Let's Talk About ...

Anti-Democratic, Anti-Queer, Misogynist, Antisemitic, Right-Wing Spaces and Their Counter-Movements

Edited by
Michaela Conen, Daniel Laufer, Dorothee Richter

Contributions by
Dagim Abebe (on Wendimagegn Belete); Inke Arns; Artists at Risk – Marita Muukkonen and Ivor Stodolsky; Jonny Bix Bongers; Jutta Ditfurth; Fabienne Dubs and Jana Kurth (on Maria Eichhorn); Michaela Dudley; Sergio Edelsztein; Ulrich Gutmair (on Hamza Howidy), Ana Hoffner; Leon Kahane; Hadas Kedar (on Khader Oshah); Veronika Kracher; Daniel Laufer (on Nir Evron, Omer Krieger and Ariel Reichman); Ahmad Mansour; Oliver Marchart; Michaela Melián; Ruth Patir; Doron Rabinovici; Dorothee Richter (on a project curated by Elena Levi, Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, Rotem Ruff, Maayan Sheleff and Hillit Zwick); Maria Sorensen; Nora Sternfeld; Simon Strick; Klaus Theweleit; Stephan Trüby

Editorial
Let's Talk About… Anti-Democratic, Anti-Queer, Misogynist, Antisemitic, Right-Wing Spaces and Their Counter-Movements
Michaela Conen, Daniel Laufer, and Dorothee Richter

There is a global movement towards authoritarian, patriarchal ideologies that are misogynistic, queerphobic, xenophobic and, last but not least, antisemitic. This involves resorting to strange, ideologically charged, twisted narratives that ignore differentiations, contradictions and historical events – fuelled by algorithms in favour of closed worldviews. This happens not only in authoritarian states, dictatorships and kleptocracies (see Russia), but also – disguised as social movements – in neoliberal democracies. The tolerance of ambiguity called for by Nathan Sznaider, i.e. the recognition and endurance of contradictions, has largely been lost in the process. We would therefore like to leave the camp debates in art and culture behind us and present intellectual, intercultural artistic and curatorial positions in Berlin in a series of panels, and subsequently publish them in a special issue of *OnCurating* in order to influence a local debate and give it international weight.

With this issue, we want to look for some missing links in the history of cultural developments and hopefully show historical developments and contradictions, removed from the simplifying theory in which right- and left-wing tendencies are seen as being similar. One has to look into the historical connections and alliances carefully. Of course we cannot and will not delve into a history of the Middle East, for example; that would be way too much for a magazine dedicated to art and curating. In the arts, unfortunately, instead of a debate, we encounter various incidents such as when a group of people disrupted the reading of Hannah Arendt at the Hamburger Bahnhof: *Where Your Ideas Become Civic Actions (100 Hours Reading "The Origins of Totalitarianism*") with shouting, spitting, and other violent interruptions.[1] Speaking from a Swiss and German background, the intensified antisemitic wave is deeply disturbing, and it shows once again that the arts can become an ideological battlefield with different centres, in which certain things can be said and done and others cannot. (Sexuality, for example, is a very sensitive topic in some areas of the world where antisemitic or anti-Zionist utterings are not.) Nevertheless, we wanted to look into counter-movements to fascism and right-wing movements – both historical and contemporary ones.

In contrast to narrow, ideologically driven views, we want to offer a kaleidoscope of different voices – artistic, curatorial, and cultural. And keep in mind, what we offer here is also spoken from certain perspectives, mainly from Europe, with its historical responsibility for the biggest and unprecedented crime against humanity: the Holocaust. We also included voices from Africa, the US and the Middle East. To answer this right away, we absolutely think that all groups in the Middle East should have the right to live in peace and in a truly democratic political situation, and not be threatened by genocidal actions, which includes not being used as shields for terrorist acts.[2]

Reading of Hannah Arendt by Tania Bruguera, *Where Your Ideas Become Civic Actions (100 Hours Reading "The Origins of Totalitarianism"),* Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, before the disruption.

But we must point out that representational democracies are also struggling with many problems, as neoliberalism makes the economic conditions for many austere (the 99%). The line between authoritarian, neoliberal democracy and dictatorships and kleptocracy seems to be blurring. Nevertheless, as long as different legislative institutions exist, and as long as negotiations and demonstrations are still possible in democratic states, there is hope. Where it is possible to demonstrate without being threatened with torture and death. The old Marxist division between so-called imperialist states and the states based on Marxist traditions has eroded, as Indian feminist Kavita Krishnan argues. Britta Petersen, director of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's South Asia Regional Office in Delhi, summarises: "Krishnan accuses her comrades of supporting authoritarian regimes by uncritically advocating multipolarity. In a defining article from December 2022, she stated that 'All streams of the Left in India and globally have for long advocated for a multipolar world as opposed to a unipolar one dominated by the imperialist USA.' Yet at the same time, multipolarity is a 'rallying cry for despots, that serves to dress up their war on democracy as a war on imperialism'".[3]

This issue also comes with a lot of historical and recent information in order to open up new perspectives, especially for young people who are sure to support suppressed people, something we can relate to. Nevertheless, we wanted to begin with contemporary art and curating, include personal accounts and artworks related to personal stories, migration and diaspora, in-between some related historical perspectives.

To come back to the recent debates in the arts, what often surprises us tremendously is what people don't know about racism, about historic events and about the history of the Israel/Palestine/Middle East conflict; yet they still think they have to hold an outward-facing opinion. Often it is necessary to start with the context one is familiar with, to look into fascism that is/was developed close by. We therefore included an interview with the politician and cultural theorist **Jutta Ditfurth**. She was a co-founder of the Green Party in Germany (which she left in protest against the realo wing), she is a feminist, and she still argues for a profound redistribution of wealth. As a politician, she met spokespersons like Yasser Arafat. Because she comes from a noble family with

roots in the Middle Ages, Ditfurth also researched how the concept of race was used to establish and maintain violent structural and economic advantages, and how this continues to play a role today.

One of the forgotten histories about the fight against fascism is described by the artist and art historian **Dagim Abebe** in relation to the work *Unveil* by artist **Wendimagegn Belete.** This reinterprets history through a fresh lens, disrupting conventional narratives and challenging established perspectives. Exhibited at the 15th Gwangju Biennale – framed around *PANSORI: A Soundscape of the 21st Century*, which explores polyphony, resistance and the reconfiguration of historical narratives – Belete's work disrupts the silence surrounding Ethiopia's defiant stand against fascism, especially against the fascist Italian army, amplifying voices often left unheard in global memory.

We also show and discuss the work of **Ruth Patir**, who has developed the latest Israeli pavilion, curated by Mira Lapidot and Tamar Margalit, at the Venice Biennale; her work actually developed from a first itinerary at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich, then curated by Maayan Sheleff[4]. The only part of the work that was visible in Venice was the mourning march of ancient, female-connotated figurines through Tel Aviv. Patir wanted to open the show only when a ceasefire was achieved and the hostages were released, which did not happen during the time of the exhibition in Venice. This project is now discussed and shown in this issue; it has many facets, one of which is a feminist perspective on the reproduction industry, which objectifies women and transforms reproduction as a service for sale. The ancient figurines have a very funny quality despite the difficult topics they address, and therefore seem to have an old, female wisdom hidden in the bodies of ancient women from the region.

The contemporary voices we are keen to present in this issue are manifold – for example **Artists at Risk** (Marita Muukkonen and Ivor Stodolsky), who, with the support of institutions and courageous individuals, manage to get artists out of threatening and dangerous circumstances and living conditions. They speak in an interview with **Jonny Bix Bongers** about how they developed these strong networks of concrete support, which are shown in exhibitions and on websites.

Fabienne Dubs and Jana Kurth write about a project by **Maria Eichhorn** that is related to European fascism. For example, they reflect on an earlier work in which she examined the Lenbachhaus's collection for paintings with unclear provenance, and staged an exhibition based on her findings. Furthermore, Eichhorn's contribution to the Venice Biennale investigated the historical changes in the architecture, as well as sites of known resistance against fascism in Venice.

In this issue, we also wanted to cultivate a future-oriented outlook on how to address such challenges of historical pasts and the present in artistic and curatorial work. This entails adopting a progressive and universalist stance, despite the current circumstances. How can this be effectively formulated in a positive manner? How can this be achieved at an international level?

Klaus Theweleit, a founding figure of research into toxic masculinity, has assessed letters written by soldiers in the Freicorps and the German Army in the 1920s and 1930s, and shows how they developed a social-psychological state that allowed crimes against humanity. The feeling of internal threat and fear was projected onto groups identified as 'others': political opponents conceived as red masses, 'aggressive' women,

Jews, queers, Sinti and Roma. Theweleit addresses the difference between terrorism and violence supported by states or state-like organisations and individual perpetrators. In the case of Hamas's attack on the left-wing, peace-loving kibbutzim, he sees the handling of the media, including live streams of the most horrific atrocities, as a new dimension. The interview was part of a seminar project at the postgraduate program in curating; the many individuals involved in this project are represented here by the interview partners **Maria Sorensen** and **Dorothee Richter**.

Michaela Melián, who also has a contribution in this issue, has previously reflected on the secret connection between the RAF (German Red Army Faction) and old Nazi fascists. In Issue 7 of *OnCurating*, we presented her work *Triangel*; here, she speaks about a project that deals with hidden histories. This work reacted to the fact that Gudrun Ensslin and her partner Bernward Vesper published works by Vesper's reactionary and fascist father.[5] Melián's contribution, entitled 'Red Threads', focuses on her exhibition at Kindl, Berlin, where she presented her work *TANIA*. Tania is the fighting name of Tamara Bunke, who was born in 1937 to a German-Jewish family in exile in Chile. The family moved to the GDR and Tamara studied at Humboldt University. In the 1960s, she left for Cuba, where she joined the guerrilla struggle led by Che Guevara in Bolivia and was shot dead in 1967. The major themes of the twentieth century come together in her life story: National Socialism/fascism, migration and exile, socialist modernity, emancipation and the post-colonial struggle for liberation. To this day, however, Tamara Bunke's biography can only be pieced together on the basis of many stories and unreliable documents.

Artist and curator **Daniel Laufer** writes about projects by **Ariel Reichman and Nir Evron/Omer Krieger**. Their works are now subject to a double viewing: in their film *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres*, Nir Evron and Omer Krieger show the peaceful atmosphere of one of the kibbutzim that were later attacked. Clearly ecologically minded people and peace activists were living here in a small utopia with shared cars and a shared dining hall, and were closely engaged in fighting for equal rights for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In retrospect, one cannot see these images without also imagining destruction and brutal violence.

Ariel Reichman uses the phrase "I am (not) safe" to signal the emotional and political state of the individual in our public realm. His sign can be activated online and is shown on the facade of museums in Germany and Israel. This sentence has regained its relevance. Synagogues are once again becoming targets of attacks; conspiracy ideologies are causing perpetrators to reverse victimisation; and there is reason to suspect that a cross-front has established itself since the coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, Muslims are under general suspicion, which is unjustified as Muslims are not at all a homogeneous group; even Palestinians are not. About 20% of Israel's population is Muslim with full legal rights; some even choose to be part of the IDF. (All this is, of course, ignored by simpler minds. It should be added that anyone interested in the Middle East conflict is exposed to algorithmically disseminated propaganda, which makes it hard to understand the situation.)

In the contribution "'We Want to Live' – On Hamza Howidy's Activism", the journalist **Ulrich Gutmair** describes the courageous and outstanding work of the Palestinian journalist and activist **Hamza Howidy**. Howidy had participated twice in the 'We Want to Live' protests against Hamas in Gaza, was arrested twice and tortured by Hamas henchmen.[6] Arriving in Europe after he left Gaza, Howidy was threatened in the first migration camp.

Howidy's Instagram posts analyses the historical background of Hamas's long and destructive rule in Gaza. Howidy is fighting for a free, democratically governed Palestinian state. Free from Israeli occupation, and liberated from the influence of Iran and Qatar. But first, the people of Gaza must be saved from starvation. Howidy draws his readers' attention to the catastrophic humanitarian situation and demands support for the civilians.[7]

As curatorial perspectives on difficult issues, we present several projects including *Curating on Shaky Grounds: Curating in Times of Crisis and Conflict*. This was a series of workshops and a symposium, curated by **Elena Levi, Ronald Kolb, Dorothee Richter, Rotem Ruff, Maayan Sheleff** and **Hillit Zwick**, and hosted by Kunst-Werke Berlin in 2021. We have identified the pandemic as an amplifier of paranoid conspiracy theories. The crisis mode that it engendered as a disruption in an aesthetic-political constellation – one that severely curtails movement and momentum – unleashes paranoia and morphs the ways in which we may act, perform, and perceive the world around us. In addition to more traditional lectures, the diverse workshops encouraged all visitors to become active participants. As curators working with contemporary artists internationally, how can we stimulate a renewed understanding of the world during these moments of crisis, as the ground beneath us is shaking?

Fascism should be investigated above all where it manifests itself nearby. How can difficult contexts be realised as exhibitions? Curator **Inke Arns** shows a differentiated and instructive project in which she delineates right-wing practices using the digital sphere. How can artists engage with the alt-right without running the risk of giving a platform to ideas associated with this toxic (sub)culture? Inke Arns' contribution asserts that if we refuse to examine and learn from the groups we confront, we will not be able to read their message. Silence is not an option; however, if we engage in reading and learning, we must ensure that we stay on our side of the fine line, even at the risk of repeating and exposing toxic content. She refers to the exhibition she curated, *The Alt-Right Complex* (2019) – the first of its kind in Germany. The artists in the exhibition rendered hidden alt-right networks – such as the right-wing meme culture of 4chan – visible by taking a closer look at the visual tactics of the alt-right and mapping and analysing the alt-right online (sub)culture. The aim of the project was to present a vision of the impact of the alt-right's visual and ideological architecture to a wider audience, in order to open up spaces and possibilities for critique and resistance.

Simon Strick's research was one of the foundations of this project.[8] Strick analyses the affective strategies of right-wing actors. Numerous analyses show how they make feelings of danger for white men popular and connectable: this fascism speaks the language of the risk society and effectively manipulates democratic public spheres. In the recent developments, he sees 'fascho-spheres' emerging that appear forcefully in Western societies with their misogynistic, anti-feminist and anti-queer narratives.

Stories about diaspora are the foundation of other research endeavours, personal narratives and artworks. The well-known, internationally published author **Doron Rabinovici** lets us take part in his life's journey, in which the element of displacement and delocation prevails. Having been born in Israel and brought to Austria by his parents, he now (after the 7th of October and the subsequent antisemitic outbursts) feels even more estranged and alienated. His story is personal and touching, but it is also a universal story about a diasporic situation.

It is important to break away from contemporary cultural 'debates', or rather their substitute, the gamified insult-slinging on social media. Individuals are constantly

interpellated to act and think by policing (controlling and condemning) others. This structure resembles a policing, bureaucratic or juridical debate, with the sole focus on policing, limiting, judging and administering others, identifying and punishing transgressions, violations, and so on. We believe it would be beneficial to make it more prominent on the international stage to formulate in a positive way – as a shared understanding – what a radical democracy means: accepting diversity, accepting the rights of queer people, accepting the rights of women, accepting all skin colours and cultural backgrounds. We believe this is precisely what is occurring: there are many younger individuals who recognise that this polarisation and fragmentation cannot continue indefinitely, and that a path towards common understanding must be found.

In this issue, **Oliver Marchart** explains how simplistic complexity prevents people from taking a clear position – a position that would be well argued and based on facts, able to think dialectically and see contradictions, without denial, nor just ambivalence. In his view, the recognition and endurance of contradictions should be achieved, and art has the means to show this. Meanwhile, **Nora Sternfeld** discusses different views presented by Michael Rothberg and Dan Diner. Rothberg proposes an approach of multi-directionality of memory and argues in favour of a productive interaction between different historical memories. Diner insists on concrete archaeologies that focus on what actually happened, which might stay as a contradiction. Sternfeld argues for agonistic contact zones, in which the aim is to argue in favour of historical work in shared/divided spaces of remembrance that see themselves as both participatory and reflexive, as well as taking a stance against antisemitism – one that insists on being both anti-fascist and anti-racist.

Curator **Sergio Edelsztein**, who lives between Berlin and Tel Aviv, questions the way art is used in the current political discourse. On the one hand, he argues for artworks that gain momentum through their powerful and convincing visual qualities, less on foregrounded political messages. On the other, he speculates that the protest against perceived censorship (the demand to not utter antisemitic statements) from the state in Germany ultimately helped to defund the art scene. Consequently, the art field has become a proxy battleground for other interests, resulting in the marginalisation of art unless it reflects an escalation in the culture wars. This incurs a significant cost: unless art is policing of some sort, (controlling and condemning), it becomes irrelevant. However, the essence of art lies in its ability to communicate in languages other than the codified ones. While these languages may not necessarily be more peaceful or inherently positive, their distinctiveness serves as laboratories for formal experimentation.

But let us look for common ground, for moments of solidarity and courage, beyond identity politics. We want to strengthen the personal agency aspect of the political struggles, in moments when real courage is required. There were very few Germans or people from other occupied fascist countries who opposed National Socialism, who hid people, made passports, or joined the resistance movements. One of these stories is told by artist **Leon Kahane** with his film *Vom Ich zum Wir – From I to We*. Kahane's grandfather and grandmother were persecuted as Jews; nevertheless, his grandfather fought in Spain against the dictatorship of Franco. He was arrested and the label under which he was imprisoned changed – first he was labelled a combatant, then a German and then a Jew. Both grandparents survived and became part of the elite who built up the GDR after the war, partly ignoring the growing antisemitism there.

In recent months, it has become evident that some parts of the global art scene do not perceive the Hamas massacres as a significant terrorist issue – rather the opposite.

However, we have also observed that there are numerous individuals who do recognise the situation, having fled Islamist rule from countries such as Iran, the exiled Iranians often demonstrating with pro-Israel activists. Of course people like DJane and author Hengameh Yaghoobifarah do not view Hamas as a liberation force, on the contrary. She has experienced what Islamists do to women's rights, queers and any personal freedom. To emphasise once again: victims of Islamist groups are predominantly Muslim. This shows once again that blanket support for Hamas will certainly not lead to an improvement in the situation of the Palestinians – quite the contrary.

In her contribution 'Migration, Identification, Queerness – Contradictions of Queer Theory Before and After October 7', artist and theorist **Ana Hoffner** discusses in detail the questionable blending of terrorist actions with queerness through different theoretical arguments. She describes how it is possible that the rape and brutal murder of women, children and men can be interpreted as justified resistance, and she dismantles these arguments. In doing so, she also reveals herself to be a person who has been marginalised in multiple ways: as a queer, Jewish migrant.

Cultural theorist **Veronika Kracher** traces how disgusting prejudices migrate between Jews, Black people and Queer people; depending on the occasion, the attributions are interchangeable. It would be comical if it weren't so sad and dangerous. Kracher's position is clearly defined as committed situated practice from a queer perspective.

One of the moments of solidarity beyond identity politics mentioned above is also described by **Michaela Dudley**. The Queer, Black author describes acts of solidarity between Jewish and Black minorities in the US. The US discourse should not forget about the injustice and violence against indigenous people, just as the crimes of slavery should never be forgotten, and it is and will remain necessary to keep this sensitivity for the foreseeable future. The same applies to crimes alongside colonialism: the countries that come to mind are the UK, Spain, Portugal – the whole of Europe, to be precise; even if colonial oppression in its worst form has ended, structural violence remains virulent in contemporary societies.

Hadas Kedar writes about a portrait series by a Bedouin artist, **Khader Oshah**. In doing so, she reflects on the complexity of her position as a Jewish, Ashkenazi Israeli art professional presenting Oshah's work. Valuable knowledge regarding changes in lifestyle, social structures, religious beliefs, and a sense of belonging to society arises from the portraits' imagery and their subjects' appearance. On the one hand, Arab Bedouins take part in Israeli society, including enlisting in the army, etc. On the other hand, many Arab Bedouin families were expelled from the new Israeli state in 1948, and the Islamic belief system creates an affinity with Palestinian identity. How did Oshah choose his subjects, and in what way do they resonate a wavering Israeli/Palestinian identity? What messages are being conveyed through his choices?

The Palestinian **Ahmad Mansour** describes his upbringing in an Arab village in the heart of Israel, about thirty kilometres from Tel Aviv. At the age of thirteen, due to anxiety about the future and a declining sense of social connection, he became radicalised. He was directly approached at the time by an imam and remained involved with an Islamist group until he was nineteen. He started to see things differently when he was studying in Tel Aviv and got to know the people he formerly saw as enemies. His outlook was changed not only by his fellow students, but also by reading all sorts of books and through the influence of his professors, who constantly encouraged their students to think critically and form their own opinions. After a terror act occurred close by,

Mansour decided to migrate to Germany and study there. He is now running an asso-
ciation with various projects focused on prevention work that promotes democracy
and combats extremism. Most of this work is based on theatre pedagogy using
role-playing methods. Those who work in the association engage in eye-level dialogues
with young people, present them with alternatives and provide food for thought.[9] This
work takes place in schools, asylum shelters, welcome classes, and prisons. Ahmad
Mansour's journey is a reminder that in Israel, about 20% of the population is of Arab
origin, and these citizens have the same civil rights as Jewish, Christian or Druse Israeli.

Conversations and encounters with artists like Hito Steyerl have always been very
important to us, ever since she was involved in *Games.Fights.Videos* – a project curated
by Dorothee Richter at Künstlerhaus Bremen in 2002 – with her film *Normalität 10*.[10]
Even if no specific contribution by Hito is included in this issue, we want to point out
the ways in which she has influenced our discourse. She always takes a very direct and
unsparing approach to certain problem areas. For example, she bought back a work
from the Berlin-based Julia Stoschek Collection because the family's money had also
been generated from Nazi crimes; it was also important for us that she withdrew her
work from documenta fifteen. This gesture helped to focus on the problem of dealing
with antisemitic narrative in Germany/Europe. In our conversation, the relation
between the RAF (Red Army Faction) and fascist connections came up. We were
already adults when the Oslo Accords were negotiated.[11]

We also found it interesting that in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Hito Steyerl referred to
the repeated neo-Nazi cooperation of the RAF and revolutionary cells.[12] To refresh
memories: the Palestinian assassination attempt on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olym-
pic Games was also based on cooperation with neo-Nazis. To understand the connec-
tion between very left-wing protagonists and other (right-wing/Islamic) terrorism, one
could think of this case: Gerd Albartus, a journalist and former member of the Revolu-
tionary Cells, later worked for the Green Party. He had connections with the Carlos
Group, which was then a subgroup of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
(PFLP).[13] One day, he was summoned to Beirut, flew there, and was executed as a trai-
tor. At the time, the Carlos Group was operating in a revolutionary mercenary capac-
ity, similar to the Wagner Group, which was paid for by Saddam Hussein, Algeria, and
repeatedly by the Stasi. They were hired by various secret services to carry out assassi-
nations. This occurred during the decadent phase of the 1970s Palestine solidarity
movement. Carlos is still alive and is currently incarcerated in France, where he has
become a radical Islamist who supported Osama bin Laden. This development appears
to be a possible progression. However, this phase of 'Palestine solidarity' is forgotten,
although it is possible that some individuals – those who remember the Entebbe aero-
plane hijacking – are aware of it.[14] Nevertheless, this phase of solidarity is not as preva-
lent in the younger generation, partly due to the lack of courage among the former
protagonists to speak out. A similar situation exists with Japanese-Palestine solidarity,
which was equally problematic. (Remember the Tokyo files from documenta fifteen).[15]
The aftermath of the Japanese terror group added to the left being largely marginalised
in Japan for the next four decades, as they lost credibility due to internal purges and
murders. Which makes it very obvious that to support and feed Palestinian people in
Gaza today, one has to use other channels than terrorist groups.

Besides other topics in the digital, algorithmic, new surveillance society, Hito Steyerl
came back to point out traces of the Nazi regime, for example in Linz, which thema-
tised the material traces of Nazi rule on a building and a bridge there.[16] And this will be
the link to the last contribution to the issue, by architectural theorist **Stephan Trüby**,

who looks into architectural space and fascism. The last article therefore opens the issue to another cultural field. Stephan Trüby and the research team worked for years on a research project that included symposia, walks through cities, workshops and a website. As a research project, 'Rechte Räume/Right-Wing Spaces' manifests not only via publications, but also via a digital 'Atlas of Authoritarian (Meta-) Politics in Architecture, Urbanism and Culture'[17]. From a curatorial perspective, the website combines in a meaningful way different events and outputs on a visually compelling and informative platform. Last but not least, this article expands the critique of right-wing spaces to include the critique of authoritarian spaces.

We hope that with this issue, we open up towards shared political aims, which will be manifested through equal opportunities, diminishing structural violence, and a diverse, feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-antisemitic society that will rethink and change the income inequalities and engage in the redistribution of wealth on a long-term basis. With this issue and its multiple voices, we hope to have shown that the struggle is about a political positioning and not about identity politics. These shared aims point towards a radical democracy, which will be a democracy to come.

————————————————

Notes

1 Tania Bruguera, *Where Your Ideas Become Civic Actions (100 Hours Reading "The Origins of Totalitarianism"*), exhibition at Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 07.02.–11.02.2024. It is another question whether a staged reading of the text would be the best way to discuss the relationship of the text to contemporary events and movements. And of course in this staged, rather static form, the project has lost its vigour from the first event in Cuba, when Tania Bruguera was not allowed to take part in the Havana Biennale. The following comes from the website of Hamburger Bahnhof: "The performance 'Where Your Ideas Become Civic Actions (100 Hours of Reading The Origins of Totalitarianism)' was first staged in 2015 at Bruguera's home in Havana when the artist was excluded from participating in the Havana Biennial due to political pressure. Bruguera and around 50 other people who expressed their solidarity against censorship and repression read Arendt's magnum opus continuously for 100 hours and analysed and discussed it with the audience present. The reading was broadcast to the street via loudspeakers and recorded. The Cuban authorities responded by drowning out the reading with jackhammers outside Bruguera's house. The reading ended with Bruguera being detained for several hours by the Cuban authorities. The reading gave rise to the collective INSTAR – Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt in Cuba, which was awarded the Arnold Bode Prize by the city of Kassel in 2021 and with which Tania Bruguera participated in documenta fifteen in 2022."

A commentary by the left-wing daily newspaper *TAZ* on the recent action reads: "A group of activists used an art performance – a public reading of Hannah Arendt – for their protest against Israel. It was a protest of a special kind, with a series of peculiar statements. The first act of this protest culminated in the slogan: 'Palestine will set us (!) free.' An astonishing fantasy of redemption. Later, they returned to shout down the director of the Jewish Museum Frankfurt in a second act. When the artistic organiser affirmed their solidarity with the Palestinian cause, they shouted: 'You are still a white person' (a flaw she shares with many activists). As if that wasn't bad enough, they hurled at the entire assembly: 'You're just performing – we're taking action.' That was, in a sense, the climax of their performance. It's hard to imagine that this serves the Palestinian cause. But then, Palestine is supposed to 'liberate us (!)' as well. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about this confused antisemitic outburst was that it was directed against an audience critical of Israel. Here, a new difference was staged: the difference between criticism and delusion. The old artistic device of provocation has

been reduced to absurdity here: art as a space of possibility no longer works." Isolde Charim Knapp, 'Wenn das Unversöhnliche noch unversöhnlicher wird', *TAZ*, Berlin, 27.02.2024. Translated by D.Richter.

2 The genocide researcher Prof. Dr. Kristin Platt (Institute for Diaspora Research and Genocide Studies, University of Bochum) asserts that genocide is defined as a permanent act of one-sided state violence; the current conflict was not started by Israel; violence from both sides excludes the accusation of genocide. This researcher also describes the genocide accusation as abstruse; she considers it to be a political strategy by South Africa to divert attention from its own violations. Actions that cause particular harm to the civilian population could possibly be considered war crimes; the problem is that Hamas has been using civilian structures to conceal its positions for years and was bombing Israel for years and in this conflict heavily for months as well.

3 Britta Petersen, 'Speaking the Language of Tyrants', website of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, www. https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/51530/speaking-the-language-of-tyrants.

4 M/otherland, exhibition at the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich: artist Ruth Patir, curator Maayan Sheleff, 17.09.–09.10.2021. M/otherLand, https://oncurating-space.org/m-otherland/; publication see https://on-curating.org/books-reader-catalogue/m-otherland.html.

5 We quote here from *OnCurating*, Issue 7: Machine-sewed thread, paper, series, each 42 x 56 cm, Slide projection with sound, 2 slide projectors, 160 slides, CD, variable dimensions, Music: Michaela Melián, *Strasse*, 2003, 8:52 min, Produced by: Michaela Melián and Carl Oesterhelt

The drawings for *Strasse* are close to the project *Triangel*. They both relate to Bernward Vesper's novel *Die Reise* (The Journey,1972), in which he describes his childhood on the Triangel estate in the Lüneberg Heath, his travels, and politicisation in the postwar period. The drawings, produced using a sewing machine, were done from photographs taken while driving through Germany, in the Lüneburg Heath (Heimatmuseum Neukirchen, Bergen-Belsen Memorial), on German motorways and in sites in Munich (Odeonplatz, Hofgarten, University, High-Fish-Kommune, Frauenkommune, various of Fassbinder's film locations): the continuous, machine-sewn black thread follows the outlines of landscape, buildings and roads.

Vesper was the son of the nationalistic, right-wing folk poet Will Vesper. Substantial parts of his autobiographical work *Die Reise* (The Journey) record his childhood, school years and youth in the seemingly idyllic town of Gifhorn in the 1950s, as well as his suffering under the authoritarian regime in his family in the village of Triangel. He then began studying German and Sociology at the University of Tübingen. During that time he met Gudrun Ensslin, the later RAF terrorist, with whom he went on to establish the publishing house Studio Neue Literatur in 1963. The Studio published only a few books. Of the planned complete edition of Will Vesper's works, which Gudrun Ensslin declared to be a "task for national Germany" in a review for the newspaper *Das deutsche Wort* in September 1963, only one volume was ultimately published; see https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernward_Vesper. In 1971 Vesper was admitted to the psychiatric hospital in Haar, near Munich, and subsequently transferred to the psychiatric ward of the University Hospital Hamburg-Eppendorf, where on 15 May 1971 he committed suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills.

For images of Melián's work, see https://www.on-curating.org/issue-7-reader/carte-blanche-strasse-2003.html.

6 Much evidence could be found. Here is a short paragraph written by Amnesty International in 2022: "Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip continued to heavily restrict freedom of expression, association and assembly. They also held scores of people in arbitrary detention and subjected many to torture and other ill-treatment.

Justice for serious human rights violations remained elusive. The Hamas de facto authorities in Gaza carried out the first executions in five years." See https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/palestine-state-of/report-palestine-state-of/.

7 See Ulrich Gutmaier, 'Aktivist aus Gaza zwischen den Fronten. Hamza Howidy zeigt, dass es auch anders geht', https://taz.de/Aktivist-aus-Gaza-zwischen-den-Fronten/!6092641/.

8 Simon Strick, *Rechte Gefühle: Affekte und Strategien des digitalen Faschismus*, Bielefeld, 2021.

9 See https://www.mind-prevention.com/.

10 Hito Steyerl, *Normalität 10*, 1999–2000, 32 min., Beta SP. The destruction of Jewish graves; the march of neo-Nazis in front of the Brandenburg Gate; the media discussion of antisemitic acts of violence: in short documentary episodes on everyday political life in Germany and Austria, film-maker Steyerl not only poses the question of the current 'normality' of such events, but also of the conditions of filmic reflection; as part of *Games.Fights.Videos*, Künstlerhaus Bremen 2002, curated by Dorothee Richter.

11 See Wikipedia: "The Oslo Accords are a pair of agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): the Oslo I Accord, signed in Washington, D.C., in 1993; and the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba, Egypt, in 1995. They marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process aimed at achieving a peace treaty based on Resolution 242 and Resolution 338 of the United Nations Security Council, and at fulfilling the 'right of the Palestinian people to self-determination'. The Oslo process began after secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, resulting in both the recognition of Israel by the PLO and the recognition by Israel of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner in bilateral negotiations.
Among the notable outcomes of the Oslo Accords was the creation of the Palestinian National Authority, which was tasked with the responsibility of conducting limited Palestinian self-governance over parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo_Accords. This was the fourth time that the Palestinian leaders rejected a two states resolution.

12 "Apparently, the Palestinian terrorists who carried out a massacre during the 1972 Olympic Games in Munich cooperated with German neo-Nazis. This is revealed by old files from the security authorities, quoted by *Der Spiegel*. According to these files, weapons of the same type as those used by the Palestinians were found on the neo-Nazis Wolfgang Abramowski and Willi Pohl [...]. Later, the neo-Nazis were apparently betrayed and arrested, and in 1974 they were only convicted of the unauthorised possession of weapons. In the 1972 Olympic attack, the Palestinian terrorists took Israeli athletes hostage in order to free Palestinians from prisons. A police rescue operation failed. Eleven athletes and one policeman were killed." (translation by the author) *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18.06.2012, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/olympia-attentat-von-1972-terroristen-hatten-offenbar-hilfe-von-neonazis-1.1385442.

13 See Oliver Tolmein, 'Antisemitismus und palästinensischer Befreiungskampf', 12.03.1992, from *konkret* 2 and 3 (1992): documentation of a text by Revolutionäre Zellen (RZ) and a commentary by Tolmein, https://www.tolmein.de/linke-geschichte/details/artikel/antisemitismus-und-palaestinensischer-befreiungskampf-1235.html. "In mid-December 1991, the RZ issued a statement in which they took the murder of an RZ member by a Palestinian group as an opportunity for self-critical reflection on the history not only of their own anti-imperialist practice. Under the heading 'Gerd Albartus is dead', they deal above all with the hijacking of an aeroplane to Entebbe in 1976, the selection of Jewish passengers carried out there with the participation of two RZ members, the antisemitism of German leftists expressed therein and the national-revolutionary narrow-mindedness of anti-imperialist groups in the FRG." The complete text of the Revolutionäre Zellen can be found on the

website; here is an excerpt: "The purpose of the publication is very simple: we want to prevent a comrade who is important to us from disappearing without a trace. We want to resist the impression that one of our own can be killed without protest, even if we lack the means to retaliate. We want to extinguish any shred of doubt that there is any justification for this decision that is consistent with our own standards. And we want to finally, finally put an end to the gruesome and grotesque situation in which his family, friends continue to live in the false certainty that he is safe, albeit gone and untraceable. For us, Gerd's personal integrity is beyond question. We have only vague information about the accusations the group made against him, but even more details could not shake us in the certainty that there is not a single argument to explain his shooting. Whatever the motives of those who killed him may have been – they lie beyond his person. On the contrary, it is one of the macabre paradoxes of this story that Gerd, in whose political biography practical support for the Palestinian resistance has always played a central role, fell victim to one of the very groups that sees itself as part of this resistance." Translated by the authors.

14 This is a slightly abridged quote from Wikipedia, https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Entebbe: "On the morning of 27 June 1976, Air France flight 139 was due to fly from Tel Aviv via Athens to Paris. The Airbus A300 aircraft with a crew of 12 and 258 passengers was diverted to Benghazi airport in Libya, where it remained for more than six hours. The aircraft was refuelled and took off. After a five-hour flight, it finally landed on the morning of 28 June at Entebbe Airport near Kampala, the capital of Uganda. The hijackers were two terrorists from the group 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – External Operations' (PFLP-EO), which was an organised group between 1968 and 1977; the group was led by Wadi Haddad, who was responsible for numerous aircraft hijackings and had been operating independently of the PFLP leadership since 1972, as well as Wilfried Böse and Brigitte Kuhlmann, two founding members of the German Revolutionary Cells. They named their unit 'Guevara (of) Gaza Commando' in honour of the PFLP fighter Mohammad al-Aswad (1946–1973), who was killed in battle with Israeli soldiers. The four who boarded in Athens were armed with firearms, hand grenades, and explosives in their luggage. The leader of the commando was Böse, who introduced himself to the passengers from the cockpit as the new captain of the aircraft under the code name 'Basil al-Kubaisy' (after a leading member of the PFLP who was murdered in 1973). At the Entebbe airport, the four hijackers were joined by other armed PFLP-EO fighters. Fais Jaber – a close confidant of Haddad since the founding of the PFLP – took over command from Böse. The plane hijacking was intended to extort the release of a total of 53 prisoners from prisons in Israel, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Switzerland. These included members of the Red Army Faction, the 2nd June Movement, and Kōzō Okamoto from the Japanese Red Army. The hijackers also demanded five million US dollars from the French government for the return of the plane. The passengers were held hostage in the old transit hall of the Entebbe terminal. The terrorists 'selected' the Jewish passengers out of the others. In addition to the Israeli citizens, there were 22 French nationals, one stateless person, and the American couple Karfunkel, of Hungarian-Jewish origin. The remaining hostages were released. The remaining hostages without Israeli passports were identified – sometimes falsely – as Jews on the basis of their supposedly Jewish names or other evidence. This selection was undertaken by the German terrorists Böse and Kuhlmann. When a Holocaust survivor showed Böse his tattooed prisoner number, reminding him of the selection in the concentration camps, Böse replied to the implied accusation that he was not a Nazi, but an idealist. The Israelis drew up plans for an intervention and rebuilt parts of the hall. Eventually, four Israeli Hercules transport planes, accompanied by Phantom jets from the Israeli Air Force, flew low to Entebbe and landed at the airport at night. They were followed

by two Boeing 707s, one as an operations centre, the other with medical equipment, which flew to Nairobi airport in Kenya. The Israeli task force of about a hundred men consisted of a staff unit led by Dan Shomron and associated communications and support troops, a strike force of 29 men led by Yonatan Netanyahu, including Sajeret Matkal soldiers in various groups, and a reinforcement force responsible for securing the perimeter, destroying the Ugandan Air Force MiG fighters, securing the takeover of the hostages, and refuelling the planes. The Israeli fighters stormed the building and, following orders, shot at all those standing. The fighting lasted less than an hour, killing all seven hostage-takers, three hostages, at least 20 Ugandan soldiers and Yonatan Netanyahu. Over a hundred elite soldiers from the Sajeret Matkal and several Mossad employees were involved in the operation." For more detailed additional information, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Entebbe_raid.

15 The Tokyo Files were mostly uncommented Palestinian propaganda films. I just want to emphasise that of course one can show these artefacts; curatorially, they could, for example, be accompanied by the film *Ici et Ailleurs* (Here and Elsewhere, 1976) by Jean-Luc Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville. They had already dissected these kinds of propaganda films with filmic means, and reflected on what it means to look at other people's struggle from our living room. The film also deconstructed the patterns which are used to establish a heroic subject.

16 *Der Bau. Unter uns* (The Building. In Our Midst). Public installation as part of Linz09 – European Capital of Culture 2009. Realisation/Collaboration with Hito Steyerl.

17 See https://rechteraeume.net/about (scroll for the English version).

—————————————

Michaela Conen, PhD, is a cultural manager and scholar whose work focuses on strategic communication, institutional branding and diversity-oriented public engagement in the arts and academia. She leads the Strategic Marketing Department at Berlin University of the Arts (UdK Berlin), where she develops university-wide positioning strategies. Her academic and professional interests include antisemitism prevention, cultural policy and the role of public institutions in democratic societies. She holds a doctorate in Cultural and Media Management from the University of Music and Theatre Hamburg.

Daniel Laufer is an artist and curator, teaching artistic and aesthetic practice at Leuphana University Lüneburg and the State Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. He creates hybrid film installations merging cinematic language with visual art. His dreamlike, non-linear narratives explore memory, myth, and storytelling, destabilizing temporal logic and generating immersive spaces where perception becomes a stage. Drawing on a media-archaeological approach, he combines historical and contemporary filmic techniques with language, painting, scenery, and performance into intermedial constellations. He has exhibited internationally, including Artists Space, New York; Jewish Museum Berlin; Jewish Museum Frankfurt; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Kunstverein Hannover; Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof; and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Kunsthalle Lingen and Rib Rotterdam (2026). He has also published in *Texte zur Kunst* and the *Journal of the Dubnow Institute*, among other publications.

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has

worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien / Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

Attitude and Resistance.
An Epic Battle for Values and Worldviews.
An interview with Jutta Ditfurth
led by OnCurating

OnCurating: In your book *Attitude and Resistance. An Epic Battle for Values and Worldviews*[1], you describe how 'race' as a concept functioned (and still functions), which defines social difference as a relation of domination. I was fascinated by how you describe how the nobility was located as a "race" in the Middle Ages and how the invented relations of skin colours with their associated racist attributions came about. Can you please explain this briefly?

Jutta Ditfurth: For centuries, the *German* concept of race' (which is ethnically and biologically charged and differs from the English race) served to justify social inequality among white people. The slaves of ancient Greece, for example, were White. White populations in Europe, such as the Franks and Gauls, stigmatized each other as inferior. The nobility was the ruling class for centuries and defined itself as a race superior to peasants and day labourers. Both groups were White. But if you were malnourished and had to work hard physically, you would have calluses on your hands and your blood wouldn't shimmer blue through your skin like it does with fine noble ladies who protected themselves from the sun. That's where the racist term 'blue blood' came from. As a child, other children scratched me because they wanted to know if what their parents were saying was true. The concept of "race", which is attached to skin colour, came later.

The 'race' theory, based on the social construction and fusion of (actual and supposed) skin colours with (assumed) character traits, originated largely from the German master philosophers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Skin colours were political colours. Before the Chinese were made 'yellow', for centuries, European travelers described them as being as white-skinned like themselves. But yellow was the colour of the Chinese imperial court, what a subjugation through European arrogance! Native Americans were sun-tanned people according to the first European travelogues before they

became 'redskins". They were made into a 'race' when they began to resist extermination. Skin colours are political colours.

The Europeans became increasingly pale and superior in European travelogues. Immanuel Kant's 'Reason' and Hegel's 'World Spirit' became the cronies of European imperialism and its colonization of the world. The Enlightenment was ambivalent. It contained humanism and universalism but also its opposite, capitalist 'reason' for the purpose of the imperialist and colonialist exploitation of man and nature.

With the colonial conquests of parts of the African continent, things became easier for racists. While people in Africa had very different skin colours, they were undeniably darker than the typical German. This argument was used with the evil intent of subjugation. Hegel wrote: 'The N*** represents' the 'natural man in all his wildness and unruliness ... there is nothing resembling humanity to be found in this character.' Hannah Arendt believed that African people at the time of their 'discovery' possessed neither 'human reason' nor 'human feelings' and had not even 'produced a primitive culture' that surpassed that of animals. The racial devaluation of Black people combined with their lower susceptibility to European diseases—in contrast with Native Americans—proved to be used as a justification and of tremendous economic benefit during the Atlantic slave trade.

During Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period, the German aristocracy was Christian and antisemitic. Around 1800, Romanticism developed as a countermovement of the German elites to the French Revolution, whose idea of equality threatened their rule. They feared social equality, humanism and universalism. In the 19th century, antisemitism became increasingly aggressive in parallel with every economic crisis. Theologians, journalists, teachers and poets led the way.

The First World War during 1914-1918 was, as far as the Germans were concerned, a *völkisch* antisemitic propaganda machine. In 1924, my great-granduncle Börries Freiherr von Münchhausen was concerned about the "purity of blood' and 'purity of race' of the German nobility. By this he meant an opposition to the 'fremdrassige' (foreign race of) Jews. This question was 'the most important question of our entire nation'. The requirements for the 'Jew-free racial purity' of an aristocratic family tree were more drastic than those of the SS later on. For example, Münchhausen and his friend Joseph Goebbels 'cleansed' the Berlin Academy of Arts from 1933 onwards. (I wrote about this in my book '*The Baron, the Jews and the Nazis. Aristocratic Antisemitism*'.[2]

OnCurating: How did the close relationship between the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Husseini, and the Nazi leaders Adolf Hitler and Goebbels come about?

Jutta: Jews, Druze, Christians and Arabs settled in a region that was later called Palestine. This is where the kingdoms of the Jews had been 3000 years ago, until their expulsion by Roman invaders. Palestine was a small region of the Roman Empire and later, until the end of the First World War, a district of the Ottoman Empire, to which Jews had long since returned. Many new Jewish people returned from the 19th century onwards, fleeing discrimination and persecution in Europe.

After the First World War, the Ottoman Empire disappeared, and the region became a British Mandate territory. Mohammed Amin al-Husseini was the representative of one of the most influential Arab clans. For tactical reasons, the British Mandate made him Grand Mufti of Jerusalem from 1921 and President of the Muslim Supreme Council in 1936. The colonial rulers thus made him the most influential Arab in the Mandate of Palestine. There were moderate Arab clans such as the Nashashibi, who embraced Western modernity and were prepared to negotiate with the British and Jews. If they had prevailed, there might have been a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one since 1948.

The German Nazis were very interested in concluding a pact with Husseini. The Germans had started and lost the First World War. Now they were gearing up for the next world war and plotting against the Jews. Husseini often came to Berlin to visit and usually stayed for a long time, well provided for by the Nazi regime with a villa, weapons and money. The joint plan of the Nazi regime and the Grand Mufti was to exterminate all

German edition of *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years*

Jewish people in the Middle East and North Africa. Fortunately, Germany lost the Second World War. But the expulsion of the Jewish population from almost all Arab states in the region succeeded—except in Israel.

OnCurating: How did Husseini assert his supremacy among the Arab families in Israel and Palestine?

Jutta: Husseini had opposing Arabs, who wanted to communicate with the Jewish people, murdered. It was also a reactionary cultural struggle over Arab identity. For example, Arabs in Palestine were occasionally murdered by Husseini Arabs because they wore modern clothes or because some women did not veil themselves. Before the rule of the Mufti, certain modern Palestinian women followed Parisian fashion, and modern Palestinian men wore the tarbush (fez) with their suits. These modern, democratic Arabs fell under the wheel of regression and repression.

The Nazi regime supported Husseini and financed 'liberation uprisings' of Arabs against Jews, including massacres between 1936 to 1939. Just as Judith Butler and other supposed leftists today falsely describe the massacre of 7 October 2023 as a 'liberation struggle', the antisemitic pogroms of the 1930s in the Middle East are reinterpreted by the völkisch 'left' as 'anti-colonial Arab revolts' right up to the present day.

In 1943, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler telegraphed Amin al Husseini: "The National Socialist movement of Greater Germany has, since its inception, written the fight against world Jewry on its banner. It has therefore always followed with particular sympathy the struggle of the freedom-loving Arabs, especially in Palestine, against the Jewish invaders." This was the firm basis "of the natural alliance between National Socialist Greater Germany and the freedom-loving Mohammedans of the whole world. ... Greetings ... for the happy execution of your struggle until the certain final victory [Endsieg]."[3]

The Grand Mufti set up SS divisions in Bosnia, visited the Auschwitz-Monowitz extermination camp and was personally responsible for the deaths of thousands of Jewish children. Even two or three years after the end of the Second World War, this war criminal remained the leading representative of the Arab Palestinians. He was considered a hero by those who had sided with Hitler against the British Empire and wanted to expel Jewish people. Incidentally, this is also one of the reasons why *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* are still in bookshops in the Middle East today .

OnCurating: You describe the post-war period as a paradoxical time, for a very short time even the Soviet Union and the USA were in agreement, they voted for the partition plan into an Israeli state and a Palestinian state. What can you say about this? What were the paradoxes and why didn't a two-state solution come about?

Jutta: In 1947, the plan for the partition of the Mandate of Palestine into the state of Israel and a Palestinian state was adopted by the UN General Assembly. The USA voted in favour. In a passionate speech, the representative of the Soviet Union, Andrei Gromyko, pleaded for a state of Israel with reference to the horrors of the Shoah. But the Arab side rejected the Palestinian territory offered to them. So, in 1948, Israel alone was founded in the designated region.

The war criminal Husseini pursued a policy that led his people into the refugee camps. The wealthy man was the political mentor of his young relative Yasser Arafat, who had been born in Egypt and was politically close to the Muslim Brotherhood. The old man sent the young one to be trained in weapons and war technology by German Wehrmacht officers living in exile in Egypt.

Arafat invented the Palestinians as nation state people. Previously, Palestinians were described as all the people who lived in the Ottoman district of Palestine: Jews,

Christians, Druze, Arabs. Now a national identity was constructed. Arafat founded the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The kufeya, the Palestinian scarf, was originally a cloth used by Iraqi farmers and agricultural workers to protect themselves from heat and dust. Arafat made it into the Palestinian symbol of his war campaign against Israel. All peace agreements failed because of him. The Palestinians under Arafat sided with the Soviet Union during the Cold War. I met Arafat in Moscow in 1987 at the Kremlin and I was not impressed.

OnCurating: The left was divided early on in its assessment of Israel, even though both the Soviet Union under Stalin and the USA voted in favor of the state of Israel in 1948. So why didn't the two-state solution come about?

Jutta: The German leftists who aligned themselves with the Soviet Union did not immediately become opponents of Israel. There were also a lot of other conflicts and Israel was not the center of attention. For example, the process of African independence, the Algerian War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and later Chile. We, undogmatic, anti-authoritarian leftists supported international liberation movements for social revolutions, but the majority of us were on the side of the Jewish people and Israel. That was the lesson we learned from Nazi history. We had great sympathy for the small country that made a desert land flourish with extraordinary effort and tried out socialist concepts of community in the kibbutzim.

Very important for young people like me were Jewish teachers like Herbert Marcuse, who came back to Germany with his books and his open-mindedness for insecure young people and encouraged us to think critically. Literature and art came back from exile. Every debate about modern art showed us what was behind the obdurate lies that surrounded us in Germany.

During the Cold War, the left was roughly divided into a dogmatic wing that leaned firmly on the Soviet Union big brother and was largely uncritical of the GDR as a supposedly socialist state. After 1945, in view of the Holocaust and the many millions of Soviet citizens who had been murdered by the Germans, Stalin could not openly show himself to be the Jew-hater that he was. He called his antisemitism 'anti-Zionism'. This is one of the poisonous traces that still runs through the dogmatic left today, including support for Hamas, BDS and the supposedly pro-Palestinian 'solidarity movement'. These are least of all concerned with a free, self-determined life for Palestinian people. It is still about the hatred of Jews.

The label 'revolutionary movement' for Palestinians living in various Arab states in reality covered up existing feudal social structures, ethnic nationalism, hostility to democracy, reactionary religiosity, sexism, hostility to LGBTQ* people, antisemitism and the absence of universal human rights.

Israel's victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 thrilled the German media. From *Der Spiegel* to the *BILD* newspaper, they shouted 'Blitzkrieg!' and celebrated Moshe Dayan like a reincarnated Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who somehow won the Second World War for the Germans after all. Absurd.

Young leftists were awakened from their romantic kibbutz dreams by the abrupt change in the situation and were confused. I was only 15 years old in 1967, lived in the countryside and didn't understand much of anything at first. Biographies also contain many coincidences. I was just lucky not to fall into the camp of 'left-wing' antisemites. I started to read. I went to the private Elisabeth von Thadden School in Heidelberg. The founder of the girls' school had been executed by the Nazis in Plötzensee. When I started studying at Heidelberg University in 1970 and working as a student assistant, my first employer was Rolf Rendtorff, the new rector. He had co-founded the German Israeli Society in 1966 and was also a fierce opponent of the Vietnam War and a defender of radical left-wing student groups. Fortunately for me, I soon found political groups in which left-wing Jews also worked and where we also read texts by Jewish Marxists.

OnCurating: What is the argument of the alleged world domination of capital that distinguishes between 'good' and 'bad' capital and then calls the 'bad' capital antisemitic? How do the arguments of part of the left meet those of the ultra-right?

Jutta: With the emergence of the capitalist mode of production in the sixteenth century, the lack of understanding of its structure began. When people did not understand something at all—storms, natural disasters, epidemics—they invented gods or witches as culprits or, as in the case of the plague, the Jews. The failure to understand the structures of capitalism led to its personalization. The old anti-Jewish codes about the Jews' supposedly special relationship to money were revived. The fact that the Christians had forced Jewish people to trade in money and obtain special qualifications to do so came from this, and this had long been forgotten. Without historical knowledge and political-economic

analysis, however, capitalism remains inscrutable. Long story short: antisemites divide the owners of capital from the capital. They attribute an exchange value of a product to 'grubbing capital' and artificially separate it from 'productive capital', which generates the use value of the goods. In the end, in the view of antisemites, capital is split into supposedly 'unproductive' and 'productive' capital.

But the crazy thing is that the production of a product and its utilization require both, so capitalism is inseparable. How can a product be utilized without being sold? So, it needs accounting, management, distribution, trade, credit, foreign exchange—in other words, banks. To the antisemite, anyone who trades in money and takes interest appears to be a particularly evil capitalist. This gives rise to the delusion that interest-bearing capital exploits producing capital, that 'grubbing' capital plunders 'producing' capital and, ultimately, that 'the Jew' exploits the Christian German worker.

Since the cross-fronts (leftists joining forces with right-wingers) of 2014, antisemitic terms from the Weimar Republic have returned to the dogmatic, partly Stalinist sections of the left. We find them in the new Russia-friendly 'peace movement' but also in the pro-Hamas Palestine solidarity scene. We recognize them by their language and their images: "international financial oligarchy", "East Coast", "Jewish world power", "child murderers", "Jews as child murderers", slogans such as "free Palestine from the river to the sea" and "Intifada for ever". As the annihilation of Israel and the death of all Jewish people. Antisemitism is the *archetype* of all conspiracy ideologies and adapts to every era without ever wanting anything other than to destroy all Jews.

OnCurating: The citizens of Israel are about 75% Jews, 20% Arab Israelis, 5% Christians and Druze, what rights do they have in Israel? Why do many Palestinians still live in camps in the surrounding Arab countries? In which countries do Palestinians have civil rights?

Jutta: There is no doubt that Israeli society, like all capitalist nations, is unfortunately also a racist and socially unequal society—like Germany, England, the USA etc. But Arabs, Druze and Christians have the same rights in Israel as Jewish Israelis. They can become members of parliament, judges, doctors, officers. There are glaring social inequalities—like in Germany, England and the USA. Is that why we are calling for the dissolution of these states? It is analytically wrong to describe Israel as an apartheid regime. Anyone who seriously claims this

has no idea how completely different the apartheid regime of South Africa was organized—a subjugated, segregated black world with separate workplaces, schools, hospitals and residential areas. Love affairs between Blacks and Whites were criminal offenses. If you really want to know, you can read about it. To call Israel an apartheid regime is an expression of political illiteracy with antisemitic intent.

The tragedy of the Arab refugees from Palestine in 1947-48 was that they were at the mercy of the strategic plans of the leaders of the Arab states, who had no interest in integrating them. Israeli historians such as Benny Morris have researched whether, how and by whom the Arabs were expelled from the region of Palestine in 1947-1948. It is a complicated picture. Many were expelled by Jewish military and paramilitary forces. In many places, the Arab leadership chased away their own people to clear the battlefield, promising them that they would soon return to a 'Jew-free Palestine'. Many therefore took their house keys with them.

Of the Arab-Palestinian refugees from 1947-48, no more than 30,000 people are still alive today. Only they experienced the expulsion themselves. But today UNRWA counts around 5 million Palestinian refugees. Why is that? Palestinians are the only refugees in the world who can inherit their refugee status, which is paid for. They are also the only refugee group that has its own UN aid organization, UNRWA. The rest of *the world's refugees* are looked after by the UNHCR. It is a contradictory special status that creates conflict. Palestinians live in some miserable conditions in the surrounding Arab nations in around fifty-eight UNRWA refugee camps. They are an instrument that can be used against Israel if necessary. This is particularly easy under the radical right-wing Benjamin Netanyahu government and its brutal warfare.

On the other hand, they are showered with donations, most of which flow into the pockets of corrupt leaders such as Hamas and other jihadist organizations. In the camps, even the youngest children are taught to hate Jews. How is a free, self-determined Palestinian nation supposed to emerge under these conditions.

A solidarity movement that supports these conditions and defends Hamas does not mean well by the Palestinian people. It defends, mostly unconsciously, the crimes of their ancestors. And it serves its own unreflected, growing antisemitism. The ideals of a genuine social revolution of free and equal people are being turned on

their head here. What presents itself today as pro-Palestinian resistance has docking points for the ethnic nationalism and Jew-hatred of the old and new right. It is frightening to imagine what is brewing here and what could turn into a new global nationalist, antisemitic mass movement.

OnCurating: What does UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 of 1975 say? And what stereotypes did the propaganda use, with what justification? And what were the political conditions in 1991 when this resolution was deleted?

Jutta: The central sentence was: "The General Assembly … determines that zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination." A "low point in the history of the United Nations", as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan judged years later. The motion was submitted by Somalia. It was supported by 19 Arab states, the West African states of Dohomey and Guinea, Afghanistan, Cuba and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Ukraine. He received 51.8 percent. The votes of the Soviet Union, China, the Arab states, Mexico and Brazil were decisive. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the UN General Assembly withdrew the shabby resolution in 1991. The still-existing Soviet Union voted in favour of the repeal, as did some of the African states.

However, the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, returned to the old hatred of Jewish people. Large Christian churches and US foundations (Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation and Rockefeller Brothers Fund) financed around 100 NGOs with a clear agenda against Israel. The NGO Forum in Durban in 2001 mutated into an antisemitic hate festival with swastikas and Hitler quotes. The South African Palestinian Solidarity Committee distributed the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, probably the most famous antisemitic work in the world.

In this run-up to the founding of the BDS campaign against Israel (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions), Christian anti-Judaism and Muslim hatred of Jews were combined. Where Hamas is not allowed to operate internationally because it is on terror lists, BDS was able to step in as its foreign policy arm. The central demands of BDS are all aimed at the destruction of Israel. Probably the most important is the right of return for all Palestinian refugees and their descendants. Israel has only 9 million inhabitants, including Christians, Arabs and Druze. An unlimited right of return for all 5 million descendants of Palestinian refugees would be the demographic and

political end for Israel. The aim of the BDS campaign is the eradication of the small Jewish state of Israel and in its place the establishment of a Muslim state of Palestine "from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea", i.e. across the entire territory of Israel. This is the only way to understand the battle cry "Free Palestine from the river (Jordan) to the (Mediterranean) sea".

Imagine a comparable demand for all Germans expelled from Silesia or Poland during the Second World War! Millions of German 'displaced persons' would be forced to 'return' to East Prussia (Russia), Silesia (Poland) or the Sudetenland (Czech Republic and Slovakia) as great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchildren and great-great-great-grandchildren. Wars would be inevitable. When Germany surrendered in May 1945, there were 10 to 12 million 'displaced persons' (DP) on its territory, the majority of whom were survivors of labour, concentration and extermination camps. They spoke thirty-five different languages. When the Western Allies handed over responsibility for the DPs to Germany in 1950, only 150,000 people were still living in camps. Millions had been returned to their countries of origin, taken into the Federal Republic or emigrated to third countries.

The misfortune of the Arab refugees from Palestine in 1947-48 was that they were at the mercy of the strategic plans of the Arab leaders, who had no interest in integrating the refugees. Instead, they used them as an instrument against Israel.

But the campaign against Israel has already borne stinking fruit. The same US Christian foundations that funded the NGOs against Israel are now funding BDS and its support groups Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and Breaking the Silence. Judith Butler, Naomi Klein and Noam Chomsky sat on the JVP advisory board. Butler judged the massacre of 7 October to be legitimate "armed resistance" and "non-antisemitic". Twenty years earlier, Butler, a professor at the University of Berkeley, had played a decisive role in opening the doors of US universities to BDS by bringing Omar Barghouti to podiums and introducing him to the public. Barghouti never left any doubt that the victory of the BDS campaign would mean the annihilation of Israel.

OnCurating: How do you explain that all these relatively easy-to-research facts are ignored by many young people in the West who see themselves as left-wing and on the side of oppressed people?

Poster at *documenta fifteen*

Jutta: They know so little and hardly read, and they have probably never been interested in the anti-Jewish crimes and war crimes of their ancestors. An example: since 1945, old Nazis and new right-wingers have raised the accusation of a 'cult of guilt'. The Germans were being forced to atone for the Shoah, which they had nothing to do with. Of course, the term 'cult of guilt' was nothing more than an aggressive defense of the Germans' guilt and shared responsibility for the world war and the Shoah. The political right spoke of 'national masochism', with which German national pride was to be brought to its knees.

This secondary antisemitism in the form of a defense against guilt never ceased. In 1986-87, historians wanted to relativize the Holocaust by describing it as a consequence of crimes committed by the Soviet Union under Stalin. In 1998, Martin Walser spoke in the Paulskirche about the "moral mace of Auschwitz" and received a standing ovation from the entire political and cultural elite.

After the horrific pogrom of 7 October, BDS supporters adopted the slogan of the "cult of guilt". Do they remember? Eleven days after the worst anti-Jewish massacre since the Holocaust, antisemitic demonstrators chanted "Free Palestine from German Guilt" in front of the Federal Foreign Office! And "From the River to sea Palestine

will be free"! These new-right, supposedly 'left-wing' demonstrators wanted to free themselves from responsibility for the crimes of their ancestors in one fell swoop—preferably by wiping out Israel.

OnCurating: How does it work that BDS networks threaten cultural figures such as Claude Lanzmann, Leonard Cohen and others, why are so many people afraid to criticize the BDS movement?

Jutta: When the Jewish-French documentary filmmaker Claude Lanzmann, creator of the masterpiece *Shoah,* came to Hamburg in October 2009 to show his film *Warum Israel* (*Pourquoi Israel*, 1973) at the B-Movie arthouse cinema, the event was violently prevented. Members of the neighboring anti-imperialist center B5, the Tierrechtsaktion Nord (TAN) and other 'anti-imperialist' groups blocked access to the cinema with objects, fists and antisemitic shouting ("Jewish pigs"). "Never before has the screening of one of my films been prevented anywhere in the world," said Lanzmann, shocked.

One of those politically responsible was Susann Witt-Stahl, who comes from a DKP background, is the founder of Tierrechtsaktion Nord (TAN) and is still editor-in-chief of *Melodie & Rhythmus* at *Junge Welt-Verlag* 8. She is a key string-puller for antisemitic and BDS-supporting actions in the cultural sector, including within the trade unions. The BDS milieu threatens those who think differently. Since the Revolutionary May Day Demo Berlin 2016, it has been documented how BDS critics are not only insulted but also beaten up.

OnCurating: Have you personally been threatened and by whom?

Jutta: Yes. My group ÖkoLinX had written a flyer critical of BDS for this demonstration. Before that, after many years of cooperation, we had left the alliance for the annual Revolutionary May Day demo because it had been hijacked by BDS- and Hamas-friendly organizations. With other left-wing groups joining in or pretending not to see through the conflict, it no longer made sense. We wrote a two-page leaflet about the events and distributed it at the edge of the demo. We were attacked and beaten up for it. A little further away from the demo sat three people with pot-bellied Israel flags. A group from the demo ran up to them and beat them with long pieces. It is all documented. The attackers, who were able to return to the demo unmolested, shouted: "Zionism is racism" and "Long live Hamas!".

Today, I cannot go for a walk in certain parts of Berlin because Nazis who have threatened me with death might recognize me and I've been doing anti-fascist work for decades. And in other parts of Berlin, I can't walk around without protection because BDS antisemites want to beat me up. At my last event in Berlin-Kreuzberg, I needed protection from Jew Haters in the hall and to get to my accommodation safely.

OnCurating: How did the legal dispute with Mr. Elsässer come about? Regarding the antisemitic Queer-front, with which speakers did he appear?

Jutta: From January 2014, I started researching the Nazi Karl-Heinz Hoffmann, head of the fascist Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann, which was banned in 1980. He met with the Swiss conspiracy ideologue Daniele Ganser and with Jürgen Elsässer. Elsässer, a sexist and homophobe, had previously been a communist. He had become an antisemite, cooperated with right-wing extremist networks, including Russian ones, and appeared at conferences of Holocaust deniers. He was preparing a 'cross-front' between nationalists, antisemites and some left-wingers from the Left Party, for example Diether Dehm and Andrej Hunko, both members of the Bundestag for the Left Party at the time.

I called Elsässer a "rabid antisemite " in a TV interview on Kulturzeit/3sat. He sued me. It was a bizarre trial that began in October 2014. His lawyer had also defended antisemites such as David Irving and the Turkish Gray Wolves. Petra Grönke-Müller, the presiding judge of the Munich I Regional Court, rid Germany of the majority of its antisemites in one fell swoop. She said that only those who referred positively to the Nazi regime of 1933-1945 could be called antisemites. During the proceedings, Elsässer agreed that I could call him an "antisemite" if I refrained from using the word "rabid." So, I was allowed to call him an antisemite. Nevertheless, in a paradoxical case in legal history, the court ordered me to pay all the costs. In the end, it amounted to around 55 000 euros, which I was only able to pay with the help of donations and loans. A very expensive adjective.

OnCurating: In a recent article you called for "Jews to be able to rely on leftists". Can you say something about the often joint, communal struggle for fairer living conditions and emancipation and the left and the Jews, why Jews are often found at the center of left-wing movements?

Jutta: If you as a Jew are persecuted and expelled for thousands of years, you are forced to get to know more of the world than a Christian German craftsman or farmer with a living radius of a few kilometers. Languages, cultures, travel routes, science, etc. Jewish people have passed on their knowledge advantage over many generations. Because they were forbidden from owning land and working in the trades for a long time, they qualified in the activities they were allowed to do. Jews were allowed to become lawyers, scientists, writers, journalists, artists and bankers. As soon as the laws allowed it, from the nineteenth century onwards, Jews sent their children, including girls, to secondary schools. They were the most enlightened social class of the nineteenth century.

This connected them with other social groups and classes, such as the proletarians who fled from the factories, as well as the imperial subject, to aspire emancipation. Where would the workers' movement have been without Jews? Where would the women's movement have been? The arts and intellectuals? Anyone who claims to be on the left today but detests Jews and rejects Israel is also betraying this shared emancipatory tradition.

Notes

1 Jutta Ditfurth, *Haltung und Widerstand: Eine epische Schlacht um Werte und Weltbilder*, Osburg Verlag, Hamburg, 2019.

2 Jutta Ditfurth, *Der Baron, die Juden und die Nazis: Adliger Antisemitismus*, Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, Hamburg, 2015.

3 See also Jennie Lebel, *The Mufti of Jerusalem Haj-Amin el-Husseini and National- Socialism*, Cigoya Stampa, 2007; and Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten (Ethnien - Regionen - Konflikte / Soziologische und politologische Untersuchungen)*, Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1988; and Matthias Küntzel, *Die Nazis und der Nahe Osten. Wie der islamische Antisemitismus entstand*, Hentrich & Hentrich Verlag Berlin Leipzig, 2019; Klaus Gensicke, *The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years*, Verlag: Vallentine Mitchell, Chicago, 2015.

Jutta Ditfurth's birth name is Jutta Gerta Armgard von Ditfurth. She is a German political activist, sociologist and author of politically engaged non-fiction and fiction. As a foreign reporter, she has reported on social issues around the world. Some of her books have become bestsellers and standard works, such as *Ulrike Meinhof. Die Biografie (Ulrike Meinhof: The Biography)*.

She has been active in the undogmatic left since 1970. She lived in Detroit and Glasgow. Her early work in the early German anti-nuclear movement and the feminist movement against the abortion ban was decisive. From 1978 onwards, she was involved in the founding of the Green Party, becoming its co-founder in January 1980. As a 'eco-socialist' she was one of the best-known representatives of the Green Party. From 1984 to 1988 she was one of three federal chairpersons of the Green Party. As chairwoman, she met Fidel Castro, Andrei Gromyko, Mikhail Gorbachev and many other politicians such as Yasser Arafat. When the Green Party decided to pursue a 'realpolitik' course and abandoned key structures and programme points, she left the party along with 10,000 other members during the period 1989-1991. Today, she is a City Councilor for the ÖkoLinX-Antiracist voters' association in Frankfurt and is currently conducting professional research into German colonial crimes in West Africa.

Wendimagegn Belete's *Unveil*: Resistance, Memory and Historical Reclamation
Dagim Abebe

Introduction

In *Unveil* (2017), Wendimagegn Belete reinterprets history through a fresh lens, disrupting conventional narratives and challenging established perspectives. Exhibited at the 15th Gwangju Biennale —framed around *PANSORI: A Soundscape of the 21st Century*, which explores polyphony, resistance and the reconfiguration of historical narratives—Wendimagegn's work disrupts the silence surrounding Ethiopia's defiant stand against fascism, amplifying voices often left unheard in global memory.[1] By unearthing narratives obscured in the Global North's historical consciousness, *Unveil* challenges the selective amnesia that shapes dominant historical accounts.

Ethiopia's resistance against Fascist Italy in the 1930s is a story of defiance, resilience and sacrifice, one that stands in stark contrast to the European-centered narratives of World War II.[2] While the world remembers the war through the lens of Allied victories, Ethiopia's struggle against Mussolini's occupation remains largely overlooked, despite its profound significance in the global fight against fascism.[3] The Battle of Adwa in 1896, where Ethiopian forces decisively defeated the Italian invaders, is often cited as a defining moment of resistance, a rare victory against European colonialism.[4] The battle sent shockwaves through imperial powers and became a symbol of African independence, inspiring anti-colonial movements across the continent.[5] However, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s posed a renewed threat that nearly extinguished this hard-won sovereignty. During the occupation, resistance movements like the Arbegnoch (Patriots) waged guerrilla warfare in the mountains, while figures such as Abune Petros, an Ethiopian bishop executed by Italian forces in 1936, transformed into powerful symbols of national defiance and martyrdom.[6]

Unveil reclaims this lost chapter of history, amplifying the voices of those who resisted imperial aggression. But Wendimagegn's work is more than a historical retelling; it becomes an act of artistic intervention. His approach to history is not linear but fragmented and layered, much like the process of memory itself. Wendimagegn excavates history through mixed media, layering archival materials, found imagery and tactile textures, mirroring how historical truths are often fragmented, reconstructed and constantly in flux. The act of unveiling, in this context, becomes both metaphor and method: peeling away the layers of erasure to expose the raw, unfiltered reality beneath. Each layer speaks to the complexities of the past—its loss, its reclamation, and its multiple, often contested truths. His work challenges the passive consumption of history, inviting the viewer into an active engagement with memory.

Incorporating elements of the conceptual framework that defines Wendimagegn's artistic practice, *Unveil* reflects his ongoing investigation into historical and collective memory. His work often interrogates the gaps in history, drawing from archival materials and physical remnants that carry the weight of time and erasure. By doing so, Wendimagegn creates an alternate archive, one that restores the agency of those written

out of history and provides a space for memory to reassert itself.[7] This act of 'unveiling', whether through the delicate layering of materials or the use of archival fragments, reflects Wendimagegn's belief in the power of art to challenge dominant historical narratives and propose new ways of remembering.

Within the curatorial framework of the Gwangju Biennale, an exhibition that has long engaged with themes of resistance, memory, and the politics of visibility—*Unveil* asserts itself as both a tribute and a provocation.[8] The biennale's commitment to showcasing works that address histories of oppression and defiance provides a powerful context for Wendimagegn's work. By positioning *Unveil* in this space, Wendimagegn compels us to reconsider whose histories are remembered and whose are forgotten. In doing so, his work calls for a reckoning with the mechanisms of historical omission, and, more importantly, a confrontation with the politics of memory that continue to shape our global consciousness. Wendimagegn's work does not merely inform; it demands recognition, urging us to question the structures of memory and visibility that govern our understanding of the past, and to reconsider how the histories of resistance are both written and remembered.

Historical context: Ethiopia's resistance against fascism

Ethiopia's resistance against fascism is a story of defiance etched in blood and memory—a battle waged not only on the battlefield but also in the collective consciousness of a nation determined to reclaim its sovereignty. Unlike much of Africa, Ethiopia had remained uncolonised, standing as a symbol of Black independence and resistance against European imperialism.[9] However, in 1935, Benito Mussolini's Fascist Italy launched a brutal invasion under the pretext of empire-building, seeking to expand its colonial dominion in East Africa.[10] Ethiopia became the first African nation to confront the rising tide of fascism, a precursor to the global struggle that would soon engulf the world in World War II.[11]

The Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935-1937) was not merely a contest for territorial control but a fight for dignity, survival and historical justice.[12] The Ethiopian forces, composed of professional soldiers, peasant warriors and noble-led militias, fought tenaciously against the technologically superior Italian army, which deployed modern weaponry, aerial bombardments, and, most infamously, chemical warfare. The Italian military, under the command of Marshal Pietro Badoglio, indiscriminately used mustard gas, violating the 1925 Geneva Protocol, causing devastating casualties among both combatants and civilians.[13] Despite these atrocities, Ethiopian forces mounted fierce resistance, exemplified by battles such as the engagements at Tembien, Amba Aradam and Maychew.[14]

Emperor Haile Selassie, a central figure in the resistance, personally led troops in battle before being forced into exile in 1936.[15] His impassioned speech at the League of Nations later that year condemned Italian aggression and called upon the world to uphold international justice, though his pleas were largely ignored due to the policy of appeasement adopted by European powers.[16]. Italy's occupation of Ethiopia (1936–1941) was marked by brutal repression, extrajudicial killings, and a systematic campaign to erase Ethiopian sovereignty. The Graziani Massacre of 1937, in which thousands of Ethiopians were murdered following an assassination attempt on Viceroy Rodolfo Graziani, stands as one of the darkest episodes of the occupation.[17]

Despite this, Ethiopian resistance never ceased. Patriot (Arbegnoch) guerrilla fighters waged relentless attacks against Italian forces, employing asymmetrical warfare, sabotage and local intelligence networks to undermine the occupation.[18] This ongoing resistance, coupled with the shifting tides of World War II, paved the way for Ethiopia's liberation in 1941. With the support of British and Commonwealth forces, Emperor Haile Selassie re-entered Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941, marking the restoration of Ethiopian sovereignty.[19] However, the British military presence that followed was a double-edged sword - while their intervention was crucial in ending Italian occupation, it also led to tensions surrounding Ethiopian autonomy. The British military assistance in support of the Ethiopian government and coupled with the suppression of local uprisings, complicated Ethiopia's post-war path to full self-governance.[20] Despite the restoration of sovereignty, Ethiopia's sovereignty was tested by continued British influence, as reflected in the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 1942, which allowed British military bases in Ethiopia. This complex relationship continues to shape the narratives of resistance and independence in Ethiopia's historical memory.[21]

Ethiopia's victory was more than a national triumph; it was a global symbol of anti-fascist resistance and African resilience against colonial oppression.[22] The struggle and ultimate success of Ethiopia inspired future anti-colonial movements across the continent, reinforcing the idea that imperial domination was neither absolute nor eternal.[23] Today, Ethiopia's resistance against fascism remains a powerful historical narrative, underscoring the nation's unwavering commitment to independence, self-determination and the enduring fight against oppression.[24]

Before delving into Ethiopia's resistance of the 1930s, it is essential to recognise the foundational significance of its earlier triumph over imperialism. The Battle of Adwa, fought in 1896, remains a monumental symbol of defiance. Led by Emperor Menelik II, Ethiopia decisively defeated Italy's invading army, shattering the myth of European military superiority and affirming its sovereignty.[25]

Sven Rubenson's *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* argues that this victory was no stroke of luck but the result of careful diplomatic and military planning.[26] Menelik II secured modern weaponry from France and Russia, while forging strategic alliances that positioned Ethiopia as an active player in global affairs. This same strategic foresight, where leadership, diplomacy and military adaptability worked in unison, would shape the anti-fascist resistance decades later.[27]

The significance of Adwa was not merely military; it was ideological. As Bahru Zewde's *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* suggests, the victory ignited nationalist sentiments that later inspired the resistance against Mussolini's invasion.[28] It established a historical precedent, embedding within Ethiopia's national consciousness the belief that foreign rule was neither inevitable nor unchallengeable. Yet, despite this legacy, Mussolini's Italy would return decades later, intent on reclaiming what it had lost.[29]

The emergence of the Arbegnoch following the 1936 occupation was not a spontaneous reaction but part of a long-standing Ethiopian tradition of armed resistance against foreign aggression. Richard Pankhurst's *The Ethiopians: A History* underscores that their tactics were deeply rooted in Ethiopia's past military strategies, mirroring those of earlier rulers like Menelik II.[30] Sven Rubenson's analysis further highlights how Ethiopian resistance movements thrived on internal and external strategic calculations, leveraging geopolitical shifts to their advantage.[31]

This historical continuity is crucial, as it suggests that the Arbegnoch were not merely a reaction to Italian aggression but an extension of Ethiopia's broader ethos of self-determination.[32] Their actions align with a lineage of Ethiopian warriors and leaders who saw resistance not as a political choice but as a national duty.

