

Poetic Writing  
and the Vietnam War  
in West Germany

ON FIRE

Mererid Pw Davies



 **UCLPRESS**

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Er Cof am Catrin Puw Davies ac Edward Roger Llewelyn Davies



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# Introduction: on fire

In the 1960s and 1970s in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, newspaper readers and television viewers were appalled by terrible images of fires burning half a world away. Especially following the escalation in 1963 of US engagement in Vietnam, and until it ended in 1975, news coverage about it often focused on spectacular, destructive conflagrations ignited by hi-tech machines of war. In response, West German opposition to the conflict in Vietnam came to real prominence from around 1965–66, and reached a high point in 1968. The phenomenon which in Vietnam is called the American War, and in Germany and elsewhere the Vietnam War, was a decisive catalyst too for the wider protest movements that in many ways defined the era.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as the 1960s went on, the Vietnam conflict became the subject, at least nominally, of many of the West German Extra-Parliamentary Opposition's most significant political events. It gave rise to an ardent anti-war discourse, in which writing in many forms was privileged. In this textual culture, poetry was key and its dominant trope was fire.

Hundreds of poems and related writings about Vietnam circulated in the FRG.<sup>2</sup> In part, these poems were the product of a culture that accorded a particular and traditional prestige to literature. As a result, in the Federal Republic, literary writers and intellectuals could be remarkably prominent public figures and commentators. This context helps to explain why individuals who wanted to write in protest against the war in Vietnam often turned to the distinctively literary form of poetry, which seemed to invest their words with value. Yet paradoxically, most West German anti-war poems are almost entirely forgotten today. This lack of posterity is due in part to the fact that in many cases, they were written by young, emerging or unknown poets. But it is due also to long-standing beliefs, both in the critical mainstream and on the New Left, about the incompatibility of art and politics.<sup>3</sup> Those views derived from the German precept, established through centuries, that true art exists in a separate realm from, and remains untouched by, politics and

history. Consequently, both traditional and anti-authoritarian observers and critics were minded to dismiss poetry that aimed to intervene in contemporary history as a contradiction in terms, and hence bound to fail poetically, politically or both.

Nor could many readers perceive literary or aesthetic qualities in the wider textuality of protest, despite the fact that some strands within it, at least, had deep roots in the aesthetic avant-gardes of the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Those movements had at their heart a challenge to the traditional, supposed separation of 'Macht' ['power'] and 'Geist' ['intellect'], and of life and art, an impulse that also underpinned segments of West German protest. Thus, the protest movements generated an important, complex textual culture which can be read through a poetic lens. Simultaneously, however, such writing was often illegible to a conventional criticism which remained invested in the idea that different kinds of discourse and genres are tightly bounded, and thus always identifiable as either clearly artistic or non-artistic.

This book takes a more flexible view, in order to uncover and explore some of the era's rich poetic production, to present a new history of engaged poetry in the FRG in the 1960s and 1970s and to draw out distinctive characteristics of wider protest textuality. Furthermore, this monograph offers a case study for reflection on the representation of war, on ways in which German oppositional culture could imagine its others and on the relationship of poetry to the historical world. In doing so, more implicitly, it makes the case for attending to marginal, non-canonical or neglected literary and cultural forms, and for critical thinking about why they might, over time, have been obscured. This introduction first sets out why this inquiry matters; second, it presents some of the ideas and methods which inform it; and third, it clarifies some of its terms. Fourth, and finally, these opening reflections indicate how the book's arguments will unfold.

## On war

In examining often occluded poetry and related texts about Vietnam, this study both augments and rewrites the literary and cultural history of both the West German protest movements in particular and the FRG in general.<sup>5</sup> It argues that far from being uninterested in poetic writing, the protest movements made a central, albeit ambivalent, place for it, caught between sometimes troubled attachment and profound scepticism.<sup>6</sup> Political poetry and poetic writing were valued not only because of the traditional high status of literature in Germany. In addition, at that time

of conflict and crisis they offered powerfully telegraphic, urgent forms of expression. Poems and other short forms of poetic writing could be produced and disseminated at high speed and little expense in comparison with lengthier works or productions. In addition, and for similar reasons, they could become at times a conduit for transnational exchange.<sup>7</sup>

Thematically, these writings are instructive about anti-war thinking in West Germany.<sup>8</sup> The chapters which follow demonstrate just how closely the poetry reflected and amplified political trends. Simultaneously, however, they show that it could complicate, undermine or challenge manifest concerns in anti-war discourse too. As a result, the dense, symbolic quality of poetry and poetic writing can encode and crystallise the essential, if often latent, contradictions and ambiguities in West German anti-war culture especially clearly. Thus, close, symptomatic study provides deeper insight into the turbulent discourses of the time and their sometimes hidden cultural and historical substrates. Put another way, this case demonstrates that critical analysis of poetic writing can deepen understanding of a political moment in unique ways.

There is no doubt as to the sincerity of many activists' anti-war engagement. Nonetheless, their discourse is multilayered and complex. For instance, the Vietnam conflict was often discussed in universalising terms. An important conference organised in Frankfurt am Main in 1966 by the student organisation most closely associated with revolt, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS), was titled 'Vietnam – Analyse eines Exempels' ['Vietnam – Analysis of an Exemplar']. That description refers to the way the Vietnam conflict was seen as emblematic the world over. The influential Critical Theorist Herbert Marcuse took part in this event and remarked in his address:

Vietnam ist zum Symbol geworden für die Zukunft der ökonomischen und politischen Repression, zum Symbol geworden für die Zukunft der Herrschaft der Menschen über den Menschen

[Vietnam has become a symbol for the future of economic and political repression, a symbol for the future of men's dominance over other men].<sup>9</sup>

These sentiments are typical of the time, on one hand identifying the conflict as a political and ethical touchstone and template for the 1960s, while on the other sidelining its historical specificity. In this context, and especially in the relative absence of influential voices from Vietnam itself



within the FRG's protest movements, the conflict could become a near-blank canvas onto which West Germans could trace their own ideas.<sup>10</sup>

Thus there are profoundly self-reflexive qualities in West German writing about the war. As literary critic Arlene A. Teraoka asks in an important study: 'To what First World German fears and desires do representations of the non-European world respond?'<sup>11</sup> This book engages carefully with the implications of Teraoka's question. It notes, for example, ways in which the texts it examines are shot through with stock images and allusions to Orientalising traditions of imagining East Asia, and reflects on often unspoken preoccupations that may underpin them. In these respects, study of the anti-war poetry adds a chapter to the longer history of German literary fantasies of the East, an account that is still being written by artists and critics.<sup>12</sup>

If the Vietnam conflict had profound significance worldwide, it held particular resonances for the Federal Republic at a time when memories of recent war and extreme violence in Europe, triggered by National Socialist Germany, remained vivid for many. In addition, West Germans responded to the conflict against the backdrop of a Cold War which had split Germany in two, and in which both post-war German states formed a tense front line.<sup>13</sup> In analyses of the FRG's anti-war movement, historian Wilfried Mausbach has contended that these historical contexts are central for understanding its positions.<sup>14</sup> This argument, too, has been important for this study. In the 1960s and 1970s, both Vietnam and Germany were divided by the Cold War into communist and capitalist states.<sup>15</sup> In the case of Vietnam, these were, respectively, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), or South Vietnam. This situation could seem to mirror that of the era's two German states, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), or East Germany, and the FRG. Furthermore, West Germans could sense analogies between the US presence in both South Vietnam and the Federal Republic. This perception was boosted by the US and FRG governments' argument that 'the defense of [West] Berlin, right now, is in Vietnam'.<sup>16</sup>

Mausbach thus points out that West German activists could perceive parallels between their own situation and that of South Vietnam. He observes too that some protesters could compare news imagery of bombing in Vietnam with their own memories of aerial war over Germany just over two decades before.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, Mausbach suggests that the younger generation's outrage about Vietnam was, in the last analysis, directed at older West Germans whom it held responsible for the horrors of National Socialism. In a sense, it was a belated protest against Germany's own fascist past.<sup>18</sup>

These arguments indicate that the protest movements were not synonymous with a complete historical and cultural caesura, as their rhetoric often implied.<sup>19</sup> Instead, discourse on Vietnam in the FRG can bely a sense of painful, if problematic, identification and articulate, albeit in indirect ways, fraught historical and symbolic legacies that had come down to the post-war generation. Such an analysis implies that in the (West) German context, Vietnam's war could stand in for a catastrophic, essentially domestic drama.

Correspondingly, this book argues that poetic representation of Vietnam reflects, among other things, other kinds of conflict closer to home. These struggles engage not only the 1960s' relationships with recent (German) history, but also other troubling preoccupations of the time, such as its gender politics and technological Modernity. Thus, the image of civil or proxy war becomes resonant in plural, often contradictory ways.

Focusing as this study does only on literature written in (or sometimes, translated into) German, it recognises that such writing is primarily revealing about itself, not the historical and cultural realities of Vietnam itself and its people. Yet at the same time this monograph seeks to think critically, as Teraoka does, about the 'dialectic of self and other' (1) in German writing. It strives to be mindful of historian Quinn Slobodian's critique, with regard to the FRG's protest movements' internationalism, of standpoints that do not go beyond thinking about (West) Germany and what it called the 'Third World' in simple, binary terms.<sup>20</sup> Such perspectives can imagine other places or cultures only as expressions of (West) German concerns, and so give primacy to the European perspective while excluding others.

This study therefore aims also to pinpoint in particular some poetic moments where such polarities and projections are at least called into question, even if only partially or fitfully. In conclusion, it spotlights the potential of poetry to become more than an apparently self-reflexive vision of an imagined East, as it highlights the presence in German poetry of works from Vietnam itself. In this respect, it looks ahead to a more dialogical future scholarship which could move away from exclusive focus on German-language, or European perspectives, and towards a different view of the world in literature.

## On poetry and poetic writing

This book does not attempt to categorise its materials strictly, with reference to such criteria as their canonical status or lack of it, their

provenance, specific themes, political arguments and positions, supposed aesthetic quality or genre. Instead, it analyses better-known literary texts which are usually categorised as high literature alongside unremembered, non- or sub-canonical works found, for example, in short-lived, independent literary magazines, politically oriented periodicals, grassroots anthologies and works from tiny, niche publishers. At strategic points too, this monograph draws in a variety of textual forms, including (apparently) non-literary works, in order to cast more light on the poems in their complex political and historical contexts. Readings of the poems in question alongside examples of anti-war writing in other genres can help to illuminate the ways in which they resonate with the wider context of protest.

Such contextualisation can simultaneously cast the poems' features into relief and illuminate the culture of protest more broadly. Travel memoir proves to be an especially important intertext here, for it provided a link, albeit mediated in significant ways, to the historical experience of Vietnam itself. At the same time such analyses show ways in which the poetry can be distinct from, even challenge, other strands in anti-war discourse, and so highlight its complexities and contradictions in emblematic ways.

This study focuses primarily on poetry, for this form was the protest movements' literary expression of choice. In order to do so, it relies less on a definition of poetry that relies on specific generic qualities defined *a priori* and more on the ways in which the texts identify or present themselves. They may do so either explicitly, for instance in their titles or self-reflections; or more implicitly, but nonetheless very clearly, for example by taking their places in poetry anthologies, or by conforming to contemporary expectations and conventions of lyric poetry, in terms of their length, organisation and structure, visual layout, occasional use of rhyme and metre, and other formal features.

Yet important as that understanding of poetry is for this study, it holds such perceptions strategically and lightly. Simultaneously, it critically questions the idea that written texts can be separated neatly into poetic and non-poetic forms; and, within those limits, into discrete genres too. In so doing, the work presented here is alive also to an understanding of poetic writing that formed part of the anti-war discourse beyond poems: that is to say in a more avant-gardist sense, as a kind of difficult writing.<sup>21</sup> In such cases especially, the written word can often be combined with other communicative elements like visual images or action. Or it may be set out in startling ways, for instance in unconventional layout and design, so forming a diverse, hybrid

textuality which has roots in the techniques of Dada and goes beyond words alone.<sup>22</sup>

By including such material alongside poetry in a more conventional sense, this monograph, following the formative example of scholars such as Klaus Briegleb, seeks to take a wide view of the poetic traditions of the 1960s and 1970s. It thus brings in texts which were previously altogether illegible to literary readings, because they were either non-canonical or, in some cases, apparently not poems at all.<sup>23</sup> For example, this study draws in ephemera which, in their disruptive deployment of text, intertext and context, may be more poetic, in the sense outlined here, than first meets the eye.

Taken as a whole, this remarkable anti-war textuality draws on what is known as high literature, as well as on expressly political and Modernist impulses from the earlier twentieth century, ranging from Dada to agit-prop to documentary writing. Such writing may be saying, as the contemporary observer Karl Heinz Bohrer put it critically, with regard to some surrealist-inspired anti-authoritarian texts:

[D]as, was ihr seht, stimmt nicht. Ihr legt das Geschenene falsch aus. Ihr müßt neue Auslegungstechniken erlernen und andere Beziehungen knüpfen. Nehmt diese Wirklichkeit nicht an.

[W]hat you're seeing isn't true. Your interpretation of events is wrong. You need to learn new modes of interpretation and to make new connections. Do not accept this reality].<sup>24</sup>

This is the case for at least some of the poems in question in a more conventional sense too. Such challenge to perception, often prompted by unconventional formal features, perpetuates the hallmarks of earlier twentieth-century avant-gardes and makes the writing in question an under-recognised but key expression of Modernism. All these elements flow into the poetics considered here, which demands at times that its audience look again, more searchingly, at the representations and deceptions of an alienated world.

While these pages often concentrate on works that first appeared in the FRG, they also address others which were read there, and so contributed to West German discourse about the Vietnam War. The study therefore includes works originally written in languages other than German, by non-(West) German citizens, or which were (first) published elsewhere, as long as they were also in circulation in the Federal Republic. The most evident examples are texts, including translations, from the

GDR, often read in West Germany. They were available, for instance, at the GDR's own bookshop in West Berlin, *Das Europäische Buch*, which advertised in the press of the protest movements. Such publications could cross over to the West in other ways too.<sup>25</sup>

Not all poems of the time about distant war name Vietnam. Comparatively high-profile examples are offered by two of the era's most prominent German-language poets, Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Paul Celan. These poems are, respectively, 'abendnachrichten' ['evening news'] (1964), and 'Einem Bruder in Asien' ['To a Brother in Asia'] (1967).<sup>26</sup> On a first reading these works seem to lack any specific historical reference points, rather appearing to be addresses to war or violence in general. However, on closer reflection, as with many other comparable examples, a reader can conclude that they allude to Vietnam by suggestion, deploying tropes that were either common in discourse about the conflict or, in Enzensberger's case, were soon to become so. These two poems also rely on historical and cultural context to direct their readers. With such examples in mind, this study does not limit its subject matter to poems that mention Vietnam explicitly, although such texts do, of course, form an important part of its corpus. Instead, it investigates a wider fabric of writing which, like the poems by Enzensberger and Celan, references the conflict, or debate about it, in implicit as well as explicit ways.

Poetry about Vietnam, or on protest against the war, can take many different political positions. For instance, a cycle of poems published in 1967 by celebrated writer Günter Grass, 'Zorn Ärger Wut' ['Anger Irritation Rage'], stands in complex relationship to anti-war discourse. This group of poems is in no way an endorsement of US actions in Vietnam, against which Grass positioned himself publicly. Nonetheless, it criticises in the harshest terms what it calls the era's short-sighted anti-war movement and its methods.<sup>27</sup> For Grass, these misguided, ineffectual efforts include writing poetry. So on one hand, the poems of 'Zorn Ärger Wut' reject anti-war poetics; on the other, they ruminate on it in trenchant ways. In order not to exclude such works, this study does not limit itself to discussing poems that share one specific view about the conflict, or how best to oppose it. Rather, it seeks to consider writing about Vietnam and anti-war protest in a broader, sometimes more associative sense.

The poems and texts explored here are not selected primarily on grounds of (perceived) literary quality either. There are two main reasons for this strategy. First, this monograph aims to give a comprehensive picture of the corpus in question, even as it recognises that it cannot be exhaustive, since it cannot encompass all the poems of the time. Second, in keeping with its symptomatic approach, this study picks out texts for

analysis based on their representative features, rather than a supposed hierarchy of literary value. In turn, this reading process often proves to highlight the intrinsic interest of the works it explores, including those cast aside by posterity.<sup>28</sup> It seems, therefore, that well-established ideas about the artistic weakness of engaged writing in the 1960s and 1970s may reflect the canonical tastes of the time, which tended to exclude expressly political writing, more than the properties of the texts themselves. Therefore, among other things, this book offers a critique of received notions of literary quality.

Alongside poems, this study includes texts that do not meet conventional definitions of poetry. The rationale for referencing song lyrics is comparatively evident, since they bear clear resemblance to lyric poems. Possibly more surprising is the debate in [Chapter 5](#) on a group of flyers which were components in a provocative, anti-authoritarian street action by the controversial West Berlin collective Kommune I [Commune I] (KI). These flyers are included here because they share immediately identifiable themes, tropes and stylistic features with the poetry in a narrower sense, and can thus be read *inter alia* as a response to it. Furthermore, as will be seen, KI's flyers are partly the product of those twentieth-century avant-garde traditions which challenge the very idea of literature as a privileged and distinct textual space. Viewed in this way, KI's texts, like some other anti-authoritarian works of the time, can be (re-)identified as forms of poetic language in an expansive sense.

## Terms of engagement

In the FRG, many organisations, formal or informal associations and individuals opposed the Vietnam War. However, they were not necessarily closely allied with one another, even when they shared interests, and while many were pacifist or of the Left in broad senses, this was not always the case. The West German anti-war movement had important roots in the peace movement of the 1950s and earlier 1960s, and in (often related) Christian influences. By 1967–8, however, a more explicitly, if at times unconventionally, Marxist-inspired view of the Vietnam conflict came increasingly to the fore, for instance in the SDS. This position favoured the victory of revolutionary Communism in South Vietnam over pacifist goals, and gradually even came to imagine West Germany itself as a second front for Vietnam. It found emphatic expression in the largest single anti-war event of the time, namely the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongress [International Congress on Vietnam] of February 1968 in West

Berlin, which was organised by the SDS.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, such an approach was by no means unanimously accepted by all SDS members. So where this book refers to ‘the anti-war movement’, the description is an inevitably simplified one for a very complex phenomenon.

In turn, the anti-war movement formed part of the era’s larger protest movements. These likewise involved many different groups and people with an array of sometimes mutually incompatible beliefs, positions and aims. To denote them, this book at times makes use also of the common contemporaneous term *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (APO), or Extra-Parliamentary Opposition. Diverse and divided as the APO was in many ways, this signifier identifies many participants’ shared objective of challenging established politics from outside traditional structures. This motivation was especially marked in the years of the Grand Coalition in the FRG’s Federal Parliament (1966–9). That coalition controversially united in government the country’s main political parties, the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* [German Social Democratic Party] (SPD) and the conservative sibling parties the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands / Christlich-Soziale Union* [Christian Democratic Union of Germany / Christian Social Union] (CDU/CSU). As a result, parliamentary opposition consisted solely of a small number of representatives from the liberal *Freie Demokratische Partei* [Free Democratic Party] (FDP). In order to address this deficit, alternative – that is, extra-parliamentary – kinds of political forum and activism grew in significance.

At times this book also references specific strands within the protest movements, notably anti-authoritarianism. Anti-authoritarianism was an influential yet loose, non-aligned, left-wing movement with partial roots in Critical Theory, Marxism and avant-garde thought and practice. It was often, but by no means exclusively, associated with urban centres of revolt such as Frankfurt am Main and West Berlin, as well as with student milieux. By around 1967 anti-authoritarianism was a crucial and growing influence within the SDS in particular. Its goals included not only economic revolution, but also the critical interrogation and dismantling of all forms of personal and political hierarchy. Articulating such interests, in 1968 critics and activists Bahman Nirumand and Eckhard Siepmann wrote in *Kursbuch* [*Railway Timetable*], the pre-eminent leftist intellectual journal of the time, edited by Enzensberger:

Die Revolution in den Metropolen muß vorbereitet werden durch eine Kulturrevolution als unabdingbare Voraussetzung für eine Revolutionierung der Massen, die ihrerseits Voraussetzung ist für

eine sozialistische Revolution. Der 'lange Marsch durch die Institutionen', die Emanzipation der Sinnlichkeit und des Bewußtseins der Menschen sind kein verlegenes Alibi für eine echte Revolution; sie sind der taktisch einzig zu rechtfertigende Bestandteil in der Phase der Vorbereitung der Revolution unter den Bedingungen der spätkapitalistischen Gesellschaft.

[The ground for revolution in the metropolises must be prepared by means of a cultural revolution, which is the indispensable precondition for mass revolution, which is itself in turn the precondition for socialist revolution. The 'long march through the institutions', the emancipation of the human senses and consciousness are not a poor substitute for true revolution; they are the sole tactically justifiable component of the pre-revolutionary phase in the conditions of late capitalist society].<sup>30</sup>

This quotation echoes the increasingly radical tone of protest in some quarters from around 1967–8. Importantly, it also stresses anti-authoritarians' interest in the symbolic, culture and the psyche as central political fields. Anti-authoritarian thought and practices came to the fore in many of the protest movements' most striking moments, like the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß, and in many ways shaped contemporary perceptions of them. Therefore specifically anti-authoritarian positions and influences are frequently reflected and debated in the poetic writing discussed here.

Where the problematic term 'Third World' and its cognates appear in this study to denote what today is more often described as the Global South, they reflect the common usage of the era. So does occasional description of the industrialised capitalist world, primarily (but not exclusively) North America and Western Europe, as the First World, or sometimes the West. Indeed, and likewise, where the terms East and West are used to denote, respectively, Asia and (Western) Europe and North America, what is meant is a strategic, inevitably limited, limiting and inadequate construction.<sup>31</sup>

In general, where this study refers to either of the era's two Vietnamese states, the DRV and RVN, as specific historical locations, it does so by name. Where it alludes simply to Vietnam, both states together are meant; or, very often, the land imagined in German writing. Vietnamese names are rendered as they appear in the texts under discussion, or at times as in common English or German usage, rather than as they would in Vietnamese *quoc-ngu*, or *chữ quốc ngữ*.<sup>32</sup> This choice



seeks to underscore the fact that what is at stake in this analysis is not Vietnam itself or its people, but the textual world of West German and other writers, translators or publishers from the Global North. In other words, it aims to mark the difference between writing in Europe and the two Vietnamese states of the time, rather than to imply that the works in question map straightforwardly onto lived, historical reality.

## Unfolding the text(s)

This study can be read in (at least) two different ways. On one level, its individual chapters are designed to stand alone as separate, topical readings. On another, they can be read in sequence, falling into three distinct sections. The first comprises [Chapters 1 and 2](#), an analytical survey of literary engagements with Vietnam in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. The second section, [Chapters 3 to 5](#), proffers close readings of selected poems and poetic texts, alongside other kinds of writing for comparison and contrast. The works in question are highlighted for their characteristic treatment of dominant themes in the poetry as a whole and, often, in anti-war discourse more generally. The third section, [Chapter 6](#), contains concluding reflections and a roadmap for future study.

[Chapter 1](#) highlights the paradoxical place of Vietnam and anti-war protest in the high literature of the FRG. The war was a topic of heated debate for many literati such as Enzensberger and Grass, yet features comparatively little in well-known works of literature from the time. Exceptions are a popular volume of poems by Erich Fried, *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* [*and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems*] (1966), and a documentary play by Peter Weiss usually known as *Viet Nam Diskurs* [*Discourse on Vietnam*]. It may be no coincidence that, while these works were published or produced in the FRG, neither Fried nor Weiss was a West German citizen or resident. Moreover, these two texts, along with others which address the war, were not universally acclaimed, suggesting that literature which engaged head-on with hot political topics was treated at best cautiously by critics. The chapter then examines further works by Weiss about Vietnam in traditionally lesser valued or supposedly minor genres, namely the travel memoir, documentary text, polemical essay and political speech, demonstrating their potential for anti-war writing. Following this lead, [Chapter 1](#) goes on to identify a wider, lively anti-war culture which involves those forms and others like them. It argues that a view of literature not oriented towards prestigious literary genres reveals a wealth of writing about the war, often by less fêted authors.

Chapter 2 focuses on poems about Vietnam. It opens by reading Grass's well-known anti-war poems in 'Zorn Ärger Wut' against the grain, as clues to a rich seam of less familiar protest poetry. The chapter tracks that corpus through an exemplary countercultural publication, a book of poems titled *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie* [*against the war in vietnam: an anthology*] (1968), edited by riewert qu. tode and published to mark the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß.

*gegen den krieg in vietnam* was the final number of an independent little literary magazine, *amBEATion*, which in the mid-1960s reflected crucial shifts in the era's oppositional and anti-war politics.<sup>33</sup> While *amBEATion*'s earlier numbers reveal pacifist alignments and apolitical literary interests, as time goes on it increasingly reflects nascent anti-authoritarian themes. Its closing issue, tode's anti-war anthology, is expressly political in tone and sceptical about conventional literature.

Chapter 2 therefore argues that *amBEATion* and *gegen den krieg in vietnam* encapsulate the development of protest poetics in the 1960s, and also demonstrate the particular importance of countercultural publications, above all periodicals, for anti-war and protest textuality. In addition, it shows that the poetry and political developments of the time are intensely interconnected in ways which means that they reflect, illuminate and refract one another in multiple, complex ways.

Exploring this textual landscape further, Chapter 2 identifies an efflorescence of West German anti-war poetry, evidenced by hundreds of formally, politically and philosophically diverse texts. They include a small number of poems in classic rhymed, metrical forms, as well as many more in free verse, documentary and other modes, including song lyrics and texts from the agit-prop movement, which assertively mobilised poetry for left-wing politics. On this evidence, the chapter argues that the powers and properties of poetry, defined in relatively conventional terms, made it the anti-war movement's pre-eminent literary genre.

Chapter 3 opens the book's series of close, comparative readings of anti-war poems with a critical examination of feminine images across different genres. These representations are a significant starting point for this section of the book because they often seem (implicitly) to participate in long traditions of personifying a country or people – here, Vietnam – as a girl or woman. As such, they elaborate contemporary perceptions of Vietnam itself. Moreover, these depictions show that anti-war discourse is 'structured through gender' at a profound level, as literary critic Susan Jeffords has argued of US writing about the conflict. Taken together, these readings suggest that gender is a central, eloquent yet difficult category for understanding anti-war and protest discourse.

This chapter investigates in particular Stefan Zürcher's poem 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules. Mit Vorspruch und Nachspruch versehen und einer Auslegung zur wahren Erhellung des gläubigen Geistes' ['The Law of the Nine Rules. Furnished with a Prologue and Epilogue and Exegesis for the True Illumination of the Believer'] (1968), from *gegen den krieg in vietnam*. This poem and others like it cast girls or women in Vietnam as passive victims of extreme violence or sexual exploitation, and so play into longstanding sexist, Orientalising conventions. By contrast, left-wing journalistic texts and memoirs based on encounters with Vietnamese women offer, to an extent, different images from the poetry. They indicate that the contemporary West German imagination could make some space, albeit of a restricted kind, for notions of Vietnamese women's agency. Thus in the anti-war writing, images of girls or women, and hence of Vietnam itself, are revealed as being riven with contradiction.

That insight is exemplified by the chapter's third set of close readings, which inspect various writings by Weiss that feature women. These examples are the play *Viet Nam Diskurs*, his travel memoir *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* [*Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*] (1968) and an entry in his *Notizbücher 1960–1971* [*Notebooks 1960–1971*] (1982). The latter text in particular clearly registers the violent, fragile gender politics of anti-war writing. Weiss's work is therefore important in casting critical light on the common twin stereotypes of femininity and Vietnam, and thus opening up critical perspectives on anti-war writing as a whole. At the same time, more unexpectedly and subliminally, Weiss relates this theme to a nightmare (gendered) vision of Modernity, linked in turn to the horrors of the Vietnam conflict.

Chapter 4 turns to another prominent theme in the poetic corpus, that of news media. It reflects the Vietnam conflict's oft-cited status as a 'living-room war', in the influential contemporaneous words of US journalist Michael J. Arlen. His turn of phrase sums up the unprecedented way in which reports from Vietnam were beamed into Western homes. Graphic visual images were central for the news, and so became the topic of some highly critical West German poems.

This chapter reflects on one striking indictment of war photography, namely Ingo Cesaro's frequently reprinted 'Pressepreis' ['Press Award'] (1969). This poem echoes the work of earlier theorists in German tradition, for example Walter Benjamin and Ruth Berlau; it also anticipates later, influential critiques of war photography, such as those by Susan Sontag and Paul Virilio. And yet, cognisant of its own paradoxical reliance on photographic material, 'Pressepreis' presents a subtly self-critical

account of the place of the documentary image in anti-war poetry. In this respect it comes closer to the more recent, nuanced reflections of critic Wendy Kozol on the complex politics and affect of war photography.

In this way, 'Pressepreis' travels in a different direction from some of the anti-war discourse around it. Even as anti-war protesters indicted news images of Vietnam, towards the end of the 1960s some anti-authoritarians used them to create materials which Slobodian has termed critically 'corpse polemics'. That is, they used shocking photographs of extreme violence against 'Third World' subjects for political ends, for instance to protest against the Vietnam War by revealing its human cost. Such works, Slobodian points out, had the effect of instrumentalising their subjects in ethically problematic ways. By using words to critique visual images of Vietnamese suffering rather than replicating them directly, however, Cesaro's 'Pressepreis' declines the 'corpse polemics' identified by Slobodian. This insight suggests that poetry can, at times, be read as a counterpoint to, rather than simply a mirror of, anti-authoritarian politics.

This book's fifth chapter turns to poetic texts which are not poems, namely the remarkable 'Maiflugblätter' ['May Flyers'] distributed in May 1967 by KI. These satirical pages imagined committing arson in department stores in West Berlin as an anti-war protest, and so seemed to some readers, at least, to incite criminal acts. As a result, two commune members were prosecuted, albeit unsuccessfully, in 1967–8. KI's flyers find a place in this study both because they stand in avant-garde tradition and, as a comparison with Fried's classic anti-war poem 'Das Land' ['The Country'] shows, they share significant concerns with the anti-war poetry too, notably the dominant motif of fire. At the same time the flyers link those issues and tropes to a new theme in the context of this study, namely a critique of shopping, which seems to embody a horrific Modernity and presage an apocalypse.

KI's texts can be interpreted using the ideas of contemporary avant-gardist group the Situationist International (SI). For instance, they call to mind an essay of 1965 by one of the SI's key thinkers, French philosopher Guy Debord, which praises arson in shops as a revolutionary act. The flyers also adopt the SI's hallmark discursive strategy of *détournement*, which pilfers the language of the Establishment and repurposes it with disruptive intent. In this case, the flyers mimic and mock powerful discourses such as news media and advertising. At the same time they subject the idiom of protest, including poetry, to *détournement*; while Fried's poem 'Das Land' condemns wartime destruction, for instance, the flyers seem ironically to glorify it, giving rise to their particular, disturbing edge.

Finally, the study's conclusion, [Chapter 6](#), reflects on the posterity of poetic writing about Vietnam, draws together key insights from the study and points to new avenues of research. At first sight, an overview of anti-war poetry might suggest it had a brief rise and abrupt fall, before being swiftly replaced by other kinds of political writing and direct action such as KI's in 1967, and then petering out around 1968 as the protest movements disintegrated, in part into real-world violence and urban terrorism. However, counter to that simplified, linear perception, this concluding chapter argues that poetry and poetic writing about the war were in reality more varied, prolific and long-lived.

[Chapter 6](#) notes too the diversity of the profiles of poets who published about the war. This observation serves to underline the importance for future scholarship of discussions of different historical positionalities within the anti-war writing and protest culture generally, for instance with regard to generation, gender, heritage and identity. Most crucially, the conclusion points out that poetry forms an important exception to the rule that voices from Vietnam itself were rarely heard directly in West Germany: in fact, a small but important body of Vietnamese poems was published in German translation. These works suggest that poetry has particular potential for speedy transnational mobility. It also indicates a genuinely comparative future scholarship that could give real prominence to the place of Vietnamese poetry in Germany, and vice versa.

The conclusion goes on to reflect on some distinctive formal features of the poetic corpus uncovered by this study. For example, it looks back on the often extremely static, stylised and limited representations of war, and of Vietnam, discussed in the previous chapters. Such images are reminiscent of the dehistoricising discourse that contemporary French critic Roland Barthes had anatomised as 'mythology' a few years previously, in 1957. Simultaneously, however, this conclusion suggests that some of the writings explored here call such representation critically into question, including by means of intertextuality, ironic heteroglossia or even *détournements* of their own.

In a related way, [Chapter 6](#) argues that the poems offer a critique of representation itself, which also proves to be a preoccupation for anti-authoritarianism more generally. Reasons for this scepticism about representation are many and complex, and the chapter concludes by drawing out just one of them: the impact of contemporary debates about the depiction of atrocity in art. These anguished conversations

were instigated by philosopher Theodor W. Adorno when he remarked in 1951:

nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch

[To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric].<sup>34</sup>

Read in the context of this well-known and often misunderstood assertion, and alongside the analogies frequently drawn at the time between events in Vietnam and the Nazi years, one way of understanding poetic writing about Vietnam is as a response to the dilemma Adorno articulated.<sup>35</sup> In this way it reflects indirectly on recent German history, and on what it has to do with poetry.

## Poetry, war, history

This book was written over years which saw warfare and extreme violence around the world, both far and near, and its final sections came into being at a time of new war in Europe. It is informed, too, by the understanding that the personal, affective, cultural, political and material impacts of war do not end when hostilities cease, a fact which is highlighted very painfully by the case of Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> These contexts invite urgent reflection on what might be gleaned for the present from writings now more than half a century old. This monograph can offer only a fleeting snapshot of the Vietnam era's poetic writings in German, and there are as many answers to questions about their ongoing relevance as there are contexts in which those questions can be asked. None of these responses can be definitive.

All the same, this study's findings are not of purely historical or abstract interest. Writing about war can illuminate, for example, with contemporary import, the difficulties of depicting extreme violence; and therefore also of interpreting those depictions. In turn, such writing may offer an understanding of (aspects of) violence itself, and its significance. It can be suggestive, too, about the complex ways in which wars and other extremely violent acts are remembered, and what such memories can mean. Likewise, the works in question here can express something about ways in which other, distant places and people can be imagined; and how those constructions might be challenged. In its conclusion, the study also uncovers moments in which the voices of others come into German literature in the form of poems from Vietnam; in so doing they hold out

prospects for less one-sided readings, and more open and reciprocal views of the world. For such reasons, among others, poems and poetic writings from the past are not only, or always, dead letters. Or, again in Adorno's words, they are a 'geschichtsphilosophische Sonnenuhr' ['philosophical sundial of history'].<sup>37</sup> Old and often obscure as they may be, intermittent and shadowy, they can still be read for the present time.

## Notes

- 1 This study uses the terms Vietnam War or Vietnam conflict to mirror (West) German usage.
- 2 Rare, significant studies of this body of work include *inter alia* Gregory Divers, *The Image and Influence of America in German Poetry since 1945* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), 98–122; Ulla Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion: Zur Entwicklung operativer Literaturformen in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: Athenaeon, 1978), 35–55; Rüdiger Sareika, *Die dritte Welt in der westdeutschen Literatur der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer, 1980), especially 235–94. These rich works have been important sources for the present study. Klaus Briegleb, *1968: Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993) also draws attention to this field in important ways.
- 3 See e.g. Mererid Puw Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016), 25–41.
- 4 See e.g. Frank Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel, eds, *Subversive Aktion: Der Sinn der Aktion ist ihr Scheitern* (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1976); Briegleb, 1968; Wolfgang Dreßen, Dieter Kunzelmann and Eckhard Siepmann, eds, *Nilpferd des höllischen Urwalds – Spuren in eine unbekannt Stadt – Situationisten Gruppe SPUR Kommune I* (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1991); Sara Hakemi, *Anschlag und Spektakel: Flugblätter der Kommune I, Erklärungen von Ensslin / Baader und der frühen RAF* (Bochum: Posth, 2008); Alexander Holmig, 'Die aktionistischen Wurzeln der Studentenbewegung: Subversive Aktion, Kommune I und die Neudefinition des Politischen' in 1968: *Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Studentenbewegung*, edited by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2007); Thomas Hecken, *Gegenkultur und Avantgarde 1950–1970: Situationisten, Beatniks, 68er* (Tübingen: Francke, 2006); Thomas Hecken, *Avantgarde und Terrorismus. Rhetorik der Intensität und Programme der Revolte von den Futuristen bis zur RAF* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006); Ingo Juchler, 'Die Avantgardegruppe "Subversive Aktion" im Kontext der sich entwickelnden Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre', *Weimarer Beiträge* 40, no. 1 (1994); Susanne Komfort-Hein, 'Flaschenposten und kein Ende des Endes', 1968: *Kritische Korrespondenzen um den Nullpunkt von Geschichte und Literatur*; Dieter Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand! Bilder aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Transit, 1998); Mia Lee, 'Umherschweiften und Spektakel: Die situationistische Tradition', in 1968, edited by Klimke and Scharloth.
- 5 Focus in this study is specifically on the FRG; on Vietnam and the (East) German Democratic Republic (GDR), see e.g. Gerd Horten, 'Sailing in the shadow of the Vietnam War: The GDR government and the "Vietnam Bonus" of the early 1970s', *German Studies Review* 36 (2013); Bernd Schaefer, 'Socialist modernisation in Vietnam: The East German approach, 1976–89', in *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World*, edited by Quinn Slobodian (Oxford: Berghahn, 2015). For concision, reference here to the FRG includes West Berlin, which was in formal terms a separate entity.
- 6 See e.g. Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*.
- 7 See [Chapters 2 and 6](#).
- 8 On the anti-war movement in West Germany, see e.g. Gerhard Bauß, *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1977), 167–220; Siegwald Lönnendonker, Bernd Rabehl and Jochen Staadt, *Die antiautoritäre Revolte: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund nach der Trennung von der SPD. Band 1: 1960–1967* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 195–303; Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German protest against America's War during the 1960s', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and international perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C.



Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), and 'America's Vietnam in Germany – Germany in America's Vietnam', in *Changing the World, Changing Oneself: Political protest and collective identities in West Germany and the US in the 1960s and 1970s*, edited by Belinda Davis, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke and Carla MacDougall (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2010); Karl A. Otto, *APO: Die außerparlamentarische Opposition in Quellen und Dokumenten (1960–1970)* (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1989), 206–30; Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A social history of dissent and democracy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 69–86, 147–64. See also Werner Balsen and Karl Rössel, *Hoch die internationale Solidarität: Zur Geschichte der Dritte Welt-Bewegung in der Bundesrepublik* (Cologne: Kölner Volksblatt, 1985); Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre: Eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und -theorien aus der Dritten Welt* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996) and *Rebellische Subjektivität und Internationalismus* (Marburg: Verlag Arbeiterbewegung und Geschichtswissenschaft, 1989). See also Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex and Socialism: Cuba in the German imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), which includes a chapter on the West German protest movements' relationship with Cuba and offers a case study of fascinating relationships between Germany and another land of the Global South.

- 9 Herbert Marcuse, 'Die Analyse eines Exempels', *neue kritik* 36/37 (June/August 1966). The presence of Marcuse, then based in the US, is evidence of the transnational components of protest as explored, for example, in Davis, Mausbach, Klimke and MacDougall, *Changing the World, Changing Oneself*. The publication of his contribution in *neue kritik*, house journal of the SDS, would have ensured the further diffusion of such ideas among left-wing students.
- 10 There was a small Vietnamese community in the FRG before 1975: see e.g. Hanna Hoa Anh Mai, 'Spiegel im Spiegel', in *Asiatische Deutsche Extended: Vietnamesische Diaspora and beyond*, edited by Kien Nghi Ha, new, expanded edition (Berlin and Hamburg: Assoziation A, 2021); Nicolaus Schmidt, 'Studium in Ost- und West Deutschland', in *Việt-Đức: Deutsch-vietnamesische Biografien als Spiegel der Geschichte / German-Vietnamese Biographies: A Reflection of History / Những trang tiểu sử Đức-Việt như tấm gương phản ánh lịch sử*, edited by Nicolaus Schmidt (Bielefeld and Berlin: Kerber, 2018). There was a somewhat larger presence in the GDR. See Uta Beth and Anja Tuckermann, 'Geschichte, Arbeit und Alltag vietnamesischer Migrant\_innen', in *Asiatische Deutsche Extended*, edited by Kien Nghi Ha; Nicolaus Schmidt, 'Studium in Ost- und West Deutschland' and 'Die Kinderverschickung in die DDR', in *Việt-Đức*, edited by Nicolaus Schmidt, and other sections in that volume. See [Chapter 6](#).
- 11 Arlene A. Teraoka, *East, West, and Others: The third world in postwar German literature* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 1. Further page references follow in the text.
- 12 For introductions, see e.g. *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History: From Germany to Central and Eastern Europe*, edited by James Hodkinson, John Walker, Shaswati Mazumdar and Johannes Feichtinger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2013); Caroline Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion: New encounters in the Asian-German avant-garde* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020); *Beyond Alterity: German encounters with modern East Asia*, edited by Qinna Shen and Martin Rosenstock (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014).
- 13 On West German politics and Vietnam more generally see e.g. Eugenie M. Blang, 'A reappraisal of Germany's Vietnam policy, 1963–1966. Ludwig Erhard's response to America's war in Vietnam', *German Studies Review* 27, no. 2 (2004); Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam' and 'America's Vietnam in Germany'; Alexander Troche, *Berlin wird am Mekong verteidigt: Die Ostasienpolitik der Bundesrepublik in China, Taiwan und Süd-Vietnam 1954–1966* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 2001).
- 14 Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam' and 'America's Vietnam in Germany'.
- 15 Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam', especially 279–80, and 'America's Vietnam in Germany', especially 45.
- 16 McGeorge Bundy, President Johnson's national security adviser (1965), quoted in Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam', 285 and 'America's Vietnam in Germany', 45.
- 17 Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam', 284.
- 18 Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam', 279.
- 19 Cf. Gerd Koenen, 'Wahn und Zeit: Rudi Dutschke am Kairós der Weltrevolution 1967/68', in *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977*, edited by Gerd Koenen (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001).



- 20 Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third world politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012). Hosek's *Sun, Sex and Socialism* offers an important example of a cultural history which draws in more complex, reciprocal encounters between Germany and the Global South.
- 21 Cf. Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 123–6.
- 22 For context on Modernism, graphics and layout, and ways in which they can be imaged as part of aesthetic textuality, see e.g. Stephen Bury, *Breaking the Rules: The printed face of the European avant garde 1900–1937* (London: The British Library, 2007).
- 23 Cf. Briegleb, 1968.
- 24 Karl Heinz Bohrer, 'Surrealismus und Terror oder die Aporien des Juste-milieu', in Bohrer, *Die gefährdete Phantasie, oder Surrealismus und Terror* (Munich: Hanser, 1970), 42, an essay first published in 1969. Cf. Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 130–4.
- 25 Cf. e.g. Hosek, *Sun, Sex and Socialism*, on the circulation of texts and information from the GDR into anti-authoritarian West Berlin, 95–6.
- 26 On Enzensberger's poem see [Chapter 6](#).
- 27 See [Chapter 2](#).
- 28 Thus, the posterity of anti-war poetry offers prospects for illuminating work on canon formation.
- 29 Anon., 'Die Schlußerklärung der Internationalen Vietnam-Konferenz', in *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes und die Globalstrategie des Imperialismus: Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß-Westberlin 17./18. Februar 1968 Westberlin*, edited by Sibylle Plogstedt, SDS Westberlin and Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut (Berlin: INFI, 1968).
- 30 Bahman Nirumand and Eckhard Siepmann, 'Die Zukunft der Revolution', *Kursbuch* 14 (1968): 93.
- 31 Cf. e.g. Mausbach, 'America's Vietnam in Germany', 44.
- 32 The exception is where specific historical people are referenced independently of specific texts about them.
- 33 The term 'little magazine' is used in a specific sense in this study to denote independently produced art and literary magazines, which often had limited funds and circulation, but large aspirations.
- 34 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' (1951), in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, edited by Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), 49; translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber as 'Cultural criticism and society' (1981), in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 210.
- 35 On these analogies in public discourse and literature see Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam' and 'America's Vietnam in Germany'.
- 36 See e.g. Nicolaus Schmidt, 'Hilfe für die Opfer von Agent Orange' ['Help for the victims of Agent Orange'], in *Việt-Đức*, edited by Nicolaus Schmidt, 158–9.
- 37 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft' (1957), in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften [Collected Works]*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann with Gretel Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss and Klaus Schulz, 20 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), IX, 60; translated by Bruce Mayo as 'Lyric poetry and society', in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O'Connor, 221.

# 1

## In the blind spot: the Vietnam War and West German literature

### Introduction

In 1965 the Marxist dramatist and author Peter Weiss published the important essay ‘10 Arbeitspunkte eines Autors in der geteilten Welt’ [‘10 working principles of an author in the divided world’].<sup>1</sup> In this work, he saw the globe starkly divided into two camps. These were the capitalist West on one hand and an alliance between the Eastern Bloc and revolutionary forces in decolonising and (post)colonial countries on the other. In such a scenario, which, Weiss wrote, saw great abuses committed by the West on other parts of the world,

Die Aufgabe des Autors ist hier: immer wieder die Wahrheit, für die er eintritt, darzustellen, immer wieder die Wahrheit unter den Entstellungen aufzusuchen

[Here it is the author’s task, again and again, to represent the truth for which he stands, again and again to seek out the truth among the misrepresentations]. (22)

This opening chapter will show how challenging, controversial and complex that task proved to be for literary writing about Vietnam in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) or West Germany.

Weiss’s essay triggered a dialogue with his more sceptical West German colleague Hans Magnus Enzensberger in the seminal literary and cultural journal *Kursbuch* [*Railway Timetable*], which the latter had just co-founded and co-edited.<sup>2</sup> Enzensberger challenged Weiss’s views about

the positionality and powers of the author, while Weiss posed the following question to his fellow writers:

Sind wir fähig, unsere Zweifel und unsere Vorsicht aufzugeben und uns zu gefährden, indem wir eindeutig aussprechen: Wir sind solidarisch mit den Unterdrückten und wir werden unsere Fähigkeiten als Autoren ausnützen, um sie in ihrem Kampf (der auch der unsere ist) zu unterstützen?

[Are we capable of relinquishing our doubts and our caution and of putting ourselves in danger's way, by stating unequivocally: We stand in solidarity with the oppressed and we will use our capacities as authors to support them in their struggle (which is also ours)?].<sup>3</sup>

In 1967, in an essay entitled 'Che Guevara!' that concerned the recent violent death of the eponymous Latin American revolutionary, Weiss identified the Vietnam conflict as an indisputable atrocity:

Wir wissen längst, daß der ganze Krieg gegen das vietnamesische Volk von Anfang an ein einziges Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit gewesen ist

[We have long known that the war against the Vietnamese people in its entirety has been, from the start and all along, one great crime against humanity].<sup>4</sup>

Thus, as Weiss's writings from the mid- to late 1960s show, for him the Vietnam conflict was a clear case in which a West European writer should maintain solidarity with the oppressed.

In these theoretical texts, Weiss pinpointed the particular significance of writing in German. He was a German-speaking émigré writer of Jewish descent living in Sweden, having found refuge there during the Nazi era. He often wrote in German, maintaining intense discussions with the literary scenes of both East and West Germany. In '10 Arbeitspunkte eines Autors in der geteilten Welt', Weiss identified this position as pivotal, for it allowed him to speak across the divided Cold War world.

In 1968, in an essay in *Kursbuch* which evaluated the debate between Weiss, Enzensberger and others on engaged writing and Vietnam, West German author Martin Walser was even more specific about the significance of the war in Vietnam for the Federal Republic's writers.<sup>5</sup> He argued that the conflict was essential to the self-image of the

US and its allies. These agents sought legitimation by imposing themselves by force across the globe:

Was in Vietnam passiert ist kein Zufall, sondern ein Ausdruck der inneren und innersten Verfassung der USA, der Bundesrepublik, der Freien Welt

[That which is taking place in Vietnam is no coincidence, but an expression of the internal, the most intimate constitution of the USA, the Federal Republic, the Free World]. (172)

Walser therefore notes critically:

Das ist unser Krieg. Mit vollem Recht sprechen die amerikanischen Militärsprecher auf den Pressekonferenzen in Saigon von den free world forces. Die Streitkräfte der Freien Welt. Wir gehören zu dieser Freien Welt. Das sind unsere Streitkräfte. [...] Die Amerikaner sind unsere engsten Verbündeten, unsere engsten politischen Freunde. Sie führen diesen Krieg auch in unserem Namen.

[This is our war. At the Saigon press conferences, the American military spokesmen are quite right to speak of the free world forces. The forces of the Free World. We belong to this Free World. These forces are ours. [...] The Americans are our closest allies, our closest political friends. They are waging this war in our name too]. (171)

According to Walser, the Cold War lent the Federal Republic distinctive, problematic features. He remarked:

In den Zeitungen führt man Berlin an. Gerade wir, sagt man, müßten daran interessiert sein, daß die Amerikaner zu gegebenen Versprechen stünden, bedrohte Bastionen verteidigten.

[The newspapers cite the example of Berlin. We, of all people, they say, should have an interest in seeing the Americans keep their promises, defend bastions which are under threat]. (174)

Reference here is to Allied and US support for the nascent Federal Republic in the post-war and Cold War years. In particular, West Berlin was reckoned to have survived as it did only thanks to US economic and military support. Consequently, as Walser sums up critically, politicians

felt it behoved West Germans and West Berliners to support the USA's parallel efforts on behalf of South Vietnam.

This analogy between divided Vietnam and West Berlin and West Germany was commonly evoked in the Federal Republic. For instance, historian Wilfried Mausbach quotes McGeorge Bundy, US president Lyndon B. Johnson's national security adviser, as saying in 1965: 'the defense of Berlin, right now, is in Vietnam'.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, according to Walser, West Germany's political class was unwilling to express criticism of the US and its overseas military interventions in support of dictatorial regimes. He concluded: 'Offenbar sind wir schon ein Stern in der amerikanischen Flagge' ['Evidently we have already become a star on the American flag'] (175).

Reflecting on the fact that in Modernity, writing has always been tightly entwined with Enlightenment, Walser also argued that:

Ein Verbrechen ein Verbrechen zu nennen, kann nicht sinnlos sein. Wenn nämlich diesem Krieg der nächste und der übernächste folgen wird, dann ist es wichtig, was Zeugen festgestellt haben.

[It cannot be without meaning to call a crime a crime. For if this war is to be followed by another, and another, witness statements are important]. (173)

Thus, for Walser, the Vietnam conflict demanded that West German writers name and challenge its misdeeds. He closed his essay by linking this project to activism, calling for the establishment of a 'Büro für Vietnam' ['Vietnam Bureau'] to support the anti-war campaign across the FRG.<sup>7</sup>

Texts such as these show the importance of the Vietnam conflict and protest about it for the literary scene of the Federal Republic in the 1960s and 1970s. Partly due to the particular significance accorded to literati in West German public life, Weiss, Enzensberger and Walser, among other authors, played a highly visible role in the anti-war movement.<sup>8</sup> In the course of the 1960s, for example, Enzensberger became an increasingly outspoken critic of US policy in Vietnam. In 1968 he published an open letter to the President of Wesleyan University in the USA as he resigned from a fellowship there in protest against the war. In this letter Enzensberger stated unequivocally:

Der Krieg in Viet Nam [...] ist nur die größte, blutigste und sichtbarste Probe aufs Exempel, das die herrschende Klasse der USA auf fünf Kontinenten zu statuieren versucht

[“The war in Viet Nam [...] is simply the greatest, bloodiest and most visible test case, of which the USA’s ruling class is seeking to make an example for five continents].<sup>9</sup>

Critic and sometime anti-war poet Ulla Hahn, writing from a left-wing perspective in 1978, identifies protest about Vietnam as a watershed in the political development not only of individual authors, but also of West German literature altogether.<sup>10</sup> The war, she argues, motivated many writers in the FRG to take a political stand for the first time. Hahn then sums up, with regard to socially critical writers,

bis ungefähr 1968 [blieb] das Thema Vietnam der Gegenstand, an dem die Autoren ihre politische Gesamthaltung artikulierten

[up to around 1968 it was still in relation to Vietnam that the authors articulated their political positions in general]. (50)

In many ways the Vietnam War thus dominated the FRG’s literary landscape in the mid- to late 1960s, as well as the political sphere.

A paradox emerges here, however, for despite the shadow that the conflict cast over West German writing, it left relatively little trace in the era’s canonical literature, in contrast, Hahn argues, to other Western countries.<sup>11</sup> This chapter sets out to examine that puzzle. First, it presents the contested place of Vietnam in the established literary and intellectual milieu of the FRG in the 1960s. Second, it considers the strikingly sparing ways in which a handful of canonical literary works of the era do address Vietnam. Third, the chapter offers an alternative account of writing in and around the Federal Republic’s protest movements, as seen through the lens of some of Weiss’s least-known writings on Vietnam encompassing a range of supposedly minor textual genres, namely polemic, documentary, memoir and ephemera. Taking these texts as a guide, a much larger body of previously forgotten writing about Vietnam in such undervalued forms begins to come to light. This corpus is showcased here by presenting further representative instances of those key anti-war genres deployed by Weiss. In conclusion, the chapter argues that anti-war textual culture is by no means one-dimensional or unimaginative, as its lack of profile or posterity might imply. Rather it utilises a range of innovative, Modernist forms, bringing them into new, dialogical relationships with one another and with the political world. At the same time, the Vietnam writing underlines both the significance of longer aesthetic traditions for 1960s protest and the desire to configure them anew.

## Debating the war

In late November 1965, as the war escalated, authors and intellectuals in the FRG signed a declaration criticising claims by the country's Chancellor, Ludwig Erhard, that West Germans supported US policy in Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> But other than in the centre-left-leaning daily newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the text of this declaration was not widely or fully reported in the press.<sup>13</sup> Instead, many other papers offered severe, misleading criticism. The *Münchener Merkur*, for example, commented of the signatories:

Die Herren wollen also dem Kommunismus freie Bahn gegeben sehen, wie schlicht festzustellen ist. In Amerika wie auch bei uns schlängeln sich dünne Propagandazüge durch die Städte; ein paar ehrliche, jedoch einfältige Leute, viel [sic] schlampige Frauenzimmer und Jünglinge, die so aussehen, als röchen sie etwas streng... Gammler, bekannte Schriftsteller und einige Hochschullehrer in einer Front: Es ist beängstigend, wieviel politische Dummheit sich bei uns ungehindert und ohne Widerspruch breitmachen kann und sogar ernst genommen wird.

