
Cynicism or Revolt:
Searching for the Political between the
Contemporary German *Bildungsroman* and
Post-Wall Popular Music

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Unpacking Pop: From Adorno to Diederichsen and Beyond

In Defense of the Popular

In his 1941 essay entitled “On Popular Music,” Theodor Adorno expresses serious doubt in the potential of popular music to transcend the strictures of hegemonic culture. Citing popular music’s all-encompassing “standardization” of form and content, Adorno sees in the rise of popular music the forward march of an all-encompassing mass culture.¹ By upholding standardization as a preferable delineator between transformative and normative music to previous discourse centered on ideas of complexity, sophistication, or class, Adorno chooses to examine the popular as it applies to the individual.² In this, he finds the popular guilty of providing a false sense of individuality while subtly ensuring the conformity of culture through recreational music.³ This dilemma is nowhere more clearly visible to Adorno than in the formulaic nature of popular tunes that can, with slight sonic modifications and requisite “plugging” from industry professionals, be forever replicated to commercial success.⁴

As the complicated legacy of “pop” from the 1960s onward demonstrates, Adorno’s wholesale dismissal of popular music fails however to anticipate its instrumental role in the

¹ Theodor Adorno. "On Popular Music." *Studies in Philosophy and Social Sciences* 9 (1941): 17-18; 25.

² Adorno 21.

³ “Pseudo-individualization...” Adorno continues, “keeps [customers] in line by making them forget what they listen to is already... pre-digested” (25).

⁴ Adorno 27ff.

formation of counter-cultural subjects in the post-war period. This blind spot is particularly curious; given Adorno's acknowledgement of the presence of "bad 'serious' music," one would expect him to at least offer the possibility of a suitably de-standardized form of popular music.⁵ As Adorno scholar Max Paddison notes in his volume, "Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture," such a possibility can be read out of Adorno's theory, even if he never explicitly acknowledges it. For Paddison, Adorno's insistence upon standardization as inherent to popular music blinds him to its potential for subject formation. Thus, to conceive of a popular music discourse in which the popular's revolutionary potential is acknowledged actually requires very little re-shuffling of Adorno's original framework. As Paddison notes,

The split is much more that between, on the one hand music which accepts its character as commodity, thus becoming identical with the machinations of the culture industry itself, and, on the other hand, a self-reflective music which critically opposes its fate as commodity, and thus ends up by alienating itself from society by becoming unacceptable to it.⁶

It is precisely this latter, subversive manifestation of popular – located in both musical and literary objects – with which this thesis is primarily concerned. Not only do I argue that popular art plays, contrary to the original Adornian view, a vital role in the formation of genuine subjectivity, I present evidence for the persistence of critical, political popular art in a time where many writers and scholars believe the popular to have forsaken countercultural possibilities once

⁵ Adorno 21.

⁶ Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture: Essays on Critical Theory and Music* (London: Kahn & Averill, 2004), 86.

and for all. In building this case, I furthermore consider a unique phenomenon in twenty-first century German popular culture: the literary musician. While quite rare in the Anglosphere, musicians-turned-authors such as Schorsch Kamerun and Sven Regener, whose works I attend to in this thesis, constitute a hearty group in contemporary German literature.⁷

As we consider the dimensions of popular culture, it becomes clear that both music and literature are invested in thinking about the creation of political subjects and the problems of contemporary society. Kamerun's and Regener's literary texts approach these topics by remembering the dimensions of their own subject formation under the auspices of the state, delving into the *Bildungsroman* tradition to illuminate various possibilities for the development for a radicalized political consciousness. Turning to the music these authors make as young adults under the vastly different conditions present in unified Germany of the early 1990s, we see struggle to define the self replaced by a struggle to define communities of resistance to the institutions, politics, and morals of an increasingly immoral hegemonic culture. While their approaches and belief systems ultimately stand in conflict to one another, Kamerun's and Regener's literature and music reveal historically-rooted approaches to the twin political dilemmas of subjectivity and resistance amplified in turn by the Cold War's reheating in the 1980s, and the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Neo-Nazi violence of Mölln and Rostock that christened the 1990s.

⁷ See, in addition to the authors discussed here: Jochen Distelmeyer, *Otis* (2015); Thomas Meinecke, *Holz. Erzählung.* (1988), *Tomboy* (1998), and others; Max Goldt, *Mein äußerst schwer erziehbarer schwuler Schwager aus der Schweiz* (1984), *Ä* (1997), and others; Rocko Schamoni, *Risiko des Ruhms* (2000), *Dorfpunks* (2004), and others; Markus Berges, *Ein langer Brief an September Nowak* (2009), *Die Köchin von Bob Dylan* (2016); Christiane Rösinger *Das schöne Leben* (2008), and Heinz Strunk *Fleisch ist mein Gemüse* (2004), *Der Goldene Handschuh* (2016), and others.

Defining “Pop”

Before examining these claims further, however, it is necessary to further define the dimensions of the popular post-war Germany.⁸ Aiding us in this is Diedrich Diederichsen, a German music critic and essayist of the 80s and 90s who challenges the Adornian view of popular culture, locating possibilities for resistance in its consumption. In his essay collection, *Der lange Weg nach Mitte* (1999), Diederichsen presents a framework for understanding a revolutionary “pop” against the backdrop of sociopolitical developments in West Germany and, later on, united Germany. Central to Diederichsen’s framework is his distinction between Pop I and Pop II. Whereas Pop I – roughly spanning from the 60s on through the 80s – arose in opposition to established forms of art and societal organization and thus possessed the will to combat the reigning political order, the Pop II that followed in the 90s sought not to disturb hegemonic culture but to become one with it.⁹

Applying Paddison’s revised Adornian critical apparatus to Diederichsen’s categories, we can characterize Pop I as a moment in Western cultural history where “pop” entails a rejection of the status quo and an effort to transgress the boundaries of society in search of an alternative to the standardization decried by Adorno. Diederichsen further subdivides Pop I into two phases named after their determining principle: *Weiter* and *Jetzt*. Beginning with the student movement of 1968, Diederichsen traces the genesis of *Weiter* as an impetus for mass rebellion. “Es ging immer weiter, es lief eine ungeheure, monumentale, nicht zu stoppende Expansion in Bohemia,”

⁸ The story Diederichsen tells in *Sexbeat* is one with a more global focus, though much of what he discusses applies first and foremost to West German society.

⁹ Diedrich Diederichsen, *Der Lange Weg Nach Mitte: Der Sound und die Stadt* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1999), 275 (hereafter: *LWNM*).

he declares, locating the unfolding of *Weiter* in the shifts in the preferred subcultural drug – from marijuana to LSD in the 60s, then from acid to cocaine in the early 70s.¹⁰ Musically, *Weiter* underwent the same abrupt transitions, from bebop to cool jazz, from rock and roll to punk. Most impressive of all was *Weiter*'s wide reach, with millions of adherents in its ranks across the Western world.¹¹

As the 1970s crept along, the *Weiter* epoch exhausted itself, foiled by the all-consuming nature of “radikale Permissivität” (Sexbeat 31). The political momentum of the student movement dissipated as many of its revolutionaries graduated from the universities and entered into mainstream society. While some hoped to reform the hegemonic culture from within, many others felt unable to keep pace with the boundlessness of *Weiter*. With the declaration that “Jeder Versuch, gerade den Pluralismus zu überwinden, führte zu immer weiteren Pluralitäten... die sich noch unumstößlicher reiner, katechistischer fühlten,” Diederichsen captures the inextricable dilemma that faced the *Weiter* vanguard: to evolve beyond the principles of *Weiter* or fall victim to patterns standardization (Sexbeat 31-32). With pop culture's claim to subject-formation at a crossroads, a new mode of resistance slowly came into focus: *Jetzt*. This response to the stagnation of *Weiter* preserved the transgressive alterity of the former while removing the compulsion for invention.

With ecstatic cries of “Jetzt, Mann, die anderen haben es noch nicht gemerkt,” this new moment of Pop I marked the dawn of the postmodern, an age where the art of creation shifted from exhausted modes of futurism to carefully-mediated historicity (Sexbeat 90). Diederichsen's prime example of *Jetzt* in popular culture is the wave of British “New Romantic” bands such as

¹⁰ Diedrich Diederichsen, *Sexbeat* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1985), 17 (hereafter: Sexbeat).

¹¹ “Einer der Haupttriumphe der Hippie-Bewegung,” notes Diederichsen, “war es, daß sie... Millionen auf dem Weg des *Weiter* mobilisieren konnte” (Sexbeat 25).

Haircut 100, ABC, and Scritti Politti, who came to prominence at the start of the 80s. Occasionally referred to as “sophistipopppers” for their exploration of jazzy and synthetic textures, virtuosic instrumentals, and philosophical texts, these bands provided – in tandem with American funk of the 1970s –the sonic foundation for platinum-selling pop icons of the 1980s such as Madonna and Michael Jackson.¹²

In the subculture boom of the 60s, 70s, and early 80s, Pop I proved adept at preserving its revolutionary potential in the face of repeated attempts by the mainstream to commodify it, standardize it, and even determine its future iterations. Both the *Weiter* epoch, with its desire to transcend, and the subsequent spirit of *Jetzt*, with its thrill of (re)discovery, responded time and time again to the corporate co-option of their styles and sounds with the creation of new forms of music, a turn to new drugs, and an eye for new fashion. “Pop I wurde meist als Gegenbegriff zu einem eher etablierten Kunstbegriff verwendet,” Diederichsen notes (LWNM 75). His Pop I works as a catchall for moments as diverse as punk and New Wave precisely because it defines pop vis-à-vis standardized, normative culture.

The genesis of Pop II, then, can be understood as the moment in time when the adversarial organizing principle of Pop I ceased to exist, replaced by a form of pop synonymous with mass culture. “Pop II besteht auf dem ersten Blick darin, daß kein Terrain sich gegen Invasion mehr sperrt,” Diederichsen explains, going on to further define this variety of pop as “permeable” (LWNM 275). By virtue of its rapid ascent into public consciousness, Pop II became susceptible to the hierarchy and values of hegemonic culture. In absorbing these traits, Pop II shed the exclusivity and counter-cultural organizing principle of its Pop I forbears for widespread acceptance. This proliferation not only neutralized pop’s potential for transgressive

¹² Like mods, punks, and krautrockers before them, the New Romantics carried with them an affinity for leftist discourse, with Scritti Politti going so far as to pen a tongue-in-cheek love song to Derrida (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pNNbJ04167I>).

subject-formation, it also led to the standardization of greater swaths of cultural territory. “Die generell zum Verständnis und zum Gebrauch von Pop-Bedeutungen notwendigen Gemeinschaften scheinen in jeder Hinsicht immer flüchtiger zu werden,” declares Diederichsen, noting the degree to which Pop II has homogenized society (LWNM 278). Though Diederichsen does not offer a precise starting point in the essay, other works point to his belief that Pop I’s decline – and, necessarily, Pop II’s rise – began after 1982.

Pop I Principles under Pop II’s Watchful Eye

Diederichsen’s historical delineation between Pop I and Pop II raises a variety of questions for the study of contemporary German media. Chief among these is whether Pop I has irrevocably ceded its subversive and subjective-formative qualities to the monolithic, institutionalized Pop II. As I show in this thesis, we would be wrong to take Diederichsen’s subdivision of pop as a hard and fast rule. For, even as the German Pop II climate saw Neo-Nazis glibly coopting cultural signifiers of African-American struggle, we find evidence of a renewed resistance to the pervasive threat of fascism facilitated by the countercultural, subject-formative tradition of Pop I.¹³ We also find reason to doubt sweeping claims about literary texts under Pop II – particularly those advanced by proponents of the *Popliteratur* model – that overlook their political, subject-formative dimensions.¹⁴

In developing these claims, I start by investigating literary memory of the 1980s in 21st century works by Sven Regener and Schorsch Kamerun that are, by virtue of their publication

¹³ See Diedrich Diederichsen, *Freiheit macht arm: Das Leben nach Rock’n’ Roll 1990-93*. (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1993).

¹⁴ For more on *Popliteratur*, see Moritz Baßler, *Der Deutsche Pop-Roman: Die Neuen Archivisten*. (München: C.H. Beck, 2002) [hereafter DPR].

date and mnemonic ambitions, in danger of being reduced to instances of the nostalgic and archival *Popliteratur*. Recontextualizing these novels as contemporary *Bildungsromane* whose protagonists struggle to attain subjectivity under the auspices of state and society, I explore the political dimensions of mid-1980s West Germany in literary memory. In the pages of Sven Regener's *Neue Vahr Süd* (2003) and Schorsch Kamerun's *Die Jugend ist die schönste Zeit des Lebens* (2016), their subjects discover various modes of resistance to the political and societal status quo at a point that Diederichsen saw as having been evacuated of its subversive potential.