The Arbegnoch movement exemplifies how guerrilla warfare can serve as an effective tool against technologically superior occupiers. By harassing Italian supply lines, exploiting Ethiopia's rugged terrain, and employing hit-and-run tactics, they maintained pressure on the Italian forces despite overwhelming military disadvantages.[33] Ethiopia's mountains, forests and caves provided natural cover, making conventional warfare ineffective for the occupying forces.[34]

Beyond their military strategy, the Arbegnoch operated within local communities, relying on civilian networks for support, information and supplies. Their movement was not just a military resistance but a social and cultural one.[35] While the Italians controlled urban centers, the countryside—where much of Ethiopia's identity resided—remained unconquered. This spatial dynamic ensured that the occupation was never complete: control over cities did not equate to the subjugation of its people.[36]

While the Arbegnoch movement sought to reclaim Ethiopian sovereignty, its struggle had broader global implications. Ethiopia was the first nation to actively resist fascist occupation, predating the larger conflicts of World War II.[37] In this sense, the Arbegnoch were among the earliest anti-fascist fighters in history, positioning their resistance as part of a global struggle against authoritarianism.

Italy's failure to maintain control over Ethiopia, despite its superior military technology and ruthless tactics (including the use of chemical weapons), exposed the vulnerabilities of fascist imperialism.[38] The Arbegnoch's resilience challenged the notion that colonial conquest was inevitable and inspired future anti-colonial movements across Africa.[39] Their defiance proved that indigenous forces, armed with strategy and determination, could undermine and ultimately defeat European imperial ambitions.

Figures like Ras Desta Damtew symbolise the personal sacrifices that defined the Arbegnoch movement.[40] His capture and execution in 1937 exemplify the high cost of resistance and the brutal measures employed by the Italian occupiers. However, rather than extinguishing the movement, such acts of repression only fueled further defiance. The Arbegnoch became not just fighters but symbols of an unbroken Ethiopian spirit - an ethos that continued to shape Ethiopian nationalism long after the war ended.[41]

The memory of the Arbegnoch remains integral to Ethiopian identity, shaping narratives of resistance, heroism and sovereignty.[42] Their legacy endures in Ethiopia's national consciousness, reinforcing the idea that liberation is never granted but fought for. Their struggle was not only for their time but for future generations, ensuring that Ethiopia's independence remained a reality rather than a historical anomaly.[43]

While the Arbegnoch waged war in the mountains, another resistance group fought in the heart of occupied Ethiopia. The Black Lions, formed in 1936, were not only fighters but intellectuals, strategists and revolutionaries. Composed of young officers, students and political thinkers, they sought to mobilise the Ethiopian people, unify the fractured resistance, and overthrow the fascist regime.[44]
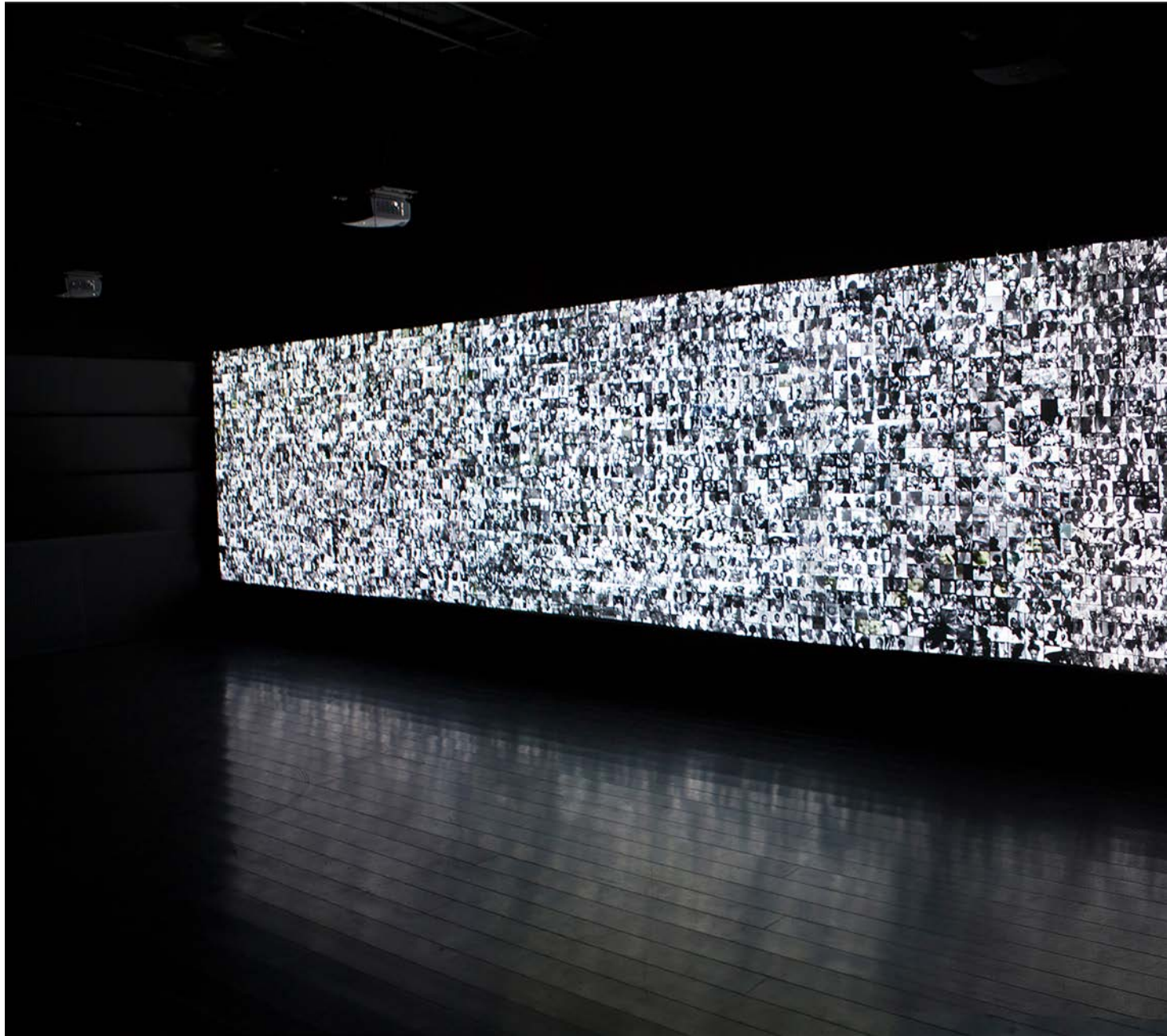
Unveil (2017) at the Gwangju Biennale 2024. Image courtesy of the artist. © Wendimagegn Belete.
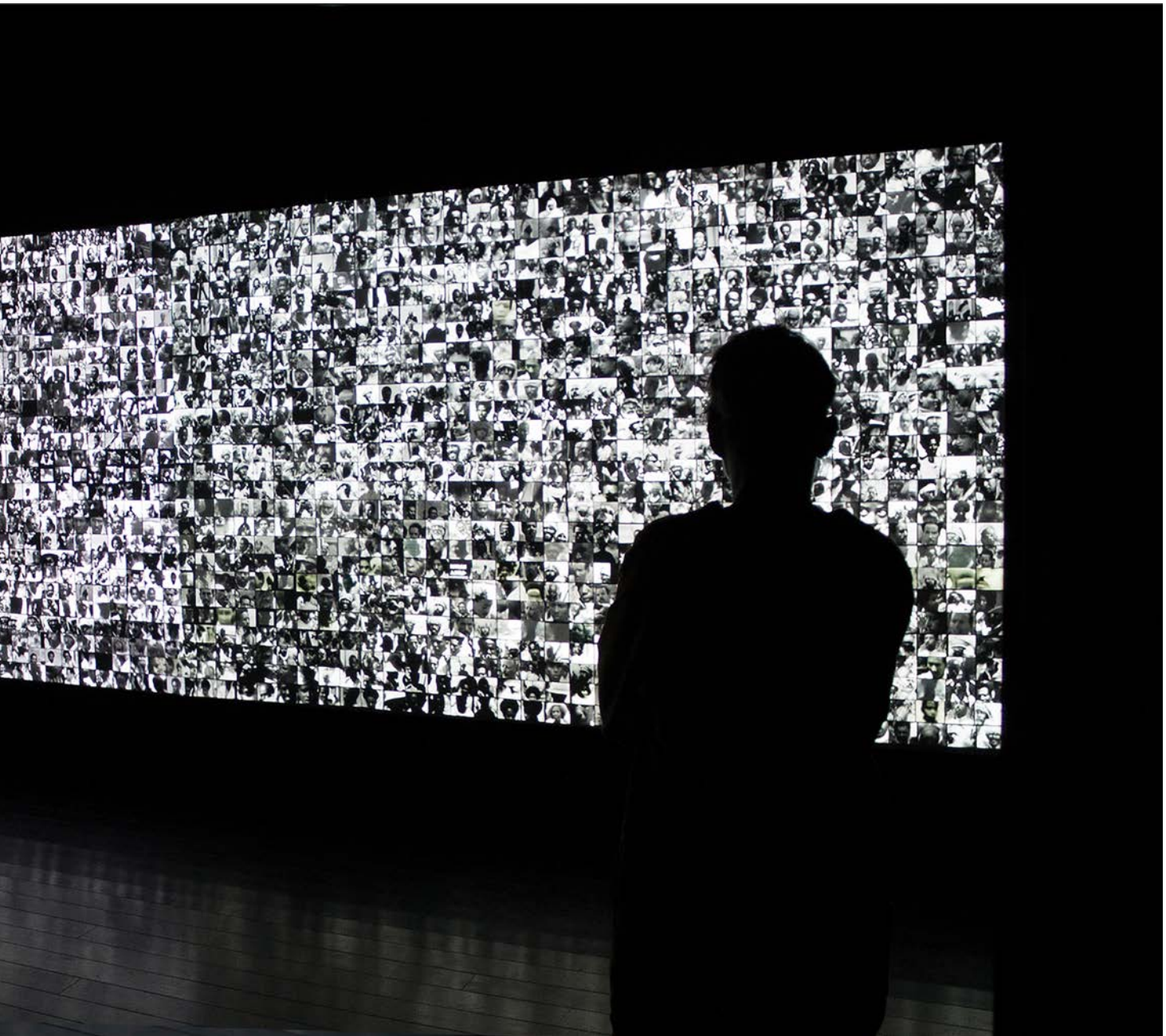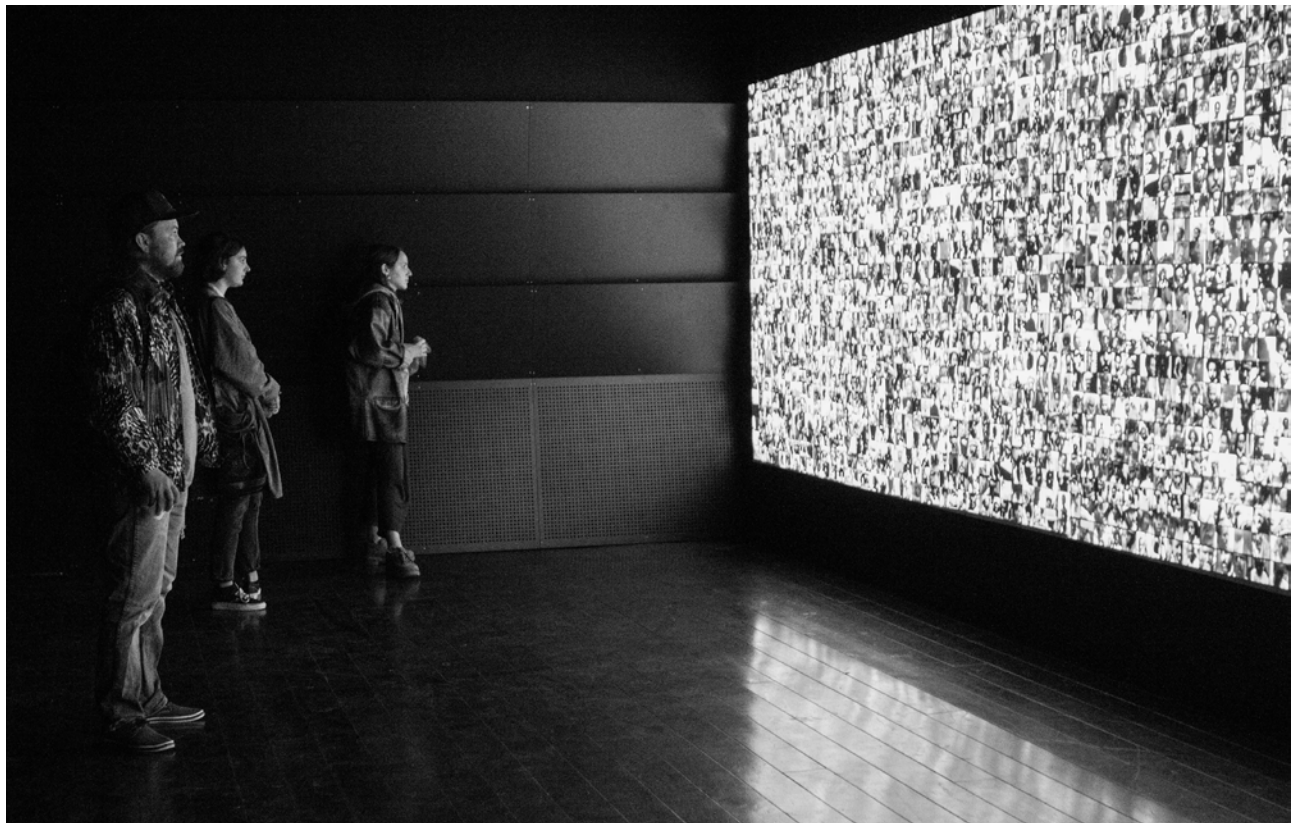
Unveil (2017) at the Gwangju Biennale 2024. Image courtesy of the artist. © Wendimagegn Belete.

Alessandro Triulzi's *Battles over Memory* positions the Black Lions within a broader anti-colonial struggle, emphasizing how their efforts connected Ethiopia's resistance to a global movement against European domination.[45] This aligns with Rubenson's analysis of Ethiopian sovereignty—not as an isolated phenomenon but as an integral part of Africa's broader fight against imperialism.[46]

Despite their strategic efforts, many Black Lion leaders proving that the fight against fascism was waged not only with weapons but with ideas, vision and an unshakable belief in self-determination.[47]

Few symbols of Ethiopia's resistance carry as much weight as the story of Abune Petros, an Ethiopian Orthodox bishop whose defiance in the face of fascist rule made him a martyr of the anti-colonial struggle.[48] In 1936, as Italian forces tightened their grip on Ethiopia, Abune Petros refused to remain silent. From the pulpit, he denounced the occupation, condemning Mussolini's brutality and calling on Ethiopians to resist.[49]

His execution was meant to instill fear, but instead, as Triulzi explains, it became a rallying cry for continued resistance. His legacy, immortalised in statues and stories, is a testament to the power of faith and defiance against tyranny.[50]

Ethiopia's resistance against fascism was far from a minor skirmish to be relegated to the footnotes of history; it stands as one of the earliest and most formidable confrontations against European fascist expansion. Rubenson underscores that Ethiopia's victory in reclaiming its sovereignty was not only a triumph of national resistance but also one of the most significant acts of defiance against colonialism, establishing a powerful precedent for other African nations.[51] Ethiopia's survival and struggle against

fascist Italy became an inspirational beacon for Black movements across Africa and beyond. The Green, Yellow and Red flag of Ethiopia, symbolizing resistance and independence, became a potent emblem, inspiring newly liberated African nations as they cast off the chains of colonial rule.[52]

Yet, despite its profound significance, Ethiopia's anti-fascist struggle has been systematically diminished in dominant historical narratives.[53] European accounts of World War II often position fascism's defeat as a triumph led by Allied powers, disregarding the sacrifices of those who resisted fascism outside the West.[54]

This is precisely why works like Wendimagegn Belete's *Unveil* serve as vital acts of historical intervention. Through layered archival materials, fragmented imagery and evocative textures, Wendimagegn reconstructs forgotten histories, challenging the very mechanisms through which history is curated, remembered, and legitimised.[55] His work, like the resistance itself, is an insistence on being seen.

Wendimagegn's artistic approach and use of media

For Wendimagegn Belete, history is not just something to be depicted—it is something to be unearthed, questioned and reinterpreted. Rather than presenting a linear, documentary-style account, it resists sanitised retellings of Ethiopia's resistance against fascism. Instead, *Unveil* operates as a layered, textured act of remembrance, mirroring the fragmented and contested nature of historical memory itself. Through an intricate interplay of mixed media, archival fragments, found objects, abstract forms and video installations, Wendimagegn forces the viewer into an active engagement with history, compelling them to navigate its complexities rather than passively observe it.

At the core of *Unveil* is Wendimagegn's meticulous use of archival materials —old photographs, historical documents, maps, handwritten texts and rare 16mm videos— objects that bear the weight of time yet have been discarded, forgotten, or deliberately erased from dominant narratives.[56] By incorporating these elements, Wendimagegn resurrects lost histories, making tangible the voices and struggles that colonial archives have suppressed.[57] These materials, layered upon one another, create a palimpsest of memory—histories written, erased and rewritten, just as Ethiopia's resistance itself has been distorted, omitted and reclaimed over time. His engagement with archival sources aligns with the broader decolonial discourse that seeks to challenge and subvert hegemonic historical narratives. Scholars such as Achille Mbembe have critiqued the ways in which colonial archives function as instruments of power, controlling what is remembered and what is forgotten.[58] Wendimagegn's work actively dismantles this control, offering an alternative counter-archive where history is interrogated rather than passively accepted.

Yet, Wendimagegn does not stop at archival sources. He expands his visual language through found objects—textiles, worn-out books, letters and remnants of military paraphernalia—each carrying its own silent testimony. These objects are not just symbols; they are evidence. They force a confrontation between past and present, between what is remembered and what has been forcibly forgotten. By embedding them into his compositions, Wendimagegn challenges the authority of official archives, which often privilege the voices of the colonisers over the colonised. His work, in this sense, does not merely document history—it embodies it, transforming the canvas into a site of resistance. The use of these found objects also speaks to the materiality of memory, echoing what theorist Rosalind Krauss describes as the "indexical trace" —a physical residue that serves as proof of an event's existence.[59] Wendimagegn's layering of these traces not only reconstructs the past but actively reclaims it from historical erasure.

A crucial element of *Unveil* is its engagement with moving images. Wendimagegn presents a continuous loop of cropped portraits—3,000 anonymous Ethiopian patriots—transforming them into a living archive of resistance.[60] This video installation serves as a stark reminder of the immense sacrifice made during Ethiopia's anti-colonial struggle from 1935 to 1941. By humanizing these individuals, *Unveil* shifts the resistance from an abstract historical event to a direct, personal confrontation with those who lived and fought.

Wendimagegn's meticulous use of rare archival footage, gathered from multiple sources, reinforces the work's political urgency, bridging past and present. The video becomes an act of witnessing, an immersive experience that refuses to let history fade into obscurity. As he himself acknowledged in our discussion, *Unveil* became a defining moment in his artistic practice—an eye-opening direction that laid the foundation for much of his later work.[61] Many of his subsequent projects have extended or evolved from this piece, making *Unveil* a conceptual backbone for his ongoing explorations.

One of the most striking aspects of Wendimagegn's approach is his intentional cropping of each portrait, a deliberate choice that shifts the focus from individual identity to a collective force of warriors. Photography and videography archives often frame history from multiple perspectives, but Wendimagegn consciously silences external narratives, directing our gaze solely to the faces of those who resisted. By doing so, he reclaims their presence - not as footnotes in history, but as central figures whose stories demand to be seen and acknowledged.

The use of layered textures further amplifies the themes of fragmentation and retrieval in *Unveil*. The physicality of Wendimagegn's surfaces—thick, overlapping materials, distressed textures, and raw, almost sculptural forms - echoes the very process of unearthing hidden histories. Layers are built up, torn away and obscured, forcing the viewer into a tactile relationship with the work. The roughness, the depth, the sense of accumulation and decay—all evoke the passage of time, the erosion of memory and the struggle to reclaim it. This act of layering is not just an aesthetic choice; it is a methodology. It embodies the way history is experienced—not as a singular truth, but as a series of overlapping, contested narratives that must be pieced together through careful and deliberate engagement. Here, Wendimagegn's practice resonates with Derrida's notion of 'archive fever', in which history is both constructed and destabilised through the very act of its documentation.[62] The fragmentation within *Unveil* reflects the instability of memory, reminding the viewer that history is never fully settled, but always in flux[63].

Beyond his material choices, Wendimagegn's engagement with digital and print media introduces another layer of complexity to *Unveil*.[64] By incorporating digital manipulations of archival images, he plays with the tension between authenticity and manipulation, a critique of how historical records have been shaped by those in power. His use of printing techniques, whether through transfer processes or screen printing, further disrupts the notion of a fixed, singular history. Prints fade, distort, or are partially obscured—mirroring the ways in which historical narratives are selectively preserved or erased. This interplay between analogue and digital, between physical presence and ephemeral imagery, reinforces the idea that memory is not static; it is malleable, shaped by those who control its transmission.[65] Wendimagegn's work, therefore, does not merely present history; it interrogates the mechanisms through which history is constructed, questioning who has the authority to narrate the past.
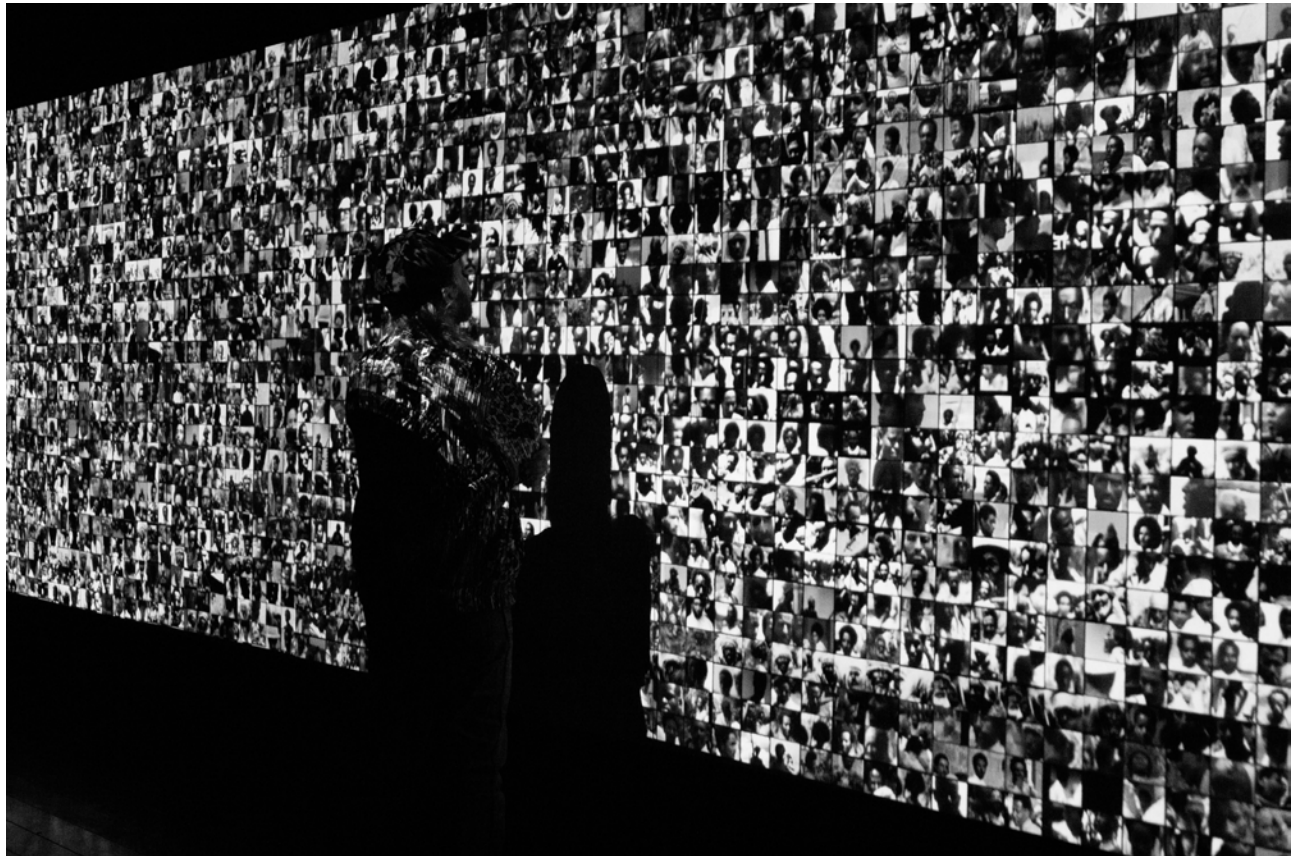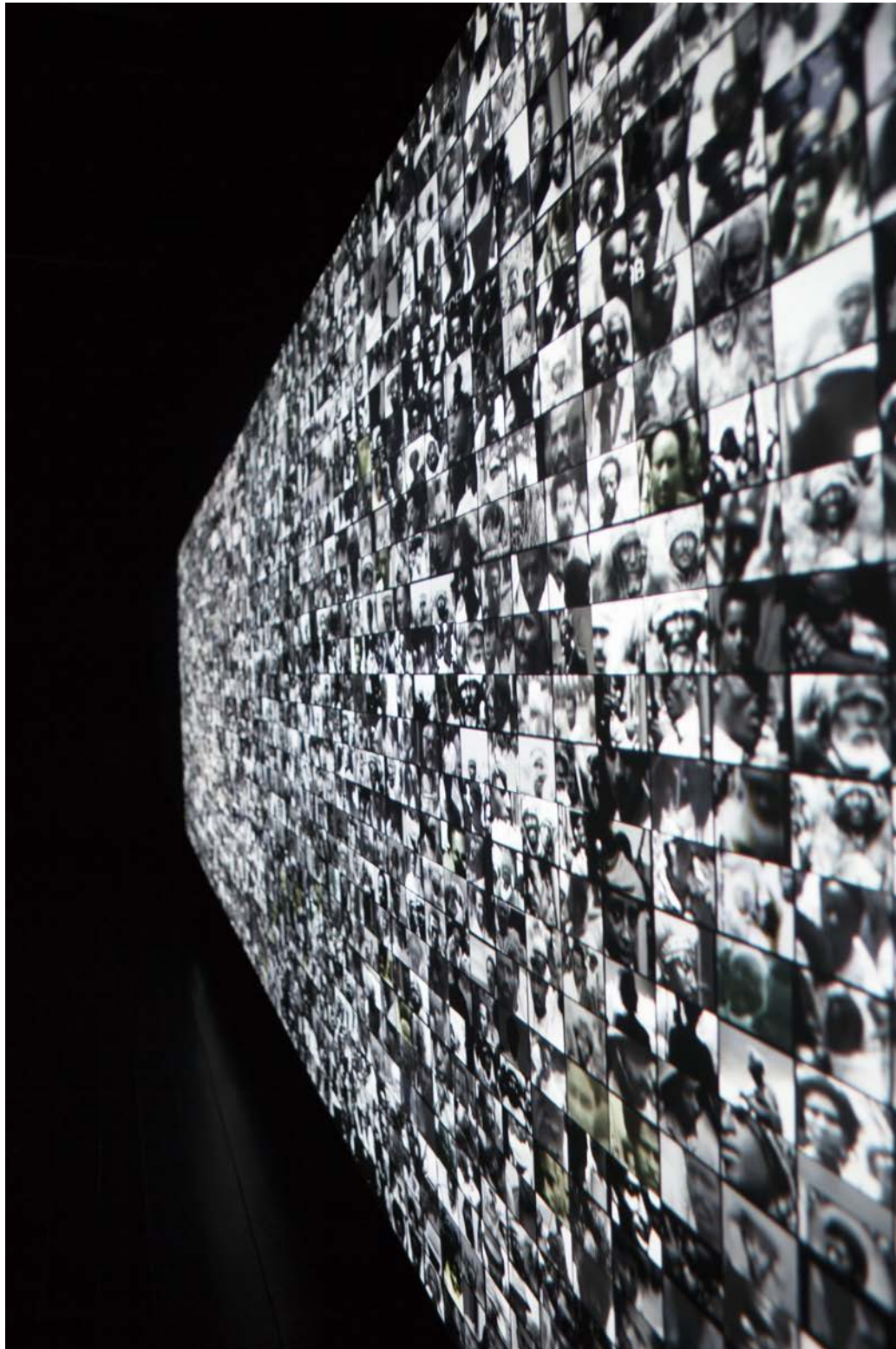
Unveil (2017) at the Gwangju Biennale 2024. Image courtesy of the artist. © Wendimagegn Belete,

The effect on the viewer is profound. Wendimagegn does not offer a passive viewing experience; he demands engagement. One does not simply look at *Unveil*—one deciphers it, moves through it, feels its weight. The layering of media requires patience and interrogation. What lies beneath? What is partially hidden? What has been erased, and why? This process of uncovering mirrors the very act of reclaiming lost histories, forcing the audience into the role of both witness and investigator.[66] In this way, Wendimagegn transforms his audience into active participants in the construction of historical memory, urging them to question the ways history has been presented to them.

Ultimately, Wendimagegn's use of media in *Unveil* is not merely a formal strategy—it is a political act. By working with materials that bear historical weight, by disrupting linear narratives, and by compelling his audience to engage with the complexities of memory and erasure, he enacts the very resistance that his work commemorates. In a world where historical narratives are still dictated by the powerful, *Unveil* refuses to be complicit. It stands as a counter-archive, a challenge to dominant historiographies, and, above all, an insistence that the past—no matter how deeply buried—can always be unearthed.[67]

The Gwangju Biennale and global conversations

Wendimagegn Belete's *Unveil* finds a powerful platform at the Gwangju Biennale, an international exhibition renowned for its critical engagement with global themes of resistance, historical memory and political reckoning.[68] The biennale has consistently provided a space for artists who confront histories of violence, erasure and oppression, making it an ideal venue for his work. By positioning *Unveil* within this context,

Unveil (2017) at the Gwangju Biennale 2024. Image courtesy of the artist. © Wendimagegn Belete.

Wendimagegn not only contributes to the ongoing global conversations about decolonization and historical revisionism but also highlights the Biennale's role in amplifying marginalised voices and challenging dominant narratives.[69]

The Gwangju Biennale's curatorial themes have historically centered on the politics of memory, the trauma of past injustices and the role of art in reshaping historical consciousness.[70] In this regard, *Unveil* aligns seamlessly with the Biennale's overarching discourse. By resurrecting the overlooked histories of Ethiopia's resistance against fascism, His work challenges the selective memorialization of history, which has often sidelined African experiences in favour of Eurocentric narratives. The inclusion of *Unveil* within the Biennale is a critical intervention—one that disrupts the established historiographies of World War II and repositions Ethiopia's anti-colonial struggle as a pivotal moment in global resistance movements.[71]

Wendimagegn work also engages in a profound dialogue with other artists featured at the Biennale, many of whom grapple with themes of historical reckoning, colonial legacies and collective memory. The 2024 edition, for instance, showcased artists exploring the impact of imperialism, dictatorship and cultural amnesia within their respective contexts, while also engaging with polyphony, resistance and the reconfiguration of historical narratives.[72] In this environment, *Unveil* extends these conversations by foregrounding Ethiopia's unique resistance against fascism and the wider impact of African liberation movements. He focus on the Arbegnoch and the broader anti-colonial struggles across the continent creates an opportunity for cross-cultural connections, demonstrating that histories of resistance are not isolated but part of an interconnected global struggle against oppression.

The Biennale's international audience presents another crucial aspect of *Unveil*'s impact. For many viewers—particularly those from the Global North—the Ethiopian resistance against fascism remains an underrecognised chapter in world history. The dominant narrative of World War II often centers on European and American perspectives, overlooking the significance of anti-colonial struggles in Africa.[73] By situating *Unveil* within a global exhibition, Wendimagegn forces viewers to confront these gaps in historical knowledge, prompting critical reflection on why certain histories are preserved while others are marginalised. This confrontation is not just about recognition—it is about the redistribution of historical agency, ensuring that the voices and sacrifices of Ethiopian patriots are acknowledged on an international stage.

Moreover, the Biennale's location in South Korea adds another layer of resonance to Wendimagegn's work. Given Korea's own history of colonial occupation and resistance against Japanese imperial rule, *Unveil* may evoke a sense of solidarity and shared struggle among local audiences.[74] The work's themes of resilience, historical amnesia and the politics of memory hold particular relevance within South Korea's own historical context, fostering new interpretations that bridge geographical and cultural divides.[75] This interplay between local and global histories transforms *Unveil* into a catalyst for broader discussions on colonial legacies, national identity and the ways in which art can serve as a medium for historical reclamation.[76]

Ultimately, *Unveil* at the Gwangju Biennale becomes more than an artwork—it is a political and historical intervention. The biennale's curatorial framework and international reach provide *Unveil* with the platform to function as both a memorial and a provocation, urging audiences to question the stories they have been taught and reconsider the mechanisms of historical narration. By occupying this space, Wendim-

agegn's work not only demands recognition for Ethiopia's resistance but also insists on a more inclusive, decolonised approach to global history. Through its placement in the Biennale, *Unveil* becomes a powerful reminder that history is not a fixed entity—it is an ongoing negotiation, one that art has the power to shape, challenge and redefine.

Conclusion

Wendimagegn Belete's *Unveil* serves as a powerful testament to the capacity of art to resurrect and reshape overlooked histories.[77] In an era where dominant narratives often obscure or erase the complexities of the past, his work calls us to re-examine those histories that have long been forgotten or deliberately hidden. By bringing Ethiopia's resistance against fascism into the global conversation, *Unveil* challenges the collective amnesia that surrounds such struggles, urging a reevaluation of what is remembered and why.[78] Through his layered textures, archival materials and found objects, he not only resurrects lost memories but also transforms them into a visual and emotional experience that demands engagement, reflection and action.

Unveil does more than recount history—it becomes a site of resistance in its own right. It directly confronts the selective nature of memory, where histories of oppression and defiance are often buried under the weight of more dominant or convenient narratives.[79] By recontextualizing these erased histories, his work forces the viewer to reckon with their own understanding of the past, challenging them to ask: whose stories are we taught to remember, and whose are we taught to forget? In this sense, *Unveil* offers a profound critique of global memory, inviting us to question the ways in which historical narratives are constructed, disseminated and consumed.

As we reflect on the power of contemporary art in shaping historical awareness, we are reminded that art has the ability not only to document history but also to alter it. Art provides an essential space where history is not just remembered but reimagined—where the past is continually in the process of being rewritten, reclaimed and unveiled. In a world increasingly divided by the forces of history and power, *Unveil* reminds us that the act of remembering is itself a revolutionary one, and through contemporary art, we are offered the opportunity to reshape our understanding of the past and its relevance to the present.[80]

What stories are we still missing? And how might art continue to be a force for uncovering and reclaiming these untold histories, giving voice to those long silenced?

Notes

1 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue* (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2024).
2 Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War*, 1935–1941 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 45–50.
3 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia,* 1855–1991 (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 145–150
4 Richard Pankhurst, "The Ethiopian Patriots: The Lone Struggle, 1936–1940," *Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (1971): 275–295.
5 Alessandro Triulzi, *Battles over Memory: The Politics of Remembering Colonialism in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2006), 78–85.
6 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 90–100.
7 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 45–60.
8 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue.*

9 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*, 160–170.

10 Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 45–50.

11 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 78–85.

12 Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 210–220.

13 Alberto Sbacchi, "Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936)," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, no. 3 (1980): 494–507.

14 Sbacchi, "Poison Gas and Atrocities," 494–507.

15 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 78–85.

16 Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892*–1937 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 210–220.

17 Ian Campbell, *The Massacre of Debre Libanos: Ethiopia, 1937 (*Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014), 45–60.

18 Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 210–220.

19 Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892–1937* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 230–240.

20 Angelo Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 200–210.

21 Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001), 180–190.

22 Asante, *Pan-African Protest*, 50–60.

23 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 190–200.

24 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 220–230.

25 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia,* 160–170.

26 Sven Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 70–80.

27 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia,* 170–180.

28 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 1980–200.

29 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 230–240.

30 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History*, 230–240

31 Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*, 130–140.

32 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History,* 240–250.

33 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 240–250.

34 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History*, 260–270.

35 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History,* 270–280.

36 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 250–260.

37 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 200–210.

38 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 260–270.

39 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 210–220.

40 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History*, 280–290.

41 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 220–230.

42 Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History*, 290–300.

43 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, 230–240.

44 Alessandro Triulzi, *Battles over Memory: The Politics of Remembering Colonialism in Ethiopia* (Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2006), 110–120.

45 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 130–140.

46 Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian* 150–160.

47 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 140–150.

48 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 160–170.

49 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 170–180.

50 Triulzi, *Battles over Memory*, 190–200.

51 Rubenson, *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence,* 210–220.

52 Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*220–240.

53 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 250–260.

54 Del Boca, *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*, 260–270.

55 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 1–20.

56 Wendimagegn Belete, "Artist Statement", *Unveil* exhibition catalogue (Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2024).

57 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 60–70.

58 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 70–90.

59 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985), 240–250.

60 Wendimagegn Belete, "Artist Statement"

61 Wendimagegn Belete, interview with the author, February 12 and 16, 2025.

62 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 100–110.

63 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 270–280.

64 Wendimagegn Belete, "Artist Statement"

65 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 140–150.

66 Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde*, 300–310.

67 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 150–160.

68 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue*

69 Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 180–190.

70 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue*.

71 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue*.

72 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue*.

73 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*,210–220.

74 Bruce Cumings, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 160, 165, 175.

75 Gwangju Biennale Foundation, 15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue.

76 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 50, 55, 60.

77 Wendimagegn Belete, "Artist Statement"

78 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 230–240.

79 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 240–250.

80 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 260–270.

Bibliography

Asante, S.K.B. *Pan-African Protest: West Africa and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis, 1934–1941*. London: Longman, 1977.

Bahru Zewde. *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991*. 2nd ed. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001.

Campbell, Ian *The Massacre of Debre Libanos: Ethiopia, 1937*. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014.

Cumings, Bruce. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.

Del Boca, Angelo *The Ethiopian War, 1935–1941*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Derrida, Jacques *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Gwangju Biennale Foundation *15th Gwangju Biennale Exhibition Catalogue*. Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2024.

Haile Selassie I, *My Life and Ethiopia's Progress, 1892–1937*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Krauss, Rosalind *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985.

Mbembe, Achille *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Pankhurst, Richard *The Ethiopians: A History*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001.

Pankhurst, Richard "*The Ethiopian Patriots: The Lone Struggle, 1936–1940.*" Journal of African History 12, no. 2 (1971): 275–295.

Rubenson, Sven *The Survival of Ethiopian Independence*. London: Heinemann, 1976.

Sbacchi, Alberto "Poison Gas and Atrocities in the Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–1936*)." International Journal of African Historical Studies* 13, no. 3 (1980): 494–507.

Triulzi, Alessandro *Battles over Memory: The Politics of Remembering Colonialism in Ethiopia*. Trenton: Red Sea Press, 2006.

Wendimagegn Belete "Artist Statement", *Unveil* exhibition catalogue. Gwangju: Gwangju Biennale, 2024.

Wendimagegn Belete, interview with the author, February 12 and 16, 2025.

───────────────────

Dagim Abebe is an artist, curator, and writer based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He holds a BFA in Painting (2018) and a MFA from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design at Addis Ababa University. His MFA thesis, *The Gambits* (2023), explores complex narratives of contemporary issues through art practices. In addition to his artistic practice, Dagim writes on the evolution of Ethiopian contemporary art, focusing on themes of memory, identity and collective experiences. His writings have been featured on Curatorialethicsnetwork.org and Africanah.org

Wendimagegn Belete received an MFA in Contemporary Art from Tromsø Academy of Art at The Arctic University of Norway in 2017, and a BFA from the Alle School of Fine Arts and Design at Addis Ababa University in 2012.
He works across a variety of media, including video, installation, painting, photography, text and found materials. As a multi-disciplinary artist, his works explores cultural elements, memory, identity, history, spirituality and epigenetic inheritance—the idea that memory can be passed down through generations unconventionally.

(M)otherland
An Interview with Ruth Patir
led by Dorothee Richter

Dorothee: I would like to start with the first iteration of the *(M)otherland* project, which actually happened in Zurich in the OnCurating Project Space. We are very proud to say that we showed your work for the first time in Europe. And the curator was Maayan Sheleff. I love the project; it was so humorous and so advanced in using digital technology.

Ruth: Yes, in 2021.

Dorothee: Could you speak a little bit about it, about developments since this first iteration and your pavilion in Venice.

Ruth: The way I stumbled upon these deities, these figurines, it happened almost accidentally when I was focusing on the late Moshe Dayan, who was the Israeli JFK, and an amateur archeologist. He was a widely admired general who was loved by the West, and known for his love of women, archeology and war. Proof of how admired he was by the West is that in the series Mad Men (set in the Sixties-Seventies), the writers in the copy room of the ad agency, which is the most masculine place on earth, had a poster of Moshe Dayan in the background. When I was researching him, it was like a coin drop, I suddenly understood the patriarchal aspects of identity in Israel via its relationship to archaeology. Through him I learned about the female figurines from the biblical era.

It was only in 2020, when I was an Artport resident, that I started my journey in women's clinics in Israel. Until 2018, I was living in the States. My journey into medical treatment in Israel started in 2020, just when Covid 19 started. I did a genetic test and realized that I had inherited my father's genetic mutation, which increases your likelihood of getting breast and ovarian cancer, in other words in your reproductive organs. One of the many unknown facts is that until very recently, people did not associate prostate cancer with cancer of the female reproductive organs. When I got the diagnosis in Israel, the mandatory approach to BRCA is to go into fertility preservation treatment. I was holding in my hands the digital copy of these female deities, from the Dayan col-

lection, and then I realised that we have the shared destiny of being questioned as to whether we are fertility figures or not. I did not know if I wanted to be a mother, but the medical world tried to make me into a mother. In parallel, this fertility deity, is a female sculpture dating back to 500 BC is an enigma for international archaeology, where predominantly men are looking at this figurine with its enlarged breasts saying, "It has such big breasts. It must be a fertility goddess." So that's when the *(M)otherland* project was initiated. I started working on it, as a big project with the curator Mayan Sheleff. We had ideas about where we want to show it, the OnCurating Project Space in Zurich being stop number one. In 2021, the project was still in development stages. I was thinking about the relationship between the project as a conceptual, philosophical idea and my lived experience. In 2021, I was still not undertaking many medical treatments. I was imagining what they would be, how they would feel. In the Zurich iteration, it was such an amazing opportunity because one of the predominant space's main aims is to prioritise writing and research.

The Covid 19 vaccination triggered all sorts of women's issues because obviously these things are never actually well researched. I was almost going into another realm. My priceless possession from that exhibition is the magazine.[1] The first iteration of the *(M)otherland* magazine was a gateway into all these questions. All these things are still very anchored in the basics of the project, Donna Haraway's "staying with the trouble,"[2] for instance, and the text by Sophie Lewis dealing with the relationship between surrogacy and labour, third party labour.[3] So, like Waze, Uber, for example, these new labour systems. Surrogacy has been outsourced to third world countries. In the magazine, you can see so much brainstorming around trying to figure out, the relationship between the very ancient past and the technological future, thinking about what we project onto the female figure. It was an opportunity to organise a lot of thinking and research. We prioritised the writing aspect of the show. And then a survey installation, which to a certain extent was brainstorming around what the project would be. It had 6000 years of art in the land of

(M)otherland, Exhibition View, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, 2021.

(M)otherland, Exhibition View, OnCurating Project Space, Zurich, 2021.

Upward Facing Dog, 2020, 3D prints, 32 Inch TV and TV Arm, OnCurating Project space, Zurich, 2021.

Israel hitting on me, a bit like the figurines catcalling the audience. It had the wild boars roaming the streets of Haifa. It had this text, which I really like, that I wrote with a German friend about the wild boars in Haifa being like a Judd Apatow film where Amy Schumer, the main character, is a woman who's drinking too much and abusing substances, and therefore will not be an eloquent mother.

One of the interesting things about Zurich was thinking about hideaways, like 'situated knowledges'. A lot of these things for Israelis would be very obvious. For example, for an Israeli when you see an archaeological relic, you recognise it since you've studied it in school, you've seen it in your elementary school. You know what the object is, you know what it represents. But then bringing it to Europe, there are different local attributes to the object and different international understandings of the object. I learned a lot from that gap.

Dorothee: For me your work in Zurich was really extremely surprising and fresh. It is so rare that you get so much humor in a work. There was this lightness, the figurines dancing to contemporary music. It was really surprising and a feminist work.

Later in 2022, you were nominated for the Pavilion in Venice. Your application for the pavilion in Venice was accepted on 7 September 2023. Which is exactly a month before 7 October attacks.

Ruth: I view the project as an accumulation. Constantly, more and more parts evolved. I admit naivete, when back in 2018, I still did not recognise the amount of underlying patriarchal oppression within different systems. But the more I got into thinking of the *(M)otherland* project, the more I realised how it works on the biopolitical stage, how it works in this place, it was like hitting a rock and then opening this stream of narrations and possibilities.

When we applied to Venice, obviously nothing yet was made. I wanted to create new work for the show. So, in any case, most of the works made especially for Venice. Most of the works are based on archives, documents and documentations. The overall research happened in between 2021 and 2023. I think contemporary art has the privilege of reacting to current events.
It was very clear to me that I was going to add new works, and I was going to react to what was happening. But obviously what was happening was quite chaotic. There's also something not fair about reacting in a state of confusion. I tried to figure out how do I react mindfully without taking advantage of the trauma, the pain or any of it. My first intuition was to go back to Mesopotamian literature, 5000-year-old traditions that are also from the Levant region. And then honing on this idea of women's practice of keening, of lamentation. This idea of the wailing woman who, in her grief, performed a political act. Knowing that I wouldn't know what I'd feel like by April, but I'd know that grief and anger were

A sign placed by the artists and curators of the Israel Pavilion at its closed entrance, street view, The Israel Pavilion
at the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2024. Image: Tal Nisim.

(M)otherland, exhibition installation detail, The Israel Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2024. Image: Tal Nisim.

always going to be there, with a whole heart. That is what I felt in that moment.

So, I went on to produce, this new work, based on keening, which is fragmented, the figurines are broken and shattered and some of them are glued back together. They are walking the streets of Tel Aviv demonstrating, because that's what my life was like then, I was demonstrating at least once or twice a week.

At the time the decision that I made with the curators, whom I was working with on the show, was that we shouldn't react too fast.

Dorothee: In the leftwing daily newspaper TAZ the work was described by Hili Perlson as follows: "Some of the giant clay figures in Patir's animated videos are missing heads or limbs, with cracks running along their round bodies, just like the real archaeological artefacts they are modelled on. These images of broken women embody a universal pain, the anger of mothers, wives, sisters and daughters around the world."[4]

(M)otherland, exhibition view, The Israel Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2024.
Image: Matteo de Mayda for *The New York Times*.

How did the process between you and the curators Mira Lapidot and Tamar Margalith develop then?

Ruth: We saw the art world reacting impromptu, too fast after 7 October, in ways that people felt were problematic in hindsight. Our first rule was that we are not reacting. We're not doing fast reactions. We're not doing gut-based reactions. We're keeping our mouth shut and trying to feel and think about how and where we situate ourselves. And as the months persevered, we felt that the Israeli government was doing heinous crimes instead of making diplomatic agreements. During all this time I kept on making work. Our decision was that we were going to Venice because we were ashamed of our government, but we weren't ashamed of ourselves. And we're going to install the exhibition completely as we envisioned it. And then we'll see.

To be honest, when we got there, first, there was just like this feeling of disconnect right between beautiful Venice, rich art world cocktail parties, gondolas on the river, and the trauma. We were both passive observers and players. And in the end we came with this idea that since the pavilion is made of glass, has a glass facade because it's a Bauhaus building, you could fill it with art, but keep the door closed.

This means that you have this half closed, half open performance, which is something that felt novel, it felt

right, like it was unexpected, it reflected in a way the rather complicated situation. It was like either we're Russia and we're going to shut the curtains and leave, or we're Zionists or propagandists. It was the idea of saying, no, we're neither of these things.

We're reacting to a time and then the time is fragile, and we feel complicated. We did install everything. And the first floor was the procession lamentation piece that was always going to be on the first floor, because it's public. This work is dealing most with the public life—while the top floor went all the way up to the private space, to my apartment. Public to the private in this hierarchical way.

That one film out of five ended up being the only work seen from the street view, attached to the sign which said that the exhibition will open: "The Artist and curators will open the exhibition once a ceasefire and hostage release agreement is reached". And another thing that we were very adamant about was not to say that the exhibition is closed, but rather that the exhibition *will open*. It became sort of like our wishful thinking of a changing reality. Unfortunately, it didn't happen. Not yet. Not then. And not since then do we have a ceasefire with Gaza, still, and the hostages weren't released, still. But maybe very naively when we put the sign up, we really, actually thought it might be possible in one month, two weeks sort of thing. We did not think that it would be for the whole show. We had like a different

(M)otherland, exhibition view, The Israel Pavilion at the 60th International Art Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia, 2024.
Image: Tal Nisim.

idea. I'm sure you remember. But at the time we became these objects of projection, it seemed like everyone was projecting upon us their political views. I oftentimes felt like a Rorschach painting, you know?

Dorothee: Yes, I understand.

Ruth: People look at me and they just see what they think, it has nothing to do with what I represent or what I stand for. It has nothing to do with how I feel about myself. It has everything to do with what they feel about whatever they think I am. It did give me the opportunity to say what I think in the *New York Times* or in the *Der Spiegel*. It gave me a voice that otherwise I would never have had.

Dorothee: But it must have been also very, very hard, to encounter so much hatred, wasn't it? (A boycott letter call asked the Italians to stop the Israeli Pavillon from showing at all, it came out in January, in April you decided to install everything but open only under the described conditions. The letter garnered over 20,000 signatures.)[5]

Ruth: I mean, it was all very hard, to be honest. There were moments where it was really, really devastating. But I think those were more like moments in December, you know, or November, five months before the opening, there were the really, really hard moments where I

realised that my voice will just never be accurate to my feelings, that I lost agency a long time before the opening of Venice.

I would think about Meirav Svirsky, a fellow artist, whose parents were killed in bed, whose brother was killed in captivity, who lost her entire life. I would think about, the Palestinian women demonstrating against the War in Gaza and the personal risk that they were taking. All these women reminded me that in comparison to real problems, an artist's boycott is just not so important.

So, the demonstration by women, these women I wanted to mention, to show. Like a mantra of sorrow and of courage.

Dorothee: Of course, one sees that the Israeli Left really try to make the government react otherwise, to negotiate and get the hostages out. These people are still in captivity. I ask myself if one can speak to terrorists, if one can negotiate. I'm not so sure about it.

Ruth: I might be naïve, I don't think people are born violent or evil. I really believe this is a result of oppression and not nature.

I'm not saying that it's only Israel's fault, but I am saying that there is a mutual influence that causes people who

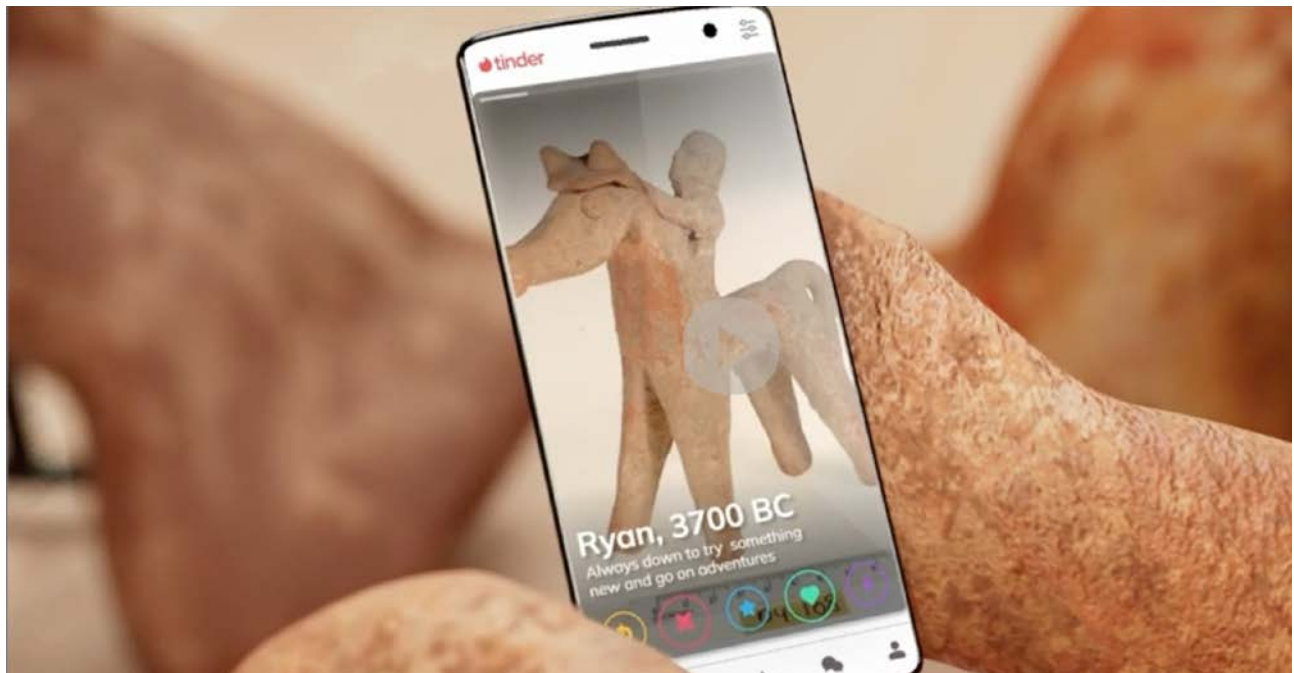*Petah Tikva (Waiting)*, video still, 3D animation and news live feed, 2024.

have never left their homes and have been under siege for 20 years to become very violent. And I personally don't believe that this level of hatred can be avoided if they are not given any other option. I still condemn violence.

But I still think that there are terrorists within the settler movement (in the West Bank) of the fundamentalist right, which is currently in government and inciting other groups on the other side. To be honest, at this moment I feel a lack of empathy towards both sides equally. But you know, this is like, again, this is very much my education. I grew up with a Holocaust survivor grandmother who I was very, very close to, who was in her 20s during the war. So, she was already married, already a graduate of the Warsaw University for law. My grandmother whom I've been thinking about this week because, her house and the house my mother grew up in, is in Tel Aviv, near Tel Aviv University. And missiles hit parallel streets. Her house wasn't demolished. I mean, the house she lived in but other houses close by. She, my grandmother, who died at 99, who survived so many different phases of history, was one of the funniest women I ever met. She was hilarious. Her humour was always quite macabre. Humour is a survival skill.

Not only was she a very funny woman, but also very much a humanist. And, throughout the years, she always made a point when she talked to us about the war, she would say that the war did not happen to the Jewish people. It happened to the world. And that if we isolate the Shoah as a singular event that only happened to the Jews we will stand as bystanders when we see it happening to other people. So, we need to make sure that it never happens to any other people in in the future. And with that education, I can't isolate villains.

That's just like my nature and it's my ideology. And even though I've contested it and there are moments in time where I'm less capable of being within that enlightenment, humanist or European perspective, some moments are easier for me and some are not. It is something I very much believe in.

Dorothee: I'm not so sure. I grew up with my father, who was always shaking, his whole body was shaking when he spoke about the Nazi Regime, his father, (my grandfather) was a German bourgeois anti-fascist.[6] When my father spoke about the time I just felt his immense fear, a fear of other people—who were capable of doing the most horrible things, so I saw that evil exists. Evil exists, through indoctrinated fanatics who

Petah Tikva (Waiting), video still, 3D animation and news live feed, 2024.
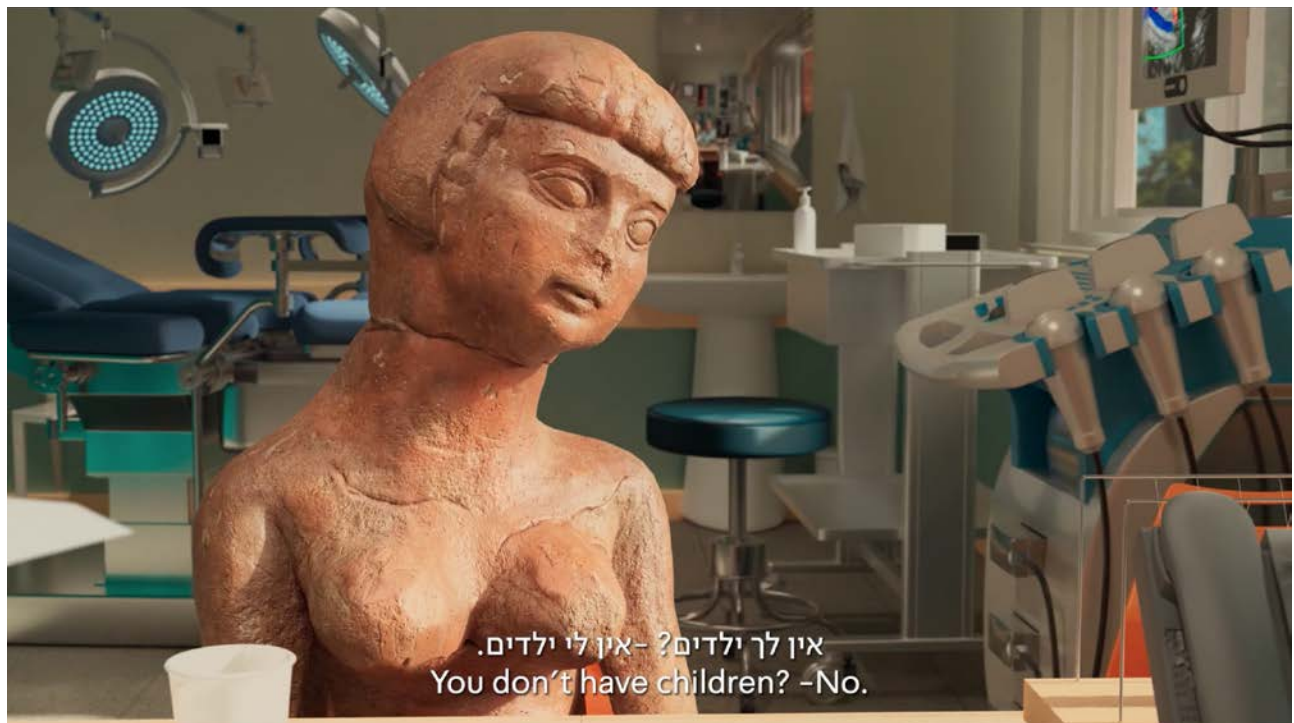
Intake, video still, 2:30, 3D animation, 2024.

Keening, video still, 2024, 2:30 min, 2024.

Keening, video still, 2024, 2:30 min, 2024.

M Otherland, video still , 2024, 30 min, 2024.

act in a kind of psychosis. And I see this type reappearing. It's actually easy to recognise: they know everything for sure, they are completely certain, they don't want to talk, they shout and spit, they knock over microphones, they don't want to talk, discuss ideas or listen, they threaten and they are violent—they hate facts and love fake images.

After the (non)opening you became a screen for projections. That must have been very, very hard to bear.

Ruth: Yes. It's very hard not to be insulted when people are trying to insult you. The exhibition closed on the 24 November without ever being open. For a year I was an object of projection without any of my art to being seen. Most people within this profession will probably never see the art. But in March it opened at the Tel Aviv Museum, there was a change, I got the art back.

Dorothee: Let's speak about the part in Venice, which was there but could not been seen.

Ruth: So, the concept for the big exhibition in Venice included now my lived experiences going through these different medical treatments.

Dorothee: There's this special humour involved. The figurines express a matriarchal type, which resists patriarchal treatment, to be objectified. You also added parts of your apartment as a printout.

Ruth: Well, about the Venice iteration, which is also different, but similar to the Tel Aviv Museum iteration. It was built on going from public to private, which I see as the most singular attributes of the Israeli identity. The project touches upon the issue: there is no boundary between the private and the public. Even the most precious private, the uterus of the women, the woman's body is always recruited for the national agenda. And are all, if we like it or not, soldiers of this narrative. Therefore, it was important that the project portrays the street.

The hidden part goes all the way into my apartment's bathroom, so all the way into the most private, most intimate space, and that's why I decided that the main film would be viewed from inside my living room. Of course, it's not my actual living room it's a simulation. Everything is computer generated. I already had to build my apartment in order to film in my apartment within the computer, I also brought my apartment into the show, as a printout. And it functions as a background to

this three-chapter film that chronicles the three egg freezing rounds that I performed to complete my preservation journey. I think what a lot of people barely notice, is that my apartment has tons of Easter eggs, and there are numerous books. For instance, all the articles that are quoted within the OnCurating catalogue are in the library in my living room. I've been reading a lot of archaeological science articles, in a subtle way I try to make the work somehow searchable, you can find the different hidden layers.

Once it became a lived experience—I actually visited all these bureaucratic medical institutions and met all these officials, doctors—I realised that I had accepted the fact that there are no boundaries protecting privacy. For example, a doctor can have the most nonchalant, invasive conversation with me because we all have this secret pact in which I, as a woman living in Israel, have a role, and the role is mothering and the role is sometimes other things, but this is a role that is undeniably, crucial for my citizenship.
Within the OECD countries, Israel has the highest birth rate with 2.9 children. It's a fertility obsessed place. And one of the more interesting phenomena that I noticed both during Covid but also later documenting any adventure, is that we are using the iPhone camera to create a portal to perform our private life in the public sphere. Women all around the world, but especially in Israel, are constantly performing their IVF rounds, what does it mean? And what does contemporary liberation mean, from a feminist perspective? We know from postmodern discourse that feminism is about giving women agency. And making them not the object but the subject.
But then when it comes to contemporary social media, we see women performing their fertility windows within public spaces. And this becomes more complicated. Who are they performing for? Are they gaining agency by performing this intimacy or are they just victims of surveillance capitalism? I don't have any of these answers, but the project tries to touch upon all these topics by making my private apartment into a stage of performance.

Dorothee: I think it's interesting that different ideals of male and female roles exist in parallel or in layers in Israeli society. As a male model, the masculine, soldierly man described by you also exists simultaneously or in parallel with the ideal of the learned man; in this constellation, the woman can also be responsible for the income of the family. And then in the socialist kibbutz, where in the early days equality between the sexes was to be achieved at all costs and private property was to be dispensed with. Not to mention the cultural influ-

ences from all the countries of origin of the Israelis, Europe, Arab countries, the Soviet Union lately.
I think one can feel this multi-layeredness of roles that exist in your work.

Ruth: A lot of my work has to do with finding my agency as an artist. I used to make orthodox films, old school real movies not animated movies.
Because you are always dependent on a big crew. You need a director of photography, an editor, lighting instructor, a sound engineer. The crew is always so big and it's predominantly masculine. Mainly men work on film sets. It's a very masculine environment. My fear of technology or my feeling of not understanding technology stopped me from achieving my independence. As slowly as the work progressed, I found that I was eager to dismantle the sphere and become technological myself. I am annoyed by that sort of alpha male character that takes your phone to fix something and doesn't teach you how to fix it yourself. I learned late how important it is to be in control of apparatuses to be really able to express yourself in a complex way.

With this five-year long project that I've been working on investigating women's role within nation states and as historical narratives I touched on topics like humor, sincerity, intimacy, and the performance of violence and power. I'm also a sinner. I'm also doing things that I don't think are idealistically fair. For example, stealing people's voices and I'm secretly recording them, and I'm abusing them in order to tell a story.

Dorothee: Yes, the doctors, for example. I think that was interesting because it is probably an experience every woman of the Western world has already gone through at some point of being handled or being rectified by the medical apparatus.

Ruth: Handled is a perfect way of describing it.

Notes
1 https://on-curating.org/
books-reader-catalogue/m-otherland.html
2 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene. Experimental Futures*, Duke University Press, 2016.
3 Sophie Lewis, "Full Surrogacy Now", a shortened version of the original text is in the catalogue accompanying the exhibion at OnCurating Project Space in Zurich, see https://on-curating.org/books-reader-catalogue/m-otherland.html)

4 Hili Perlson, Israelische Künstlerin Ruth Patir. Die Last des weiblichen Körpers, Die feministische Saga „(M)other-land" der Künstlerin Ruth Patir wurde wegen des Gazakriegs nicht öffentlich gezeigt. Nun wird sie doch ausgestellt. in TAZ 06.Jan. 2025, https://taz.de/Israelische-Kuenstlerin-Ruth-Patir/!6060288/, translated by the authors.
5 See Hili Perlson, in TAZ 06.Jan. 2025, https://taz.de/Israelische-Kuenstlerin-Ruth-Patir/!6060288/, translated by the authors.
6 Bourgeois anti-fascist means, that he was not formally a Marxist or part of the communist party, they were better organised. He lost his job 1933 and was expelled from the army and was generally avoided socially. The family was very fortunate not to be sent to the camps, which happened to others in similar circumstances. The American occupation forces later appointed him director of all (about 100) schools in the district.

―――――――――――

Ruth Patir fuses documentary with computer-generated imagery in a quest to expand the possibilities of realism. Ruth's works often begin with the artist's autobiography, and gradually open up to address larger societal issues, such as the politics of gender, technology, and the hidden mechanisms of power. What began with her exhibition *Love Letters to Ruth*—where she resurrected the late IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan and summoned him to be her 3D lover— has evolved into an ongoing exploration of representation, reproduction, and biopolitics in patriarchal Israel. In her recent works, Patir breathes life into archaeological artifacts from the Levant, focusing on female figurines that allow her to weave together her personal story with women's lives today. Her most recent project, *(M)otherland*, commissioned for the Israeli Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Biennale, is currently on display at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.
Patir work has been exhibited at the Center for Contemporary Art *My Father in the Cloud* 2022. Her film *Sleepers* won first prize in the Video Art and Experimental Film competition at the Jerusalem Film Festival (2017). Additional works have been shown at the Center of digital Art Holon Pavilion at the Gwanjou Biennale in Korea, the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA), OnCurating Gallery in Zurich, the Petach Tikva Museum of Art, the Anthology Film Archives, the Municipal Gallery Line 16, Jerusalem Design Week and the Flux Factory collective in New York. Patir holds a BFA from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (2011) and an

MFA from Columbia University in New York (2015). Her works are included in private collections as well as in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the Israel Museum, and the Jewish Museum in New York.

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien/Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

Mondial Solidarity.
An Interview with Artists at Risk (AR), Marita Muukkonen and Ivor Stodolsky led by Jonny Bix Bongers

Jonny Bix Bongers: Hi, Marita. Hi, Ivor. Thanks for being here. Maybe as a short starting point for those who may not yet be familiar with your work, could you briefly describe what you do and what Artists at Risk (AR) is?

Ivor: So, I think we can start by mentioning that the umbrella organization which runs Artists at Risk (AR) is called Perpetuum Mobile.

Perpetuum Mobile (PM) is a non-profit organisation registered in Helsinki, Finland, which runs many long-term thematic platforms. The most well-known of these is Artists at Risk (AR), but there have been several such long-term platforms which we've carried out. We started with something called the *Perestroika Project*, which was a big museum show at Kiasma, the Finnish National Museum, with a conference and events at the National Library and National Film Archive. We went on to create several other platforms.

We developed the *Perpetual Romani Pavilion*, for example, which is focused on Roma art. It started as an emergency 'pavilion' at the Venice Biennial in 2009, when the 2nd 'official' Roma Pavilion was cancelled at the last minute. The Perpetual Romani Pavilion had many subsequent iterations, including at the Moderna Museet in Malmö and the Hungaricum in Berlin, where it became the Venice Pavilion in our reckoning, because once again the official Roma Pavilion in Venice was not taking place. The great (late) Damian Le Bas, Sr. simply painted the name on the large-scale project called *Safe European Home* which he and his wife Delaine Le Bas were working on with PM. It was emblematic of the forced displacement faced by Roma people.

The Arts Assembly is another long-standing and ongoing platform, which acts as a reflexive model for cooperation in the creative field. It functions as a self-organising platform of artists and thinkers that creates context-specific charters and public evaluations through participatory, peer-to-peer dialogue and critical reflection. With the goal of fostering collective agency, it has shaped curatorial and evaluative frameworks at major events like Manifesta 8.

Marita: They are often intertwined, as Ivor says. Artists at Risk (AR) started in 2013, but it grew out of the *Re-Aligned* platform that was focused on the "movements of the squares", the wave of revolutions across northern Africa and well beyond. In 2012 Egypt, artists who had joined the Tahrir Square movement were at high risk. The new president, General Al-Sisi came from the same group as President Mubarak who had been deposed two years earlier and represented the army which had tortured and jailed artists and activists who had been key proponents of the revolution.

At that time, we worked at an artist-in-residency centre in Helsinki, so it was very natural for us to use these facilities to invite and host these peers for a residency, to have a breather in a safe space, to rest and think about their next steps. Should they go back? Where should they go? What can they do?

Our work with politically and socially engaged art led directly to the creation of AR.

Ivor: We are very much a hands-on organisation. Since then, over more than 10 years, we have relocated over 1,100 artists at risk from all over the world in cooperation with over 330 hosting institutions.

Artists at Risk (AR) stands at the intersection of arts and human rights. We have an ongoing 'Public call'", as we call it, and artists who are at risk, or persecuted artists, can apply for a residency, which may last from three months to up to two years.

We have residency-hosts around the world, and aside from providing a 'safe haven' for physical safety, these artist-in-residences provide the artists with an artistic context. This is crucial. They say that there can be two 'deaths' for an artist. One is the concrete, physical death, and the other is their death artistically. Being able to

The Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion at the Venice Biennial 2024 – under the tile *ARTISTS. RISKS. HUMANS. RIGHTS* – was a celebration of cultural professionals who risk their lives on the frontlines of artistic freedom and human rights.

actively practice their art is particularly important for artists who have been silenced by their persecutors. Once in safety, they are finally able to create freely. Indeed, they are often highly prolific!

Artists at Risk (AR) is a peer movement. The hosting institutions vary from traditional artists-in-residences to opera houses. The key thing is to provide a matching artistic context for each artist which considers their personal profile, including that of any dependents such as their family, their artistic discipline and other needs.

Jonny: That's impressive. You write that you understand your work as a 'curatorial vehicle' and also describe your practice mainly in assisting artists in a certain way. Maybe you can also elaborate a bit on your role as curators?

Ivor: Yes of course.

But, first of all, especially when working with people from outside of Europe, we try to avoid using the language of 'helping' people. We try to avoid the 'saviour complex', so to speak. We work with artists as artists. We work with them as peers. We curate shows with them. We do conferences with them. We're not here to pat ourselves on the back for 'saving' artists. I know that wasn't suggested or implied. But, in our opinion, that kind of thinking is the legacy of the colonial-era's 'white man's burden'.

This is a distinction that we really must keep. We are a horizontal network of socially and politically engaged residences, not a UFO coming down from the sky. We come from the artistic field, and these are our colleagues. These are curators, artists, cultural professionals–just like us– in a situation of high risk, right? It could happen to any of us, and indeed has happened to some of our colleagues and families in the past.

Now to come to your question. Once an artist is in safety, and in an artistic context, the curatorial aspect really comes to the fore, an aspect which is already a key part of the so-called 'match-making' of the artist with the hosting organisation, which the AR-Secretariat oversees. The hosts develop an artistic programme with the artist, providing them with the tools and opportunities to develop their art in that locality. Later, further curatorial aspects come into play.

Marita: AR is all about risk, logistics and coordination, but as Perpetuum Mobile, we put on our curatorial hat. At AR we have certain criteria when artist risk is evaluated, and the first criteria is about risk. When we do curatorial projects, we curate as PM because it involves a selection based almost solely on thematic and artistic quality.

When we curate venues like the Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion on the occasion of the 2024 Venice Biennale in UNESCO's Palazzo Zorzi, for example, it is of course

to everybody's advantage that the key criteria for selection is the quality of the art.

We have many excellent hosting organisations doing outstanding work. Take the National Theatre, which have worked with the amazing playwrights AR has placed in residence in Helsinki. Or the Centre National de Danse in Paris, which worked with young Afghan dancers. If there's an artist at ZKM, then their curatorial work with that artist is exemplary. We have seen many remarkable productions. Over the last few years, we have worked with over 330 different hosting organisations. Each one of them has their strengths. Locally, the productions depend more on the current level, interests and needs of all artists and partners involved.

Jonny: You mentioned the international network that you created with culture institutions and different funding organisations that support your platform. I would be interested to know how do you keep those networks alive? And what kind of challenges do you face while maintaining those networks?

Marita: The AR network has been growing gradually for over a decade. Individual organisations were added one by one; first across Europe, then Africa. In the past few years, however, growth has accelerated rapidly. We were part of the international effort from Berlin to London to Paris and New York, helping Afghans of all backgrounds fleeing the Taliban takeover in 2021. AR coordinated a 'list of lists' of all artists under threat. Only a few months later, with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the number of hosting organisations in Europe exploded.

At this point we began to build national-level networks. Next to the national network in Finland, we started a new model of cooperation in Sweden with a network called Swan, and then developed this model further in Germany with the Goethe Institute, as well as the Mir network in Italy, and our Spanish network based around AR-Barcelona. We also created the first network in Ukraine: the AR Ukraine Internal Residency Network. We are now developing cooperation with a new national network launched in Switzerland; we cooperate with various residency networks in France; and have strong interest in developing such a national network in Taiwan.

Marita Mukkonnen and Ivor Stodolsky, co-founders and co-directors of Artists at Risk (AR), welcome guests to the AR-Pavilion in Venice, at UNESCO's Palazzo Zorzi.

Key here is that artists benefit greatly from effectively applying, via one centralised form, to hundreds of residency organisations in the AR network. AR's regional teams do the risk analysis and background checks, usually in the original language and with expertise in that discipline and country's artistic field. A match is made between an artist's profile and needs, and the hosts profile and facilities. If we have someone from theatre, we need a theatre to host them. Or if an artist has family in Sweden, a Swedish host might be considered. And so on. All of this benefits the horizontal network of hosts, who do not have such expertise and wide variety of choices to match the artist with the host.
We must keep these national networks alive. The problem is, as you might imagine, is that governments do not always provide funds. They may allocate funding for Ukraine, but only temporarily. And they do not allocate anything for Sudanese artists, despite this being the biggest displacement crisis in the world with over 12 million displaced, and over 3 million outside of Sudan. Furthermore, it's very difficult to get visas to certain countries, especially to Europe. So, there are many obstacles to moving artists and finding funding, and hence keeping national networks alive.

Jonny: How did you grow this network out of art practitioners and institutions? I would be eager to know more about this collaboration with international artists that you assist. Did you face conflicts of ideologies and interest while working and managing these diverse artists and institutions?

Ivor: There are naturally different positions and different kinds of groups that are at risk. And sometimes they come from opposite sides of a lethal conflict. You can have somebody who's fleeing the Putin regime, who's Russian, and you can have somebody who's fleeing the Putin regime in Eastern Ukraine, who's Ukrainian. And because of the current situation, many Ukrainians are against having any contact at all with somebody with a Russian passport. And that is understandable. But it would be going against UN conventions, for us to exclude one and take only the other. We follow international conventions. We take both.

Naturally, we have already been doing precisely this already, for ethical reasons. It's not just because there are international conventions, but because our ethical vision sees this the same way. In fact, our work has included developing fine-grained protocols for ensuring our ethical probity under often difficult and conflictual conditions. One such protocol we will be presenting

more publicly in the coming months is called the "Protocol for Invitations to Platforms in the context of Lethal Conflicts".

We can't reveal all the details right now, but it's quite simple. It's a step-by-step way of inviting people to a platform, making sure that nobody can sabotage the work of the platform because they are unhappy about the outcomes. You've seen many conflicts—actually not at programs run by us, but at many major and minor institutions.

Sometimes people fight for identity-politics, others for ideological reasons. Other times it is really about power, and we see people exploiting ideological positions related to various identities merely for their personal profit, which is certainly problematic.

But let's talk about another point of view: the positive side. What is surprising in the work of AR, is that we have somehow managed to work with, and sometimes put on a common stage, artists from a very wide variety of identity-backgrounds. Perhaps it is because those at risk are often the most courageous artists from their countries or regions of origin, and they see beyond purely identity-related issues. These are people who were willing to put their own life and freedom on the line for their art or cause. And so, they truly value others that do the same. They have a lot of understanding for other people's positions. Because, in the end, even if in a completely different context, they are fighting for the same thing.