[So as we can ascertain simply enough, these gentlemen wish to clear the way for Communism. Here, as in America, thin propagandistic processions are snaking their way through the streets; a few honest, yet simple people, many slovenly females and youths who look as though they give off a somewhat pungent smell... Drop-outs, well-known authors and a few academics all joining forces: it is frightening to see just how much political stupidity can spread unchecked and unchallenged in this country, and even be taken seriously].<sup>14</sup>

In a counter-move to that controversial critical declaration on Vietnam, the highly influential conservative Springer media group, which owned many West German newspapers, announced a fundraising drive to gift a model of West Berlin's 'Freiheitsglocke' ['Liberty Bell'] to the families of all US service personnel killed in the conflict.<sup>15</sup> This replica of the US Liberty Bell had been donated to West Berlin from America in 1950 as a symbol of support; it hung in the Rathaus Schöneberg [Schöneberg City Hall], then the seat of West Berlin's government. The return gifts of bells from West Berlin to America would thus serve to underline both the city's gratitude to its Cold War protector and the widely perceived analogy between the freedoms of West Berlin and South Vietnam.

Late in 1965, the popular West Berlin cabarettist and writer Wolfgang Neuss issued a pamphlet satirising this campaign by the Springer press.<sup>16</sup> He was consequently charged by the authorities with issuing an unauthorised publication, insulting an Allied occupying force and disparaging the dead. In the end, the prosecution did not progress, but Neuss was prominently targeted by Springer newspapers and the corporation's West Berlin publications refused to carry advertisements for his shows. In turn, writers such as Enzensberger, Grass, Uwe Johnson and Reinhard Lettau expressed solidarity with him.<sup>17</sup>

This chain of events shows that opposition to the Vietnam conflict was far from being universal in the Federal Republic. It indicates too just how controversial the 1965 anti-war declaration was, at a time when any non-parliamentary political activity, critique of the authorities or general nonconformism were regarded with great suspicion.<sup>18</sup> This situation demonstrates also that expressions of protest, especially against the US, could quickly be discredited or demonised in the tense atmosphere of the Cold War city; and that literary writers played an important part in public debate about them.

As time went on, writers such as Heinrich Böll, Horst Bingel, Erich Fried, Christian Geissler, Frieder Hitzer, Peter Rühmkorf, Peter Schütt, Walser and Weiss all spoke at anti-war events. At the high point of the anti-war campaign, its most celebrated (or notorious) expression was the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß [International Congress on Vietnam] that took place in West Berlin in February 1968. It was organised by the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS). A large number of authors, journalists, academics and other intellectuals issued a public statement in support of this event, asserting:

Vietnam ist das Spanien unserer Generation. Wir dürfen nicht durch Schweigen oder Neutralität gegenüber dem revolutionären Kampf des vietnamesischen Volks Schuld auf uns laden. Daher begrüßen wir die Initiative der jungen Generation, die dazu beiträgt, die Weltmeinung gegen die US-amerikanische Intervention in Vietnam und die dadurch verursachte Vernichtung des vietnamesischen Volkes zu mobilisieren. Wir solidarisieren uns mit den Streiks, die ein Ende dieser Intervention fördern, und mit all denen, die amerikanischen Bürger, welche ihren Militärdienst verweigern oder aus ihm desertieren, unterstützen. Wir begrüßen deshalb diese vom SDS einberufene Konferenz junger sozialistischer Gruppen aus den verschiedenen Ländern Europas zur Unterstützung des Kampfes



gegen die amerikanische Intervention in Vietnam und die Quisling-Regierung in Saigon und setzen uns für das Recht des vietnamesischen Volkes ein, seine Zukunft selbst zu bestimmen.

[Vietnam is our generation's Spain. We must not become guilty parties to it, by staying silent or neutral towards the Vietnamese people's revolutionary struggle. Thus we welcome the young generation's initiative, which is contributing to mobilising world opinion against the US American intervention in Vietnam and the ensuing destruction of the Vietnamese people. We stand in solidarity with the strikes which demand the end of that intervention, and with all who support those American citizens who are conscientious objectors to military service or who desert it. Therefore we welcome this conference, called by the SDS, of young socialist groups from the countries of Europe in support of the struggle against the American intervention in Vietnam and Saigon's Quisling regime. We support the right of the Vietnamese people to decide their own future].<sup>19</sup>

This text was signed by many writers associated with the era's pre-eminent literary forum, Gruppe 47 [Group 47]. Better-known signatories included Ilse Aichinger, Ingeborg Bachmann, Günter Eich, Enzensberger, Fried, Lettau, Hans Werner Richter, Walser and Weiss. Other, newly emerging authors who supported the declaration included Nicolas Born, Hans Christoph Buch, Franz Josef Degenhardt, F. C. Delius, Hubert Fichte, Günter Herburger, Peter Schneider, Bernward Vesper and Peter-Paul Zahl. In addition, the International Congress on Vietnam attracted individual messages of solidarity from Lettau, Enzensberger, Wolf-Dietrich Schnurre and Gerhard Zwerenz.<sup>20</sup> At the event itself, Fried and Weiss made speeches on the podium.<sup>21</sup>

Later in the war years, in December 1972, West German writers responded to the USA's aerial Operation Linebacker II against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) or North Vietnam. Over 200 intellectuals joined Böll in signing a telegram urging Chancellor Willy Brandt to take a stand against the bombardment. At a conference of the newly formed Verband deutscher Schriftsteller [Association of German Writers] in January of the following year, almost all members expressed solidarity with that statement.<sup>22</sup>

Yet simultaneously the war polarised the West German literary scene and helped to hasten the end of Gruppe 47. In 1966 the group received a prestigious invitation to Princeton University in the USA.

During this visit Weiss gave a speech entitled 'I Come Out of My Hiding Place', a political *parti pris* for the world's oppressed.<sup>23</sup> As a result he was sharply criticised by some of Gruppe 47's leading figures, for example Grass and Richter. Weiss wrote later in his published *Notizbücher 1960–1971* [*Notebooks 1960–1971*] that Grass responded to this speech with 'Kälte u [sic] Ablehnung' ['coldness & rejection'].<sup>24</sup>

On this visit Weiss also joined US thinkers and writers in making public criticisms of US foreign policy.<sup>25</sup> His *Notizbücher* describe an encounter that followed with unnamed West German colleagues:

Das Zusammenstoß im Hotelzimmer. Ich hätte mich in amerikanische Angelegenheiten nicht einzumischen. Mißbrauche die Gastfreundschaft. Und überhaupt: was ich denn für ein Recht hätte, auf diese Weise politisch Stellung zu nehmen. Hätte auch über deutsche Fragen schon viel zuviel gesagt. Wo ich denn während des Kriegs gewesen wäre –

20 Jahre waren an ihnen abgelaufen wie Regenwasser.

[The clash in the hotel room. I was told I wasn't to meddle in American affairs. I was abusing hospitality. And in any case: what right had I to take a political position in this way. I'd already said too much about German issues as well. Where had I been during the war –

20 years had run like rainwater off their backs].<sup>26</sup>

Weiss's biographer Jens-Fietje Dwars glosses these conflicts as follows:

Richter und Grass, die beide der SPD verbunden waren, verstanden sich und 'ihre' Gruppe 47 als Repräsentanten Deutschlands. Die Regierung der Bundesrepublik hatte sich offiziell zur Sprachregelung der US-Regierung bekannt, wonach man in Vietnam einen Angriff des kommunistischen Nordens auf den freiheitlichen Süden abzuwehren habe. In dieser Konstellation wollte man sich heraushalten, lieber schweigen, als außenpolitisches Porzellan zu zerschlagen.

[Richter and Grass, both linked to the SPD [the moderate Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or German Social Democratic Party], saw themselves and 'their' Group 47 as representing Germany. The FRG government had officially espoused the US government's line, according to which it was necessary to

defend the free South of Vietnam against attack by the Communist North. In this context it was desirable to keep out of it, better to remain silent than to behave like a bull in the china shop of foreign policy].<sup>27</sup>

These notebook entries of Weiss's are evocative of anguished fault-lines running through the post-war era's (literary) politics. Those fissures emanate not only from the explosive present of the Cold War, but also the German past. The question about Weiss's whereabouts in the Second World War is offensively provocative, given that in the Nazi years he had had to flee for his life under agonising circumstances. Such conflicts in the 1960s were thus rooted in the complex legacies of history. Nonetheless, Weiss observes too that FRG-based contemporaries could brush them off in ways characteristic of an era that was, to a great extent, yet to engage critically with the recent past.<sup>28</sup>

Such controversies continued into 1967, when Gruppe 47 met again at the Pulvermühle guest house in rural Franconia in West Germany. Fried proposed that the group make a public statement, criticising the Springer media corporation and its pro-US stance.<sup>29</sup> There was also discussion on how to respond to a lively protest by the SDS outside the venue. Arguments ensued, in which Grass, for example, opposed both the statement on Springer and the student demonstrators and Gruppe 47, in effect, came to an end.<sup>30</sup>

In turn, events at Pulvermühle had an impact on activist culture. They became, for instance, the subject of an aggressive, anti-authoritarian poem by Manfred Bosch, which celebrated the idea of silencing Gruppe 47 through a demonstration of verbal violence.<sup>31</sup> This poem appeared in *Edelgämmler: Poesie Satire Prosa* [*The High-Class Dropout: Poetry Satire Prose*], a short-lived, countercultural little magazine. It points therefore to the protest culture's turn away from the canonical forum of Gruppe 47 and its ilk and move towards an alternative (sub)culture.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, competing positions with regard to the Vietnam War seemed to bring about the end of an era in West German literature.

## A blind spot in literature?

The Vietnam conflict played an important part in West German literary theory of the 1960s, as evidenced by the debate in *Kursbuch* between Weiss, Enzensberger and Walser quoted in the introduction to this chapter. In addition *Kursbuch*, a literary periodical at heart even when

appearing to be the very opposite, devoted important issues to post-colonial, anti-colonial and internationalist theory.<sup>33</sup> The most important in this respect are numbers 2 (August 1965), 6 (July 1966), 9 (June 1967) and 11 (January 1968), and *Kursbuch* 6 and 9 include numerous contributions on Vietnam in particular. The year 1967 also saw an important theoretical debate conducted in other high-profile cultural periodicals on the representability of the war in poetry.<sup>34</sup>

Yet startlingly, in context, Vietnam features only relatively sparsely in the high literature of the time. An early instance is Enzensberger's poem 'abendnachrichten' ['evening news'], in his collection *blindenschrift* [*braille*] (1964).<sup>35</sup> In just 10 lines it describes a news bulletin about an unnamed war. The poem's tropes of rice, gunfire and natural imagery are echoed in another, even shorter work, Paul Celan's nine-line 'Einem Bruder in Asien' ['To a Brother in Asia'] which first appeared in 1967.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, from 1965 onwards, Fried published a much more substantial series of anti-war poems, including in 1966 the landmark collection *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig gedichte* [*and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems*].<sup>37</sup> Here 41 poems, mostly short, appear alongside a prose 'Chronik' ['chronicle'] of events in Vietnam. Fried's poems seek to raise awareness of the horrors of the conflict and helped to trigger the debate of 1967 on anti-war poetry.

One year later, in 1967, Grass too published a poetry collection, *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* [*Interrogated: Poems and drawings*] (1967).<sup>38</sup> A handful of poems in this volume are commonly read, including by Fried himself, as a stinging attack on Fried's anti-war poetry.<sup>39</sup> So in this sense, for all Grass's differences from Fried and the anti-war movement, he too can be read as an author of Vietnam poems, albeit ones that go against the grain of anti-war protest.

Narrative prose which discusses Vietnam includes Grass's novel of 1969, *örtlich betäubt* [*local anaesthetic*].<sup>40</sup> This work is part of the author's celebrated Danzig Quintet of novels, which had opened spectacularly with *Die Blechtrommel* [*The Tin Drum*] in 1959. The more understated, lesser-known *örtlich betäubt* offers an account of the West Berlin anti-authoritarian movement around 1967 from the perspective of a middle-aged history teacher, formerly one of the rebellious youths of wartime Danzig about whom Grass had written in *Die Blechtrommel*.<sup>41</sup> In the present day this protagonist, now in his late thirties, is horrified by his students' increasing preparedness to consider violent action against the Vietnam War and haunted by his own past.<sup>42</sup>

Likewise, Johnson's epic four-part novel *Jahrestage. Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl* [*Anniversaries: From the life of Gesine Cresspahl*]

(1970–83) explores recent German history and the vicissitudes of memory. Its present-day, German-born, eponymous protagonist lives in New York City and avidly reads *The New York Times*.<sup>43</sup> This newspaper's reports on the Vietnam conflict are often referenced in the novel. Meanwhile Ingeborg Bachmann's short story, 'Drei Wege zum See' ['Three Paths to the Lake'] (1972), focuses on a successful, Paris-based press photographer, Elisabeth Matrei, who is on a visit to her father and childhood home in Austria. There she reflects on her complex life and, at the very end of the story, is offered an assignment to photograph the war in South Vietnam. Matrei is minded to accept the assignment, albeit with apprehension.<sup>44</sup>

In drama, an important work which centres much more fully on Vietnam is Weiss's lengthy documentary play *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten* [Discourse on the Prior History and Progress of the Long War of Liberation in Viet Nam as Exemplary of the Necessity of Armed Struggle of the Oppressed Against the Oppressors; and on the Attempts of the United States of America to Destroy the Basis of the Revolution], usually known as *Viet Nam Diskurs* [Discourse on Vietnam]. Published in 1967, this work was first performed in 1968.<sup>45</sup> According to critic Caroline Rupprecht, its remarkable title 'was designed to evoke Mao Zedong's 1938 *Über den lang andauernden Krieg* [On Prolonged War]'.<sup>46</sup> Correspondingly, it offers a Marxist-inspired exposition and analysis of the history of Vietnam from its earliest recorded times. The first half of the play is devoted to the country's history up to 1945 and the second treats the period after 1945.

However, all these works can be described as West German responses to the Vietnam conflict only in extremely qualified ways. While all their authors published in the FRG, only Grass lived and worked there primarily in the years in question. Celan, Fried and Weiss were long-standing exiles since the Nazi era, living in France, Britain and Sweden respectively. The multilingual Jewish poet, and Holocaust survivor, Celan was born in Czernowitz (present-day Chernivtsi), which was then part of Romania and today is in Ukraine. Fried had fled anti-Semitic persecution in Austria and Weiss had formerly been a Czechoslovak citizen. By 1964 Enzensberger, although born and raised in Germany, had been living in Norway for some years and was writing sceptically about German identity.<sup>47</sup> He was often abroad in the later 1960s too, most famously leaving for revolutionary Cuba towards the end of the decade. Likewise

Uwe Johnson, originally from North Germany, was a sometime citizen of the German Democratic Republic (GDR); he later lived in West Germany but resided in New York in the late 1960s and was based in England from 1974 onwards. Bachmann was an Austrian living in Rome at the time 'Drei Wege zum See' appeared. Thus it seems that canonical literary writing about Vietnam which appeared in the Federal Republic is best described as a complex, transnational fabric, often generated by writers with, at best, a distanced relationship to West Germany.

Furthermore, most of these works engage with Vietnam's conflict in distant, theoretical or otherwise mediated ways. Enzensberger's and Celan's poems do not mention Vietnam by name, but instead hint at it by means of allusion.<sup>48</sup> The key themes of Grass's poems on protest in *Ausgefragt*, as well as the novel *örtlich betäubt*, are not the Vietnam conflict itself, but the fundamental shortcomings of the anti-war and protest movements as the author saw them. In addition, Grass's works insistently critique the idea of depicting the conflict, and so it recedes almost completely within them. Johnson's *Jahrestage* does not foreground the war itself either, focusing rather upon press reports about it.

Vietnam is mentioned only at the very end of Bachmann's 'Drei Wege zum See', a text predominantly concerned with the Austrian past. For its protagonist Matrei, Vietnam is a possible future destination rather than a tangible reality. Moreover, she is concerned that to take meaningful pictures once she has reached her destination seems impossible. The philosophical core of the story is a debate she recalls with a former lover who argued that the very idea of photographing conflict or suffering for the media is an outrage. He states: 'es ist eine Zumutung, es ist eine Erniedrigung, eine Niedertracht, einem Menschen auch noch zu zeigen, wie andere leiden' (158) ['it's too much to expect, it's humiliating and despicable to go so far as to show people other people's suffering' (143)]. This argument suggests that Matrei's war photography will not only endanger her personally, but also carries grave ethical risks. Bachmann's Vietnam thus appears in terms of its distance from Western Europe and is linked to unrepresentability.

By contrast, Fried's poems engage head-on with aspects of the Vietnam conflict. All the same, they often reflect critically on the ways in which it is mediated through news coverage, and so on the difficulties of representation in ways related to Grass's and Bachmann's concerns.<sup>49</sup> Most emphatically among the examples discussed here, Weiss's *Viet Nam Diskurs* depicts Vietnam and its war directly. It presents Vietnamese history as a sequence of wars of liberation, culminating in the contemporary conflict. As such, the play is in line with the West European

New Left's fascination with the idea of Vietnam's traditional elective affinity with revolution.<sup>50</sup> It recalls, too, an anarchist-influenced ideal of permanent revolution. However, despite the play's exhaustive documentary approach, its full title indicates that Weiss is interested primarily in what he sees as Vietnam's exemplary, transhistorical qualities. His account of Vietnamese history consequently tends towards abstraction, in ways which are mirrored by its avant-gardist rejection of realism and pared-back staging.

Of these works, the three which focus most extensively on Vietnam and related themes are *örtlich betäubt*, *und VIETNAM und* and *Viet Nam Diskurs*. Another commonality between them is the fact that their contemporary reception was split between popular and critical responses. Grass's *örtlich betäubt* sold extremely well.<sup>51</sup> Fried's *und VIETNAM und* was also a bestseller, and the author read from it on the radio.<sup>52</sup> Weiss's *Viet Nam Diskurs* was the work of an acknowledged playwright during a key decade in his career. Published by the important house Suhrkamp, it was produced immediately at a major theatre in Frankfurt am Main, as well as at the prestigious Berliner Ensemble in East Berlin and in Rostock, also in the GDR.

Yet the literary establishment was not unanimously taken with these works. Grass's *örtlich betäubt* was poorly received by critics and, according to prominent literary journalist Marcel Reich-Ranicki, marked a low point in Grass's career.<sup>53</sup> Fried had originally approached his colleagues in Gruppe 47 to join him in contributing to a poetry anthology devoted to Vietnam, but he met with little response.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he wrote *und VIETNAM und* himself and struggled to find a publisher for it.<sup>55</sup> On publication, the volume was not reviewed in any major newspapers.<sup>56</sup> It only featured in the liberal *Die Zeit* in late 1968, that is, two years or more after its first appearance, and was not discussed in Springer publications at all.<sup>57</sup> The fact that *und VIETNAM und* did not garner widespread critical acclaim may be at least in part due to its status as explicitly engaged poetry. As Reich-Ranicki put it in general terms, in an obituary for Fried written in 1988:

Denn was tatsächlich politisch wirkt, ist keine Dichtung, und was Dichtung ist, hat keinen realen Einfluß auf die Politik

[For that which is truly politically effective is not poetic, and that which is poetic can have no real influence on politics].<sup>58</sup>

In such a view, political poetry fails to have lasting value.<sup>59</sup>

Weiss's *Viet Nam Diskurs* did not enjoy great critical success either.<sup>60</sup> The newspaper *Darmstädter Echo*, for example, mockingly rephrased the play's long title as follows:

Diskurs über die Absicht und den Verlauf des lang andauernden, gutgemeinten Polemik auf der Bühne als Beispiel für die Entbehrlichkeit einer theatralischen Darbietung unterdrückter Menschen durch unterdrückter Schauspieler sowie über die Versuche des Erfinders vorgeturnten Schulfunks, Peter Weiss, die Grundlagen des Theaters zu mißachten

[Discourse on the Intentions and Progress of the Long-Lasting, Well-Intentioned Stage Polemic as Exemplary of the Dispensibility of a Theatrical Presentation of Oppressed People by Oppressed Actors; and on the Attempts of the Inventor of Didactic Style, Peter Weiss, to Violate the Basic Principles of Theatre].<sup>61</sup>

As a result, Dwars suggests that the play heralded Weiss's 'Untergang als Dramatiker' ['downfall as a dramatist'] (207). Rupprecht's study, too, describes the play as 'lengthy and uninspiring' (85), noting that after its first productions it 'was rarely performed or discussed by anyone' (87). In other words, even the era's best-known texts on Vietnam, whether critical or supportive of the anti-war movement, were and are considered to be at best minor works by otherwise more major writers.

It seems, then, that while Vietnam was a topic of concern for many writers and artists of the 1960s, it was not extensively reflected in fine writing. Furthermore, where it does appear, it is often not much valued by criticism. This apparent blind spot is all the more striking when contrasted with the weight accorded to anti-war themes in East German literature of the time.<sup>62</sup> Their importance is embodied, for instance, in the prestigious anthology *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation [Vietnam Now: Documented by artists]*, which appeared in the GDR in 1968.<sup>63</sup> Some 260 pages in length, this richly illustrated, large-format volume includes work by some of East Germany's most highly regarded talents, as well as a wealth of international texts. It was brought out by the important East German literary publisher Mitteldeutscher Verlag. By contrast, in the Federal Republic of Germany, there was no equivalent, high-end anthology about the Vietnam War.



## In other words: forms of anti-war writing

And yet the Federal Republic did not lack a significant culture of anti-war writing. This study, in accordance with its aim of breaking down traditional literary canonical boundaries, now looks beyond Weiss's better-known works on Vietnam to introduce four further texts of his which are considerably more obscure today. First, Weiss's short, polemical essay 'Vietnam!' (1966), published in both Swedish and German, offers a summary of the war and a call to international, anti-imperialist action.<sup>64</sup> It was the first publication in the New Left series *Voltaire Flugschriften* [Voltaire Pamphlets], which drew in works from around the world and in which some of contemporary anti-authoritarianism's most important texts appeared. As such, this series stands as a record of the movement's successive concerns.<sup>65</sup> Second, the *Voltaire Flugschriften* included in 1968 a further text by Weiss and his frequent collaborator (and wife) Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss. This work is a documentary-style compilation, *Bericht über die Angriffe der US-Luftwaffe und -Marine gegen die Demokratische Republik Vietnam nach der Erklärung Präsident Johnsons über die 'begrenzte Bombardierung' am 31. März 1968* [Report on the Attacks of the US Air Force and Navy on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam Following President Johnson's Statement on 'Limited Bombardment', 31 March 1968].<sup>66</sup> Third, again in the same year, Weiss published the book-length memoir *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* [Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam] (1968).<sup>67</sup> This text describes a visit which he and Palmstierna-Weiss made to the DRV on the invitation of its government, as did numerous other sympathetic foreign writers and intellectuals in the war years. Weiss's account focuses in particular on Vietnamese literature and history. Fourth, the untitled speech he gave at the *Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß*, later printed in the conference proceedings, provides another instance of his anti-war writing.<sup>68</sup> These four texts can be read for their intrinsic interest. However, in addition, they serve in more general terms as a guide to the wider if lesser-known anti-war writing of the time, making emblematic use as they do of four of its key genres, namely the political polemic, the documentary, the memoir and the ephemeral text.

Unsurprisingly, the era saw significant use of political analysis, polemic and similar forms. Vietnam and protest about it were discussed, for instance, by campaigning journalist Ulrike Meinhof in her regular column in the pre-eminent leftist magazine of the time, *konkret* [concrete].<sup>69</sup> Meinhof's work is remembered today in part due to her later

engagement in the urban terrorist group, the Rote Armee Fraktion [Red Army Faction] (RAF). Another, now forgotten, example of polemical writing is Bernd Kramer's pamphlet *amerikanischer faschismus* [*american fascism*] (1968).<sup>70</sup> As the title of this essay suggests, it endorses the contemporary hypothesis that US intervention in Vietnam was akin to Nazi atrocities.<sup>71</sup> At the same time it pushes that position further by arguing that the offences of the US in Vietnam are in some senses worse than those of the German National Socialists, inserting them into a teleology of horror.

Kramer was a familiar figure in West Berlin's counterculture, and this essay of his is representative of wider anti-authoritarian textuality in various senses. He was part of the collective that produced the controversial, sometimes officially censored magazine *linkeck* [*leftangle*] in 1968–9, and *amerikanischer faschismus* appeared with Verlag Peter-Paul Zahl – a small West Berlin publisher with which some of the movement's most definitive texts appeared.<sup>72</sup> Verlag Peter-Paul Zahl embraced increasingly radical tendencies in parts of the fragmenting anti-authoritarian movement at the end of the 1960s. Consequently, this publisher was frequently associated with underground action and targeted by police.<sup>73</sup> Like the *Voltaire Flugschriften*, Kramer's essay is distinctive in its styling, appearing as it did in Verlag Peter-Paul Zahl's visually elegant pp-quadrat series. These formal features show how, in anti-authoritarianism, Modernist design was mobilised as a means to a political end.<sup>74</sup>

A contrasting example of polemical writing is the work of philosopher Günther Anders, who had lived in exile during the Nazi era, then in Vienna during the 1960s. In 1968 he published the full-length book *Visit Beautiful Vietnam: ABC der Aggressionen heute* [*Visit Beautiful Vietnam: An ABC of aggression today*] (1968).<sup>75</sup> This work comments critically and satirically on the war in a collection of short, topical meditations arranged under alphabetical headings, so breaking up any conventional narrative or argument. Instead, Anders's series of aphorisms gives an impression of a catalogue of wrongs committed against the people of Vietnam, perhaps as it could be imagined they themselves experienced it; that is to say with no apparent logic or causality. At times too, *Visit Beautiful Vietnam* prefers allegorical to historical exposition, drawing on allusions to a fictional people called 'die Molusser' ['the Molussians']. In these formal respects, Anders's book stands apart from the era's more conventional works of political and historical analysis, such as a 1966 special issue of the left-wing journal *Das Argument: Berliner Hefte für Probleme der Gesellschaft* [*The Argument: Berlin Journal*

of *Societal Problems*], entitled 'Die Amerikaner in Vietnam' ['The Americans in Vietnam'].<sup>76</sup>

In 1967 Anders also authored a Voltaire Flugschrift, *Nürnberg und Vietnam: Ein synoptisches Mosaik* [*Nuremberg and Vietnam: A synoptic mosaic*] (1967).<sup>77</sup> This short work is typical of the era's intense interest in documentary writing, as practised by Weiss, Enzensberger and many others. Such forms were particularly valued in view of prevalent critiques of mainstream media and their alleged distortions of the truth about the conflict. Thus, *Nürnberg und Vietnam* presents, in parallel text, information about the post-war Nuremberg trials of leading Nazis on one hand and the present-day trial in the US of a conscientious objector on the other. In setting up this parallel, Anders draws attention to the legal principle established at Nuremberg that following orders may not exonerate perpetrators of war crimes, arguing that it should apply to the US's military engagement in Vietnam too.

A further, related type of anti-war text is the memoir, of which Weiss's book *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* is not the only example to appear in the FRG. The most substantial publication of this type is Georg W. Alsheimer's *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam* [*Vietnamese Apprentice Years: Six years as a German doctor in Vietnam*] (1968).<sup>78</sup> *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* was the only work originally published in the FRG in the period in question to be based on long-standing, first-hand familiarity with Vietnam. Almost 400 pages in length, this pseudonymous memoir by Erich Wulff records the time he spent in the university city of Hué in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), or South Vietnam, up to 1967. Alsheimer worked in South Vietnam as a doctor and university teacher in the context of a well-known West German development initiative, namely the establishment of a medical faculty with the participation of academics from the University of Freiburg.<sup>79</sup> In time he became a pro-democracy activist and supporter of the National Liberation Front (NLF, also known, originally pejoratively, as the Viet Cong). His memoir gives a richly detailed account of his everyday life as well as many aspects of Vietnamese history, culture and society.

Another, rather different memoir is Schütt's *Vietnam 30 Tage danach* [*Vietnam 30 Days On*] (1973). This book recounts and idealises a visit to the DRV as part of a delegation from the West German Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party] (DKP).<sup>80</sup> Schütt's title refers to the date of his visit 30 days after the Paris peace accords were signed, following which US troops were to leave Vietnam, and his memoir focuses on encounters with North Vietnamese citizens.

The popularity of memoirs about time spent in Vietnam is suggested by the fact that numerous examples in German translation also appeared in the Federal Republic. Still others became available due to their publication in the GDR, from where they could circulate to the FRG, often through West Berlin. These translated works include accounts by US journalists Mary McCarthy and Harrison E. Salisbury, US critic Susan Sontag, the Australian investigative journalist Wilfred G. Burchett and Swedish writer Sara Lidman.<sup>81</sup> Another important book, published originally in the GDR and subsequently in the Federal Republic, is Walter Heynowski's and Gerhard Scheumann's *Piloten im Pyjama. Von Deutschen befragt: US-Piloten in nordvietnamesischer Gefangenschaft. Eine Dokumentation [Pilots in Pyjamas. Questioned by Germans: US pilots in a North Vietnamese prison. Documentation]* (1968). This work documents the making of Heynowski's and Scheumann's television mini-series of the same title, which focused on interviews on location with US pilots captured in the DRV.<sup>82</sup>

Other West Germans who wrote about visiting Vietnam included journalists who made shorter trips there.<sup>83</sup> Journalistic eyewitness accounts in translation from international sources were likewise widely available, for example the alternative reportage on the conflict in the pages of Meinhof's *konkret*.<sup>84</sup> Finally, reflections of travel include poems, namely Hans Gutke's 'Qui Nhon' (1968), and works by Dorothee Sölle. The latter were published in the leftist literary periodical *Kürbiskern [Pumpkin Seed]* and Sölle's own poetry collection *die revolutionäre geduld [revolutionary patience]* in 1974.<sup>85</sup>

Less easily traced today are some of the protest movements' most controversial textual forms, namely their ephemera. Some, such as the notes on which Weiss's *Notizbücher*, published much later, were based, were personal writings. Other examples were intended to communicate powerfully in public or semi-public situations, for instance the plethora of texts from and around the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß, including Weiss's address from the podium. The conference proceedings included not only such speeches but also transcripts of discussions, a written declaration of support by the NLF's representatives in the GDR and telegrams from an array of prominent figures in international politics, academia and the arts.<sup>86</sup> Accounts of the Congress appeared in underground newspapers and magazines which proliferated in this period, and so belong to its textual legacy too.

Further associated ephemera included stickers, slogans, graffiti, posters and flyers, many of which combined words and pictures in characteristic ways.<sup>87</sup> An iconic example was the outsize banner made by

artists Elke Regehr and Helga Reidemeister to form the backdrop for the podium. It was inspired by the flag of the South Vietnamese rebels, the NLF. It bore the words:

FÜR DEN SIEG DER VIETNAMESISCHEN REVOLUTION

[FOR THE VICTORY OF THE VIETNAMESE REVOLUTION]

and

DIE PFLICHT JEDES REVOLUTIONÄRS IST ES DIE REVOLUTION  
ZU MACHEN

[EVERY REVOLUTIONARY'S DUTY IS TO MAKE THE  
REVOLUTION].<sup>88</sup>

Another instance among the countless ephemera which foregrounded visual imagery is Arie Goral's and Rolf Nierling's poster-flyer hybrid, *Entwicklungshilfe für Vietnam [Development Aid for Vietnam]* (1968).<sup>89</sup> Even more fleeting works of this kind are suggested by descriptions such as the following, by writer Uwe Friesel:

1965 habe ich zusammen mit dem Maler Eckart [sic] Heidrich und der modern-jazz-band 'The Foursome' einen Band 'Bilder von der Großen Freiheit' im Audi Max der Hamburger Universität veranstaltet. Heidrichs Antikriegsbilder wurden in Totalen und Ausschnitten projiziert, dazu über Lautsprecheranlage plus zusätzliche Verstärker Text und aggressive Musik. Es war so etwas wie eine mixed-media-show.

[In 1965, alongside the painter Eckart [sic] Heidrich and the modern jazz band The Foursome, I created a volume *Images of Große Freiheit* in the main lecture hall of Hamburg University. Both partial and full images of Heidrich's anti-war pictures were projected and accompanied by text and aggressive music on the PA system and additional amplifiers. It was something like a mixed-media show].<sup>90</sup>

On one level, such combined textual and visual forms underline the fact that for West Germans the Vietnam conflict was the first media war, broadcast extensively in vivid television and film footage.<sup>91</sup> On another level, works that combined words and images testify to the anti-war

movement's search for innovative modes of communication. Anti-war exhibitions, for example, also blended texts and pictures.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, Friesel's remark shows that words and music could meet in the work of anti-war artists, in ways characteristic of anti-authoritarian textuality; another example is Neuss's work in cabaret.

Finally, some anti-war ephemera had clear affinities with the era's cutting-edge happening and performance culture, practised by artists Klaus Staeck and Wolf Vostell, for example, both of whom often mobilised text.<sup>93</sup> The most notorious example of protest that criss-crossed between political text and artistic performance was the work of controversial West Berlin group Kommune I [Commune I] (KI).<sup>94</sup> This group's actions deployed written texts such as provocative flyers alongside physical action in public spaces, and came in many ways to epitomise the image of anti-authoritarian protest.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that in the Federal Republic in the 1960s and 1970s prominent writers and intellectuals were deeply interested in Vietnam. Yet some of the most notable literary texts featuring Vietnam or protest about it to be published in the FRG were the work of German-language writers from, or based, elsewhere. Furthermore, works that focused centrally on Vietnam, even Fried's popular poems, tended not to be critical successes. However, guided by the prolific anti-war writing of an eminent if controversial figure, Weiss, this chapter's closer exploration of the era's less canonical textuality reveals a rich, forgotten field which touched the pulse of contemporary protest.

This field draws in multiple forms, from documentary and polemic to reportage, memoir and ephemera which mix words, images, music and performance. That is to say, much anti-war writing eschews supposedly high literary genres with a view to communicating more directly or truthfully, or to raise readers' consciousness and stimulate debate and protest. Significantly, these aims are shared by Weiss's better-known anti-war play, *Viet Nam Diskurs*, as well as by Fried's poetry collection *und VIETNAM und*. Moreover, both these works resonate with the wider writing of protest in their forms as well as their themes, containing as they do documentary, collaborative, dialogical or performative elements.<sup>95</sup> These formal similarities between the recognised literary texts by Weiss and Fried and other kinds of anti-war writing show that the latter, too, take their place in aesthetic tradition.<sup>96</sup> Moreover, the writing's

frequent use of documentary form, montage, agit-prop or unconventional performance, as well as the Modernist-inspired graphic styling of some texts, for example, allude to cultural traditions of the Weimar era, or even earlier.

Simultaneously, anti-war writing is often formally innovative, for instance the work of Anders. At times these writings are distinctive also in merging various textual modes and styles. The corpus thus combines intellectual, documentary and literary impulses with such heterogeneous influences as US pop culture and Marxist theory. It is also deeply and intertextually connected as texts frequently cross-reference one another, both implicitly and explicitly.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the anti-war texts form a novel, heteroglossic continuum of writing and, sometimes, action. As Fried later noted of his poems' interface with protest culture:

Viele dieser Gedichte [...] wurden als Flugblätter, in Schülerzeitungen, Veranstaltungsprogrammen nachgedruckt oder als Liedertexte verwendet. Auch auf Transparente wurden kürzere Gedichte oder Verse aus längeren geschrieben. Ich selbst habe sie als Einlage zwischen Ansprachen, als Unterbrechung und Ergänzung eigener Ansprachen, als Teile akustischer oder visueller Montagen, die ansonsten aus Fotos oder Zitaten aus Zeitungen bestanden, benutzt.

[Many of these poems [...] were reprinted as flyers, in school newspapers, event programmes or used as song lyrics. Shorter poems or lines from longer ones were written on banners too. I myself used them as intermezzi between speeches, as an interruption or complement to my own speeches, as parts of acoustic or visual montages, which consisted also of photos or quotations from newspapers].<sup>98</sup>

Critic Volker Kaukoreit also reports that Fried's anti-war poems 'fanden ihren Weg auf die Bühnen politischer Theater und Kabarets' ['made their way onto the stages of political theatre and cabarets'].<sup>99</sup> Weiss's *Viet Nam Diskurs* crossed from page and stage into activist contexts; its premiere proved a tumultuous political event in itself, as demonstrators halted the performance and the actors and the playwright joined them.<sup>100</sup> On one hand, this complex interaction shows that protesters challenged traditional theatre as a political form. On the other, however, their interest in Weiss's play shows that it resonated perceptibly with contemporary protest and even became part of it. It was therefore brought into (distant) connection to the era's more demotic activist theatre.<sup>101</sup>

In these respects, the anti-war texts are reminiscent of avant-garde styles which break down conventional generic boundaries. In addition, they typify contemporary anti-authoritarian textuality, which both drew on aesthetic heritage and challenged it.<sup>102</sup> In other words, the anti-war writing as a whole has affinities with strands in Modernist tradition. Read against this background, it is possible to reconceptualise the place of Fried's and Weiss's anti-war works, in particular, in the writing landscape. Seen in this context, *und VIETNAM und* and *Viet Nam Diskurs* lose their apparently exceptional, auratic – or erratic – status; they are unusual not for their theme or political position, but above all for their continued, if limited, posterity. At the same time, they hint that the protest movements valorised poetic expression in more classic senses too, as the next chapter of this study will show.

## Notes

- 1 Peter Weiss, '10 Arbeitspunkte eines Autors in der geteilten Welt' (1965), in Peter Weiss, *Rapporte 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971). Further page references follow in the text.
- 2 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Europäische Peripherie', *Kursbuch 2* (August 1965) and 'Peter Weiss und andere', *Kursbuch 6* (July 1966); Peter Weiss, 'Enzensbergers Illusionen', *Kursbuch 6* (July 1966). For critical analysis of this exchange see Jennifer Ruth Hosek, *Sun, Sex and Socialism: Cuba in the German imaginary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 93–4; Sara Lennox, 'Enzensberger, *Kursbuch* and "Third-Worldism": The Sixties' construction of Latin America', in *Neue Welt' / 'Dritte Welt': Interkulturelle Beziehungen Deutschlands zu Lateinamerika und der Karibik*, edited by Sigrid Bauschinger and Susan L. Cocalis (Tübingen: Francke, 1994); Arlene A. Teraoka, *East, West and Others: The Third World in postwar German literature* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996). On Enzensberger's Cuba see also Henning Marmulla, 'Rethinking the writer's role: Enzensberger and Cuba – or a story of self-censorship', in *A Revolution of Perception? Consequences and echoes of 1968*, edited by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2014). On Enzensberger, other intellectuals and revolutionary Latin America see Jamie H. Trnka, *Revolutionary Subjects: German literatures and the limits of aesthetic solidarity with Latin America* (Berlin, Munich and Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2015), 63–119.
- 3 Peter Weiss, 'Enzensbergers Illusionen', 170.
- 4 Peter Weiss, 'Che Guevara!', translated by Andreas Thalmayr (Enzensberger's pseudonym), *Kursbuch 11* (January 1968): 5, also in Weiss, *Rapporte 2*. According to the latter volume, this essay first appeared in the Swedish paper *Dagens Nyheter* on 14 November 1967.
- 5 Martin Walser, 'Praktiker, Weltfremde und Vietnam', *Kursbuch 9* (June 1967). Further page references follow in the text.
- 6 Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German protest against America's war during the 1960s', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and international perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), 285.
- 7 There are references to this bureau's operation by literary authors in Peter Schütt, 'Politische Lyrik', *Splitter: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Graphik und Kritik* 5, nos. 2+3 (December 1967): 8; Ulla Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion: Zur Entwicklung operativer Literaturformen in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1978), 53–5. Further page references follow in the text. According to Hahn, the bureau was established in 1967 in Frankfurt am Main. Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 55.



- 8 For critical analysis of the complex relationship between writers and the protest movements which has been formative for this study see Klaus Briegleb, 1968: *Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 161–71; and on Gruppe 47 and Vietnam protest, 196–221.
- 9 This open letter was first published in the *New York Review of Books*. Jörg Lau, *Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Ein öffentliches Leben* (Berlin: Alexander Fest, 1999), 24. In German it appeared as 'Warum ich Amerika verlasse (Offener Brief an den Präsidenten der Wesleyan University)', in *Die Zeit*, 1 March 1968, n.p., and 'Offener Brief', in *Über Hans Magnus Enzensberger*, edited by Joachim Schickel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 234. In 1998 Enzensberger described his actions and letter as 'skandalös und ein Affront gegen meine liebenswürdigen Gastgeber' ['scandalous and an insult to my kind hosts'], noting that even then he was aware 'daß mein Entschluß etwas Lächerliches an sich hatte' ['that there was something ridiculous about my decision']. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Coming to America' (1998), translated by Reinhard Kaiser as 'Wie ich fünfzig Jahre lang versuchte, Amerika zu entdecken', in *Der Zorn altert, die Ironie ist unsterblich: Über Hans Magnus Enzensberger*, edited by Rainer Wieland (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 105. This essay is also cited in Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Vexierbild: Hans Magnus Enzensberger im Jahre 1968', in *Hans Magnus Enzensberger und die Ideengeschichte der Bundesrepublik*, edited by Dirk von Petersdorff (Heidelberg: Winter, 2010), 59.
- 10 Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 53–5; cf. Hahn's poem 'Nixon in Moskau' (1972), in the East German anthology *Denkzettel: Politische Lyrik aus der BRD und Westberlin*, edited by Annie Voigtländer and Herbert Witt (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1974), 439–40.
- 11 Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 54.
- 12 Gerhard Schoenberner, 'Der Krieg in Vietnam und die Schriftsteller', *werkhefte: zeitschrift für probleme der gesellschaft und katholizismus* 20, no. 2 (1966) outlines the controversy unleashed by the statement, which appeared in full, e.g. as Inge Aicher-Scholl and others, 'Erklärung über den Krieg in Vietnam', *werkhefte* 20, no. 1 (1966); and Dr Margherita von Brentano and others, 'Erklärung über den Krieg in Vietnam', *Das Argument* 8 (February 1966). The declaration is reprinted as Inge Aicher-Scholl and others, 'Erklärung über den Krieg in Vietnam', in *Die Gruppe 47: Bericht Kritik Polemik. Ein Handbuch*, edited by Reinhard Lettau (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967); see also Steven W. Lawrie, *Erich Fried: A writer without a country* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 284.
- 13 Schoenberner, 'Der Krieg in Vietnam und die Schriftsteller'. According to Schoenberner, following the scandals around the declaration, later in the year the full text was carried by *Der Spiegel* (as paid-for advertising) and *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik, pardon, Ansätze, werkhefte, Vorgänge, konkret* and other periodicals.
- 14 Quoted in Schoenberner, 'Der Krieg in Vietnam und die Schriftsteller', 42.
- 15 On Springer, see e.g. Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A social history of dissent and democracy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 165–8.
- 16 Wolfgang Neuss, 'Neuss Deutschland Extra-Blatt'. According to Briegleb, 1968, this undated text was distributed between 2 and 6 December 1965 in West Berlin by members of 'Die Falken', also known as Sozialistische Jugend Deutschlands [Socialist Youth of Germany] (SJD); the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS) and some writers, 57. The text appears in facsimile in Briegleb, 1968 and Volker Kühn, *Das Wolfgang Neuss Buch* (Cologne: Satire, 1981). See also 209 and 240 of the latter. Cf. Gaston Salvatore, *Wolfgang Neuss – ein faltenreiches Kind. Biographie* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1995).
- 17 Facsimile, 'Neuss Deutschland Extra-Blatt 3', dated 15 January 1966, in Kühn, *Das Wolfgang Neuss Buch*.
- 18 Cf. Richard Hinton Thomas and Keith Bullivant, *Literature in Upheaval: West German writers and the challenge of the 1960s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1974).
- 19 Quoted in Gerhard Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern / an alles was man vergißt': *Erich Fried – Biographie und Werk eines 'deutschen Dichters'*, new, revised edition (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1998), 121–4.
- 20 Hahn refers to participation by further writers such as Born, Delius, Yaak Karsunke, Schütt and Volker von Törne. Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 54; cf. Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern', 124–30.
- 21 Untitled addresses by Weiss and Fried appear in the conference proceedings *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes und die Globalstrategie des Imperialismus: Internationaler*

- Vietnam-Kongreß-Westberlin 17./18. Februar 1968 Westberlin, edited by Sibylle Plogstedt, SDS Westberlin und Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut (Berlin: INFI, 1968), 89–90 and 91–7 respectively. Other authors' messages of support appear 170–1.
- 22 Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 54.
  - 23 Peter Weiss, 'I come out of my hiding-place' (1966), in *Über Peter Weiss*, edited by Volker Canaris (Frankfurt am Main: 1970).
  - 24 Peter Weiss, *Notizbücher 1960–1971*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), II, 492 and quoted in Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung: Peter Weiss. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2007), 199. Dwars observes that Weiss's published notebooks are products of later editing. The pre-publication versions are available on CD-ROM in Peter Weiss, *Die Notizbücher: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Jürgen Schütte, Wiebke Amthor and Jenny Willner (St Ingbert: Röhrig, 2012).
  - 25 See e.g. Sven Kramer, 'Zusammenstoß in Princeton – Peter Weiss und die Gruppe 47', in *Bestandsaufnahme: Studien zur Gruppe 47*, edited by Stephan Braese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1999); Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern', 110–2 on Fried's perspective. Birgit Lahann, *Peter Weiss: Der heimatlose Weltbürger* (Bonn: Dietz, 2016), 214–5, draws in Richter's account.
  - 26 Weiss, *Notizbücher*, II, 491–2 and quoted in Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 198.
  - 27 Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 198.
  - 28 Cf. e.g. Briegleb, *Mißachtung und Tabu. Eine Streitschrift zur Frage: 'Wie antisemitisch war die Gruppe 47?'* (Berlin and Vienna: Philo, 2003).
  - 29 See e.g. Volker Kaukoreit, 'Vom "Heimkehrer" zum "Palastrebellen"? Ein Protokoll zu Erich Fried und die Gruppe 47 (1963–1967)', in Braese, *Bestandsaufnahme*.
  - 30 *Die Gruppe 47: Ein kritischer Grundriß. Sonderband text + kritik*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1980), 251–4; Briegleb, 1968, 123–30; Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern', 124–7; Toni Richter, 'Oktober 1967 im Gasthof Pulvermühle bei Waischenfeld' and Guntram Vesper, 'Eingeladen, meiner Hinrichtung beizuwohnen', in *Die Gruppe 47 in Bildern und Texten*, edited by Toni Richter (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1997).
  - 31 Manfred Bosch, 'Episode', *Edelgämler* 4 (May 1969): 21.
  - 32 Mererid Puw Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016), 11–46.
  - 33 Cf. Henning Marmulla, *Enzensbergers Kursbuch. Eine Zeitschrift um 68* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2011); Vibeke Rützwow-Petersen, *Kursbuch 1965–1975: Social and literary perspectives of West Germany* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988).
  - 34 See [Chapter 6](#).
  - 35 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'abendnachrichten', in *blindenschrift* (1964), edited by Hans Magnus Enzensberger (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 11. See [Chapter 6](#).
  - 36 Paul Celan, 'Einem Bruder in Asien', *Akzente* 16, no. 6 (1967), 485; also in Celan's *Lichtzwang* (1970), in Paul Celan, *Gedichte*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), II, 259; 'To a Brother in Asia,' translated by Beatrice Cameron, *Chicago Review* 29, no. 3 (Winter 1978): 53; 'For a Brother in Asia', in Paul Celan, *Selected Poems*, translated by Michael Hamburger (London: Penguin, 1996), 303.
  - 37 Erich Fried, und *VIETNAM und: einundvierzig gedichte* (1966), in Erich Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Volker Kaukoreit and Klaus Wagenbach, 4 vols (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1998), I.
  - 38 Günter Grass, *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967).
  - 39 Erich Fried, 'Hans Mayer oder der nachhinkende Schweinskopf', *konkret* no. 9, 1967 (September 1967): 37. See [Chapter 2](#).
  - 40 The quintet comprises in addition the novels *Die Blechtrommel*; *Katz und Maus* (1961); *Hundejahre* (1963); and *Im Krebsgang* (2001), all of which are rooted in pre-war and wartime Danzig. See Katharina Hall, *Grass's 'Danzig Quintet': Explorations in the memory and history of the Nazi era from Die Blechtrommel to Im Krebsgang* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007).
  - 41 Günter Grass, *örtlich betäubt* (1969) (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1978), translated as *Local Anaesthetic* by Ralph Manheim (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).
  - 42 See e.g. Mererid Puw Davies, 'Humane horrors: The dentist in Günter Grass's *örtlich betäubt* / *Local anaesthetic*', in *Medical Humanity and Inhumanity in the German-Speaking World*, edited by Mererid Puw Davies and Sonu Shamdasani (London: UCL Press, 2020).
  - 43 Uwe Johnson, *Jahrestage. Aus dem Leben von Gesine Cresspahl* (1970–83), 4 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996); *Anniversaries I: From the life of Gesine Cresspahl*, translated by Leila

- Vennewitz (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975) and *Anniversaries II: From the life of Gesine Cresspahl*, translated by Leila Vennewitz and Walter Arndt (London: Deutsch, 1988).
- 44 Ingeborg Bachmann, 'Drei Wege zum See', in Ingeborg Bachmann, *Simultan* (Munich: R. Piper, 1972); 'Three Paths to the Lake', in Ingeborg Bachmann, *Three Paths to the Lake*, translated by Mary Fran Gilbert (New York and London: Holmes & Meier: 1989). Further page references follow in the text.
- 45 Peter Weiss, with additional research by Jürgen Horlemann, *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten* (1967), in Peter Weiss, *Stücke [Plays]*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), II.1; *Discourse on the Progress / of the Prolonged War of Liberation / in Viet Nam and the Events Leading up to It / as Illustration of the Necessity / for Armed Resistance Against Oppression / and on the Attempts / of the United States of America / to Destroy the Foundations of Revolution / (Discourse on Vietnam)*, translated by Geoffrey Skelton (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971).
- 46 Caroline Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion: New encounters in the Asian-German avant-garde* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020), 88. Further page references appear in the text. On both the play and Weiss's work on Vietnam more generally, see also e.g. Hyeong Shik Kim, *Peter Weiss's 'Viet Nam Diskurs': Möglichkeiten und Formen eines Engagements für die Dritte Welt* (Frankfurt am Main etc: Peter Lang, 1992); Jan Kostka, *Peter Weiss's Vietnam/USA Variationen über Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Schkeuditz: Schkeuditzer Buchverlag, 2006); Rüdiger Sareika, *Die dritte Welt in der westdeutschen Literatur der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer, 1980); and [Chapter 3](#).
- 47 Cf. Lau, *Hans Magnus Enzensberger*.
- 48 Both poems have been interpreted as referencing Vietnam, e.g. by Reinhold Grimm, 'On Enzensberger', *Neohelicon* 34, no. 1 (June 2007): 223–4; Christine Ivanovic, 'Breath turn, linguistic turn, political activism: Reading Celan's poems of 1967', in *Paul Celan Today: A companion*, edited by Michael Eskin, Karen Leeder and Marko Pajević (Berlin and Boston, MA: de Gruyter, 2021); Charlotte Melin, 'Celan and Enzensberger on an Asian conflict', *Germanic Notes* 18, no. 1/2 (1987); and Charlotte Melin, 'A look at Enzensberger's America before and after "On Leaving America"', in *Amerika! New Images in German Literature*, edited by Heinz D. Osterle (New York and Bern: Peter Lang, 1989), 298–9.
- 49 In these respects, the works by Bachmann, Fried and Grass link closely with key themes in anti-war poetry, namely news media, war photography and representation itself. See [Chapters 4](#) and [6](#).
- 50 For example, Georg W. Alsheimer describes in Vietnam a centuries-old 'immer wiederkehrende Bildung von Banden "primitiver Sozialrebelln", die in Krisenzeiten eine weite Anhängerschaft fanden und in manchen, besonders armen Provinzen geradezu endemisch waren. Alle diese Faktoren haben in Vietnam so etwas wie eine sozialrevolutionäre Tradition geschaffen' ['perennial (re)formation of groups of "primitive social rebels", which found wide support in times of crisis and in some regions, especially poor ones, were truly endemic. All these factors created a kind of social-revolutionary tradition in Vietnam']. Georg W. Alsheimer, 'Die Amerikaner in Vietnam', *Die Amerikaner in Vietnam*, special issue, *Das Argument* 36 (February 1966): 7. Alsheimer is quoting Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Vietnam, Histoire et civilisation* (Paris: Minuit, 1955), 263–4.
- 51 Hermann Eckel and Rüdiger Eichel, 'Zeit der Politik', in *Blech getrommelt: Günter Grass in der Kritik*, edited by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Göttingen: Steidl, 2007), 110–20; Siegfried Mews, *Günter Grass and his Critics: From The Tin Drum to Crabwalk* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: 2008), 103–19. Mews notes a more positive reception in the US, a cultural space with different expectations and traditions.
- 52 Gerrit-Jan Berendse, *Vom Aushalten der Extreme: Die Lyrik Erich Frieds zwischen Terror, Liebe und Poesie* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2011), 69. On Fried's radio readings see Hartung, 'Poesie und Vietnam: Eine Entgegnung', *Der Monat* 19, no. 226 (July 1967): 78.
- 53 Mews, *Günter Grass and his Critics*, 104.
- 54 Lettau, Walser and Weiss alone showed interest in the project. Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern', 107; cf. Lawrie, *Erich Fried*, 284.
- 55 Lampe, 'Ich will mich erinnern', 107.
- 56 Harald Hartung, 'Poesie und Vietnam: Eine Entgegnung', 78.
- 57 Lawrie, *Erich Fried*, 295.

