Jahres (Novel of a Year), it presents, as a publisher’s inlay elaborates, a “diary,” “construction site for reflections,” and “existence-experiment” as well as a “history of the moment” and “novel of 1998.” To be sure, the print edition sacrifices crucial elements of the online design, as it provides a permanent version of the text in a definite, chronological order, whereas on the website, the visitor was first presented with the most recent entry. For the late twentieth-century diarist, however, whose digital experiments are of a conceptual more than sophisticated technological nature, the significance of media hardware is ultimately secondary to the poetics of production and reception.23

English rendering does not quite capture the rhetorical effect of the way Goetz emphatically fuses the adjectives with the nouns.

22. See specifically also Stierle, “Zum Status narrativer Oppositionen” 527; “Geschichte als Exemplum.”

23. The design of Goetz’s actual web diary was very minimalist; it did not make use of any images, sound, or even hyperlinks (Schumacher 113).
As he insists, not only a hypertext but also a book can be read in a mode of “floating” and “leaping” (155).

The interesting question, then, is in which ways and to what effect the print novel, which certainly continues to be part of digital literature in the sense that most contemporary literature is: by virtue of its initial electronic production (see Hayles 43), develops its hero and his adventures through its digitally inspired poetics. How does the diarist’s day-to-day snapshot montage invite the reader to construct the book’s narrative? Brigitte Weingart tackles this question in her discussion of Abfall für alle as a postmodernist update of the modernist “Berlin novel,” that is, a text that can be contextualized as part of the postunification search for a narrative representation of the new German capital preoccupying German feuilletons in the later 1990s. While Weingart also warns of all too quickly embracing the genre label for fear that such “centralist” readings (65) reduce the text’s dispersed character as the provocative heap of garbage as which it announces itself, my argument implies that we can, in fact, productively superimpose the two labels. The textual trash-construction site generated through narrative bouncing functions as a quest for evoking the dispersed “Realrealität” (‘real reality’) of the new German capital, which was not only quite literally an ensemble of construction sites throughout most of the 1990s but is also, in the diarist’s avant-garde–inflected language of abjection, a “VERSCHISSENE STADT” (SHITTY/FUCKED-UP CITY, 23). Insistently pointing to its “SWATHES OF FECES” (23), the diary finds its—ruptured—identity in this repeated gesture of abjection.

The diarist’s practices of capitalization evoke the intensity of his “‘vital sensation’” of disgust, which has been phenomenologically conceptualized as “the violent repulsion vis-à-vis . . . a physical presence” (Menninghaus 1 [quoting Kant], 6). As Winfried Menninghaus has argued, the themes of disgust obsessively evoked in contemporary culture mediate a “return of ‘the real’” (393). In contrast to Gumbrecht’s aesthetics of presence, the ‘Real’ evoked in the mode of disgust defeats the quietist implications with which Gumbrecht charges his own theorizing. If experiences of presence ‘impose’ their relevance upon us, the diarist’s poetics of abjection does not invite feelings of “‘redemption’” (Gumbrecht 103). Rather, presence serves an affectively grounded critique of the social (“POVERTY CREATES AGGRESSION,” 24), in which the diarist’s poor, desolate neighborhood becomes a synecdoche of the larger city (“Fucking Wedding. VERSCHISSENE STADT,” 132) or even the country (“Dreck-deutschland” 605; see also 420, 699). Moving through this space, in which “the eternal Herrchen”—this diminutive of “master” is the German notion for “dog

24. Weingart 50; on the Berlin novel more generally see Gerstenberger.
owner”—parade “with their Nazi-faces,” the diarist rants: “this is all simply so
REPELLANT—I hate them all” (23).

Given the diary’s globally ‘networked’ character (see Weingart) and trans-
national pop affinities, the presence of the national theme is conspicuous. Even an election poster of Joschka Fischer, the soon-to-be first Green Party
secretary of state who had initially become known for wearing tennis shoes
in the political arena, is maliciously described with a rhetorical reference to
Hitler’s 1933 rise to power: as showing him “shortly before (his) takeover”
(Machtergreifung 479). “[S]orry,” the diarist adds, underlining the historical
association precisely by marking it as inappropriate. With these references
to Germany’s fascist past, Goetz positions himself in ongoing debates about
national ‘normalization.’ In the course of the 1990s, claims for such ‘normal-
ization’ had begun to shape public discourses beyond their earlier association
exclusively with right-wing thinking (see Taberner, German Literature xiv,
xxi). Established novelist Martin Walser provoked a controversy on the sta-
tus of Auschwitz in Germany’s political memory with his acceptance speech
for the 1998 Friedenspreis des deutschen Buchhandels, in which he translated
his desire to no longer be confronted with painful memories of German fas-
cism into charges of instrumentalization. Explicitly commenting on the affair,
the diarist evaluates Walser’s call for closure as premature, pointing to the
continued presence of the past in everyday life, for example, the name and
demeanor of his building’s janitor, Adolf (709).

Cynical about the possibility
of political change in his country, the diarist does not feel like getting out of
bed on the day after the actual election that ended sixteen years of conserva-
tive government (615; see 611). Writing in a pre–September 11 world of pop-
cultural affiliation, he, at best, locates hope on the other side of the Atlantic:
emphatically, he describes the Frank Sinatra line “and did it / my– / way” as
the essence of “DEMOKRATIE. American style” (313–14).

“In German,” the diarist adds, “this sentence reads, equally beautiful in
its own way: not me / I didn’t [ich nicht]” (314). Implicitly, the performative
aesthetics of rupture as abjection as such is provided with a national tag here.
In doing so, however, the diarist also points at his own embeddedness in the
postfascist configuration he analyzes—and, as I will suggest in closing here,
the limits of his own critical reconfiguration project in Abfall. While he clearly
articulates his dissent vis-à-vis the national normalization projects of his con-
temporaries, the diarist cannot configure his hero’s resistance but through the

25. Kreienbrock, whose Abfall reading exemplifies the deconstructive preferences of most
performance scholarship, uses the Walser controversy (documented in Schirrmacher) as proof
of his claim that Goetz is interested in “formal qualities” rather than “content” (230). This op-
position simply does not hold.
‘German’ insistence on negative gesture. Correspondingly, he also insists on the ‘asocial’ nature of writing (e.g., 128) and opts against the “path of social entanglement [gesellschaftlichen Verstrickung] and intervention” that he discerns, for example, in the quintessentially national poet’s—J. W. Goethe’s—classical quest for the “novel of life” (361). Repeatedly articulating his aversion against all collective identifications (e.g., 138, 150, 221, 295), the diarist turns not only against new affirmations of the national but, with his favorite theorist Niklas Luhmann, also against alternative assertions of any “particularity of difference—I am gay, black, woman” (167). While the 2000s have brought a transnational comeback of this position, its Luhmann-based, antihumanist articulation in Goetz’s text from the late 1990s indicates less a move beyond postmodernism than the ways in which significant factions of the German intellectual scene resisted the emphasis on difference throughout its academic career elsewhere. Although the diarist does acknowledge that the “insistence on marginality” has a political function, he insists that it fails to make sense of the (implicitly general) situation at hand (167)—and thereby forecloses the path of imagining democratic narrative acts that would reconfigure collective identity through difference and similarity.

Insisting on the analytical marginality of questions of gender, sexuality, and race, the Abfall diarist unwillingly aligns himself with precisely the national configuration he rejects so forcefully: the dominant tradition of conceptualizing national identity in terms of homogeneity and the simultaneous “denial and obsession” specifically with matters of race in postfascist Germany (El Tayeb 29). Racism never really comes into focus in the diarist’s critically realist snapshots of either his thoughts or his daily affairs around the neighborhood, which is, next to the Kreuzberg featured in Lola und Bilidikid, one of Berlin’s traditional immigrant districts. In recording the presence of Germany’s past, he mostly bounces across—elides—the signs of transnational traffic constituting it, and the contemporary Realrealität of the Turkish-German minority in Berlin Wedding can be inferred only from a few, mostly nega-

26. On these national inflections of theoretical discourse see Winthrop-Young, as referenced in chapter I. Without, again, underestimating the transnational dimension of theory production, it seems significant that (postmodernist) constructivist positions found their most influential articulations in German academia through theories that deemphasize group difference, namely, apart from Luhmann, Friedrich Kittler’s media theory, and Jan and Aleida Assmann’s theories of cultural memory.

27. The few exceptions provide hints rather than full-fledged discussion. An entry titled “Dauerkolonie Togo e.V.” (“Permanent Colony Togo Registered Association,” 439—technically the name of a local gardening association) seems to present an implicit commentary on the nationalist responses to a World Cup soccer game recorded the previous day. While West Berlin’s weekend and summer garden settlements are generally called “Kolonien,” this specific association was founded in 1939 as part of the Third Reich’s colonial propaganda (see Aikins).
tive remarks on ‘foreigners’ (83, 379). To his credit, the diarist also repeatedly reflects on the role of “ressentiment” and “hatred” in his own thinking (123, 137, 703). Nonetheless, his “mad” realism of writing “photographic ecstasy” (Barthes, Camera 119, italics in original) in the mode of abjection does not escape the German predicaments he diagnoses.

Posing for Presence
THE VOICES OF ZAIMOGLU’S KANAKSTAS

Although Goetz’s 864-page recording of 1998–99 overall reads as a quasi-encyclopedic compendium of contemporary German literature, Feridun Zaimoğlu is not mentioned anywhere—unless the nameless “Türken-Dichter” (literally, ‘Turk-poet’) “lolling in a chair” on television on page 155 happens to be he. This would certainly seem plausible. A few years after the publication of Kanak Sprak (Kanak Speech), Zaimoğlu was on his way to broader fame, with his image about to be transformed from that of an ‘ethnic’ voice in German literature to the provocative enfant terrible of new German pop (see Cheesman 83–85), before his most recent novels, especially Liebesbrand (2008), would bring him a more serious literary reputation (see Greiner). The story of the new pop literature itself, however, has generally been written as a story that begins with Faserland (1995) by Christian Kracht, whom Goetz met during the Abfall year (555). “Christian” and his friends form the “Kiepenheuer” faction of new pop literature (based on their Cologne publisher, and as opposed to the more radical “Suhrkamp” group to which Goetz himself belongs, 647). After hanging out and drinking with them, the diarist is full of admiration for their suits and overall sense of style. Through a marketing focus on the Kiepenheuer group, new German pop literature was established as the sound of a generation interested in sex and drugs more than the Holocaust or political activism. In fact, the Kiepenheuer faction’s works present a highly exclusive subgroup of this generation, as they stage primarily the voices of affluent (or at least credit-worthy), Western, educated, white males.28 In left-wing responses to the conservative postunification calls for a return to ‘narrative,’ these texts have been criticized for ‘selling out’ to precisely such new narrativity (Ernst, “German Pop Literature,” 177–78). The charge is at best partially accurate insofar as their scenic, everyday-recording–based poetics resists tighter forms of plot construction. Not quite as apolitical as

28. See the theatricalized, albeit programmatically unironic, group ‘manifesto’ Tristesse Royale, which was reviewed very critically by Zaimoğlu (quoted from Ernst, “Jenseits von MTV” 148).
it claims to be, however, this Kiepenheuer pop variously explores the possibility of affirming collective identities in postunification society (see, e.g., Liesegang): the title *Faserland* is a word play on the English ‘fatherland.’ Along with the national leitmotif in Goetz’s ‘Suhrkamp’ online diary, this summary indicates that to a degree, the new pop in fact receives its contours as a specifically German trend also thematically. A closer look at Zaimoğlu’s *Kanak Sprak* confirms this diagnosis in some respects but simultaneously allows me to tell a supplementary story, emphasizing those often elided transnational relations of contemporary pop literature that exceed reference to popular Anglo-American ‘chick lit’ or Andy Warhol.

