

Dawn of Europe

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New Right Appropriation: Arts and Culture and the rise of the New Right

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Repressions against artists and political opponents are on the agenda of liberal states worldwide. The right-wing nationalist turn of eras has long reached Europe, with Hungary only being the tip of the iceberg: since Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party took over the government in 2010, right-wing populists are working specifically on undermining democratic civil rights while establishing an illiberal regime, which takes vicious actions against minorities, dissidents and critical creators of cultural work. Similar developments can be perceived in Poland and other European states as well, in which right-wing populists are represented in government.

The political situation in Germany can hardly be compared to these examples, however, ever since the alarming results of the European Elections in March 2019, the New Right gaining power in Germany is an undeniable fact. The extreme success of the right-wing populist AfD in East Germany is particularly appalling, albeit hardly surprising, considering the constant right-wing activities in the new eastern states.

Even though the AfD's forefront won't stop accentuating how they have distanced themselves "since the beginning and quite clearly from any form of extremism, be it religiously left- or right-wing motivated", critical observers label the party a parliamentary arm of the new right.¹ The term New Right describes a heterogeneous network of organisations combining nationalist, extreme right-wing, anti-egalitarian and socially conservative ideology.² Thus, personnel and ideological connections exist between the AfD, the Identitarian Movement, patriotic fraternities, citizens of the Reich and right-wing thought leaders such as Götz Kubitschek, that also expand internationally. The defined goal of the New Right is to boost a cultural revolution by the right³ by means of a political counterculture opposite an alleged mainstream.

Groups of the New Right rely on i.a. strategies for appropriation and wrench the opposition's power of disposal over long-serving strategies and discourses, besides the cultural appropriation of Post-culture subjects and artistic forms of action, debates on liberal basic rights, such as freedom of the arts and speech, are also interpreted and exploited for right-wing objectives. Deliberately disbanding the border between democratic expression and right-wing extremist ideology is used to try and gradually push the societal consensus further to the right and to expand the limit of what can be said. By now, terms such as foreign domination and Islamisation are part of the political everyday life in Germany, though parts of the political centre consider it unproblematic.

Pluralist culture and political arts that are offensively set against the constant swing to the right are the New Right's lifeblood. The fact that the AfD is entering more and more local councils entails certain risks: namely right-wing populist claims regarding cultural policies finding a sympathetic ear. Oftentimes, the party pleads in favour of a restrictive cultural policy with slogans such as not one cent for politically motivated art, which might result in countless publicly sponsored and liberal culture institutions facing the axe.

However, political contemporary art is not solely attacked by the AfD. The artist collective Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (ZPS) translated Centre for Political Beauty, known for provoking campaigns and artistic initiatives against xenophobia and for radical humanism has been severely investigated by the public prosecution of Gera in Thuringia since November 2017, as they suspected the formation of a criminal union – until proceedings, which made it possible to widely interfere with the privacy of the accused artists, were stopped in April 2019 without any result.⁴ The fact that the investigating prosecutor had already been criticised for xenophobic statements and

¹ N.A. With 23.5%, the AfD became the strongest force of the free state of Saxony among the European Election. Moreover, with 16.5% it also became the strongest force for the AfD amongst the post-social states in the last two not assigned states. Cf. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Europawahl: AfD erreicht 20,9%*, <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/europawahl/afd-erreicht-20-9-15878888.html>, accessed 12.09.2019.

² *Markus Gausel: Die AfD als Identitätsbewegung*, Berlin/Verlag Berlin.

³ Cf. *provisional: Deutsche Identitätsbewegung*.

⁴ *Christoph Bode, John Smith, Nilsa: Die Identitäre, Handbuch und Gegenüberstellung der Partei Rechts in Europa*, Münster 2014, p. 27.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 106.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷ *Report on the election process of the AfD Dresden, May 2019.*

⁸ Cf. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Artisten werden verhört*.





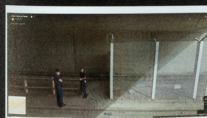
84

Rókus, Hungary



85

Border fence between Hungary and Serbia



146

Calais, France

147

Google Streetview screenshots of Calais, image capture: 2014-2018





124

Westermund, Germany



125

filled with different parts of metal) detaches within Comptor Voltaire. Astonishingly, only he was killed, yet a number of guests and employees suffered severe injuries.

The other screen shows a film, which consists of various sequences that are cut together. We can see drawn-out close-ups in which an organically formed object gradually pushes into the image, slowly takes over the centre and finally appears to be a statue of a naked person made out of stone. During the course of a slow-motion shot, the statue, in itself static and still, obtains eerily animated features. The video recordings are held in blue and grey, glowing over the sculpture and the sounds which fill out the background. Accompanying the visual images, we can hear a threateningly sustained noise that is deep and crashing and that gives the impression of air jets in the distance. It seems to be important that the series of scenes perform a metamorphic process, slowly darkening from shot to shot until they reach the brink of twilight. The sculpture, now seen in a wide shot, is wrapped in darkness and barely distinguishable. After the following black image that seems to be a drastic cut, there's a shift and we now see a different scenery without leaving the space of the sculpture: It's still twilight, but now we can recognise the sculpture in a far more common, so-called macro-context. After the previous sequence was filled with delicate noises, the first arises with the busy and familiar sounds of humans. We are shown a massive, oversize pedestal that had been held in the off. The sculpture is placed next to other sculptures, all of them arranged in a park. At the periphery of the park – behind trees which are constraining the view – city buildings appear. There is a waste bin close to the statue. On the verge of the image, to the left, we can see a man standing, motionless. He's holding a plastic bag in his left hand while effectively covering his face with his right hand. After a still picture, the camera pans upwards. The whole face of the statue slowly becomes visible, having been either not visible at all or covered by darkness. It finally forms the same gesture like the man next to it, covering its face with its right hand. Luz informs us that this is a gesture of Cain, performed after having killed Abel. In the sculpture Cain venant de l'air son Père Abel (1996), which is presented to us the sculptor Henri Vidal interpreted this gesture. The sculpture is positioned