And so, when it comes down to it, when it's about humanity and basic rights, they agree on many things. As a result, we have a highly international, highly diverse exhibition practice.

Jonny: That's remarkable. Also, that you're trying to maintain a positive view and want to create different spaces aside from the conflict spaces. These days, the cultural landscape is very tense and polarised, from politics to artists and institutions. Especially in the recent weeks and months, voices have grown louder, calling for clearer positioning on sides in these conflicts. I would also be interested in your understanding of art itself and how art can be a 'third space' in these turbulent times.

Ivor: We could talk about the 'third space' and that freedom to take this kind of position is something we would advocate for. But first, let us just mention that as Artists at Risk (AR) we can't and do not make political statements. As individuals, we do. As curators, we can.

As PM, which is a curatorial vehicle we have. But not as Artists at Risk (AR). Because AR is an NGO which focuses on risk and making sure that people are safe when they're at high risk.

Of course, people say, what is your position? Why didn't you make a big statement about this or that? We have to explain to them that this is not our mission. Our job at AR is to physically get people out of danger. If we spent our time making statements, we would never get anything done.

Even advocacy specifically for artists at risk is not our primary focus. Everyone else in the field is doing that. There are statements made, and petitions signed day and night, but we are not so sure how much this achieves. If there is something we can do that physically helps someone at high risk, we do it. And these very material things take a lot of work, time, effort and resources.

I think the way you phrased it is correct: to "create different spaces aside from the conflict spaces". We create an environment in which people are not identified according to their national or other identity markers, but according to their basic principles, their art, their courage and standing up for others and human rights.

These are spaces, where it is possible for solidarity to flourish. It is when they say, wait a minute, actually we are on the same side after all. What I see, at least, is that there is growing authoritarianism, rising across continents. If you are sucked into the kind of position of being for this and against that identity, you're actually playing into their hands, giving them more power. By creating a space, which says we're against all those forms of authoritarianism one can create a kind of 'mondial' solidarity. We use the term 'mondial' rather than 'international' because the word international is still about nations. So, we're talking about a mondial kind of solidarity, beyond nations. Also, as we work with ecology—notably in our Ecologists at Risk (ER) programme—we have a common goal, rather than just an enemy, right?

Jonny: I think that's especially interesting for art makers and for curators to define those spaces where art and activism come together.

I have two more questions. Firstly, you already mentioned that you realised your own exhibition on the occasion of the Venice Biennale. Would you see the Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion that you created also as a counter-project to the traditional framework of the Biennale?

Marita: We have worked at the Venice Biennale over many years, in many ways. This time we did a larger-scale exhibition at the Palazzo Zorzi, the headquarters of UNESCO in the city, which of course gave the project a certain official framing. The previous Biennale, we curated an intervention in front of the Russian Pavilion by the Ukrainian artist, Alexey Yudnikov. The performance was based on Gogol's *Nose*, and caused a lot of hilarious and not-so-amusing reactions, including from the Italian police. It garnered plenty of media attention.

So, we work in very different ways in biennials. Ivor also mentioned earlier that we work with Roma artists. We organised an emergency *Perpetual Romani Pavilion* dedicated to and with Roma artists at the Venice Biennial, which took place at many national pavilions. It involved asking visitors to commit their finger-prints to a special "postcard from Venice" which enumerated the crimes being committed against Romani people by the Berlusconi government. It was an activist pavilion. Not long before the opening of the Venice Biennale following the first Roma pavilion, we received information that the second Roma Pavilion was being cancelled. These were the times of Berlusconi's fascist antiziganism, when he gave orders to fingerprint Roma, throwing them in camps and separating children from their parents.

In short, we have done very different types of activist interventions. Often, they are done in emergency situations, and put together at high speed, in order to draw international attention to a burning issue.

Last year, in 2024, we worked in cooperation with UNESCO, which was quite different. We had been working with the UNESCO international headquarters in Paris over several years to support artists, and so we were able to secure their magnificent Palazzo Zorzi, which lies centrally between San Marco and the Arsenale. We filled it with artworks (we think very strong ones!) by artists connected to AR. One comment by a German gallerist tells a lot about this Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion in Venice. He said that in the exhibitions of the Venice Biennale proper, there were plenty of works and pavilions touching on issues related to human rights and other typical NGO topics. But the art was not always very strong. However, when he came to Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion, he was relieved to see genuinely strong artworks. Strong in their artistic language. It was not 'NGO art', a term he used to talk about art made to merely illustrate certain political events or actions.

In the kind of work we do, artists often double as human rights defenders. If their art is good, however, their experience is translated into work—from paintings to sound installations to cinema—that bring with them a different level of intensity and authenticity, because of their lived experience.

The Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion we curated this time reflected this. We also had several incredible performances during the opening days, one of them by a Palestinian artist Aws Zubaïdy, the other one by a Kurdish artist, Barış Seyitvan.

Ivor: We also had a performance by the Ukrainian-Ethiopian-Jewish hip-hop trio from Kharkiv, Ukraine. It was beautiful to have both Palestinian and Jewish artists in the same programme.

Marita: Unlike previous events we have done in Venice, this time we didn't engage in activism, like with the *Perpetual Romani Pavilion* or the intervention of the Ukrainian artist in front of the Russian pavilion. This time, artworks, performances, and an extensive programme of speeches by dignitaries including ministers and leaders of arts councils, talks and panel discussions featured. This is what we felt was needed. It depends on the political moment.

Jonny: I would like to finish this interview with one last question. Maybe it is a broad one, but it is also quite personal. Many crises are intensifying, and there will be much to do in the upcoming years. I would be interested in knowing what keeps you hopeful amidst all these challenges.

Ivor: That's a difficult question, for sure. Optimism, I think, comes from the fact that when we work with great artists, and when we get them out of danger, they can flourish and we see their work developing… and when we put that work on show, we get a sort of cross-boundary appreciation of each other's work. There's a whole level of humanity and art, beyond identity and conflicts.

This is something that has reached a crescendo in the last decade or so. Even though we're dealing with the most harrowing problems of our time, in our work it is humanity that comes to the fore and we hope that will always supersede the terror induced by these conflicts. We all need shelter from the rain, after all. And, we all need love and we all need art to survive. And so, although it sounds a little bit corny, this all comes back around full circle. It shows that there are universals after all, that bring everyone together.

One of the most beautiful works at the Artists at Risk (AR) Pavilion in Venice was visually captivating. It is an enormous, oversized life-ring covered in the most dazzling mosaics, made by Said Ahmed Alhassan from Sudan. But what is taking place in Sudan is truly horrendous. Over 11 million people displaced, hundreds of thousands of civilians (not combatants) killed and injured. Sexual violence on a mass scale. This is the second genocide in Darfur in a decade of Massalit people and other non-Arab communities by the Arab-funded belligerents. This is the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time according to the UN, yet it hardly registers in the mass media or on our screens. Despite all of this, you have a very beautiful work of art, overcoming all the horror. The author won a prize for it at Ars Electronica and is doing well in France. It's hard work, good work, and that gives you hope.

Marita: To add a little bit, it gives hope to see how some of these artists—artists who we believe are often human rights defenders—also go back. Like Issa Touma from Aleppo, who first was our resident in 2013. After three months, he went back to continue his work. He had to leave again during the height of the Syrian civil war, but now he's been back in Aleppo for several years. He restarted his gallery, physically rebuilding it. In Aleppo, he especially works with young people, as he did throughout the war. As he is a Christian Syrian, he now came out for a brief residency, as the uncertainty and danger is great under the new regime. Nevertheless, he returned, again, and just today, he sent a WhatsApp message—continuing his work as a human rights defender—commenting on the situation following the underreported killings of the Druze and Allawites, and the attack on the Christian Church in Damascus.

He is not the only one. Nkoshilathi Moyo, from Zimbabwe, is a great activist and a poet. He keeps coming out of the country for what we call a 'breather', and then he goes back and continues his work. These are human rights defenders, and you see how they continue their work in their countries or outside of their countries. And that gives you hope.

Another thing that gave us a lot of hope was the immense wave of solidarity of art institutions and colleagues who wanted to join Artists at Risk (AR) and work with artists when the Russian invasion started in Ukraine. As Peter Weibel, the late director of ZKM said, every art institution needs a Department of Artists at Risk. If everyone would take care of just one person, we would have a mass movement. This gives us hope. It happened with Ukraine, so why can't it happen with other countries,

and for ecological defenders, and so on? These kinds of peer-movements give us hope.We are witnessing all kinds of right-wing extremists, fundamentalisms on all sides. But we can get beyond our differences. We can really build a movement which can make a difference.

Ivor: Oh, that brings back to mind one last story. Not many years ago, a renowned HRD and poet from Uganda was left for dead in a ditch by the government thugs who ambushed him. We managed to get him to safety, and he became an AR-resident, and recovered. Amazingly, he was more active than ever. Later, he actually joined our team and has brought a whole new set of residencies to join our growing network in Africa. Such stories are infectious. One good thing leads to another. Like Marita said, it becomes a kind of movement.

The AR-Virtual Pavilion by Artists at Risk (AR)
– the global non-profit working at the intersection of art and human rights – offers visitors a first-person-view walkthrough of the AR-Pavilion at UNESCO's Palazzo Zorzi at the 2024 Venice Biennale. Curated by AR co-directors Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen, the AR-Virtual Pavilion offers immersive access to galleries, performances, concerts and interviews with artists and curators, as well as digital rooms documenting four conferences (Helsinki, CCCB, ZKM, ArtVeda) of AR-ENSH: Artists at Risk (AR) – A European Network of Safe Havens.

Artists: Said Ahmed Mohamed Alhassan (sculpture/mosaic), Kholod Hawash (textile), Saddam Jumaily (painting), Nikita Kravtsov (textile, digital print), Suva (sculpture/sound), Fo Sho (hip-hop), Damien Le Bas (painting, sculpture), Delaine le Bas (installation/video), Nkoshilathi Moyo (costume intervention), Mirwais Rekab (film), Barış Seyitvan (performance), Issa Touma (photography), Aws Zubaïdy (performance). The AR-VP is furthermore launching new works, starting this autumn with Luis Manuel Otero Alcántara (from prison).

The AR Pavilion Venice ARTISTS.RISKS.HUMANS.RIGHTS supported by UNESCO was co-funded by the Swedish Arts Council, Creative Europe, Saastamoinen Foundation and others. AR has worked with 330+ hosting organisations in 40+ countries to enable the relocation and support over 1,100 artists fleeing persecution, oppression, terror or war since its founding in 2013.

Explore the pavilion and support artists at risk.
Launch at UNESCO's MONDIACULT 26 September, 2025:
virtual.artistsatrisk.org

Screenshot virtual.artistsatrisk.org

Ivor Stodolsky and Marita Muukkonen are co-founders of *Perpetuum Mobile (PM)*. Their exhibition practice began with an experimental-historical inquiry into dissident and non-conformist art in the late-Soviet period, and how to re-open the archive to re-write canned history: *The Raw, the Cooked and the Packed*. This led to the *Re-Aligned* Project, which predicted and advocated for a political turn. Real-world curatorial 'interventions' in (frontline) political space followed: *The Arts Assembly* (Manifesta), *The Perpetuum Romani Pavilion* (Venice), *Back to Square 1*, *To the Square 2*... Creating a nomadic institutional form for this type of engaged curating - closely related to their work at AR—the *The Artists at Risk* (*AR*) Pavilions have intervened at biennials from Athens to Venice. With *Ecologists at Risk* (*ER*), they strive to defend the frontline defenders in the biggest crisis yet to come.

Jonny-Bix Bongers is a Berlin-based curator working at the intersection of digital art, performance, and futures thinking. With a background in theatre and cultural studies, he develops exhibitions and formats that explore how technology shapes artistic practice and collective imagination. He has curated programs for institutions such as HEK Basel, the Goethe-Institut, and the Münchner Kammerspiele, and currently teaches storytelling and transformation at the Berlin School of Economics and Law. Jonny also runs *Realtime Affairs*, a series focused on digital-performative arts, and curated the online exhibition *Attention Is All I Need* with OnCurating Academy. His current work explores digital art as a way of assembling perspectives – curating the space between authorship, collaboration, and shared infrastructures.

Right-Wing Spaces and Their Counter-movements: Maria Eichhorn's Approach
Fabienne Dubs and Jana Kurth

Between 1933 and 1945, the National Socialists abducted art and cultural assets across Europe in state-organised raids and thus stole them from their rightful owners. Many of these objects have still not been restituted, which is why many artworks of unknown provenance are still circulating on the international art market or are held in private and public collections.[1] However, the restitution of cultural assets seized as a result of persecution has not received the same level of attention everywhere: collections such as that of Cornelius Gurlitt in Germany, for example, were kept hidden for a long time (until 2012) and thus removed from any public discourse.

Prior to this – in November 1998 – the Washington Convention took a significant step towards uncovering unlawful spoliation: it was agreed internationally to actively conduct research in order to find out more about the origin, i.e. provenance, of the looted and expropriated works of art in museums' collections. The aim was to find the rightful owners who had been aggrieved by the Nazis or, if impossible, their heirs, and to find restitution solutions in the sense of a "just and fair solution"[2]. This search for solutions should also be seen as a 'countermovement' to dispel the shadow of oblivion that has settled over the past of the objects and their rightful owners by focusing on the background. Ultimately, it is not only the provenance of the objects that has created a 'right-wing space' around them; it is also the way in which the generations since the Second World War have chosen to deal with this burdened and incriminating history.

German artist Maria Eichhorn also dealt with the subject of looted art and the restoration of ownership of these works of art in her exhibition *Restitution Policy* at the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus in Munich, Germany, in 2003/04. Eichhorn shed light on the provenance of fifteen oil paintings and one watercolour from the collection of the gallery in the Lenbachhaus: these were not hung on the wall, but stood on wooden pedestals so that the front and back were visible.[4] The artist wanted to address the question of ownership, as it is above all the backs of the paintings with their inscriptions, markings and stickers that reveal the original ownership.

However, she was not only interested in a documentary reappraisal, but also in developing an artistic methodology that makes it possible to illustrate the heterogeneous levels of meaning that works of art can acquire as objects of real history and the target of various ownership claims.[6] Maria Eichhorn thus also investigated the fundamental institutional and cultural-political processes, which are not only characteristic of the situation of the museum collection in the Lenbachhaus, but in the course of decolonisation in the institutions are probably also seen as a permanent task for other museums, as current developments – for example in Switzerland at Kunsthaus Zurich – show.

Although not a legally binding declaration, the ratification of the Washington Convention in 1998 laid down how to deal with art seized as a result of Nazi persecution in the future, with the focus initially on identification (provenance research) and subsequent reparation (restitution). However, in the implementation of these principles over the past twenty-five years of their validity – despite the use of various dispute resolution

mechanisms to resolve ownership issues – it has become clear that the question of the legitimacy (worthiness of recognition) of restitution by no means ends with provenance research and restitution. This was demonstrated not only by Maria Eichhorn's exhibition *Restitution Policy*, but also by the debates that have arisen around the topic since. The desire to publicly engage with the history and memories in this context on the basis of witness objects has become a desire that now overshadows almost everything. The works in question are historically burdened and politicised, which ultimately restricts an unclouded view of them. Demands to "create or expand understanding of the political and racist baggage that haunted this period of 20th century art" become understandable and increasingly shape public discourse.[7] In addition, the desire for the "necessity of publication in an exhibition form that shows both the results and the works themselves" is being fuelled, as Maria Eichhorn put it in an interview with Adam Szymczyk in 2017 in the run-up to documenta 14.[8]

With a view to the restitution of cultural property seized as a result of Nazi persecution in the sense of a "just and fair solution", the authors believe that the dimension of legitimacy takes centre stage, which must be underpinned by the following indispensable elements:

1. public interest and discourse
2. voluntariness and willingness
3. provenance research and clarification
4. contextualisation
5. transparency
6. completeness.

The fact that there must be a fundamental interest on the part of the public has already been demonstrated above. The Washington Declaration, to which forty-four states agreed, is a necessary basis for recognition and, with its voluntary, moral commitment, makes it clear what an important role the public plays here. A comprehensive discourse can impose the pressure that is often required. Artistic debates, such as Eichhorn's exhibition *Restitution Politics* at the Lenbachhaus or her exhibition contribution *The Rose Valland Institute* at documenta 14 in Kassel in 2017, contribute to

Photo: Maria Eichhorn's exhibition Restitution Policy, 2003/04 at the Lenbachhaus in Munich.[3]

Recto and verso of Theodor Leopold Weller's Portrait of a Girl, c. 1820, as shown in Eichhorn's exhibition Restitution Policy at the Lenbachhaus in Munich, 2003.[5]

uncovering historical events and power-based processes, and offer the general public the opportunity to familiarise themselves with such topics and do memory work. In her participation in documenta, Eichhorn even went one step further by calling on the public – via an open call on the subject of "unlawful ownership" – to "research whether their inherited property contains Nazi-looted goods" and offering research support.[9] Eichhorn's 2022 Venice Biennale contribution, presented in the German Pavilion, also took up the history of the exhibition venue, which was converted by the Nazi state in 1938; she subjected the architecture of National Socialist rule to an examination in order to subsequently uncover its structures and thus traces of the past.[10] In this context, the importance of public discourse becomes clear: the way in which an exhibition is curated can make an intrinsic contribution to the debate.

Another indispensable element is the voluntary nature and willingness of the institutions and individuals involved. Although this has already taken place to some extent at a national or international level with exhibitions such as the 2017 documenta in Kassel or the national Biennale Pavilion in Venice in 2022, even renowned institutions shy away from fully uncovering underlying conflicts and making them visible, which would allow artworks to be read as carriers of meaning and interpretation.[12] Cases such as that of the Curt Glaser Collection at Kunstmuseum Basel show that processes are often only set in motion by external pressures, which in each case represent a tough struggle and cannot usually be successfully concluded within a short period of time. It took over a decade – the restitution claim was rejected as unjustified in 2008 after lengthy investigations[13] – until the Kunstmuseum Basel reached an agreement with Glaser's heirs in 2017: Museum Basel was able to keep the artworks, but had to compensate the heirs with an extensive exhibition on Curt Glaser and financial compensation. Ultimately, being proactive here also means not only wanting to provide financial resources for the restitution itself, but also having a sufficient budget in advance to finance human resources for provenance research, or ideally to set up a provenance research department – as Kunstmuseum Basel did in 2017, for example, in the course of the restitution of the Curt Glaser collection. There has certainly been a change in existing self-perceptions in recent years.

Of course, provenance research and clarification as such takes on one of the most fundamental roles and should also be seen as the starting point for contextualisation, which is also an important element in the legitimacy considerations. As part of her

exhibition at the Lenbachhaus in 2003/04, Maria Eichhorn developed an artistic methodology that "could potentially be applied as a model of clarification to all unsolved cases" and suggested that "the artwork is transformed into a testimony or analytical object and at the same time [is] linked to concrete provenance research in order to both determine its status and initiate a possible restitution [that] is not tied to a specific location and collection".[14] Provenance research as a procedure is, however, also characterised by the respective context and claim that an institution and the persons involved have set as their goal. The Kunsthaus Zurich only announced a new approach to works by previous Jewish owners in March 2023, and is investing one million Swiss francs in the newly adopted provenance research strategy over the next few years to enable a systematic review of this part of the collection. By contrast, the Bührle Foundation, whose works have been housed at the Kunsthaus Zurich since 2021, considers the provenance of its works to have already been clarified: the art historian Lukas Gloor, who was also the director of the Bührle Foundation, worked on the collection from 2002 to 2021 and publicly stated that Emil Bührle had not left behind a Nazi art collection. At the same time, he resigned in 2021 when the City of Zurich announced that the works on loan from the Bührle collection were to be examined independently. The aim was to clarify whether the E. G. Bührle Collection Foundation had conducted its provenance research properly and presented the results correctly.

This brings us to contextualisation, another element that is needed in order to ensure legitimacy. In addition to the question of what is presented, the way in which it is presented is also highly relevant. In order for the looted or unlawfully obtained objects to act as carriers of meaning, they must be presented appropriately in exhibitions. It is

Maria Eichhorn's project Relocating a Structure in the German Pavilion at the 2022 Venice Biennale[11]

often not enough to exhibit the object alone; it is important that the curation is enriched with files, photographs and reports from contemporary witnesses, so that its level of meaning as a tool of Nazi injustice is revealed. This can mean that the art historical importance of a work of art may – at least temporarily – fade into the background. It is then up to the curators to choose a suitable form of presentation, in order to provide visitors with information on the various levels of meaning of the objects, as Maria Eichhorn's exhibition contributions have already made clear.

Central to the credibility and sincerity of curatorial efforts in terms of contextualisation is the careful consideration of the informative and physical space given to the perpetrators (or collectors) and victims in the exhibition.[15] In the case of the new presentation of the Bührle Collection at Kunsthaus Zurich – which has been on display since November 2023 – it is noticeable, for example, that the photos and texts about Bührle's career, the development of his collection and his political and social ties with the Zurich elite of his time (in particular with the artists' society that still runs the Kunsthaus today) take up a great deal of space. The life stories of the Jewish people who were the previous legal owners of some of Bührle's collection objects, on the other hand, are contained within a small text panel and one or two family photos placed next to the respective work, often leaving the public with the impression of a marginal note or footnote. Moving the 'perpetrator-related' information into the digital realm, so that it could be called up using QR codes, for example, would be a possible solution here.

It has already been made clear in the comments on provenance research and clarification that it only makes sense to investigate the provenance of controversial objects or those proven to have been unlawfully acquired if the investigations are conducted by independent researchers and financed by neutral donors. The results of the research must be published comprehensively and with objective openness. If an institution allows censorship or editorial interference by stakeholders, it makes itself untrustworthy and destroys the positive effect of provenance research. This became clear in the report "War transactions, capital and Kunsthaus. The emergence of the Bührle Collection in a historical context",[16] which historian Prof. Matthieu Leimgruber from the University of Zurich was commissioned to write by the City and Canton of Zurich in August 2017. In 2020, Erich Keller, who was involved in the research project, raised accusations against the steering committee of the project. It had allowed the then director of the Bührle Foundation, Lukas Gloor, to have formulations in the report changed by Leimgruber in order to present Bührle in a more favourable light.[17] Transparency and completeness are therefore two further important elements that are required in order to gain recognition. The aspect of completeness was also discussed by Maria Eichhorn, Alexander Alberro and Adam Szymczyk in 2017 in the run-up to documenta 14, when it came to the question of whether the Gurlitt Collection should be presented there in its entirety. Given the remarkable size of the estate, this seemed practically impossible, and yet it became clear in the discussion that breaking the collection up into small parts could encourage accusations of concealment and suppression.[18]

Restitution and restitution intentions are and will remain an extremely multi-layered and complex undertaking. However, the authors follow Maria Eichhorn's argument that documenta – and thus, in a broader sense, platforms such as museums and similar institutions –must always be seen as social links that belong to that core area of a civil society in which its self-image is shaped and further developed. In the light of legitimacy, the voluntariness and willingness that must be expected from institutions and other initiatives appear all the more important. In the context of cultural assets confiscated as a result of Nazi persecution, the aim must be to promote the transformation of existing self-images. The way in which burdened and incriminating history

has been dealt with for a long time must be countered. The role of curation probably lies less in provenance research and clarification itself. However, there is a need for interaction, not only in terms of transparency and completeness. With a view to public discourse and contextualisation, curation can play a key role in helping to clarify and restore the ownership of these artworks. Only when the full historical circumstances surrounding the unlawful or amoral acquisition of the objects have been researched, presented and understood will we be able to make the artworks shine again.

Notes

1 Wittchow, M. (9 Apr 2019). 'Provenienzforschung am Lenbachhaus: 255 Kunstwerke im Wert von 97.883 RM – das Lenbachhaus forscht. Ein Beitrag zum Tag der Provenienzforschung'. Retrieved from https://www.lenbachhaus.de/blog/provenienz-forschung-am-lenbachhaus

2 'Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art', item 8 (1998). Retrieved from https://www.state.gov/washington-conference-principles-on-nazi-con-fiscated-art/#:~:text=Every%20effort%20should%20be%20made,War%20owners%20or%20their%20heirs.

3 Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus (2004). 'Programm – Ausstellung: Maria Eich-horn'. Retrieved from https://www.lenbachhaus.de/programm/ausstellungen/detail/maria-eichhorn-967.

4 Dultz, M. (13 Dec 2003). 'Fremde Habe', in: *Die Welt*. Retrieved from https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article279753/Fremde-Habe.html

5 Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus and Kunstbau Munich. In: 'What Does Identity Mean to Maria Eichhorn?' by Szymczyk, A., *FRIEZE*, Issue 226 (14 Apr 2022). Retrieved from https://www.frieze.com/what-does-identity-mean-to-maria-eichhorn

6 Proveana, Provenance Research Database, German Lost Art Foundation (26 May 2023). 'Restitutionspolitik. Politics of Restitution von Maria Eichhorn'. Retrieved from https://www.proveana.de/de/ereignis/restitutionspolitik-politics-restitution-von-ma-ria-eichhorn

7 Haacke, H. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate: Adam Szymczyk in conversation with Alexander Alberro, Maria Eichhorn, and Hans Haacke'. Retrieved from https://www.documenta14.de/en/south/59_the_indelible_presence_of_the_gur-litt_estate_adam_szymczyk_in_conversation_with_alexander_alberro_maria_eich-horn_and_hans_haacke

8 Eichhorn, M. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate', op. cit. (n. 7).

9 Bang Larsen, L., & Eichhorn, M. (2020). 'Maria Eichhorn in conversation with Lars Bang Larsen. The Rose Valland Institute at documenta 14', In: Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, *Historische Urteilskraft* 02. Magazin des DHM, Issue: 'docu-menta. Geschichte/Kunst/Politik' (pp. 13–17). Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck.

10 Trebing, S. (20 Apr 2022). 'Deutscher Pavillon in Venedig – Ans Fundament'. In: *Monopol - Magazin für Kunst und Leben*. Retrieved from https://www.monopol-maga-zin.de/maria-eichhorn-deutscher-pavillon-venedig-biennale

11 Cappelletti, M., Courtesy La Biennale di Venezia. In: Becker, St., & Kuhn, L. (27 Apr 2022). 'Rückbau Schicht um Schicht – Zu Besuch im Deutschen Pavillon auf der Kunst-Biennale in Venedig'. Retrieved from https://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen-Zu_Besuch_im_Deutschen_Pavillon_auf_der_Kunst-Biennale_in_Venedig_7914559.html

12 Eichhorn, M. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate', op. cit. (n. 7).

13 Staatskanzlei – Präsidialdepartement des Kantons Basel-Stadt (19 Feb 2008). 'Medien-mitteilung Regierungsrat: Rückgabeforderung an das Kunstmuseum Basel nicht ge-rechtfertigt'. Retrieved from https://www.staatskanzlei.bs.ch/nm/2008-02-19-rrbs-005.html

14 Eichhorn, M. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate', op. cit. (n. 7).
15 Szymczyk, A. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate, op. cit. (n. 7).
16 Title translated by the authors, original: *Kriegsgeschäfte, Kapital und Kunsthaus. Die Entstehung der Sammlung Bührle im historischen Kontext.*
17 Keller, E. (2021). *Das kontaminierte Museum. Das Kunsthaus Zürich und die Sammlung Bührle.* Zurich: Rotpunktverlag, pp. 67 f.
18 Eichhorn, M. (2017). 'The indelible presence of the Gurlitt estate', op. cit. (n. 7).

Fabienne Dubs, MA, is the curator and assistant head of the Art Collection of the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland. She studied art history and history at the University of Zurich UZH. She has closely followed the developments and discourse surrounding the Bührle Collection and its move to Kunsthaus Zurich ever since her BA thesis in 2015/16, which centred on some artworks that Bührle acquired through questionable means. Her master's thesis on the construction of Zurich Town Hall focused on questions of early modern representations of sovereignty through room and frontage schedules and the ordering of guild assignments. Between September 2023 and May 2024, Dubs completed the CAS Curating at Zurich University of Applied Arts (ZHdK).

Jana Kurth, MA, is an independent curator, researcher and consultant. Passionate about art that explores social change in its historical context, human rights, culture and identity, she works at the Center of Human Rights at the University of Zurich. Her academic journey includes a master's degree in curating from Zurich University of Applied Arts (ZHdK) and prior studies at the University of Art and Design Lucerne. Jana Kurth also holds a master's in business administration from the University of Rostock, Germany. Her background as an artist, coupled with her extensive managerial expertise in both the non-profit and the private sector, provides her with a nuanced perspective that enriches not just her curatorial work but also her analytical approach to developments and discourses on the topic of restitution and provenance research.

It's Not the Good Ones, the Peaceful Ones, Who are Winning. That's How It Goes. Everybody Knows.[1]
Interview with Klaus Theweleit
led by Maria Sorensen and Dorothee Richter.
The questions were prepared as part
of a seminar.

Introduction: Klaus Theweleit's seminal work *Male Fantasies* (1978)[2] delves into the imagination that captivated the private paramilitary group which first appeared in the wake of Germany's defeat in World War I: the Freikorps.[3] Echoing Deleuze and Guattari's argument for the coextension of rational and irrational forms, *Male Fantasies* sets out to describe the dialectical entanglement of social, political and fantasy machines. Subsequently, many members of the Freikorps went on to become key functionaries for Hitler's SA and the Nazi regime. Notably, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the co-founders of the German Communist Party, were tragically murdered by a Freikorps member in 1919.

Male Fantasies provides the analytical framework for examining toxic masculinity, particularly the type of violence that resulted in the systematic murder of millions of people, transforming the life of citizens into horrific human tragedies. Theweleit assembles excerpts from a vast corpus of Freikorps literature and subjects these materials to unconventional interpretations. He discerns that imagery suggestive of intimacy, hybridity, or the transgression of boundaries – dirt, disorder, fluidity and flux – is consistently associated with dread and profound revulsion in Freikorps writings. This suggests to Theweleit that the fascist male's obsessive misogyny and hypervigilant machismo are rooted in the traumatic severing of the negative symbiosis between mother and infant son. In his perspective, the "soldier male" (Theweleit's term for the archetype of fascist manhood) emerges as a consequence of a catastrophic reaction formation.

For the male soldier, battle serves as a mechanism of self-preservation. He sustains his existence by distinguishing himself as a killer, in opposition to any perceived threats. Throughout Freikorps literature, Theweleit encounters imagery of adversaries transformed into what he refers to as the "bloody miasma" – a crimson cloud, a formless mass – as the soldier male inflicts upon his adversary the feminising dissolution that embodies his deepest fear. Subsequently, the crimson miasma transitions into a "white totality", a void where the previously standing enemy, the "swarthy rabble", resided. This hygienic zone of purity aligns with the ideal of the "white woman". By displacing the tainted and teeming rabble, the white totality also displaces womanly filth. In this manner, race and gender are conflated.

Maria Sorensen and Dorothee Richter: You, Klaus Theweleit, propose that it just might be that these men (the Freikorps) were doing "exactly what they wanted to do", as they come with a deep disturbance of the psyche. Do you think the recent global events lead to the need for this type of psychoanalysis, and if so, how important is it to apply such psychoanalysis in today's discourse on fascism and violence? Can we say that fascism is coming back? Or has it never really left and simply flourishes when the conditions are ripe?

Klaus Theweleit: Fascism has never really left. But I wouldn't have expected it to come back in the sort of actual "flourishing" you mention. For some time, maybe in the 1980s, we had hopes like that. Wishful thinking, having stopped (for moments) to take a closer look at political realities worldwide. But when we take that closer look, we realise that sociological developments in the world don't happen simultaneously; in certain regions of the world, fascistic traits get stronger; in other regions they nearly disappear. But apart from those changing realities, the need for psychoanalysis to understand violence and deal with its different forms is always there. There isn't any better set of instruments for that.

Maria, Dorothee: The analysis you provided in *Male Fantasies* is a rare and rigorous hybrid of psychoanalysis and social critiques. In a way, you are implying a transformation from the psychological to the sociopolitical, which is still rather daring in the studies of fascism and violence. Could one say that a specific sociopolitical moment encourages these sorts of psychosis?

Klaus: The main thesis is that there is no main thesis. There are some basic perceptions: it's the state of human bodies which decides about the political shapes a society has developed and will develop, or not.

Maria, Dorothee: In one of your lectures, you quoted Walter Benjamin and explained that fascism is not an ideology as such but a product of all centuries and cultures. In *Male Fantasies*, you also argue that fascism is not an ideology. Could you explain in more detail what you mean by that?

Klaus: A dominating force in that is the existence of what I call the "fragmented body" (a term I borrowed from the psychoanalysis of the child, as developed by Margaret Mahler, Melanie Klein and others). Its first result: fascism is primarily not an ideology but is based in the need of certain bodies to construct institutional and political realities according to the needs of their bodies. In certain ways, these are 'disturbed' bodies; I call them "not yet fully born". They try to find their way to feeling alive through acts of violence. Many people think it is not possible to imply a transformation from the psychophysical aspect of human bodies to the sociopolitical sphere. I try to show that it is possible. The first thing I took from their writings – sort of a main thesis – is that their bodies are filled with fears.

Maria, Dorothee: What you wrote about in your book is not just any man's psyche; you describe a very specific type of man that you call a "man soldier". What kind of boys/men are these who grow up to be "men soldiers"?

Klaus: This term came to me from the practical reason of not having to talk all the time about 'fascists' or the 'fascist' body. Because there are many more violent forms of male behaviour in the world that are not bound to the political form of 'fascist states' but who, in the foreground, are 'soldierly'. This is a word you can use, for example, in

relation to the psychophysical states of a ten-year-old boy. The disturbance of bodies of people who as adults will act in mostly violent ways in their surroundings begins very early on; it starts in the bodies of babies who are subjected to destructive actions (of possibly very different sorts) by the persons who are bringing them up. In some particular societies, they get their final shape through military drill – a sort of body-building torture. This was the case, for example, in Germany in the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century. Many of them felt that they were being newly born through the horrors of the military drill. Being reborn as 'real men'.

Maria, Dorothee: Could that also be nurtured by very rigid sexual or other forms of oppression looking for an outlet? But I think it is much more than that in your definition. According to you, women as a group are split into two different groups – the good ones and the bad ones – be it white women or red ones; in these fantasies, all women are punishable one way or the other, either by suffering and drainage of life (for obedient white women), or by being killed and mutilated to a "bloody mess" (for red women). The primary crime or "potential" crime for all women is in fact their sexuality and sexual/physical/individual agency. In light of today's global events, this analysis proves to be chillingly resounding. Would you talk more about it?

Klaus: Yes. Their behaviour towards 'women' as a sociological position was very peculiar. The main structure you mention – splitting this sort of creature into two parts – was something they had learned to do with (more or less) every phenomenon of the outside world: 'good' or 'bad'. In colours: white (hospital nurses, their sisters and – sometimes – mothers); red for the rest: mostly working-class women at this time, who were taking part in the mass demonstrations after World War I for a socialist republic after the defeat of the German monarchy. These women partly walked hand in hand with men, sometimes kissing in the street. Obviously being on equal terms with everybody in those 'masses'. They (the soldierly men) knew nothing about women – creatures they had very little contact with on their way to being trained to become 'soldiers' (after having been separated from their mothers and, sometimes, sisters). Women they had got to know during the war had been nurses in the hospitals for wounded soldiers or prostitutes in places organised by the military. The term 'socialist', these soldiers had been told, meant 'bolshevism', meant 'communist whores', many of them Jewish (= *poisoning* good *German* blood by means of their sexuality). It meant the *destruction* of every order, the destruction of the *natural order* of men in the ruling positions – soldierly men like them, not 'dirty workers' with their 'red' whores.

All of this led to the term 'rote Flut' – the 'Red Flood' under which name all phenomena of the German Revolution were put together. A world of *fluidity,* threatening every upright man who hadn't learned to swim in those swamps and mud and slime of human bodies. *Male Fantasies* started as a work on the language of those killers. They didn't write: "There were workers on strike, defending the gates of their factories"; instead they wrote: "The mud (or the slime) of the Republic had grown to our very lips. We were threatened with drowning, in danger of being swallowed by the whirling red swamps", and things like that. Finally I realised they were not just talking nonsense. They talked about themselves: the "mud" came up from their insides and reached the edge of their lips; the words contained their feelings of fear in such situations. The solution: they fired their guns into those congregations.

All those threats were encoded by them (and not only by them) with 'femininity'. All the stories they were told about cruel "red women" joyfully castrating "good German soldiers" melted into a stream of hatred in their actions against those "unnatural

demons"; turning their bodies into a "bloody mess", when killing many of them in the suppression of the workers' fights.

As you point out, this is a worldwide phenomenon in such struggles to this day. Another main point: the central fear of the "fragmented body" is the fear of bodily dissolution, of being melted into one of those "swamps" encoded with femininity.

Maria, Dorothee: In a lecture you gave in 2016, you talked about the constructed "male hierarchical symbiosis" (everyone is in their "right place") as a substitute for proper object-relation, therefore a psychological construct. Again, what would you say could be the potential relation between such a psychological construct and an a posteriori, societal implementation?

Klaus: We have to take a slightly broader view on that, on the ways in which feelings like that get into human bodies. The primary relation of babies after their birth is what analysts call the 'symbiosis' with the nurturing body, mostly that of a mother. It takes the child about two years or more to grow out of that symbiosis into a person 'of its own' – still dependent, for years, on the nurturing family or a similar formation. If this upbringing happens in a modest way of helping the child grow, it will, one day in his later life, arrive at a state of being able to find its way into 'object relations' with other people – in friendships, groups, love affairs, etc. In psychoanalytical terms: the child has developed 'friendly introjects'; that means bodily representations of friendly persons from the outside. And realises one day that she or he exists in her or his own right, apart from the others: a joyful experience. People who, when growing up, find themselves forced to live in "fragmented bodies", didn't get enough of that necessary help. When treated badly – in whatever way – friendly introjects that made them feel good in their bodies didn't grow in them (what Melanie called "the good, nurturing mother's breast"). Instead of that, they are filled with unsure feelings which often turn into fears. That makes it difficult for them to part in a more or less 'normal' way from their symbiotic relations; the child turns these relations into negative ones. Children like that get into a principal insecurity about who other people really are, and in a principal insecurity about realities as a whole. They tend to get into states of feeling persecuted (by the introject of the "wicked breast", as Melanie Klein calls it). Those feelings can be successfully 'treated' by the military drill where something like a 'body armour' is placed on the soldier, and a special social body order in which every part – every person – knows his exact place in a formation, in groups, in society. There, the "societal implementation" referred to in your question happens. People like that learn to transform every potentially 'symbiotic' relation (of insecurity) into a hierarchical one (of security). That's their process of fencing in their fears. Which means they become – in political terms – bodily anti-democratic persons. Accepting only realities of a strong hierarchical order, obeying leaders, loving dictatorships, and all that. That's one of the main reasons for the 'flourishing' of fascist formations worldwide.

In Germany with the (propagandistic) specialty that from World War I there are reports inside the military, warning soldiers to take care when dealing with Jewish prostitutes. They were said to infect German soldiers on purpose, to weaken the German army through the deaths of syphilitic soldiers. There is no end to the summoning of female wickedness – always planning bodily dissolutions.

Maria, Dorothee: Can you please talk about the main thesis of your 2015 book *Das Lachen der Täter* (The Laughter of the Perpetrators)[4] and the conclusions you have reached after comparing these various atrocities?

Klaus: There are some scenes of killing/laughing soldiers in *Male Fantasies*; later, I found so many more that it made sense to put them together to form the core of *Das Lachen der Täter*. It describes one of the central feelings of relief for the killing agents. In the scripts of the German soldiers, it appears mostly in the form of the "empty place", or "empty space". For example, soldiers have been commanded to dissolve a group of workers on strike: they go there, check out how to control the situation, come near, and in the end fire their guns into the group. A miracle – *within seconds*, the place is empty, except for some corpses lying there. That's the moment they burst into raucous laughter. Also in similar situations in 'the field', at the front during the war. This laughter is absolutely irresistible. One of the moments the killer gets into a feeling of being 'whole', no longer threatened by fragmentation. Then I found exactly this sort of laughter in different killings all over the world – South America, Indonesia, in the Congo, Japanese killings, Abu Ghraib, everywhere. It's sort of an orgasm to those killers.

But the killing alone is not sufficient, To get into a feeling of a sort of "satisfaction", the victim has to be turned into that special view of a "bloody mess". Shooting at the heads of persons who are already dead, stabbing into their bellies or cutting off their limbs are the most common ways to put them into these final states.

Maria, Dorothee: In this 2015 book, you applied the theory of the fascist psyche to Islamist terrorists and right-wing extremist mass murderers like Anders Breivik. In what way is it different when a psychotic person like Breivik delves into mass murder, as opposed to when a group like Hamas does it?

Klaus: Breivik – one of my 'prominent' examples for the laughing killer. Islamist terrorists we could see on the internet, beheading people, laughing like hell. It really makes no difference to what group or nation the killing men belong. Muslims from the IS state want "all Christians" (= Ungläubige) to be dead. Christians like Breivik want all Muslims to be dead. The same with Hamas. It's not a national, not an ethnical, not a special religious sign, but a sign of killing men worldwide. Some traits they share are killing with joy and the celebration of elimination. This joy of killing they have in common. Especially when destroying female bodies.

Maria, Dorothee: You also discussed in your work the possibility of creating a strong social support and educational environment that could potentially reduce the burgeoning of fascism and radicalisation in men. An obvious answer would be to have a caring society with infrastructures that would prevent that. Is that a naive dream or a possibility? And how was it possible that Norway – a very different society from Russia or Belarus, a democratic country with strong social support, a welfare society where the weak are protected – produced someone like Breivik?

Klaus: In a way you may be right to say that the Norwegian society produced someone like Breivik. But it produced a guy like that as a sort of counterpart – as a solitary figure, a 'lone wolf'. Breivik had to act as a loner just because the Norwegian society in its daily life *doesn't* produce persons like him. In other societies, a 'Breivik' would have found enough companions for killing actions like those he committed.

Klaus Theweleit with Dorothee Richter at UdK, Berlin

I'm not afraid of being called 'naive' when speaking about the possibilities of a 'caring society' in preventing mass murders. You all know the song text: "You may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one …" If you had better ways – okay, there's no limit to those … But – give the world to the realists – and you are in hell immediately. 'Realists' are consuming realities, swallowing them. Turn realities into the shape of their insides: bloody pieces of shit. Building societies which are equivalents of their inner states.

Maria, Dorothee: You mentioned before that it is important to engage, that political education is important. You give an example that in Germany, the AfD has a very strong influence in some regions and almost none in others, and the mistake was to stop working with young people in East Germany. It is possible to influence something at a certain stage of human psychological/social development, when these men/boys are still young. Can you give some examples or suggestions as to what these alternatives might be, at least in democratic societies?

Klaus: I'm speaking about the situation after the Wall had come tumbling down in 1989, and shortly after that East Germany, the GDR, ceased to exist and became part of West Germany, the FRG. West German politicians (and many inhabitants too) acted in this moment as if they had 'won the Cold War' now (that's how they felt). And, as if that were not enough, they celebrated it as a belated victory over the Soviet Union, as a rewinning of WW II, idiotically. One of the first things they did was to close nearly all places where the young people in the East had gathered in their free time; they especially closed all the youth centres, because these had been meeting places for the 'communist youth' of the East, for the FDJ, *Freie Deutsche Jugend.* As such, they had to disappear, and many music venues too. Sports centres were also closed. Clubs ceased to exist. But places like these are absolutely necessary in open societies to keep the social contacts of young people going. By closing most of them, there was nearly nothing left of the old meeting places, especially in rural regions. In this gap, the radical right-wing youth movement of neo-Nazis began to grow – those political forces, now organised in right-wing parties like the NPD, later the AfD. The West had missed the opportunity to offer democratic alternatives to what they had destroyed. A social vacuum had grown, and into vacuums like that youth violence will step in, on the edge of criminality.

Maria, Dorothee: What we read in Breivik's manifesto reflects what you analysed in the letters in *Male Fantasies*: hatred and fear of women. For him, they are a threat and danger. According to him, when given power, they (women) let foreigners and Muslims into the country and marry them, hence "Islamising" Europe. He blames them for the "great replacement" – by now a mainstream, far-right conspiracy theory proposing that the 'original' population of Europe is being replaced with foreigners and migrants, due to liberal elites' conspiracy. So to him, the biggest 'threats' are women, Islam and Marxists. Over sixty teenagers that he killed were from the youth wing of a social democratic, left-leaning party. This rhetoric is quite popular on the Right; it is no longer on the fringe but is used even by mainstream political parties. How concerning do you find it to be?

Klaus: Parts of the answer are in your question. It's the description of a horrible development. My question is: does it make any impression on people who talk like that if you tell them that they themselves are products of the very mixtures of populations they 'hate'? Does it make sense to tell them that women are not necessarily a threat to their bodily constitution? I fear it is of no use. They've got to have new experiences – the experience of being helped by other people, friends, groups, lovers. But how should one speak to people/men who say – like the American 'incel' men do – that we don't need women any longer, not even for giving birth.

Maria, Dorothee: In an interview with *NZZ*, you talk about how all religions are also based on this male dominance. "One of the main purposes of the Bible and the Qur'an is to set rules for women: how they should give birth and get married, what they are allowed to do and what they are not allowed to do. Religions are men-made; God's word is men's word. This means that the attack is present from the start."[5] In his manifesto, Breivik also presents rather extreme theories on controlling women, about how they should only be allowed to study up to Bachelor level, should have a minimum of two kids and stay at home, should not join the police, etc. It sounds like a special form of Islamic patriarchy – which he claims to fight in his own battle for a free men's world. What do you make of this connection? And how can one relate this to the Hamas terror in Israel?

Klaus: Women should not join the police or the army, Breivik writes. Because those are purely male fields which would only be poisoned by the presence of women. Yes, it absolutely sounds like one of the rules of an Islamic patriarchal catalogue. Is that a contradiction? People don't care about contradictions. Some people – the most intelligent ones – know and say that contradictions only exist inside of logical, philosophical or mathematical *systems*. In actual reality there are no contradictions; reality is a chaotic multiplicity of things. So, from the perspective of eliminatory thinking – or better, eliminatory feelings, there is basically no difference between an Islamic guy demanding the deaths of all Christians and a Christian guy pleading for the death of all Muslims. No difference to a Hamas killer who wants all Israelis to be dead. Or to Netanyahu, whom I heard say that all Hamas people should be wiped out from the surface of the earth. Or a white racist in the US (or elsewhere) who wishes just the same to all coloured people. People who demand elimination – the most dangerous form of humans existing. We know – from real history – that they are going to act out what they demand, the moment they have the political and/or military power to do this.

Maria, Dorothee: What do far-right terrorists and Islamic extremists have in common that makes you put them in the same book? What makes them commit these terrible crimes? If we think of beheadings by ISIS, mass rapes by Hamas and, as you

pointed out, they laugh when they committed these acts of violence; they seemingly derive pleasure from killing.

Klaus: It's the things they have in common. In terms of the psychoanalysis of children (Margret Mahler and others), we should speak of 'dedifferentiation' and 'deanimation' here – two central terms. 'Dedifferentiation': "All women are just the same … All Muslims are just the same … All blacks are …, etc." ("And what are they? Just the same *heap of shit*. Get them out of the way. It's our *right* to act like this.") That leads to 'deanimation': the process of taking life out of all those who are around and who are different from one's own group; from one's own body. But to get the psychological processes even more precisely: it's a trait in sexuality they share. You speak about their "pleasure in killing". What is this really? What is the pleasure in raping? And killing the women afterwards? It has become common to call it sexualised violence. But where is the sexuality when a leader of a Congo unit orders his child soldiers to cut bodies with their machetes all day long until they get an erection. Then they would have become men. For me, sexuality is primarily a word for a pleasurable bodily intermingling of persons who like each other, not a process of violence. Using the term '*sexualised* violence' – isn't that a denunciation of sexuality? What I see are completely *de-sexualised* acts. We have to realise, I think, that the form of bodily behaviour that we are used to calling sexuality has stopped to exist in bodies like that. It has been transformed into forms of torture, destruction and elimination – which are enjoyed by the bodies of the perpetrators. It's their form of feeling bodily sensations. There is no sexuality at all left in their bodies. It becomes visible when the penis turns into a murderous instrument that gets an erection over the person the killer is chopping up. A body of sexuality couldn't do that. It's lust of killing. And they *know* this from each other.

Maria, Dorothee: Did modern-day extremist terrors, such as those committed by Hamas, reach a new level of cruelty when they utilised social media and the terror also became a public performance (as parts of it were broadcast in real time on social media, were posted and replicated)?

Klaus: Yes, as far as I can see, this is the only real difference to other killing acts we know. When asked during the last two years to write something about Putin's cruelties, his dehumanising terror, I refused to do so with the argument that all those things happening in war actions, in other terrorist actions, are completely well known to all the people who wanted to know about them. Putin didn't add anything 'new'. I got furious when I heard people say that these were unprecedented cruelties in Europe after WW II. Memory? Obviously that doesn't exist, even in the brains of actual ruling politicians. Where have they stored away the events that occurred when Yugoslavia fell apart?

But the broadcasting of killings in real time on social media *is* a change in that field. Some commentators stressed that the killings the Hamas people executed were obviously performed and recorded for the purpose of their exhibition on social media; not only for their 'documentation', but also planned to produce a general shock, a feeling of horror and a feeling of being personally threatened. And a feeling of overwhelming power in all those who share the target of that actions. Maybe to billions of people. The electronic networks have become a powerful instrument, not only of 'communication' among people who didn't know from each other before the Nineties, but also an extremely forceful and effective power in the hands of 'right-wing' powers all over the world in their fight against democracies, their fight for authoritarian societies, for states ruled by dictators. Hardly to be controlled. Another 'common thing' they share: it was Mary Douglas who realised that people like that used to feel that their own

body's borders were equivalent to the borders of their country. A big, 'invulnerable' body built out of millions of followers. The electronic media are strengthening these sorts of feelings: "The silent majority is no longer silent" – this we could read on many banners carried by the Donald Trump community. It's a huge electronic effect.

Maria, Dorothee: Can you think of an explanation why young people (and Judith Butler), who believe they are left wing, justify these atrocities as acts of resistance? And how can they believe that Hamas did not calculate from the beginning the disastrous outcome for their own people? And how do young people deny that in Gaza, Hamas and other Islamic forces have installed a rigid regime against women, queer people and any political opponent?

Klaus: This seems to be a typical result of social conflicts that turn into military conflicts. Both 'sides' of those actions tend to become criminal, or at least idiotic. Wars are the crime par excellence, allowing all kinds of behaviour and thinking that are banned in 'normal' social life. I cannot see at all that Hamas cares for the Palestinian people. Or that Netanyahu, a war criminal, cares for the people of Israel. Leaders in war situations never care for anyone but themselves, or what they call their countries' "cause". An intelligent person like Judith Butler should know that. I think she knows. But wars make idiots out of all of us.

Maria, Dorothee: As modern psychology and psychoanalysis tend to focus on the unpacking of 'childhood traumas' and to attribute many adult behaviours – including extreme, criminal behaviours – to these traumas, to blame their wrongdoings on their parents, especially their mother. The Breivik case, as you wrote about, used one such rationale. And you also said that for example for Putin, the KGB was more influential than any upbringing, if I understood you correctly?

Klaus: They use whatever they can get, whether somebody believes it or not. The wrongdoings of parents, the mother, etc. Everybody knows, things like that can play a major, even decisive role in any personal case in court. In the case of heavily and methodically acting perpetrators of mass killings, I would hesitate. Even for Breivik, a single person, it was extremely important to become accepted as a person speaking in the name of a big, overarching historical congregation – the so-called Knights Templar of Malta. Putin does everything in the name of Old Russia, which he believes has been betrayed by 'the West'. And was he raised by 'parents'? I don't think so. He is a man of the KGB, a secret service man from head to toe, including his (non-existent) soul. Hitler spoke in the name of 'history' itself. 'Hope of salvation'? (I hear them laughing). ("Everybody knows," as Leonard Cohen used to sing): Not the good ones, the peaceful ones, are winning. "That's how it goes. Everybody knows."

Maria, Dorothee: To come back to new right wings, and to young people denying the obvious facts, you wrote that once a person is isolated from society and is left alone with only violence as an option, the battle is lost. He/she would be radicalised by various groups/ideologies. Perhaps this is what happened to someone like Breivik. By that point he was already beyond the help any psychotherapy or psychoanalyses can provide. In your opinion, how can radicalisation be combatted when it has already taken place? With what means or narratives?

Klaus: "Radicalisation – when it has already taken place"? When there is the decisive will to kill? I think there is no way then. There is no point of return for those who have crossed all possible borders. Whether they are in prison or not. How do you argue with

people who are proud to be killers; who declare that they don't give a shit about anything you could say; who would never lie down on the couch of analysts; who feel that they themselves are the *healers of the world*. That seems to be just a waste of time.

Maria, Dorothee: In one of the discussions, you say that it is possible to prevent radicalisation through love, friendship, relationships – that these have the power to change things. Not through learning history but through art. Art can reach emotions. Can you provide some examples of how this could be achieved? What would you say to those sceptics who think this tenor is naïve and idealistic?

Klaus: When we take a look at the "fragmented body" again – that is a state of being which possibly can be changed. All personal, bodily changes don't happen, as far as my experience tells me, without the help of others, of at least one other person. Personal transformation is a process of your relations. Young neo-Nazis who left their groups – which has happened – did it in all the cases I heard about with the help of a friend or a lover; mostly girls who managed to get their motorcycle-wooden-club-bearing, alcoholised, pretty guys out of their 'clubs' or 'gangs', away from their leaders, who often have a total impact on them. Things like that are worth being done in every single case. Every friendly, lasting relation can save a person from the fascist frame of fake news and violent lying and acting. The first step is stopping the process of finding the reasons for every disturbing feeling in your own body in the outside world: "It's not me. It's *them*." Somebody has to help you to realise that some of the threats you feel stem from your own inner life, are part of your own body. To accept that is hard work. To stop shouting: "It's the migrants. The foreigners! The Jews!" And so on.

One precondition is that new relations have to have the power to dissolve the physical boundaries of the bodies of the involved persons. It happens best between two persons in love. But to come to that state, you have to trust another person totally, which is not easy to achieve.

There are two other main fields with the power to dissolve bodily boundaries. One is a close encounter with recreational drugs – where you also need help; the other is the way that you mentioned: through art, playing music, listening to music, painting, filming, or for some people it may be through sports. There are lots of fields of artistic and life-production. But it's not always easy to find a group or a person whose vibrations linger on the same wavelength, or take whatever metaphor you want. What do your "sceptics" do about realities like that? Look at them and talk about them sceptically? Good for them. But I admit, I'm not any more 'idealistic' than they are. Not idealistic at all.

———————————

Notes
1 Paraphrase of the Leonard Cohen song *Everybody Knows*; the original text reads as follows:
Everybody knows that the dice are loaded
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed
Everybody knows that the war is over
Everybody knows the good guys lost
Everybody knows the fight was fixed
The poor stay poor, the rich get rich
That's how it goes
Everybody knows

Everybody knows that the boat is leaking
Everybody knows that the captain lied
Everybody got this broken feeling
Like their father or their dog just died [...]
See https://songmeanings.com/songs/view/37899/

2 Klaus Theweleit, *Männerfantasien*, 1978, 2019, Matthes & Seitz Berlin; and Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies* University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota1987.

3 See the online article 'Freikorps – How Germany's Post-WWI Paramilitaries Paved the Way for the Nazis', which contains the following text under the heading 'A New Kind of Soldier': "Unlike formal armies, the Freikorps consisted of volunteer units that mixed military discipline with political radicalism. Many members were drawn from nationalist and right-wing circles, forming a loosely organized and often fiercely ideological force. The Freikorps were instrumental in suppressing socialist and communist uprisings across Germany, particularly during the 1919 Spartacist Uprising in Berlin, in which they violently cracked down on workers' demonstrations and executed left-wing leaders, including Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. Although the Weimar government technically disapproved of extrajudicial military actions, they covertly supported the Freikorps to counter left-wing threats. This uneasy alliance allowed the Freikorps to act with a relative free hand, blurring lines between state-sanctioned and rogue violence." https://militaryhistorynow.com/2024/11/04/freikorps-how-germanys-post-wwi-paramilitaries-paved-the-way-for-the-nazis/. According to this website, at their peak, the Freikorps numbered between 200,000 and 400,000 members.

4 Klaus Theweleit, *Das Lachen der Täter: Breivik u.a. Psychogramm der Tötungslust*, Residenz Verlag, Salzburg 2015.

5 Interview by Judith Sevinç Basad, 'Männerforscher Klaus Theweleit: "Männer tragen eine 12 000 Jahre alte Gewaltgeschichte im Körper, die in unseren Gesellschaften gepflegt und gefördert wird", *NZZ Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 30.11.2019, translated by the authors. https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/klaus-theweleit-maenner-tragen-eine-gewalt-geschichte-im-koerper-ld.1524973

Klaus Theweleit studied German Studies and English Studies in Kiel and Freiburg. From 1969–1972, he worked as a freelancer for a public radio station (Südwestfunk). He wrote his dissertation *Freikorpsliteratur und der Körper des soldatischen Mannes* about Freikorps narratives, a sub-literature produced by paramilitaries organized in Freikorps, who, during the early Weimar republic, had fought external or internal enemies. In academia only few historians had read and analysed this literature before Theweleit. His book *Männerphantasien* (1977); translated as *Male Fantasies* (1987), a study of the "proto-fascist consciousness" in general and the bodily experience of these former soldiers in particular. Throughout the book Theweleit uses ideas, terminology and empirical experience from works of Margaret Mahler, Wilhelm Reich, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Melanie Klein, and Michel Foucault among others to develop his theory of the "fascist male imprinting and socialization". In the introduction, Theweleit points out that discussions with Margaret Berger and his wife Monika Theweleit-Kubale (both of whom have professional clinical experience) had an important influence on the book as well as the feedback from Erhard Lucas, a leading German left-wing historian of the Weimar Unrest. Theweleit lives in Freiburg, he teaches in Germany, the United States, Switzerland, and Austria. He was a lecturer at the Institute of Sociology at the University of Freiburg and

lecturer at the film academy in Berlin. From 1998 until retirement he was a professor for "art and theory" at the Staatliche Akademie für Bildende Künste, the art academy, at Karlsruhe.

Maria Sorensen is a Zurich-based art curator, writer and researcher. Drawing upon her background in film and visual arts, her curatorial practice deals with important societal issues through the use of strong, expressive artistic language. Her recent projects include *UnSaid*, an exhibition on state and self-censorship; a theatre festival of Russian language anti-war drama held at the Kulturhaus Helferei; and serving on the jury of the Iranian Film Festival Zurich. Sorensen's writing on art and culture has been published by Kunstmuseum Bern, London-based Index on Censorship, Berlin-based On Curating and Zurich-based research initiative MinEastry of Post-collapse Art and Culture.

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien/Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

Red Threads
Michaela Melián

With and in my works – with artworks – I ask questions. Questions about the historical charge of public places, about our collective memory, social constructions and canon formation. The tools of my practice are diverse and multimedia-based, ranging from drawing to pictorial and musical composition to installation i.e. spatial organisation. The paths of searching and finding and setting are not linear either; they intersect and lead to a multi-layered accumulation and intermingling of materials from the most diverse sources.

The 'red threads'[1] that I want to talk about today are linked to works and themes that I was already exploring at the beginning of the 1990s. I would like to start with a small ink drawing of a stamp from 1988. The stamp shows the logo of the Red Army Faction with a rapid-fire weapon and star in black and white, but without the three letters of the organisation – 'RAF' – in the centre. On the one hand, this iconographic logo stands for the resistance against fascism, against the continuity of Nazi elites, who were once again active in important positions in West Germany after 1945 – such as in politics, the justice system, the secret service, economics, journalism and so on. But it also stands for the anti-imperialist to antisemitic-motivated speeches and actions by the RAF-related milieu and especially for the RAF terrorism. And, at the same time, this logo entered into pop and media culture.

In the early 1990s I did a series of stamp drawings – drawings of postage stamps that of course never existed. Stamps accompany the social discourse. Juries decide on the themes and choose the motifs and personalities to be depicted on them. Stamp motifs mark and represent important historical and cultural moments as well as people – which in this way could be put into circulation cheaply. Stamps are a kind of currency and have always been collector's items.

The red threads also tie in with works that I began in the 1990s under the title *Tomboy*. The term 'tomboy' refers to a girl who does not act or behave according to her socially intended role. In *Tomboy* I dealt with gender roles, attributes of femininity and the representation of female protagonists in history, art and the media. I produced a series of portraits of female protagonists in collaboration with the facial composite creator of the Bavarian State Criminal Police Office (LKA) – an artist who had been working there for many years as a portraitist for the police (also an opportunity to earn money as an artist, I guess). At the time, the LKA had started to make scans of the composite sketches this guy had created over the years as part of the digitalisation process, aiming to develop a simple image program with which you could very quickly click together individual parts of the face to create a portrait – a very simple variation of Photoshop, as it were, for which you didn't need to be able to draw.

From a newspaper article, I had learnt about this first digital program developed in Munich and that it was already being used by police throughout the European Schengen area. So I applied to the police for permission to work with the draughtsman and his new program for an art project. I then selected several female figures who had been largely omitted from the canon of art, politics, literature, music and pop history. Based

on photos of these women, I formulated precise descriptions, which the police artist then used to put together the respective portraits. So the portraits created with this program were based on my description of a particular photo of a person – a person I don't know and have never seen. The mere translation of an image into language, the description of a photo, constructs and sets linguistic and image-immanent attributions. I see every portrait as a projection of the person making the portrait onto the person being portrayed. From a feminist perspective, I am of course critical of the genius of the artist's hand (usually the male genius that expresses itself through the hand). In other words, men have formulated the canon of art history by focusing on women, capturing them with a pen, brush or camera, sketching, painting, modelling and writing them down. During the meetings with the police draughtsman/artist, I found out that the police computer program was only equipped with drawings of male facial features. These male-coded, sometimes racially charged facial features give the portraits an uneasy expression. But here the story comes full circle: even in the Bible, Eve is modelled by God from Adam's rib.

One of these portrait drawings is that of Tamara Bunke – the agent and *guerrillera* known as Tania. I had heard of Tamara Bunke, alias Tania, when I gave a concert with my band F.S.K. in East Berlin, in the Kreiskulturhaus Treptow, a few days after the Wall came down in 1989. Our concert organisers from the GDR youth radio station DT64 told me about her and I was surprised because we West Germans knew nothing about her. We only knew about Che Guevara's anti-imperialist liberation combat in Latin America. Although the story of these two people, Che and Tania, is so closely linked, it was told totally separately and also differently in the two parts of Germany.

In 1992, as a reaction to the so-called German reunification that was just taking place, I organised the exhibition *Subjekt Prädikat Objekt* in Munich, which I dedicated to Tamara Bunke / Tania. What I was able to find out about Tamara Bunke at that time, I only knew from two sources: one was the documentary film *Tania La Guerrillera* by the Swiss documentary filmmaker Heidi Specogna, which was broadcast on German TV by ZDF in 1991 and which I recorded on a video cassette. The other was the GDR publication *Tania La Guerrillera*, published in East Berlin in 1973, which I was only able to buy in a used bookstore. This book also contains the iconic photo of Tamara Bunke, which shows her in Cuba in 1973, wearing a beret as a member of the revolutionary people's militia, shortly before she joined the Cuban secret service as agent Tania. *Subjekt Prädikat Objekt* asks for a Vita Activa, an active artistic practice, political thinking, speaking and acting and its consequences and images. *Tania* as an image for an ambivalent mysterious and glamorous subject; *Mossberg Model Bullpup* as a weapon (machine-gun) representing the Prädikat; and buildings of different architectural types, sites of administration and power i.e. offices and ministries, standing for the objects. The temporal background for these works is the second Gulf War, and later also the civil wars since the 1990s in the former Yugoslavia, along with the associated debates about so-called peace-making measures and missions abroad of the now all-German Bundeswehr, which until then had only been given a mandate for defence. And, of course, the massive increase in right-wing nationalist riots in reunified Germany around this time.

During my research in international weapon catalogues for new types of weapons, I came across the *Mossberg Model Bullpup* rifle; although largely made of plastic, it is robust and easy to handle. It was used by the American police as well as by various guerrilla groups. I made a series of 1:1 models of this weapon from various fabrics and also a few

Michaela Melián, *Tania*, Sound installation, 2022 and *Mossberg Model Bullpup*, 1992:
Installation view, Kindl – Centre for Contemporary Art Berlin, 2022. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

models 10 times enlarged as soft textile sculptures. The fetish function of the weapon is transformed in the artwork from a hard and destructive instrument into a soft anti-sculpture, which can now take on the function of a pillow or seat in the exhibition.

Then, in 2022, I picked up these threads again for the *Red Threads* exhibition in Berlin, which was held in the space of the former KINDL Brewery in Neukölln. The exhibition space on the second floor of the KINDL building offers a fantastic view over the formerly divided city – you could say, a strategic overview. This was the perfect place to find out whether new interpretations of the persona of Tania would now be possible. Because now, international sources were available for research purposes. For example, Bunke's parents' estate had been archived in Berlin and handed over to Cuba in 2015. The historian Isabel Enzenbach from Berlin, a specialist in GDR history, researched and collected new information for me. Today, in addition to the publications from the GDR, there is a lot more material such as scientific works, documentary films, journalistic articles, literary works and biographies, from Cuba, Bolivia, Germany, the USA and so forth. Again and again, authors have come to the conclusion that Tamara was in love with Che Guevara and therefore became a guerrilla. But this cannot be proven at all from the available materials. There is hardly anything personal from Tamara left, just a few old photos, an empty diary, some letters and the photos she took of herself with the guerrillas. Everything that was published about her in the GDR was mainly controlled and formulated by her mother.

All sorts of different versions of this story are told in Cuba, Bolivia, Chile, Peru and so forth. In South America, Tania is a public figure and is remembered as a heroine. As there are no direct testimonies from Tamara Bunke herself, this has opened the door to speculations of all kinds. That's why it's clear that her portrait can only be put together from unreliable narratives, fake documents, cover identities, projections, suggestive documentation and heroic narratives – actually it eludes a clear classification. So who was Tamara Bunke, born in 1937 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, killed in 1967 on the Río Grande near Yado del Yeso in Bolivia? The following outline provides a brief introduction:

In 1937, Haydée Tamara Bunke Bider was born to German-Jewish communist parents in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The family had fled Germany to South America in 1935 and lived in a German-Jewish neighbourhood where German emigrants had settled for many decades – from 1945 onwards, they were joined by fascist Germans who reached Argentina via the so-called 'Rat Line' (Rattenlinie). Che Guevara's father had an office in the same neighbourhood.

In 1952, Tamara's family returned to the GDR. They first lived in the newly founded Stalinstadt (now Eisenhüttenstadt), later in East Berlin. After graduating from high school, she studied Romance languages and literature at the Humboldt University in Berlin. She was active in the Freie Deutsche Jugend (FDJ), a member of the Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED), worked with youth groups, and founded a Latin American group and choir. She played guitar and accordion and was skilled in handling weapons.

Michaela Melián, *Mossberg Model Bullpup*, 1992 and *Tania*, Mural, Sound installation, 2022: Installation view, Kindl – Centre for Contemporary Art Berlin, 2022. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.
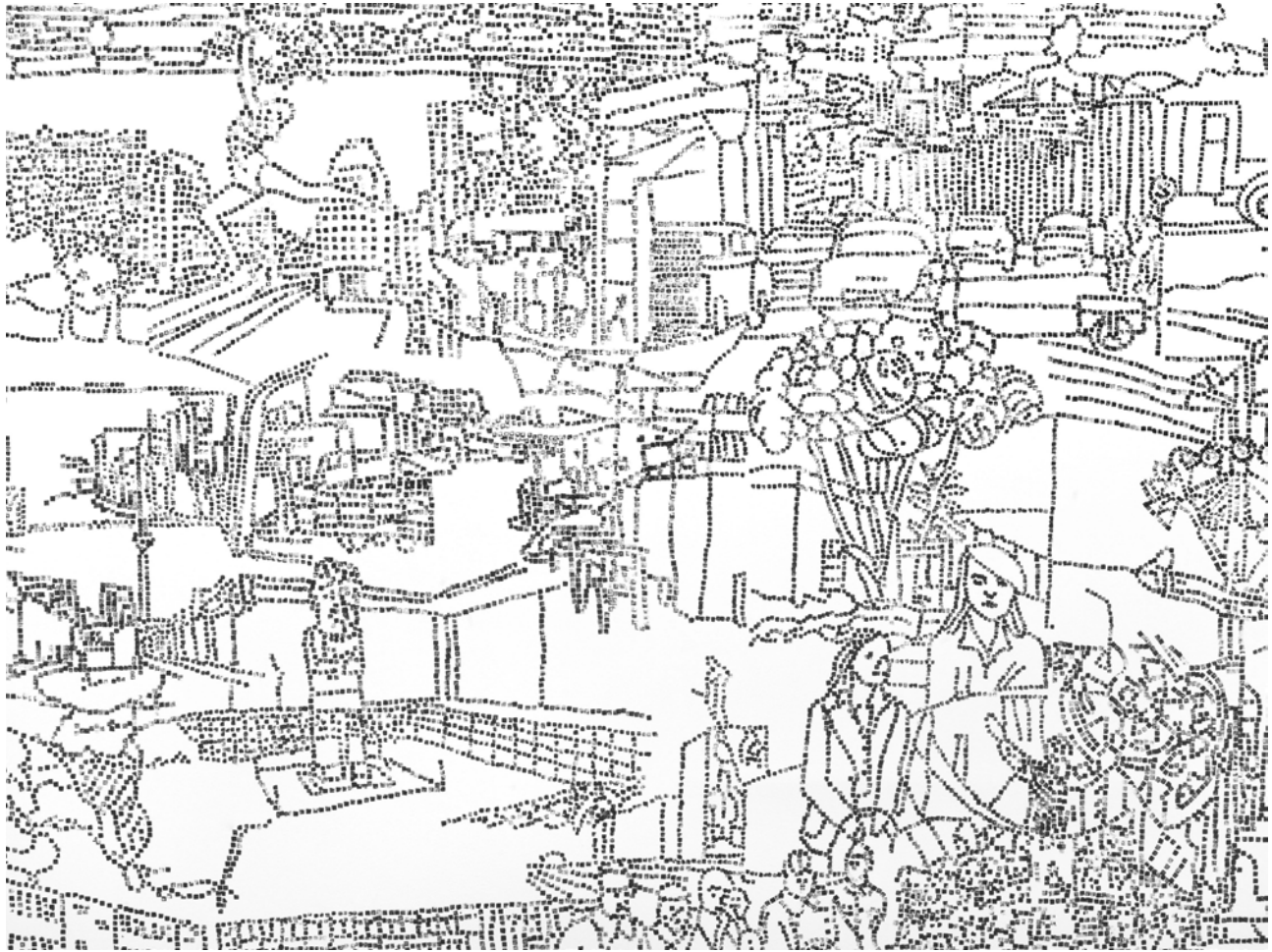
Michaela Melián, *Tania*, Mural, Sound installation, detail, 2022: Installation view, Kindl – Centre for Contemporary Art Berlin, 2022. Photograph by Jens Ziehe.

When, in 1960, Che Guevara and a Cuban delegation visited the GDR, Tamara travelled with them as a translator around the GDR. From then on, she was determined to go to Cuba to participate in the revolutionary restructuring of Cuban society. How she exactly organised her departure to Cuba in 1961 is still not clear. In any case, she flew from Prague to Havana on the plane ticket of a dancer from the Cuban National Ballet who had secretly left the troupe to stay in the West. Again, that departure was often interpreted as an escape from the GDR. Other sources assert that she was assigned to act as a spy for the Stasi to track Che Guevara.

In Cuba, Tamara immediately joined the revolutionary people's militia and wore their uniform with a beret. She was particularly involved in the Cuban literacy campaign and women's support program, but also worked as a translator. Around 1963, she was apparently recruited by Che Guevara for the Cuban secret service, with the objective of spreading the socialist revolution on the South American continent. Now she started using the nom de guerre 'Tania' and received intensive military and intelligence training, which included travelling through Europe for several months under various identities, such as the code names Tamara Lorenzo, Haydée Bidel Gonzáles, Marta Iriarte and Vittoria Pancini. This took her to South Tyrol, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Munich, West Berlin and Prague – an astonishing amount of travel for that time.
Finally, in 1964, she was infiltrated as ethnologist Laura Gutiérrez Bauer into Bolivia by the Cuban secret service as an agent to spy on the upper classes and provide strategic support for the underground combat that Che Guevara and his troops planned to launch there. Officially, she was researching indigenous music and the cultural history of South America. This false identity opened many doors for her, even to the highest circles. For example, she managed to get close to the family of President René Barrientos. She used the tape recorder and camera she needed for her spy work to document the musical culture of the high Andes. Further, she regularly hosted a radio show especially for women living in rural and remote areas. These radio programmes also included coded messages for the guerrillas. Radio was a medium of information and education, but also a tool for warfare and propaganda, and could also serve as an instrument for political resistance. Radio was able to reach people of all social classes in the city and the most remote villages, to spread pop culture and spark revolutions.

Meanwhile, Che Guevara's underground fighters marched through impassable jungle terrain in the Andes, trying in vain to recruit the rural population for their revolutionary struggle. Tania was one of their few contacts with the outside world. In March 1967, she was discovered as an agent – presumably through her own fault – and subsequently joined – against Che Guevara's will – the guerrilla group in the jungle. She was the only *guerrillera* among approximately 60 guerrilla fighters. The troops marched for five months under the most extreme conditions – she documented this time with her camera – until she and some of the guerrillas were ambushed and shot while crossing the Rio Grande. The rest of the group, including Commandante Che Guevara, was tracked down and captured a few weeks later, in early October 1967, by the Bolivian military with support from the CIA. All but five guerrillas who managed to escape were executed. What particularly interests me was Tania's camouflage as cultural anthropologist Laura Gutiérrez Bauer and her research into indigenous culture, sculptures and different musical styles.
For the *Tania* soundtrack, I started by compiling a music collection. The final composition is based on an extremely slowed-down sample from the 1972 song *Tania / Eres guerrilla y flor* by the Venezuelan political activist and singer Alí Primera – a song very well known in Latin America. Primera sings softly in a high, thin voice – a long, drawn-out, yearning "Taaaniaaaa", delicately accompanied by the echoing call of a horn.

In addition, there are numerous samples from archival recordings of indigenous Andean music, creating magnificent rhythms with various percussion instruments and snatches of melody played on the siku (a pan flute).

These archival recordings, with their specific sound, always bring their own space into the composition: the location, the room, and also the time-bound nature of the historical recording. I always try to bring together certain layers in the compositions, including digital and analogue recording techniques, which are also stored in the sounds. Into this web of sound I have woven fragments of international protest songs from the workers' movement, such as *Bella Ciao, Guantanamera, Wir sind die Moorsoldaten*, the *Internationale*, the national anthem of the GDR and the *Cuban March of July 26.* I played these fragments myself on different instruments.

Fragments of the soundtrack *Tania* could be heard in the exhibition, in ever-changing mixdowns and variations lasting for half a minute or sometimes three minutes – interrupted with short breaks. These fragments of the track wandered around the space, broadcast over loudspeakers, and guided visitors through the exhibition by their ears. When I was combing through the material of the Tamara Bunke complex, I didn't take notes but rather drew notes – I was drawing in accompaniment. In the end, I had 250 drawings – people, architecture, landscapes, topographies, objects and so on – and then I collaged all of these individual drawings into one huge drawing the size of a freestanding wall in the exhibition space.

The narrow sides of the freestanding wall were rounded so that the drawing could go around the wall, as if it were a loop without a beginning or end. In the collage, I didn't arrange events chronologically; I wanted the multiple connections between the individual drawings to be effective.

In the centre of each side of the mural, I placed the drawing of a mast from Havana with public loudspeakers and their cables stretching out in all directions, the power cables and telephone lines forming a kind of network. I took up this motif directly for the installation in the space: the speaker cables for the sound installation were hung between the different walls and thus connected the speakers inside the space. Next to an image of Tamara Bunke as 'Tania' in uniform, one can see Patty Hearst who, after being kidnapped by the SLA (Symbionese Liberation Army) had become part of this left-wing radical group and called herself 'Tania'.