While later Zaimoğlu works were picked up by Kiepenheuer as well, *Kanak Sprak* was published—in the same year as *Faserland*—with the leftist Hamburg Rotbuch Verlag. It presents precisely the kind of political project from which the *Abfall* diarist distances himself: the assertion of difference as group identity. “Kanak” is a German hate speech term for “foreigners from a Southern country” or “brown-skinned people.” As Zaimoğlu claims in his preface, it has been resignified by the “guest worker children,” who use it with “proud defiance” (9) for constructing an ethnic identity in response to immigrant experiences of social exclusion and ghettoization (11). Often used to refer to Italian, Spanish, and Greek ‘guest workers’ in the early phase of postwar West German labor immigration, the notion “Kanak” has more recently been directed primarily at people of Turkish and Arabic descent, thus pointing to the superimposition of general xenophobia with more specific racialization processes. As the marker of a new, albeit still “primarily negative” self-confidence and collective identity, Zaimoğlu suggests in 1995, “Kanak” identities can be seen in analogy to the Black consciousness movement in the United States (17).

*Kanak Sprak* presents these identities through a series of first-person portraits. Variously identified by name, age and their socially marginal occupations (“garbage worker,” “unemployed,” “drug dealer”), different “Kanakstas”—as Zaimoğlu also words, extending the African diaspora analogy—thus speak in ‘their own voice.’ The category of (literary) “voice” has been controversial in narrative theory. In highlighting “the act of narrating” (Genette, *Narrative Discourse* 26), it inscribes the drama of political representation into narrative theory: it poses questions not only about who speaks but

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30. Ibid. Sociological studies highlight statistically low educational achievements and exceptionally high unemployment rates in Turkish and Arabic immigration communities, compared to both their peers in other European countries and other immigrant communities in Germany (Şen 221; Stanat et al.).
also from what spatial, temporal, and ideological location, with what authority, and in which language something is uttered in a text. The prominence of the category in African diaspora (see Jablon 112) and feminist literary theory challenges the poststructuralist critique of voice as a ‘phonocentric’ metaphor that carries “implications of possession, property, authority, identity, source, or origin.”

Thus, Derrida’s account of the Western tradition as one privileging orality over writing downplays the ways in which orality has also crucially functioned as a site of racialized otherness in the grand narratives of modernity (see Julien; also Jackson, Professing 200). In African and African diaspora studies, the often damnatory, sometimes romantic attribution of orality has been rewritten as a source of authenticity but also critically repositioned for the contemporary age of ‘secondary orality’ (see Julien). As long as we remember that the notion of voice is in fact a metaphor with respect to literature, it does not have to privilege oral performance as a locus of presumed immediacy. Zaimoğlu’s construction of literary Kanak voices specifically acknowledges the poststructuralist warning that ‘writing’—as both media technology and, metaphorically, the weight of discourses preceding the speaker—is always already “interior to” voice. However, the metaphor of voice also supports the complementary move of insisting that—as my reading of Abfall has begun to explore—modernist and contemporary forms of scenic and theatricalized narrative are coconstituted, rather than merely disrupted, by orality in the sense of a poetological insistence on presence, embodiment, spontaneity, addressivity, and articulation context.

Conceptualizing voice as a “composite and quotational” entity (Aczel, “Understanding” 598) and “a site of crisis, contradiction, or challenge” (Lanser, Fictions of Authority 7) also answers the poststructuralist concerns about authority and identity. Rather than holding on to models of presumably sovereign speech, the staging of narrative voice in Zaimoğlu’s text brings into focus how “‘discontinuity . . . and alterity’ are always ‘working upon’” literary voice, as the poetic act of prosopopoeia figures the marginalized (Kanak) subject by evoking “a deictic center of subjectivity.”

31. Gibson, “And the Wind . . . ” 645; see also Towards, 166–72. Lanser begins by underlining that “for the collectively and personally silenced the term has become a trope of identity and power” (Fictions of Authority 3). Gibson himself acknowledges that his plea against the concept is complicated by feminist critiques (see Towards 156–65).

32. See also Aczel, “Hearing Voices” 494; Blödorn and Langer 54—if, arguably, a “metaphor we live by” (Jahn, “Commentary” 695).

33. Gibson, Towards, 169 (he does not make the complementary move of emphasizing also the ‘hybridity’ of writing; see, e.g., 146).

34. Ibid., 169 (quoting Derrida); Aczel, “Hearing Voices” 467; see Blödorn and Langer 74, 80.
of Zaimoğlu’s Kanakstas read as complex acts of internal dialogism (see Julia Abel) in that they appropriate words “overpopulated” with “the intentions of others,” ‘ventriloquizing’ (Bakhtin 294, 299; see Aczel, “Understanding” 599). In resignifying hate speech concepts for Kanak articulation, Zaimoğlu’s text explores a multifaceted terrain of “double-voiced discourse” (Bakhtin 324, italics in original), the effects of which include not only an assertion of agency against hegemonic voices but also more complicated interlockings of dominant and marginalized discourses.

In his preface, Zaimoğlu announces a variation on the aesthetics of recording by describing the following texts as “‘protocols’” from the “Kanak ghettos” (15). The notion of protocol comes with quotation marks in Zaimoğlu’s text. Rather than programmatically claiming (‘photographic’) transmission without mediation, the author states that he provides “translations,” or “free adaptations,” of “Kanak Sprak”: a “construction” of “reality” undertaken in his desk chair (17–18). This embrace of theatricality in the sense of active mediation does not prevent him from making a claim to ‘authenticity’—if in quotation marks as well (18). More fully than the Abfall diarist, Zaimoğlu displaces the tension between mediation and the real that governs modern European epistemologies. In describing the authentic through the attribute of coherent, and thereby visible, aesthetic form (18) rather than the rawness of direct recording, he also provides the dominant uses of realness in African diaspora culture with a twist.35 Folding presence and theatricality into one another by basing the authority of “presence” on the act of ‘showing’ (14) rather than the identity presented, Kanak Sprak asserts authenticity as the effect of—culturally mediated and artistically developed—stylization. Dominantly in the present tense, the monologues are more systematically theatricalized than the Abfall diary not only through their authorial framing as “Kanak Sprak” but also in that the individual monologues have the form of explicit self-dramatizations addressed to an audience. That is, they are written as—within in the presented fictional frame, oral—commentaries on Kanak identity and experiences. Whereas critics have categorized the (not primarily plot-based) monologues as only a ‘weak’ form of narrativity or even “dissolution” of narrative (thus Julia Abel 301–2), their heightened experientiality certainly justifies describing them as a specific form of narrative (performance). Crucially, my insistence allows me to show how the monologues not only attest to the particular identity troubles of minoritized subjects (ibid.,) but quite forcefully assert identity—through the authority of reconfiguration—from within the (general) condition of its postmodern critique.

35. For a critique of this notion see Lewis.
The aesthetic model credited for this narrative production of minority presence is the “Free-Style-Sermon” of “Rap”\textsuperscript{36}—a form of performative speech that the author explains to his readers as generated by a “pose” complete with suitable facial expressions and gestures (13). In the written form presented in the book, this theatricality of speech is produced through radical abandonment of all capitalization (usually required also for nouns in German), except at the beginning of sentences; a loose regime of punctuation, which generates a breathless rhythm; highly colloquial language; and flamboyant metaphors. Notably, very few of the unusual linguistic images are translated Turkish idioms. In order to avoid the “folklore trap” (12), Zaimoğlu intentionally restricted linguistic import from that language, instead ‘creolizing’ \textit{sic} German through the interplay of regional dialects with standard German and the transnational lingua of rap (13; see Yildiz, “Critically ’Kanak’”). If Kanak Sprak has, from a retrospective vantage point, coconstituted new German pop literature, its reference to the model of rap implies a critical challenge to the—only presumably dehierarchizing and inclusive—forms of hegemonic pop (see also Ernst, “Jenseits von MTV” 157). Thus, the first ‘protocol’—titled “Pop is a fatal orgy”—presents the voice of a rapper who describes the “egalität” created by pop as an “illusion” based on standardized “cheap” dreams (19–20). In contrast, another voice (identified as “Ali” from Da Crime Posse, an actual German hip-hop group) argues, “public enemy” signaled the glimmering of “the epoch of true culture” (27). Emphatically, Ali defines this true culture through its communication of a political “message” and highlights the importance of hip-hop’s oral form in a social situation in which reading and writing amounts to “luxury” for many, “in yankeeland . . . in the ghettos” (27–28).

As indicated here, rap provides the Kanaksta with “a direct connection \textit{Draht}, literally ‘wire’] to the black man” (27). Zaimoğlu’s figuration of cultural identity through African diasporic reference underlines recent conceptual reworkings of diaspora as a conscious practice of transnational articulation marked by differences as well as similarities rather than an orientation toward a shared “homeland” (Brent Edwards 11–15). Through their (metonymic) link to ‘the black man,’ Zaimoğlu’s Kanakstas (metaphorically) articulate shared discrimination experiences based on ongoing racialization processes. Using American hate speech terminology, a flea market dealer heftily words that

\begin{quote}
we are all niggers [English word in German original] here, we have our ghetto, we carry it everywhere, we steam foreignness \textit{wir dampfen fremd-}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{36} Zaimoğlu does not use the more politically inflected notion of hip-hop. On the significance of the model in Kanak Sprak see, e.g., Loentz.
... our own style is so damned nigger that we scratch our skin like crazy, and in doing so understand that it is not the pitch skin which makes the nigger, but a ton of being different and a different life. (25)

Along with commonality, this performance of racial abjection indicates difference: despite the racialization of Turkish-German bodies, hegemonic regimes of looking do not identify them with those of the African diaspora, who have been the primary targets of racist violence in postunification society. While Zaimoğlu’s Kanakstas articulate their solidarity with the “Africa brothers” thus targeted by “white-ass-grumblers” (80), they also distinguish their own “Kanak” identities from them precisely by reiterating racist abjection. Immediately after the passage quoted above, the flea market dealer describes the “nigger tour” as the “dirty” version of the “kanak tour” (26).