Regener's cynical protagonist, Frank Lehmann, grows up distrustful of both the middle class exemplified by his parents and the revolutionary youth movements inhabited by his closest peers. To shield himself from the machinations of the State and the utopian ideals of the left, Frank engages in verbal one-upmanship that preserves his critical distance from both hegemonic society and its most robust antagonist. When Frank neglects to opt out of state-mandated military service, he is both challenged in his autonomy by the state and subjected to the most persuasive temptation to engage in leftist modes of resistance. Though his cynical detachment from both camps is severely challenged in the course of the narrative, Regener's protagonist ultimately escapes the ideological snake pit of the *Bundeswehr* to neutral West Berlin. In a similar fashion, Kamerun's protagonist, Tommi, rejects early on all forms of societal standardization, earning a troublemaker's reputation in his sleepy seaside town. What begins as an instinctive fight against his parents, his school, and his stuffy, middle-class neighbors slowly turns political, culminating in Tommi's conscientious objection to military service and subsequent migration to Hamburg's leftist, underground arts scene.

While the literary narratives conclude in the mid 1980s, Kamerun's and Regener's record albums of the early 1990s pick up and develop the respective political messages of their novels.

Reflecting both the growth of the literary subject to a young adult and the changing political realities of a newly unified Germany, these records propose alternatives from the Pop I playbook to combat a society that has fallen victim to the standardization of culture and the normalization of fascism. Both *Weißes Papier* (1993), by Regener's band, Element of Crime, and *Das bißchen Totschlag* (1994) by Kamerun's band, Die Goldenen Zitronen, display an evolved sense of belonging to post-war traditions of resistance.

On *Weißes Papier*, the escapism and the search for an apolitical alterity hinted at by *Neue Vahr Süd* come to the forefront through Regener's lovelorn, poetic lyricism. Taken by itself, the record's emphasis on introspection and heartache seems politically disinterested or naïve; in conjunction with Regener's literary output, however, the political origins of this disinterest in come into focus. In keeping with his literary subject's rejection of both hegemonic culture and its radical alternative, Regener's *Weißes Papier* exhibits a political mindfulness reminiscent of the Sponti and Tunix movements of withdrawal that arose in the 1980s. Likewise, Die Goldenen Zitronen's *Das bißchen Totschlag* invokes a post-war political tradition, its lyrics espousing an updated version of the radical leftism behind the student movement of 1968. Kamerun and his lyric-writing bandmate, Ted Gaier, take the establishment, the media, the complacent German middle class, and even old-guard leftists to task for their role in what they view as an inequitable, violent, and decaying society.

While Kamerun and Regener ultimately disagree on how best to subvert political and cultural hierarchies – or indeed if it can be done at all – both clearly embody the possibility of the popular to break free from the mold of standardization, to facilitate the formation of subjectivity, and to engage in critical political discourse. Adorno and Diederichsen may deny the popular a transformative dimension or circumscribe its revolutionary potential it within a bygone

era, but a close reading of works by Kamerun and Regener identifies recent instances of popular culture that both remember and live out resistance to political and cultural hegemony. This exercise does not require the creation of a new theory of the popular, nor do these objects represent the dawn of a new era of popular culture. Rather, there is a historically mediated link between the serious music praised by Adorno, the subversive art of Pop I that energized Diederichsen, and the Pop II literature and music I analyze here.

Remembering Everyday Politics in the Era of Kohl: Kamerun's and Regener's Contemporary *Bildungsromane*

What is *Popliteratur*? The Case of Moritz Baßler

In his 2002 monograph *Der deutsche Pop-Roman*, Moritz Baßler offered what was then a pathbreaking account of what was believed to be a new literary phenomenon in reunified Germany: *Popliteratur*. Though he never advances a comprehensive framework for the genre as a whole, the canon of *Popliteratur* texts assembled in his book share a number of distinct stylistic and substantive characteristics. Stylistically, *Popliteratur* represents a small fraction of contemporary German novels that are eagerly and widely consumed not simply as mass-mediated pulp fiction but rather as “ästhetisch...schwierig...Kunst” (DPR 10, 12). As a result, such works must display a “sprachlich-stilistisch[e] Kompetenz” and contain some degree of depth of thought (DPR 15). When it comes to subject matter, *Popliteratur* constitutes a break with earlier post-war literary discourses and a seeming abandonment of moral-didactical aims.¹⁵ For Baßler, the generation of authors responsible for *Popliteratur* – headed by Benjamin Stuckrad-Barre (b. 1975) and Christian Kracht (b. 1966)– grew up at a time when National

¹⁵ Some scholars, like Katharina Rutschky (in “Wertherzeit. Der Pop-Roman – Merkmale eines unerkannten Genres.” *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Europäisches Denken*. 57:2 (February 2003), 106-117) do acknowledge *Popliteratur*'s potential for overlap with classic literary traits.

Socialism ceased to dominate German public discourse (47).¹⁶ Whereas previous generations of authors (for example, Böll and Grass) problematized the influence of National Socialism and its agents on West German democratic society by dissecting culture and challenging collective memory, *Popliteratur* supplants the old case for the ethics of national memory with personal recollections. Blending linear narrative and autobiographical form with content drawn from everyday life, the *Pop-Roman* stands as a literary account of fleeting pop cultural moments and trivial personal experiences (DPR 27-28, 21). Baßler attributes the originality of the *Pop-Roman* to its authors' uncanny ability to craft a relatable piece of writing equal parts cultural archive and mundane, subjective happenings (DPR 21). "[Archiv] war bislang nicht Gegenstand jener künstlerischen Anstrengung gewesen," notes Baßler, arguing that, although *Popliteratur* may not be revolutionary, it is decidedly unique (21). Could this uniqueness provide the longevity needed to establish the genre in the literary canon? On this question, present-day scholarship has yet to arrive at a consensus.¹⁷

While *Popliteratur* enjoyed critical and popular success in the mid 1990s, Thomas Ernst had seen enough by the early 2000s to declare the movement dead in the water.¹⁸ With the *Pop-Roman* already walking a fine line, as Baßler noted, between mass media and art, the genre

¹⁶ Baßler's claim that Germany had already managed to normalize its past by the 1970s – the time at which many of *Popliteratur*'s authors were growing up – is refuted in this chapter. Both works analyzed herein grapple with the reverberations of Nazism still present in the 1980s.

¹⁷ The willingness of scholars to include *Popliteratur* in the German literary canon varies somewhat. For example, Hartmut Stein sorts authors from Chotjewitz to Meinecke under the *Popliteratur* header in "Chronik der deutschen Literatur," while Wolfgang Beutin et al prefer to sort the works of authors frequently designated as *Popliteratur* authors – including Sven Regener – in various thematic groupings that emphasize, among other things, their relationship to the fall of the Berlin Wall. However, as Margaret McCarthy's English-language volume *German Pop Literature* indicates, present-day interest in the movement has begun to soar (1).

¹⁸ In "Das Ende der Popliteratur. Eine Fortsetzungsgeschichte." *Poetik Der Oberfläche: Die deutschsprachige Popliteratur Der 1990er Jahre.*, Eckhard Schumacher points to a variety of publications declaring the death of *Popliteratur* by 2003 (53ff). He then goes on to question the very idea of *Popliteratur* has any true value outside of literary criticism (55).

proved easy for publishing houses to commodify. Lacking the particular insights and wit of a Kracht or Stuckrad-Barre, much of the subsequent *Popliteratur* output fell flat. After one particularly onerous publication in 1999 (*Crazy* by Benjamin Lebert), Ernst noted that “[d]ie Mainstream-Popliteratur war an einen Punkt gelangt, wo sie nur noch satirisch zu ertragen war.”¹⁹ Subsequent critical successes of the early 2000s were rarely linked to the term, with early *Popliteratur* proponent Maxim Biller decrying the movement as “lauwarm[e] Geschichten” unable to stave off their own commodification.²⁰

Post-Pop Authors: Regener & Kamerun

It is in this climate that Sven Regener and Schorsch Kamerun debuted as authors after decades spent primarily recording and performing as pop musicians. In many ways, Regener’s *Neue Vahr Süd* (2004) and Kamerun’s *Die Jugend ist die schönste Zeit des Lebens* (2016) fall in line with the positive traits of *Popliteratur* as identified by Baßler and Ernst: they are linear, autobiographical narratives of youthful experiences in the 1980s, with plentiful references to the pop culture of that era. Indeed, Regener and Kamerun fall in line with a larger group of pop musicians seemingly spurred on by Jürgen Teipel’s landmark oral history of punk music, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (2001), to provide their own accounts of that time period.²¹ Though Teipel is primarily concerned with creating a durable, non-fictional archive, Regener and Kamerun are not primarily interested in providing their own historically accurate memoirs.

¹⁹ Thomas Ernst. *Popliteratur*. Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt/Rotbuch, 2001, 74.

²⁰ Ernst 78-79.

²¹ This group also includes Rocko Schamoni, Jochen Distelmeyer, and Nagel, though not all of these authors are interested in autobiography and memoir.

Instead, they offer literary accounts that go beyond recollections of punk, pop culture, and politics to explore coming of age in 1980s West Germany.

While the temptation to lump these novels in with *Popliteratur* given their archival characteristics is reasonable, I believe Regener and Kamerun are, more importantly, tapping into the time-honored tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, characterized by Joseph R. Slaughter as a wide-ranging genre with a tendency post-18th century to “[narrate] the struggle between the rebellious inclinations of the individual and the conformist demands of society” against the backdrop of said individual’s coming of age.²² On the surface, there is some passing similarity between the *Pop-Roman* and the *Bildungsroman*.²³ As literary scholar Tobias Boes points out in *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman* (2012), the *Bildungsroman* ought to be read as a “coherent account of events as they exist in time” with an emphasis on the protagonist’s “experiences and insights” of “seemingly random and repetitive” character.²⁴ While this emphasis on linear, personal narrative and the importance of subjective, even trivial experience is also inherent to *Popliteratur*, the *Bildungsroman* carries with it a more fixed narrative focus.

Where, then, does this focus lie? To capture the essence of the *Bildungsroman*, we can again turn to Boes: a *Bildungsroman* must display, he insists, “an emphasis on change in the protagonist, a relationship between this change and the specific national setting in which the protagonist moves, and the positive effect that the depiction of this change will have on the

²² Joseph R. Slaughter. “Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman.” In *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*. Edited by Peter Melville Logan et. al, Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2014, 93.

²³ Indeed, Margaret McCarthy in her introduction to *German Pop Literature, a Companion*. Edited by Margaret McCarty. Berlin: DeGruyter, 2015, 1-30. acknowledges the “coming-of-age rubrics” that appear in certain works of *Popliteratur*, though she does not explore whether the *Bildungsroman* might provide a more suitable interpretive framework for these novels.

²⁴ Tobias Boes. *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012, 6, 34 [hereafter FF].

reader” (5). Boes then declares: “The human subject discovers itself to be an aesthetic object that has not yet quite come into being,” and the *Bildungsroman* recounts its subject’s struggle to self-actualize, or, at the very least, reconcile himself with the world around him (19). This process is set against the backdrop of “turning points in the history of German nationalism,” giving rise to a clash of the individual and the political which, per Boes, leaves the reader with “some identity claim that resists nationalism’s aim for closure in... the normative regime of the nation-state (FF 3).”

With this definition in mind, it is not a stretch to situate Regener’s *Neue Vahr Süd* and Kamerun’s *Die Jugend ist die schönste Zeit des Lebens* historically as post-reunification novels about pre-unification male adolescent identity formation in the West German state, *Bildungsromane* that go beyond a mere fascination with the cultural archive to offer an account of subject development in the context of the West German state shaped by sundry Cold War discourses. Without a doubt, the 1980s constituted a transitional period for the Federal Republic of Germany, a time marked by questions of national identity and existential fears. As historian Michael Gehler notes, West Germany found itself caught in the middle of a Cold War thawing between the USSR and NATO, a renewed period of tension ushered in by the latter’s December 1979 “twin-track decision” regarding the deployment of atomic weapons in Europe.²⁵ US President Ronald Reagan’s reinstatement of Eisenhower’s “policy of confrontation with the USSR” likewise unnerved West Germany, which saw peace in Europe once again under credible threat.²⁶ In response to these clear existential dangers, both East and West German citizens

²⁵ Michael Gehler. *Three Germanies: West Germany, East Germany and the Berlin Republic*. London: Reaktion Books, 2011, 174.

²⁶ Gehler 179.

organized, demonstrated, and advocated for “peace without weapons.”²⁷ Domestically, 1982 saw the election of Helmut Kohl to West German chairman, who continued to pursue the Ostpolitik of his Social-Liberal predecessors, even as he green-lighted the feared NATO twin-track decision.²⁸

It is this danger-filled West Germany that Regener and Kamerun’s protagonists inhabit. These two young men struggle to define their individuality and preserve their agency against the tide of state-driven attempts to return Germany to normalcy.²⁹ Indeed, each novel uses the meddling of the state in order to illuminate questions of subjectivity in the novel. As their subjects progress from state-mandated education and family life to compulsory military service and adult life, they wholeheartedly refuse to conform; Kamerun’s protagonist lives into the kynical tradition of punk, while Regener’s discovers the power of unbridled cynicism.

Learning to Resist: Ideological State Apparatuses and Civil Society

Boes’ readings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s and Thomas Mann’s works identify clear fault lines between the German *Bildungsroman* tradition and German nationalism spanning over more than one hundred years. Though these authors necessarily worked within specifically German historical and geographical dimensions, their *Bildungsromane* warn against the ills of nationalism. According to Boes, Mann’s *The Magic Mountain* (1924) “gave a powerful literary

²⁷ Konrad Jarausch. *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 178.

