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Anne Dippel

Trivial Pursuits?

Ludic approaches to digital work environments*

Abstract: As the digitization of daily life has advanced and computer games have become a widespread phenomenon of popular culture, play as both form and practice has become a key scientific topic, one which demands more in-depth cultural-anthropological reflection. This article approaches the ludic by way of cultural theory and ethnographic data gathered in the technologized work environments of high-energy physics at the European Center for Nuclear Research (CERN). Based on participant observation of the entanglements of work and play, the article brings together established approaches and innovative developments in the field of play research. It demonstrates the capacity of ludic phenomena and theoretical concepts of play to advance fundamental modes of thinking in cultural anthropology. This work sees games and play as a crucial analytical perspective that enables us to interpret complex social processes in new ways.

Keywords: Game and play, toys, work, scientific cosmology, CERN, computer simulation, media theory, uncertainty, rules

A toy in a functional space

During my first field trip to CERN, the European Center for Nuclear Research located in Meyrin on the Franco-Swiss border,[1] I spent many hours in the control room of a collaborative experimental project based there called ATLAS.[2] Some 3500 people, mainly physicists, engineers and IT experts, work exclusively on this one experiment. The aim is to record the processes of decay of colliding subatomic particles – protons – and to look for specific patterns predicted in theoretical studies using computer simulations. The detector is doughnut-shaped, consisting of several layers wrapped around what is currently the largest particle accelerator in the world, the Large Hadron Collider. My summertime sojourn in 2014 coincided with a period of maintenance and repair. Prior

* This paper was first published in German in *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 2021, 117 (1): 5–24. The text and quotations in German have been translated by Kathleen Cross.

1 A shorter version of the empirical sections of this article and parts of the analysis of chance can be found in the same form in the paper "Play" (Dippel 2020). I extend my thanks to Timo Heimerdinger and Markus Tauschek, to Karin Bürkert and the students in her Tübingen study group "Arguing from Cultural Theory" during the winter semester 2019/2020, as well as to two anonymous referees for their critical comments on earlier versions of this article.

2 The acronym stands for "A Toroidal Ladron Hadron Collider ApparatuS."

to this, the machine had been used – successfully – to measure the long sought-after Higgs Boson, so, things were relatively relaxed in the CERNers' otherwise busy work environment: everyone seemed to be basking in the glory of success – and, yet, when interviewed, a few people recalled (not without a note of bitterness) the almost unbearable pressure they had been under while working in the groups that discovered the Higgs: during this period they had nearly lost everything, including, in some cases, their passionate love of science.

ATLAS was in the process of being 'upgraded.' The physicists were not gathering any new data but were attending instead to other tasks, such as analyzing the data already collected, renewing and replacing hardware components, rectifying technical errors and updating software, either by programming new algorithms or correcting nonfunctioning algorithms, and eliminating bugs. During their breaks, summer students from all over the world romped around playing ball on the grassy area in front of the cafeteria of Restaurant 1. With the splendid backdrop of Mont Blanc on one side and the Jura mountains on the other, surrounded by vineyards and refreshed by afternoon swimming trips in the blue waters of Lake Geneva, I found the work in my new field of research highly invigorating, despite the difficulties associated with getting into it. Whenever my head began to spin with the sheer multitude of new concepts, strange objects and a world materialized mostly in code, I hopped on my borrowed CERN bike and, riding past the airport with its "Kiss&Fly" zone (short stay) for people in a great hurry, fled to the extravagance of Geneva. Calvin's refuge gave me the sense of being safe and sound in a privileged world apart, simultaneously, carefree and hard-working.

One day during the long hours spent in the control room of the ATLAS detector (which, on account of the circumstances just described, felt even longer), I suddenly noticed a rubber duck sitting among the screens and monitors. I had just been listening with great concentration to a physicist as she searched for the error in a piece of software and fixed the bugs she found. Now all I could do was stare at this yellow plastic creature. In order not to appear impolite, I waited patiently for the next pause in her explanation, even though I was no longer capable of following it. Then I went over to the table on which the rubber duck was sitting. An A4 sheet of paper had been stuck there provisionally with sellotape. On it was written: DAQ-Desk. The acronym DAQ stands for "data acquisition." I was so excited, my heart jumped into my throat. Feeling a little shy and gathering up all my cultural anthropological courage, I went over to the table where some people were sitting whom I had never met before. It wasn't the first time I had been in a new field. But wouldn't they think I was totally naive if I wanted to know something about this rubber duck which, to cap it all, bore the inscription "DAQ"? What was this toy doing in such an earnest environment? Was the duck's existence self-explanatory? Had this DAQ duck materialized on the basis of a play on words where, based on the difference between spoken and written language, homophones from completely different worlds were unified in a thing that could only have this meaning in this place?

Fig. 1: DAQ duck, ATLAS control room, CERN (photo: Anne Dippel)

I was now standing in front of a group of physicists who were in the process of installing the software for a new detector position, and they looked up questioningly. I had distracted them from their focused work. The only thing to do was get straight to the point. Nobody seemed in the least bit surprised about my interest in this duck: it was clearly completely normal, as was their enjoyment of it. This is the moment when the picture below was taken. It is easy to see in the physicists' faces what they feel for the squeaky yellow fellow, a mother duck with little rubber-duck chicks.

"Then you'll just have to follow the rubber duck"

Upon returning home and taking a walk with my colleague Kathrin Amelang through our neighborhood in Berlin, the latter asked me whether I had discovered anything that Sharon Traweek hadn't yet described in her classic study *Beamtimes and Lifetimes. The World of High-Energy Physics* (1988). Somewhat disillusioned and in a small voice, I admitted that I hadn't found anything in particular that went beyond what she or, indeed, Peter Galison had found in his standard work *Image and Logic* (1997). There were actors, both non-human and human, at CERN who produced facts; this knowledge was not given, it was made (Knorr-Cetina 1984, 1999). Everything there was just as Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar had described it in their book *Laboratory Life*, which had proved so significant for actor-network theory (1986: 181, 208). I hesitated for a

moment, then said that I had actually encountered an object that puzzled me: a rubber duck. She listened attentively, but I went on to joke that I could probably have a T-shirt printed for myself that said: "I went to CERN and all I found was a lousy rubber duck." She laughed briefly – and gave me some good advice: "Then you'll just have to follow the rubber duck."

And that's just what I did.

First of all, I wanted to find out how the presence of the DAQ duck at CERN was received and understood. I began to ask about the rubber duck (both via emails and in every interview I conducted on-site) and to research its origins. For some, it was a 'play on words,' while for others it was a 'gimmick' that provided a little light relief from time to time, one of many objects that brought out what might be called 'nerd humor.' For others again, it served to 'solve a problem by explaining it to the duck.' One person maintained ironically that it was "something to play with when there was nothing else to do"; and, not least, visitors found it 'fun.' I was told repeatedly that the rubber duck was not the only playful object at CERN. I was shown the "CERN Animal Shelter for Computer Mice," an installation in front of the site's computer center in which discarded computer mice hung from a tree or were guarded by a wooden cat in a rabbit's cage. Time and again came the laconic comment that physicists just like to play.

During the course of my field research, it emerged that ludic cultural theories could help explain not only the presence of the DAQ duck but also the work environment of physics in particular and post-Fordist, digitized work environments in general – an approach that has not yet taken center stage in the parts of science and technology studies dedicated to cultural anthropology, though the phenomenon has been mentioned in passing (Knorr-Cetina 1999; Merz and Knorr-Cetina 1994). Both cultural historian Johan Huizinga and philosopher Karl Popper argued long ago that science is a form of play (Huizinga 1938; Popper 1935). My research has, thus, begun to contribute toward exploring various scholarly questions, including the fundamental understanding of why people play,[3] how cultures of work and play are constituted,[4] how the complicated relationship between play and work can be described,[5] and how games are acquiring new significance in digital worlds, times and spaces.[6]

3 Adamowsky 2018; Bachtin 1995; Bateson 1972; Benjamin 1991, 1996; Berne 1992; Dostojewski 2011; Gadamer 1990; Geertz 1973; Graeber 2014; Hamayon 2016; Hansen 2004; Schiller 1795; Sicart 2014; Turner 2009.

4 Abend et al. 2020; Ariès 1960; Bareither 2012; Boisot 2011; Csikszentmihalyi 1975; Dippel 2017; Graeber 2015; Hammerl 2018.

5 Aristoteles 1971; Bausinger 1988; Dippel 2018, 2019; Friedrich et al. 2018; Kühme 1997; Malaby 2009; Marcuse 1965; von Neumann and Morgenstern 2004; Raczkowski 2018; Stevens 1980; Tschofen 1988.

6 Boellstorff 2008; Deuber-Mankowsky 2015; Dippel and Fizek 2018; Lackner 2014; McGonigal 2011; Pias 2002; Rautzenberg 2018; Saam and Schmidl 2018; Zimmerman 2014.

Play in scientific work

Whenever I went to CERN or trawled through the data I had gathered there – interviews, photographs, diary entries – it became clear that this bathtub creature was the first but would not be the only toy I would encounter. In the seven years I have now been engaged in anthropological research on physics, the DAQ duck has retained its key position to this day. It is thanks to this duck that I was transformed from the 'village idiot' into an authority in my field; and it contributed substantially to the 'invention' of the culture I have since been attempting to understand (Wagner 1981: 15, 17). Both play as form and the act of playing have transformed the humming, rationalistic physics factory near Lake Geneva into a magical playground filled with community-building rituals (Turner 2005, 2009), theatrical (self-)representations (Geertz 1980; Goffman 2003) and ubiquitous competitions (Bally 1966; Bateson 1972; Caillois 2017). The physicists go about their business with "holy seriousness" (Huizinga 1992: 180). Where I had previously seen only modern functional objects purified by the Latourian gaze, I now noticed an excessive surplus of things standing right next to them that, up to now, had seemed to be out of place and were now in exactly the right place: lucky charms, even toy figures. I saw the apparently countless comics hanging on doors and corridor walls and in people's offices which minimized work pressure in a playful fashion, subversively ironicizing the seriousness of the job at hand. I would hear a playful note in otherwise fairly dry conversations: plays on words and expressions full of wit and irony revealed competitive elements in social interaction. Even in scientific discussions, I registered a staggering number of playful expressions and terms in the specialist language used. People spoke, for example, of "toy simulations" – approximations of a simulation of realities that take account of only 10% of the data – and of social "intrigues" engaged in by individual members of experimental collaborations, that is, a group of people within a network of actors working on a specific experiment. There were a host of allusions to popular culture in the form of 'geek jokes' and 'nerd culture' that referred to fantasy worlds: Star Trek, Harry Potter and Game of Thrones all gave the scientists an opportunity to playfully add a little spice to their insipid daily routines and, thus, mitigate the ever-present pressure to get results. My analysis was that, in the guise of fantastical realities, management-based architectures of knowledge and technocratic tools were being made bearable for humans. Generating knowledge had to happen in a play environment.

If we assume that 'doing physics' can be described using cultural theories of play, we suddenly notice that there are ludic elements in scientific practice which only come together to form a whole within a theoretical framework. Experiments are developed, for example, on the basis of 'intellectual games', i.e. imagined scenarios. Experiments themselves are closed systems, for which reason Karl Popper described them as games (1935). What is more, they require an attitude of playfulness for their technical realization, just as Friedrich Schiller had argued in relation to art (1795). This attitude is by no

means given; rather, it is practiced as habitus (Findlen 1998). During an introductory lecture on mechanics and thermodynamics at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2013, for example, I watched as a lecturer preparing an experiment cheerfully announced: "Physicists are actually children at play!" This clearly touched a chord, as everyone in the lecture theatre appeared to be laughing. They waited with baited breath for the experiment to be conducted before their eyes. For a moment, even I felt part of this community. Could there be anything more beguiling than an adult who hasn't lost the joy of play but, instead, has made it her or his profession? Even established professors have explained in conversation with me that they had never stopped approaching their experiments with playful seriousness. Playing belongs to the 'imaginaries' of the culture of physics and the technosciences more generally (Fortun and Fortun 2005; Jasanoff and Kim 2015, Marcus 1995), just as the imagination of each individual together with others keeps the ball rolling.

What conclusions can we draw from these observations about human play in particular and the relationship between work and play in general, given that these latter two, depending on perspective and zeitgeist, are understood sometimes as complementary, sometimes as contrasting and sometimes as a continuum? I would like to explore this question in the following by referring back in time to the only two articles in the last 130 years of this journal's existence that have addressed the issue of play. Rather than give an account of the state of research on this topic (which I have already done extensively elsewhere, cf. Dippel 2020), I would like to focus here on the studies conducted by Georg Schläger in 1917 and 1918 and on an essay by Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann from 1974, thereby rendering visible continuities, understandings and innovations in our reflections on play.

Back to Go: Children's games and language games

That play should apparently have received so little attention in this journal, despite it being a ubiquitous part of everyday life, seems curious: perhaps it has something to do with the complexity of the topic, its ambiguity and multidimensionality. Only two articles have shone a theoretical light on the issue, one regarding children's games as action (Schläger 1917, 1918) and one regarding children's toys as objects of the modern social order (Weber-Kellermann 1974)[7]. More recently, play and playing crops up in a

7 Elisabeth Lemke's article 'Ancient Children's Toys' (1895) looks at a few classic toys of her time and shows that their precursors have already been found in ancient graves. The article can be neglected from a theoretical point of view, however, as can Samuel Singer's piece on 'German Children's Games' from 1903, which describes common children's games of his time and refers to the history of their motifs. Johannes Bolte's 'Testimonies to the History of Our Children's Games' in the 1909 volume and the subsequent comments as well as a continuation from 1924 also come into this category. Similarly, we might mention Johannes Wehrhan's article on 'Hopscotch in Frankfurt a.M.' from 1911 for its descriptive focus on childlike physical and language games in early ethnology. This research trajectory is also reflected empirically in the Thuringia documents – still not analyzed to date – of a survey conducted

fairly long section of an article by Markus Tauschek, though the author distances himself from the largely 'essentializing' concept of play and shifts the debate about competition (the topic of his article) onto the field of performances (Tauschek 2012) – which, incidentally, bearing in mind the work of Victor Turner, Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz, might themselves be read as varieties of play … At which point we are already delving into the paradoxical tautological effects entailed by play that are probably why so many researchers quite sensibly avoid the topic in the first place. At the same time, the rational, empirical view of precisely this fundamental ambiguity of play and games opens up the possibility of substantial critical engagement with the discipline itself – enabling us to ask big questions such as: what does it mean to be human, what does culture represent, and what might cultural anthropology include in its programmatic purview?

Georg Schläger's double article appeared in the 'Journal of the Association for Ethnology' (*Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*), as the association's lead publication was called at the time. It bore the heading "Some basic questions about research on children's games" and was published in the middle of the first fully technicized war, in which machine guns and gas attacks, fighter planes and bombs exposed the grotesque face of modernity. Against this backdrop, the two articles from the years 1917 and 1918, hopeful – almost escapist – in tone, seem strangely anachronistic despite their contemporary style and prevailing worldviews, although the author does mention the history of games and never tires of emphasizing the historical and local situatedness of practices of play. With his peculiarly nonpolitical and nonideological tone – a far cry from the din of propaganda put out by other academics of his time – he develops his own theoretical approach, which, however, would not be followed up on during the decades that followed. Without making reference to the great changes taking place parallel to the production of his text, Schläger addresses the task of the discipline, namely, to search for non-essentializing understandings of what it means to be human and a part of society. His style remains fully within the zeitgeist of the ethnologies of the early 20th century, which, in contrast to the discipline of history, are dedicated more to spatial than to temporal fields of study (even if, from today's perspective, these two dimensions cannot be separated from one another). A former elementary school teacher, Schläger was for many years director of the German Song Archive, which still exists at

under the aegis of the National Socialist teachers' alliance from 1938 and 1939, which asked not only about superstitions and choice of first names but also about children's games and rhymes. The exact circumstances of this survey regarding the history of its research will be excavated together with students of ethnology/cultural history in a year-long project seminar at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena directed by Julia Pfeiffer, beginning in the winter semester 2020/2021. I make no further reference in the following to Georg Schläger's 1925/1926 excursus, published posthumously, on the articles discussed here which focus specifically on the Sleeping Beauty game. Anton Dörrer's article 'Cult and Play in Flux and Stasis. Three Examples from Tirol' from 1956/1957 focuses on the nativity play, albeit without mentioning the concept in the ludic, cultural theory-based sense pursued here.

the University of Freiburg and has been included within the Center for Popular Culture and Music there. The double article emerged during this creative period of his career.

The author gives a meticulous account of the various research approaches of his time, regularly underpinning the theoretical developments with empirical examples taken from his own observations as a teacher (a profession he had to give up due to hearing loss). However, before gushing over in his analysis of children's onomatopoeia, the author provides a critical reading of philosophical treatises and, thus, places ethnological research on play firmly upon the foundation of a humanist-influenced Enlightenment. Former Jena university student Schläger chooses the philosophical Enlightenment as his starting point, introducing the concept of play contained in Immanuel Kant's pedagogical writings – his description of play as a "freely chosen pre-occupation", as "an end in itself" (Kant 1803) – and building on Friedrich Schiller's treatment of play in the latter's aesthetic writings, where play becomes the embodiment of human creativity.

Schläger does not remain stuck in the realm of idealistic speculation, however. He sympathizes with Herbert Spencer's ideas about imitation, later described systematically as mimicry by Roger Caillois (2017); he speaks of the proximity between play and struggle, as did Bateson after him (1972), and labors with polite reserve over biologistic and evolutionistic approaches. From the interaction between creative energy and invention, on the one hand, and imitation as a kind of 'rehearsal' (or "*Einübung*," to put it in Walter Benjamin's (1991) terms), on the other, the author develops an explanation all his own of a phenomenon that is inherent in humans and animals alike. While he rarely engages critically with the category of 'childhood,' he vehemently opposes locating children's games in "far-off, nebulous primitive origins" (Schläger 1917: 118). In this regard, he notes that one encounters "this and that fashionable scientific trend," especially ones that have "elevated a new idol to the throne and clothed it in scientific garb" and, like Edward B. Tylor in his work *Primitive Culture* (1871), spoken of children's games as "survivals" (Schläger 1917: 118). Schläger sets abundance and human creativity as well as the "need for repetition" (Schläger 1918: 17) as counterpoints to an evolutionist or biologistic or, indeed, essentializing interpretation of play. In my view, he describes the process of becoming human as a rehearsal of cultural settings and contexts that have been shaped by history – a rehearsal which, although pleasurable, is not free of struggle and frustration. His account of the playful acquisition of language might well be viewed in association with Peter Rühmkorf's '*Natural History of the Rhyme and of Human Resonance Nerves*' (Rühmkorf 1981; Dippel 2015: 96). Pleasure rules poetry and music, and language acquisition is play: it arises from soundscapes, from the ambiguity of joy and the compulsion to decide, in each and every communicative moment, whether to observe boundaries, laws and rules and their 'do's' and 'don'ts,' on the one hand, or to cross boundaries and give oneself over to abundance and ebullience, overexertion and exuberance, on the other. Play in general and, even more so, language

games cancel out frustration and pleasure dialectically in the act of engaging in them, so that, effectively, every human action is a playful one *per se*.

Some of the lines of conflict he sketches can be traced even to the present today. He describes critically, for example, arguments from cultural theory which, in the style of Edward B. Tylor, develop into culturally essentialist origin myths by way of analogies that appear almost magical (Jones 2017). Meanwhile, he also describes attempts to link together ontological webs of complexity within an undistorted view of the present day and interpret the individual into the context of his or her specific environment (as Wilhelm Wundt (Wundt 1912) prominently managed to do at that time), in order, ultimately, to legitimate evolutionist positions once again. Schläger is unable, based on the research of his time, to separate out which aspects of play are natural and which cultural – a state of affairs that continues to preoccupy anthropology to this day (Beck 2008, Graeber 2014; Gesing et al. 2019). He ultimately comes up with a concept of children's play that is barely distinguishable from work (Schläger 1917: 113), justifying this by arguing, among other things, that small children know no difference between work and play – an approach that Herbert Marcuse (1965) would vehemently reject because the concept of play is crucial as a contrastive foil in his own efforts to develop a concept of work. However, Schläger shows through his focus on language and language acquisition, *avant la lettre*, that work and play need not be conceived of as opposites.

Schläger manages to avoid the various traps of essentialism, particularism and universalism. He remains modest to the very end, regarding his own work as preliminary to further efforts and hoping, finally, that one day the "uncertain and mysterious" aspects of a "little researched" area might be replaced by "established" and "unambiguous" knowledge. However, his desire for the discipline to engage in systematic research on play has remained unfulfilled to this day. Instead, play and playing seem to have been used mainly as a field in which other issues and trends are explored – as an ideal stage, as it were, onto which current fashions and more pressing issues are projected, such as the study of social structures (Weber-Kellermann 1974), emotion (Bareither 2016), museumization (Weber-Kellermann 1974; Bausinger 1988; Tschofen 1988), competition (Tauschek 2012) and the surveying of material culture (Hammerl 2018) – and, not to forget the present case, the universalist cosmology of a digitized science and its conditions of production in the 21st century (Dippel 2017).