in the Jardin des Tuleries in Paris, where many tourists imitate the gesture while being photographed. The artist lets us know that the audio track consists of sound recordings from Comptor Voltaire. In the beginning, they are slowed down and become unrecognisable, whereas they are played at a normal pace in the final sequence.

It's not only in *The Beast* that the sculpture of Cain and the terror attack by Brahmin Abdestan are linked. They are located close to each other within the neighbourhood. The pair *Jardin des Tuleries* is situated only one kilometre from the café Comptor Voltaire.



Staging the Event

The Beast improves a supposed point of reference on us by linking both screens with a diagram that goes from one centre to the other, thus creating a clear exchange. They are connected by a model of similarity which mediates the general motif of the gesture: Lowering the gaze – covering the face with the hand. This gesture appears in three different realisations: in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in the sculpture of Cain and in the unknown tourist. But how are we to understand the state of these interdependencies and where do they lead us? In a mode related to that of Luz, the art historian and cultural theorist Ayi Warburg created synoptic views of different images by assembling them on plates representing each one theme (pathos formula) in his *Mnemosyne Picture Atlas*, a work which rests incomplete due to his death in 1929. To Warburg, too, the presented gesture (Gestaltbild)

are extremely important. Methodically, he develops a new complex picture of history that "examines the subterranean roots of life!" This development is inextricably linked to his concrete efforts of illustrating the progress from the visual language of egypt antiquity into the visual language of the Italian Renaissance in his *Picture Atlas*. Let us have a closer look at Warburg's conceptions in order to find methodical affluities with *The Beast*.

Only a few snippets of some plates of the *Mnemosyne* project are left. One of them is the frequently discussed plate number 48 which is named *Nympha* and which contains 27 images of a female figure appearing in different contexts. The photographs and reproductions that are flexibly attached to a black surface with staples contain images out of the time span between the 7th and the 17th century. They are paintings, drawings, book illustrations, engravings and come by artists such as Sandro Botticelli or Domenico Ghirlandaio. Even though the selection is quite heterogeneous, we can spot similarities, such as the *Motif of a Walking Woman* or the *Motif of a Woman Carrying a Load* or similarities in the hairstyles. Reducing the function of this plate to merely revealing general motifs (i.e. revealing iconographic archetypes as original from which every individual manifestation could be deduced, would grossly contradict Warburg's understanding of a processual history. Rather, we have to understand Warburg's ambition of discerning a rootlike "representation of life in motion" which can show that the process of history is determined by hybrid procedures of becoming. Within these procedures, associative and combining connections, but also discontinuing and fragmenting discontinuities take place continually. From this perspective, every image on the plate creates itself through specific transformations to be differentiated continuum on its own. It realises its inner time by selecting the past according to what is relevant and by selecting out new potentials of the future. This means that the signature of the plate, *Nympha*, will not deplete at any point, but that it rather is paradigmatically bound to the singularity of each and every image and circulates between the images. In his studies on Warburg, Giorgio Agamben states that the representation of the hysterical female figure is "unproductive in regards to deontology and

synchrony, unity and multiplicity". Ultimately, the signature of the *Nympha* acts as a dynamic operator, making us feel the transversal movement in the space between the images throughout time.



Line the artist Luz, the cultural theorist Warburg is not excluded from the active processes of history. He doesn't try to access them from a neutral position on the outside, but is intimately connected to them. Warburg tries to appropriate the seemingly active procedures of appropriation through which the images permeate each other on a complex level. So him, it matters how they are presented. In this context, he calls his workshop a "laboratory of pictorial history in the theory of culture". The *Nympha* we can find as a correlative on the plate is the result of

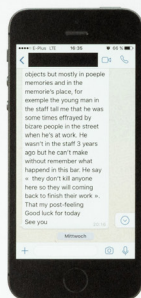
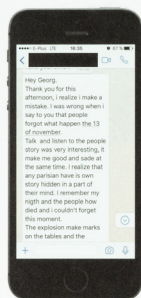
¹ Rühling, Ayi: *The Mnemosyne Project*, *Journal of the History of Art*, 1999, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 273–283, 278.

² Agamben, Giorgio: *The Signatures of All Things*, New York 2009, 28.

³ Rühling, Ayi: *The Mnemosyne Project*, *Journal of the History of Art*, 1999, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 273–283, 278.

⁴ Rühling, Ayi: *The Mnemosyne Project*, *Journal of the History of Art*, 1999, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 273–283, 278.

⁵ Rühling, Ayi: *The Mnemosyne Project*, *Journal of the History of Art*, 1999, Vol. 2, 2000, pp. 273–283, 278.



On November 11th, 2011, British politician Nick Brown was at the Café Campana in Paris. In the completely mirrored wall, the only traces the remained from the terrorist attack on the workers and reporters of the French magazine in a real call.