²⁸ Gehler 178.

²⁹ Konrad Jarausch also notes the presence of attempts to normalize 1980s West Germany at the level of civil society, an endeavor fraught with debate along ideological lines. While some parties or interest groups will have aligned themselves with the state, others will certainly have put forth oppositional visions for West German normalcy. However, both Regener and Kamerun’s protagonists’ oppositional behavior is overwhelmingly concerned with the state and its proponents in civil society (237).

shape to his fear that a narrow-minded allegiance to the notion of national entelechies could lead to unspeakable evil,” while Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795), written at the dawn of the newly-formed German Confederation, rejects the growing nationalistic climate to promote a spirit “decoupled from state institutions and from the influence that they attempt to exert on the public sphere” (177, 36). To come of age in the German literary tradition, then, is to regard the state with some degree of skepticism.

It is precisely this skepticism toward the state and its far-reaching influences that most clearly imbues Regener’s and Kamerun’s narratives with the qualities of the *Bildungsroman* as Boes describes it. Central to each is the protagonist’s formative interactions with the West German established order and the evolution of oppositional responses that endow each with a non-conformist subjecthood. In the course of both narratives, Regener’s Frank and Kamerun’s Tommi categorically reject the state’s attempts to translate their bourgeois upbringing into a dutiful adulthood, combatting the ideology of the family, school, professional development, and, most importantly, the military.

These antagonists find unity in French structuralist Louis Althusser’s concept of the “state ideological apparatus” as elucidated in his seminal “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (1970).” For Althusser, the school is the primary apparatus, as it not only teaches school children the “know-how” required to one day fit into the capitalist division of labor, it also instructs them in the “‘rules’ of good behavior... rules of morality, civic and professional consciousness.”³⁰ No less crucial for the reproduction of labor power is having a church, family, and larger community that reinforces capitalistic values. What Althusser expresses scientifically as the “reproduction of [labor power’s] submission to the rules of the established order,” Frank

³⁰ Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972, 88-89 [hereafter ISA].

and Tommi experience practically as a threat to their freedoms and their happiness (ISA 89). School, apprenticeship, military service, and expectations for civil behavior demand total conformity. What drives Frank and Tommi to reject not only the most obvious manifestation of the state – the military – but also the norms imparted in school, by their families, and in the workplace is the shared realization that, as Althusser puts it, these seemingly distinct elements in fact conspire to “ensure the subjection to the ruling ideology” (89). To counteract the state’s erosion of their freedoms and the resulting threat to their budding nonconformist identities, both protagonists take up the mantle of cynicism.

In response to the Bimmelsdorfer bourgeoisie, Kamerun’s Tommi taps into what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk coined in the early eighties “kynicism.” Kynicism struggles against the reigning idealisms of its age, Sloterdijk explains, by utilizing the grotesque and offensive in order to loosen the grip of dominant ideologies.³¹ Sensual enlightenment, transgressive behavior, and all-around irreverence toward the will to power are the tools by which kynical behavior returns truth, the love of knowledge, and, in so doing, happiness and freedom as well to the public sphere. The kynic is one who “perhaps did not mean to be so wicked” but is all the same driven to “desperate cheekiness that gives off a spark of independence” apart from the collision course of society (CCR 127).

Although young Tommi’s kynical potential is accidentally called into being, he quickly takes to troublemaking as a means of combatting the intrusive, smothering state. This kynical spirit is expressed most purely in Tommi and his friends’ repeated cries of anarchy throughout the narrative: “überhaupt, ihr Wissen über radikale Versuche von umgesetzter Freiheit ging gegen null,” the narrator assures, but the thrill of opposition, informed by the Sex Pistols’ Johnny

³¹ Peter Sloterdijk. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 104ff [hereafter CCR].

Rotten and propelled by a close-knit circle of troublemaking friends help solidify Tommi's desire to resist.³² Despite the occasional bump along the way, young Tommi develops his own ethics of transgression. "Man musste nur wissen, wie [Autoritäten] zu kitzeln sind," he explains. "Dann kamen sie ganz von selbst aus ihrer Ecke heraus (JSZ 10)."

This ethics mandates a series of subtle, precise attacks on a majority of institutions on Althusser's list of ideological state apparatuses. His hometown of Bimmelsdorf, the seat of bourgeoisie norms and institutions, bears the brunt of Tommi and his anarchistic clique's initial ire, with Bimmelsdorf's cafés drawing the first of many short straws. Beloved by both Hamburg's vacationing elite and the town's own bourgeoisie alike and unfriendly to local children, the café was the perfect target; although spraying "Bimmelsdorfer Cafés haben keine Ahnung von Kaffee" on the side of the Rathaus seemed to elicit more reactions against the presence of graffiti than the anti-bourgeois message it conveyed, Tommi found validation in the furor he had caused (JSZ 11).³³

Future attempts to unsettle the town proved more organized, as Tommi's ethics of cynicism acquires its own nomenclature and his target pool expands to include other key apparatuses. "Falsche Fische machen" [making false fishes] and the "Kuck-kucksmethode" [cuckoo's method] lead to more impactful disturbances in the seaside town, most notably when a rumor begins to circulate in a local paper that a new stretch of the Autobahn was to be built around Bimmelsdorf (JSZ 13, 18ff). The ensuing furor bemoaning the impending destruction of the town's tourist and property values emboldens Tommi to greater heights of cynical

³² Schorsch Kamerun. *Die Jugend ist die schönste Zeit des Lebens*. Berlin: Ullstein, 2016, 9 [hereafter JSZ].

³³ Tommi's graffiti attack on the late-bourgeois institution of the café recalls the "cynical, enlightening, realistic momentum" Sloterdijk attributes to feminists vandalizing porno stores in protest of the commodification and objectification of women (266).

transgression. From forging theater tickets to reselling crates of Fanta below sticker price outside of the supermarket, Tommi takes every opportunity to unsettle the institutions of Bimmelsdorf.

Having dropped out of school, the norms and requirements of which he likewise flaunted, Tommi finds himself entrapped by a further apparatus of state-mandated *Bildung*: namely an apprenticeship. Despite Tommi's clear unwillingness to conform, the state ceased to give up the fight. Worse yet for Tommi, his master was no longer an assortment of world-weary teachers but his own stepfather, a man with little tolerance for his stepson's delinquency. Once again, Tommi draws upon the kynical, albeit in a more subdued form, employing what he termed the *Dauerwurstprinzip*.³⁴ By taking somewhat longer than necessary to complete each and every task his stepfather assigns, Tommi turns the menial, degrading nature of sweeping floors and sorting parts into subversive activities (JSZ 158-159). His youthful freedom to roam and terrorize the town now a relic of the past, Tommi nonetheless clings to principles of kynical revolt throughout the drudgery of his apprenticeship and finds a modicum of happiness and individual expression where the state otherwise may have snuffed it out.

Unlike kynical Tommi, Regener's Frank finds cynicism best suited to express his discontent with the state's attempts to impress its values upon him. Here, too, Sloterdijk offers an apt diagnosis: "Modern cynicism presents itself as that state of consciousness that follows after naive ideologies and their enlightenment" (3). This cynicism is merely the most reasonable response to the traditionalism of his parents and the idealism of his peers, both of which are entirely untenable in the world Frank inhabits. Tommi's cheeky spirit ultimately serves to bring him joy in life, but Frank's cynicism offers little comfort. Rather, it seems to Frank to be, as

³⁴ This term, perhaps best left untranslated, is a reference to the power of measured, patient resistance. Just as cooking a sausage to perfection requires thoroughness and patience at the grill, so too does Tommi's incremental inefficiency at work ensure a loss for the business in the aggregate.

Sloterdijk puts it, the most “realistically attuned way of seeing things” (41). This is a joyless realization for Frank, but a comical circumstance for the reader, as Regener’s novel expertly weaves hapless event after hapless event into a humorous narrative that has the reader chuckling at Frank’s comical misfortune even as she sympathizes with his unfair treatment at the hands of the state.

Likewise, Frank’s opposition to the state is less intentional and, accordingly, more existential than Tommi’s medley of graffiti, delinquency, and defiance. His primary complaint is not with the state institutions themselves but with their effect on his identity as a whole. His initial complaint, a deep discontent with his family, the most subtly ideological of all state apparatuses, snowballs into a comprehensive, cynical disavowal of the rest. Frank’s descent into cynicism thus begins rather benignly; the German family values of his youth have lost their appeal in young adulthood merely because his family does not respect him. His parents hold long, protracted arguments about him without consulting him. “Hört endlich auf, über mich in der dritten Person zu reden, das ist ja widerlich,” he repeats many a time.³⁵ The final straw comes when Frank’s father uses his bedroom, now vacant during the week, to repair TVs, and his mother blindly defends this behavior. “Ihm macht das Spaß,” she repeatedly asserts, even as his father helplessly tries to reassure Frank of his place in the family (NVS 92ff). The next weekend, Frank moves out, the idyllic family dream tarnished by the tragicomic, squabbling one with which he can no longer stand to live.

Without the stabilizing element of his family, Frank’s sphere of cynical malcontent rapidly expands to encompass the spheres of education and politics. After meeting a university friend for lunch, he observes the hollowness of the student lifestyle: “Das ist interessant,” he

³⁵ Sven Regener. *Neue Vahr Süd: Roman*. Frankfurt Am Main: Eichborn, 2004, 35 [hereafter NVS].

observes. “Nun sind sie schon Studenten und müssen nicht arbeiten, und zur Bundeswehr müssen sie auch nicht. Aber viel Spaß daran scheinen sie nicht zu haben (NVS 27-28).” Cynicism likewise renders political activity meaningless; Frank sees his friends’ political aspirations as nothing more than a bourgeoisie pastime, powerless to change the dismal reality he inhabits. After tolerating his friends’ idle political talk for much of the narrative, he begins to lash out at their folly: “Erst konfirmieren lassen, dann die Revolution machen mit dem Geld von Oma (NVS 316).” Clearly, Frank’s rejection of education, politics, and the family brings him no cheer, his shattering of society’s idols is a weighty, depressing task brought on by a fatalism devoid of the kynical spirit that quickens Tommi’s step. Nonetheless, this cynicism enables him to absolve himself of participation in the institutions of the state.

Military Aus(Bildung) and the Intensification of Resistance

As their protagonists reach adulthood, Kamerun’s and Regener’s narratives shift their attention to West Germany’s compulsory military service, the mechanism by which the state sought to direct its young men into a responsible, patriotic, and dutiful adults and citizens. However, as foreshadowed by Frank’s and Tommi’s youthful experiences, this proves a difficult task for the state. Neither Frank’s brooding cynicism nor Tommi’s gleeful kynicism lends itself to the military’s ceaseless instruction in conformity. Each protagonist’s attempts to ward off the state’s guiding hand not only furthers the cynic/kynic dualism at work in these texts, but also illuminates the *Bildungsroman* as a depiction of individual struggle against the all-consuming obedience demanded by the ideological state apparatuses.³⁶

³⁶ “[The *Bildungsroman*] undermine[s] simplistic narratives about national consciousness and its putative quest for closure in the normative ideal of the nation-state” (FF 34).

In *Neue Vahr Süd*, Frank's military service exposes him to the true maleficence of the state, forcing him to reevaluate the passive cynicism that characterized his youth and to take control of his life's direction. Frank initially accepts his fate; his complaints are unaccompanied by evasive action of any sort. Fifteen months of service can't be all that bad, he seems to conclude. But when he arrives, he is shaken by the caprice and impersonality of the *Bundeswehr* that confronts him. After one week of service, Frank has already begun to rue his earlier nonchalance. "Es ist höchste Zeit, sich mit Kriegsdienstverweigerung zu beschäftigen," he decides (NVS 237). For the moment, however, Frank must live with his decision to enlist, a reality that drives him towards action. While he plans for his eventual withdrawal hearing, he learns to employ his cleverness and resourcefulness – heretofore tempered overwhelmingly by apathy – to reject the state's designs on his labor, loyalty, and, ultimately, the formation of his identity.

Frank's disavowal of state intervention ignites slowly from the twin flames of wry curiosity and annoyance. "Ich meine, wer ist noch so blöd und geht zum Bund," Frank notes wryly (NVS 47). Expecting a degree of civility or even collegiality, he adds: "da müssten sie doch eigentlich über jeden froh sein, der kommt, und ihn nett behandeln (NVS 47)." This hope is quickly shattered, when, on the very first morning, his quarters fail inspection. Confronted by the menacing Cadet Heitmann, whose ire rises as Frank fails to refer to him by his rank, Frank quickly sees the error in his assumption but, in a snap decision, continues to feign ignorance of the conventions pertaining to military address. "Sie sind jetzt Pionier," snaps the cadet after Frank finally complies. "Das ist ihr Dienstgrad, das ist Ihr neuer Vorname, das ist alles, was sie hier haben (NVS 47)."