In both academic and political discourse, Zaimoğlu’s theatrical constitution of identities in Kanak Sprak has been charged with reinscribing racist hate speech, including also Nazi vocabularies of dehumanization, which surface when, for example, a Kanaksta derogatorily describes himself as “a poor kanak louse” (89; see Cheesman 94; Hobuß on the debates). On the most general theoretical level, the debate underlines the political instability of performative resignification processes as such. Since the act of displacing an established meaning is always necessarily incomplete, the quotation of hate speech to different ends risks reiterating hateful effects. In line with some theoretical discourse on resignification, Zaimoğlu responded to the charges by pointing to the importance of positionality, defending his right to use the words in question because of his own ethnic background (see Cheesman 97). Without downplaying the significance of positionality as such, this answer can be productively complicated by moving the theoretical problem of performative resignification into the more concrete realm of aesthetic practice. Here, we have to not only distinguish the positionality of the author from that of his textual voices; we also must take into account that the Kanakstas’ use of hate speech may resonate differently where they speak about African bodies and identities as opposed to their own. More generally, it is crucial how precisely the rhetoric of hate is arranged in a text—voice matters with respect not only to who is speaking but also to the narrative configuration this speech establishes.

The quoted passage in which Akay, a flea market dealer, first associates and then distances his own positionality with and from the ‘n-word’ in fact reemploys classically racist—and fascist—discourse by defining a positive

37. Butler, Excitable Speech; see Cheesman 93–94, specifically on Zaimoğlu.
group identity through the opposition of cleanliness vs. dirt. Arguably, his gesture of abjection also points at the composition of the entire book in its aggressive construction of an exclusive community. While heterogeneous in some respects, the different Kanaksta voices sound like a unified chorus in others. For example, they construct their ethnic identity through performances of ‘vigorous’ male masculinity, with the exception of one male-to-female transsexual.38 However, the narrative context established in the flea market dealer’s monologue, as well as the larger book, also brackets the Kanaks’ gestures of exclusivity and abjection by positioning them as a (helpless) response to the dominant climate of German society. Creating some distance from the “posited author or teller” (Bakhtin 312), the (implied) author showcases the genealogy of Akay’s aggression in his despair about not being able to escape the force of discriminatory projections, which invade even his dreams (25).9

Immediately following the attempt of distinguishing a “clean kanaken-tour,” Akay himself acknowledges the fruitlessness of that endeavor by adding, “whatever you do, you can never wipe the foreigner [fremdländer] off your puss [aus der Fresse]” (26). Linguistically defined as a stranger even in the Kanaksta’s ‘own’ speech (always already invaded by “alien” utterances; Bakhtin 294), the immigrant subject himself is figuratively identified as dirt that needs to be washed off. Zaimoğlu highlights this sentence, which performatively undoes the preceding attempt of conceptually ‘cleansing’ Kanak identity, by making it the title of the entire monologue, which finds its conclusion in the diagnosis that “the country depresses [drückt] your own style” (26).

As hateful “contexts inhere in certain speech acts in ways that are very difficult to shake” (Butler, Excitable Speech 161), the words used here may “stubbornly resist” their reappropriation (Bakhtin 294) for more positive configurations of identity. In this situation, the Kanakstas’ theatricalized commentary on the processes of discrimination, the negativity of which deeply resonates with the Abfall diarist’s poetics of abjection, produces violent revisions of identity short of any grand-scale liberatory gesture. Because of the ways in which Kanak Sprak combines emphasis on the theatrical pose—as the very precondition of the immigrant subject’s powerful presence—with a clear-cut narrative of marginalization, I nonetheless believe that the text

38. In response to respective criticism, Zaimoğlu published a supplementary, somewhat more intellectual all-female volume in 1998: Koppstoff. For a critique of the misogyny and homophobia inscribed in Zaimoğlu’s literary masculinity performances (mostly in other texts), see Schmidt.
39. Distancing herself strictly from the notion of the implied author, Julia Abel discusses the distancing at stake as irony (308, 311). However, we are certainly not dealing with oppositional irony (or even parody) here. Only partially distancing, the theatricalization of Kanak abjection instead provides explanatory contextualization.
is overall successful in critiquing, rather than merely repeating, racist hate speech, with the caveat that the potentially hurtful effects of violent language can never be determined outside their concrete reception by flesh-and-blood readers. However, several of Zaimoğlu’s more recent texts—specifically German Amok (2002) and Leinwand (Canvas/Screen, 2003)—offer much more disturbing reading experiences. From one angle, these texts present radicalized aesthetic and political experiments: with protagonists and narrators who uneasily negotiate the claims of different collectives, they critically question precisely the production of exclusive, ethnicized communities undertaken—if self-reflexively—in Kanak Sprak. But in conjunction with an aesthetic shift toward more mainstream models of pop, precisely this reconfiguration of narrative voice also increases the risk that the racist utterances featured in the text are understood as plain hate speech.

German Amok, which I will use as my example here, is the character narrative of an artist with a Turkish background whose primary group of affiliation is a (postunification) West Berlin, mostly majority-German alternative art community. Unlike the Kanakstas, this narrator uses hate speech not primarily for describing his own marginalized positionality but in ranting against (other) people of color. Unable to identify with either the majority-German art crowd or the Turkish-German community, as well as frustrated by his lack of success as an artist, he articulates violent revenge fantasies. Like the Abfall diarist, he hates the city he lives in, but unlike the Abfall diarist, he neither self-critically reflects on this hatred nor conceptually develops it as a (post) avant-garde strategy of aesthetic abjection. Instead, his sermons unfold a full spectrum of fascist rhetoric, targeting Berlin's ostensibly multicultural, “decadent” art scene for its “gender traitors” (10) and “social (security) parasites” (13) as well as for its exoticist fascination with what it hails as ‘primitive’ non-European culture. While African diaspora immigrants are described as hypersexualized drug dealers (see 20–24, 43), religious Turks draw the narrator’s hatred as much as East German neo-Nazis; in fact, the text insistently associates these two groups of ‘Eastern’ “barbarians” (e.g., 112) in a play with overlapping discourses of orientalism, in which the former GDR features as the “Eurasian Democratic Republic” (110).

Kanak Sprak features a commentary that helps make sense of the configuration of hatred staged in this later text. “No seeds sown bear fruit as quickly as the seed of violence,” the poet among the featured Kanaks reminded us (111). He analyzed the aggressively masculinist reputation of his community as a result of the “obsession” to be “better than the [German] native who hammers into us very early on that only particularly beautiful, diligent, or
intelligent kanaks will make it. We have swallowed the message and obey it like the last prussians... We want to adorn ourselves with the insignia of the blond supermen [übermenschen]” (113). In thus describing the psychological effects of discrimination, the garbage worker featured in the early volume even used the title notion of the later work: “the word amok is not sufficient to describe what is ranting inside me” (124). With this in mind, German Amok can be read as staging the legacy of hatred from the perspective of a narrator who has traded Kanaksta-identification for a (re)German(ized) version of fascism.

However, the later text itself does not feature an effective analysis of the mechanism in question. Where Kanak Sprak staged rap-inspired poses of ethnic self-presentation, German Amok aesthetically approaches the mainstream pop of the Kiepenheuer faction. In place of the systematic reflexivity of Kanak Sprak’s self-expository discourse, the character narrator 'simply' records a mixture of everyday observations and casual thoughts. This is not to say that his voice is not at all deauthorized in the text’s more exclusively scenic poetics. If character narration in general is “an art of indirectness,” which “by definition creates some unreliability in the narration” (Phelan, Living 1, 7), these virtual disjunctures between narrator and implied author are actualized in German Amok through the use of direct, untagged dialogue—that is, the insertion of other voices—as well as plot development. In particular, the narrator is explicitly called a “fascist” by others (114), and his violent homophobia is exposed as an apparent defense against his own queer desires through the series of narrated events. In rudimentary ways, narrative discourse is also theatricalized even here, for example when, halfway into the book, the part of the novel set in the former GDR opens with a passage in italics, suggesting a different narrative voice or format (110–12). However, the location of this speech act remains unclear, and since it is rhetorically congruent with the main narrating voice, no truly alternative discourse emerges. Overall, the unsystematic development of bivocality in this novel fails to effectively challenge the character narrator’s voice, whose violent rhetoric is so overwhelmingly dominant that the novel offers a highly uncomfortable reading experience. With its critical agenda remaining diffuse, Zaimoğlu’s experiment in staging hyperbolic narrative voice at best presents a drawn-out satire on contemporary German society as shaped by various interlocking processes of racialization and violent discrimination. Even more so than the Abfall diarist’s ‘Drecksdeutschland,’ this society does not seem to leave any room for productive reconceptualizations of personal or collective identity.
Presentification—at-a-Distance

ÖZDAMAR’S SELTSAME STERNE STARREN ZUR ERDE

Emine Sevgi Özdamar is mentioned more identifiably than Zaimoğlu in Goetz’s casual encyclopedia of the German cultural world of the 1990s—although not any more positively, when he comments on the reception of the new book by “this Karawanserei-woman”: “All this shit about flowery, metaphorical language, Turkish-German, made to sound artificially naïve on top of it. horror” (389). In 1991 Özdamar had received the renowned Ingeborg Bachmann prize for her first novel, Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei . . . (Life Is a Karawanserai . . .). Seven years later, Die Brücke vom Goldenen Horn (The Bridge of the Golden Horn) presented the second part of the author’s fictionalized autobiography in between Turkey and Germany. Focused on the student movement in Berlin, Paris, and Istanbul, and the resistance against Turkey’s military regime in the early 1970s, Die Brücke actually featured significantly fewer ‘flowery’ metaphors and Turkish-German linguistic play than the earlier novel with its magical realism-inflected narrative about a child growing up in mid-twentieth-century Turkey. However, the diarist’s response captures the ways in which Özdamar reception in Germany has been haunted by the orientalist tropes she had playfully evoked in her first novel ever since.