Tamara Bunke took her nom de guerre from Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, a Moscow schoolgirl, who called herself 'Tania' as a partisan. Kosmodemyanskaya carried out attacks on SS bases during World War II and was hanged at the age of eighteen. The drawing was based on a photograph – a very famous image in the East, the Soviet Union and the GDR – in which Kosmodemyanskaya is forced to wear a sign labelling her an "arsonist" as she is being led away by SS men for execution. In the GDR, there were institutions named after Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya and stamps commemorating her. There is also the minor planet 2283, which was discovered by the Soviet astronomer Lyudmila Zhuravlyova and dedicated "to German patriot Tamara Bunke". To this day it bears the name "Bunke".

My drawing features colonial architecture and works of art from the National Museum of archaeology in Bolivia; Karl-Marx-Allee and the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin; Eisenhüttenstadt; modern housing in La Paz; Tamara's apartment in Havana; and schools named after her in the GDR and Cuba. In addition, it shows Tamara playing the guitar

in Havana, playing the accordion in the GDR, or dancing in Berlin's Treptower Park. You can see a pile of potatoes, landscapes, and indigenous huts from the Andes, Klaus Barbie in a café in La Paz, French revolutionary theorist and Che-supporter Régis Debray in Paris, and the memorial for Che Guevara and his guerrillas in Santa Clara, Cuba, where the remains of the troops – including Tamara's – are buried.

All of this amalgamates into one image. This drawing was then transferred to the wall using a technique that translates the linear drawing into small, square dots. From a point overlooking the mural as a whole, one might think that small, square mosaic tiles had been laid. However, the closer one approaches, the more the drawing dissolves into individual pixel dots, and one can see that the small squares are stamped directly onto the wall.

To create the mural, my drawing was projected onto the wall using a projector and then hand-stamped along the projected lines using stamp ink. The entire installation team helped to transfer the drawing to the wall. The translation of my freehand drawing was therefore a team effort; this is also reflected in the result, as everyone held the small stamp differently and applied the paint to the wall with a varying amount of pressure.

Of course, a connection is intended to the murals and wall mosaics, for example, at the Haus des Lehrers on Alexanderplatz in Berlin, but with the crucial contrast that the mural *Tania* doesn't formulate a mission or a message, but functions more like a storage disk or hard drive. Every dot, every pixel carries information that is stored side by side and interacts with one another. This also corresponds to the process that precedes the mural: I read, watch films, browse the internet, listen to music, have conversations, collect, sort, sort out again. And in the same way, the originally delicate drawing becomes abstract, simplified, more perforated and open – when transferred to the wall. There is no ideal viewpoint or clear interpretation of this work. It merely lays out many possible threads, clues and traces.

_____

Notes
1 In German, a 'roter Faden' literally means a red thread, but also refers to a common thread or linking theme.

_____

Michaela Melián is an artist and musician who is known for her multimedia installations, radio plays and sound works. She is a co-founder of the band F.S.K. and taught in the Department of Time-Based Media at Hamburg's University of Fine Arts until 2023. She lives in Munich and Marseille.
In recent years, Melián's work has been exhibited at the Lenbachhaus in Munich; Fundació Juan Miró in Barcelona; Kunsthal Rotterdam; Deichtorhallen Hamburg; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart; Kunsthalle Mannheim; Lentos Museum Linz; Cubitt, London; Ludlow 38 in New York City; the War and Women's Human Rights Museum in Seoul, and Kindl Berlin, among others. In 2010, she was commissioned by the City of Munich to realise *Memory Loops*, an acoustic memorial to the victims of National Socialism.

Shifting Gazes: Choreographing Memory – From Kibbutz Visions to Neon Reflections: On Works by Nir Evron, Omer Krieger and Ariel Reichman
Daniel Laufer

In phases of profound political upheaval, works of art often experience a second birth: what was once conceived as a formal exploration of aesthetic principles or an abstract reflection on social ideals becomes, in new contexts, a living, resonant space for contemporary experiences. What originally appeared as a poetic utopia for a communal vision can, under the impact of real violence, turn into an unwitting document of collective trauma. Likewise, a light installation intended to foster introspection and playful self-inquiry can become a detached mirror of the security needs of individuals and entire societies, as soon as experiences of political violence shape public perception.

In this tension between the artist's original intention and its historically conditioned reception, the transformative power of art comes to light: it no longer functions solely as an autonomous aesthetic object, but as a medium of critical remembrance, in which the boundaries between idea and reality, past and present, intention and effect become fluid. Especially in times when political events shake the collective psyche, revisited or newly exhibited works open up unforeseen dimensions of meaning, challenging artists and audiences alike to rethink solidarity and actively shape memory. In this way, every artwork becomes a dialogue partner for a society negotiating grief, vulnerability and hope.

This shift is evident, for example, in the video work *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres* (2014) by Nir Evron and Omer Krieger. It opens with a wide aerial shot of the Gaza Strip, filmed by a drone hovering just a few kilometres from the border, outside the kibbutz. This initial view establishes a geopolitical tension that underlies the entire work. The second shot moves to the central gathering area of the kibbutz – showing the dining hall, the general secretary's office and the public assembly house – introducing the social and architectural core of the community. In calm, gliding camera movements, the lens then continues to explore both public and private spaces of the kibbutz, creating an interplay between collective expansiveness and individual intimacy. Interspersed among these sequences are close-ups of speakers reciting a poem by Anadad Eldan – sometimes in a single take, sometimes layered one upon another, their voices coalescing into a visible and audible community. The precise framing evokes minimalist cinema, while also providing a sober stage for the performative encounter of space and voice. The sound mix merges the Hebrew recitation of Eldan's 26-verse poem with ambient noises – birdsong, the rush of wind, faint conversations. Multilingual subtitles (Hebrew/English/German) open the work to an international audience and underscore the transnational reception of collective memory.

At the heart of the video lies Eldan's poem, whose alliterative, biblically inflected language invokes the kibbutz's utopian ideal as a space of collective existence. By giving equal prominence to various speakers – including Eldan himself, who was ninety years old at the time of filming and is now 101, and, posthumously, Hagay Avni, who later fell victim to the attacks – remembering is transformed into a performative act in

which individual life stories fuse into a polyphonic chorus. The intimate close-ups grant the spoken word a corporeal presence and emphasise the vulnerability of human voices in the face of violence and loss. The title, *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres*, alludes to an ongoing rehearsal of one's own history, in which the 'spectres' – ghosts of the past – are continually restaged and renegotiated. This metaphor makes clear that collective memory and utopian visions are at once spectral and theatrical: the kibbutz ideals appear here as a staged exercise, only to become, under the real trauma of 7 October 2023, an unwitting document of historic violence.

In the wake of those events, the peaceful architectural landscapes of the kibbutz reso-nate like silent memorials, simultaneously evoking past security and present vulnera-bility. As a transnational intervention, the work directly confronts a Western audience with the global entanglements of conflict, trauma and solidarity, raising questions of cultural responsibility and the politics of remembrance. On repeated viewings of Nir Evron and Omer Krieger's video, one constantly catches oneself overlaying the horrific media images of 7 October onto the film's hushed, documentary-style camera move-ments. It is as if the archive of terror shaped by television, social media and news out-lets projects itself in real time back onto the artistic material. This effect is not only a personal superimposition, but can also be understood in terms of media theory as a form of 'remediation' – the medium of art becomes the venue for the media image shocks that, consciously or unconsciously, inscribe themselves. With each replay, these images surface again, demanding the question: can one still see with any neutrality?

      What occurs here is a kind of retroactive image infection: works created before 7 October 2023 appear retrospectively contaminated – not by any change in their con-tent but by the new media circumstances in which they are received. This is especially striking in the interplay of architecture and violence, of refuge and exposure: the kib-butzim depicted, originally conceived as social utopias, now read in hindsight as fragile façades, their aesthetic quietude haunted by ghostly associations. As viewers – and thus

Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres, Nir Evron, Omer Krieger, 2014, HD video with stereo sound, 10 min., Hebrew with German and English subtitles

as part of that Western, digitally networked audience – we are drawn, through our own media conditioning, into this new constellation of images. It is as though collective memory is being remounted in the present – not only in archives and commemorative acts but in the silent motion of a camera, in the aesthetic repetition of a place shattered by real events. Here, art becomes a medial threshold: it produces no new images of terror, yet it repeatedly summons them along with it, whether it intends to or not.

The work and its effects unfold in a double dynamic: on the one hand, *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres* appears as a literary-poetic reflection – its alliterative, utopian vision of the kibbutz fusing communal ideals with biblically tinged language. On the other, in the media-shaped aftermath it mutates into an unwitting archive, into which the horrific images of 7 October are constantly projected: the calm, wide shots of the architecture retrospectively take on the aura of silent memorials to terror, and the intimate portraits of the reciters become witnesses to a collectively endured trauma. This sense of shared experience is further intensified by the close-ups of the speakers, whose voices blend through overlapping takes into a polyphonic chorus, creating a collective atmosphere in which both solidarity and alienation are palpable. Thus the poem – originally conceived as a poetic utopia – resonates in the wake of real violence as a moving testament to a reality transformed by brutality. In *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres*, these lines are fulfilled time and again – both as spoken recitation and as the echo of a community shaken, but not broken, by violence. The work functions simultaneously as a poetic document of utopian ideals and as an involuntary archive of actualised violence. Yet the power of this poetry does not end with the Be'eri kibbutz context: it expands into the universal question of how we live together amid pain and protection.

Just as Evron and Krieger poured the silent monuments of pain and hope into moving images, Ariel Reichman shifts the site of collective experience back into the here and now: *Safe/notSafe* no longer treats the 'verses' of memory as a static archive, but translates them into a pulsating field of individual choice. Instead of close-ups and

Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres, Nir Evron, Omer Krieger, 2014, HD video with stereo sound, 10 min., Hebrew with German and English subtitles

Safe/notSafe, Ariel Reichman, Mishkan Museum of Art, Ein Harod. Photo: Ran Arda

sound collages, we confront the hand-lit glow of neon letters that confront each of us with the question "Am I safe?" as an immediate, tangible scenario. Where once the spoken word summoned community, Reichman's interactive light piece invites us to actively negotiate the balance between safety and vulnerability – making our collective mood a luminous metaphor for our shared existence. By offering two opposing slogans – "I AM SAFE" and "I AM NOT SAFE" – which viewers can activate via a website or push-button, Reichman turns our fluctuating sense of security into a visual, participatory event.

Since its debut in 2021 at Berlin's PSM Gallery, Ariel Reichman's *Safe/notSafe* has felt like a quiet meditation on the fragile relationship between individual perception and collective safety – located in an abstract, almost timeless realm. The installation's minimalist materiality – two neon modules measuring 106 × 34.5 × 35.5 cm, crafted from acrylic, steel and Arduino technology – formally references the tradition of conceptual light art and invites calm contemplation on the ambivalence of protection and threat. But after 7 October 2023, this work's reading has been radically transformed: the binary choice between "I AM SAFE" and "I AM NOT SAFE" is no longer merely a personal play with identity or mood, but a condensed sign of collective upheaval.

left: *Safe/notSafe*, Ariel Reichman, Kunsthalle Mannheim. Photo: Studio Ariel Reichman
right: *Safe/notSafe*, Ariel Reichman, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. Photo: Marek Kruszewski

Against the backdrop of a dramatically altered political and affective reality – particularly in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since 7 October 2023 – Ariel Reichman's *Safe/notSafe* undergoes a striking shift in meaning. Whereas at its 2021 debut at PSM Gallery the work inhabited an open field of interpretation, centred on personal reflections of the need for protection, vulnerability and subjectivity, it now functions as a precarious seismograph of collective insecurity. The installation's strict formal reduction – two identical neon modules whose slogans "I AM SAFE" and "I AM NOT SAFE" are triggered by a digital or tactile impulse – now operates less as a purely conceptual gesture and more as a visual condensation of a perpetual state of exception. When the letters glow, they pulse like signals through the fog of a global architecture of fear, in which the boundary between individual feeling and geopolitical reality grows ever more ambiguous.

When the piece was re-staged in December 2023 at the Mishkan Museum of Art in Ein Harod – simultaneously projected at Kunsthalle Mannheim and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg – it gained a new conceptual frame as a transnational communication network. By linking multiple locations through a digital interface, viewers around the world can now co-shape the work through their own choice, symbolically articulating their personal sense of safety. This opening toward a 'distributed experience' transforms the minimalist light installation into a relational, media-architectural field: a temporary platform for affective synchronisation, an aesthetic interface of collective vulnerability that responds to the current crisis not by specifying content but through formal responsiveness. It is precisely this juxtaposition of technical simplicity and emotional complexity that gives the work its renewed urgency: rather than confronting its audience with a definitive political statement, it offers structural openness, making the state of exception itself an aesthetic experience.

At the same time, the work's functioning on the level of reception has fundamentally changed: what in 2021 was read as a conceptual experiment between minimal form and maximal meaning – a meditation on identity, affect and perception in public space – today operates as an interactive archive of affect, in which states of fear, calm, alienation or hope are visually registered and transmitted into the digital realm. The clear, semantically polarised structure (SAFE / NOT SAFE) gains new depth against the current political backdrop: every decision, every click, every glow becomes a real articulation of subjective uncertainty within a globalised communication system.

This shift from contemplative sculpture to intermedial field of experience elevates *Safe/notSafe* beyond the tradition of conceptual light art. The work becomes a participatory aggregator of affective resonance, an open, fluidly coded repository of collective states in times of crisis. It is precisely in the simultaneity of multiple individual inputs that a new quality of the communal emerges: the act of declaring oneself safe or unsafe becomes a performative gesture within a community defined not by territory but by atmosphere. In this reading, *Safe/notSafe* no longer poses a question to its audience – it becomes the question itself: how safe is the world when safety can no longer be assumed generally but only asserted individually?

At the heart of *Safe/notSafe*'s aesthetic logic lies in the digital interface as an epistemic instrument and affective threshold between self-assertion and collective visibility. The online interface – accessible at https://iamnotsafe.digital – does more than extend the installed work functionally; it transposes it into a media-dispositive structure that fundamentally reflects on the conditions of artistic reception in the age of algorithmic publics. This dual address – analogue and digital in parallel – points to the hybrid topology of contemporary subjectivity production, in which individual experience is increasingly determined by networks of mediated interactions. By choosing between the dichotomous positions "SAFE" or "NOT SAFE", users perform not just affirmation or negation, but contribute to a globally visible register of affective positioning.

This interactive constellation creates a dialogical space that reaches beyond the physical exhibition venue and deconstructs museum architecture as an exclusive site of art reception. What manifests in the gallery as a minimalist glowing object transforms online into a relational interface that carries the aesthetic experience from contemplation into action – from observer to co-creator. The artwork thus becomes an aesthetic-political feedback system that aggregates, visualises and transmits affective states in real time into a kind of digital resonance field. By opening his work through its media infrastructure, Reichman situates himself within art-theoretical discourses that conceive of art no longer as a closed form but as a processual, relational practice – a place where political sensitivities, social shocks and subjective fragilities become visible and negotiable.

The question of safety is no longer represented thematically but inscribed structurally in the work. "Am I safe?" loses its rhetorical character and emerges as a structuring principle that not only compels reflexive self-inquiry but also fundamentally destabilises the aesthetic relationship between artwork and audience. Within this destabilised configuration lies *Safe/notSafe*'s true political quality: it is not about conveying a stance, but about opening an ambivalent space of possibility in which art, public and subjectivity enter into new relations to one another.

The digital interface makes viewers not merely an audience but implicit co-producers of collective moods. The reduction to binary decision-logics lays bare the ambivalence of this process: what seems to be a simple choice exposes the fragility of decision-making itself – as a performative provocation amid political and emotional overdetermination. In this way, *Safe/notSafe* renders productive the very tension that

defines our present: the simultaneity of participation and powerlessness, visibility and insecurity, agency and precarious existence.

In comparing the two works – Evron and Krieger's *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres* and Reichman's *Safe/notSafe* – a paradigmatic shift becomes apparent in the relationship between art, memory and the present. Both pieces were originally conceived in other historical constellations, born as poetic, conceptual or speculative forms that did not mirror social conditions but modelled them. Yet their reception after 7 October 2023 settles over their aesthetic structure like a second skin – it changes the works' very state of being. Of course, art has always been open to historical accretions; meaning is never fixed but emerges relationally among artwork, context and audience. What is distinct about the post-7 October situation is the urgency with which collective trauma – anchored in concrete images, voices and losses – inscribes itself into reception. The media images of that day, in their unprocessable brutality, act as an inexhaustible overlay that projects itself relentlessly onto earlier artistic productions. It is not merely that we see differently, it is that we must see differently, because images of destruction and pain no longer stand apart but sear themselves into the works as residue, even when those works predate the event. In *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Spectres*, this occurs through a reactivation of its utopian premise: what was once a tender retrospective on the collectivist ideals of the kibbutz system becomes, in the light of Be'eri's destruction, a spectral prelude to real violence. The 'spectres' the work invokes no longer exist solely as figures of intellectual history or aesthetic constructs – they have returned as horror, as loss, as what endures after destruction. The video images, once poetic simulations of memory, now unwillingly serve as visual stand-ins for dehumanising attacks. The media-theoretical notion of 'remediated trauma' takes concrete form here: the original footage becomes the projection surface for collective visual memory, overlaid by the harrowing media images that shaped global understanding of the 7 October attacks. What began as a literary utopia has become an involuntary archive of the failure of protection. Ariel Reichman's *Safe/notSafe*, by contrast, originally a conceptually minimalist reflection on the feeling of safety, undergoes a radical recoding through this historical watershed. Its binary structure – "I AM SAFE" versus "I AM NOT SAFE" – turns into a symbolic shorthand for a world in which that question ceases to be rhetorical and becomes a diagnostic of existence. The light installation steps out of minimalism's formal rigour and mutates into a digital seismogram of collective fragility. What in 2021 felt like an aesthetic condensation of inner states has, by 2023, transformed into a global interface of the state of exception. The artwork becomes an ethical challenge: it demands a stance, forces positioning and confronts its audience with an ontological uncertainty that is no longer metaphorical. Both works thus open spaces where individual experience and collective memory intersect.

What is new after 7 October 2023 is not the fundamental mutability of meaning, but the inescapability of a traumatic context that filters every aesthetic experience. Art is no longer perceived as a stable interpretive realm, but as an unstable construct that itself trembles with the world's upheavals. Its aesthetic language remains, but its semantic temperature has shifted. This new situation also demands a changed perspective from the writer: as author, as viewer, as participant and observer, I find myself in a double position. I am part of the historical present through whose lens I read the work – but I am also transformed by the works themselves, because they reveal how memory, politics and poetry coalesce into a new form. Perhaps this is the deeper meaning of what has changed in art since 7 October: not that art itself has changed, but that we who behold it have – and with us the questions we bring to it.

Nir Evron (b. 1974 in Herzelia, Israel; lives and works in Berlin) explores the construction of political and social histories through films, videos and photography. Mining charged artefacts – monuments, modernist buildings, archival documents and forgotten biographies – he fuses meticulous historical research with reflexive, medium-specific inquiries. His practice exposes the material apparatus of image-making while asking how ideology becomes embedded in visual form. He has exhibited internationally, with solo shows at the Jewish Museum, Berlin; LAXART, Los Angeles; ICA @ VCU Richmond; and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, among others. He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, including those at the New Museum, New York; FOMU, Antwerp; the ICP Triennial, New York; Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin; and the 6th Berlin Biennale.

Omer Krieger (b. 1975 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa; lives and works in Berlin) studies the public experience through forms of collective expression, movement and assembly, and creates performative actions, transgressive rituals, political situations and civic choreographies in public spaces. He co-founded and led the performative research and action body Public Movement from 2006 to 2011, before co-founding and leading as artistic director the 1:1 Center for Art and Politics, Tel-Aviv (2018–20). His performances and video works have been shown internationally, in Berlin at the Maxim Gorki and HAU theatres, the Jewish Museum, the Georg Kolbe Museum et al. His forthcoming performance will premiere at the Gorki's *Herbstsalon* in October 2025.

Ariel Reichman (b. 1979 in South Africa; lives and works in Berlin.) Freud preferred the form of the silent word, that is, of the symptom, which is the trace of a story. This would be a good description of Reichman's practice: he creates objects and artistic artifacts that evoke feelings of confusion and conflicting emotions. Often, they cannot be resolved, and in that way they are analogous to the contemporary *conditio humana*. Reichman creates an ambiguous and subtle play between private and collective memory, apparent idyll and subliminal brutality. He has exhibited at Kunsthalle Mannheim; Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; KW; Kunstverein in Hamburg; Goodman Gallery; and PSM, among others. In 2025 he opened a solo exhibition *Keiner Soll Frieren!* at the Felix Nussbaum House in Osnabrück. The exhibition runs until May 2026 and will be accompanied by talks and workshops.

Daniel Laufer is an artist and curator, teaching artistic and aesthetic practice at Leuphana University Lüneburg and the State Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. He creates hybrid film installations merging cinematic language with visual art. His dreamlike, non-linear narratives explore memory, myth, and storytelling, destabilizing temporal logic and generating immersive spaces where perception becomes a stage. Drawing on a media-archaeological approach, he combines historical and contemporary filmic techniques with language, painting, scenery, and performance into intermedial constellations. He has exhibited internationally, including Artists Space, New York; Jewish Museum Berlin; Jewish Museum Frankfurt; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Kunstverein Hannover; Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof; and KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin. Forthcoming solo exhibitions include Kunsthalle Lingen and Rib Rotterdam (2026). He has also published in *Texte zur Kunst* and the *Journal of the Dubnow Institute*, among other publications.

"We Want to Live"
# On Hamza Howidy's Activism
Ulrich Gutmair

One of Hamza Howidy's latest posts analyzes the historical background of Hamas's long and destructive rule in Gaza and points to the two political figures who are responsible for it; namely, Mahmoud Abbas, the head of the Palestinian Authority (PA) residing in Ramallah, and Benyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister. "For 16 years", Howidy wrote on his Instagram account on August 28th, "two bitter rivals pursued entirely different strategies that led to the same result: the rise and entrenchment of Hamas." Furthermore, Howidy believes that they didn't intend for October the 7th to occur, but through "cynical politics and short-term calculations, they armed and empowered the very enemy they claimed to oppose." When Hamas violently seized Gaza in 2007, Abbas refrained from fighting Hamas even though his troops clearly outnumbered the Hamas forces. Moreover, he did not stop paying salaries for PA employees in Gaza. He was happy to rule the West Bank and present himself as the representative of Palestinians internationally, and let Hamas be blamed for any disfunction in the strip.

According to Howidy, over the course of about a decade, over $2 billion were flowing from the PA into Gaza, salaries that were "taxed lavishly by Hamas to fund its rule". Netanyahu allowed even more money to be transferred to Gaza in order to stabilize the Hamas regime. He agreed that Qatar poured huge amounts of cash into Hamas's coffers, $15 to $30 million per month. Netanyahu's objective: divide and conquer. With a strong Hamas ruling Gaza, a two state solution would not be possible. "And when the barbaric massacre of October 7 and [the] wholesale slaughter of the Gaza war ensued, it wasn't them who paid the price, it was everyone else." So Howidy's conclusion is: "Hamas pulled the trigger. But Abbas and Netanyahu loaded the gun."

Hamza Howidy is one of the most important political voices from the Palestinian exiled community. He exemplifies what we used to think of as an intellectual before social media algorithms pushed the public to replace political discourse with demonization of political opponents, i.e. the exchange of carefully presented arguments with polemical ad hominem attacks, and careful consideration and differentiation with maximum polarization. Howidy was born in 1997 in Gaza in a relatively open-minded family, as he told a reporter in October 2024.[1] His father had been working in the UK for many years. Today, Howidy lives in a refugee camp in Germany.

In 2019 he was one of the organizers of the "We want to live" protests in Gaza. At the time, he was about to complete his studies and had started applying for jobs, as he told the German newspaper *die tageszeitung* in July 2024.[2] Economic conditions in Gaza were poor, but above all, Hamas pursued a policy "that only allowed Hamas members to work in the public sector, not people like me – not to mention the massive corruption."

The motive behind the protests was to overthrow Hamas, "but we weren't brave enough to say that publicly, so we hid behind the slogan 'We want to live.'" The demonstrators demanded better living conditions, more jobs and elections. "Because there have only been elections in Palestine once, in 2006. We took to the streets, but after 20 or 30 minutes we were attacked by Hamas militias. I was detained by a Hamas man
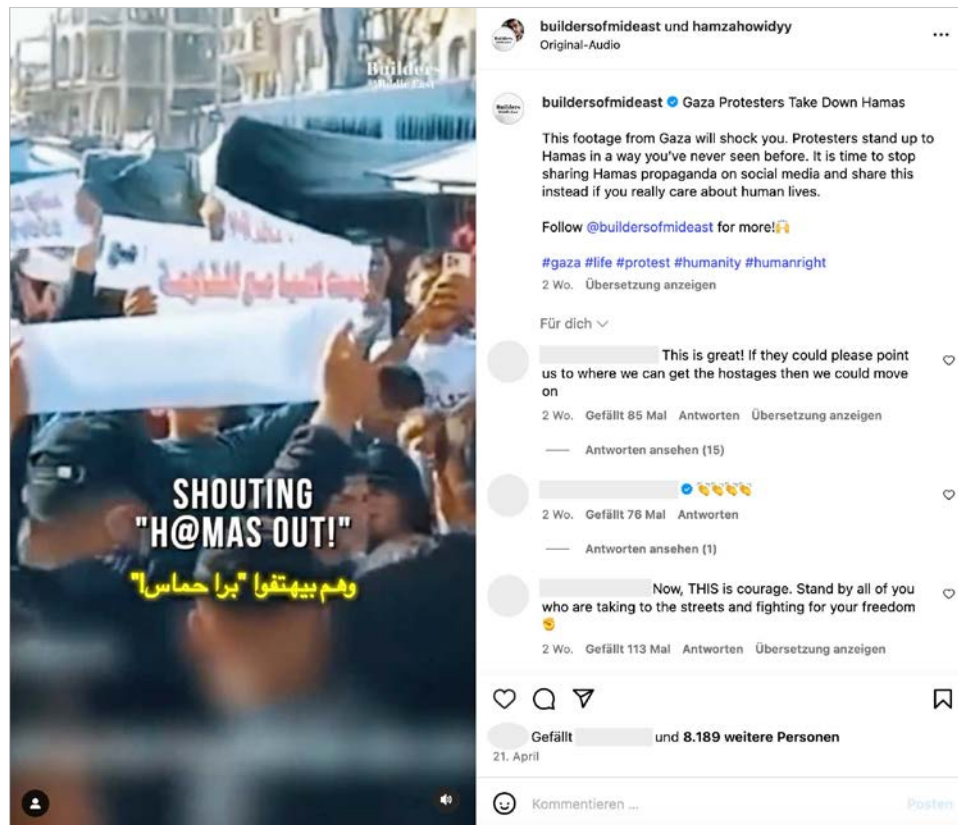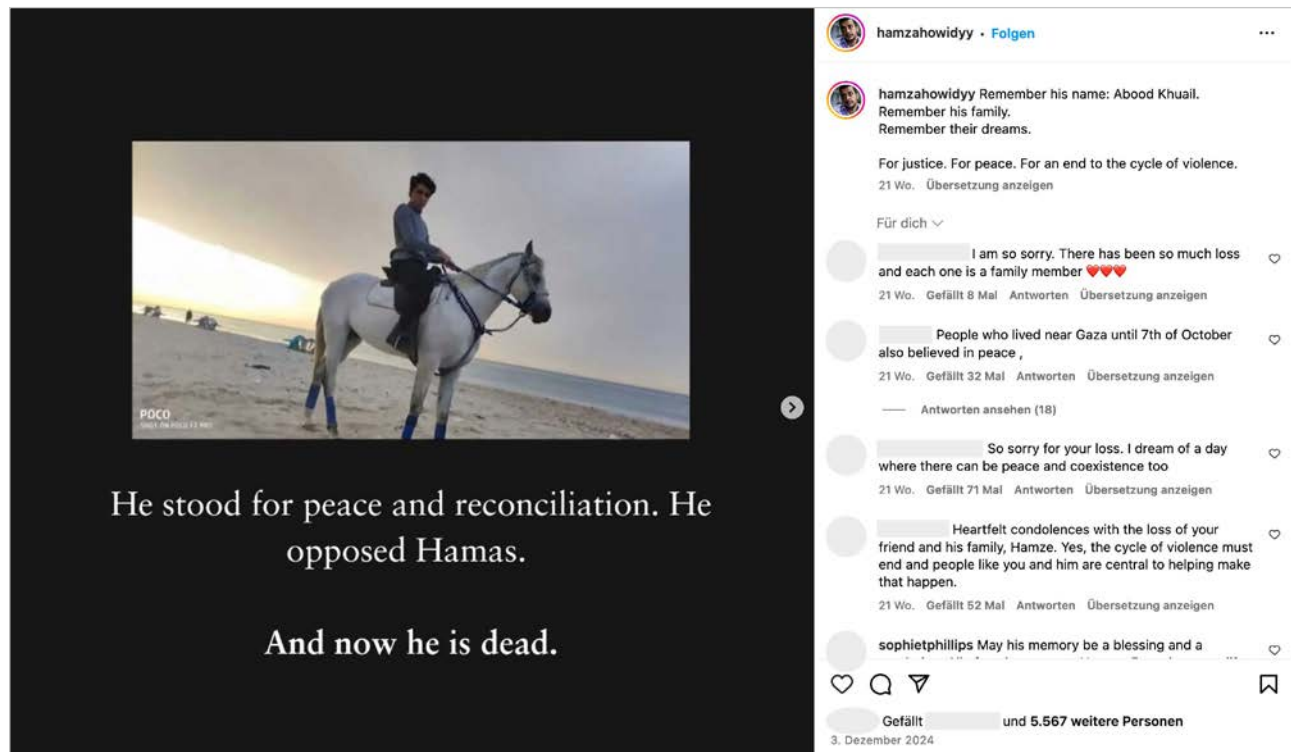
Screenshot Instagram hamzahowidyy

standing right next to me who was working undercover. We were arrested and taken to Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip. I was there for three weeks and was tortured. My family was able to pay the bribe. Those who didn't have the money stayed there for months."

In June 2023, when the Israeli protest movement against Netanyahu's far-right government and its judicial reforms intensified, the protest movement in Gaza also made a second attempt, despite massive repression by the Hamas regime. "We demonstrated, Hamas arrested us, I was alone in a cell without a toilet and with one meal a day that could hardly be called a meal." But what frustrated Howidy most was the fact that neither Western nor Arab media were interested in the protests, there was hardly any coverage. The protesters also felt abandoned by international aid organizations. Shortly thereafter, Howidy fled via Turkey to Greece.

After Hamas attacked Israel on October 7 and the Gaza War began, Howidy broke the promise he had made to himself: to no longer speak publicly about the political situation in the Middle East. He criticized Hamas and Abu Obeida, the spokesman for the Al-Qassam Brigades, the militant wing of Hamas, on social media. As a result, he received death threats from other Gazans in the Greek refugee camp. Howidy fled again, this time to Germany. He has since become an internationally respected and valued voice because he speaks about events in Gaza and the West Bank from the humanistic perspective of a democrat. He has commented on *CNN* and has been interviewed on German public television channel ZDF; he has written for *Newsweek*, *L'Express*, *National Post*, *ABC Today*, and other media outlets. Both the left German Green Party and the conservative Christian Democratic Union invited Howidy to talks, and he took part in the Holocaust memorial ceremony in the Bundestag.
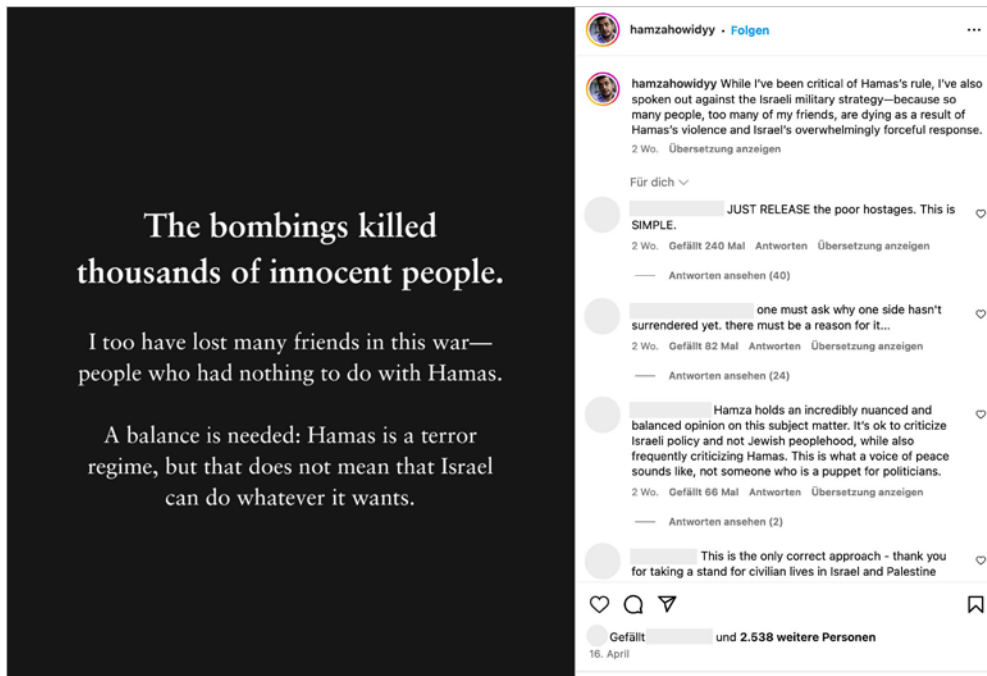
Screenshot Instagram hamzahowidyy

Howidy criticizes Hamas's criminal policies. He considers the pro-Palestinian protests in the West to be hypocritical. These protests, he argues, reveal the intellectual dishonesty of a narrative that classifies all residents of the Gaza Strip as either accomplices or victims of Hamas violence, thereby dehumanizing them. Howidy condemns Israel's warfare because of the many civilian casualties. On December 3, 2024, for example, he posted a sad message on Instagram. A few days earlier, his friend Abood Khuail had been killed by an Israeli bomb in Gaza, along with eleven members of his family. Howidy wrote: "The Khuails weren't Hamas. They weren't a threat. They were just a family trying to survive. My friend Abood dreamed of a two-state solution where Palestinians and Israelis could coexist with dignity and freedom." A few months later he criticized that "there is no safe place for Gaza's children – no shelter from the bombs, no escape from the violence that rains down from above."

In the toxic and emotionalized public debate, Howidy's voice stands for doubt, deliberation and reason, a position that often leaves him feeling isolated. He is not only caught between two stools, he is caught between two fronts. As a result, Howidy is also subjected to hostility and threats in Germany. He supports the initiative *Realign For Palestine* (RFP), a project at the Atlantic Council that aims to amplify pragmatic and rational voices that courageously hold multiple truths, advocating for Palestinian statehood and self-determination, and asserting that the two-nation solution is the only credible, humane path forward for peace between the Palestinian and Israeli people. Howidy's personal statement on the website of RFP reads: "I support the Realign for Palestine project because I also seek to foster a transformative narrative for the Palestinian community – one that acknowledges our failures and wrong decisions in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." The radical wing of the pro-Palestinian movement considers him a Zionist. And Zionism for them is not a national movement like any other, but a synonym for evil.

Howidy continues to lament the Arab public's lack of interest in the political situation in Gaza. Like many people in Gaza, he criticized Al Jazeera's coverage, which in the beginning ignored the recent protests in Gaza in the summer of 2025 against Hamas rule and soon reinterpreted them as protests against Israel because they clearly did not fit its own political agenda. "Suddenly, Al Jazeera stopped reporting on Gaza. (And now they're silencing us by putting words in our mouths). Al Jazeera and other 'pro-Palestine' media networks are betraying the Palestinians and protecting the regime oppressing them", he wrote on his Instagram account. Howidy then took on the

Screenshot Instagram hamzahowidyy

Screenshot Instagram hamzahowidyy
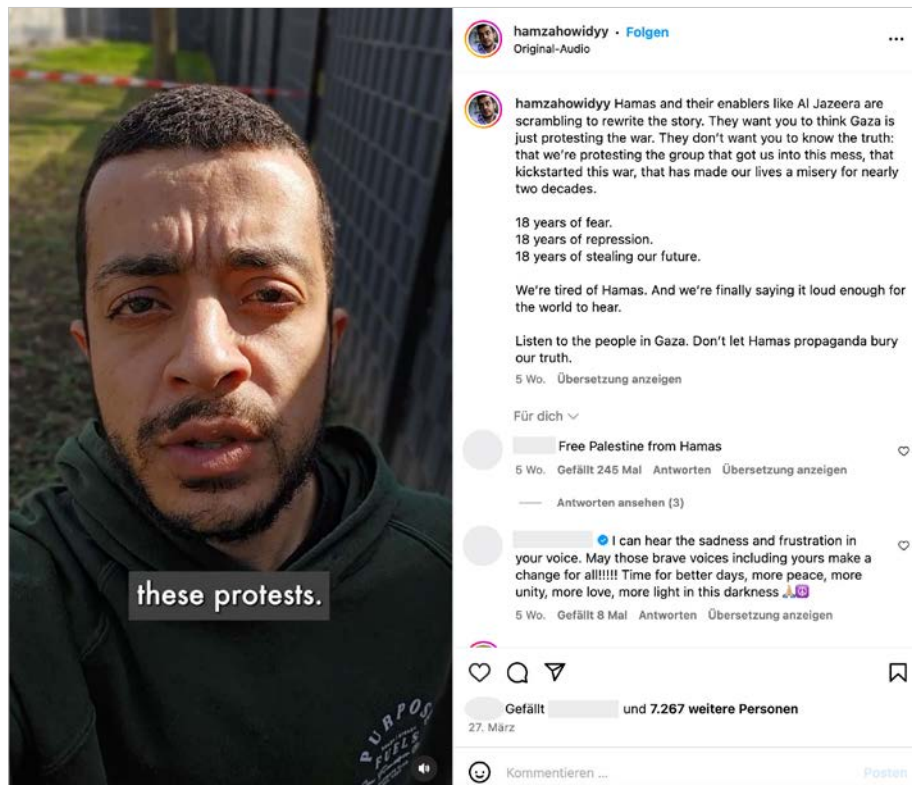
Screenshot Instagram hamzahowidyy

job that Arab media outlets did not want to do. He gave a voice to people from Gaza who expressed their frustration with Hamas rule, but also with the international protests against the Gaza war: "Hamas distributed food to their members while we were starving." – "They built tunnels to save themselves while we were left above the ground to face death." – "Islamist and leftist communities outside of Gaza hate to hear us speak." – "To them, we are just a reality show."

When Israeli forces attacked Iran's nuclear program and representatives of the regime in Tehran in the summer of 2025, Howidy wrote that for over three decades, Iran has actively worked to prevent Palestinians from reaching a political settlement that might sideline Tehran's influence in the region. Iran's "current predicament is the direct result of policies rooted in sabotaging any chance of peace." After the Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in Oslo in 1993, Iran had poured money and weapons into militant movements to undermine the newly emerging Palestinian Authority and destroy state institutions.

Howidy is fighting for a free, democratically governed Palestinian state. Free from Israeli occupation, and liberated from the influence of Iran and Qatar. But first, the people of Gaza must be saved from starvation. In July, Howidy drew his readers' attention to the catastrophic humanitarian situation: "Babies are dying of malnutrition. Doctors are begging for supplies. People are collapsing from hunger in the streets. Please see our pain. Please show compassion. Please demand change."

Notes

1 https://taz.de/7-Oktober--ein-Jahr-danach/!6034823/
2 https://taz.de/Aktivist-ueber-Anti-Hamas-Protest-in-Gaza/!6020586/

Hamza Howidy was born and studied in Gaza. Today, the 27-year-old activist and journalist lives in refugee accommodation in Germany. He is currently facing deportation from Germany to Greece.

Ulrich Gutmair is an editor for politics, culture and arts for the daily newspaper *die tageszeitung*. His book *The First Days of Berlin* tells the story of the short lived Temporary Autonomous Zone after the fall of the Wall in central Berlin. His latest publication *Wir sind die Türken von morgen* shows how early German-language Punk's politics of negation attacked authoritarian societies.

Curating on Shaky Grounds:
Curating in Times of Crisis and Conflict
Dorothee Richter

***Curating on Shaky Grounds: Curating in Times of Crisis and Conflict* was a five-day project with workshops, night walks, on-site visits and theoretical talks. Curated by Ronald Kolb, Elena Levi, Dorothee Richter, Rotem Ruff, Maayan Sheleff and Hillit Zwick, hosted by Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2–6 November, 2021**

In retrospect, one can suspect that in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, conspiracy theories already circled redundantly and a certain strange new crowd emerged – a mixture of people who were formerly known as left-wingers (autonomous, ecologically thinking, relying on nature as a form of justice) and right-wingers, who were against any 'interference' from the state, against a 'natural' survival of the fittest world order. We did not foresee that this uncanny collaboration could be repeated on other occasions.

In November 2021, our concept read as follows: "What if we consider the recent pandemic, and the crisis mode that it engenders, as a disruption in an aesthetic-political constellation –one that severely curtails movement and momentum, unleashes paranoia, and morphs the ways in which we can act, perform, and perceive the world around us? Through such a reading, can we explore current curatorial practices as a method to voice urgencies in new ways? As curators working with contemporary artists internationally, how can we stimulate a renewed understanding of the world during this moment of crisis and as *the ground beneath us is shaking*?

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly amplified the challenges facing societies worldwide: inequalities have increased in a severe way, accelerating acute gaps in class, race, and labor, and creating immense needs in healthcare and social services; the media, big tech, and other algorithm-based modes of communication have stirred up significant social fragmentation, creating divided communities that can no longer find a common language; human activities have provoked disastrous climate change that is wreaking havoc on our lived environment; alienation and singularization have become magnified.

The need for serious and systemic change in the order of things seems both palpable and out of reach.

Where do contemporary artists and art institutions find themselves at this very moment? What other contemporary dilemmas and conflicts might be identified and understood through curatorial practice, which would otherwise be hidden in plain sight? How can curatorial platforms re-organize social space or re-articulate knowledge during times of crises?

Curating on Shaky Grounds is a symposium and curatorial workshop that investigates the ways in which new forms of curating can evoke ideas on subjectivity and situated knowledge. Exploring the social and political dimensions of curatorial practice, the workshop will address ways in which the presentation of art can contribute to the reorganization of a public in times of crises. Questioning traditional hierarchies of knowledge and power structures, *Curating on Shaky Grounds* will look at the possibility of transferring conflictual aesthetics to a curatorial realm, and examine the problematics of curating in taming political criticality and its potential to unleash radical positions. Through research and case studies, participants will be invited to think through the role and responsibility of curators as critical mediators, with an emphasis on curating that addresses the pace and tone of contemporary experience.

Curating on Shaky Grounds will reflect on new practices that have developed out of and/or as a response to the current crisis mode, and examine ways in which curating can provide possibilities for regaining differentiated and nuanced viewpoints."[1]

What became an extremly interesting moment in the project was the mixture of straightforward theoretical talks, workshops, exhibition visits and a night walk. The workshops in particular made people perceive each other on different scales: if you are composing with others or doing something resembling yoga together, you are more prepared to be open and perceive inputs, such as the personal archive of Dor Guez, with a sensitive and open mind.

Even as we had to change to an online format during the symposium part, due to a diagnosed Covid case, we had the experience of a shared space as an embodied space. I must confess, we did not achieve a conflicting, antagonistic zone, more a friendly contact zone. We used some scores from 'Small Projects for Coming Communities' to make people behave differently – not in a hierarchical form but as a big group, having fun and also discussing burning issues. On the first day, we found out about the topics and challenges the participants were interested in.

What we did change, compared to a formal symposium, was the way in which the public was addressed. In many different instances, the usually passive and instructed public was now co-producing, so they became co-authors. The idea of temporary communities evolved and in general the atmosphere was unusually welcoming. Aspects of daily life sneaked into the practices and a space of negotiation and experience was opened up. I imagine that the interpellation for people changed; it opened up the space to negotiate societal issues. After some exercises which helped people to connect and established a relaxed atmosphere, we jointly identified issues that the participants wanted to discuss: One of the pressing topics was alienation/loneliness. As John Berger stated: "The Marquise de Sorcy de Thélusson, painted in 1790 by David, looks at me. Who

could have foreseen in her time the solitude in which people today live? A solitude confirmed daily by networks of bodiless and false images concerning the world. Yet their falseness is not an error. If the pursuit of profit is considered as the only means of salvation for mankind, turnover becomes the absolute priority, and consequently, the existent has to be disregarded or ignored or supressed."[2] The symptom of solitude is accelerated by Covid, the impression of being cut from gaining agency. Another topic was the care crisis, as discussed by Nancy Fraser: "My argument is that capitalism's economic subsystem depends on social reproductive activities external to it, which form one of its background conditions of possibility. Other background conditions include the governance functions performed by public powers and the availability of nature as a source of 'productive inputs' and a 'sink' for production's waste. Here, however, I will focus on the way that the capitalist economy relies on – one might say, free rides on – activities of provisioning, care-giving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds, although it accords them no monetized value and treats them as if they were free."[3] And she continues: "Non-waged social-reproductive activity is necessary for the existence of waged work, the accumulation of surplus value and the functioning of capitalism as such. None of those things could exist in the absence of housework, child-rearing, schooling, affective care and a host of

Workshop by Dor Guez

Workshop by Dor Guez

other activities which serve to produce new generations of workers and replenish existing ones, as well as to maintain social bonds and shared understandings. Social reproduction is an indispensable background condition for the possibility of economic production in a capitalist society."[4] This also became more pressing during Covid and the problem did not vanish after the pandemic. Another topic was the economic crisis, which is often even worse for cultural producers, because they already live in precarious circumstances. But of course any crisis in the dimension of the pandemic just made it clearer who had means to live safely and who did not. But also generally, local and global inequality produces a permanent state of crisis. Joseph Vogl described this as accelerated capitalism: "A first precondition for our economic present surely lies at the beginning of the 1970s. I refer to the end of the Bretton Woods arrangement, that postwar order which responded to the Great Depression by equipping the world economic system with a security mechanism: when all important currencies are bound in a fixed relation to the dollar, while the dollar is in turn bound in a fixed exchange relation to gold, the international trade of commodities and capital should remain crisis-free. For whatever reasons this system failed (an essential

reason being the United States' gigantic foreign debts), in 1971 President Nixon brought the so-called gold window to a close, and, in 1973, the Bretton Woods agreement was formally laid to rest."[5] He goes on: "A second precondition, which takes us back to the 1980s, has received the title of 'neoliberalism' and been tied to the names of Reagan and Thatcher. Their politics consisted not only of the power to break up trade unions, to privatize state-owned enterprises, and to perform radical redistributions with tax reforms. Far beyond these markers, they also began the great politics of deregulation and of the liberalization of financial markets – through repealing the antitrust laws, removing the separation between commercial banks and investment banks, and reducing controls on financial markets. Subsequently, the trade of financial products broke loose from the controlled stock exchange centers."[6] And he concludes: "The dynamics of today's financial markets would not be possible without new electronic and digital technologies. Such technologies range from the first ideas about the institution of electronic financial markets in the 1960s, through the opening of computerized stock exchanges and the provision of electronic stock exchange platforms up until the release of the World Wide Web for financial operations in 1993, and finally

up to today's high-frequency trading. With these technologies the financial economy has become a world-wide information machine."[7] The next crisis we identified was the ecological crisis, as Anna Tsing drastically emphasises: "Too-rapid climate change; massive extinctions; ocean acidification; slow-decaying pollutants; fresh-water contamination; critical ecosystem transitions: industrialization has proved far more deadly to life on earth than its designers might ever have dreamed. Addressing this disaster offers one of the great challenges for all thoughtful people today."[8]

Infrastructural failures and the commons came up as a topic: "Politics is also about redistributing insecurity, after all. So whatever else it is, the commons concept has become a way of positivizing the ambivalence that saturates social life about the irregular conditions of fairness."[9] and later: "The better power of the commons is to point to a way to view what's broken in sociality, the difficulty of convening a world conjointly, although it is inconvenient and hard, and to offer incitements to imagining a liveable provisional life. The close readings that follow aim to extend the commons concept's pedagogy of learning to live with messed up yet shared and ongoing infrastructures of experience."[10]

These short descriptions of different moments of crisis gave just an outlook on what was mentioned as an insecurity in the group in 2021, and this was before the violent outbreaks of war and terror acts came to a convulsive outburst. We did not provide an antagonistic

conflict zone; what we could provide was an atmosphere in which insecurities could be addressed and viewed – through shared circles, through different workshops, and through radical artistic and curatorial work that was presented. We were building up a contact zone in which difference and diversity could also unfold and be present. Of course these topics could only be touched upon in the workshops and talks, but all of them showed unexpected ways to deal with crisis, and they involved participants in such a way that they would experience personal agency. The following descriptions are based on the announcements and booklet for the workshops and symposium; I did not include the more detailed biographies.

Introduction and executing scores from 'Small Projects for Coming Communities'
Rotem Ruff, Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb. This part did convey a certain joyful togetherness and also provided the atmosphere to share individual impressions of crisis; the next step entailed a maping current crisis from the participants' perspectives, as I addressed above.

Workshop with curator Gilly Karjevsky
This workshop explored the concepts and practices of responsive and responsible curatorial processes. Drawing on previous site-specific programmes that emerged from their immediate contexts, such as the Jardin Essentiel – a public garden in Brussels of over thirty varieties of medicinal and aromatic herbs, where a

Workshop by Ariel Reichman, Stephanie Amurao, Maya Shenfeld

series of experimental design and artistic interventions were held (2016) – and Climate Care – an arts festival taking place at Floating ~~University~~ (2019, 2021 and 2023) – the workshop will explore questions such as: how do we situate and create on shaky or fluid, grounds? How do conceptual shifts, such as emergence and interconnectedness, inform curatorial making? What kinds of learnings can be emphasised at this moment?

Meeting with artist Yael Bartana at the Jewish Museum Berlin to view *Redemption Now*.
Walk-through of a solo exhibition of work by Yael Bartana with artist and exhibition curator Shelley Harten. Yael Bartana is an artist who was born in Israel. She is an observer of the contemporary and a pre-enactor who employs art as a scalpel inside the mechanisms of power structures and navigates the fine and cracked line between the sociological and the imagination. Over the past twenty years, she has dealt with some of the dark dreams of the collective unconscious and reactivated the collective imagination, dissected group identities and (an-)aesthetic means of persuasion. In her films, installations, photographs, staged performances and public monuments Bartana investigates subjects like national identity, trauma and displacement, often through ceremonies, memorials, public rituals and collective gatherings.

Site visit to ZK/U with Philip Horst, co-founder and co-director of the artist collective KUNSTrePUBLIK (2006) and ZK/U Berlin (2012).
ZK/U is an artist-run residency and platform for creative and urban experimentation. ZK/U Berlin links global discourses to local actions. On the crossroads between art, research and everyday surroundings, it investigates the multi-layered dynamics of urban spaces and creates experimental formats and projects that serve as a model for new scenarios. ZK/U seeks to develop projects, co-produce knowledge and share values created through exchanges. Instead of letting the 'final product' constrain the possible routes that a practice might take, ZK/U focuses on the processes that come from, and feed into, the particular contexts of the fellows' practice, whether they be locally defined situations or international discourses.

Night Walk in Humboldthain Park with artist Alona Rodeh
Alona Rodeh's current work focuses on the omnipresence of artificial illumination in the city and its influence on humans and non-humans alike. In light of the current post-pandemic city, and with an emphasis on

the pressing need for more private-in-public places to inhabit, night walking suggests an expansion of possibilities for living in the shadows. In this guided nocturnal tour, Rodeh leads the way into the semi-darkness of Humboldthain Park: mapping, observing and assimilating into its various mental and optical states of exposure.

I AM (NOT) SAFE
Workshop with artist **Ariel Reichman** and his collaborative partners – dancer and performer **Stephanie Amurao** and musician and sound artist **Maya Shenfeld**.
A participatory workshop on the notion of safety, explored through discussions, body exercises and sounds. Developed in collaboration with musicians, performers and professionals from diverse fields, this workshop considers questions such as: what does safety feel like? What does safety sound like? Ariel Reichman is a Berlin-based visual artist. He uses poetic and conceptual forms in his practice, touching on issues of identity and politics through intimacy and the public space, thereby subtly drawing attention to complex subjective, cultural and political realms. Reichman's current work *I AM (NOT) SAFE* is on view at Kunsthalle Mannheim and can be activated online. www.arielreichman.com Stephanie Amurao is originally from Vancouver, BC, and graduated from the Juilliard School in 2010. Maya Shenfeld is a Jerusalem-born, Berlin-based composer and sound artist.

Workshop with artist Dani Gal
"The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realise that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against Fascism." (*On the Concept of History* by Walter Benjamin, 1940). With Walter Benjamin's famous dictum as a backdrop, Gal will present his recent films as a starting point for a discussion about unsettling empathy, multidirectional memory, witness testimony and the politics of silence.

Book Launch: (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies,
edited by curators **Maayan Sheleff** and Sarah Spies, with a lecture by **André Lepecki**, performance studies scholar and curator.
(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies is a new publication in the OnCurating academic book series, edited by Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies. Connecting studies of the voice and theories of the body via

the politics of performativity, the publication complicates the collateral understanding of power and agency inherent in collective or communal address and participation. The book launch will include an online lecture by performance studies scholar and curator Professor André Lepecki, live from NYC. Lepecki will discuss the politics of movement and its pause during the pandemic, followed by a conversation with Lepecki and editors Sheleff and Spies.

(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies takes as its starting point the project of the same name curated by Sheleff and Spies for Reading International, UK (2019). Looking back at the project from within the pandemic's viral choreography – with the forced distancing of bodies and further silencing of already marginalised voices, alongside the simultaneous performative enactment of transnational solidarity – the contributors respond to the ongoing crisis within a broader and topical context. The publication includes texts by Susanne Clausen, Susan Gibb, Edgar Schmitz, Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies, and a transcription of a conversation between Florian Malzacher, Maayan Sheleff and Jonas Staal.

André Lepecki, PhD, is a writer, independent curator, and Full Professor and Chairperson at the Department of Performance Studies, New York University.

Corona / Spectacle / Conspiracy Theories.
Lecture by **Johan Frederik Hartle**, professor of art science & media theory and aesthetics.
The aesthetico-political implications of the COVID-19 pandemic (and the measures taken against it) reinforce general tendencies of late capitalist societies. They atomise, dematerialise and virtualise social practice and inscribe fear and social antagonism into people's daily interactions. Also, they increase phantasmic ideologies and collective irrationality, including wild and creative conspiracy theories. This talk discusses the relationship between COVID-19 and the spectacle, and attempts to draw aesthetic conclusions from it.

Berlin, before and after, Shanghai
Lecture by curator and gallerist **Avi Feldman**, joined by media artist, blogger, activist and programmer **aaajiao**.
The starting point for this lecture is a recent exhibition by media artist, blogger, activist and programmer aaajiao titled 'I was dead on the Internet', which was on view at the Sifang Art Museum's exhibition space in Shanghai, China (September 2021). "I was dead on the Internet, where I once thought I was raised," the artist writes from his home in Berlin, away

from his studio and life in Shanghai. The bustling city of Shanghai is also where curator and gallerist Avi Feldman met aaajiao for the first time in August 2019. Feldman will discuss aaajiao's exhibition, while recalling his two-month residency at Ming Contemporary Art Museum (McaM) in Shanghai, and his research on law and art in China at a time before a global pandemic – or was it already a post pandemic world?

The Changing Grounds of Value: Art between so-called online showrooms, acts of value-discrimination and a general atmosphere of increased mistrust
Lecture by Isabelle Graw, co-founder of *Texte zur Kunst* and professor of art history and art theory.
In this lecture, Graw will introduce a theory of the (specific) value of art, through a combination of theoretical propositions and case studies that highlight artistic practices. As social struggles intensify worldwide against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, Graw will address how the pandemic and recent protest movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo affect the value of art.

On the tip of the tongue: art and politics between sound and sight
Curator **Maayan Sheleff** in conversation with artist, writer and curator **Boaz Levin**.
Looking at the role of the human voice in forms of commoning as well as methods of exclusion, Boaz Levin and Maayan Sheleff will discuss the agency and power of both the voice and the gaze, through their recent curatorial and research-based projects: Sheleff's exhibition *Voice Over* at the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht, Holland, that dealt with exiled and silenced voices; and Levin's *Say Shibboleth! On visible and invisible Borders* at the Jewish Museums in Hohenems and Munich.
Boaz Levin is an artist, writer and curator who lives and works in Berlin. Levin is the co-founder, together with Vera Tollmann and Hito Steyerl, of the Research Center for Proxy Politics.

Hosting Differences and Encouraging Space
Movement workshop with **Liz Rech** and **Salah Zater, Schwabinggrad Ballett**
How can we create a space where people can meet, where they can reflect, and where people can move freely? Liz Rech and Salah Zater, who are members of the artist-activist collective Schwabinggrad Ballett, are interested in embodied politics and the practice of being corporally present in space. What does it mean to inhabit space? What does it mean to create space? One of their

main areas of research is experiencing togetherness as a tool for resistance, while celebrating differences within a group. They work in different formats, from direct action in the political field to temporary occupation of territory and choreographic practice in public space, to performances in 'high culture' contexts like Wiener Festwochen and Live Art Festival, kampnagel/Hamburg. In this workshop, they will facilitate a participatory movement improvisation informed by their activism and collective practices. https://schwabinggrad-ballett.org.

Petrified Conflicts. The Para-Museum and the Specters of Infrastructure

Lecture by **Nora Sternfeld**, art educator and curator. Archival materials from the Art Workers' Coalition and its actions at the MoMA in New York in 1969 are currently presented in a display case as part of the museum's new installation of its permanent collection. A stylish glass box encases these materials, which outline thirteen demands made of the museum by the Art Workers' Coalition – including free admission, a section of the museum devoted to showing work by black artists, and a public hearing on the topic of 'The Museum's Relationship to Artists and Society'. In this lecture, Sternfeld will address the role and responsibility of art institutions in engaging in self-critique. What are political demands addressed to a museum doing in a display case of the museum? What do the struggles against cultural institutions mean from the perspective of the institution? How can a museum be both critical of and faithful to the material it houses? Sternfeld will discuss how material can be preserved through the process of institutional change – in a way that it is capable of reactivation – and not just neutralised and immobilised.

Conflictual Aesthetics: Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere

Lecture by **Oliver Marchart**, political theorist and philosopher.
A new wave of artistic activism has emerged in recent years in response to the ever-increasing dominance of authoritarian neoliberalism. Activist practices in the art field, however, have been around much longer. As Oliver Marchart asserts, there has always been an activist undercurrent in art. In this talk, he traces trajectories of artistic activism in theatre, dance, performance and public art, and investigates the political potential of urbanism, curating and 'biennials of resistance'. What emerges is a conflictual aesthetics that does not conform to traditional approaches in the field, and that activates the political potential of artistic and curatorial practice.

Mapping archival traces

Performative lecture by artist **Dor Guez**.
Dor Guez's photography, video installations, essays and lecture-performances explore the relationship between art, narrative, trauma, memory and displacement. Guez was born in Jerusalem to a Palestinian family from Lydda and a family of Jewish immigrants from North Africa. Interrogating personal experiences and official accounts of the past, Guez's lecture-performances raise questions about contemporary art's role in narrating unwritten histories and recontextualising visual and written documents. In the past twenty years, his studies and artistic work have focused on archival materials and photographic practices in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as on mapping traces of violence in the landscape.
This workshop is a result of Dor Guez's most recent work, developed in collaboration with the American Colony Archive in Jerusalem. Additionally, Guez draws insight from other archives, such as the Pinchas Lavon Institute for Labour Movement Research in Tel Aviv and the Christian Palestinian Archive, founded by the artist in 2006. In an intimate setting, Guez will narrate and animate the archival materials. Participants will be invited to share personal experiences and exchange knowledge, while the artist presents his research findings from different sources.

Permeable Exhibitions

Lecture by Paz Guevara, curator, researcher and author. How can exhibitions create community rather than objectifying those that enter into the modern grid layout of the gallery? How can an exhibition be permeable to life through orality and reciprocity? How can an exhibition be related to geopolitical trajectories, struggles and potential alliances? In this talk, Paz Guevara invites us to reflect on the violence of the exhibition as a medium and an objectifying mechanism, while also presenting partly speculative and partly documentary propositions.

Hegemonies of Healing: Curatorial Governmentalities and their Discontents

Lecture by Nanne Buurman, researcher and lecturer. Nanne Buurman will discuss how the dialectics of care and control manifest in what she calls "curatorial governmentality", a concept loosely derived from Foucault's elaborations on the birth of biopolitics. Based on her analysis of how certain curatorial practices, discourses and subjectivities relate to specific social conditions, she shares insight into her current research on Nazi

continuities in the early history of documenta, relating them to the broader ambivalences of modernity and their uncanny hauntings in the present day.

The discourse of the project developed through a combination of workshops, talks, visits and night walks, as well as in the breaks, when all of the participants spoke with each other. The trust that was necessary for an open-minded encounter was developed mostly through the workshops and scores with a bodily involvement and encounter. In retrospect, this paved the way to understanding the contradictions and astonishing visual knowledges that emerged. So for me, the workshop delivered by Dor Guez, in which he showed photographs from his ancestry – a Palestinian family from Lydda and a family of Jewish immigrants from North Africa. We could turn over the old artefacts and see where the photo studies were based. For example, one image of a couple was taken in Berlin, in fantastic Middle Eastern clothes, dressed like Bedouins, or how one would imagine Bedouins in the early twentieth century in Berlin; the same couple was also portrayed in Tel Aviv in specifically Western clothes. In a way, one could say that it is not only femininity that is a masquerade, because attributions are imposed on us from outside, unfortunately often with very real consequences.[11] The *Curating on Shaky Grounds* project at least offered the opportunity to step back and see what lies beyond these attributions.

The project, delivered as workshops and a public symposium, invited participants to think about the role and responsibility of curators, theoreticians and artists as critical mediators at a time of crisis. Questioning traditional hierarchies of knowledge, critique and power structures, the programme provided opportunities to collaboratively consider ways in which curating can create possibilities for regaining differentiated and nuanced viewpoints.

***

Notes

1 The text is based primarily on the concept for the workshop and conference programme developed by the curatorial group and the artists.
2 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London: Penguin Classics (2008), p. 89.
3 Nancy Fraser, 'Contradictions of Capital and Care', *New Left Review* 100 (July/Aug 2016): 99–117, here p. 101.
4 Ibid., p. 102.
5 Joseph Vogl, 'The Sovereignty Effect. Markets and Power in the Economic Regime', trans. William Callison, in *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23(1),

Special Dossier: Rethinking Sovereignty and Capitalism (Fall/Winter 2014): 125–155, here p. 128.
6 Ibid., pp. 128–9.
7 Ibid., p. 129.
8 Anna Tsing, 'Earth Stalked by Man', *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 34(1), Spring 2016: 2–16, here p. 2.
9 Lauren Berlant, 'The commons: Infrastructures for troubling times', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34(3) June 2016: 393–419, here p. 395.
10 Ibid.
11 Cf. Liliane Weissberg, *Weiblichkeit als Maskerade*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag (1994).

***

Biographies of the curators of *Shaky Grounds*

Ronald Kolb, PhD, is the artistic director of M.1 Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung in Hohenlockstedt. He is a researcher, lecturer, curator, designer and filmmaker based between Stuttgart and Zurich. He was Co-Head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, ZHdK, and is Co-Editor-in-Chief of the journal *On-Curating.org*. His PhD research deals with curatorial practices in global/situated contexts in light of governmentality – its entanglements in representational power and self-organised modes of participatory practices in the arts.

Elena Levi is Deputy Director at Artis, where she oversees grant and public programs, supports curatorial programs, and works on organizational strategies and fundraising initiatives. Elena co-creates the podcast Audio Interference, produced by Interference Archive, a volunteer-run exhibition space and community archive of social movement history. In this context, she co-organized the exhibition *Resistance Radio: The People's Airwaves* (2019). Previous positions include Program Assistant at Triangle Arts Association in New York (2014–16) and Weitz Family Intern at Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, NE (2012–13). Elena received her B.A. in Art History from Carleton College in 2012.

Rotem Ruff is Associate Director of Artis, Tel Aviv, and Head of the Office of International Academic Affairs at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, where she is also a lecturer in the Visual and Material Culture Department. Previously, Rotem held positions in various institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, NY, and the Haifa Museum of Art, Israel; she has also organized

public programs and curated numerous exhibitions in leading museums and institutions globally. Rotem is the co-founder and co-director of REAC-TIK, an International Erasmus+ Jean-Monnet Network researching EU perception and implementation of cultural diplomacy and policy.

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien/Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

Maayan Sheleff, PhD, is a curator based in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv and the Cultural Programs Coordinator in Jerusalem at Goethe Institute, Israel. Her thesis explored the agency of the voice in participatory, performative and political practices. She has curated projects at the Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht; the Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Madre Museum, Naples; Herzliya Museum, Israel; and the Bloomfield Science Museum, Jerusalem, among other venues. Sheleff was co-curator of the first Tel Aviv-Jaffa Biennial. She is the co-editor of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* (with Sarah Spies, PhD, ONCURATING, 2021) and is the author of 'Fear and Love in Graz', published in *Empty Stages, Crowded Flats. Performativity as Curatorial Strategy*, Performing Urgency #4, edited by Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza (Berlin: House on Fire, Alexander Verlag and Live Art Development Agency, 2017).

Hillit Zwick is Deputy Director for Public Engagement and Partnerships at the Jewish Museum in New York, where she is responsible for audience development, digital initiatives, communications, and institutional partnerships. Prior to this role, Hillit served as Executive Director of Artis, where she developed and managed a dynamic portfolio of grantmaking and public programs, and worked closely with artists and curators internationally to support exhibitions and residencies. An arts and philanthropy professional, Hillit began her career at the Metropolitan Museum of Art followed by a decade working at foundations supporting the arts and progressive politics. Hillit holds a master's degree in Modern Art and Critical Studies from Columbia University.

The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online
Conversation: Inke Arns and Dorothee Richter

DR: In 2019, you curated the show *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online* at HMKV Hartware MedienKunstverein. If you think back, some of the nightmares have come true – in a way already pointed out by the exhibition. How do you feel about it?

IA: To tell you the truth, the nightmares were already real back in 2019. The alt-right was a scene that already existed back then – the only difference being that a broader audience was not really aware of it. Including me. I first heard about it from a friend and colleague, Florian Cramer, who teaches at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. In early 2017, he gave a lecture about 'Meme Wars: Internet Culture and the "Alt-Right"'.[1] He started off with lots of direct quotations from the subculture of the alt-right. Usually, I can follow Florian's presentations, but this time I did not understand a single word. I could not grasp what he was talking about. I was really shocked, which piqued my interest. I wanted to know more about this. In the 2019 exhibition, my intention was to share my research on the alt-right – and the artists who addressed this subculture very early on – with a broader audience. The exhibition started off with a glossary of terms circulating in the alt-right. I think it provided a good overview of, among other things, the weaponisation of language.
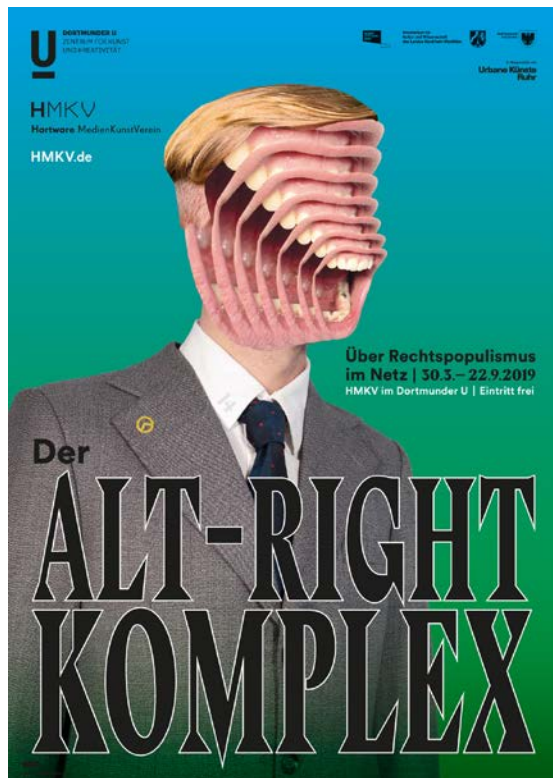
Exhibition poster *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV in the Dortmunder U, 30.3. – 22.9.2019. Design: e o t . essays on typography

How do I feel about "some of the nightmares coming true"? Well, back in 2019, Donald Trump was already president of the United States (2017–21). Making the exhibition felt a bit like making a forensic analysis of how this rise to power of the alt-right had become possible. However, the show was not only about America's recent past, but also about the present and future of Germany and Europe.

When I look at it from today's perspective, I have to say that I am (still) shocked to see how well the alt-right masters the tools of communication (social media) and propaganda (fake news). You know, it is as if the concept of 'tactical media' was hijacked and brought to the next level by the alt-right, including the current social

Glossary in the entrance area of the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV in the Dortmunder U, 30.3. – 22.9.2019. Photo: Hannes Woidich

Simon Denny *Founders Rules*, *Ascent – Above the Nation State Rules*, *Game of Life: Collective vs Individual Rules*, 2017, in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV. Photo: Hannes Woidich

Milo Rau / IIPM — International Institute of Political Murder, *Breivik's statement*, 2012,
in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV. Photo: Hannes Woidich

media strategy of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany. The concept of 'tactical media' was originally developed in the relatively optimistic mid-1990s in rather left-wing and activist contexts. It was coined in the context of the *Next 5 Minutes* festival series in Amsterdam (1993–2003).[2]

A recent discussion about the 'Echoes of Tactical Media' put it like this: "We witness the memeification of everything, sprawling reactionary media ecologies and a rising flood of synthetic bullshit. Tactical media may have sketched a shape of things to come, but the diagram can't be assumed as exclusive to any kind of progressive agenda (if it ever could)."[3] Actually, that's what I would like to research further: whether the concept of 'tactical media' was brought to perfection by the alt-right. And whether it can again be re-appropriated.

DR: I quote from the book that accompanied the exhibition. "The term 'alt-right' is problematic, because it conceals central elements of this movement: it is a collective term for various right-wing to far-right extremist groups and ideologies that are loosely linked to one another. The common denominator here is the assumption that the 'identity' of the white US American (and in the case of the European counterparts, the white European) population is under threat from any of the following – immigration, multiculturalism, Islam, Judaism, feminism, cultural Marxism and political correctness – and needs to be defended by all means."[4] In the exhibited works, this is reflected, for example, by the piece by Milo Rau.

IA: Milo Rau's/IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder's video *Breiviks Erklärung* (Breivik's Explanation, 2012, 78:00 min.) consists of a re-enactment of the (non-public) explanation given before a Norwegian court by Anders Behring Breivik. Breivik, a right-wing extremist and anti-Islamic terrorist, killed seventy-seven people in 2011 in Oslo and on the Norwegian island of Utøya – predominantly participants of a camping trip run by the social democratic youth organisation AUF.

In 2012, Breivik was sentenced to twenty-one years in prison with subsequent preventive detention – the maximum sentence in Norway. In April 2012, Breivik explained his actions before the Oslo district court – in camera. In defence of his actions, he invoked the degeneration of Norwegian culture, which, he claimed, was a result of multiculturalism, Islam and, in particular, "cultural Marxism".

In the documentary theatre of Milo Rau/IIPM, Breivik's one-hour explanation is presented word for word, however, with the greatest possible distance: performed matter-of-factly by the German-Turkish actress Sascha Ö. Soydan while chewing gum, Breivik's speech – when detached from omnipresent media images – is "de-dramatised" (Milo Rau) and reduced to its mere text, the racist mindset of which is frighteningly close to that of established right-wing nationalist discourses.

DR: Could you please explain how you developed the *parcours* of the exhibition?

IA: This exhibition dealt with right-wing extremist online culture and traced the development from a (sub)culture of transgression in online forums such as 4chan to platforms such as Breitbart News. It was about memes, white supremacists and the Dark Enlightenment. *The Alt-Right Complex* presented twelve projects by sixteen artists from twelve European countries. The twelve projects in the show explored very different aspects of the alt-right complex. The exhibition presented both works that look at the US context and those that examine the phenomena in Europe or, more specifically, in Germany.

The artist duo DISNOVATION.ORG developed a form of speculative cartography of current political memes in their piece *Online Culture Wars*. Visitors to the exhibition could take these maps home as a guide to orienting themselves better in 'real' life after their visit. In his ten-channel video installation, *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective (visual ecology)*, the Dutch artist Jonas Staal explored the cinematic and political work of Bannon, a former Breitbart chairman and chief strategist and senior consultant to Donald Trump, in order to analyse the mechanisms of modern-day, alt-right propaganda. The artist duo UBERMORGEN conducted extensive visual research on the web for their work *BREITBART RED*, which they used to build an immersive installation where visitors are confronted with 'art for the right wing'.

DISNOVATION.ORG, *Online Culture Wars*, 2018–2019, in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV. Photo: Hannes Woidich

Szabolcs KissPál, *From Fake Mountains to Faith (Hungarian Trilogy) 2012*, 2016, in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV. Photo: Hannes Woidich

The Slovak artist and curator Boris Ondreička, on the other hand, used *Satan Watching the Sleep of Christ* by Joseph Noel Paton – a nineteenth-century painting done in the style of the Pre-Raphaelites – to develop a whole political theory on today's alt-right memes.

The New Zealand artist Simon Denny created cryptic board games, which he uses to question the beliefs and philosophies of influential Silicon Valley billionaires with a penchant for doomsday prepping. The game instructions were on display in the exhibition. The Canadian artist Dominic Gagnon and the German artists Vera Drebusch and Florian Egermann focused on preppers, taking us into their cosmos, as well as other concerned citizens who express paranoid fantasies to visionary hysteria – for example, conspiracy theorists and gun fanatics whose YouTube videos have long been deleted (they live on in Dominic Gagnon's work).

In *Breivik's Explanation*, Swiss director Milo Rau and the IIPM – International Institute of Political Murder revive the defence speech held by the Norwegian extreme right-wing and Islamophobic terrorist Breivik held in camera – alienated by its performance by the German-Turkish actress Sascha Ö. Soydan. It shows toxic masculinity in its purest form. The British artist Nick Thurston even created an entire library of hate speech for his work *Hate Library* – comprised of material gathered from various internet forums. Like weighty hymnbooks, the volumes are displayed on music stands arranged in a circle (similar to the European flag), as though in preparation for a – European – group singing lesson.

In their comic *Bruchlinien: Drei Episoden zum NSU* (Faultlines: Three Episodes on the NSU), Paula Bulling and Anne König concentrate on female figures in the context of the National Socialist Underground, a German far-right terrorist group. For the third part, which they completed for the exhibition, the artists spoke to Gamze Kubaşık, the daughter of the NSU murder victim in Dortmund, Mehmet Kubaşık.

The museum docu-fiction project *From Fake Mountains to Faith (Hungarian Trilogy)* by the Hungarian artist Szabolcs KissPál explored political communities (in this case, the Hungarian nation) as complexly constructed entities. The walls of the museum had been painted in the colour of the right-wing populist governing party in Hungary, Fidesz (orange).

Lastly, the Serbian artist Vanja Smiljanić presented *Waves of Worship (WOW)*, the final part of her three-part examination of the relationship between religious movements and nationalism. In her installation and lecture performance, Smiljanić looked at the web-based UFO religion, the Cosmic People, and the Flag Nation Society, a Christian community that expresses their beliefs in the form of flag worship.

DR: In the exhibition, you combined parts that transfer knowledge about the scene and their wording with a *parcours* of works that are situated between activism and art. Could you explain your thoughts about it?

IA: I found it very important to a) present the artworks dealing with the alt-right and b) transfer knowledge about the heavily coded language used in alt-right subcultures. The glossary presented in the entrance area of the exhibition explained more than thirty symbols (14, 168:1, ((( )))), platforms (4chan/8chan), companies (Breitbart News, Cambridge Analytica), terms (accelerationism, cuckservatives, the Dark Enlightenment/neo-reactionary movement, manosphere, The Red Pill, social justice warriors, Gamergate), practices (doxing, sock puppets, lulz, memes, trolls), groups (Identitarian Movement, NSU, preppers, Reconquista Germanica, Reichsbürger, white supremacists), individuals and figures (Anonymous, Steve Bannon, Nick Land, Mencius Moldbug, Paulchen Panther, Pepe the Frog, Richard Spencer, Peter Thiel, Milo Yiannopoulos) and belief systems within the context of the alt-right (ethnopluralism, toxic masculinity, transhumanism).