Far from being intimidated, Frank is elated by his newfound method of resistance: kynicism. Like Tommi, who once salvaged his tedious apprenticeship under his dehumanizing stepfather by applying the aforementioned *Dauerwurstprinzip*, Frank proceeds to verbally subvert the established order at every turn. His superiors' rigid adherence to codified forms of salutation provides Frank with a subtle yet significant method of interference. His seemingly accidental failure to properly address his superiors and their subsequent furious corrections become a central gag in *Neue Vahr Süd*. Even those rare officers for whom this protocol holds little personal value, his transgression still prompts a response. "Mir ist das ja egal," offers the surgeon major, "aber Sie werden hier Leuten begegnen, denen das wichtig ist. (NVS 61)"

Not only do these uniform responses serve a humorous roll in the narrative, they more importantly typify the zombie-like principal of order to which Frank gradually awakens.³⁷ His stunts gradually become bolder, culminating in his protracted cross-examination of the hapless chaplain and the telling off of a sergeant (NVS 164ff, 213ff). However, this particular sergeant takes a liking to Frank's subversive behavior, and Frank finds himself thrust into the role of confidence man for his company. Endowed for the first time with a responsibility to others, Lehmann's view of his conscription changes for the worse. His first task, to represent a fellow new recruit in his disciplinary process, effectively ends his short-lived kynical phase. His impassioned statement recommending the commuting of the recruit's punishment is met with derision, and the recruit, out of despair, makes an attempt on his own life (NVS 213ff, 232ff).

³⁷ In "The Pop-Nostalgia of Sven Regener and Leander Haußmann." In *German Pop Literature: A Companion*, edited by Margaret McCarthy, 79-100. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015., Hester Baer notes the role of comedy during Frank's service term – a nod to the tradition of *Militärklamotte* [military comedies] – to bring out Frank's "search for belonging beyond the 'constitutional patriotism' that he recognizes as a bankrupt concept in the course of his military experience" (91).

Rebuffed in his attempt to contribute to the system and shaken by news of the recruit's suicide attempt, Frank also realizes his former cynicism can no longer protect him from this most powerful state apparatus. Fed up with its cruelty and caprice, Frank resolves to file a conscientious objection. At the culmination of his hearing, Frank's contrarian tendencies resurface, no longer in the employ of his brief kynical spirit but as an expression of deep despair at the biased, unreceptive committee he has faced.³⁸ Despite an impassioned, nuanced expression of his moral objection to bearing arms, Frank cannot satisfactorily evade the snare laid by the committee's central question as to whether he would take up violence to save family members endangered by foreign marauders (NVS 380). Frustrated and losing ground, Frank loses his cool after being subjected to a lengthy discussion of his fate in the third person. This gag, which was previously a humorous apologetic for cynicism now takes on more existential undertones. Instead of injecting Frank's woeful circumstances with a modicum of levity, this utterance lays Frank's helplessness at the hands of state bare for all to see (NVS 384). His appeal for withdrawal denied, Frank must wholly forsake the passivity his cynicism demands of him to escape the state.³⁹ Thus, with a heavy heart, Frank fakes a suicide attempt to finally secure his release from the service.

Whereas Frank cursed his apathy and the ensuing struggle to extricate himself from the military, Tommi would never have dreamed of fulfilling his *Wehrpflicht*. While his school years spent antagonizing schoolteachers, shopkeepers, and *Spießher* of Bimmelsdorf made him an ideal

³⁸ For example, his *Klugscheißerei* [smart ass] comment on 376.

³⁹ Despite overwhelming textual evidence to the contrary, Hester Baer denies Frank's military experience a role in his character formation. Instead, she locates it in the "generational experience" of the *Wende*, a move especially puzzling considering Regener's narrative concludes nearly a decade before the fall of the Berlin Wall (86). Baer's choice to invoke extradiegetic events over an interpretation of the text itself bespeaks *Popliteratur's* preoccupation with phenomena only tangential to an understanding of literature. The movement's inability to dialogue meaningfully with the literary tradition threatens to leave the depths of contemporary novels unplumbed and their relationship to the historical novel unexamined.

candidate for neutralizing influence of the state, those escapades ultimately endow him with the determination and tools to escape it. A visit to the library suffices to outfit Tommi with the language necessary: “ich bin durch und durch gegen jedwede Form von Gewalt... ich weiß ganz sicher, dass ich nicht einmal die Meinen verteidigen könnte. Geschweige denn mich selbst (JSZ 86).” To ensure the success of this defense – after all, Frank’s remarkably similar appeal was denied – Tommi digresses into a tearful and entirely fabricated account of his father’s drunken, violent rages (JSZ 86). “Method Acting at its finest war das,” recalls Tommi proudly (JSZ 86).

The flippancy with which Tommi goes about his hearing is rivaled only by his disgust for the unceremonious program the state cooks up to curb his individuality and redirect his energies into nation-building. The tears that lend his sob story credence are in fact a product of his disgust at being reduced to a beggar in front of the panel, a “zeterndes Schicksalsschluchzen” borne of acute loathing (JSZ 87). In the end, this debasement pays off. Informed of the panel’s favorable decision, Tommi can barely contain his joy. Free from the iron hand of military service, he experiences “ein Flug auf den Schwingen des warmen Beschützervogels” that even one hearing committee member’s callous rejoinder of “*Flasche!*” cannot dampen (JSZ 88). This refusal to serve goes far beyond previous arbitrary kynical, transgressive exercise or even freedom from drudgery to an affirmation of a cynical view of the state. His gleeful, self-assured deception of the committee merely serves as the mechanism to express his disgust for state-sanctioned violence. He sees the fruits of the state at war in his youthful experiences: “[d]ie Rollstuhlgroßväter. Die Einarmigen. Die Kehlkopfmikrofone. Die Dellen im Schädel. Ein Land voller Witwen und Omas ohne Opas (JSZ 85).” He knows enough to identify its enablers: nationalistic teachers like Nazi Schmidke and the self-satisfied petty bourgeoisie of Bimmelsdorf. In his refusal to travel the state-appointed course of military service, Tommi

champions kynical resistance to the cynical acquiescence and its dilemma that characterizes Frank Lehmann's experience. "[Das eigene] Leben in einem nicht zu gewinnendem Kampf zu verpfänden" would be not merely a personal but a moral tragedy for Tommi (JSZ 89).

New Modes of Resistance in the Metropolis

Ultimately, both Kamerun's and Regener's novels hinge on the protagonist's evolving response to the state's attempts to mediate their formation. For Kamerun's Tommi, this response begins as kynical rebellion, wielding the body to undermine the conformist, bourgeoisie values thrust upon him by his town, his school, and his family.⁴⁰ This gleeful troublemaking occurs without much regard for the larger tradition of rebellion, serving instead to ameliorate Tommi's doubts about his identity and value.⁴¹ Though Regener's Frank expresses his distaste with societal norms verbally, his cynicism is likewise devoid of any connection to social responsibility or personal advancement. Frank is in many ways the very embodiment of Sloterdijk's "enlightened false consciousness," aware and mistrustful of the world around him, but unable to overcome the inertia of cynicism to effect change (5).

Yet as both protagonists grow older, their experiences necessitate revised approaches to rebellion. This conflict and ensuing response constitute the "formation" expected of the *Bildungsroman*, demonstrating what Georg Lukács terms "the reconciliation of the problematic individual, guided by his lived experience of the ideal, with concrete social reality."⁴² For both

⁴⁰ Sloterdijk insists on the centrality of the body in acts of kynical resistance: "Greek kynicism discovers the animal body in the human" (103).

⁴¹ Kamerun is quite candid about his protagonist's lack of ideological pretension: "Überhaupt, ihr Wissen über radikale Versuche von umgesetzter Freiheit ging gegen null. Sie verstanden es aber trotzdem sofort, das herausgeschleuderte "Anarchy" des Sängers Johnny Rotten" (8).

⁴² Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 132.

Tommi and Frank, this reconciliation manifests itself as a dual motion. Philosophically, both Tommi and Frank shift from individualized rebellion borne of inner turmoil towards a healthier, community-driven lifestyle, still resolutely oppositional. Practically, this shift towards community entails the second motion: an abandoning of the hometown for a new life in the metropolis.

In Tommi's case, his discovery of an artistic community in Hamburg offers him the chance at an authentic, sustainable expression of his childhood cynicism and an escape from the hopelessly bourgeois seaside town of Bimmelsdorf. Meeting Mali, a young woman from Hamburg's underground arts scene, opens Tommi up to a brand new world. The lonely struggle to break free from the institutions and expectations that characterized his youth now grows into "eine grenzlosere [Lebensrichtung]. Bis hin zur Mitgliedschaft in der Künstlersozialkasse" (JSZ 116). This new chapter for Tommi elevates the childish pranks of his youth to artistic discourse. This artistic activity is no less anti-establishment and no less cynical, even though it takes on a more refined form than his childhood mischief. "Und genau so, wie es sich mit dem intuitiven Nachbrüllen des Anarchy-Schreies verhalten hatte, genau so war es auch bei den ersten eigenen Versuchen: Sie wurden Protestsänger und Protestmusikanten, ohne es sich vorzunehmen," recounts Kamerun, firmly connecting these two modes of state resistance (122).

To enable this jump into the professional realm of art, Tommi relocates to Hamburg, a move both invigorating and empowering. Gone are the days of feeling marginalized and insecure in a small-town. Gone are the constant feuds with authority figures. Ceaseless vigilance against the state's institutions and their standard bearers are simply unnecessary in such a large, anonymous metropolis, and, likewise, principled resistance to the ills of bourgeois society are met with less forceful resistance. This is, according to Sloterdijk, the gift of the city to cynical

practice, like universities and carnivals, cities “function as safety valves through which needs that otherwise are not given their due in social life can achieve a limited release” (117).⁴³ Instead of struggling along as an outsider in his small, homogenously bourgeois hometown, Tommi participates in Hamburg’s community of likeminded individuals, a community that allows him to effectively manage those very same personal concerns that lay at the heart of his youthful rebellion (JSZ 224-225).

While the big city life empowers Kamerun’s Tommi to further develop his ethics of rebellion through artistic expression, Regener’s Frank seeks out West Berlin precisely because his prior mode of resistance has been crushed by the state. Despite his dry, humorous verbal dismantling of previous state apparatuses, his cynical approach is clearly inadequate to protect him from this most direct encounter with the state’s true power. Firsthand experience of the psychological and physical devastation brought on by the military has not merely crushed Frank’s once matchless cynicism, it has also forced him into action. Though the novel concludes with Frank uprooting and moving to West Berlin, what Frank does with this change of scenery is left unanswered by the narrative.

Will his experience of helplessness at the hands of the military be enough to permanently reshape Frank’s character? While the clear disintegration of Frank’s cynicism before the austere military tribunal seems initially to bespeak a desire for self-renewal, there is reason to suspect this conclusion. The very same anonymity of the city that allows Tommi to provoke with greater

⁴³ Sloterdijk is ultimately critical of the city’s effect on the kynical drive, terming the metropolis “a hollow political mechanism” and calling for a new method of kynical propagation. This new requires the kynic to pledge loyalty not to a “random city-community” but to the “extended cosmos” (164). What Sloterdijk overlooks in this rejection of the city, however, is the metropolis’ global interconnectivity and cosmopolitan makeup. This facet of the city is especially relevant to a musician like Tommi, whose professional success depends in large part upon his ability to reach an audience with his art. Considering the way in which his young adult artistic career dovetails with his kynical childhood experiences, his move to Hamburg has only served to widen his political footprint. Indeed, we learn of his first foray into the global community – an appearance on MTV – on page 143 of the novel.

impunity also affords Frank the chance to recuperate away from the menace of the military. West Berlin's exemption from the system of compulsory military service Frank has just fled only heightens this sense of security. However, this case is difficult to make considering how abruptly the narrative closes.⁴⁴

Both Tommi and Frank are shown to employ various tools for resisting the ideological state apparatuses' overwhelming influence, devising new strategies for school, the family, and finally, the military. Tommi torments his bourgeois environment, and Frank isolates himself from social norms via a cynical attitude. Wielding these tools, each protagonist encounters complications to their modes of interaction that ultimately catalyze their own self-actualization. For Tommi, this complication manifests itself overwhelmingly positively in the form of a supportive artistic community in the metropolis of Hamburg, a network that encourages him to refine his cynical-oppositional practice within the realm of artistic expression. Frank, on the other hand, undergoes change thanks to a more ominous set of circumstances: the cold, callous environs of the West German military. Here, he has finally encountered a state institution strong enough to demand he choose compliance or face serious consequences. Thus, his abrupt break with his former apathetic self and hasty move to Berlin constitute at least a move of self-preservation if not a complete rejection of his former cynicism.

The existential and geographical progression of these characters mapped out above illuminates how both Regener and Kamerun stake a claim to participation in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. Each narrative resists the superficial accounts of *Popliteratur* as mere archives and furthermore inserts the form of the *Bildungsroman* into coming-of-age stories from the West

⁴⁴ However, an intradiegetic reading of *Neue Vahr Süd* and its companion novel *Herr Lehmann* (2001) would suggest that Frank has retained much of his dispassionate cynicism. Nearly a decade older, the Frank of *Herr Lehmann* is characterized by the same haplessness and apathy found in the pages of *Neue Vahr Süd*.

German eighties, a time when resistance to dominant political discourse was core element of youth subcultures. In accordance with Boes' definition of the *Bildungsroman*, each subject grapples with the disparity between their own identity and the normative ideal of subjecthood promoted by West Germany in the 1980s. From clashes with the ideological state apparatus – chief among them the rejection of the militaristic state – to the beginning of their new lives in the big city, Tommi's and Frank's stories are characterized by the struggles, decisions, and changes central to the *Bildungsroman* tradition.