- 58 Quoted in Tilman von Brand, *Öffentliche Kontroversen um Erich Fried* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2003), 11. Reich-Ranicki nonetheless praises Fried in this obituary.
- 59 See [Chapter 6](#).
- 60 Cf. Cordelia Scharpf, 'Vietnam Discourse: Its reception in the two Germanies', in *Rethinking Peter Weiss*, edited by Jost Hermand and Marc Silberman (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).
- 61 Quoted in Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 211.
- 62 The image of the 'blind spot' is shared with Hilde Domin's essay 'Nachwort: Das politische Gedicht und die Öffentlichkeit', in *Nachkrieg und Unfriede: Gedichte als Index 1945–1970*, edited by Hilde Domin (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1970), 131. However, Domin uses the image for themes other than Vietnam.
- 63 Werner Bräunig et al. (eds), *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation* (Halle an der Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968).
- 64 Peter Weiss, *Vietnam!* (Berlin: Voltaire, n.d.); also in *konkret* no. 9, 1966 (September 1966); in *Vietnam in dieser Stunde*, edited by Bräunig et al. and in Weiss, *Rapporte 2*; see also 'Antwort auf Kritiken zum Vietnam-Aufsatz', in Weiss, *Rapporte 2*. These pieces were first published in Swedish, in the paper *Dagens Nyheter*, on 2 August and 7 September 1966.
- 65 The Voltaire Flugschriften were initially edited by an important anti-authoritarian protagonist, Bernward Vesper – or Vesper-Triangel, as he sometimes styled himself in the 1960s, e.g. in his credit as editor in Weiss's 'Vietnam!'. Triangel was Vesper's parents' country estate where he grew up, as detailed in his posthumous cult 'novel-essay' *Die Reise: Romanessay* (1977) (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1981). Due to *Die Reise*, Vesper is known today as one of anti-authoritarianism's key literary voices. In addition, he is remembered as the former fiancé of Gudrun Ensslin and the father of her child; she later co-founded the Rote Armee Fraktion [Red Army Faction] (RAF).
- 66 Peter Weiss and Gunilla Palmstierna-Weiss, *Bericht über die Angriffe der US-Luftwaffe und -Marine gegen die Demokratische Republik Vietnam nach der Erklärung Präsident Johnsons über die 'begrenzte Bombardierung' am 31. März 1968* (Frankfurt am Main: Voltaire, 1968); 'Limited bombing' in Vietnam. Report on the attacks of the US Air Force and Navy on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam following President Johnson's Statement on 'limited bombardment', 31 March 1968, translated by Anna Björkwall and Davis Jones (n.pl.: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, n.d.).
- 67 Peter Weiss, *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), which also names Palmstierna-Weiss as a collaborator; *Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*, no translator (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971). See [Chapter 3](#).
- 68 See note 21 above.
- 69 Collected in Ulrike Marie Meinhof, *Die Würde des Menschen ist antastbar: Aufsätze und Polemiken* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1980).
- 70 bernd kramer, *amerikanischer faschismus* (Berlin: verlag peter-paul zahl, 1968).
- 71 Cf. e.g. Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam'.
- 72 On *linkeck*, see Mererid Puw Davies, 'Dada in the underground: *linkeck* and West Berlin's anti-authoritarian newspapers, 1968–9', *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 59 (2023), forthcoming.
- 73 verlag peter-paul zahl printed the newspaper *Agit 883* (1968–72), frequently confiscated or banned by the authorities. In 1970 Zahl was imprisoned for printing a poster considered an incitement to criminal activity. Cf. *agit 883: Bewegung Revolte Underground in Westberlin 1969–1972*, edited by Rotaprint 25 (Hamburg and Berlin: Assoziation A, 2006); Bernd Drücke, *Zwischen Schreibtisch und Straßenschlacht? Anarchismus und libertäre Presse in Ost- und Westdeutschland* (Ulm: Klemm und Oelschläger, 1998), 153–6; Holger Jenrich, *Anarchistische Presse in Deutschland 1945–1985* (Grafenau-Döfingen: Trotzdem, 1988), 81–8.
- 74 verlag peter-paul zahl's championing of more conventionally literary, albeit now forgotten, texts is significant, e.g. in its magazine *SPARTACUS: zeitschrift für lesbare literatur* (1967–70). Zahl later made his name as a poet, playwright and novelist.
- 75 Günther Anders, *Visit Beautiful Vietnam: ABC der Aggressionen heute* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968).
- 76 'Die Amerikaner in Vietnam', special issue, *Das Argument* 36 (February 1966).
- 77 Günther Anders, *Nürnberg und Vietnam: Synoptisches Mosaik* (1967) (Berlin: Voltaire, n.d.).
- 78 Georg W. Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968). See [Chapter 3](#).

- 79 Soon after Wulff left the RVN, his remaining German colleagues still in Huế died violently, in circumstances which remain unexplained, following the 1968 Tet Offensive, in which the South Vietnamese rebels, the National Liberation Front (NLF), temporarily took the city. This case attracted public attention in West Germany when it became known in April 1968, but according to Nicolaus Schmidt was soon overshadowed in the news by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in the USA and the attempt on prominent anti-authoritarian activist Rudi Dutschke in West Berlin. Nicolaus Schmidt, 'Die Vietnam-Mission der Freiburger Universität', in *Việt-Đức: Deutsch-vietnamesische Biografien als Spiegel der Geschichte / German-Vietnamese Biographies: A Reflection of History / Những trang tiểu sử Đức-Việt như tấm gương phản ánh lịch sử*, edited by Nicolaus Schmidt (Bielefeld and Berlin: Kerber, 2018), 92–7. Cf. Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, 448; Hans Magnus Enzensberger et al., 'Die Ärzte von Huế', *konkret* no. 6, 1968 (June 1968); Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Der Vietcong als Mythos des bewaffneten Volksaufstandes', in *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, edited by Wolfgang Kraushaar, 2 vols (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), II; Simon Reuter, *Im Schatten von Tet: Die Vietnam-Mission der Medizinischen Fakultät Freiburg (1961–1968)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011).
- 80 Peter Schütt, *Vietnam 30 Tage danach* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1973). See [Chapter 3](#).
- 81 Wilfred G. Burchett, *Partisanen contra Generale: Südvietnam 1964* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1965). Although published in the GDR, this book was known in West Germany; it is referenced, for example, in Jürgen Horlemann and Peter Gäng, *Vietnam. Genesis eines Konflikts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), 206. See also e.g. Sara Lidman, *Gespräche in Hanoi*, translated by A. O. Schwede (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1967); Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam-Report*, translated by Klaus Harpprecht (Munich and Zurich: Droemer Knauer, 1967); Harrison E. Salisbury, *Hinter den feindlichen Linien: Ein Amerikaner in Hanoi*, translated by Hellmut Jaeschig and Günther Danehl (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1967); Susan Sontag, *Reise nach Hanoi*, translated by Anne Uhde (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969).
- 82 Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, *Piloten im Pyjama. Von Deutschen befragt: US-Piloten in nordvietnamesischer Gefangenschaft. Eine Dokumentation* (Munich: Kindler, 1968), first published in the GDR by Verlag der Nation (1967). Excerpts were widely published, for example in the West German magazines *konkret* and *Stern*, the French illustrated weekly *Paris Match* and the US magazine *Life*, and also featured on the US television station NBC. Heynowski and Scheumann, *Piloten im Pyjama*, 379. Cf. e.g. Seán Allan, 'Images as weapons. DEFA, Studio H&S and the global Cold War', in *Violence Elsewhere: Imagining distant violence in Germany 1945–2001*, edited by Clare Bielby and Mererid Puw Davies (Rochester, NY: Camden House, forthcoming).
- 83 In *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, Alsheimer argued that visits under US supervision, like one by Marion Gräfin Dönhoff of *Die Zeit*, limited journalists' understanding, 356–7.
- 84 E.g. Bernard Courret, 'Madame Vietkong', *konkret* no. 17, 1968 (16 December 1968); Donald Duncan, 'Fuck the Army: Zerfall der amerikanischen Moral in Vietnam', *konkret* no. 14, 1968 (4 November 1968); Monika Warnenska, 'Man nennt sie Vietkongs', *konkret* no. 6, 1966 (June 1966); 'Eine Frau unter Vietkong-Rebellen', *konkret* no. 7, 1967 (July 1966); 'Man nennt sie Vietkongs. III. Folge', *konkret* no. 8, 1966 (August 1966). Warnenska's book *Pfade durch den Dschungel: Ein Vietnam-Report* later appeared in translation in East Berlin (Berlin: Holz, 1974) and so is likely to have been accessible, to an extent at least, to West Berlin or West German readers. Warnenska makes a cameo appearance in Schütt, *Vietnam 30 Tag danach*.
- 85 'Qui Nhon', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, edited by riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968), 16. The collection adds: 'hans gutke, deutschamerikaner, bereiste zweimal den kriegschauplatz vietnam. unter den besonderen eindrücken einstand das gedicht "QUI NHON"' ['german-american hans gutke has travelled twice to the theatre of war in vietnam. His particular impressions there gave rise to the poem "QUI NHON"'], 87. Dorothee Sölle, 'Das Reichum der Armen' and 'Nachtrag zum 218', *Kürbiskern* no. 4, 1974 (December 1974): 35 and poems in *die revolutionäre geduld* (Berlin: Wolfgang Fietkau, 1974). See also Dorothee Sölle, *Gegenwind: Erinnerungen* (1995) (Munich: Piper, 1999), 86–93; Renate Wind, *Dorothee Sölle – Rebellin und Mystikerin. Die Biografie* (2008) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 87–99.
- 86 See *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes*, edited by Plogstedt, SDS Westberlin and Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut.
- 87 Less transiently, *konkret* featured visual compositions by Jürgen Holtfreter and Bohumil Štěpán (1966), alongside Vietnam poems by the likes of Fried. Holtfreter's work (captioned 'Montage') appears e.g. in *konkret* no. 10, 1966 (October 1966): 48 and *konkret* no. 11, 1966 (November

- 1966): 43–5 and Štěpán's (captioned 'Collagen') in *konkret* 2 (February 1966): 41; cf. the picture book by Martin Walser and Carlo Schellemann, *Stationen Vietnams* (Frankfurt am Main: Röderberg, 1968); cf. e.g. East German Volker Braun's *KriegsErklärung* (Halle an der Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1967), an extract from which appears in *Vietnam in dieser Stunde*. Political cartoons were also common, notably in the satirical magazine *pardon*. See e.g. Arno Ploog, *Napalm macht frei: 60 politische Karikaturen zum Krieg in Vietnam* (Berlin: Voltaire, 1968).
- 88 Elke Regehr, 'Für viele Männer war die Psyche Weiberkram: Die Zerreißprobe zwischen Kunst und Politik', in *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer rebellischen Frauengeneration*, edited by Ute Kätzel (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002).
- 89 Arie Goral and Rolf Nierling, *Entwicklungshilfe für Vietnam, Eppendorfer Bilderwort 1* (1968).
- 90 Uwe Friesel, 'Biografie und was ich bisher gemacht habe', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Joachim Fuhrmann et al. (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, n.d.), 217. The visual artist mentioned is probably Eckard Heidrich. The expression 'Große Freiheit' [literally, 'great freedom'] is a play on words. Beyond its literal meaning, it is also a well-known street in Hamburg's traditional nightlife and red-light district.
- 91 See [Chapter 4](#).
- 92 A 'Vietnam Ausstellung deutscher Künstler' was held in Munich in 1966. Rüdiger Sareika, *Die dritte Welt in der westdeutschen Literatur der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer, 1980), 220. Another influential exhibition was organised by the SDS: Bundesvorstand des Sozialistischen Studentenbundes, *Viet-nam: Ausstellung des Sozialistischen Deutschen Studentenbundes Wintersemester 1965* (Frankfurt am Main, 1965).
- 93 On Staeck, see Sareika, *Die dritte Welt*, 286–92. On happenings and performance see e.g. Wolf Vostell, *Miss Vietnam* (1967) and *Aktionen: Happenings und Demonstrationen seit 1965. Eine Dokumentation*, edited by Wolf Vostell (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970), n.p. Vostell's influence is illustrated for example by use of his work on the cover of the important compilation, *Die 2. Kultur: Alternativliteratur in der Bundesrepublik*, edited by Thomas Daum (Mainz: NewLit, 1981).
- 94 See [Chapter 5](#).
- 95 E.g. *und VIETNAM* and combines poetry with a historical 'Chronik'; *Viet Nam Diskurs* credits the collaboration of SDS activist Jürgen Horlemann; on the collaboration see Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 200.
- 96 Cf. e.g. Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 47–74, which debates this case as it is (obliquely) made in Hans Magnus Enzensberger's seminal theoretical essay 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968); 'Commonplaces on the newest literature', translated by Michael Roloff, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982).
- 97 Cf. for example Kostka, 115–6, on connections between Weiss's *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* and Lidman's *Gespräche in Hanoi*. Sontag's account of her journey is strikingly similar to Schütt's later memoir, to the extent that at one point the German translation of her text matches with it verbatim, a feature which nothing in either text explains explicitly.
- 98 Erich Fried, 'Eigene Erfahrungen mit Agitprop-Texten', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 214–5.
- 99 Quoted in Lawrie, *Erich Fried*, 295.
- 100 See e.g. Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 49–50, 201; Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung*, 211–2; Lahann, *Peter Weiss*, 220–3.
- 101 See e.g. Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 87–107; Agnes Hüfner, *Straßentheater* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), including work on Vietnam, e.g. Kölner Straßentheater, *Tünnies und Schäl*, 174–6. See also Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 208, on US anti-war plays which were known in translation in West Germany; and a list of anti-war plays in *Frieden für Vietnam: Sprechtexte Agitation Lieder / Vietnam II*, edited by Annemarie Stern (Oberhausen: Arbeitskreis für Amateurkunst, 1970), special issue, *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurkunst* 30–1 (1970): 84.
- 102 See e.g. Briegleb, 1968; Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*.



## 2

# Missing in action: locating anti-war poems in West Germany

## Introduction: interrogating anti-war writing

In the 1960s Günter Grass, one of the Federal Republic's most prominent authors, suggested that prospects for anti-war literature were dismal. Grass was a staunch campaigner for the moderate, centre-left Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands [Social Democratic Party of Germany] (SPD). As [Chapter 1](#) of this study has shown, he did not espouse the more radical engagement of leftist contemporaries such as Erich Fried, Martin Walser, Peter Weiss or, as the 1960s progressed, Hans Magnus Enzensberger. For example, Grass rejected public anti-war statements made by Weiss in 1966 while visiting Princeton University in the USA with the era's premier circle of literati, Gruppe 47 [Group 47]. Grass was also at times critical of contemporary extra-parliamentary protest, including the anti-war movement.

Grass expressed such positions energetically in his poetry volume *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* [*Interrogated: Poems and drawings*] (1967).<sup>1</sup> In *Ausgefragt*, Grass was scathing of one aspect of anti-war culture in particular, namely its poetry, and stressed the form's complete unsuitability for this kind of politics. Given Grass's contemporary reputation, his dismissive pronouncements on political poetry in *Ausgefragt* seem authoritative; and to be supported by the fact that when Fried sought to muster poems from Gruppe 47 writers for a proposed anthology on Vietnam in the mid-1960s, he was unsuccessful.<sup>2</sup> While Fried's own poetry collection *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* [*and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems*] (1966) was an important and popular exception, it was not widely reviewed on publication, presumably reflecting a lack of appreciation by critics. An evident

conclusion to be drawn from *Ausgefragt* is that anti-war poetry gained little traction in the 1960s.

However, Grass's political and aesthetic stances in the 1960s were by no means one-dimensional. At times he did engage with the protest movements, spoke against the Vietnam War, and signed a public statement opposing it too.<sup>3</sup> Grass's literary works of this period are well-informed about anti-authoritarian culture and share certain insights and formal features with it.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, this chapter argues that when read more closely, *Ausgefragt*, for all its critique of anti-war poems, offers an unexpected clue to the real place of poetry in protest culture. So, on Grass's paradoxical lead, this chapter undertakes a search for West Germany's lost anti-war poetry.<sup>5</sup> On one hand, this investigation reveals the ambiguity that underlies Grass's apparent rejection of poetry against the Vietnam conflict. On the other, it identifies poetry as the anti-war movement's most valued literary expression, one that reflects not high culture, but rather a grassroots one; and so opens up this book's major exploration.

This chapter begins with an analysis of Grass's critique of anti-war poetics in *Ausgefragt*. It argues that it can be read, against the grain, as a pointer to a rich body of anti-war poetry outside West Germany's literary mainstream. Subsequently, the chapter examines alternative contexts in which anti-war poems did appear. One such setting is apparently non-literary, namely the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß [International Congress on Vietnam] which was held in West Berlin in February 1968. This conference was the era's most significant single anti-war event and it was organised by the left-wing Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS), the organisation most closely associated with the protest movements in general and anti-authoritarianism in particular.

Among the many texts inspired by the conference was a book of poems, *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie* [*against the war in vietnam: an anthology*], edited by riewert qu. tode.<sup>6</sup> This collection, and the little literary magazine from which it emerged, *amBEATion* (1963–8), were emblematic of their time and place. As a result, the cultural history of anti-war poetry itself can be traced through *amBEATion* from its inception. Furthermore, these publications serve as signposts towards other, obscured loci of anti-war poetry. This chapter goes on to present representative examples of such sources, as well as introducing some of the hundreds of poems themselves. It closes by reflecting on reasons for this poetic vibrancy, its significance for its time and what it can reveal today.



## Grass's anti-protest poetics

In 1967 writer Peter Rühmkorf reported in the left-wing magazine *konkret* [*concrete*] on an event in Hamburg, at which Grass spoke on the relationship between literature and politics:

Da nannte nämlich Günter Grass den fernen Kriegsschauplatz das unverbindliche Utopia einer rein romantischen, arg platonischen Art von Zeitkritik. Von pubertären Schwarmgeistern war die Rede, die sich mit idealistischem Feuer aufs weit Entlegene verlegten, ähnlich wie die Pubertäts- und Pennälerlyrik vergangener Epochen unentwegt mit unerreichbaren Geliebten sich geschmückt habe.

[Here Günter Grass said that the faraway theatre of war served as a non-binding Utopia for a purely Romantic, heavily platonic type of critical political commentary. He spoke of adolescent zealots who take up distant matters with idealistic ardour, just as the adolescent and schoolboy poetry of the past decked itself out steadfastly with unapproachable beloveds].<sup>7</sup>

On this account, Grass considered anti-war poetry to be an accumulation of far-fetched fantasies and its immature authors to lack self-awareness.<sup>8</sup> Rühmkorf's summary is highly partisan and critical of Grass. Nonetheless, the views imputed to him here do seem to be reflected in *Ausgefragt*, which engages critically with the protest movements. For instance, one of its 60 poems, 'Der Dampfkesselleffekt' ['The Steam Kettle Effect'] (56), is clear in its description of a hostile, elite crowd. This group has been educated at others' expense and takes pleasure in aggressively whistling down a speaker, like a loud stove-top kettle. This image seems provocatively to portray student meetings in which dissenting voices, perhaps including Grass's own, are drowned out.

Another poem, 'Der Delphin' ['The Dolphin'] (47), is dedicated to both the Apostle Paul and Weiss.<sup>9</sup> It defiantly rejects a message spoken by a convert, like the biblical Saul who was transformed suddenly and spectacularly into the Apostle Paul. Here Grass appears to allude to Weiss's *parti pris* for engaged writing from the mid-1960s onwards, as in a high-profile address he gave during Gruppe 47's visit to Princeton in the US in 1966, for instance.<sup>10</sup> Certainly when Fried reviewed *Ausgefragt* for *konkret* in 1967, he described 'Der Delphin' as a

Denunziationsversuch gegen Weiss, den wir bei Grass schon von seiner Princeton-Rede her bis zum Brechreiz kennen

[Grass's attempt to denounce Weiss, which we've witnessed to the point of nausea since his speech in Princeton].<sup>11</sup>

In more general terms too, 'Der Delphin' is sceptical about apparent ideological clarity, a quality that Weiss advocated in his political texts of the time.

Grass's longer poem 'Neue Mystik' ['New Mysticism'] (74) is subtitled 'Ein kleiner Ausblick auf die utopischen Verhältnisse nach der vorläufig allerletzten Kulturrevolution' ['A short preview of the Utopian conditions which will follow the provisionally ultimate cultural revolution']. Such a cumbersome title may satirise the kind of diction associated with Weiss, as in the title of his well-known 1967 play, *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten* [Discourse on the Progress / of the Prolonged War of Liberation / in Viet Nam and the Events Leading up to It / as Illustration of the Necessity / for Armed Resistance Against Oppression / and on the Attempts / of the United States of America / to Destroy the Foundations of Revolution], usually known as *Viet Nam Diskurs* [Discourse on Vietnam].<sup>12</sup> Apparently paradoxically, 'Neue Mystik' also indicts what it sees as the reductive oversimplicity of anti-authoritarian thought. As a counterweight, poems in *Ausgefragt* are at times difficult and opaque.

Reflecting specifically on anti-war culture, *Ausgefragt* includes a cycle of four poems collectively entitled 'Zorn Ärger Wut' ['Anger Irritation Rage'] (58–69). This title denotes the successive emotional states of the poems' speaker(s), as he, or they, contemplate the infuriating ineffectuality of protest about the Vietnam conflict, especially its writing. The lack of punctuation in the cycle's title suggests a sense of rushing headlong through such unabating feelings of conflict.

The first poem of the group is entitled 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' ['Fallen into a Faint'] (58). It describes the powerlessness felt by its collective subject, an unidentified 'wir' ['we'], in the face of the Vietnam conflict. The poem discusses satirically some inconsequential activities undertaken in protest, such as reading about napalm, writing letters or listening to songs, all of which depend on empty, fetishised language. The poem's title involves some complex word play, further explored in the body of the poem itself. The expression 'in Ohnmacht fallen' literally means to fall into a faint, but at the same time has potentially more sinister implications too; the noun 'Ohnmacht' can mean not only a faint,

but also powerlessness. Thus the poem's title suggests a collapse into helplessness in the face of the terrible war, in which the different meanings of 'Ohnmacht' are curiously superimposed onto one another. The suggestion may be that living in a powerless state gives rise to debilitating physical symptoms, like fainting; or that there is something pathological about the belief that one is powerless.

However, the title's play on the participle 'gefallen', which can mean both 'fallen' and 'pleased', also hints that such a position provides emotional gratification, and the poem concludes on a note of foreboding. While the speakers engage in all kinds of frantic if redundant protest activity, 'feinmaschig und gelassen / wirkt sich draußen die Macht aus' ['outside, fine-meshed, indifferent / power goes about its business']. On this analysis, the use of poetry to protest about Vietnam is feeble and, ultimately, self-serving; it does nothing to influence the anonymous, sinister forces that really govern the world. At the same time, for its authors, it is a source of mendacious pleasure, perhaps because it allows them to salve their consciences in the face of the extreme violence of Vietnam, a conflict in which they know they are, in some unexamined, uneasy form, implicated.

The cycle's second poem, 'Irgendwas machen' ['Doing Something'] (59–63), is almost five pages long. It describes the speaker's impotent rage at an atrocious world and the unproductive outlets available for 'doing something', doing anything, about it. These activities include going on demonstrations, making public statements and writing poetry. However, the speaker says of the latter project: 'Ich rede vom hölzernen Schwert und vom fehlenden Zahn, / vom Protestgedicht' ['I speak of the wooden sword and the missing tooth, / of the protest poem'] (59). In this analysis, such blunt and toothless writings are 'Traktatgedichte' ['tract-poems'] (60), so weighed down with clumsy intentions and language that they make no aesthetic or political headway. They are calculating exercises too, at best therapy for rage and a literal or figurative boost to their authors' capital.

Instead, the third poem in 'Zorn Ärger Wut', 'Die Schweinekopfsülze' ['Jellied Pig's Head'] (64–8), recommends using 'Wut' ['rage'] as an ingredient in the eponymous German dish. A complex, lengthy recipe is outlined over more than four pages. The poem praises the traditional process of cooking a pig's head, over the course of a long day, to share with guests and as a way of channelling fury into something useful. At the end of the poem, a 'Sparsamer Nachsatz' ['Thrifty Postscript'] (67) suggests that bones and cartilage from the pig's skull, with added inexpensive ingredients and emotions, can make soup. For poor, large

families, this dish made of leftovers '[vermag] ein zwar einfaches, aber nahrhaftes Essen zu ersetzen' ['[may] serve as a replacement for a simple yet nutritious meal'] (68).

'Die Schweinekopfsülze' seems defiantly quietistic in its turn away from society and towards the domestic kitchen, and in redirecting anger at the state of the world into an unglamorous, time-consuming but practical task. The poem's concluding emphasis on frugal housekeeping challenges the tenor of contemporary protest. Such recommendations would be anathema to activists who did not recommend that the poor spend more time in the kitchen to mitigate their lot. Rather, as prominent activist Rudi Dutschke wrote in an essay of 1968 on the evolution of the student movement, quoting Frankfurt School theorist Max Horkheimer:

'Alle Menschen sollen essen und wenig arbeiten'

['Everyone should have food to eat and work little'].<sup>13</sup>

That is, Dutschke and his cohorts argued for a challenge to the social inequities and exploitation that kept many families short of money for food. These circumstances impoverished them in terms of time and energy, too, for while the ingredients for the soup described at the end of the poem are inexpensive, producing it costs significant time and labour. And in stylistic terms, the language of 'Die Schweinekopfsülze', modelled on cookbooks and their clear imperatives, sets itself apart from the anti-authoritarian drive to question rules.

However, despite the apparent confidence of 'Die Schweinekopfsülze', the fourth and final poem in Grass's cycle, the short 'Der Epilog' ['Epilogue'] (69), expresses renewed doubt. This poem describes an unspecified 'wir' ['we'], perhaps the cook and family of 'Die Schweinekopfsülze', sitting around a table in a state of exhaustion. The cook's rage has boiled away like soup, leaving behind uncertainty, disenfranchisement and inaction, and no clear prospects for change.

On first reading, the four poems of 'Zorn Ärger Wut' discredit anti-war culture, including poetry, while pessimistically holding out no real alternatives either, as 'Epilog' indicates. Indeed, in his review of Grass's poems in *konkret*, Fried called them 'Protestgedichte gegen Protestgedichte' ['protest poems against protest poems'].<sup>14</sup> Fried concluded that *Ausgefragt* was contradictory and unjust towards anti-war protesters and their writing. He went so far as to call 'Zorn Ärger Wut' a 'Krankheitsherd' ['seat of disease'] (44) and 'Schandfleck' ['disgraceful stain'] (45) in Grass's volume. Yet Fried also wrote that there was some

good work in the volume, and he expressed appreciation of 'In Ohnmacht gefallen'. So while Fried's evaluation was predominantly negative, it was nonetheless differentiated; and implies that, for all the scepticism in 'Zorn Ärger Wut' towards protest and anti-war discourse, the cycle does not respond to it simplistically.

Indeed, the critical judgements in *Ausgefragt* are not all they seem. As Fried points out, Grass's collection, for all its criticism of engaged poets, contains protest poems of its own too. For instance, 'Neubau' ['New Build'] (82–3) indicts the past involvement of the then West German head of state, Bundespräsident [Federal President] Heinrich Lübke in National Socialist projects. Fried notes also that 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' echoes the thought of anti-authoritarian *maître à penser* Herbert Marcuse, albeit, as Fried sees it, in a flawed way.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, the distinguished poet and critic Hilde Domin commented on 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' in a letter of 1967 to Horst Mahler, then lawyer to the anti-authoritarian stars.<sup>16</sup> She called it a 'sehr zu Unrecht angegriffenes Gedicht' ['poem which was most unjustly attacked'] and saw its resonances with anti-authoritarian thinking.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the term 'Ohnmacht', in the sense of 'powerlessness', is a touchstone of the era's New Left discourse. At one point in Dutschke's 1968 essay cited above, for instance, this keyword and its cognates appear eight times in under two pages, as it discusses fears that life under capitalism destroyed genuine individual agency.<sup>18</sup> These fears are especially eloquent about the anti-authoritarian project, preoccupied as it was with the impact of politics on the psyche, and the need for subjective liberation. And the way in which the double meaning of the noun 'Ohnmacht' fuses ideas about physical symptoms (fainting) with power and autonomy underlines anti-authoritarian interest in the body as a political locus, as well as belief that life in an oppressive society could, in the last analysis, be physically as well as emotionally harmful.

Contradiction is essential to 'Die Schweinekopfsülze' too. Its postscript states, apparently approvingly, that soup made from skull bones, gristle, anger and cares can replace a simple meal. However, the claim that this soup can replace a nutritious meal for a large family is muddled. If it is only a replacement instead of a healthy meal, it is not really suitable food, especially for children. Therefore, this poem's ambiguous ending, followed by the despairing poem 'Epilog', hints strongly that the turn to everyday actions and duties does not solve problems after all. In this light, the double meaning of the noun 'Sülze' comes to the fore. In a culinary context, it means brawn or jellied meat, as produced using the recipe in question. But in

figurative usage 'Sülze' can also mean nonsense. Thus attitudes towards protest and poetry in *Ausgefragt* are more complex than they at first appear.

Together, *und VIETNAM und*, *Ausgefragt* and Fried's review of Grass's poems triggered a wider debate about anti-war poetry. In 1967 three critical essays responded in print to these landmark works. One of these pieces, by Rühmkorf, appeared in *konkret*, while Peter Härtling and Harald Hartung published theirs in the US-sponsored cultural periodical *Der Monat* [*The Month*].<sup>19</sup> These contributions discussed, from varying political perspectives, the difficulties involved in writing anti-war poetry, as well as relationships between history, literature, politics and action.

All the authors of these critical essays seemingly drew different conclusions from Grass, perceiving value or promise of one kind or another in literary writing about Vietnam. At first sight apparently an exception, Härtling expressed scepticism with regard to anti-war poems and criticised Fried's work in particular for what he saw as sensational simplification. Yet even Härtling, at the end of his essay, does not entirely rule out the possibility that literature can say something meaningful about current reality, albeit possibly in prose rather than poems.<sup>20</sup> These three publications were followed by a second piece by Fried in *konkret*, entitled 'Hans Mayer oder der nachhinkende Schweinskopf' ['Hans Mayer or the pig's head, limping along behind'].<sup>21</sup> Here Fried defended his original review of *Ausgefragt* against the severe criticism of Grass's close associate, critic Hans Mayer, which had appeared in the West Berlin daily newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*.

The counterculture frequently answered Grass back, and critical challenges to him in fact themselves constitute a theme in anti-authoritarian poetry and other texts. Examples are two poems, Paul Karalus's 'hommage à grass / ausgesagt' ['hommage à grass / statement made'] (1969) and G. Schramm's 'Unerfüllter Weihnachtswunschzettel' ['Unfulfilled Christmas Wish List'] (1970).<sup>22</sup> Ironically then, Grass did contribute to the protest poetry of which he so disapproved, *inter alia* in the sense that *Ausgefragt* served to generate ripostes from other poets. Thus, by prompting the publication of essays about anti-war poetry, and more critical poems too, *Ausgefragt* binds itself into the very textual complex that it claims to reject. In this way, the volume maps onto the fissured, challenging and intertextual writing culture of anti-authoritarianism itself.<sup>23</sup>

## In the margins: tracing anti-war poetry

*Ausgefragt's* excoriating allusions to low-quality anti-war poems have often been understood, for example by Mayer in 1967, as specific

references to Fried's work. This interpretation was shared by Fried himself, since he deduced in turn that Mayer's certainty on the issue stemmed from personal knowledge of Grass's intentions.<sup>24</sup> However, Fried's single, short poetry collection *und VIETNAM und*, alongside some lesser-known anti-war poems which he published separately, do not seem on their own to merit the satirical description in Grass's 'Irgendwas machen' of a poetry which is in 'Konjunktur' ['booming'] (59). Indeed, Fried noted too in response to Mayer 'ich, weiß der Himmel, [bin] nicht der einzige Autor in der Bundesrepublik erschienener Protestgedichte' about Vietnam ['heaven knows I am not the only writer of protest poems to be published in the Federal Republic'].<sup>25</sup> Decades later, Grass stated that his poems were not a criticism of Fried, with whom he had had a collegial relationship, despite their differences. If he had meant Fried, Grass wrote, he would have named him. Rather, he explained that he was focusing on a 'damals übliche Protestlyrik als Meterware' ['the era's customary protest poetry, which was available by the yard']. Grass continued:

Frieds Gabe, auf aktuelle Ereignisse spontan mit einem Gedicht zu reagieren (manchmal geglückt, manchmal daneben) [hat] eine Vielzahl von Talenten bewegt [...], gleichfalls Gedichte im Schnellverfahren herzustellen

[Fried's gift of spontaneous poetic response to current affairs (sometimes successful, sometimes less so) prompted numerous talents likewise to produce poems at high speed].<sup>26</sup>

And Härtling referred in his essay of 1967 on anti-war poems to the related genre of the song lyric, in terms which recall 'Irgendwas machen':

wir hören Sänger an, üben uns geschwätzig im Widerstand, der ein folkloristisches Phänomen geworden ist

[we listen to singers, rehearse a prolix resistance which has become a folkloristic phenomenon]. (60)

That is to say, like Grass in *Ausgefragt*, Härtling highlights a popular song-writing culture in anti-war protest.

These observations all suggest that anti-war poetry and songs were very popular around 1967 and that the form was practised by many apart from Fried. And yet it has left little trace in familiar literary contexts. Indeed, Fried's *und VIETNAM und* came into being precisely because the

conflict was not a popular theme for the country's established writers: Fried wrote it after his failure to convince colleagues in Gruppe 47 to contribute to an anti-war poetry anthology. Neither does Vietnam feature significantly, for example, in two representative, comprehensive anthologies of contemporary poetry from reputable publishers. One is *Nachkrieg und Unfriede: Gedichte als Index 1945–1970 [(Post-)War and No Peace: The index of poetry]* (1970), edited by the knowledgeable Domin and published by high-profile house Luchterhand. The other is *Deutsche Gedichte seit 1960 [German Poems Since 1960]* (1972), edited by Heinz Piontek, which appeared with major publisher Reclam.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, anti-war poetry in the FRG seems to be in a curious, contradictory situation. Contemporary sources, such as Grass's *Ausgefragt* and comments by Fried and Härtling, allude clearly to such writing, and yet it is conspicuous by its absence from mainstream literary contexts such as Domin's and Piontek's anthologies. Thus a different kind of search for anti-war poetry is indicated. In his contribution to the 1967 literary debate on Vietnam, Rühmkorf argued that anti-war poems are located in 'ein Randgebiet der Poesie [...] das Gebiet des politischen, des öffentlichen, des Zeitgedichts' ['a marginal zone of poetry [...] that of political, public poetry on contemporary affairs'] (35). This chapter now enters such marginal zones.

## Poetic and political trajectories: *gegen den krieg in vietnam* and *amBEATion*

The substantial textual output of the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß of February 1968 is a rich source for any enquiry into the culture of anti-war protest. It includes a ground-breaking, if now forgotten poetic publication, *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, edited by tode. This collection was published to coincide with the conference and provides a remarkable introduction to a poetry which eludes the conventional literary gaze.

*gegen den krieg in vietnam* is a professionally but inexpensively produced paperback of some 90 pages. It has no illustrations or colour printing, but its simple design is elegant and the presentation of the text is clean and of high quality.<sup>28</sup> According to information provided in the volume itself, 2,000 copies were printed, 200 of which came, for a higher price, with a signed, limited-edition print by graphic artist Cloy Kahrmann.<sup>29</sup> The volume contains 59 poems, including two short, prose poem-like texts. These works are mainly, albeit not exclusively, original publications. By way of an introduction, the collection also contains a



repurposed speech by then-emergent West German writer Yaak Karsunke.<sup>30</sup> The anthology ends with a note by tode, dated February 1968. With these contents, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* is the largest single compendium of originally German-language poems about Vietnam published in the FRG.

The profile of the poets in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* is distinctive. It is striking that no women poets are included. Apart from Fried and the much younger F. C. Delius, none is known for links with Gruppe 47, generally the hallmark of an established or soon-to-be established writer in the 1960s. One contributor, Horst Bienek, had had a longer literary career by 1968, but in the main the FRG poets featured are younger, and many are in their twenties or thirties. Correspondingly, they are mostly new or unknown writers of the time.<sup>31</sup> The majority went on in one way or another to writing or artistic careers.<sup>32</sup> Thus tode's early recognition of these poetic voices makes *gegen den krieg in vietnam* a sensitive record of a new wave of West German literature. However, few poets in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, even those with a wider literary reputation, are among Germany's canonical writers today.<sup>33</sup> Often, where they continued to write, they are more evidently associated with alternative or regional contexts, or types of writing beyond poetry.

The diversity of the poets' origins reflects transnational interests. Most are from the FRG, but, alongside Londoner Fried, there are also seven GDR poets, three from Switzerland, one from Vietnam and one 'deutschamerikaner' ['german-american'].<sup>34</sup> The considerable presence of GDR poems in the anthology highlights the fact that East German materials were read in West Germany and flowed into its textual culture. The two Vietnamese poems, by Te Hanh, also came into tode's collection via the GDR, for they were translated by East German poet Paul Wiens.<sup>35</sup>

*gegen den krieg in vietnam* was the final, double issue of an independent little magazine, *amBEATion: zeitschrift für junge dichtung grafik kritik versuch versuch* [*amBEATion: magazine for a young poetry graphic art criticism experiment experiment*], which had been appearing irregularly since 1963 in very small editions.<sup>36</sup> *amBEATion's* original mission was to publish new work by young writers and artists. It is distinctive for its international approach, featuring work from outside as well as inside West Germany, for example Denmark. It is notable also for its focus on Modernist graphic art, for instance that of longstanding collaborator Kahrmann. The magazine was evidently produced on a shoestring, comprising as it did reproductions of typed pages on inexpensive paper stapled together, with numerous original prints and artworks included in addition.

*amBEATion*'s title pages, editorial notes and other matter document some of its history, as well as that of its editors. The magazine was originally edited by a young team, tode (editor 1963–8) and hartmut könig (editor 1963–5), both of whom were born in 1943. The magazine was founded in the small town of Wanderup near Flensburg in the north of Schleswig-Holstein, and this location no doubt fostered its Danish connections. *amBEATion* 4 (1965) announces that könig is soon to relocate to Frankfurt am Main and tode to Bethel, a district of Bielefeld. The latter is said to be moving in order to carry out his civilian service as a conscientious objector to compulsory military service for young men. *amBEATion* 5 (August 1966) and *amBEATion* 6 (April 1967) explicitly locate tode, now sole editor, in Bethel, although the magazine's main address remained in Wanderup. The final, double issue 7+8, the volume *gegen den krieg in vietnam* itself, was edited and printed in West Berlin's Kreuzberg district.

The trajectory of *amBEATion* tallies closely with developments in the anti-war and anti-authoritarian movements through the 1960s in highly illuminating ways. The magazine's origins were entwined with pacifism: the editorial in *amBEATion* 1+2 (July 1964) noted that the first (unnumbered) issue of 1963 had been misunderstood by some readers as 'eine verkappte aktion der kriegsdienstgegner' ['a covert operation by conscientious objectors']. This perception was likely due to the fact that *amBEATion* used the bank account of the 'Flensburger Kriegsdienstgegner' ['Flensburg Conscientious Objectors'].<sup>37</sup> In 1965, *amBEATion* 4 announced plans to publish

eine grafik-mappe mit zehn blättern von cloy kahrman. titel: 'maudit soit qui ne maudit pas la guerre – verdammt sei wer den krieg nicht verdammt.'

[a graphic art portfolio of ten works by cloy kahrman. title: 'maudit soit qui ne maudit pas la guerre – cursed is he who does not curse war'].<sup>38</sup>

That title clearly evokes pacifist slogans. The same number also carried the following editorial advice:

beachten sie bitte die beilagen dieses heftes. wir legen nur prospekte bei, die uns wichtig erscheinen

[please note the inserts in this number. we only include brochures which seem to us to be important].<sup>39</sup>

This reference is to advertisements from other publishers delivered alongside the magazine. In the case of *amBEATion* 4, they included a well-produced card from studio neue literatur. This short-lived publishing house was at that time run from a Kreuzberg address by the anti-authoritarians Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper or, as he was then sometimes known, Vesper-Triangel. This card announced a widely read, substantial anthology edited by the couple, *gegen den tod* [*against death*] (1964), which contained texts protesting against the atomic bomb.<sup>40</sup> The title and concept of this work probably influenced *gegen den krieg in vietnam*. Another leaflet included with *amBEATion* in 1965, from Verlag Pläne, promoted leftist and pacifist music recordings.

The pacifist influences which are detectable in earlier numbers of *amBEATion* help to illuminate tode's decision to carry out civilian service, as opposed to the then far more usual military service for young men. His move from West Germany to West Berlin can also be understood in this context, for in West Berlin young men were exempted from military service. Consequently, the city had an attraction for those who did not wish to undertake it, and would also have been a congenial location for former conscientious objectors such as tode. As the peace movements fed into anti-authoritarianism as the 1960s went on, West Berlin became an anti-authoritarian metropolis and the location of the period's most spectacular anti-war protests. And within West Berlin, *amBEATion's* new address in Kreuzberg is significant because that traditionally working-class, inexpensive district was a popular base for activists. It was not only the home of studio neue literatur, but also of anti-authoritarian printers zahl-wien, which produced *gegen den krieg in vietnam* among other key works like those of the in-house 'miniverlag' ['mini-publisher'], verlag peter-paul zahl.<sup>41</sup>

Like *amBEATion*, the movement against the Vietnam War had deep roots in pacifist and humanitarian groups of the 1950s and earlier 1960s. For example, in 1966 a flyer issued by the Kampagne für Abrüstung [Campaign for Disarmament] for the Ostermarsch [Easter March], the traditional annual, country-wide Easter peace march, read:

Man muß in aller Freundschaft der amerikanischen Regierung sagen: Schluß mit der Kriegsführung in Vietnam. Im eigenen Interesse des amerikanischen Volkes: Macht endlich Frieden mit dem vietnamesischen Volk!

[In the spirit of friendship, we have to say to the American government: stop waging war in Vietnam. In the interests of the American people itself: Make peace with the Vietnamese people at last!].<sup>42</sup>

That is, the flyer's producers called simply for peace in Vietnam and positioned themselves as critical friends to the US.

However, as the 1960s progressed and the influence of anti-authoritarianism grew, many protesters became increasingly prepared to support not only peace in Vietnam, but also North Vietnam's military resistance. In addition they aligned with South Vietnam's rebel, revolutionary organisation, namely the National Liberation Front (NLF), also known by its French name Front National de Libération (FNL) or, more colloquially, and initially pejoratively, as the Viet Cong. By May 1967 the SDS was campaigning and fundraising at a national level in explicit support of the NLF. At West Berlin's Freie Universität (FU) the SDS was joined in this goal by more moderate student groups. By 1968 the SDS in Frankfurt was even calling for

WAFFEN FÜR DEN VIETCONG

[ARMS FOR THE VIET CONG].<sup>43</sup>

Thus some protesters' demands shifted from peace to revolution in Vietnam; their perceived interlocutors and partners were no longer the USA, but South Vietnamese rebels.

Marginal references in *amBEATion* to financial arrangements reflect changing attitudes towards war and peace.<sup>44</sup> In spring 1967, *amBEATion* 6 announced preparations for *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, noting:

der verkaufserlös kommt dem roten kreuz der südvietnamesischen befreiungsfront und dem roten kreuz nordvietnams zugute

[proceeds from sales will benefit the south Vietnamese liberation front's red cross and the red cross in north Vietnam].<sup>45</sup>

That is, profits were to support medical aid to both communist North Vietnam and the NLF. While *amBEATion*'s proposed support for medical aid to North Vietnam and the NLF was politically partisan, it remained more compatible with a pacifist outlook.

However, when *gegen den krieg in vietnam* appeared one year on, in 1968, it expressed its intentions differently:

der reinerlös dieser anthologie kommt der medizinischen hilfe für nordvietnam und der fnl zugute

[net proceeds from this anthology will benefit medical aid for north Vietnam and the fnl] (n.p.).

Here there is ambiguity with regard to the donation to the NLF, which might, or might not, be for medical aid. It is possible that the magazine no longer planned to offer financial support for medical aid only, but for the US's antagonists in South Vietnam with no further qualification. In other words, this detail may indicate a move towards more militant politics.

A sense of political evolution shines through *amBEATion's* literary content too. In its first, formative number of 1963, a contributor, V. Scherliess, wrote in an essay:

Heute mehr denn je ist die Kunst für uns vonnöten. In einer Zeit, da der Mensch sich an materielle und mehr oder weniger fragwürdige Werte hält, gibt die Kunst ihm die Möglichkeit, seine Situation, sein selbst wieder zu erkennen.

[Today we need art more than ever. In times when humanity holds to material and more or less questionable values, art offers us a chance to know our situation, our own selves].<sup>46</sup>

In line with this apolitical, pro-aesthetic statement, *amBEATion's* earlier issues took no evident political position. Instead, they contained often highly personal or enigmatic poems, short literary texts and typographical experiments. These works are Modernist, avant-gardist, Expressionist, Symbolist or Surrealist in style, and the influence of poets such as Georg Trakl and Paul Celan is evident.

However, even the earlier numbers of *amBEATion* reflect historical and cultural developments, albeit sometimes in subliminal or implicit ways. In the first issue the original editors, *tode* and *könig*, wrote programmatically:

große literatur machen zu wollen sei ferne von uns. auch verfolgt *amBEATion* kein kommerzielles ziel. lediglich blätter, aus einer stimmung heraus oder auch voller mutmaßung beschrieben, vielfach nur als selbstzweck, zur beruhigung des erhitzten oder einsamen gemüts, wort- und satzorgien, ein wahrer stoß davon, der in schiebladen [sic] irgendwo zwischen heften und zeitungem verschwindet, werden hervorgeholt, auf tauglichkeit beleuchtet, veröffentlicht. werden wir leser haben? die welt ist entmutigend genug, unsere absicht, faule zähne zu ziehen, mit hohn dazwischen zu fahren, den kleinen lieblichen moment zu besingen, wird man uns nicht nehmen können.

[far be it from us to want to create great literature. nor does amBEATion pursue commercial goals. here, it's only about pages which were written in a certain mood, or indeed as pure speculation, often simply as an end in themselves, to calm the fiery or lonely heart, orgies of words and sentences, a real sheaf of them, lost in a drawer in between notebooks and newspapers. they are brought out, scanned for suitability, published. will we find readers? the world is discouraging enough as it is; we won't be deprived of our aim of drawing rotten teeth, making scathing interruptions, praising short, sweet moments].<sup>47</sup>

While this statement seems resolutely personal, it expresses interests which were soon to feed into nascent anti-authoritarian culture. They include rejection of material profit ('kein kommerzielles ziel') and high culture ('große literatur'). Simultaneously there is a preoccupation with marginalised or non-canonical literary forms and voices, the idea of subjective experience as a guide ('aus einer stimmung heraus'), a link between culture and pleasure ('den kleinen lieblichen moment [...] besingen') and a critical stance ('mit hohn dazwischen [...] fahren'). The sexualised imagery at the centre of the quotation ('wort- und satzorgien') likewise foreshadows the anti-authoritarian focus on sexuality as a key to creativity and subjective liberation.

*amBEATion*, no doubt due to its title, was perceived by some readers as a beatnik project. In *amBEATion* 1+2 the editors corrected this view:

eine beatnik-apotheose findet nicht statt (auch hier entstanden irrtümer). eine besondere nr von 'amBEATion' wird sich jedoch mit dem beatnik-fänomen befassen.

[there will be no beatnik apotheosis (here too, there were misunderstandings). however, a special no. of 'amBEATion' will address the beatnik phenomenon].<sup>48</sup>

This editorial thus distances itself to an extent from Beat culture and the promised number on beatniks seems not to have come about. Nonetheless, it underlines the importance for young West Germans of US counterculture, which fed into anti-authoritarianism.

The same editorial says in an address to the reader:

Wir hoffen sehr, daß sie dem 'moralischen realismus' unserer dänischen freunde aufgeschlossen gegenüberstehen

[We very much hope that you will be open to our Danish friends' 'moral realism'].

Reference here is to the work of Michael von Rütz, from Odense, translated into German from Danish.<sup>49</sup> One of his pieces is an essay entitled 'Das Dichten' ['Poetic writing']. It criticises poets who write for an elite only, advising instead:

Bedenkt, wenn Ihr Papier in die Maschine spannt, daß Ihr nur für andere schreiben könnt – daß es nur auf Eure Mitmenschen ausgerichtet sein kann, selbst dann, wenn es nicht gedruckt wird. Bedenkt, daß Ihr Eure Mitmenschen und Euch selbst belügt, wenn nur wenige das kontrollieren können, was Ihr macht. [...]

Ich nenne das moralischen Realismus, und mit Moral meine ich nicht die Dorf-moral. Sondern ich meine die Moral, die man notwendigerweise seinen Mitmenschen und seiner Gesellschaft gegenüber haben muß, und mit Realismus meine ich einfach, daß wir unsere gegenwärtige Situation bedenken müssen.

[Consider, when you put paper into your typewriter, that you can only write for others – that writing can only be addressed to your fellow beings, even if it isn't published. Consider that you will be lying to yourself, and to your fellow beings, if only few people can check what it is that you're doing. [...]

This is what I call moral realism, and by morality, I don't mean a parochial moralising. Rather, I mean the morality with which we must meet our fellow beings and society, and by realism I simply mean that we must consider our current situation].<sup>50</sup>

This passage does not reveal any specific political agenda. Nonetheless, in contrast to the individualistic, existential editorial of *amBEATion* 0, von Rütz's programmatic tone and interest in engagement with society distantly herald *amBEATion*'s later interest in explicitly engaged poetry. That topic is foreshadowed by an approving round-up of socially critical and pro-peace records in *amBEATion* 5 of 1966.<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, too, *amBEATion* 5 includes an early example of a poem on Vietnam.<sup>52</sup>

*amBEATion* 6 foregrounds 'gedanken von geisteskranken' ['thoughts of the mentally ill']. This theme may be linked to today's civilian service. He did not specify the nature of his work in Bethel, but that location is known for its large psychiatric clinic, a probable setting for a period of

civilian service. While in some senses the content of *amBEATion* 6 seems to turn away from politics or history, in reality this number is also very much embedded in its time, reflecting intense contemporary literary interest in psychiatric patients as creative subjects.<sup>53</sup> That interest, shared by Beat culture, had evident political dimensions in the FRG. Anti-authoritarianism emphasised not only traditional leftist concern with the so-called objective factors of politics, such as economics, but also its subjective factors, such as culture and the psyche.

In such thinking, as Dutschke's reflections on 'Ohnmacht' quoted above demonstrate, life under capitalism oppresses people psychologically as well materially. On this argument, adverse mental health conditions are indicators of social injustice, and activists demanded a revolution in subjectivity alongside revolution in society. Moreover, *amBEATion's* focus on the work of psychiatric patients resonates with a characteristic anti-authoritarian belief, derived from the work of Marcuse, that capitalism can be revolutionised only by those at its margins. Such 'Randgruppen' ['marginal groups'] hold no stake in the status quo and therefore have the most to gain from rebelling against it.<sup>54</sup> Psychiatric patients could be such a marginal group, and their writings were considered to be keys to meaningful social critique, even to revolution.<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, there is timeliness and coherence in the way in which *amBEATion's* last, double issue, the anti-war anthology, focuses fully on the great anti-authoritarian theme of Vietnam. The closing poem of *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, by Karlhans Frank, is cryptically entitled 'Man sollte ihnen die Fressen...' ['Their Gobs Need To Be...']. It concludes:

Keine Gedichte gegen den Krieg in Vietnam !

AKTIONEN !!!

[No poems against the war in Vietnam !

ACTIONS !!!]<sup>56</sup>

These lines are not only the last in this poem and *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, but in *amBEATion* itself.

The closure of *amBEATion* after it published Frank's outspoken poem could be said to put his demands into action.<sup>57</sup> This decision is in keeping also with the wider development of anti-authoritarianism. On 2 June 1967, at a demonstration in West Berlin, a plain-clothes police officer shot dead a peaceful first-time protester, Benno Ohnesorg. That tragedy both catalysed and radicalised the protest movements. From that moment on,



scepticism about allegedly contemplative, stabilising practices such as (literary) theorising and writing grew. Activists became increasingly prepared to abandon traditional, legal modes of protest like debates, officially sanctioned marches and engaged literature, preferring to embrace direct action instead. This topic was a key theme in and around the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß, such that the closure of *amBEATion* in 1968 dovetails precisely with shifts in parts of the protest movements to new kinds of political praxis. The trajectory of *amBEATion* thus both tracks and fosters the intertwined development of anti-authoritarianism and anti-war poetry in the Federal Republic through the 1960s; and *gegen den krieg in vietnam* is a highly representative work, in both political and poetic terms.

## Locating anti-war poetry

*gegen den krieg in vietnam* is, amongst other things, a roadmap to further anti-war poems which have been to date invisible to literary history. For instance, tode's collection draws attention to the importance of the alternative poetry anthology as a reflection of contemporary political preoccupations. While the mainstream anthologies edited by Domin and Piontek referenced above do not foreground Vietnam, anti-war poetry is commonly found in other, lower-profile collections which do not aim or claim to represent high literature. Rather, they tend to be more specialised and demotic in character. Some may present the work of grassroots groups,<sup>58</sup> for instance, while others concentrate on young poets or expressly political poetry.<sup>59</sup> Typically too, anthologies such as *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, unlike Domin's and Piontek's, were brought out by independent, local or niche publishers.<sup>60</sup> Song books and collections of song lyrics and related materials also provide further examples of anti-war texts.<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* helps to identify individual poets interested in Vietnam. Some of the writers included by tode, such as Born, p.g. hübsch, Karsunke, Schütt and Zahl, published more poems on the conflict in single-authored volumes of their own around the same time or soon after – although these books' titles do not mention Vietnam, reflecting as they do more diverse content.<sup>62</sup> These examples thus draw attention to the fact that poems on Vietnam are present in many other contemporary individual collections of poetry or lyrics, often by younger poets and songwriters, even though the titles of their volumes do not specifically draw attention to anti-war themes.<sup>63</sup>

Most significantly of all, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* is rooted in 1960s periodical culture. Some of the earliest anti-war poems reached the public

in the magazine *konkret*. While that magazine was not primarily a literary publication, it clearly reflects the importance of culture and the arts for the New Left. More specifically, in 1966, it carried poems on Vietnam by Fried, Uwe Herms, Reimar Lenz, Erasmus Schöfer, Schütt and Kurt Sigel, and continued to publish such works in the years that followed.<sup>64</sup> In 1967, for instance, one of Fried's essays on anti-war poetry appeared alongside five Vietnam poems by GDR singer-songwriter and poet Wolf Biermann.<sup>65</sup> The prominent positioning of those poems over a whole page, alongside Biermann's photograph, indicates that anti-war poetry appealed to *konkret's* editorship and readership. Indeed, so prominent was this type of poem for a time in *konkret* that it even generated its own parody.<sup>66</sup> As well as in *konkret*, anti-war poems were published in other established leftist literary contexts, notably the periodical *Kürbiskern [Pumpkin Seed]* (1965–87), co-founded by one of tode's contributors, Karsunke. Because these long-running reviews were widely read, the anti-war poems they contained were influential.

As a double number of *amBEATion*, tode's anthology points up, too, the importance of more obscure and transient literary magazines. Another comparable example is *Splitter: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Graphik und Kritik [Splinters: Magazine for literature, graphic art and criticism]* (1963–8), edited from Erlangen. *Splitter's* trajectory was similar to *amBEATion's*: both magazines appeared over the same years and became increasingly politicised from around 1965. While earlier numbers of *Splitter* carried poems on current affairs, sex, pop and Beat, in December 1967 it dedicated an issue to political or agit-prop poems.<sup>67</sup> This issue contains a substantial group of anti-war poems, some of which reappeared in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* the following year. In addition, in an accompanying essay, Schütt identified magazines as the era's most important forum for anti-war writing. Alongside *Splitter* itself and *konkret*, he named primarily little magazines, namely *amBEATion*, *pro, törn [trip]* and *total*.<sup>68</sup>

Further classic examples of independent reviews containing poems on Vietnam, along with other topical, satirical, political, artistic, literary and pop themes, are verlag peter-paul zahl's *SPARTACUS, Exitus, Edelgammeler [The High-Class Dropout]* and *phoenix*.<sup>69</sup> A comparative reading of these diverse publications shows how interconnected the alternative writing scene was, with authors and editors appearing and referencing one another across a range of publications. For instance, one of *Splitter's* editors, Fitzgerald Kusz, published anti-war poems, including in *amBEATion* and *Splitter* itself.