Schläger's double essay on fundamental questions in research on children's play substantiates my observations in the digital technoscientific spaces of physics research, namely, that play coincides with work in various ways, not least because the latter demands considerable creativity and repeated rehearsals. During a research visit in 2016, for example, a doctoral student explained to me:

> What we're actually doing is building things. Whether we're doing simulations and analyzing data as experimentalists or calculating things as theoreticians. You have to try things out and play around a bit sometimes before it works. You need an atmosphere of

> playfulness to do this work. I also think it's the very restrictive nature of physics and its formulae that produces such a high degree of playfulness.

Looking at the world through and during play sets the imagination free. It enables the production of the unpredictable and strengthens collective cohesiveness. Modern physics, thus, remains true to the ideals of play envisioned by Enlightenment philosophy.

Go into the symbolic: critical interrogation of toys

The next article on play to appear in the *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* was published 76 years later. Its focus is on the social conditions suggested by the enactment of play and those in which it can be realized; this is followed by a study of the conditions of production in which toys emerge. Ingeborg Weber-Kellermann, who, as a professor at Marburg University, was at the zenith of her career, had already led an eventful life: having gained her PhD in 1940 during the period of National Socialism at the start of World War II, she had also taught for more than ten years at the German Academy of Sciences in East Berlin. She maintained a self-critical attitude, even while navigating three systems of science. Her 1974 essay reflects various sociohistorical currents of its time and also contains references to cybernetics, a popular topic at that time. Basing her account on objects in an exhibition of children's toys curated at the Marburg Institute, the author conducts an object-oriented ontology that is ahead of its time (Bogost 2012). Her comments can be read today in a feminist light as well as from the perspective of agential realism (Barad 2012) and the new materialism; they can equally be read in the tradition of 'conjunctural' cultural analysis (Hall 2000; Lindner 2003; Sutter 2020). Her highly eclectic thinking cannot be subsumed beneath any one specific intellectual tradition. In contrast to many male colleagues of her time, she displays no territorial behavior in some effort to define programmatic discourses and fashions, but rather ties these into the study of objects and focuses on the empirical material. Based as they are on robust socio-critical hermeneutics, her deliberations have lost nothing of their clarity even today. In her interrogation of toys, she describes how the patriarchal, capitalist order of the bourgeois age led to the emergence of toys and the concomitant conditions of production. She describes the "close systemic relation in which the children working here [in toy production during the bourgeois era] stood with the children who played with the toys" (Weber-Kellermann 1974: 207–208). In a time of ever speedier digitized work done at home (due to the current pandemic) and of new and unfamiliar daily work routines, the question her essay raises is: To what extent is capitalism introducing a new version of oppression and self-alienation by way of the computer? A material-semiotic analysis that attends to the discourses of power, such as the one conducted by Weber-Kellermann, explains why, for example, we are currently seeing the first budding trade unions in the Anglo-American computer game industry. It also illustrates how citizen science games are anything but innocent mobilizations of human labor in a playful

guise for some higher purpose or other; they are, of course, also ideological tools that stabilize the system.

Weber-Kellermann's approach of inquiring into toys can be fruitfully extended into cosmological dimensions in the present case. I have heard about a whole host of rubber ducks in laboratories since the evening when I first spotted the rubber duck in the ATLAS control room; I've had photos sent to me and have seen several other specimens for myself. I have been told that many programmers use rubber ducks 'to explain' the problem they are working on to them. They say it helps them to come up with a solution more quickly. Rubber ducks are usually to be found in bathrooms: the bathtub is their natural habitat, as it were. They are the epitome of the playful in the context of daily hygiene. They have fans in every generation, young and old alike, and on every continent; the variety of their shapes can be read as a symbol of the norm of equality and inclusive diversity in a world where we are ultimately all the same. They symbolize an industrially reproducible, universal experience: bath time fun. In the bathroom, they stand for the ideal – widespread in industrialized modernity thanks to powerful advertising – of soap-scented cleanliness, a side effect of the use of animal fats from 19th century factory farming and industrial meat production (Jarvis 2020), combined with the desire, especially strong in work cultures, for carefree leisure. Interestingly enough, rubber ducks are considered neither as stuffy and square nor as corny and tacky, therefore, their popularity translates across social classes, much more so than garden gnomes or trinkets – contemplating them ranks alongside experiments in "popular cultural nanology" (Gyr 2016). They are true cosmopolitans. As ambassadors of a trouble-free world, they spread cheerfulness and joy, their ubiquity serving to strengthen a global sense of community. They show that the cultural imperative for hygiene can bring pleasure to each individual. In short, they serve just one purpose: to embody human delight in play.[8]

Just how the first duck made it into the control room – whether popular narratives, such as Douglas Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, (1980/2001) played a role or whether a shipping accident involving a vessel laden with rubber ducks might prove more relevant – is a question that, even when explored from a nanological viewpoint, is bound to involve a hint of speculation. What we do know is that Douglas Adams has the captain of the Golgafrinchan Ark Fleet Ship B, in the restaurant at the end of the universe, proclaim that one is never alone with a rubber duck (Adams 1980/2001). It is no secret in the community that a rubber duck was in the control room of the DØ experiment in the US Tevatron facility (Naked CERN Blog 2014): it was probably placed there around 1992 when the latter began operations and when, about the same time, a tanker containing 30,000 rubber ducks sank not far from the Korean coastline. Perhaps, then, it was precisely through this accident – which contributed to the scientific falsification

8 Sadly, there is no scope here to discuss the special use of rubber ducks as a symbol of protest in Thailand in 2020, where their inflatable cousins were used to protect the protesters from water cannons.

of existing theories about ocean currents and their simulation – that the rubber duck found its historical destiny as a media-friendly artefact. It can be read as a talisman for simulative situations in a speculative age where computer-based knowledge develops an operative relationship to reality (Dippel and Warnke 2022) through the illusions of worldmaking based on informatics (Pias 2003). Perhaps it was a language game that brought the DAQ duck to its appointed place, but, as so often happens, the object then generates larger symbolic dimensions in the realm of the real. No more evocative totemic animal could have been chosen to occupy this place – after all, nothing less than the fate of the cosmos is at stake here.

Dicey constellations

Games as fate and plays of fate alike lead into the realm of the existential; they enable the emergence of religions and – as in the present case too – an understanding of scientific cosmology (Sutton-Smith 1997). Media games with and through nature as described by physics, ones that work via computer simulations, are based on a conception of randomness or chance. Roger Caillois describes games based on the principle of chance as "*alea*," a Latin word meaning *dice*. Aleatoric elements can obviously be found in the lottery, where (usually) six balls with numbers on them are drawn out of a total of 49 being tossed around mechanically in a large round container. Casinos and amusement arcades contain various board and card games with a built-in mechanism of chance – or, to be precise, pseudo-mechanisms of chance, given that the possibilities of combination and sequence are calculable and finite in mathematical terms. Whether it is the little ball spinning in the roulette, the wheels with symbols spinning around on the one-armed bandit, or the shuffling and dealing of cards face-down in a card game – mechanics of chance are at work. A chance-centered theory of play enables us to describe phenomena that involve people grappling with the unpredictability of events. A good case can be made for seeking the foundational principle of nature in games of chance.[9] We might infer back from this that playing is the first and final state of being of the world *per se* (Graeber 2014, 2015), reconciling past and future in the now and itself being posited *qua* proxy as a principle of permanence and eternity. This kind of approach has much to recommend it, but it does make the concept somewhat arbitrary: if everything can be 'play' or has always been always at play, then the term itself becomes useless heuristically as it no longer allows for differentiation.

Chance can also be approached in a perfectly businesslike, mathematical way by means of stochastics, i.e. the probability calculus. Thus, all computer simulations that operate using pseudo-random generators within their algorithmic infrastructure can

9 In such a constellation, God either becomes superfluous or manifests in chance itself, as someone at CERN (a devout Catholic woman) said to me while referring to the example of quantum fluctuation in a vacuum – a view also shared, incidentally, by Muslim and Hindu CERNers.

be understood in the broadest terms as a form of play (Dippel 2017; Saam and Schmidl 2018). An example of this is one of the most important tools used by physicists working with informatics: the Monte Carlo simulation. On the basis of simulations, Cernies (as some of them like to call themselves) apply a combination of algebra, stochastic methods and logic to predict the behaviour of protons when they collide at the speed of light. The Monte Carlo simulation got its name when mathematicians Stanislaw Ulam and John von Neumann were looking for a suitable term to describe the probability generator they had conceived during development of the hydrogen bomb. Since Ulam, born in the imperial-royal monarchy of Austro-Hungary, had an uncle who had lost his money gaming in the famous casino city of Monte Carlo on the Côte d'Azur, this was the image they chose. Indeed, they could not have chosen a better one: just as with the small ball sent rolling around the roulette table, the cards dealt for a game of poker, blackjack or baccarat, and the dice thrown repeatedly in a craps game, the method decides the probabilities of physical events. A female physicist explains the method thus in a PowerPoint presentation collected during my field research in 2017: "At every point of the detector the dice fall in order to find out whether and how a certain particle is interacting with the material of the detector." The simulations can be described as medial exercises in the unknown of a nature that behaves seemingly at random, as an epistemic mechanics of the experimental play that seeks to understand the uncertain character of nature. From this perspective, *alea* constitutes the experiment's very foundation.

Viewed against this backdrop, the DAQ duck acquires a far more significant function – not unlike a totem, acting as a lookout over the cosmological conditions in which scientific work based on Monte Carlo simulations occurs: as a waymark bobbing up and down on the oceans of data, it offers security in uncertain constellations, itself half fiction, half fact. And every explanation of its existence points to a different dimension of the ludic element of scientific work cultures, be it social, cultural, existential, ontological, cosmological, structural, narratological or medial.

What's to be gained

Play opens up a new perspective on the research process in high energy physics. The latter's production of 'hard' facts requires the presence of 'connecting' elements within the strict rules of science. Unsurprisingly then, multiple forms of play can be found at CERN: ones for producing knowledge and ones for communicating science. Citizen science crowdsourcing games and machine learning competitions are regularly deployed when dealing with big data. Children are initiated playfully into the world of physics. Narratives of video game culture, the fantasy genre and science fiction crop up even in serious situations during scientific meetings. In fact, the discovery of the Higgs Boson, the greatest success story in the history of CERN, was presented to the global public by General Director Fabiola Gianotti using the typeface "Comic Sans." Thus, the rub-

ber duck highlights a new theoretical interpretive option in an already well-researched field.

Play is a key element of the culture of physics. One reason why I have reached this conclusion is that several physicists themselves have made mention of it. Physicist Harald Lesch, for example, remarked on Swiss television: "Why does CERN work so well? Because everyone there is at play" (Lesch 2014). At first sight, no one at CERN is at play. Some of the people I talked to rejected this term for the work they do, even if they inadvertently make use of ludic metaphors or their actions are playful ones. There is no question that what physicists do at CERN is hard work. Yet, as I have shown, the everyday practices of physics can be understood more thoroughly in all their complexity when a ludic perspective is applied: it serves to illustrate how deeply rooted the culture of physics is in an Enlightenment understanding of human beings.

A further reason why the everyday in high energy physics can be explained within the framework of play, is the inner ludic logics of physics' understanding of its scientific object. Uncertainty is an inherent part of the certainty-driven practice of physical inquiry, and truth in research is only negotiated within a context of strict rules. In the course of this, a specific constellation for successful action must converge, one which enters into unpredictable interaction with more-than-human-made thing-worlds (*Dingwelten*). This is precisely what the DAQ duck stands for: on the one hand, for repetition and imitation, the controlled and formatting aspects of objects, and, on the other, for chance, for the creative, playful faculty of reinterpretation and each individual's endeavor to achieve true originality and original truth; it is an endeavor that speaks of the unpredictably ingenious human talent of making sense of the world.

Perhaps Georg Schläger would have had more confidence in his conclusions about play if he had been able to follow the last one hundred years of research – or lack thereof – on the topic. In particular, the last lecture given by New Zealand cultural anthropologist Brian Sutton-Smith would have been encouraging for him. After 65 years of studying play, he concluded: "Something about the nature of play itself frustrates fixed meaning" (Sutton-Smith 2008: 80). And a glance at the Master's theses that appear in the newsletters of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft ('German Society for Cultural Analysis and European Ethnology') would have certainly also cheered him, as they make clear that play and playing constitute an interesting field for students concluding their studies at this degree level.

Whether it is ritual (Hamayon 2015), performance (Goffman 2003) or liminality (Turner 2009), deep play (Geertz 1973) or bureaucracy (Graeber 2015) – the list of anthropological concepts emerging from the observation of play is a long one. In an age of computer and citizen science games, where some 3.5 billion people engage in video games (Clement 2021), where Barbie, Playmobil and Lego, Transformers, Tamagochis and rubber ducks have found their way into every nook and cranny of this planet, where no one seems to be too poor or too rich not to have come into contact with some kind

of play thing, the phenomenon ought to be accorded its rightful place in the discipline. After all, interrogating toys and play makes it possible to move from something as outlying as a rubber duck individualized with a marker pen to the basic grammar of the current narrative of scientific cosmology. And is it not exactly this that constitutes the irresistible charm of our discipline?

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Malte Völk

Popular health guides between knowledge transfer, entertainment and storytelling*

Abstract: The article follows the intertwining of Walter Benjamin's narrative theory with a 1911 Swiss herbal book (Johann Künzle: *Chrut und Uchrut*). The resulting findings on the connection between ancient 'folk medicine' and narrative art are associated with the enormous popularity of this book, which continues to this day. Benjamin's definition of a storyteller who takes what he tells from experience is used as a heuristic category to comparatively examine Giulia Enders' contemporary book *Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ* (German 2014, English 2016). What both books have in common, apart from their extraordinary popularity, is that they elude clear genre definitions. They are both hybrids of a medical guide, nutritional guide and entertaining story collection. To answer the question of how medical knowledge is conveyed, the narrative characteristics of the books are analyzed and compared, thereby, revealing persistent patterns of knowledge transfer in connection with the topos of activating the readers' own experience.

Keywords: Narrative research, Walter Benjamin, health guides, medical culture, popular culture

Introduction

In a 1931 review essay, Walter Benjamin discusses *Chrut und Uchrut* ('Herbs and Weeds'), the "practical booklet on medicinal herbs"[1] (thus, its subtitle) by the Swiss village pastor Johann Künzle (1857–1945), first published in 1911. Benjamin's interest in this book was partially due to its immense popularity, as can be gleaned from the title of the essay: "How Can Highly Successful Books Be Explained?". Benjamin, who – as a busy literary critic – followed developments in the commercial book market closely (Kaulen 1999; Opitz 2006; Palmier 2009: 923–1020), expressed the assumption that it was the most widespread book in Switzerland after the Bible (Benjamin 1991d: 2) – an assumption that is not empirically supported but which is based on the six-figure print runs report-

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1 Direct quotations from Künzle's work have been translated to English.

ed of the book itself.[2] Künzle was not only active as an author, but – overlapping with his activities as a pastor – also appeared in public with herbalist lay medical lectures and consultations. In light of these activities and his popularity, Künzle had to pass an official examination of sorts in 1922 in order to be allowed to continue his work: "Thus he was officially recognized as a herbal pastor and became world famous in one fell swoop" (Kräuterpfarrer Künzle AG 1962: 7).

It may come as a surprise that factors such as sales figures, popularity and dissemination were the starting points for Benjamin's interest. However, his work as a literary critic and journalistic reviewer rested on an approach (Palmier 2009: 784–845) that, shaped by political-strategic and epistemological considerations, also included a turn to popular literature that was close to everyday life. Among these reviews, the essay on "Chrut und Uchrut" also stands out for a reason that is intrinsic to the work: it is a first application of ideas and concepts around oral and written narrative that Benjamin would eventually elaborate into his essay on the narrator (Benjamin 1991c), published in 1936 and still widely received today (Schöttker 2006: 560).

I would like to take this two-stage nature of Benjamin's narrative theory as the occasion for a broader inquiry. Consequently, it must first be clarified to what extent Benjamin's considerations can be made productive for cultural anthropological questions (I). Subsequently (II), the concept of the narrative, which is fully developed in the essay on the narrator, is referred back to Künzle's *Chrut und Uchrut*, focusing on its content and, thus, the category of giving advice. This is central for Benjamin. For him, the tipping figure between the real and present oral narrator and the instance of the narrator in texts is always someone who knows how to give advice to the listener (Benjamin 1991c: 441). The advice that Kräuterpfarrer Künzle knows how to give is medical in the broadest sense, as it is aimed at alleviating symptoms or, more rarely, directly at curing diseases. It is necessary to ask here how the transmission of this (lay) medical knowledge occurs, and how it is narrated. Accordingly, I would like to use Benjamin's narrative theory heuristically in order to, as it were, extract this particular narrative moment. At the same time, I aim to test whether and to what extent Benjamin's theory can also prove its viability on comparable objects. For a direct comparison with *Chrut and Uchrut*, I will, therefore, consult a book (III) which, some 100 years later, provides narrative advice in a similar way: *Darm mit Charme* ('Gut: The Inside Story of Our Body's Most Underrated Organ'), published in 2014 by author Giulia Enders – now a practicing physician who, at the time, was still a medical student. As Honold (2018: 118) puts it, the book, which sets out to give an insight into everything there is to know about an underrated organ, has cut a wide corridor through the German book trade. It is considered by some to be the most successful nonfiction book of our time (Schneider 2017) as

2 The book continues to be republished to this day, sometimes in heavily modified versions (Künzle 2018).

it is now available in 40 countries and has already sold 2.2 million copies in the German-speaking world alone – not yet including the updated new edition of 2017.

The comparison of these two mega-sellers of medical culture from the perspective of Benjamin's narrative theory forms two mutually supporting branches: on the one hand, it is intended to show in an exemplary manner how Benjamin's concept can still be made productive today. On the other hand, and radiating into the field of medical culture, it will become clear that the popular communication of knowledge is also possible in other ways than in the booming segment of the genre of advice literature in the narrower, normative sense (Heimerdinger 2012; Messerli 2012).

I Benjamin's narrator as advisor

Benjamin's reflections on the narrator are based on a preliminary assumption about a development of modernity: in his view, this epoch forced an impoverishment of the human ability to process experiences (Benjamin 1991b). In the course of this general loss of the individual's ability to experience, the art of storytelling was also coming to an end since its living effectiveness depended on the ability to exchange experiences (Benjamin 1991c: 439). In its reception, Benjamin's argumentation is sometimes dismissed as nostalgic (Müller-Funk 2002: 220) or criticized as not differentiated enough (Lonitz 1994: 192–193). Nevertheless, the essay on the narrator is still used time and again in literary and cultural studies – even as a poetic cue (Oels and Schikowski 2012: 7). In terms of content, it often serves as a point of reference for the cultural functionality of narrative as a real-life practice which, as Albrecht Koschorke (2017: 73) puts it with reference to Benjamin, has also survived the much-lamented poverty of experience of modernity – although advanced narratives since the end of the nineteenth century can only be told with what he calls a bad conscience. For the most part, a certain skepticism remains regarding the presuppositions of Benjamin's reflections, which are perceived as culturally pessimistic.

I would like to argue here that Benjamin uses the pointed formulations of the end of narrative and experience heuristically in order to make them analytically productive. That he does not actually assume an overarching decay of the ability to experience is already visible in the fact that Benjamin himself refers in his argumentation to everyday, collective experiences in the assertion of this general lack of experience by stating that an experience to which we have almost daily opportunity tells us that the art of storytelling is coming to an end (Benjamin 1991c: 439). Collective experience, therefore, cannot be quite so atrophied. Moreover, in his assertion of the decline of the art of narration, he refers back to literary figures of the 19th century who, according to his theory, should already be in decline. Finally, Benjamin himself provides a clue to the historical-materialistic classification of his theses by stating on the very first pages of the essay on the narrator that nothing would be more foolish than to want to see the process he describes as merely a phenomenon of decay, let alone a modern one. Rather,

he continues, it was only a concomitant of secular historical productive forces that had removed the narrative very gradually from the realm of living speech and, at the same time, had made a new beauty perceptible in what is disappearing (Benjamin 1991c: 442). This dialectical understanding of change, which does not mourn for a supposedly ideal state in a culturally pessimistic or nostalgic way, is typical of Benjamin. His fundamental assumption is that one can no longer tell stories in an industrial society as one can in an artisanal or rural one. Nevertheless, the disappearance of the old gives rise to the new – which forms a contrast to the old and lets it shine one more time. This explains why, in Benjamin's understanding, the old narrator may have come to an end but can still be found occasionally. And perhaps some of its characteristics can be preserved? Decay, in this sense, is simultaneously an expression of historical-social change and aesthetic liberation.

The essay on the narrator belongs to a series of essays in which, according to Palmier (2009: 1058), Benjamin evokes the decay of the aura and which – using a wide range of subjects – show an astonishing unity with hidden correspondences. This *aura* stands for an always unique and experience-saturated perception of works of art which Benjamin considered to be disappearing with modern mass production, with mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1991a). Works of art are broadly defined here; in addition to works of visual, plastic and narrative art, photographs and films are also included. Just like in the essay on the narrator, the category of human experience is fundamental, and here, too, a dialectical understanding of decay can be discerned. Thus, the shattering of the aura (Benjamin 1991a: 440) that accompanies mass production also means a liberation of the work of art from being bound to faith and corresponding ritual functions. In Benjamin's words, the mechanical reproduction of the work of art emancipates it, for the first time in world history, from its "parasitic" existence in ritual (Benjamin 1991a: 442).