The Sound of the Political: Sonic Resistance in Die Goldenen Zitronen and Element of Crime

Introduction

The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked both the end of East and West Germany's chief existential threat – the Cold War – and the emergence of a power vacuum in which West German chancellor Helmut Kohl could secure his constitutional mandate for German reunification.⁴⁵ One chief consequence of Kohl's success, according to historian Konrad H. Jarausch, was the emergence of “a new conflict for intellectual hegemony” between the rising conservative architects of German post-Soviet triumph and the entrenched liberal actors who rose to prominence in the wake of student movements in the 60s and 70s.⁴⁶ Battleground issues for intellectuals included the German “double burden” of Nazism and Communism, as well as proposed amendments to migration policy.⁴⁷ In this task, a Center-Right news media aided the conservative attempt to undermine Leftist visions for the unified nation.⁴⁸ Where the former debate pitted the Right's shameful past against the Left's, developments around the latter

⁴⁵ See Noel D Cary. “‘Farewell Without Tears’: Diplomats, Dissidents, and the Demise of East Germany.” *The Journal of Modern History* 73, no 3 (2001): 617–51.

⁴⁶ Konrad H Jarausch., *After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997),10.

⁴⁷ Jarausch 12.

⁴⁸ Jarausch 19.

controversy quickly left the intellectual community in the dust.⁴⁹ Neo-Nazis and skinheads perpetrated violent attacks on housing complexes for asylum seekers and guestworkers. Instances of arson in Hoyerswerda (1991), Rostock (1992), Mölln (1992), and Sollingen (1993) top the list of nearly 1000 anti-migrant attacks occurring in Germany from 1991-1993. While most Germans were quick to condemn the violence from the outset, the persistence of xenophobic violence attests to the failures of Kohl's government, the media, and the German people to provide a safer, more welcoming climate for refugees and guestworkers.⁵⁰

While the failure of the GDR and the massive political successes of the Kohl regime marginalized leftism in the public eye, the political turmoil of the early 1990s gave rise to a renewed wave of political consciousness in German artistic communities. Their values and ideals under fire not only from a conservative regime but also from an unchecked wave of fascist violence, artists such as Sven Regener and Schorsch Kamerun delved into Germany's rich post-war tradition of political agitation to offer new sonic possibilities for anti-fascist resistance. Though both Regener and Kamerun are concerned with the distressing political realities they inhabit, they quite clearly clash on the question of methodology and ideals. For their part, Schorsch Kamerun's band, Die Goldenen Zitronen, adoption of styles traditionally associated with African-American performers placed them in the thick of what Diederichsen identifies in his influential essay, "The Kids are Not Alright" as style wars among subcultures, where Neo-

⁴⁹ In *Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification, and National Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), Jan-Werner Müller typifies the "self-declared right wing 'generation of 1989' as siding with prominent Nazi intellectuals of the past (Heidegger, Schmitt, etc.) while their leftist opposition, battle-tested from the events of 1968, proudly held to anti-capitalist positions associated with the effectively vanquished socialist GDR state (12). This ensured that both Left and Right must contend with shameful elements of their past, a task Müller and his interlocuter in the volume, Andreas Husseyn, both determine the Left was not willing to undertake (149-150).

⁵⁰ Indeed, 1993 saw the German government pass legislation designed to restrict the number of those granted asylum the country, while the conservative elements of the general population persisted in their skeptical, derogatory rhetoric concerning asylum seekers (Jarausch 84).

Nazis in Malcolm-X hats, who by all accounts, failed to look beyond the “Gemensamkeiten zwischen allen Notbandenbildungen,” set migrants’ homes on fire. By drawing on hip-hop and funk, *Das bißchen Totschlag* (1994) pushes back against this Neo-Nazi cooption of radical leftist, liberating modes of expression to advocate on behalf of the oppressed in German society. Paired with lyrics critical of German society across the political-ideological spectrum, *Das bißchen Totschlag* makes clear a rebirth of leftist ideals comes only with a rekindling of 1968’s revolutionary spirit.

Skeptical of the return to revolutionary politics of the student movement, Sven Regener and Element of Crime’s *Weißes Papier* (1993) locates relief from political turmoil inside a distinctly apolitical alterity. In this view, first proposed by the *Spontis* in the 1970s, a refusal to participate in conventional politics is more powerful in denying fascism its power than revolt. In this view, the alarming number of 68ers who, instead of pursuing their revolutionary goals into adulthood, entered into mainstream society after graduation testifies to the futility of organized protest and agitation. Where Die Goldenen Zitronen adopt the music of oppressed American minorities to proclaim revolutionary solidarity, Element of Crime latch onto the musical stylings of the *Liedermacher* whose political texts underpinned the student movement. Element of Crime’s tribute to the German *Liedermacher* tradition is jarring in its lack of political content, and with good reason. For in a country where neo-Nazis claim solidarity with Malcolm X through fashion and fuel their rampages with American hip-hop tracks, the cultural lines between fascists and radical leftists have become irreversibly blurred. If modes of protest and symbols of leftist resistance no longer serve to distinguish between good and evil, the only way past Germany’s recurring fascist tendencies is to establish an alterity free from the incessant strife of politics.

A Little Homicide

Disgusted by the German people's complacent response to this xenophobic terror, the media's role in downplaying the return of fascism, and the Left's intellectual and moral frailty, Schorsch Kamerun and his band, Die Goldenen Zitronen, returned from a three-year recording hiatus with *Das bißchen Totschlag* (1994) to musically lambast all three. Determined to reintroduce relevant, uncompromising Leftist critique, principal songwriters Kamerun and Ted Gaier engaged in more overtly political lyrics than those found on previous records.⁵¹ Musically, the band veered dramatically away from their critically-acclaimed fun-punk sound to experiment more with funk and hip-hop.

To introduce these changes, the band invested significant time and energy in a title track representative of the entire record. For Die Goldenen Zitronen, this titular lead-off track served as an introduction to the band's new sonic direction. As the previous studio album – 1991's *Punk Rock* – and calling card single – “Für immer Punk (1987)” – indicate, the band had made a career writing punk songs, albeit heavily blues and country-influenced ones.⁵² Longtime fans expecting a similar offering on *Das bißchen Totschlag* were instead greeted by the title track's funk-laden drum beat interspersed with dueling bass and organ riffs.⁵³ Not only is the 12-bar blues and I-IV-V chord progressions featured on most of the band's earlier output missing, chord progressions

⁵¹ In an interview with Diedrich Diederichsen, Gaier alluded to the band's desire to overhaul the perception of leftist thought in German society. “Warum haben Linksradike keinen Geschmack,” he muses, with Diederichsen concluding that “nur mit der richtige Gesinnung [sei] kein Land zu gewinnen” (see Diederichsen, Dietrich, “Die Goldenen Zitronen: Fünf gegen 80 Millionen.” *Spex* (August 1994): 32-37.).

⁵² This track, a parody of Alphaville's “Forever Young (1984),” also serves well to highlight's the band's propensity to open up a discourse with various elements of popular culture (and, in this case, to poke fun at hippies).

⁵³ The verse's drum pattern is nearly identical to common funk drum grooves, such as those found on James Brown's “Get Up (I Feel Like Being a) Sex Machine (1971)” and Earth, Wind, and Fire's “Kalimba Story (1974).”

of any kind are wholly absent from the verses. Instead, the organ and bass trade off riffs around the tonic (A Major). Each riff repeats in turn without variation until the extended third verse rolls around, at which point guitar and organ begin to take small liberties with their proscribed parts. Even when a modicum of chordal order is restored in the chorus, the funk elements of the verse persist. Julius Block's organ riff transforms into a wandering, syncopated melody, while Psycho T's bassline begins a walk from anchor point to anchor point in a convincing Bootsy Collins impression.

The relatively static instrumentals across the piece conspire in a twofold manner. First and foremost, they afford vocalist Schorsch Kamerun the ability to experiment with his songwriting and vocal delivery. Like his bandmates, Kamerun has largely forsaken his punk elements on this track, trading the raspy, occasionally off-key singing of his fun-punk years for *Sprechgesang*. Kamerun is clearly influenced by his hip-hop contemporaries such as Die Fantastischen Vier, Advanced Chemistry, and experimental rock act Blumfeld in this endeavor, though he stops short of the energy and affect associated with rapping.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the aggregate effect of this strategy is to force the listener away from the instinct to sing along. Whereas the simple melodies of their fun-punk recordings encouraged the simple repetition of memorable phrases – evidenced, for example, by the gang vocals on “Marihuana (1987)” – Kamerun's *Sprechgesang* proves much harder to emulate. In order to sing along, the listener must not only learn the lyrics to a much longer verse, she must pay attention to phrase breaks and emphases not typically found in rock and punk compositions.

⁵⁴ While Kamerun may have largely ignored contemporary developments in German hip-hop, which was largely commercial to focus on the American artists that inspired them, these artists stood at the forefront of German hip-hop in the early 1990s.

Certainly, the band's shift to spoken texts and funk-laden instrumentals constitute a notable departure from previous punk records. However, the band's move towards funk and hip-hop does not require them to entirely forsake their rock roots. Taking cues from period guitar-driven hip-hop outfits such as Beastie Boys, Rage Against the Machine, and Public Enemy, Die Goldenen Zitronen are hardly compelled to put down the guitars. In true title-track fashion, "Das bißchen Totschlag" contains a little bit of each style to be explored in the course of the album. While it ultimately leans more towards hip-hop (Kamerun's vocal delivery) and funk (Palluca's drumming), flashes of Ted Gaier's guitar work and the Doors-esque organ (think "Alabama Song" run through a fuzz circuit) remind the listener that Kamerun and company have their roots in the rock tradition.⁵⁵

Just as the track's musical components hint at the various sonic directions to be explored on the record, Kamerun's acerbic and witty lyrics touch on the album's three major themes: German complacency in the face of violence, leftist impotence in political discourse, and the media's role in each phenomenon.⁵⁶ To this end, Kamerun invokes broadcast media – ARD, ZDF, and public radio among others – and the history of German pop culture to satirize the insufficient German response to xenophobic violence within its borders. To this end, Kamerun's vocals are recorded to tape through an overdriven channel strip, the net effect of which is to submerge his vocals with the sort of static and compression one might hear on a radio broadcast

⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, Jim Morrison experimented with spoken-word delivery on later Doors recordings such as "Ghost Song (1980)."

⁵⁶ Tracks exploring the German response to violence include "6 gegen 60 Millionen" – a reference to Heinrich Böll's essay on RAF terrorist Ulrike Meinhof, "Will Ulrike Gnade oder freies Geleit" – and "Die Bürger von Rostock, Mannheim, etc." Tracks examining the leftist plight include "Schorsch und der Teufel" and "Diese Menschen sind halbwegs ehrlich." Tracks discussing the media include "Menschen machen Fotos gegenseitig" and "Schorsch und der Teufel."

or at a punk house show, where the vocalist's low-wattage speakers clip and distort in an attempt to keep up with the overwhelming of the guitars and drums in a small room.⁵⁷

This twofold evocation finds resonance in Kamerun's lyrical approach. In "Das bißchen Totschlag," Kamerun shifts between two roles: that of a news reporter and that of a leftist critic of German middle class culture. As news reporter in the first two verses, Kamerun's aims are clearly subversive. Throughout the text, he adopts the passive voice typical of media outlets in Germany use to convey impartiality and detachment from the potentially contentious affairs on which they report. The horrors of anti-immigrant and right-wing violence in early 1990s Germany are recounted in a placid, factual manner, with phrases such as "Nachbarn können das bezeugen / Heil Hitler wurde gesagt" belying the shocking dimensions of such a claim. Such a noncommittal, even doubting appraisal of the allegedly nationalist frenzy surrounding attacks on migrant homes in Mölln and Solingen is, Kamerun reminds us, typical of German media outlets at the time.

Kamerun continues his news report with reference to the murder of 27 year-old *Autonomer* Silvio Meyer at the hands of right-wing youth, an event largely stripped of its politically-charged context by mass media: "Sogennanter Autonomer, abgestochen von stolzen Deutschen / verblutet auf den Bahnsteig / mitten in Berlin."⁵⁸ Once again curiously absent from the media narrative is any serious talk of the specters of National Socialism, and Kamerun goes so far in his satire of the media's spinelessness as to portray the perpetrators of these crimes in the same terms as the murdered Silvio Meyer. Maybe, the media insinuates, the outcry against

⁵⁷ This move anticipates Rage Against the Machine's "Vietnow (1996)," a most famous leftist critique of media broadcast.

⁵⁸ As Kamerun's text reminds us, this politically-charged, violent episode was downplayed by the media as "nichts weiter als rivalisierende Jugendbande."

these well-meaning patriots is misplaced.⁵⁹ Clearly, Kamerun doubts the media's ability to take a moral stance on nationalist, right-wing violence.