Szabolcs KissPál, *From Fake Mountains to Faith (Hungarian Trilogy) 2012*, 2016. in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV. Photo: Hannes Woidich

Nick Thurston, *Hate Library*, 2017, in the exhibition *The Alt-Right Complex, On Right-Wing Populism Online*, HMKV.
Photo: Hannes Woidich

In addition, the exhibition included two videos that document lectures by Florian Cramer and Angela Nagle, two of the most distinguished European researchers on the alt-right at the time.

DR: Was the exhibition accompanied by discursive events?

IA: Yes, we hosted a lecture performance by the artist Vanja Smiljanić: *Waves of Worship (WOW)*, as well as three lectures by Florian Cramer ('Right-Wing Extremist Avant-Pop: From the "Autonomous Nationalists" to "Alt-Right"'), Klaus Walter ('The Kids Are Alt Right? Porn, Pop and the Culture Wars of the New Right'), and Jonas Staal ('From Alt-Right to Popular Propaganda Art'). In addition to these events, we also gave guided tours (even for kids).

DR: What do you think about the recent development that right-wing parties are on the rise, which also threatens the support for critical art?

IA: I simply do not understand why a political party like Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has not been made illegal. Their programme clearly goes against the German constitution. I fear that with the upcoming elections in Thuringia, Saxony and Brandenburg in September 2024, the AfD will end up as the strongest party, at least in one (if not all) of those *Länder* [states]. OK, they will then have to form a coalition with other parties, which will be difficult – maybe also impossible.
    What will happen if they are in the government is pretty clear: just read their party programme and listen to their statements. To get an idea, look at what happened in countries like Poland, Slovenia and Hungary: culture is the first target, because it is about identity. Luckily, Germany is a federal state, so it means that only parts of the country will be affected. So far.

DR: How would you change the project if you did it as a new version?

IA: One could, of course, think about adding more projects, such as *The White Album* (2018) by Arthur Jafa (US). This 40-minute video about fanatical gun lovers, German 'cybergoths', viral video stars and, above all, white self-pity would be a *must*.

However, I think I would make a totally different exhibition because the context has changed significantly. It is not only about certain terms listed in the glossary that are known today to a broader audience. Indeed, we have seen a very creepy restructuring of the political landscape, whereby many issues that were formerly voiced in alt-right subculture became topics of mainstream politics. Maybe the focus would be on this process of normalising alt-right topics.

DR: And how can curators react to the new antisemitism? I know that's too general a question – I mean, how can they react to the increased antisemitism since 7 October 2023?

IA: As we all know, unfortunately, antisemitism is not a new phenomenon. However, the current weaponisation of the term 'antisemitism' in Germany is. In some cases, it is used to silence dissenting voices – for example, those who criticise the politics of the Israeli state. Accusing somebody of 'antisemitism' (maybe because s/he is presenting voices from the Global South) can seriously damage a person's career in Germany. Political parties like the right-wing AfD (and others for sure) are silently rejoicing while watching this spectacle. The seed of suspicion has been successfully planted in the field of culture.
     But your question was more specific: how should curators react? Well, I think it is rather simple: continue to exhibit Jewish and/or Israeli artists, Palestinian artists, as well as Ukrainian and Russian artists and so on. Boycotts are not productive. They do not lead anywhere.

DR: Recent political research shows that female voters are much more left-wing than male voters, and that lonely, isolated men can more easily become right-wingers on the political scale. Klaus Theweleit attributes this to the soldierly men and the murderously violent men who have had an early traumatic experience and the disturbed development of the subject. Can we draw conclusions from this for artistic and curatorial action?

IA: These are certainly very important analyses and findings, but I don't see what kind of conclusions you can draw for artistic and curatorial actions, really. Art is not a pedagogical tool, you see? You can certainly point to these issues in your artistic and curatorial work in order to make these issues more visible. But you can only fight these developments by educating people. This means that you will have to address these issues before the symptoms can even emerge. Simply treating the symptoms will not help.

Notes

1 Lecture at FACT, Foundation for Art and Creative Technology, Liverpool, 2 March 2017, http://tacticalmediafiles.net/videos/45022/Y.
2 See also 'The Concept of Tactical Media', 7 March 2017, http://tacticalmediafiles.net/articles/44999.
3 'Echoes of Tactical Media', 10 July 2024, http://tacticalmediafiles.net/events/50117/Echoes-of-Tactical-Media-_-Premiere-of-CDI_TV-on-July-10th_-2024.
4 See https://www.hmkv.de/shop-en/shop-detail/the-alt-right-complex-on-right-wing-populism-online-publication.html

Inke Arns, PhD, director of HMKV Hartware MedienKunstVerein in Dortmund, Germany (www.hmkv.de). She has worked internationally as an independent curator and theorist specialising in media art, net cultures and Eastern Europe since 1993. After living in Paris (1982–1986), she studied Russian literature, Eastern European studies, political science, and art history in Berlin and Amsterdam (1988–96 M.A.) and in 2004 received her PhD from the Humboldt University in Berlin.
She has curated numerous exhibitions – among others at the Bauhaus (Dessau), MG+MSUM (Ljubljana), KW (Berlin), Museum of Contemporary Art (Belgrade), CCA (Glasgow), La Panacée (Montpellier), Jeu de Paume (Paris), CCA Ujazdowski Castle (Warsaw), HKW (Berlin), Muzeum Sztuki (Łódź), La Gaîté Lyrique (Paris), BOZAR (Brussels) and Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna). Recent exhibitions include *Genossin Sonne* (Comrade Sun, 2024–25), *Was ist Kunst, IRWIN?* (2023), *House of Mirrors: AI as Phantasm* (2022), *Technoshamanism* (2021) and *Artists & Agents – Performance Art and Secret Service* (2019). Curator of the Pavilion of the Republic of Kosovo (artist: Jakup Ferri), 59th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia (2022). She is the author of articles and books (most recently: *Tutorials*, 2024) on contemporary art, media art and net culture, and has edited numerous exhibition catalogues. www.inkearns.de

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien/Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

On Fascistisation and Impoverished Languages
Simon Strick

> "We must abandon, once and for all, the quick and easy formula: 'Fascism will not make it again.' Fascism has already 'made it,' and it continues to 'make it.' It passes through the tightest mesh; it is in constant evolution."
> Félix Guattari, 'Everybody wants to be a fascist', 1977

The theme of a recent lecture series organised by OnCurating, and as part of which I gave a (different) lecture on 11 April 2025, was "Let's Talk About … Anti-Democratic, Anti-Queer, Misogynist, Antisemitic, Right-Wing Spaces and Their Counter-Movements". Belatedly, my article intends to critically counteract this title, its implied gesture of 'talking about', as well as the attendant designation of specific 'spaces' in which seemingly clearly delineated bad things happen. It is as though there were items or objects – misogyny, antisemitism, queerphobia or *racism* (curiously missing from the list) – which could be disentangled from each other (and broader frameworks), only to re-entangle them in a broad critique of what is frequently called a 'swing to the right' and 'anti-democratic' tendencies.

The processes of dehumanisation shorthanded by these terms, however, are in my view much too weighty to be viewed from a simple meta-perspective that compounds them under 'right-wing/anti-democratic' shifts. If anything is certain at the moment, it is that 'democratic spaces' have always been very accommodating to 'right-wing movements' and have always been highly functional containers of processes of dehumanisation. Likewise, there is no unambiguous 'countermovement' to be won by running down a checklist of bad items to intervene against. As some authors featured in this special issue will likely demonstrate (I haven't read their contributions at this time of writing), such itemisation inevitably leads to gestures that 'play off' topoi against each other, so that 'antisemitism' might cancel out 'racism', 'queerphobia' or vice versa – a symptom (or function) in my opinion of the isolation, abstraction and de-materialisation that happens when dehumanisation is 'talked about' with such item lists, which is to say, when it is addressed in increasingly impoverished languages.

In light of these reservations, I want to offer some thoughts towards a different perspective and speculate on a broad process of *fascistisation*. This process is not simply meant to include or combine such topoi, but it dynamises dehumanisation within mechanisms and flows of desire. Talking about *fascistisation* has been and is being suppressed by objectifying languages such as the title of the lecture series mentioned above, and further by the pervasive German language game that is frequently called 'right-wing extremism research'. I think these language games are wrong and obfuscating, an issue all the more pressing in times of genocide, as everything is in such times. They are prone to become enlisted in a larger apparatus of fascistisation and annihilatory desire.

Liquidation

My speculations are informed by Felix Guattari's text 'Everybody wants to be a fascist' (1977), which paradigmatically rejects the notion of talking 'about fascism' as an object (always threatening to return), and instead emphasises its pervasiveness, mutability and dynamism. As one example, Guattari describes the Nazi fascist project as a totalising death project that did not pursue an ideology of 'national or racial rebirth' per se – i.e. "palingenetic ultranationalism" (Roger Griffin) – but instead mobilised a dynamic towards total annihilation. In the sense of a 'desire for death', National Socialism was successful in more ways than one:

> "All fascist meanings stem out of a composite representation of love and death, of Eros and Thanatos now made into one. Hitler and the Nazis were fighting for death, right up to and including the death of Germany; the German masses agreed to follow along and meet their own destruction." (168–9)

"Fighting for death" in my reading can be understood as a primarily energetic movement rather than an ideological one in the strict sense. "Alles für Deutschland", the slogan that has at times been adopted from the SA by the German Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), can be read as such an energetic statement: everything is to be surrendered for the nation, which means everything is to be annihilated for it, leaving it empty and only a provisional name for the drive itself. A transformation machine towards death. I would like to compare this notion of a 'desire for death' to a statement made by the blogger Curtis Yarvin, whom the *New York Times* recently portrayed as the chief ideologist of contemporary tech fascism. In February 2025, Yarvin described his plan for Gaza in similar libidinal terms, where 'annihilation' becomes 'investment' and the spaceless 'capital/stock' replaces 'the nation':

> "[…] Gaza, *without* its residents (even more important, without their complex maze of Ottoman-era land titles), is worth much more than Gaza *with* its residents, *even to its residents*. This is 140 square miles of Mediterranean real estate, clear of titles, demolished and demined at a cost of perhaps ten billion dollars. This land becomes the first charter city backed by US legitimacy: Gaza, Inc. Stock Symbol: GAZA."

There would be much to say on an international genocidal project, propelled by governments and military tech companies alike, which is currently clearing away human rights and international law, while also circumventing basic rights of assembly, free speech and habeas corpus in several Western countries. In the above quote, however, I'd like to highlight the centrality of energetic languages to the project of fascistisation, because Yarvin above all envisions a broad project of 'liquidation' (recalling Masha Gessen's 2023 observation that "The ghetto is being liquidated"). Such languages are not simply 'dehumanising' and therefore speak with genocidal or anti-democratic intent, which could in turn be specified and dealt with under the 'dehumanisation categories' listed above. Fascistisation propagates genocide and annihilation in order to *achieve* something: establishing death factories to produce *Lebensraum* under National Socialism; turning people and places into market capital in Yarvin's vision for Gaza. Complex orders – i.e. the migration history and plurality of societies; international law and domestic legal frameworks; democratic and other infrastructures, human rights – are destroyed to achieve *liquidation* or, in other words, liquefaction – turning people, land and history into streams of fuel or capital. "Alles" for the drive itself.

In this sense, contemporary fascisms might not ultimately imply an end goal – a state or condition of society or body politic – that is to be achieved and then solidified, such as totalitarianism or the above-mentioned "right-wing spaces", enlarged to national or maybe global proportions. The phantasm of "GAZA Stock" seems to indicate as much. Likewise, such fascisms also cannot appropriately be prevented by addressing their itemised ideological concerns. *Fascistisation* may not even describe a 'political project' per se, but rather an energetic machine for endless transformation – for liquidating what exists. Walter Benjamin envisaged a similar machine in his essay 'The Destructive Character' in 1931, where he describes the titular type as such a transformational machinic agent:

> "The destructive character knows only one watchword: make room. And only one activity: clearing away. His need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred. The destructive character is young and cheerful. For destroying rejuvenates, because it clears away the traces of our own age; it cheers, because everything cleared away means to the destroyer a complete reduction, indeed a rooting out, of his own condition." (301)

Based on this speculation on fascisms as processes of happy destruction, as liquidation undertaken to generate energy and "clear away" people, cultures and history, the following discussion will reflect on the current discursive austerity politics of 'talking about fascism'. They are, I want to argue, a broad repressive apparatus preventing the acknowledgement and critique of such "fascist desires" (Morten Paul) and of blunting sensibilities towards their workings and effects.
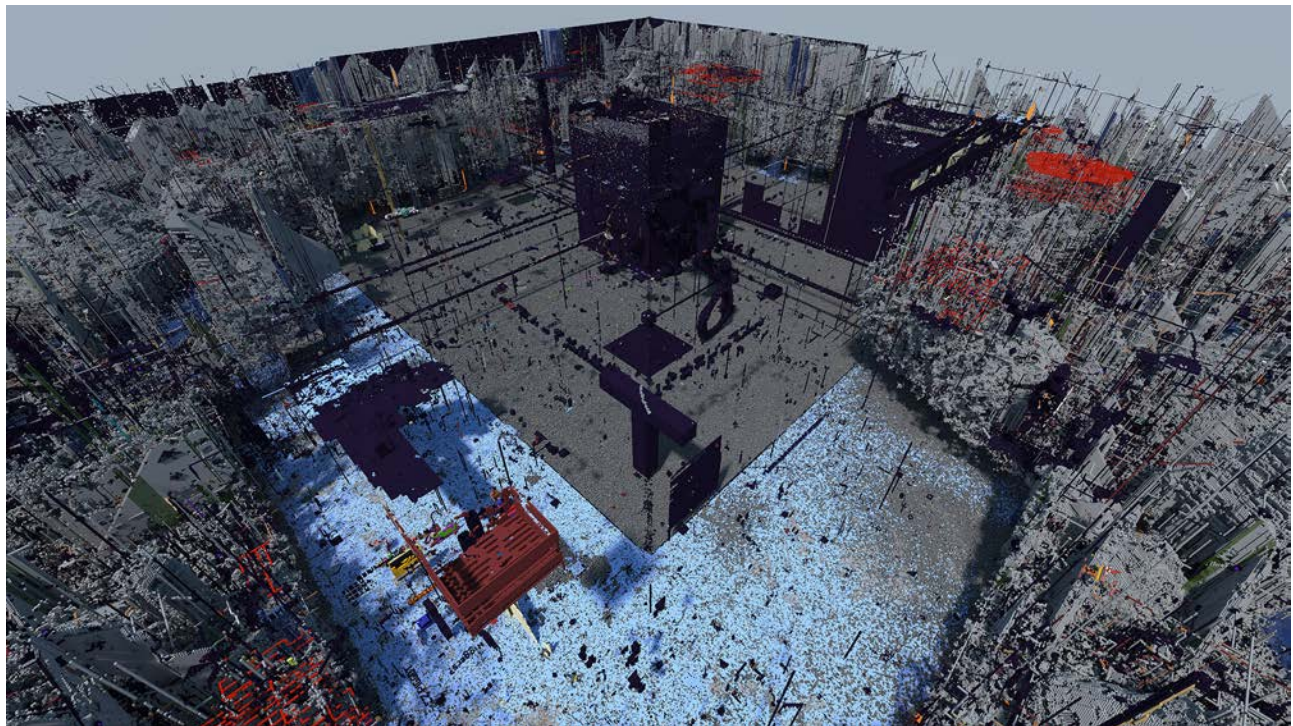
Minecraft Server „2b2t", June 2022
Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/2b2t/comments/v903ok/the_destruction_of_spawn_over_time_in_18_images/
Posted by u/AuraTheLucario in r/2b2t

Discursive Austerity

German discussions of current fascism(s) primarily revolve around rhetorics of preventing its repetition. Has fascism returned? Has the point that is called 'never again' been reached, or when exactly is 'again'? Similar to the discourse around clearly delineated 'spaces', framing the question of fascism around particular *points in time* disarticulates much of its current currency and work – e.g. the varying intensities with which the energetic affects and energising effects of fascistisation are working all the time, with only occasional interruptions. 'Never again' obscures that "Fascism has already 'made it,' and it continues to 'make it,'" as Guattari writes. The term *fascistisation* draws attention to the current situation in which it is obvious that the consciousness-raising measures aimed at preventing the point of 'again' (e.g. German memory culture) have not succeeded, but rather failed spectacularly. When, for example, German discourse routinely invokes the paradoxical formulations of "historical amnesia" (Geschichtsvergessenheit) and simultaneous "historical backsliding" (die Ewiggestrigen) to circumscribe and anticipate a present nearness to a fascist takeover, it is clear that such attempts have not in any way hindered the energy production of fascist projects as such – voting patterns indicate as much, as do discursive patterns, deportation schemes, flows of capital, appeals to national exceptionalism, and so forth.

This failure to address what is going on because one focuses on what threatens to arrive is one result of the language game: if a mobilisation of energies is conceived as a 'point in time' or 'state' to be prevented, then its energetical, processual aspect is not addressed. Fixating on a future 'point of no return' disarticulates the increasing velocities at which things move. If a society organises its discursive approaches somewhat exclusively around temporal fixations, and dismisses and discourages many others, one can speak of social repression. It is therefore possible – and this is the speculation I am proposing – that the general approach to 'fascism' (and fixed objects such as 'Machtergreifung' or right-wing spaces) by way of 'never again' has also constituted a repressive apparatus in post-fascist societies. This is especially the case for Germany, which was not only trying to reinvent itself, but also had to consolidate – or overcode, as it were – two different postwar strategies of imagining nationhood in contradistinction to state fascism.[1] In a way, this repression is already indicated in the name given to the branch of research that is supposed to address contemporary fascisms: In Germany, it is generally referred to as historical 'totalitarianism studies' (Totalitarismusforschung) and topical 'extremism research' (Extremismusforschung). Only this year, the University of Tübingen inaugurated the first academic institute in this line of research, called the Institute for Research on Far Right Extremism (IRex) [Institut für Rechtsextremismusforschung]. On a very basic level, 'fascisms' cannot be named and can therefore not be addressed as ongoing processes or projects, as social forces that are constantly present and continually active (and comprising, for example, queerphobia, racism, antisemitism, etc.). At a base level, this is a problem: the scholarly disciplines tasked with dealing with the object also enact its repression – to what extent is an open question.

Repressive Apparatuses

To further speculate, I want to draw a parallel between this constellation and the critique of classical psychoanalysis elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*. They argue that although psychoanalysis paid a great deal of attention to clinical psychoses, it also repressed their specific logics, materiality and situatedness. Psychoanalysis transposed these clinical cases into the different neurotic types of bourgeois psychology, meaning that the neuroses of the psychoanalytic subject are abstracted and domesticated versions of clinical psychotic disorders. Psychotic structures are

described by Deleuze and Guattari through their materialist concepts of the desiring-machine, becoming, wish-production and flows of desire, a way of understanding them that is repressed in the idealised and sanitised language of 'complexes' in psychoanalysis. Psychic and libidinal processes are not, in contradistinction to neuroses, meta-phorical operations, they write in this passage which invokes the earlier parallelisation between a "desire for annihilation" and a "desire for capital":

> "It was not by means of a metaphor, even a paternal metaphor, that Hitler was able to sexually arouse the fascists. It is not by means of a metaphor that a banking or stock-market transaction, a claim, a coupon, a credit, is able to arouse people who are not necessarily bankers. And what about the effects of money that grows, money that produces more money?" (114–5)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, psychoanalysis turns such open-ended psychotic forces and constellations into a theatre in which psychotic machines appear as mythologised neuroses, for example as the 'Oedipus complex'. While a trace of the mechanical and production-oriented apparatus remains in the word 'complex' itself, the apparatus-like functioning is not linked to sites of meaning production but is domesticated into the fissured make-up of the heteronormative nuclear family. As a result, the bourgeois family takes on the proportions of Greek tragedy and is thus privi-leged as the mythical centre of society and the individual. The energy flows of psycho-sis are shrunken down into micro-dramas, and the work of libidinal machines is converted into individualised contradictions and dilemmas. In Deleuze and Guattari's view, psychoanalysis is carried by a repressive movement that dims down flows of energy into the neuroses of a bourgeois subject, in order to uphold the fiction of func-tioning social structures and located problems in the inner contradictions of individuals. Energies and lines of flight continue to rage and operate, but are reduced to the remnant of bourgeois neurosis, *about which* one can then talk.

I'm not advocating in particular for this criticism of psychoanalysis, but rather want to suggest that the 'constellation' into which Deleuze and Guattari put it is helpful to speculate on the constellation between fascistisation and the impoverished discourses mentioned above. When *fascistisation* is understood as an energetic machine that consistently dynamises social orders towards dehumanisation, selection, annihilation and liquidation, then research into right-wing extremism can, to a certain extent, be regarded as its psychoanalytical theatricalisation. *Fascistisation* uses the possible means to dynamise, liquidate and destroy – the concepts of 'the people', nation, gender, race, ability are means with which to mobilise differences into antagonisms for escala-tion. It denotes a desire for expulsion from the collective, dissolution in the collective and world destruction in the name of the collective. Measured against such an under-standing, the currently prevailing paradigm of extremism research – which talks about 'confirmed right-wing extremist' (gesichert rechtsextrem) or 'anti-constitutional attitudes' (verfassungsfeindliche Einstellungen) – indeed seems like a domestication of energetic fields into group attitudes, individualised complexes and failures.

Such domestication stabilises a specific image of democracy that claims to be so dif-ferent from fascism that the latter can only attack 'from the outside'. Fascism's repre-sentatives on the 'inside' are therefore approached and treated as distinct objects (e.g. of extremism research, attitudinal research, deradicalisation, etc.) and its ideolo-gies as 'items of discrimination'. If something like fascistisation exists, and I think it does, it becomes simultaneously separated off and, as it were, psychoanalysed: fascism appears in the guise of authoritarian characters (treated as bourgeois neurosis),

itemised sites of discrimination (reifying the groups discriminated against), and generally as something that is historically past but at the same time always threatening (as in memory culture). Any collective desires for destruction in the collective's name are on the one hand relegated to historical research, and on the other are treated as deviations in the individual, to be diagnosed through the F-scale, authoritarianism studies and questionnaires focusing on items associated with extremist attitudes.[2] In this context, we are further dealing with *de-differentiated neuroses*, exhibited by the fact that from a German state perspective, there is no inherent difference between right- and left-wing extremism – both allegedly constitute an unspecific neurotic distortion of democratic subjects, for which the only therapy is more 'centrism' or 'Mitte'. This paradigm transforms fascist energies and potentials into small, theatrical situations involving deviation, therapy and policing.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, fascism is a line of flight, an interaction between various machines of desire, repression, destruction and death that cannot be localised in the individual, but rather offer and enact the individual's dissolution. A line of flight captures, transforms, dynamises. National Socialism worked to perfect the industrial production of annihilation (the movie *The Zone of Interest* revolves around the technical improvements made to the crematoria), thus moving along a line of phantasmatic flight of efficiency, technical innovation and maximised production of dead bodies and space (as Moishe Postone argues, it was far from efficient). After this phantasmatic social order – which produced life and space for some by annihilating and displacing others – was defeated and/or annihilated itself, as Guattari writes, Germany made the attempt to transform this desiring apparatus into a discourse on individual character traits, extremist movements, and prohibited symbols and speech acts. This attempt was, on the face of it, a repressive strategy that both failed and is still the reigning paradigm.

Within this repressive movement, the discourse on 'right-wing extremism' is the small theatre in which 'theatrical effects' of fascism are presented as its 'neurotic structure', expressed always in certain people, to be publicly cured or prohibited. For years now, the attitudinal research carried out, for example, by the *Leipziger Authoritarianism Study* (Decker et al.) has been published under titles that are variations of the notions of 'The Endangered Centre', 'The Radicalised Centre', 'The Fragile Centre', etc. – regardless of what share of the vote the AfD secures, how radicalised or misanthropic governmental deportation industries are, how large the poverty gap is, how antisemitic, transphobic or racist the majority culture is – fascist energies continue to be described and objectified as neurotic crises of the centre. This results in a series of paradoxes that all point to neurotic structures and thus to individuals who generally require therapy, rather than, for example, to constellations of forces inherent in society itself which are energised and escalated by processes of fascistisation.

Mass Neurotic Data
With the digitalisation not only of fascism, but also of large parts of public and social communication, a resonant field has emerged in which the psychoanalytical theatre no longer functions, at least in terms of the medium. 'Digitalisation' itself means a technological and ideological line of flight that encompasses societies and allows the minor dramas of the bourgeois subject and their psychology to be transcended: as 'users', individuals are connected to huge, media-based apparatuses of resonance and escalating feedback. At present, research attempts to domesticate this unruly media environment, which produces fascistising energies at scale: research seeks to apply the F-scale and questions from authoritarianism studies to social media, for example by algorithmically evaluating big data repositories. Institutions that work with big data,

such as the Center for Monitoring, Analysis, and Strategy (CeMAS), then publish find-ings of "forty million right-wing extremist messages" on Telegram, in the space of one month. From my perspective, it is unclear what forty million Nazi messages might mean within the neurotic theatre of 'right-wing extremist attitudes'. When one acknowl-edges the dissolution and algorithmisation of milieu-specific spaces in networked media, it no longer makes sense to talk about 'right-wing spaces', any more than it does to refer to 'right-wing extremist attitudes'. The theatre of extremism as bourgeois or democratic neurosis is unable to process the massified data events taking place on social media platforms any minute..

I believe that the function of these primarily diagnostic discourses is a further repres-sion of fascistising lines of flight and energies, now including neuroticising approaches to digital media, upon which therapeutic measures are exerted: regulation, digital social workers, governmentalised practices of 'moral outrage' on the internet, media literacy. These entail the individualisation and psychologisation of fascist desire, as well as the individualisation of digital processes and thus the containment of a socio-technological line of flight to individual neurosis. This is a misunderstanding not only of fascistisation, but also of the digital condition to which modern media societies by and large have surrendered.

As Gilles Deleuze writes, what societies of control produce are not individuals but "dividuals", data points and contact zones of systems and force fields. On the internet, such "dividuality" is mechanically and algorithmically generated. Attributing a psychol-ogy or authoritarian character to media assemblages such as 'Donald Trump' indicates the helplessness and repressiveness of these approaches. Where would Trump appear on the F-scale? How would Obama, Curtis Yarvin or Friedrich Merz rate, or the anony-mous user XYZ? To me, these are somewhat pointless questions because such figures are only accessible via media and as media; they exist and operate as configurations of media, attention, power, discourses, and other aspects. Being a person or a psychology is just one of the many public functions they perform, as Brian Massumi convincingly argues in his book *The Personality of Power*.

Digitalisation is a line of flight upon which Western societies at least are currently situated. The conversion of Gaza into American cryptocurrency or the prerogative state that Germany has installed under the term 'reason of state' (Staatsräson) – in other words, liquidation for the purposes of energy production – are other, related lines of flight. I want to argue that what is needed to 'talk about' fascistisation are descriptions of energy, analyses that capture the dynamisms that the discourse on right-wing extremism domesticates, objectifies and ignores. In that context, neurotic inertia con-tinues to prevail along with the formation of the myth of the 'resilient democracy' that must defend and immunise itself against unspecific 'extremisms' – for example, by criminalising protests against an asymmetrical war and/or genocide. In my view, fascistisation means something else: a continuously operating machine to produce annihilation that is, among many other things, also coveted in current Western societies, as presently made visible in the legitimized annihilation of Palestine and its inhabit-ants. The research of fascistisation calls for something else than tracking mass neurotic data, sorting it into items in order to *prevent*, but rather to trace the destructive work that large-scale desiring machines and energising paranoid networks are already doing, all the time.

Literature

Walter Benjamin, 'The Destructive Character' [1931], trans Edmund Jephcott, in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1978).

Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess, Ayline Heller and Elmar Brähler (eds.) *Vereint im Ressentiment; Autoritäre Dynamiken und rechtsextreme Einstellungen* (Giessen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2024).

Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on the Societies of Control' [1990], trans. Martin Joughin, in *Negotiations 1972–1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* [1972], trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

Masha Gessen, 'In the Shadow of the Holocaust', *The New Yorker*, 09.12.2023.

Félix Guattari, 'Everybody wants to be a fascist' [1977], trans. Suzanne Fletcher and Catherine Benamou, in Sylvère Lotringer (ed.), *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008).

Brian Massumi, *The Personality of Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2025).

Morten Paul, 'Faschismus als Lustgewinn', *Berlin Review*, 21.02.2025. https://blnreview.de/ausgaben/2025-03/morten-paul-faschismus-als-lustgewinn

Moishe Postone, 'Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus: Ein theoretischer Versuch', *Kritiknetz – Zeitschrift für Kritische Theorie der Gesellschaft*, 2012.

Curtis Yarvin, 'Gaza, Inc. "What if Adam Neumann runs the roadshow?"', *Gray Mirror*, 06.02.2025. https://graymirror.substack.com/p/gaza-inc

Notes

1 This opens a historical perspective on how 'never again' was devised as a language of national(ist) unity to dethematise the differences between West German (non-fascist) and East German (anti-fascist) forms of statehood post-1989.

2 To orient my polemic with a specific point: the popular attitudinal research project *Leipziger Autoritarismus Studien* reported in 2024 that 69.5% of participants positively affirmed the questionnaire item "Many in Germany exaggerate their tolerance towards transsexuals". I find it significant that the so-called 'extremist attitude' is not only two-thirds majoritarian (making the idea of extremism or deviation obsolete), but that a desire for dehumanisation is already working through the questionnaire itself, which uses the historically pathologising term "transsexuals". Cf. Decker et al., 71.

Simon Strick is a scholar of cultural, media and gender studies. He received his PhD from Humboldt University in Berlin with a thesis on pain, sentimentalism and biopolitics; his book *American Dolorologies* was published by SUNY Press in 2014. Strick has held positions at Humboldt University, Paderborn University, the John F. Kennedy Institute Berlin, the Leibniz Center for Literary and Cultural Research (ZfL) in Berlin and the University of Virginia. His monograph *Rechte Gefühle: Affekte und Strategien des digitalen Faschismus* (2021) received the Hans Bausch Media Prize and its analyses of online fascist spaces and their political impact have been widely discussed. Together with Kat Köppert (HGB Leipzig), he is currently pursuing the VW-Project *Digital Blackface* at the University of Potsdam. Together with Susann Neuenfeldt and Werner Türk, he founded the performance group PKRK, which has been active in Berlin theatres since 2009.

On Provisional Existence
Doron Rabinovici

We had not come to stay. Next year, my parents told me, or the year after that at the latest, we would return to Tel Aviv. They repeated this intention as often as they postponed our departure, which they did the next year and in every year that followed. We lived in a state of provisional existence. The temporary solution thus became a permanent condition.

Under no circumstances did I want to become a Viennese Jew. When I talk about my family now, many people automatically assume that we, the Rabinovicis, were originally from Vienna and that we returned to our homeland after the war. Far from it. My mother was born in Paris and spent her early childhood in Vilnius before being deported to the camps. My father was originally from Romania and met my mother in Israel. Before I was born, therefore, we were already living in a foreign country: perhaps my parents were able to move to Austria because this was a place where they themselves had never been persecuted.

I cannot remember ever having been unable to speak or understand German, but my parents used to describe how indignant I was, still just a tiny tot, when I could not make myself understood. Holding my mother's hand, I used to toddle around the grey streets of 1960s Vienna, a city where young women walking with their children still had to step aside and make way for the older Viennese ladies with their hairnets and dachshunds. I came from a country where it was acceptable for little boys to be a bit cheeky and forward. In the Austria of my childhood, however, girls were expected to curtsey and boys to make a small bow out of respect. I, on the other hand, used to shout at the older people in Hebrew: "*Chamor*," I screamed – the Hebrew word for 'donkey' that makes a harsh, guttural sound in the back of the throat: "*Chamor*! I'm so small and I already know how to talk, and you're so big and you don't understand me." I wanted to learn this new language as quickly as possible. When my parents spoke *Ivrit* (Hebrew) to me, I answered in German.

My parents took me to the Vienna Opera and to concerts. They dressed me in my smartest clothes, making me look like a little grown-up, because in Austria in this period, even young boys had to wear a suit and tie to attend such events. I was also allowed to go and watch *Kasperle* (Punch-and-Judy) shows. To me, the Austrian children always seemed really stiff and well-behaved. They reminded me of bread dumplings: mealy, white, puffed-up balls. When Punch asked: "Is everybody here?", all the kids around me replied with a single clear voice: "Yeeess!" I didn't feel at home here, but when I visited Israel, I felt increasingly alien there too. So in Austria I played the role of the southerner among Alpine folk, while in Tel Aviv I presented the perfect little boy from Vienna who bewildered and delighted his relatives with his polite use of *Bitteschön* (If you please) and *Dankeschön* (Thank you kindly). The native sabra became a born Yekke.

I recall being invited some time ago to take part in a discussion with a class of high school students. Not for the first time, the discussion revolved around notions of home, homeland and nativeness. The majority of the young people at this high school were from immigrant families, but there were also some among them who are referred to as 'true' Austrians; this is because their ancestors did not come to Austria in recent

decades, but came here from Bohemia, Moravia or Budapest, for example, maybe fifty years ago. These pupils said to the others, their migrant contemporaries: "Why don't you think you are Austrian? We're no more Austrian than you are. We're not even sure what 'Austrian' is supposed to mean, but whatever it is, you've long since become it." But the girls and boys who came from Turkey, Bosnia, Russia, Chechnya or Syria simply laughed. "What are you talking about?" they said. "Don't you see how different we are from you? Even just the way you talk, how you sit, how you walk, how you move."

The Majority Austrians had no idea what these Minority Viennese pupils meant, but I understood them very well. I knew that feeling of being different. I could remember it. I knew how strange the children in this country had seemed to me at first. I was surprised by how still they could sit. Yes, they do move differently, the child I once was thought to himself. In the kindergarten in Vienna, we were made to go to the toilet in pairs. I could not comprehend where I had ended up. Don't get me wrong: children in Israel at that time were also subject to disciplinary measures, but the educational methods used were different. If you broke a rule in that Viennese kindergarten, you risked getting a clip round the ears. Boys who felt so sick that they threw up were reprimanded for having got the floor dirty. I didn't want to put up with that kind of treatment. I rebelled against it for so long that my mother eventually stopped sending me to kindergarten.

"No," some of the immigrant pupils in the class I was talking to objected: "No. We're not true Austrians. And in any case, we're not going to stay in this country." I recognised my former self in them. Back then, I had also not reckoned on still being in Vienna decades later, and even though, in the eyes of all too many people in this country, I am still not a 'true' Austrian and never will be regarded as such, I am someone who has devoted himself to speaking and writing German, and who is continuing to live his life in Vienna.

Authors who write in German even though it is not their first language often attract attention because they tell of modern life between different countries and between different social groups in a region. They have long since stopped being a small minority. Quite the opposite, in fact: the couples dressed in traditional costumes are now the actual minority – a minority that is unwilling to integrate into our modern age – but who am I to criticise them? Everyone has the right to be unhappy in his or her own way …

While society seems to be more colourful than ever before and the whole world is talking about its diversity, the tabloids and right-wing extremists rail against immigration and brand cultural difference as evil. A mood of agitation prevails and shapes everyday life. If youngsters talk to each other in Turkish on a tram in Vienna, they are often told that they should damn well learn German. The mere fact that they are not talking German raises the suspicion that they can't.

The tabloids often claim that teaching standards are falling due to the presence of foreign pupils in classrooms. Because of them, it is alleged, the native offspring are not learning how to express themselves. I have a different experience, and when I listen to some of the politicians talking in parliament on Vienna's Ringstrasse, I know for certain that it is not due to us immigrants that they cannot construct a proper sentence or formulate a clear thought.

The demand for assimilation is not primarily motivated by wanting foreigners to speak German; it is more about telling them that they should kindly unlearn their own lan-

guage. Ordering people to assimilate is, however, a paradoxical request. During the
early twentieth century in Vienna, for example, it was only people of Jewish origin who
were described as *Assimilanten* (assimilated). It never helped the Jews, however, if they
tried to escape the hatred through assimilation or camouflage. In fact, the opposite
was true: over the course of history, the more Jews assimilated and the more they tried
to finally be less Jewish, the more they became and were – for this precise reason –
Jews. Complete assimilation is an illusion, because the assimilated person always
remains the Other.

Jewish people turned to Zionism in the twentieth century because the hopes they had
placed in enlightenment and emancipation had ended in utter catastrophe. They were
no longer willing to content themselves with the diaspora because they had experi-
enced and suffered what it meant to exist as a nation without sovereignty in a world of
nation-states. The 'Jew' had remained an outsider everywhere – someone who could
be outlawed from one day to the next. To banish this threat, the State of Israel was
founded, but the problems it was supposed to help overcome are still far from being
fully solved. The foundation of Israel did not eradicate antisemitism. On the contrary: a
hatred of Jews exists despite and, to a certain extent, probably also because of Israel.
This hatred sometimes pretends to be purely political, but behind many a statement
that claims to be merely legitimate criticism lies the monomaniacal fervour that is
nothing other than the old resentment of Jews.

I remember a debate I once had with the Imam of Sarajevo. He was keen to stress the
importance of cultural roots in order to claim that the Enlightenment was ultimately
an idea that derived from Western Christian thinking. I disagreed. People, I said, do not
have roots, they have legs – which is fortunate, especially for those who have to run for
their lives. But the reply I had given to the Imam with good reason definitely pointed to
what he had meant when he talked about the power of tradition, because my response
– I can hardly deny it – had in a certain sense been a typically Jewish one.
At the same time, I must correct myself, because the discussion I got caught up in with
the Imam is one I can also imagine having with more than a few orthodox rabbis who
believe that the Judaism they adhere to is no different to that with which Moses and
King David once lived. Such religious individuals, who are not to be confused with all
Jewish believers, revel in an early history that does not want to acknowledge its histori-
cal development. They deny how what they now are once came into being.

Many years ago, I travelled to the Grand Canyon with a friend. The evening before we
headed down into the canyon, we had dinner at a restaurant. Surveying the selection
of hearty dishes on the menu, we came across: "Viennese Schnitzel. The original.
Topped with a fried egg." We laughed about the certainty with which the schnitzel
topped with a fried egg was deemed to be "the original", but afterwards I asked myself
who could have any idea of how the original Viennese schnitzel was actually made,
and how it might have tasted? In any case, this is ultimately irrelevant or, as the Vien-
nese would say, *wurscht*. No matter how the schnitzel was originally made, the cutlet
would be pretty tough and rancid by now, and it would definitely stink to high heaven.

Years ago, I discovered that social scientists talk about the so-called 'pizza effect'.
According to this theory, pizza was originally a food eaten by poor people in Naples,
and it was not until Italian immigrants took it to the United States, where new top-
pings were added, that it became a delicacy; pizza was then re-imported to Europe
and declared a national dish. The term 'pizza effect' is also used with reference to Hin-
duism, which had not previously been considered a unified religion. Only after people

in the West brought together its various movements and traditions did it also become established as a separate religion in India. And isn't it also true that the döner sandwich first become famous as a snack in Berlin?

Hasn't all culture always been a form of assimilation? And wasn't every holy scripture initially nothing but a heretical statement? The term 'pizza effect' was, incidentally, coined by Swami Agehananda Bharati, who spent many years as a Hindu monk in India before becoming a professor of anthropology at Syracuse University in the United States. Originally, however, Agehananda Bharati was born Leopold Fischer in Vienna in 1923.

The late Rafael Eitan, an Israeli general and later an objectionably nationalist politician, was once asked by an interviewer whether he, the cold-blooded soldier, liked music. Eitan said that he loved Israeli folk songs. "Which ones?" the journalist asked, to which the general replied: "The Russian ones."

In Vienna I know a man called Thomas Kiang, who is originally from Taiwan and owns a restaurant that is named after him. I like going to Kiang's to eat spring rolls, wontons or ramen soup. Thomas Kiang's brother, Josef Kiang, once opened a restaurant in Beijing where he served Austrian specialities such as *Griesnockerl* (semolina dumplings) and *Tafelspitz* (boiled fillet of beef). So which Kiang restaurant, one might ask, is the Chinese eatery, and which the Viennese? But perhaps there is no need to answer this question. Would it not be wiser to simply eat in one place and then in the other, in order to see whether you prefer Austrian cuisine in Beijing or Asian food by the Danube? But that might also be the wrong solution – after all, why shouldn't something in one place taste better on one occasion, and a dish at the other place another time? Simply depending on what you fancy eating that particular day.

Is there, then, under such conditions of misfortune and disaster throughout the world, anywhere we can still call home? While all of those people who have a share in consumption and luxury living can be at home everywhere – on every continent and in every country – do we develop a longing for a place where we feel safe, in short, at home? The more diverse and indefinite our identity becomes, the more urgently we desire to give it an unambiguous name. The vehemence with which people's origins, national affiliation or religious faith are defended underscores how contentious these notions have long since become.

The fundamentalist does not live suspended in his faith, but in conflict with a reality that is not in accordance with the laws and ideas of his holy scriptures. Not only do the scientific discoveries that have been made since the Enlightenment not correspond to the literal expositions – how the ancient books imagined the universe and its creation; it is also hardly possible to follow the rules that once established a set order for life. The fundamentalist lives not in belief but in opposition to doubt, and his ideology is racing against the continual development and diversity of society. The Austrian philosopher Isolde Charim has drawn attention to this in her texts: nowadays, we all – even the Orthodox and the fundamentalist – are in a certain sense ultimately converts, as we do not find our denomination impartially. It is highly unlikely that our predecessors would not have been considered believers in their respective religion. They basically had no choice. Most of them were unaware that any alternatives even existed. Today, on the other hand, someone who decides to leave the church is not an apostate or a heretic, but is making an individual decision. The fundamentalist opposes enlightened theology, opposes the critical reading of the Torah, the Bible or the Koran, and opposes

reform, but his path is also a decision, not something predetermined over which he has no control. I know it could be argued here that it is difficult to talk about free will, especially with regard to these questions of spirituality. The devout person will declare that he has no choice, as he has ultimately been chosen. In this respect, he is similar to the person in love who justifiably declares that he has not fallen for his beloved of his own free will, because he simply cannot help but adore her; in our time, at least, he and she – unlike many of their ancestors – can love, marry, leave and find new love with whomever they want. In our present time, the believer – however fundamentalist they may be – is always a bit like the atheist, since someone who believes in the Christian god is simultaneously rejecting all of the other gods and religions that co-exist on an equal footing in our various countries. And in the same way that romantic ties now take many different forms, such as open relationships or polyamorous variants, there are numerous people who have no problem with living out their religiosity in very different denominations – combining Kabbalah with Zen Buddhism, Sufism, Vipassana and midnight mass, for example, and garnishing the result with a little wellness and homeopathic globules.

The desire for identity and a sense of home stems above all from the inhospitable nature of social reality. However, the desire for identity also reflects the feeling of having no value other than that of one's own labour power and capital assets. This value, however great it may be, is countable, exchangeable and subject to general inflation. The person who wishes to lay claim to uniqueness therefore has good reason to insist on their own identity.

What sets me apart is also how I came to be who I am. What happened to my family is therefore not insignificant. Before my life there was death – there was murder and the mass murder of my relatives; what was done to them shapes my life. I have to talk about identity when I fear that it is being denied, but I also do not want to remain silent when others define me solely by this identity. My full identity will eventually be inscribed on my gravestone; until then, I still have some say in the matter.

───────────────

Doron Rabinovici was born in Tel Aviv in 1961 and has lived in Vienna since 1964. He is a writer and historian whose work includes short stories, novels, essays, dramas and scholarly studies. In Austria, Rabinovici repeatedly takes a prominent stand against racism, right-wing extremism and antisemitism. His publications include *Instanzen der Ohnmacht. Wien 1938–1945. Der Weg zum Judenrat* (Jüdischer Verlag bei Suhrkamp, 2000); *Andernorts* (novel; Suhrkamp, 2010); *Neuer Antisemitismus? Fortsetzung einer globalen Debatte*, co-edited with Christian Heilbronn and Natan Sznaider (suhrkamp edition, 2019); *Die Einstellung*; (novel; Suhrkamp, 2022). From 2013 to 2015, in cooperation with Matthias Hartmann, Rabinovici brought some of the last surviving Holocaust survivors to the stage of Vienna's Burgtheater in *Die letzten Zeugen* (The Final Witnesses). In 2018, his collage of speeches by right-wing extremist statesmen, *Alles kann passieren!* (Anything Can Happen!), was presented at the Burgtheater. His most recent work is the reading drama *Der siebente Oktober* (The Seventh of October), which premiered at the Burgtheater in 2024. Rabinovici has received numerous awards, including the Mörike Prize, the Heimito von Doderer Prize, the Clemens Brentano Prize, the Jean Améry Prize, the Anton Wildgans Prize and the Austrian Book Trade Prize for Tolerance in Thought and Action.

Complex Simplicity Against Simplistic Complexity. Artistic Strategies to Unlearn Worldviews
A conversation between Oliver Marchart, and Nora Sternfeld

What is conflictual aesthetics in times of the extension of the conflict zone? Extreme simplifications have found their way into current art practices. Some artistic and curatorial strategies have turned into politically empty gestures. So the question arises as to whether critical art can do justice to the true complexity of our present circumstances. Oliver Marchart, Havîn Al-Sindy and Nora Sternfeld discuss questions such as: how do visible and invisible structures produce powerlessness? To what extent is artistic practice entangled in this? What mechanisms of representation and exclusion determine these processes? To what extent do social media and digital communities pretend to shape the conditions for unlearning violent worldviews – while they actually at the same time reinforce their persistence? In short: how can a sense of aesthetic and political complexity be regained in times of excessive simplification?

Oliver Marchart: So, we said that I will start and present only a few words about this strange topic of complex simplicity and simplistic complexity. The main idea behind this is that we have encountered for many years this very problematic notion that things are supposedly 'complex'. The very term 'complexity' has become a catchphrase, which in neoliberal discourse has above all become highly disempowering, because if things are so incredibly complex, we cannot do anything about them. We must leave it to the experts who have the cognitive capacity to understand all the complexity. However, if you think about it, things might not be that complex after all, so the discourse about the complexity of everything might be a ruse.

In the art field, too, the idea of complexity has always been part of the default ideology of the art field. Artworks are supposed to be complex. If they are simplistic, they're usually seen as not very good art. If they are too straightfoward, they don't seem to produce a lot of surplus value. Now, I think there has been a countermovement to that in the last decade or so, leading people to abandon this idea of fake or simplistic complexity. What we see both in the art world, but also and above all in political activism, is a return of very Manichaean, dualistic worldviews where you're either part of the solution or you're part of the problem. A sort of simplistic, friend/enemy logic has gained traction in activism, as if there were no other alternative to the ideology of fake complexity.

Not that I'm denying that politics is always about erecting an antagonism against something. But if you do this, you must cognitively process what you're doing, and I think there's very little reflection on that. People just easily fall into that friend/enemy logic. This is the first, let's say, natural reaction to the ideology of fake complexity: total simplification, a world in which everything is either good or bad. But there is another kind of reaction by those who would say: "No, the world isn't black and white, it's grey. There are shades," or something like that. And this has also been expressed with the

notion that we need to be tolerant with regard to ambivalence or ambiguity, so everything is portrayed as ambiguous. And, by claiming this, you are of course silently returning to the form of complexity I have criticised, the simplistic complexity where you say that everything is very complex, end of story. So the discussion basically goes back and forth between these two poles. On the one hand, you're making a claim for ambivalence, for a thousand shades of grey. On the other, you're falling back into a friend/enemy logic where you're either part of the solution or part of the problem – you're either with us or against us, and you must take a side. What got lost in the process is what in previous ages would have been called dialectics – the idea of taking account of contradictions, by which I mean contradictions that cannot easily be overcome by simply taking a side.

I would like to illustrate this with an example from the field of memory politics. During the time of the Black Lives Matter protests, the idea of toppling monuments was, as you know, a major activist strategy. Some activists wanted to get rid of the monuments of the colonisers, and there are many cases, I think, where it would be perfectly fair to just topple them. But there are other cases where I'm not saying that they are 'ambivalent', but they are contradictory. One case that comes to mind is the Winston Churchill statue in London, which was also attacked and people wanted to topple the statue. They wanted to topple it because Churchill was a racist and a colonialist, which he certainly was, so there is no reason to deny that, and there is no reason to find a compromise. But at the same time, they wanted to ignore that Winston Churchill was also the one in charge when Britain decided not to enter a pact with Nazi Germany, like the Soviet Union did and Stalin did, but to fight basically the whole of Nazi-occupied Europe. At that point, to remind you, Europe, with the exception of a few neutral countries, was either occupied by the Nazis or in alliance with them. So, at a time when basically the whole of Europe stood with the Nazis, Churchill said, "We'll fight them anyway." And let's not forget that to this day, among neo-Nazis, Churchill is still seen as their historical arch enemy, as the 'war criminal' Number One, because he commanded the forces that dared to confront Nazi Europe.

So now the question is: can you at one and the same time, cognitively or in your political judgment, process that contradiction or not? That is to say, can you think about Churchill as both a racist and coloniser and a fighter against Nazism, and hold on to both ends of that contradiction simultaneously without any 'ambivalence' or compromise – and certainly without any denial or omission? Or are you prepared in your activism to erase all memories of Churchill the anti-fascist, thus taking a side not only against Churchill, but also taking a side with the neo-Nazis, who would be the first to cheer when his statues are toppled.

Of course, holding on to both horns of a dilemma is not an easy exercise, but perhaps we should revisit the moment when people were still trained in thinking dialectically. To give you an example from literature, let us revisit Heiner Müller's teaching play *The Horatian*. It takes place in ancient Rome when Rome was at war with Alba, another Italian city. The Romans and the Albans decided that they didn't want to engage in mutual destruction and have a clash of their armies. So, they would outsource their battle to three members of a Roman tribe, the Horatians, and three members of an Alban tribe, the Curiatians, to fight it out among the six of them. In the end, a Horatian was the last man standing and Rome had won. He returned to Rome as the victor and was celebrated as the hero who won this struggle with Alba. The problem was that one of the Curiatians he had killed was engaged to his own sister, and when she had a nervous breakdown and accused him of killing her future husband, he killed his own

sister too – which was a crime according to Roman law. So, in the eyes of the Romans, he had instantaneously turned from a hero into a murderer. And now the Romans had to decide what to do with this man who was a hero and a murderer at once. So what did the Romans decide? I will read to you the central passage from this play by Heiner Müller. In German, this is beautiful Brechtian language, but I will read it to you in the DeepL translation so you can enjoy the beauty of artificial intelligence. The main question is, similar to the case of Churchill: how should we remember him?

> What shall the Horatian be called to posterity?
> And the people answered with one voice:
> He shall be called the victor over Alba
> He shall be called the murderer of his sister
> With one breath his merit and his guilt.
> And whoever speaks of his guilt and not of his merit
> Shall dwell where the dogs dwell, as a dog
> And whoever speaks of his merit but not of his guilt
> He, too, shall dwell among dogs.
> But he who speaks of his guilt at one time
> And at other times speaks of his merit
> Speaking out of one mouth at different times differently
> Or to different ears differently
> His tongue shall be torn out
> For the words must remain pure. For
> A sword can be broken and a man
> can also be broken, but the words
> fall into the gears of the world uncatchable
> making things recognisable or unrecognisable.
> So they set up, not fearing the impure truth
> in anticipation of the enemy a temporary example
> of clean separation, not hiding the remainder
> that was not absorbed in the unstoppable change.

I won't be engaging in an in-depth analysis of this passage. Just note that the Romans are not searching for a compromise. The words, Müller says, must remain pure, if only to set a temporary example. Well, you don't need to have read a lot of Derrida to know that words are never pure. Nonetheless, for the Romans, as an ethico-political imperative, the word 'victor' or 'hero' and, respectively, the word 'murderer' must remain pure. The Horatian is both a pure victor and a pure murderer. There is no easy synthesis or compromise, no shade of grey. Nor is there anything involved like tolerance toward ambivalence. There was no Roman prepared to make a claim along the lines of: "Well, I knew the guy, and he was not really that bad. He didn't really mean to kill his sister, you know? In the heat of the moment, he just fell victim to his emotions." And then another Roman would say: "I knew him, and he wasn't really a hero either. He actually was a coward; and also he didn't really mean to kill the Curiatian." And then a third Roman says: "So maybe we should see the complexity of the case. Maybe we should be more tolerant towards ambivalence." No, Müller opts for a completely different approach. The words – 'hero', 'criminal' – must remain pure because they must remain recognisable. We must be able to recognise a crime as a crime and heroism as heroism.

And yet, it is also clear for Müller that truth is impure. The Romans set up, he says, in the face of "impure truth" "a temporary example of clean separation". And at the same time, he continues, they wouldn't hide "the remainder that was not absorbed" in a

world that is in constant flux. So while the words must remain pure, the truth is impure because the truth is the remainder that emerges when I try to hold on to two opposite, two contradictory things at once. This, of course, is an impossible enterprise, more of the nature of an ethical injunction that should guide our actions, nothing that is going to work out without remainder.

So, what is basically Müller's point according to my interpretation? He wants to give us an idea not of what I have called fake or simplistic complexity. He doesn't want to say that things are very complex once we look at them in more detail. He wants to give us an idea of what I propose to call true complexity or complex simplicity. Truth is impure, not because we can't understand it, but because truth involves the acceptance that things are contradictory, and it makes no sense to water them down to find a compromise. We need to cling to the contradiction, but – and this is why I would speak about complex simplicity – accept that contradictions evolve on multiple fronts. In political reality, we're rarely confronted with a single antagonism. Only in cases of civil war does a single antagonism cut across a country, putting one part of the people on one side and the other part on the other side of the antagonism. One could discuss whether this is really the case even in civil war, but in everyday politics, we never encounter a single antagonism. There are always many antagonisms criss-crossing the political field, but also criss-crossing ourselves and our own subjectivity.

There is a very nice performance piece which I use to illustrate my point. It's called *Positions* by the performance collective Public Movement, and it is very simple. You draw a line and then you call out binary choices. So, for instance, freedom/equality, left/right, Israel/Palestine, or whatever. And then you ask people to take sides. And the more contradictions you call out, the more people will realise that they need to change sides. There is no totally congruent position, because on one issue you may find your-self with some people on the same side, while on the next issue you find the same peo-ple on the opposite side. So the position of the group turns out to be inconsistent, and your own position turns out to be quite idiosyncratic, rather than being made from a single mould. And so you realise that you hold many different opinions that stand in a contingent rather than a necessary relation to each other. Conversely, people who you think are on the same side turn out to be standing on the other side. I think that a sense of true complexity means understanding the simultaneity of many contradic-tions. And fostering a sense of true complexity, or what I would call complex simplicity, is also what art could actually be quite good at. Isn't it one of the advantages of art – or, in Müller's case, literature – that it can cling to the paradox of a contradictory relation, of saying one thing and saying the other thing at the same time, and of processing this cognitively? The job of art is to provide us with a sense that the world is not more 'complex' or 'ambivalent', but much more contradictory than we tend to see.

Nora Sternfeld: Well, I will now take up from what Oliver Marchart was talking about with regard to a simultaneity of many contradictions. And I want to add a con-crete reflection on history work to our discussion of the dialectics of simplistic com-plexity and complex simplicity: 'analogy' on the side of simplistic complexity, and 'archaeology' on the other side, on the side of complex simplicity.

Analogy or Archaeology?
If we now know that history is contested, how should we deal with it? If memory must be understood as conflictual, then the question arises as to what happens when differ-ent narratives of memory clash and have to be negotiated. Two authors stand here paradigmatically for two positions that have been formulated in this regard in recent

Oliver Marchart and Nora Sternfeld at Radialsystem, Berlin,

years, for two different forms of dealing with contradictory and contested memories: Michael Rothberg's book *Multidirectional Memories*[1] and Dan Diner's essay 'Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse'[2]. The controversial positions could be described as concretion versus narration and singularity versus globalisation of the Holocaust.

Multidirectional Memories – Michael Rothberg

Michael Rothberg is concerned with the fact that memory always relates to other memories.[3] With his book, he wants to counter the zero-sum conflicts of a memory competition with the approach of multidirectionality and argue in favour of productive interaction between different historical memories. This seems to make sense insofar as Rothberg describes struggles over memory as intertwined and interrelated. He can thus show that memory not only produces identity and is always contested, but also always produces gaps, entanglements, ruptures, unexpected outcomes and relationships. And he suggests focusing on precisely this multidirectionality, which is associated with all historical politics and historical work. His book ends with the following sentences: "Thus, finally, understanding political conflict entails understanding the interlacing of memories in the force field of public space. The only way forward is through their entanglement."[4] So when it comes to what history means for the present, we have to start from entanglements and relationships.

And yet there seems to be something problematic about the focus on multidirectionality. Rothberg presents it from the outset as the right answer to existing competing memories.[5] But does the answer really lie only in the freely available references to history, which Rothberg also refers to as "comparative imagination"? Or is this not a dangerous call for analogisation and identification – instead of reflection and solidarity? He discusses the question of what actually happened, not in concrete terms, but as a discursive practice.[6] He therefore argues in favour of analogies as imaginative links, as a basis for solidarity and struggles for justice. However, if the discourse of memory is limited to analogies as appropriations and negotiations, it not only gains, but also loses an essential basis for solidarities – because critical memory work is not only work that focuses on history as a confirmation of collective identities; it has also always had the function of bringing historical facts into play with regard to the formulation of counter-history(ies) to collective narratives.

Although Rothberg shows that analogies not only have the function of delegitimising the memory of the Holocaust, but are also productive and offer new possibilities of alliance, it seems as if identitarian reclamations are repeatedly reproduced that are not necessarily geared towards solidarity. Although the book clearly writes against the existing forms of conflict between the claim to singularity on the one hand and comparability on the other, there seems to be little room for fragile perspectives that radically thwart existing identitarian propositions. But what if the possibility of unexpected solidarities lies not in prefabricated analogies, but in the concrete work with history? For if we focus solely on the multidirectionality of identitarian group narratives, there is a danger of producing those competitions and identities in the first place, which are then claimed to overcome them. For me, this is very much in the realm of what Oliver Marchart has defined as "a thousand shades of grey" of a problematic discourse. It's in the realm of the possibility of a memory to identify with another memory for different reasons, maybe a victim memory that identifies in an analogy with another victim memory. But isn't this exactly the problematic of simplification we talked about?

Precisely because memory discourses in post-colonial migration societies are fragile, it seems important to give space to ruptures that undermine existing identitarian narratives and to do justice to them – and this potential lies not only at the discursive level, but also at the level of the factual. With this in mind, it is worth taking a look at an essay by Dan Diner, who, as a historian, places the main focus of thinking about Holocaust remembrance and colonial history on what actually happened.

Conflicting Memories (Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse) – Dan Diner
In his essay, Diner uses a specific day, 8 May 1945, to work out the contradictions in perspective with regard to the events that took place on the day of the Nazi surrender in different places around the world: in this context, he speaks of "paradoxical situations of opposing memories" , which he would like to read together with the concrete stories of experience that preceded them. By examining the specific events of 8 May 1945 against the background of the respective involvement in the Second World War in Germany, the Soviet Union, Poland, the Baltic states, Czechoslovakia, Spain and, above all, Algeria, and against the background of the respective current national memory discourses, Diner shows the diversity and contradictory nature of the perception of a historical date.

It is not creative analogies, but concrete archaeologies that focus on what actually happened that are at the centre of historical work here. The essay's work on the "latency of hidden memories" of colonial history and colonial violence in the course of decolonisation seems particularly interesting.[7] For example, Diner deals with the massacres in Sétif in northern Algeria, where tens of thousands of Algerian liberation activists were massacred by the French military, the police and the local settler militia during the liberation celebrations. Diner describes this as follows:

> Everything had begun in a basically harmless way: thousands of Algerians came together on the day of the German capitulation to celebrate the Allied victory in marches and joyous rallies. Among the banners carried by the victorious coalition, including the French banner, the green and white flag of the Algerian national movement was also recognisable. After the organisers of the manifestation failed to comply with the authorities' demands to confiscate the incriminated cloth, security forces opened fire into the crowd. Fuelled by the violence in Sétif, unrest spread throughout the Constantine department in the days that

followed. The French military and police, supported by the local settler militia, sought to drown the riots in blood through summary executions and indiscriminate killings. Not only small arms but also heavy mortars were used. The force of the violence rained down on entire villages. The killing was accompanied by staged ceremonies of submission. Muslim Algerians had to prostrate themselves on the ground in demonstrative humility in front of raised French flags. The bodies of the Algerian civilians who were massacred were buried in makeshift mass graves or burned at the stake in public. To this day, there is no consensus on how many people fell victim to the bloodbath. Various sources speak differently of between 15,000 and 45,000 dead.[8]

The example shows very clearly that there are direct and concrete links between liberation from the Nazis on the one hand and colonial violence on the other. "The end of the Second World War and the beginning of decolonisation fall on one and the same date,"[9] says Diner. The concrete confrontation with the historical material not only makes the contradictory nature of memories visible, it also makes it more complicated to take a clear position in view of what happened. And this is where concrete transnational historical work seems to open up potential: by insisting on the concreteness of historical work, Diner creates spaces for possible solidarities that may thwart rather than confirm memory collectives.

However, Diner himself is not explicitly concerned with opening up such solidarities – for him, it is about the singularity of the Holocaust. And so the memories he pursues do indeed remain contradictory, unconnected and non-negotiable. In contrast, I would rather emphasise this necessary aspect of agonistic negotiation against the background of dealing with what has actually happened.

Counter-Narrations (Errungene Erinnerungen) in Agonistic Contact Zones
In order to present a position of complex simplicity, I want to introduce the concept of the contact zone as the context of a history that is always both shared and divided in the post-migrant societies we live in. In these shared and divided spaces we live in,[10] I opt for recognising conflict – because there is a lot to do in relation to the processes of current racist and antisemitic violence, current racist structures and official silencing in the work of remembrance.

I am therefore proposing an alternative to the alternative between Rothberg and Diner: counter-narrations in agonistic contact zones. These are neither simply multiperspectival nor non-negotiable. Chantal Mouffe speaks of agonism as a "kind of conflictual consensus", "which opens up a common symbolic space for the opponents as 'legitimate enemies'".[11] To avoid any misunderstandings: this in no way means that historical work should be neutral. Quite the opposite, because for Mouffe, agonism means partiality: "The fundamental difference between the 'dialogical' and the 'agonistic' perspectives is that the aim of the latter is a profound transformation of the existing power relations and the establishment of a new hegemony. This is why it can properly be called 'radical'."[12]

In this sense, the aim here is to argue in favour of historical work in shared/divided spaces of remembrance that sees itself as both participatory and reflexive, as well as taking a stance against antisemitism, a stance that dares to be both: anti-fascist and anti-racist.

If we now assume that memory is negotiated agonistically, then it is certainly changeable. The negotiation processes in the contact zone often, but not always, lead to hardening. The experience of history education shows that dealing with history in shared/divided spaces very often also offers the opportunity to position oneself unexpectedly within contradictions – especially on the basis of an examination of facts.

Existing hegemonic offers of identification are not always merely reproduced; these are also questioned in the contact zone. They can lead to historical-political positionings that challenge the hegemonic interpretation. The anti-racist thinker Peggy Piesche insists on the need for such negotiation: "… we have to broaden our perspective, recognise experiences of difference, but also always place them in relation to other experiences of difference. We can also demand that people put themselves in relation to others."[13]

Because history is "geteilt" in the truest sense of the word: it is divided and shared at the same time. And so it is quite possible that unexpected solidarities arise in these processes of negotiation.

Notes

1 Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memories*, Stanford, 2009.

2 Dan Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse. Über Geltung und Wirkung des Holocaust*, Göttingen, 2007.

3 "Against the framework that understands collective memory as *competitive* memory – as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources – I suggest that we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative." Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memories*, p. 3.

4 Ibid., p. 312.

5 Ibid., p. 21.

6 Ibid., p. 18.

7 Diner, *Gegenläufige Gedächtnisse*, p. 12.

8 Ibid., pp. 65 f.

9 Ibid., p. 67.

10 With the concept of 'geteilte Räume' in the double sense of *shared* and *divided* spaces, I refer to the notion of 'geteilte Geschichten' in postcolonial theory. Cf. Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, 'Einleitung. Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt', in: Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria and Regina Römhild (eds.), *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus. Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und* Kulturwissenschaften, Frankfurt a. M., 2002, pp. 9–49.

11 Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political*, London/New York, 2005, p. 52.

12 Ibid.

13 https://taz.de/Peggy-Piesche-ueber-den-CSD/!5608995/ translated by the author.

Oliver Marchart, Mag.Dr.phil. (University of Vienna, philosophy), PhD (University of Essex, Government), 'habilitation' in philosophy and sociology (University of Lucerne). 2001–06 scientific assistant in the Department of Media Studies, University of Basel. 2006–12 SNF-research professor in the Sociological Seminar of the University of Lucerne. 2012–16 professor of sociology at the Art Academy Düsseldorf. Since March 2016, professor of political theory at the University of Vienna. Fellowships: 1995 Research Fellow at the Centre for Theoretical Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Essex. 1997/98 Junior Fellow at the International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK), Vienna. 2005 Fellow at the Columbia University Institute for Scholars at Reid Hall and the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) Paris. 2013 Senior Fellow at the International Research Center for Cultural Studies (IFK) Vienna. 2016 Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Study, University of Konstanz.

Nora Sternfeld is an art educator and curator. She is a professor of art education at the HFBK Hamburg. From 2018 to 2020 she was documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel. From 2012 to 2018 she was Professor of Curating and Mediating Art at Aalto University in Helsinki. In addition, she is co-director of the /ecm – Master Program for Exhibition Theory and Practice at the University of Applied Arts Vienna, in the core team of schnittpunkt. austellungstheorie & praxis, co-founder and part of trafo.K, Office for Art, Education, and Critical Knowledge Production (Vienna) and since 2011 part of freethought, Platform for Research, Education and Production (London). In this context, she was also one of the artistic directors of the Bergen Assembly 2016 and has been BAK Fellow, basis voor actuele kunst (Utrecht), since 2020. She publishes on contemporary art, educational theory, exhibitions, politics of history and anti-racism.

The Schrödinger Artist: Art in the Age of Rage, A German Perspective
Sergio Edelsztein

This text is somehow the continuation of one that I wrote almost ten years ago, which was published in the internet journal *OnCurating* as an article titled 'Are Boycotts the new "Collective Curating"?'[1]

In that text, I analysed a few boycotts led by artists intending to influence the development – or bring about the cancellation – of some high-profile artistic events. I examined the calls to boycott the 2014 Sydney Biennial because of the businesses of the main financial sponsor of the event; the boycotting of Manifesta X in St. Petersburg because of Putin's recent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the anti-gay legislation he passed; and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, as a protest against the working conditions behind the construction of the Guggenheim Museum franchise in that emirate. In this article, I stated that: "Thanks to the Internet and global television networks, people have a relatively clear picture of the internal politics, institutional mechanisms, and sponsor's human rights records from everywhere in the world." It is significant, in retrospect, that at the time I still saw broadcast and cable TV as a dominant factor. After all, it was precisely in that year, 2014, that social media platforms started to grow exponentially. Facebook already had over 1.5 billion users worldwide. That sounds like a lot, but it is a fraction of the 5.17 billion users (over 18) today. And anyway, at the time, these were mostly the middle-aged white bourgeoisie, curious to experiment with new technology and wanting to be 'cool'.

Needless to say, social media is today the dominant medium of communication and dissemination. But its effect is similar to the one I wrote about at the time: "The increasing number of calls for boycotts in the art world stem from this reality, where we all feel at home anywhere in the world, and feel comfortable expressing ethical approval or reprobation about any issue." More specifically, I quoted Dave Beech, who wrote that: "artists who boycott large survey exhibitions represent the first serious challenge to the rise of the curator and the corporate sponsor that have shaped the neoliberal art institution. Putting aside the content of each boycott, therefore, we can say that the art boycott generally is a method for renegotiating the balance of power within art."

A decade later, the role of the curator with respect to large exhibitions has been completely eroded. We can find one of the strongest examples of the devaluation of the curatorial agency in documenta 15, where the concept of its artistic director, ruangrupa, was precisely the abdication of curatorial responsibility, and with it, also of institutional accountability. The results are widely known: there was no one to discuss with the exhibition participants which works would fit more than others in the wider context of German and European culture and history, for instance – and there was no one to defend artists when they were attacked and bullied by the press. Here, we reached the 'cul de sac' of curatorial abstention and devaluation.

We can find this nihilistic curatorial endgame in many other situations: for example, in the closing panel discussion of the 2024 Transmediale festival in Berlin, where the curators of the festival and other speakers, instead of elaborating on the issues pertaining the festival, were asked to share their reasons and excuses for being present there and not having boycotted their own event – in the light of German policy and in the spirit of 'Strike Germany'.[2]

The fact is that this *renegotiation of the balance of power* between the curator and the institution has been taking place inside an increasingly charged political atmosphere, the consequence of a canon that is shaped mainly by post-colonial and identity politics issues in their many cycles and appearances. For years, curators have been expected to 'illustrate' these issues with the correct artists – rather than works. It took way too many years for a critic like Nicolas Bourriaud to synthesise this dogma, writing about the 60th Venice Biennale, curated by Adriano Pedrosa, that: "what the artist is becomes more important than what they produce".[3]

Indeed, recent mega-exhibitions have been looking like a homogenous mix of live and dead artists, so-called 'Global South' artists, marginalised – or at least generically perceived to be marginalised – because of their gender, ethnic background, life story, etc., etc. In times where artificial intelligence is obsessing the world, the curatorial algorithm is already wired in our heads and large exhibitions already look as if they could have been, so to speak, 'curated by Alexa'.

The problem is that normally, it is not the general public that will demand compliance with the canon, but the internal pressure of the art world, the critics and the artists. A good example can be found in the 12th Berlin Biennial, where participating artists withdrew, demanded installation changes and more.

With this hyper-dogmatic canon, the public sphere of art became a battlefield of one-sided ethics, where there is no interest in dialogues and diverse opinions, and where boycotts and censorship are a prominent feature.

Back in 2014, artist-organised boycotts would typically oppose two entities: sponsors, characterised by the source of their wealth; and institutions, as a protest against various curatorial and management decisions. At the time, I refrained from analysing the BDS because I thought – and still think – that it is different from all other boycotts, due to the fact that its demands and aims are blurry at best. But in the contemporary context, this discussion is impossible to avoid. Firstly, because the BDS stands high in the centre of the German polemics that put the art milieu in flames over the last year, but also because it became the most celebrated boycott, serving as an example for others.

The fact is that while the reasons for the BDS (the Boycott, Divestment and Sanction campaign against Israel) are widely known – even if not deeply understood – its political aims are notoriously vague. The BDS is like a Rorschach test, where each supporter or sympathiser sees its purpose as something different. Some believe that the demands of the BDS are about giving Palestinians in the West Bank equal rights – ending a regime of Apartheid – while others will say it's about ending the occupation of those territories conquered by Israel in 1967. Others again will assure you that the aim of the BDS is to end the occupation in ALL of Palestine and have all the Jews leave, leading to the termination of the Jewish State in the Middle East. This aim is clearly expressed in the slogan "From the river to the sea …". In between, we might have more ideas and beliefs. It is this last extreme side of the spectrum that prompted the German Bundestag to classify the BDS as antisemitic – and rightly so – while those that support, for instance, the end of the occupation in the West Bank and a 'two-state' solution don't understand why the BDS should be condemned as antisemitic – and they are totally right too. I often wonder how many BDS supporters took the time to read and seek clarification on its aims. Not many – certainly no one in the Bundestag did. But the fact is that the BDS and PACBI – the academic and artistic branch of the BDS – websites are very clear in the reasons for implementing the boycott – which we all know and lament, but they themselves leave the aims totally open.

Furthermore, BDS and anti-Israeli positions became a focal point of the present crisis, amalgamating every position claiming to be 'radical' and 'emancipatory' – but as we see, it also exemplifies the role that blind spots, double standards, collective pres-

sure and plain ignorance play in today's discourse, together with the lack of depth and the 'sloganisation' of every position.

I think that of the three cases I analysed in 2014, in perspective, we can see in the Manifesta X case the closest to what we are experiencing today in Germany, because it targeted the 'state politics' of the Russian Federation. Back then, the artists calling for the boycott were modest enough not to demand that Vladimir Putin leave Crimea or that the anti-gay laws be abolished immediately. Ideally, they expected a critical mass of artists to withdraw from the event, causing its cancellation. But in fact only a handful of artists withdrew, and these were precisely the ones whose works could have been more uncomfortable to the government anyway (if they care at all), making the final exhibition even more palatable to the state than it was intended to be.

But in Germany today, and especially after 7 October 2023, the demands of boycotts have different aims. On one side these are less realistic – like the demand for Germany to radically change its Middle Eastern policy, ditching the historical responsibility for the Holocaust that led to the creation of the State of Israel together with the Palestinian Nakba. But other demands are more 'declarative' – coercing institutions to publish specific political affiliations or remove officials, employees, members of committees, and sponsors. These symptoms contribute enormously to the total loss of value of the institutions,[4] and ultimately to the total devaluation of culture in the eyes of the general public and many decision-makers, which has been implemented through brutal budget cuts in the cultural sector in Berlin and elsewhere.

It is precisely the movement called 'Strike Germany' – the one that just seeks to punish Germany for its support of Israel – that resonates the most with the old-school boycotts. Artists supporting it don't seem to wait for a change in Germany's policies; they just don't want to be associated with it. The point being that precisely aimless, declarative boycotts are bound to flourish these days because, unlike a decade ago, artists still can profit from supporting them.

* * *

To understand the long process that made these political positions so central to the art world, we need to consider a few different vectors that have been operating in the last twenty-five years or so, ultimately creating the aforementioned 'canon'. As an 'umbrella' of some of these vectors, we can define the politisation of the artwork. Or maybe we should better call it: the 'mainstreaming' of political art, along with the new kind of art criticism this trend created.

We can trace this criticism to the early exhibitions dealing with a less 'Western'-leaning art – precisely to those exhibitions that opened the art world to other geographies and other cultures. The exhibition '*Primitivism' in 20th Century Art*, staged at MoMA in 1984, for instance, was thrashed because it "replayed classic modernist assumptions about avant-gardist formal borrowings as well as about the notion of 'primitive art' itself"[5]. *Magiciens de la Terre*, which took place at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1989, was a seminal exhibition that showcased artists from Africa and the Third World. While this show was acclaimed by the public, it slowly gained traction among critics as an infamous example of superficiality, exoticism, lack of context, and the implicit idealism underlying the idea of a "global colloquy of artists-magicians".

Other exhibitions – and their critics – continued these trends, so by the time we got to documenta 10 in 1997, the critical machine that leaves no room for the appreciation of the artwork in itself, without centring on the provenance or identity of the artist, was well in place. Indeed, Catherine David's documenta was also criticised for "continuing to draw the overwhelming majority of the artists represented from the traditional western European/ North American heartlands of the Avant-garde".

The unpacked work of American Artist, as exhibited at *Poetics of Encryption*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 2024. Photo: Spike

This short historical introduction is intended to stress that as soon as identity issues, post-colonial and multicultural subject matter entered the mainstream of the exhibition, criticism, too, left the realm of the artistic and went right away to highlight and focus on these issues, validating, almost exclusively, ethics above aesthetics.

To be sure, the 'political' was part of the exhibition circuit long before the dogma we are discussing now was elaborated. Talking specifically of biennials as a natural derivation of the large World Fairs – Oliver Marchart argues that "biennials and similar large-scale events have always served as magnets for political movements, which carried out their political activities under the protection and in the shadow of the spectacle, and, indeed, proved adept at tapping into its prestige."[6] While documenta 10 went under the term 'globalisation', five years later we were already talking about the 'postcolonial'. As such, Okwui Enwezor outlined the concept of the 'postcolonial constellation' that underlined his documenta 11 as follows: "It is a name which reverberates in a series of structural, political, and cultural entanglements, from the decolonization movements of the post-war era to civil rights movements and feminist, queer, anti-racist, anti-essentialist, contra-hegemonic politics of a new global community."[7]

Artistically, this ambitious project would have been hard to elaborate without the massive use of video. In fact, the total embrace of video by the exhibition world allowed the integration of reality, in connection with other moving-image media: cinema and TV, documentary and mockumentary practices. Artists who saw themselves as researchers and investigators came to be central to the exhibition space, happily embracing works bordering on the documentary that could have been shown rather on broadcast channels like the BBC or Discovery.