The essay on the narrator – and with it, his opening essay on Künzle's herbal book – exhibits a firm connection to Benjamin's thinking as a whole by focusing on the category of living experience. In its continuous turn to the everyday and the marginalized, it is, in principle, compatible with cultural anthropological questions.[3] There are two points in the essay on the narrator that are of interest in the closer disciplinary context: firstly, the oscillation of the figure of the narrator between orality and writing, which is a classic topic of narrative research (Fischer 2009); secondly, a focus on the practice of giving advice, again both in oral and written form, which arouses the interest of cultural anthropology, especially in the form of current popular advice books (Heimerdinger 2012) and historical texts of advice and instruction (Alzheimer-Haller 2004; Messerli 2012). Alfred Messerli (2012) briefly addresses Benjamin's essay on Künzle in his cultural-historical outline of advice media since the 15th century and

3 Admittedly, not without some intermediary steps; cf. Völk (2015, esp.: 50–84, 183–208).

places what he calls his masterful content analysis (23) into the broader context of an opening up of appropriation practices by laypeople (24). This aspect of activating self-appropriation also guides my approach.

II *Chrut und Uchrut*

Künzle answers the question he posted himself – "Why did I write this booklet?" – in the form of a wish in the preface to the first edition of *Chrut und Uchrut*: that it might "help the people." As a pastor in a small parish, he wrote in 1911, he had for a long time been giving "lectures here and there to the people about the old household remedies." In doing so, he had not strayed at all from the tradition of his profession, for "almost all country pastors" had "in earlier times" (Künzle 1962: 11) been concerned with the healing effects of herbs and, to some extent, acted as physicians. Apart from the naturalistic work of monks, a very profane, practical circumstance also plays a role here, which Künzle explains by using his own example: a reasonably educated pastor or even a general knowledge of herbal remedies may, at times, be the only medical options available in remote villages.

The priest as a village healer and lay medicine as a substitute for unavailable physicians – these phenomena represent cornerstones of historical-cultural studies of medicinal culture (Schenda 1973: 195, 201–202; Simon 2003: 11–13); they are also clearly emphasized time and again in Künzle's book.

Benjamin sees one reason for the immense popularity of *Chrut und Uchrut*, in this lay medical work of Künzle's with its everyday anchoring, for example, by describing Switzerland as "the promised land of any folk medicine" (Benjamin 1991d: 296), which he ascribes to the country's peasant character: for the peasant, his own body is an "indispensable means of production" that must always be protected. In asking how this practice of "folk medicine" is narratively shaped by Künzle, it is worthwhile to first consider his self-assessment of his role in relation to the medical profession: "Far from being a competitor or even an opponent of the doctors, I am their altar boy" (Künzle 1962: 11). An altar boy assists the priest and is under the priest's authority – yet, they are united by the common service of faith. Regarding medicine, a differentiated attitude is derived from this, which seems to be less susceptible to ideological emoluments: both doctor and herbal priest have the common goal of helping the people, however, a clear gradation and division of labor is recognized. This attitude enables Künzle to refer to physicians or "the professors" (Künzle 1925: 4) in a mocking way, thereby distinguishing himself, but without losing sight of the common goal as a unifying factor. Research on medical culture (Wolff 1998) often rightly warns against considering a strict demarcation between physicians and laypersons as natural (Wolff and Simon 2006: 486) and, thus, assuming two antagonistic cultures (487) – the professional and the lay system. Such a dichotomy, they caution, could encourage ideological and, thus, schematic patterns of interpretation, as had been observed in the past. Nevertheless, a distinction

between academic medicine and other cultural expressions of medical activity is, at the same time, the basis for this research on medical culture (otherwise, it would have to be identical with medical research). This balancing act has to be performed time and again when dealing with such topics. I would like to rely here on Künzle's differentiated self-assessment, just as Benjamin did, who refers to the readers of the herbal booklet as "patients" (Benjamin 1991d: 298), taking it as a given that Künzle is not a doctor but that he gives advice which, in terms of its objective, is to be regarded as medical. To follow this distinction provisionally – as much as, on closer inspection, it may be a gradual one – is necessary for this analysis in order to comprehend Benjamin's line of argument.

The narrative form of Künzle's healing advice is, therefore, inextricably linked to his differentiated self-assessment in relation to academic medicine. Benjamin's central interpretation relates to the field of medical authority in dealing with patients.

As a rule, according to Benjamin (1991d: 298), a doctor would display an unshakable certainty of salvation, saying that this was his diagnosis and those were his instructions.

By contrast, Künzle always offers a great variety of explanations and possible methods of treatment. In addition, the register with symptoms which Künzle appended to his book does not contradict this: the references by page numbers are numerous, so that there is rather just an appearance of order, which repeatedly establishes new references. In the attempt to find the right herbs for a particular symptom, up to eleven different passages of the book can be given, whereby one inevitably encounters new potential explanations for a disease. Everything is connected with everything else, and, in the end, one has to decide for oneself. However, this is precisely the strength of this book. Benjamin interprets its appeal to be due to Pastor Künzle giving his patients space – for their instincts, their luck, their ingenuity – and continues that, compared to a doctor, Künzle appears, in his way, to be more knowledgeable and more liberal at the same time (Benjamin 1991d: 298) by offering a variety of means and explanations, not committing himself and including the patient's self-responsibility from the outset.

This simultaneously knowledgeable and liberal approach – one almost wants to speak of flat hierarchies or an anti-authoritarian attitude – proves, according to Benjamin, to be a moment that inspires confidence on various levels. This is especially true in Künzle's narrative style, which combines so many different aspects as examples, as references, pictorial comparisons[4] or simply background information, that Benjamin feels reminded of a farmer's calendar. He advises that the people loved such disorder in their books because they found familiar disorder to be homely and unfamiliar order to be frosty (Benjamin 1991d: 299). This homely disorder is the clearest immediate impression with which the herbal book leaves the reader. It begins with such diverse elements as a small list of dialect vocabulary: "word explanations for the non-Swiss" (Künzle 1925: 2),

4 However, actual illustrations of the plants in question cannot be found until later editions.

an excerpt from a letter written to the author by a "very well-known and esteemed Swiss physician" (3), followed by programmatic announcements and a paragraph that stands on its own entitled "Something for the gentlemen professors" (4). Overall, the mostly short sections of the book neither follow a comprehensible structure, nor are they organized in a uniform way. The sections – one could also speak of short stories – take their starting point sometimes from a general symptom, sometimes from a specific disease and sometimes from a plant or an anecdote.

Benjamin emphasizes the pastor's knowledge of human nature, which he holds to be more important for its healing effect than any knowledge of herbs (Benjamin 1991d: 300). His act of giving advice, thus, has a primarily anthropological and social scope. In this dimension, too, Benjamin dissects the causes for the way in which the pastor awakens people's trust. What he calls Künzle's democratic civic pride (Benjamin 1991d: 297) is combined with an egalitarian attitude that does not deny differences in status in society, but also does not see them as necessary and unchangeable. This social attitude is also reflected in the way Künzle distinguishes between herbs and weeds in the title. It is an inclusive distinction, which also carries its opposite: "All weeds are in fact medicinal herbs" (Künzle 1925: 25), and he states that they were often even the best and unjustly misjudged. The plantain, for example, "is a very despised herb, but is indisputably the first and best and most common of all medicinal herbs" (Künzle 1925: 16). Künzle elaborates what Benjamin calls his apologetics of the weed (Benjamin 1991d: 297) in great relish and detail: among the various plantain varieties, he writes, "the hoary plantain (*Plantago media*) is the most common and most despised […]; it resembles the poor day laborer who has to duck under everything and yet lugs everyone up, cleans the ditch and votes for the government – but never gets into the latter himself" (Künzle 1925: 17). The unappreciated medicinal herbs should receive a revaluation; the title *Chrut und Uchrut* seems to follow the societal conventions of this division only to undermine them.

In this context, Benjamin mentions Künzle's treatment of groups of different social status. The "professor's tea" is also intended for the "porters at train stations, town criers, etc." mentioned in the same breath, because they all have to "speak a lot and loudly" in the same way (Künzle 1925: 40). Similarly in the section on "headaches", the "scholars" are found in a symptom cluster with the "railroad officials" because both groups are "in a perpetual din and clamor" and "work habitually deep into the night" (Künzle 1925: 42). The confidence-inspiring motifs of colorful confusion and socially egalitarian attitudes form a plateau from which Künzle unfolds his art of giving advice.

Benjamin's reading of this nonfiction book represents an early, fragmentary expression of his theory of the narrator (Schöttker 2006: 560). When Benjamin sums up, for example, that a lively applicability such as that inherent to the medical book also lies deeply hidden at the heart of great poetry (Benjamin 1991d: 300), this strikes at the heart of the reflections he exercised a few years later, published in 1936 as *Der*

Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows ('The Narrator. Reflections on the Work of Nikolai Lesskov'). This historical-materialistic, universalistic narrative theory spans an arc from antiquity through sagas, fairy tales, proverbs and modern narrative forms, such as the novel and the short story, to the journalism of the 20th century. The narrator appears here as a tipping figure between reality and the narrative work. Insofar as he comes from the tradition of oral storytelling, he is part of narrative situations in everyday life, especially in simple, monotonous work. Benjamin sees the sailor and the craftsman as archetypes of the narrator. Both can come up with news and convey what was previously unknown (Benjamin 1991c: 441).[5]

Benjamin sees in the narrator a social figure with an integrating function that creates what he terms a community of eavesdroppers (Benjamin 1991c: 446). The narrator succeeds in this by being able to report on his/her own and other people's *experiences*. The listeners can take up these experiences as an enrichment of their own wealth of experience. In order to do so, they must actively process what they have heard and relate it to their own lives. Therefore, such narratives do not have a conclusive end, unlike, for example, the modern novel or the short story.

Such a narrator can retain certain characteristics of the original oral narration as a narrative instance in the text, with the listeners, thereby, becoming readers. The central moment that makes this leap possible is the 'advice' implicit in the narrator's experience: in Benjamin's words, every true narrative carries with it, overtly or covertly, its utility; and this utility may, at one time, consists of a moral, at another, a practical instruction, at a third, a proverb or a rule of life – in every case, the narrator is a man who knows advice for the listener (Benjamin 1991c: 441). However, he continues, since the communicability of experience decreases, we know no advice for ourselves and others (Benjamin 1991c: 441). Benjamin defines this advice in distinction to a potentially authoritarian instruction and writes that advice was not so much the answer to a question but rather a suggestion for the continuation of such a (just unfolding) story. And a story that continues to unfold was now also the life of the listener, and, thus, such narrated advice was woven into the fabric of lived life (Benjamin 1991c: 441).

Künzle can be understood as a storyteller in this sense. His herbal lore, emerging from oral lectures, consists of a collection of heterogeneous, unfinished stories. With these, he leaves, as Benjamin puts it, room for the patient – his/her instincts, his/her luck, his/her ingenuity (Benjamin 1991d: 298). The booklet, furnished like a cozy farmhouse parlor – traditionally a popular place for storytelling in front of an audience (Schenda 1993: 114–124) – in which the narrator addresses the readers directly in a mix

5 Source-based folkloristic narrative research supports such assumptions; cf., for example, on seafaring and crafts, Schenda (1993: 71–75, 88–90), where the role of the clergy is also emphasized cf. (141). Popular images of the sailor are still strongly influenced by ideas associated with the sociable sailor who, as Heimerdinger (2005: 198) puts it, also has something to tell ashore and is never at a loss for a story.

of sermon and chit-chat and turns them into listeners, offers advice but no authoritarian instruction.

III *Darm mit Charme*

Enders seems, even with the cover of her book, to want to express that no authoritarian instruction should be expected from her either. One is greeted by the author personally, as it were: a frontal shot of her face takes up about two thirds of the cover, and she turns to the reader with a radiant, friendly smile. Medical student that she still is, she has a greater knowledge and understanding of medical issues than a layperson, but without being able to be considered a specialist in the strict sense. Enders, nevertheless, pursues a clear agenda: as an ambassador for the intestine, she counters its shameful taboo: Where there used to be a "bowel with shame," there should be a "bowel with charm" (Enders 2017: 19).

In her efforts, she sees herself as a mediator who wants to make knowledge more tangible (Enders 2017: 14). This role of the mediator seems to be tailor-made for her, since, as a student, she is still a learner herself, which promotes a mutual empathy between her and her readers. Similar to Künzle, Enders' specific, finally balanced location in the coordinate system of medical culture is a prerequisite for the narrative design of the book. Künzle saw himself as an altar boy of the medical profession and emphasized the common goal, and Enders also avoids a strict demarcation between doctors and laypeople (Wolff and Simon 2006: 486), however, without levelling the difference. The evocation of two antagonistic cultures (Wolff and Simon 2006: 487) is omitted because Enders, as a student, embodies the gradual and not essential character of the difference between laypeople and doctors. The casualness with which she represents this takes away the reader's fear of contact. Accordingly, in her role as mediator, she does more than explain how the digestive organs work. She takes the cultural side of medicine seriously, especially in two dimensions: in the tabooing of digestive processes and in the embedding in the everyday practice of the medical knowledge she seeks to convey. I will follow the first point in more detail before returning to the everyday practical dimension.

Enders takes the cultural tabooing of digestive processes for granted. She does not trace the reasons for this tabooing, but makes it clear that she considers this taboo harmful and outdated. She counters it with a nonchalance that sometimes resorts to childishly innocent vocabulary such as tooting (Enders 2017: 44) or pooping (20). Apart from this central taboo, potentially confrontational areas are mostly bypassed.

Literary scholars have praised the book's stylistic and compositional sophistication, which also includes what Honold calls a certain tendency to shy away from conflicts and problematic issues (2018: 127). In this way, Enders succeeds in avoiding

a moralizing, lecturing, authoritarian undertone, even on topics such as obesity.[6] This can be seen as innovative and fruitful, albeit some statements about the potential origin of mental illnesses in a disturbed intestinal flora (Enders 2017: 156) may seem a little daring.

Among all the convoluted processes of the human organism – including the psyche – Enders has chosen the intestine as an Archimedean point from which everything becomes understandable. She would like to see what she calls the absolute leadership position of the brain (Enders 2017: 132) questioned and suggests that it was not a bad idea to add a little to René Descartes: I feel, therefore, I think, therefore, I am (150). However, this feeling comes from the body, not from the psyche, which is why psychotherapies are considered here as something Enders compares to physiotherapy for the nerves, saying that they loosen tension and teach us healthy alternative movements on a neural level. According to her, this is the domain of hypnotherapy (Enders 2017: 145). However, she writes, it could also merely be microbes in the intestine that make us sad which needed to be controlled. Especially when people were suddenly afflicted by strong depression, even though their life itself was quite alright, one should ask whether it was only their belly that had to go and lie on the couch – and the head was not to blame at all (Enders 2017: 148). The question of who or what was to blame for a mental illness could be misunderstood in a worrying way, especially if the category of shame was added, and she points out that insecurity, anxiety or depression caused shame because of what she calls a supposedly broken life computer in the upper story (Enders 2017: 132). Breaking down the taboo of the intestine goes hand in hand with avoiding other difficult topics – and with a tendency to adopt a truncated view of mental illnesses, which also does not take into account psychosomatic factors in intestinal or eating disorders.[7]

However, the metaphor of the life computer in the upper story also points to a special characteristic of Enders' view of the cultural side of medicine, which clearly leads further: she includes the everyday cultural dimension. This occurs, for example, when her explanations of the processes within the human body are repeatedly guided by metaphors, allegories and images from the world of work. The brain, for example, as the head office has field staff (Enders 2017: 137) and clerks (139) who organize meetings between the brain and the gut so that they can collegially (141) coordinate their activities. The world of wage labor, white collar and office work has inscribed itself in the body. Neoliberal turns of phrase are also frequently found, for example, when she writes of a job well done (Enders 2017: 270), when she recommends keeping bacterial subcontractors as a reserve for tough times (257) or when what she describes as the

6 Here, she refers to evolutionary events from the "past millions of years" (Enders 2017: 58); similarly with food intolerances – cf. (71). For an analysis of such interpretive patterns from the perspective of cultural studies, cf. Niewöhner (2008).

7 Psychological influences on the gut are sometimes mentioned, but Enders is thinking here of temporary phenomena, such as mastering a stressful situation, time pressure or anger (Enders 2017: 141).

outsourced part of our digestive business (48) is considered. The body, thus, appears as a productive enterprise that functions smoothly, provided that certain principles are observed and quality management is not neglected. This positivistic image of the body is consistent with the book's tendency to de-emphasize potentially contradictory or conflicting issues.

From a narrative point of view, however, this body image is infused with an ironic undertone. Where there is work, there is also free time, and where there is free time, there is also popular culture – in this sense, the depiction in *Darm mit Charme* is lightened up by means of appropriate metaphorical references. She writes, for example, that lymphatic vessels were to blood vessels what Robin was to Batman (Enders 2017: 58), and that a permanent bacterial Woodstock was underway in the intestine (159). She discusses potential photo posts in an imagined microbe Facebook (Enders 2017: 175), and the Dracula saga, whose historical core Enders wants to see traced back to a genetic defect (189), is also included. Enders evokes a division between work and leisure that the anthropomorphized body parts share with humans as a whole.

The many comic-like drawings found in the book, which were created by Jill Enders, the author's sister, also contribute to a further lightening up in the sense of popular culture. Exemplarily, when what she calls the housekeeper (Enders 2017: 97) of the small intestine carries out his cleaning spree (98), a small male is pictured below the descriptive text, handling a broom and dragging a cleaning bucket and other cleaning equipment behind him on a little cart. Immune cells are depicted as small flying figures with spears in their hands (Enders 2017: 34). The cover of the book already shows that these pictorial representations do not only serve to create a better understanding of the sometimes highly complex scientific content, but are also supposed to contribute an entertaining component: on it, under the large picture of the author, next to the title and subtitle, a transparent comic male is depicted who pushes a tartlet into his mouth with relish, which his intestine, provided with face and hands, takes note of in joyful anticipation.

Since Enders understands and depicts the intestine and digestion in the context of lived life, her explanations are interwoven not only metaphorically but also in terms of content with everyday culture – especially in the area of eating. The focus is primarily on the microbiological level of food intake, but Enders always manages to link this to the everyday experience of eating. Exemplarily when a piece of cake is used as an example to provide a microbiologically thick description of the situation of consumption: from what she describes as particles of light bouncing off the piece of cake and activating the optic nerves of the eyes (Enders 2017: 89) right down to going to the toilet and little piles of poop (100).

The big topic in connection with food is always the intestinal flora, the importance of which Enders strongly advocates. She particularly promotes pre- and probiotics. The latter presumably help against a wide range of diseases from diabetes to dermatitis

(Enders 2017: 257–263). Prebiotics, on the other hand, were much more suitable for everyday use (263) because, according to her, most readers who want to get better had some favorite prebiotic dish anyway, which they would eat often without any problems. Her own grandmother, she recounts, always had potato salad in the fridge, and her dad made a terrific chicory salad with tangerines (Enders 2017: 265–266). It is a convincing line of argument: circumstantial changes of dietary habits are not at all necessary because in one's own everyday life, as a rule, we already find what promises improvement. One must merely shift the emphasis in order to be able to already obtain a lasting effect. Enders, too, leaves room for the patient – his/her instincts, his/her luck, his/her ingenuity (Benjamin 1991d: 298). Does this already make her a narrator in Benjamin's sense?

Benjamin postulates that it was the tendency of narrators to begin their story with an account of the circumstances under which they themselves experienced what follows if they did not simply pass it off as having experienced it themselves (Benjamin 1991c: 447). This inclination can certainly be found in Künzle, who titles his preface "Why I wrote this booklet" (Künzle 1962: 11), and in it, presents the book as a continuation of his herbology formerly presented in oral lecture and practical application. In Enders' book, this being there splits into two phases. In the first sentence of the preface, she describes her birth by caesarean section, after which she could not be breastfed. From this, she deduces a connection with the development of her intestinal flora and sums up that this made her the perfect poster child of the intestinal world in the 21st century (Enders 2017: 11). She reports various symptoms in childhood and adolescence that she only overcame through self-study when she discovered the intestine as a key organ, describing that it was a sense of achievement, and that she felt in her own body that knowledge could be power – and began to study medicine (Enders 2017: 12).

The second phase of her (co-)experience begins with her medical studies. The experiences on which she is now able to report are increasingly not only her own, but also those that should actually be called canonized, institutionalized knowledge: the knowledge from textbooks and medical journals. Enders succeeds, however, in passing on the examination of this knowledge as living experiential knowledge. One way to achieve this is to embed the acquisition of knowledge in real, communicative social situations. Accordingly, Enders repeatedly emphasizes her status as a student: she first became aware of her special topic, the intestine, through roommates in her shared student apartment, which adds to the motivation from her early intestinal self-study described in the preface. Her personal involvement is emphasized throughout, and Enders relates the initial state of social motivation as continuing, telling the story of her roommates already knowing exactly the look on her face when she raced into the kitchen and had to tell them the latest bowel anecdotes (Enders 2017: 24).

As a reader, one is, thus, drawn into an everyday, oral narrative situation – in this case, the kitchen of a student flat-sharing community in which material from one's university course is conveyed in a lively and passionate manner. Even the already published

text that the reader is holding in their hands is integrated into this situation. Enders describes that when she read this very text to her family in the living room, she looked at puzzled faces (Enders 2017: 28). In fact, Enders had already presented some of the content of her book orally at science slams[8] – as with Künzle, the book grew directly out of earlier talks.