The title of the 2003 Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde (Strange Stars Are Staring to Earth), the third part of Özdamar’s fictionalized autobiography, presents an implicit metafictional commentary on these reception trends. It is a quote from Else Lasker-Schüler, whom Özdamar’s protagonist reads in the opening scene as she lies awake at night, freezing, in an unheated floor of a West Berlin factory building, home of her 1970s alternative student Wohngemeinschaft (literally, ‘living community’). On the cover of the protagonist’s edition, the early twentieth-century German-Jewish poet is praised for her “oriental” imagination (15). The cover of my own Seltsame Sterne edition shows Özdamar as she opens a bright red curtain. In conjunction with the visually reproduced star motif of the title, the image evokes less the theaters of 1970s East Berlin, in and around which much of the novel is set, than the notion of an oriental storyteller whose “marvelling eyes” (staunende Augen, back cover) suggest a lack of familiarity with, if not a naïve admiration for,

40. With its origins in the communes of the student movement, the Wohngemeinschaft (WG) became a widespread alternative to traditional family, couple, or single households, well beyond one’s student years.

41. Konuk reads this reference more straightforwardly as proof of the protagonist’s identification with Lasker-Schüler; however, Mani also points to the distanciation effect of the cover’s invocation in this passage (Cosmopolitical Claims 104).
the German world of the novel. In response to the legacies of exclusion thus haunting the reception of Özdamar’s work, more recent scholarship has correctly underscored the importance of reading her texts in aesthetic terms rather than as primarily sociopolitical documents of migration. More than once, this scholarship has emphasized the ‘performatif’ character of Özdamar’s poetics, for example, by characterizing her style through its reliance on the conventions of comedy (Shafi 207) or by highlighting her use of the Turkish forms of meddah (storytelling) and Karagöz (shadow play), in the encounter with Brecht, in *Die Brücke* (Mani, “The Good Woman”). However, the aesthetic turn in scholarship does, by itself, not yet suffice to escape established culturalist reception schemata, as indicated by the repeated characterization of Özdamar’s transnational poetics as a connection of (Turkish) oral tradition with (European) modernity and literariness.

Against the background of these expectations, *Seltsame Sterne* has puzzled critics. More directly than other Özdamar works, this text defies the established reception clichés. Reading it as another Berlin novel, I specify its poetics of performative narration as a poetics of (critical) presentification-at-a-distance and thus situate *Seltsame Sterne* within the (broader) field of the German pop (rap, etc.) literary scene discussed in this chapter. I hope to have demonstrated by now that this national contextualization does not erase but merely resituates the work’s transnational genealogies.

42. For the respective reception of Özdamar’s earlier novels, see my discussion in “Meine Herren.” Although the topos of this naïve gaze has been broadly criticized in Özdamar scholarship, it has resurfaced also in the new century (see Beil 9, as well as the *Seltsame Sterne* reviews quoted below).

43. Most fundamentally Adelson, “Touching Tales”; see also Sheila Johnson; Shafi.

44. See Viehöver; Sheila Johnson’s comments on Karawanserei’s use of the “archaic element of Turkish traditions” (44). Venkat Mani does not entirely escape oppositional terms, either, when he words that in *Die Brücke*, the “centuries-old Turkish aesthetic tradition of Meddah and Karagöz” meets the “Western texts that populate the intellect of the first person narrator,” especially Brecht’s theater theory (“The Good Woman” 35).

45. Several of them have tried to read the text through and in basic continuity with the earlier novels (Pizer; Konuk). Through the protagonist’s identification with Lasker-Schüler, Konuk argues, *Seltsame Sterne* presents Özdamar’s continued self-inscription into a discourse of orientalism in terms of both content and style. Eliding the circumstance that *Seltsame Sterne* uses fairly standard German (see Mani, *Cosmopolitan Claims* 103), this reading is also based on problematic inferences (e.g., features such as the transgression of genre boundaries cited by Konuk are too widespread in contemporary literature to serve as indications of a specific intertextual relationship with Lasker-Schüler; see 240–42).

46. Azade Seyhan has warned of replacing orientalist exoticizations with an appropriation of Turkish-German literature for German culture and historical memory (“Is Orientalism in Retreat?” 214). Whereas she therefore continues to emphasize the Turkish dimension of Özdamar’s writing, I argue that particularly with respect to *Seltsame Sterne*, a broader emphasis on the transnational constitution of all local cultures is needed.
cussion of contemporary German literature in the light of transnational avant-gardes, my reading specifically underlines its intermedia connections with the performative aesthetics of late twentieth-century theater (only hinted at in Goetz’s diary) as well as (post)modernist object art. Unhinging Özdamar’s transnational aesthetics from the binaries of ‘Turkish-vs.-German’ and ‘European-vs.-oriental,’ I position Seltsame Sterne in the multidirectional traffic not only across the (black and white) Atlantic but also across the Mediterranean and along the routes to Asia explored, if often in appropriative ways, by Brecht, Artaud, and their contemporaries.

Supplementing the Abfall diary and Zaimoğlu’s Kanak Sprak with a historical perspective, Seltsame Sterne is set in the divided Berlin of 1976–77. Depressed by the political situation in Turkey, the protagonist has returned to Berlin where she had lived before, during the late 1960s. While Turkey remains present as an emotionally important backdrop (see Mani, Cosmopolitan Claims 108; Ette 185–88), the thematic emphasis of the book’s memory work is on German—specifically East-West German—scenarios, in the broader context of transnational politics as conceptualized from the protagonist’s emphatically internationalist perspective. Having pursued a theater degree in Istanbul, where she was introduced to various twentieth-century avant-gardes, the protagonist now intends to ‘learn,’ as the narrator puts it, “das Brechttheater” (28). As an intern, she participates in the post-Brechtian experiments of East Berlin directors Benno Besson, Heiner Müller, Manfred Karge, and Matthias Langhoff. Operating on the basis of short-term (often for just one day) visas for the GDR (and for a while, after her tourist visa has expired, without one at all for West Berlin), the protagonist moves back and forth between the two parts of the divided city. In the East, she meets theater people and dissidents whose names the educated early twenty-first-century German reader mostly recognizes; in the West, she lives in the postrevolutionary student culture that, in the later 1970s, seems to gain its historical significance—especially from the perspective of the police, who pay regular visits—primarily from its connection with the terrorist Red Army Faction: “In this roof garden, there had been secret meetings between Horst Mahler and Ulrike Meinhof” (68). Depending on her generation, as well as systemic and (sub)cultural background, Özdamar’s early twenty-first-century reader may easily share the protagonist’s ‘wondering’ gaze at these worlds in that the featured milieus may be as unfamiliar to her as they initially seem to be to the

47. On Özdamar’s earlier novels as “a complex site of German memory work,” see Adelson, “The Turkish Turn” (328); on Seltsame Sterne as an instance of Turkish migration ‘into the German past,’ see Konuk.
Turkish traveler. In other words, the trope of ethnic difference highlights the heterogeneity of national histories (see Ette 191).

In the introductory scene, the protagonist recites Lasker-Schüler's modernist poetry in an attempt to drown out the insistently barking dog in the neighborhood who woke her up. Hoping that some water will help her fall back asleep, she then gets up. The factory floor apartment, which regularly remains unheated on weekends and holidays, is not only cold but also deserted because all the revolutionary students have left to spend Christmas with their families of origin. It is, furthermore, so big that one of her roommates has the habit of biking to the bathroom “on the cold days” (12). On her long way to the kitchen the protagonist turns on the light in all of the rooms to comfort herself and looks at the traces of her departed roommates’ daily life and habits:

In Susanne’s room there was an ashtray full of frozen butts next to the typewriter, in Inga’s room an open water bottle; the water was frozen. With Janosch, a nibbled-at [angebissene] chocolate bar lay frozen on the keypad of his typewriter, I saw the impression of his teeth on it and thought he is smiling at me. When I opened the door to Rainer’s room, the radio suddenly came on. How warm was the voice of the man speaking at the moment! I put my hands on the radio, but the cold metal was burning. On a plate, there was a bitten-into bockwurst with frozen ketchup, looking like pop art. In Barbara’s room, a box full of frozen-together candy and chocolate stood next to her typewriter, and it seemed to me as though the candy was grinning of the cold [als ob die Bonbons vor Kälte grinsten]. In front of all doors there were shoes filled with Barbara’s candy and chocolate. (12–13)

The frozen leftovers of the students’ collectively uncommunicative junk food consumption in their work spaces and their disorderly play on holiday rituals (boots full of chocolate three weeks after the December 6 Nikolaus holiday for which they were presumably filled) give us a first glimpse at how the novel portrays their subcultural life. More generally, the introductory narrative arrangement of frozen junk food exemplarily illustrates how Seltsame Sterne, ‘feeding itself’ on the transnational exchange of intermedia avant-garde poetics, approaches the German 1970s through a scenic presentation of perceptions, things—and, in later parts of the book, also dialogue fragments and political slogans.

As Bill Brown has suggested, the persistent fascination with objects in twentieth-century avant-garde art was driven by the “desire to make contact
with the ‘real’” (2). By virtue of their materiality, things can come across as “warrantors of presence” (Ecker and Scholz 9). The three-dimensional thing at first presents itself as an object apparently free of significations, a “place of origin unmediated by the sign” (Brown 1). In the historical context of Özdamar’s writing, such programmatic affirmations of presence have been revived not only in the _Abfall_ diarist’s poetics but also in the postdramatic aesthetics of performance that had its local genealogy, not least, in the post-Brechtian experiments Özdamar’s protagonist saw in the making. It seems almost self-evident to position Özdamar’s poetics, with its focus on perceptions, bodily sensations, and things, at the (historical and conceptual) point where transnational pop art meets the theater forms traced also thematically in the book: as a literary analogue to Fischer-Lichte’s antinarrative aesthetics of presencing more or less desemanticized, self-referential bodies, gestures, and things (see chapter I). In Özdamar’s text, the poetological connection to the featured theater forms is hinted at when the narrator quotes critiques of Heiner Müller’s writings as “too simple” (118) and comments on Brecht’s naïveté (42), associating them with the very qualities critics have used to characterize Özdamar’s presumably foreign signature.

