

## Call for Papers: Kunstszenen gegen rechte Szenen: Cultural Responses to the Far-Right in Reunified Germany

Joseph Twist is looking for contributions to an interdisciplinary edited volume provisionally entitled 'Kunstszenen gegen rechte Szenen: Cultural Responses to the Far-Right in Reunified Germany', for a proposal submitted to 'German Monitor'.

'Wir sind das Volk!' has been ringing out again on German streets, but its meaning has changed since the 'Monday Demonstrations' in the GDR. Whereas the slogan was initially a call for democracy and for open borders, it has now been co-opted by Pegida and the Alternative für Deutschland for their ethno-nationalist, anti-migrant politics, with echoes of the racist use of the term during the National Socialist era (Richardson-Little and Merrill 2020, p. 59). These multiple meanings and resonances of the word 'Volk' are written into the very fabric of the Reichstag building, a building that neo-Nazis recently attempted to storm during a protest against Covid-19 restrictions. Whereas the message above the building's western entrance reads 'Dem deutschen Volke', in one of the inner courtyards is an overgrown flowerbed containing the words 'Der Bevölkerung' in the exact same typeface. This art project by Hans Haacke, visible from within the building and from the rooftop viewing gallery, has symbolic meaning for Germany as a country of immigration and shows how art can intervene in politics. The choice of the word 'Bevölkerung', in comparison to 'Volk', is neutral and removes references to ethnicity. 'Soil' too is a concept laden with nationalist significance, and although Haacke invited members of parliament to bring 'native soil' from their constituencies to fill the bed, the ground was left for wild plants to self-seed in a botanical metaphor for Germany as a place where migrants can settle. To date only one politician from the AfD has brought soil from their constituency: Jörn König (member for Hannover City I). Thus, although the impact of the artwork on the laws made in the building of which it is a part is difficult to assess and most likely very minimal, its participatory nature has at least created a list of politicians who support the inclusive spirit of the piece.

The recent protest on the steps of the Reichstag, which included various far-right groups, unleashed a series of shocked responses in political and media circles, with President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (2020) calling it an attack on 'das Herz der Demokratie'. In contrast, Turkish-German writer Mely Kiyak (2020) questions this surprise in her column in *Die Zeit*, stating that Germany's minorities do not underestimate the far-right in this way. She states that they have stopped wondering 'wer ist wir, wer sind die?', as for them it is quite clear-cut: 'Die, das sind immer die mit den erschossenen, verbrannten, zu Tode geprügelten Angehörigen, deren Väter weinend in das Mikrofon eines ausländischen Fernsehsenders stammeln. Wir, das sind die, die sich erst mit einem Sicherheitsabstand von zehnzwanzigdreißig Jahren darüber erschrecken. Immer erst dann, wenn ihre eigenen Institutionen und ihre eigene Unversehrtheit in Gefahr sind.'

Thus, just as Fatima El-Tayeb speak of a 'Rassismusamnesie' that prevents mainstream society from acknowledging the historical presence of racialised people in Germany (2016, p. 15), a similar amnesia surrounds their expectations regarding the far-right, meaning that every act of violence is greeted by shock and dismay. Indeed, similar shock was expressed in the press after the riot in Chemnitz, which saw migrantised people being chased in the streets. However, although events such as the AfD reaching 12.6% of the vote on an ethno-nationalist ticket in the 2017 federal elections and the Nationalsozialistische Untergrund's racially motivated murders (potentially with the state's involvement) certainly signal the ascendancy of the far-right in Germany, it is important to note that far-right violence, fed and legitimized by political appeals to an ethnic sense of Germanness, has been a constant presence in reunified Germany. Indeed, the very birth of the reunified state was

marked by the expulsion of foreign workers from communist countries such as Mozambique and Angola (Howell 1994). Moreover, this is not just an issue at the extremes. Just as politicians from the CDU/CSU and SPD demonised migrants and asylum seekers, and sought to change the Grundgesetz whilst racist pogroms took place in Hoyerswerda, Rostock and Mölln, Angela Merkel's grand coalition also founded the controversial Heimatministerium whilst the AfD were appealing to a 'völkisch' sense of Germanness.

This edited volume seeks to explore how cultural practitioners (writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers, architects, etc.) intervene in such political debates both to challenge far-right narratives and fight against the amnesia surrounding neo-Nazi and far-right violence in the Berlin Republic. It will explore what art can do that conventional politics cannot in terms of both galvanising alliances and imagining alternative forms of community and belonging.

Potential topics and potential artists/texts could include, but are not limited to:

- art and political protest/activism (Zentrum für politische Schönheit)
- art and practical responses to community- and alliance-building (hip-hop scene of the '90s, the Ballhaus Naunynstraße, Max Czollek and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's 'Desintegration' project, literary magazines such as Freitext, Jalta and Literarische Diverse)
- alternative forms of community and belonging in art, literature, and film
- the politics of queer culture
- Neo-Nazis in art, literature, and film (Lola + Bilidikid by Kutluğ Ataman, NSU: Mitten in Deutschland, Wir sind jung. Wir sind stark. by Burhan Qurbani, Aus dem Nichts by Fatih Akin, German Amok by Feridun Zaimoglu, Das schweigende Mädchen by Elfriede Jelinek, Rechtsmaterial by Jan-Christoph Gockel and Konstantin Küster)
- satire and the limits of satire (Er ist wieder da! by Timur Vermes/David Wnendt)
- rethinking German memory culture
- the legacy of colonialism in contemporary Germany
- collective memory and memorialisation of right-wing violence (Kaltland ed. by Karsten Krampitz, Markus Liske and Manja Präkels; 'Poesie Post-Solingen' (Yeşilada 2012))
- architectural reconstruction and political nostalgia

Please submit a ca. 500-word abstract and a short biography to Joseph Twist at [joseph.twist@ucd.ie](mailto:joseph.twist@ucd.ie)

Deadline for submissions: 30 November 2020