In addition to this embeddedness in the narrated events, Enders also shows other characteristics of Benjamin's narrator. She, too, does not have a consistent, strictly executed system, but rather a colorful mixture of short, unfinished narratives that can begin at very different points. One example would be her story "Am I sitting on the toilet correctly?" (Enders 2017: 24–28), which recommends experimenting (24) with a little footstool (28).

Time and again, as with Künzle, other symptoms are mentioned in passing which could also be cured in the course of the subject matter just treated. In addition, like in Künzle's book, the starting points might sometimes be the cure, the symptom, an anecdote or an imagined scenario. All conceivable logics of healing are considered: thus, additionally, an acupuncture point which can be determined with the help of one of the drawings in the book and over which one could simple gently stroke until it got better (Enders 2017: 113). Thus, the impression is created that such recommendations especially serve the purpose of establishing a relationship with the readers.

This relationship-building often takes place by addressing the reader directly – in Künzle's case, still in a priestly tone, in Enders' case, instead, in a youthful and cheerful conversational tone, which one already expects when looking at the cover. Enders uses this direct address with particular emphasis when dealing with a shameful or taboo subject. The chapter "A little reading on stool: Components. Color, consistency" (Enders 2017: 77–85) already stands out visually and typographically as it is set off from the rest of the book as an intermediate piece. Enders evokes here a storytelling situation like a story time session, as if narrator and reader/listener were actually sitting together: in an ironic introduction, she asks her dear readers to buckle their suspenders tighter, give their glasses the final nudge up their nose and take a daring sip of tea (Enders 2017: 78). When millions of people then voluntarily engage with the color and consistency of excrement, one can only sum up: the relationship building has succeeded, Enders creates trust, which is indispensable for the transfer of knowledge.

This form of addressing the audience directly also protrudes into Benjamin's understanding of narrative modes that stand in the tradition of oral storytelling. It is true that he considered the modern narrator of the novel as a countercurrent to this. However, already at the time of its blossoming around 1800, one can find thematizations of

8 Cf. ScienceSlam. YouTube channel. "Giulia Enders: Darm mit Charme/Les charmes de l'intestin/Charming Bowels (Science Slam Berlin)." November 14, 2012. Last accessed June 29, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MFsTSS7aZ5o

this very upheaval, this new formulation of the narrator's role.[9] Jean Paul, who takes the fictional game of superimposing oral and written narration to the extreme, has his narrator in "Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz in Auenthal" ('Life of the Amused Schoolmaster Maria Wutz in Auenthal') of 1790[10] begin by addressing the readers directly – whom he wants to turn into listeners. There, the image of a "grandfather's chair" is conjured up in which the narrator sits and "from which" he "narrates." But, firstly, the readers/listeners are to put themselves in the right mood: "But now, my friends, above all, the chairs around the stove, the serving table with the drinking water must be pulled to our knees, and the curtains drawn, and none of us must think of the grand monde above the alley over there and of the Palais royal, just because I am telling the quiet story of the amused little schoolmaster"[11] (Jean Paul 1970: 423).

The allusion to the French Revolution emphasizes the historical context. A narrator who postulates the oral form alludes to the sagas and fairy tales that used to be passed down orally by ostentatiously evoking such a narrative situation. The printing press was invented long ago, but the period around 1800 with its social, artistic and literary innovations accelerated the dwindling of the importance of oral narration. It is the social component of this factor, this coming together of narrator and listener, that Jean Paul wants to incorporate into his printed work. The slightly ironic, but by no means condescending imitation of a stylized fairy-tale narrative situation was, thus, already used around 1800 to reflect the increasing untimeliness of traditional narrative traditions. The fact that Giulia Enders uses this motif in a similarly structured way to facilitate the tabooed confrontation with one's own excrement is an artifice that speaks for the persistence of those narrative traditions, which now continue resolutely in a fragmented, altered form, but have been able to retain something of their former social function.

With the inclusion of her sister, Enders also connects to the formative period around 1800. Communications designer Jill Enders is introduced on the inside cover as the creator of the pictorial language of the book that was discussed above, and she is also presented with a portrait photo. The two sisters are shown here in equal size next to each other. She has already been mentioned as the first-instance editor in the preface, while the acknowledgements concluding the book emphasize an even more important and comprehensive role when she writes that her book would not exist without her sister (Enders 2017: 290). Franziska Frei Gerlach, who has studied what she terms the sibling dispositive around 1800 as part of a cultural history of the horizontal (2012: 58), points to the diverse associations that can be stimulated by siblings when they are associated, for example, with balance, equality and social utopias – in contrast to what she calls a vertically dominated culture and perceptual tradition (10) which, thus, refers

9 Cf. for further details also Wirth (2008).

10 The story is part of the *Last Sector* of the novel "Die unsichtbare Loge" ('The Invisible Lodge').

11 Translated from the German edition.

symbolically to relationships between generations and emphasizes more strongly the authority differential of hierarchical levels. According to Frei Gerlach, the social and cultural upheavals at the threshold of the 19th century mean that siblings occupy the collective imagination to an extraordinary degree (2012: 19) and are, indeed, virtually omnipresent. In her words, they are found in real life, in discourses of knowledge, in political action, in literary texts, in figurations of the cultural imaginary, in psychic organization and as an element of the symbolic order (Frei Gerlach 2012: 1). The staging of a double narrator offered by Enders teaming up with her sister who, in the best sense, takes away the authority of the text with a parallel pictorial narration, reinforces the narrative peculiarities in the direction of such a horizontal, non-authoritarian attitude of knowledge transmission. At the same time, it ties in with traditions and motifs from the period in which Benjamin located the beginning of the dialectical decline of narrative art.

Conclusion

The two books examined here are not guidebooks in the sense of belonging to a genre that combines narrative closure with normative claims (Alzheimer-Haller 2004; Fritz 1993; Heimerdinger 2012). From the perspective of the advisory narrative used here, the mediation of medical knowledge becomes the mediation of experience. Enders even succeeds in conveying knowledge from current medical studies in this way as experiential knowledge. Both Künzle and Enders make use of narrative procedures that Benjamin identified as suitable for such a mediation of experience, in which the recipients actively weave what they receive into their own lives instead of merely accepting it in a passive-authoritarian manner. Although one could understand Künzle's sometimes apodictic tone and the religious imprint, and Enders' tendency towards positivism, as authoritarian in this sense – however, these opposing tendencies are counterbalanced by the narrative idiosyncrasies. This is favored by the incompleteness of the many small individual stories that make up the texts, their eclecticism, and their entertaining nature achieved with anecdotes and linguistic wit. By assuming the Benjaminian role of the narrator at a tipping point – between a social narrator figure and a narrator instance in the text – Künzle and Enders also transfer characteristics of oral narration into their texts. One can assume that this is an essential reason for the enormous success of these books, that the reading also contributes to community-building, that regarding the recipients, what Benjamin calls the community of eavesdroppers (Benjamin 1991c: 446) has become a community of readers – in exactly the same way, but also vice versa, since both books originated from successful oral lectures by the authors. Regarding medical culture research, it can be summarized that a stronger attention to the narrative moment offers promising perspectives. Benjamin's concept is particularly suitable for a better understanding of this interface between medical culture and narrative.

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Agnieszka Balcerzak

'Cursed soldier' versus 'eco-terrorist'

Comics as media of social division in Poland*

> We [the Poles, A. B.] are mentally and socially a broken society. On the one hand, the liberal-democratic, rational and secular culture of the West. On the other hand, the demagogizing tribalist authoritarianism in relation to religious-patriotic values, the Eastern despotism that builds the community on the basis of lies about the past, hatred towards foreigners, grotesque megalomania, fear and religious superstition. […] Our theoretically ethnical and religiously homogeneous Poland is in a state of cultural war. (Bartosz Bolechów) 2016[1]

Abstract: This article at the intersection of cultural studies of popular and memory culture deals with the genre of comics as an identity-forming (protest) medium and projection surface for the ideologized 'culture war' between traditionalists and modernists in contemporary Poland. The analysis focuses on two historical comics that combine facts and the imaginary and refer back to the Second World War, the communist period and the recent history of the Republic of Poland after 1989. The article juxtaposes two title heroes and their comic worlds, which represent opposite ends of the political spectrum and reveal the problem areas of Poland's dividedness along the underlying canon of values and symbolic worlds: Jan Hardy, the national-conservative 'cursed soldier,' and Likwidator, the relentless 'anarcho-terrorist.' The characters and their adventures exemplify fundamental memory and cultural, religious, nationalist and emancipatory discourses in Poland today. The focus of the analysis lies on the creation context and the (visual) language with its narrative–aesthetic intensifications, which illuminate Poland's current state of conflict between national egoism and traditional 'cultural patriotism,' on the one hand, and liberal value relativism, with its progressive-emancipatory rhetoric, on the other.

Keywords: Poland, popular culture, memory culture, protest, comic, Jan Hardy, Likwidator

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1 Bartosz Bolechów (cited in Balcerzak 2020b: 578) is a political scientist and head of the Conflict and Political Violence Research Unit at the University of Wroclaw. All Polish quotations were translated into German by the author.

Introduction: Two comics, two world views, two images of Poland

Entertainment and amusement cultures play a prominent role in the transfer of sociopolitical discourses, ideological world views and cultural myths to a broadly effective everyday level (Bareither and Tomkowiak 2020). Popular culture media contribute to the structuring and negotiation of national identities as a resonance space for identity-forming messages, semantics and guiding images. Accordingly, they can polarize imagined communities (Anderson 1983) and point to acute sociopolitical areas of tension.

The garish, exaggerated and visually stunning comic has become a recognized art genre in Poland since 1989 within the polarized entertainment and protest culture.[2] The two ideologically very different superheroes at the center of this analysis may illustrate this: Jan Hardy, a 'patriotic' national soldier whose combat unit is stylized as the defender of a nationally conservative Poland and the values of 'God, Honor, Fatherland,' and the black-clad, scornful 'eco-terrorist' Likwidator, who draws on cynicism and extreme brutality to enforce anarchist 'justice.' Both comic worlds utilize narrative and aesthetic exaggerations that are prototypical of Poland's split between a traditionally conservative world view and progressive-emancipatory rhetoric.

Although the comic series with the title heroes Jan Hardy and Likwidator are not mainstream reading material, they can be used as examples to show which narratives, topoi and fusions of religious, nationalist and memory-cultural discourses are currently stereotypically negotiated in Poland. In this context, the Second World War, the communist era and the recent history of the Third Polish Republic after 1989 are considered points of reference for new memory cultures and master narratives (Macdonald 2013). These are understood as pop-cultural products intended to enforce political demands and cultural ideals. The example of both comic series can, therefore, be used to contrast problem areas of a widespread antithetical memory and protest culture in Poland. The underlying ideological debate is bundled in the question, "A European or a national Poland?" (Jarosz 2014).

Against the backdrop of the view of popular culture and its media as seismographs for social developments, this analysis is devoted to the pop genre of comic and poses questions about its ideological appropriation and social function. The comic as a "popular representation of history" (Korte and Paletschek 2009: 13) and as an aesthetic-visual and affective-narrative form of representation possesses diverse possibilities for disseminating knowledge and identity in a contemporary and attractive form. These

2 In addition to translations of US hits about the adventures of Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, one of the first Polish comics – *Koziołek Matołek* ('Little Goat Goofball') by Kornel Makuszyński and Marian Walentynowicz – was created in 1933. After 1989, the market was initially dominated by translations of foreign comic series, including those from the USA. Today, comic festivals in Gdansk, Łódź or Warsaw, *inter alia*, and comic websites, such as *Aleja komiksu* ('Comic Avenue'): http://www.alejakomiksu.com (accessed November 11, 2020) bear witness to the genre's growing popularity. On the history of Polish comics, see Frąckiewicz (2012).

possibilities include production context, language and visual aesthetics, which are of particular interest in this comparative analysis. It will discuss how comics help ideologically polarized identities and positions to form in Poland, how they (de)construct memories and how they interpret Poland's role in Europe based on historical events.

In the following, after two chapters on the background and vehemence of Poland's ideological polarization and on comics as a medium of contemporary memory and popular culture, the article will inquire about the protagonists and their motivations. Thereafter, the contribution will focus on the exploration of the language and symbolism of both comic worlds and the means used to create antagonistic images of Poland. The final presentation of the results provides a summary of the central arguments of the article.

Tradition or modernity? Sketches of a European country in cultural turmoil

A deep rift runs through Polish society: increasing polarization and radicalization make it difficult for a society that has been oscillating between national isolation and belonging to a united Europe to understand itself democratically. Poland, once a model EU state, has been a divided and contradictory country not only since the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* ('Law and Justice': PiS) party came to power in 2015.[3] However, the arch-Catholic, Eurosceptic PiS government is endangering the gains of democracy and driving the division of the society into 'true Poles' and 'traitors to Poland.' These developments have not come as a complete surprise: Poland's centuries-long geopolitically conditioned victim role as a 'pawn' of the Eastern and Western powers, the influence of the Catholic Church, the experiences of partitions (1795–1918), World Wars (1914–1918, 1939–1945) and communism (1945–1989) continue to leave their mark on the country today and become subject to political exploitation. The conservative revolution and 'moral renewal' under the slogan *dobra zmiana* ('good change') have sharpened the conflict between conservatives and liberals and consolidated the strong right-left polarization.[4] The focus of this antagonistic understanding of democracy (Mouffe 2007) and ideological 'culture war' is the central question of identity and patriotism,[5] closely interwoven with thematic complexes, such as belonging to Europe, reference to the past, or faith, sexuality and morality.

The right side of the spectrum is dominated by the ruling PiS party, whose authoritarian "turbo-patriotism" (Napiórkowski 2019) is characterized by clerical conservatism, nation-state egoism and an affirmative-nationalist reference to the past, evident in recent media and education reforms, *inter alia*. This apologetic-martyrological

3 On the change and division in Poland after the 2015 election year, see Gdula (2018).

4 On the specifics of the Polish right-left dichotomy and protest culture, see Balcerzak (2020b).

5 Concerning the construction and negotiation of Polish identity, see Jaskułowski (2012); Napiórkowski (2019).

patriotism of uprisings and victim narratives emphasizes Poland's strength: national symbols such as the Katyn massacre in 1940, the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the founding of the *Solidarność* movement in 1980 or the Smolensk disaster in 2010 are decisively anchored in it. This non-negotiable 'prescribed image of history' is based on the memory of the 'heroic struggle,' the rejection of a (self-)critical examination of history and pronounced anti-communism.[6] The affirmative reference to the past, thereby, becomes the core of the reshaping of national history policy and memory culture, with the aim of discrediting respected figures such as the *Solidarność* leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner Lech Wałęsa as a communist secret service agent.[7]

Poland is moving to the right thanks to an alliance of conservative parties and media, clerical-religious actors, a large majority of Catholic clergy and radical right-wing movements. Particular attention should be paid here to the strongly growing right-wing extremist youth organizations such as *Młodzież Wszechpolska* ('All-Polish Youth') or *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* ('National-Radical Camp'),[8] whose prevalently young members are among the main recipients of the *Jan Hardy* comics. Their identity is based on an anti-pluralistic idea of the nation and 'Christian nationalism,' which is why, according to the slogan 'God, Honor, Fatherland,' they represent a synthesis of romantic messianism[9] with ethno-nationalism.[10] This is evidenced by hundreds of thousands of 'likes' on their social media channels, cooperation with the multi-million dollar industry of 'patriotic' fashion labels, such as *Red is Bad*,[11] and regular marches on historic holidays. The *Marsz Niepodległości* ('March of Independence') organized in Warsaw on Independence Day (November 11), for example, with over 100,000 participants every year, is considered a central event of the extreme right.[12] The martial demonstration of national pride, the glorification of the country's history and traditional conservative

6 Regarding nationalist historical narratives in Poland, see Saryusz-Wolska et al. (2018).

7 On Wałęs's forced monument overthrow, see Krzemiński (2017).

8 On the rise of far-right groups in Poland, including the *National Movement* founded by the *All-Polish Youth* and the *National-Radical Camp* as part of the *Confederation of Freedom and Independence*, whose members have held some seats in parliament since 2015, see Balcerzak (2020b: 146–176).

9 The romantic philosophy of Polish messianism, popularized during the period of partitions by, *inter alia*, the national poet Adam Mickiewicz, arose based on the Christian-Jewish tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries. The idea indicates that Poles possessed extraordinary character traits that would make this nation stand out in a special way, thus, assuming the role of the bulwark of Christianity in Europe. On Romantic messianism in Poland, see Rudaś-Grodzka (2009).

10 First and foremost, they receive Roman Dmowski (2007), the founding father of the Polish national movement of the interwar period, who argued for a homogeneous, Catholic one-people state, thus, contradicting the idea of a multiethnic federation put forward by Marshal Józef Piłsudski.

11 The popular 'patriotic' fashion brand *Red is Bad:* http://www.redisbad.pl (accessed November 16, 2020) settles scores against communism and the EU or prints symbols of Polish history and nationalist militarism on clothing and accessories available in the online store and retail stores nationwide.

12 Regarding the nationalist march, see the Facebook profile *Marsz Niepodległości*, counting around 260,000 followers: http://www.facebook.com/MarszNiepodleglosci (accessed November 16, 2020) and Balcerzak (2020b: 369–375).

views on family, gender roles and sexuality are supported by like-minded people from other European countries, PiS politicians and representatives of the Catholic Church. This not infrequently fundamentalist symbiosis of politics and religion can be read, on the one hand, as a consequence of the "renaissance of the religious" (Pollack 2009) and the defense of traditionalist sections of society against the modernization processes in the course of the changes after 1989. On the other hand, it can be explained by "Poland's religious uniqueness" (Borowik 2002), due to the historically handed-down topos 'Pole = Catholic.' In addition, there is the religious tradition resulting from the country's confessional homogeneity and the myth of the 'Polish Pope,' who contributed significantly to the nonviolent collapse of the communist regime in 1989, even if the image of the pontiff and the church as moral authorities has been increasingly crumbling in recent times due to cases of clerical corruption and sexual abuse.[13]

On the other side of the political spectrum are organizations, media and networks with pro-European, emancipatory or libertarian-anarchist agendas, reaching from anti-fascism and anti-clericalism to the fight for minority and women's rights. These include various feminist and LGBT non-governmental organizations as well as numerous libertarian-anarchist collectives and networks operating according to the principle of leaderless resistance, having informal structures and being illegal. The liberal-anarchist idea and movement have been a marginal phenomenon of political life in Poland, both quantitatively and qualitatively, since the former's emergence at the end of the 19th century.[14] Given the arch-conservative narrative in politics and the church, this is not surprising, but conversely, it leads to the revival of libertarian-anarchist activism. Noteworthy in the context of the emergence and reception of the *Likwidator* comics is, *inter alia*, *Federacja Anarchistyczna* ('Anarchist Federation'),[15] Poland's oldest and largest anarchist organization with a dozen nationwide sections, whose beginnings date back to the *Solidarność* era of the 1980s. Its emergence and the transformation of anarchist thought was influenced by youth countercultures, the artistic avant-garde, protest movements, such as *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* (Orange Alternative'),[16] and subversive punk subculture.[17]

These wide-ranging influences created a milieu that combines liberal, antiauthoritarian and -state ideas, but whose heterogeneity testifies to the search for a contemporary formula for action. This status quo can be attributed, on the one hand, to the still strongly religious character of Polish society and its "habitually conservative" character (Garsztecki 2011: 5) and, on the other hand, to the lack of a modus operandi in historical

13 On the crisis of the Catholic Church in Poland, see Mechtenberg (2019).

14 On the anarchist movement in Poland, see Urbański (2009).

15 For the *Anarchist Federation:* http://federacja-anarchistyczna.pl (accessed November 22, 2020), see Balcerzak (2020b: 256–261).

16 On the history and the protest of the *Orange Alternative*, see Balcerzak (2011).

17 The punk subculture in Poland dominated in the 1980s to 1990s and was one of the main carriers of anarchist content. On punk in Eastern Europe, see Kasprzycki (2013).

and identity politics. The political scientist Michał Sutowski (2017) describes this state of affairs as the "search for the Holy Grail" and sees not only in Poland's shift to the right but also in the counter-protests, for example, against the recent wave of homophobia or the tightening of the abortion law,[18] the great opportunity for the left-wing, progressive social groups to set accents and redefine themselves.

The comic: Popular cultural genre, knowledge reservoir and visual artistic resource

The notion of 'popular culture' is used as an umbrella term for everyday areas that produce themes, conveyed through mass media and broadly used, regardless of ancestry, social class or gender.[19] According to the sociologist Rafał Pankowski, popular culture is "[t]he mirror in which contemporary civilization views itself" (2006: 10). The field of popular culture is determined by the activities of the actors, the medial, aesthetic and performative properties of the products, and by various forms of their social functionalization (Korte and Paletschek 2009; Witkowski 2017).

Popular culture is based – in addition to auditory communication – primarily on visual communication because visual messages, unlike the written word, are more direct and, therefore, easier to decode (Mitchell 2008). Comics have occupied a prominent place here since the founding of the US publishers *DC Comics* and *Marvel*, celebrating a global triumph as a pop-cultural phenomenon. Following the concept of "sequential art" (Eisner 1985), the comic scientist Scott McCloud defines comics as "pictorial or other signs arranged into spatial sequences that convey information and/or produce an aesthetic effect on the viewer" (2001: 28). Its diverse forms, such as comic strips or comic books, which combine aspects of literature and art by means of image-word synthesis, are characterized by several typical features and techniques: A clear subdivision of the pictorial signs portrayed and textual content depicted in the form of speech and thought bubbles, panels or onomatopoeia, humorization, puzzlement and (de-) moralization are the central visual strategies.