Quite in accordance with familiar Özdamar readings, the introductory scene’s leftovers thus read, on a first level, as unwieldy materialities that resist being mediated within the frame of fictional or historical narratives. Rather than telling stories about either heroic revolution (as the hagiographers of the 1968ers would have it) or violent extremism (as their political opponents have claimed increasingly loudly in the 2000s), they foreground fragments and layers of history traditionally excluded from political narratives. Through the force of their—imagined—sensual presence, Özdamar’s material traces of everyday life enable a bodily “countermemory” (Pizer 137), ranging from discomfort and privation—everything is frozen—to lust: in passing, the protagonist eats a piece of chocolate she found in the boots of her absent lover. But while media-ontological protocols have eased the acceptance of antirepresentational presence claims for the ‘live’ encounter with bodies and objects on the stage or in the museum, the realm of literary mediation is less conducive to them, as indicated by the _Abfall_ diarist’s reflections. Furthermore, the objects of German histories present a highly charged terrain quite obviously overpopulated with cultural significations. Like the retroworlds of the unification comedies discussed above, literary arrangements of preunification objects—not only in Özdamar—have aroused critical suspicions of uncritical surrender to nostalgia, or presentification in Gumbrecht’s sense. For the films, I argued that the complex framing of n/ostalgia clearly defies these charges, but the

48. In a particularly controversial way, Götz Aly—himself part of the movement in earlier years—has underscored the 1968ers’ unwilling complicity with their fascist fathers.
programmatic emphasis on presence in turn-of-the-century literary aesthetics complicates matters. Some critics have resolved the issue by distinguishing the (‘proper’) “method pop” with its focus on the present in both content and form from nostalgic, affirmative memory literature, for which they cite texts such as Florian Illies’s portrait of growing up in the saturated late years of the old Federal Republic (*Generation Golf*, 2000) and Jana Hensel’s East German equivalent *Zonenkinder* (2002). Moritz Baßler’s identification of archiving, or a positivistic “mania for collecting” (184), as a crucial aesthetic technique of pop literature in general, however, questions this opposition. In conceptualizing Özdamar’s literary dwelling on objects as part of her aesthetics of presentation-at-a-distance, I explore how historical memories are constructed precisely through the methods associated with pop.

In addition to the junk food leftovers of the opening narrative arrangement (to which I will return), Özdamar’s *Seltsame Sterne* also archives cultural objects more directly reminiscent of Illies’s Playmobil toys and Hensel’s pioneer scarves, in particular those evoking the irretrievably lost everyday culture of East Germany. For example, the narrative highlights the “five mark bill Ostgeld” with a Thomas Müntzer portrait (33), which the protagonist exchanges at the border, and the “small bottle” of mineral water “with its fat belly” (47) she buys in East Berlin. Unlike in *Generation Golf* or *Zonenkinder*, however, the procedure is not developed in a way that emphasizes comprehensive collection or representative selection. Instead, Özdamar’s practice of archiving resembles the *Abfall* diarist’s casual snapshots, to which it adds—metaphorically speaking—the more substantial use of a teleobject. Özdamar’s narrative camera takes ‘print pictures’ of its objects. Capturing apparently random detail in an exact fashion, it records, not least, the text written on the objects themselves and graphically arranges it through italics, paragraph breaks, and indentation:

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{Spree} & \text{Quell} \\
\text{Selterswasser} & VEP \\
0,331 & 0,12M \\
0,51 & 0,18M (47)
\end{array}
\]

49. See Schumacher 9–10, quoting Thomas Meinecke, a fellow Suhrkamp-faction colleague of the *Abfall* diarist.

50. Like Goetz’s diary (and unlike *Zonenkinder*), the text does not include pictures of the recorded daily world. It does include theater production drawings.

51. “*VEP*” (“Verbraucherendpreis”) translates as “final consumer price,” here attesting, of course, to the GDR’s inexpensive staple foods praised by Michael Ehrenreich.
Although Spreequell mineral water does not have the symbolic value of Spreewald pickles in postunification discourse, a superficial glance can in fact suspect such ‘fetishizing’ close-ups of nostalgia, especially in conjunction with Özdamar’s narrative recording also of the protagonist’s enthusiasm for the socialist project as such, which, in the mid-seventies, still constituted a shared ideological horizon for both the West Berlin radicals and the majority even of the GDR dissidents she lived with. Presentifying their revolutionary slogans along with their things, Seltsame Sterne indirectly associates the realist method of recording itself with the political struggle at hand: “Long live our awareness [das wache Bewusstsein]. Long live objective observation!” (126).

While a positive review praised how much of Seltsame Sterne was “of yesterday in an almost sensational manner” and underlined the enchantment effect of the narrator’s “warm eyes” (Bartmann), a less enthusiastic voice reiterated the complaint about her “naïve Gestus,” which refused any analysis of what is shown (Hartung). In fact, Özdamar’s character narrator seems to never operate “from today’s perspective” (Geisel). As she takes her ‘snapshots,’ the retrospective autobiographical narrator almost disappears behind the younger, experiencing self in an apparent abdication of narrative authority. Although the narration begins in the past tense, it is fairly consistently focalized through the protagonist. Occasionally, even her voice interferes through free indirect speech or direct thought recording, including momentary tense switches and deictic shifts. Thus, the narrative situation effectively changes very little when after a third of the novel, a shift in format is introduced, which explicitly refers us back to Abfall. As the narrator explains, she started to write a diary at that point of the story (84), with which we then are presented, to the effect of formalizing the spatiotemporal alignment of narrator and protagonist.

While the reader is thus transported back into the 1970s, the effects of immediacy and—potential—nostalgia remain, nonetheless, transitory and fragile. Significantly, critics diagnosed not only ‘warmth’ and a ‘lack of distance’ but also their very opposite: “Volitionally [gewollt] naïve and cold, childlike and distanced” (Farsaie). A closer look at the text shows that the apparently hardly present retrospective narrator—who can overall be aligned with the implied author here—is quite active in the background. While her critical activity does not unfold through explicit commentary, the text features a complex management of distance that frames the diagnosed presence effects, both interrupting and configuring them. Its primary technique is the arrangement of things—or, more generally, montage—through a narrative practice.

52. For example, see in the introductory scene: "Ich muss Wasser trinken" 12; “Wenn jetzt die anderen hier wären” (9, italics added).
that is less visibly jumpy but therefore not any less artful than that of the *Abfall* diarist. In its support, subtle modulations of rhetoric occasionally give away the critical voice mostly operating in hiding.

The introductory junk food arrangement exemplifies this management of distance. If nostalgia emerges at all here, it does so only against the background of contrary impulses, in that the sensations recorded are highly contradictory.\(^{53}\) The icy factory building is anything but homey, and with its half-eaten sausage as well as, in the further course of the protagonist’s nightly excursion, the unwashed dishes in the kitchen and a bathtub full of used water (13), the scene participates in the aesthetics of abjection so central for the overall literary configuration discussed here. In the reader’s mind, the associations evoked by the featured objects may effect the very opposite of a longing for this past, especially as mediated through prevalent cultural narratives about the precarious cleanliness standards of West German alternative culture. Of course, the reaction of the protagonist herself, which is privileged by the dominant interior focalization, is precisely not disgust. For her, the traces of the absent roommates instead transport remnants of closeness and community. Putting a finger into the cold bathwater, she recalls that her lover Peter last used it, and as quoted earlier, the impression of teeth in the chocolate on Janosch’s typewriter produces the idea that he is smiling at her. Furthermore, the potentially disgusting effect of the arranged leftovers is balanced also by the (itself distancing) theme of cold: its frozen state stops the imaginatively associated decay of the sausage and makes it enjoyable again—as (pop) art.

In this play of contrary associations, Özdamar’s poetics of things unfolds an excess of signification; rather than grouping into one coherent narrative, the objects multiply rearrange themselves in the process of reading (see Ecker and Scholz 13, 11). More clearly than the jumpy *Abfall* diary, their arrangement nonetheless invites the construction of narrative meaning. The poetic significance of the introductory scene results, not least, from the fact that the backgrounded retrospective narrator has provided the novel with more of a critical plot than will strike the reader at first glance. Reading on (or rereading), she may notice that the introductory arrangement of frozen things also serves as an exposition of the novel’s larger political configuration: it finds its allegorical contours somewhere between Heinrich Heine’s satire *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* (Germany: A Winter’s Tale, 1844)\(^{54}\) and the notion of

\(^{53}\) Sonja Klocke has suggested that the novel’s distance management targets the West German subculture more critically than the idealized East. There are in fact moments of such confrontation, but the overall configuration of critical distance and fond reminiscence is still quite balanced.

\(^{54}\) The repeatedly censored and banned work, which loosely documents a trip of Heine’s
“German Autumn,” which was coined for the escalation of Red Army Faction (RAF) terrorism and the state’s security regime in the fall of 1977 by the film Deutschland im Herbst (Germany in Autumn, 1978). The national narrative developed here—notably through Alexander Kluge’s montage techniques—contextualized the terrorist attacks and state responses with Germany’s fascist past. In Seltsame Sterne, such a ‘national weather connection’ is explicated by Heiner Müller who, in a recorded dialogue, summarizes the contemporary political situation with the words: “Kalt ist es in Deutschland” (202)—“It is cold in Germany.”

Not unlike the Abfall text scraps, the things, dialogues, and theater scenes arranged in Seltsame Sterne sketch the image of a land shaped by the specters of authoritarian regimes on both sides of the wall. The emphasis is on the terrorist hunts of the West Berlin police and the Eastern authorities’ spying on the oppositional artists, but it is not restricted to these state-sponsored forms of violence. For example, the narrator hints at the authoritarian dimensions of the West Berlin counterculture in portraying the members of the “AA” (Aktionsanalytischen) commune of the Viennese actionist Otto Mühl, who lived on the protagonist’s West Berlin factory floor for a while. While apparently neutrally reporting on their beliefs, the ‘undercover’ narrator subtly intervenes by amassing verbs such as “sollen” (ought to) and “müssen” (have to, 10–11). This implicit commentary is underscored by the montage of plot fragments: abhorred by their conversion, the official tenant beats the commune members out of the factory floor apartment, only to afterward fall for Mühl’s charismatic authority himself (73). When the free-spirited protagonist later laments the fact that she has not found a lover in East Berlin yet, her friend Gabi Gysi55 laconically comments that “Germans like to stay among themselves” (193). On both sides of the wall, the Turkish visitor repeatedly has to cope with leftover fascist ideologies in old as well as young brains. Toward the end of the novel, Besson advises her, “Save yourself from Germany” (236), and she accepts his offer to work with him in Paris. The novel finds its closure with a narrative snapshot of ethnic and cultural diversity in the Paris Métro (247). Without explicit argument to that effect, this resolution can be read as a response to the national narrative constructed by the preceding arrange-

through his native country after years of exile in Paris, radically critiques Prussian militarism and the overall reactionary political situation and anti-French climate in Germany—through, among others, weather metaphors.