Other magazines focused on anti-war poetry in more systematic ways. *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur [working notebooks of*

*the amateur art circle*] was closely aligned with the FRG's Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party] (DKP). Strikingly early, in 1966, it produced a double *sonderheft vietnam* [*special issue on vietnam*].<sup>70</sup> This collection is almost 50 pages in length and contains 31 poems and song lyrics as well as texts for spoken performance. In 1970 a second double issue on Vietnam followed, larger and formally more diverse than the first.<sup>71</sup> And in 1968 *Lyrische Hefte* [*Poetry Notebooks*] published a large collection of poems by North Vietnamese leader Ho Tsch Minh [*sic*].<sup>72</sup>

All these publications highlight the remarkable prevalence of the anti-war poem in the 1960s and early 1970s. Diverse as they are, they underscore the importance of unconventional anthologies, thematically diverse collections by mainly young poets, and periodical culture, especially the little magazine, for a rich culture of anti-war poetry. This culture is archetypally embodied in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* and *amBEATion*. It is consequently from *tode's* anthology that this study will draw many of the readings that follow.

## Top speed: the popularity of poetry

The anti-war poem was a widely used form for many reasons. Most evidently, Fried's *und VIETNAM und* and the poems published in 1966 in the widely read *konkret* exerted a formative influence. The era's densely dialogical magazine culture meant that anti-war poems would have circulated quickly, in turn generating further poems. Furthermore, like older writers, the post-war and protest generations were heirs to a German cultural and educational tradition which valued literature and poetry as ethical media. In part for that reason, an emphasis on literature and poetry was characteristic of the protest movements generally and manifested itself in various, albeit complex ways.<sup>73</sup> Some writers connect to pre-National Socialist, Weimar-era traditions; in particular, in terms of style, the influence of Bertolt Brecht's poems is often palpable.<sup>74</sup>

Other poets express attachments to classic literature. An example is Kusz's parodic 'Goethe an Johnson' ['Goethe to Johnson'] in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* (52) which imagines an address to the then US President Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>75</sup> This work references the later of the two versions of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's celebrated poem 'An den Mond' ['To the Moon'] (1789). Goethe's speaker describes powerful, mysterious emotions inspired by the moonlight he sees around his cottage in a wooded valley. Kusz's poem mimics Goethe's by describing, in the same

rhyme and metre, a wooded valley lit up by napalm. The speaker's cottage is burned down and the blessing which falls from the sky is not Goethe's benevolent moonlight, but, as the speaker puts it ironically, the gentle rain of freedom pouring out of bomber planes.

'Goethe an Johnson' relies for its satirical effects on readers' familiarity with German literary tradition. Its image of a burning forest evokes appallingly the hallowed Romantic trope of the forest as a place of solace and spirituality, on which Goethe's poem itself draws. Moreover, Kusz's first-person speaker is identified with the poetic persona of Goethe himself. The burning cottage recalls the latter's celebrated 'Gartenhaus' ['summerhouse'] in Weimar, a *locus amoenus* traditionally associated with high German poetry. The implication here is not only that beloved homes in Vietnam are being destroyed. The burning cottage stands for the destruction of the values which Goethe's life and works also conventionally represent in the German context. In this sense, the Vietnam War epitomises a barbarous present which falls short of the ideals of the past and so demands correction.

More complex, ironic readings of 'Goethe an Johnson' are possible too. Kusz's poem can simultaneously be read as a vandalism of Goethe's, mocking classic poetry, and indeed, with its fiery imagery, hinting at or demanding its destruction. Read in this way, the poem critiques the traditional idea that high literature is an index of moral worth. It implies that the type of canon represented by Goethe's writing offers no defence against the horrors of contemporary warfare, and so is defunct. At some level too there may be reflection here on the way poetry such as Goethe's was compromised by its enthusiastic use in National Socialism just over two decades before. Seen in this light, that instrumentalisation of poetry was linked to the real burning homes of the Holocaust and Second World War in Europe.

Poetry was popular in the anti-war movement for practical reasons as well. Most of the poems are distinctive for their brevity; such short forms offered an immediacy which other genres of literature, even engaged ones, could not. As the young poet Heike Doutiné asked rhetorically in the extensive, popularly oriented anthology *agitprop*, published around 1968:

Wer kann schon solange warten, bis ihn 'die Muse küßt'. Manch einer hat an Auschwitz und Hiroshima vorbeigewartet. [...] Agit-Prop: Die Möglichkeit für einen Schriftsteller, seine Wahrheit zu wagen. Schnell. Sofort. Eine plakatgrelle Wahrheit. Am Morgen in der Zeitung gelesen, am abend schriftliche Konsequenzen gezogen. Verbreitet. Vorgetragen. Auf Flugblättern ausgeteilte Aktion.

[Who's got time to wait for the 'Muse' to come along and 'kiss' him? Some people waited so long they missed Auschwitz and Hiroshima. [...] Agit-prop: the writer's chance to venture his truth. Quickly. Immediately. A truth as loud as a poster. Read it in the morning paper, draw your conclusions in writing by evening. Distributed. Declaimed. Action handed out on flyers].<sup>76</sup>

This comment stresses the importance of writing and disseminating poetry at speed, for example in a magazine, flyer or performance.<sup>77</sup>

Short poems could communicate with few institutional and financial resources, as demonstrated by the independent *ambEATion*, with its material limitations. Moreover, Doutiné's reference to flyers suggests that poetry and songs were produced in even lower-cost, more ephemeral media too. These forms could include actions in the street and other public spaces, cabarets or community readings, such as those described by Schütt in the magazine *Splitter*.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in the anthology *agitprop*, Münster-based poet Martin Jürgens describes working alongside other artists in:

pol.-lit. vietnam teach-ins (collagenform: tonbandcoll./ musik/  
projektionen/dokumentation/agitprop-texte/ thesen // beat und  
agitprop – lyrik – veran

[pol. and lit. teach-ins on vietnam (in collage form: audiotape coll./  
music /projections/documentation/agit-prop texts/ positions //  
beat and agit-prop – poetry – evts].<sup>79</sup>

Even Jürgens's prolific abbreviations underline a desire for swift communication. Fried, in the same volume, pointed out that very short poems were suited for use on banners and in performance.<sup>80</sup> Poetry thus had particular potential for accessibility and mobility, especially, though not exclusively, for the agit-prop aesthetic.

Poetry therefore took its important place in the culture of the time by virtue of its openness to process and transformation, at a time in which political events unfolded at pace. This aspect helps to account for the importance of little magazines for anti-war poetry, because they could respond rapidly to the moods of the times. Reflecting this sense, some poems vary, where they are published more than once, as one draft is succeeded by another. For instance, Born's 'Fünfzehnte Reihe' ['Row Fifteen'] in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* (37) is 21 lines in length, but a 16-line version appears in later collections, perhaps recording an ongoing

process of paring down the poem for maximum impact.<sup>81</sup> Another poem in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, hübsch's 'demonstrationen' ['demonstrations'] (64–7) is likewise changed when it reappears in a single-authored volume by the poet a year later.<sup>82</sup> The earlier version includes a stanza on the terrible self-immolation of the Buddhist monk Thích Quảng Đức in Saigon in 1963, in protest against the South Vietnamese regime, but the later version does not. Hübsch's poem represents the chaotic, overwhelming experience of the present, so the alteration that he makes between 1968 and 1969 may aim to keep the poem feeling contemporary, as the monk's death receded in time.

The poems change, too, in response to their uses in practice, especially in accessible, serial contexts such as the little magazine, the reading, political action and on the street. As Fried noted,

Fast nach jeder ersten Lesung eines Texts fielen mir Änderungen ein  
[After almost every first reading of a text, I thought of changes].<sup>83</sup>

That idea of the poem as a work in ongoing progress is in keeping, in many ways, with anti-authoritarian ideals of permanent change. It also reflects the essential dialogicity of much anti-authoritarian textuality, as set out most influentially by Enzensberger in his seminal essay of 1968 on anti-authoritarian poetics, 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend' ['Commonplaces on the Newest Literature'], which appeared in his high cultural review *Kursbuch* [*Railway Timetable*].<sup>84</sup> This characteristic principle is reflected vividly in practice too, in the less elevated, more popular volume *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*. Here contributors and editors foreground the importance of critical feedback in their theoretical texts and invite readers to write to them directly with comments, providing their own home addresses.

## Conclusion: a poetics of disobedience

At first sight, on reviewing (West) German literary history it seems that Vietnam was not an easy topic for respectable poetry and that anti-war poetry was rare.<sup>85</sup> However, on closer examination contemporary writings suggest a more complex picture. For instance, in the sophisticated debate of 1967 between Grass, Fried, Rühmkorf and others on anti-war poems, Rühmkorf wrote of a poetry

dem die Greuel des US-Wirtschaftskriegs in Vietnam nicht sind, was sie dem braven deutschen Landekind zu sein haben: gleichgültig

[which doesn't regard the horrors of the economics-driven US war in Vietnam as the model children of Germany are supposed to: with indifference]. (35)

The story of this more unruly, disreputable form cannot be traced through high culture and its traditional forms and fora, but elsewhere.

Some contexts in which the anti-war poetry appeared are not considered primarily artistic, such as the magazine *konkret* and the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß. Nonetheless, that conference gave rise to the essential collection *gegen den krieg in vietnam*. Here then, Fried's idea of an anthology of anti-war poetry was realised not by prominent writers, a prestigious publisher or an influential editor. Rather, it came into being thanks to a little-known young editor-activist with limited means, tode, and the little literary magazine he co-founded, *amBEATion*. Other contemporary anthologies also prove to be important sources of anti-war poems: these collections tend to claim topical or local, rather than aesthetic, validity. They are often, though not always, the work of lesser-known authors, editors and publishers, or 'mini-publishers'. In many cases, anti-war poems can be hard to find because the Vietnam theme is not reflected by the titles of the publications in which they appear. However, tode's list of contributors indicates the productive exploration of single-authored poetry volumes, notably by younger poets. And above all the era's prolific independent magazines, for all their different interests and contents, contain a wealth of anti-war poems.

The survey presented in this chapter is by no means exhaustive, based as it is on representative rather than comprehensive examples. All the same, it shows that from 1964 onwards the FRG knew hundreds of poems about the Vietnam War. This poetry emerges from a wide range of geographical, political, cultural and institutional origins, including the GDR, and translations from other languages. Poets who were not citizens of West Germany also contributed to this body of work, in part through translations.<sup>86</sup> The corpus includes the work of both forgotten and well-known poets, and of others in between. For example, Uwe Timm or Walser are known nowadays as authors of major narrative prose, but both were once writers of what might conventionally be considered minor anti-war poems.<sup>87</sup> This corpus includes song lyrics, because they often appear alongside poetry in anthologies and little magazines.

The poets' alignments, affiliations and interests vary greatly, from pacifism to communism to pop and Beat culture. While the anti-war poetry contains prominent examples from left-wing agit-prop culture, by no means all the poems in question are products of that movement.

Furthermore, on the evidence collected here, it seems to be less productive to try and categorise poems in this way than it is to recognise that there is no hard and fast distinction between agit-prop and other types of poem. This point is demonstrated by the reflective commentaries in the anthology *agitprop*. Their authors take a generally optimistic, flexible stance towards genre. Fried, for instance, observed in his contribution:

Ich glaube nicht, daß sich Agitpropgedichte von anderen Gedichten scharf abgrenzen lassen oder daß das nützlich wäre. [...] Jede Festlegung des Begriffs Agitpropgedichte bedeutet schon deren Erstarrung und Niedergang.

[I do not believe that agitprop poems can be distinguished neatly from other kinds of poem, nor that to do so would be useful. [...] Any standard definition of the agitprop poem would involve its petrification and decline].<sup>88</sup>

Uwe Friesel notes that political writing can have different impacts on different audiences.<sup>89</sup> It follows that one person's (supposedly low-value) agitprop is another's (higher-value) true poetry. Here, too, poet and activist Carlo Bredthauer writes in defence of political poetry, commenting that:

die Abwehrnetze der Herrschenden [erfassen] [politische Lyrik] nicht vollständig [...] Immer schlüpfen Erkenntnisse und Parolen durch die Maschen

[the defensive nets of the ruling classes cannot [catch] all [political poetry] [...] Insights and slogans will always slip through].<sup>90</sup>

That is, the textual life of protest is complex; even agit-prop poems have the potential to escape reductive identifications and so to achieve a wider impact.

It is intriguing that Bredthauer uses the image of a fine net for the restrictive workings of power, just as Grass did in his apparently very different poem 'In Ohnmacht gefallen', discussed earlier in this chapter. This unexpected congruity between two such different authors, Bredthauer and Grass, underlines the tight intertextual ties, intentional or not, between so many writings of the time. Indeed, taking an expansive view, even Grass's anti-anti-war poems form part of this poetic fabric because they are in intense dialogue with it. This body of work crosses boundaries between countries, styles and poetics, and notions of high and



popular, aesthetic and operative writing. Frequently it exhibits a drive to make poetry political and accessible outside the library and classroom. In these respects, this work is a poetry of disobedience, not only to the political norms of its day, but to literary ones too.

In the last analysis this chapter demonstrates that, despite influential claims such as Grass's that anti-war poetry was a waste of time, poetry was the West German anti-war movement's literary expression of choice. In part, at least, this preference for poetry was due to the form's ability to respond to the world at high speed. The development of anti-war poetry and its changing foci closely reflect the very rapid trajectory of anti-authoritarianism as it evolved its positions from the mid-1960s onwards. Moreover, the publication of *gegen den krieg in vietnam* at the anti-war movement's zenith, represented by the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß, illustrates the attachment of many protesters to literature, certainly until 1968. It also demonstrates the remarkable interdependence between politics and poetry in the protest movements, which make poetry such a powerful seismograph of the times.

Poetry can thus tell us more about politics, including extra-parliamentary politics, in the FRG in the 1960s. In time, the anti-war poetry voiced something of the growing, profound and painful clashes of the age as it explored how to take forward political engagement in the Federal Republic. These struggles include conflict over the future of poetry itself. Indeed, an apparent paradox lies at the heart of *gegen den krieg in vietnam*: even as poetry flourished as an expression of growing anti-war activism, that activism was becoming increasingly torn, *inter alia* about poetics. In these senses, the West German anti-war poetry is always double, indeed multiple, in its meanings. It graphically records a horribly real war taking place half a world away. Yet it also responds powerfully to more figurative, internal conflicts close to home, as the following chapters will explore.

## Notes

- 1 Günter Grass, *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967). Further page references follow in the text.
- 2 See [Chapter 1](#).
- 3 Grass did not join Gruppe 47 colleagues in signing the controversial anti-war declaration of December 1965 described in [Chapter 1](#) because, along with Richter and others, he had recently put his name to an international statement on the war in *The New York Times*. That declaration was a general criticism of the war, in contrast to the December statement which explicitly challenged US action in Vietnam. Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A social history of dissent and democracy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 65, 147. Cf. Julian Preece, *The Life and Work of Günter Grass: Literature, history, politics* [2000] (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 93–9.

- 4 Mererid Puw Davies, 'Humane horrors: The dentist in Günter Grass's *örtlich betäubt*', in *Medical Humanity and Inhumanity: The human and the humane in the German-speaking world*, edited by Mererid Puw Davies and Sonu Shamdasani (London: UCL Press, 2020). Grass wrote a differentiated expert report about controversial writings by the West Berlin anti-authoritarian collective Kommune I [Commune I] (KI) when two group members were tried in 1967–8 for incitement to arson. Grass identifies what he calls 'postfaschistische Züge' ['post-fascist traits'] in these texts, but this style is due to their diction, which mimics a style of advertising that, according to Grass, is also 'post-fascist'. Grass, letter of 5 July 1967 to Horst Mahler, in Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), Sammlung 'Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv Berlin', file no. 03.13 ('Kommune I Iib Brandstiftung Gutachten'), 3. See [Chapter 5](#).
- 5 On the poems see e.g. Gregory Divers, *The Image and Influence of America in German Poetry since 1945* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), 98–122; Ulla Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion: Zur Entwicklung operativer Literaturformen in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1978), 35–55; Rüdiger Sareika, *Die dritte Welt in der westdeutschen Literatur der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer, 1980), 235–94.
- 6 *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, ed. riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968). Further page references follow in the text. The volume simultaneously appeared as a double issue of the journal *amBEATion*: *amBEATion* 7+8 (1968).
- 7 Peter Rühmkorf, 'Haben wir zu viele Vietnam-Gedichte?', *konkret* no. 5, 1967 (May 1967): 36. This quotation shows that anti-war poetry was debated at public events and readings. Cf. e.g. Martin Walser, 'Auskunft über den Protest', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968).
- 8 In addition the authors are clearly identified in this description as masculine, a point which Rühmkorf does not gloss. On the gender politics of the anti-war poetry see [Chapters 3 and 6](#).
- 9 'Der Delphin' was previously published in *Kursbuch* 7 (September 1966): 11, without the cutting dedication to Weiss. The title could allude to the ancient Greek singer Arion, who was saved from drowning by a dolphin, as evoked in Fried's poem 'Vision im Golf von Bakbo' (1966), in Erich Fried, *und VIETNAM und*, in Erich Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Volker Kaukoreit and Klaus Wagenbach, 4 vols (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1998), I, 381.
- 10 See [Chapter 1](#).
- 11 Erich Fried, 'Ist "Ausgefragt" fragwürdig? Erich Fried über die neuen Gedichte von Günter Grass', *konkret* no. 7, 1967 (July 1967): 44. See [Chapter 1](#).
- 12 Peter Weiss, with additional research by Jürgen Horlemann, *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten* (1967), in Peter Weiss, *Stücke*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), II, 1; *Discourse on the Progress / of the Prolonged War of Liberation / in Viet Nam and the Events Leading up to It / as Illustration of the Necessity / for Armed Resistance Against Oppression / and on the Attempts / of the United States of America / to Destroy the Foundations of Revolution / (Discourse on Vietnam)*, translated by Geoffrey Skelton (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971).
- 13 Rudi Dutschke, 'Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus', in Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre and Bernd Rabehl, *Rebellion der Studenten oder die neue Opposition. Eine Analyse von Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968), 75. Further page references follow in the text.
- 14 Fried, 'Ist "Ausgefragt" fragwürdig?', 44.
- 15 On Marcusean features in Grass's contemporary prose, see e.g. Michael Hollington, *Günter Grass: The writer in a pluralist society* (London and Boston: Marion Boyars, 1980), 136–47; Davies, 'Humane horrors'.
- 16 Domin is writing here to Mahler about the 1968–68 trial of KI, at which he defended the group. See note 4 above and [Chapter 5](#).
- 17 Domin, letter to Mahler dated 7 August 1967, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), Sammlung 'Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv Berlin', file no. 03.12 ('Kommune I Iia Brandstiftung Diverses').
- 18 Dutschke, 'Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus', 75–6. Making a classically anti-authoritarian link between politics and the psyche, Dutschke refers here to the work of philosopher and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm in this area.
- 19 Rühmkorf, 'Haben wir zu viele Vietnam-Gedichte?'; Peter Härtling, 'Gegen rhetorische Ohnmacht: Kann man über Vietnam Gedichte schreiben?', *Der Monat* 19, no. 224 (May 1967); Harald Hartung, 'Poesie und Vietnam: Eine Entgegnung', *Der Monat* 19, no. 226 (July 1967).

Further page references follow in the text. Härtling's essay is also reprinted in *Erich Fried: Gespräche und Kritiken*, edited by Rudolf Wolf (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986) and in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, edited by Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995). For critical accounts of this debate and its repercussions see Klaus Briegleb, 1968: *Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 206–21; Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion*, 37–9.

- 20 See Chapter 6.
- 21 Erich Fried, 'Hans Mayer, oder der nachhinkende Schweinskopf', *konkret* no. 9, 1967 (September 1967). The pig's head in Fried's title refers to illustrations which were printed in his advance copy of *Ausgefragt*, which he mentioned in his review. Mayer then criticised Fried for alluding to the images because they were not included in a subsequent, more widely available edition. Fried points out in response that he could not have known at the time of writing that the pictures would later be dropped.
- 22 Paul Karalus, 'hommage à grass / ausgesagt', in *Beispiele Beispiele: Texte aus der Literarischen Werkstatt Gelsenkirchen*, edited by Hugo Ernst Käufer (Recklinghausen: Georg Bitter, 1969), 15–6; G. Schramm, 'Unerfüllter Weihnachtswunschzettel', *phoenix: lyrik aus amerika kanada england schweiz rumänien jugoslawien deutschland dokumente texte* 3+4 (1970): 40. Other contemporary poems which criticise Grass include e.g. Hans Siegmann, 'Zur Sache'; Karlhans Frank, 'Literatur und Lüge', *total: die literarische illustrierte* 5, no. 16 (1968): 3 and 32 respectively.
- 23 Cf. Davies, 'Humane horrors'.
- 24 Fried, 'Hans Mayer oder der nachhinkende Schweinskopf', 37.
- 25 Fried, 'Hans Mayer oder der nachhinkende Schweinskopf', 37.
- 26 Tilman von Brand, *Öffentliche Kontroversen um Erich Fried* (Berlin: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2003), 37, quoting personal correspondence with Grass, 15 October 2001.
- 27 *Nachkrieg und Unfriede: Gedichte als Index 1945–1970*, edited by Hilde Domin (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1970); *Deutsche Gedichte seit 1960*, edited by Heinz Piontek (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1972). In Domin's anthology of poems about contemporary history, only three poems seem to centre on Vietnam, namely Fried, 'Das Land', 80–2; Martin Jürgens, 'weitere schlagzeilen kauend' (1966), 75; Edwin Wolfram Dahl, 'Friedensgespräche über Vietnam', 121–2. Another poem included by Domin from Fried's *und VIETNAM und*, 'Gründe', 85–6, is not about the Vietnam conflict specifically but political commitment generally. Grass's anti-war poem 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' is anthologised by Domin too. Anti-war poetry is thus not much showcased in this anthology. Piontek's extensive section on contemporary affairs contains 54 poems, just two of which, both by Fried, relate explicitly to Vietnam. On these two collections in particular, and the importance of poetry anthologies for tracing anti-war and internationalist poetry of the time in general, see Sareika, *Die dritte Welt*, 237–51, a discussion which suggested the exploration undertaken in this study.
- 28 The design is by Jürgen Jebram, responsible also for the distinctive styling of anti-authoritarian publications such as the little magazine *pro these: zeitschrift für unvollkommene* (1966–7) and the ppz-quadrat series by verlag peter-paul zahl, discussed in Chapter 1.
- 29 That is, Klaus-Ove Kahrmann.
- 30 'Statt eines Vorwortes: Rede zum Internationalen Vietnam-Tag am 20.X.67 – gehalten vor dem Prinz-Carl-Palais in München', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode.
- 31 The GDR writers' profile is more mixed, with some (Erich Arendt, Adolf Endler, Günter Kunert, Müller and the young yet already prominent Volker Braun) established, and others (for example, Frank Horeni and Karl Mickel) emergent. Swiss poets Walter Matthias Diggelmann, Peter Lehnert and Hans Mühlethaler were comparatively established. This comparison suggests greater editorial familiarity with up-and-coming writers in the FRG than in Switzerland.
- 32 Poets from the anthology who appear not to have had longer publishing careers are Jürgen Billich, Johannes Dollmann, Karl-Heinz Grewe, Hans Gutke, Georges Reymond and Stefan Zürcher. These names, or at least some of them, may be pseudonyms and the writers' identities therefore uncertain.
- 33 Emergent poets who developed wider reputations are Arnfried [*sic*] (later Hans Arnfrid) Astel, Ingo Cesaro, Delius, Nicolas Born, Hans-Jürgen [*sic*] Bulkowski, Karlhans Frank, Günther Guben, P. G. (later Hadayatullah) Hübsch, Heinz Jacobi, Jürgens, Yaak Karsunke, Fitzgerald Kusz, Reimar Lenz, Rolf Nörtemann, Jürgen Ploog, Johannes Schenk, Godehard Schramm, Peter Schütt, Kurt Sigel and Peter-Paul Zahl. Born and Nörtemann died young, in 1979 and 1975 respectively.

- 34 The German-American is Gutke, on whom no further detail is given (87).
- 35 Te Hanh, 'Zwischen meinen Töchtern sitzend', 'Hanoi 1966,' translated by Paul Wiens, *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 14 and 15 respectively.
- 36 For example, the issue states that '180+2' copies were produced of *amBEATion's* (unnumbered) "Vorausheft", 70 of (double issue) nos 1+2 (1964), 150 of nos 4 (1964) and 5 (1966), and 200 of no. 6 (1967). Cf. *Deutsche literarische Zeitschriften 1945–1970: Ein Repertorium*, edited by Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Bernhard Fischer and Thomas Dietzel (Munich, London, New York and Paris: KG Saur, 1992), 4 vols, I, 85–6. The term 'little magazine' is used here not as a diminutive, but in a specific, technical sense to mean an independent literary review with, generally, a fairly limited print run.
- 37 riewert q. tode and hartmut könig, 'an unsere leser', *amBEATion* 1+2 (July 1964).
- 38 riewert q. tode and hartmut könig, 'kleine chronik', *amBEATion* 4 (July 1965).
- 39 tode and könig, 'kleine chronik'.
- 40 *Gegen den Tod: Stimmen deutscher Schriftsteller gegen die Atombombe*, eds. Gudrun Ensslin and Bernward Vesper-Triangel (Stuttgart-Cannstatt: studio neue literatur, 1964). On Ensslin and Vesper/Vesper-Triangel, see [Chapter 1](#), note 64.
- 41 verlag peter-paul zahl describes itself as a 'mini-verlag mit großem programm' ['mini-publisher with a big programme'] in its literary magazine *SPARTACUS: zeitschrift für lesbische literatur* 1, no. 1 (October 1967), 19. zahl-wiener was partly owned and run by Peter-Paul Zahl and became notorious for clashes with the authorities. See [Chapter 1](#), note 71.
- 42 Quoted in Gerhard Bauß, *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre in der Bundesrepublik und Westberlin. Handbuch* (Cologne: Pahl-Rügenrein, 1977), 175.
- 43 Bauß, *Die Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre*, 195; cf. SDS Gruppe Frankfurt, 'Flugblatt-Aufruf zur Teilnahme an dem Teach-in "Waffen für den Vietcong – Kampf dem USA-Terror" und der anschließenden Demonstration zum US-Generalkonsulat' (2 February 1968), in *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail. 1946–1995*, edited by Wolfgang Kraushaar, 3 vols (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard bei Zweitausendeins, 1998), II.
- 44 Cf. e.g. Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German protest against America's war during the 1960s', in *America, The Vietnam War, and the World*, edited by Andreas Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington DC: German Historical Institute, 2003); Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third world politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 78–100.
- 45 From a call for poems for the anthology printed in another little magazine, *törn: zeitschrift für literatur und grafik* 6 (Spring 1967): n.p.
- 46 V. Scherliess, 'Musik ist die Mitte: Gedanken zur gegenwärtigen Musik', *amBEATion* 0 (1963): n.p.
- 47 r[iewert] q. t[ode] and h[artmut] k[önig], 'versuch einer vorausschau und begründung', *amBEATion* 0 (1963): n.p.
- 48 tode and könig, 'an unsere leser'.
- 49 'michael falckenlowe von rütz, geb. 2.8.42, lyriker und kritiker, kulturredakteur an "fyns tiende" [sic], odense / danmark, arbeitet an einem werk über neue nordische dichtung: moralischer realismus, debütierte mit einem gedichtsammlung' ['michael falckenlowe von rütz, d.o.b. 2.8.42, poet and critic, arts editor at "fyns tiende" [sic], odense / denmark, is working on a study of new nordic poetry: moral realism; first publication a volume of poetry'].
- 50 Michael von Rütz, 'Das Dichten', translated by ü [uwe ehrich], *amBEATion* 1+2 (July 1964): 26–7.
- 51 riewert q. tode, 'an unsere leser', *amBEATion* 6 (1966).
- 52 pg or pidschi (both versions of the name are given) hübsch, 'vietnam for ever', *amBEATion* 5 (August 1966): 27.
- 53 E.g. *Kursbuch* 3 (November 1965) is dedicated to this theme, and in 1966 the poetry of Alexander Herbrich / Ernst Herbeck (1920–91), a long-standing psychiatric patient in Klosterneuburg in Austria, was first published to great interest among the young generation of the 1960s. See W. G. Sebald, 'Des Häschens Kind, der kleine Has: Über das Totemtier des Lyrikers Ernst Herbeck' (1992), in *Campo Santo*, edited by Sven Meyer (Munich: Carl Hanser, 2003); W. G. Sebald, 'Das Häschens Kind, der kleine Has (The little hare, child of the hare): On the poet Ernst Herbeck's totem animal', in W. G. Sebald, *Campo Santo*, edited by Sven Meyer, translated by Anthea Bell (London: Penguin, 2006).
- 54 Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), 51–8.

- 55 Cf. e.g. Sozialistisches Patientenkollektiv an der Universität Heidelberg, *SPK – Aus der Krankheit eine Waffe machen. Eine Agitationsschrift* (Munich: Trikont, 1972). This text draws parallels between the SPK and the NLF.
- 56 Karlhans Frank, 'Man sollte ihnen die Fressen...', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 86.
- 57 Later tode co-founded a publishing house, bookshop and gallery in Kreuzberg. See e.g. 'Kleine Galerie in Kreuzberg' ['Little Gallery in Kreuzberg'], <https://friedrichshain-kreuzberg-online.de/index.php/kleine-galerie-am-kreuzberg-das-antiquariat-tode/> and 'Antiquarisches und Antiquiertes' ['Antiquarian and Antiquated'], <https://www.kreuzberger-chronik.de/chroniken/2003/november/geschaef.html> (both accessed 5 January 2022).
- 58 E.g. *Beispiele Beispiele*, edited by Käufer, which originated in the grassroots, leftist Literarische Werkstatt Gelsenkirchen [Gelsenkirchen literature workshop], forerunner of the better-known Werkkreis Literatur der Arbeitswelt [working group for the literature of the world of work], founded in 1970. Cf. Gundel Mattenklott, 'Literatur von unten – die andere Kultur', in *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, edited by Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (Munich: dtv, 1992), 154–8.
- 59 E.g. *Wir Kinder von Marx und Coca-Cola: Gedichte der Nachgeborenen. Texte der Jahrgänge 1945–55 aus der Bundesrepublik, Österreich und der Schweiz*, edited by Frank Brunner, Armin Juhre and Heinz Kulas (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1971); *Und ich bewege mich doch: Gedichte vor und nach 1968*, edited by Jürgen Theobaldy (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1977); *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al. (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, n.d.). This anthology comprehensively introduces the agit-prop writing movement that was often, if not exclusively, associated with the organised left and communist groups.
- 60 *Beispiele Beispiele* appeared with local publisher Georg Bitter, known for Catholic and children's books. *Wir Kinder von Marx und Coca-Cola* was published by Peter Hammer, a relatively new house interested in New Left and youth literatures. The countercultural Quer-Verlag produced further remarkable publications, such as Uwe Wandrey's aluminium-bound *Kampfpreise* (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, 1968), a 'Handliche, mit scharfen Kanten ausgestattete Kampfausgabe für die Phase des revolutionären Widerstands' ['practical fighting edition for the revolutionary resistant phase, complete with sharp edges'] (n.p.), playing on the idea of words as weapons.
- 61 For example, Franz Josef Degenhardt, Wolfgang Neuss, Hanns Dieter Hüsch and Dieter Süverkrup, *Da habt ihr es! Stücke und Lieder für ein deutsches Quartett* (1968) (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1970); *Politische Lieder '72*, edited by Arbeitskreis Progressive Kunst (Oberhausen: Asso, 1972), 95–7; *Politische Lieder '73–'74*, edited by Arbeitskreis Progressive Kunst (Oberhausen: Asso, 1974).
- 62 E.g. in Nicolas Born, *Wo mir der Kopfsteht* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1970) and *Gedichte 1967–1978* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1978); paul gerhard hübsch, *mach was du willst: gedichte* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1969); Yaak Karsunke, *Kilroy & andere: Gedichte* (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1967); Peter Schütt, *Sicher in die siebziger Jahre: Straßentexte* (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, n.d.); Peter-Paul Zahl, *Konterbande: Eine Gedichtauswahl* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1982).
- 63 E.g. in Gerhard Rühm, *Gesammelte Gedichte und visuelle Texte* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970); Franz Josef Degenhardt, *Kommt an den Tisch unter Pflaumenbäumen: Sämtliche Lieder mit Noten* (Munich: dtv, 1981).
- 64 Poems by Erasmus Schöfer and Peter Schütt, *konkret* no. 2, 1966 (February 1966): 40–1; poems by Schöfer, Schütt, Uwe Herms, Kurt Sigel and Reimar Lenz, *konkret* no. 4, 1966 (February 1966): 38–9; Erich Fried, 'Bomben für Mutttern', *konkret* no. 7, 1966 (July 1966): 41; a cycle of poems by Uwe Herms, 'Lieder zur moralischen Aufrüstung', *konkret* no. 10, 1966 (October 1966): 48–9.
- 65 Wolf Biermann, 'Vietnam-Gedichte', *konkret* no. 9, 1967 (September 1967): 36.
- 66 Klaus Pätzmann, 'Vietnam-Gedichte', *konkret* no. 7, 1967 (July 1967): 4.
- 67 *Splitter* 5, nos. 2+3 (December 1967): 20–6. The poets are Cesaro, Elias Dogas, Fried, Herms, Jürgens, Kusz, Lenz, Gerd Loschütz, Schöfer, Schütt and Guntram Vesper.
- 68 Peter Schütt, 'Politische Lyrik', *Splitter* 5, no 2+3 (December 1967): 8. *pro* (1966–70), edited by Hansjürgen Bulkowski, had high production values and innovative design; it announced itself as a map for 'die VERÄNDERTE welt' ['the CHANGED world']; *törn* (1966–8), edited by hübsch, presented a lively, cut-up aesthetic.
- 69 *SPARTACUS: zeitschrift für lesbare literatur* (1967–70), edited by peter-paul zahl; *Edelgamlmer: Poesie Satire Prosa* (1968–72), edited by Friedl Brehm of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; *Exitus: die*

- literarisch-satirische zeitschrift* (1968–71) edited from West Berlin; *phoenix: lyrik aus amerika kanada england schweiz rumänien jugoslawien deutschland dokumente texte* (1968–1970). *phoenix* promoted unusual international content, for example Welsh-language poetry in *phoenix 2* (1968).
- 70 *sonderheft vietnam*, special issue, *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20–1 (1966).
  - 71 *Frieden für Vietnam: Sprechtexte Agitation Lieder*, edited by Annemarie Stern (Oberhausen: Arbeitskreis für Amateurliteratur, 1970), special issue, *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30–1 (1970). This issue included texts from both the 1966 special issue of the periodical and *gegen den krieg in vietnam*.
  - 72 Ho Tschü Minh [sic], *Gefängnistagebuch: 102 Gedichte. Als Sonderdruck der Lyrischen Hefte herausgegeben von Arnfrid Astel*, translated from English by Annegret Kirchoff, Martin Jürgens and Arnfrid Astel (Saarbrücken: Lyrische Hefte, 1968).
  - 73 Mattenklott, 'Literatur von unten', 166; Mererid Puw Davies, *Writing and the West German protest movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016).
  - 74 See for example allusions to Bertolt Brecht and Walter Benjamin in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al.; Schütt's 'Politische Lyrik' references Erwin Piscator as a model.
  - 75 Cf. also e.g. Lenz, 'Also sprach Lyndon B. Johnson', which parodies Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra* (1883–5), in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 62–3; also in *konkret* no. 4, 1966 (April 1966): 39.
  - 76 Heike Doutiné, 'Stillett der raschen Worte', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 185.
  - 77 As Mattenklott notes, 'zu mehr ist erklärtermaßen kaum Zeit und Ruhe' ['it's recognised that there's no time or leisure for anything more'], 'Literatur von unten – die andere Kultur', 166.
  - 78 Schütt, 'Politische Lyrik', 7. Cf. e.g. *Beispiele Beispiele*, edited by Käufer.
  - 79 *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 238. Biographical notes for other authors in this collection contain similar descriptions.
  - 80 Erich Fried, 'Zum Agitprop-Gedicht', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 188.
  - 81 Cf. e.g. Born, *Gedichte 1967–1978*, 75; *Denkzettel: Politische Lyrik aus der BRD und Westberlin*, edited by Annie Voigtländer and Hubert Witt (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1974), 279–80.
  - 82 hübsch, *mach was du willst*, 18–20.
  - 83 Erich Fried, 'Eigene Erfahrungen mit Agitprop-Texten', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 215.
  - 84 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968); 'Commonplaces on the newest literature', translated by Michael Roloff, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982); on this essay's anti-authoritarian poetics and plaidoyer for dialogicity see Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 47–74.
  - 85 See [Chapter 6](#).
  - 86 See e.g. *Wo ist Vietnam? 89 Amerikanische Dichter gegen den Krieg* (1967), edited by Walter Lowenfels, translated by Renate Sami and Horst Tomayer (Darmstadt: Joseph Melzer, 1968). In keeping with the observation above that anti-war poems often appeared outside the literary mainstream, Melzer's other fields were Jewish themes and sexuality. This volume of poetry, with English and German parallel text, included high-profile poets such as Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg, Denise Levertov and Robert Lowell. The title is from Ferlinghetti's 'Where Is Vietnam?', 91–3, also in *Kursbuch* 6 (July 1966): 1–4.
  - 87 Uwe Timm, 'Bundesdeutschekriegsberichtserstattung'; Martin Walser, 'Fachleutemoral', in *Denkzettel*, edited by Voigtländer and Witt, 276–7 and 441 respectively.
  - 88 Fried, 'Zum Agitprop-Gedicht', 187–8.
  - 89 Uwe Friesel, 'Agitprop ist kommunikativ', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al.
  - 90 Carlo (Karl Dieter) Bredthauer, 'Aus "Wozu Agittexte"', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al., 183.

### 3

## Women in war: gender, nation and nightmare

### Introduction

The iconic news photograph *Accidental Napalm Attack* (1972) shows people fleeing on foot from an aerial bombing carried out over the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), or South Vietnam, by South Vietnamese forces.<sup>1</sup> It was taken by Vietnamese-American photographer Hyung Cong 'Nick' Ut, and won numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize and Press Photo of the Year. Following the picture's publication in *The New York Times*, it immediately became known around the world, for it seemed to encapsulate the Vietnam War's worst horrors. It has been described by critics Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites as 'a moment when the Vietnam War crystallized in US public consciousness' (207) and is often identified, as they point out, as 'a turning point in ending that war' (172).<sup>2</sup>

A key figure in Ut's photograph is a little girl, Phan Thị Kim Phúc, who screams as she runs, naked and injured, down a road towards the camera. This terrible image remains well-known today, often in cropped reproductions, so that all or some of the people around Kim Phúc are excluded. Indeed, it was a cropped version of the photograph which made *The New York Times's* front page the next day.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the photograph is generally not seen alongside fuller images and footage which exist of the same attack. The image of the little girl is thus often detached, or partially detached, from its context.

This treatment of the picture suggests that there is something symbolically compelling about a female victim, especially a young child, who is alone. She might, for example, stand for a certain idea of Vietnam itself, in bleak, helpless isolation. This chapter argues that in poetry about Vietnam published in West Germany such imagery can shore up key notions about the Western self and its others. The critic Wendy Kozol, for



example, has made this case compellingly with regard to uses of news photographs of women, girls and children.<sup>4</sup> However, the following pages also suggest that the cultural imagination of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) knew, in addition, different possibilities in representation.

One year after *Accidental Napalm Attack*, the West German poet, author and left-wing activist Peter Schütt offered readers a very different set of Vietnamese images in a travel memoir, *Vietnam 30 Tage danach* [*Vietnam 30 Days On*] (1973).<sup>5</sup> He visited the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, 30 days after the 1973 Paris peace accords came into force. Schütt feels, therefore, that he is recording a momentous historical moment. Like many other sympathetic intellectuals from the Global North, he travelled at the North Vietnamese government's invitation with a delegation from the West Germany's Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party] (DKP). Schütt and his party met citizens in various walks of life and observed their work at close hand. His book is a detailed, glowing record which emphasises social and political issues, as well as the agency and determination of the Vietnamese people, and can be understood as an instance of 'radical Orientalism', as theorised by historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu.<sup>6</sup> Just as more classic Orientalisms imagine a polarity between East and West, so too does twentieth-century radical Orientalism. However, while traditional Orientalisms denigrate the East and silence its subjects, radical Orientalism admires Asia as a source of revolutionary inspiration, and is shaped in part by its voices in transnational dialogue.

Soon after his return home to the Federal Republic, Schütt attended a showcase Eastern Bloc event, the tenth Weltjugendfestspiele [World Youth Festival], which in that year was held in East Berlin. At the end of his memoir he describes this gathering. Here Schütt is reunited with a Vietnamese woman, Phuong, who had been his interpreter during his recent travels and whose heroic attitude and intelligence he admires. He also writes of two further guests at the Festival:

Niemand schämt sich seiner Tränen, als Angela Davis die anmutige  
Vo Thi Lien, die als einzige das Blutbad von My Lai überlebte, in die  
Arme schließt

[No one is ashamed of their tears as Angela Davis embraces the graceful  
Vo Thi Lien, the sole survivor of the My Lai bloodbath]. (165)<sup>7</sup>

During the Mỹ Lai massacre of March 1968 hundreds of unarmed civilians, including infants and children, were abused and murdered by



US personnel.<sup>8</sup> Initially these crimes were covered up by the US military; later courts martial led to just one conviction. The presence in East Berlin of a citizen from Mỹ Lai, herself a child at the time of the attack, unequivocally evoked war crimes. Her attendance called to mind the bad faith of the perpetrators who had attempted to deny their actions; and the fact that, all the same, the whole world saw them.

Schütt's presentation of Vo Thi Lien as the sole survivor of Mỹ Lai resonates at one level with reproductions of *Accidental Napalm Attack* that show its protagonist as a lone, vulnerable little girl. In context, it may be no coincidence that well-known photographs of Mỹ Lai also feature victims who are women and children. However, in Schütt's account Vo Thi Lien has grown into an adult survivor who can command a world stage. Schütt's description of her as 'anmutig' ['graceful'] points to a classically literary stylisation. It calls to mind the 'Anmut' ['grace'] and individual sovereignty that were prized by the German dramatist and theorist Friedrich von Schiller.<sup>9</sup> Schiller believed a theatre that presented such qualities could become a pre-eminently moral institution, and Schütt's description of Vo Thi Lien on the festival podium echoes such ideals of the Schillerian stage, brought to life in historical reality. At the same time, her openness to an embrace matches traditionally feminine attributes of emotional warmth and generosity under pressure.

The author's meeting with Phuong shows that Vo Thi Lien is not an exception in Vietnam. For him, she represents all the unknown women like Phuong who are tireless historical and political agents. And crucially, Vo Thi Lien is no longer alone. As Schütt sees it, the meeting in East Berlin of Vo Thi Lien and Angela Davis, the era's most celebrated US Black woman activist, embodies an internationalist solidarity that cuts through Cold War and East–West divisions.<sup>10</sup> Together with Phuong, the three women embody the future of international socialism. So, according to *Vietnam 30 Tage danach*, a new world, all the brighter for being tempered in pain and struggle, could implicitly be imagined as feminine.

While Schütt's optimistic conclusion is very different from the horrific scenario in *Accidental Napalm Attack*, both works make powerful use of representations of girls and women, and suggest that such images in anti-war writing reward study. In pursuit of this enquiry, this chapter presents critical, comparative readings of portrayals of girls and women in poetry and other genres of anti-war writing in German. It begins with an analysis of poetry, focused on a reading of Stefan Zürcher's long poem 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules. Mit Vorspruch und Nachspruch versehen und einer Auslegung zur wahren Erhellung des gläubigen Geistes' ['The Law of the Nine Rules. Furnished with a Prologue and Epilogue and Exegesis

for the True Illumination of the Believer’]. This work was published in a representative West German anthology of anti-war poems, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* [*against the war in vietnam*], edited by riewert qu. tode (1968).<sup>11</sup> tode’s collection marked the era’s largest anti-war event, the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß [International Congress on Vietnam], held in West Berlin in 1968. ‘Das Gesetz der Nine Rules’ is also characteristic of many anti-war poems in its focus on often-used images of Vietnamese women as suffering mothers, and as victims of sexual violence. The chapter goes on to consider interpretations of these tropes and possible reasons for their persistence in anti-war poetry. Drawing on the work of US literary critic Susan Jeffords, it argues that the poetry’s perceptions of the war are gendered, revealing in turn some limitations of the anti-authoritarian movement’s ideas.<sup>12</sup>

Documentary prose writings of the era offer a remarkable contrast to poetry in this respect. Next, therefore, the chapter considers left-wing critical journalism by Bernard Couret and Gabriele Sprigath and travel memoirs, primarily Peter Weiss’s *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* [*Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*] (1968) and Georg W. Alsheimer’s *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam 1961–1967* [*Vietnamese Apprentice Years: Six years as a German doctor in Vietnam 1961–67*].<sup>13</sup> These memoirs, by two of the era’s most knowledgeable writers on Vietnam, show that West German readers had opportunities to encounter an array of feminine roles in texts about Vietnam beyond that of the isolated, suffering girl or woman; the chapter then considers possible reasons for these differences between the images of women in poetry and prose. The final critical reading explores complex, contradictory images of women in further works by Weiss, his play commonly known as *Viet Nam Diskurs* [*Discourse on Viet Nam*] (1967), *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* and passages from his *Notizbücher 1960–1971* [*Notebooks 1960–1971*] (1982).<sup>14</sup> Together these works articulate critical awareness of both the fragility and the violence of the era’s literary images of Vietnamese women.

## Imagining Vietnamese women: poetry

In the showcase anthology *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, the first two poems are by East German Volker Braun.<sup>15</sup> One, ‘Elendsquartier’ [‘Hovel’] (12), describes a landscape with palm trees. For the poem’s speaker, it lies ‘[v] or meiner letzten Tür’ [‘outside the last of my doors’] and ‘in den

Besitzungen meines Herzens' ['in the territories of my heart']; it may be the war-torn Vietnam of his imagination. The speaker sees a rice store, a threatening masked man and an unknown, possibly injured or dead woman with a 'von Blut schwarze[s] Gesicht' ['face blackened with blood']. This ominous line sets the tone for further portrayals of women in the anthology.<sup>16</sup>

The representation of women is developed most extensively in 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' (40–50), by Zürcher, an unknown writer today. At ten pages, this poem is by some way the volume's longest, but in other stylistic respects it is characteristic of the poems collected by tode. It employs clear, direct, free verse and makes central use of irony. Like many other poems, Zürcher's is inspired by a documentary text, in this case the 'Nine Rules' officially issued on a card to US personnel to guide their behaviour in Vietnam.<sup>17</sup> The poem addresses an imagined US soldier in the field with a parody of these rules. Tellingly then, the poem emphatically genders its supposed addressee, and hence military aggression in Vietnam more generally, as masculine.

In addition to introductory and concluding sections, 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' contains nine discrete segments, which are in effect individual poems within the poem. Each is dedicated to one of the 'nine rules' and contains five stanzas, interspersed with a short refrain. These verses contrast the high-minded 'nine rules' with the sordid realities of US action. For example, Rule VII states 'don't attract attention by loud [*sic*] rude or unusual behaviour' (47). The poem's seventh segment suggests that US forces follow that precept in perverse ways by using silent methods of destruction such as spraying herbicides on the Vietnamese jungle or aerial bombardment which separates the aggressor from the children he kills, so that he cannot hear their cries. These crimes 'don't attract attention' either, in the sense that they are covered up by the authorities, as in the case of Mỹ Lai.

The third segment of 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' (47–8) addresses Rule III, which instructs soldiers to 'treat women with politeness and respect'. The poem asks rhetorically who these women are. In response, the first stanza describes a woman whose father, brother and husband were killed by the poem's reader, the US soldier. In the second, a woman's house and rice field are destroyed and her child killed by enemy fire. The third verse presents a woman hiding other people, and herself, in a hole in the ground, presumably from US assault. In the fourth stanza a woman is raped by the poem's implied addressee; she later accepts a dollar from him since she has nothing at all left. The fifth depicts a woman whose life has been taken, along with those of her family (44). The poem exhorts the

American serviceman throughout to honour in turn the widow, the childless woman, the woman in rags, the woman forced into prostitution and the dead woman. It reminds him that they were once someone's wife, mother, sister and lover respectively, and calls to mind his own wife back home.<sup>18</sup> This logic takes away from the women's individuality in that they are imagined only in relation to others, often, men. It indicates too that the implied reader can only see the Vietnamese women's humanity if he compares them to women in his own life.

Read synchronically, Zürcher's stanzas represent a series of women in a variety of dangerous situations, suggesting that such experiences are widespread in Vietnam. Read diachronically, they outline the tragic unfolding and ending of one life in wartime. At the outset, the woman protagonist is a respected wife, daughter, sister and mother, as well as a householder and farmer. But US aggression turns her into a bereaved woman in rags hiding from murderous violence, then, later, a destitute victim of rape. This narrative culminates in the woman's violent death, alongside her entire 'Geschlecht' ['family'] and 'Nachkommenschaft' ['descendants'] (44). Such killing is genocidal, for the noun 'Geschlecht' can mean an entire people (or sex) as well as a specific family.

The woman or women in 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' are alone and powerless. At first sight the third stanza, which describes a woman helping others to hide from US attack, seems different; she shows agency and solidarity. However, by the end of the stanza, she is a pitiful, solitary 'zerlumppte' ['woman in rags']. There is a sense here that the woman's resistance is not only futile; it may even have triggered more persecution, as shown by the ever greater violence committed against her as the stanzas proceed. In this respect, 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' resonates with the violent punishment of women's collective action that is implied in some other anti-war poems, too.<sup>19</sup>

Two more of Zürcher's tropes also correspond to images common in the poetry, and in anti-war culture more broadly. One is the image of a woman as a suffering or bereaved mother.<sup>20</sup> This representation is repeatedly mobilised, for instance, in the visual art collected in the East German anthology *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation [Vietnam Now: Documented by artists]* (1968), which includes international works, including some by West German artists.<sup>21</sup> This circumstance suggests that transnational and German anti-war discourse construct diametrical oppositions between nurturing, non-aggressive motherhood on the one hand and unbridled masculine war on the other.

So important is this maternal image that even in the extremely rare cases where the anti-war poetry circulating in the FRG depicts

non-Vietnamese women, they are mostly mothers. An example is singer-songwriter Fasia Jansen's lyric 'Mutter gib deinen Jungen nicht her' ['Mother Don't Give Up Your Son'] (1967), which calls on a woman in the US to stop her son from going to fight in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> It recalls the position of US anti-war group Women Strike for Peace (WSP), which appealed to mothers to persuade their sons not to join up.<sup>23</sup> At first sight, Jansen's text seems to counter trends in West German anti-war poetry, both in representing a woman who is not Vietnamese and in recognising her potential to resist the war. However, such an impression is relativised and made more complex by the implications that it is only in private life, as a mother, that a woman can have any influence on the conduct of the Vietnam conflict; and, perhaps, that only Western women have genuine agency in this theatre of war.<sup>24</sup>

The highly circumscribed nature of maternal imagery in the poetry is underlined also by the posterity of the poem 'Bomben für Muttern' ['Drop a Bomb for Mother'] (1966), written by the era's best-known anti-war poet, Erich Fried. This work highlights the irony in a report from the *Washington Post* about a competition held for children in Minnesota to mark Mother's Day. That contest (its nature is not specified) was called 'Drop a Bomb for Mother', and so Fried imagines pilots in Vietnam dropping bombs 'für Muttern' ['for mother'].<sup>25</sup> Like a number of his other influential Vietnam poems of 1966, 'Bomben für Muttern' appeared in the high-profile, left-wing magazine *konkret* [concrete]. However, it is the only one of them not also included in Fried's well-known collection *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* [and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems], published the same year. Neither does 'Bomben für Muttern' feature in Fried's collected works of 1993. This absence might imply that the association in 'Bomben für Muttern' between mothers and warfare seemed to fall beyond the conventions of anti-war poetry in ways which made the poem too difficult to anthologise and so commit more fully to posterity.

A further, distinctive image in 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' is of women as victims of sexual violence and exploitation.<sup>26</sup> The poem makes no distinction between rape by US forces and paid-for sex in South Vietnam, for which the poem says there can be no genuine consent. Moreover, rape is immediately followed by the death of the woman in question, so the two instances of violence are linked. Another poem from *gegen den krieg in vietnam* offers that same idea. Hans Gutke's 'Qui Nhon', said to be based on visits to Vietnam, shows a child begging money from male foreigners.<sup>27</sup> It hints that her behaviour is modelled on that of her older sister who works in a US-style bar, a locus which in context suggests

sexual exploitation or sex work. All the while, bombs continue to drop and human remains are ferried into a hospital. The little girl's path into sexual exploitation, violence and death is clearly mapped out.

The twin images in 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' of suffering mothers and victims of fatal sexual violence have key commonalities. The poem focuses on their suffering and isolation in ways that dovetail with the reception of photographs such as *Accidental Napalm Attack*. It also echoes the consistent tendency of wider anti-war poetry to omit images of women involved in politics, work, surviving the hardships of war, going about everyday life or acting as part of a group.<sup>28</sup> Images of women fighting or resisting are rarer still, so women in Vietnam are often invisible as agents and subjects of history in this body of work.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, the poetry often stresses the masculinity of foreign military aggressors, creating a starkly gendered duality. Indeed, the poles of passivity and action, victimhood and aggression, object and subject often seem themselves to be gendered, so that history itself appears as a masculine, dynamic process enacted on a feminine, apparently unchanging nation. Such anti-war poems are thus repositories of conventional or conservative European ways of thinking about men, women, warfare, East and West. Put another way, this schema reproduces a traditional Orientalism which constructs the relationship between East and West in binary, hierarchical terms.

## Fields of battle, fields of gender

At one level, the poetry's emphasis on Vietnamese women as victims reflects historical events. During the war, many women indeed suffered losses of status and property, bereavement, sexual exploitation and deadly violence, and consequently poets highlighted such real-life suffering in order to protest against the conflict and its devastating effects. However, so consistent and restricted are the poetic patterns noted here that they also invite further, less literal interpretations. Perhaps most evidently these images evoke symbolic traditions in which a community, nation or continent can be imagined as a girl or woman.<sup>30</sup> As critic Caroline Rupprecht points out, this kind of symbolism is familiar in Vietnamese culture itself.<sup>31</sup> Its significance for the mid-century German cultural imagination is likewise evident, as in Bertolt Brecht's collection of critical poems based on photographs of the Second World War, *Kriegsfibel* [*War Primer*] (1955). Here, for example, Africa is shown as a desirable woman about to be targeted by foreign invaders.<sup>32</sup>

Poems such as 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules' draw on further cultural traditions of imagining femininity, for instance the Christian iconography of the Madonna and *Pietà*, and place these representations alongside their supposed opposite, namely mistreated, sexualised women familiar from popular Orientalising romances such as Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904). Here the eponymous Japanese heroine is duped into an exploitative relationship with an American man, believing that it is a genuine marriage; her emotional suffering at his hands is bound up with her role as mother to his child. The story ends in betrayal and violence as the American abandons Butterfly for a new, legitimate wife from home. When Butterfly realises he will not come back to her, she takes her own life.