These features and techniques also characterize the type of historical comic we are concerned with here. In this case, the sequential narration is based less on the reproduction of history with academic accuracy than on individual memories and the mixing of history, the present and fiction. The synthesis of fact and the imaginary makes both comics alternate histories, counterfactual or alternative histories in the form of

18 This polarization manifested itself most recently in 2019–2020, *inter alia*, after numerous local governments declared themselves so-called 'LGBT-free zones' and banned equality marches, or during the mass protests after the Constitutional Court effectively banned abortions. Regarding the situation of sexual minorities and women's rights in Poland, see Bachmann (2020); Druciarek (2018).

19 On the complexity of the concept of popular culture and the debates surrounding the phenomena of pop, see Hecken (2009).

fictional narratives or thought experiments about altered courses of history.[20] Both comics strive to be as accessible and comprehensible as possible as "sensual forms of mediation" (Assmann 2013) through a wide range of aesthetic-narrative forms, such as intervisuality, hypertextuality or coloring: bridges are built between past and present, and offers of identification are underscored by personalized and affective elements.

This comparison shows how both historical comics contribute to the cultures of remembrance of the Second World War, the communist era and Poland's most recent history after 1989 through aestheticization and relativization, and how they use visual-aesthetic means to establish different (self)images of Poland.[21]

'Cursed soldier': The superhero Jan Hardy in the service of the 'patriotic' narrative

The character of the superhero Jan Hardy[22] and his narrative universe – the "Hardyverse" – were created in 2013 by the conservative artist Jakub Kijuc, celebrated as a "propagandist for patriotism and faith" (Król 2016) in the radical right-wing portal *Narodowcy.net* ('Nationalist.net'). Kijuc describes Hardy as a "patriotic" superhero "who invokes Polish culture history, and tradition. […] The source of his strength is God, Honor and Fatherland" (cited in Król 2016). This positioning allows an interpretation that relates the context of the comic's creation to the affirmative reference to the past and religious conservatism of the far right.[23] The transformation of Jan Hardy into a "Christian" superhero and Kijuc's comment that the series is "in a sense, an inversion of the leftist Likwidator" (cited in Zembrzuski 2013) once again confirm that the main protagonist is placed in the service of a national conservative ideology.

The comic includes three series: *Jan Hardy – Żołnierz Wyklęty* ('Jan Hardy – Cursed Soldier'), *R. O. T. A. XXI* and *Jan Hardy*.[24] The starting point of the plot is the glorified myth of the so-called "cursed soldiers." These were resistance fighters from various anti-communist underground organizations who fought against the communist regime

20 On counterfactual storytelling using the example of US mainstream comics, see Harbeck (2020).

21 The ethnographic analysis is based on the 2019–2020 evaluation of five print issues from each of the two comic book series published between 2011 and 2018.

22 See the *Jan Hardy* comic book series homepage: http://www.janhardy.pl (accessed November 19, 2020).

23 Kijuc was associated with the left-wing radical punk milieu at the beginning of his career and published his works in cooperation with the anarchist squat *Tektura* ('Cardboard') from Lublin. After an ideological 'transformation,' he turned to the radical right-wing milieu, including the *National Radical Camp*.

24 All three series comprise more than 20 issues, which have been published by *Materia Komiks*, a publishing house founded by Kijuc in 2010, by two right-wing conservative weekly magazines or by the Catholic publishing house *Vera Icon*. The Facebook profile *Jan Hardy* has about 5,600 'likes': http://www.facebook.com/jan.hardy.komiks (accessed November 25, 2020).

in the years 1944 to 1963.[25] The design of the comic series is a mix of fantasy, Polish history and Slavic mythology, combined and reinterpreted in the style of steam punk and the fantasy horror genre. The Hardy comics are obviously influenced by the classics of the fantasy world: *Marvel* and *DC Comics*, and by the horror writer Howard Phillips Lovecraft, whose bestiary of ancient god-monsters still serves as an inspiration for many authors today. In terms of design and imagery, the comics resemble the *X-Men* series of super-powered mutants from the 1960s or the comic *Hellboy* about a red-skinned devil, created by Mike Mignola in the 1990s. Kijuc's comics feature a militaristic post-apocalyptic narrative tone and drawing style. The colorful, clearly outlined drawings, which use a wide color palette of reds, yellows, greens, browns and grays, have a punky, surrealistic style, reflecting the groundbreaking mix of history and fiction. The stylistic devices emphasize the 'patriotic,' i.e. the national conservative and Catholic narrative of the comic series reflected in the narrative plot, the partly juvenile language and the visual design of the characters, for example, in their names (Jan Hardy, R. O. T. A.), their outfits (military uniforms with superhero motifs, futuristic armor with religious emblems), or the overrepresented synthesis of national and religious symbolic aesthetics (national colors, cross symbolism).

Combat unit R. O. T. A.: Against progress and the leftist 'rainbow revolution'

The series *Jan Hardy – Cursed Soldier* tells about the struggle of the fictional 'cursed soldiers' against the communist occupier after the end of the Second World War. The series can be read as a form of glorification of the controversial 'cursed soldiers' within the framework of the right-wing radical commemoration boom. The pop-cultural medium is, thus, instrumentalized nationalistically. In retrospectives, the reader learns that Kijuc designated Jan Kwiatkowski as the title character of the series. He lives with his family in the forest as a woodcutter and is a descendant of the Stolemy, a race of giants from Slavic mythology. The giant is drafted into the secret service under the pseudonym Jan Hardy in 1934. Henceforth, together with other heroes, Hardy fights against the enemies of Poland in the secret unit R. O. T. A. On the one hand, the name refers to *Rota*, probably the most famous patriotic poem by Maria Konopnicka, written in the form of an oath, which deals with the resistance against the Germanization during the partitions of Poland in the 19th century. It is one of the most important patriotic songs of Poland (along with the Polish national anthem). On the other hand, the name R. O. T. A. is an acronym for *Rozpoznanie – Obrona – Taktyka – Atak* [Recognition – Defense – Tac-

25 The increasingly institutionalized myth of the 'cursed soldiers' is polarizing. On the one hand, the resistance fighters are celebrated by the right as forgotten national heroes and stylized as central figures of a new commemoration boom. On the other hand, members of anti-fascist groups speak of 'damned soldiers' and, thus, denounce the ethnic-religiously motivated murders of the civilian population by the soldiers. Regarding the 'cursed soldiers,' see Balcerzak (2021).

Fig. 1:
R. O. T. A. superhero and 'cursed soldier' Jan Hardy with the *szczerbiec* sword.
Source: Kijuc 2014a: 6.

tics – Attack], a slogan describing the secret unit's approach to fighting its enemies. Although the unit was crushed by the Nazis in 1939, Jan Hardy continues his fight after 1945 with several R. O. T. A. members thanks to supernatural powers and the latest technology. The muscular, bearded superhero wearing a military uniform is endowed with superhuman strength, regenerative ability and physical resistance. The name Hardy stands for intransigence and foolhardiness, the white letter 'H' placed on his chest, modeled after Superman and aesthetically reminiscent of the Hussaria wings of Polish horsemen in the 16th and 17th centuries, highlights the soldier as a Christian hero and defender of the Catholic faith. This visual coding is reinforced by Hardy's depiction with the *szczerbiec* ('sharp sword') as a battle attribute (Fig. 1). The coronation sword of the Polish kings is the only surviving crown insignia of the Piast dynasty, whose first ruler Mieszko I ushered in the birth of Poland's Christian tradition by baptizing the country in 966.

Among Hardy's loyal comrades, who also possess supernatural powers – for example, teleportation or plant transformation – is a unit in whose creation Kijuc mixes Polish history, legends and fantasy with biblical references. It includes the robot Pan Tadeusz, whose name derives from the national epic *Master Thaddeus* written by Adam Mickiewicz, or the agent E. P. A. R.,[26] inspired by the resistance fighter Halina Szymańska,

26 The name refers to Lucjan Łągiewka, a Polish designer and inventor of the accumulative-dispersive energy adapter [*Energetyczny Przetwornik Akumulacyjno-Rozpraszający*, EPAR].

Fig. 2:
The agent E. P. A. R. as a patriotic national heroine with a halo, a cross and a Polish standard. Source: Jakub Kijuc, private archive of Agnieszka Balcerzak 2018.

who, as an agent of the British Secret Service, provided the link between the resistance and the Allies. The struggle of the superheroes under the motto "We fight progress and revolution!" refers to the internal and external enemy images of the right, such as feminists or the LGBT movement, named in the series *Jan Hardy – Cursed Soldier* and later, even more clearly, in the follow-up series *R. O. T. A. XXI*. This ideological 'culture war' is impressively visualized by the author: Kijuc shifts the struggle into the 21st century by depicting Jan Hardy's powerful hand smashing a rainbow as a symbol of a hostile world view. The most important adversary of the R. O. T. A. heroes is the monster Tęczozilla, a rainbow monster inspired by the Japanese creature Godzilla. It is the personification of 'anti-Polish' LGBT ideology with a clear message: the "rainbow revolution" (Kijuc 2014b: 14), imported from the West, must be stopped and Poland's recent history rewritten in terms of a conservative world view.

This fight against homosexuality and a liberal world view finds its sequel in the series *R. O. T. A. XXI* and *Jan Hardy* based on Catholic doctrine. Kijuc uses numerous biblical quotations, Christian prayers and pro-life references, such as the blood-covered coat hanger symbolizing illegal abortions on the cover of the issue *Dzieci Boże!* ('Children of God!') from 2018. The author also implements the religious imprint in the depiction of the agent E. P. A. R., inspired by the medieval iconography of the French national heroine Joan of Arc. Following her example, E. P. A. R. is presented as a 'saint' of the Christian counterrevolution in the Polish national colors of white and red: Her white, kinetic energy-absorbing armor is crowned by a futuristic halo. In her hands she holds a sword and a wooden cross. The cloak hanging over her shoulder corresponds visually with the white and red Polish standard waving behind her head (Fig. 2). Kijuc

uses these aesthetic stylistic devices to repeatedly place the comic and its protagonists in the service of a religiously motivated 'battle for souls' and a conservative image of Poland and the Polish society.

The Likwidator: Sardonic comic art under the sign of libertarian (eco-)anarchism

Extremely violent, vengeful and relentlessly evil: this is the most accurate description of the Jan Hardy antagonist and title character of the anarchist comic series *Likwidator* ('Liquidator'),[27] created by the anarchist and cartoonist Ryszard Dąbrowski.[28] Much like the picture stories about Jan Hardy, this is an underground comic and not mainstream reading material.[29] Nevertheless, the graphic novels with the mischievously grinning Likwidator in the leading role, which have been published for almost 30 years, have also achieved cult status outside the anarchist milieu.

The Likwidator is an 'eco-terrorist' and individualist anarchist who rejects the doctrines of nationalism, socialism or conservatism.[30] He is the "fantastic alter ego of the author," as the editor of the comics Robert Zaręba (2016: 3) writes. Drawn in the visual style of a computer game, the Likwidator destroys all enemies. Despite all the cruelty of his actions, the Likwidator's exaggerated moral sensibility and philosophical reflection should not be disregarded: "'Humanity – that is the skin disease of the earth' – This thought of Friedrich Nietzsche accompanies the bloody deeds of the Likwidator unchanged […]" (Rusek 2010: 151).

A look at the character and the imagery of the series reveals some parallels to US comic superheroes. The fearsome 'eco-terrorist,' always depicted with a machine gun, has similarities to two comic book characters from the *Marvel* universe: one is the figure of the Punisher, a vengeful and torturous crimefighter created in the 1970s, and the other is the violent anti-hero Venom, an amorphous alien 'symbiote' that survives only when it bonds with a human host. On his relentlessly brutal missions, to which he

27 The first issue of *Likwidator* appeared in 1995 with a circulation of 1,000 copies. Dąbrowski published a total of over 15 issues, mostly in the anarchist publishing house *Bractwo Trojka* ('Trojka Brotherhood'), which cooperates closely with the *Anarchist Federation*. Between 2011 and 2018, for example, he published an anti-PiS trilogy: *Prawda Smoleńska* ('Smolensk Truth'), *Likwidator kontra Kaczystan* ('Likwidator versus Kaczystan'), and *Likwidator kontra Dobra Zmiana* ('Likwidator versus Good Change'). For more about the *Likwidator* comic series, see Rusek (2010: 150–52).

28 The comic author published his relentless visual satire of Poland's politics, religiosity and intellectual backwardness in anarchist punk zines as early as the 1980s.

29 This is evidenced by the comic's print run of no more than a few thousand copies and the relatively small number of some 900 followers of the *Likwidator* page on Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/Likwidator-135037983276145 (accessed November 2, 2020).

30 When creating the Likwidator figure, Dąbrowski invokes not only Dave Foreman, the co-founder of the radical environmental network *Earth First!*, and the so-called 'Unabomber' Ted Kaczynski but also two 19th century German philosophers: Friedrich Nietzsche, with his critique of Christianity as a religion of oppression, and Max Stirner, the founder of individualist anarchism.

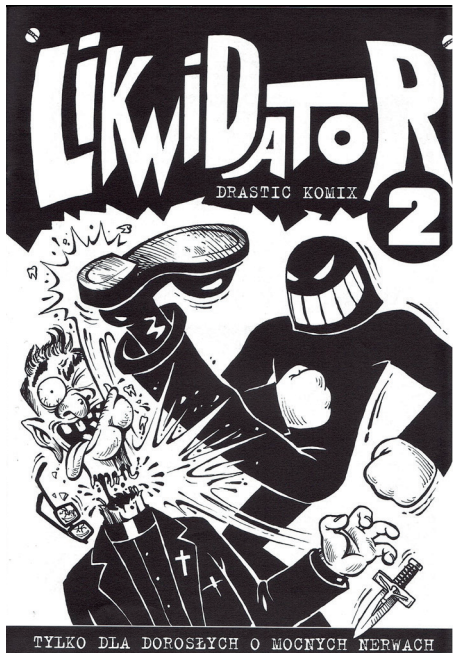

Fig. 3:
The anarcho-terrorist Likwidator beheads the priest Adam Boniecki.
Source: Ryszard Dąbrowski, Zaręba 2016: 5.

always travels on a Harley-Davidson branded with an L monogram and converted to run on hydrogen, the Likwidator is accompanied by his wife and son, with whom he lives together in an turf hut in the Białowieża virgin forest in eastern Poland – the last primeval forest in Europe. The trio's identical appearance is inspired by various comic book characters, anarchism and the color black as a symbol of negation and anti-authoritarian thinking: their trademarks are the tight, black full-body suits reminiscent of Venom, complete with combat boots and balaclavas, the huge, continuously bared teeth, and the striking, white, pupilless Batman eyes.

A cartoon-like line and detailed illustrations, whether in black and white or in color, is characteristic of the entire *Likwidator* series. The images have an undeniable charm, even if the action scenes depicted, accompanied by snappy dialogues in a colloquial language style, comment on the transformation of Poland after 1989 with abundant violence and intrinsic exaggeration. From time to time, Dąbrowski sends the anti-hero on journeys through time and space, including the period of the Russian Civil War (1917–1921) or the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), where the Likwidator supports anarchists in their fight against the Bolsheviks or the Franco dictatorship. The comic series is intended to convey resistant, revolutionary ideas in the guise of pop-cultural entertainment and to encourage the recipient to think critically.

The Likwidator prefers to take extremely violent revenge on public figures: Pope Benedict XVI, the Belarusian dictator Alexander Lukashenko and the Al-Qaeda leader

Osama bin Laden have all encountered the bloodthirsty anti-hero and been executed by him. His wrath is often directed against right-wing politicians and Catholic priests. According to Likwidator, the Catholic doctrine means "spewing religious poison" and religion itself is a "'hoax' that robs people of inner freedom for deceptive comfort" (Zaręba 2016: 5).

Tadeusz Rydzyk, the founder of the arch-conservative radio station *Radio Maryja*, is executed in a particularly cruel manner. After extensive torture, the Likwidator pours hydrochloric acid into his intestines. It is not without reason that Dąbrowski provides the cover of one of the first issues with warnings such as "Only for adults with strong nerves" and *Drastic Komix*. He portrays on the black-and-white cover from the 1990s, for example, Father Adam Boniecki, whom the Likwidator decapitates with a brutal kick to the face (Fig. 3). The theologian is a former companion of the 'Polish Pope' John Paul II and, at the same time, one of Poland's few Catholic intellectuals critical of the Church and the PiS, who has been repeatedly banned from speaking by the Marian Order because of his unorthodox statements. By showing no mercy even to a clergyman criticizing the Church and right-wing parties, Likwidator's drastic illustration conveys a clear positioning and political message: Likwidator is anticlerical; he sharply criticizes the Church's canon of values, affirmative-martyrological patriotism and vehemently rejects nationalist-oppressive structures.

'Kaczystan': A ruthless reckoning with national-conservative Poland à la PiS

Dąbrowski (2015) continues his bestial vendetta against Catholic clergy, right-wing politicians and conservative right-wing radicals in the anticipative counterfactual comic book *Likwidator versus Kaczystan*. In it, he mocks the conspiracy theories surrounding the 2010 Smolensk plane crash,[31] the 'Smolensk cult' as the 'founding myth' of a clerical-nationalist Fourth Polish Republic, and its supporters portrayed as religious fanatics. The cover of the magazine, on which Deputy Prime Minister Paweł Kukiz (Kukisz), President Andrzej Duda (Dudda) and PiS Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński (Kaczorski) are portrayed, chained to a burning number IV imitating a funeral pyre as a visual allegory of the Fourth Polish Republic, already lets the reader anticipate the borderline cruel-grotesque character of the comic episode (Fig. 4).

The comic begins with the 2015 PiS election rally, where Kaczyński supporters react with unfettered euphoria to the absolute majority of the PiS party parodied as *Prawo i Spolegliwość* ('Law and Pliability'). Shortly thereafter, Beata Szydło is appointed prime minister, but her grandfather's Jewish communist roots force her to resign. Jarosław Kaczyński

31 A plane crashed in Smolensk in 2010, killing Polish President Lech Kaczyński and 95 other people. The theory that the disaster was an assassination attempt by Donald Tusk and Vladimir Putin is part of the PiS propaganda canon. Anti-PiS circles refer to this as the 'Smolensk religion' conspiracy theory. On the Smolensk disaster, see Gliński and Wasilewski (2011).

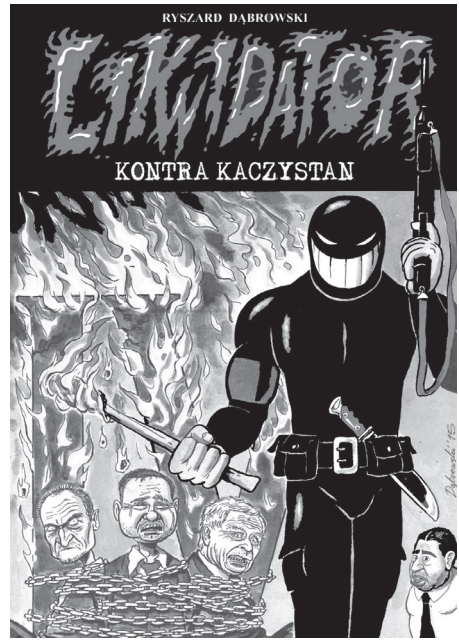

Fig. 4:
The cover of the comic book *Likwidator versus Kaczystan* by Andrzej Dąbrowski. Source: Dąbrowski 2015.

takes power and begins to establish 'Kaczystan,' a nationalist-clerical regime under the PiS. Dąbrowski draws on associations and symbols of World War II and the Communist era in his portrayal of this authoritarian state. He mocks the new leader cult, which finds its aesthetic expression in posters with the slogan "One Poland, One Party, One Chairman," a parody of the Nazi propaganda slogan "One People, One Reich, One Leader." The posters portray the PiS chairman in a fascist uniform with a *'kotwica'* partially imitating the swastika. The caricature is an allusion to the so-called 'anchor,' the central symbol of the Polish resistance movement, especially of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, which is regularly appropriated and instrumentalized in the right's discourse of patriotism.

The purity of 'Polish blood' has top priority in the authoritarian regime of 'Kaczystan.' Young Polish women are detained in the "National House of Reproduction," with its guiding maxim "Reproduction Makes You Free," referring back to the Auschwitz concentration camp, in order to be forcibly impregnated by PiS politicians in an 'act of patriotism.' Armed paramilitary combat troops of the 'Neo-Cursed Soldiers' are deployed to eliminate 'communists' – a parodic representation of the 'Cursed Soldiers' glorified in the comic strip *Jan Hardy*. On behalf of the 'Ministry of Religion' and under the slogan "God, Jesus, Wojtyła," 'Catholic preventive patrols' led by Captain Terlikowiecki – a caricature of the ultra-conservative journalist Tomasz Terlikowski – take over the function of the Catholic religious police with the task of monitoring morality and the 'reproductive duty' of the population. The fundamentalist units create fear and horror and strengthen the expanding 'Kaczystan,' which is affirmed thanks to a church mass that

is continuously broadcasted in the media. In time, freedom of expression is abolished, and all critical artists, who previously had their hands chopped off so that they could not write 'defamatory' books and make films critical of the regime, are locked up in labor camps. The symbol of 'Kaczystan' and of the conspiracy-theory hysteria of 'real Poles' after 2010, becomes the gigantic Smolensk Monument erected in Warsaw's Castle Square. It shows the 'betrayed' saber-swinging President Lech Kaczyński (Kaczorski) being pierced from behind by an airplane. The depiction is a bitter satire on the 'Smolensk cult' that the PiS has made the foundation of its 'patriotic' policies.