Connected to this, there is another influential vector that grew steadily since the 1980s, which is the academisation of art and art criticism. Starting with the French 'post-structuralist' philosophers – Foucault, Deleuze, Baudrillard and others – who addressed art and art history as part of their field of postcolonial studies, along with anthropology and sociology. This new language quite soon practically 'colonised' art

criticism and art production itself, as artists started sometimes addressing, at other times directly illustrating these new ideas.

Whether related to this or in parallel, artistic research practices started to appear in a growing number of graduate and practice-based PhD programmes for artists. But this academisation goes beyond artists' interest in pursuing better-paid teaching jobs. In the long run, it also caused the full takeover of artistic practice by the theories developed in the field of 'cultural studies'. Specially developed in the United States university circuit, the dialogue around these theories was imbued from the start with the typical toxicity of American social discourses.

* * *

The influence of the US in the cultural field brings us directly to the issue of identity politics – a vector that we need to dwell upon longer than the others, because we will find in it not only the root of the "Who is the artist?" and not "What is the work of art?" I mentioned before, but also the source of the fragmentation and violence we are experiencing. We can define identity politics as a political movement sustained by minority agency: the determination to convert structural disenfranchisement into a means of claiming cultural and political power for historically marginalised groups.[8]

The roots of identity politics can be traced to the American New Left movement that developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The New Left itself, both in Europe and the US, grew from the need to re-elaborate socialism after the disappointment with the Soviet regime following the crisis of 1956.

The New Left in the US, unlike the one in the UK, for instance, emboldened by the 1970s achievement that highlighted the racial and gender gaps in society with the Civil Rights movement and the student revolts against the Vietnam War, focused on the emancipatory needs of minorities regarding gender and race. In this way, instead of proposing culture as a way of developing common aims, in the spirit of socialism, the American New Left chose to erect identitarian barriers.

In the mid 1980s, while the economic policies of Ronald Reagan in the US and Margaret Thatcher in the UK dismantled what was left of the welfare state, the American New Left was already entrenched in the new battleground of identity politics, abandoning the claim to universal rights and focusing on demanding particular rights and privileges for oppressed minorities. In doing so, the New Left stressed openly that "culture is [a] battleground" where the hegemony must be fought. The inception of 'cultural studies' in the universities was the direct result of the New Left's interest in addressing the potentialities of popular culture, rather than the ideological 'upside-down' hierarchies of the Old Left.

The New Left reimagined the social struggle not between poor and rich, but between the gender oppressed and the patriarchy, between the colonised and their imperial oppressors, constructing culture as a significant sphere of conflict. It comes as no surprise, then, that the cultural field was in the end adopted and taken over by the conservatives, and is now being used within and against cultural institutions.[9] The sad episode we witnessed a few months ago, when Republican congresspersons thrashed the heads of the Ivy League universities in the US, using tactics they themselves didn't know how to contain, is a perfect example of the interest the conservatives took in culture and how they learned to dominate that battleground. Today, identity politics embodies all the basic elements of neo-liberalism and the cultural theory of the New Right, rather than the Left.

In terms of identity politics, the art world has experienced this same process. Candidly and truly interested in opening their and the public's horizons with those exhibitions of the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s that I mentioned before, curators criss-

crossed the world looking for artists that would enlarge the view of a globalised culture and offer a comprehensive view of the new issues in the eyes of the Northern artistic elites. But this interest soon focused on the way oppression and marginalisation was represented by those minorities. The art world became increasingly interested in artists that were, and still are, expected to *perform* their marginality, even as this 'marginality' has been steadily receding. Moreover, this perceived struggle against the neo-liberal and capitalistic system slowly became a system of fragmentation, cancellation and exclusion. The censorship and tagging, deciding 'who' can talk about 'what' – like when only artists from former colonies could talk about anti-colonialism, and only gender-diverse artists can talk about gender, for example, as it is in the American discourse, hardly qualifies as a 'leftist' principle, but seen in the light of this historical analysis of the New Left, we can understand the position of some intellectuals regarding the present crisis.

To be sure, mainstream, European and North Atlantic artists have also become increasingly political – working on issues that pertain to Northern perspectives, such as migration and the climate emergency. Many of them with works in which there is not much layering of meaning, rather bordering on the work of journalists and documentary filmmakers, as I mentioned before. These issues were free game for almost every artist, without belonging to the emancipating minorities, ultimately making their political view their main currency.

In my view, right now we are in the midst of a conservative system, after those minorities that achieved notoriety, in many ways, shaping the mainstream of the exhibition world, are now fighting to maintain their privileges. That is the essence of *conservativism*.

* * *

It is worth now doing a detour around the world because, when we talk about identity politics and emancipatory positions in the 'art world', we need to ask: 'what' or 'where' is this 'art world' exactly? Is this a homogeneous 'art world'? Are these dogmas grappling all of the 'art world' – or is it only a dubious 'privilege' of a few countries and institutions, while others are totally free of it?

Clearly, this dogma exists only in and for the so-called 'Western" – or maybe we should call it 'the liberal' – hegemony. There is a whole other, parallel hegemony we could call the 'illiberal' one that is growing and developing – while the 'liberal' one seems to be rather shrinking. I am talking about the growing number of museums, biennials, residencies, art fairs and more that are popping up in places like Saudi Arabia, the Gulf Emirates and China, and already exist in countries with authoritarian regimes like Turkey, Russia and more – in short: in the undemocratic, totalitarian or authoritarian states. Whether the aim is art-washing repressive politics, an interest in developing tourism, genuine art-loving, or maybe all three and more, it does not matter.

The point is that in all of these places, the dogma we are talking about – and especially the criticism based on this dogma – is completely absent. In a world where every artist and intellectual has something to say about any political or artistic issue taking place anywhere else, even if they know nothing about its roots, there is total silence when it relates to this 'illiberal' art world.

A prominent German curator this year curated a biennial in Saudi Arabia where all of the artists are vetted by the minister of culture himself, a cousin of the notorious murderer Muhammad Ben Salman, and a former executive in the oil business of the kingdom. And talking about oil – there is no need or interest in questioning where the sponsorship's money is coming from. It's all from the oil business, of course. Just remember the pressure the British Museum, for instance, was under to give up BP's

sponsorship – which in the end they did in 2023. Of course in this biennial in Saudi Arabia, there were no gender-diverse artists included. And there were no works pushing political agendas, human rights, feminism or sexual identity. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, there was no outcry, no letters sent to the curator, no *e-flux* declaration and no calls for artists to boycott the exhibition.

Just to make it clear, I do not disapprove of the curator's grabbing a wonderfully a paid gig, even if that fee was paid with petrodollars, and I am not judging her and will not censor her either, or the artists participating in these events. I mention this again because it is a good example of how the 'illiberal' hegemony in the art world is immune to the criticism that became an integral part of the Western institutions – and because it highlights the blind spots and double standards that are in play here and now. Also, it's important to understand that this field – what I called the 'illiberal hegemony' has an enormous influence on the Northern mainstream. This growing parallel world has been feeding artists that embody the 'other', the colonised. Significantly, this parallel 'art world' also introduced into the dogma the fictional term 'Global South' – that is the place where EVERY artist is authentic, natural, poor, telluric, a victim of colonisation and extractivism – no one is white, there is no access to wealth, to means of production and distribution, without the generous support of the 'Global North'. In the Global North, on the contrary, everyone is rich, everyone has access to production means, everyone is complicit personally with colonialism, oppression and – now – with genocide.

Franco Berardi[10], the dear "Bifo" of *e-flux*, indoctrinates us, writing that there is actually a "line that divides the North from the South, which runs from the Mexico-Texas border to the Mediterranean Sea to the forests of Central and Eastern Europe", that, in his own words: "has become the battleground of an infamous war – the black heart of global genocide. This is a genocidal war against unarmed people, exhausted by hunger and fatigue, assaulted by armed policemen, dogs, sadistic fascists, and above all by the forces of nature supercharged by climate change."

There are no overlaps, no hard-working artists struggling in London, Berlin or New York. No privileged practitioners in Sao Paulo, Lagos or Calcutta. The 'Global South' is just another performative quality of certain artists – whether the cliché applies or not.

Saying this is by no means a general critique of political art. On the contrary, there are many artists whose positions – even in the fields that today occupy us – are exemplary, touching and enlightening. But these artists have the sensibility and gift to translate a political situation – even if it relates to a specific issue – into a human reality that transcends a specific 'conflict', and it is never about themselves directly. The 'currency' of these artists is not exclusively political. It's ethical, but it's also aesthetic – and poetic.

<center>* * *</center>

Going back for a moment to the boycott issue: in my 2014 article, I had the possibility to argue that "A boycott is nothing more than withdrawal and is not a form of activism". Today, in the times of social media, I cannot argue that any longer. Today, all these one-sided demands, petitions and boycotts go under an umbrella term that denotes intransigency and a lack of a hierarchical system that could implement any kind of negotiation and resolution: it's called 'activism'.

Andrea Fraser categorised 'activism' as one of the fields of contemporary art, but warned that "Cultural activism linked to collective action by mobilized groups or broad-based social movements may exist primarily outside of the field of art" and warned of entering the field, as then "it risks being misused within it".[11] On the other

hand, back then I quoted Tiffany Jenkins, who wrote that: "many contemporary campaigners calling for boycotts are from the so-called liberal left who, it would seem, want art to show a world they wished existed, having given up on trying to change it".[12]

At its most basic, activism means action taken to create social change, but change inside an art institution is not social in the widest sense – it's only a *representation* of it.

Some weeks ago, I was visiting the Egyptian archaeology collection at the Neues Museum in Berlin. There, I saw the procession of sculpted human figures carrying offerings to the next world – a perfect world of eternal life, abundance and peace. I thought to myself: "nothing has changed". Artists are still more interested in the representation of a better world than in trying to achieve it. I am not implying that artists are not interested in making the world a better place; some of them maybe are true 'activists' outside of the art world as well, but inside of it, it's always only a representation of activism. For our argument, and following the theories of Stuart Hall, a "representation" is a sign that is seen as constructed in some way, and that "stands instead of an object (or the act) to which it refers".[13]

In the last year, the 'representation' of activism took over the art world. In order to protest the German policy towards the Middle East, we saw artists disrupting a performance at the Hamburger Bahnhof, instead of, for instance, disrupting a session on that subject in the Bundestag, just a few blocks away. We saw so-called 'activists' vandalising the home of a museum director in Brooklyn, rather that the home of the local congressman nearby. We saw endless protests taking place at different museums in NY and other cities – instead of at the Capitol in Washington DC, where the actual decision-making with consequences was taking place.

Of course, this also builds on the symbolic status of art, which teaches society to project into it its aspirations and frustrations. Art and art institutions are a magnet of attention – but exempts the true agents (like governments) from acting. A lot is being said, for example, about the plundered artefacts being held in museums – but not nearly as much about imperialism itself. Worldwide, 'anti-imperialism' is being addressed not by the governments of the ex-colonial powers considering reparations for the plundering and slavery of the colonies, but almost exclusively by cultural institutions. As positive as it is, this largely symbolic act in fact *represents* the 'reparations' themselves, while exempting governments from discussing and implementing more significant measures. See now in the UK, where calls for reparations to the former colonies are answered with well-publicised ceremonies of artefacts being returned, while the demand for greater economic compensation is consistently taken off the table. Unfortunately, many artists and academics are aggressively playing into this.

Capitalism and neoliberalism are in many ways built on the representative currency of art. Targeting art – as we saw in the 'Just Stop Oil' teenagers gluing themselves or pouring tomato soup onto a Van Gogh painting – creates a scandal. But this – in Fraser's words, is not an 'art system' event – it is an activist utilising the symbolic content of art to make a point. It's like artists who make artistic installations and interventions in political rallies. But the representation of activism inside the art institution by artists, is like an 'autoimmune' disease that destroys the system and has no effect outside of it.

The *representation* of activism in the art world is also important when we come to evaluate the success or failure of boycotts and campaigns, because even when these are 'successful', this is symbolic and representative. Take, for instance, Nan Goldin's 'PAIN' campaign against the Sackler family, for what she and others thought was that family's responsibility for the opioid crisis in the US. The campaign succeeded in the end and the Sackler name was erased form museums and universities – but most of their money stayed with them and they are not facing any criminal indictments. So an

activist process inside art institutions got the result it deserves: a symbolic 'success' inside the art institution.

Art is a *representation*, and the art world got used to representing a world that does not exist outside of it – most probably, it is developing in the opposite direction. As we have seen, for a generation, art has been dealing with post-colonialist utopias while the new imperialism of China is colonising the African continent, in much the same way as it was colonised by the Europeans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and slavery is alive and well in places like Southeast Asia, India and Africa. In the art world, we champion gender equality while sixty-six countries – in fact, much of that venerated 'Global South' – have strong anti-LGBTQ legislation. In Saudi Arabia, whose influence in the art sector is steadily growing, as mentioned before, a woman was just sentenced to eleven years in prison for "her choice of clothing and support of women's rights".[14]

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

The most dominant vector in the shifting culture over the last twenty years, however, is social media. Social media is above all a means of self-representation. For artists, it permits them to exist as 'artists' even if they are sidelined from the mainstream. As mentioned before, if, ten years ago, an artist could only lose from staging a boycott, today – thanks to social media – there is a lot to win because social media is the perfect tool for boycotts. In the past, the paradox of the cultural boycott was that in order to be effective, it needed to be public, but if the artist then disengaged, it lost its visibility. Today, if an artist disengages or feels sidelined or is – as they like to say today – 'de-platformed', social media will keep and amplify this visibility precisely because of that. Through social media, users can disengage but still be very much engaged in the event they asked to be disengaged from – that was not the case ten years ago.

All of this, finally, brings us to the 'Schrödinger artist'. With this term I like to define those artists who seem to gain more capital by NOT participating in exhibitions and events than by participating in them. Although the term 'Schrödinger's cat' is widely used, it's worth describing its origins. This term comes from a paradox in quantum mechanics devised by Erwin Schrödinger in 1935 in a discussion with Albert Einstein. In this thought experiment, a hypothetical cat may be considered simultaneously both alive and dead, while it is unobserved in a closed box, because of its fate being linked to a random subatomic event that may or may not occur.

Of course, this paradox of simultaneity, as we will see, defines some artists' behaviour on social media. But there are interesting instances of a creative collaboration of some institutions, like those cancelling exhibitions or those who decide to give the stage to this kind of organised disruption, as in the case of the Tania Bruguera performance at Hamburger Bahnhof. Outstanding among these institutions is Kunst-Werke Berlin (KW) where, at the exhibition *Poetics of Encryption*,[15] two artists who boycotted the institution in support of 'Strike Germany' did not disappear from the exhibition but, on the contrary, their 'non- participation' was highlighted by keeping their names on the posters and in the publications with a strikethrough line, and with an asterisk explaining why they decided to 'withdraw'. Furthermore, their 'non-works' were still present in the exhibition space. A video work was represented by the screen turned off; another piece by an unopened crate. The wall labels referring to these works were still there. This box in the exhibition is a perfect example of Schrödinger's paradox. As a crate, it might or might not contain the artwork of an artist that is – or is not – participating in the exhibition. The artist's name – 'American Artist' – totally fits this situation – and might also exist or not – just like the cat in the box. And, talking about double standards, this American Artist – at more or less the same time as they

were not 'not participating' in the KW show in protest at Germany's support of Israel – was showing at MoMA, the Whitney and the Guggenheim in New York, apparently in total disregard of the US's support of the same causes.

So the Schrödinger artist is alive and well, and flourishing on social media, trading with his non-artistic currency in another sphere than the exhibition and the institution, very possibly creating for itself more 'capital' than what participating in an exhibition could bring. The ideas of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu are important in this context because he identified the social environment as one that determines the value of the artist as much as the artistic work itself. He called this environment the "space of literary or artistic position-takings" and defined it as "the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc."[16]

I will give only one example of an artist and an event that, in my view, epitomises this symptom of the Schrödinger artist. It relates to Jonas Staal, a Dutch artist whose currency has always been one hundred percent political. He is normally active on the exhibition circuit and has a large following in the Dutch institutional scene, which is also very fond of pushing political issues – especially if these criticise latitudes other than its own and times other than its own dark, imperial and genocidal history. The story goes like this: on 19 April 2024, Staal published in *e-flux notes* an open letter to Mr Joybrato Mukherjee, the president of the DAAD, rejecting his nomination for a DAAD artist's residency.[17] The reason was that Mr Mukherjee – wearing his other 'hat' as the rector of Cologne University, had decided "to rescind the Albertus Magnus Professorship to the Jewish-American political theorist Nancy Fraser due to her signature of a letter with over four hundred other philosophers' names expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemning the 'ongoing and rapidly escalating massacre being committed in Gaza by Israel."

The fact is that when I heard about it, I wanted to read the letter on *e-flux*, so I just did a Google search. To my surprise, the top hit was not *e-flux*, but the X account of none other than the celebrity Greek economist Ioannis 'Yanis' Varoufakis. Together with the link to the letter, Varoufakis's comment was: "Artist Jonas Stahl [sic] takes a stand against the new McCarthyism unleashed in Germany – by turning down a prestigious residency in Berlin".[18] By the time I saw this, the post had already got almost 40,000 views, out of the 1.2 million followers Varoufakis has on X.

So, there are a few things to unpack here. Firstly, we saw how an artist who was only 'nominated' for the DAAD residency, among eighteen other nominees on a supposedly confidential list – could already 'refuse' it by the force of social media. Then we saw Staal, an artist dealing with political currency, making a huge amount of 'capital' – probably more than any show he's done – from the resonating power of X. Staal's aim was to accuse Joybrato Mukherjee of being an antisemite, and he took upon himself to defend Fraser as a Jew. Because of that, at the time, I could easily see this letter published in almost any German newspaper, but the fact that it was published on *e-flux* confirms that it was just a gig intended to gain capital inside the artistic circle.

We can only hope that the DAAD learned from this episode and in future, they are going to nominate and offer their residencies to artists who really need and appreciate them. After all, as Helen Starr, who was introduced as an Afro-Caribbean Trinidadian at that closing panel at Transmediale I mentioned before, indicated – in so many words: "boycotts are a white privilege".

It's hard to calculate the value of these ticks on Varoufakis's X account and how that is influencing Staal's career. Maybe he is venerated and invited to panels and exhibitions – and maybe precisely he is being disinvited. Time will tell.

Paraphrasing what Andy Warhol famously said – that everyone should have their fifteen minutes of fame – social media scholars argue instead that on the inter-

net, everyone is famous to fifteen people. Thanks to Yanis Varoufakis, Jonas Staal was famous to many more – maybe, but even then, for sure, not even for fifteen minutes. The social media attention span is way lower than media in Warhol's times …

So this is how our Schrödinger artist gains capital and social power. Prophetically, in 1983, Pierre Bourdieu penned a perfect definition of the infamous algorithmic echo chamber of social media, saying that "recognition [is] accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize."

What to do with this kind of artist is for each one of us to decide. But in my view – and following the quantum physics theory – the artists whose currency is primarily political are quite unpredictable. Not because they are capricious, but because they react to an unpredictable world. If an artist from the US can withdraw from a show in Germany because of a war happening in the Middle East, then another unexpected chain reaction can happen at any time, and in the case of withdrawal, the artist can still accrue, or believe he is accruing, significant capital.

* * *

The short chain of inaccuracies and misleads in the Staal/Varoufakis episode shows that social media operate strictly according to the laws of gossip, amplifying words – never facts – that are seldom verified. Because much of our online social interaction is rather banal, social media researchers came up with the term 'phatic' to describe something that "is more about maintaining connections than about conveying information."[19] The 'phatic' is "a communicative gesture that does not inform or exchange any meaningful information or facts about the world. It […] is a social one, to express sociability and maintain connections." That's the description of the 'likes', 'retweets', etc. Furthermore, "… these phatic communications may not always be 'meaningless', they are almost always content-less in any substantive sense." What is interesting for us talking about the Schrödinger 'cat' (not the artist) is that also on social media theory, researchers speak of a "change in the notions of 'presence' and 'absence' … Their argument is that a new sociability pattern of the constantly contactable [is] one which blurs presence and absence, [resulting] in relationships becoming webs of quasi-continuous exchanges."[20]

* * *

Just one last look at my article of a decade ago: at the end of the text, I somewhat sarcastically proposed two apps to facilitate the political navigation of artists and curators in the institutional world. One was called "Rate Your Sponsor". With this app, institutions, artists and curators could rate the application process, money flow and other aspects of exhibition-making. Curators could use it to avoid inevitable controversy and boycotts. The other app was called "Rate Your Artist", where curators and institutions could fill in information according to their experiences of working with specific artists. There, we could even view a list of petitions and boycotts the artist has endorsed. That way, we could work with artists with no record of boycotting, or with a conceptual flexibility that would assure their commitment to participation under virtually any political stress and without them having to agree to the details of sponsors' activities.

This last one is no longer necessary, as artists themselves are filling in data on public spreadsheets that denounce institutions.[21] While these artists and institutions present themselves as victims of political persecution, they are also effectively tagging themselves as 'troublemakers' that curators and institutions committed to the swift execution of exhibitions and projects should better stay clear of. And then, of course,

we can always access the social media accounts, so there is no need now for this innovative app I was proposing.

However, I'm afraid that very soon we could have another list in the artist's CV, together with the list under "group shows" and "solo shows": that of the exhibitions and events that the artist refused to participate in and the institutional and private collections to which s/he refused to sell works; I still don't have a title for this item in the bio, but with so much capital to be gained from refusing, boycotting, disengaging and demanding – I'm sure it's coming.

While Schrödinger artists will continue to flourish – as long as social media exists, I must say that I have the feeling that this trend of almost exclusively political and identity-based art is coming to an end. The quote from Nicolas Bourriaud at the beginning of this lecture, lamenting the fact that the identity of the artist is more important than the work of art, is eloquent in this regard, and there are many more indications.

This is echoed by different writers and curators in different media. Just a few days before I delivered this text for the first time, a friend form New York sent me the link to a new article that has since gone 'viral', triggering discussions on the state of art on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. The article – published in the December 2024 issue of *Harper's Magazine* – was written by Dean Kissick and titled 'The Painted Protest – How Politics Destroyed Contemporary Art'[22]. In it, Kissick concludes, among other things, that:

"When the world's most influential, best-funded exhibitions are dedicated to amplifying marginalized voices, are those voices still marginalized? They speak for the cultural mainstream, backed by institutional authority. The project of centering the previously excluded has been completed; it no longer needs to be museums' main priority and has by now been hollowed out into a trope."

So, hopefully we are standing at the brink of a well-needed change of paradigm. That doesn't mean that we'll go back to the all-white-men exhibition. Some very good artists of formerly marginalised communities have entered the mainstream and are being influential by virtue of their work, not by the privileges they enjoyed as marginal figures. Likewise, the ethical will not disappear, but it will live side by side with the aesthetic, and the poetic.

Besides the personal capital that artists and individuals or groups of artists are accruing in their social media representation, because of culture operating in a multi-layered institutional, political and individual ecology and on a very extended timeline, the actual success of boycotts in this field – unlike in the economic one – is rather impossible to assess. Earlier, I mentioned one 'success' that remained largely symbolic, and another that turned out to be quite comfortable for the government whose policy it was targeting, without achieving the aims it called for.

As demands grow more ambitious – like the radical turnaround of German policy towards the Middle East – the option of success becomes rather impossible. But we can't dismiss the lack of 'success' only as such because, while not achieving their demands, cultural boycotts very often pay a price and lead to negative consequences. First and foremost, when the establishment feels it needs to fight back, the obvious means are economic. I've been following this issue for a long time, and I can say that there is an almost 'Pavlovian' reaction of politicians to boycotts: they cut budgets – at times indiscriminately.

This is not something that I can prove, but I'm convinced that the tremendous budget cuts that are coming upon artists and institution from the Berlin Senate are also the consequence of the conflicts, the boycotts, the petitions and everything that in the last year and a half disrupted the cultural milieu in Germany, and in Berlin in particular, where the cultural field presented itself as fragmented and at times violent

towards each other and the system, causing the devaluation of the cultural institutions and the perception of artists as troublemakers. In criticising the system as such (German *Staatsräson*, for example), it's only normal that the system pushes back, and budgets are the obvious means to do so. We can only guess what the reaction to such upheavals would be inside the 'illiberal hegemony' …

Notes

1 https://www.on-curating.org/issue-26-reader/are-boycotts-the-new-collective-curating.html

2 https://youtu.be/o20yfTukhKY?feature=shared

3 https://spikeartmagazine.com/articles/review-foreigners-everywhere-venice-biennale-2024

4 https://taz.de/Antisemitismus-in-der-Kultur/!6018208/

5 Niru Ratnam, 'Art and Globalisation', in *Themes in Contemporary Art*, eds. Gill Perry and Paul Wood, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004, pp. 277–313, here pp. 277 ff.

6 Oliver Marchart. *Hegemony Machines, documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennalization*, independently published, 2022, p. 8.

7 Oliver Marchart. *Hegemony Machines, documenta X to fifteen and the Politics of Biennalization*, independently published, 2022, p. 13.

8 Grant Farred, 'Endgame Identity? Mapping the New Left Roots of Identity Politics', *New Literary History*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Autumn 2000), pp. 627–48, here p. 631.

9 On this subject, see Racheal Fest, 'Culture and Neoliberalism: Raymond Williams, Friedrich Hayek, and the New Legacy of the Cultural Turn', in *Mediations, Journal of the Marxist Literary Group,* Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring 2021), pp. 9–32.

10 Franco "Bifo" Berardi, *Hyper-Colonialism and Semio-Capitalism.* https://www.e-flux.com/notes/633189/hyper-colonialism-and-semio-capitalism

11 Andrea Fraser, *The Field of Contemporary Art: A Diagram*; https://www.e-flux.com/notes/634540/the-field-of-contemporary-art-a-diagram

12 https://newrepublic.com/article/120524/exhibit-b-really-useful-knowledge-and-europes-art-censorship

13 Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation. Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage/The Open University, 1997.

14 Saudi Arabia activist imprisoned for eleven years for 'support' of women's rights. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/may/01/manahel-al-otaibi-saudi-arabia-womens-rights-activist-sentenced-11-years-prison-anti-terrorism-court?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

15 https://www.kw-berlin.de/en/kw-digital-poetics-of-encryption/

16 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production or: The Economic World Reversed*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 30.

17 https://www.e-flux.com/notes/603681/letter-to-the-daad

18 https://x.com/yanisvaroufakis/status/1781956796216656072

19 'Phatic exchange' is a term first used by Malinowski to describe our bonds. Vincent Miller, 'New Media, Networking and Phatic Culture', *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* (2008), p. 393.

20 Christian Licoppe and Zbigniew Smoreda, 'Are Social Networks Technologically Embedded?', *Social Networks* Vol. 27, No. 4 (2005), pp. 317–35.

21 https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Vq2tm-nopUy-xYZjkG-T9FyMC7ZqkAQG9S3mPWAYwHw/edit#gid=1227867224

22 https://harpers.org/archive/2024/12/the-painted-protest-dean-kissick-contemporary-art/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

---

Sergio Edelsztein (b. Buenos Aires, Argentina) is a curator who lives and works between Berlin and Tel Aviv. In 1995 he founded the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv and served as its director and chief curator until 2017. In the framework of the CCA, he curated seven Performance Art Biennials and five International Video Art Biennials – Video Zone – and also curated numerous experimental and video art screenings, retrospectives and performance events. Among the major exhibitions he curated for the CCA were shows by Guy Ben Ner, Roee Rosen, Rosa Barba, Ceal Floyer, Marina Abramović and Gary Hill. Since 1995, Edelsztein has curated exhibitions and time-based events in Spain, China, Poland, Singapore and elsewhere. He curated the Israeli participation at the 24th São Paulo Biennial (1998), as well as the 2005 and 2013 Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Over the course of his career, he has lectured, presented video programmes and published his writings in Israel, Spain, Brazil, Italy, Austria, Germany, China, the USA and Argentina, among others. He writes extensively for catalogues, websites and other publications.

Vom Ich zum Wir – From Me to We
Leon Kahane

An important aspect of my work *vom ich zum wir* (from me to we) is the exhibition space itself, where the Void – which not least refers to the Holocaust – makes a strong architectural statement. It is a challenge to work artistically in this space. In my installation, the Void's concrete wall is braced and partly covered, so it looks as if you are at the back of an exhibition stand or building site, creating the impression of a temporary structure. In an earlier work, I filmed the barracks at Birkenau, which are braced to stop them from falling apart. There, too, the ephemeral played an important role: for me, it stands for the fragility of the culture of remembrance, the history of reappraisal, and the role that these questions play in the cultural representation of a society.

In my work at the Jewish Museum Berlin there is a massively enlarged photograph that was printed in 1960 in the East German newspaper *Neues Deutschland*. It shows a work of art by my grandmother: she produced a wall mosaic for the GDR's pavilion at the third World Agricultural Fair in Delhi. The 8.3 x 2.4 metre mosaic was apparently destroyed after the fair; all that remains is a head. It seems as though the body that belonged to this head didn't find a place within the mosaic. The head is a kind of survivor.

Wall mosaic by Doris Kahane
in Delhi, 1960.
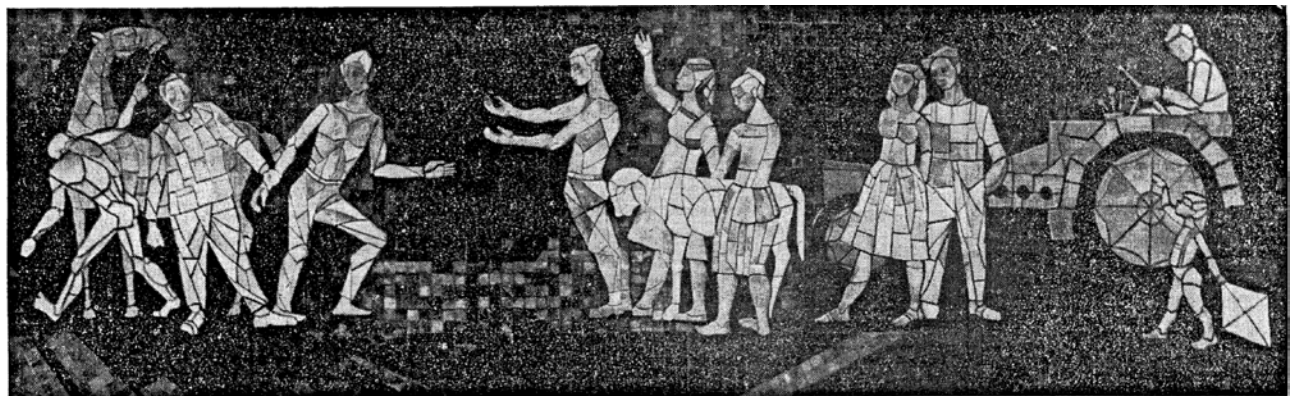
Doris Kahane, *Vom Ich zum Wir*, wall mosaic for the GDR pavilion of the World Agricultural Fair in Delhi, 1960.

The mosaic is called *vom ich zum wir*, and the idea behind it follows a typical GDR vision: subjectivity is left behind and a collective 'we' – a solidarity-based, socialist society – becomes the focus. My installation has the same title but incorporates a critique of this utopia, which legitimised so much abuse.

On the one hand, the title and visual language of the mosaic refers to the utopia of the GDR and of socialism, which my grandmother had hoped would bring a better and fairer world. On the other hand, especially in the context of an international agricultural fair, it also contains an implicit commentary on West Germany and the West more generally. The FRG and the GDR both succeeded the Nazi state.

For me, this is the point where my work leaves the historical behind and refers to the present. There were three German-speaking, post-Nazi countries with three different variants of reappraisal. In Austria, there was externalisation – the myth of having been among the first victims of the Nazis, combined with the denial of their own involvement and responsibility. In West Germany, there was internalisation, which took a long time and resulted in the culture of remembrance becoming a central part of the country's own culture, while also being perceived as alien. The third country was East Germany, with a universalisation of the culture of remembrance that made everyone – including Germans themselves – the victims of fascism. In all of these variants, the handling of guilt and responsibility has repercussions on cultural debates and the political present.

Fragment from the wall mosaic *Vom Ich zum Wir* (1960)
by Doris Kahane.

Doris Kahane, *Kinder von Drancy*, drawing, 1944.

The representative role that is ascribed to artists or that they voluntarily choose to assume is always of particular interest to me. How often does an artist represent a country at an agricultural fair? But I also mean this self-critically: I have now brought my grandmother's work into the Jewish Museum Berlin, where it takes on an entirely different function. My work also includes a film made up of various elements: there is 8mm footage from India filmed by my grandparents, in which Otto Grotewohl appears. In 1951, he asserted that "literature and art are subordinate to politics [...]. The idea of art must follow the march of the political struggle." Animated figures crop up in the video that are strongly informed by illustrations from GDR children's magazines. These figures sing in chorus of the so-called young nation's spirit of optimism.

My work also includes a portrait of my grandmother from a GDR children's magazine. The title of the article translates to 'She Paints Children, Time and Again'. In the deportation camp Drancy, my grandmother experienced how 450 children were selected for the last transport to Auschwitz, and it is believed that none of them survived. She never got over this, and so she drew the children.

It is interesting that the portrait from the magazine does not contain these drawings, but it does include an etching of the zoo – as fascism in the GDR had finally been overcome. Nevertheless, the text does show an interest in my grandmother's drawings of children and reinterprets them for propagandist purposes: it claims that fascism was now being directed at children from "Arabic countries", meaning Israel. One of the drawings is also part of my installation.

Immer wieder malt sie Kinder

In der 20. Oberschule in Berlin-Johannisthal freuen sich Lehrer und Kinder täglich an einem großen Wandbild. Es wurde von der Malerin Doris Kahane gestaltet. Die Pioniere erkennen sich darauf wieder. So lebendig erzählt es vom ersten ungeschickten Sprung, vom zaghaften Melden im Unterricht, vom fröhlichen Spiel.

Gründlich hatte sich Doris Kahane auf ihre Arbeit vorbereitet. Viel Zeit verbrachte sie in der Schule. Sie besuchte die Kinder, und sie besprach mit ihnen ihre Entwürfe. In der Werkstatt mischte sie die Farben und trug sie auf den Keramikgrund auf. Nach und nach entstanden die Gestalten unbekümmerter Kinder. Dabei dachte Doris Kahane daran, daß viele Kinder der Welt noch hungern müssen und nicht in einer neuen Schule lernen können. Doch die Solidarität, die auch die Pioniere der 20. Oberschule in Berlin-Johannisthal üben, hilft ihnen im Kampf gegen die Ausbeuter und Unterdrücker.

Was für eine Kraft die Solidarität ist, hat Doris Kahane selbst erfahren. Während des faschistischen Krieges lebte sie in Frankreich. Dorthin war sie mit ihrer Mutter gekommen, um vor den Faschisten Schutz zu suchen. In Frankreich begann Doris Kahane Malerei zu studieren. Aber schon bald überfielen die Faschisten auch dieses Land. Doris Kahane wurde in ein großes Gefangenenlager gebracht. Einmal erlebte sie, wie die Faschisten dreihundert Kinder verschleppten, um sie zu ermorden. Viele Bilder von Kindern und jungen Frauen zeichnete Doris Kahane in jener Zeit. Sie und einige Tausend andere Lagerinsassen konnten durch die Solidarität französischer Arbeiter gerettet werden: Die Eisenbahner streikten, und damit verhinderten sie, daß weiterhin Gefangene in die Vernichtungslager transportiert wurden. Als junge Frau kehrte Doris Kahane nach Deutschland zurück und fand für immer ihre Heimat in der DDR. Sie nahm das unterbrochene Kunststudium wieder auf. An der Hochschule in Berlin-Weißensee lernte sie, wie Wandbilder gemalt werden. Inzwischen entstanden von ihr viele Arbeiten, die von unserer frohen Gegenwart erzählen.

Die Kinder, die von den Faschisten ermordet wurden, wird Doris Kahane nie vergessen. Sie sind ihr nicht nur eine

Doris Kahane mit Jungpionieren vor dem Wandbild in der 20. Oberschule Berlin-Johannisthal

Erinnerung, sie sind ihr auch eine Mahnung. Denn der Faschismus hat noch immer viele Gesichter. Diese aufzuzeigen ist auch die Aufgabe eines Künstlers. Heute geht es um die Kinder Chiles, Moçambiques und der arabischen Länder. Ob Doris Kahane im Vietnamausschuß mitarbeitet oder in ihrem Atelier malt – immer übt sie Solidarität. Mit ihrer Kunst hilft sie die Welt zu erkennen, zu verstehen und zu verbessern.

Foto: JW/ELKE GÖRTZ

Das Bild „Im Tierpark" von Doris Kahane ist eine Radierung. Die Malerin ätzte die Zeichnung in eine Metallplatte ein; mit dieser wurde das Bild dann gedruckt. Eine ganz andere Technik wendete Doris Kahane an, als sie das Bild vom Ehrenmal Unter den Linden druckte. Sie zeichnete es mit Kreide auf eine Druckplatte aus Kalkstein. Ein Steindruck wird auch Lithografie genannt.
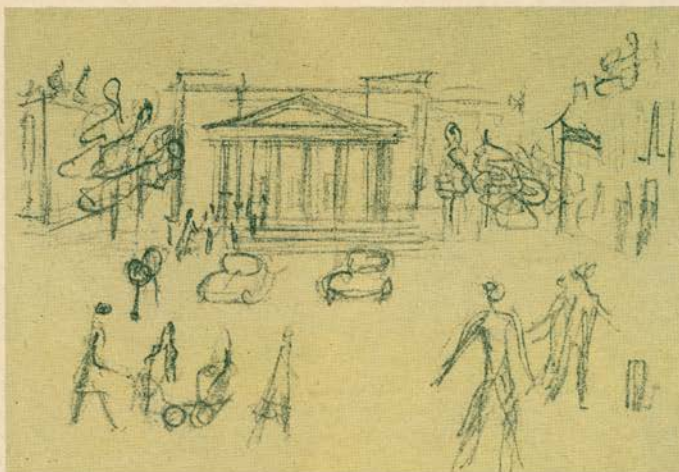
15

Extract from *ABC Heft* about the artist Doris Kahane, 1974.

Leon Kahane, *Vom Ich zum Wir*, 4K Video, 16 minutes, 2023. https://youtu.be/piQqlK3xt8g

Leon Kahane, *Vom Ich zum Wir*, 4K Video, 16 minutes, 2023. https://youtu.be/piQqlK3xt8g

In all of this myth-building through images and language, it becomes clear that the GDR always represented itself as childlike, naive and innocent. It claimed to be a young nation that represented a break with Nazism, yet political indoctrination began in childhood: "Who is the enemy?", "And who are the good guys and what is right?" The characters in my film represent various ideology carriers from the GDR: an ear of corn, two hands in a handshake, the dove of peace. In total, there are six symbols singing solidarity songs in chorus. And you hear a voice reading passages about my grandmother's life, passages about her experience in the camp. The chorus as a motif always has something of a new beginning, something innocent and pure. Sanitising one's own history, you might say. The chorus is the epitome of a collective. Even my grandmother joins in. Through this, a great contradiction between the collective and the individual emerges. Because all the "from me to we" leaves little space for the biographies of the actual survivors like my grandmother, these Jews in the GDR.

When I saw the banner of Taring Padi at Documenta, the visual language reminded me of socialist realism. This was hardly addressed in its reception, and what this has to do with the artistic representation of political world views wasn't addressed at all. Instead, it was widely argued that, because it comes from Indonesia, the representation must be viewed differently, particularly in relation to antisemitism. I have considered how, in my work, I can make visible that, in a global context, these aesthetic overlaps do not develop in isolation but are part of globalisation. My grandparents' biographies clearly show this. They lived for a long time as correspondents in India and also spent time in Chile, Brazil and Vietnam. If you leaf through newspapers from the GDR, you quickly see how much they referred to each other. Of course, this was always also

Leon Kahane, *Vom Ich zum Wir*, installation view, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, 2023.

Leon Kahane, *Vom Ich zum Wir*, installation view, Jüdisches Museum Berlin, 2023.

about legitimising and mediating their own worldview. Especially in contemporary art discourse, however, this historical knowledge seems to remain untouched, whether consciously or unconsciously. This is what the German reception of Documenta 15 showed me, and I think it is a problem. This is why I used my grandparents' footage from India in my work: it shows their vision of the places in which they found themselves, using the visual language of their times. In my work, I am interested in the representative function of images, language and culture. How do art and culture relate to politics? In a totalitarian system it works differently than in an open society.

The family biography is important to me because I can view it critically myself. I see my grandparents both critically and with a lot of understanding, because they actually were victims, because they – in contrast to the vast majority of GDR citizens – really were in the anti-fascist resistance and this meant they had an entirely different connection to the state. They were searching for something, and they may have underestimated the abuse of their own history in the process. I can't be sure that this wouldn't happen to me, or even that it hasn't already been happening for a long time. I think about this a lot.

This text was first published in: Tamar Lewinsky, Martina Lüdicke, Theresia Ziehe, Another Country. Jewish in the GDR, *Foundation Jewish Museum, Berlin, Ch. Links Publishing, Berlin, 2023*

Leon Kahane was born in 1985 in Berlin. He creates conceptual video works, photographs and installations that centre on themes of migration, identity, and coming to terms with majorities and minorities in a globalised society.

Migration, Identification, Queerness – Contradictions of Queer Theory Before and After October 7
Ana Hoffner

Many people ask me why I am increasingly addressing antisemitism.[1] It is because it has become necessary. I came from Yugoslavia to Vienna in 1989 as an eight-year-old kid and grew up as a migrant. Returning to my home country was out of question because the state disintegrated in a series of armed conflicts in the 1990s, so I became a citizen of Austria in 2002. Speaking about racism as a migrant has given me some symbolical capital in the world of contemporary art over the course of many years. Since 7 October 7 2023, however my statements on war, violence and sexism, which have always been formed from the position of anti-racism and migration, cannot be properly classified any more, precisely because they include a critique of antisemitism and expressions of solidarity with Israel. This mirrors an embodied split of reality, an epistemological caesura between racism and antisemitism in the discourse of contemporary art and theory, which I will discuss in this text. Addressing racism is intuitively considered 'right', while addressing antisemitism might be 'wrong' (hence the formation of a whole discourse about false accusations of antisemitism). Instead of substantive debates, talking about antisemitism, its very invocation triggers conundrums that are tied back to identity. Addressing antisemitism means being confronted with questions that are very similar to those that have accompanied my arrival in Vienna over the years. They were never questions that were looking for an answer, but questions that were an expression of irritation directed at the very articulation of migrants: people were puzzled that a migrant was speaking at all. Although in a different way, today, I find myself in a minority position in which nothing less than my inner essence (Who am I actually?; Where do I stand?; Where is my origin and anchoring?; Am I still on the move or have I settled down?) is at stake – due to pressure to take a position against Israel. As a consequence, I want to address the fact that the discussion space in which identity and non-identitarian positions could be negotiated simultaneously seems to have disappeared completely.

The sudden outbreak of transnational euphoria that accompanied the massacre of 7 October has triggered an existential fear for many who have already been turned into minorities in their biographies. My experiences of loss (the loss of a country, a culture, a language, a family, a society, etc.), as well as the long-standing experience of being cut off (i.e. social exclusion in Austria), have turned into a new reality. This is a very contemporary migrant position, and it has everything to do with antisemitism. If a mass movement tries to find out who the Jews are (because you never know exactly), then the correct identification is ultimately irrelevant. The language must change and not call them Jews, but Zionists.[2] From this point on, the interrogation, the panicked agitation, the impossibility of conversation, affects everyone who comes close to the new enemy image, because ultimately everyone can be a Zionist. This is precisely the irrationality and arbitrariness of antisemitism, the search for culprits that constantly confirms scattered suspicions and beliefs that no longer have to correspond to reality at any point. So since 7 October, I have been a Zionist, a racist, an advocate of white supremacy, a white or liberal feminist, I could go on and on with this list. Crucially, it makes no difference what identity or political past I actually have; it remains indeter-

minate, sinister and threatening, just like my arguments of antisemitism criticism, which are heartless, unsympathetic, cynical and at worst seen as murderous, just like the Israelis themselves. The point I want to make here is that structures of antisemitism affect us all. There are no Jews or Israelis, or Jewish or Israeli representatives of a political establishment, who talk about the aggression of Hamas in order to conceal the oppression of the Palestinians out of malice. The structures of antisemitism, and at the moment especially those that came to light on 7 October and afterwards, affect everyone who speaks about them. This is the authority of antisemitism.

In this text, I would like to try a critical revision of those fields of theory production that in the recent past have fundamentally addressed the problems of identity and identification, but also origin, migration and racialisation, by focusing on affects, desire and sexual politics. I am particularly interested here in the difficult-to-define academic field that has become known as 'queer theory' since the 1990s and has developed between the USA and Europe in a back-and-forth process. I myself began a research project in 2010, which I published under the title 'The Queerness of Memory'. The necessity of introducing a political dimension of memory into queer theory was due to the post-Nazi experience in a restructured Europe after 1989, which asked to look for the legacy of the Cold War. Where could this have found a better place of articulation than in those English-language discourses that promised to liberate me from both the narrowness of German and the familial pressure of authenticity of Serbo-Croatian? Queer theory seemed like a continuation of a practice of ideology critique from a perspective of sexual politics, like a symptomatic reading that sought to interpret the social convulsions, the unformulated stuttering of official politics, as the utterances of a neurotic patient. Psychoanalysis and ideology critique were self-evident components of a new, progressive gender research and an exciting view of sexuality that was able to shake the methodological apparatus of academia because it had recognised the potential of self-analysis in theory and was courageous enough to apply it. At the beginning of the 1990s, the field of queer theory, carried by Judith Butler, Lee Edelman, Leo Bersani, Jose Esteban Munoz and Teresa de Lauretis, among others, emerged as a constantly growing and inspiring academic field, because it drew on experience and understood sexuality as a place of knowledge formation.[3] The impossibility of unifying this academic field can be seen in its understanding of identity. Lee Edelman, for example, writes about the problem of the metaphorical use of sexuality for the purpose of identity formation in his book *Homographesis. Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (1994).[4] When, in a heteronormative society, a complete translation of body and voice into a text is sought, a text that can be read, then a manic search begins for those gestures that can act as signs, as indicators of being gay, to establish sexuality as identity. This psychoanalytically based element of the incipient queer theory – and Edelman's *Homographesis* is one of the standard works here – is thus directed against the historical and ongoing persecution of those who are identified as queer by a simple sign. Queer theory's questioning of identity politics is thus to be understood as creating a critical toolkit against accusation, recrimination and persecution of those who are identified as queer, whose sexuality is assumed to be a placeholder for an inner truth of subjectivity, for their whole person. A crucial strand of queer theory thus shows a proximity between the critique of homophobia and antisemitism by examining the persecutory delusion and fantasy of annihilation common to both. But then something crucial should change, even reverse.

After 9/11, as a phenomenon of the early twenty-first century, a completely opposite approach to identity politics developed within queer theory. Jasbir Puar's *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, published in 2007, plays a decisive role

here.[5] Queer is repurposed as a term for a double identity – on the one hand, gay men, especially in the US and Israel, have been identified as the new queer nationalists, while on the other, the symbolic figure of the suicide bomber is proposed as the actual, 'truer' queer identity that has supposedly been misunderstood in the past.[6] But what is queer about a suicide bomber? Nothing at all.[7] On the one hand, Puar pointed out the double discrimination of queer migrants, i.e. the simultaneity of their experience of homophobia and racism – which is and will remain unquestionably important – but also triggered a wave of apologetics of terrorist violence. This also involved an ideological intervention that promoted identification with terrorists as marginalized resistance fighters. The focus here was not on sexuality, but on the affective state in an individual's supposed struggle for liberation. To achieve this, Puar had to sexualize affect, in other words, that state of euphoria, enthusiasm, and uninhibitedness that is enabling the act of violence became a foundation for thinking about sexuality.[8]

While it makes sense to cite Jasbir Puar as an example of a turn in queer theory, the ideological entanglements of its content lie elsewhere. With Noam Chomsky's *9–11* – published a few weeks after the attack on the World Trade Center – anti-imperialist politics on the US left came to the fore, making their own references to the Soviet Union with their antisemitic totalitarian tendencies even more unrecognisable than before.[9] Chomsky's focus is on US policy as the sole imperial centre, from which he also derives the cause of the September 11 attacks. He sees it exclusively in the military interventions of the USA in the Middle East, thereby failing to recognise the expansionist, imperial movements of the Soviet Union and the formation of several terrorist organisations. The resulting trivialisation of the terrorist act of violence, or worse, the exoticisation of terror as the legitimate resistance of oppressed peoples (entirely in the sense of an anti-imperial glorification of the world revolution with its centre in the Soviet Union) is gradually becoming a characteristic of the committed US left which, in contrast to its own raison d'état, has built up an apparatus of knowledge over several decades in academic and artistic contexts (i.e. wherever possible). On closer inspection, it is often reminiscent of Soviet propaganda but consistently fails to mention this liaison. Antisemitic, anti-imperialist propaganda such as 'Zionism is racism' can normalise undisturbed in the US since the 1970s, as can a discourse on an imaginary Western modernism that was cemented by the Cold War.

On the foundation laid by Chomsky, Puar's sexualisation of the suicide bomber can unfold, because a discursive framework already existed in which the book could become successful. Claims of queer complicity with US imperialism are immediately understood, while sympathy with the populations in the Middle East oppressed by US imperialist foreign policy is secured as a legitimate counter-position outside the mainstream. The methods are decisive here. Chomsky gives the terrorist attack a primordial character – 9/11 becomes something of a primal scene – and although the event is described as a historical turning point because it is supposedly the first time the 'Empire' has been attacked, Chomsky paints a timeless picture that is only possible through the repression of the Cold War's history, the Shoah. This is most evident in the assertion that Europe was never attacked either.[10] Unlike in the immediate aftermath of September 11, when there was no longer a Soviet Union, the difference in the present is that of a real Russian ideological and military violence, which since the Ukraine war has brought the past and the co-existence of several empires back to mind.[11] Antisemitism does not have one origin.

Puar's book begins at a pivotal moment that illustrates this, namely the public hanging of two Iranian gay men that sparked worldwide protests against homophobia in 2006.[12] The fact that a revolt against homophobia also brought to light racist elements that were directed against the entire Iranian population became the decisive moment to

relate sexuality and racism to each other. First of all, there is Puar's diagnosis of a "racism of the global gay left".[13] At the same time, Puar is increasingly constructing a globally organised, goal-oriented context out of a loose network of international organisations, which is at times rather based on fear of a sexual supremacy of queer communities (queers becoming more powerful than normal people) than a critique of international politics made by NGOs. In this way, a sexual minority that receives selective support (and is selectively internationally organised) becomes part of the US imperialism that Chomsky had already asserted. Here, too, a timeless image of an orientalised Other is painted that is not anchored in history (Puar merely lists orientalisms of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries), making racism as a mechanism of historically structured inequality disconnected from its materialist foundations. Racism becomes rather a feeling of oppression (oppressed by Israeli and US queers); hence it can become transferable.[14] The focus is therefore not on the emancipatory disclosure of racism and concern for a population affected by racism, but on the use of a politically deflated, race-affirming concept of race as positive hierarchy, which has made Puar's observations problematic from the outset.

Following this abbreviated analysis of racism and sexuality, Puar constructs the concept of homonationalism, a nationalism practiced decidedly by homosexuals, in continuation of queer theorist Lisa Duggan's concept of homonormativity.[15] On behalf of homonormativity, judgments are made about legitimate and non-legitimate 'proximity' to the nation state, colonialism, imperialism and (crucially) neoliberal capitalism, which has since been elaborated far beyond queer theory. However, even critical arguments on homonationalism revolve around a return of identity politics and attributions of guilt, while performing unsuccessful attempts to escape them. For example, the philosopher Nikita Dhawan discusses homonationalism quite critically in the con-
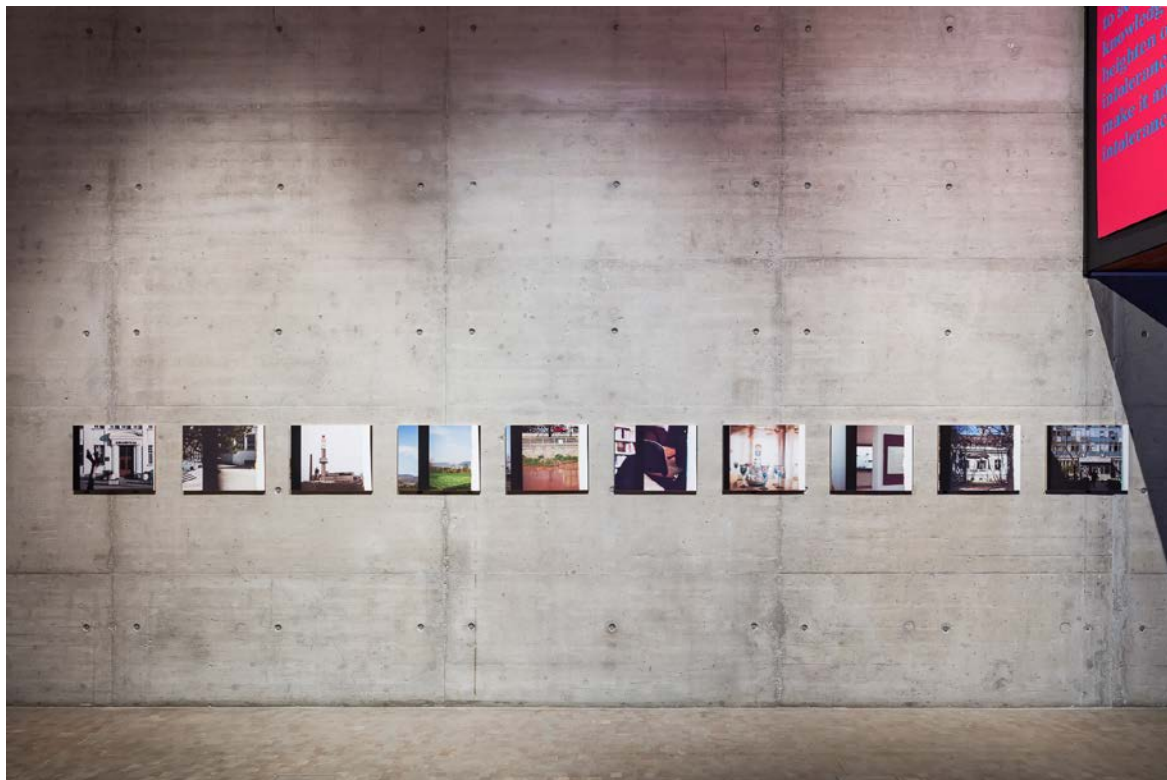
Ana Hoffner ex-Prvulovic*, *Active Intolerance*, installation, 2021/23. Six A0 posters, each 118.2 x 168 cm; 10 fine art prints on Hahnemühle paper. Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com

Exhibition view: *Ana Hoffner ex Prvulovic* & Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński*, Kunsthalle Wien, 22 October 2021 – 6 March 2022.
Photo: kunst-dokumentation.com

text of queer decolonisation debates, but adopts the assertion of a "complicity of Western queer politics with neoliberal, imperial discourses".[16] Her notion of complicity does not leave much space for entangled social positions; it rather suggests moral wrongdoing of a sexual minority, at the moment when it is no longer exclusively a victim of state regulation but also enjoys rights and protection. The question that arises here is why participation or involvement in certain discourses is interpreted exclusively through identitarian perpetrator positions.

The lack of recognition for those queers who do not fit the image of an oppressed minority—and some Israeli queers belong to this group—is met with both radical resistance and queer bashing in the academic field. And indeed, both Jasbir Puar and many other queer theorists (such as Judith Butler) are subject to antisemitic, racist and homophobic attacks that make no distinction between the need for a well-founded critique of certain theories and the discrediting of an entire field. On the basis of misinformation, distortion of facts and associative, unscientific construction, these positions are made into representatives of queer theory.[17] How should we address the simultaneous tendency to normalise apologetic, identity-political and moralising radicalisations within queer theory on the one hand, and the right-wing populist attack on the academic emancipation of gender and sexuality theories on the other? What can we actually say about sexual norms, violence and gender in a post-7 October present?

Without wishing to defend Puar, I want to suggest that it is worth looking at her arguments that clearly show that the construction of "terrorist assemblages" was also permeated by an inherent contradiction. Puar criticises the exclusive focus on transgression when it comes to definitions of queerness, whereby, as she notes, a freedom from all norms is presented as a precondition for the constitution of queer subjectivity.[18] Here, Puar certainly indicates interest in a position that is critical of normativity but

decidedly not oriented towards liberation narratives through transgressive politics. This characterised queer theory of the early 1990s as well. However, I would argue that a problem arises when she argues that heteronormativity is "not tethered to hetero-sexuals".[19] Here she suggests herself that the ideal of a transgressive sexual identity can be translated into an abstraction of (hetero)normativity – in other words, social nor-malisation can be seen as something that allows everyone to participate in it or is accessible to everyone; hence everyone falls under the same criteria of integration into the norm. The assumption of a possibility of participation in all norm-forming pro-cesses conceals its origins in a liberal democracy, which aims for this inclusion but can never fully realise it. Ultimately, such a reformulation of what can be considered nor-mative results in a loss of specific positioning. It is only on the basis of this misguided assumption of an arbitrarily transferable sexual identity that Puar (and Dhawan) can create the trope of complicity, because only through idealised sexuality that is seem-ingly accessible to all for identity formation, positions within biopolitical violence no longer need to be differentiated. In this way, the original critical impetus has ultimately lapsed into a susceptibility to perpetrator/victim reversal. This is also where Puar's exemplary turning away from queer theorists, who have written about the problematic reversal of positions in the context of sexualised violence, begins.

One such example is queer theorist Lynda Hart.[20] The case history of Aileen Wuornos, a lesbian sex worker who killed several of her rapists and was executed on the electric chair in 2002, is Hart's central example for the re-evaluation of female aggression, or rather: the consistent refusal to excuse the perpetrators that is being stigmatised as lesbian violence. Wuornos is confronted with a typical patriarchal sys-tem of demands: she is supposed to deny her experience as a victim of sexualised vio-lence and symbolically free her rapists from their guilt by confessing herself as a mur-derer, as a perpetrator. This sacrifice serves to distort the facts by pushing the very act of sexualised violence into the background and stabilises a regime whose most import-ant characteristic is to mark the refusal of reconciliation as aggression. It is thanks to queer theorists like Hart that the transgression of the ideological perpetrator/victim reversal could be elaborated and understood in the context of sexualised violence. Hart, like Lee Edelman, formulated sexual politics in a similar way to a critique of antisemitism: perpetrator/victim reversal is contextualised as a legacy of Christian morality. However, when Puar calls for the suicide bombers to be exonerated by equat-ing them with queer people such as Aileen Wuornos, she falls into the awkward posi-tion of demanding that the victims (of the attacks, the massacres, the rapes) deny their experience of violence. This turns the act of violence into an identity linked to violence – terrorism becomes a site of identification.

It is worth taking a closer look at the connection drawn here between sexuality, life, death and the act of killing. In his essay 'Against Survival: Queerness in a Time That's Out of Joint', Lee Edelman describes the normative field of identity formation as one in which life, in its distinction from death, has been replaced by a zone of survival, in which a future-oriented struggle for survival takes place through the "ideology of cul-tural survival".[21] To this end, everything that disrupts identity formation, and for Edel-man this is queerness, must be continuously, overwritten by norms.[22] For according to Edelman, queerness is never suitable to be integrated into identity formation – "To be queer is, in fact, not to be".[23] I would add that the struggle for survival represents therefore the acting out of an infantile desire to remain free of guilt or to continuously locate guilt in an outside of oneself. Edelman describes this struggle as a desire to be dominated by a symbolic father, to be taught a lesson ("will-to-be-taught")[24], that closes off an open future and devotes itself to "reproductive futurism"[25], the creation and longing for educative events.

From Edelman's critical perspective on the ideology of cultural survival, I would argue that the suicide bomber (but above all the Hamas fighter) is the identity formation that defends reproductive futurism as a fixed, irreconcilable vision of the future by (consciously) choosing to sacrifice everything and everyone (!) to its own ideology and postulates an excusability of its own actions as the norm. For Hamas's struggle is repeatedly ideologically anchored as the only possibility for Palestinian liberation and as the only legitimate resistance against Israel. It leaves no room for any identification other than that with Hamas and punishes even the slightest deviation with brutal violence against the civilian population. This violence can therefore only be described as a form of terrorism, because it manifests itself solely as a normative, authoritarian, futuristic practice and can therefore not have the slightest connection to the field of queer theory, which enables a simultaneous critique of homophobia and antisemitism.

Following the massacre of 7 October, it seems as if the mere invocation of the terrorist event has become a sign of a split-off and projected discourse, an invocation whose performative act would have been forbidden to us by both the opponents and some representatives of queer theory themselves. Judith Butler made this explicit by banning the use of the term 'terrorism' and concealing from us the implicit denial of the violence inherent in her own speech act.[26] Instead, it would have been necessary to focus on those normative requirements that sexualise political resistance for propaganda and war purposes (almost all left-wing structures are constantly called upon to include and passionately advocate 'free Palestine') and therefore urgently need the inclusion of sexual minorities as credible representatives of their struggle.

The non-discursive sexualisation of the suicide bombers as queer has certainly contributed to misjudging the sexualised violence of Hamas as an act of liberation. After an event like 7 October, these preconditioned sexual politics were used to seek a real reason for the violence as an inner truth among all those in whom, despite all the suspicions in the recent past, minimal trust has perhaps been achieved. Large parts of queer communities and queer academic fields are passionate supporters of 'No pride in occupation' (now 'No pride in genocide') and similar organisations, which made Israeli lesbians and gays complicit in, but rather guilty of, Israeli occupation policy even before 7 October but even more after, because they have gained a certain degree of nation-state rights and can therefore no longer be so easily identified as disadvantaged. Consequently, and this is probably the most tragic part of the massacre, the credibility of Israeli women* as victims of sexualised violence was made impossible. They are to be understood as accomplices, because the Hamas fighters are to be recognised as a marginalised, disadvantaged minority affected by racism, whose potential to be perpetrators or whose actual crime is to be forcefully denied.

However, participation in 'No pride in occupation' or similar boycott movements must be authenticated by individual Jewish feminists and queers, so that pressure can be exerted on all Jews to support them. Judith Butler, Naomi Klein, Sarah Schulman and many others repeatedly attribute the cause of the massacre to Israel and transform the war in Gaza into an act of aggression started by Israel, the Zionist, terrorist state. The recurring reference to Israeli occupation policy as the cause of 'legitimate resistance' suggests that Israelis themselves are responsible for their destruction and, above all, their rape. This reference once again repeats the most horrific part of homophobic and antisemitic violence: women* who do not conform to ideology are themselves to blame for the violence perpetrated against them. The goal to achieve is that it can be committed with impunity. Arguments starting with "But Israel …" after the rapes of 7 October did not follow a feminist form of critique that excludes the possibility of a perpetrator/victim reversal and ensures the condemnation of sexualised violence, which

is why they could not convince as a 'critique of Israel', no matter how much they were defended. What emerged here instead is a successful intimidation of women* and queers. Some of them (from the producers of academic discourse to those new jihadists who actively seek proximity to Hamas and other terrorist groups) are, out of their own experience of sexualised violence, dependent on the promise of healing through repetition, in the hope that things will be different next time. To achieve this, they must pay the high price of being apologetic to the perpetrators, finding an excuse for rape and condemning those friends, lovers and colleagues who are not doing the same. Hopefully there will be an environment created in the future in which we can learn more about their actual stories.

Notes

1 Love affairs, friendships, familiar colleagues, but also a not strictly delimited circle of familiar faces and voices form a social environment that evolves over many years through artistic-academic agreements, conflicts and debates. I will not name them in detail here.

2 Soviet antisemitism provided a template for this replacement. As an example of a vast field of material from the 1970s and 1980s, see Sergei Sedov, *Zionism Counts on Terror*. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1984. The short booklet includes a chapter titled 'Genocide Israeli Style'. For a German historical example, see Theodor Fritsch, *Die Zionistischen Protokolle. Das Programm der internationalen Geheim-Regierung*. Leipzig: Hammer Verlag, 1924. This antisemitic pamphlet focuses specifically on the incitement of resistance of oppressed peoples against Zionism; in the Nazi understanding, Zionism is about the foundation of a state from which the Jews would engage in capitalist and colonial exploitation of the world.

3 I would name Teresa de Lauretis (ed.), 'Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities', special issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Summer 1991), as a beginning of queer theory. De Lauretis' work on a Freudian model of lesbian sexuality shows queer theories' legacy of psychoanalysis.

4 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis. Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1994.

5 Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

6 Shortly after the book was published, it seemed as if someone had finally addressed those tricky positions which no one had been interested in until then. As a queer, migrant artist, I identified strongly with Puar's apparent achievements in destigmatising perpetrator figures and making multiple discrimination a visible topic. Because the struggle of migrant, queer people in Austria was precisely that. We were able to productively misjudge Puar because nobody wanted to be used for the racist stigmatisation of their own country of origin. Feeling like a Serbian 'terrorist' in Vienna and fighting back was not wrong; it was (and still is for many) a short-lived, performative, identity-political solution.

7 Bruno Chaouat articulates a well-founded critique of French post-war philosophy, which is decisive for the development of postmodern discourses that have been incorporated into queer theory and contemporary art production. Puar's Deleuzian tradition of ideas of nomadism, deterritorialisation and assemblage promotes a liberation discourse that primarily refers to the uninhibited, expressionist manifestation of a subjectivity, in which the instance of control, from which this subjectivity has to liberate itself, is shifted further and further into an abstract, non-objectively anchored space. This focus on the decentred subject depends on the mode of production established partly by the historical avant-garde (surrealism and futurism) which

translated selectively into postmodern and contemporary art with its elements of nihilistic thinking. The avant-garde's relationship to the object is defined through joy and excitement about the annihilation of the world, which often comes close to antisemitic fantasies of purification through destruction. See Bruno Chaouat, *Is Theory Good for the Jews? French Thought and the Challenge of the New Antisemitism*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016.

8 This concealed the fact that, as Marie-Luise Angerer has noted, there is a desire for affect that focuses on wishes for direct, immediate experience that are not limited or restricted from the outside. See Marie-Luise Angerer, *Vom Begehren nach dem Affekt*. Zürich/Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007.

9 The history of the left in the US turning to the Soviet Union is much longer, but I will only go into one crucial point here. Noam Chomsky, *9–11*. New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2001. Naomi Klein also contributes to promoting an uncritical, anti-imperialist US left by constructing a global economy as the cause of exploitative relations and deriving from this a policy whose best example is Israel as an apartheid state. Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2007.

10 This is an assertion that is reminiscent of Aime Cesaire's historically revisionist trope of the Holocaust as a boomerang for Europe's colonial crimes, and thus clearly has a theoretical location in an antisemitic tradition. Particularly in the debate surrounding documenta 15, which I will not go into here, it became clear to what extent the argument of antisemitism imported from the colonial West had established itself in contemporary art in former colonies that were involved in the anti-imperialist struggle. This reference was aimed at exonerating one's own culpability, but above all at further establishing the antisemitic perspective that the Holocaust was a consequence of European colonisation movements, as in: Eyal Weizman, 'Der Bumerang-Effekt. Documenta Views', *springerin / Hefte für Gegenwartskunst*, 4/2022.

11 The silence about or the appeasement of the elements of antisemitism does not go hand in hand with emancipatory interests, but always with an instrumental use of racism, which also characterised Soviet support for the so-called liberation of oppressed peoples. For this reason, applications of Puar's theories to the Russian and Austrian contexts, in which Austria assumes a homonational role vis-à-vis Russia without naming the increasing influence of Putin's policies in Austria, must also be reconsidered. See Masha Neufeld and Katharina Wiedlack, '*Wir sind Conchita*, nicht Russland, oder: Homonationalismus auf gut Österreichisch', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften*, 29(2) (2018): 153–75.

12 Mhmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni were hanged in Iran in 2006. Puar, ix.

13 Ibid., xi.

14 Ibid., 37.

15 Lisa Duggan, 'The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism', in Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (eds.), *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.

16 It is questionable why Dhawan does not abandon the trope of complicity, as she is explicitly against an ahistorical reduction of the state to a monopoly of violence. By understanding the state as the source of all rule, differentiated processes of state formation are disregarded, according to Dhawan. For Dhawan, the reconfiguration and reimagination of the state is only feasible with a practice of decolonisation that abolishes the universalism introduced by European colonialism, which would imply that sexual legislation can abolish any norms by claiming that they are a product of European colonialism. See Nikita Dhawan, 'Homonationalismus und Staatsphobie: Queering Dekolonisierungspolitiken, Queer-Politiken dekolonisieren', *Femina Politica* 1 (2015): 38–51.

17 Some examples of queer-bashing can be found in the volume *Siebter Oktober Dreiundzwanzig. Antizionismus und Identitätspolitik*, which includes the essay 'Die

Vordenkerin des queeren Antizionismus. Von Judith Butlers Prägung der Queer Theory zur Dekonstruktion des jüdischen Staates' by Chantalle El Helou. No conclusions can be drawn from Judith Butler's anti-Israel position to gender theory, which is of course not the preparation of an anti-Zionist position as claimed by Helou. Helou's argument is rather about the discrediting of an entire field of research. See Vojin Saša Vukadinović (ed.), *Siebter Oktober Dreiundzwanzig. Antizionismus und Identitätspolitik*. Berlin: querverlag, 2024.

18 Puar, Terrorist Assemblages, 22.

19 Ibid. 32.

20 Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression.* London: Routledge, 1994.

21 Lee Edelman, 'Against Survival: Queerness in a Time that's Out of Joint', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 2 (2011): 148–69.

22 Ibid., 149.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 169.

25 Ibid., 148.

26 Judith Butler: "We can have different views about Hamas as a political party. I think it is more honest and historically correct to say that the uprising of October 7 was an act of armed resistance. It is not a terrorist attack and it's not an antisemitic attack. It was an attack against Israelis. And, you know, I did not like that attack. I have gone public with this. I have gotten in trouble for saying it. It was for me anguishing. The violence done to Palestinians has been happening for decades. This was an uprising that comes out, it comes from a state of subjugation and against a violent state apparatus. Okay. Let us be clear. Now you can be for or against armed resistance. You can be for or against Hamas, but let us at least call it armed resistance and then we can have a debate about whether we think it's right or whether they did the right thing. The problem is if you call it armed resistance you are immediately thought to be in favor of armed resistance and in favor of that armed resistance and that tactic. It's like, well, maybe not that tactic. And we can discuss armed resistance. You know, it's an open debate." See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFjYFonN3ZI (4 February 2025).

Ana Hoffner ex-Prvulovic* (born 1980 in Paraćin, Yugoslavia) is an Austrian-Serbian artist, researcher and author. From 2020 to 2025 she was professor for artistic research at the University Mozarteum Salzburg where she co-developed the PhD in the Arts, a transdisciplinary doctoral program for artists. She has received several awards for her politically engaged artistic work. Hoffner ex-Prvulovic*'s work can be located in the fields of contemporary art, art history, cultural studies and critical theory. Recurring themes in her works are queerness, global capitalism, colonialism and the East, forms of flight, early psychoanalysis, and the politics of memory and war. She works with video, photography, installation and performance. Hoffner ex-Prvulovic* has been exhibiting her work both in Austria and internationally since the 2000s. Her monograph *Antisemitism, Homophobia and Contemporary Art* is forthcoming from Routledge, and *Denialism. Antisemitismus und sexualisierte Gewalt aus feministischer Perspektive*, which she co-edited with Livia Erdösi and Nora Sternfeld, is forthcoming from Verbrecher Verlag, Berlin.

Lecture On Queer Hostility and Antisemitism
Veronika Kracher

Actually, I don't want to have to sit here. I don't want to have to give this lecture, in which I will talk about the relationship between antisemitism and LGBTQ hostility. Because the fact that I'm sitting here talking about this topic is primarily a reaction to the worldwide increase in attacks against the queer community, which has become the number one enemy of the global right in recent years. And the brutal extent of the attacks against the queer community is actually far too enormous to be able to adequately address everything that is going wrong in a fifty- or sixty-minute lecture. We have the illegalisation of queer lifestyles in Uganda. Under the mullah dictatorship in Iran, gays are being murdered by the regime's henchmen. In Chechnya, there are camps for homosexual men that one eyewitness compared to concentration camps. In Russia, Vladimir Putin passed a law against 'homosexual propaganda in public' ten years ago – and thus continued to work on consistently undermining liberal democracy. In Poland, neo-Nazis have set up 'LGBTQ-free zones'. In the UK, 'concerned mums', conservative politicians, and publications like the *Daily Mail* are waging a massive disinformation campaign against trans people's bodily autonomy, supported by public figures like Graham Linehan and JK Rowling, who is not above publishing an entire novel packed with trans-hostile tropes. In April of this year, the Supreme Court in the UK declared that gender should be determined by chromosomes, accompanied by a sardonic comment from a once-popular children's author – but you just *had* to buy *Hogwarts Legacy*. Here in Germany, too, a community consisting of the CDU/CSU, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), the remnants of the lateral thinking movement, neo-Nazis, trans-hostile, wannabe 'feminists' are agitating against the – in my opinion relatively tame – self-determination law, drag queen story hours or the display of kink at pride parades. And all of these actors generally have a great deal of financial clout, political influence and excellent contacts. We also have radicalisation and networking via the internet: explicitly anti-trans troll forums such as Kiwi Farms or Lolcow, whose users carry out coordinated hate campaigns; image boards such as 4chan, where misanthropy is celebrated as a cynical joke; and normal social media platforms such as Facebook, Reddit, TikTok, YouTube and X, formerly known as Twitter, which do not consider queer-hostile content to be problematic. Twitter, in particular, which was bought by billionaire Elon Musk, who is increasingly inclined towards fascism and conspiracy ideologies, in an act of narcissistic offence (his wife left him for a transgendered whistleblower; being rejected at Berghain), has become a fertile breeding ground for anti-queer propaganda. Accounts such as 'Libs of TikTok', whose operator Chaya Raichik proudly describes herself as a "stochastic terrorist", have over four million followers**.** 'Libs of TikTok' regularly shares outrage material about, say, hospitals allegedly performing gender reassignment surgery, or libraries organising readings with drag queens for children – and the mob follows her lead with actions such as sending bomb threats to said children's hospital. Influencers like Andrew Tate turn anti-feminism, misogyny and LGBTQ hostility into a lucrative business model and teach teenagers the systematic devaluation of everything that is not chauvinistic, cis-hetero-'alpha masculinity' – whatever that actually may be.
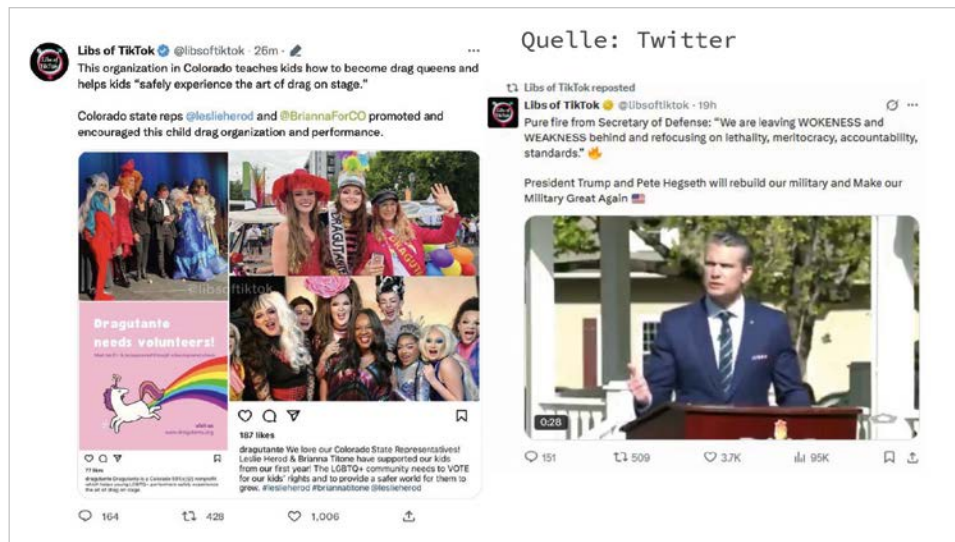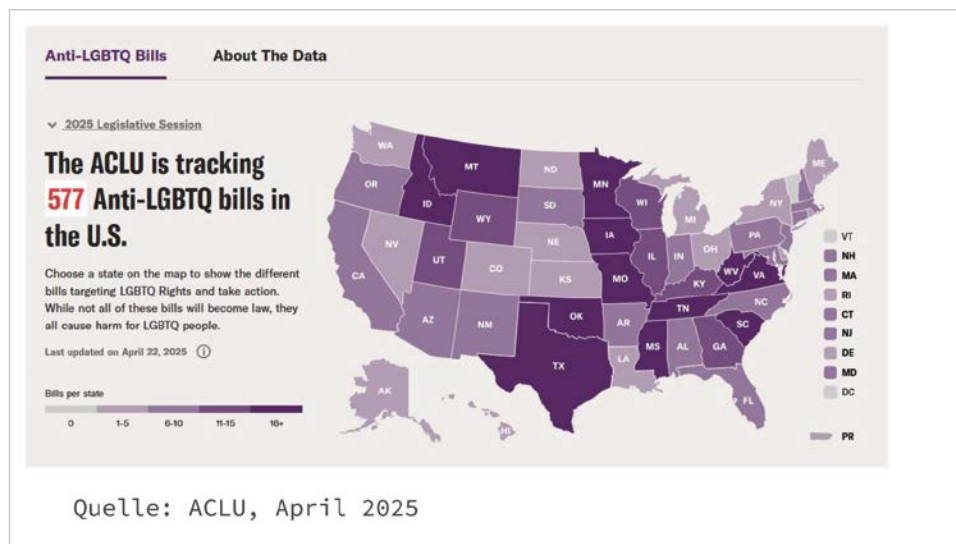
Slide from my power point presentation

In the United States, we can clearly see what happens when online radicalised edgelords come to political power. During his election campaign, US President Donald Trump declared everything that falls under the label 'woke' to be public enemy number one. Since the beginning of 2025, over 500 (!) pieces of legislation targeting homosexual, bisexual, transgender and intersex people have been discussed in the USA Anti-feminists like the 'theocratic fascist' Matt Walsh radicalise bourgeois conservatives into right-wing radicalism on the basis of queerphobia. Republican Party events can hardly be distinguished from the 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville in 2017, where protesters chanted "Jews will not replace us". Donald Trump, Elon Musk and their party of boot-lickers are working flat out to turn the USA into a fascist state, and the CEOs of major companies are willingly joining in – Holocaust Memorial Day, for example, can no longer be found on the Google calendar. The 'fight against diversity, equity and inclusion' is now item number one on the presidential agenda: companies and universities must adapt to a Christian nationalist, patriarchal and white supremacist ideology, Photos with Black or female soldiers from the photo database are deleted.