If the news media cannot be trusted to call a Nazi a Nazi, perhaps the general populace can read between the newspaper lines and curb the violence. This hope, too, is shattered as Kamerun shifts into his second role – that of an acerbic leftist commentator – for the chorus and final verse. Kamerun hones in on his target with the aid of German popular music. Line by line, Kamerun's chorus sarcastically appropriates iconic German songs, beginning with Johanna von Koczian's 1977 hit, "Das bisschen Haushalt... sagt mein Mann."⁶⁰ In the song, von Koczian's character satirizes her husband's total ignorance of the work that goes into domestic life. "Das bisschen Haushalt macht sich von allein / sagt mein Mann / Das bisschen Haushalt / kann so schlimm nicht sein / sagt mein Mann," she declares before going on to lampoon the man's elevated view of self and unwillingness to toil alongside his wife. Invoking von Koczian's spirit of critique, Kamerun begins the chorus with, "Das bißchen Totschlag / bringt uns nicht gleich um," throwing in von Koczian's refrain of "sagt mein Mann" occasionally for good measure. Like the husband in von Koczian's tune, for whom the distinction of a proper office job impairs his ability to empathize with his wife's labor, the people who survived the Third Reich ("wir haben schon schlimmeres gesehen") is unable to grasp the horror of a mere seventeen dead.

Continuing in this vein is the second line – "hier fliegen nicht gleich die Löcher aus dem Käse," a reference to Gottlieb Wendehals' "Polonäse Blankenese (1981)," a favorite of German Fasching-goers since its inception. The tempering addendum of *nicht* undercuts the celebration and revelry present in the original. Things are *not* about to get wild for us ordinary folk; we are

⁵⁹ After all, as Kamerun sarcastically notes, the nationalists faced their share of trials in counter protests, too: "Denn es flogen, nein, keine Brandsätze / aber Eier, und die nicht zu knapp."

⁶⁰ Further underlining this continuity is Kamerun's and von Kocizan's near-identical rhythmic delivery of their respective phrases.

not the targets of violence. We can simply ride this one out.⁶¹ “Take it easy, altes Haus,” Kamerun continues, invoking yet another German popular tune. This time, he cites Truck Stop’s “Take it easy, altes Haus” (1979), a call to indulge in the simple pleasures of sleep and relaxation. Kamerun thusly locates the spirit of Truck Stop’s anthem in the apathy of the German people to xenophobic violence in the 1990s.

Kamerun picks up this pop-culture-driven satire in the third verse to mock the German people for their childlike, hollow response to the violence against migrants. On December 6, 1992, nearly one million Germans gathered in various cities to build *Lichterkette* [chains of lanterns] in memory of the victims, in a spectacle of virtue-signaling essayist Roberto Ohrt describes as “der Wettbewerb der Leuchten.”⁶² Far from being encouraged by this mass vigil, Kamerun denounces the *Lichterkette* as a middle-class pastime. “Pack die Lichterketten ein / nimm dein kleines Schwesterlein,” he intones, wryly equating the demonstration with the free-time activities of German children enumerated in Conny Froboess’ “Pack die Badehose ein” (1951). Reasonably, Kamerun believes such child’s play to be an insufficient response to nationalist violence, a point he further drives home by further satirizing the juvenile behavior of those lantern-bearing Germans. His interjection of nonsense words “rabimmel, rabummel, rabumm” accents his distaste for Germany’s collective shirking of responsibility. The phrase, taken from “Ich geh mit meiner Laterne,” which is traditionally sung by children processing in the public square on the feast of St. Martin, underscores the childlike irresponsibility of the German escapism (“Nun war es amtlich / Mann hatte kolletiv böse geträumt”). For such a crowd,

⁶¹ The official music video released for this track features Kamerun and his bandmates partaking in the life of carefree, rich Hamburg residents, a setting meant to satirize German opulence and escapism in response to domestic crisis.

⁶² See page 5 of the booklet included with *Die Goldenen Zitronen*, “Das bißchen Totschlag (Compact Disc).” (Hamburg: Buback Tonträger, 1994).

Kamerun concludes, the constant reminder of suffering and violence constitutes an annoyance at best. “Ich kann den ganzen Scheiß einfach nicht mehr hören / Laß uns endlich mal zur Tagesordnung übergehen,” Kamerun declares, wrapping the song up in his role as an acerbic critic of middle class culture.

Even though the ordinary German citizen is his primary target in this song, Kamerun does not hesitate to draw attention to the impotence of leftist culture in political discourse. Perhaps most telling is the second verse: “Nazis? Fast. / Autonome, sogenannte, selbsternannte Menschenfreunde.” Where Kamerun-as-media-proponent used the term “Autonomer” in the first verse to refer to murdered leftist Silvio Meyer, the term’s reoccurrence in the second verse to refer to the perpetrators of xenophobic violence symbolizes the cooption of leftist vocabulary so troubling to Diederichsen by a more powerful cultural force: German populism. More concerning than the ascendance of the far right, according to the following lines, is that that particular faction had begun to position itself as virtuous and brave in the face of hate from leftists, who, according to Kamerun’s satirical media report, are easily lumped in with “Mißbräuchlern und Schmaroztern” seeking asylum.

Rediscovering the Spirit of '68 in '94

As a title track, “Das bißchen Totschlag” sets up the three greatest lyrical targets for Kamerun and company: the mass media, the failure of leftist political discourse, and the apathetic masses complicit in the ills of reunited Germany. Though the band takes a closer look at these topics individually on subsequent tracks, the interrelation of these themes is most clearly stated in a title track that is at once both innately relatable for a German audience and deeply critical of the German political landscape. Despite its ultimately dismal subject matter, the

opener features at least one muffled voice – screaming behind Kamerun’s-as-leftist-critic’s chorus line: “Totschlag!” – determined to get to the bottom of this what ails the nation.

Die Goldenen Zitronen’s persiflage of Germany’s apathetic, nationalist-enabling attitude towards political developments continues with a series of tracks exploring the dimensions of popular response to nationalist, anti-immigrant violence overtop of riotous, punk, funk, and hip-hop-hybrid instrumentals. “6 gegen 60 Millionen” reveals the hypocrisy of German silence in the face of Rostock and Mölln by recalling the nation’s exaggerated response to the RAF famously captured by Heinrich Böll’s essay on Ulrike Meinhof and Axel Springer published in *Der Spiegel*.⁶³ “Ein Paar verwöhnte Kinder, ein Paar Expositionen / Eine andere Sprache sprach aus ihrer Hysterie / denn ob es Million würden war durchaus nicht klar”, reminisces Kamerun, rhetorically wondering why the public outcry surrounding the RAF’s violence has not been revived by the horrors of nationalist violence. While the imprisoned and “*ermordet oder geselbstmordet*” domestic terrorists bear witness to the strong and merciless German state, no such crackdown has been visited upon contemporary purveyors of nationalist violence.⁶⁴ “Pogrome sind Sport hier traditionell,” notes Kamerun acerbically on “Die Bürger von Rostock, Mannheim etc.,” a track that continues an exposition of Germany’s lingering xenophobic tendencies in graphic, uncompromising, and largely sarcastic terms.

In the course of lampooning the German middle class throughout the record, Kamerun occasionally focuses his ire his fellow leftists, many of whom have grown politically complacent

⁶³ Heinrich Böll, “Will Ulrike Gnade oder freies Geleit?” *Der Spiegel* (January 10, 1972), accessed March 15, 2017: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43019376.html>.

⁶⁴ The German words for murder [*Mord*] and suicide [*Selbstmord*] are distinguished only by the latter’s prefix, “*Selbst-*,” meaning self. While *Mord* exists as a verb in a variety of forms, including *gemordet*, *Selbstmord* does not. Like in English, one does not “suicide” oneself, one commits suicide [*Selbstmord begehen*]. Thus, Kamerun’s neologism – *geselbstmordet* – reflects suspicion that the German government had murdered imprisoned *Rote Armee Fraktion* said to have committed suicide.

after integration into the middle class. “Diese Menschen sind halbwegs ehrlich” serves as a mocking challenge to the left, whose newfound wealth and security compromise their political ideals. While the sarcastic manner in which Kamerun depicts the ordinary middle-class German life cycle leaves no doubt as to his contempt for such people, the chorus reveals his tempered admiration for their steadfast commitment to populist principles. Shouting over the self-same organ patch that dominates the title track, Kamerun declares: “Diese Menschen sind halbwegs ehrlich / und somit sind sie gefährlich.” Implied here is not only that his fellow leftists have lost their sense of honesty, rendering themselves powerless to impact German society and politics, but that the mass of ordinary citizens are much more dangerous political actors in light of their unwavering conviction.⁶⁵

Similarly, “Menschen machen Fotos gegenseitig,” a German-language cover of The Kinks’ “People Take Pictures of Each Other” (1968) memorializes the decline of leftism in Germany. “Menschen machen Fotos von dem Sommer / damit bloß niemand mißtrausch zweifelt / um zu beweisen, daß er wirklich da war,” takes on a political hue in the context of *Das bißchen Totschlag*, with Kamerun insinuating that, were it not for their pictures of bygone days, leftists would have nary a way of proving their commitment to the cause. Kamerun’s request in the refrain – “bitte zeig’ sie mir nicht mehr” – constitutes perhaps the most pointed critique of the left on the album: a wearied frustration at the left’s immobilizing nostalgia.

Rounding out the trio of themes is “Schorsch und der Teufel,” in which Kamerun entertains the notion of signing Die Goldenen Zitronen to a major-label contract. While the media, particularly the news media, is implicated in the band’s other critiques (“Das bißchen

⁶⁵ Diedrich Diederichsen notes in “Fünf gegen 80 Millionen” that the band’s harsh criticism of the middle class, media, and leftists alike stems not solely from a rage against their objects of derision, but from a desire to instill in the band’s audience a modicum of knowledge.

Totschlag, 6 gegen 60 millionen”), this track hones in on the tension between artist and airwaves. As Diedrich Diederischen notes, Kamerun has managed to avoid the Faustian temptation of “Ruhm, Geld, Unabhängigkeit.”⁶⁶ This seems to have been a rather easy decision, in fact, as evidenced by the lighthearted Motown instrumentation, cheery xylophone lines, and classic Kamerunian sarcasm. “Rebellion! Aufruhr! Schocken! / Guck doch mal wie sie durchs Stadion rocken,” shouts Kamerun, simultaneously describing and dismissing the archetypical major-label rock act as a grotesque farce. An anti-capitalist, anti-digital band that has so clearly moved beyond the realm of rock and roll clearly has little to gain from such a business association.⁶⁷

Though taken as a whole, *Das bißchen Totschlag* constitutes an abrupt musical and thematic departure from Die Goldenen Zitronen’s fun punk roots, the ensemble’s characteristically carefree, kynical spirit undergirds the entire record. The funk and Motown of cuts like “Schorsch und der Teufel” remind the listener that, although the overall musical character of the record has evolved significantly, Kamerun and his bandmates have not lost their ability to musically convey their contempt for mainstream culture in a sly and witty manner. However, the album’s predominant musical characteristics – hip-hop-laden, angst-driven, angular rock – throw the spotlight on the band’s intensified commitment to radical leftist principles that extend beyond the contrary anti-authoritarianism associated with punk. The end result is a record that condemns in musically and lyrically appropriate terms the rise of populism and the decay of social morality in Germany, a reality for which both neo-Nazis and complacent

⁶⁶ Die Goldenen Zitronen, “Schorsch und der Teufel.”

⁶⁷ As attentive fans might notice, Die Goldenen Zitronen have very little regard for the direction of the major label-controlled music industry. The insert of the CD booklet features an essay by Peter Wacha decrying how digital media – an industry in its infancy at the time of the album’s release – is allowing for the consolidation and homogenization of art under the auspices of major labels. While the essay relies heavily on the audiophile argument against digital technology, it does entertain the potential for resistance in the form of a digital underground.

leftists are responsible. A return to the unrest and protest of 1968 is, in Die Goldenen Zitronen's view, both a shot in the arm for the disempowered left and the antidote to populism. In this light, the copious allusions to 1960s and 1970s Schlager in the title track take on added significance. Kamerun recalls these songs – undoubtedly derided by 1968ers at the time of their release as hallmarks of an oblivious and shallow mainstream culture – to convict the self-same 1968ers of their complicity and complacency in the crisis of the early 1990s. Likewise, the CD booklet's visual resemblance to revolutionary leaflets, its inclusion of essays by leftist contributors, and its twin-page spread of iconic images of revolution make clear the band's desire to revive the political spirit of 1968.