In order to cope with the situation, which is becoming increasingly threatening to liberal thought, Dąbrowski calls Likwidator onto the scene and lets him rule with his usual brutality: under his leadership, an uprising breaks out in which the PiS leader and the priest patrols and 'pseudo-soldiers' are mercilessly shot while evoking the ultra-Catholic image of Poland with their last breath. In an extremely grotesque and borderline pointed, aestheticized form, the comic criticizes the 'patriotic' narrative in the cultural and historical politics of the Polish right and expresses the liberal-anarchist protest against nationalist-clerical tendencies in Poland.

Conclusion: Antagonistic signs, images and attitudes in the field of popular cultures

Comics – as a look at *Jan Hardy* and *Likwidator* shows – have an identity-forming effect: they document and entertain, provoke and criticize, invite reflection or express protest. As a visual-aesthetic commentary on historical and current events, the medium of popular entertainment and memory culture requires contextual knowledge and the ability to clearly assign the (visual) language and the frame of reference.

This paper analyzed two historical comics that combine facts and the imaginary, drawing their inspiration from the history of Poland. Both main characters and comic worlds that this analysis has compared represent opposite political and ideological standpoints of the social spectrum: the national conservative superhero and "cursed soldier" Jan Hardy, created by ultra-Catholic artist Jakub Kijuc, and the brutal "eco-terrorist" and individualistic anarchist Likwidator, whom PiS and church-critical comic artist Ryszard Dąbrowski breathes new life into in every new comic book. The article argues that these figures and their adventures exemplify the fundamental memory-cultural, nationalist, and emancipatory discourses shaping contemporary Poland.

The polarizing leitmotifs and topoi can be seen particularly expressively in the production context, the language and the different visual aesthetics. The visual narration regarding the rainbow monster Tęczozilla as a personification of the 'anti-Polish' LGBT ideology, for example, or the hagiographic depiction of the agent E. P. A. R. with a cross, sword and a Polish standard, based on the iconography of the French national heroine Joan of Arc, strongly highlight the comic about the Slavic Stolem giant Jan Hardy as a medium of a nationally conservative and clerically influenced image of Poland. By contrast,

the grotesquely bitter "Kaczystan" parody speaks a different (visual) language: as the brutal 'anarcho-terrorist' Likwidator brings down the oppressive PiS regime, exaggeratedly depicted in fascistic aesthetics, he is stylized as a convinced advocate of an openly progressive, emancipatory and pro-European Poland.

The field of the popular-cultural genre of comics can play an important role while analyzing the discourses surrounding these Polish fissures – especially in understanding their dichotomous character and the contrasting notions of identity and legitimate 'national culture.' Motifs and symbols from the superhero worlds of Jan Hardy and Likwidator also adorn everyday objects, such as clothing, as a kind of mix of 'fighting' and 'artistic' comic art, which can be publicly staged as an ideological confession. Various Jan Hardy motifs, for example, embellish T-shirts of the 'patriotic' fashion label *Red is Bad*. The figure of Jan Hardy has become an instrument for universalizing the national creed and an easily accessible marketing tool for the 'patriotic idea.' In this sense, the comics *Jan Hardy* and *Likwidator* draw attention to areas of tension in the identity-creating politics of culture and memory, make the recipient aware of them and challenge the viewer to weigh the affirmative or critical stance of the comic artists, while locating them in their own store of knowledge and opinion.

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On the renaming of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde**

"Again that tiresome discussion of names in our discipline. As if we had no other problems,"[1] complained Wolfgang Slapansky in 1992 (107), then lecturer at the Vienna Institute for Folklore Studies, in the volume *Die Volkskunde als Wissenschaft? Zweite und letzte studentische Volkskundetagung – erste studentische kulturwissenschaftliche Tagung* ('Folklore Studies as a Science? Second and Last Student Folklore Studies Conference – First Student Cultural Studies Conference'). The title of the student conference[2] seems humorous nowadays and probably expresses a good deal of enervation – but this should not obscure the fact that the students engaged in a committed discussion of the status, visibility and potential of folkloristic research. Dorothea Peter (1992: 99) proposed "Egnelik" as an artificial name that had the advantage of being free of any connotations. Gertrud Benedikt demanded that we take leave of folklore studies and set out on our way (1992: 47). This farewell, for which Benedikt pleaded a good twenty years after the Falkenstein conference and the Tübingen publication *Abschied vom Volksleben* ('Farewell to Folklife'), had already been called for many times in the history of the discipline and also practiced in different ways;[3] the contingent effects of this farewell were lamented with warning (Burckhardt-Seebass 1997; König and Korff 2001).

The debate around the name has accompanied the discipline and the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* for several decades now, and it has been the subject of many lucid and committed publications – such as the knowledgeable Göttingen volume *Namen und was sie bedeuten* ('Names and What They Mean') (Bendix and Eggeling 2004). On many occasions, the question was asked why a renaming had not succeeded despite the unanimous votes after the Falkenstein conference. As productive as the discussions have always been and as much as they have advanced the discipline, in a certain sense,

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1 In the interest of readability, this quotation has been translated from German.

2 This student conference is one of many occasions in the disciplinary history of German-language folklore studies during which intensive discussions took place about the name of the discipline, its objects of research, the role of cultural studies research in society, and about new programmatics and paradigms. The conference contributions show how productive the disciplinary reflection practiced here was; at the same time, the conference proceedings show the problems the students saw in the disciplinary designation 'Volkskunde.'

3 Also see the *Forum zur Falkensteiner Tagung* (Schmoll 2020; Thiemeyer 2020).

they have also been paralyzing because the step of a concise renaming has never been comprehensively taken. Helge Gerndt summarized the various lines of argument and ventured a prognosis in the 1988 volume *Fach und Begriff "Volkskunde" in der Diskussion* ('The Discipline and the Name "Folklore Studies" in Discussion'): "Those disciplines will hold their ground best which, with regard to their *subject matter*, are as empirically bound – i.e., via perception – as possible, which, with regard to their *goals*, always think and formulate their theoretical guidelines with renewed precision, and which, with regards to *methodology*, are dynamic and far-sighted enough to draw on the most appropriate procedure in each case – wherever it comes from – without falling from one fashionable trend to another" (Gerndt 1988: 19; italics in the original).

Here, aspects are addressed that students and teachers discuss in introductory courses at all locations of the discipline (Hengartner 2000): our agility in dealing with theories on offer, the dynamic and innovative methodological debates, our objects of study – and one would certainly have to add our interdisciplinary competence and our capacity for reflection not only in methodological questions but also regarding the situatedness of scientific knowledge. This refers to the cognitive identity of the discipline, which Gerndt clearly recognizes, especially at our conferences. He points out that the self-image of a scientific discipline manifests itself not only in theoretical proclamations but also tangibly in subject-related work. Gerndt continues that there are common topics that can be seen, for example, in the general acceptance of professional conferences. He states that the biennial congresses have had an integrating effect for German folklore studies even during the period of the most violent differences of opinion (Gerndt 1988: 18). Gerndt identifies the concept of culture as the central concept here – also in terms of creating community (Hengartner 2001; Lindner 1987).

Today, in the context of theoretical differentiation and especially in view of the critical debates about the concept of culture, to which Chris Hann (2007), for example, has made a controversial contribution, one may not unreservedly agree with this (Beck 2009). On the other hand, the critical-reflexive approach to the concept of culture, as practiced by Walter Leimgruber (2013) in his concluding lecture at the 38th congress of the German Society for Folklore Studies in September 2011 in Tübingen, has had an integrating effect.

Despite all the differences in the understanding of the discipline, the reception of theories, the conception or rejection of the concept of culture (May 2020) and the search for possible connections to international scientific discourses, we can, nevertheless, put a tick next to the categories that make up the cognitive identity of this discipline. And in spite of, or perhaps because of, all the differences, enormous potentials become apparent on very different levels, which can be described, above all, with the concept of cooperation, which is sometimes also explicitly initiated from the outside by corresponding funding formats (e.g. by the Volkswagen Foundation). The kind of reflexive cultural analysis practiced by folklore/empirical cultural studies/European

ethnology, with its location-specific variants, has long since become an important component of interdisciplinary collaborative research. Colleagues have explicitly sought cooperation with non-university research and cultural mediation institutions for many years. And here, the uniquely intensive and long-established interlocking between university institutes, museums and regional research institutions – of which more than 100 are active as corporate members in the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde* – is of particular value and interest. We have been thinking intensively about the role of our knowledge stocks in science, politics, economics or society as a whole – as was the case at our Tübingen University Conference – for a long time. Despite all the concerns about the continued existence of the discipline, which are certainly well-founded, there is good news with new locations and new professorships.

Nevertheless, this optimistic assessment is fragile: declining student numbers with hardly any predictable effects on the promotion of emerging researchers; expected funding cuts as an effect of the pandemic; political expectations of the immediate usability of scientific knowledge; attacks not only from right-wing extremist and right-wing populist circles that question the value of cultural studies knowledge fundamentally (prominent in the field of gender studies) – all this challenges our discipline and requires sustainable strategies.

Against this background, the expectations for a renaming of the professional society are high: the renaming promises that we leave behind a term that has become problematic and has long since ceased to represent what we do (Thiemeyer 2020). Regina Bendix, with reference to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, discussed this as a "topic drift" in her presentation at the Tübingen University Conference. At the same time, however, it must be added that we sometimes strategically retain the term 'folklore' in some fields because it is associated with topics that other disciplines hardly ever work on and with employment for our graduates. We also do not want to leave this term to others who use it politically and ideologically in a different way than we do and employ it to justify racism and agitation against every form of the other (Klaus Schönberger highlighted this aspect during the Tübingen University Conference). Incidentally, Reinhard Johler also made a pointed remark in the context of the student conference mentioned above by saying that if one were to give up the name "folklore studies," one would run the risk of leaving certain terms/areas to the "brutals," to the "butchers" (Vitovec 1992: 91). The renaming promises, on a completely different level, to win members for our professional society for whom the term 'folklore studies' is not acceptable for understandable reasons. In any case, it is an opportunity, as Gisela Welz (2004: 40) has so aptly put it by stating that in this respect, she understands renaming debates as a chance to find out what problems a discipline faces, or would like and is able to face.

In other words, it is about the epistemological core of a discipline and, thus, inevitably also about questions of identification and disciplinary cohesion (Köstlin 2015), that is, about an aspect that we commonly deconstruct and critically discuss with good

reason. It is often an emphatic experience for our students when, in the context of a Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (dgv) congress or a conference of our international professional association, the SIEF, they realize that, for all our extremely productive differences, we share professional understandings and perspectives on the world and reality.

It is precisely this shared understanding, on the other hand, that makes the debates about renaming difficult. Our bodies of knowledge on diversity and fluidity, on cultural ambiguities and non-simultaneities are perhaps also a certain hurdle to finding a common and consensus-oriented position (Hengartner 2004: 40). The failure in the search for consensus has been described very clearly by Carola Lipp, who found that although the renaming narrative is already part of the history of the discipline, when examined more closely, it sometimes appears as a tragicomic farce, sometimes as a hair-raising inconsistency and, all in all, is full of human weaknesses and institutional pitfalls. The renaming of the discipline, she continues, is a story of missed opportunities, competition and failed communication, and professional constellations that have long prevented a consistent renaming common to all institutes (Lipp 2004: 136).

Gerhard Lutz drew attention to the difficult situation in his highly readable contribution "Zur Frage der Ortsbestimmung unseres Fachs" ('On the Question of Determining the Location of Our Discipline') as early as 1971, in which he wrote that our situation was not easy and the real conditions at our universities still excluded the possibility that all relevant subjects came together to form a corresponding department of cultural anthropology, as was possible in social anthropology (1988: 303). Lutz refers here to the respective location-specific challenges which have certainly become even more complex since the 1970s and led to the characterization of the discipline as a "discipline of many names." One could describe the location-specific strategies as forms of the disciplinary management of difference (Eggmann 2009) which, depending on the location, has led (or should lead) to the discipline being strategically well positioned in each case. On the other hand, however, this management of difference has also had negative effects, which have been discussed many times in the debate around the name, for example, by Silke Göttsch (2004: 125–126), who said that she would like to make a strong plea for a uniform name for the discipline rather that coquetting with the discipline of many names because identity and recognition function via names.

Lutz, who himself pleaded for ethnology (in his contribution, the adjective "European" is deliberately put in brackets), first points out the importance of the debate around the name and writes that these connections and differences in the direction that folklore studies research should take had also been disregarded in Falkenstein. This was unfortunate, he finds, and it was, therefore, misleading when, in the list of recommended names, names of different significance regarding what *can* be designated by them [italics in the original] stood next to each other indiscriminately and without comment. This again caused the impression that it was only a matter of finding an-

other name for folklore studies and gave rise to the belief that 'cultural anthropology' was best suited because most were able to agree to it without major differences. Here, he finds, a more thorough thinking through of the connections *had* to be insisted on. The clarification of these connections, according to him, was not simply a matter of scientific policy; it was the question of scientific self-understanding that was at stake here (Lutz 1988: 293–294). There are, of course, reasons for this hesitancy, such as the concern that individual locations might migrate to other disciplines. In the context of the Falkenstein conference, this issue was addressed on various occasions and cited by Lutz as a motivation for his contribution, which ends with a specific suggestion: he concludes that if, in addition (as long as there was not yet an institutional framework for the cultural anthropological disciplines), it was important to express the cultural anthropological concept as well, then a solution parallel to the designation of the leading discipline of social anthropology would perhaps be appropriate, namely, "European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology." He himself, he continued, considered this "grand solution" to still be premature under the present circumstances (Lutz 1988: 304–305). Footnote 13, which follows the name he proposes, is also highly instructive. In it, he concedes that he is aware that this suggestion had its shortcomings and that instead of the "and," there could also be – more correctly, he adds in brackets – "and/as" or simply a comma (Lutz 1988: 305).

A reflective struggle can be seen here which weighs up political and scientific-theoretical arguments and can also inspire our current debates since there are a number of proposals that combine the designation Empirical Cultural Studies with European Ethnology. Here, too, the connecting (additive?) "and" would certainly have to be problematized accordingly.

At the same time, this proposal points to a challenge: while Lutz himself characterizes his proposal as premature, today we are rather confronted with a 'too late.' With the renaming of the "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde" into "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Sozial- und Kulturanthropologie" ('German Society for Social and Cultural Anthropology') in 2017, part of it falls away for reasons of disciplinary policy.[4] And it is surprising that in the debate conducted in that discipline (documented in the boasblogs under the title "What's in a name?"[5]), only a small number of authors point out that a whole range of institutes in our discipline carry the designation cultural anthropology in the title. The renaming of the ethnological society contains a claim that can also be reflected critically (Ege 2019).

4 Of course, this argument would also apply to the term 'Cultural Studies,' which, firstly, is used in an almost inflationary manner and, secondly, has also experienced a form of institutionalization with the "Kulturwissenschaftliche Gesellschaft," founded in 2015, and which is currently vehemently advocating for representation in the DFG's review boards, https://kwgev.wordpress.com (last accessed March 29, 2021).

5 https://boasblogs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Boasblogs%20Paper%2001_What%27s%20in%20a%20Name.pdf (last accessed September 27, 2021).

It would certainly be wrong to attribute the renaming debate in the dgv solely to the pressure generated by the renaming of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Völkerkunde. What is certain is that the arguments before this renaming would have been different. The fundamental dilemmas and ambivalences, on the other hand, have remained.

I would like to go into these in a little more detail. I am referring to the submissions from colleagues and students who responded to our call for participation in the renaming debate.[6] The submissions show that we have not been taking things lightly throughout this process. In view of the scope of the decision to rename the society and, thus, to terminologically cut off at least one strand of tradition, this responsible attitude can only be welcomed. I have the impression that almost all contributions to the debate are very consciously weighing up and arguing in a way that is intended to strengthen the discipline and the professional society. The difference lies only in the paths to be taken. A good number of contributions side with pragmatic, non-ideological solutions. This is a welcome development, since the debate about the name has been conducted in the form of a commitment which makes any consensus more difficult or even impossible. I discern four scenarios in the contributions.

First of all, some contributions plead for keeping the term 'folklore studies' in the most relaxed manner possible. Here, arguments of tradition are cited and, in addition, reference is made to non-university contexts in which 'folklore' is still in use. Another argument is that folklore studies is a well-established brand and would, furthermore, represent the museum sector as well. In response to this, it could be argued that a change of name would by no means cut off contacts with museums, for example, which, for their part, are also discussing the adjective 'folkloristic,' as is the case at the Württembergisches Landesmuseum in Stuttgart. The addition 'folklore' was abandoned at the Museum Oberschönenfeld in 2018. The LWL-Freilichtmuseum Detmold – the venue of a heated debate on perspective and name in 1969 (Birkalan-Gedik et al. 2021) – removed 'folklore' from its subtitle in 2019.[7] The dgv must be interested in focusing more on cooperation and networking among the actors in the entire disciplinary context – especially in scientific landscapes that are increasingly organized along market lines. Even after a change of name, 'folkloristic' cultural mediation and research institutions are, of course, indispensable and play an enormously important role, especially in the area that could be described as 'public anthropology' and which represents an attractive and important professional field for our graduates.

6 Dossier in preparation for the renaming of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde (dgv): https://www.d-g-v.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/dgv_Dossier_Umbenennung_MAILVERSION.pdf (last accessed September 27, 2021).

7 Museum director Jan Carstensen said in the museum's statement on the renaming to "Landesmuseum für Alltagskultur" (State Museum of Everyday Culture) that they had noticed that the term "folklore" with all its implications was less and less understood, https://www.alltagskultur.lwl.org/de/blog/lwl-freilichtmuseum-detmold-heisst-kunftig-landesmuseum-fur-alltagskultur/ (last accessed March 29, 2021).

Secondly, contributions argue for a double name, which has been chosen at many locations in recent years for quite different reasons and in different combinations: "Gesellschaft für Europäische Ethnologie und Empirische Kulturwissenschaft" ('Society for European Ethnology and Empirical Cultural Studies') from the Berlin Institute and "Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft und Europäische Ethnologie" ('German Society for Empirical Cultural Studies and European Ethnology') from the Munich Institute. The attribute 'German' has been problematized in various contributions, sometimes with reference to our friendly neighboring societies in Austria and Switzerland. It is certainly correct to question the national focus. At the same time, however, this corresponds to the scientific-political logics of professional societies that are organized nationally. For reasons of professional policy, the professional society of a discipline that operates as a so-called small discipline cannot afford to give up its claim to representation within a national frame of reference. This does not prevent us from further developing our strong connections to Austria and Switzerland. The manifold tasks of a professional society, however, require the scientific-political capital which is provided by the attribute 'German' and which distinguishes the professional society from other societies. When letters have to be written to political decision-makers or university administrations on the threat of cuts or closures, or when interventions have to be made on events relevant to science policy (as has recently become necessary more often), this attribution is useful to us, even if all the arguments on problematization are completely understandable.

The double name was also the subject of the panel discussion at the Tübingen University Conference. It seemed to be a viable solution because it would prevent a narrowing of the concept of culture and the ethnographic element would remain explicitly marked. The research achievements of the discipline on Europe and Europeanization in a globally connected world would, thus, continue to be addressed.

A third option has already been mentioned: many contributions privilege the name "Empirische Kulturwissenschaft" ('Empirical Cultural Studies') – sometimes for very pragmatic reasons. It is short and the recognition value is high; at the same time, it marks a difference to cultural studies with a literary focus, which have an interest in textual and aestheticized representations and whose results are not based on field research or an interest in historical everyday and lifeworlds. Here, however, the problem of translatability arises, which was solved in Tübingen with the auxiliary construction "Historical and Cultural Anthropology" or in Hamburg with "Anthropological Studies in Culture and History." At the Tübingen University Conference, Regina Bendix proposed "Cultural Analysis." As justified as the problematizations of the term empiricism articulated in the ensuing panel discussion may be, it marks a central competence (in my understanding, ethnography is included in the term empiricism, which, in turn, is by no means to be understood as a narrowing to fieldwork) which no longer provides our perspectives with a unique characteristic since, for example, cultural geography,

political science or educational science also conduct fieldwork. Nevertheless, our empiricism/ethnography is much more strongly characterized by reflexivity in the collection, evaluation and interpretation of the material; it is based on innovative forms of the continued development of methodological instruments and connected to theory work, which points to the indispensable mutual feedback of theory and empiricism. Our forms of empirical work, which are also characterized in a central way by a historical dimensioning of contemporary phenomena, are not practiced in other disciplines, even if the labels 'fieldwork' and 'empirical' adorn many studies from other disciplines. My own experience in interdisciplinary alliances is highly encouraging here: our way of thinking, researching and writing is needed (Bendix et al. 2017) – especially because we do not let the dialogical end with the publication of our research results. Suggestions by reviewers in the context of larger interdisciplinary alliances are also often worded in this direction.