55. More certainly than with this successful GDR actor herself (who would leave the country in 1985), postunification German audiences are familiar with her brother Gregor Gysi, at the time one of the few independent lawyers in the GDR, who defended political dissidents, and after unification was chairperson of the reformed socialist party PDS (Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus), today Die Linke (The Left).
ment of textual snapshots. Insistently, the montage narrator’s transnational perspective has foregrounded the exclusionary force of national(ist) and racist normalcies on both sides of the wall—normalcies that belie the internationalist rhetoric used by both the East German state and the radical West German subculture. At the end, even the leftovers of revolutionary work from the opening scene may resonate as signs of cultural identity: typically German sausages and chocolate associated with a Christian holiday.

But despite this accumulation of clues for a national reading, the novel’s aesthetics of narrative performance does not provide a coherent explanatory metanarrative that would firmly ground authoritarianism and violence in national mentalities.\(^\text{56}\) Also, the narrator refuses to surrender to the force of negativity exerted by the analogous accumulation of fascism clues in Goetz and Zaimoğlu as well as Heiner Müller’s work. As she develops her (indirectly self-reflexive) poetological commentary by arranging Besson’s theater notes, Özdamar’s narrator champions the active, thinking recipient (43–44). Her technique of generating critique primarily through montage provides this reader with opportunities to repeatedly reevaluate the complex, overdetermined constellations unfolded. Thus, she also records warnings vis-à-vis the tendency to analyze everything in national terms, which merely fortifies existing boundaries (see 51) and supplements her presentation of German normalcies with an insistent deconstruction of any politics of national identification.\(^\text{57}\)

As indicated by the introductory junk food arrangement, the novel’s overall evaluation of left-wing histories is no less complexly balanced. The frozen state of the revolutionary leftovers certainly forestalls any immediate idealization of the 1970s: it reads as an allegory of political absence, or the musealization of political culture. The stalling of revolution is the topic also of the Karge-Langhoff production of J. W. Goethe’s farm burlesque Der Bürgergeneral (The Citizen General) at the East German Volksbühne, which is featured prominently in the novel through the protagonist’s rehearsal notes and drawings. In this production, which was politically scandalous at the time with its barely concealed critique of GDR authoritarianism (see Stuber 239–40), even the turkey fears the “Liberty Cap,” the symbol of the French Revolution (Seltsame Sterne 170). Beyond merely analyzing the failure of revolution, however, theater in Özdamar’s novel also functions as a sphere of play and the carnivalesque (see 88, 91, 148), which aligns it with the French Revolution, against

\(^{56}\) Most notoriously, see the Goldhagen controversy (Shandley).

\(^{57}\) For example, there is a satirical scene in which a Kurdish nationalist insists that the protagonist must be Kurdish, too, because of her beauty. He is clearly deauthorized by his subsequent fantasies about German women, along with a German who intervenes into the conversation with racist generalizations (41).
the misery of German authoritarianism. Thus, Gabi Gysi advances the claim to “expression and life” born in the French Revolution against Heiner Müller’s pessimist reading of history (202; see 117). The diarist herself quotes Müller’s famous conception of theater as a ‘dialogue with the dead’—with a difference. While he emphasizes that theater can become a space of “resurrection” only by also rendering the daily presence of death (see Heeg 91), the diarist underlines that “the dead want to live on, in order to intervene into the future plots/histories [Geschichten] of the world” (170). Not confined to the theatrical institution, this model of political theater also comes into play when the diarist praises her dissident friend for never simply railing against the state but instead asking what the state is “playing,” and what “we” can “play against it” (230). Gabi fantasizes about founding an East German “female retiree mafia” (Rentnerinnenmafia, 189). Aided by their postretirement travel privileges, the old ladies could fight injustice with uncommon means, for example, by idealistically robbing Western banks. Whereas Özdamar’s Müller answers this playfully anarchistic fantasy with the cynical vision of a (male) “retiree militia” that would discipline the old ladies (189), Gabi and the protagonist imagine sending them out to fight the military regime in Turkey or even that of compulsory heterosexual promiscuity into which the sexual revolution has turned in the West Berlin communal apartment toward the end of the novel.

As developed by Özdamar’s narrator with recourse to the Volksbühne milieu of the 1970s, this model of theater gains its significance as a means of ‘resurrecting’ protest life at the intersection of Brechtian and Fischer-Lichtean vectors. Although championing bodily presence—or anarchic physicality—against the strictures of representation, Özdamar’s theater does not turn against mediation, or the “word,” which, as the narrator quotes Heiner Müller, has “a great effect” specifically in the East (215). On the level of poetic technique as well, it may be this model of theatrical activation—rather than ‘unmediated’ nostalgia—that ‘revives’ the novel’s introductory verbal arrangement of frozen revolutionary leftovers. The protagonist’s ‘warm,’ loving associations, which counteract the (cold, if not disgusting) situation, are narratively developed through—implicitly theatrical—images of bodily action and lighting effects. Thus, the narrator recalls the momentary warming effect of communication within the Wohngemeinschaft: the “hot breath” of the speaker, which is personified and thereby endowed with agency, would “rip apart” the cold for a moment (10). Reminiscent of plane condensation trails, the “seven breath streets” of all seven roommates would function “like the light rays of

58. This may be an indirect reference to the bank robberies of the anarchist faction of the West German terrorists, the Movement 2 June.
59. The repeated evocation of the magic number adds a fairy-tale touch: realism finds its limit here.
seven flashlights in a dark [finsteren] night” (ibid.). Although critically balanced by the following evocation of the “yelling breath” of the AA commune (11), the scene creates a—fragmentary—fantasy of present community. Its theatrical contours emerge at the metaphorical crossroads of the (a)live body with technology (planes and flashlights). In the introductory passage quoted above, the radio voice similarly functions as a source of warmth, even while the cold metal surface of the apparatus creates a ‘burning’ sensation on the protagonist’s hands.

Thus short-circuiting contrary semantic fields, the narrator’s rhetoric implements Özdamar’s poetic solution to the dilemmas of im/mediacy with which the other diarist was struggling in the mode of explicit reflection. In her model of theatrical reanimation, physical presence and technological mediation conspire to revive the ‘dead’ things of revolution with a caveat of aesthetic and political distance. While criticizing the utter negativity of Müller’s concept of theater, Özdamar’s narrator does subscribe to this model herself insofar as the concept of a ‘dialogue with the dead’ displaces unqualified notions of performative presence with a (Derridean) insistence on the ‘ghostly’ absence always already inscribed in it.60 Simultaneously, Özdamar’s move beyond deconstruction can be explained by associating another famous literary arrangement of colliding metaphors of cold and warmth: the scene from Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu that served as a starting point for Paul de Man’s reflections on the undecidability of diverging readings in the literary process (Allegories 59–62). Whereas de Man offers a gesture of interpretative resignation, Özdamar’s complex arrangements of simple things create aesthetic space for imagining different futures implied in the memory of the past. With her unwieldy images of grinning drops and the warm smile of teeth markers on icy chocolate—in short, the presentification of frozen revolution leftovers as pop art—Özdamar undermines the polarizing grid of political evaluations that dominates postunification memories of both the GDR and the West German counterculture. Balancing presentification with historicization, Seltsame Sterne disrupts nostalgia but also counteracts wholesale attacks on the political heritage of the left on both sides of the wall. In their place, Özdamar’s narrative montage inserts a seriously imaginative play with colliding images, in which warm enthusiasm for the egalitarian ideals of twentieth-century Eastern and Western socialisms is fused with a cooler look at the ways in which both failed to overcome the authoritarian legacies of modern German—and transnational—culture.

60. See Lehmann’s reading of “Heiner Müller’s specters” with Derrida’s Specters of Marx.
Epic Recording

ZEH’S EAGLES AND ANGELS

Decorated with almost a dozen prizes and translated into twenty-eight languages (see Herminghouse 271), Juli Zeh’s 2001 literary debut Adler und Engel (Eagles and Angels) turned its author, who was born in 1974 and already had degrees in both law and creative writing, into a literary shooting star. While critics were overall enthusiastic, the German feuilleton reviews also feature an occasional note of arrogance vis-à-vis such unusual success in the sphere of international marketing. Written according to “the tested models of the suspense novel,” Eagles and Angels, for Stephan Maus, shows Zeh’s training at the Leipzig Literaturinstitut that teaches creative writing “American style.” “Perfectly constructed” and “readable,” the novel departs from the ways in which contemporary ‘high’ German literature has been characterized by its critics and defenders alike, but also from the pop authors’ preference for diary-style, loose arrangements of everyday routines and objects over conventional plot figuration. The reception of Zeh’s novel as something other than pop had the positive effect of rescuing her work from being labeled as part of the so-called Fräuleinwunder (‘literary girl wonder’), through which most of the female voices associated with the new pop were trivialized (see Herminghouse 269). Without papering over the differences in poetic technique, my reading nonetheless underlines that Eagles and Angels’s narrative form resonates with the performative ‘method pop’ in important regards, showing that pop’s recording of the now is more compatible with storytelling than has been assumed.

In contrast also to Zeh’s more recent Spieltrieb, discussed in chapter V, Eagles and Angels performs its return to narrative as a return precisely not to the authoritative forms for which conservative critics called in the wake of unification. Rather, its multifaceted aesthetics of narrative performance recuperates narrative as a problem. Unfolding the “hallucinatory spell of a nightmare” with its ‘breathtaking,’ “excitingly precise” prose and images “reminiscent of a Quentin Tarantino movie,” Eagles and Angels is both highly scenic and quite theatricalized. Narrated mostly in the present tense by a character whose memory is affected by drug use and trauma as well as intentional repression, the novel’s poetics of physical sensations awards its readers

61. Andreas Nentwich, Neue Züricher Zeitung. 6 September 2001; quoted from: http://www.perlentaucher.de/buch/6943.html; accessed 8/30/09); Maus.

62. “halluzinatorische Bankkraft eines Alptraumes,” Der Spiegel, quoted from the publisher’s website (http://www.schoeffling.de/content/foreignrights/fiction-163.html; accessed 09/04/09). The other quotations are from the German reviews quoted in the English edition (Hamburger Morgenpost; Abendzeitung).
more intense presence experiences than Goetz’s self-reflexive recordings, Zaimoğlu’s stylized poses, and Özdamar’s implicitly distanced memories. Simultaneously, Eagles and Angels highlights narrative construction to the effect of configuring these bursts of presence into larger narrative experiences. My counterintuitive wording indicates the claim to be unfolded, namely that what I describe as the novel’s aesthetics of epic presence ultimately serves less to distance readers than to fortify their immersion into a world in which sense-making is more terrifying than the loss of overview signaled by the protagonist’s elliptic gestures of narration.