Commercial Liedermacher: Love Over Politics

While Kamerun and company were laying the groundwork for *Das bißchen* Totschlag in the studio, Sven Regener and his band, Element of Crime, burst onto the German pop scene with 1993's *Weißes Papier*. Following up 1991's *Damals hinterm Mond* – the band's first German-language record after a handful of English-language ones – and a series of dates opening for Germany's paragon of stadium rock, Herbert Grönemeyer, *Weißes Papier* marked Element of Crime's first appearance in the German album charts. Twenty-three years and eight studio albums later, the band has cemented itself as one of the premier folk-rock acts in the German-speaking world, with one festival billing Regener's band "Deutschlands führende Liedermacher-Kultkapelle."⁶⁸

Whether Element of Crime truly continues in the Liedermacher tradition of 1960s artists such as Wolf Biermann and Franz Josef Degenhardt or not is not so apparent. Musically, the

⁶⁸ See, for example, the program for 2015's Rudolstadt-Festival: <https://rudolstadt-festival.de/de/programm/artistdetail/artist/element-of-crime/bp/p131/ba/a32.html>.

connection to Liedermacher is readily traceable. Though *Weißes Papier* is built on a seamless interweaving of various musical styles, the folk-style guitar central to *Liedermacher* compositions remains the starting point for each and every track. Employing a full-band, Regener reimagines the Liedermacher with a variety of musical futures. A bluesy ballad graced with accordion (“Immer unter Strom”), a somber Latin waltz replete with horns (“Du hast die Wahl”), a soaring, slide-guitar-driven Britpop number (“Schwere See”), a minor-key polka (“Mehr als sie erlaubt”): all are brought together quite seamlessly under the chief hallmark of the Liedermacher tradition: direct, personable, folk-influenced story-telling. A few factors disrupt the band’s endeavor to blend genres – drummer Richard Pappik, for instance, plays a kit suited for more aggressive forms of rock music – but by and large, *Weißes Papier* succeeds as a compendium of variations on the *Liedermacher* theme. Doubtlessly, the positive commercial reception to *Weißes Papier* encouraged the band to stick closely to this musical formula on subsequent records.

Despite convincing musical commonalities, the Liedermacher tradition and Element of Crime largely part ways in the lyrical arena. Where Degenhardt’s “schöne Poesie ist Krampf im Klassenkampf” was emblematic of the *Liedermacher* in the 1960s, Regener is clear about *Weißes Papier*’s poetic, apolitical intentions.⁶⁹ “Ich werd nie mehr so rein und so dumm sein / wie weißes Papier,” he sings on the title track, bemoaning his loss of comfort, security, and identity in the wake of a breakup. This cynical detachment – from love, from politics, from the outside world – is the order of the day. Whether this is because Regener, too, feels the leftist political movement behind the original *Liedermacher* has lost its moral authority or relevance, or because Regener’s emotional affairs take precedent in his music is not entirely clear. Interviews with

⁶⁹ Katharina Götsch, *Linke Liedermacher*. (Innsbruck: Limbus Verlag, 2007), 36.

Regener seem to suggest the latter, though a closer examination of his literature and lyrics indicate Regener is hardly politically uninvolved.⁷⁰

Regardless, *Weißes Papier* constitutes a fascinating break with the overtly political lyrical lineage of Liedermacher. Like Die Goldenen Zitronen's "Das bisschen Totschlag," the title track serves as a lyrical roadmap for the remainder of the record, examining Regener's journey to process the end of a romantic relationship. "Weißes Papier" finds Regener at the outset of this journey, wryly engaging in a futile attempt to fully reclaim all traces of his physical existence from his ex-lover. "Ich nehm deine Katze und schüttel sie aus / Bis alles herausfällt / Was sie jemals aus meiner Hand fraß / Später klopfe ich noch den Teppich aus / Und finde ich ein Haar von mir darin / Dann stecke ich es einfach ein," he sings, using such inconsequential details to illustrate the all-consuming intertwinement he has been forced to leave behind.

Where Kamerun and Gaier sketch out current events and cultural trends, Regener weaves brief, detailed narratives into a deeply introspective treatise on suffering. On "Mehr als sie erlaubt," Regener's old lover is revealed through metaphor and idiom to be a sinister agent: "Was fällt dir ein, zu ihr zu sagen, sie wär niedlich/ Sie hat die Niedlichkeit eines jungen Wolfs/ Ihr Gemüt ist alles andere als friedlich/ Für ihre Zunge braucht sie einen Waffenschein." The idyllic *Hansestadt* life lampooned in the music video for "Das bisschen Totschlag" is transformed on "Schwere See" into the location of Regener's most painful memories. A luxurious meal onboard a private boat sees Regener seasick at the thought of his impending loss: "Und während ich schon krank bin / Und den Fischen was zu essen bringe... / Trinkst Wein und lachst so laut / Als ob du's extra machst."

⁷⁰ Citing interviews, Andrew Hurley contends in *Into the Groove: Popular Music and Contemporary German Fiction* (Rochester: Camden House, 2015) that "Regener eschews the political in his artistic practice," though my previous chapter on Regener's literary appraisal of the State should give the reader ample opportunity to question this claim (57).

Considering the variety of styles, tempos, and keys represented on *Weißes Papier*, it is curious that Kamerun remains locked in a perpetual state of misery and despair. He requires no particular type of accompaniment to set the mood; no matter what sort of tune is playing in the background, the agenda remains melancholic introspection. Waltz, shuffle, ballad; blues, folk, stadium rock, polka – Regener’s hapless protagonist barely bats an eye. Such a pronounced disparity between instrumentalists and lyricist would doubtless raise questions of compatibility for another band. However, the contrast between musical diversity and lyrical fixation on *Weißes Papier* has its roots in the budding literary ambitions of Sven Regener. In fitting his protagonist’s tale of heartbreak to each and every stylistic shift with which his bandmates present him, Regener reinforces the band’s role as accompaniment to the unfolding of a literary narrative. From the marching groove of “Mehr als sie erlaubt” to brooding arpeggios of “Schwere See;” from the plucky organ hits of “Sperr mich ein” to the peaceful lullaby of “Das alles kommt mit,” Regener’s protagonist remains admirably steadfast in his misery. The most flexibility Regener allows is in his vocal delivery, changing his singing style to match stylistic shifts. Notable instances of this include “Schwere See,” where Regener employs a hushed *Sprechgesang* to mimic the physical exhaustion of his seasick protagonist, and “Und du wartest,” where Regener’s delivery is at once both shrill and husky, hinting at the lonely aging process that awaits his protagonist should he wait for his departed lover to return. Element of Crime’s refusal to bend text to music or music to text should not be seen as a mere breach of musical convention. This disruption plays a vital role in preserving the literary character of Regener’s lyrics, preventing the listener from mistakenly identifying music and text as a singular entity.

The Loser, *Tunix*, and Escape from Politics

A closer look at Regener's lovelorn lyrical subject further underlines *Weißes Papier*'s uniquely literary character. Most apparent is that the record's unnamed protagonist has much in common with the protagonist of *Herr Lehmann* (2003). As Thomas Groß notes, both Regener the author and Regener the lyricist profess a deep interest in the "loser."⁷¹ Where the eponymous Herr Lehmann – who is, one must recall, Frank Lehmann from *Neue Vahr Süd* nine years hence – is conferred the title of "loser" for his lack of social status, the nameless protagonist of *Weißes Papier* is one who has lost – in this case, his lover, and, perhaps, his sense of self.⁷² Despite these distinct forms of loss and loserdom, we can find early iterations of *Herr Lehmann*'s themes and motifs. "Und du wartest" features variations on the line "Kommt Zeit / kommt Rat / kommt Vater Staat," cited by Herr Lehmann at the close of the novel, while "Du hast die Wahl" deals cursorily with the *Nichtschwimmerbecken*, one of Herr Lehmann's many objects of wonderment (HL 278, 74).

Indeed, this continuity between Regener's early-90s lyrical exploits with Element of Crime and his writing career a decade later suggests the band is not an earnest attempt to carry the Liedermacher torch into new sonic territory but a sonic dressing for Regener's budding literary ambitions. Like Die Goldenen Zitronen, Element of Crime have refashioned old forms to serve their narrative aims. Kamerun and company instrumentalize hip-hop, funk, and punk rock to levy charges of fascism, negligence, moral temerity, and mindless consumerism at society, creating a sonic concoction as sharp and fresh as their lyrical insight. In taking up the musical stylings of 1960s Liedermacher, Element of Crime attest to the same necessity to locate the

⁷¹ Hurley 64.

⁷² See Sven Regener, *Herr Lehmann* (Munich: Goldmann, 2001), 54 [hereafter: HL] for the scene in which Lehmann protests his designation as loser for his choice of employment and lifestyle, professing a deep enjoyment of full-time bartending.

present through the past. Yet Regener, so thoroughly preoccupied with his own personal suffering, leaves no room on *Weißes Papier* for mention of the political turmoil of Mölln and Rostock. The political urgency of Degenhardt and Reinhardt Mey has been hollowed out in the service of what one might well deem a more narrow, introspective, ultimately commercial end.

Upon further inspection of the loser in *Herr Lehmann* and *Weißes Papier*, however, Regener's seemingly apolitical thrust takes on an understated political significance. In his review of *Herr Lehmann*'s film adaptation, Daniel Haas of *Spiegel Online* echoed a common sentiment about Regener's loser archetype: "[Herr Lehmann] mag viel trinken, sich prügeln und unglücklich lieben - wirklich dramatisch ist dies alles nicht. Mehr ein Mäandern durch das Berliner Nachtleben kurz vor dem Mauerfall; ein harmloses Dümpeln im ewig gleichen Trott der ausgedehnten Adoleszenz."⁷³ What Haas dismisses as a humdrum treatment of prolonged adolescence might, in fact, be better understood as a clever literary attempt to recapture the last vestiges of the *Tunix* movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

In the wake of the student movement of the 1960s, a new generation of disaffected German youths devised a new method of resistance.⁷⁴ With 1978's *Tunix-Treffen*, the combatting of "authoritarian structures of mainstream society" begun by the 68ers took on a new look (API 86). Headed by the Spontis, a group that eschewed the "theoretical discourse and organized protest" of the student movement for its lack of historical results, the countercultural youth of the late 1970s represented at the *Tunix-Treffen* saw the creation of a utopian alterity as their best chance at undercutting traditional power structures (API 85). In its literature, the *Tunix* movement presents an alternative to both "mainstream society and the... generation of the

⁷³ Daniel Haas, "Viel Bier, wenig Dramatik." *Spiegel Online* (October 10, 2003). Accessed March 15, 2017: <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/herr-lehmann-viel-bier-wenig-dramatik-a-267967.html>

⁷⁴ Sabine von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination: The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 67 [hereafter: API].

student movement,” proclaiming “resistance as a mode of passive withdrawal (API 112, 115).” The new generation of disaffected youth has withdrawn from the futility of revolution and the drudgery of the mainstream to the beachfront commune of *Tunix*.

It is precisely this alterity that Herr Lehmann inhabits: the Kreuzberg dive bar scene is his utopian seashore. Sponti signifiers abound in the text, with Herr Lehmann and his companions’ frequent witticisms – “alles, was über Bier hinaus geht ist falsch” – recalling tongue-in-cheek Sponti aphorisms (HL 5). Lehmann’s chief mode of engagement with the world around him is, as Tilman Spreckelsen notes, one of refusal to engage. “Der auf ihn einstürmenden Welt begegnet er am liebsten mit Sprachkritik, weil diese Form der Auseinandersetzung garantiert folgenlos bleibt,” he notes in his review for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁷⁵ Like the Spontis he recalls, Lehmann is committed to passivity, not out of ignorance, but out of necessity.⁷⁶ The one time Lehmann takes direct action in the narrative, he ends up being attacked by the unruly bar patron he had been attempting to escort out of the bar (HL 99). The bothersome cost of his intervention is symbolized in his prone form, lying in a puddle on the streets of Kreuzberg while the much more physically imposing Karl handles the disturbance (HL 100). While Herr Lehmann’s laughable combat skills serve to reinforce his loser status, the incident cleverly enough recalls the Tunixian declaration that “Tunix celebrates falling down as a

⁷⁵ Tilman Spreckelsen, “Verwirrt, träge, und verliebt” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (August 11, 2001). Accessed March 15, 2017: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton/buecher/rezensionen/belletristik/rezension-belletristik-verwirrt-traege-und-verliebt-133082.html>

⁷⁶ While Arno Widmann recognizes the elements of Sponti thought in Herr Lehmann that elude Haas, he believes the revolutionary momentum of *Tunix*’ initial years no longer exists by the time *Herr Lehmann* takes place. “Es ist ein kluges, zartes Buch, das mit seinem Helden, einem Musterexemplar jenes Kneipenmilieus, in dem der Widerstand der siebziger Jahre sich längst in nichts als träges Beharrungsvermögen gewandelt hatte” (see “Vom Nachttisch geräumt” *Perlentaucher.de* (September 25, 2002). Accessed March 15, 2017: <https://www.perlentaucher.de/vom-nachttisch-geraeumt/25-09-2002/nachttisch-teil-1.html#a5>.

pleasurable process” (API 115). The designation of loser is of no consequence to a member of the movement, for “Tunix means, in the words of Paul Scheerbart, denial of everything and staying precisely where one is,” in Herr Lehmann’s case, a puddle (API 115). This episode also serves as further support for passivity as a mode of political action. Just as active opposition to an aggressive customer poses the risk of harm to Lehmann, so too does organized revolution endanger the revolutionary on both physical and existential levels. The Sponti sees beyond the dichotomy of subservience and rebellion, withdrawing from the ceaseless conflict to a utopian space of calm, camaraderie, and charm like the Tunixian bar around which *Herr Lehmann*’s narrative revolves.

Even though a second glance at the titular “loser” finds him drawing on the tenets of Tunix, *Herr Lehmann* ultimately stands as a portrait of the fading embers of the Sponti moment. For *Herr Lehmann* is not, ultimately, a defense of *Tunix* but a memorial to its legacy. Regener has, twelve years hence, traced the death of the Spontis’ political ideals back to the fall of the Wall. In glibly building his narrative up to this historical moment, only to have a drunken protagonist wholly unable to process its import, Regener offers a most fitting tribute to the *Sponti* spirit of disengagement and contrarianism even as its embers burn out entirely.