Finally, there are a number of proposals that include 'cultural analysis,' 'everyday culture research,' or 'ethnography.' Here, too, colleagues have put forth powerful arguments (for example, Gisela Welz with her proposal of "ethnography of modern societies"), all of which strengthen a common disciplinary context. However, the fact that these terms have been used only sporadically in the naming of institutions, associations, courses of study and the like must be taken into account in the evaluation of whether such terms are sufficiently viable for the naming of a professional association.

A crucial question for the renaming of the professional society is undoubtedly which new arguments have been added today to the reasons that have already been discussed many times. As early as 2004, Regina Bendix discussed the significance of growing market logics, from which our bodies of knowledge have not remained unaffected and have certainly intensified in their effects on science, science policy and orders of knowledge to this day. Gisela Welz has also emphatically pointed out this aspect, stating that disciplines have found themselves in a market in which they offer their knowledge and, consequently, compete with other providers. This dimension of the market form of scientific practice, she continues, had been inscribed in the historical process of institutionalization of scientific question and research programs and the recruitment and training of their actors from the very beginning. She also writes that the market means competition for recognition and processes of distinction, and the generation and reinvestment of social capital, and designations of disciplines secure the identity and recognizability of a discipline both internally and externally as they mark independence and distinctiveness from others (Welz 2004: 31).

The latter seems to be a central argument for the renaming of the professional society, in addition to the often problematized mortgages of the term folklore (aptly Bausinger 2004, who, incidentally, also summarized and evaluated the arguments against the ethnos in ethnology). Weighing up the arguments in the dossier on the call of the professional society and at the university conference, it becomes clear that the

paradigm shift in the discipline has long since been realized (although this, in turn, is and must be an ongoing process) and that it is now time to take the next logical step. As Timo Heimerdinger, among others, argues, it would be consistent and beneficial to the development of the discipline in every respect to harmonize the names of individual locations, courses of study and the dgv journal *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*. The new name of the professional society must do no less than formulate offers of identification and identifiability. In doing so, it does not in any way discredit specialist traditions that retain the adjective 'folkloristic' before and perhaps after a renaming has taken place. It is also important to emphasize that this is about a renaming of the professional society with all its implications for science policy and not – even if this can by no means be clearly separated – about a new conception of the discipline itself.

A new name sends an important signal both internally and externally in an increasingly differentiated scientific landscape with new competitive relationships and disciplinary alliances. It will release energies that have been important in the disciplinary discourse on paradigms, names and concepts over the past decades and advanced the discipline enormously in many respects, but which today, in view of the extraordinary relevance of our research results, perspectives and positions, are certainly well invested in the substantive, theoretical, historical, ethnographic, empirical and science policy work.[8]

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"In which direction does Switzerland really want to go now?"

Future visions and models of society in the context of the Swiss wolf debates*

Abstract: Wolves were exterminated in Central Europe by the second half of the 19th century but have been returning for several decades to the areas where they were formerly distributed. The return and gradual establishment of these wild animals in Switzerland since the mid-1990s is a remarkable process, not only from an ecological perspective but also in terms of the social negotiations triggered by this development. It is precisely on these cultural processes that this article focuses by asking how debates about wolves in Switzerland negotiate how to deal with the nature embodied by wolves in an ecologically and socially sustainable way, and to what extent future scenarios and models of society are created in the process. The article argues that such negotiations of a contemporary approach to wolves can be understood as a medium for the self-understanding of a modern and progressive society.

Keywords: Human-environment relations, wolf management, Switzerland, nature - culture, relational anthropology, political anthropology, Alps

Introduction

Wolves were wiped out across Central Europe by the second half of the 19th century. After they were placed under international protection from the 1970s onwards, the populations recovered and have since been spreading again in the areas where they used to be found – including Switzerland. The first isolated wolves were detected in the mid-1990s, mainly in Valais, but sightings increased in various mountain cantons after the turn of the millennium. The first confirmed evidence of a wolf pack in Switzerland since the extinction of the species was found in the Calanda region in Graubünden and St Gallen in autumn 2012 (KORA n.d.). Official state wolf management in Switzerland

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is carried out under the supervision of the *Bundesamt für Umwelt* ('Federal Office for the Environment') by cantonal authorities and scientific institutions commissioned by the federal government. It is based on international species protection agreements (such as the so-called Bern Convention) and national legislation (above all, the *Jagdgesetz* ['Federal Hunting Act']), and its implementation is regulated by the *Konzept Wolf Schweiz* ('Concept Wolf Switzerland'; the official enforcement aid for state wolf management). While the spread of wolves in Switzerland is seen as a success story from an ecological perspective, wolf attacks on small livestock herds cause farmers major problems, as they necessitate fundamental structural changes in livestock and Alpine farming. Accordingly, wolves trigger criticism and sometimes lead to extremely vehement debates and conflicts.

The controversies regarding wolves go far beyond the disputes between agriculture and environmental protection, which are described as the core conflict in the public debate, and revolve, above all, around a more general classification and evaluation of the social consequences and challenges of the wolf return. Although extremely heterogeneous in content, these differently positioned classifications have certain logics in common, which I will elaborate in the following. As I argue at the end of this essay, the wolf debates are always about the negotiation of what constitutes a future-oriented societal approach to wolf-embodied nature and, thus, a progressive society.

Similar processes can be observed in neighboring countries where wolves have also returned after a long absence and, thus, certain aspects of what follows can be applied to other contexts. However, it will become clear that the negotiations in Switzerland have very specific characteristics as they are closely related to the Swiss political system and the historically very present relationship between the Alpine regions and more urban centers in lower-lying parts of the country, which are linked to national identity issues. Parallels can also be drawn with social debates about other wild and large predators, such as bears, lynxes, beavers or cormorants, regarding certain fronts and lines of conflict between environmental protection and various economic sectors. However, in the case of wolves, which are extremely symbolically charged, strongly polarizing and highly effective due to their high mobility and ability to learn, such constellations crystallize to a particular degree. By repeatedly undermining physical and imagined boundaries, wolves also lead to incomparably intensive and urgent negotiations of social orders.[1]

Wolf scenarios and interweaving levels of scalability

A central element of almost all perspectives on the spread of wolves in Switzerland is the cognitive and argumentative linking of micro and macro levels. Ecological processes, for example, which can be combined to form entire ecosystems, become conceivable

1 See Frank and Heinzer (2019) on wolfish border infiltrations in Switzerland.

only through the interrelationships and interaction of single individuals and species. According to this view, what happens to individual wolves and wolf packs in the mountain valleys of Grisons and Valais influences the development of a whole Alpine or even European wolf population. Conversely, administrative and economic interventions on Alpine cultural landscapes as a whole only become effective when they start at the level of everyday, individual experiences and lifeworlds and attempt to automate and systematize them. In order to avoid conflicts between livestock guardian dogs and tourists, for example, the agricultural advisory center AGRIDEA,[2] which is responsible for livestock guardian dogs in Switzerland, and the two nature conservation organizations World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and Pro Natura have produced a video that gives concrete advice and tips on how hikers or sports enthusiasts should behave in the event of a physical encounter with livestock herds protected by livestock guardian dogs: "Stay *calm*," "*Wait* until the dog is calm," "*Go around* the herd slowly," "*Push* your bike," the video says.[3] With the provision of a digital map tool in which areas protected by livestock guardian dogs are marked, the preparation and planning of leisure activities of individual users of the Alpine space should be changed in such a way that there are fewer conflicts between agriculture and tourism. By training situational, individual behaviors in physical space and introducing a new planning tool, an attempt is, thus, made to reconcile everyday micro levels and systemic macro levels.

This interweaving of different levels of scalability can also be observed in the position of the association Aqua Nostra Switzerland (Aqua Nostra Schweiz 2003), which is "committed to a popularly oriented and anchored environmental protection."[4] Everyday pragmatic problems of livestock guardian dog keeping are directly linked to disadvantages for state systems in a critical statement of the association on the "Concept Wolf Switzerland":

> The protection measures envisaged are costly; for example, the herd protection of at least two dogs per small herd requires enormous effort for the breeding, training and year-round keeping of the guard dogs plus administrative effort for their registration,

2 AGRIDEA is an important actor in the context of the state wolf management (especially in the field of livestock protection) and describes itself on its website as follows: "AGRIDEA is the agricultural advisory center of the cantonal agencies and actively promotes agriculture and rural home economics. Through our agronomic and methodological expertise as well as our tools, we act as a neutral knowledge hub, linking actors from the entire Swiss agricultural and food industry. We reduce complexity and create synergies." (AGRIDEA n.d.)

3 Short film on livestock guardian dogs (AGRIDEA 2019); emphasis in original.

4 Founded in 2002, the association is made up of regional sections and a national umbrella organization and sees itself as a conservative bourgeois counterweight to environmental protection organizations such as WWF or Pro Natura. Its "main task," according to the self-description on its own website, is to pursue environmental protection in which "people have to be the center of attention" and, thus, "to create a link between the representation of legitimate economic and social interests, on the one hand, and the necessary preservation of a harmonious basis for life, on the other" (Aqua Nostra Schweiz 2003).

> verification and compensation. The financial implications for the federal government and the cantons are enormous, especially since, in addition to the costs for national and cantonal advisory bodies, there are also the direct payments plus the coverage of costs due to wildlife damage. If every farmer with smaller animal herds also has to keep herd [guardian] dogs, this is, in many cases, not only detrimental to good neighborliness, but also detrimental to the tourism and hiking state of Switzerland. As is increasingly evident, guard dogs also cause human bites and get along poorly with other dogs.[5]

In this statement, the association argues against the feasibility of livestock protection measures by emphasizing their high costs and negative impacts on existing cultural landscape systems. In doing so, the negative effects are located both on the everyday level – time-intensive additional effort and impaired neighborly relations of livestock guardian dog owners – and are described as "detrimental to the tourism and hiking state of Switzerland" and, thus, elevated to a national state problem. In this position, which rejects wolves altogether, everyday dysfunctionality is, therefore, equated with systemic dysfunctionality.

Linking environmental, economic and social arguments

Another discourse practice that can be observed in the wolf debates is the coupling of environmental, economic and social arguments. Assessments of the ecological effects of the spread of wolves are almost always accompanied by forecasts and assessments of the economic and cultural, demographic and sociopolitical consequences of this process. René Imoberdorf, a wolf-critical member of the Valais Council of States of the *Christlichdemokratische Volkspartei* ('Christian Democratic People's Party'), mentions the negative consequences of the return of wolves for sheep and tourism in the same breath as landscape ecology problems, such as the overgrowth of the cultural landscape and the increase in natural hazards, in the context of the Council of States debate of March 16, 2011, on the "Motion Hassler Hansjörg. Large Predator Management. Facilitated Regulation" (which called for more direct access to wolves, including the killing of animals that cause damage):

> If the effort becomes too great for the sheep farmers, i.e. protection and use are no longer in reasonable proportion to each other, sheep farming is endangered. This has serious consequences: Wide areas from the bottom of the valley to far beyond the upper forest boundary would become overgrown; tourism, one of the most important economic sectors in our canton, would suffer; and, what is even more serious, we would increasingly have to reckon with natural events, such as avalanches. (Ständerat 2011)

According to Imoberdorf, the deterioration, i.e. the overgrowth of the landscape, becomes a double problem, as it leads to an economic loss due to a degradation of pastures

5 Aqua Nostra Schweiz, *Konsultation zu den Konzepten Wolf und Luchs*. Statement of the Aqua Nostra Switzerland Association, August 29. 2014, here p. 4. The statement addressed to the *Bundesamt für Umwelt* can be accessed online at http://www.aquanostra.ch/, June 1, 2021.

and a feared decrease in tourism, on the one hand, and to safety problems due to "natural events such as avalanches," on the other hand.

Social and cultural aspects of the wolf return are also addressed, together with ecological and economic aspects. Following a similarly pessimistic assessment of the consequences of this return, the *Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Berggebiete* ('Swiss Working Group for Mountain Areas'), for example, describes the increasing spread of wolves in the Swiss Alps as a process involving not only ecological and economic but also sociopolitical issues in a statement on the revision of the "Concept Wolf Switzerland":

> The debate about the wolf is ultimately about the self-image and function of mountain areas. The mountain areas see themselves as the living and economic space for the local population. The mountain population wants to be able to live and work here. It can be seen from letters to the editor, announcements and the like from environmental protection organizations and urban circles that for these circles the wolf is the symbol of untouched nature. From this it can be deduced that the reintroduction of the wolf meets a need of these mainly urban circles for unspoiled nature. The mountain areas are, thus, reduced to a role as a nature reserve and compensation area for the cities. This attitude is not acceptable for the mountain areas. It ignores the fact that the Alps have long ceased to be an untouched natural space. The landscape in the Alpine region is a cultural landscape. Without this cultural landscape, neither agriculture nor tourism could take place. (SAB 2014: 4)

Thus, via the ecological process of the wolf return, the social role and "function of mountain areas," the relationship of different population groups and social milieus to each other, and different perceptions of and demands on the natural environment are also addressed here. Such linkages of ecological and social issues can also be demonstrated in other positions, as an excerpt from an interview with Laura Schmid of WWF Oberwallis shows. In addition to the ecological role, Schmid particularly emphasizes the symbolic value that wolves can have in social value debates:

> Just as [for Valais sheep owners, N. H.] the wolf is a symbol of foreign domination and of not being taken seriously by the rest of Switzerland, the wolf in our camp is also a symbol of larger questions: How much nature and wilderness is possible in Switzerland? Or what is the weighting? How strongly does one say, 'No, man and his hobbies and his claim to space are supreme and everything else has to be subordinated to that'? Or to what extent do you also say, 'No, the wilderness, nature also has its rights in this country and there are areas where we just have to adapt or put aside in order to deal with the matter accordingly'? So it's really a question of values: What is more important to you, or how strongly do you say, 'Yes, nature itself has its value'?[6]

6 Interview of Laura Schmid, WWF Upper Valais, with Elisa Frank and Nikolaus Heinzer in Bern on November 8, 2016.

For the environmentalist Schmid, wolves do not only mean an enrichment of (pre-) Alpine ecosystems. Analogous to the previous examples, she also links the ecological process of wolf return with ethical questions about the meaning and justification of "nature" or "wilderness" within Switzerland. In this way, similar to the actors cited previously, she also expresses, at least implicitly, societal ideals, wishes and hopes.

Aesthetic and affective evaluations play a role in these scenarios alongside ecological, economic, political and ethical value issues. Interview partners and actors from the field of environmental protection repeatedly expressed in interviews and informal conversations, for example, that the presence of wolves lends an additional charm to a landscape, even if the wolves themselves are hardly ever or never seen. David Gerke, president of the *Gruppe Wolf Schweiz* (Group Wolf Switzerland), for example, reports in an interview about a fascination that wolves, to which he otherwise has a distanced relationship based on ecological concepts, trigger in him in a 'natural' context: "For me, nature just feels different when the wolf is in it and when you see the tracks, then that's very special, isn't it?"[7] Despite – or precisely because of? – their invisibility, wolves increase for these actors not only the ecological and ethical but also the aesthetic and emotional value of the environment enriched by them.

However, the negatively connoted idea of a landscape that is becoming scrubby, barren and altogether overgrown due to the decline in sheep grazing also carries an aesthetic dimension in addition to the economic-ecological one.[8] In the eyes of some actors, not only are the Alpine biodiversity, economic functionality and security of mountain landscapes lost through overgrowth but also their orderliness and familiar appearance. Overgrowth is, thus, understood, in this sense, as a loss of value in many respects. A particularly significant term that comes up repeatedly in this context and vividly conveys the perception of this also aesthetic-moral degradation of human habitats is that of "desolation (in German: *verlottern*)".[9] The desolation of Alpine cultural landscapes through the spread of forests, the associated loss of open meadows and pastures, and the abandonment and slow destruction of mountain pastures, stables and entire hamlets means the loss of control, order and attractiveness, as well as a physical and moral neglect; losses that manifest themselves in an external appearance that is unpleasant even to the eye.

The "*Argumentationskatalog* ('Argumentation Catalogue')" on the website of the *Schweizerischer Ziegenzuchtverband* ('Swiss Goat Breeders' Association'), for example, lists aesthetic as well as health and ethological reasons for criticizing the implementation of livestock protection measures, in this case, the installation of night pens: "Night

7 Interview with David Gerke, president of the *Gruppe Wolf Switzerland* (Group Wolf Switzerland), with Nikolaus Heinzer in Solothurn on October 20, 2015.

8 On the terms "*verbuschen* ('becoming scrubby')" and "*verganden* ('becoming barren')," see, *inter alia*, the vote of National Councilor Franz Ruppen in Nationalrat (2016).

9 See, *inter alia*, the author's field notes of June 20, 2016.

pens have a negative effect on sheep health. Some breeds of sheep instinctively prefer to feed during the night and rest during the day. Night pens are also readily identifiable in the landscape several years later."[10] What is meant by the last sentence is that the regular nocturnal concentration of herds in a small area leads to not only the destruction of the soil by the hooves of the animals but also, above all, the overfertilization by the many droppings and, thus, to the local overgrowth of individual plants that specialize in the high ammonia content. These explanations are a good example of how ecological, sheep-economic and aesthetic criteria are combined and interwoven into complex strands of argumentation.

Alpine visions of the future between displacement and coexistence

It is negotiated in such a functionalizing and, at the same time, moral discourse, what a good, safe, pleasant and beautiful life in the Alps looks like and can look like in the future (Fig. 1 and 2). The various future scenarios differ diametrically in their assessment, depending on whether the changes triggered by wolves are evaluated as positive or negative. While actors who see the influence of the wolf presence as positive speak of cohabitation and coexistence and outline correspondingly optimistic designs, skeptical perspectives are expressed in the form of displacement and doomsday scenarios. The latter especially are sometimes very pointedly formulated, as the following example of an online comment on the article "Wolf kills Moosalp sheep despite closed electric paddock" shows. The user "shepherd" comments on the incident with the following words:

> There is no protection, grasp that finally! Let's enjoy the last years with our sheep! A cultural asset is lost! Traditions as well! This generation is destroying many things, the next will rebuild some with a lot of sweat and money! By the way, this is not whining, this is a fact! How are we going to master this situation if even certain hunters' associations think 'this is not a problem of the hunters, but of the shepherds' finally wake up!!!!!!! In contrast to our ancestors, we are only trouser sh …!!!!! What is worse? Eliminating a wolf? Or having our race eliminated? (1815.ch 2015)

The return of wolves to the Swiss cultural landscape is, thus, equated in this statement with the end of sheep-herding practices and cultures. A "cultural asset," "traditions," "generation[s]" of "shepherd[s]," even a whole undefined human "race" are facing extinction by the wolfish troublemakers. The decline predicted here goes hand in hand with the feeling of being abandoned by other interest groups ("hunters' associations") and of losing control: One is no longer "master" of the situation. In a somewhat more detailed and similarly martial way, the Graubünden organic farmer Georges Stoffel outlines the future of the Swiss Alps and their inhabitants in a fourteen-page paper

10 Schweizerischer Ziegenzuchtverband: Argumentationskatalog. Entry on the website of the Schweizerischer Ziegenzuchtverband: http://szzv.ch. The entry could not be found on the website at the time of writing this article, which is why no working link can be provided here.

Fig. 1: A possible vision of a good, safe and beautiful life in the Alps: wolves are not included. Illustration of an information event critical of wolves (Calcagnini 2020).

from 2017 on the failed project for a national park in the Adula region. In the paper, Stoffel accuses urban "green" elites of trying to impose their idea of a wild Alpine nature against the will of the local population.

Among other things, he also expresses the assumption that urban people want to clear their bad ecological conscience. In addition to nature parks, such as the "Parc Adula" project, large predators and especially wolves are also presented as weapons with which the mountain population is to be prevented from their accustomed lifestyle and, thus, displaced from the Alpine valleys step-by-step. Wolves, thus, become means of enforcing political paternalism:

> PRO NATURA wanted to give itself (literally) 'a national park for its hundredth birthday' and it was advocated for an 'orderly withdrawal of man from certain Alpine valleys.' This remained a piece of intellectual wishful thinking of these associations. Due to our basic democratic rights and the central right of the communities affected to have a say, this was rejected or the planning was aborted for lack of support. The intended goal was not achieved because the population affected distrusted the intentions of the nature conservation organizations. […] But as a special weapon, they have in their quiver the action plan for the reintroduction of the wolf, which is being implemented and which is now intended to force a disorderly withdrawal from certain Alpine valleys in order to achieve more wilderness areas. (Stoffel 2017: 7)

Stoffel paints an extremely pessimistic picture of a future in which environmental organizations, with the help of wolves as a "special weapon," will have forced the inhabitants of Alpine regions to make a "withdrawal from certain Alpine valleys" (Stoffel

2017: 7). According to Stoffel's explanations, this horror scenario could admittedly be averted by safeguarding and claiming "basic democratic rights" in the context of the planned nature park project, in that the communities "affected by the planned park" voted against its opening. This case is, thus, made into a selective success story for the otherwise disadvantaged mountain population, which has come under additional pressure due to the politically reinforced wolf return. The ideal of grassroots democratic and egalitarian participation in political decisions by the population depicted as peripheral is affirmed here as a basic political value. However, wolves are seen as a potentially overpowering pressure device, with the help of which precisely these basic values are to be attacked and a "disorderly retreat" of humans from Alpine habitats is to be forced (Stoffel 2017: 7).