In the FRG's anti-war poetry, narratives like Puccini's join hands with those German high aesthetic traditions that persistently link sexuality and death. This nexus is explored influentially, for example, in literary and cultural critic Klaus Theweleit's near-contemporary, monumental work *Männerphantasien* [*Male Fantasies*] (1977–8), which in many ways has its origins in the thought and history of West Germany's 1960s and 1970s.<sup>33</sup> Such tradition may also play its part in the persistent entanglement of thinking about libido and aggression, or the 'struggle between Eros and Death' observed by historian Dagmar Herzog in some psychoanalytical discourses in post-war West Germany.<sup>34</sup>

In anti-war discourse, this very conventional kind of representation can fuse with contemporary views of modern war as a consequence of repressed sexuality under capitalism. Psychoanalyst Hans Kilian wrote in *konkret* in 1968, reflecting the Cold War mood:

Die durch Sexualverdrängung stimulierte intraspezifische Aggression ist zu einer Gemeingefahr geworden, die die Überlebenschancen der ganzen Menschheit in Frage stellt

[intraspecific aggression triggered by sexual repression has become a common danger which puts the survival of all humanity into question].<sup>35</sup>

Soon after, again in *konkret*, journalist Stefan Aust wrote that '[d]er Vietnamkrieg und seine katastrophalen Folgen' ['the Vietnam War and its catastrophic consequences'] are a result of the sexual repression described by Kilian.<sup>36</sup> Some anti-war poems seem to flesh out that theoretical narrative, as they imagine the conflict as an expression of aggressive, masculine, US sexuality that targets girls and women, who in turn embody Vietnam.<sup>37</sup>

Chapter 2 of this study argued that West German anti-authoritarianism feared a pervasive 'Ohnmacht; ('powerlessness'), and the poetry's images

of helpless women may mirror that feeling at a deep level. Simultaneously, however, if even more implicitly and very indirectly, these images may point up prospects for agency as well. In a discussion of *Accidental Napalm Attack*, Guy Westwell describes in US culture 'a legacy of colonialist discourse in which the Third World is presented as feminine, helpless and childlike in order to legitimize the need for the "help" of the First World' (414).<sup>38</sup> This idea resonates with German poems' characterisations of Vietnam, which imply that it – or she – is in need of active intervention, perhaps by Europeans or even, specifically, by Germans. This discourse may offer an imagined way out of a West German sense of 'Ohnmacht'.

In her study of US writing and films about Vietnam, Jeffords argues that 'the arena of warfare and the Vietnam War in particular are not just fields of battle but fields of gender' (xi). The corpus Jeffords analyses implicitly reflects domestic issues at a time when authoritative, patriarchal cultural norms were felt to be under threat.<sup>39</sup> Such narratives become 'an emblem for the presentation of dominant cultural ideology' (5), seeking to 're-masculinise' the US itself. At the same time they sideline critical thematisations of gender. Paradoxically, sexualised images of women contribute to this process. Here

gender is rephrased as sexuality and presented as its own spectacle. [...] By eliding (hetero)sexuality with gender, these representations suggest that gender is being addressed at the same time that they dismiss the need for its discussion. (50)

In such ways, feminine perspectives or subjects, indeed the contingent nature of gender itself, are occluded and 'the masculine point of view becomes less available to challenge' (52). The effect is to support an uncritical sense of war as men's business. Consequently, according to Jeffords, this kind of writing is 'structurally written through relations of gender' (xi).

The positionalities of the West German anti-war poems under discussion here are different from Jeffords's selections in significant ways. The poems are written from oppositional perspectives and their authors do not write with the same urgent sense of personal experience of, or proximity to, the conflict. Nonetheless, they share such features as emphasis on masculine agency and sexualisation of female figures. In so doing, like the US works considered by Jeffords, they reflect back on the gender politics of their own contexts. In 1968 a key West Berlin anti-war event, the *Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß*, was simultaneously an important origin of West Germany's nascent *Neue Frauenbewegung*



[New Women's Movement]. That movement criticised the sexism of much anti-authoritarian and anti-war politics, and called into question traditional gender roles.<sup>40</sup> So even as Jeffords observes that US writing about Vietnam supported embattled notions of masculinity, so might West German anti-war discourse, including some of its poetry, do the same for the protest movements.

## Encountering Vietnamese women: journalism and memoir

The FRG's New Left was suspicious of mainstream media's supposedly one-sided, pro-US reporting on Vietnam.<sup>41</sup> Critical journalism based on first-hand encounters with Vietnamese people and Vietnam, as well as travel writing like Schütt's, were therefore valued counterweights, and some examples of such writings offer striking images of Vietnamese women. In 1968, for example, *konkret* carried a sympathetic interview, in translation, by French writer Couret with Nguyen Thi Binh. She was a leader of South Vietnamese rebel organisation, the National Liberation Front (NLF, also known as the Viet Cong), and a high-profile delegate at the Paris peace talks of the time.<sup>42</sup>

Couret's piece is titled 'Madame Vietkong' and the magazine introduces its subject, with reference to the upcoming talks, as only 'die zweite Vietnamesin, die ab morgen im Scheinwerferlicht der Weltöffentlichkeit steht' ['the second Vietnamese woman to stand, from tomorrow, in the spotlight of the world's attention'] (27). This characterisation underscores the novelty of seeing a Vietnamese woman in authority. Like the interview's headline, it probably references Trần Lệ Xuân, often known as Madame Nhu, the influential sister-in-law of South Vietnam's former premier Ngô Đình Diệm, who had been South Vietnam's unofficial First Lady from 1955 to 1963. *konkret's* headline thus equates two very different individuals. Simultaneously, it makes Nguyen Thi Binh appear less a multi-dimensional person on her own terms than a static embodiment of the 'Vietkong'. In addition, Couret begins by asking Nguyen Thi Binh about her children and how she met her husband, so downplaying her political role.

Nonetheless, Couret's interview does focus primarily on politics and it is illustrated with two large photographs which show Nguyen Thi Binh formally dressed and stateswomanlike, with the NLF flag beside her. This kind of representation is accentuated further in another long interview with the NLF leader, published in leftist literary magazine *Kürbiskern* [*Pumpkin Seed*] in 1969.<sup>43</sup> It was conducted by a young West German

woman, Sprigath, who prefaces it with dense pages of facts and figures about the war. The conversation itself is entirely devoted to politics and there is no outward description of Nguyen Thi Binh, or any mention of her personal life. In such journalistic writing, she appears as a more powerful historical agent.

Rare contemporary records of time spent in Vietnam, such as Schütt's *Vietnam 30 Tage danach*, provide extensive representations of women. Another, very different example is Alsheimer's *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam 1961–1967*. Alsheimer was the pen name of Erich Wulff, later a prominent reforming psychiatrist in West Germany. His memoir is unique in FRG writing because it discusses extensive experience of life in the Republic of Vietnam, or South Vietnam. Here, over almost 400 pages, Alsheimer documents the time he spent in the university city Hué as a doctor and academic, then, eventually, a pro-democracy activist and NLF supporter. Exceptionally among West German authors writing on Vietnam, he describes learning fluent Vietnamese and translating Vietnamese poetry into German, as well as his personal and professional engagements with many classes of society. In its day, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* was well-known, with Hans Magnus Enzensberger referring to it as a model for revolutionary literature in his seminal essay on poetics around 1968, 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend' ['Commonplaces on the newest literature'] (1968).<sup>44</sup> Alsheimer's book is also referenced positively by Schütt's interviewees in *Vietnam 30 Tage danach* (70–1).

*Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* is divided into two parts. The first describes Alsheimer's early days in Saigon and Hué. Often personal and anecdotal in character, it includes accounts of social, romantic and sexual experiences with women. The second part, in which Vietnamese women are less visible, describes Alsheimer's later political activity. This comparative absence is in part a consequence of his recent marriage to a woman he has met during a visit back to West Germany, after which he no longer seeks liaisons with Vietnamese women. In addition, the narrator's attention is now on politics and he tends not to meet women in such contexts; only at second hand does he hear of an unnamed, armed NLF woman who guards a village and whose description maps onto the radical Orientalism of the times.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by this point Alsheimer is coming to a fuller understanding of the RVN and his political consciousness is raised. The shift in his sexual habits could thus also be the result of changing times, embodied by the armed NLF woman who might correlate with concomitant change in the narrator's thinking about his own relationship to Vietnam and the Vietnamese people, and to gender politics.

Early on, Alsheimer's first mention of Vietnamese women is as 'Saigoner Freudenmädchen' ['Saigon ladies of the night'] (6) and his encounters with them begin with 'Taxi-Girls' (that is, sex workers) (14).<sup>46</sup> Alsheimer later describes commodified sexual experiences. On a trip with a male Vietnamese friend, he describes 'die beiden 18 jährigen Mädchen, die wir am Nachmittag zur Siesta in unseren Betten vorgefunden hatten, als freundliche Aufmerksamkeit des chinesischen Hotelbesitzers' ['the two 18-year-old girls whom we had found in our beds at siesta time, a kind gift from the Chinese hotel owner'] (47). This account is apparently uncritical on the narrator's part and the reader learns nothing more about these anonymous 'Mädchen' ['girls']. On another occasion, Alsheimer pays for sex with a very young woman in Saigon. She expresses herself in 'eine Unzahl unverständlicher glockiger Laute' ['countless incomprehensible, bell-like sounds'] (109) that Alsheimer takes as signifying pleasure. What the woman says to Alsheimer is 'unverständlich' ['incomprehensible'] to him, he implies, only in a linguistic sense: while this episode takes place before he learns Vietnamese, he is certain that her enjoyment is genuine and imagines her as a sexual revolutionary.

This episode perpetuates traditions of Orientalising writing about women. A contemporary reviewer, writer Yaak Karsunke, observed:

Wie ein empfindsamer Reiseschriftsteller des 19. Jahrhunderts beginnend, vermittelt Alsheimer eine Fülle von konkret-sinnlichen Details. [...] ([...] auf dem Gebiet der Sexualität scheint der Kolonialstandpunkt noch am wenigsten überwunden, sondern nurmehr romantisch revolutionär überglänzt – 'revolutionäre Züge' in den Praktiken einer Prostituierten sähen vielleicht doch anders aus als die auf S. 108 ff. beschriebenen!)

[Starting his account like a sentimental travel writer of the 19th century, Alsheimer communicates a wealth of concrete, sensory detail [...] ([...] the colonial perspective seems to be least diminished in relation to sexuality, which from this point onwards is given a romantically revolutionary veneer – in a prostitute, 'revolutionary traits' might well look rather different from those described on pp. 108 ff.!)].<sup>47</sup>

Karsunke's reference to sentimental narratives evokes works like *Madama Butterfly*, itself based on popular nineteenth-century fictions.<sup>48</sup> Parallels between Puccini's opera and this episode in *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*

most obviously include the transactional relationship between a teenager and an older foreign man. Alsheimer, using recreational drugs, describes the Saigon woman's hands 'wie zu Schmetterlingen verwandelte Feuerlilien' ['like fire lilies transformed into butterflies'] (109), a description that recalls Puccini's title and imagery. While Alsheimer's partner, unlike Butterfly, actively seeks out sex work, Alsheimer stresses her honesty and 'Unschuld' ['innocence'] (108), qualities which recall the opera's heroine. At the same time, he rewrites its conventional plot in contemporary, non-tragic ways.

Alsheimer also has a relationship with a 'Tanzmädchen' ['dancing girl'] (121), Mai Lien. She says she was born into a high-ranking family but, as the daughter of one of her father's 'Nebenfrauen' ['concubines'] (121), her status in it was inferior. In protest she began a relationship with a young officer who was later imprisoned in a putsch, while her father was killed by the French. As a result:

um den Rest der Familie durchzubringen und ihrem jüngeren Bruder eine standesgemäße Erziehung zu ermöglichen, sei [Mai Lien] ins Tanzhaus gegangen

[in order to support the rest of her family and give her brother an education which befitted his standing, [Mai Lien] said that she danced for money]. (121–2)

The relationship does not endure and Alsheimer fulfils a 'Dienst' ['service'] (121) for an American friend by introducing the pair. Mai Lien and the American develop a long-standing, mutually beneficial relationship. Eventually he returns to the US without her, establishing another parallel with *Madama Butterfly*. However, in a pragmatic counter-narrative, Mai Lien's departing partner gifts her a house and an income, and both, according to the narrator, are content.

Alsheimer does not reflect extensively on the perspectives of the women in his anecdotes. He discovers that Mai Lien's father is alive and her lover, the officer, no longer imprisoned but married to someone else, to which he remarks:

Diese Geschichte von Edelprostitution, um die unschuldig leidende Familie vor dem Elend zu bewahren, war nur allzu offensichtlich dem vietnamesischen National-Epos Kim van Kieu nachgebildet, dessen Heldin sich in ein Bordell verkaufen ließ, nachdem Vater und Geliebter von einem korrupten Gouverneur ins Gefängnis geworfen worden waren

[This story of entering high-class prostitution in order to save the innocently suffering family from destitution was all too evidently modelled on the Vietnamese national epic Kim van Kieu, in which the heroine had herself sold into a brothel after her father and lover were thrown into prison by a corrupt governor]. (122)

Reference here is to the epic poem by Nguyễn Du (1766–1820), often known in English as *The Tale of Kiều*.<sup>49</sup> Its eponymous protagonist, a beautiful, virtuous young lady, submits to sexual exploitation and forced prostitution in order to save her family from hard times. At the end of many dangerous trials, she is saved and reunited with her family and first love. Alsheimer concludes:

[Mai Lien] hatte sich also aus ein paar Körnchen Wahrheit einen Mythos zusammengesetzt, den typischen Mythos der gefallenen Mädchen Vietnams aus gutem Hause, und inzwischen auch gelernt, allen entgegenstehenden Tatsachen zum Trotze, selbst an ihn zu glauben

[So [Mai Lien] had constructed a myth for herself out of a couple of grains of truth, the typical myth of the fallen Vietnamese girl of good family, and had by now, despite all the facts which contradicted it, learned to believe in it herself]. (122)

Typically for women in Alsheimer's memoir, Mai Lien is not accorded direct speech; she remains the silent object of the doctor-narrator's confident analysis. Noting the parallel with 'Kim van Kieu', he casts his experience into literary moulds, as he does with the Saigon sex worker. The narrator assumes that Mai Lien has deluded herself with her tale and does not consider that she might be making conscious, strategic use of it. So, even as Alsheimer is sure that Mai Lien has become unreasonably convinced of the fake romance she has woven, the same could be said of his own belief in the story he tells here.

Elsewhere, however, Alsheimer reveals moments of greater self-awareness. He recognises that he is influenced by Orientalising fantasies rooted in home and childhood, remembering:

Tante Leni, die ein halbes Menschenleben in China verbracht hatte und [...] in unserem Hause in Reval wohnte. Chinesische Lactische, Porzellanvasen und Märchengestalten haben mich bis zu meinem dreizehnten Geburtstag umgeben

[Aunt Leni, who had spent half her life in China and [...] lived in our home in Reval. Up to my 13th birthday, Chinese lacquer tables, porcelain vases and fairy-tale figures surrounded me]. (11)

This transgenerational memory, mediated through precious commodities and fairy tales, forms Alsheimer's initial view of Vietnam. He also observes that his ideas were partly formed by the popular French 'feuilletonistisch[e] Indochinaromanen von Jean Hougron, von denen einige als rororo-Taschenbücher erschienen waren' ['Jean Hougron's superficial novels about Indochina, some of which had appeared as rororo paperbacks'] (12).<sup>50</sup> The first of Hougron's seven-novel series *La Nuit Indochinoise* [*The Indochina Night*] is titled *Tu récolteras la Tempête* [*You Will Reap the Whirlwind*] (1950) and it appeared in German as ...*wird Sturm ernten* in 1956.<sup>51</sup> Hougron's anti-hero is a tough, gifted and sexually attractive French doctor who goes by the name Georges Lastin. During the Second World War and German occupation of France Lastin's wife has an affair with a German officer, so he murders her. Lastin escapes undetected and casts off his former identity in colonial Indochina. Here he continues to practice medicine, establishes a relationship with a local woman and settles into a world of casual criminality, racism and violence. This setting is also characterised by routine exploitation, commodification and abuse of girls and women.

This grittier story contrasts with *Madama Butterfly* and Alsheimer omits its overt brutality, writing instead euphemistically that such novels bequeathed him a glamorous 'Traumbild von mandeläugigen, elfenbeinhäutigen, zierlichen Vietnamesinnen' ['fantasy image of almond-eyed, ivory-skinned, delicate Vietnamese women']. These figures are characterised, according to Alsheimer, by an 'exotischer sexueller Reiz, der billig zu kaufen war' ['exotic sexual charm, which could be cheaply purchased'] (12). Nonetheless, he acknowledges that his attraction to Hougron's images lies in his 'neurotische Abwehrschema und [...] der daraus sich ergebenden Bindungsschwäche' ['neurotic defence mechanisms and [...] associated fear of commitment'] (12).

Alsheimer's accounts of sexual relationships thus highlight a variety of contacts between Vietnamese women and foreign men and indicate at times a certain scope for women's agency within them. For example, he describes the young sex worker in Saigon as 'eine kleine Arbeiterin auf der Suche nach einem Zusatz-Verdienst' ['a little worker in search of some extra income'] (108). That is to say, in his eyes she is neither passive nor desperate, since she initiates the encounter and cheerfully combines it with other kinds of work. Mai Lien shows agency first by telling a life story

in order to try and control of the way she is seen, and later by entering into a pragmatic relationship with the memoirist's American friend. According to *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, therefore, at least some South Vietnamese women can seek to balance the demands and benefits of their encounters with a foreign man.

At times, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* highlights other complexities faced by South Vietnamese women in a rapidly changing society. Alsheimer comments on aspects of women's lives and customs which relate to them, for instance regarding menstruation and childbirth, and still-dominant traditional expectations around marriage. He recognises too that his benchmarks for women's emancipation are predicated on European and North American models of sexual liberation and individualism. Such attitudes, he realises, are in essence a:

Privileg der Elite, aus dem Westen importiert wie die Eisschränke, die Klimaanlage, die Straßenkreuzer, mit denen Saigon vorzeitig großtat

[privilege for the elite, a Western import like the refrigerators, aircon units and limos with which Saigon showed off in premature ways]. (241).

The narrator appreciates that such behaviour can generate a double-bind for women.

Alsheimer also registers the potentially negative impact on women of relationships with foreign or powerful men, which generally involve sexual or social transgression and so can be fraught. For instance, his liaison with a woman called Thao is the 'einzige Liebesgeschichte, die ich mit einem "anständigen" vietnamesischen Mädchen hatte' ['only love affair I had with a "respectable" Vietnamese girl'] (227–8). He observes:

Ihre Bindung an mich erinnerte an die flehende Anhänglichkeit einer Hündin, die einen Herrn sucht, der für sie sorgt

[Her attachment to me recalled the imploring affection of a female dog in search of a master to look after her]. (227)

The narrator identifies Thao's submissiveness as evidence of extreme pressure on women to marry in order to gain or maintain social status. However, his disparaging comparison of her predicament to that of a stray dog is startling, and he does not pause to wonder whether his relationship

with her may further reduce her chances of fulfilling her dearly-held wish to marry. Thus there is some disconnection between Alsheimer's theoretical, more critical understanding of some of the contradictions of South Vietnamese women's lives and his anecdotes about his affairs with them. More generally, too, his representations of women in their variety and relative complexity oscillate between stereotypes and more nuanced perceptions.

The discrepancy between the mono-dimensional representations of women in poetry on one hand and the sometimes more complex documentary prose on the other invites reflection. In formal terms of course, longer narrative texts provide scope for more extensive explorations, while the extremely short forms of anti-war poetry telegraph information in highly condensed ways. In such confines, traditional tropes can seem to provide an economical shorthand to communicate Vietnam's suffering. In part, too, divergences between documentary prose and poetry are due to their contrasting provenance. The journalists and memoirists wrote about first-hand encounters with Vietnamese citizens, and their experiences were not uniform. Furthermore, in Schütt's and Weiss's DRV, there was no US-driven sex industry as imagined by the poetry, and even while Alsheimer writes about the RVN, he is comparatively protected from the war's hardships by a privileged expatriate lifestyle. By contrast, the poetry is far less likely to be based on lived experience, presenting instead what Braun calls the territories of the heart.<sup>52</sup> Within them, Vietnam often appears not as two states encompassing a great range of milieux and experiences as they did in reality, but rather as an undifferentiated space in which girls, women and their experiences tend towards the archetypal.

## Peter Weiss's nightmare

Among the writers discussed in this chapter, Weiss's contributions to anti-war literature are the most extensive and some of the most deeply researched – and correspondingly they offer varied representations of women. These works include the major documentary play *Viet Nam Diskurs*. It shares Schiller's interest in theatre as a moral institution, albeit in this case underpinned with Marxist thought. The play presents scenes from Vietnamese history, divided into discrete 'Stadien' ['Phases'], from ancient times to the present. It emphasises feudal, class and economic pressures and the people's perspective, and a highly theorised view of history.



Correspondingly, the staging of *Viet Nam Diskurs* is abstract. Each of its 15 actors is allocated a number and plays a variety of parts, as described in the directions:

Jeder Spieler [...] stellt eine Vielzahl von Figuren dar, deren Aussagen und Verhaltensweisen in ihrer Gesamtheit einen bestimmten historischen Prozeß verdeutlichen. [...] Jene, die durch einen Namen gekennzeichnet werden, sind nicht Charaktere im herkömmlichen Sinn; wir nennen sie einzig als Träger wichtiger Tendenzen und Interessen. (75)

[Each actor [...] represents a number of figures whose statements and behaviour as a whole typify a particular historical development. [...] Those identified with a name are not characters in the usual sense: they are named simply as representatives of significant tendencies and interests]. (n.p.)

Frequent role changes and anti-realist insistence on the figures as embodiments of theoretical or historical positions demand conspicuous separation between an actor's individual person and the roles s/he is playing. In principle then, any role might be taken by any actor, and the play would have the potential to undo traditionally gendered representations.

However, the directions also specify that only two actors, 5 and 6, should be women, and closer reading of the play itself shows that it specifies that individual characters should be played by an actor of the same gender, too. Since many individualised male characters appear, most of the men actors take on a variety of roles; but there are only two individualised female figures throughout, who barely speak. *Viet Nam Diskurs* ascribes symbolic importance to one woman, one of the two legendary Trung sisters who led an initially successful rebellion in Vietnam against its Chinese rulers around 40 CE. Yet while the play's script names these two sisters and describes their deeds, the stage directions seem to specify that only one of them should appear on stage, recalling the isolation of Vietnamese women and girls discussed elsewhere in this chapter. This lone Trung sister appears only briefly, does not speak and is swiftly defeated. The other individuated female character appears in 'Stadium IV' ['Phase IV'] of the play's second part. She is an unnamed 'Gesellschafterin' ['hostess'] of unspecified nationality, alongside an American man based in Vietnam during the contemporary war (209–17) [125–32], and again has little to say. Consequently, women actors are far less prominent in this play than men, and actors 5 and 6 mostly function as generic speakers, the ordinary population of Vietnam. In this way, *Viet Nam Diskurs* implies that the main

events in Vietnamese history were and are driven by men, and that the nameless, undifferentiated and forgotten population is feminine. The limited part women play in *Viet Nam Diskurs* shows that even Weiss's apparently neutral staging is, put in Jefford's terms, structured through gender, in ways which downplay the place of women in history.

Following completion of *Viet Nam Diskurs*, in 1968 Weiss made a state-sponsored journey like Schütt's to the DRV, and likewise published a book about it. This work is *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* (1968), referenced by Schütt five years on.<sup>53</sup> It features women workers, activists, fighters and citizens, and their words are presented extensively. There is a focus on Vietnamese art and culture, and many interviews with academics, writers, artists and others, both men and women. In line with Weiss's political interest in praising the DRV, *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* focuses amongst other issues on the immense courage, sacrifice and emancipation of women. One of Weiss's interlocutors, the writer Cam Than, states:

Für uns Schriftstellerinnen bedeutete die Revolution einen zweifachen Befreiungskampf. Uns ging es nicht nur um die Veränderung der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse, sondern auch um unsre Emanzipation, um die Auflösung der patriarchalischen Ordnung. (58)

[For us women writers the revolution signified a war of liberation in two senses. For us it was not only a change in the general social condition but our own emancipation as well, a release from the older, patriarchal order]. (63)

She notes too:

Innerhalb von 2 Jahrzehnten wurde ein 1000 Jahre altes Muster aufgelöst [...] Von den Frauen [...] wird niemand mehr bereit sein, die Gewinne der Revolution aufzugeben. Zwar gibt es noch viele Männer, die sich das alte Familienmuster noch zurückwünschen, ihre Zeit aber ist vergangen, und so, wie wir uns selbst erziehen mußten, so müssen diese umerzogen werden. (59–60)

[Within the span of only two decades 1,000 years of the old pattern were discarded. [...] None of the women are prepared to yield what they have gained from the revolution [...] To be sure, there are still many men who would like to have the old family system back, but their day is over and gone and so, even as we must educate ourselves, they, too, have to be re-educated]. (64–5)

This account asserts that the revolution is empowering women and teaching everybody.

Cam Than also describes her predecessors' literary achievements, and the place of women in Vietnamese literature:

In der Literatur war die Frau die Hauptperson. Wurde sie nicht verherrlicht als Geliebte, so traf sie zumindest Mitgefühl, Mitleid. In einem der größten klassischen Werke, KIEU, von Nguyen Du, erscheint sie in jeglicher Erniedrigung, in allen Leiden, die Generationen von Frauen widerfuhren. (59)

[In literature woman was the central figure. If not glorified as the loved one, at least she was treated sympathetically and compassionately. In one of the greatest of the classical works, *Kieu* by Nguyen Du, she is shown in all imaginable humiliation, in all the sufferings that generations of women have endured]. (63)

Weiss writes that this poem is 'überall durch mündliche Überlieferung bekannt' (72) ['known everywhere through oral transmission' (81)]. He was likely attracted by the idea of a literary work which transcended elitist, commodified print culture and social class, and the fact that *The Tale of Kiều* can be read as disguised political commentary.<sup>54</sup> It was inspired by a Chinese model at a time when France supported restoration of feudal power in Vietnam, and Weiss is sensitive to the possibility that it can have symbolic significance for the present.<sup>55</sup> Whereas for Cam Than, the protagonist stands for Vietnamese women, Weiss states:

Hinter der Kette von Qualen, die sie bis an die Grenze des Todes und schließlich zur wunderbaren Errettung führen, steht, obgleich versetzt in das alte Reich der Mitte, die vietnamesische Gesellschaft zu Beginn des kapitalistischen Stadiums. In den Leiden der KIEU erkannte die Bevölkerung sich selbst wieder. (72)

[Behind the succession of woes that carry her to the brink of death and finally to miraculous salvation stands Vietnamese society itself at the beginning of the capitalist stage, although here moved back into Middle Kingdom times. The people recognized themselves in the sufferings of *Kieu*]. (81)

In other words, for Weiss, 'KIEU' embodies the nation.<sup>56</sup>

A corresponding series of powerful feminine images runs throughout *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam*.

Weiss retells essential narratives of Vietnamese culture, including a myth from the sixth century BCE which he describes as Vietnam's 'Nationalepos' (14) ['national epic' (10)]. It tells the story of warrior hero Than Giong, who, in infancy, lies on his back and cannot laugh or speak for three years. However, when the king calls for aid to defend the land, Than Giong stands up, offers to lead the soldiers and does so successfully. Weiss explains that this story of a poor child who grows rapidly into a powerful adult leader is seen, like 'KIEU', as a national self-image in Vietnam. Importantly for the present discussion, it begins with a peasant mother who recognises her pregnancy after a stormy night and gives birth to her boy on a hill surrounded by water which is rich in fish, and where magical, useful artefacts appear.

Weiss refers also to a novel by Ngo Tat To, *DIE LAMPE ERLISCHT* (47–8) [*The Lamp Goes Out* (49–50)] (1938), about the suffering of a poor woman at the hands of the powerful. And the end of a chapter on art contains four sketches of contemporary women whose wartime achievements outstrip representation itself (99–100) [113–5]. In these ways Weiss links up the oldest myths with a literature which is yet to be written about the brave women of the war and constructs a Vietnamese story embodied by symbolically important women who are now, with Communism, finally coming into their own. In this respect Weiss's memoir resonates with the conclusion of Schütt's and, following his visit to the DRV, reflects a development from the more limited gender roles of *Viet Nam Diskurs*. Yet these positive images too have their limitations, for they are extreme idealisations which can be understood as a kind of radical Orientalism, as Wu puts it.<sup>57</sup>

Arlene A. Teraoka observes that both *Viet Nam Diskurs* and *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* exhibit a 'sovereign, didactic tone' in their accounts of Vietnamese history.<sup>58</sup> However, she complicates her reading by drawing in Weiss's *Notizbücher 1960–1971*, an extensive collection of fragmentary jottings and notes about both work and personal matters.<sup>59</sup> Teraoka shows that their turbulent contents are at odds with the lucid visions of the play and memoir, revealing 'physical and emotional trauma' (48) precipitated by an illness Weiss experienced in North Vietnam. Her reading produces a different perspective on Weiss's anti-war writing, one which dovetails with Rupprecht's conclusion that Weiss's 'insight from Vietnam seems to have been the recognition of his European limitations. The purpose of the trip – to get to know Vietnam, and come to its aid – was defeated, but Weiss realised that he was not in a position to rescue the Vietnamese' (108).

In Teraoka's interpretation, the apparent confidence and clarity of Weiss's play and memoir are severely called into question by the troubles of the *Notizbücher*, and her comparative approach can be adopted productively here for a reading of his visions of women. The 1967 notebook entries show Weiss preparing for the international Vietnam Tribunal in Stockholm, and include what may be notes for an address to it. Alongside them, an entry titled 'Nacht vom 2-3/5' ['Night of 2-3/5'] (538), apparently records a nightmare about a deadly storm over a lake:

Sturmböen. Schiffe, Landungsbrücken überschwemmt. Die Menschen flüchten. Boote kentern. Schiffbrüchige, aneinander geklammert. Tote am Straßenrand. Die SCHILDKRÖTE. Sie liegt auf dem Rücken. Sie kann sprechen. Spricht *deutsch*. Ich wende sie um. Die Schildkröte ist ein Mädchen. Steht aufrecht. Hat Brüste. Steht fordernd da. Die Schildkröte ist eine Prostituierte.

[Squalls. Ships, landing stages flooded. The people flee. Boats capsize. Shipwrecked people, clinging to one another. Corpses at the roadside. The TORTOISE. It is lying on its back. It can speak. Speaks *German*. I turn it over. The tortoise is a girl. She stands up straight. Has breasts. Stands there, challenging. The tortoise is a prostitute]. (538)

The narrator goes with the woman to find a room, implying an attempted, possibly paid-for sexual encounter. But all they find is a derelict space which contains:

Reste von Papier. Meine eigenen Notizen. Wasser bricht durch die Decke. Oder Blut. Ein dicker Strahl. Wie aus durchschnittner Ader. Der Blutstrom ergießt sich in ein Loch im Boden. Wie ein Brunne, eine Kloake. Es wird geredet über die Zusammenkunft, das Tribunal. Lächerlich. Die Welt ist da: ein großer Globus. Übergossen mit Blut. Alles rot gefärbt. Gelächter über das Gleichnis. –

[Leftover scraps of paper. My own notes. Water bursts through the ceiling. Or blood. A broad jet. As from a severed artery. The stream of blood pours into a hole in the ground. Like a well, a drain. There is talk of the meeting, the tribunal. Ridiculous. There's the world: a great globe. Covered with blood. All coloured red. Laughter at the image –]. (538)

The dangers within the building suggest a possibly failed sexual encounter between the narrator and the woman, extreme violence and physical threat, and the destruction of the dreamer's writing in a blood-soaked world. The woman herself forms part of the threat, for in the wider context of the anti-war poetry, the rare Vietnamese women characters who demonstrate agency and sexuality can be linked with violence and water, and are able to draw blood.<sup>60</sup> As such they key powerfully, as Weiss's account of his nightmare does, into Theweleit's analyses of twentieth-century 'male fantasies' of sexuality and extreme violence, often linked to flood and destruction.

After a note in English which seems to contain phrases for use at the Tribunal, description of the nightmare continues:

die Schildkröte war zuerst ein Kind, zeigte dann ihre Brüste – war 21 Jahre alt. Goldene Schildkröte: Wahrzeichen Viet Nams. Viet Nam wird zur Hure gemacht. Nicht zum ersten Mal.

[the tortoise was a child at first, then showed her breasts – was 21 years old. Golden tortoise: Symbol of Viet Nam. Vietnam is made into a whore. Not for the first time]. (538–9)

The woman personifies Vietnam in that the golden tortoise is a national emblem. Moreover, at 21 in 1967, she is the same age as the DRV, founded in 1945. Intriguingly too, her development resonates faintly with the stories of both Than Giong and Kieu as they were soon to be retold by Weiss in *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam*. For example, the stormy, lakeside setting of Weiss's nightmare is evocative of the pregnancy of Than Giong's mother and his birthplace. Like the ancient hero, the woman in the dream swiftly transforms from a helpless child lying on her back and who cannot get up, to an assertive, dangerous adult who stands upright and moves. Just as the adult Than Giong is a warrior, the girl-woman assertively challenges the narrator. And yet the description in the passive voice, 'zur Hure gemacht' ['made into a whore'] suggests circumstances beyond her control, echoing Kieu's suffering in forced prostitution.

At the same time, Weiss's nightmare offers a disturbing revisioning of these narratives as he outlined them in *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam*. There, Than Giong's birthplace provides supernatural, helpful objects for his mother, and the water around is replete with nourishing food. By contrast, in the nightmare the lakeside is mortally dangerous and the surroundings filled with wreckage. Rupprecht points out that Weiss's memoir overlooks a key dimension in Kieu's story, for she

'is the Vietnamese symbol not just for suffering and fighting, but also for homecoming'.<sup>61</sup> That deficit is amplified in this nightmare, for here, the woman and the narrator have nowhere safe to go.

The narrator tries to save Vietnam by turning over the tortoise so that she can move and survive; and, one might infer, become fully human through his intervention. Subsequently, his interest in her seems to become sexual and she is imagined as a 'Hure' ['whore']. These images and actions tally with the gender politics of some German anti-war writings, like the poem 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules', which envision victimised, sometimes sexualised, sometimes infantilised Oriental women in need of rescue. Thus Weiss's nightmare points to the persistent power of idealising, instrumentalising and gendered discourse about Vietnam in West Germany, as outlined in this chapter. So compelling are these images, it seems, that they break forth from the dreams of even one of the era's most knowledgeable writers on Vietnam, who insisted in his published writings of 1967–8 on very different images of women.

Weiss's notebook entry also recalls the celebrated imagery of Walter Benjamin's essay 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte' ['Theses on the Philosophy of History'] (1950), which engages with the nature of history in Modernity.<sup>62</sup> That work's ninth section challenges the current idea of the past as an orderly series of events which points forward clearly into the future. Instead, Benjamin imagines the longer perspective of an angel of history who sees the past as 'eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert' (697) ['one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet' (249)]. The angel wishes to stay and repair the destruction, but is prevented by a violent storm which blows him backwards into the future. Benjamin concludes: 'Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist *dieser* Sturm' (698) ['This storm is what we call progress' (249)]. This vision of Benjamin's withholds simple solutions to historical conflicts and undermines the naïve faith in progress which hallmarked more conventional perceptions of history as a simple continuum.

Weiss's dream, embedded as it is in reflections on shocking global events, resonates with this passage in curious ways. The narrator of the nightmare is powerless and distressed at the scene of a stormy disaster which cannot be alleviated. Put another way, in the notebook, via its echoes of Benjamin's essay, the Vietnam war is obliquely associated with a terrifying, irrational vision of history, from the vantage of the mid-twentieth century. Weiss's text thus draws attention to a central idea in the anti-war writing more generally, namely that the conflict was the

apotheosis of an alienating, technological Modernity.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, this catastrophic scenario adds an explicitly gendered turn to Benjamin's vision, for it hinges on highly conventional stereotypes and features a specifically masculine subject which seeks, and loses, control.

However, for all the initial impressions of immediacy in Weiss's *Notizbücher*, they are by no means spontaneous, unreflected jottings. The author edited them carefully at a later date for publication, and as such, they are conscious meditations on his position, historical and aesthetic contexts. So if at first sight, the notebook entry seems to exemplify an uncritical and unselfconscious use of clichéd images of Vietnam and its place in history, it is in fact more compellingly read as a highly critical (self-)reflection on such fantasies. Just as memoirist Alsheimer recognises the origins of his fascination with Vietnam in childhood memory, Weiss emphasises that the woman in his nightmare '[s]pricht *deutsch*' ['speaks *German*'] (538); that is, she expresses something very close to home.

The discomfort of the dream may serve as a warning against succumbing to stereotypes; and reflect concern that to respond emotionally to images of the Vietnam conflict is to derive gratification or catharsis from others' suffering. In casting the narrator as a potentially exploitative sexual partner or client to the woman, the dream may suggest too that to use Vietnam as material in a writing career, to fashion a self-image or to demonstrate theories may itself be a form of exploitation. Moreover, this symbol of Vietnam is neither submissive nor docile. The encounter in the dream ends in fraught, bloody, if unclear confrontation linked to sex, cash and power. Therefore it does not affirm the European masculine subject, and offer a bulwark against the Benjaminian storm of progress raging across the world. Rather, it knowingly reveals that such fantasies are not natural(ised) truths, and uncovers their violent, fissured foundations.

## Some conclusions

This chapter argues that representations of girls and women in Vietnam are doubly important in anti-war writing circulating in West Germany. First, they illuminate its gender politics. These images show that anti-war discourse in the FRG, like the US works analysed by Jeffords, is structured through gender at a deep level. Second, in this corpus, women or girls often represent Vietnam, and so cast light on the era's interpretations of the conflict more broadly, and the wider preoccupations of anti-war culture. West German anti-war poems are striking in this respect, for they



demonstrate clear patterns in which women and girls are dispossessed and powerless; mothers and victims of sexualised exploitation or abuse are notable figures. Such imagery draws on both high and popular religious and cultural traditions which flatten or erase real historical situations. In such poems, passivity and victimhood are feminised, as is the very idea of Vietnam itself as a girl or woman who needs to be saved. Concomitantly, action and historical process are gendered as masculine, and there is a subtle suggestion that the ideal European or FRG anti-authoritarian subject who may aid Vietnam is masculine too.

The prominence of poetry as an anti-war genre in the FRG in the later 1960s and 1970s makes it a particularly privileged expression of contemporary ideas. It seems therefore that anti-war culture had special attachments to the traditional imagery and thought outlined here. Yet paradoxically, the very consistency of the poetry in this respect hints that in an age of internationalism and feminism, as in the US discussed by Jeffords, these older models were under threat, and needed poetic reinforcement.

Indeed, in this respect the poetry is all the more remarkable for the contrasts it offers to other anti-war genres discussed in this chapter, namely critical journalism and memoirs of time spent in Vietnam. In that writing, sometimes even within just one work, images of women and girls move between conventional, Orientalising stereotypes of femininity and nation, and sometimes greater agency and complexity. Thus the documentary prose demonstrates that the contemporary West German imagination knew, at least to an extent, more diverse roles for Vietnamese women. At times, too, some of these texts show flashes of critical self-consciousness, registering that their scenes from Vietnam are also images of home. Thus the anti-war writing, sometimes, at least, holds competing voices in tension.

Among other things, the texts discussed here draw attention to the diverse origins and authorship of anti-war writing. For instance, two of the authors in question, Fried and Weiss, spoke at the *Internationaler Vietnam-Kongress* in West Berlin in 1968, so underlining their important roles in anti-war culture. However, they wrote as exiles of Jewish descent from Nazi Europe, Fried in London and Weiss in Stockholm. They were older, too, than the post-war protest generation. Their works thus highlight the multiple perspectives and positionalities of anti-war culture, beyond the youthful (West) German post-war generation with which it is most frequently associated; and the fact that its interpretation calls for nuance and differentiation.

In context, it is noteworthy that Fried authored audacious, unusual poems on motherhood and the war; close reading of Weiss's *Notizbücher* suggests that his radical Orientalist visions are simultaneously haunted by more conservative images of female Vietnamese victims, and hence of Vietnam itself. Indeed, Weiss's descriptions of people escaping an overwhelming disaster on foot and a helpless little girl on a devastated road prefigure uncannily later uses of *Accidental Napalm Attack*, showing shared cultural ground. Weiss's text about an encounter with feminine Vietnam also resonates with the mid-twentieth century's profound ambivalence about Modernity, and links it to the conflict in characteristic ways.

But at the same time, Weiss's nightmare bespeaks a critical awareness of the inadequacy, precarity and self-reflexivity of such constructs. In this way, Weiss's work shifts between various and varied tropes for imagining the East and gender, and comes to knowing grief on their limitations. Indeed, so destabilising and disruptive are its insights that they can only be expressed obliquely in dream form, in an initially unpublished text. They are, simultaneously, a testing of literary argument and form which acknowledge difficulty. And as such, they indicate exploration of further contemporary texts, including poems and poetic writing, which refuse simple schematisations of the world and highlight the dangers within them.

## Notes

- \* An earlier version of parts of this chapter appeared in my article "Viet Nam wird zur Hure gemacht": Women, victimhood and the Vietnam conflict in West German writing', *German Life and Letters* 64, no. 1 (2011).
- 1 The image can be seen at Nick Ut, *Accidental Napalm Attack*, accessed 7 January 2022, <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/1973/nick-ut/1>.
- 2 Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic photographs, public culture, and liberal democracy* (Chicago, IL and London: Chicago University Press, 2007), 207, 172 respectively. The latter quotation is from a text of 2004 on the website Global Women's Strike (no longer available). Close analysis of the photograph and the ways in which it achieved its remarkable public impact is provided by Hariman and Lucaites, 171–207. This study also explores the legacy of Ut's image, as it has been frequently revisited in other works and media. On the photograph and its legacy see also e.g. Katherine Kinney, *Friendly Fire: American images of the Vietnam War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 187–92; Guy Westwell, 'Accidental Napalm Attack and hegemonic visions of America's war in Vietnam', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 28, no. 5 (2011). Further page references follow in the text.
- 3 Cf. Westwell, 'Accidental Napalm Attack and hegemonic visions'.
- 4 Wendy Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible: The ambivalence of witnessing* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 23–94; see [Chapter 4](#) for further discussion of such tropes.

- 5 Peter Schütt, *Vietnam 30 Tage danach* (Dortmund: Weltkreis, 1973). Further page references follow in the text. On German images of East Asian women in protest culture including poetry see also Davies, 'West German representations of women and resistance in Vietnam, 1966–1973', in *Warlike Women and Death: Women warriors in the German imagination since 1500*, edited by Sarah Colvin and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Columbia SC: Camden House, 2009), and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016), 75–103; Quinn Slobodian, 'Guerilla mothers and distant doubles: West German women look at China and Vietnam, 1968–1982', *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 12 (2015).
- 6 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and feminism during the Vietnam era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4.
- 7 Cf. Marilyn Garson, 'Vo Thi Lien: "People are same, all country"', *Canadian Woman Studies / Les Cahiers de la Femme* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1988).
- 8 This event is known in Vietnam as the Son Mý massacre. Both names, Mý Lai and Son Mý, refer to neighbouring settlements which were attacked. Other residents survived the massacre, a fact possibly unknown to Schütt at the time.
- 9 Friedrich von Schiller's essay 'Über Anmuth und Würde' (1793) idealises the 'Schöne Seele' ['beautiful soul'] who combines grace, dignity and moral autonomy. Friedrich von Schiller, 'Über Anmut und Würde', in *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity' in its Cultural Context: Essays and a new translation*, edited by Jane V. Curran and Christophe Fricker (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2005); 'On Grace and Dignity', translated by Jane V. Curran, in *Schiller's 'On Grace and Dignity'*, edited by Curran and Fricker. Schiller's thinking became a touchstone in anti-authoritarian theory through the work of Herbert Marcuse. Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation: A philosophical inquiry into Freud* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), 172–96.
- 10 On Angela Davis and the GDR see *1 Million Rosen für Angela Davis / 1 Million Roses for Angela Davis*, edited by Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, Kathleen Reinhardt and Hilke Wagner (Dresden: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, 2020).
- 11 Stefan Zürcher, 'Das Gesetz der Nine Rules. Mit Vorspruch und Nachspruch versehen und einer Auslegung zur wahre Erhellung des gläubigen Geistes' in *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, edited by riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968), 40–50. Further page references follow in the text. For more on this anthology see [Chapter 2](#).
- 12 Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington, IN and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), xi. Further page references follow in the text.
- 13 Peter Weiss, *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); *Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*, no trans. (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971); Georg W. Alsheimer (pseudonym for Erich Wulff), *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam 1961–1967* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968). Further page references follow in the text. On the context of Wulff's work in the RVN see [Chapter 1](#), note 77; Erich Wulff, *Irrfahrten. Autobiographie eines Psychiaters* (Bonn: Psychiatrie-Verlag, 2001).
- 14 Peter Weiss, with additional research by Jürgen Horlemann, *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten (Viet Nam Diskurs)* (1967), in Peter Weiss, *Stücke*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), II.1; *Discourse on the Progress / of the Prolonged War of Liberation / in Viet Nam and the Events Leading up to It / as Illustration of the Necessity / for Armed Resistance Against Oppression / and on the Attempts / of the United States of America / to Destroy the Foundations of Revolution / (Discourse on Vietnam)*, translated by Geoffrey Skelton (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971). Further page references follow in the text. See [Chapter 1](#). Peter Weiss, *Notizbücher 1960–1971* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 2 vols, II, 538–9. Further page references follow in the text.
- 15 On Braun's poetry on Vietnam, its gender politics and reflections on photography, see J. J. Long, 'KriegsErklärung: Volker Braun's Cold War camera', in *Violence Elsewhere: Imagining distant violence in Germany 1945–2001*, edited by Clare Bielby and Mererid Puw Davies (Rochester, NY: Camden House, forthcoming). Long's study highlights important parallels between Braun's poems and the works discussed here.

- 16 See Nicolas Born, 'Fünfte Reihe'; Johannes Schenk, 'Brief eines Reisbauern an seine Mörder', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 37 and 74 respectively.
- 17 See e.g. Anon., 'Nine rules for personnel of US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam', accessed 9 December 2020, <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.11082/pageturner?ID=pm0002001>.
- 18 In German the first refrain alludes to a 'gattin', a formal, dated way of referring to a wife, perhaps akin to the English expression 'lady wife'; the fifth refrain refers to a 'frau', meaning both 'wife' and 'woman', so making this figure universal.
- 19 See Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*.
- 20 This motif is closely related to the poems' most frequent signifier for Vietnamese suffering, that of children. Cf. Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*. On contemporary anti-authoritarian radicalisation of this image in visual culture see Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third world politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 164–5; and, in more general terms, Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 23–60. See [Chapter 4](#).
- 21 *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation*, edited by Werner Bräunig et al. (Halle an der Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968).
- 22 Fasia Jansen, 'Mutter, gib deinen Jungen nicht her' (1967), in *Denkzettel: Politische Lyrik aus der BRD und Westberlin*, edited by Annie Voigtländer and Herbert Witt (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1974), 435–6.
- 23 Amy Swerdlow, "'Not my son, not your son, not their sons': Mothers against the Vietnam draft'; Alice Echols, "'Women's Power" and Women's Liberation: Exploring the relationship between the antiwar movement and the Women's Liberation Movement', both in *Give Peace a Chance: Exploring the Vietnam antiwar movement*, edited by Melvin Small and William D. Hoover (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993).
- 24 Some contemporary feminist critiques of WSP raised such concerns about its framing of women. On this complex in US literature see Kinney, *Friendly Fire*, 143–85.
- 25 Erich Fried, 'Bomben für Müttern', *konkret* no. 7, 1966 (July 1966): 41. See also Fried's long poem 'Mutter in Vietnam', in *Befreiung von der Flucht: Gedichte und Gegengedichte* (1968), in Erich Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Volker Kaukoreit and Klaus Wagenbach, 4 vols (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1998), I, 581–93. In this poem, a North Vietnamese mother mourns her child's killing in the US bombardment of Cam Lo on 2–3 August 1966. The text explains that this date was the 21st anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing as well as the wedding day of US President Lyndon B. Johnson's daughter, in a church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. This poem is possibly unique in Fried's poetry, both in giving direct speech to a Vietnamese woman and in revealing her anger and resolve: 'Wir schlagen zurück' ['We will strike back'] (592). This character contrasts with the mild Marian imagery of the Immaculate Conception.
- 26 E.g. Fried, 'Das Land' and 'Verhinderter Liebesdienst', in Erich Fried, *und VIETNAM und* (1966), and in Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, I, 363–4 and 369–70 respectively; Hans Gutke, 'Qui Nhon', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 16; Kurt Sigel, 'Pilotengespräch', *konkret* no. 4, 1966 (April 1966): 39; also in *Denkzettel*, Voigtländer and Witt, 432–3; Peter-Paul Zahl, 'Untergrundbewegung', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 24.
- 27 West German publications on the RVN's wartime begging culture include Georg W. Alsheimer, 'Amerikaner in Huế', *Das Argument: Berliner Hefte für Probleme der Gesellschaft* 36 (February 1966): 32–7; Pierre Noir, 'Augenzeuge in Saigon', *konkret* no. 6, 1968 (June 1968).
- 28 Here Gutke's 'Qui Nhon' is an exception.
- 29 Resisting women feature centrally in just two of the poems collected by tode, namely Ingo Cesaro's 'In Einkaufsnetzen', 22, and Karl Mickel's 'Bericht nach Burchett', 80–1. See Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 84–9.
- 30 Cf. e.g. Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller, 'Introduction: Looking for Germania', in *Gender and Germanness: Cultural productions of nation*, edited by Patricia Herminghouse and Magda Mueller (Providence, RI and Oxford: Berghahn, 1997).
- 31 Caroline Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion: New encounters in the Asian-German avant-garde* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2020), 109–11.
- 32 Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfiabel* (1955) (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 1977), n.p.; *War Primer*, edited and translated by John Willett (London: Libris, 1998).

- 33 Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main and Basel: Roter Stern/Stroemfeld, 1977–8); *Male Fantasies*, translated by Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987–9).
- 34 Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an age of catastrophe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 123–50.
- 35 Hans Kilian, 'Die Revolution der Moral', *konkret* 2 (February 1968): 13.
- 36 Stefan Aust, 'Liebe unter LSD', *konkret* 1 (January 1968): 12. On this complex see Herzog, *Cold War Freud* and Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and morality in twentieth-century Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 141–83.
- 37 E.g. Sigel, 'Pilotengespräch'; see Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 82–4; Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America*, 9–10.
- 38 Cf. Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*.
- 39 Cf. also Gina Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril: Race, sex and discursive strategies in Hollywood fiction* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 1993), 78–108; Kalí Tal, 'The mind at war: Images of women in Vietnam novels by combat veterans', *Contemporary Literature* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1990).
- 40 Cf. e.g. Davies, 'West German representations of women and resistance in Vietnam, 1966–1973' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 99–101; Helke Sander, 'Nicht Opfer sein, sondern Macht haben', in *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer rebellischen Frauengeneration*, edited by Ute Kästel (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002).
- 41 See [Chapter 4](#).
- 42 Bernard Couret, 'Madame Vietkong', *konkret* no. 17, 1968 (16 December 1968).
- 43 Gabriele Sprigath, 'Gespräch mit Madame Nguyen Thi Binh', *Kürbiskern* no. 3, 1969 (September 1969). Sprigath's knowledgeable perspective is shown by her further contributions 'Über die vietnamesische Kulturfront', *Kürbiskern* no. 3, 1969 (September 1969) and 'Vietnamesische Frauen und nationale Befreiung', *Kürbiskern* no. 1, 1971 (March 1971): 138–51. This essay makes many literary references. On Sprigath see also [Chapter 6](#), note 41.
- 44 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968): 196; 'Commonplaces on the newest literature', translated by Michael Roloff, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982), 44.
- 45 Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, 294–5. Cf. Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 91–2.
- 46 The term is explained on page 127 of the memoir.
- 47 Yaak Karsunke, 'Alsheimer, Georg W.: *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre. Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam 1961–1967*', *Das Argument* 51 (April 1969): 143.
- 48 Pierre Loti's novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) and John Luther Long's story *Madam Butterfly* (1898) are thought to have inspired Puccini's plot. Cf. Jean-Pierre Lehmann, 'Images of the Orient', in *Madam Butterfly – Madama Butterfly. Puccini*, edited by Nicholas John (London and New York: John Calder and Riverrun, 1984). Claude-Michel Schönberg's and Alain Boublil's musical *Miss Saigon* (1989) is a more recent version. Edward Behr and Mark Steyn, *The Story of Miss Saigon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1991). Cf. Marchetti, *Romance and the Yellow Peril*.
- 49 The poem is variously known as *Kim Vân Kiều tân truyện*; *Truyện Kim-Vân-Kiều*; *Truyện Kiều* or *Kiều*. Cf. Huỳnh Sanh Thông, 'Introduction', in Nguyễn Du, *The Tale of Kieu: A bilingual edition of Truyện Kiều*, translated and annotated by Huỳnh Sanh Thông (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1983), xx. A more recent English edition is titled *The Song of Kiều: A new lament*, reworked into English by Timothy Allen (London: Penguin, 2019).
- 50 rororo was an inexpensive paperback series from major publisher Rowohlt.
- 51 Jean Hougron, *La Nuit Indochinoise* (Paris: Ribert Laffont, 1989), 2 vols; ... wird Sturm ernten, translated by Edmund Th. Kauer (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1956).
- 52 Exceptionally, Gutke is described in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* as a 'deutschamerikaner' ['German-American'] who visited Vietnam twice, 87.
- 53 On Weiss's little-known memoir see Jens-Fietje Dwars, *Und dennoch Hoffnung: Peter Weiss. Eine Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2007), 212–7; Kai Köhler, 'Mythisierung des Widerstands? Peter Weiss's *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben in der Demokratischen Republik Viet Nam*', in *Peter Weiss Jahrbuch [Peter Weiss Yearbook]* 5 (1996); Jan Kostka, *Peter Weiss's Vietnam/USA Variationen*

- über Geschichte und Gedächtnis* (Schkeuditz: Schkeuditzer Buchverlag, 2006), 104–19; Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion*.
- 54 Huỳnh, 'Introduction', xxxvi; Alexander B. Woodside, 'The historical background', in *The Tale of Kieu*, xi.
- 55 Schütt relates *The Tale of Kiêu* to a discussion with Phuong about revolutionary celibacy in the DRV. Schütt, *Vietnam 30 Tage danach*, 105.
- 56 Cf. Huỳnh, 'Introduction', xi; Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion*.
- 57 Cf. e.g. Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion*, 106.
- 58 Arlene A. Teraoka, *East, West and Others: The third world in postwar German literature* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 48. Further page references follow in the text.
- 59 Peter Weiss, *Notizbücher 1960–1971*. Further page references follow in the text.
- 60 Davies, 'West German representations of women' and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*.
- 61 Rupprecht, *Asian Fusion*, 111.
- 62 Walter Benjamin, 'Über den Begriff der Geschichte', written in 1940, first published 1950, in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften [Collected Works]*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), I.2, 697–8; 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt (1968) (London: Bodley Head, 1999). Further page references follow in the text.
- 63 See [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#).