In short, the war against the LGBTQIA+ community has become one of the most important aspects of the culture war from the right. And its goal is – this may sound dramatic now, but it is actually the case – the repression, even the eradication, of queer existence. The draft laws in Republican states in the USA in particular make this very clear, and show that when the queer community speaks of a 'war', this is not exaggerated scaremongering but a concrete and cruel reality.

In addition to the structural violence caused by reactionary legislation and per-manent demonisation by traditional and social media, there is also very specific violence against lesbians, gays, bisexual, trans and gender-nonconforming people in general. In rural areas in particular, many people are familiar with this: after the euphoria of the Pride Parade or queer parties, it's time to go home, and with that comes the removal of glitter from the face and rainbow pins from clothing, while rainbow flags are quickly stuffed into pockets for fear of causing a stir with the wrong people. In Germany, offences against queer people have been steadily increasing for years. This violence can extend to murder and terror – just think of the trans man Malte C., who was beaten to death after CSD in Münster in 2022. In addition, two explicitly LGBTQ-hostile terrorist attacks shook the queer scene and its allies: in October 2022, a right-wing terrorist radicalised via the internet shot two visitors to the Tepláreň bar in Bratislava; his mani-festo was a collection of LGBTQ-hostile and antisemitic murder fantasies. Just one

Slide from my power point presentation

month later, a young man murdered five visitors to Club Q in Colorado Springs, where an 'All Ages Drag Brunch' was taking place at the time. In Minneapolis in 2023, there was also an armed attack on a queer punk show, killing the musician August Goldin.

In a better world, I wouldn't have to research and lecture on this violence. Audiences wouldn't spend their evening listening to me and having their mood spoilt. But we have to do it. We must not close our eyes to what is happening. The goal of any progressive political work should be the abolition of this violence – and so it is with mine. I work in memory of all the victims of queer-hostile violence, and to do my little bit to help curb it. And I'm glad I'm not doing this alone. So thank you very much for the invitation, to the organisers and to the audience who accepted this invitation. Unfortunately, I won't be able to talk about all the topics I've just touched on – a book of several hundred pages could be written on each of them. I will talk about the connection between LGBTQ hostility and antisemitism, which are closely interwoven, both historically and ideologically. First, I'll give a brief historical overview, then I'll talk about current examples of the connection between antisemitism and queerphobia, many of which come from my intensive monitoring work on neo-Nazis, conspiracy believers and transphobic trolls. I will also try to categorise and explain these ideologies from a socio-psychological perspective, because in order to adequately combat queer hostility, we need a fundamental understanding of its ideological background and function.

Let's take a look at the propaganda being promoted from the centre right to the far right: instead of being systematically discriminated against, queer people allegedly have billions in wealth, social influence and powerful allies. They have an extremely powerful LGBTQ lobby that has its fingers in every pie, as a patron of protection. The gender mania financed by billionaires like George Soros is spreading worldwide, with the sole and declared aim of sacrificing traditional gender roles, the bourgeois nuclear family and, above all, the well-being of our children on the altar of postmodern gender madness. And these homos and trans people are everywhere: at universities, in Hollywood, in parliaments, editorial offices and NGOs. Using diabolical weapons such as 'diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)', 'cancel culture' and a 'woke opinion dictatorship', they silence any criticism, no matter how quiet (that is, except for interviews, lectures, lead articles and expressions of solidarity on social media, but otherwise you are REALLY NOT ALLOWED TO SAY ANYTHING).

Slide from my power point presentation

Wait a minute: a sexually deviant and overpowering minority controls world events to serve its own interests and brainwashes humanity in the process – doesn't this narrative sound a little familiar? It is no coincidence that LGBTQ foes regularly utilise structurally to openly antisemitic narratives, as the fight against gender and sexual self-determination and anti-feminism is historically and ideologically closely linked to these. Since the fin de siècle, a specific image of German masculinity (or femininity) has been established as the antipode to either the effeminate Jew or the masculinised Jewess. Here, the white, Christian, bourgeois, heterosexual and cisgender man is understood as the norm, and everything that deviates from it as the 'other'. (By the way, I don't want to equate queer hostility with antisemitism here; that would be ahistorical and would level out the specific ideology and violence. My aim is to show the interconnectedness and demonstrate that LGBTQ hostility operates on a massive scale with antisemitic resentment and conspiracy narratives).

These gender concepts were cemented above all under National Socialism; they still live on in the radical and extreme right. In antisemitic discourse, Jewishness is still equated with queerness and perversion. Examples of this are the depiction of the Jewish woman as an intellectual, cigar-smoking 'man-woman' or the portrayal of the Jewish man as unfit for military service and therefore not adequately masculine, and as nervously and physically weak, i.e. feminine. Both 'the Jew' and 'the woman' were attesting the inability to participate in political discourse, the mental inability to have a say in politics, which was determined on the basis of physical characteristics. This development of the sexist 'gender character' (a term coined by the feminist sociologist Karin Hausen), the development of religious anti-Judaism into racist antisemitism and the idea of the 'effeminate Jew', which linked the two, coincided with the peak of nationalist endeavours at the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century (see, for example, the Treitschke controversy). Shortly after the turn of the century, the ardent antisemite Otto Weininger wrote in his highly regarded dissertation *Gender and Character*: "The fact that the Jew has not only been alien to the state since yesterday, but more or less from time immemorial, already indicates that the Jew, like the woman, lacks personality [...] For only from the lack of the intelligible ego can, like all female egos, the Jewish unsociability be derived." In this text, Weininger establishes the image of the ideal man, who is diametrically opposed to what Weininger understands as both the 'ideal woman' and the Jew.

Slide from my power point presentation

Slide from my power point presentation

In the German Empire, the ideal image of German masculinity ALWAYS went hand in hand with the idea of militarism and nationalism. The cultural scientist Klaus Theweleit describes in his dissertation *Male Fantasies* that this combination of masculinity, commitment to the nation and glorification of soldiering and war formed the breeding ground for National Socialism. Because, when we talk about fascism, we HAVE to talk about the hatred of the non-masculine – and also about the fact that the 'Jew' was automatically equated with 'non-masculine'.

The fact that the Germans suffered a brutal defeat in the First World War was accompanied by a massive break in the nationalist self-image. This is why the German national psyche worked collectively to rebuild its own self-image, by establishing the Jew as the culprit behind the German failure – keyword 'stab-in-the-back legend'. Even though Jews had of course fought on the side of Germany in the First World War, the image of the Jew as an anti-soldier was established – too effeminate to go to war, he had contributed to the downfall of the German Reich**.** For example, he was said to be 'narrow-chested' or 'Jewish flat-footed', which was a hindrance to military drill or long

marches; the attribution of an inability to perform military service was an elementary component of antisemitic images of the 1920s and 1930s.

In the Prussian state, however, where militarism was understood as part of being a man, the *inability* to do military service was, as it were, a denial of masculinity. As the body was considered to represent the mental constitution, this inability to perform military service was also a characteristic of the alleged 'Jewish cowardice', which was pathologised as a consequence of the weak nervous constitution of 'the Jew' – just as 'the woman' was often accused of a lack of mental composure.

Following Freud's thoughts on psychoanalysis, I would just name the circumcised penis of the Jewish man as a partial cause of effemination – a circumcised man is perceived as 'castrated', the circumcised penis is compared to the clitoris, and by means of the seemingly omnipresent Jewish threat, however, he seemed to be able to perform a symbolic castration on the German man 'in himself' by taking over the German nation – as he had apparently done by stabbing the proud empire in the back.

Another aspect that Theweleit emphasises in *Male Fantasies* is the staging of the Aryan body – and thus the body of the people – as steeled, hard, clinically clean and pure – while the Germans' enemies are often portrayed as explicitly 'dirty' and sick. Associating Jews with the spread of diseases – including sexual ones – is a classic antisemitic resentment, and this is repeated above all in the prejudices against men who desire other men.

In antisemitism, the Jewish man is portrayed as impotent, as it were, and as a rapist – sometimes a paedophile – who assaults not only German women, but even German children. This narrative is now experiencing a revival in the 'grooming' accusation that reactionary actors level at trans people and drag queens in particular. It is no coincidence that the AfD has chosen this very clear imagery. It suggests: 'The deviant, degenerate, modern foreigner is attacking *our German children,* the most vulnerable members of our national body'. This is also intended to convey that same-sex desire or trans identity is not something natural and normal, and that queer children are usually aware of their queerness from a very early age, but insinuates that queerness is brought to children from outside: they are 'indoctrinated' by an LGBTQ agenda and don't know any better (keyword 'early sexualisation'). It must therefore be the task of concerned parents and citizens to protect these children against misgendering, the banning of puberty blockers and gender reassignment measures, physical violence and even conversion therapy. The narrative of the sexually assaulted trans woman who is just waiting to enter the pure halls of cis womanhood like a foreign body and commit offences against innocent cis women, goes in a similar direction. In both cases, images are evoked of groups in need of protection, whose physical and sexual safety is threatened by queer people, and this is accompanied by an indirect appeal to the upright, combative man to defend himself. A particularly drastic example is the call by the trans-hostile activist Kelly Jay-Keen, better known as Posie Parker, who in a stream called on cis men to patrol women's toilets armed in order to defend visitors from trans women. But yes, this image of the sexually deviant 'other' as a threat to the generally white, cisheteronormative, bourgeois status quo, which specifically focuses on very basic fears such as the safety of women and children, is a classic in the right-wing repertoire of hatred. Incidentally, this fuelling of fear also serves to conceal the fact that sexual violence is primarily carried out in close proximity and primarily by cis men.

Quellen: AfD Telegram, Deutsches historisches Museum

Slide from my power point presentation

As the antipode to the Aryan woman, the Jewish woman is constructed either as a beautiful seductress or an intellectual and often lesbian-coded 'shotgun woman', and with her striving for emancipation and spiritual fulfilment, as well as the promiscuity attributed to her, she is set as the antithesis of the simple, sincere Aryan girl who, instead of devoting herself to such gender-inappropriate pursuits as intellectual endeavours and permissive sexuality, naturally dedicates her entire body, especially of course her uterus, to the German people.

It can therefore be summarised that 'Jewish' sexuality is antagonistic to 'German' sexuality. If the disciplined German man is able to subordinate his own instincts for the good of the people, Jewish (as well as gay and lesbian!) sexuality, just like the rest of the Jewish 'being', is materialistic and selfish, concerned only with its own pleasure. However, unlike the racist attribution of 'black' instinctiveness, their 'abnormality' does not result from a lack of civilisation, but from 'too much' of it. Marxist theorist Bini Adamczak comments: "Gender relations in antisemitic discourse are described precisely as decadent, unnaturalised, perverse, modern" – in other words, precisely the same attributions that are directed at queer people today.

The interplay between queer hostility and antisemitism is particularly evident in the attacks on the Institute for Sexual Science, which was founded by Magnus Hirschfeld in Berlin in 1919. Magnus Hirschfeld was gay, Jewish and a socialist – the ultimate enemy of German fascism, which was characterised by the celebration of soldierly masculinity, eliminatory antisemitism and brutal anti-communism.

The Institute for Sexual Science was groundbreaking in its function as a scientific institution, as well as a place of international networking and activism for queer people – the first gender reassignment procedures for trans people were carried out there. During the Weimar Republic, Hirschfeld and his team attempted to decriminalise and normalise homosexuality and transsexuality – still referred to as 'transvestism' at the time – which were a thorn in the side of the Nazis with their 'blood and soil' policy. Hirschfeld was regularly attacked as a gay, socialist Jew. In 1907, the scientist found notes outside his house with the inscription "Dr Hirschfeld a public danger – the Jews are our misfortune!", and in 1920 he was beaten up by a fascist after a lecture on the decriminalisation of male homosexuality. Even before 1933, the institute was regularly 'visited' by SA men, which the police dismissed with the excuse that "they must have

been communists in disguise". Hirschfeld's lectures, as well as screenings of the gay sex-education film *Different from the Others*, in which Hirschfeld acted as an advisor and appeared himself, were regularly disrupted by fascist thugs, and organisers regularly received threatening letters (this also sounds bitterly familiar). Hirschfeld's petition to abolish Section 175 of the German Criminal Code was also vilified early on as an allegedly Jewish project, and homosexuality – like feminism – was portrayed as a 'Jewish invention' for the 'degeneration' of the German people.

In May 1933, the institute was destroyed by Nazis – mainly right-wing extremist fraternity members – and Hirschfeld's works were destroyed as part of the book burning. Hirschfeld was accused of spreading 'pornography' – the Jew as pornographer and pimp is also a classic antisemitic cliché – and of having an 'un-German spirit' in general, which the purifying fire of National Socialism wanted to put an end to. This went hand in hand with the closure of all queer establishments in Germany. We see history repeating itself in the United States under Donald Trump: the banning of books with queer, anti-racist and socialist content in Republican states like Florida. Anti-intellectualism is a core principle of fascism, and the banning or burning of books, especially from the fields of art and humanities, is an excellent indicator of a society turning away from democracy.

It is also noteworthy that Hirschfeld's name was mentioned very prominently and frequently at the book burning, during which the Nazis destroyed the works of Jews, liberals, pacifists, democrats, communists, women's rights activists and generally all those who were associated with a 'modernity' that always had Jewish connotations; Nazis had also visibly attached an antisemitic caricature of the man to a demonstration wagon – because Hirschfeld was gay, Jewish and a socialist.

As we know, this hatred of all forms of sexuality that did not fit in with the Nazis' 'blood and soil' ideology resulted in the systematic extermination of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and trans people in labour and concentration camps. Incidentally, queer victims were not compensated after the Nazi era, but continued to be persecuted as 'criminals' under Paragraph 175 in the Federal Republic of Germany – further proof that there was never any real denazification in Germany.

That homosexuality and feminism are part of a sinister Jewish plot to destroy the white, heterosexual nuclear family, and thus the white race, is also a recurring element in the right-wing battle concept of 'cultural Marxism', which can be found in tweets by AfD politicians, in the manifesto of the mass murderer and right-wing terrorist who murdered over seventy people – mainly young socialists – in Oslo and Utoya in 2011, as well as in articles in conservative newspapers.

The catchphrase 'cultural Marxism' is very clearly based on the Nazi concept of 'cultural Bolshevism' and should also be understood in this antisemitic and anti-communist tradition. It was developed in the 1960s by US right-wingers and really became a part of public discourse after the far-right, anti-communist terrorist attack on Utoya: the perpetrator wrote hundreds of pages in his manifesto about how cultural Marxism was one of the main causes of feminism, the decline of the West and therefore also the acceptance of refugees and Islam.

The conspiracy behind cultural Marxism claims that after fleeing the Nazis to the USA, the representatives of the Frankfurt School – i.e. communist Jews – used their knowledge of social psychology and the culture industry to destroy the American values of freedom, apple pie and the patriarchal nuclear family of the 1950s. The members of the Frankfurt School would have established their corrosive ideas at universities and in Hollywood, thus fuelling the decline of American society. And the media and universities continue to be driven by this agenda; an idea that is fundamentally and deeply antisemitic.

Slide from my power point presentation

Slide from my power point presentation

In the USA in the 1950s, a connection between anti-communism, queerphobia and antisemitism was articulated in the narratives of the Red Scare and the Lavender Scare: communists would rule universities; homosexual communists would rule Hollywood. Structural antisemitism was a recurring undertone of this panic, which expressed itself in systematic repression against people branded as communist and homosexual.

Cultural Marxism, embodied above all by the sociologist and former professor Herbert Marcuse, is seen as the driving force behind progressive movements. According to this ideology, feminism, anti-racism, the emancipation of queer people or even labour struggles are not independent movements, but part of a larger plan to – what else – destroy the white race. Talk of cultural Marxism regularly ends in the far-right conspiracy narrative of the Great Replacement – which has been used by numerous right-wing terrorists such as the perpetrators of the Christchurch, Halle or Buffalo attacks as the reason for their crimes. This conspiracy narrative says, in a nutshell: cultural Marxism and its agents not only seduce women into feminism and men into homosexuality, but also channel streams of refugees into Europe and the USA so that they can multiply and overpopulate the country, while white women prefer to

Slide from my power point presentation

devote themselves to such gender-inappropriate pursuits as a career. It can't possibly be that people are seeking protection from war, hunger and political persecution, but rather they aim to overpopulate the country as well as to commit offences against white women – an age-old, racist myth that is rehashed again and again. The racist hatred of non-white men is characterised by colonial racism and is pathological: they are envied for their supposed potency, drive and virility, as these are an expression of the 'original masculinity' that they themselves have supposedly lost. The white man, on the other hand, cannot fight against his wife being abused by the sexually virile immigrants, as he has been effeminised and emasculated by cultural Marxism and the PC dictatorship. Thus, it is precisely here that the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy, the anti-feminist demand for women to return to the role of mother for the people, the masculinist desire for traditional masculinity and racist attributions to men of colour coincide.

The fact that Jews are accused of exterminating whites is a classic moment of pathic projection in antisemitism: in the course of the development of this pathic projection, the inner antagonisms are externalised and projected onto an external enemy – in this case, Jews. Freudian psychoanalysis understands pathic projection as the displacement of the repressed impulses of the id onto objects in the environment, in order to seemingly detach the ego from them. In short, the Jew is seen as desiring the annihilation of whites in order to be able to deny his own desire for annihilation and project it onto the other, which is then persecuted all the more vehemently. Fascists see themselves as victims of a 'genocide against whites', which is of course nothing more than a paranoid delusion. One name that crops up time and again is that of Holocaust survivor and billionaire Georg Soros, who has now become the number one enemy of the global right. Soros's Open Society Foundation, which is committed to philanthropic causes, is then taken as supposed 'proof' that progressive movements do not emerge organically, but are coordinated 'from above' and with financial resources provided. In short: George Soros serves as a projection for everything that these people feel threatened by.

I would like to talk about this sense of threat in more detail because it is integral to analysing antisemitism, racism, anti-feminism, anti-genderism and fascism. These are all ideologies of inequality based on the devaluation of others for the narcissistic exaltation of the self, and are therefore extremely attractive to people with a weak ego. Because these people are in a state of permanent fear for their own patriarchal, white,

bourgeois … supremacy. For ego-weak individuals, identification with this supremacy, and the position based on it of devaluing marginalised people in order to exalt themselves, is an integral part of their own personality and identity. As a result, they see feminism, or anti-racism, or anti-nationalism, or even just the demand for a speed limit, not only as a political programme that criticises their way of life and ideology, but *specifically as a personal affront.* When we talk about fascist ideology or misogyny or queerphobia, we must always bear one thing in mind: it is not rational. The whole thing is the result of pathological anger at no longer being allowed to be misanthropic without contradiction. That's why the reaction is often so emotional, angry, even regularly articulated in fantasies of violence: it's the panicked howling of people who are afraid that, in the worst case, the damned of this earth will demand consequences for what has been done to them.

Queer hostility in particular is based on the affirmation of patriarchal and thus cis- and heteronormative rule, which is usually articulated in the bourgeois nuclear family. This is charged and defended in a reactionary way as a 'protective space' against the 'foreign' and 'other'. This always goes hand in hand with a defence of traditional gender roles – i.e. the man as breadwinner and protector, the woman primarily reduced to the roles of housewife and mother. The biological essentialisation of gender is inherent in these gender images. Queerness, and transgender in particular, is perceived as a threat to these gender images and is therefore vehemently rejected; cisgender, on the other hand, is defended affectively. Weak-ego men in particular, who build their identity on the systematic devaluation of the non-masculine, see themselves being threatened by feminist and queer emancipation – after all, they are denied the right to discriminate without consequences. Reactionary, and usually fascist images of masculinity, on the other hand, offer the opportunity to regain sovereignty: "Feminism and cultural Marxism want to castrate me and make me gay and take women away from me, but if I swallow the 'red pill' and organise myself in male fascist groups, I will regain this masculinity that was taken away from me!"

At this point, I would like to emphasise that it is precisely in view of this ideological connection that 'playing off' the interests of cis women against those of trans people reveals itself to be incredibly ridiculous; contrary to what anti-trans 'feminists' claim, both cis women and trans and inter* people are fighting the same battle: namely, the battle for bodily self-determination against a biologistic and patriarchally based, domineering body politics. The fact that women like JK Rowling play the struggles of cis and trans women off against each other is nothing more than the authoritarian stepping on weaker people in order to be able to play a little part in the patriarchy under the label of 'women's rights' – but this pseudo-feminism only enforces the patriarchy instead of abolishing it.

Queerphobes constantly insinuate that they are no longer allowed to say that 'there are only two genders' because of a 'woke dictatorship of opinion'. So they present themselves as an oppressed underdog who is prevented from telling the truth by an overpowering 'lobby' – which, as I said, is of course complete nonsense, because if this cancel culture really existed, we wouldn't have to listen to constant queer-hostile rubbish. Those who shout about cancel culture are usually just complaining about the fact that their own misanthropy is suddenly being contradicted. Sociologist Volker Weiß describes this as an "authoritarian revolt". Instead of facing up to the fact that they are opposing a group of people who are extremely vulnerable, especially trans and inter* people, they fantasise about being on the defensive. This is also rooted in the irrational sense of threat that I mentioned. Through this false but internalised narrative of standing up to a superior force threatening 'our women and children', queerphobes justify their hatred: they are not attacking extremely vulnerable people, they are defending women, children and their people as a whole from evil perverts who also have a bil-

lionaire like Georg Soros on their side. This pathological-projective perpetrator-victim reversal is an integral part of conspiracy narratives, and the narrative that there is a powerful lobby deliberately indoctrinating society through propaganda is nothing other than a conspiracy narrative that is structurally and openly antisemitic. The fact that more and more people of all ages are coming out as queer is not the result of a targeted propaganda machine, but rather an indication that our struggles for safety and visibility against structural and concrete violence are finally bearing fruit, so that coming out is now – albeit not always – much safer and more relaxed than it was twenty years ago. And, by the way, if there is this overpowering lobby, why haven't people like Elon Musk and JK Rowling been dispossessed by an army of trans women armed to the teeth?
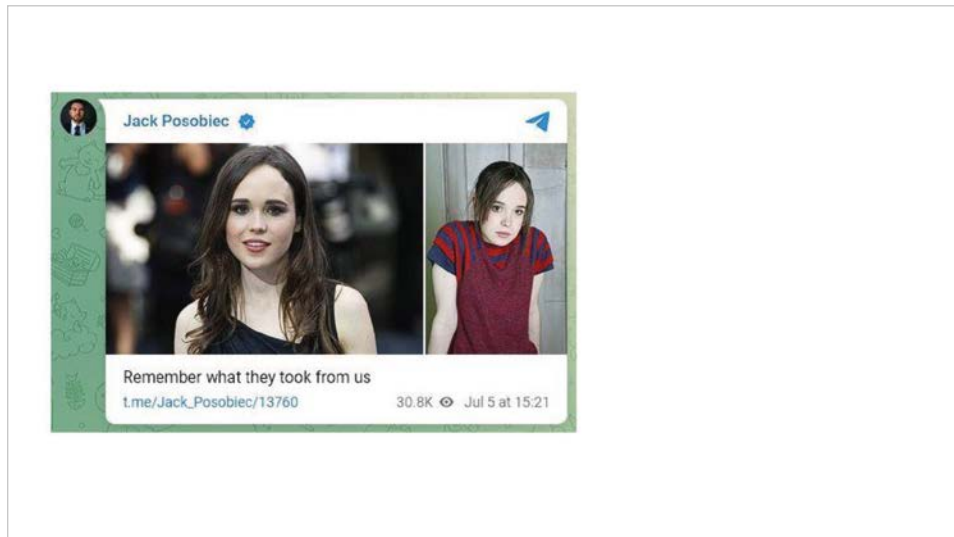
Slide from my power point presentation

Now I'm going to point out a few contemporary examples of queer-hostile and antisemitic conspiracy narratives. I have noticed that the remnants of the lateral thinking movement have become a fertile breeding ground for virtually every form of reactionary outrage – from the energy crisis to hatred against climate activists to hatred against homosexual and transgender people.

This hate speech is increasingly culminating in anti-queer murders and even acts of terrorism. The manifesto of the Bratislava attacker is a particularly clear example of the interplay between antisemitism and queerphobia. This document shows so clearly what is inherent in the ideology espoused by the AfD, conspiracy ideologues, anti-feminists and right-wing radicals: the act of annihilation.

   The Bratislava assassin's manifesto clearly shows the almost paranoid traits of antisemitism. He writes on dozens of pages about the omnipotence and omnipresence of Jewish rule and control. One example: the federal ban on abortion in the USA was, he claims, actually brought about by the "Zionist-Occupied Government" in order to contribute to an increase in black birth rates – which would ultimately contribute to the Great Replacement. Hatred of Jews is the common thread that runs through the perpetrator's work, be it in the form of swear words, conspiracy narratives, Holocaust denial, fantasies of violence or concrete instructions for acts of terrorism. The other common thread is queerphobia: several pages of the manifesto are directed against homosexual and especially transgender people, whom he pathologises, insults and denies the right to exist.

One page stands out: the perpetrator writes about a transgender boy, apparently from his circle of acquaintances. TikTok, a supportive circle of friends, and of course the propaganda of the Jewish trans lobby would have persuaded the teenager – who is consistently misgendered by the perpetrator – to take testosterone and have a mastectomy. The claim that social media corrupts young people into being transgender is well known and also widespread in the bourgeois spectrum. The perpetrator's manifesto is a consistent ideological continuation of socially established trans hostility, in which he writes that queer people would weaken and "degenerate" society. The hate messages directed against trans women – "you can tell by your bone structure that you are trans, you will never be a real woman" – can be found almost word for word in the books, articles and tweets of bourgeois-conservative trans enemies.

Migration, feminism, queer visibility, Marxism, and all other aspects associated with modernity: for the perpetrator of the Bratislava attack, these are all instruments of Jewish domination. Not only is it meant to weaken the white race, but – here he quotes a post on the imageboard 4chan – *to personally humiliate* white men*:* "The enemy doesn't want Pride parades on your street, drag queens in your adverts, your son transgendered, your parents dead from opioids, your daughter in a relationship with someone of a different origin [he uses a racist term, however], or your flesh replaced by bugs while the media laughs at you because he thinks it will do any good. He wants it because he knows you can't stop him, because he wants to humiliate you. There is no other reason."

But the classic question remains: what is to be done? I am not speaking here as a sociologist or journalist, but as a private individual, specifically as a member of the LGBTQ community. The last few months and years have shown that unfortunately, the authorities are often not very reliable. That's why I appeal to the community to remember its history and its strength: our love and solidarity for one another. Yes, the situation is drastic. But that is precisely why we should put aside trivialities such as disputes on the platform X in favour of political organisation. Let us remember the struggles of Stonewall, the demonstrations against Paragraph 175, the lesbian women who took to the streets to fight for their gay brothers who, during the AIDS pandemic, were condemned to die by inactive governments. Despite all the repression, it is important not to forget the moment of liberation that is inherent in our movement and to draw strength and vigour from it. Because we will need that in the coming years.

———————————————

Veronika Kracher is a researcher, writer and activist. Since 2015, she has been studying the intersection of online radicalisation, anti-feminism and far-right extremism, a topic she has also written numerous articles on and given lectures and workshops about. In 2020, she published her first book, *Incels: Geschichte, Sprache und Ideologie eines Online-Kults*, on the incel subculture. She is currently working on her second book, which examines the function of online misogyny and misogynistic hate campaigns – such as Gamergate or the campaign directed at Amber Heard – as an instrument of far-right culture wars.

Broken Chains, Binding Challenges
# The Black-Jewish Alliance: Past, Present and Potential
Michaela Dudley

Apartheid state, colonial power, racist regime. We are all too familiar with the persistent allegations. Such malignments fundamentally mischaracterise Israel as a white oppressor state. The claims are certainly nothing new. They have been circulating for decades, while excusing and encouraging violence against the Jewish state. Yet they have intensified with calculated precision since the cataclysmic events of 7 October 2023. Conveniently overlooked, however, is the fundamental truth that the Jewish community, both within Israel and across the global diaspora, constitutes a vibrant mosaic of individuals representing a spectrum of skin colours and diverse ethno-cultural origins. These basic, readily available facts challenge any effort at a monolithic racial categorisation.

Nevertheless, the underlying objective of these detractors, achieved through the deployment of antisemitic theories and tropes, reveals a more surreptitious motive. Indeed, it exceeds wanting to sow racial discontent simply *within* the Jewish community. In fact, it involves the cynical instrumentalisation of vast numbers of *non-Jewish people of colour* in an attempt to strategically stigmatise Jews and separate them from their proximity to other marginalised groups, further contributing to their own isolation. This, in turn, aims to deny Jews their legitimate place within the broader scope of struggles for social justice.

Accordingly, the crucial question then becomes: how can such hostile attacks be thwarted? The answer lies in rediscovering the potent legacy of an historically profound alliance, unearthing the deeply rooted and intertwined experiences of African Americans and Jewish Americans, two communities that have battled systemic oppression.

Speaking as a Catholic of African American heritage, I don't hesitate to acknowledge that many non-Jewish people of colour view Jews as being invincible or so well established that they are no longer at risk of being marginalised, given that they have survived the likes of Herod and Hitler. Conversely, the Jewish community sometimes underestimate the unique and persistent impact of institutional racism and the ongoing vulnerabilities faced by Black people. The fact is, the two communities must remind each other and humankind itself that neither Black nor Jewish suffering is a closed chapter in this world. Both, notwithstanding their distinct forms, unfortunately remain constants in this world.
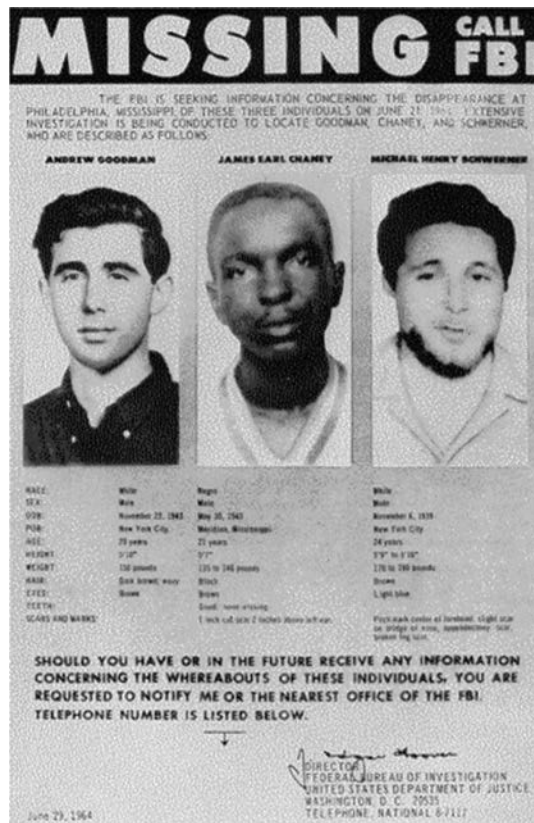
A wanted poster with photographs of the missing men (from left to right): Andrew Goodman, James Earl Chaney and Michael Schwerner, 29 June 1964. (Source: Public Domain. FBI).

Common Ground and a Common Grave

It was 1964. I was barely three years old at the time. While playing with wooden ABC building blocks on the living-room rug, I suddenly stopped. Like my parents, I began to stare at the images flickering on the black-and-white television screen. An FBI poster was being shown. It depicted three men side-by-side in mugshot fashion. A Black man named James Earl Chaney in the centre, flanked by two white men, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. However, the urgently sought individuals were not suspects, but missing persons. Missing persons in Mississippi.

> Something, one way or another, was in the air. In the stifling heat, the scent of faded magnolias and fermented molasses hung heavy. Outsiders who found themselves here perceived the aroma as both intoxicating and unsettling. It was a sickly-sweet, putrid cocktail of smells, often accompanied by a smoky undertone. The locals were unfazed. Back then, it was common practice to deliberately burn overgrown pastures to make way for new growth. So, the scent of mulch and straw repeatedly stung the nostrils, tickling and even tormenting.
>
> At times, however, one could also smell burnt wood. Burnt wood that evoked eerie rituals. Rituals straight out of ghost stories. Yet, these ghost stories were rooted in the present and corresponded to the truth. At night, crosses blazed on the open hills while white shadows swirled in the moonlight. Sometimes, the flames engulfed a log cabin. An inhabited, overcrowded log cabin, whose remains rose into the firmament the next morning as gray, shimmering clouds of ash, permeated by the acrid aromas of decomposition. Whoever thought to seek refuge in the coolness of the forests could suddenly stumble upon a slit,

Broken Chains, Binding Challenges. The Black-Jewish Alliance

Let's Talk About …

The burned-out station wagon of the three CORE activists. (Source: Public Domain. FBI).

frayed hangman's rope. The telltale exhibit of vigilante justice lay either on the carpet of leaves beneath the oaks or hung, even swaying slightly, from the branches. Any grove could transform into a place of execution at any hour.

There had been several urgent warnings against visiting the realm of the rednecks. The plan to visit Mississippi, of all places, the scene of the gruesome murders of Emmett Till (1941–1955) and Medgar Evers (1925–1963), was akin to leaping into the abyss. Yet, James Earl Chaney, 21, as well as Michael Schwerner, 24, and Andrew Goodman, 20, absolutely refused to be deterred.[1]

The African American Chaney was originally from Mississippi. Schwerner and Goodman were Jewish American colleagues from New York City. All three belonged to the civil rights organisation Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an NGO founded in 1942. In Mississippi, perpetually amongst the poorest states in the USA, and throughout the former Confederacy, a nexus of laws, economic coercion and violence had established an electoral system that systematically marginalised Black citizens. Consequently, the African American population was largely denied meaningful political participation. This was particularly stark in Mississippi, where Black individuals constituted as much as 45 percent of the population, yet only approximately 15 percent were deemed eligible to vote.[2] Confronting this injustice, CORE established Freedom Schools to empower and mobilise disenfranchised citizens. The aim was to overcome the barriers to voter registration through education and encouragement. CORE activists undertook the courageous step of establishing such a school in the Deep South to specifically prepare Black individuals for the state-mandated literacy tests.

In that era, predating the digital tools that now significantly facilitate protest coordination, mobilising people for a common cause posed an immense challenge. Instead of flash mobs, there were leaflets; instead of posts, posters; and instead of TikTok and tweets, there were telegrams. Nevertheless, the organising team successfully rallied numerous volunteers in a short period.

The Freedom Summer of 1964 marked a turning point in the American Civil Rights Movement. Thousands of young people, predominantly white students, journeyed to the Deep South of the USA. They arrived not as protesters with signs, but as allies with registration forms. Their goal was to assist Black citizens in registering for the

Buried bodies on the farm in Philadelphia, Mississippi. (Source: Public Domain. FBI).

elections scheduled for November. Indeed, that's what they did. They also visited a church of the Black community in Neshoba County. Driven by a profound belief in justice and equality, they confronted raw racism. Their motivation? To change the world – or at least a part of it. Ultimately, their work significantly contributed to raising awareness of the injustices in the South and strengthening the Civil Rights Movement.

The White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan did not take kindly to this. Particularly those in Philadelphia, a community of five thousand souls – a stark contrast to the size of the northern City of Brotherly Love of the same name. A mere three days after the initiation of the search for Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman, their charred station wagon was discovered at the periphery of a local swamp. Some six weeks elapsed before their bullet-riddled remains were unearthed in an earthen dam on a nearby farmstead.

The autopsy reports revealed a grim prelude to their deaths: the three activists had been subjected to torture before their execution. Chaney endured repeated and brutal beatings prior to being shot and, with a particular barbarity rooted in racial animus, was additionally castrated. A typical fate for a Black man at the hands of the KKK. His colleagues, Schwerner and Goodman, were each shot directly through the heart. Goodman's autopsy further chillingly disclosed the presence of fragments of red clay within his lungs and clenched fists, evidence suggesting he was buried alive.[3] The Klan's virulent hatred was especially directed towards those white individuals who aligned themselves with the emancipation of Black people. In particular, educated and relatively affluent Jews from the liberal North, such as Goodman and Schwerner, were made the targets of a sadistic demonstration.

In 1967, seven individuals, including a deputy sheriff, were convicted in connection with these heinous crimes. None, however, served more than six years of imprisonment. The suspected orchestrator, the local Klan leader Edgar Ray Killen, who also served as a part-time Baptist preacher, was not finally convicted until 2005, when he received a sentence of sixty years for three counts of manslaughter. The federal authorities designated the case "Mississippi Burning", and it subsequently served as the basis for the 1988 feature film of the same title.

A Black female Moses, a Rabbi named Prinz, a Reverend King

Between the flames of hatred and the torchlight of freedom, much was afoot in the USA. The Klan's terror and the languid pace of justice against hate crimes did not deter the interfaith, multicultural alliance from persevering. Indeed, Jewish men and women constituted a disproportionately large segment of the white individuals involved in the struggle for civil rights. Fully half of the young activists who participated in the pivotal Freedom Summer of 1964 in the crucible of Mississippi were Jewish – a striking fifty percent.[4]

Moreover, the alliance between Black and Jewish communities in the fight for civil rights during the 1960s was not a sudden blossoming, but rather the resurgence of historical bonds forged in the crucible of shared suffering. The echoes of enslavement resonated across both groups, albeit through distinct historical trajectories. Jewish people endured periods of forced servitude in antiquity, their narratives woven with the bitter threads of captivity. Centuries later, the brutal transatlantic slave trade brought Africans to the Americas, marking another profound chapter of human bondage. Yet, even prior to this transatlantic horror, the Arabic slave trade across the Sahara, beginning some fifteen hundred years ago, had already scattered and subjugated countless Black lives. Separate fates emerged, continents and cultures apart, but a common understanding of oppression, of being dehumanised and exploited, subtly underlay their distinct histories.

This latent empathy, born from parallel experiences of marginalisation, would eventually find powerful expression in the shared struggle for liberation in America. The Book of Exodus, with its multicoloured pages of parchment recounting a journey from bondage to freedom, found a powerful echo in the modus operandi of Harriet Tubman.[5] This African American woman, armed with both Bible and pistol, successfully guided approximately 300 enslaved people north across the Mason-Dixon Line between 1849 and 1865. Tubman, the fearless conductor of the Underground Railroad escape network, was known to insiders by the codename "Moses", and the song *Go Down, Moses* served as her signature tune. This piece, based on Exodus 5:1, resonated deeply with the enslaved; it was sung as they toiled in the fields, during their meagre rest and prayer times, but also as a coded message to signal an escape or to call for rebellion.[6]

Parallels can be drawn between the fight against slavery and the burgeoning women's rights movement, and within this context, the activism of the Jewish feminist Ernestine Rose[7] stands as a compelling example. Born in Poland in 1810, Rose emigrated to the United States and became a prominent figure in various social reform movements, most notably abolitionism and the fight for women's equality.

Rose's commitment to the abolition of slavery was deeply rooted in her belief in universal human rights. She saw the enslavement of Black people as a fundamental injustice, a denial of their inherent dignity and freedom. This conviction was not isolated but intertwined with her advocacy for women's rights. For Rose recognised that both enslaved people and women were subjected to systemic oppression and denied their full personhood. Her outspoken and courageous abolitionism, remarkable for a 19th-century Jewish woman, involved extensive lectures challenging pro-slavery views, even facing hostility in the South. Her anti-slavery activism underscored the intersectionality of social justice, likely fuelled by her own experience of prejudice, and highlighted the interconnectedness of the fight for human liberation alongside her pioneering work for women's rights.

In 1909, Henry Moscowitz, a Jewish American of Romanian descent, joined forces with W. E. B. Du Bois and other Black intellectuals to establish the esteemed civil rights organisation, the NAACP. Between 1910 and 1940, Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald remarkably founded over 2,000 elementary and secondary schools for Black students, as well as 20 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

African American soldiers took part in freeing Jews from Nazi concentration camps. In Gunskirchen, a subcamp of Mauthausen in Austria, the "Black Panthers" of General Patton's 761st US Tank Battalion participated in the liberation. In Buchenwald, the African American unit 183rd Engineer Combat Battalion treated surviving inmates shortly after their liberation. These accomplishments offer a poignant, potent illustration of shared humanity in response to the hate espoused by the Nazis and the KKK.

After the war, a King and a Prinz built an admirable relationship with each other in the name of justice: Reverend Martin Luther King and Rabbi Joachim Prinz. Born in Upper Silesia, Prinz was later active in the Vereinssynagoge Friedenstempel before his immigration to the USA. Beginning in 1958, Prinz served as president of the American Jewish Congress, and in this capacity, he became the first rabbi to reach out to the rising Black Baptist preacher. King's charisma, courage and intellect profoundly captivated the exiled rabbi, laying the foundation for a valuable collaboration. In 1963, Prinz was among the organisers of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and he stood as one of the keynote speakers at the demonstration before the Lincoln Memorial, the very stage where King delivered his monumental "I Have a Dream" speech.

Rabbi Abraham Heschel, originally from Warsaw, also played a significant role in the interfaith friendship. Prinz and Heschel, who had both narrowly escaped the clutches of the Gestapo, were Holocaust survivors. Their solidarity, expressed arm-in-arm, whether demonstrated in the March on Washington or on the arduous path from Selma, Alabama, forged a bond between them and Black Americans so strong that its unifying power eclipsed the destructive, hate-fuelled arson of the racist and antisemitic Klan. For King, who had visited Jerusalem in 1959, questioning Israel's right to exist was out of the question. In 1968, he asserted, "The talk about driving the Jews into the Mediterranean Sea, as we have heard it in recent weeks and years, is not merely unrealistic; it is suicidal for the whole world, and it is also terribly immoral."[8]

King lauded the American Jewish Congress as "one of the few organizations willing to take a forthright stand for integration in the South."[9] Furthermore, King warned that it was the aim of racial supremacists to employ scapegoats to facilitate their political and social dominion over all people. "Our mutual fight," King declared, "is against these deadly enemies of democracy, and our glory is the fact that when we are chosen to be the proving ground, we shall prove that courage is a characteristic of oppressed people, no matter how cynically and brutally they are denied full equality and liberty."[10]

Such reciprocal loyalty on the part of the Jewish community towards the Black community spanned several generations and weathered some ugly crises, such as the deadly Crown Heights riots (1991).[11] Jewish solidarity was also clearly evident in 2020 when the murder of George Floyd mobilised tens of millions of people worldwide.

Introspect? Or Intifada?

As time flowed on, the resonance of King's message faded. *We shall overcome* was displaced by *From the river to the sea*. Thus, it is hardly surprising that 55 years after King's assassination, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement welcomed the terrorist attack

on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023.[12] BLM posted a gleefully schaden-freude-filled illustration depicting a paraglider with a Palestinian flag – a tasteless allusion to the massacre at the Supernova music festival. Others followed suit. It echoes James Baldwin's purposefully provocative warning: "Negroes are antisemitic because they're anti-white."[13]

Prominent figures like Kanye West, Dave Chappelle and Ta-Nehisi Coates joined in with conspicuous criticism of Israel, without a hint of empathy for the Jewish community. Claudine Gay, Harvard's first African American president, responded to antisemitic incidents at her university with relativisation and indifference. Yet, precisely on university campuses, a shift in thinking is now discernible. The Black Student Union (BSU) of the University of Michigan recently dissociated itself from the pro-Palestinian Tahrir Coalition.[14]

This is because the BSU felt subjected to systematic discrimination within that coalition. "However, it has become increasingly apparent that Black identities, voices, and bodies are not valued within this coalition, and therefore we must withdraw," the statement read.[15] Similarly negative experiences are being gathered at universities between New York and Los Angeles. African American students in the Free Palestine movement feel like tokens or doormen. Black individuals feel they have to stand submissively grinning at the gate while White Saviors in keffiyehs swagger in, preach against cultural appropriation, and are welcomed with open arms by the leadership. In campus dining halls, Arabic speakers call their Black peers "abeed" (enslaved). Protest organisers prefer to be seen with white members of Jewish Voices for Peace. Jokes circulate that Black attendees are only interested in the watermelon, a symbol of the pro-Palestinian movement, echoing Jim Crow-era stereotypes portraying Black people as lazy and dependent on cheap food due to poverty. Despite the intifada's emphasis on 'decolonisation', there's little willingness to address the nearly 1,500-year history of the Arab slave trade. Heated online disputes reveal a turning point. Black users confront Hamas's brutal anti-LGBTQ+ stance. Others warn against Black mothers raising their children to be martyrs for Islamism, referencing Hamas's child soldier terror camps. Black individuals retort that Muslim terrorists like Boko Haram have also killed thousands of Africans. Furthermore, they question why the Palestinian cause overshadows far greater tragedies in Congo or Sudan.

The Hamas execution of two Tanzanians on 7 October 2023 continues to resonate. One of them, Joshua Mollel, an agricultural intern at Kibbutz Nahal Oz, was racially abused on camera before his captors shot him – a chilling ellipse to the KKK's lynching of Black activist Chaney alongside his white Jewish colleagues Goodman and Schwerner in Mississippi in 1964. Such historical parallels prompt many African Americans to reflect on times when Jewish people risked their lives to help Black individuals in the Jim Crow South and to exercise their right to vote.

The Gaza war added further dynamics to the US election campaign in 2024. Pro-Palestinian voices in the USA accused the Democratic candidate Kamala Harris, a Black woman married to a Jew, of subservience to Israel and demanded, accordingly, that progressives refrain from voting for her. Even party colleagues turned their backs on her. As a result, she lost in important swing states such as Michigan, where the nationwide victorious Donald Trump even received notable support from the Arab community. Interestingly, despite their concerns about the Democrats' overall commitment to Israel, 78% of American Jews voted for Harris.[16] Black women, who overwhelmingly supported Harris with 92% of their vote, took note of the strong Jewish voter loyalty.[17]

A Path Forward

Amidst the contemporary complexities and occasional fractures, Black and Jewish communities are slowly rediscovering their deep-rooted historical parallels and shared experiences of marginalisation. The pace of this renewed awareness must be accelerated, for the consciousness of their laudable common history underscores the enduring value of their alliance. This partnership can once again become a potent force, indeed, not only in domestic struggles for justice. In fact, it has the potential to function as a unique mediating voice, leveraging Black perspectives to foster understanding even within the charged geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, operating behind and beyond the confines of military conflict. History itself has dispelled the insidious myth of the white supremacist Jew as a baseless fabrication designed to sow division. The chains have been broken; the bonds must be strengthened.

Notes

1 Dudley, Michaela (2025). *Race Relations: Essays über Rassismus.* Leipzig: Orlanda, pp. 13–14.

2 Ibid, p. 14. See also Dittmer, John (1994). *Local people: The struggle for civil rights in Mississippi.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press; Watson, Bruce (2010). *Freedom Summer: The savage season that made Mississippi burn and made America a democracy*. New York: Viking; Rubin, Susan Goldman (2014). *Freedom Summer: The 1964 struggle for civil rights in Mississippi*. New York: Holiday House.

3 Dudley (2025), p. 19. See also Dudley, Michaela (2024). 'Fehlende Solidarität,' *Berliner Zeitung,* 14 May 2024, p. 11; Dudley, Michaela (2024). 'Es ist gefährlich, Israelis als White Supremacists darzustellen,' *Berliner Zeitung*, 15 May 2024, accessed 6 May 2025, https://www. berliner-zeitung.de/kultur-vergnuegen/michaela-dudley-es-ist-gefaehr-lich-israelis-als-white-supremacists-darzustellen-li.2213088.

4 'Jewish Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement', *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed 6 May 2025, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/american-jews-and-the-civil-rights-movement.

5 Dudley, Michaela (2021). 'Black History Month: Schwarze Geschichte ist Mensch-heitsgeschichte', *Tagesspiegel,* 7 February 2021, accessed 6 May 2025. https://www. tagesspiegel.de/ kultur/schwarze-geschichte-ist-menschheitsgeschichte-4225990.html

6 Dudley (2025), pp. 226–7.

7 Doress-Worters, Paula (ed.) (2008). *Mistress of Herself: Speeches and Letters of Ernestine L. Rose, Early Women's Rights Leader*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY. Cf. Kolmerten, Carol A. (1999). *The American Life of Ernestine L. Rose*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

8 Dudley, Michaela (2024). 'Palästina in der Schwarzen Community: Apartheid? Echt jetzt?' *taz*, 15 October 2024, accessed 6 May 2025, https://taz.de/Palaestina-in-der-SchwarzenCommunity/!6039758/.

9 Dudley, Michaela (2023). 'Wenn Wokeism schläft. Fehlende Schwarze Solidarität mit Israel und dem Judentum', *Belltower.News*, 21 November 2023, accessed 6 May 2025, https://www. belltower.news/wenn-wokeism-schlaeft-fehlende-schwarze-solidaritaet-mitisrael-und-dem-judentum-154159/

10 Ibid.

11 Marcus, Kenneth L. (2010). *Jewish Identity and Civil Rights in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press. "Amid shouts of 'Let's go to Kingston Avenue and get a Jew,' 10 to 15 young black men walked a few blocks into this predominantly Jewish neighborhood, throwing stones at houses and damaging cars along the way." The Crown Heights riots of 1991 were a tragic event that exposed tensions between Black and Jewish communities in Brooklyn, New York City. Triggered by a traffic accident in

which a Jewish driver struck two Black children, the events escalated into three days of severe violence. Black residents attacked Jewish institutions, damaging them and looting businesses. The riots underscored deep-seated social and ethnic conflicts in the city and led to a broad public discussion about racism, discrimination and the need for better conflict resolution.

12 Dudley (2025), p. 22. See also Dudley, Michaela (2024). "Schwarze gegen Antisemitismus: Es mangelt so an Empathie," *taz*, 12 February 2024, accessed 6 May 2025. Cf. Propper, David/Oliveira, Alex (2023). "BLM Chicago under fire for pro-Palestinian post featuring paragliding terrorist: 'Disgusting and disgraceful', *New York Post*, 10 October 2023, accessed 6 May 2025, https://nypost.com/2023/10/10/blm-chicago-under-fire-forpro-palestine-post-featuring-paragliding-terrorist/.

13 Baldwin, James (1967). 'Negroes Are Anti-Semitic Because They're Anti-White', *The New York Times Magazine*, 9 April 1967.

14 Dudley (2024, 15 October).

15 Ibid. Cf. Mottola, Matilda Sophia (2024). 'BSU withdraws from TAHRIR coalition', *The Michigan Daily*, 6 September 2024, accessed 6 May 2025, https://www.michigandaily.com/news/news-briefs/bsu-withdraws-from-tahrir-coalition/.

16 Dudley, Michaela (2024). 'Die Lady muss warten: Harris-Niederlage bei US-Wahlen', *taz*, 5 November 2024, accessed 6 May 2025, https://taz.de/Harris-Niederlage-bei-den-US-Wahlen/!6047335/. See also NBC News (2025). 'Exit polls', *NBC News*, 9 November 2025, accessed 6 May 2025. https://www.nbcnews.com/ politics/2024-elections/ exit-polls.

17 Dudley (2024, 5 November). See also (2025, 9 November).

Michaela Dudley, J.D., a Berlin-based journalist, diversity speaker and cabaret artist, was born in 1961 in the USA. In her youth, she experienced the Jim Crow era of segregation. Herself a Catholic, she recalls being befriended by the children of concentration camp survivors, and she is a fierce opponent of antisemitism. The Juris Doctor prides herself as a queer feminist and LGBTQ advocate. She is a respected columnist and commentator in the German press (*taz*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Tagesspiegel*) and has authored the German-language book *Race Relations: Essays über Rassismus* (2nd edn., 2025) in which she also addresses the historical alliance between Blacks and Jews.

Khader Oshah: Voice of Emerging Arab Bedouin Urban Generation in Negev Desert
Hadas Kedar

This article curatorially examines the artwork of Gaza-born, Rahat-based artist Khader Oshah and through the analysis of his artworks, discusses social, economic, political and environmental perspectives of contemporary Arab Bedouin society. Oshah's artwork resonates with the recent shift that the Arab Bedouin Negev communities are experiencing – from an age-old agrarian existence in villages to an urban lifestyle in newly constructed, government-initiated cities. The conceptualisation of the artwork articulates a new form of Arab Bedouin contemporaneity that is unique in its combination of tradition and progress.

Introduction
The artwork of Gaza-born (1966) Khader Oshah, currently living in the Arab Bedouin city of Rahat[1] in the Negev desert, sparks a discussion on how art and curating – posited at the intersection of politics, culture and institutional policy – may "right wrongs"[2] in terms of representation of Arab Bedouin art. Oshah, like many other Arab Bedouin, comes from a line of tribes that have inhabited the Middle East and North Africa for centuries across present-day Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman, Yemen, Jordan, Syria, Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Algeria and Morocco. The term 'Bedouin' evolved from 'badawi' – used to describe the nomadic or semi-nomadic agrarian people who inhabited the desert.[3] Since the establishment of the Israeli state in 1948 and quite intensively since the 1970s, the indigenous Arab Bedouin community – one third of the southern Negev desert population[4] – have undergone processes of urbanisation, in many cases through forceful acts of demolishing the villages and dwellings of rural communities. The centralisation of Negev Arab Bedouin communities and the urbanisation process that has been put into motion by the Israeli governments have created a forced move from rural life to an assimilated urban lifestyle in seven government-initiated cities that have been constructed from the late 1970s onwards in southern Israel/Palestine.
The article firstly conducts a curatorial investigation into a series of portraits of the young urban generation of Rahat in the Negev desert created by Oshah, and asks in what way they convey the social, economic, political and environmental impacts of the assimilation to urbanism that has recently been imposed on Arab Bedouin society. Secondly, the article conceptualises the knowledge gained from the examination of the portrait series to articulate a unique form of Arab Bedouin contemporaneity – one that is in incongruence with the widespread globalised and Westernised 21st-century contemporary art and culture.

Oshah's portrait series raises to the surface a unique negotiation that the Arab Bedouin urbanite generation manage between a forced Westernised and globalised lifestyle that they have been interpolated into in the last decades, and the predominant societal sentiment that they propagate and the previous generations embrace, which strives to preserve the traditional Arab Bedouin agrarian existence. The negotiation between progress and traditionalism that the young urbanite generation manages pronounces a form of Arab Bedouin secular traditionality that, although it is rooted in Islamic belief and religiosity, defies the oppressive religious authority that restricts indi-

vidualist behaviour. The traditionalist sentiment of the older generations is the focal point of the main exhibition in the chief cultural institution in the world responsible for the collection, preservation and communication of traditions and visual and material culture of Arab Bedouin society. The curatorial programming of the Joe Alon Center / Museum of Bedouin Culture demonstrates the complexity involved in challenging the dominating authoritarian perspective that is rooted in an ethnographic principle of exhibiting artifacts. The Negev-based institution's artifacts mainly have their origins in the Sinai desert (where quite different traditions than the Negev Arab Bedouin communities are practised) and date back hundreds of years. Narrating ancient Arab Bedouin culture and traditions, the museum's permanent exhibition includes traditional clothes, household utensils, carpets, tools and jewellery, as well as historical photographs and archaeological findings. The museum's outreach program centres on 95% groups of school children and youth from the Jewish communities and 5% Arab Bedouin groups. On the museum's grounds lies a hospitality tent where coffee and pita bread are made and served by the local Arab Bedouin community. The staff of the museum are predominately Jewish Israeli, while a slight Arab Bedouin presence is found on the instruction team. Alongside its main historical collection, the museum dedicates a small space to contemporary Negev Arab Bedouin art. But by focusing on a collection of artifacts from the Arab Bedouin past, the museum avoids addressing the contemporary tension between autonomy and traditionalism and contemporaneity as it arises amongst the young generation of Arab Bedouin urbanites. In summary, the main museum in the world dedicated to Arab Bedouin art and culture communicates it through the prism of an authoritarian perspective, avoiding a discussion on the trajectory of Westernisation and capitalism that the younger generation of the Arab Bedouin cities pursue. The development of curatorial methods that represent Arab Bedouin art of the Negev in local and international institutions is central to my dissertation-based book *Keeping the Edges Open: Towards a Curatorial Horizon in the Negev Desert*.[5] The book stemmed from my position as the curator of an international residency program and a contemporary art centre that I founded in Arad in the Negev desert. During my post in Arad, I faced a lacuna in the representation of Arab Bedouin art in Negev and in international institutions. I approached the omission of Arab Bedouin art in local and international cultural institutions by initially investigating the historical circumstances that had brought about the absence of Arab Bedouin contemporary art, especially in the context of the global trend in the art world of the last decades whereby indigenous and other cultures dominate the curatorial programming of many Western institutions and mega-exhibitions in Europe and the US.[6] I subsequently considered the lacuna in cultural representation of Arab Bedouin contemporary art resulting from the common curatorial approach assumed by Negev art institutions that aligns with a Westernised and globalised perspective and therefore does not curatorially address current trends in Arab Bedouin society. In continuation of my previous research on Negev art and curating, the article curatorially investigates Oshah's portrait series to conceive a form of presentness typical of Arab Bedouin society that presents how the negotiation between a globalised, Westernised perspective and a traditional rural, secular Islamic sentiment are the beating heart of the emerging urban generation. The nature of Arab Bedouins that were born and/or grew up in government-initiated cities in the Negev transpires through the paintings' formal characteristics (painting style, composition and palette) and through the painted subjects' attire (expressions, hair, fashion and setting). Curatorial investigation into the painting series of Oshah creates a typology of the emerging generation of Arab Bedouin urbanism. The unique status of knowledges acquired through their curatorial investigation documents social trends in real time. Demonstrating how identity is an entity that is in constant negotiation and in flux, Oshah's portraits create a body of knowledge that is

valuable in its contemporaneity, signifying the flux of identity in Arab Bedouin society as enduring a dramatic shift from a rural to an urban lifestyle. Oshah's painted subjects highlight identity as a dynamic framework in which individuals negotiate their individualism in accordance with their traditional upbringing. Maintaining that the younger generation in traditional societies feels the need to create an updated sense of belonging, Oshah's portrait series creates an up-to-date body of knowledge that may be used in other contexts where the notion of civic belonging in urban environments in relation to traditional, indigenous societies is discussed.

Methods

The curatorial method applied in the analysis of Oshah's portrait series makes beneficial the gaps between academic, institutionalised research methods, and concepts and ideas that arise from the paintings and their subjects. Sadiya Hartman, an American academic, writer and first-generation US-born woman of black decent, addresses the question of the sense of agency in terms of writing the narrative of minorities in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*.[7] Hartman introduces the idea of "critical fabulation" as a research methodology that combines historical and archival knowledge with critical theory and fictional narrative.[8] She writes: "Every historian of the multitude, the dispossessed, the subaltern, and the enslaved is forced to grapple with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known, whose perspective matters, and who is endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor."[9] Hartman refuses to write the narrative of African American women through the academic, institutionalised, historical perspective. Rather, she develops a writing style that is frequently considered fiction in academic circles; an artistic method that leaves room for a powerful imaginative empathy towards her characters to arise.[10] Following Hartman, the method applied in the curatorial investigation of Oshah's portrait series combines the art-historical perspective of the analysis of portraiture with concepts and ideas arising from the painted subjects that create fragmented and partial storied accounts of recent trends in contemporary Arab Bedouin society.

Problematics

The complexity of my position as a Jewish, Ashkenazi Israeli art professional with a Western upbringing problematises the artistic investigation into Oshah's portrait series. My positionality brings with it some inherited differences that need to be acknowledged and challenged. The inheritance of a Western, academic vantage point – replete with its own traditions and orthodoxies – preserves an outsider perspective on Arab Bedouin culture and society. The democratic impulse that is at the heart of the impetus of this article to "right wrongs" of the structural injustice of the cultural representation of Arab Bedouin society stems from years-long activities in promoting the rights of minorities in Israel/Palestine. In the capacity of my current work in a philanthropic organisation for leadership in the Negev, in which I facilitate leadership amongst Arab Bedouin communities, I react to the historical imbalances in the representation of Negev communities. My leadership role stems from the comprehension I arrived at during my previous position as the curator of the international residency program and the contemporary art centre in Arad, that the lacuna in the representation of contemporary Arab Bedouin art derives from a Westernised artistic and curatorial approach – a lacuna that is most surprising in terms of museums that are dedicated to non-Western cultures such as the Joe Alon Center / Museum of Bedouin Culture.

Questions at stake

The article questions the capacity of the curatorial to "right wrongs" in terms of historical injustice in artistic representation. It raises the need to develop a systematic method of the curatorial to not only "right wrongs" in terms of historical misrepresentation, but also articulates the current moment in indigeneity where a dramatic shift from agrarian to urban existence takes place. The article devises a form of presentness in Arab Bedouin society that is at the intersection between progress and traditionality – a contemporaneity that does not fully align with the logic of Western Eurocentricity. The curatorial investigation of Oshah's artwork is rooted in questioning how artistic, curatorial and pedagogical developments in the Negev have assumed a form of presentness that diverges from the Eurocentric Westernism. As founder and curator of the Arad Contemporary Art Center in the Negev desert, I questioned the Westernised curatorial code of conduct that I had been accustomed to in my upbringing, which requires a form of the curatorial that deals with the collection, preservation and exhibition of traditional artifacts such as oral knowledge, traditions and rituals. My work as a staff member at the Mandel Center for Leadership in the Negev and as a lecturer at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design raises questions regarding pedagogical means that address the plurality and diversity of Negev populations: Jewish, Arab Bedouin, Orthodox, religious and secular voices. How can this plurality be nurtured as a fundamental condition for creating a sustainable community fabric? Working in the Negev with diverse communities requires a mode of attentiveness that builds confidence in the ability to express the uniqueness of cultures – to create a curatorial environment for collaborative development of content that is natural to the community, while simultaneously reflecting cross-population values of mutual respect, equality, diversity and pluralism.

Khader Oshah: Painter of Everyday Urban Life in Rahat

Historians and archaeologists have conducted research on ancient portraits to amass a wide range of knowledges typifying ancient societies. Although portraiture has been the focal point in historical academic research, it was only late in the 20th century that portraiture was recognised by art historians as a valuable artistic genre. In his well-known article "Mona Lisa" (1973), the British art historian Kenneth Clark asserted that an artwork whose subject is the "truthful likeness of an individual" is worth artistic examination. Clark writes: "Some of the greatest pictures ever painted have been portraits – we need think only of Titian, Rembrandt and Velasquez to accept that statement; and yet the aesthetic theory of the last seventy years runs entirely counter to the fact of experience that a truthful likeness of an individual can be a great work of art."[11] Two decades later, the American academic and writer Richard Brilliant asserted that the significance of the artistic investigation of portraiture as a particular genre is that it is especially sensitive to changes in the nature of the individual in a particular society. Analysing a broad range of portraits from antiquity to the 20th century, Brilliant argued that: "Portraits reflect social realities. Their imagery combines the conventions of behavior and appearance appropriate to the members of a society at a particular time, as defined by categories of age, gender (…), social and civic status and class. The synthetic study of portraiture requires some sensitivity to the social implications of its representational modes, to the documentary value of art works as aspects of social history, and to the subtle interaction between social and artistic conventions."[12] Brilliant's pronouncement that portraiture creates knowledges that allow one to learn about social realities, conventions of behaviour and appearance in certain societies is relevant to the investigation of Oshah's portraits. Valuable knowledges regarding changes in lifestyle, social structures, religious beliefs and a sense of belonging to society arises from the portraits' imagery and their subjects' appearance.
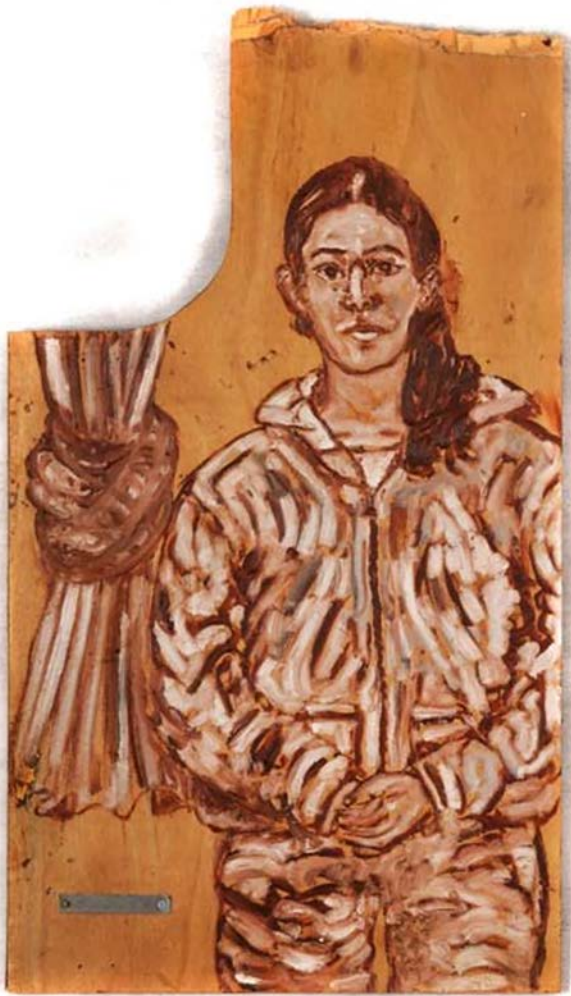
Khader Oshah, *Khadeja*, oil on wood plank, 70x100 cm, 2008

> I express what is in my heart in all the ways available to me and address personal, social, and political issues. For me, this is a mirror that reflects the tragedies I experienced at different periods in my life. I am influenced by the environment and bring to my works the memory of my Palestinian family that was expelled and part of which still lives in Gaza. The distance, the longing, the siege on Gaza, life in Israel – all components of my identity are partners in the drive to express them in artistic creation. I address all these issues and criticize both Palestinian and Israeli society, because as an artist I am committed to my inner voice regardless of society's reactions.[13]

On the one hand, Arab Bedouin take part in Israeli society, including enlisting in the army, etc. On the other hand, many Arab Bedouin families were expelled from the new Israeli state in 1948, and the Islamic belief system creates an affinity with Palestinian identity. How did Oshah choose his subjects, and in what way do they resonate a wavering Israeli/Palestinian identity? What messages are being conveyed through his choices? How do the portraits reflect the embedded conflict of identification that is at the root of Arab Bedouin society? These questions shed light on what issues may arise from the paintings that can teach us about the first urban generation of Rahat. Addressing them, one may propagate a sense of presentness that encapsulates the dramatic shift in lifestyle in recent decades, and to link it to a much broader schism – that of the sense of belonging to a society amongst the Arab Bedouin community.

Portrait of the Boy Eutyches, encaustic on wood, 38x19 cm, A.D. 100–150, collection of Metropolitan Museum, NY

Khader Oshah, Self portrait, oil on wood plank, 47x69 cm, 2006

The sense of belonging to society can be traced back to the ancient Roman Empire – especially to the periphery of the Roman Empire where a conflict of identity took place between the affinity with the local identity (for example Egypt) and the sense of belonging to Roman society. In the ancient Roman Empire, the concept of the freedom of an individual was linked to one's class and status. If you were born to the class of slaves, you lived according to what the ruling class ascribed to you. If you were affiliated with the ruling class, your rights were clear. In a society which prescribed individuals the extent of freedom according to their class, the concept of 'civitas' i.e., the sense of belonging to a society, was meaningful. The Roman sense of 'civitas' linked all citizens together – whether serfs or rulers. One of the first unique documentations of this dual sense of belonging to society arises from the artistic investigation of the Fayum portraits (100–300 A.D) – an important source of knowledge on the Roman-era Egypt. The investigation of the Fayum portraits reveals how Roman citizenship and a sense of belonging to society operated in a peripheral society, distant from its cultural and administrative centre. Historians have used the research of the portraits to trace the position certain individuals attained within the ancestor cult and thus to create a historical database of the Roman era in Egyptian society. Nevertheless, an artistic investigation into the Fayum portraits contributes unique knowledges to the research into Roman-era Egypt that differs from other sources: the analysis of their imagery demonstrates how Egyptian citizens of the Roman Empire assumed Roman visual codes to assert their participation in the imperial civitas, while preserving their traditional Egyptian rituals. Examination of the Fayum portraits establishes how their subjects – the affluent elite who had the means to commission the portraits that would later be used in their burial – adopted metropolitan Roman fashions including togas, tunics and jewellery; woman's hairstyles that follow imperial court trends; men with carefully groomed beards such as those adorned in Rome to emphasise their affinity with Roman culture. The inquiry into the portraits reveals a unique type of 'civitas' – that which has integrated Roman and Egyptian cultural features. While the portraits employed Greco-Roman artistic techniques that emphasised individual likeness and personality, their function remained rooted in ancient Egyptian funerary practices. The portraits were created to fulfil the traditional Egyptian religious requirement to pre-

Wall Panel with Geometric Interlace, polychrome marble, mosaic, 118.1x59.7, 15th century, collection of Metropolitan Museum

Khader Oshah, *Self portrait*, oil on wood plank, 47x69 cm, 2006

Khader Oshah, *Samar*, oil on wood plank, 60x75 cm, 2008

serve the deceased's physical appearance for their journey into the afterlife. This combination reveals that acquiring Roman 'civitas' did not demand the complete rejection of ancestral traditions, but instead permitted a blending of cultures, whereby Roman civic identity could coincide with local, traditional beliefs and practices.

One may notice sense the sense of Roman 'civitas' and the blending of cultures in Roman-era Egypt in Oshah's portrait series. One may also recognise this sense of a mixture of styles in Oshah's subjects: young men wearing baseball T-shirts; Hawaii-printed blouses; women with uncovered heads wearing Western attire with vegetal and ornamental backgrounds. Like Roman-era Egypt, Oshah's subjects portray a mixed identity in which the notion of 'civitas' accommodates Arab Bedouin traditions and at the same time follows the trajectory of globalised and Westernised cultures. The sense of a layered notion of 'civitas' appears with a metal strip engraved with the artist's ID number, which is fixed to the paintings' wooden substrate – a gesture that seems to express Oshah's questioned sense of belonging to Israeli society. One may link the gesture of attaching his ID number to each of his portraits, engraved upon a metal strip, to the fact that Oshah's Israeli identity is quite volatile. His family was expelled in 1948 from the newly founded Israeli state to the Gaza Strip where he was born. Only later in life, when Oshah married a Bedouin woman from Rahat and was allowed to exit Gaza and return to Israel, was he given an Israeli ID number. One may link the attachment of the engraved ID number to the portraits to a sense of syndication of his feeling of belonging to a society that is responsible for his family's traumatic history. By fixing his recently acquired identity to the paintings on a metal strip, he reminds us of the Gaza Strip and his family's precarious history.

Not only is the notion of 'civitas' questionable in contemporary Arab Bedouin society but also its affinity to religious belief is undergoing many shifts and changes. While the presence of Islamic religious institutions is strengthening in many Arab Bedouin cities, it seems that with the assimilation to a globalised and Westernised culture, the younger generation is developing an urban, secular mode of Islam. Although neither

Khader Oshah, *Lenah*, oil on wood plank, 55x98 cm, 2006

Khader Oshah, *Mahmoud,* oil on wood plank, 45x60 cm, 2008

the Qur'an nor Islamic tradition explicitly warns against figural representation in art but rather idolatry and the worship of images, by painting portraits the artist clearly defies the conservative Islamic sentiment in Arab Bedouin society that prohibits the depiction of humans in art and culture. But Oshah chooses not only to defy the Islamic prohibition on depicting human figures, but also to contrast traditional Islamic imagery in his paintings with a secular, Westernised and globalised aesthetic. Ornaments, calligraphy and geometric patterns that appear in the background of select portraits and that frequently adorn architectural elements such as walls and ceiling panels in Islamic buildings, are juxtaposed with painted subject's Western attire. For example, the ornamental and vegetal pattern in the background of *Self-Portrait* (2006) contrasts with the striped Western outfit of the painted subject, creating a unique aesthetic out of the two incompatible styles. While the subject of *Samar* (2008), blends with its background her skin tone fusing with her dress that, in turn mixes with the ornamental pattern in the background, creating a tapestry-like composition that emphasises the dominance of Islamic imagery in Arab Bedouin culture, her bashful facial expression raises questions regarding the religious regulation of women's tradition attire. Her glance sideways conveys her disquiet from the unconventional setting. Wearing unconventional dress, with loose hair and deprived of a headdress, the painting's subject conveys a form of secularity that is quite new to the Arab Bedouin street. *Self-Portrait* and *Samar* express how the urbanites of Arab Beoduin cities manage the tensions between a form of Islamic secularity and a traditional lifestyle.

One can also find in Oshah's choice to paint his portraits on wood substrate an expression of his subjects' and his own assimilation to an urban lifestyle. This recalls the Western artistic methods of 'objet trouvé' practised by the Surrealists, which challenged traditional ideas about art by appropriating urban remains into artworks. In Oshah's case, the appropriation of slabs of used wood draws the viewer's attention to the new Arab Bedouin urban environment of Rahat. The use of wood as the portrait's substrate raises awareness of the fact that the contemporary use, transformation and codification of materials in the urban Arab Bedouin sphere have changed immensely with the recent process of centralisation and modernisation in Arab Bedouin society. This contrasts with an agrarian lifestyle in which the use of materials stemmed from long-term engagement with the natural environment and preserved communal knowledge of creation. Present-day Arab Bedouin cities are flooded with commercial, mass-produced materials. By choosing to portray his subjects on mass-produced slabs of wood, Oshah reminds us that together with an accelerated assimilation to an urban lifestyle, Arab Bedouin society is experiencing a loss of a long-term engagement with the natural environment. The portraits express the sadness involved in the break in the chain of tradition but also the excitement that accompanies the newly forming urban environment. They allow one to contemplate on how the new urban environment influences bodies, movements, physicality, concepts and ideas and how through art and curating, one may begin to sketch out the portrait of a young, urban, secular, individualist generation of Arab Bedouin in the Negev.

Conclusion

Oshah records the young generation of Arab Bedouin that populate the government-initiated cities of the Negev desert, focusing on how they manage the tensions between an individualist, secular urban lifestyle and their parents' and grandparents' agrarian and traditional past. The curatorial investigation into Oshah's portrait series amasses a body of knowledge that is unique to art and curating regarding the first Arab Bedouin urbanite generation in the Negev desert and how they meet the standards of modernisation while preserving traditions and knowledges of the Arab Bedouin indigenous community. The analysis of the portrayed subjects' appearance – fashion, hairstyle, expression and setting creates up-to-date knowledges that conveys the vivacity and exuberance of the young Arab Bedouin urban generation. The analysis of the portrait series demonstrates how Arab Bedouin youngsters negotiate issues such as religiosity, urbanism, traditionalism, history of rural and agrarian existence, traumatic expulsion from Israeli society, blended identity, amalgamated Israeli/Palestinian identification and more. In conclusion, Oshah's portrait series has a dual significance – it not only reflects the young generation of Arab Bedouin that populate the government-initiated cities, but also holds the power to generate knowledge regarding a form of Arab Bedouin contemporaneity in the Negev desert cities that has not yet been fully articulated in academic literature.