With the novel’s ending, the drunken protagonist is left wondering what will become of his idyllic urban alterity. Kreuzberg, once effectively hemmed in on three sides by the Wall, is no longer an isolated, neutral space for non-participants. The ambiguity of the coming decade, with its vastly different political realities is, predictably, lost on Herr Lehmann. “Ich geh erst einmal los... Der Rest wird sich schon ergeben,” Herr Lehmann decides (HL 285). As this, the very last sentence of the novel indicates, the Sponti ideal can and must persist across distinct historical moments. The only question remaining is the how.

While Regener the novelist does not address this question, Regener the musician embodies the answer to this question in a most striking manner. With Berlin no longer a physical haven for non-participation, Regener locates a viable alterity in the arts. Heeding Marcel Reich-Ranicki's call for a "return to belles lettres" that "[does] not succumb to the politicization of literature the student movement demanded," Regener delivers a classically poetic record in *Weißes Papier* (API 74-75). Where *Herr Lehmann* sees its protagonist let out his frustration with the world on his distant lover – "eigentlich rede ich mit dem Rest der Welt, und sie bekommt es ab" – *Weißes Papier* is a private epistle to an estranged partner that, unable to be delivered to her doorstep, is sent out instead to the world at large on compact disk (HL 57). This focus and approach is in keeping with the doctrine of new subjectivity, a source of inspiration for the Sponti movement, which, in the words of Reich-Ranicki, requires "the representation of the individual's suffering in the contemporary world" (API 74). Certainly, *Weißes Papier* is nothing if not a lyrical exploration of heartbreak in the Zeitgeist of mid-90s folk-influenced adult contemporary.

While this album-length treatise on individual suffering sets Element of Crime at odds with artists like Die Goldenen Zitronen, who insist on the primacy of addressing collective suffering, it preserves with great success the ideals of New Subjectivity and *Tunix* within the context of updating the *Liedermacher* sound. While this necessarily opens Element of Crime up to claims of appropriating *Liedermacher* tradition for commercial purposes, Regener finds plausible vindication in a most eerily symbolic manner. The Bremen native's musical re-housing of the Tunixian spirit in a spin-off of *Liedermacher* taps into a central motif of the original *Tunix* flyer: the Bremetown Musicians. Explaining the symbolism of the traditional folk story, von Dirke states that "[The tale] highlights key elements of the alternative culture's understanding of

itself: social marginalization, resistance (or is it escape, we may want to ask), and solidarity” (API 114). She goes on to add that “[The Brementown Musicians] do not put up any active resistance to the capitalist value system... but instead they quietly retreat and try to find a niche for themselves” (API 115). Regener, quite literally a Brementown musician by birth and by trade, respectively, carries on the spirit of the Brementown musicians invoked by *Tunix*’ symbolic discourse in his Element of Crime project.

Regener’s revitalization of the *Liedermacher* tradition in particular provides one further continuity with the tale of the Brementown Musicians, his rescue of a long-forgotten musical tradition evoking the animals’ ability to preserve themselves past their owners’ declarations that they were too old to be of any use. As the animals were required to find new modes of self-preservation in their old age, so too was Regener compelled to replace the worn-out political motor of *Liedermacher* past with an alternative discourse more suited to self-preservation in the post-unification political landscape.⁷⁷ Given the fall of the Wall and the political turmoil of Mölln and Rostock, the physical spaces of West Berlin memorialized in *Herr Lehmann* could no longer fulfill that need, so Regener and his band turned from physical to conceptual locations. Regener’s pursuit of art as a post-unification alterity is made quite clear in his conceptualization of both *Herr Lehmann* and *Weißes Papier* as an antidote to the troubling political developments of the early 1990s. Die Goldenen Zitronen, for their part, decry Regener’s brand of cynical escapism as a concession to fascist elements tearing at the fabric of German society. Art’s role is, in their view, not a safe haven from political and existential dangers, but a formidable tool for

⁷⁷ As von Dirke notes, “The [Spontis] criticized [the strategies of the student movement] as suffocating the imagination... ‘For years we believe that actions according to the motto of “Do away with...” and “Tear down...” would bring about change.” With the student movement’s failure painfully apparent to the Spontis, recalibrating resistance took the form of alterity: “Instead of getting mixed up in a traditional mode of resistance, we want not only to discuss new modes of opposition but to practice them already in the way we conduct our meeting” (API 119).

resistance. The left's decline can be traced back to their turn from the ethos of an angry, organized student movement to peaceful, self-exempting *Tunix*. While the latter may have proved a more desirable or even sustainable ideal, it has blood on its hands for its refusal to engage in the exhausting and costly arena of political discourse.

Aesthetic Practice and Political Possibilities

To some readers, the focus on Sven Regener and Schorsch Kamerun in this thesis may at first seem arbitrary or even suspect. However, as a closer look shows, these works offer critical and clever insight into age-old questions of subjectivity and politics. In both literature and recorded music, Regener and Kamerun proffer competing models of the political at a moment in time where the room for agency in popular culture has shrunk dramatically. Beginning with their novels, we are introduced to the problem of subject formation vis a vis the state in the 1980s, where school, church, family, and civil service conspire to shape youth into the mold of responsible, patriotic, and productive adults. Doubtlessly remembering their own upbringings, our authors travel back in time from the 21st century to provide coming of age tales with competing solutions to the political and social realities of 1980s West Germany. After examining these novels, we turn to a moment in these authors' music careers in the early 1990s where not only the political realities that defined their literary subjects have shifted drastically – from divided German to reunification, from fear of nuclear violence to a renewed bout of domestic terrorism – but also, as Diedrich Diederichsen shows, the subversive potential of popular culture has been comprehensively redirected to serve the interests of hegemonic culture.

In response to the stifling character of their upbringings, Kamerun's and Regener's protagonists tap into historicized methods of resistance: kynicism and cynicism. Kamerun's

Tommi adopts the spirit of Diogenes, transgressing physically and verbally against the bourgeois order of his seaside town of Bimmelsdorf. Having successfully pushed back against the formative powers of school, family, and class, he faces one last adversary: state-mandated military service. This proves an inconsequential obstacle for Tommi, who, equal parts subversive and principled, successfully defends his case as a conscientious objector before the army's appeals board. Having conquered the state's last defenses, Tommi slips away from Bimmelsdorf to join the leftist artist community in Hamburg. Regener's Frank, for his part, is forced to enlist for military service after forgetting to file a conscientious objection. Despite this oversight, Frank is hardly interested in conformity. Nor does he see the use of Tommi's brand of leftist rebellion. Endowed with the cynic's tools of resistance, a sharp mind, a sharper tongue, and a deep distaste for participation, Frank makes clear his desire to escape the confines of political discourse entirely. After a few miserable months of constant supervision, ceaseless orders, and firsthand experiences of the military's deeply violent nature, Frank fakes a suicide attempt in order to gain release from his term of service. Freeing himself from the mandates of political discourse through such a deeply symbolic act, Frank set off to West Berlin to reinvent himself away from the competing interests of state and revolutionaries.

Occupied by many of the same concerns as the novels' protagonists, Regener's and Kamerun's bands pick up in the early 1990s where their novels' protagonists leave off. Kamerun's erstwhile fun-punk band, Die Goldenen Zitronen, fashion a formidable funk, hip-hop, and rock hybrid on 1994's *Das bißchen Totschlag* that draws on the same kynical mode introduced in Kamerun's novel. Like Tommi, the band offers absolutely no quarter to the values and norms of hegemonic German society, espousing instead the tenets of leftist resistance. While musically proclaiming solidarity with oppressed minorities in the Anglosphere, Kamerun and

fellow lyricist Ted Gaier excoriate the negligent media, the complacent middle class, and ineffectual old-guard leftists for their failure to protect vulnerable migrant and guest worker populations from nationalist violence. To solve the twin conundrum of violent xenophobia and national apathy, *Das bißchen Totschlag* invokes a spirit of organized resistance that harkens most recently back to the West German student movement of 1968.

In this same moment of national political upheaval, Regener's folk-influenced adult contemporary band, Element of Crime, present a fully realized cynic's vision with 1993's *Weißes Papier*. In juxtaposing the album-long tale of a heartbroken young man with the musical gestures of the 1960s *Liedermacher* tradition, *Weißes Papier* serves as a no-confidence vote in the supposed panacea of revolutionary re-dedication. Absent any mention of the political turmoil raging around him, Regener's lyrical repudiation of the *Liedermacher*'s revolutionary praxis points to the freedom possible in quietism. Setting *Weißes Papier* in dialogue with Regener's first novel, it becomes apparent that Regener has great admiration for the Sponti movement's principled non-participation; both novel and album, with their shared focus on the cynical "loser," offer a roadmap for a life beyond the adversarial politics that have come to dominate German society.

Lost in the tension between Kamerun's praxis – from Tommi's vandalism to Die Goldenen Zitronen's calls for revolution – and Regener's theory – encapsulated by Frank's aloof cynicism and *Weißes Papier*'s apolitical ethics – is the way in which both political approaches dovetail. While Kamerun's condemnation of complacent dissidents and Regener's disdain for overt revolutionary practice may seem irreconcilable, the commonalities in their approaches to the political hint at a new possibilities for resistance. Both have a high estimation of history's ability to inform present-day action, their narratives and albums tapping into long-established

lines of political thought and action that can, at the very latest, be traced back to 1968. Most importantly, both approach the past with a critical eye, aware that to simply imitate Sponti or student movement practices could only lead to the reproduction of their failures.

This begins with each recognizing what Adorno sees as the need to synthesize praxis with theory. “The Archimedian point—how might a nonrepressive praxis be possible, how might one steer between the alternatives of spontaneity and organization—this point, if it exists at all, cannot be found other than through theory,” he writes in “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” repudiating those headstrong activists who would pursue Marx’s call to change the world too hastily.⁷⁸ Though Schorsch Kamerun is most easily typecast as an avid and practitioner of organized rebellion in the mold of 1968, his artistic texts and music show a commitment to the development and dissemination of a new leftist theory. *Das bißchen Totschlag*’s equal disregard for middle class and leftist establishment alike testifies to Kamerun’s willingness to revise the revolutionary praxis of 1968, while the political leaflet included as a CD booklet, with its consideration of identity politics, ideology, technology, and statist violence offers a revised theoretical model for the future of leftist praxis.

Likewise, in invoking the Sponti movement, Sven Regener’s distaste for the praxis of revolutionaries like Kamerun cannot be reduced to cynicism or quietism. Instead, he realizes the urgency of rethinking a malfunctioned praxis in the struggle to muster consequential resistance.⁷⁹ “Whereas praxis promises to lead people out of their self-isolation, praxis itself has always been isolated,” Adorno declares, something to which Frank’s inability to stomach his peers’ self-

⁷⁸ Theodor Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 814.

⁷⁹ “Thinking is a doing, theory a form of praxis; already the ideology of the purity of thinking deceives about this” (Adorno 781).

indulgent revolutionary ambitions bears witness.⁸⁰ Instead of an isolating praxis, Regener conceptualizes a practical isolation in his works. Frank Lehmann's character in *Neue Vahr Süd* and *Herr Lehmann* is not simply a relatable cynic or a sympathetic "loser," but the unsuspecting creator of a blueprint for an alterity that, unencumbered by the endlessly self-replicating war between state and revolutionary, has a secure space from which to rethink praxis entirely.

Aesthetic practice, however, which cannot be collapsed into the philosophy and politics of Adorno's binary, has the final say in matters of art. While Regener, particularly in his novels, proves more adept at occupying a political space between spontaneity and organization Regener, Kamerun's aesthetic approach lends itself more readily to the formation of subjectivity and offers a more compelling possibility for resistance. Where Regener and Element of Crime are content to continue, without particular invention, in the singular tradition of German-language folk music, Kamerun and his bandmates synthesize the lyrics of Schlager, the rhythm section of funk, the guitar work of punk, and the vocal delivery of hip-hop with the disruptive, provocative spirit of the avant-garde that demands the careful attention of its listeners.

With *Das bißchen Totschlag*, Die Goldenen Zitronen have created an aesthetic experience at once jarring and memorable, one that forces listeners to critically engage with the historical and spatial dimensions of the record. *Weißes Papier*'s folk pastiche does not similarly challenge its listeners with aesthetic innovations or forays into unfamiliar music traditions, nor do Regener's lyrics or vocal delivery highlight the album's thematic content. Stuck in the aesthetic paradigm of standardized, commercial music, Regener's insights into Adornian resistance are at risk of being overshadowed by these non-descript aesthetic qualities, something *Das bißchen Totschlag* actively and wholeheartedly combats with distorted organ and atonal

⁸⁰ Adorno 777.

guitar lines. If *Weißes Papier* can so easily be reduced to background noise on the basis of its familiar, noninvasive aesthetic qualities, its potential for fostering subjectivity is immediately endangered. In this task, the disruptive aesthetic practice of *Das bißchen Totschlag* is far more likely to succeed both in rejuvenating political praxis and freeing artistic practice from the standardization and commodification of Pop II.

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