Visions of the future that include wolves as positive factors also refer to these political conflict constellations that exist between different population groups. This is the case, for example, in the teaching material "*Mit dem Wolf unterwegs* ('On the road with the wolf')" published by WWF Switzerland (Junod et al. 2015). There, however, despite the references to existing conflicts both between humans and animals and between different human interest groups, power imbalances are largely ignored and a tolerant coexistence is demanded from all sides:

> Among city dwellers, the wolf is often quite popular, but less so in the mountains, where it has a direct impact on people's lives. It is precisely in this ecosystem, however, that the wolf is most common in Switzerland, even if it can also be found in the lowlands from time to time. Its most important habitat is currently in the Alps. Yet, it does not inhabit this area alone. It is a sparsely developed area shared by the inhabitants of small mountain communities, mountain farmers, tourists, hunters and other actors. In addition, there are the wild animals. They all have to live together in this space with their different needs. The challenge is to accept each other. (Junod et al. 2015: 15)

The next page of the educational booklet goes on to say:

> The wolf is an additional problem for the sheep breeder to cope with, even if the federal government and the cantons offer concrete financial aid in case of losses. How is coexistence nevertheless possible, and how can conflicts be mitigated? There are various ways to reduce the potential for conflict. *We can help the wolf by helping the herders and focusing on prevention. The return of the wolf is also an opportunity for agriculture in mountain zones: Livestock protection measures are being reintroduced, offering numerous benefits such as protecting herds from natural hazards and predators, monitoring herd health and sustainable and optimal pasture management*. (Junod et al. 2015: 22; emphasis in the original)

In this quotation, the positive functionalization of the wolf becomes very clear. The return of the wolf is seen as an "opportunity," not only for the improvement of sheep husbandry and an economic and ecological optimization of the use of Alpine natural resources, but also for "reducing conflict potentials" between different actors, "helping"

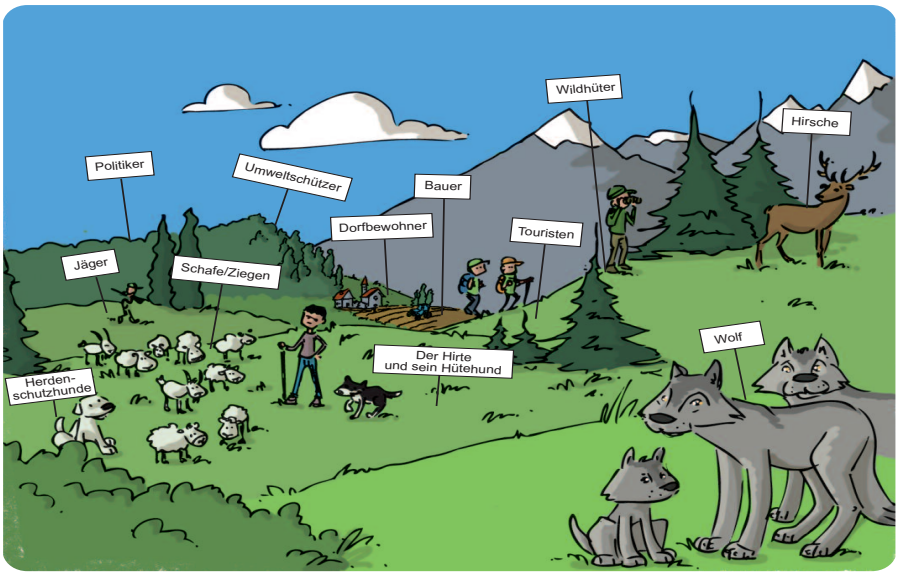

Fig. 2: A possible vision of coexistence. Illustration from a WWF teaching aid (Junod et al. 2015: 16).

each other and, thus, coming to a more beneficial system for all. The significance of the wolf for concrete ecological and economic systems is, therefore, also addressed by its (in this case positive) function in a society as such. The central concept in this design is "living together." This can only happen through the mutual acceptance of the different human and animal actors involved. A tolerant coexistence, therefore, represents the core and goal of the scenario outlined as desirable. Interestingly, the questions "How is coexistence nevertheless possible, and how can conflicts be mitigated?" can be applied to the coexistence of wolves, livestock and humans, but potentially also to the relationship between different interest groups within Swiss society. The fact that this future scenario relates not only to the core conflict between Alpine sheep farming and species protection but also to sociopolitical relationships can be seen not least in the illustration "Living together on an Alp," which accompanies the two quotations (Fig. 2) (Junod et al. 2015: 16).

The colored, computer-generated image shows an Alpine landscape with green hills covered with scattered trees and forests, populated by various human and animal actors, who (which) are labeled with their respective names. The viewer of the picture is far away from the human settlements: the village and the city indicated by "politicians" and "environmentalists." From this remote location away from civilization, one looks at the people and animals living peacefully together in the cultural landscape of the "Alp." The central actors in this view are, therefore, the wolves, with whom one finds oneself. The positioning of the other actors on the different levels visualizes the degree to which they are involved in the process of wolf return. The circle, which is drawn starting from

the wolves, does not end with the groups of actors "sheep/goats," "the shepherd and his herding dog" and "livestock guardian dogs," nor with "gamekeepers," "deer," "hunters," "tourists," "farmers" or "villagers," but also includes the actors "politicians" and "environmentalists," who are not visible in the picture but are, nevertheless, present through their naming.

The "coexistence" illustrated in this image, thus, refers firstly – and according to the focus primarily – to the coexistence between wolves, on the one hand, and humans and animals used by them, on the other. In addition, however, it also refers to the coexistence of the various human actors located in different proximity to the wolves. In this visual future scenario, "directly affected" actors, such as shepherds, farmers and villagers, live together not only with wolves but also with the tourists who visit them frequently, as well as with the spatially distant politicians, who are located here exclusively in the urban environment. A model of society based on the principle of coexistence is designed around wolves, and this only works if all the actors involved "accept each other" (Junod et al. 2015: 24). When the *SP* (Social Democratic Party) politician Silva Semadeni talks in the National Council debate of September 14, 2016, on the Valais initiative "Wolf. Fertig lustig! ('Wolf. Fun's over!')" about "measures for a sustainable coexistence of humans, livestock and wolves," then according to her reading, "sustainable" (Nationalrat 2016) is to be understood in not only the ecological but also the social sense.

Dealing with wolf-embodied nature as a medium of societal self-understanding

The question of how to deal with wolves and the nature they embody, therefore, has far-reaching sociopolitical dimensions. Negotiating the coexistence between humans, livestock, wolves and other wildlife is always a discussion of ecological as well as economic, sociopolitical, aesthetic, ethical and moral values. It is also related to questions of societal self-identification and -positioning. Regardless of their (political) position, all the actors are concerned with locating themselves in a future-oriented and, thus, progressive society and, in turn, with defining this social progressiveness in terms of a certain way of dealing with wolves.

In conclusion, it should be made clear once again that the question of how a society should relate and behave in relation to wolf-embodied nature is always about negotiating what constitutes responsible and progressive social action and how one presents oneself both internally and externally as a modern and contemporary nation through dealings with wolves. This thesis refers to the work of the cultural anthropologist Tobias Scheidegger, who researches the development of the concept of urban nature from the

1970s to the 2010s using the example of the city of Zurich.[11] Scheidegger poses questions that, while focusing on urban nature and its practices, can easily be applied to the field I am investigating. This is because Scheidegger deals with social negotiations of nature that are comparable to the ones I describe in many aspects, as the research questions he formulates show:

> What purposes and norms are associated with this preoccupation with urban nature? Which societal guiding concepts shape the references to nature or which value attitudes (but also lifestyles, ways of life, aesthetics) are to be derived and legitimized from dealing with and perceiving urban nature? […] How are these nature practices and the norm and (life)style productions reflected in them to be contextualized against [the] background of post-industrial urban development and society?[12]

Scheidegger assumes that "urban nature functions as a medium of self-understanding for late-modern urban societies."[13] This can also be stated precisely for nature embodied by wolves, and analogously, I see the negotiation of a contemporary way of dealing with wolves as a medium of self-understanding for a late-modern Switzerland. According to Orvar Löfgren and Götz Großklaus, social perceptions of, ways of dealing with and relating to wolf-embodied nature can also be embedded historically in societal self-positioning processes.

Löfgren, for example, in an article on bourgeois views of nature, states that links between human-animal relationships and social relationships have existed since the 19th century and are still being established today:

> We know a dialogue with the animal world from all cultures – this applies to the societies of antiquity as well as to those of our day. One projects values, character traits, hierarchical principles and moral basic values onto the animal world. This humanized world then serves as an argument for naturalness or nature-determined orders in the discussion of how human society should be arranged. The animals speak to us. (Löfgren 1986: 142)

The literary and media scholar Götz Großklaus also considers the "rational-instrumental appropriation of nature" (1983: 170), which has been promoted since the Enlightenment and industrialization and is essentially traded as progress and modernization, to be an important axis of the historical development of European bourgeois societies. While a relationship between man and the environment based on constant mechanization and increasing control of nature has been positively valorized by the bourgeois classes as a

11 Sabine Eggmann also describes the mode of self-understanding as an "essential quality" of modern socialization and an important practice by means of which social orders are produced, stabilized and reproduced, but also challenged (2013).

12 Tobias Scheidegger, Lecture at the retreat of the chair of Bernhard Tschofen on January 8, 2020, at the ISEK – Popular Cultures of the University of Zurich. Scheidegger provided me with the PowerPoint presentation of his talk.

13 Tobias Scheidegger, see previous footnote.

"rational civilization process" (Großklaus 1983: 190), Großklaus identifies Rousseau's thoughts on the nature of man in the 18th century, Romanticist fears of the alienation and disenchantment of nature and the accompanying fascination with wild landscapes in the 19th century, or the ecological movement of the 1960s and 70s as counter-moments in which alternative models of society are articulated through the discussion of human-environment relationships.

Bernhard Tschofen argues in a similar vein, regarding the cultural studies analysis of natural disasters, understood as events threatening social orders, as having the potential to reveal "the modes and patterns of social self-description" (2019: 118). Using the example of avalanches in the Alps, Tschofen explains how cultural practices and logics are shaped and emerge precisely through the social confrontation with natural forces that are perceived as catastrophes in this sense:

> What seems to be important here is not to lose sight of how the natural, conversely, also becomes the rationale of the social, in which the threat and specific situation of Alpine lifeworlds helps to establish the *common sense* of the *communities* under study precisely through the cultural practices (symbols, rituals, materializations) that are being described. (Tschofen 2019: 118)

The question of progressiveness and social coexistence

Such questions of late-modern social self-understanding and negotiation of the future manifest themselves in my research field, *inter alia*, in statements such as that of the Valais Blacknose sheep breeder Rolf Kalbermatten. He describes the increased regulation of wolves, which he advocates, as a progressive management of nature and, thus, simultaneously integrates Switzerland as a modern society in an enlightened Western European context:

> The wolf has its rights and it should also have its existence, that is quite clear. There are enough areas in the world where the wolf can feel at home, but not here. We no longer live in Switzerland as we did 100 years ago. With the settlement density that we have today, I am of the opinion that it is no longer conceivable for the wolf to feel somehow at home here. The wolf is not helped with it either. It no longer finds any real wilderness, with all the agglomeration, and agriculture, with its farmland. I don't see that coexistence will be possible in the future. After all, the animal is not threatened with extinction. I don't understand, for example, why it is still on the red list of that Bern Convention. It should be allowed to be regulated in Western Europe. Because as I said, we don't live today as we did when the wolf was here. It looks quite different today, in Switzerland above all, but also in the surrounding countries. (Tschofen et al. 2017: 27)

Progressiveness is represented here by concepts such as "agglomeration," "agriculture" and "farmland" and consists of the "regulation" of wolves, which stand for an anachronistic "wilderness" and a past, superseded time. The regulation of wolves receives additional valorization by being framed as ethically responsible behavior toward the

predators, which consistently accounts for the ontological status of civilized Switzerland evoked here and the notion of a culturally incompatible wolf-embodied nature.

However, it is precisely this regulation that is criticized by actors from environmental protection, similarly in the name of progress, as inefficient and simultaneously connoted as primitive and archaic, as can be seen, for example, from a joint media release by the nature conservation organizations Pro Natura, BirdLife and WWF Switzerland from 2016 on the revision of the federal hunting law that was being drafted at the time: "'Regulating' is thereby the euphemistic paraphrase of decimation by killing. Experiences abroad clearly show that population decimation leads neither to fewer conflicts nor to more acceptance towards the wolf – conflicts even often increased" (Pro Natura et al. 2016).

The reference to international experience and wildlife biology expertise associated with progressiveness portrays the handling of wolf populations envisaged by the revision of the law as misleading and backward. Accordingly, these actors attacked the hunting law revision, submitted to a vote in autumn 2020, in public debates as a "shooting law" and rejected it as outmoded: "The environmental associations, therefore, reject the revision of the hunting law in this nature-hostile, shooting-focused form. They expect the Federal Council and Parliament to come up with a much more nature-friendly, technically sound bill that is appropriate for a modern society" (Pro Natura et al. 2016).[14] It is, thus, the negotiation of a behavior "appropriate to a modern society" that underlies the disputes about wolf-embodied nature.

In addition to the legal basis and concrete substance of wolf management, the way in which public and political debates are conducted is also used as a mirror for the constitution of society. Thus, the strongly pronounced emotionality in the discussions, which is always blamed on the opposite side, is criticized by all actors as an obstacle to a sober and reasonable resolution of the conflict (Straub 2018). Accordingly, a reduction in the emotionalism of the topic and a more objective way of looking at and discussing the issue is demanded from all sides. An example of this is the following statement from a position paper of the *Schweizerische Arbeitsgemeinschaft für die Berggebiete*:

> The discussions about the wolf are very emotional in Switzerland as well as in other countries. The fronts are hardened and objective discussions are almost impossible. The fact that when a wolf is shot, death threats are made and a bounty is even offered by private individuals is not worthy of a democratic constitutional state. (SAB 2014: 4)

14 The revision of the Federal Hunting Act, which had already been discussed in 2016, was passed by parliament on September 27, 2019, after several meetings of the National Council and Council of States to discuss differences. Various environmental protection organizations, parties and interest groups lodged a referendum against this, which is why the revision of the law was put to the vote (and very narrowly rejected) on September 27, 2020. During the campaign for the referendum in the spring and summer of 2020, references to the progressiveness and backwardness of the revision of the law also appeared in both pro and con camps. The websites of the pro and counter camps are on https://ja-jagdgesetz.ch, February 20, 2020, and https://jagdgesetz-nein.ch, February 20, 2020, respectively.

National self-positioning

The negotiation of "modern society" (Pro Natura et al. 2016) is, thereby, also formulated as a question of a "democratic constitutional state" (SAB 2014: 4) and, thus, concerns not only a 'civil' culture of argumentation but also the role and actions of a contemporary political system and a progressive state. Again, as an example, here is the opinion of the *SVP* (Swiss People's Party) member of the Council of States Werner Hösli from the Council of States debate of March 9, 2016, on the "Motion Imoberdorf René. Classify the wolf as a game species that can be hunted," which called for an easing of the hunting of wolves:

> If the spread of the wolf leads to our Alpine areas no longer being farmed and our mountain areas experiencing a further surge in migration – not least because children no longer dare to go to school alone – then we have not only acted very disproportionately but naively in terms of state policy. (Ständerat 2016)

In the process, Hösli called the approach to wolves envisioned in the motion being debated "forward thinking and action worthy of government" (Ständerat 2016).

However, the question of the progressiveness of dealing with wolf-embodied nature, which once again clearly emerges here, goes hand in hand not only with an internal but also with a foreign policy self-understanding of Switzerland. Thus, in the debate in the Council of States on September 27, 2017, Robert Cramer, a Green politician from Geneva, presented various arguments against the Valais initiative "Wolf. Fertig lustig!". The initiative called for a shift in wolf management authority from the federal to the cantonal level and, consequently, for Switzerland to withdraw from the Bern Convention, an international species protection treaty. Cramer argued, on the one hand, that the initiative violated the federal constitution, which requires Switzerland to protect wildlife; on the other hand, he elevated the discussion to an international level by evoking possible negative foreign policy implications of a Swiss withdrawal from the Bern Convention:

> Switzerland is a small country and for a small country like ours, international agreements are of great value, because they allow us to escape the law of the jungle. To send the signal in this Chamber that we think it is reasonable to follow up on a cantonal initiative that calls for the denunciation of an international agreement is, in my opinion, simply irresponsible, regardless of the agreement in question. In Switzerland, we have a sense of commitment; when we make a pledge, it is for good, and the denunciation of an international agreement seems to me, especially in these times, to be completely irresponsible. (Ständerat 2017)

Cramer emphasizes that it is irresponsible for a small country like Switzerland to jeopardize the possibilities of political influence at the international level by terminating an international agreement. This would not only put an important position of power at risk, but also damage Switzerland's reputation as a trustworthy and reliable nation. Cramer not only takes a domestic political sounding of Swiss society but also performs

national identity work at the foreign policy level. In the context of the controversy over wolves, therefore, what is at stake is how to present Switzerland as a progressive country, both internally and externally.

Finally, two voices should be heard that articulate this national identity negotiation, which is mediated by the wolf debates, in a particularly acute way. Georges Schnydrig, co-president of the association *Lebensraum Schweiz ohne Grossraubtiere* ('Swiss Habitat without Large Carnivores'), saw himself compelled in an interview that Elisa Frank and I conducted with him[15] to reformulate the treatment of nature as a fundamental question of a national orientation. Relationships to wolf-embodied nature, thus, become the medium through which directional questions of meaning and identity are negotiated:

> G. S.: "And for me this question simply arises, yes, in which direction does Switzerland really want to go now? […] Do we want to keep our Switzerland as it is here and now, do we want to expand it a little bit or no, do we want to go back? There are different possibilities, but that has to be, that has to be debated. […]"
>
> N. H.: "And in which direction do you want Switzerland to go?"
>
> G. S.: "Well, I would just leave Switzerland where it is. […] You know, I don't like this Europe anyway. I don't like this system. Well, I understand the system that you have to solve problems together, I understand that. But the flow of money, the way it is today, is a disaster in the EU. I don't want to know how much money goes down the drain every day. Where just a few parliamentarians simply sit somewhere and earn money. So, solving problems is one thing, but there are some other things that don't work. Switzerland has to stay where it is, but then, of course, Switzerland has to be aware of its strengths We have those."
>
> N. H.: "And what are they?"
>
> G. S.: "The very ones we have today. We have a clean Switzerland, an absolutely intact landscape, a certain security. We have a high level of security. Where people at the moment still feel safe and comfortable, also in the authorities, with the cantons, everywhere. And that's what one now opens precisely, also with such a topic [the topic of the wolf, N. H.], slowly again a little bit. Whether that is good or bad, I can't say now. But I can just see certain dangers that are coming our way. And a certain existence that you simply question and partly also take away from very many people."[16]

Schnydrig sees in the wolves, therefore, a danger to values he has set as the cornerstones of Swiss national identity, such as cleanliness and "security," an "intact landscape" or a trust in the state, which has led to a secure and contented "existence." An "opening"

15 Elisa Frank and I, as project collaborators, conducted field research and interviews together, including the interview quoted here, as part of the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project "Wolves: Knowledge and Practice. Ethnographies of the Return of Wolves in Switzerland".

16 Interview of Georges Schnydrig, co-president of the *Vereins Lebensraum Schweiz ohne Grossraubtiere*, with Elisa Frank and Nikolaus Heinzer in Visp on November 14, 2016.

toward Europe, but also toward an integrative relationship with wolves, which he and his association oppose, endangers, in his eyes, a prosperous future for Switzerland.

Politically diametrically opposed to Schnydrig's position but arguing on the same overall societal level, Laura Schmid of WWF Oberwallis discusses the question of accepting wolf-embodied nature as a question of Switzerland's fundamental societal orientation. The idea that Switzerland renounces total control of wolves and the wilderness they embody and, thus, lets them "go a bit"[17] is extremely positively charged for her: "So, I think that for me, it would be a symbol of a kind of modern Switzerland that manages to somehow say, 'Hey, there are different entitlements in the country and there's also an entitlement for wilderness.'"[18]

Schmid, in spite of all her differences with Schnydrig, also sees the wolf issue as being about more than the management of predators. For her, the societal relationships to wolves which she and her organization envisages – namely to grant wolves space and opportunities for development – stand for a "modern Switzerland," in contrast to the restrictive and anthropocentric environmental relationships which she discredits.

Wolves and the negotiation of society

It would certainly be an exaggeration to say that wolf policy defines an entire country. However, society is being negotiated in the context of the disputes about the spread of wolves in Switzerland. What is at stake are not only internal sociopolitical and demographic relationships and international positionings, sustainable traditions and questions of self-determination and -representation, but also how to deal with the other, the foreign, which comes from the outside or is even imposed: control or coexistence, exclusion or integration, border or welcome policy? Wolves increase the visibility of actors and give them a loud voice, their word weight. They make it possible to bring ecological and economic, political and cultural, social and historical contexts to a head and put possible futures of Switzerland up for discussion with immediate urgency in a prominent arena. And they make it possible to examine and better understand precisely these social, interspecifically shaped negotiation processes in cultural studies.

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17 Interview of Laura Schmidt, WWF Oberwallis, with Elisa Frank and Nikolaus Heinzer in Bern on November 8, 2016.

18 See footnote 17.

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