Notes

1 For an interactive online map of the Arab Bedouin cities and villages, see: "On the Map: The Arab Bedouin Villages of the Negev-Naqab", https://www.dukium.org/village/ריס-א-רסק/ accessed 4 June 2025.

2 Spivak, Gyatri, 'Righting Wrongs', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103 (2–3) (2004), p. 560.

3 For further information on the history of the Arab Bedouin of the Negev/Naqab, see: Nasrasa, Mansour, 'Bedouin tribes in the Middle East and the Naqab: Changing dynamics and the new state', in idem, *The Naqab Bedouin and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2014).

4 The Arab Bedouin population currently makes up around one third of the Negev population (30%), while Israeli-born people (Sabras) with European (Ashkenazi) and North African (Sephardic) origins make up 65%; immigrants from the former Soviet Union make up 3%; and African Israelites from the United States make up the remaining 2%.

5 For a comprehensive analysis of the exclusion of Arab Bedouin visual and material culture from the curatorial agendas of Negev art institutions, see: Kedar, Hadas, *Keeping the Edges Open: Towards a Curatorial Horizon in the Negev Desert* (Zurich: OnCurating, 2024), https://www.on-curating.org/book/keeping-the-edges-open.html, accessed 18 August 2025.

6 Documenta 15 is just one out of a series of examples.

7 Hartman, Sadiya, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women and Queer Radicals*, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019).

8 Hartman introduced the idea of 'critical fabulation' in her article 'Venus in Two Acts' and developed it fully in *Wayward Lives*.

9 Hartman, *Wayward Lives*, p. 1.

10 One may notice in Hartman's concept of 'critical fabulation' the intellectual developments of her predecessor, the American philosopher of science and cultural theorist Donna Haraway. In *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, Haraway proposed considering a form of feminist objectivity that distances itself from the male, Western, so-called scientific objectivity by piecing together knowledges from partial perspectives that derive from specific locations. Developing what she considers to be a unique form of feminist objectivity, Haraway avows for "a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as other practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions." Haraway, Donna, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Autumn 1988), pp. 575–599, here p. 579.

11 Clark, Kenneth, 'Mona Lisa', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 115, No. 840 (March 1973), p. 144.

12 Brilliant, Richard, *Portraiture*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 11.

13 Saab, Shirin Falach, 'Khader Oshah: The artist torn between Palestinian heritage and Israeli citizenship', *Ha'aretz* newspaper, 27 February 2022 (my translation).

Hadas Kedar is a curator, educator and researcher whose work explores how cultural encounters generate new ways of understanding identity and place. With experience spanning from the desert peripheries of the Negev to international art institutions, Kedar examines how artistic practices reveal and unsettle both visible and invisible borders. Their forthcoming curatorial project 'Learning from Deserts' (ZKU, Berlin) brings desert community knowledge to European audiences, highlighting indigenous approaches to climate instability. Through teaching, research and exhibitions, Kedar investigates art of the peripheries while fostering cross-cultural dialogue and community engagement. Kedar is the founder and curator of a residency programme and an art centre in the Negev desert, and has led initiatives that emphasise the transformative potential of cultural work in our interconnected, multicultural world.

"I want to do things differently"
Interview with Ahmad Mansour
led by Dorothee Richter

Dorothee Richter: Ahmad Mansour, you are currently leading an initiative that supports democracy and prevents extremism. Can you tell me what the initiative is working on at the moment?

Ahmad Mansour: We run various projects focused on prevention work that promotes democracy and combats extremism. Most of our work is based on theatre pedagogy using role-playing methods. We engage in eye-level dialogues with young people, present them with alternatives and provide food for thought. Our work takes place in schools, asylum shelters, welcome classes and prisons. Soon, we also plan to expand our democracy-promotion efforts into the digital realm – specifically on social media, where propaganda is spread and people are exposed to anti-democratic content. We want to fight for every soul – for democracy and for human rights.

Dorothee: Could you please describe where you grew up and what images and ideas influenced you?

Ahmad: I grew up in an Arab village in the heart of Israel, about thirty kilometres from Tel Aviv. The village was shaped by agriculture; my parents were simple labourers and my grandparents were farmers. I grew up in a multi-generational household – my grandparents lived upstairs and we lived downstairs. We were a big family: I have four siblings. My childhood was marked by hard work and stories of war – the War of Independence and the conflicts between the Arab countries and Israel, which my family had experienced first-hand.

I did well in school, but as a child I had very few toys and, later on, hardly any opportunities to go out or have fun. I read a lot and immersed myself in books. At the age of 13, due to bullying, anxiety about the future, and a declining sense of social connection, I became radicalised. I was directly approached at the time by an imam and remained involved with an Islamist group until I was about nineteen. I spent a lot of time in mosques, took Islamic lessons, and was frequently involved in various group activities – including Islamic concerts, lectures and more.

Dorothee: When did you start to see things differently?

Ahmad: When I began studying in Tel Aviv, I suddenly came into contact with my 'enemies' – or rather, the people I had previously considered my enemies: the Jews. Life in Tel Aviv, a Western-oriented party city, along with the books I read outside of theology (I studied psychology and had to read Freud, Nietzsche and Machiavelli), sparked my curiosity and made me reflect. But above all, two factors led me to start seeing things differently: first, the direct contact with people on the ground – those I had once seen as enemies, who quickly became my friends. Their outlook on life and the feeling of belonging to this group had a deep impact on me. Second, my professors, who constantly encouraged us to think critically and to form our own opinions. All of this together fundamentally changed the way I saw the world.

Dorothee: Could you give some numbers – how many Arab-Israeli Palestinians live in Israel and how many in Gaza (controlled by Hamas) and how many in the West Bank (with Fatah as an important power in the region)?

Ahmad: There are 2.14 million people living in Gaza, and about 3.4 million people in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The residents there either hold Israeli citizenship or have a different legal status. Around two million Arabs live in Israel, making up approximately 20% of the country's population. Most of them are Muslims, along with other minority groups such as Druze and, notably, Christians.

Dorothee: What did you study, and how was your attitude changed by your experiences?

Ahmad: In Israel, I began studying nursing science for one year at Tel Aviv University. After that, I switched to psychology, sociology and anthropology. Later, in Germany, I completed a diploma in clinical and organisational psychology at Humboldt-Universität in Berlin. The time I spent studying psychology in Tel Aviv had a particularly strong impact on me. It was there that I began to see things very differently and developed a completely new way of thinking. I gained new ways of

reflecting – especially about my inner self, my personal development and my childhood. This critical perspective helped me to see things differently and, above all, to break free from Islamist ideologies and patriarchal structures.

Studying in Germany was more challenging in terms of integration within the university itself, especially compared to Tel Aviv. Still, I believe that clinical psychology, my self-observations and the experience of encountering a new environment – a new language and a new culture – all shaped me deeply. It allowed me to see things from new angles and perhaps reach a new level of reflection, particularly regarding my culture, my religion, the way I was raised, and my relationship with my parents and with people in Israel – especially in my small village.

Dorothee: Do you know how many Arab-Israeli Palestinians study at Tel Aviv University of Engineering?

Ahmad: According to the most recent data from the 2020/21 academic year, around 460 Arab-Israeli Palestinians were studying at the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science at Tel Aviv University of Engineering. That number has likely increased slightly since then. Many are also enrolled at other universities – in Jerusalem, Be'er Sheva, at the Technion in Haifa – as well as at numerous colleges across Israel, which have a status comparable to community colleges in the United States. There are also Arab Israelis who go to Europe to study, others to Jordan, and in recent years even to the West Bank, particularly if they are not admitted to universities in Israel. This is a positive development. Arab Israelis are now firmly established in the labour market – not only in basic jobs but also in academic positions. No hospital in Israel could function without Arab doctors, nurses and healthcare workers. Pharmacy is also a particularly popular field of study among Arab Israelis.

Dorothee: Do Palestinians in Lebanon have the same civil rights as other citizens living there?

Ahmad: No, Palestinians in Lebanon do not have the same rights – nor do they in Syria. They are treated as second-class citizens, are not granted citizenship and are barred from many professions under the justification that they are refugees. Yet, if they do receive citizenship, they lose their right of return. The problem is that the refugee status is being passed down to the fourth and fifth generations. Entire generations grow up learning to live in poverty and dependency on aid organisations, without ever truly having the chance to arrive or become part of the society around them.

Dorothee: When did you go to Germany? How did this influence your attitude?

Ahmad: Physically, I arrived in Germany in 2004. I first learned the language, then started studying, and from 2007 onwards, I began working and earning my living here. But emotionally, I only truly arrived when I felt like I was part of this society. This was not a momentary experience but a process.

My wife, who is German, has been a huge help in making me feel part of this society – being in a partnership with a German person supported me massively. Also, the opportunities I received to become a co-creator and have influence in this society as a migrant – to learn the language, find work and succeed – these were all factors that enabled me to develop an emotional connection to this society. One moment that helped me tremendously to arrive and stop feeling like a stranger was my experience in a shared students' apartment in early 2007, when I first encountered Germans on an equal footing. We celebrated parties together, talked about worries and politics, laughed and cried together, and developed friendships.

I believe integration is only truly successful when people gain emotional access and no longer feel like strangers, especially when they internalise that the fundamental values of this society represent an opportunity, not a threat. For someone coming from a patriarchal society and family, who was partly socialised in Islamist contexts, this was a process. I am very grateful to have met people in Germany who enabled me to feel German and become part of this society.

Dorothee: How difficult is it for you to have a different worldview to that of your family in Israel/Palestine?

Ahmad: It has always been difficult, especially when I moved to Tel Aviv, started working in Israel and developed a different political stance. When I decided to go to Germany, I didn't follow the simple, prescribed path: marrying at 26, building a house, living next to my parents, choosing a wife from the village. But the hardest part, of course, was marrying a German woman and raising my child with different methods and values.

The situation after 7 October 2023 was incredibly difficult for me. My parents adopted an extremely pro-Palestinian stance, were angry at Israel and, above all, they don't understand my perspective – not the German perspective, not my personal perspective, not my attempt

to take a completely different path than my parents, who have spent their whole lives waiting for a victory that will never come.

I want to do things differently – as a German, as a Muslim, as an Israeli. I want to show empathy to Jews and not be on the wrong side of history: I do not want to relativise Hamas terror, nor question Israel's right to exist, but rather seek other ways. This has become extremely intense and difficult, making a normal relationship between me and my parents nearly impossible, let alone between me and the people in my village or those I grew up with. But that is the price you pay when you come from a patriarchal family and still want to be autonomous and develop your own views. I'm not saying I'm right; I'm just saying this is my position, and at forty-eight years old, I want to be able to express it without negative consequences and without being crushed by people who should actually love me.

Dorothee: What was your motivation for founding the Mansour–Initiative?

Ahmad: *MIND prevention* was an attempt to carry out a completely different kind of prevention work – not one that excuses, 'tabooises' or downplays these issues, or treats migrants like helpless, pampered pets. Rather, it is a prevention approach that is capable of speaking very clearly about Israel-related antisemitism, Islamism, hostility to democracy, and patriarchal structures. It aims to reach people by taking them seriously – not by coddling or patronising them, but by holding them accountable and expecting them to think critically and reflect on their own positions and perspectives.

This method and approach have been very successful in every one of our projects, but unfortunately – especially from the left-wing spectrum – it has faced massive opposition. One common claim is that Islamism is a product of discrimination. We oppose this one-sided view of the issue. As a result, our work is rejected in certain circles and we are sometimes accused of being racist when we address certain topics in our own way and speak about them directly.

Dorothee: You mentioned that it is difficult to bring in food and other urgently needed support for the civilians, because Hamas would bring everything under their control and sell the auxiliary goods. So the problem arises of feeding into the military equipment of Hamas as soon as one sends in food and housing for people?

Ahmad Mansour, talk in Berlin, Photo: Dorothee Richter

Ahmad: Unfortunately, yes – but this is a problem that must be addressed at an international level. The fact that humanitarian aid is managed and controlled by Hamas, which embezzles aid goods and uses the funds generated to finance its terrorism and secure its continued existence, is a major issue. On the other hand, uninvolved civilians must have access to humanitarian aid – and this must happen without Hamas acting as an intermediary.

Dorothee: What do you see as a possibility for the future? How could a democratic regime be found and installed?

Ahmad: A democratic regime cannot simply emerge on its own. It is a long process and a long path toward reconciliation, which requires re-education and cooperation among all Western countries, Israel and moderate Arab states with the Palestinians. This can only happen once Hamas has been dismantled.

Dorothee: I heard you and your wife's podcast about a German-Arab marriage. It was very funny and at the same time it also showed the difficulties – for example, the security measures your family has to live with were

mentioned two or three times. It takes courage to speak out like you do. Would you like to comment on the more light-hearted podcast and the seriousness of the situation?

Ahmad: Humour is always good medicine for difficult situations. The idea for the podcast came about because the binational challenge of a German-Arab marriage also brings many funny moments in everyday life. We simply wanted to be an inspiration for others in similar situations. Even though there are strong cultural differences, love and respect are fundamental and can solve many problems.

We started before 7 October 2023 and consciously decided to stop at some point. The situation has unfortunately become much more difficult for us since then. Nevertheless, I see the positive side: this country does everything to ensure that we can continue to express our opinions without intimidation or threats.

––––––––––––––––––

Ahmad Mansour is an Israeli-German psychologist and author of Arab-Palestinian origin. Born in Tira, close to Kafar Saba in the Triangle, Israel, in 1976, he has lived in Germany since 2004 and has held German citizenship since 2017. Mansour works on projects and initiatives against radicalisation, oppression in the name of honour, and antisemitism in the Islamic community. He grew up in a non-practising Muslim family. During his school years, he came into contact with a fundamentalist imam, and this almost led to him becoming an Islamist. Mansour's bachelor's degree in psychology (1996–99) at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo helped him to break away from Islamism. After witnessing an attack, he went to Germany in 2004 and continued his psychology studies at Humboldt-Universität in Berlin in 2005; he received his diploma in 2009. Since 2015, Mansour has worked as a research associate at the Center for Democratic Culture in Berlin and as an advisory programme director at the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussels. His work focuses on Salafism, antisemitism, and psychosocial issues and problems among migrants of Muslim origin. From 2007 to 2016, he was group leader of the Berlin-based project Heroes, which actively opposes all "oppression in the name of honour". From 2012 to 2014, Mansour was a participant in the German Islam Conference. Since 2017, he has been Managing Director of MIND prevention, a Berlin-based initiative for the promotion of democracy and prevention of extremism.

Dorothee Richter, PhD, is Professor in Contemporary Curating at the University of Reading, UK, where she directs the PhD in Practice in Curating programme. She previously served as head of the Postgraduate Programme in Curating (CAS/MAS) at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), Switzerland. Richter has worked extensively as a curator: she initiated the Curating Degree Zero Archive and was artistic director at Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated various symposia on feminist issues in contemporary arts, as well as an archive on feminist practices entitled *Materialien/Materials*. Together with Ronald Kolb, Richter directed a film on Fluxus: *Flux Us Now, Fluxus Explored with a Camera*. Her most recent project was *Into the Rhythm: From Score to Contact Zone*, a collaborative exhibition at the ARKO Art Center, Seoul, in 2024. This project was co-curated by OnCurating (Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb) and ARKO (curator Haena Noh, producer Haebin Lee). Richter is Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of OnCurating.org, and recently founded the OnCurating Academy Berlin.

From the Critique of Right-Wing Spaces to the Critique of Authoritarian Spaces
Stephan Trüby

Is there an architectural and urbanism agenda behind the policies of today's right-wing populist, far-right, extreme-right and (neo)fascist forces? This is the central question informing the 'Right-Wing Spaces' research project, the results of which appear in a guest-curated issue of *ARCH+* magazine titled 'Rechte Räume: Bericht einer Europareise' (Right-Wing Spaces: Report on a Journey Through Europe, 2019),[1] edited by the IGmA Institute for Principles of Modern Architecture (Design and Theory) at the University of Stuttgart, and in the book *Rechte Räume* published in German in 2020.[2] The answer to the question posed by the project is cautiously emphatic: "Architecture – or more precisely, architectural reconstruction – seems to have become a key medium of the authoritarian, *völkisch*, historically revisionist right."[3]

Rechte Räume was brought out in autumn 2020 – six months, that is, after the start of the Covid pandemic. It was associated with a gateway for far-reaching changes to the political order in many countries whose governments were already latently or overtly authoritarian, and in more liberal societies – as stated in the introduction – the far right and extreme right hoped that Covid-19 would be the "ultimate catalyst to precipitate the downfall" of the political status quo.[4] Even if a different view might be taken of some of the material now, Covid delineated a pattern that persists to this day. For the people who, back in the period that began in 2020, interpreted 'freedom' as a lack of consideration for others (manifesting as a refusal to be vaccinated or even to wear a mask) and even fantasised – with encouragement from media platforms that spread disinformation – about a conspiracy run by Bill Gates or Davos tended to find themselves on the side of Putin when Russia launched its war of aggression against Ukraine or expressing understanding for Hamas after the events of 7 October 2023 (or 10/7). The implicit or explicit endorsement of a multipolar world – and thus also the acceptance or defence of an authoritarian Russia-Iran-Hezbollah-Hamas axis – occurs on both the right and the left and is usually bound together by antisemitism. This was already the connecting element of a left-right *Querfront* (akin to the 'Third Position') in the diagram of political positions printed in *Rechte Räume* [fig. 1] – a political movement that became even more evident after 10/7 – also in the work of Slavoj Žižek, whose theories gave rise to the diagram, and who, in his opening speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair, peddled the historically inaccurate line that Reinhard Heydrich was a closet Zionist.[5] In doing so, he dealt, as Detlef zum Winkel puts it, a "serious blow" to his own philosophy. We will be returning to this anti-Israeli *Querfront* which, in a particularly disturbing way, has also manifested itself in the field of architecture after 7 October 2023 as a virulent wave of implicit, and sometimes explicit, support for Hamas.

In this way, the narrow review of 'Right-Wing Spaces' is expanded into a more general critique of 'authoritarian (meta)politics in architecture and urbanism'. This is also the subtitle of the rechteraeume.net video platform [fig. 2], which was developed together with Philipp Krüpe; it is based on documentary films of walks with a critical take on antisemitism and racism, which the IGmA ran in cooperation with various theatres, museums and other cultural institutions in Berlin, Hamburg, Cologne, Mannheim, Munich, Nuremberg, Frankfurt am Main and, most recently, Stuttgart in 2024.[6] The

potential for discrimination – as should also become clear in what follows – is not confined to the right but also has its place on the left. In order to bring the two sides back into dialogue, people need to be constantly on the alert internally to guard against not only "structural racism"[7] but also 'structural antisemitism'. What binds these two forms of observation together is the question of power. While racism is based on a clear ranking system between the poles of oppressor and oppressed, antisemitism is more complex in nature: here, discrimination is enacted as a paranoid construct in which the collective that is discriminated against – Jews, the Jewish state – is characterised as inferior and at the same time all-powerful.
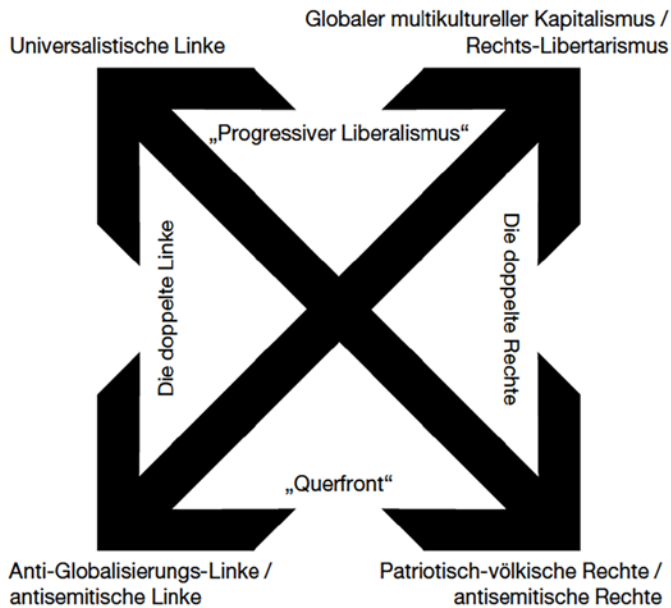
fig. 1: Diagram of political positions.

fig. 2: Screenshot of rechteraeume.net video platform.

**Erosion of Left-Wing Solidarity with Jews in a Jewish State:
The Wave of Support for Hamas post 7 October**

Even though the 'Right-Wing Spaces' research, which takes a critical view of both antisemitism and racism, has always been clear about the difficulties posed by fair-weather concepts like 'multidirectional memory', the impact that the events of 7 October 2023 have had on universities and exhibition settings has provoked a veritable crisis:[8] working relationships were reviewed and, in extreme cases, cooperations were ended. The Hamas attack on Israel that day – the worst massacre of Jews since the Holocaust – has also brought down untold suffering on the heads of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip in the wake of the Israeli counterattack: a terrible price that Hamas factored into their cold-blooded calculations. Their strategy of escalation has prompted distressingly one-sided responses in some sections of the cultural milieu, as well as in the world of architecture. While empathy for the Palestinian victims has become prevalent around the world, there is remarkably little talk of the suffering experienced by the Israelis and foreigners who were murdered or abducted. On the first anniversary of the event, the IGmA therefore organised a conference titled 'Antisemitism in the Cultural Field? A Conference on the Post-10/7 Situation in Architecture, Art, Film, Music, Theater, and Theory' [fig. 3] at the University of Stuttgart.[9] One of the topics covered there was Israel-related antisemitism, manifesting in the field of planning and construction, represented in all its breadth at the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale, curated by Lesley Lokko. The show ran between May and November 2023, under the rubric *The Laboratory of the Future*. What was unquestionably its great merit – the fact that for the first time, Africa and the African diaspora were in the spotlight of the world's most important architecture exhibition – should not distract from the fact that the show was also accompanied by a hitherto unprece-

fig. 3: IGmA conference on "Antisemitism in in the Cultural Field", Octomber 2024.

figs. 4-5: Anti-Israel agitation during the Venice Architecture Biennale 2023 included a graffiti attack on the Israeli pavilion.

dented normalisation of anti-Israeli agitation, presided over by a curator who is the daughter of a Jewish Scottish mother (and Ghanaian father). *The Laboratory of the Future* was for architecture what documenta fifteen was for the arts – only without a critical public [fig. 4]. The biennale finished on 26 November 2023 with a graffiti attack on the Israeli Pavilion [fig. 5].

"Occupied Palestine, on Both Sides of the Green Line": The Case of Petti and Hilal (DAAR)

The exhibition's bias is evident simply from the fact that the 2023 Golden Lion for best contribution to the main exhibition went to Sandi Hilal and Alessandro Petti of Decolonizing Architecture Art Research (DAAR). Based in Bethlehem and Stockholm, the Palestinian/Italian duo, who are supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, showed an installation called *Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza*. The work was conceived as a travelling exhibition, whose intention was to explore possibilities for the "critical reappropriation, reuse, and subversion of fascist colonial architecture and its modernist legacy"[10] – based on the Sicilian settlement of Borgo Rizza, which was built in 1940 by the Ente di Colonizzazione del Latifondo Siciliano (ECLS), the body responsible for colonising Sicily's latifundia. Multipurpose items of furniture were set up in the Arsenale for the installation: they borrowed their form from the façade of a key building in the settlement and were used for screenings and debates before, during and after the Biennale. The view of Sicily from the point of view of DAAR is thus an emblematic means to grapple with the built heritage – and Italian colonialism, in particular – because a similar architectural design to that of Borgo Rizza was used by fascist urban planners at around the same time in Libya, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia. The way a critical engagement with the legacy of Italian fascism – commendable in itself – is turned into an oversimplified 'criticism of Israel' in the interests of short-term political expediency is brought out in DAAR's best-known publication, *Architecture after Revolution*, the book they authored together with Eyal Weizman in 2013, which examines how built legacies are dealt with in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In this publication, DAAR ponders the key question of how an architecture of decolonisation might actually look or, to be more precise, the extent to which relationships based on violence can be repurposed and thereby reproduced. Between the extremes of a decolonial frenzy of destruction and a usage that simply continues unchanged, they advance the idea of a "third way", conceived as a well-thought-out act of repurposing. For inspiration here, Hilal and Petti look to the Fossoli POW camp in Carpi in northern Italy: during the Second World War, this was used as, among other things, a deportation camp for Jews; after the war it was taken over by a priest and converted into an orphanage, operating as such until 1952. Or they turn to the Staro Sajmište camp in Belgrade, which was originally built in 1936 as a fairground, then fell into Nazi hands and became a site of murder and imprisonment, before being transformed in the post-war period into a community centre by artists and Sinti and Roma.[11] *Architecture after Revolution* now puts Israel in the absurd line of tradition of Nazi Germany, speculating on the future of "Israeli colonial architecture" on the basis of a series of paper projects: "That is, reusing the evacuated structures of Israel's domination in the same way as the occupiers did – the settlements as Palestinian suburbs and the military bases for Palestinian security needs – would mean reproducing their inherent alienation and violence: the settlement's system of fences and surveillance technologies would inevitably enable their seamless transformation into gated communities for the Palestinian elite."[12] Passages like the one in which the authors speak of "occupied Palestine, on both sides of the Green Line" make it clear that, in the context of "Israel's domination", DAAR does not just mean the West Bank, with its history of occupation dating back to 1967.[13] This is tantamount to a kind of delegitimisation of Israel, because – it should be remembered – the 'Green Line' is the ceasefire line drawn after the 1949 War of Independence, and those on both sides who regard it as 'occupation' see Israel's right to exist, if it is to exist at all, as limited, at maximum, to the borders established in the UN partition plan of 1947.

At first sight, the DAAR projects seem to gravitate toward a gentle dovishness – such as the idea of planting olive trees in former Israeli watchtowers and repurposing them as aviaries. However, this should not be allowed to conceal the fact that the architects – as the title of their book telegraphs – hope for a revolution, and a violent one if necessary: "Popular uprising, armed resistance, or political negotiations . . . are, of course, integral and necessary parts of any radical political transformation."[14] In line with this, *Architecture after Revolution* is infused with a calculated cultivation of Palestinian hatred: "Are you a one-, two-, or three-state solutionist? A partitionist? A federalist? . . . The only state we know is a state of conflict and struggle."[15] DAAR suggests that Palestinians, as DPs, are simply not able to become native residents anywhere and must reconcile themselves to a status quo (as some 12 to 14 million German expellees managed to do after the Second World War) – no, they are to vegetate in refugee camps, if you please, and on the basis of some duplicitous political calculus at that: "What makes refugee life a potentially powerful agent of decolonization is that the ongoing desire for return is the strongest possible challenge to the sovereign power of the state."[16] The authors regard their book as an "invitation to rethink the problem of political subjectivity not from the point of view of a Western conception of a liberal citizen but rather from the point of view of the displaced and extraterritorial refugee".[17] The award of the Golden Lion to DAAR originated in the decision of a five-person international jury, presided over by the Italian architect, curator and former OMA partner Ippolito Pestellini Laparelli, who, after 10/7, put himself and his office 2050.plus at the disposal of the 'Portraits for Gaza' campaign, which was critical of Israel. One member of the jury was Nora Akawi, a Palestinian professor of architecture at New York's Cooper Union who had also signed the 2021 open letter. At Cooper (and elsewhere too), the Israeli-Pales-

fig. 6: Screenshot from Nora Akawi's Instagram account, February 2024.

tinian conflict ran hot after 10/7. On 26 October 2023, Jewish students had to take shelter behind locked library doors to protect themselves from demonstrators yelling "Free Palestine".[18] After 10/7, Akawi's social media presence was conspicuous, featuring multiple posts in support of Hamas; she also celebrated the siege of the Museum of Modern Art in February 2024, in which pro-Palestinian activists unfurled an enormous banner in the great hall of the museum bearing the genocidal slogan 'FREE PALESTINE – FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA', which calls for the obliteration of a state with more than nine million people [fig. 6].

"Mobile Parcel of Earth":
The Case of Léopold Lambert and *The Funambulist*[19]

The English-language architecture magazine *The Funambulist*, which operates out of Paris, also featured prominently at the 2023 Architecture Biennale – with co-financing from the Institut français – and had a plaque in the Arsenale presenting all the magazine's issues and book titles. *The Funambulist* started life in 2010 as a blog produced by Léopold Lambert, a Frenchman born in 1985, and has been published as a bimonthly print magazine since 2015. Lambert is regarded as one of the most aggressive supporters of BDS in the world of international architecture. His 2016 article 'On the Future of Palestine: Letter To My Liberal Friends' provides a more detailed sense of his Middle East worldview, which could be described as a more explicit variant of DAAR.[20] He rejects a two-state solution because it would bring nothing other than a retroactive legitimisation of the 'Nakba' – the 'catastrophe' which led, with the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, to the expulsion of the Palestinians and displacement of their traditional way of life. He remains silent about the expulsion of 850,000 Jews from North Africa and all across the Islamic world, which took place in parallel with the Nakba.[21] The future of Palestine, according to Lambert, should once again be in the

hands of the Palestinians themselves; there should be no more Israelis there in the future, only "Palestinian Jews".[22] Although Lambert accuses his "liberal friends" of being unnecessarily peace-oriented, he states: "I'm not here to attack you here [*sic*], I 'come in peace'."

Four years earlier, Lambert had already made clear what lies behind his contradictory declaration of peace in connection with the Israel-Palestine conflict – and what this means on an everyday political and architectural level. In the *Funambulist* essay 'Architectural Stockholm Syndrome' (2012), he objects to the successful economic policies of Salam Fayyad, who was finance minister from 2002 to 2005 and then prime minister of the Palestinian Autonomous Territories from 2007 to 2013. With his reforms, Fayyad temporarily brought economic growth of 8.5 per cent to the West Bank, almost on par with China, but many Palestinians – and Hamas, in particular – considered him far too pro-US and pro-Israel. Lambert complains that under Fayyad's aegis, a Palestinian bourgeoisie has emerged in the West Bank that dares to feel comfortable in more luxurious housing complexes modelled on Israeli settlements. Lambert misrepresents these preferences as an architectural "Stockholm syndrome", i.e. the identification of an abductee with their captor. By contrast, he argues – in terms that are almost *völkisch* in their use of blood-and-soil language – in favour of a traditional architecture redolent of an assumed Palestinian national identity that would play a defensive part or even be used as a weapon in the "territorial struggle" in the West Bank.[23]

In another Lambert essay, also published in 2012, entitled 'The Palestinian Archipelago: A Metaphorical Cartography of the Occupied Territories', it becomes clear what kind of residents he envisages for the identitarian houses that are to be built: not citizens with "cars, phones, computers and comfortable houses" – that would be a dangerous social change towards Palestinian prosperity for the author – but a poor, angry mass of revolutionary, nomadic bodies that are ready to use violence and shouldn't just swallow the sedative pill called comfort. For Palestinians, says Lambert, it's about – and there you have it – becoming a "mobile parcel of earth" that the body itself limits.
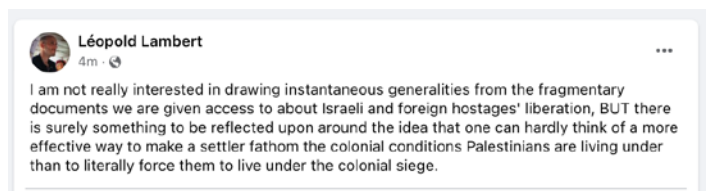
figs. 7-8: Screenshots from Léopold Lambert's Facebook account on 10/7 and shortly after.

On 7 October, many of these "mobile parcels of earth" got through the barriers around the Gaza Strip, murdered almost 1,400 civilians and soldiers, injured 4,100 people, kidnapped over 210 others, and tortured children, parents and elderly people, killing them in front of rolling cameras. Lambert celebrated the start of these sadistic crimes with a Facebook post in which a photo of a fence broken through by diggers was commented on with the sentence, which was liked hundreds of times by the *Funambulist* community: "You're beautiful like a smashed prison door" [fig. 7]. A few days later he proclaimed, again with a Facebook post, that "Palestine will be free from the River to the Sea". After 10/7, on 30 November 2024, to be precise, Lambert even defended the taking of Israeli civilians as hostages with the following words: "There is surely something to be reflected upon around the idea that one can hardly think of a more effective way to make a settler fathom the colonial conditions Palestinians are living under than to literally force them to live under colonial siege" [fig. 8]. It is important to locate such sentences at the heart of the 2023 Architecture Biennale – not to do so would be to underestimate the seriousness of the situation: Lambert sits on the scientific advisory board of Lokko's African Futures Institute, and many of the biennale's contributors have been featured in *The Funambulist*. Never before can a European biennale have been staffed by so many supporters of BDS, all working towards a global isolation of Israel that is tantamount to a new ghettoisation of Jews. The cultural and historical significance of this happening in Venice of all places – and, incredibly, under a Jewish director of the biennale – has not yet been considered: the word 'ghetto' is derived from the Venetian island of the same name in the Sestiere di Cannaregio; this island was the self-contained area where the city's Jewish population lived in segregation from the sixteenth century until the decree instituting it was countermanded in 1796 under Napoleon.

"We Stand in Opposition": The Call for Immediate Action

The Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, to which Israel responded on 27 October 2023 with a ground offensive in the Gaza Strip, has led to major upheavals in almost every cultural milieu. This is evident, too, in the countless open letters and calls that have since been published. The art world set things in motion with an 'Open Letter from the Art Community to Cultural Organisations', published in the American art magazine *Artforum* on 19 October 2023, before the ground offensive had even begun. Without so much as one word criticising Hamas, more than 8,000 signatories expressed their "support" for "Palestinian liberation", deploring "crimes against humanity that the Palestinian people are facing" and an "occupied and besieged Gaza strip" and demanding an "opening of Gaza's crossings" – only twelve days, mind you, after hundreds of armed men descended upon Israelis from there. The letter, which was uncritically shared by other art portals like *e-flux* and *Hyperallergic*, was illustrated with an artwork by one of the signatories, New York-based artist Emily Jacir, the 2008 recipient of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation's Hugo Boss Prize.[24] Shortly after 7 October, she had become known for posting a photo on social media of eighty-five-year-old Yaffa Adar – pictured with a distraught smile after being abducted by Hamas from her home in Kibbutz Nir Oz – and for adding the pernicious text: "This captured settler looks happy. I hope they feed her a good Palestinian dish" [fig. 9]. The letter was signed by many well-known artists, musicians and intellectuals – including Judith Butler, Jarvis Cocker, Brian Eno, Nan Goldin and Barbara Kruger, as well as Alessandro Petti and Eyal Weizman. David Velasco, editor-in-chief of *Artforum* since 2017 and another to sign the letter, was subsequently dismissed.

fig. 9: Screenshot from Emily Jacir's Instagram accunt shortly after 10/7.

The architecture world was not slow in going public with statements of this kind. The 'Call for Immediate Action to Architecture and Planning Programs, Organizations, and Individuals to Stand Against the Destruction of Lives and Built Environments in Palestine, and to Protect Academic Freedom' was published on 14 November 2023 by a group calling itself Architects and Planners Against Apartheid; others were to follow.[25] Again, not a word is said in it about the Hamas acts of terror; and one-sided solidarity is expressed for the Palestinian position. Israel is charged with both genocide ("deliberately inflicting conditions of life to bring about the destruction of a group in whole or in part") and urbicide ("deliberate destruction of built environments"). The authors of the letter entirely fail to mention that Hamas, meanwhile, has been firing rockets at Israel on an ongoing basis since seizing power in the Gaza Strip in 2007, using its own civilian population as human shields. Instead, the complexities of the conflict have been simplified and cast as the supposed struggle of the oppressed (Palestinians) against the oppressor (Israel) and its alleged "colonial violence". The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is singled out as representative of the diverse ways in which the disciplines of architecture and urbanism are enmeshed in a general history of violence, in a bid to put a final end to unethical behaviour on the part of planners, with the roles of villains and saints clearly allocated: "The disciplines of architecture, planning, and historic preservation have been historically complicit in regimes of violence and oppression. It's vital to take a clear ethical stance against the destruction of lives and built environments. We stand in opposition to colonialism, militarism, apartheid, racism, white supremacy, and genocide in Palestine and around the world." Note that antisemitism as a form of discrimination – unrivalled in terms of its deadly effect – is not mentioned once in this list.

More than two thousand people from all over the world signed this appeal, including Léopold Lambert, Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti and Eyal Weizman, as well as many other well-known figures. What is striking is the complete absence of the names of any teaching staff from German universities. Austrian signatories are likewise rather few and far between, although there is one notable exception that proves the rule: the letter is also signed by Bärbel Müller, head of the Institute of Architecture at the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Things are very different in the UK and especially in London, where at the time of mid- to late November 2023, the two most important architecture schools – the Architectural Association (AA) with ten signatures and The Bartlett with thirteen – turned out to be real hotspots for anti-Israeli sentiment. Signatories from the AA included Manijeh Verghese, head of public programmes, and curator Harriet Jennings, as well as José Alfredo Ramirez, co-head of the landscape and urbanism programme, and Nicholas Simcik Arese, chair of history and theory; and from The Bartlett, professors Murray Fraser, James O'Leary and Catalina Ortiz. The picture is even worse at Belgium's KU Leuven, where eighteen people have affiliated themselves with the appeal, including such well-known professors as architectural theorist Hilde Heynen, philosopher Lieven De Cauter and architect and co-founder of Dogma, Martino Tattara. There is an even more serious situation at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard University, where twenty-five people have signed – including professors Danielle N. Choi, Ana Maria Léon and Valentina Rozas-Krause. At the time of publication of this letter, conditions at the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) at Columbia University in New York were the worst, with fifty-eight affiliations. The Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich, the sole European 'leader' in structural Israel hatred, ranked second worldwide with twenty-seven affiliations. Therefore, the following separate studies will be devoted to the latter two architecture schools, which will also consider developments since then.

"Zionist Killing Machine":
On the Situation at the Department of Architecture at ETH Zurich[26]
Although the vast majority of Jewish architects of the Zionist project in the early twentieth century were not trained in Zurich, but mainly in Germany and Austria – primarily in Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Darmstadt, Dessau and Stuttgart[27] – ETH Zurich deserves credit for having academically researched their history with great thoroughness. This achievement is primarily attributable to architectural historian Ita Heinze-Greenberg, who conducted research at the university from 2012 onwards and, from 2016 until her retirement in 2020, also served as Adjunct Professor for the History of Modern Architecture under the Andreas Tönnesmann Chair at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta). Since her departure, which left a major gap in Zionism expertise, anti-Israel rhetoric has become part of the 'radical chic' of everyday university life, as was evident not least during a departmental conference in December 2023: it was accompanied by 'Stop the Genocide' calls displayed on digital screens. The Parity Group, an otherwise commendable diversity initiative, also promoted a radical, pro-Palestinian narrative with online statements that uttered no critical words about Hamas's mass rapes and femicidal violence. On Instagram, it accused its own university of "silencing" "certain voices" – the ETH had banned a demonstration planned for 12 October 2023 on the university campus with slogans like 'Intifada until victory'.[28] The group, which does not publicly disclose its members' names, also accused Israel of "ongoing apartheid". It was believed that this accusation adequately described a state that, even under its current right-wing government, offers the Arab-Muslim part of its population more freedom than any other Arab country and ranks 31st in *The Economist* magazine's Democracy Index – whereas Hamas-financing countries appear at the bottom of the list: Qatar (117th place), Saudi Arabia (148th place), Iran (154th place).[29]

The anti-Israel rhetoric at the ETH Department of Architecture was fuelled by a vocal, pro-Palestinian milieu of teachers, both at the mid-level and professorial levels, on social media and in campus spaces. For example, Nadi Abusaada, a former postdoctoral fellow at the gta Institute, not only defamed the new Israeli National Library, recently completed by Herzog & de Meuron, on social media as a building "built on theft" [fig. 10], but also celebrated the crimes of 7 October as the beginning of an "open, liberated geography", thus calling for the destruction of the beleaguered country [fig. 11]. He is deeply disappointed that only some ETH colleagues are willing to follow his exterminatory desire, as he expresses in a conversation available on YouTube.[30] Also worth mentioning is former gta employee Faiq Mari, who, as part of an ETH research project, established the online library *Maktabat Sabil* to make "knowledge on Palestine and its anti-colonial struggle" more accessible. The website,[31] which for a time had an ETH URL but was relocated after an online petition in early 2024,[32] contains digital copies of Arabic-language journals, including *Al Hadaf* – an outlet affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which is listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU and the US [fig. 12]. Furthermore, Mari's dissertation, *Masha' Of The Periphery*, supervised by Philip Ursprung and published in 2024, delegitimises Israel as an "imperial outpost in the region"[33] and a "small, hostile European settler colony implanted within a huge Arab nation."[34] Ethel Baraona Pohl, assistant to the Chair of Architecture and Care, also agitates against the existence of Israel by posting phrases like 'From the River to the Sea' or maps of a 'free Palestine' on social media [fig. 13]. As expected, all of the ETH employees mentioned signed the 'Call for Immediate Action'. Two now former professors in the Department of Architecture who struggle with the fact of Israel's existence also signed this letter: the Algerian-born Swiss architectural historian Samia Henni and the Dutch architect Anne Holtrop, who builds extensively in the Arab world, especially in Bahrain. While Holtrop, who now teaches in Mendrisio, quickly reveals his anti-Israeli bias with Instagram posts that describe
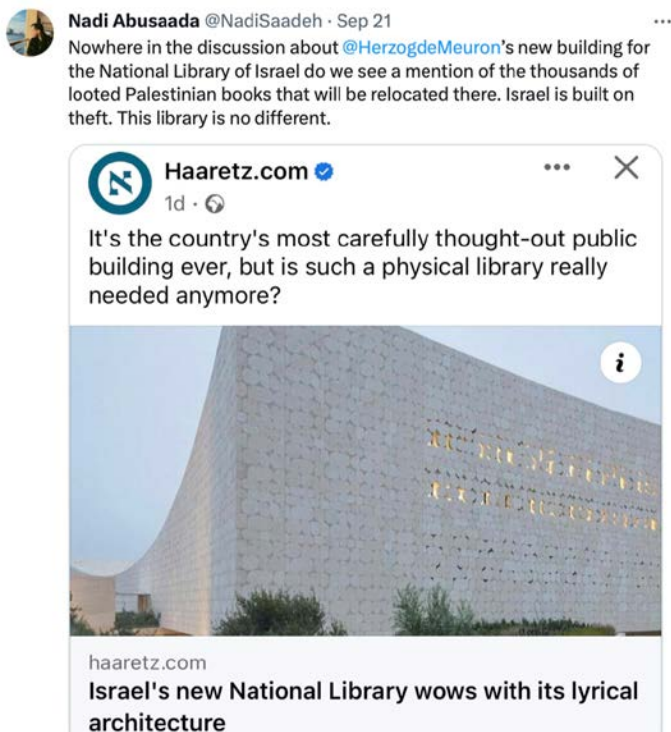
figs. 10-11: Screenshots from Nadi Abusaada's Facebook account before and on 10/7.

Israel as an "evil country" [fig. 14] and propagate "It's free Palestine til' Palestine is free" [fig. 15], one must take a closer look at Henni, who, after a visiting professorship at ETH, has been teaching at McGill University in Montreal since autumn 2024.

In 2017, Samia Henni published her book *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria*, published by gta Verlag at ETH Zurich [fig. 16]. It was based on her dissertation of the same name, also supervised by Philip Ursprung.[35] Although it focuses on the period of the Algerian War from 1954 to 1962, Henni unfolds the history of a violent nexus that stretches from National Socialism to the end of French colonial rule in Algeria. Her central figure is Maurice Papon. As a high-ranking Vichy official

Fig. 12: The online library *Maktabat Sabil*, developed by former ETH employee Faiq Mari.

Fig. 13: Screenshot from Ethel Baraona Pohl's Facebook account, December 2023.

during World War II, he was responsible for the arrest and deportation of over 1,500 Jews, primarily to Auschwitz. After the war, he ruled for many years as colonial prefect of the province of Constantine in French Algeria. From 1958 onward, he served as police prefect in Paris, where, among other things, he was responsible for the 'Paris Massacre' of 200 peaceful Algerian demonstrators in 1961. Papon's biography provides Henni with a framework for blending the Nazi regime of violence with French colonial rule: "[…] the ghosts of Vichy continued to live and serve in colonial Algeria, and echoes of the Vichy regime and the Second World War persisted in Algeria under French rule even after Papon's departure from Constantine."[36] Even the considerable differences between Nazi concentration camps and French 'camps de regroupement' are condensed into a kind of concentration camp continuum.[37] A more precise analysis of the respective camp realities and their objectives is omitted. She doesn't even shy away from accusing the French ethnologist, Vichy resistance fighter and Ravensbrück concentration camp survivor Germaine Tillion of trivialising the French camps in Algeria.[38] Like Léopold Lambert, Henni doesn't acknowledge the expulsion of 850,000 Jews from the predominantly Islamic region, which took place in parallel with the Algerian independence movement and the founding of Israel[39] – in 1948, 140,000 Jews still lived in Algeria alone; today, there are none.[40] Between the lines, Henni subsequently expatriates Arab Jews who have settled in North African territory for 2,000 years, long before the emergence of Islam, by categorically distinguishing between 'Jews' and 'Algerians'.[41] At no point does she refer to 'Arab Jews' or 'Algerian Jews'; rather, for her, 'Jews' are always the Other. In doing so, she reproduces the colonialist civic segregation with which France, with the Crémieux Decree of 1870, granted French citizenship to Jews but not to Muslims – and, in a sense, naturalises them. Unsurprisingly, Henni sees the Algerian liberation struggle as the blueprint for "anticolonial movements and struggles

Figs. 14-15: Screenshots from Anne Holtrop's Instagram account, December 2023 (right) and December 2025 (left).

around the world", including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[42] In 2020, while still an assistant professor at Cornell University in the United States, she attracted attention with anti-Israel events that led to expressions of discontent from many Jewish students and teachers.[43] Her guest, Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, a radical Jewish anti-Zionist, gave an online lecture in which she showed the famous photograph of David Ben-Gurion at the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948, but edited it to
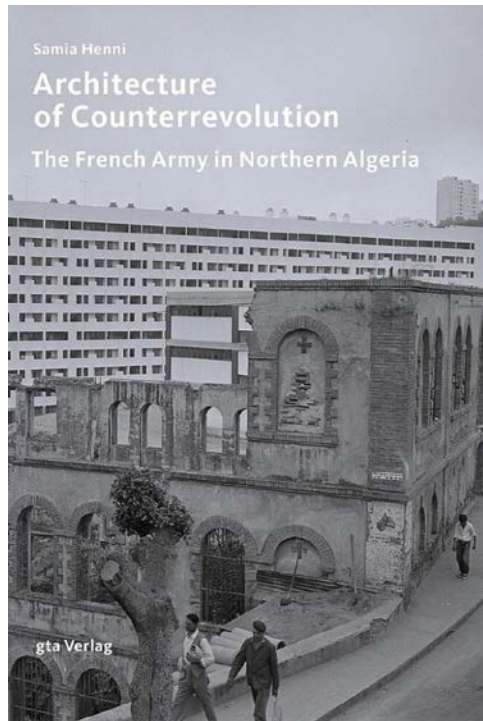
Fig. 16: Samia Henni's book *Architecture of Counterrevolution*, published in 2017.

Fig. 17: Ariella Aisha Azoulay's Cornell presentation from 2020 with blacked-out faces of the proclamation of the state of Israel.

black out all the people – including Theodor Herzl's face, which hangs over the scene [fig. 17]. She also blacked out other photos of Zionists from the 1930s and 1940s, as well as Israeli flags in the images. Her reasoning: "I can't bear to look at them."[44] A Cornell staff member interrupted the session with the brief, diplomatic comment that the topic being discussed was "sensitive" and would provoke "multiple viewpoints", which they would also consider in future events. This led to a storm of indignation in the ruthless Israel-hating community, which reacts extremely sensitively to the slightest criticism of their positions, and over 1,000 outraged people came together in defence of Henni and Azoulay with an open letter in which the phrase "settler colony known as Israel" is used.[45] These included Lesley Lokko, Eyal Weizman and many ETH lecturers, such as Philip Ursprung and Laurent Stalder. Who published the letter? Léopold Lambert with *The Funambulist*. In 2024, Henni's anti-Israel sentiment also became apparent when "she publicly adopted phrases like 'Zionist killing machine' [fig. 18] and co-signed – like Holtrop – the call for a boycott of the Israeli Pavilion at the 2024 Venice Art Biennale."[46] Since the departure of Henni, Holtrop, Abusaada and Mari from ETH Zurich in 2024 and 2025, the situation there for people in solidarity with Israel has noticeably improved – not least as a result of discussions following the publication of an earlier version of these remarks in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Although this was followed not only by a – misleading – rebuttal from the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (gta) at ETH Zurich,[47] but also by a legal dispute against the NZZ initiated by Henni and financed through a crowdfunding campaign,[48] the article could not be made to disappear because his statements proved to be incontrovertible in court.[49]
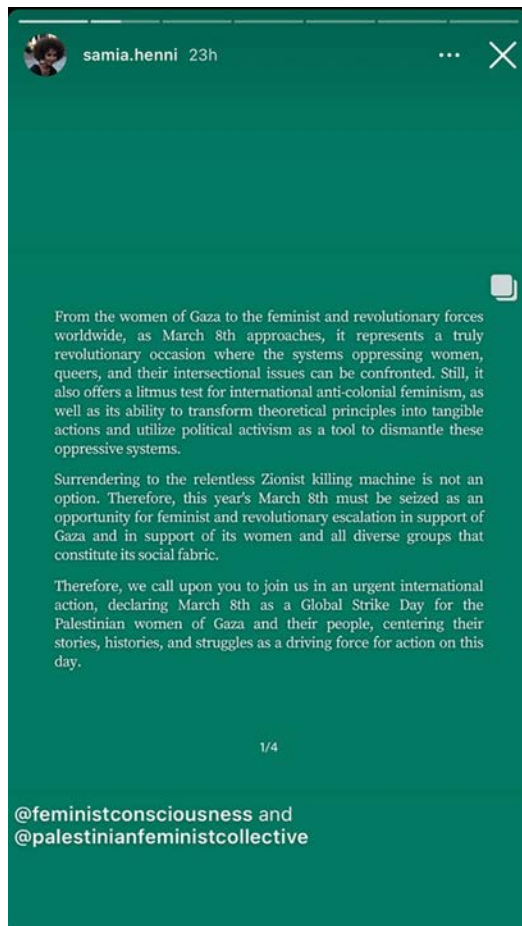
Fig. 18: Samia Henni published phrases like "Zionist killing machine" in an Instagram post, March 2024.

**"Dismantlement of Zionist Settler-Colonialism":
The Situation at Columbia University's GSAPP[50]**

While things have improved at ETH Zurich through a mix of internal discussions and journalistic observation, at Columbia University in New York this is only happening due to authoritarian pressure from the Trump administration, which has rightly identified the "Achilles heel of antisemitism" as a welcome opportunity to carry out a reactionary rollback that will unfortunately not help Jewish life in the long run. The fact that after 10/7, Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) in New York developed into a mecca of institutionalised hatred of Israel in the field of architecture and urbanism is not due to a sudden antisemitic eruption, but rather has a long local history. The university was strongly influenced by Edward Said, the US American literary scholar of Palestinian origin, who taught at Columbia as an assistant professor from 1963 and as full professor of English literature and comparative literature from 1966 to 2003. Many of his best-known books were published during this time, including the postcolonial standard work *Orientalism* (1978) and *The Question of Palestine* (1979). In the latter, Said untruthfully portrays Zionism as a movement that was built on a "total denial of the Palestinian presence".[51] He also trivialises the "Jewish Nakba", i.e. the expulsion and expropriation of around 850,000 Jews of Mizrahi and Sephardic origin from Arab and Islamic countries after the founding of the state of Israel, turning it into a kind of voluntary relocation – and speaks of "Jews who left the Arab countries to come to Israel".[52] Rashid Khalidi, another American with Palestinian roots, was also teaching at Columbia from 2003 until his retirement in 2024, as the Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies. The BDS supporter rigorously rejects any compensation for Jewish refugees from Arab countries on the grounds that this would be an "insidious argument" – "because the advocates of Jewish refugees are not working to get those legitimate assets back but are in fact trying to cancel out the debt of Israel towards Palestinian refugees".[53] In 2004, students produced the film *Columbia Unbecoming*, which critically examines the "anti-Semitic rantings" of three Columbia professors – Joseph Massad, George Saliba and Hamid Dabashi – all of whom teach in the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures Department (MEALAC). In 2007, the then Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadineschād, even gave a hotly debated speech – at the invitation of Lee C. Bollinger, the then president of Columbia, who wanted to demonstrate "the sovereignty of democratic institutions" but succeeded, first and foremost, in normalising an antisemitic Holocaust denier with genocidal intentions.

Given this background, it is no surprise that the 'Call for Immediate Action' was signed by many Columbia architecture professors, including some well-known names such as architectural theorist Reinhold Martin and architectural historian Mabel O. Wilson, but also Farah Alkhoury, an adjunct assistant professor at Columbia. After 10/7, she posted statements on social media like "The fascist right wing can't be defeated without the liberation of the Global South" or "Terrorism is the only area where white people do most of the work and get none of the credit". With calls for a "dismantlement of Zionist settler-colonialism" the statement also calls for the elimination of the state of Israel. From 2023 to 2024, Cruz Garcia and Nathalie Frankowski, who are notable on social media for their particularly militant anti-Israel statements, were also teaching as adjunct assistant professors at the GSAPP. Signatories of the 'Call for Immediate Action', they see Israel as a synonym for "75 years of occupation" and an "openly genocidal racist state", describe "peace" as a word used by white people, believe that the decoupling of racism and antisemitism is a "white supremacist move", view Zionism as "the most regressive invention of the modern world" and adopt Malcolm X's antisemitic statements about "Zionist dollarism" [fig. 19]. The architectural theory journal
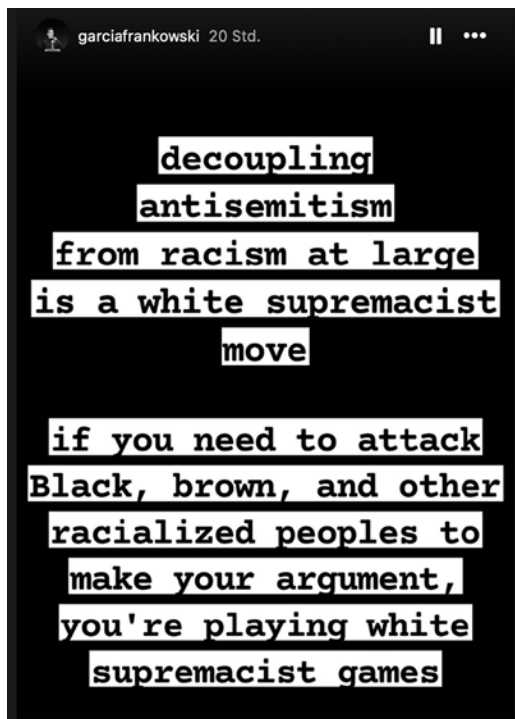
Fig. 19: Screenshot from Cruz Garcia's and Nathalie Frankowski's Instagram account, March 2024.

Avery Review, which is run by the GSAPP's Office of Publications, is also fully in the hands of BDS-affiliated Israel haters, as became publicly known on 13 October, if not before with the publication of the open letter 'Solidarity with Palestine'. Just six days after the massacre, the entire editorial team not only declared their support for the "Palestinian people in their struggle against Israeli occupation, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing" but also spoke of "Israel's 75-year-long settler colonial occupation". This is about nothing less than questioning Israel's right to exist. This is what they called for: "In addition to demanding a ceasefire from the international community and an end to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, we stand with a notion of peace that attends to the complete decolonization and end to the oppressive, settler colonial project in Palestine." They state almost duplicitously: "To call for justice for Palestinians is to call for justice for Black, trans, feminist, Indigenous, and Jewish life." Finally, mention should also be made of Hiba Bou Akar, associate professor at the GSAPP and director of the Post-Conflict Cities Lab – which was established in 2018 – who also signed the 'Call for Immediate Action'. On 23 April 2024, she proudly noted on social media that she – like many other teachers – held her "last class of semester" in the "Gaza Solidarity Campus" on the grounds of Columbia University. This was evacuated by the police on 30 April and 1 May 2024 at the request of Columbia president Nemat 'Minouche' Shafik after antisemitic attacks and property damage occurred.[54] Since Donald Trump's second term as US president, the university has been under immense pressure. His administration has cut grants to Columbia amounting to the equivalent of around $400 million, accusing it – not without reason – of having done too little to combat antisemitism and protect Jewish students. Even after an agreement with the government, the university must pay a $200 million fine for its failure. Meanwhile, Reinhold Martin, who also serves as president of the Columbia branch of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), has come under fire from Trumpist doxxing websites like Canary Mission, which accuse the architectural theorist of being close to BDS and of participating in a "pro-Hamas encampment at Columbia University", where chants included "Disclose! Divest! We will not stop, we will not rest!" [fig. 20].[55]

Just as the Columbia development as a whole did not come out of the blue, the GSAPP developments after 10/7 were not entirely unforeseeable. For example, in 2016, *The Arab City: Architecture and Representation* was published by Columbia Books on Architecture and the City, one of Columbia University's distributed presses.[56] The book was edited by the then dean Amale Andraos together with Nora Akawi, a jury member of the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale, who is also radically anti-Israel. The publication is influenced not only by spectacular architectural and urban development projects in Arab states but also by the failed Arab Spring in 2011, the resulting civil war in Syria, and the founding and spread of the terrorist group Islamic State in Iraq. It speaks a lot about identity – about "Arab identity", "Emirati identity", "Qatari identity", etc., and in some cases, it also attempts to deconstruct this search for identity – but that Jews were historically part of the Arab world and were largely expelled from it in around 1948 is suppressed in the texts. Israel appears (in an essay by Nasser Rabbat that is otherwise well worth reading) either as the victor of 1967, which plunged the Arab states into a general "mood of melancholy and wounded ego" or – in Akawi's case – as

Fig. 20: Screenshot from Canary Mission website, September 2025.

an aggressor who occupies, destroys and rages in Gaza with remote-controlled Caterpillars. Following Said, Akawi warns against a "pact universities make with the state or with national identity" – this pact, she says, has pushed Arab universities in particular into the trap of an 'Arabisation' that is at once postcolonial and loyal to the government. But she seems unwilling to reflect on the fact that her hatred of Israel and wish to eliminate it is fuelled by precisely this Arab nationalism, from which she maintains a rhetorical distance. Any attempt to avoid portraying Israel in a one-sidedly negative light as a contemporary 'perpetrator state par excellence' is taboo in these university circles. Accordingly, only one Jewish Israeli is represented in this book: Eyal Weizman, the founder of Forensic Architecture and favourite researcher of the Israel-bashing international within the architecture and art world, was allowed to contribute a text on 'The Nakba Day Killings' of 2015, in which two Palestinian teenagers were shot dead by Israeli soldiers in Beitunia in the West Bank.

Consensual Shrinkage through Projections onto Israel

The 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale considered the comments on hate-fuelled antipathy for Israel worthy of an exhibition and an award, and these sentiments were disseminated in the academic world with the help of important educational institutions in the realm of architecture like Columbia University. It is evident from this that seventy-five years after the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, the country is facing the greatest existential threat in its history, to which many disciplines have contributed – including an architectural discourse dressed up as science. Israel's territory, which, owing to its complex history – one that is primarily Jewish extending far back into pre-Muslim and pre-Christian times – is extraordinarily ill-suited to an essentialist discourse of decolonisation with clearly defined roles of coloniser and colonised, and is in danger of becoming a target onto which all the possible experiences of injustice that the world currently has to offer are projected. In the United States (Columbia University, etc.), Israel is being condemned for the kind of settler colonialism that has been practised for centuries – with support, irony of ironies, from a university named after Christopher Columbus. Researchers from Arab countries or Iraq and Iran are making one-sided accusations, charging Israel with a 'Nakba' that was contemporaneous with a 'Jewish Nakba' in their homelands. And in France (Léopold Lambert), Italy (Alessandro Petti), the Netherlands (Anne Holtrop) and Spain (Ethel Baraona Pohl) – there are many other examples that could be mentioned from the UK or Portugal – Israel is seen as the colonial state par excellence that should be eradicated, instead of contemplating the 'decolonisation', or demolition in plain language, of the city centres of Amsterdam, London, Paris and Rome, which were also financed, first and foremost, by colonialism. In countries with a particularly long and brutal history of colonialism, the university milieus, especially those that are left-wing and liberal, tend to recognise, as part of a discourse of decolonisation, the abysses their nations have fallen into historically but to baulk at the existential economic and political consequences of this – allowing them to treat Israel as a surrogate that is to be razed to the ground. Michael Brenner recently adverted to a pattern of hypocrisy when he said in an interview with *Der Spiegel*: "There would be more compelling arguments for returning New York to the Native Americans than for giving Israel back to the Arabs."[57]

According to the historian and antisemitism researcher Günther Jikeli, the patterns of thought informing this development can be traced back to two intellectual movements. The first, as he explains in his essay 'Ascheregen über den amerikanischen Eliteunis' (Ashfall over American Elite Universities), is the emergence of Saidian postcolonialism, which has encouraged binary thinking that divides the world "into oppressors and oppressed, into privileged and disadvantaged", with a stand needing to be made

against the oppressors: "Against imperialism, the state, the system, in other words. But this doesn't mean all states, all forms of imperialism, all patriarchal structures, at least not if they are outside Europe or North America."[58] According to Jukeli, antisemitism is a "perfect mass of contradictions that is put in people's hands".[59] The second is the postcolonial theory of intersectionality, inspired by Angela Davis, which is correctly used to analyse multiple discrimination as it really exists, but which, in the process, sorts the world into *white* oppressors and *non-white* oppressed with a form of binary thinking that is even more pernicious. Jikeli recognises in the two movements revenant thought patterns that were already used – as Izabella Tabarovsky observed before him – in the "Soviet Union's anti-Zionist propaganda campaign between 1967 and around 1988".[60] "The radical anti-Zionism developed during this period connected Israel with racism, settler colonialism, imperialism, fascism, Nazism and apartheid."[61] Jikeli goes on to argue that the slogans that can be heard at anti-Israeli demonstrations today are "astonishingly similar to those from the past, except that in the West they are now being propagated at elite universities and in mass demonstrations and not just in left-wing splinter groups".[62] For Jikeli, it is only a small step from postcolonial intersectionality's refusal to systematically see Jews as possible victims of discrimination, even accusing them of being "privileged whites" – despite or perhaps because of the centuries of persecution they have suffered – to the tirade against "Jewish privileges": "a prominent theme in *Mein Kampf*".[63]

Long before 10/7, British Jewish comedian David Baddiel had devoted his book *Jews Don't Count* (2021) to the ignorance of antisemitism that is structural in 'progressive' left-wing movements. According to Baddiel, "Jews are the only objects of racism who are imagined . . . as both low and high status. Jews are stereotyped, by the racists, in all the same ways that other minorities are – as lying, thieving, dirty, vile, stinking – but also as moneyed, privileged, powerful and secretly in control of the world."[64] As Baddiel writes in consternation, "Jews are somehow both sub-human and humanity's secret masters. And it's this racist mythology that's in the air when the left pause before putting Jews into their sacred circle."[65] What is becoming apparent is that just when an authoritarian takeover by the right (Trump, etc.) is in full swing, parts of the 'global left' have also turned into geopolitical supporters of an authoritarian axis involving Russia, Iran, Hamas and the Houthis. Democratic and (left-leaning) liberal-minded milieus now find themselves tragically caught between a rock and a hard place, a dilemma that is also articulated, most evidently, in the fields of art and architecture. The erosion of solidarity on the left with Jews living in a Jewish state (including the people there who are fighting against Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government), which has a long tradition but did not become globally visible in its full extent until after 10/7, comes at an extremely inauspicious time. For at the very moment when the requirement for a terrestrial politics is at its most urgent to tackle the impending climate catastrophe, an increasingly multipolar Earth is fragmenting and degenerating into a parcelling out of separate, self-contained identities, whereby for sections of the global population – including architectural milieus that approve of terrorism – a shrunken consensus can only be brought about by externalising perceived or actual problems and projecting them onto Israel.

Notes

1 'Rechte Räume: Bericht einer Europareise', *ARCH+* 235 (May 2019), https://archplus. net/de/ausgabe/235/, accessed 15 August 2025.

2 Stephan Trüby, *Rechte Räume. Politische Essays und Gespräche* (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2020).

3 Ibid., 19, 138.

4 Ibid, 32.

5 Detlef zum Winkel, 'Slavoj Žižeks seltsames Analyseverbot' (2023), in Tania Martini and Klaus Bittermann, eds., *Nach dem 7. Oktober: Essays über das genozidale Massaker und seine Folgen* (Berlin: Tiamat, 2024), 147 ff.

6 See 'Rechte Räume', https://rechteraeume.net, accessed 20 January 2025.

7 See Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018).

8 See Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

9 See 'Konferenz "Antisemitismus im kulturellen Feld", Universität Stuttgart', https:// www.igma.uni-stuttgart.de/institut/news/veranstaltung/Konferenz-Antisemitismus-im-kulturellen-Feld/, accessed 20 January 2025.

10 Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal (DAAR), 'Ente di Decolonizzazione – Borgo Rizza', in Lesley Lokko, ed., *Biennale Architettura 2023: The Laboratory of the Future* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2023), 143.

11 See Alessandro Petti, Sandi Hilal and Eyal Weizman, *Architecture after Revolution* (Berlin: Sternberg, 2013), 22.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 11.

14 Ibid., 34.

15 Ibid., 30–31.

16 Ibid., 44.

17 Ibid., 36.

18 Harriet Alexander and Joe Hutchison, 'Jewish Students Take Refuge in Library and Lock Themselves In While Pro-Palestinian Demonstrators Pound on the Door to Gain Entry at NYC's Liberal Cooper Union College', *Daily Mail*, 26 October 2023, https://www. dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12673287/cooper-union-jewish-students-hide-library-pro-palestine-demonstration.html, accessed 20 January 2025.

19 This section first appeared under the title 'Die rechten Sätze der linken Freunde Palästinas', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*, 28 October 2023, https://www.faz. net/aktuell/feuilleton/kunst-und-architektur/leopold-lambert-the-funambulist-und-der-hass-auf-israel-19271323.html, accessed 20 January 2025.

20 Léopold Lambert, 'On the Future of Palestine: Letter to My Liberal Friends', *The Funambulist*, 30 December 2016, https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/future-palestine-letter-liberal-friends, accessed 20 January 2025.

21 See Georges Bensoussan, *Jews in Arab Countries: The Great Uprooting*, trans. Andrew Halper (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019). Originally published in French as *Juifs en pays arabes: Le grand déracinement* (Paris: Tallandier, 2012).

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Many of those who signed this letter, which can at best be described as one-sided, are world famous – Jarvis Cocker, Peter Doig, Brian Eno, Nan Goldin and Barbara Kruger; some are from Germany, have their main place of residence there or teach at German art colleges (including Shumon Basar, the Berlin-based British author, curator and

director of Art Dubai's Global Art Forum; Céline Condorelli, an artist and professor of exhibition design at Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design (HfG); and Kerstin Stakemeier, professor of art theory and art education at the Academy of Fine Arts in Nuremberg).

25 Examples include 'Architects for Gaza | AFG | A Call for Immediate Action to Rebuild Gaza' (4 December 2023), https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScyAfjceu1Ut4VRNM2_lHXPqR91JyB8RREWyocMpeMBL6Rm1A/viewform, and the open letter 'Palestinian Liberation Is Our Collective Liberation: Statement by Scholars of the Constructed Environment' (12 December 2023), https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/45612/Palestinian-Liberation-Is-Our-Collective-Libera-tion-Statement-by-Scholars-of-the-Constructed-Environment, both accessed 15 February 2025.

26 This section first appeared under the title 'Israelhass in der Architektenszene – ETH-Mitarbeiter feiern den 7. Oktober und unterzeichnen Offene Briefe von Hamas-Freunden', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19 March 2024, https://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/hamas-israel-eth-architekten-propaganda-aktivismus-ld.1822584, accessed 15 August 2025.

27 See Ita Heinze-Greenberg, *Zuflucht im Gelobten Land. Deutsch-jüdische Künstler, Architekten und Schriftsteller in Palästina/Israel* (Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2023), 88.

28 Fabian Baumgartner: 'Marxisten wollen an Uni Zürich und ETH eine Pro-Palästina-Kundgebung durchführen. Die Hochschulen sprechen von "Aufruf zu Gewalt"', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung,* 12 October 2023, https://www.nzz.ch/zuerich/zuerich-universitaet-toleriert-pro-hamas-kundge-bung-nicht-ld.1760524, accessed 15 August 2025

29 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Economist_Democracy_Index, accessed 15 August 2025.

30 The passage can be found from min. 33:00 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_bDcsh4cIS8, accessed 15 August 2025.

31 https://maktabatsabil.com/s/en/page/welcome, accessed 15 August 2025.

32 https://www.change.org/p/eth-zurich-make-knowledge-on-palestine-and-its-anti-colonial-struggle, accessed 15 August 2025.

33 Faiq Mari, *Masha' Of The Periphery: Collective Labor And Property in Palestinian Liberation Struggle*, dissertation (Zurich: ETH Zurich, 2024), 39, https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/entities/publication/951eacff-5b2f-4e29-aaeb-c7f-bee4e0d22, accessed 15 August 2025.

34 Ibid., 39–40.

35 Co-reviewers of the dissertation submitted in 2016 were Tom Avermaete and Jean-Louis Cohen.

36 Samia Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution. The French Army in Northern Algeria* (Zurich: gta, 2017), 92.

37 Ibid., 21–24.

38 Ibid., 39.

39 See Bensoussan, *Jews in Arab Countries.*

40 See Stephan Grigat: 'Zweierlei Vertreibungen, zweierlei Integration. Die jüdischen Flüchtlinge aus den arabischen Staaten, ihre Bedeutung für Israel und der arabisch-islamische Antisemitismus (Vorwort)', in Georges Bensoussan, *Die Juden der arabi-schen Welt. Die verbotene Frage* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2019), 12.

41 See Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution*, 136.

42 Ibid., 294.

43 https://cameraoncampus.org/blog/erasure-of-faces-and-facts-anti-zionism-at-cor-nell-university/, accessed 15 August 2025.

44 https://elderofziyon.blogspot.com/2020/10/brown-u-professor-hates-israel-so-much.html, accessed 15 August 2025.

45 Léopold Lambert, '"Palestine is there": A Problem, evidently, for the Cornell Chair of Architecture', *The Funambulist*, 6 October 2020, https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/palestine-is-there-a-problem-evidently-for-the-cornell-chair-of-architecture, accessed 15 August 2025.

46 https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSenrG1TdWagSeXZjL4thl9xNTEsfxSUB3arj7DcJugGR99Fbg/viewform, accessed 15 August 2025.

47 https://gta.arch.ethz.ch/agenda/aktuell.html, accessed 15 August 2025.

48 https://www.gofundme.com/f/against-defamation-protect-academic-integrity, accessed 15 August 2025.

49 The article was merely supplemented with a brief 'clarification' (not a 'correction'), including the following sentence: "Should the impression have arisen that Samia Henni espouses antisemitic positions or questions Israel's right to exist, especially in her academic publication *Architecture of Counterrevolution – The French Army in Northern Algeria*, we would like to clarify that this was not our intention." Two things need to be said about this: first, the accusation of antisemitism was not explicitly stated in the published text; and second, Henni's sudden commitment to the right of the state of Israel to exist may seem surprising in light of what she wrote and signed, but even late insight is fundamentally to be appreciated.

50 This section first appeared under the title 'Nicht aus heiterem Himmel', *taz*, 15 July 2024, https://taz.de/Antisemitismus-an-US-Universitaet/!6023257/, accessed 20 January 2025.

51 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (1979; New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 179.

52 Ibid., 45.

53 See Marc Perelman, 'Study Estimates Assets of Arab Land's Jews', *Forward*, 10 April 2008, https://forward.com/news/13134/study-estimates-assets-of-arab-lands-jews-01648/, accessed 20 January 2025.

54 Tania Martini, 'Proteste an der Columbia University: Die linke Sorge um Deutschland', *taz*, 26 April 2024, https://taz.de/Proteste-an-der-Columbia-University/!6004757/, accessed 20 January 2025.

55 https://canarymission.org/professor/Reinhold_Martin, accessed 15 August 2025.

56 The book *The Arab City* emerged from two conferences, one held in Amman, Jordan, in 2013 and the other in New York in 2024. The Amman conference took place at the local Columbia Global Center, one of the university's eleven international "research outposts", which are blessed with an endowment fund of almost fifteen billion US dollars and tasked with operating as "knowledge hubs that aim to educate and inspire through research, dialogue, and action". In April 2023, Columbia University announced that it now wanted to establish one of these Global Centers in Tel Aviv as well. This prompted a letter of protest, signed at the time by ninety-five faculty members. Even though a letter was put out in response, signed by 172 teaching staff, the Tel Aviv "Global Center" has yet to open.

57 Michael Brenner, quoted in 'Es gibt den Zionismus der Begeisterung und den Zionismus der Verzweiflung: Michael Brenner im Gespräch mit Tobias Rapp', *Der Spiegel*, 21 March 2023, https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/israel-es-gibt-den-zionismus-der-begeisterung-und-den-zionismus-der-verzweiflung-a-5388d3db-9171-4eb0-b51e-a63d1598d4cc?fbclid=IwAR1fMNBUTxE7x1SmtUniNmKLKZaeITgi6vJCIdcBkplxBxMuIKcmYXV7e6I, accessed 20 January 2025.

58 Günther Jikeli, 'Ascheregen über den amerikanischen Eliteunis: Antisemitismus auf dem Campus' (2023), in Martini and Bittermann, *Nach dem 7. Oktober*, 165.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 165–66. Angela Davis had been accused by both Alexander Solzhenitsyn and her doctoral supervisor Herbert Marcuse of being overly sympathetic towards the Soviet Union and for embracing authoritarian regimes in Eastern Europe.

61 Jikeli, 'Ascheregen über den amerikanischen Eliteunis', 167.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 David Baddiel, *Jews Don't Count* (London: TLS Books, 2021).
65 Ibid.

Stephan Trüby, PhD, is Professor of Architecture and Cultural Theory and Director of the Institute for Principles of Modern Architecture (IGmA) at the University of Stuttgart. Previously, Trüby was Visiting Professor of Temporary Architecture at the State College of Design in Karlsruhe (2007–09), Head of the postgraduate study programme 'Scenography/Spatial Design' at Zurich University of the Arts (2009–14), a lecturer at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design and Professor of Architecture and Cultural Theory at the Technical University of Munich (2014–18). His publications include *Exit-Architecture. Design Between War and Peace* (2008), *The World of Madelon Vriesendorp* (2008, with Shumon Basar), *Germania, Venezia. Die deutschen Beiträge zur Architekturbiennale Venedig seit 1991* (2016, with Verena Hartbaum), *Absolute Architekturbeginner: Essays 2004–2014* (2017), *Geschichte des Korridors* (2018) and *Right-Wing Spaces. Political Essays* (2020).

Senatsverwaltung für Kultur und Gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalt | BERLIN

There is a global movement towards authoritarian, patriarchal ideologies that are misogynistic, queerphobic, xenophobic and, last but not least, antisemitic. This involves resorting to strange, ideologically charged, twisted narratives that ignore differentiations, contradictions and historical events – fuelled by algorithms in favour of closed worldviews. This happens not only in authoritarian states, dictatorships and kleptocracies (see Russia), but also – disguised as social movements – in neoliberal democracies. The tolerance of ambiguity called for by Nathan Sznaider, i.e. the recognition and endurance of contradictions, has largely been lost in the process. We would therefore like to leave the camp debates in art and culture behind us and present intellectual, intercultural artistic and curatorial positions in Berlin in a series of panels.

With this issue, we want to look for some missing links in the history of cultural developments and hopefully show historical developments and contradictions, removed from the simplifying theory in which right- and left-wing tendencies are seen as being similar. One has to look into the historical connections and alliances carefully.