## 4

# Moving images: film, photography and anti-war poetry

## Introduction

One of the most disturbing works made in protest against the Vietnam War is an installation by US artist Ed Kienholz. It is called *The Eleventh Hour Final* (1968), and consists of a life-size re-creation of a 1960s-style sitting room. Most evidently, this work's title alludes to a term used in the US for a late-evening news bulletin. Figuratively, however, it also suggests a sense of impending disaster. At first sight, Kienholz's small room can look inviting. It is a conventional, dimly lit and extremely neat space in which a sofa faces a television set, highlighting the importance of the screen for the home's imagined middle-class US American inhabitants. Shadowy as the room is, someone approaching it is likely to perceive its details only gradually. They may fail to see immediately that the television set resembles a concrete gravestone, or that the script displayed on its screen records high numbers of US and 'enemy' casualties. Most shocking, as the eye slowly adapts to the half-dark, is the realisation that behind the glass of the television screen, there lies the severed head of a mannequin.<sup>1</sup>

*The Eleventh Hour Final* exemplifies the idea that Vietnam's conflict was a 'living-room war', as journalist Michael J. Arlen influentially termed it at the time.<sup>2</sup> It is often said to be the first media war, due to astonishing, novel uses of photography and film in the field. These images were presented daily in newspapers and nightly on television news across the world, often with great impact.<sup>3</sup> The photograph *Accidental Napalm Attack*, taken in 1972 by Huỳnh Công Út, or Nick Ut, and discussed in the [Chapter 3](#) of this study, is a case in point. Consequently, it is unsurprising that so many Western artworks about the Vietnam conflict thematise visual culture: Francis Ford Coppola's celebrated film *Apocalypse Now* (1979), for example, features photographers at key moments.

However, in many other respects *The Eleventh Hour Final* differs starkly from *Apocalypse Now*. While the film represents the war zone itself in knowingly spectacular ways, Kienholz's apparently lower-key installation focuses on the presence of visual media in the US home. It seems to criticise a daily consumption of pictures of violent death, a process that makes their very horror appear banal. Thus *The Eleventh Hour Final* obliquely draws attention to the integration of such images in complex social and commercial contexts in the US. As critic Wendy Kozol argues, in such settings photographs of conflicts which the US pursues overseas can support its 'dominant visual regime'.<sup>4</sup> Yet at the same time, the fact that Kienholz places the television set at the heart of this space shows that protest against the conflict, including this very work, relied centrally on awareness of its visual images too.<sup>5</sup> At a deep level, then, *The Eleventh Hour Final* references some of the ambiguities involved in the use of pictures of war.

As in Kienholz's US, in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) television played a central part in perceptions of the Vietnam conflict. By February 1965 television was installed in around 55 per cent of West German households, and so reached unprecedentedly wide audiences.<sup>6</sup> Print media also made extensive use of photographs from the conflict zone. Thus, for the West German public in general and for anti-war protesters in particular, the visual image was as central as it was for the US, albeit in differently, locally inflected ways.

For instance, one year on from *The Eleventh Hour Final*, critic Karl Heinz Bohrer published a commentary on new trends in photography which, he argued, condensed symbolic and real violence.<sup>7</sup> He writes that news photographs from Vietnam seem at first sight indistinguishable from modern art, implying that the horrors of reality can match or even exceed the wildest dreams of artists. Therefore:

Der Terror kennzeichnet heute keinen Ausnahmezustand mehr, sondern den Alltag. Dieses Element des Terrors ist unausweichlich und seine Sublimierung durch Literatur und Kunst vollzieht sich nicht mehr als Ablenkungsmanöver, sondern als seine Potenzierung.

[Today terror denotes not an exceptional state, but a quotidian one. This element of terror is unavoidable and its sublimation in literature and art no longer distracts from it, but intensifies it]. (34)

According to this argument, in the appalling images coming out of Vietnam the conventional boundaries between art and reality are



challenged, so that art can no longer fulfil its traditional function of sublimating and neutralising disruption. The resulting experience of reality, in which truth and fiction merge nightmarishly and perception blurs, is terrifying. German traditions of thinking about high art come into play here, for in a culture that had valorised the aesthetic realm as superior to, and a refuge from, the vicissitudes of history, this collapsing together of art and reality is especially shocking.

Bohrer was not writing from an anti-authoritarian perspective, and his original analysis is not typical of all West German readings of wartime images. It seems to move in a different direction, too, from that suggested by *The Eleventh Hour Final*, with its hints at a domestic desensitisation to documentary footage of horror. Indeed, in the quotation above Bohrer describes an opposite effect: a sense that the pictures of war are becoming ever more powerful and overwhelming. Nonetheless, his reflections indicate that the FRG, like the US, knew profound, troubled preoccupations with the imagery of war. And for all their differences from *The Eleventh Hour Final*, Bohrer's remarks are in keeping with a time when boundaries between visual images and violence seemed increasingly porous. Just like the decapitated head inside Kienholz's television, Bohrer's thoughts imply that, through spectacular visual images, a supposedly distant violence is coming home to the West in baleful, uncanny ways.

Correspondingly, media and photography are key themes in anti-war poetry published in West Germany. This chapter explores some ways in which images of war are debated in, and refracted through, the poems. It begins by outlining the anti-war movement's reading of the country's media landscape, especially with regard to photographic and film images. This discussion draws in historian Quinn Slobodian's recent work on West German anti-authoritarian culture, which draws attention to its increasing interest, as the 1960s came to a close, in what he calls 'corpse polemics'.<sup>8</sup> This aesthetic, Slobodian argues, employed pictures of extreme violence from around the world to make political and anti-war arguments in contradictory, problematic ways.

The chapter goes on to consider the treatment of media and technologically reproducible images in examples of West Germany's poetry. It deepens that analysis by examining in detail one emblematic poem about two war photographs, the young poet Ingo Cesaro's 'Pressepreis' ['Press Award'] (1969).<sup>9</sup> This poem presents war photography as being not only offensive but also actively harmful. In this respect, 'Pressepreis' anticipates important critical writings from the 1970s and 1980s by writers like Susan Sontag and Paul Virilio, both of whom identify tight links between war photography and violence. Yet at the same time,

and paradoxically, 'Pressepreis' relies on photography for its material. Cesaro's poem thus stands, as does Kienholz's *The Eleventh Hour Final*, at a difficult intersection between discourses on war, politics and visual culture.

The chapter considers these tensions in 'Pressepreis' in relation to the specific photographs on which it reflects. They were taken by award-winning Japanese war photographer Kyoichi Sawada, who worked for United Press International (UPI), a US news agency, before his violent death in Cambodia in 1970. The discussion that follows relates Cesaro's poem and its treatment of Sawada's photographs to longer German theoretical traditions which are highly sceptical about visual media – as expressed, for instance, in the work of earlier writers and theorists Walter Benjamin and Ruth Berlau. The chapter also reads the poem in the light of Kozol's present-day critical theorisations. All these readings suggest that 'Pressepreis' challenges the era's tendency towards fascination with 'corpse polemics' and offers a critical alternative to it. In this way the poem simultaneously illuminates the wider, complex relationship between political and poetic language in the 1960s protest movements.

## War, media and image in West Germany

The West German anti-authoritarian movement privileged what it called the subjective factors of politics, such as the psyche, culture and the symbolic. As a consequence it was deeply interested in news media. Historian Christina von Hodenberg observes the rise of an influential leftist and liberal press in West Germany from the late 1950s, modelling innovative, critical and investigative styles of journalism.<sup>10</sup> Such publications strove for balanced coverage and gave the New Left serious consideration. Nick Thomas also points out that despite an overall press bias towards the mainstream conservative sister parties, the Christlich-Demokratische Union / Christlich-Soziale Union [Christian Democrat Union / Christian Social Union] (CDU/CSU), the Federal Republic sustained a broad range of newspapers and similar publications.<sup>11</sup>

All the same, the interest shown in news media by New Left activists' views on the subject was in general increasingly critical. Looking back in 2002, for instance, one former anti-authoritarian, Annette Schwarzenau, identified the dual, interrelated catalysts of her politicisation as the Vietnam War and her outrage at the West German press.<sup>12</sup> The association she made between these two factors underscores the fact that, for many

contemporaries, disapproval of the Vietnam conflict and its media coverage were almost inseparable.<sup>13</sup>

Schwarzenau's recollections draw particular attention to the Springer media group, and it was with this publisher that anti-authoritarians, and many other observers, were most preoccupied. The corporation had been founded in 1946 by Axel C. Springer and by 1964, according to Thomas, it controlled 31 per cent of the FRG's daily newspapers, a figure which rose to 67 per cent in West Berlin. In addition, Springer owned 89 per cent of regional and 85 per cent of the Sunday papers, leading anti-authoritarians to take the view that the company held a possibly illegal near-monopoly.<sup>14</sup> Certainly they perceived the Springer group's influence on the news agenda and public opinion to be both disproportionate and unethical, and this position was shared in part by the mainstream liberal and left-of-centre press.<sup>15</sup> An important contemporary anti-authoritarian campaign thus demanded 'Enteignet Springer' ['Expropriate Springer'].<sup>16</sup>

Springer media were emphatically pro-US and their reporting was seen by the New Left as favouring America's war effort in East Asia, as well as its other interventions around the world. In related ways, the corporation was also staunchly opposed to the anti-war and protest movements. Indeed, Slobodian observes that:

the pro-American stance of the West Berlin population and tabloid press was more violent than that of the US authorities. (87)

Bearing out this argument, in an essay of 1968 the prominent West Berlin anti-authoritarian activist Rudi Dutschke described press and public responses to a demonstration that had taken place in 1966. This action protested against the controversial visit to West Berlin of Moïse Tshombe, then Prime Minister of the Republic of Congo. Activists accused Tshombe of complicity in the murder of one of his predecessors as premier, Patrice Lumumba, in 1961, with the covert support of the US. Dutschke wrote of media reactions to the demonstration:

Die Demonstranten erkannten sich in den Pressekommentaren des nächsten Tages nicht wieder, ihr Mißtrauen gegen die staatlich-gesellschaftliche Ordnung wurde verstärkt. [...] alle Ebenen der Verzerrung und Lüge kamen zum Durchbruch [...] die *Berliner Morgenpost*: 'Demonstranten mit den Rufen: "Tschombé [*sic*] raus" über den Mehringdamm. Vergeblich versuchten Polizisten die Studenten aufzuhalten. Die Beamten wurden überrannt.' (12 December 1964)

Die Leserbriefkästen in den Zeitungen standen auf Sturm: die 'Bevölkerung' wünschte harte Maßnahmen gegen uns. 'Schickt die wilden Horden in den Osten' – war die immer wieder durchkommende Stereotype.

[For demonstrators, their description in the next day's press commentaries was unrecognisable, their mistrust of the state and social order was reinforced. [...] At every level, distortion and lies carried the day [...] [according to] the *Berliner Morgenpost*: 'Demonstrators shouting "Tschombé [sic] out" on [major West Berlin street] Mehringdamm. Police tried in vain to stop the students. The officers were overrun.' (19 December 1964)

There was a frenzied storm of letters to newspaper editors: the 'population' wished severe measures to be taken against us. 'Send these savages off to the East' was the recurring cliché.<sup>17</sup>

While Dutschke's essay refers in negative terms to other papers too, it is telling that the *Berliner Morgenpost* which he mentions here belonged to the Springer group.

This passage shows that Dutschke, along with many others at the time, believed that the media, above all Springer, fundamentally misrepresented current affairs for political reasons. In addition, he describes the active hounding of protesters by the press, which was indeed very soon to lead to a serious attempt on Dutschke's life in April 1968, the long-term consequences of which brought about his early death in 1979.<sup>18</sup> The perpetrator, a young man called Josef Bachmann, explained at his trial that he took action as a result of reading Springer's tabloid *Bild*, as well as far-right papers like the *Nationalzeitung* and *Deutsche Soldatenzeitung*. In turn, news of Bachmann's assault on Dutschke launched major, partially violent demonstrations against the Springer group in which further people lost their lives. In the shadow of the recent totalitarian past, such developments seemed especially frightening. Axel C. Springer himself was even compared in one protest flyer to Julius Streicher, founder and publisher of the anti-Semitic Nazi paper *Der Stürmer* [*The Stormer*] (1923–45).<sup>19</sup>

In theoretical terms, the influence of the Springer corporation appeared to activists to support philosopher Herbert Marcuse's diagnosis of a 'repressive tolerance' in modern capitalist democracies.<sup>20</sup> The importance of this philosopher's essay on 'Repressive tolerance' (1965) can barely be overstated for the FRG's New Left.<sup>21</sup> This work argues that the supposedly liberal state's claim to allow free speech is disingenuous

and in fact subtly enforces self-serving ideologies, for instance through media. Under capitalism, the press claims to be an independent voice for well-informed, enlightened citizens, yet in reality, it is a fig-leaf for the repressive interests of the Establishment.<sup>22</sup> Marcuse wrote:

With the concentration of economic and political power and the integration of opposites in a society which uses technology as an instrument of domination, effective dissent is blocked where it could freely emerge; in the formation of opinion, in information and communication, in speech and assembly. Under the rule of monopolistic media – themselves the mere instruments of economic and political power – a mentality is created for which right and wrong, true and false are predefined wherever they affect the vital interests of the society. This is, prior to all expression and communication, a matter of semantics: the blocking of effective dissent, of the recognition of that which is not of the Establishment which begins in the language that is publicised and administered. The meaning of words is rigidly stabilised. Rational persuasion, persuasion to the opposite is all but precluded. (95–6)

Anti-authoritarians believed that Springer represented the consciousness industry as described here by Marcuse in an especially pure form.

Marcuse's analysis reaches far beyond such issues as the express political views of press editors and proprietors. He argues that the power of the media reaches into society's very assumptions regarding right and wrong, and into language itself. On this kind of argument, all newspapers at best fail to give a real account of events. At worst, as instruments of repressive tolerance, they give the state a false air of legitimacy. They can therefore perpetuate an unjust status quo, even when they claim to write against it. This view is reflected in Dutschke's remarks above, which equate the interests of the media, state and society. Furthermore, as commodities, all media were part of a lucrative consciousness industry. On this logic, the purchase of any newspaper directly supported capitalism, and hence its most powerful embodiment, the US itself. Even socially critical, anti-war newspaper consumers were thus unwittingly or unwillingly drawn into supporting US military enterprise in Vietnam.

In the wake of such readings, newspapers of many kinds came to be criticised in the protest movements, including the mainstream liberal and left-of-centre press. Nor was this scrutiny reserved for national or

West Berlin papers. In Heidelberg, for example, there was a sustained campaign against the local *Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung*.<sup>23</sup> In this climate, press reviews, digests and critical glossaries became favoured genres, as writers sought to analyse the bias of such reporting and to correct the record.<sup>24</sup>

As the 1960s went on, anti-war activists began to turn away from more contemplative methods of protest. Partly as a consequence of the assassination attempt on Dutschke, a turn to direct, sometimes violent action against property began to emerge in parts of the anti-authoritarian movement.<sup>25</sup> In this process conventional political forms, including those based on reading and writing, were increasingly called into question. Therefore, approaches to dissent which drew in the press, such as composing letters to editors or investigative reporting, were sidelined.<sup>26</sup> Instead, many anti-authoritarians came to prioritise action in which they believed the press could not be any kind of partner. Schwarzenau recalled, for instance, a 'dirty protest' that she and others carried out against the offices of the news weekly *Stern* in West Berlin in the winter of 1968–9.<sup>27</sup> A better-known instance of this development was the decision made in 1970 by eminent campaigning journalist Ulrike Meinhof to abandon her profession and embark on a life underground with the terrorist group soon to be known as the Rote Armee Fraktion [Red Army Faction] (RAF).

Yet Meinhof's years in journalism, primarily with the popular left-wing magazine *konkret* [concrete], were distinguished, if increasingly fraught. Activists made other important uses of media too. For example, Schwarzenau initiated an anti-war action at a church in Tübingen at Christmas 1967.<sup>28</sup> She chose the service in question because it was to be televised, and she aimed to instrumentalise the broadcast to communicate an anti-war message with striking, home-made banners. In keeping with the era's growing interest in action, they read 'Nur Beten ist Mord' ['Prayer Alone is Murder'] (44). To Schwarzenau's disappointment, footage of the incident was excised from the transmission. Yet her plan to get the anti-war protest on television nonetheless underlines anti-authoritarians' interest in the potential of visual media to disseminate their message.<sup>29</sup>

Protesters also relied on press reports for information. To give an example, in West Berlin in February 1965 a debate on Vietnam took place between US officials and members of the student organisation most closely associated with protest, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS). This event was the only one of its kind to be organised in the city, and so represented

an early landmark in the development of the anti-war movement. As one account puts it:

Auf dieser Veranstaltung gelang es den Vertretern des SDS, die ihre Argumentation jeweils sofort mit in- und ausländischen Pressezitaten belegten, die Vertreter der US-Mission, die keine Belege für ihre Thesen anführen konnten, so zu provozieren und in Widersprüche zu verwickeln, daß diese unfreiwillig den Hauptvorwurf der Linken bestätigten, die USA führten ihren Krieg in Vietnam gegen das Volk und nicht mit dem Volk gegen eine fremde Macht.

[At this event, the SDS representatives were able to support their arguments directly in every case with quotations from the domestic and foreign press. They thus succeeded in provoking the representatives of the US diplomatic mission, who could not produce any evidence to support their theses. They trapped them in contradictions so that they involuntarily confirmed the left's primary argument, namely that the USA is waging its war against the people in Vietnam, not with the people against a foreign power].<sup>30</sup>

This description suggests that in the traditionally pro-US atmosphere of West Berlin, America's representatives had taken West German students' approval of US policy for granted. Crucially in this context too, this passage highlights the importance of media in anti-war discourse, for it was by quoting evidence gathered from the press that the SDS students drew their arguments. Indeed Dutschke's account of the same event, published three years later, specifies that SDS members supported their arguments 'ausschließlich mit amerikanischen Materialien' ['using exclusively American materials'].<sup>31</sup> Thus media were important for anti-war protest in highly ambivalent ways. On one hand, they were perceived by anti-war protesters as an opponent. On the other, media were central to activism in that they provided the information and, sometimes, the platforms on which it relied.

Schwarzenau's Christmas protest shows too that within this complex, the visual image had a privileged, if contested place. According to Slobodian, in the later 1960s:

New Leftists operated within a media landscape dominated increasingly by images rather than the spoken or written word. (167)

In a comparatively early stage of this development, in West Berlin in 1966, German, African and other 'Third World' students protested against

screenings of Gualtiero Jacopetti's and Franco Prosperi's sensational, supposedly documentary film *Africa Addio* [*Africa: Blood and Guts*] (1966).<sup>32</sup>

The film's original title *Africa Addio*, literally translated as 'Farewell Africa', references contemporaneous transitions from colonial to post-colonial Africa. The back cover of a book accompanying the film sums up these changes as

DER TOD DES ALTEN AFRIKA / DIE GEBURT EINES NEUEN

[THE DEATH OF THE OLD AFRICA / THE BIRTH OF A NEW ONE].<sup>33</sup>

The cover text goes on to project a romanticised idea of the past:

Das alte, koloniale, das romantische Afrika endet heute in blutigen Kriegen, Machtkämpfen und Stammes-Massakern

[The old, colonial, romantic Africa is meeting its end today in bloody wars, power struggles and tribal massacres].

And text inside the volume cites words from the film script itself:

Das alte Afrika gibt es heute nicht mehr. Unberührte Urwälder, riesige Herden wilder Tiere, tollkühne Abenteuer, geeignete Jagdgründe – all dies gehört der Vergangenheit an. Der Traum ist ausgeträumt. Heute gibt es ein neues Afrika – modern und aufstrebend.

Das alte Afrika ging während der Massaker und Verwüstungen zugrunde, die wir filmten. [...]

Die Kamera filmt schonungslos, was sie sieht, ohne zu verschönern, ohne Parteinahme. An Ihnen ist es, später zu urteilen und zu richten. Dieser Film sagt nur dem einstigen Afrika Lebewohl und zeigt der Welt seinen Todeskampf...

[Today the old Africa is no more. Pristine jungles, gigantic herds of wild animals, reckless adventures, rich hunting grounds – all these belong in the past. The dream is over. Today there is a new Africa – modern and striving for progress.

The old Africa went to its doom in the massacres and destruction we captured on film. [...]

The camera mercilessly films what it sees, without idealising, impartially. It is for you, later, to judge and decide. This film merely bids adieu to the old Africa and shows the world its death throes...] (n.p.)



By contrast, the film's English title emphasises not a romantic fantasy of the pre-independence past, but rather present-day moments of extreme violence. In this respect it aligns more aptly with contemporary readings of the film in West Berlin.

Students in West Berlin questioned the film's claim to irreproachable truthfulness, criticised its racist portrayals of Black Africans and urgently linked those depictions to violence. They argued that on one hand the imagery of *Africa Addio* had potential to trigger racist violence in Germany; on the other, it reflected violence in unacceptable ways. In addition, and most seriously, students highlighted accusations that the film-makers had orchestrated killings in the Republic of the Congo expressly in order to film them.<sup>34</sup> Thus, from early in its development, the anti-authoritarian movement made powerful connections between global, neo-colonial violence and the reproducible image.

While dissident students responded negatively to *Africa Addio* in 1966, Slobodian suggests that their attitude towards photographic or filmic images shifted as the decade went on. They began to turn away from the written or spoken word and instead increasingly adopted and adapted images from war zones for their own ends. In such work, they used photographs of violence in a style that Slobodian terms 'corpse polemics' or 'didactic gore'. With such material, activists 'hoped to shock and enlighten public opinion by using images of suffering, non-white bodies as political weapons' (135). However, this visual culture was contradictory, for within it, and without the subjects' consent, 'activists made a demand for dignity by displaying and circulating images of indignity' (160).<sup>35</sup> Such communications included images from Vietnam, designed to highlight the inhumanity of what protesters saw as a capitalist, neo-imperialist war.<sup>36</sup> But at the same time, like the SDS's exclusive use of press cuttings from the US in a debate with American representatives, such documents can replicate the silencing and objectification of Vietnamese people in news media.

## Poetry and media

In keeping with these interests, the sometime anti-war poet and critic Ulla Hahn noted in a rare survey of 1978 that most West German poems on the Vietnam War involve 'einen explizit medienkritischen Ansatz' ['an explicitly media-critical approach'].<sup>37</sup> The most prominent instance is Erich Fried's influential volume *und VIETNAM und:*

*einundvierzig gedichte* [and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems] (1966). In addition, Chapter 2 of this study has identified the anti-authoritarian anthology *gegen den krieg in vietnam* [against the war in vietnam], edited by riewert qu. tode, as a further classic, if lesser-known expression of West German anti-war poetics.<sup>38</sup> Significantly, media representations of the war are explicitly debated in 13 of this volume's 59 poems. Many more of them, written in documentary mode, seem to draw on information gleaned from the news. Therefore tode's collection vividly serves to illustrate the ways in which, in the late 1960s, poetic writing about the Vietnam War was almost inseparable from writing about its coverage in media.

In *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, the press is represented in clearly positive terms just once. This exception is Heiner Müller's poem '[Nach Joris Ivens]' ['[After Joris Ivens]'] (35). The poem's title alludes to the Dutch film-maker Ivens, known at the time in part for his anti-war documentary about Vietnam, *Le Ciel – la Terre* [*The Threatening Sky*] (1966) and a contribution to the collaboratively-made film *Loin du Vietnam* [*Far from Vietnam*] (1967).<sup>39</sup>

However, the unspecified work by Ivens referenced by Müller's poem is likely to be another documentary, *17e parallèle: La guerre du peuple* [*17th Parallel: Vietnam in War*] (1968), co-directed by Ivens and Marceline Loridan.<sup>40</sup> This film depicts war efforts in the Communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam, including in subterranean tunnel networks where newspapers were produced under dangerous conditions. However, Müller's poem is not about newspapers made in the capitalist world; furthermore, it was written by a citizen of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In many ways, therefore, '[Nach Joris Ivens]' reflects very different political and cultural environments from West Germany, even as it underscores contemporary recognition of the power of news media.

This exception apart, poems in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* give a critical account of media and their images. Another very short example, Arnfrid Astel's 'Neue Waffe' ['New Weapon'] (19), describes a report in *Stern* about an ultra-destructive addition to the US armoury, a weapon that kills on any contact with the human body.<sup>41</sup> Astel cites an American soldier's description of its effect on a Vietnamese partisan and the poem ends with his words:

Ich sah, wie ein Vietcong  
in die Hand getroffen wurde.  
Er war sofort tot.

[I saw a VC  
hit in the hand.  
He died on the spot.]

The serviceman appears here merely as an eyewitness, while the Vietnamese fighter's only function in the poem is to demonstrate the efficiency of the new weapon by his violent death. This scenario highlights the poetry's common topos of technology as the dominant actor in the war. And indeed, while the poem does not say who deploys the hi-tech weapon, it is possible that it is the US serviceman, although he does not mention this point explicitly. In that case, the poem is suggesting that even the agency of the active soldier is sidelined by technology. But in addition, 'Neue Waffe' implicates media in the Vietnamese man's death by highlighting the way the *Stern* report, just like the indifferent American soldier, marginalises its importance.

The Western newspaper reader is very frequently evoked in the anti-war poetry, as s/he also is in anti-war writing more generally. In Georges Reymond's poem '[Jeden Tag öffne ich die Zeitung]' ['[Every Day I Open the Paper]'] (77), the speaker notes with shame his eagerness to open his daily paper and see the latest US death toll in Vietnam. He checks himself, wonders rhetorically what the war has done to him and concludes that the horror of the Vietnam conflict extinguishes the humanity of all who witness it, near or far.<sup>42</sup> Reymond also implies that media are complicit in this process, whipping up the reader's anticipation of ever more shocking casualties.

It seems, then, that for many poets, news publications have no value for political action. Reflecting a comparatively late stage in anti-authoritarian discourse about the news, in which all media were increasingly considered to be suspect, Michael Kottke wrote of two highly influential weeklies in a poem of 1969:

Kauf keine ZEIT / Keinen SPIEGEL!

[Don't buy *DIE ZEIT* / Or *DER SPIEGEL*!].<sup>43</sup>

Neither publication belongs to the Springer corporation and neither took conservative positions. The poem thus illustrates the growing, more universal critique of the press. Another eloquent example is Cesaro's 'In Einkaufsnetzen' ['In Shopping Bags'], in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* (22). Here, young women, presumably rebels in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), or South Vietnam, carry bombs undercover, wrapped in

newspaper in their shopping bags. 'In Einkaufsnetzen' may be understood *inter alia* as a comment on media. The newspapers' ephemerality and insignificance are underlined by their use as disposable packaging. That is to say, their use value as a medium of communication pales in comparison with their subversive re-purposing for partisan action.

## Poetry, photography and film

In an age of accelerating photographic and film coverage, it is unsurprising that visual images in the news have a central place in West German writing about the Vietnam War. They are a focus, for instance, in Günter Grass's comparatively well-known anti-protest poetry in his volume *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* [*Interrogated: Poems and drawings*] (1967), discussed in [Chapter 2](#).<sup>44</sup> In the poem 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' ['Fallen in a Faint'] (57), the speaker describes, with great irony, the act of looking silently at images of napalm after breakfast, presumably in the morning paper. He considers a wish he shares with many others to learn more about napalm and reflects 'Bald wird es preiswerte Bildbände / Mit besseren Fotos geben' ['Soon there'll be good-value picture books / with better photos']. Such publications will make the effects of this weapon even clearer. That is, Grass implicitly criticises the commodification of horrible pictures to satisfy the curiosity of well-meaning German readers. Likewise, Grass's novel *örtlich betäubt* [*local anaesthetic*] (1969), which is among other things an extended, savage satire on the anti-war movement, includes extensive, agonised considerations about film and photographs of atrocity.

In anti-war poetry too, photographic images are key. Indeed, critic Gregory Divers considers poems about photographs to constitute a specific subgenre of the time.<sup>45</sup> As with the poetry's treatment of newspapers, very few examples present the press's use of photographs in a positive light. A rare case is, arguably, Hans Mühletaler's 'Weihnachten 66' ['Christmas 66'], included in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* (20). This extremely short, free-verse poem describes a photograph of a 'panzerwagen' ['armoured car'] dragging a person or corpse along behind it, face down, by a rope tied around their ankles. The poem concludes:

auf dem panzerwagen die inschrift

us army

12 bx 8 4

[on the armoured car the inscription  
us army  
12 bx 8 4].

The poem was published without any reference to the photograph it describes, or any accompanying image. However, 'Weihnachten 66' seems implicitly to allude to *Dusty Death* by Sawada. According to details published elsewhere, Sawada took this monochrome photograph in 1966 in Tan Binh, near Saigon in the RVN. It shows '[t]he body of a Viet Cong soldier [...] dragged behind an armoured vehicle en route to a burial site after fierce fighting on February 24, 1966'.<sup>46</sup> The vehicle is manned by two American soldiers who appear to pay no attention to either the corpse or the photographer. This image was chosen as a World Press Photo of the Year in 1966. This circumstance tallies with the sceptical remark in 'Weihnachten 66' that the photograph in question is supposed to be the best picture of the year. As such, one can speculate that Mühletaler's title may allude to the appearance of the image in an end-of-year round-up of news images, coinciding with Christmas.

Contemporary readers would probably recognise the picture described in 'Weihnachten 66'. Its contemporary familiarity is underlined, for instance, by its uncaptioned, uncredited appearance in Meinhof's *konkret* in 1966.<sup>47</sup> The poem points out that the photograph is incontrovertible evidence of an atrocity. Moreover, Mühletaler's rather cryptic but conspicuous closing reference to the number on the armoured car may be intended to point out that the photograph makes the vehicle and its personnel identifiable. Photography in the field can thus identify perpetrators beyond reasonable doubt. Read in this way, 'Weihnachten 66' could affirm the value of news photographs, able as they are to bring crimes to the world's attention and, potentially, criminals to justice.

But by and large, poems in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* are more negative about photographs and film of the Vietnam War. For instance, a short poem by Cesaro, 'Im Lehnstuhl' ['In Easy Chairs'] (23), reflects on television viewers sitting in easy chairs to watch the deaths of countless people in Vietnam. It concludes:

wie gemütlich  
sitzt es sich doch  
in der guten stube.

[but how cosy  
it is to sit  
in the parlour.]

Another poem in tode's anthology, Nicolas Born's 'Fünfzehnte Reihe' ['Row Fifteen'] (37), describes sitting in row 15 at the cinema and watching a newsreel which features a weeping Vietnamese woman and children who are 'verbrannt verstümmelt verwaist' ['burnt mutilated orphaned']. The poem concludes:

Zum Schluß noch etwas Sport  
dann fing der Hauptfilm an

[Rounding up, a bit of sports news  
then the main feature started].

Here, commodified images of war merge seamlessly with other forms of entertainment, appear subordinate to the (implicitly fictional) main, longer feature of the evening and so are quickly forgotten. If the newsreel appears at first sight to promote sympathy for the war's Vietnamese victims, then in the last analysis, by providing cheap, transient catharsis or possibly simply a form of entertainment, it deadens the impulse for meaningful understanding and change. In these critiques of the living room, or auditorium, war, these two poems by Cesaro and Born have much common ground with Kienholz's *The Eleventh Hour Final* discussed in the introduction to this chapter. In context, it is perhaps no coincidence that by the early 1970s Kienholz was engaged with West Berlin's avant-garde art scene.

## The price of an image: Ingo Cesaro, 'Pressepreis'

For many poets in West Germany, the power of news media in general and war photography in particular posed grave ethical problems. This complex is expressed in exemplary ways by Cesaro in 'Pressepreis', a short poem that first appeared in 1969, in the short-lived literary little magazine *Edelgammler: Poesie Satire Prosa* [*The High-Class Drop-Out: Poetry satire prose*] (1968–70?).<sup>48</sup> While Cesaro's poem reflects on two photographs of the Vietnam conflict, no pictures were published alongside it in *Edelgammler*, nor are the images in question or the photographer named. However, readers were likely to recognise the two well-known photographs described in 'Pressepreis', both by Sawada.<sup>49</sup> The first is *Dusty Death*, also the focus of Mühletaler's 'Weihnachten 66'. The second, known as *Flight to Safety*, shows a 'Vietnamese mother and her children [escaping] bombs from a US air strike' in Qui Nhon in the RVN in 1965.<sup>50</sup> Like *Dusty Death*, *Flight to Safety* became a World Press Photo of the Year (1965). In 1966 it won a Pulitzer Prize, probably the literal 'Preis' of

Cesaro's title. The photograph's contemporaneous global recognisability is illustrated, for instance, by its satirical use in a contemporary US anti-war poster.<sup>51</sup>

'Pressepreis' contains 18 short, unpunctuated lines which are organised into five free-verse stanzas. The first describes *Dusty Death* and notes that it won a prize. The second verse presents *Flight to Safety*, summarising its subject matter as a mother who is scared to death and holding two children in raging water. The poem's third, more reflective stanza notes that the photographer also won an award for this picture because of its technical excellence. The fourth asks rhetorically whether he should not have saved the mother and children rather than taking the picture. The last verse concludes with a terse reflection upon the photographer who takes photographs of human suffering and mortal danger:

mensch sein  
hätte ihn in einer anderen zeit  
mehr ausgezeichnet.

[to show humanity  
would, in a different time,  
have been greater distinction.]

That is, if the photographer had intervened to rescue his subjects instead of merely recording their life-or-death struggle, he might have forfeited a professional accolade but retained his decency. The last stanza plays on the double meaning of the German noun 'Preis', which means both 'prize' and 'price'. While the photograph wins a prize, the photographer pays for it with his humanity, a modern Faustian price, or pact. But if Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's classic literary Faust, for all his terrible errors, is ultimately redeemed, this optimistic vision seems to be distant from Cesaro's more dystopian scenario. According to the poem, the prospect of more humane behaviour is imaginable only 'in einer anderen zeit' ['in a different time'].

'Pressepreis' devotes more reflection to the second photograph than to the first. The greater explicit brutality of *Dusty Death* may seem to make further comment superfluous. However, in addition, *Flight to Safety* may claim more space in the poem because it invites readers to think critically about the power imbalance between subjects who are fleeing for their lives and a photographer who has the time and security to compose a technically accomplished image of their perilous situation.

The poem's greater focus on *Flight to Safety* may thus imply that this image illustrates the immorality of war photography itself in more urgent ways than *Dusty Death*: here, at the moment the photograph was taken, lives remained in the balance. 'Pressepreis' thus criticises ways in which photographs of the Vietnam War are complicit in the destruction that the conflict wreaks.

Cesaro's poem has been frequently reprinted since its first publication and this history suggests that it is in many ways emblematic.<sup>52</sup> For instance, the poet's biography is characteristic of the demographic associated with protest and its poetry. Born in 1941, he was not part of the West German literary establishment in 1969. At the time the poem was published Cesaro was based in Frankfurt am Main, a centre of anti-authoritarian activism and he published his poems in typically countercultural settings, including *gegen den krieg in vietnam*.<sup>53</sup>

The magazine in which 'Pressepreis' appeared, *Edelgammler*, was primarily a literary publication. Its title references a distinctive 1960s subculture of quasi-itinerant young people known as 'Gammler' ['drop-outs'], which fed into the burgeoning countercultures.<sup>54</sup> Conversely, the harsh treatment of 'Gammler' by the authorities and public opinion helped to fuel anti-authoritarian social critique. The term 'Gammler' was applied pejoratively to protesters of the time, but this magazine's title satirically deflects the insult, and perhaps associated stereotypes of young nonconformists as 'Söhne aus zu gutem Haus' ['sons from too-good families'], as Grass's provocative poem in *Ausgefragt*, 'Platzangst' ['Claustrophobia'] (41), has it. *Edelgammler* thus had its finger on the political pulse and occasionally carried poems related to the protest movements.<sup>55</sup> Such contributions highlight anti-authoritarian interest in an alternative public sphere, partly in response to the era's suspicion of mainstream media. In addition, they indicate the movement's deep literary interests and origins.<sup>56</sup>

The representative status of 'Pressepreis' rests partly on the poem's formal qualities too. It shares its free versification, accessibility, brevity and directness with most other anti-war poems published in West Germany, a diction that seeks to divest poetry of traditional, highbrow or elitist connotations. Like many other examples of the form, 'Pressepreis' uses irony and, in drawing on photographs, the era's signature documentary mode.<sup>57</sup> The documentary movement of the 1960s and 1970s aimed to bypass both the perceived unreliability of fiction and the Establishment bias of the press; it focused instead on communicating information drawn from historical sources, albeit in very diverse, often partisan ways. At the same time the poetic qualities of 'Pressepreis' stress



the suggestive capability of documentary, giving the lie to any view that it is exclusively factual and aesthetically flat.<sup>58</sup>

In thematic terms, 'Pressepreis' is characteristic in its representation of the Vietnam War, not only because of its engagement with the theme of media. The rushing water described in the poem recalls the deluge which in some founding narratives of European culture drowns a sinful world. Such imagery is in tune with the sometimes apocalyptic scenarios of anti-war poetry and, more indirectly, its occasional recourse to European and Christian imagery.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, Cesaro's poem draws on one of the anti-war poetry's great tropes, the helpless Vietnamese mother and children.<sup>60</sup> In 'Pressepreis' the dual roles of the woman as mother and victim are condensed and highlighted since she is in danger, at least in part, because she is looking after children.

'Pressepreis' is also typical of the anti-war poetry in placing victims of war in diametric opposition to a powerful, presumably foreign, other, in this case the photographer. This schema is commonly gendered, as it is here, where the active photographer is male and his passive primary subject, the woman in the water, female.<sup>61</sup> 'Pressepreis' underscores that dynamic in traditionally coded ways, through the association of the woman and children with nature, namely the water, and the photographer with culture, in the form of his camera.

With references to 'belichtung' ['exposure'] and 'tiefenschärfe' ['depth of field'], 'Pressepreis' emphasises the technology of photography. In so doing, it echoes the poems' frequent critique of US deployments of technology in Vietnam, as in Astel's 'Neue Waffe'. In such visions the war is above all a technological one. As such it is highly alienating, allowing aggressors to separate themselves from their victims in every sense. In 'Neue Waffe' the US soldier does not fight his Vietnamese opponent directly, but instead observes his death at physical and emotional removes even if he is in reality responsible for it. The photographer in 'Pressepreis' similarly sees the woman and children from a distance defined by a lens, that is to say, the photographer's hi-tech apparatus disconnects him from the victims of war. The possibility that he may even gain pleasure from his superior position is subtly amplified by his aestheticisation of his subjects. This representation of a man photographing and styling a less powerful woman may also hint at a gendered, voyeuristic and sadistic dynamic and so resonate with the gender politics of the wider anti-war discourse in this respect too.

'Pressepreis' anticipates very precisely some later, influential discussions of war and documentary photography. Eminent US critic

Sontag was soon to argue in *On Photography* (1973) that taking a picture is not only ‘essentially an act of non-intervention’. It is also:

a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening. To take a picture is [...] to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing – including, when that is the interest, another person’s pain or misfortune.<sup>62</sup>

On this view, the photographer in ‘Pressepreis’ has an active interest in perpetuating the scene before him, and even the Vietnam War itself, so as to prolong his opportunities for taking successful photographs. Sontag observes too that ‘[l]ike guns and cars, cameras are fantasy-machines’ (14). Such an apparatus can produce fantasies of tremendous aggressive power, to the extent that ‘to photograph someone is a sublimated murder’ (14–5). The parallel with Cesaro’s photographer, interested as he is in symbolically replicating real-life violence, is evident.

Indeed, this poem’s critique comes close to Virilio’s later, more radical account of the interdependence of war and visual technologies in the modern era.<sup>63</sup> Here photography and related technologies are not merely a means of recording warfare; they are an intrinsic part of it, for machines designed for getting sight of the enemy are central to the ability to wage war. Therefore the development of military *matériel* is inseparable from the development of visual technology itself. Increasingly, according to Virilio, war itself has an essentially visual character, and it ‘can never break free from the magical spectacle because its very purpose is to produce that spectacle’.<sup>64</sup>

Likewise, ‘Pressepreis’ describes *Dusty Death* as a shocking sight ‘ins bild geschleift’ [‘dragged into the picture’], namely the body pulled behind a tank as a brutal display of power. In effect, the photographer has reiterated that action, co-producing the spectacle essential to modern war. ‘Pressepreis’ is likewise evocative of Abigail Solomon-Godeau’s argument that the documentary picture is part of a far-reaching complex of power relations, for it is ‘produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents’.<sup>65</sup> The institutional recognition won by Sawada’s photographs may form part of this dynamic.

While for Virilio visual representation is indispensable to hyper-violent modern warfare, in ‘Pressepreis’ the converse applies too. That is, the poem suggests that the creation of sensational wartime images is in itself a violent act. In relation to *Flight to Safety*, the poem claims that photographer has the Vietnamese woman and children in his sights and

is prepared to let them die so that he can capture their image. If they drown, it is because he was taking a photograph rather than helping them. In other words, the photograph is the product of an action that is negligent to the point of being in itself violent. Thus the torrent in which the woman and children are caught in 'Pressepreis' may also be understood metaphorically. The raging water is a correlative to the war, and to the circulation of the visual image too, for both are malign forces threatening everyone in their path. Read in this way, there seems to be little scope here for positive interpretation of conflict photography. In this respect Cesaro's poem bears a resemblance to the anti-authoritarian critique of *Africa Addio* in 1966, which argued that the film had given rise, quite literally, to murder.

### Words and pictures: Kyoichi Sawada, *Flight to Safety*

*Flight to Safety* is a high-angle, medium-long, monochrome shot of five people, sparingly framed by leaves and branches in the foreground. The people are making their way through water which reaches adult chest height. This water looks calm, though small ripples on its surface could suggest currents beneath. The subjects are a relatively young woman, a small baby, a very young boy or toddler, an older boy and another female figure. The latter is harder to identify precisely because of her stance and the way her hair falls, but she may be an older girl, a teenager or a young adult. The three older subjects form a tight triangle around the smaller boy, who is supported by the woman and the other, less distinct female figure. The woman is also carrying the baby and the subjects seem to be wading towards a point which is out of shot but indicated by the woman's gaze ahead. They all face forward, and one figure's arm reaches out purposefully. All the subjects' expressions show great strain, and the older boy and girl (or woman) look into the camera with urgency.

'Pressepreis' offers an unrelievedly negative interpretation of *Flight to Safety*, and in so doing amplifies the dangers suggested in the photograph. For example, the poem describes the water, almost unruffled in the picture, as 'reissend' ['raging'] and reduces a close group of five to three, a mother holding two children. In this respect the poem matches the pattern of isolating feminine figures in representations of Vietnam discussed in [Chapter 3](#). Cesaro's poem is unequivocal in reading the tense look on the woman's face as 'todesangst' ['mortal fear'], that is, in stressing that she and the children are all in danger of death.

The poem's contrasting emphasis on the photographer's agency seems implicitly to draw on some of the photograph's formal characteristics. If the foliage in the image's foreground gives it depth and perspective, it also underlines the facts that the photographer is located on the shore or bank and so does not share his subjects' position. This framing indicates too that the photographer has a better sight of his subjects than vice versa, and that his oblique, downward view diminishes them. It is in part due to this angle that three of the subjects are not looking into his lens; as Solomon-Godeau has observed, documentary photographs in which subjects do not look back at the camera can disempower them.<sup>66</sup>

In this disposition, the photograph calls to mind the origins of documentary photography in class and power dynamics which favoured its practitioners over its subjects. As Liz Wells notes, when documentary photography was developed in the later nineteenth century, 'photographers from the middle and upper classes [...] sought images of the poor'. Wells cites John Tagg, who argues that:

[t]o be pictured [...] was [...] a mark of subjugation: the stigma of another place; the burden of a class of fetishized Others.<sup>67</sup>

That analysis dovetails in turn with descriptions like Martha Rosler's of documentary, a form she perceives, despite humanist or liberal intentions, as 'victim photography'.<sup>68</sup> Such theorisations, as Wells puts it, can:

undermine the twin bases of documentary, namely, the idea of documentary 'truth' and the notion of the neutrality of the observer. (303)

Rosler, among others, has observed too that documentary photography is bound up with representing and forming notions of supposed racial identity and difference. In such processes, as Andrea Walsh has noted with reference to colonial photography, individuals and their names recede. Instead, those subjects, again often not looking into the camera, appear generic; they become merely exemplars of their people.<sup>69</sup> Read in this way, for a Western audience, *Flight to Safety* could be said to replicate the era's common binary thinking about East and West, in which the former is weak and the latter powerful.<sup>70</sup>

Yet even as 'Pressepreis' criticises war photographs for making victims of its subjects in these ways, it provides an implicit meditation on the painful, possibly complicit position of the engaged West German poet

in the face of an unstoppable war. In drawing on horrible scenes presented by the news, 'Pressepreis' could be said to exploit them. According to Sontag's arguments in *On Photography*, the poem might even convey an interest of its own in perpetuating those scenes, however unintentionally. And just as Cesaro's poem criticises the photographer for recording the incident he witnessed, rather than taking action, it too remains in contemplative mode; like the photograph, the poem aestheticises its subjects.

On this argument, the speaker of 'Pressepreis' finds himself in a contradictory position, as does the subject in Reymond's '[Jeden Tag lese ich die Zeitung]', with his shocking interest in reading about US casualties. So for all that 'Pressepreis' calls to account media and their images, it may also reflect on the pact it makes with them, Faustian in its own way. In this sense, the poem might even implicitly suggest that the poet senses a kind of identification, however partial and problematic, with the poem's Vietnamese protagonists trapped in swirling currents. In this case, the torrent is the flow of media images.

### 'Looking elsewhere'

However, 'Pressepreis' can also be read differently, and less bleakly, in (at least) three ways. First, it is striking that Cesaro's poem foregrounds not *Dusty Death*, which shows the atrocious treatment of a victim of violence, but *Flight to Safety*. By making this choice it concentrates on a photograph in which the subjects are clothed, apparently uninjured and walking upright in effective formation, taking mutually supportive action on their own behalf. Extreme and frightening though their situation is, they seem to be taking control of it. The hair of the three older figures is largely dry, suggesting a relatively steady passage through the water. And assuming the five subjects' aim is to reach the bank where the photographer is located, they have almost achieved it. Sawada's picture can therefore be interpreted as a record of people prevailing against the odds.<sup>71</sup> As such, it is hard-won evidence from the war zones of its subjects' determination, obtained in a moment of danger and potentially valuable for both its subjects and its allies abroad.

In addition, the way in which two of the subjects look back into the camera and hold the photographer's and viewer's gaze challenges the sense that they are the photographer's passive objects. As Kozol asks of a later news photograph from Afghanistan in which a woman looks back

into the camera, unsettling a sense that she is being objectified by it, for all the limitations of that image:

Does this woman make space for her own subjectivity by disrupting the viewer's desire to look? Recognition takes place, then, within shifting conditions of relationality between photographer and subject as well as between viewer and subject. (90–1)

As such, the subjects' gaze back at the photographer has potential to trouble the monolithically disempowering 'corpse polemics' identified by Slobodian. And, as the work of an East Asian photographer, albeit one who worked for an American agency, Sawada's photograph does not fit entirely seamlessly into simplified perceptions of East–West polarities of power mediated through the photographic lens.

Second, Cesaro's poem tallies with an older, Marxist-inspired mode of managing documentary photographs.<sup>72</sup> This tradition has its roots in a long-standing mistrust in high German culture of figurative and visual representation.<sup>73</sup> It is expressed, for instance, in Walter Benjamin's important Modernist essay 'Der Autor als Produzent' ['The Author as Producer'] (1934).<sup>74</sup> For all Benjamin's enthusiasm for novel visual arts in an age of mechanical reproduction, this text dismisses reportage which deploys photography. Here Benjamin is critical of the contemporary *Neue Sachlichkeit* ['New Objectivity'] movement in visual culture, even where it aims to use photography for leftist purposes. He argues that such representation turns political struggle into a 'Gegenstand kontemplativen Behagens' ['object of enjoyment'] (695 [775]). Comparable comments on documentary photography are made by Ruth Berlau, in her foreword to Bertolt Brecht's collection of war photographs and poems, *Kriegsfibel* [*War Primer*] (1955). She asserts that to the untrained eye press photographs are mere 'Hieroglyphen' ['hieroglyphics'], a language based on icons which, detached from its context, remains illegible.<sup>75</sup>

So, according to Benjamin and Berlau, documentary photographs occlude the truth and skew attempts at rational analysis. Both writers advocate compensating for these deficits by the corrective use of writing. According to Benjamin, while words and images taken individually might be powerless, in dialectical interaction they may create a work with genuine 'revolutionärer Gebrauchswert' ['revolutionary use value'] (693 [775]).<sup>76</sup> For Berlau, too, text is needed to make sense of the hieroglyphs of photography.

Protesters of the 1960s, keen to reconnect with pre- and anti-Nazi culture, would have been receptive to such thinkers. They would also

have responded to the idea of an anti-authoritarian Brecht persevering with the controversial publication of *Kriegsfibel* in the GDR, where the volume was deemed insufficiently faithful to official discourses on the war and National Socialist past.<sup>77</sup> Such thinking offers an alternative to ‘corpse polemics’. It is cognate too with a contemporary counter-example presented by Slobodian, namely works by West Berlin film-maker Harun Farocki, like the short anti-war film *Nicht löschesbares Feuer* [*Inextinguishable Fire*] (1969). This film illustrates the horrors of napalm not through direct visual representation, but in verbal descriptions and images closer to home (162–9).

Reading ‘Pressepreis’ in this light shows that contemporary anti-authoritarian critique of media and their images, such as that of Cesaro (and Farocki), is deeply rooted in both older and contemporary German cultural traditions of scepticism towards figurative representation itself. Indeed, part of the shock value of a ‘corpse polemics’ based on photographs is derived from its offensive clash and competition with traditional discretion about visual images that exists in German theory. Echoing the thinking of Benjamin and Berlau about the value of adding text to images, Cesaro’s poem transposes distressing photographs – which, taken alone, might overwhelm a viewer with affect – into explicatory and critical language. In this sense ‘Pressepreis’ goes further than either critic advised, by excluding photographs altogether and recalling them only in words. There are, of course, practical explanations for the fact that ‘Pressepreis’ was published without photographs, most probably that a little magazine like *Edelgammeler* lacked the resources to reproduce them. Nonetheless, this unillustrated poem about photographs also stands as a defence in left-wing tradition of the ethical importance of text, including poetry, in a world of ever more invasive images. In this way too, ‘Pressepreis’ marks a critical distance from ‘corpse polemics’.

Third, Sawada’s *Flight to Safety* can be read as an example of photography which Kozol describes as ‘looking elsewhere’ in the main theatres of US wars abroad. This kind of image, she argues, reflects more indirectly and suggestively on the conflict in question. Although most war photographs are enmeshed in complex political and economic contexts at home, Kozol contends that nonetheless, ‘[in] turning away from the main stage or actions of the battlefield, looking elsewhere can rupture the authoritative power of Western visuality’ (7). That is, such images have the potential to evade full recuperation by the interlinked powers of war and corporate media.

In identifying Sawada’s photographs as part of a rapacious visual culture, ‘Pressepreis’ apparently sees no scope in them for the kind of

productive ambiguity proposed by Kozol. Yet the subject matter of *Flight to Safety*, which does not show military aggression directly, might match Kozol's concept of a picture that is 'looking elsewhere'. In featuring this photograph, 'Pressepreis' too encourages readers to 'look elsewhere'. The lack of photographs to accompany the poem on its publication plays a part in this dynamic, their absence providing an invitation to look elsewhere in a literal sense. In other ways, too, the absence of the pictures places them 'elsewhere', that is to say, in words and the mind's eye. The omission of the photographs thus breaks up their voyeuristic effects; it creates an interval for critical reflection both on the scenes depicted and the medium of photography itself.

Kozol suggests that 'looking elsewhere' can produce ambiguities and 'unpredictable excesses' in the representation of war. She quotes another theorist, Barbie Zelizer, who

describes such excesses as the subjunctive voice which 'adds impulses of implication, contingency, conditionality ... and impossibility to the supposed certainty of visual representation'.  
(7–8)

These comments also find resonance in 'Pressepreis'. At its close, this poem shifts into an explicitly conditional tense as it reflects on what might have been, had the photographer acted differently. The penultimate line invokes a similarly conditional 'ander[e] zeit' ['different time'], an imagined space in which people could be more fully human.

## Poetry, refuge, intervention: some conclusions

The 1960s saw important transnational debates about media coverage of the Vietnam War. Such discussion weighed the press's role in disseminating vital information about the war against critiques of its potential for misinformation and exploitation, and its complex commercial and symbolic interests.<sup>78</sup> This chapter has argued that the Federal Republic's anti-war movements and its poetry shared those contemporary global preoccupations with media and their pictures from the war zone. While the West German anti-war movement in general was critical of media, it made use of them too, suggesting a mixed perception overall. Poetry sets itself apart from the wider anti-war culture in this respect, because poems that see any positive value in the press are very scarce indeed.



It may be significant that the two instances uncovered in this chapter of poems which are less negative about media are by Müller and Mühletaler, who were, respectively, GDR and Swiss citizens. More commonly, poems which appeared in the FRG seem to reject news media unequivocally. It seems that poetry published in West Germany almost exclusively expresses profound, pessimistic concern about the treatment of the Vietnam War in the news, especially in regard to photography and film. Indeed, an emblematic example which this chapter has examined closely, Cesaro's 'Pressepreis', even implies that photography and film are in themselves potentially violent forms.