Everything begins with a “Whale” (1). This title of the first chapter refers to a comparison used by the character narrator, whom we join as he looks through the peephole in his apartment door into “a giant pupil” (1): an eye belonging to an unexpected visitor at his door trying to spy on him. Thrown directly into this scene of ‘bilateral’ voyeurism, the reader only gradually makes sense of the situation. Eventually we understand that the visitor, initially referred to only as “she,” is Clara, host of the late-night radio talk show “A Bleak World” (55), which she herself advertises as a show for “the desperate, the nihilistic . . . , atomic scientists, dictators and any jerk off the street” (49). Clara has come to learn more about the story that one of her listeners, the narrator Max, started to tell her anonymously on the phone. Max, a successful lawyer and specialist in Balkan and Eastern European integration law, had begun to self-destructively devote himself exclusively to his coke habit after his lover Jessie died. Apparently, Jessie, the psychologically—and, according to some of the novel’s voices, also mentally—instable daughter of a drug dealer involved in the Balkan wars of the 1990s, shot herself while on the phone with Max. Now that Clara has found him, she entangles Max into a sadomasochist relationship organized around the fight for Jessie’s story. While he is desperately struggling to forget but simultaneously obsessed with the past, she persistently plays his need for communication against his resistance. Clara, who is also a student of psychology, wants the material for her thesis. The novel combines the present-tense account of their struggle with the results of the initiated process of memory work: the past-tense tapes that Clara makes Max record.

Retrospectively, the whale-eye moment of bilateral voyeurism thus turns out to be the foundation of narrative, a gender-balanced variation of Mulvey’s sadist story. Prior to all larger connections, however, it finds its form as the introductory close-up on an (imagined) ‘live’ object or grotesquely distorted body part (in the German original, the giant pupil is also ‘wide-angled and twisted,’ 9). More so than Özdamar’s object close-ups, Zeh’s foregrounding of physicality produces effects of decontextualization through the
delay of narrative information. At least momentarily presenting—as Fischer-Lichte would have it—the desemanticized object in its “phenomenal being” (The Transformative Power 141), the novel attests to the power of literature to produce such effects through aesthetic technique beyond the condition of physical copresence. On one level, Eagles and Angels receives its nightmarish spellbinding force from this foregrounding of the body. The prominence of the organic continues to be indicated by chapter titles, which feature, for example, “Moths,” “Piglet[s],” “Snails,” “Flies,” and “Pigskin.” Throughout, the novel aligns us with the perceptions of Max, who rarely reflects on things and instead indulges in recording physical processes (see Falcke), including the presences of snot, sweat, blood, etc., abundantly produced in the course of his days devoted to cocaine intake (e.g., 11, 20, 31). Zeh’s (authorial) reader thus actually experiences the sensations of abjection that the Abfall diarist observed in himself. Repeatedly, we are reminded that its entire present-tense plot is set not in ‘German winter or autumn’ but in unbearable summer heat, thereby fully developing the aesthetics of disgust in which, along with trauma, Menninghaus has located the “return of ‘the real’” in contemporary culture (393). In contrast, again, to Gumbrecht’s quieting presentification, the novel thus produces thorough discomfort. If disgust, as Menninghaus suggests with Aurel Kolnai, implies a “normative and quasi-moral moment,” as it apprehends “something that should not be, at least not in proximity to the one judging” (5, italics in original), Zeh’s spellbinding gestures of presence may simultaneously produce distance, initiating a critical response mediated by emotion rather than rational insight.

If triggered by (the) presence (of the abject), however, this critical response is developed through the ways in which Zeh’s presence stimuli are combined with techniques of theatricalization and plot configuration. Gradually, the spellbound reader understands that its organic images, many of which are introduced as comparisons in the first place, also have decisive metaphorical functions in the emerging story. A second group of images points to violence with indicative chapter titles that name predators: “Tiger,” “White Wolves,” “Eagles.” Both snails and tigers are featured in the stories that Jessie tells, and of which the reader hears, although they are never fully related to us, even while Jessie herself is introduced as an embedded narrative agent, whose discourse is directly reproduced on Max’s tapes in long, partially untagged paragraphs. As it turns out, Jessie’s animal tales configure horrors that by far surpass the implications of their literal meaning: during the Bosnian war, her father abused her innocent appearance by making her prepare war refugees and rape victims as drug carriers (see 226–28). Be it in response to her traumatic experiences or because of her alleged ‘sickness’ (see 90), Jessie has
developed an alternative method of relaying her experiences. As she fails—or refuses—to ask “any questions about what it meant,” or to connect her memories to media information to which she must have had access (224), significance and connection are established poetically, through the fragile, argumentatively inexplicit links of metaphor, metonymy, and simile. This practice of poetic recording, however, shapes the entire novel because Max lovingly recalls Jessie’s world and systematically numbs his own conventionally analytical faculties, and even the editorial instance (whom we can hold responsible for the chapter titles) mimics his discourse.

Pursuing the tracks of figural connection, the reader herself participates in assembling the novel’s stories. Thus, the introductory whale prefigures the corpse in a garbage bag that Max finds at the end of the novel (281), and the tigers, of whom Jessie talked on the phone right before dying, point to the Serbian paramilitary units operating under that name, whom she had to watch doing their murderous business during the war (10, 37, 221). They may or may not have returned in the embodied form of headhunters: if Jessie has not in fact committed suicide, she was killed by her father’s own troops after she sided against him in an internal drug ring conflict (see 301). The title-giving eagles are established as a metaphor of highly sensitive, traumatized perception when Jessie claims to have “the ears of an eagle” (234). “Eagles,” Max objects, “don’t have ears” (234)—a feature that links them to the Bosnian victims whose ears Jessie saw being cut off, as well as Max’s own ear that was injured when he heard the shot killing Jessie through the phone. Angels, meanwhile, feature as a metaphor for blandished, possibly euphemistic speech (“the tongue of angels,” 127), antithetically integrated into Jessie’s world when she describes nudibranchs, which look like cut-out tongues to her, as “[t]ongues of angels” (139). “Eagles and angels” is the image Max associates when Clara looks as though her consciousness was communicating with heavenly forces after he fed her with coke (248). The association is foregrounded not only as the title of the book but also as that of one of the chapters. In this chapter Max and Clara visit with an artist who uses corpses delivered by Jessie’s father as models for his plastic busts, which are famous for their “anatomical realism.” In this way, Zeh’s poetic practice of configuration becomes a medium also of metanarrative self-reflexivity, suggesting that the novel’s own artistic recording is implicated in the gruesome world it depicts through its intensely physical presentification of deadly affairs. Beyond these metaphorical hints, such self-reflexivity is developed also in the overall plot

63. The novel’s particular obsession with comparisons is observed by Maus.
64. German edition 333; the English translation has “hyper-realism” (245).
configuration in that the scene of detective-style investigation is unfolded as a plot in its own right, which takes up more narrative space than the uncovered story itself and revolves around narrative also thematically.\textsuperscript{65}

Zeh’s techniques of theatricalization, however, are not limited to the foregrounding of narrative construction through highlighted figuration and such play with self-reflexivity. The most conspicuous element of the novel’s form is the way in which Max’s (and, by an additional degree of mediation, Jessie’s) traumatic re-enactments\textsuperscript{66} are developed through diegetic rather than straightforwardly mimetic discourse. Despite the occasional use of interior monologue and untagged dialogue, the reader is not primarily provided with direct “enactment” (Chatman, \textit{Story and Discourse} 182)—except on the tape recordings that short-circuit the mimetic and the diegetic by delivering Max’s monologues as the novel’s primary instances of ‘proper,’ past-tense narration. The almost constant visibility of narrative mediation explicates the act of communication within the novel’s scenic poetics. While most of the dialogue is tagged, the novel’s most characteristic feature is indicated in the introductory door scene. Rather than directly presenting thought or perception (‘What is that? A whale eye!’), we get an action and perception report: “I approach the peephole with one eye and look directly into a giant pupil.”\textsuperscript{67} Occasionally, Max’s voice even goes beyond the function of reporting, indirectly addressing the audience with, for example, an explanatory comment about coke consumption: “There are times when it just doesn’t kick in, when you have to take a break” (22).

Using J. M. Coetzee’s \textit{Waiting for the Barbarians} as her case study, Dorrit Cohn has begun to conceptualize the “deviance” of such simultaneous character narration, which emancipates “first-person fictional narration from the dictates of formal mimetics, granting it” a “discursive freedom that we take for granted in third person fiction: the licence to tell a story in an idiom that corresponds to no manner of real-world, natural discourse” (“‘I doze and wake’” 19). As Phelan points out correctly, the “mimetic standard” at work in Cohn’s account can be questioned (“Present Tense Narration” 227), but Zeh’s reader might in fact wonder about the circumstances of enunciation and the exact spatiotemporal relationship between the action and the act of narration. At moments, the use of temporal summaries can tempt us into natural-

\textsuperscript{65} Pyrhönen suggests that detective fiction as a genre “invariably includes an overt preoccupation with its own formal and thematic characteristics” (103).

\textsuperscript{66} See Kacandes, “Trauma Theory” 616, on how such reenactment has been contrasted with narrative memory.

\textsuperscript{67} German edition, 9. The English edition translates too freely here to fully capture the effect.
izing the present tense as a historical present simply chosen for the effect of added immediacy. However, the proliferation of “now[s]” (e.g., 3) characteristic of pop literature (see Schumacher 51) and of elliptic cuts (withholding summary) insistently reconnect the act of speaking to the moment of action. Later in the novel, the narrator’s reflections on his inability to remember not only the events around Jessie’s death but increasingly even the time spent with Clara foreground that the reader—who has just read what he claims to have forgotten (249, 214)—in fact needs to imagine the process of narration as a simultaneous recording: a second layer of ‘tapes’ nowhere pragmatically anchored in the fictional world.

In not only consistently foregrounding narration but also repeatedly underlining its precarious nature (see, e.g., also 254), Zeh’s novel departs from the rule of “discretion” about the circumstances of enunciation that, according to Cohn, generally facilitates the acceptance of simultaneous narration (“I doze and wake” 20). Consequently, the reader may be startled, and it seems that Zeh’s aesthetics of diegetic recording would likely produce Brechtian distancing effects. Furthermore, the reader’s immersion is endangered by the fact that Max’s reliability is repeatedly questioned, even beyond his forgetfulness. Thus, he himself comments on the fact that regular coke consumption leads to paranoia, as well as affecting one’s ethical judgment through pathological personality changes (51, 167). In a moment of anger, Clara calls all of his memory work the “ramblings of a psychotic junkie” (310), and in fact, the reader needs to account for the possibility that the entire nightmare unfolding in the book could be a drug-induced phantasmagoria. However, it is difficult to sustain such fundamental doubts throughout the reading process; after all, *Eagles and Angels* is, like Zaimoğlu’s *German Amok*, dominated by the voice of its problematic character narrator. More likely, the reader will naturalize the strangeness of the narrative situation—including the disorienting play with approximation and distance between narrator and protagonist—by explaining it in terms of drug- and trauma-related splits within the experiencing and narrating self. Even the narrator’s deauthorization can, counterintuitively, authenticate his words, when, for example, Max’s comment on how he forgets things before recording them implicitly positions the preceding thought

68. For example, “I have kicked her out, but the door bell rings again ten minutes later” (17). See Fludernik, *Towards* 250, 263; Cohn, “I doze and wake” 16, on that strategy of resolution.