This negative perception is underlined by the way in which, in the Federal Republic, poems such as 'Pressepreis' tended to be published with no accompanying images. It is striking, for instance, that there is no West German publication equivalent to GDR poet Volker Braun's *KriegsErklärung* [*Declaration of War*] (1967). This high-profile volume of poetry combines poems and news photographs from Vietnam in the style of Brecht's *Kriegsfibel*. While, as J. J. Long argues, Braun is highly critical of news photography, he nonetheless devotes poetic reflections to it and includes the images in question for his readers' consideration.<sup>79</sup> Neither is there a West German publication similar to *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation* [*Vietnam Now: Documented by artists*], a large, richly illustrated anthology of writing and images that was published in the GDR in 1968.<sup>80</sup>

This comparison seems to suggest that in the 1960s locally specific issues, both societal and philosophical, were at work in the overwhelming rejection of media and their photographs in West German poetry.<sup>81</sup> This scepticism has extensive roots. It is derived partly from the FRG's distinctive media landscape, dominated as it was by the Springer media group. It reflects, too, the era's emphatic reception of Critical Theory such as Marcuse's and longer traditions of scepticism about representation and photography, as in the work of earlier writers such as Benjamin or Berlau. In turn, the FRG's anti-visual poetics foreshadows later critical theorisations of war photography, for example those of Sontag and Virilio.<sup>82</sup>

Cesaro's 'Pressepreis' and its intertexts, two award-winning photographs by Sawada, show how difficult this poetics may be, for the poem both condemns war photography and draws on it. The poem resolves this dilemma by transposing images of distant violence into writing, as recommended by Benjamin and Berlau; like Kienholz's *The Eleventh Hour Final*, which uses words, numbers and a dummy's head in place of photographs of war, Cesaro's poem declines to replicate those

images. And so, just as Kienholz's installation hints at the uncanny presence of a distant violence in the US sitting room, 'Pressepreis' recalls the pictures on which it was based only in shifting, spectral form.

This chapter also shows that study of anti-war poetry illuminates wider anti-authoritarian and anti-war discourses and imagery in important ways, demonstrating that they were by no means homogeneous. On one hand, the poems mirror the anti-war culture's preoccupations with media and their technologically reproducible images. Indeed, the expressive and symbolic properties of poetry can facilitate more detailed understanding of those concerns. However, on the other hand, poetry can act simultaneously as a subtle counterpoint to dominant strands in anti-war culture. In this case 'Pressepreis' and similar poems reject the contradictory, more strident 'corpse polemics' which, according to Slobodian, increasingly hallmarked anti-authoritarian cultural production at the end of the decade. In so doing, poetry might appear to offer a refuge from the political world. But equally, this chapter concludes, poetry can both be, and challenge, political discourse, and so highlight its diverse, fissured nature.

## Notes

- \* An earlier version of this chapter appeared as Mererid Puw Davies, 'The price of an image: Poetry, photography and the Vietnam War in West Germany', *Modern Language Review* 106, no. 1, 2011.
- 1 Detail reproduced e.g. in *Vietnam Images: War and representation*, edited by Jeffrey Walsh and James Aulich (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1989), plate 7, n.p.
- 2 Cf. Michael J. Arlen, *Living Room War* (1969) (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997); Jeffrey Walsh and James Aulich, 'Introduction', in *Vietnam Images*, edited by Walsh and Aulich, 8.
- 3 Cf. e.g. George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950–1975*, second edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 202–3; on Vietnam photography in cultural history see Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A cultural history* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 202–5; Patrick Hagopian, 'Vietnam War photography as a locus of memory', in *Locating Memory: Photographic acts*, edited by Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 201–2.
- 4 Wendy Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible: The ambivalence of witnessing* (Minneapolis, MT: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 7. Further page references follow in the text.
- 5 See e.g. Hagopian, 'Vietnam War photography'; David Kunzle, 'Killingly funny: US posters of the Vietnam era', in *Vietnam Images*, edited by Walsh and Aulich.
- 6 Ulrich Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke: Eine Biographie* (Munich and Zurich: Pendo, 1993), 88–9; cf. Siegfried Zielinski, 'Die Ferne der Nähe und die Nähe der Ferne: Bilder und Kommentare zum TV-Alltag der Sechziger', in *CheSchahShit: Die sechziger Jahre zwischen Cocktail und Molotow*, edited by Eckhard Siepmann et al. (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984); *Buch Buchhandel Rundfunk: 1968 und die Folgen*, edited by Monika Estermann and Edgar Lersch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).
- 7 Karl Heinz Bohrer, 'Surrealismus und Terror oder die Aporien des Juste-milieu', in Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die gefährdete Phantasie, oder Surrealismus und Terror* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1970). The volume's foreword dates the essays in the book to 1969, 7.

- 8 Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third world politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 135–69. Further page references follow in the text.
- 9 Ingo Cesaro, 'Pressepreis', *Edelgammeler* 5 (September 1969): 21.
- 10 Christina von Hodenberg, 'Mass media and the generation of conflict: West Germany's long Sixties and the formation of a critical public sphere', *Contemporary European History* 15, no. 3 (2006).
- 11 Nick Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany: A social history of dissent and democracy* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 165. Further page references follow in the text.
- 12 Annette Schwarzenau, 'Nicht diese theoretischen Dinger, etwas Praktisches unternehmen', in *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer rebellischen Frauengeneration*, edited by Ute Kätzel (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002), 41–2. Further page references follow in the text.
- 13 See e.g. Uwe Bergmann, 'Das "Vietnam-Semester"', in Rudi Dutschke, Uwe Bergmann, Wolfgang Lefèvre and Bernd Rabehl, *Rebellion der Studenten oder die neue Opposition. Eine Analyse von Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968), 19; Urs Jaeggi, Rudolf Steiner and Willy Wyniger, *Der Vietnamkrieg und die Presse* (Zurich: EVZ, 1966); Reimar Lenz, 'Foltern für die Freie Welt: Der Vietnam-Krieg im Spiegel der deutschen Presse', *konkret* no. 3, 1966 (March 1966): 18–9.
- 14 Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 165.
- 15 Von Hodenberg, 'Mass media and the generation of conflict', 388–9.
- 16 Contemporary documentation includes Rudi Dutschke, 'Wir fordern die Enteignung Axel Springers: SPIEGEL-Gespräch mit dem Berliner FU-Studenten Rudi Dutschke (SDS)', *Der Spiegel* 21, no. 29 (9 July 1967); Helke Sander, dir., *Brecht die Macht der Manipulateure!* (1967); SDS-Autorenkollektiv, Springer-Arbeitskreis der KU [Kritische Universität], *Der Untergang der Bild-Zeitung* (Berlin: no publ., n.d.); *Kapitalismus und Pressefreiheit. Am Beispiel Springer*, edited by Peter Brokmeier (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1969). For a historical account see Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 165–8; *Imperium Springer: Macht und Manipulation*, edited by Bernd Jansen and Arno Klönne (Cologne: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1968).
- 17 Rudi Dutschke, 'Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus', in *Rebellion der Studenten oder die neue Opposition*, 64.
- 18 Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 169–70; Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke*, 233–90. Dutschke's own analysis is in *Briefe an Rudi D.*, edited by Stefan Reisner (Berlin: Voltaire, 1968), a compilation of letters sent to him after the attempted assassination.
- 19 In *Provokationen: Die Studenten- und Jugendrevolte in ihren Flugblättern 1965–1971*, edited by Jürgen Miermeister and Jochen Staadt (Darmstadt and Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1980), 144.
- 20 Herbert Marcuse, 'Repressive tolerance', in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969). Further page references follow in the text. In German the text appeared in pirate editions and as 'Repressive Toleranz' in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse, *Kritik der reinen Toleranz*, translated by Alfred Schmidt (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).
- 21 Cf. *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail. 1946–1995*, edited by Wolfgang Kraushaar, 3 vols (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard bei Zweitausendeins, 1998), I, 235; Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Herbert Marcuse und das lebensweltliche Apriori der Revolte', *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, edited by Kraushaar, III.
- 22 There is a parallel with the FRG anti-war campaign's view that US involvement in Vietnam, as Slobodian puts it, 'discredited the language of liberal freedoms and human rights' and revealed a significant gap between 'liberal norms and reality', *Foreign Front*, 78.
- 23 Michael Buselmeier, 'Leben in Heidelberg', in *Nach dem Protest: Literatur im Umbruch*, edited by W. Martin Lüdke (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 82.
- 24 E.g. Heinz Kulas, 'Ein "Springer-Lexikon" von Absurd bis Zusammenrottungen', in *Imperium Springer*, edited by Jansen and Klönne; Reinhard Lettau, 'Journalismus als Menschenjagd', *Kursbuch* 7 (September 1966); Reimar Lenz, 'Springer Dictionary', *pardn* no. 6, 1967 (June 1967): 44–5.
- 25 Cf. e.g. Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 137, on such action following the 'Springer-Tribunal' of 1 February 1968 at West Berlin's Technische Universität (TU).
- 26 Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German protest against America's war during the 1960s', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and international perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach

- (Washington, DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), 289.
- 27 Schwarzenau, 'Nicht diese theoretischen Dinger', 48–9.
  - 28 Schwarzenau, 'Nicht diese theoretischen Dinger', 44–5. This action was planned as a parallel to the better-known protest in the same Christmas season at West Berlin's prestigious Gedächtniskirche, during which Dutschke was attacked and injured by a member of the congregation. See e.g. Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke*, 197–200.
  - 29 Cf. Dieter Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand! Bilder aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: :Transit, 1998), 49.
  - 30 Siegwald Lönnendonker, Bernd Rabehl and Jochen Staadt, *Die antiautoritäre Revolte: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund nach der Trennung von der SPD. Band 1: 1960–1967* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 212.
  - 31 Dutschke, 'Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus', 64.
  - 32 For a detailed account of these events see Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 137–46. A meticulous analysis of the film's racial politics is given by Peter Pleyer, 'Neger und Weiße in dem Film *Africa Addio*', *Rundfunk und Fernsehen* 15, no. 3 (1967).
  - 33 John Cohen, *Africa Addio* (1966), translated by Willi Thaler (Munich: Heyne, 1967). Further page references follow in the text.
  - 34 Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I: Berlin 1967–1969* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2004), 71–4; Lönnendonker, Rabehl and Staadt, *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 296; Walter Heynowski and Gerhard Scheumann, *Der lachende Mann: Bekenntnisse eines Mörders* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, n.d.), 156–60.
  - 35 Cf. Kunzle, 'Killingly funny', for a similar debate on protest art using disenfranchising or offensive images of Vietnamese people in the US, 115–21.
  - 36 Examples are seen in *konkret*: Helke Sander's visually rich film about the movements, *Der subjektive Faktor* (1981); Elke Regehr, 'Für viele Männer war die Psyche Weiberkram: Die Zerreißprobe zwischen Kunst und Politik', in Kätzel, *Die 68erinnen*, 90.
  - 37 Ulla Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion: Zur Entwicklung operativer Literaturformen in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: Athenaiion, 1978), 39. Cf. Gregory Divers, *The Image and Influence of America in German Poetry since 1945* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), 98–122.
  - 38 *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, edited by riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968). Further page references follow in the text.
  - 39 Joris Ivens, William Klein, Claude Lelouch, Agnès Varda, Jean-Luc Godard, Chris Marker and Alain Resnais (dir.), *Loi du Vietnam* (1967).
  - 40 Cf. Marceline Loridan and Joris Ivens, *17e Parallèle: La guerre du peuple. Deux mois sous la terre* (Paris: Les Éditeurs français réunis, 1968). The film script printed here describes underground printing, 135–7, and includes a photograph of it (n.p.).
  - 41 See also Divers, *The Image and Influence of America*, 99–100.
  - 42 The theme of the complicit European bystander recurs in the poetry, e.g. Hans Mühletaler, 'Liste der am Krieg in Vietnam Schuldigen', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 21.
  - 43 Michael Kottke, 'Ratschläge fürs Leben', *Edelgammler* 4 (May 1969): 12–3.
  - 44 Günter Grass, *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967). Further page references follow in the text. See [Chapter 2](#).
  - 45 Divers, *The Image and Influence of America*, 98–122.
  - 46 *Requiem. By the photographers who died in Vietnam and Indochina*, edited by Horst Faas and Tim Page (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 134. Page references follow in the text. The photograph is available at Kyoichi Sawada, *Dusty Death*, accessed 31 January 2021, <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1966/35995/1/1966-Kyoichi-Sawada-WY>.
  - 47 *konkret* no. 6, 1966 (June 1966): 21.
  - 48 *Edelgammler* launched in October 1968, appeared regularly throughout 1969 and ended with the publication of a sixth, undated issue apparently soon afterwards.
  - 49 The poet could assume at the time that readers would know the pictures from the poem's descriptions. Ingo Cesaro, personal correspondence with the author, 24 April 2010.
  - 50 *Requiem*, edited by Faas and Page, 151. The photograph is available at Kyoichi Sawada, *Flight to Safety*, accessed 31 January 2021, <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1965/36117/1/1965-Kyoichi-Sawada-WY>.
  - 51 Anon., 'THIS IS THE SPELL OF CHANEL FOR THE BATH', in *Vietnam Images*, edited by Walsh and Aulich, plate 13, n.p.

- 52 The poem was reprinted at least 10 times. Ingo Cesaro, personal correspondence with the author, 14 April 2010.
- 53 E.g. Ingo Cesaro, 'In Einkaufsnetzen', 'Vietnamesische Kinder', 'Im Lehnstuhl', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 22–3; 'Abzählvers', *phoenix. lyrik aus amerika kanada england schweiz rumänien jugoslawien deutschland dokumente texte*, 3–4 (1970): 9.
- 54 See e.g. Sara Bangert, 'Müssiggang ist aller Laster Anfang? Literarische und Filmische Typen der Verweigerung im Milieu der deutschen Gegenkultur der 1960er/70er Jahre', *German Life and Letters* 74, no. 1 (January 2021): 109–29; Michael 'Bommi' Baumann, *Wie alles anfang* (1975) (Frankfurt am Main: multiple publishers, 1977), 60; Peter Fleischmann (dir.), *Herbst der Gammler* (1967); Margret Kosel, *Gammler Beatniks Provos: Die schleichende Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Bärmeier & Nickel, 1967); Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand!*, 18–9, 35–7; Thomas, *Protest Movements in 1960s West Germany*, 4–42.
- 55 E.g. Manfred Bosch, 'Episode', *Edelgammler* 4 (May 1969): 12–3; Kottke, 'Ratschläge fürs Leben'.
- 56 See e.g. Klaus Briegleb, *1968: Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993); Mererid Puw Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016).
- 57 See e.g. Keith Bullivant, *Realism Today: Aspects of the contemporary West German novel* (Leamington Spa, Hamburg and New York: Berg, 1987), 81–105; Gundel Mattenkloft, 'Literatur von unten – die andere Kultur', in *Gegenwartsliteratur seit 1968*, edited by Klaus Briegleb and Sigrid Weigel (Munich: dtv, 1992), 153–81.
- 58 Cf. Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 59–62.
- 59 See Chapter 5.
- 60 Cf. Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 23–60.
- 61 See Chapter 3.
- 62 Susan Sontag, 'In Plato's cave', in *On Photography* (1973) (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 11–2. Further page references follow in the text.
- 63 Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema: The logistics of perception* (1981), translated by Patrick Camiller (London and New York: Verso, 1989).
- 64 Quoted in Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible*, 8.
- 65 See Abigail Solomon-Godeau, 'Who is speaking thus? Some questions about documentary photography', in *Photography at the Dock: Essays on photographic history, institutions, and practices* (1987), edited by Abigail Solomon-Godeau (Minneapolis, MT: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 176.
- 66 Solomon-Godeau, 'Who is speaking thus?', 176.
- 67 Liz Wells, 'Introduction' to section on 'Documentary', in *The Photography Reader: History and theory*, second edition, edited by Liz Wells (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 302. Further page references follow in the text.
- 68 Martha Rosler, 'In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography)', abridged in *The Photography Reader*, edited by Liz Wells, 338.
- 69 Cf. e.g. Andrea Walsh, 'Re-placing history: Critiquing the colonial gaze', in *Locating Memory*, edited by Kuhn and McAllister, 21–51.
- 70 See Chapter 3.
- 71 This reading is supported by the fact that another, later photograph of 1966 shows Sawada himself presenting a print of *Flight to Safety* to its subjects, *Requiem*, Faas and Page, 155. However, the survival of the family, and their reunion with Sawada, may not have been (widely) known in West Germany when *Flight to Safety* or 'Pressepreis' first appeared.
- 72 See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology: Image, text, ideology* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 160–208.
- 73 See Bullivant, *Realism Today*.
- 74 Walter Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent' (1934), in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), II.2; 'The author as producer', translated by Edmund Jephcott (1968), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 1999), II. Further page references follow in the text.
- 75 Ruth Berlau, untitled foreword, in Bertolt Brecht, *Kriegsfibel* (1955) (Berlin: Eulenspiegel, 1977), n.p.

- 76 There may be such impact in Mühletaler's 'Weihnachten 66', where words gloss the photograph to stress that the identity of the perpetrators of atrocity is in the public domain.
- 77 John Willett, 'Afterword', in Bertolt Brecht, *War Primer*, edited and translated by John Willett (London: Libris, 1998), xii–xv.
- 78 Cf. Howard Chapnick, *Truth Needs No Ally: Inside photojournalism* (Columbia, MO and London: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 296.
- 79 J. J. Long, 'KriegsErklärung: Volker Braun's Cold War camera', in *Violence Elsewhere: Imagining distant violence in Germany 1945–2001*, edited by Clare Bielby and Mererid Puw Davies (Rochester, NY: Camden House, forthcoming).
- 80 *Vietnam in dieser Stunde: Künstlerische Dokumentation*, edited by Werner Bräunig et al. (Halle an der Saale: Mitteldeutscher Verlag, 1968). On further examples of prestigious visual culture in the GDR which referenced the Vietnam War and other violent events in Asia see also Martin Brady, 'So it has to be said: Hammer and sickle here, hammer and sickle there' ['Deshalb muß festgestellt werden: Hammer und Sichel hier, Hammer und Sichel dort']: Heynowski-Scheumann's *Die Angkar* (1981) and the problem of *Khmer Rouge* violence for the GDR'; Seán Allan, 'Images as weapons. DEFA, Studio H&S and the global Cold War', both in *Violence Elsewhere*, edited by Bielby and Davies, forthcoming.
- 81 On West German anti-war visual culture see [Chapter 1](#).
- 82 These points of resonance suggest that the deep shock of the Vietnam conflict and its visual images played an important part in the genesis of that later body of theory. Contemporary writings about those images, including 'Pressepreis' itself, may have played their part too.

## 5

# That red-hot Vietnam feeling: Kommune I and poetic language

## Introduction

For some two years in the late 1960s, the anarchic West Berlin collective Kommune I [Commune I] (KI) helped to define and transform perceptions of protest in West Germany. Founded in early 1967, KI was an informal, changeable group of anti-authoritarians who lived and worked together in order, as they claimed, to explore new political methods and revolutionary subjectivities.<sup>1</sup> Most controversially, on 24 May 1967, the group issued four flyers, often known as the ‘Maiflugblätter’ [‘May flyers’], which comment on the Vietnam conflict.<sup>2</sup> Their production was prompted by a tragic fire in a department store called À l’Innovation in Brussels on 22 May, in which hundreds of people died.<sup>3</sup> KI responded not by criticising, say, the inadequate attention paid to workers’ and public safety at À l’Innovation, as the store staff’s trade union had done even before the fire.<sup>4</sup> Instead these texts excitedly imagined shops burning in anti-war protests across the world, from the ordinary streets of Los Angeles to West Berlin’s luxury boulevards. These texts, as this chapter will argue, can be read not only as political provocations, but also as manifestations of poetic language.

Above all, the flyers were scandalous for appearing to celebrate destruction and extensive loss of life. In addition, however, in Cold War West Berlin, the presence of department stores, especially the aptly named, prestigious Kaufhaus des Westens [Western Department Store] (KaDeWe), was a powerful statement of defiance towards the Communist East all around. This shopping culture could even take on moral dimensions, as an active expression of what were held to be superior political and societal values. Consequently, the idea of attacks on high-end shops, the flagships of consumer culture, had a particularly sharp symbolic edge.

West Berlin authorities considered the four May flyers inflammatory in more than a figurative sense. Two communards, Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel, were quickly charged and tried for incitement to arson liable to endanger life.<sup>5</sup> In turn, they used their trial to ridicule the judiciary with eye-catching antics in court. After a break in proceedings, Langhans and Teufel were acquitted in 1968. While the court agreed that the flyers could be understood as incitement to arson, the prosecution could not prove beyond doubt that they were intended as such. Therefore KI considered the trial to be a vindication of its position. It also seemed to be a strategic victory in unmasking what philosopher Herbert Marcuse in 1965 had influentially termed the repressive tolerance of capitalist liberal democracy.<sup>6</sup>

KI's profile was already high in May 1967. However, its dramatic trial catapulted it to new levels of disrepute and also contributed to the general escalation of the protest movements. Almost from the group's inception, its actions, statements and gift for publicity had horrified both the public at large and many participating in the protest movements. For instance, the leadership of the most strongly anti-authoritarian student organisation, the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS), distanced itself clearly at times from KI. Nonetheless, the May flyers crystallised a pivotal moment for the West German New Left. In terms of political theory, the flyers underlined a changing emphasis in international and internationalist interests, as some anti-authoritarians started to argue around 1967 that distant Vietnam was less important politically for West Berlin than formation of an anti-capitalist front in the metropolis.<sup>7</sup> And in practice, the May flyers anticipated the movement's increasing openness to direct action.

It is difficult to overstate KI's role in (re-)framing anti-war discourse and action in the Federal Republic (FRG): such works as the May flyers triggered major shifts in culture and communication.<sup>8</sup> The group's impact is reflected, too, by its persistent afterlife. More recent pointers to the group's place in cultural history include, for example, Sophie Dannenberg's highly critical novel of 2004, *Das bleiche Herz der Revolution* [*The Pale Heart of the Revolution*], which takes issue with the protest movements from the next generation's perspective. Fascination with KI is perpetuated by publication of Langhans's autobiographical reflections, as well as his appearances on German television reality shows.<sup>9</sup> KI's extraordinary *oeuvre* and its aftermath are thus central for a cultural history of West German anti-war writing, the broader Extra-Parliamentary Opposition and the post-war Federal Republic itself.



Less evident at first sight is justification for including KI's May flyers in this study of anti-war poetry, on the face of it a very different kind of writing. However, this chapter begins by arguing that in terms of both their heritage and style, these texts stand in *avant-garde*, aesthetic traditions. There follows a commentary on each flyer, which pinpoints why many readers in West Berlin, including anti-war protesters, found them so shocking. The chapter then examines the May flyers using the work of another contemporary political grouping, the Situationist International (SI) and its leading light, philosopher Guy Debord. This context also helps to elucidate their subversive poetics.

This study has argued so far that anti-war sentiment in West Germany found central expression in poetry. Strikingly, this chapter finds that the May flyers have many commonalities with the era's anti-war poems in terms of styles, themes and tropes. This case is supported by close comparison of the May flyers with some representative poems, for example by Erich Fried and others, and their treatment of key themes in the poetry, such as Modernity, technology, gender and apocalypse. Yet the flyers address these preoccupations in different and strange ways; and their disruptive conversation with anti-war poetry, too, can be read through Situationist thought. At the same time, as this chapter contends in conclusion, this nexus invites new readings of the poetry itself.

## **Bombshells: KI and poetic language**

It was originally reported that the tragedy at À l'Innovation claimed as many as 323 lives, although the total is now thought to be 251. Among them were 67 staff members, around half the store's personnel. The cause of the fire was soon confirmed as accidental but some initial news coverage claimed that it had been set by far-left, anti-war protesters. That suspicion was fuelled by the fact that at the time À l'Innovation was running a high-profile 'quinzaine américaine' ['American fortnight'] event – a two-week showcase of US goods which attracted anti-war demonstrations.<sup>10</sup>

To West Berlin activists, accusations that protesters had started the fire were a grave libel, for the anti-war movement was overwhelmingly peaceful at that point.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless these claims were eloquent about fearful contemporary perceptions of the anti-war movement, and KI composed its flyers in response. In court, Langhans and Teufel argued that their aim was satirical. The authorities' reaction to the flyers, they said, highlighted the hypocrisy of West German society. On one hand, it

responded sentimentally to the losses of Brussels, and with horror to the idea that the fire was an act of protest. On the other, it remained indifferent to the daily deaths by fire of countless Vietnamese civilians.

KI's forays into discursive subversion mirror the West German New Left's commitment to what it called the subjective factors of politics, that is, the cultural and symbolic realms. The group's methods also derive in part from its antecedents in unruly Modernist movements of the twentieth century, such as Dada and Surrealism. During KI's trial, when the judge asked defence counsel Horst Mahler what he had in his briefcase, the lawyer remarked 'Keine Bomben' ['no bombs']. Rather, he said, the case contained a different kind of bombshell, namely 'Surrealistische Literatur' ['Surrealist literature']. In his response Mahler was alluding to his legal argument that KI's flyers were artistic texts akin to 'Surrealismus, Pop-Art und Happenings' ['Surrealism, Pop Art and Happenings'], and so not to be taken literally.<sup>12</sup>

Read in such contexts, the May flyers' references to arson are a continuation of avant-garde philosophies which deploy the imagery of revolt and destruction. At Mahler's request, 19 experts wrote reports on the flyers for the court.<sup>13</sup> One of them, critic Reinhard Baumgart, noted parallels with:

Dada, die italienischen Futuristen, den französischen Surrealismus oder die zeitgenössische Happening-Bewegung [...] die sämtlich Aufrufe zur Zerstörung von zivilisatorischen Einrichtungen gebracht haben

['Dada, the Italian Futurists, French Surrealism or the contemporary happening movement [...] all of which have called for the destruction of the institutions of civilisation].<sup>14</sup>

Or, as scholar Sara Hakemi has more recently put it, with reference to the military origins of the term avant-garde, or vanguard, itself:

Die Avantgarde führt Krieg

['The avant-garde wages war'].<sup>15</sup>

Thus the flyers' resemblance to short Modernist forms like experimental prose, collage or concrete poetry are by no means coincidental. In addition, KI and its supporters drew attention to their place in such aesthetic traditions by making the trial of Langhans and Teufel itself look like performance art.<sup>16</sup>

Langhans later stressed the strategic character of this defence. In reference to the expert reports commissioned by Mahler, he noted:

Einige Intellektuelle haben uns zähneknirschend die Stange gehalten, als sie die Gutachten zum Brandstifterprozess verfasst haben. [...] Sie haben versucht, unsere Aktionen zu Kunst zu erklären: *Freiheit der Kunst*, Satire, Dada [...] Sie glaubten an die Kunst – wir nicht. Denn die ist ein Geschäft, das das schlechte Leben erträglicher machen soll. Wir wollten es aber grundlegend verändern. [...]

Was wir mit der Kommune wollten, was wir lebten und was wir glaubten, war: Alle Kunst muss verschwinden. Und wird verschwinden. [...] Deswegen war klar, dass wir versuchen, das ganze Leben zu Kunst zu machen, also wirklich zu leben.

[Some intellectuals backed us up, through gritted teeth, when they wrote the expert reports for the arson trial. [...] They tried to declare our actions to be art: *Artistic Freedom*, satire, Dada [...] They believed in art – we didn't. Because it's a business that's meant to make a bad life more tolerable. But we wanted to change that life completely. [...]

What we wanted to achieve with the commune, what we lived out and what we believed was this: all art has to vanish. And it will. [...] So it was clear to us that we would try to turn all of life into art, that is, really to live].<sup>17</sup>

These remarks closely echo the Weimar-era critic and theorist Walter Benjamin's call of 1934 for a 'Literarisierung aller Lebensverhältnisse' ['literarisation of all the conditions of life'].<sup>18</sup> This demand is absolutely that of the European avant-gardes and so, even as political artefacts, the flyers are simultaneously mobilisations of hybrid, poetic language which aim to transcend the bourgeois notions of art criticised by Langhans. More generally, too, the hallmark of KI's work is ambiguity, traditionally considered an essential characteristic of literature. That association is misleading insofar as ambiguity inhabits all written texts. Nonetheless the flyers stress it especially conspicuously, and so draw attention to their own difficulty. In these respects, for all the implied shortcomings of modern art – including, implicitly, poetry – in the eyes of Langhans and his cohorts, the flyers in a sense join hands with it.

## The language of news: flyer 6

The May flyers form part of a longer series issued by KI, which it later numbered. This retrospective numbering, in which the May flyers, all dated 24 May 1967, appear as numbers 6 through to 9, is adopted here. The first text in the sequence established by KI, flyer 6, is a densely typewritten page under the headline ‘Neue Demonstrationsformen in Brüssel erstmals erprobt’ [‘New styles of demonstration tested for the first time in Brussels’]. It is a mocked-up newspaper report on the Brussels fire, written in an anonymous journalistic voice that proffers no explicit opinions of its own. The text presents dramatic, tabloid-style descriptions of the blaze and its victims. It also includes an interview with the fictional ‘Maurice L. (21)’, from an equally fictional pro-Chinese, Belgian political group called ‘Aktion für Frieden und Völkerfreundschaft’ [‘Action for Peace and Friendship Between Peoples’].<sup>19</sup>

Maurice claims he started the fire to illustrate the terrible realities of the Vietnam War, which are normally hidden in Western Europe by manipulative media. He explains in detail how his group prepared for the attack in the days before. For example, they perpetrated a bomb hoax and distributed flyers

die auf die Zustände in Vietnam hinwiesen und empfahlen, die Ausstellung [amerikanischer Waren] im Kaufhaus À l’Innovation ‘hochgehen’ zu lassen

[which referenced conditions in Vietnam and recommended ‘blowing up’ the display [of American goods] in the department store À l’Innovation].

As a result, store staff and shoppers became desensitised to warning signs of the impending arson. The report goes on to describe the fire as follows:

Das Kaufhaus glich einem Flammen- und Rauchmeer; unter den Menschen brach eine Panik aus, bei der viele zertrampelt wurden; einige fielen wie brennende Fackeln aus den Fenstern; andere sprangen kopflos auf die Straße und schlugen zerschmettert auf; Augenzeugen berichteten: ‘Es war ein Bild der Apokalypse’; viele erstickten schreiend.

[The department store resembled a sea of flames and smoke; panic broke out among the people, in which many were trampled; some fell from the windows like burning torches; others lost their heads

and leapt from the windows down to the street, their bodies shattering on impact; eye witnesses reported: ‘It was a vision of the apocalypse’; many screamed as they suffocated].

The report ends by stating that although all indications point to arson, police refuse to comment for fear that this new protest method may be adopted elsewhere, ‘nicht nur in Belgien’ [‘not only in Belgium’].

The flyer has a convincing feel, derived not only from its fluent adoption of tabloid language. Maurice’s preparations for the arson reflect real-life protest actions which took place around À l’Innovation before the fire. In addition, as Hakemi points out, his detailed account reads like barely veiled instructions for aspiring real-life arsonists.<sup>20</sup> The flyer’s claim that the police fear copycat actions thus seems disturbingly realistic. For West Berliners, this account could support the prosecution’s claim that the flyers cynically disregarded human life because Maurice does not reflect on his victims. The report’s narrative voice seems equally uninterested in them, reducing the fire to a sensational spectacle.

## The language of advertising: flyer 7

Flyer 7 is topped by a banner headline which mimics the endless repetition of advertising slogans:

NEU ! UNKONVENTIONELL ! NEU ! UNKONVENTIONELL ! NEU ! UNK  
Warum brennst Du, Konsument?

NEU ! ATEMBERAUBEND ! NEU ! ATEMBERAUBEND ! NEU !  
ATEMBER

[NEW ! UNCONVENTIONAL ! NEW ! UNCONVENTIONAL ! NEW ! UNC  
Consumer, why are you burning?

NEW ! BREATHTAKING ! NEW ! BREATHTAKING ! NEW ! BREATH]

The ironic emphasis on novelty references the name À l’Innovation, while the gerund ‘ATEMBERAUBEND’ [‘BREATHTAKING’] plays on the shocking image of death by suffocation in a fire. The text’s main body admires American enterprise around the world and extols US products, stating:

Coca Cola und Hiroshima, das deutsche Wirtschaftswunder und der vietnamesische Krieg, die Freie Universität und die Universität von Teheran sind die faszinierenden und erregenden Leistungen und

weltweit bekannten Gütezeichen amerikanischen Tatendrangs und amerikanischen Erfindergeists; weben [sic] diesseits und jenseits von Mauer und Stacheldraht für freedom und democracy.

[Coca-Cola and Hiroshima, the German Economic Miracle and the Vietnamese War, the Free University and the University of Tehran are fascinating and exciting achievements and world-renowned quality marks of the American enterprising spirit and American inventive genius; they are advertisements for freedom and democracy on either side of the wall and the barbed wire].

US interventions in Vietnam, Hiroshima, Germany and Iran are imagined as world-beating consumer products like Coca-Cola, extolled by daring advertising campaigns. Thus US support for Cold War West Germany and West Berlin is not motivated by selfless imperatives like a commitment to liberty, as politicians and others might claim. Rather, that support is driven by the self-interest of the market.

Just as clever publicity brings the thrill of US brands direct to European consumers, the Brussels fire promotes the most exciting American commodity yet, the Vietnam conflict, and makes it an amazing reality for Belgian shoppers. The conflagration is described in satirical terms as a 'neue[r] gag in der vielseitigen Geschichte amerikanischer Werbemethoden' ['new gimmick in the multifaceted history of American advertising techniques'], and the flyer enthuses:

Ein brennendes Kaufhaus mit brennenden Menschen vermittelte zum erstenmal in einer europäischen Großstadt jenes knisternde Vietnamgefühl (dabeizusein und mitzubrennen), das wir in Berlin bislang noch missen müssten.

[For the first time, a burning department store with burning people communicated that red-hot Vietnam feeling (being there, and burning along), which we've had to miss out on in Berlin to date].

This imagery is in keeping with the way in which advertising is used to sell not only products, but also desirable experiences and emotions. The text's greatest, most exciting offer is consequently not a specific, material consumer object, but the commodified 'knisternde[s] Vietnamgefühl' ['red-hot Vietnam feeling'] available to shoppers. The narrative goes on to reflect:

Skeptiker mögen davor warnen, 'König Kunde' den Konsumenten [...] einfach zu verbrennen. [...]

So sehr wir den Schmerz der Hinterbliebenen in Brüssel mitempfinden: wir, die wir dem Neuen aufgeschlossen sind, können, solange das rechte Maß nicht überschritten wird, dem Kühnen und Unkonventionellen, das bei aller menschlichen Tragik in Brüsseler Kaufhaus steckt, unserer Bewunderung nicht versagen.

[Sceptics might caution against simply burning to death the customer who is always right. [...]]

Much as we feel the pain of the bereaved of Brussels: because we are open to novelty, as long as it doesn't go too far, we cannot deny our admiration of the boldness and unconventionality of the Brussels store, for all its tragedy].

The text pays lip service to the lives lost, yet breezily accepts them as collateral damage in the service of advertising. It concludes that anti-war demonstrators could not have set the fire, for they are 'weltfremde junge Leute' ['unworldly young people'] who fail to grasp 'unsere dynamisch-amerikanische Wirklichkeit' ['our dynamic American reality'].

Most shocking is this text's apparent praise of hundreds of deaths, instrumentalised as successful advertising. In addition, many readers would have been alarmed by its explicit attacks on US foreign policy beyond the Vietnam War. Especially provocative are the seamless alignment of US actions in Iran or Vietnam with the US's Cold War support of West Germany and West Berlin, and the claim that all these enterprises they are driven by business interests. This idea dovetails with the increasingly anti-capitalist tone of anti-war protest in the later 1960s, complemented by arguments that the real purpose of the Vietnam conflict was not to defend freedom, but to boost the arms industry.<sup>21</sup> Because West Berlin depended on the presence of the Allies, especially the US, for its security, such critique was especially controversial and feared.

## The language of protest: flyer 8

Flyer 8 is titled 'Wann brennen die Berliner Kaufhäuser?' ['When Will Berlin's Department Stores Burn?']. It is presented as a more conventional, if extreme, anti-authoritarian flyer in the voice of West Berlin activists

who support the imagined Belgian arsonists. The main text opens with the only representation in KI's flyers of the Vietnam conflict itself. It notes laconically:

Bisher krepieren die Amis in Vietnam für Berlin. Uns gefiel es nicht, daß diese armen Schweine ihr Cocolablut im vietnamesischen Dschungel verspritzen mußten.

[So far, the Yanks bought it in Vietnam, for the sake of Berlin. We weren't happy that these poor sods had to shed their Coca-Cola blood in the Vietnamese jungle].

The flyer then puts forward a critical retrospective of West Berlin's anti-war protest to date and its methods, and finds them wanting. These practices include going on marches, throwing eggs at the Amerikahaus (a major if isolated scandal that had occurred in 1966) and even KI's own very recent plan for a 'Pudding-Attentat' ['custard pie attack']. That action was to be a fake, slapstick assault on US Vice-President Hubert H. Humphrey's motorcade as he toured West Berlin during an official visit at Easter 1967. While this project was foiled in advance by the police, it garnered considerable media attention for KI, which the group welcomed. The flyer goes on to hint that the next action in this sequence might be a violent castration of the Shah of Iran on his upcoming visit to West Berlin.<sup>22</sup>

According to flyer 8, however, the Belgian arsonists' approach is more effective:

Unsere belgischen Freunde haben endlich den Dreh heraus, die Bevölkerung am lustigen Treiben in Vietnam wirklich zu beteiligen

[Our Belgian friends have finally got the hang of letting the public participate in the fun and games of Vietnam for real].

The flyer then observes that as activists

zünden ein Kaufhaus an, dreihundert saturierte Bürger beenden ihr aufregendes Leben und Brüssel wird Hanoi

[set a department store alight, three hundred smug, well-heeled citizens' exciting lives come to an end and Brussels becomes Hanoi].



That is to say, unlike peaceful protest, this lived experience of fire can reveal the real truth about Vietnam. As a result:

Keiner von uns braucht mehr Tränen über das arme vietnamesische Volk bei der Frühstückszeitung zu vergiessen. Ab heute geht er in die Konfektionsabteilung von KaDeWe, Hertie, Woolworth, Bilka oder Neckermann und zündet sich direkt eine Zigarette in der Ankleidekabine an.

[Now none of us needs to shed any more tears for the poor Vietnamese people over our morning papers. From today, anyone can go to the clothing department of the KaDeWe, Hertie, Woolworth, Bilka or Neckermann and just light a cigarette in the changing room].

This passage could be an instruction to activists who want to abandon the painful position of a powerless newspaper consumer. It suggests that they can take direct action by setting fires in any of the stores listed, which span the retail spectrum from the grand KaDeWe to such inexpensive alternatives as Bilka. This flyer thus jauntily presents the real deaths in Brussels as the (perfectly acceptable) price of effective resistance against the war.

The text of the flyer concludes:

Wenn es irgendwo brennt in der nächsten Zeit [...] seid bitte nicht überrascht. Genausowenig wie beim Überschreiten der Demarkationslinie durch die Amis, der Bombardierung des Stadtzentrums von Hanoi, dem Einmarsch der Marines nach China  
Brüssel hat uns die einzige Antwort darauf gegeben:

Burn, ware-house, burn !

[If there's a fire somewhere any time soon [...] don't be surprised. Just as you shouldn't be when the Yanks cross the demarcation line, Hanoi city centre gets bombed, the Marines invade China

Brussels has provided the only answer:

Burn, ware-house, burn !]

Here, the anti-authoritarian voice is declaring that it will respond to the US's military violence with acts of arson. In so doing, it assertively announces a militant position that marks out a significant distance from the anti-war movement's traditional pacifist roots and casts itself as a major player in global politics, equally matched with the US.

The term 'ware-house' may be a clumsy translation of the German noun 'Warenhaus' or department store. If this is the case, the flyer's parting shot references unrest in the US itself, namely the turmoil of August 1965 in and around the Watts district of Los Angeles, a predominantly Black area. These events were triggered by a confrontation between a young African-American man and police and highlighted severe racial divisions. Events escalated quickly and within a few days, according to historian Jeanne Theoharis:

[t]hirty-four people died, and hundreds were injured, many at the hands of the police; 14,000 National Guardsmen had been called out and 4000 black people had been arrested. Forty-five million dollars' worth of property had been damaged.<sup>23</sup>

There was news of looting and people on the street cheering blazing buildings with the call 'Burn, baby! Burn!' This slogan had been reported critically in the West German press less than two years before, and so would have been recognisable for many of KI's readers in May 1967.<sup>24</sup> Thus flyer 8 may have further alarmed readers by depicting West Berlin as a second Watts.

The implicit reference to Watts highlights KI's interest in US countercultures, especially African-American politics, a development characteristic of wider West German anti-authoritarianism.<sup>25</sup> Even more controversially, this allusion shored up the impression that KI supported violent confrontation with US authorities. In the febrile atmosphere of West Berlin, the theme of deadly social unrest conjured the ever-proximate spectre of civil or inter-German war. It seemed to confirm some readers' fears about protesters as dangerous people who welcomed violence and did not care about its human cost. Many anti-war protesters would also have been horrified at the flyer's grotesque, megalomaniac caricature of violent anti-war activism. The flyer thus cut too close to the bone for multiple readerships and it may be for these reasons that, according to communist Dieter Kunzelmann (who later claimed authorship of this particular text), it triggered 'besondere Empörung' ['particular indignation'].<sup>26</sup>

## Poetic language: flyer 9

While flyers 6, 7 and 8 are clearly and fairly accurately typed, untitled flyer 9 is handwritten in capitals. It also includes hand-drawn shapes. The short text is a spiral, starting at the paper's outer edge and circling

tightly inwards. Individual phrases are separated by five-pointed stars, rather than by traditional punctuation. At the end of the text, in the centre of the spiral, is a large, comma-like form. The flyer makes conspicuous use of alliteration and repetition, with its final words generating an euphonious sense of iambic metre, broken up by a dactyl. Its content and imagery are associative, impressionistic and rather enigmatic. In formal terms, then, this flyer contrasts strikingly with the others. And while flyers 6, 7 and 8 adopt the language of the press, advertising and protest respectively, flyer 9 seems to speak in the voice of poetry.

Flyer 9 appears to praise the Brussels fire as a

REVOLUTION IN ROSE REVOLUTION IN ROT

[REVOLUTION IN ROSE REVOLUTION IN RED].

The text describes mink coats flying through 'FLAMMENDES ROT' ['FLAMING RED'] onto the street, to lie there for the taking by Brussels housewives. According to the flyer, this fire fosters

DAS VÖLLIG NEUE REVOLUTIONIERENDE GEFÜHL

[THAT ALL-NEW REVOLUTIONISING FEELING].

At the same time, the flames are

DIE HÖCHSTENTWICKELTE PROPAGANDA FÜR JOHNSON [*sic*]  
VIETNAM-POLITIK

[THE MOST ADVANCED PROPAGANDA FOR JOHNSON [*sic*]  
VIETNAM POLICY].

Finally, the flyer suggests that this exhilarating rose-red revolution is available to anyone who can get their hands on a bottle of the flammable domestic gas propane.

BEI KEPÄ UND KA-DE-WEH

[AT KEPÄ AND KA-DE-WEH].

The mink coats flying through flames recall news reports of shop and emergency services personnel in Brussels throwing valuable furs out of upper windows in an at-risk store next to À l'Innovation as it burned, in

an attempt to save the stock.<sup>27</sup> Repeated reference to shades of red evokes the distinctive shade of containers used to store propane gas.<sup>28</sup>

The phrase ‘Revolution in rosé’ [‘Revolution in rose’] is taken from a contemporary advertising slogan for Pril washing-up liquid, itself reminiscent of French working-class star Edith Piaf’s hit *chanson La Vie en rose* [Life in Pink] (1947), still familiar in the 1960s. Both Pril and propane were no doubt for sale in stores such as KaDeWe and Kepa.<sup>29</sup> Since Kepa was a low-cost arm of the Karstadt department store chain, the flyer suggests that experience of fire could be available from the luxury to the budget ends of the retail scale: that is, an all-encompassing commodity. The flyer closes with a play on the name KaDeWe, in which the homonym ‘WEH’ [‘woe’ or ‘pain’] suggests warning, pain or sorrow.

Flyer 9 reprises from flyer 7 the idea of the burning department store as an advertisement for the Vietnam War which brings its excitement home. At the same time, however, it offers further critical commentary on marketing. Flyer 9 draws attention to the Pril slogan’s exploitation of demotic culture (*La Vie en rose*) and the vocabulary of revolution (‘REVOLUTION IN ROSE’) in the service of capitalism.<sup>30</sup> The advertising industry’s (literal) domestication and neutralisation of the idea of revolution is marked by the shift from a traditional red to a more charming, feminine rose. Citation of this slogan highlights the hypocritical incorporation of radical ideas by commerce, another concern that KI shared with Benjamin.<sup>31</sup> Even as capitalist institutions condemn revolutionary politics, the commune claimed, such institutions shamelessly co-opt its language for profit. There is also a suggestion that even as these institutions condemn shoplifting or looting, they are not above pilfering the language of revolt. In retaliation, flyer 9 defiantly snatches that language back from the jaws of advertising by re-appropriating the Pril slogan. By combining it with images of violence and crime, flyer 9 makes it unfit for future marketing purposes.

From flyers 6 and 8, flyer 9 draws the idea of arson in shops as revolutionary action. Its reference to propane gas serves to complement the other flyers’ apparent practical instructions on how to start fires effectively in West Berlin stores. To this explosive mix, flyer 9 adds and makes explicit the motif of revolutionary looting, implicitly evoked in flyer 8’s allusion to Watts. In flyer 9’s euphoric representation of the burning department store, luxury goods like mink coats are suddenly available to all, even, it is implied, to normally law-abiding housewives. Looting is depicted as a powerful, democratising strike against both retail institutions in particular and capitalism in general.

Former communist Ulrich Enzensberger later described flyer 9's curious form as a 'Rauchwirbel' ['smoke spiral'].<sup>32</sup> This interpretation fuses with another, namely that the text is a ludic visual rendering of the idea of a (permanent) revolution, going round and round in a quite literal sense. As such, it is in keeping with KI's key strategy of taking figurative language literally, with sometimes startling results. Yet even as flyer 9 foregrounds the buzz of fiery, smoky uprising, it also addresses a theme noticeably absent from the other flyers, namely human suffering. Recurrent reference to the colour red suggests not only communist revolution and propane gas, but also danger and bloodshed.

Teufel refused to specify during his trial whether the odd shape at the centre of flyer 9 represented a teardrop or a drop of blood; but either possibility points to pain.<sup>33</sup> At one level, allusion in the text to 'ROSE-GRAUEN WOLKEN' ('rose-grey clouds') evokes the colours of smoke. However, on another it plays on double meanings: 'GRAUEN' can also be a noun or a verb, both of which signify horror. Similarly, the concluding pun on 'WEH' ('woe' or 'pain') underlines suffering. In this sense, flyer 9 stands to an extent apart from the others in the series; it openly mixes pleasure, liberation and harm, a dimension that renders its praise of fire all the more disturbing. So too does the expression of such ideas in a form that recalls lyric poetry, a kind of writing more traditionally seen as a haven from political strife.

## KI / SI

One lens through which KI's May flyers may compellingly be interpreted is Situationist thought.<sup>34</sup> The SI activated ideas from aesthetic and unorthodox Marxist traditions and was a major influence on the 1960s protest movements, most prominently in France.<sup>35</sup> At KI's trial, neither Mahler nor the defendants mentioned the SI. Nor is there any explicit evidence in KI's writings that it responded deliberately or systematically to the SI.<sup>36</sup> However, there are direct biographical and philosophical links between the groups. Both descended in part from avant-garde artistic movements; they accordingly shared interests in analysing cultural phenomena and undertaking provocative, symbolic actions far removed from traditional left-wing practices.

Moreover, to seek specific references to the SI in KI's work is to misunderstand its syncretic, expressly anti-theoretical *modus operandi*. As historian Martin Klimke notes, West German anti-authoritarians at times inserted Situationist thinking into a distinctive 'revolutionary amalgam' of

various philosophical and political influences.<sup>37</sup> Like some of its contemporaries, then, KI was involved in the extensive if often unattributed circulation of ideas directly or indirectly inspired by the SI, a process which would, in turn, have tallied with that group's own philosophy.

Resonant here is Debord's perception of the modern, capitalist world as a place in which illusory emotional experience can be derived only from advertising, consumption and shopping. Debord describes the extreme alienation of modern consumer capitalism as a spectacle, an ubiquitous display of affluence and consumer fantasy. People are so mesmerised by it, he argues, that they become passive spectators in their own lives, trapped in an extensive web of mendacious images and cut off from real experience. In Situationist terms, the eye-popping celebration of US products in *À l'Innovation* in May 1967, featuring elaborate parades, events and musicians, as well as large-scale advertising, would be a perfect expression of the spectacle.

Debord's essay 'The decline and fall of the spectacle-commodity economy' (1965) argues that:

now for the first time it is not poverty but material abundance which must be dominated according to new laws. (156)

As the work's title suggests, it deploys the key notion of the spectacle and relates it explicitly to August 1965 in Watts.<sup>38</sup> It seems no coincidence that Watts borders Hollywood, the ultimate source of the spectacle; Debord argues that the youths of Watts have learned to reject this illusion and seek instead to take control of it for themselves. The importance of their actions lies in their dissident interpretation of the spectacle, for they 'take modern capitalist propaganda, its publicity of abundance, *literally*. They want to possess *immediately* all the objects shown and *use* them' (155). This move is not a naive misunderstanding, but a liberating strategy. Debord goes on to observe that:

In taking the capitalist spectacle at its face value, the blacks are already rejecting the spectacle itself. [...] It is supposed not to be taken literally, but to be followed at just a few paces' distance; when this distance is abolished, the mystification becomes evident.<sup>39</sup> (157)

In their actions, the people of Watts are:

daring to demand [...] the right to really *live*. In the final analysis they want nothing less than the total subversion of this society. (154)

According to Debord, these subjects realise that to take the promises of the spectacle at face value is to unveil its deceit. In turn, the public character of looting makes this insight clear to everyone. The events at Watts are therefore a crucial anti-capitalist moment because they show that the spectacle can be replaced by action, immediacy and pleasure. In other words, looters enact a joyous 'festival' (155) and 'the positive supersession of the spectacle' (160). Their actions are thus, in Debord's words, 'the first step of an immense struggle, infinite in its implications' (156).

'The decline and fall of the spectacle-commodity economy' would not have been known specifically to many recipients of the May flyers, which were issued some 18 months after Debord's essay was published. KI put its thoughts about consumer capitalism differently from Debord too, and so subterranean are the connections between these works that even readers familiar with the SI would not necessarily have spotted them. Nonetheless, KI explicitly shared the French philosopher's interest in the notion of spectacle.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the commune worked with a comparable critical analysis of a society which is paradoxically as poor as it is rich, and fixated on consumption enforced by malign media and advertising. More specifically, the May flyers and Debord's essay have a common interest in Watts and propose looting as effective political action. Furthermore, just as Debord debates the subversive potential of play between literal and figurative meanings, so do the flyers draw power from their unpredictable, disturbing shifts between apparent references to real and metaphorical fires.

In more general terms too, the May flyers chime with Situationist ideas. For example, their distribution in the street echoes the SI's practice of *dérive* or drift.<sup>41</sup> *Dérive* describes the aimless exploration of a city, normally on foot, which opens up participants to its symbolic possibilities and induces new states of mind. The flyers are designed to circulate within an urban environment in highly individualised, often haphazard ways, depending on the person who holds them, and to create opportunities for edgy thinking along the way. Along with their perplexed, alarmed or excited readers, the flyers can themselves be said to undertake a *dérive*.

Likewise, the classic Situationist textual technique of *détournement* can be brought to bear on the flyers. *Détournement* is a parodic representational strategy which takes and repurposes elements of the spectacle in order to undermine it.<sup>42</sup> The expression 'Burn baby! Burn!' in Watts is an example of this process. It was originally the catchphrase of a local African-American radio soul/R&B DJ, Magnificent Montague.<sup>43</sup>

Montague later explained that it had nothing to do with real fire or violence but was simply 'a way of signifying that rare, glorious, sanctified moment in which a record or anything else had taken its art to a new level' (4–5). As a result:

When Watts went up in flames [...] [people] triumphantly screamed the most evident and analogous and hip thing at hand: 'Burn, baby!' (5)

Consequently, for the authorities, Montague's catchphrase was a call to arson. In time, KI's flyer 8 undertook a further *détournement* of Montague's slogan, changing its meaning anew for West Berlin.

In this series of (mis)appropriations, Montague's saying took on new meanings. Applied to a burning building, it might be suggesting that destruction by fire is beautiful, like a song. These words might then redefine the blaze as an artwork comparable to a hit record, so challenging auratic or commercialised notions about art, as well as the common view that burning buildings are horrific. Or, when repeated by the authorities, the slogan implied that Montague himself had incited or endorsed the fires, albeit perhaps indirectly. But these re-purposings of his statement about music were all unauthorised and in a sense they resemble discursive looting of his intellectual property. For Montague himself they were distressing, for he believed of those who used his words in these ways: 'they've got it all wrong'. Instead, he 'wanted [his] listeners' hearts to burn, not their homes' (2). Indeed, he expressed 'horror' (5) at these misleading new usages, which contributed to the end of his DJ career.

Above and beyond this example, the May flyers are also an extensive series of *détournements*. Each one satirically adopts the diction of a familiar textual genre, such as journalism, advertising and anti-authoritarian polemic. Yet the flyers' apparent praise of murderous destruction is at odds with readers' expectations of those genres, while at the same time, and even more scandalously, they reveal unpalatable truths about the discourses in question. For example, flyer 6 shines a light on the duplicitous language of tabloid media, which claim to be saddened by the many deaths in Brussels even as they benefit from selling lurid stories about them. Flyer 7's description of the Brussels fire in the language of marketing implies that the spectacle blinds people to their real needs, that is to say, it is interested rather in profits at any cost. The flyers thus indict through mockery the genuinely inhumane discourses they ape, rendering KI's demystifying *détournements* shocking in their very truthfulness.



By contrast, flyers 8 and 9 do not speak in the voices of authority or commerce. Flyer 8 seems unequivocally to call for arson in the voice of West Berlin activists, while flyer 9 praises looting and revolution, SI-style. However, juxtaposition with the evidently parodic flyers 6 and 7 opens up the possibility that flyer 8 is not an earnest expression of the commune's real intentions either, especially since flyer 7 explicitly ridicules the idea that anti-war protesters could be arsonists at all. Rather, flyer 8's offensive defiance starts to look like a kind of knowing self-caricature. Simultaneously, it may be mimicry of what readers might expect the commune to say, an ironic play on the era's prejudices about radical protest. Flyer 9 is the most difficult of these texts to read, mixing as it does overblown revolutionary rhetoric, the language of advertising and poetic language: it is, perhaps, simultaneous *détournement* of all three.

When the flyers are taken as a sequence, further possible interpretations emerge. KI's retrospective numbering proposes an overarching narrative in which arsonist Maurice's words and actions are appropriated first by newspapers, then by advertising agencies. The flyers thus reveal that not only political violence, but also capitalism's profitable instrumentalisation of it are spreading like wildfire. Flyer 8 claims that all protest methods to date, including KI's own 'Pudding-Attentat' of just a few weeks previously, have already become obsolete. On this logic, so too would any attempt at imitating the Brussels fire, which has already got old. As the permanent revolution of flyer 9 suggests, new forms have continually to be found. In this interpretation, flyer 8's belated, supposedly anti-authoritarian call to emulate Maurice is derivative and not to be taken seriously.