69. Thus, momentary effects of ‘external’ focalization in Genette’s sense (which, as narratologists know, is unsystematic; see Bal, *Narratology*; Phelan, *Living to Tell* 110–14) can be explained by the fact that Max sees himself from the outside: he has trouble controlling and feeling sensation in his own body as well as accessing his mind, and he self-protectively derealizes his perceptions (e.g., 2, 6, 93).
report as a more ‘immediate’ recording. In this way, the book may achieve its spellbinding power not only despite but also through its techniques of distanciation. In the long run, the reader’s suspension of disbelief—the concept from theater and cinema studies nicely underlines the novel’s ‘filmic’ poetics (see also Wehdeking)—is also supported by her story construction results: Max’s apparently paranoid conclusions about narrative connections (51) are verified as diegetically correct observations on the state of the world.

Max is obviously unable to perform as an authoritative teller, but the (authorial) reader makes do with him as a recorder of bits and pieces of story information—and in doing so constructs the presented world as a nightmare. Beyond the national confines of Goetz’s and Zaimoğlu’s German miseries, it unfolds as a terrifyingly globalized world in which drug traffic financed the war and genocide in former Yugoslavia, before the routes of that traffic moved north in conjunction with the “EU expansion into Eastern Europe” (318). All of this happened under the protection of the major EU- and UN-affiliated law firm for which Max has worked. In the attempt to cover up and, in the moment of disclosure, justify the cooperation, his boss resorts to the rhetoric of “non-intervention” and “human rights,” “international law,” and the prevention of “World War Three” (228, 274–75). Since Max is barely on better terms with such newspaper language than Jessie was, the significance of these implications of transnational institutions and humanist discourse into genocide is not analytically evaluated in the novel. Perhaps the reader will merely experience that the “calming” function of “the workings of the law,” which the boss highlights in the beginning of the novel (14; see also 269), dissipates. Her reaction would then resemble that of Max, who answers the disclosures by recording physical experience: “The air in the room was growing thin. I felt slightly dizzy” (275).

Under the spell of dizziness, the effects of the Brechtian epic are thus drawn back into the orbit of phenomenological presencing, and the techniques of approximation and distanciation, desemanticization, and configural sense-making converge in a poetics of disturbance, in which a critical response—in contrast to Brecht’s program—is produced in the mode of sensation rather than thought. After the conversation with his boss, Max, who is deeply implicated in the horrors uncovered himself, stays put, “simply breathing, hoping never to form another coherent thought again in my life”

70. In addition to his work for the firm, Max is also directly (co)responsible for the death of one of the drug dealers, Shershah. Jessie loved Shershah, but one night she asked Max to shoot him, either because she didn’t recognize him (and felt threatened) or because she felt betrayed by him (see 321). When Max, who did recognize the rival, in fact tried to shoot him, Shershah ran into a truck on the street and was killed.
In one of his few philosophical moments earlier on, he had mused that “it’s human nature always to want to know everything,” but that “it really should be common sense to refuse to comply with that demand” (195). Max’s turn away from forms of narrative that generate conscious, coherently articulated knowledge is certainly understandable. In addition to the sheer terror inscribed in the uncovered connections and the specter of personal guilt overshadowing them, he is also confronted with Clara’s abuse of narrative’s power. Cynically, she worries that the healing effect of narration, about which she has learned in school (that’s “first-semester material”), could rob her of her pathological object before she is done with her thesis (128). Highlighting the cold function of narrative in the generation of institutional knowledge, which is, in Clara’s person, furthermore indissolubly intertwined with the commercial worlds of popular entertainment, the novel inverts the affirmative conception of narrative in contemporary psychology and medicine. As it turns out, Clara has even made a deal with the drug dealers to protect her work environment (see 309).

By staging this configuration, Zeh’s novel holds on to ‘postmodernist’ distrust vis-à-vis narrative even as it powerfully returns to plot making. The few clues given that invite a more analytical evaluation of the configured story fit with the postmodernist label as well, as they gesture toward a Derridean deconstruction of legal institutions as invariably estranged from any idea of justice but performatively affirmed by their employees as a quasi-religion (83, 125–26; see Derrida, “Force of Law”). The “higher meaning of world order” is available exclusively with chemical support—upon doing cocaine again for the first time after taking a break. Through the ways it balances the unmaking and making of sense, however, Eagles and Angels certainly does not propagate the kind of postmodernism that advocates radical play or subject dissolution for their own sake. Instead, the novel works through deadly serious affairs of narrative world constitution and subjective identity. Zeh’s aesthetics of epic recording thus attains its contours as an aesthetics of precarious narration, in which the artfully immersive configuration of epic gesticulates with any comfort there might be in closure. To be sure, there is an element of symbolic closure: the novel ends in a powerful thunderstorm that finally washes away the oppressive summer heat. Max, however, just stares into that rain while he waits for the drug dealers. He has accidentally found the computer code with which Jessie had locked everybody else out of the drug ring’s central information database before her death (Max had forgotten about all of

71. German edition (“Sinn der Weltordnung” 58); not quite captured by the English translation as “proving that all is right in the world” (36).
this until now). By delivering the code to the police, he could have caused a major scandal that would have made “a few people get jailed for genocide” but would also have been the end of the EU (322). Faced with this imbrication of justice with institutional dissolution, Max instead tries to bribe the drug dealers into returning Clara, who may have simply left him after she finished her thesis, to him. Whatever the outcome of his foggy scheme, the ‘bad guys’ will certainly not end up in jail—and Max himself not safely in drug rehab, either. In Zeh’s brutal, apocalyptically tinted narrative world of war and globalization, there is, in fact, little promise for healing, and no poetic justice can make up for Max’s failure to translate dizziness into critical action.

Conclusion

This chapter has pursued the ways in which turn-of-the-twenty-first-century German literature, as dominantly characterized through the poetics of pop, along with adjacent forms, challenges authoritative forms of narration. It does so through its performative aesthetics, which is distinguished from that of contemporary film through its programmatically scenic, presence-oriented forms, but also interweaves these with techniques of theatricalization indicative of the latter’s overall cultural influence in the 1990s. My readings underline metaphors from the visual and new media arts used in the texts themselves or by their reviewers, to the effect of conceptualizing these configurations both in analogy to and as constituted through the active exchange with medial forms that have traditionally been described as performative. Simultaneously, I show how these intermedia affiliations serve to constitute contemporary literature as such—as an ensemble of techniques of narrative performance with widely diverging effects on its readers’ affective and critical engagement. A blog _avant la lettre_ later published as a novel, Goetz’s Internet diary _Abfall für alle_ draws on the model—more than the actual technologies—of new, as well as older, electronic media in developing its project of a recording of ‘the Real’ of unified Germany’s ‘shitty’ capital; his gestures of abjection gain their significance as a dissenting alternative to Gumbrecht’s quietist conceptualization of presentification. On its quest for presence—developed, not least, through poetological self-reflexivity—the diary showcases but also works through the critical narrative-vs.-performance opposition and conceptualizes its own ‘secondary orality’—writing as a discontinuous practice of narration: a ‘snapshot’ montage.

The limits of this particular poetics of narrative performance, however, are in its negativity: the emphasis on gestures of rupture over reconfigura-
tion, and the figuration of these gestures as acts of abjection. Indirectly, the diarist himself provides his procedure with a national tag, and in fact, Goetz’s critical variation on the postunification Berlin novel fails to free its diary voice from dominant (national) conceptualizations of collective identity by foreclosing democratic acts of reconfiguring collectivity through alternative group imaginations. In contrast, Zaimoğlu’s Kanak Sprak, a collection of first-person ‘protocols’ from what the author calls the Turkish-German ‘ghetto,’ makes the play of voices in the act of narration into a site of political struggle by having his Kanakstas pose for presence in the exclusive German public sphere. Referencing the model of rap music, Zaimoğlu undoes the charged oppositions between presence and theatricality by basing the protocols’ claim to realness not on their presumed rawness but explicitly on his own construction of the Kanakstas’ highly stylized self-presentations. This interweaving of presence and theatricality authorizes imagined acts of counterhegemonic refiguration (specifically, provocative resignifications of hate speech), which do not simply escape the negativity of racism, either, but investigate its genealogies more successfully than both Goetz’s diary and Zaimoğlu’s later, more mainstream contributions to the pop genre.

Reading Özdamar’s Seltsame Sterne in the broader context of the pop configuration allowed me to reposition her transnational poetics beyond the dichotomy of Turkish vs. German, or, worse, ‘oriental’ vs. Western aesthetics, which continues to inflect her reception in German studies. Drawing on the models of postdramatic theater as well as pop art, Özdamar’s fictionalized memoir on 1970s politics and theater on both sides of the wall subtly intervenes into heated postunification discourses on the politics of memory with its carefully arranged close-ups on radical left-wing histories. Özdamar’s critically affective practice of presentification-at-a-distance—that is, her backgrounded narrator’s indirectly evaluative montage of highlighted objects, sensations, and political slogans—allows her to displace both nostalgia and summary condemnation of left-wing histories in contemporary memory culture. The poetics of Zeh’s debut novel Eagles and Angels, finally, which has been described as filmic, radicalizes the project of nonauthoritative sense-making with its technique of epic recording. Developed through the psychological themes of the character narrator’s drug addiction, trauma, and memory loss, this form of disoriented, perception-focused present-tense narration awards its readers intense presence experiences in radicalizing the aesthetics of abjection that characterizes the entire literary configuration discussed in this chapter, while opening it up into a thematic framework of Europeanization and globalization. But the text also develops self-reflexivity and epic distancing, if not primarily to a Brechtian effect of rational evaluation. Instead, Zeh configures
disgust and shock into a larger narrative experience of disturbance. If Zeh's novel, as elaborated by its critics, recuperates plot-knitting more fully than the 'antinarrative' pop 'proper,' it holds on to a turn-of-the-century suspicion vis-à-vis authoritative narrative by immersing its readers in a world of horrors in which sense-making is more terrifying than the character narrator's loss of overview.