However, to read the flyers in this numeric sequence is problematic, not only because it was applied retrospectively. This reading overlooks the uses of the flyers in practice, for they were likely to be read individually, piecemeal or in any number of permutations by recipients as they were passed around in the public space. Therefore, attempts at establishing clear narrative development from one flyer to the next are dogged by contradiction. For all these reasons, and more, the May flyers offer disturbing reading experiences. Taken individually, the discrepancies in each text between signature, style and content are so dissonant that nothing in them is as it first seems. As a series, the flyers do not tell a clear story either. They are open to all kinds of meanings and their Situationist-style *détournements* confound interpretation.

## In the jungles of Brussels: representing Modernity

The many ambiguities in KI's May flyers highlight their status as difficult language, and so, more unexpectedly, their similarities with many of the era's anti-war poems. They also share specific tropes and themes with the poetry to a startling degree, as this chapter will now reveal. In all these texts, the most prevalent symbol of the war is fire. Flyers and poems express disapproval of media that sensationalise and minimise the daily tragedies of Vietnam. Present in both groups of texts is a related figure, the European newspaper reader who is horrified by coverage about the war, for example in Erich Fried's emblematic poetry collection *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte [and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems]* (1966).<sup>44</sup> In fact, so prominent is this character or speaker in anti-war discourse that Günter Grass's anti-protest poem 'In Ohnmacht gefallen' (1967) singles it out for derision.<sup>45</sup> In KI's flyer 8 too, the European reader weeps in useless distress over the morning news. However, in a departure from the poems, the flyer suggests that s/he should replace ineffectual imaginings with lived experience, and so set fire to shops. As a result, there is no further need to agonise over faraway Vietnam because the Western European metropolis will itself become Hanoi.

The poetry, like the flyers, often embeds thoughts about Vietnam in wider critique of the US and its foreign policy. Representation of US forces, too, is similar in both groups of texts. In the poetry, US personnel in Vietnam appear most frequently as non-individuated, unfeeling figures.<sup>46</sup> That characterisation is encoded in the term 'Ledernacken', which is occasionally used in telling ways, as in Reimar Lenz's satirical poem 'Also sprach Lyndon B. Johnson' ['Thus Spake Lyndon B. Johnson'] (1966).<sup>47</sup> Here the poem's purported speaker, US President Johnson, makes the opening declaration in grandiose, faux-Nietzschean tones:

Ich aber künde Euch die Ledernackenfreiheit

[But I bring you tidings of leatherneck liberty].

The rest of the poem develops the satirical motif further, with reference to violent US foreign policy. The expression 'Ledernacken' is a translation of 'leatherneck', often used positively to denote the US Marines and said to have referred originally to a leather collar which was once part of their uniform.<sup>48</sup> However, in the West German poetry it has only connotations of brutality, and it recalls the idea of the neurotically armoured, aggressive

self which features in psychoanalytically-inspired contemporary analyses of the war.<sup>49</sup> This image also suggests a dying away of humanity, since tough leather is the skin of a dead creature, transferred here from an article of uniform to the insensitive soldier himself. And because the soldier's body and uniform are thus condensed, he becomes an assemblage of lifeless, standard-issue parts.

That theme of reification is related to the poems' wider representation of US military action as a dehumanising, fiery assault, especially by means of air raids, napalm and hi-tech weaponry. This equipment allows assailants to maximise damage without encountering their victims or their conscience. An example is Kurt Sigel's 'Pilotengespräch' ['Pilot Talk'] (1966), in which two pilots return exhilarated from a successful sortie without reflecting on the deaths they inflicted.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, modern armaments limit the servicemen's agency, or even render it superfluous, as in Arnfrid Astel's 'Neue Waffe' ['New Weapon'] (1968), which disconnects the soldier from his weapon entirely.<sup>51</sup> This topos in the poetry is underpinned by preoccupation with alienating technology and the war itself as both an instrument and a product of alienation more generally. Because that technology is American, the poetry aligns with a strand of German cultural tradition which characterises the US's machine age itself as 'monstrous', as literary critic Gregory Divers puts it.<sup>52</sup>

Flyer 8 represents US soldiers as 'arme Schweine' ['poor sods'] shedding Coca-Cola blood in the jungle. One way of interpreting this turn of phrase is as a suggestion that the soldiers have drunk so much Coca-Cola it has replaced their blood. This choice of product is not coincidental, since Coca-Cola was commonly used as a signifier for US capitalist culture in the 1960s, for example in the work of French New Wave film-maker Jean-Luc Godard and indeed the SI.<sup>53</sup> But on another level, the image of Coca-Cola blood is like that of the leather neck, because it transforms the soldiers' bodies through synecdoche into something inhuman and non-living. However, while leather is an organic substance, Coca-Cola is artificial and so even further removed from any natural state of being. In addition, it is a commodity, so when it becomes the soldiers' lifeblood, it is implied that consuming Coca-Cola and all it stands for has in turn consumed the soldiers themselves. Consequently, the servicemen too become consumable products.

There is even a hint here that the modern capitalism that drives the Vietnam War is cannibalistic, because Coca-Cola is intended for humans to drink. In this vision US personnel are not so much cruel, inhuman(e) agents as victims themselves. Yet because they are entirely objectified,

they are not subject to any real compassion.<sup>54</sup> They may be described, in a rather offhand way, as ‘arme Schweine’, suggesting a degree of sympathy, but that impression is soon undercut with irony.

Simultaneously, the May flyers explore a different yet cognate manifestation of alienating and combustible Modernity, namely the department store. As Rachel Bowlby observes in her cultural history of shopping, ‘[t]he department store [...] is one of the emblems of nineteenth-century modernity’ (9). She also notes that in the 1960s the department store could, like other modern phenomena, be seen in an ambivalent light. Confirming this argument, contemporary coverage of the Brussels fire in the mainstream magazine *Paris Match* described it as follows:

‘L’Innovation’, avec ses 24 000 mètres carrés de surface de vente et ses 8 000 mètres carrés d’entrepôts, l’orgueilleux magasin aux 30 millions de chiffre d’affaires quotidien, n’est plus qu’un immense brasier, qu’un immense four crématoire où se consomment trois cents pauvres morts. Victimes d’un fléau monstrueux, révoltant. Et cependant – quelles que soient les responsabilités en cause – victimes d’un certain progrès. Victimes de la société de consommation, avec ses risques que nous devons admettre au même titre que ceux de l’autoroute ou de l’avion.

[‘L’Innovation’, with its 24,000 square metres of shopping floors and 8,000 square metres of storerooms, the proud store with a daily turnover of 30 million, was reduced to an enormous blaze, an enormous crematorium oven where 300 poor people were burning. Victims of a monstrous, shocking calamity. And yet – whatever caused the event – victims of a kind of progress. Victims of consumer society, with the risks it entails and which we need to acknowledge, just as we acknowledge those associated with motorways or aeroplanes].<sup>55</sup>

Here, the outsize department store is perceived to be as much a part of modern life as the aeroplane or the car and potentially just as dangerous, even monstrous.

The 1960s could also be more explicitly critical of retail culture. Bowlby points out that for the European imagination, the department store’s twentieth-century successor,

[t]he supermarket, massive and materialistic, figures as an American invention subsequently exported to Europe. (9)

In 1960s critiques of consumerism, ‘the supermarket took on dramatically negative appearances, as a “jungle” or “trap”’ (10), and such views resonate with KI’s flyers. While À l’Innovation was a department store, culturally coded as European, rather than a US-style supermarket, its ‘quinzaine américaine’ clearly links it to the US. The image Bowlby cites of the modern store as a jungle is remarkably reminiscent of flyer 8’s description of the Vietnamese jungle as a site where injured US bodies shed not blood but Coca-Cola, a premier consumer product. Here a suspect, Americanised Modernity is embodied in the spectacular promotion of US products in a large store, just as it is in the hostilities in Vietnam, and the differences between these two loci seem to erode.

So, even as the flyers share with anti-war poetry a critique of a US-inflected, monstrous Modernity, they apparently demand a different response. For many poets, the destructive deployment of alienating US technology in Vietnam must stop forthwith because it dehumanises people and causes murderous conflagrations. By contrast, KI’s texts seem to advocate re-creating the burning jungle in the continental metropolis. In the flyers’ view, the war can end only if its fires first spread across the world.

## ‘REVOLUTION IN ROSE’: Violence, victimhood and gender

Fried’s poem ‘Das Land’ [‘The Land’] is of particular note for this book on anti-war poetry because it opens and sets the scene for *und VIETNAM und* in some detail. The poem describes an unnamed, war-torn country which readers can easily identify as the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), or South Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> The poem is distinctive for parodying the style of a tourist guidebook, in which bland, misleading and sometimes appalling descriptions of wartime events are presented as tourist attractions. For example, it describes the burning bodies of Vietnamese people as a local type of cuisine. At the same time, Fried’s poem exemplifies key features of the wider poetry, such as its predominant representation of Vietnamese people, even partisans, as doomed or dead.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, the May flyers barely register Vietnamese subjects, apart from a dismissive, sarcastic reference in flyer 8 to ‘das arme vietnamesische Volk’ [‘the poor Vietnamese people’]. Instead, they focus on victims of fire in Europe. While flyer 8’s implicitly cannibalistic image of Coca-Cola blood spilling

in the jungle recalls Fried's horrific culinary imagery, the victims are not Vietnamese, but US personnel.

Also typical in 'Das Land' is the specific attention paid to girls and women as victims of the war. The poem mentions brothels and, immediately afterwards, lightweight coffins for girls or women, a detail that suggests a link between sexual exploitation and violent death, all at the hands of US forces. In this respect 'Das Land' connects with a wider trend, more conspicuous in other poems, of gendering aggression and victimhood as, respectively, masculine and feminine.<sup>58</sup> Likewise, the May flyers subtly preserve that gendering of action and passivity, for in the few cases where the flyers name individuals, for instance Maurice L. or President Johnson, they are men, so suggesting that they, and not women, make history. Conversely, at an unspoken level, the flyers' imagined victims of arson in stores are women for, as Bowlby points out, 'the history of shopping is largely a history of women' (7).<sup>59</sup>

Such an idea is based on traditional reliance in retail on female staff and shoppers, and is supported by media reports on the Brussels fire. Contemporary coverage shows clearly that both male and female staff and customers were affected by the blaze at À l'Innovation, not to mention children. Nonetheless, there is especial emphasis in some such discourse on women's experiences, and some news photographs in particular allude to the gendered character of the department store.<sup>60</sup> For instance, pictures of burning feminine mannequins are a terrible, transferred allusion to the real deaths of women.<sup>61</sup>

The best-known images of the tragedy are those taken by Alain Pierrard and others of a smartly dressed woman, later identified as survivor Monique Lenssens, jumping from a precarious ledge outside the burning building's fifth floor.<sup>62</sup> Pierrard's photographs appeared in large format on the front pages of the West German and West Berlin tabloids *Bild* and *BZ* and defined perceptions of the tragedy.<sup>63</sup> One feature of these images which drew particular attention is the large, distinctive handbag Lenssens held, even as she jumped. This handbag took on a cultural life of its own, to the extent that Lenssens was subsequently photographed with it placed prominently on her hospital bed.<sup>64</sup> As a result she came to be known, even 50 years on, as 'la dame au sac' ['the lady with the bag'].

This interest was inspired no doubt partly because the handbag made Lenssens visually noticeable in the photographs. In addition,

however, it plays into stereotypes about women and retail. According to Bowlby, women shoppers in the 1960s and later could be caricatured as 'passive, exploited and dim' (7), or not even quite in their right minds (9). She argues too that:

the phrase 'consumer society' usually suggested a deluded, essentially female population: the unresisting victims of manipulative advertising and vulgar, alluring displays. (6)

Lenssens was in fact not a customer but a store employee and she had her handbag with her because it contained her family allowance cheque.<sup>65</sup> But for contemporary newspaper readers it could look like a chic accessory of the kind sold at À l'Innovation, designed for carrying new luxury purchases and money to spend on non-essentials. It might also have seemed that holding the bag would have prevented Lenssens from keeping both hands free while climbing on the outer cornices of the building, so placing her in even greater danger. Lenssens's attachment to her bag might thus have appeared to be evidence of a self-destructive fixation on frivolous, fashionable consumption, *à la* Madame Bovary, confirming the stereotypical associations Bowlby identifies in contemporary discourse between luxury shopping and women's poor judgement.

The May flyers do not mention the 'lady with the bag'. However, they do work with the supposedly feminine character of shopping. Flyer 9's allusion to Pril detergent emphasises a product specifically marketed to women, with its offer of 'REVOLUTION IN ROSE'. Just as there is special, rose-tinted advertising for women, so flyer 9's emphasis on pink and grey clouds of smoke and fur coats may be seen as KI's particular proposal to them. Put another way, women are imagined here as recipients of adverts and looted goods, rather than agents of change. Above all, by targeting department stores, traditionally associated with women, as sites for arson, the flyers implicitly cast women as the principal victims of fires in shops.

The gendered narratives of anti-war poetry and the May flyers therefore both converge and diverge. They share scenarios in which men are agents and action is masculine, even as women are victims and suffering is feminine. But while the era's poets indict losses in Vietnam as tragic, cruel and criminal, and draw critical, if often stereotypical, attention to the vulnerability of women and girls in war, the flyers seem to dismiss deaths in Europe as possibly self-induced collateral damage, including in traditionally sexist ways. At the same time the flyers'

persistent ironies and ambiguities leave readers unsure of how to evaluate their gender politics.

## Brussels-Babylon / Apocalypse Now

At times, the poets' Vietnam evokes the end of the world.<sup>66</sup> For example, 'Einbürgerung' ['Naturalisation'], a poem in Fried's *und VIETNAM und*, concludes as follows:

Weißer Knochen  
roter Sand  
blauer Himmel  
  
[White bones  
red sand  
blue sky] (380)

The title implies that the US war effort is aimed at making Vietnam American. However, it leads only to dead, empty landscapes in the colours of the Stars and Stripes. These primary colours no longer seem bright and positive but morbid for, according to this poem, the conflict is so ferocious that it destroys all human life. Likewise, Sigel's 'vietnam' (1968) concludes with a vision of a land reduced by fire to 'Steine, geborstene, verglühte' ['Stones, burst asunder, burned out'].<sup>67</sup> These dead landscapes reinforce the poems' recurrent representation of the machine war as an attack on human agency and humanity which has come to its logical terminus here.

Other poems base their allusions to end times in Vietnam on scriptural references. Fried's 'Nach dem Monsun' ['After the Monsoon'] (379) refers explicitly to Noah's flood in Genesis, in which humanity is all but wiped out.<sup>68</sup> 'Das Land' depicts the South Vietnamese capital Saigon, associated with a corrupt, pro-US regime, as 'Sodom', one of the Cities of the Plain. Like its sister city Gomorrha, Sodom has become by tradition a byword for general immorality. In addition, the Cities of the Plain are especially associated with sexual infamy, linking into the poem's implicit reference to sexual violence. Just as modern-day Vietnam is destroyed by aerial napalm attacks, so the Cities of the Plain are destroyed by 'brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven' (Genesis 19, 24), and only a handful of virtuous people survive.

Likewise, the May flyers evoke biblical texts. Flyer 6 describes the fire in À l'Innovation as 'ein Bild der Apokalypse' ['a vision of the apocalypse'] and flyer 9 references 'DIE APOKALYPSE VON BRÜSSEL'



['THE BRUSSELS APOCALYPSE']. Both texts recall the end of the world in the Book of Revelation.<sup>69</sup> Here the worldly city Babylon burns, and all its wealth, trade and luxury goods 'come to nought' (Revelation 18, 17–18). In other words, sinful Babylon must make way for a radically new world, populated only by the good. In KI's analogy, consumerist Brussels is Babylon, embodying a capitalism that is so corrupt it cannot be reformed. Here, New Testament tropes resonate with some anti-authoritarian discourse which envisages its revolt as a significant caesura in history.<sup>70</sup>

However, there are differences too between the apocalyptic scenarios of the poems and the flyers. Fried's poems 'Nach dem Monsun' and 'Das Land' deviate from their scriptural forebears in that they do not present the incandescent rain over Vietnam as divine justice. Rather, they deplore it. By contrast, KI's narrative seems to glorify the destruction of Brussels-Babylon. Indeed, flyer 8's portrayal of burning shoppers as 'saturierte Bürger' ['smug, well-heeled citizens'] implies that their prosperity makes their fate less regrettable, even deserved. On this reading, the violent deaths of European (women) shoppers are celebrated, while European (men) arsonists such as Maurice are like a righteous, vengeful God.

In a further move, flyer 8 remarks that in the department store fire, 'Brüssel wird Hanoi' ['Brussels becomes Hanoi']. Since Brussels, in the flyers, is implicitly Babylon, the North Vietnamese capital Hanoi is drawn into association with the sinful city too. This triangular analogy opens up the unexpected possibility that even the aerial destruction of Hanoi is in some way justified. In this respect, the flyers display a complex intertextual relationship with scripture; they seem to rely on it for authority, yet ironise it in blasphemous, unnerving ways. They are also far removed from the poems' calls to spare Vietnam, and their despairing humanism.

## Some conclusions, no guarantees

This chapter's close readings of KI's May flyers show that they are not straightforward calls to arson. Rather, they are disorienting texts with multiple possible meanings that generate tension between playfulness and aggression. This chapter has argued that the flyers can be productively understood in light of Situationist theory, in (at least) two respects. First, they are examples of Situationist *détournement*, copying variously the idiom of tabloid journalism, advertising, protest, poetry and scripture, albeit in grotesque, inconclusive ways. As a result, the flaws and

contradictions of these discourses, and of those who wield them, are powerfully exposed. Moreover, both within and between the individual flyers, these competing voices clash and wrong-foot any expectation of clarity.

This reading supports the court's acknowledgement at the end of KI's trial that while the May flyers might be read as incitement to arson, the authors' intentions in that respect could not be established. In other words, the possibility that these texts might prompt a real arson attack cannot be entirely ruled out. In this respect, they emanate a diffuse yet powerful sense of threat, summed up in critic Karl Heinz Bohrer's contemporaneous observation that here:

Die Technik der Satire ist um jenen Grad weitergedreht, wo sie ein Gefühl von blutigem Ernst um sich zu verbreiten vermag

[The technique of satire is given an additional twist, so as to disseminate a feeling of bloody earnest].<sup>71</sup>

In other words, these texts are playing with fire.

Second, the May flyers map with Debord's arguments in 'The decline and fall of the spectacle-commodity economy' about the liberating effects of reading the spectacle against the grain, and of taking its metaphorical discourse literally. The flyers make this same manoeuvre. Most evidently, they seem to deploy the tropes of heat and fire, commonly used in advertising to convey consumer excitement, literally as they call for fires in shops. At the same time these texts perform a reverse move. They take a real instance of fire, the blaze in Brussels, and transform it into an explosive, equivocal poetic language which is impossible to pin down. In all these ways, KI's texts resist conventional legibility, and so do not frame a positive vision for protest. Instead, their endgame seems to be no specific political goal, but a form of cognitive dissonance that highlights the essential ambiguity of the political and linguistic worlds. Indeed, if these texts have any message at all, it is that signification itself is moody and unreliable, and their greatest potential for disturbance lies in this insight.

This chapter has observed remarkable consonances between the May flyers and anti-war poems circulating in the FRG. Formally all these texts stand in Modernist traditions and eschew classical forms. Thematically they share critiques of the war, media, capitalism and technological Modernity, as well as such important tropes as fire. Both flyers and poems characterise the Vietnam War as a cataclysm which disempowers, dehumanises and even reifies everyone in its global ambit.

Hence, the horrors of Vietnam are interconnected with life in the supposedly peaceful West. The poems and flyers also share a gendered narrative about agency, passivity and suffering, in which women and girls appear almost always as victims.

Simultaneously, however, the May flyers disrupt these poetic themes. At times they push them to absurd extremes, as in the image of inhuman US personnel with Coca-Cola blood. At others the flyers reverse familiar tropes: most notably, they no longer denounce and mourn deaths by fire, as Fried's poems do, for instance, but seem excitedly to affirm them. Moreover, the flyers do not see Vietnam but cities like Brussels and West Berlin as the era's most important battleground. Such a relocation of the theatre of war erases Vietnam and its people almost entirely.

Yet the flyers' focus on bringing the war to Western Europe also invites critical (self-)reflection for West Berliners, because emphasis on fire at home challenges certain conventions in anti-war culture. This culture often draws on traditionally perceived binary divisions between West and East in which the former is powerful and active, the latter weak and passive. By contrast, KI reverses and undermines this dynamic, primarily framing not Vietnamese people but Europeans as helpless victims of the war. Furthermore, the flyers' insistent focus on Western Europe draws implicit attention to the self-referentiality of much West German anti-war discourse. They claim that in fire 'Brüssel wird Hanoi' ['Brussels becomes Hanoi'], enabling shoppers to experience 'jenes knisternde Vietnam-Gefühl' ['that red-hot Vietnam feeling']. These assertions are, in many ways, quite ostentatiously bizarre and misplaced. As such, they may parody the ways in which the West German imagination projected its own images and fantasies onto Vietnam.

This reading suggests that KI's texts employ poetic language to exploit and subvert some of the era's most significant ideas about Vietnam as they are embodied in poetry. The May flyers can therefore be understood as *détournements* not only of tabloid journalism or advertising, but of anti-war poetry too. They transfer the familiar tropes and images of poetry onto different referents and shift the grounds on which they stand, sending their meanings spiralling away into unexpected territory. As a result, these troubling texts unbalance or even reverse the anti-war poetry's more common messages. Such *détournement* corresponds to KI's consistent tactic of creating dissent and opposition within the wider protest movements. KI, like some other anti-authoritarian agents, saw activism different from its own as potentially supportive of capitalism, furnishing it with a veneer of political tolerance in a Marcusean sense. Or, in Situationist terms, the group judged that some sections of the anti-war

movement were themselves part of the spectacle; they consequently sought to antagonise and disrupt them. This judgement could be extended to anti-war poetry, by definition a more contemplative and peaceful mode of protest than KI's actions.

Paradoxically however, the May flyers' engagements of poetic language and *détournement* underline their avant-gardist character; they thus tie them into the very traditions they subvert. Simultaneously, the flyers' overlap with anti-war poetry emphasises the fact that *détournement* is a key strategy in the latter too. Fried's satire on the lexis of tourism in 'Das Land' is a case in point. In addition, this poem's title transports memories of high German literature. It recalls Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's celebrated lyric:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen

[Oh have you seen that land where lemons grow].

Often known as 'Mignons Lied' ['Mignon's Song'] (1795–6), this work appears in the novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* [*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*] (1783–96).<sup>72</sup> The poem's eponymous speaker is a vulnerable young girl who was abused in childhood; she dreams of a wonderful foreign country where lemon trees blossom and she will be protected. This vision haunts 'Das Land', where Mignon's idyll becomes a nightmare. Fried's poem thus challenges not only contemporary politics, but the German classics too. In this way it articulates the conflicted relationship of anti-authoritarianism and literature. In turn, as well, the poem calls into question the cultural order for which fine writing like Goethe's was thought to stand.

Reading the May flyers alongside anti-war poems such as Fried's gives the lie to any view that either the political writing or the poetry of the time was simplistic or one-dimensional. Rather, this chapter's comparative readings show that both bodies of writing make subversive use of intertextuality, irony, satire, ambiguity and *détournement*. Central to that enterprise is their refusal to distinguish neatly between political and poetic language, and between different genres within them, as tradition demands. Instead, all these texts seem to tally with Benjamin's observation of 1934:

daß wir in einem gewaltigen Umschmelzungsprozeß literarischer Formen mitten innestehen, einem Umschmelzungsprozeß, in dem viele Gegensätze, in welchen wir zu denken gewohnt waren, ihre Schlagkraft verlieren könnten

[that we are in the midst of a mighty recasting of literary forms, a melting down in which many of the opposites in which we have been used to think may lose their force].<sup>73</sup>

In so doing, these works underscore a long, deep critical and literary sensibility in protest and challenge discursive certainty.

## Notes

- \* An earlier version of parts of this chapter appeared in Mererid Puw Davies, “Burn Baby! Burn!”: Paris, Watts, Brussels, Berlin and Vietnam in the work of Kommune I, 1967, *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 54, no. 2 (2018).
- 1 On KI see for example Mererid Puw Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements: The textual revolution* (London: imlr books, 2016), 105–38; Siegwald Lönnendonker, Bernd Rabebl and Jochen Staadt, *Die antiautoritäre Revolte: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund nach der Trennung von der SPD. Band 1: 1960–1967* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 304–30 and 400–60; Alexander Holmig, ‘Die aktionistischen Wurzeln der Studentenbewegung: Subversive Aktion, Kommune I und die Neudefinition des Politischen’, in 1968: *Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Studentenbewegung*, edited by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2007); Alexander Holmig, “Wenn’s der Wahrheits(er)findung dient...”: Wirken und Wirkung der Kommune I (1967–1969), unpublished master’s thesis (Humboldt University, Berlin, 2004); and a shorter version of the M.A. dissertation, “Wenn’s der Wahrheits(er)findung dient ...”: Wirken und Wirkung der Berliner Kommune I (1967–1969), *Kulturation* 1 (2005), accessed 8 September 2021, [http://www.kulturation.de/ki\\_1\\_thema.php?id=88](http://www.kulturation.de/ki_1_thema.php?id=88). I thank Alexander Holmig for making his valuable unpublished dissertation available to me. Further page references to these sources follow in the text.
  - 2 The flyers are reproduced in facsimile, for example in KI’s rare home-made compilation *Quellen zur Kommune-Forschung* (n.pl.: no pub., 1968) [Berlin: KI, 1968] or the widely available Rainer Langhans and Fritz Teufel, *Klau mich: StPO der Kommune I* (1968) (facsimile reprint) (Munich: Trikont, 1977), n.p. Further references here are taken from the unpaginated Langhans and Teufel, and so do not include page numbers. Analyses include Klaus Briegleb, 1968: *Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 61–112; Davies, “Burn Baby! Burn!”; Sara Hakemi, *Anschlag und Spektakel: Flugblätter der Kommune I, Erklärungen von Ensslin / Baader und der frühen RAF* (Bochum: Posth, 2008), 32–58; Martin Huber, *Politisierung der Literatur: Ästhetisierung der Politik: Eine Studie zur literaturgeschichtlichen Bedeutung der 68-er Bewegung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, Bern etc: Peter Lang, 1992), 137–55; Susanne Komfort-Hein, ‘Flaschenposten und kein Ende des Endes’. 1968: *Kritische Korrespondenzen um den Nullpunkt von Geschichte und Literatur* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach, 2001), 265–71; Werner Leise, *Die Literatur und Ästhetik der Studentenbewegung (1967–73)* (Berlin: Papyrus-Druck, 1979), 138–44.
  - 3 The store is sometimes referred to as ‘L’Innovation’. See ‘L’Incendie des grands Magasins À l’Innovation de Bruxelles du 22 mai 1967’, accessed 25 February 2021, <http://innovation1967.com/fr/>, a memorial site initiated by survivors. Information featured here is taken from this site, news and other contemporary reports, in particular Georges Menant, Michou Simon, Jean-Paul Penez, Catherine Duranteau, Florence Portes, Gabriel Conesa and Jean Lagache, ‘Bruxelles: La Tragédie du grand Magasin’, *Paris Match*, no. 947 (3 June 1967); Bernard J. Houssiau’s lightly dramatised narrative, *22 mai 1967: L’Incendie de l’Innovation. 35 ans déjà!* (Brussels: Luc Pire, 2002). Houssiau’s account, based on research and interviews with survivors and witnesses, differs in some facts and conclusions from other sources and crosses over in part with the same author’s more novelistic, detailed *Soudain... Rue Neuve* (Montigny-le-Tilleul: Scaillet, 1987), based on similar materials. Without references, it is difficult to distinguish what content in these two works by Houssiau is strictly factual and what is imaginative reconstruction. A concise account in English is Stephen Barlay, *Fire: An international report* (London: Hamish

- Hamilton, 1972), 125–37. See also Siegfried Evens, *De brand in de Innovation: De geschiedenis van de ramp die België veranderde* (Antwerp: Witsand, 2017). Further page references to these works follow in the text.
- 4 Houssiau, *22 mai 1967*, 31–3. Barlay, *Fire* also argues that À l’Innovation was a fire hazard.
  - 5 The trial is documented in Langhans and Teufel, *Klau mich*. Analyses include Gerrit-Jan Berendse, *Schreiben im Terrordrom: Gewaltcodierung, kulturelle Erinnerung und das Bedingungsverhältnis zwischen Literatur und RAF-Terrorismus* (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2005), 114–23; Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*; Hakemi, *Anschlag und Spektakel*; Martin Klimke, “‘We are not going to defend ourselves before such a justice system!’ – 1968 and the courts”, *German Law Journal* 10, no. 3 (2009).
  - 6 Herbert Marcuse, ‘Repressive tolerance’, in Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr and Herbert Marcuse, *A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (1965) (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969). See Chapter 4.
  - 7 Wilfried Mausbach, ‘Auschwitz and Vietnam: West German protest against America’s war during the 1960s’, in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and international perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Wilfried Mausbach (Washington DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003).
  - 8 Kathrin Fahlenbrach, *Protest-Inszenierungen: Visuelle Kommunikation und kollektive Identitäten in Protestbewegungen* (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2002) and ‘Protestinszenierungen: Die Studentenbewegung im Spannungsfeld von Kulturrevolution und Medien-Evolution’, in 1968, edited by Klimke and Scharloth; Martin Klimke, “‘We are not going to defend ourselves’”. Further page references follow in the text.
  - 9 Sophie Dannenberg, *Das bleiche Herz der Revolution* (Munich: DVA, 2004); Rainer Langhans, *Ich bin’s. Die ersten 68 Jahre* (Munich: Blumenbar, 2008) and *#soists: Selfies von der Kommune bis Trump* (n.pl.: n.pub., 2017).
  - 10 Houssiau quotes, without a source, a document said to be from those protests: ‘Pendant que les Vietnamiens meurent courageusement sous les bombes américaines, les Belges, eux, viennent en masse soutenir une action commerciale représentative du capitalisme sauvage sous l’égide des valets du Président Lyndon Johnson. Non au capitalisme! Solidarité avec le peuple vietnamien! À bas l’Innovation’ [‘While the Vietnamese people die courageously under American bombing, the Belgians come in droves to support a commercial action which is representative of savage capitalism under the aegis of President Lyndon Johnson’s lackeys. No to capitalism! Solidarity with the Vietnamese people! Down with l’Innovation’], *22 mai 1967*, 10; see also 11. KI’s flyers at times echo this tone.
  - 11 Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I: Berlin 1967–1969* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2004), 138.
  - 12 Langhans and Teufel, *Klau mich*.
  - 13 Kept at the archive of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), Sammlung ‘Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv Berlin’, file no. 03.13 (‘Kommune I IIB Brandstiftung Gutachten’). Experts included Reinhard Baumgart, Günter Grass, Walter Jens, Alexander Kluge, Eberhard Lämmert, Klaus Reimers and Irmela Reimers-Tovote, Hans-Werner Richter, Peter Szondi, Jacob Taubes, Peter Wapnewski and Gerhard Zwerenz. Reports later published include Peter Szondi, ‘Aufforderung zur Brandstiftung? Ein Gutachten im Prozeß Langhans/Teufel’, *Der Monat* 19, no. 227 (August 1967); Anon., ‘Flugblätter, Gutachten, Epiloge oder Wie weit sind Stilprobleme – Stilprobleme?’, *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter* 27 (July–September 1968) (a dossier including Lämmert’s, Szondi’s and Wapnewski’s reports); Jacob Taubes, ‘Surrealistische Provokation. Ein Gutachten zur Anklageschrift im Prozeß Langhans-Teufel über die Flugblätter der “Kommune I”’, *Merkur* 21, no. 236 (November 1967). On these reports see Berendse, *Schreiben im Terrordrom*, 114–21; Hakemi, *Anschlag und Spektakel*, 59–64; Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), 269–76. They feature also in Dannenberg’s novel.
  - 14 Baumgart’s report, n.p. Some of the other reports draw attention to avant-garde and literary intertexts too.
  - 15 Sara Hakemi, ‘Das terroristische Manifest: Die RAF im Kontext avantgardistischer und neo-avantgardistischer Diskurse’, in 1968, edited by Klimke and Scharloth, 280.
  - 16 Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 126–30.
  - 17 Langhans, *Ich bin’s*, 67.
  - 18 Walter Benjamin, ‘Der Autor als Produzent’ (1934), in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main:

- Suhrkamp, 1991), II.2, 694, 'The Author as Producer', translated by Edmund Jephcott (1968), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 2 vols, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 1999), II, 776.
- 19 Houssiau's *Soudain... Rue Neuve* refers to accusations against a contemporary political group called 'Association pour la Paix et l'Indépendance des Peuples', 194.
- 20 Hakemi, *Anschlag und Spektakel*, 63–74.
- 21 Cf. e.g. Günther Anders, *Visit Beautiful Vietnam: ABC der Aggressionen heute* (Cologne: Pahl-Rügerstein, 1968); Günther Weisenborn, 'Mekong-Ballade', in *Frieden für Vietnam: Sprechtexte Agitation Lieder / Vietnam II*, edited by Annemarie Stern (Oberhausen: Arbeitskreis für Amateurliteratur, 1970), 67, a special double issue of *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970).
- 22 That visit, partly due to tension generated by the May flyers, was to become a tragic turning point for the protest movements. On 2 June 1967 peaceful demonstrators were hit by police violence; one of them, Benno Ohnesorg, was shot dead by a plainclothes officer.
- 23 Jeanne Theoharis, "'Alabama on Avalon": Rethinking the Watts uprising and the character of Black protest in Los Angeles', in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights–Black Power era*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 49. In *Fire This Time: The Watts uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995), Gerald Horne notes in addition a thousand injuries and damage to the estimated value of \$200 million over a 46.5 square-mile area, 3. See also Jerry Cohen and William S. Murphy, *Burn, Baby, Burn! The Los Angeles race riot, August 1965* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1966); Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space and Riots in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 197–225.
- 24 Anon., 'Nationalgarde dringt in das Negerviertel von Los Angeles ein', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 16 August 1965; Anon., 'Die Rassen-Unruhen in Kalifornien breiten sich aus', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 August 1965; Anon., 'Rassenkrawalle: Der häßliche Neger', *Der Spiegel* 19, no. 35 (23 August 1965); Anon., 'Los Angeles kehrt zum normalen Leben zurück', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 18 August 1965; Jan Reifenberg, 'Die Flammen von Los Angeles', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 August 1965; Joachim Schwelzen, 'Explosion im Palmenghetto', *Die Zeit*, 20 August 1965; Jürgen Tern, 'Die Schraube der Armut', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19 August 1965. Reifenberg and the report in *Der Spiegel* quote, respectively, the calls 'Burn, Baby, Burn!' and 'Brenne Baby, Brenne!' ['Burn Baby, Burn'], 68.
- 25 See e.g. Volkhard Brandes and Joyce Burke, U.S.A.: *Vom Rassenkampf zum Klassenkampf. Die Organisation des schwarzen Widerstands* (1970) (Munich: dtv, 1972); *Black Power: Ursachen des Guerilla-Kampfes in den Vereinigten Staaten*, edited by Bernward Vesper (Frankfurt am Main: Voltaire, 1967); Robert F. Williams and Robert B. Rigg, *Großstadtguerilla* (Berlin: Voltaire, 1969). This relationship is analysed for example in Maria Höhn and Martin Klimke, *A Breath of Freedom: The Civil Rights struggle, African American GIs and Germany* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 107–22; Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre. Eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und -theorien aus der Dritten Welt* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student protest in West Germany and the United States in the global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jeremy Varon, *Bringing the War Home: The Weather Underground, the Red Army Faction and revolutionary violence in the Sixties and Seventies* (Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2004); Martin Klimke, 'Sit-in, teach-in, go-in: Die transnationale Zirkulation kultureller Praktiken in den 1960er Jahren', in 1968, edited by Klimke and Scharloth, 119–35.
- 26 Dieter Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand! Bilder aus meinem Leben* (Berlin: Transit, 1998), 78.
- 27 Houssiau, *Soudain... Rue Neuve*, 151.
- 28 Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I*, 137.
- 29 In one expert report for KI's defence, Klaus Reimers and Irmela Reimers-Tovote note: 'dieser Slogan [schmückt] in großer Aufmachung die ganze Rückseite der Zeitschrift "BRIGITTE", [...] Heft 11, vom 23.7.1967: "Revolution in rosé ... man sieht Ihren Händen das Spülen nicht mehr an"' [this slogan prominently adorns the entire back page of "BRIGITTE" magazine [...] no. 11, 23 July 1967: "Revolution in rose ... no one will see that your hands do dishes"], 7. See note 13. See also Szondi, 'Aufforderung zur Brandstiftung?', 29; Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I*, 142.



- 30 For contemporary examples of similar recuperations see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Gemeinplätze, die Neueste Literatur betreffend', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968); 'Commonplaces on the newest literature', translated by Michael Roloff, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982); Michael Ruetz, 1968. *Ein Zeitalter wird besichtigt* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1997), 105; *Eiffe für President. Frühling für Europa: Surrealismus zum Mai 68*, edited by Uwe Wandrey with commentary by Peter Schütt (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, 1968), 9.
- 31 Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent', 695; ['The Author as Producer', 774].
- 32 Ulrich Enzensberger, *Die Jahre der Kommune I*, 142.
- 33 Langhans and Teufel, *Klau mich*. Ulrich Enzensberger interprets the form as a teardrop, *Die Jahre der Kommune I*, 142. Cf. Eberhard Lämmert's expert report in the dossier in *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, 327; Briegleb, 1968, 112–3.
- 34 For further readings of KI's flyers in light of Situationist ideas see Davies, "'Burn, Baby! Burn!'"
- 35 Cf. for example Davies, *Writing and the West German Protest Movements; Subversive Aktion: Der Sinn der Aktion ist ihr Scheitern*, edited by Frank Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1976); *Nilpferd des höllischen Urwalds – Spuren in eine unbekannte Stadt – Situationisten Gruppe SPUR Kommune I*, edited by Wolfgang Dreßen, Dieter Kunzelmann and Eckhard Siepmann (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1991); Holmig, 'Die aktionistischen Wurzeln der Studentenbewegung'; Ingo Juchler, 'Die Avantgardegruppe "Subversive Aktion" im Kontext der sich entwickelnden Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre', *Weimarer Beiträge* 40, no. 1 (1994); Mia Lee, 'Umherschweiften und Spektakel: Die situationistische Tradition', in 1968, edited by Klimke and Scharloth.
- 36 Kunzelmann was a former SI member. See Kunzelmann, *Leisten Sie keinen Widerstand!*; Aribert Reimann, *Dieter Kunzelmann: Avantgardist, Protestler, Radikaler* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).
- 37 Klimke, "'We are not going to defend ourselves'", 270.
- 38 Guy Debord, 'The decline and fall of the spectacle-commodity economy' (1965), in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1995). Further page references follow in the text.
- 39 Homogenising characterisation of the alleged looters in Watts as 'the blacks' is in itself of course as problematic as it is dated, both in linguistic terms and as a generalisation about the district's Black inhabitants.
- 40 Langhans described his trial as a 'Spektakel', Langhans and Teufel, *Klau mich*; Kunzelmann's memoir calls KI itself a 'Spektakel', 29.
- 41 Guy Debord, 'Theory of the dérive' (1958), in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Knabb.
- 42 Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 'Methods of détournement' (1956), in *Situationist International Anthology*, edited and translated by Knabb; cf. Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist international in a postmodern age* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 86–7.
- 43 Magnificent Montague with Bob Baker, *Burn, Baby! BURN! The Autobiography of Magnificent Montague* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003), e.g. 1–11. Further page references follow in the text.
- 44 Erich Fried, *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* (1966), in Erich Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Volker Kaukoreit and Klaus Wagenbach, 4 vols (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1998), I. Further page references follow in the text.
- 45 See Chapter 2.
- 46 Poems tend not to differentiate between professional soldiers and conscripts, whose presence in Vietnam may be due to less privileged social backgrounds, not personal choice. As representations of critical or confused US personnel in Vietnam, Fried's 'Letzter Brief aus Boston', and possibly the cryptic 'Der Freiwillige', the protagonist of which could be a volunteer soldier in any modern conflict, are possibly unique. Fried, *und VIETNAM und*, 381–2 and 383–4 respectively. Franz Josef Degenhardt's lyric 'P.T. aus Arizona' about a G.I. deserter in the FRG is exceptional. The protagonist is a Native American, hence imaginable as disenfranchised by modern America. Franz Josef Degenhardt, *Im Jahr der Schweine: 27 Lieder mit Noten* (1970) (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1973), 96–8.
- 47 E.g. Reimar Lenz, 'Also sprach Lyndon B. Johnson', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam: eine anthologie*, edited by riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968), 62–3; also in *konkret* no. 4, 1966 (April 1966): 39. There is critical parody here on the title of Friedrich Nietzsche's controversial work



- Also sprach Zarathustra: Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen (1883–92). Thus Lenz's poem participates in the anti-war poetry's debate with literary and intellectual tradition. See [Chapter 2](#).
- 48 'US Marines', in *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia*, fourth edition, edited by David Crystal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- 49 Cf. Davies, 'West German representations of women and resistance in Vietnam, 1966–1973', in *Warlike Women and Death: Women warriors in the German imagination since 1500*, edited by Sarah Colvin and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 2009), and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 75–103.
- 50 Kurt Sigel, 'Pilotengespräch', *konkret* no. 4, 1966 (April 1966): 39, also in *Denkzettel: Politische Lyrik aus der BRD und Westberlin*, edited by Annie Voigtländer and Herbert Witt (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1974), 432–3. See Davies, 'West German representations of women', and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*; and [Chapter 3](#).
- 51 Arnfrid Astel, 'Neue Waffe', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 19. See [Chapter 4](#) and Gregory Divers, *The Image and Influence of America in German Poetry since 1945* (Rochester, NY and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2002), 99–100.
- 52 Divers, *The Image and Influence of America*, 241.
- 53 E.g. Raoul Vaneigem, 'Comments against urbanism' (1961), in *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and documents*, edited by Tom McDonough (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004). Coca-Cola was a common metonymy for the US and its culture, for example in an intertitle describing 1960s youth as the 'children of Marx and Coca-Cola' in Jean-Luc Godard's 1966 film *Masculin féminin* (1966). This idea was frequently reused, e.g. in the title of the anthology *Wir Kinder von Marx und Coca-Cola: Gedichte der Nachgeborenen. Texte der Jahrgänge 1945–55 aus der Bundesrepublik, Österreich und der Schweiz*, edited by Frank Brunner, Arnim Juhre and Heinz Kulas (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1971). See [Chapter 2](#).
- 54 Portrayals of US soldiers as vulnerable, or victims of the conflict, are highly unusual. They include for example Peter Schütt, 'Grabschriften aus Vietnam', in Voigtländer and Witt, 438; Dieter Süverkrüp, 'Western-Ballade', in Franz Josef Degenhardt, Wolfgang Neuss, Hanns Dieter Hüsch and Dieter Süverkrüp, *Da habt ihr es! Stücke und Lieder für ein deutsches Quartett* (1968) (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1970), 82–3.
- 55 Menant et al., 'Bruxelles, la Tragédie du grand Magasin', 65.
- 56 Erich Fried, 'Das Land', in Fried, *und VIETNAM und*, 363–4.
- 57 The topos of the dead partisan reflects *inter alia* the difficulty in guerrilla war of distinguishing between civilians and partisans; and critique of US troops' reported passing-off of dead civilians as NLF fighters. Fried writes in the poem 'Was alles heißt: 'Getötet werden / heißt nachher / Vietcong gewesen sein' ['Being killed / means, after the fact / being V.C.'], in *konkret* (2 December 1968): 55, and in *und VIETNAM und*, 367–8, 368.
- 58 See [Chapter 3](#).
- 59 See e.g. Rachel Bowlby, *Carried Away: The invention of modern shopping* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 5–11.
- 60 E.g. Menant et al., 'Bruxelles, la Tragédie du grand Magasin'; Françoise Baré, 'Incendie de l'Innovation il y a 50 ans: Monique se souvient', accessed 26 February 2021, [https://www.rtf.be/info/societe/detail\\_incendie-de-l-innovation-il-y-a-50-ans-monique-se-souvient](https://www.rtf.be/info/societe/detail_incendie-de-l-innovation-il-y-a-50-ans-monique-se-souvient); Michel Bouffioux, 'Incendie de L'Innovation: La Dame au sac n'a rien oublié', *Paris Match Belgique* (4 May 2017), and '50 ans après l'incendie de l'Innovation, nous avons retrouvé la "dame au sac"', accessed 24 May 2022, <https://parismatch.be/actualites/societe/38013/50-ans-apres-lincendie-de-linnovation-avons-retrouve-dame-sac>.
- 61 E.g. in Barlay, *Fire*, n.p.; Menant et al., 'Bruxelles, la Tragédie du grand Magasin', 58–9.
- 62 Lenssens landed on a jump sheet, but suffered life-changing injuries. Bouffioux, 'Incendie de L'Innovation', 78–81.
- 63 H. J. Trocha, P. K. Kirchstein, R. Winkler, H. Gehlen and H. Rothe, 'Das schwarze Todeshaus verschlang 303 Menschen', *Bild*, 24 May 1967; Anon., 'Rund 300 Tote durch SABOTAGE! Brandstiftung als Demonstration gegen Amerika-Ausstellung', *BZ*, 24 May 1967; see also Anon., 'Wie in einem Leichenschauhaus', *BZ*, 24 May 1967; Inspektor, '400 Tote – für sie ein Happening', *BZ*, 26 May 1967. Both *Bild* and *BZ* belonged to the Springer media group discussed in [Chapter 4](#).
- 64 Bouffioux, 'Incendie de L'Innovation', 80; Barlay, *Fire*, n.p.
- 65 Bouffioux, 'Incendie de L'Innovation', 78–81.
- 66 This vision tallies with the apocalyptic rhetoric of the era's anti-nuclear movement. Cf. Michael Geyer, 'Cold War angst: The case of West German opposition to rearmament and nuclear

- weapons', in *The Miracle Years: A cultural history of West Germany, 1949–1968*, edited by Hanna Schissler (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).
- 67 Kurt Sigel, 'vietnam', in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 59.
- 68 Erich Fried, 'Nach dem Monsun', in Fried, *und VIETNAM und*, 379.
- 69 Cf. Reimers and Reimers-Tovote, 7.
- 70 Cf. Gerd Koenen, 'Wahn und Zeit: Rudi Dutschke am Kairós der Weltrevolution 1967/68', in Gerd Koenen, *Das rote Jahrzehnt: Unsere kleine deutsche Kulturrevolution 1967–1977* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001).
- 71 Karl Heinz Bohrer, 'Surrealismus und Terror oder die Aporien des Juste-milieu', in Karl Heinz Bohrer, *Die gefährdete Phantasie, oder Surrealismus und Terror* (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1970), 37. On Bohrer see also [Chapter 4](#).
- 72 'Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn' ['Oh have you seen that land where lemons grow'], Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Selected Poetry*, translated by David Luke (London: Libris, 1999), 56–7.
- 73 Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent', 687 ['The Author as Producer', 771].

## 6

# Representing war: some conclusions

### The rise and fall of anti-war poetry?

For a short time in 1960s West Germany, poetry played a prominent part in protest against the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup> Above all, Erich Fried's volume *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* [and VIETNAM and: forty-one poems] (1966) was a bestseller.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the celebrated if controversial author Günter Grass criticised anti-war poems in his collection *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* [Interrogated: Poems and drawings] (1967).<sup>3</sup> In 1967 these two books prompted a high-profile theoretical debate between writers and critics about the value of poetry against the war, a discussion that partly took the form of essays in important cultural and political periodicals of the time.<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, in 1968, a poetry anthology called *gegen den krieg in vietnam* [against the war in vietnam], edited by riewert qu. tode, appeared with a tiny independent West Berlin publisher, amBEATion. It was planned to mark the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß [International Congress on Vietnam], the work of the left-wing and increasingly anti-authoritarian Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [Socialist German Student Federation] (SDS).<sup>5</sup> This major event was held in West Berlin, a key centre of revolt, and so illustrates the tight links between the protest movements, especially their anti-authoritarian strand, and the FRG's largest cities. Speeches given at the conference also indicate that the anti-authoritarian self-image itself was expressly urban.<sup>6</sup> tode's anthology therefore comes from the very heart of anti-authoritarian culture, and so is in many respects emblematic for this study. It ends with an explicit, urgent call to jettison poetry for action; in context, it seems no coincidence that *gegen den krieg in vietnam* was also the final issue of a relatively long-lived literary little magazine called *amBEATion* (1963–8). It is striking too that Fried's *und VIETNAM und* remained unique in the

Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) as a well-known, single-authored collection dedicated to Vietnam.

Instead, in the later 1960s, a different kind of protest textuality was coming to the fore. In May 1967 controversial West Berlin collective *Kommune I* (KI) distributed the extraordinary 'Maiflugblätter' [May flyers] in the street.<sup>7</sup> These texts apparently called for an end to conventional, legal activities in protest against the Vietnam conflict, such as going on marches. Instead, they imagined something radically different: setting fire to department stores. The aim would be to raise sensory, rather than cognitive, awareness of the realities of the conflict, and so to bring its horrors home. These four flyers so alarmed some readers that two communards were swiftly prosecuted for incitement to arson. However, they insisted in court that their works were satirical and the prosecution was unsuccessful because, in the last analysis, it proved impossible to ascribe any clear intentions to these complex texts at all.

KI disbanded in 1969. Two contrasting responses to its idiosyncratic fusion of text and action serve to show how quickly its work was, in turn, eclipsed. First, in April 1968, shortly after KI's acquittal, real-life fires were set in shops in Frankfurt am Main, and declared by their perpetrators to be anti-war actions.<sup>8</sup> Four activists were convicted, two of whom, Andreas Baader and Gudrun Ensslin, were soon to co-found a notorious left-wing terrorist group, the *Rote Armee Fraktion* [Red Army Faction] (RAF). While the Frankfurt arson is in many respects very far removed from the equivocal ironies of KI's May flyers, it seems implicitly to reference them. In an indirect sense for West Germany, then, the conflagrations in Vietnam were a matrix of the era's emergent violence at home.

Second, in 1970, poet, critic and editor Hilde Domin recorded the following recent incident:

Ich erinnere mich an ein 'Gedicht', das auf einer roten oder gelben Postkarte ins Haus kam, irgendeine Einladung zu einer Veranstaltung – und aufforderte, 'diese Karte zu verbrennen wie Vietnam brennt'. Ein Gedicht, das kein Gedicht ist, ruft zu einer Tat auf, die keine Tat ist. 'War Ihnen wohler, als Sie das Stück Papier verbrannt hatten?' fragte ich die Veranstalter. 'Aber das tut doch keiner,' sagten sie.

[I recall a 'poem' which came through my letterbox on a red or yellow postcard, an invitation to some event – and demanded that I 'burn this card, just as Vietnam is burning'. A poem which is not a poem, inciting an action which is not an action. 'Did you feel better

after you burned that piece of paper?’ I asked the organisers. ‘But no one will burn it,’ they said].<sup>9</sup>

In exhorting readers to start a fire, this postcard too reads like a conscious response to KI. However, it transforms the flyers’ ambiguous, edgy air of menace into a slick, eye-catching and highly conventional communication which everyone knows will not have dangerous consequences. As the New Left would have put it, in this invitation the culture industry recuperates KI’s once-subversive works for commercial or otherwise socially stabilising ends.<sup>10</sup> For all their fundamental differences, both the Frankfurt arson and Domin’s postcard appear to be termini of anti-war poetic writing. The Frankfurt fire-raisers’ turn to violent praxis expresses a loss of faith in the oppositional power of text. On Domin’s postcard, meanwhile, formerly disruptive language about the war is seamlessly absorbed by the Establishment it had sought to challenge.

All these events and examples seem to support a particular view of the development of anti-war poetry in West Germany. In this perspective, poetry has a short-lived, early currency in Fried’s work, followed by wider debate about it, and its role, in 1966–7. However, by 1968 such literature is called into question by anti-authoritarians, before being rapidly superseded by other, non-literary kinds of writing and action like KI’s, and ultimately, by acts of violence, for instance those in Frankfurt, which abandon any kind of written word. At the same time protest literature is commodified and neutralised by mainstream culture.

In this account, West German anti-war poetry is at best a sparse, minor, transient genre which expired long before the murderous war it documented. It was soon forgotten as the protest movements turned their attention away from Vietnam and fragmented, in part under the pressures of political violence, from around 1968. This interpretation dovetails with the notion that the West German protest movements were themselves brief and finite, epitomised today by the way in which they are often denoted by reference to just one year: 1968. That date becomes a cipher which serves discursively to sever the politics of the time from longer historical and cultural continua. The idea that anti-war poetry was meagre in quantity is also cognate with the common view that the New Left produced little or no literature, especially as the 1960s came to a close.

However, this conclusion to the present study challenges such stories in quite fundamental ways. It begins by looking back at findings from [Chapters 1 and 2](#) of this book, which uncovered a remarkable anti-war poetry and poetic writing that appeared over years in the FRG. This closing chapter goes on to reflect on the extent of that corpus and its

connections with other kinds of writing and anti-authoritarian textuality, as well as its diverse authorship. It opens up, too, wider consideration of the potential of poetry to circulate and create dialogue transnationally, and to move both with and against political discourse. Put another way, this conclusion not only casts light on previously neglected forms of protest culture; it also offers a vantage on the relationship of poetry, history and politics in the post-war FRG and, more broadly still, in global Modernity.

The discussion comments, subsequently, on poetic representations of the war, as explored in [Chapters 3, 4 and 5](#) of this study. These chapters addressed, respectively, the representation of women and gender politics in anti-war writing; complex, contradictory relationships between the poems, news media and photographs; and KI's May flyers. In many ways the images of war explored here seem limited and Eurocentric; they also seem to turn away from Vietnam itself and its people. Simultaneously, however, some of them problematise such qualities, showing that critique of representation itself was a key if under-acknowledged preoccupation in anti-authoritarian thought. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the meanings of this insight in the fraught contexts of post-Holocaust, Vietnam-era West Germany; and on some of the responses poetic writing could offer to the era's acute dilemmas in representation. Throughout, this conclusion highlights prospects for new research.

## Poetry, popularity, longevity

At first sight, the apparently anti-poetic conclusion to *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, and the demise of *amBEATion*, the magazine from which it emerged, seem to corroborate narratives about the leftist rejection of poetry around 1968. In *tode's* anthology, the call to give up poetry is expressed in its last poem, Karlhans Frank's 'Man sollte ihnen die Fressen...' ['Their Gobs Need to Be...'] (85–6), which concludes:

Keine Gedichte gegen den Krieg in Vietnam !  
AKTIONEN !!!

[No poems against the war in Vietnam !  
ACTIONS !!!] (86)

Such a demand seems at first sight to be an uncompromising rejection of poetry. Yet paradoxically, that thought is itself expressed in a poem, and

other lines within it express clear faith in the sustained power of poetry over time:

Wortesteller als Wortesteller  
können kommende Kriege verhindern

[Word-setters as word-setters  
can prevent future wars]. (86)

The apparent neologism 'Wortesteller' forms part of the poem's poetological reflections, reimagining the poet as perhaps a kind of technician, in the spirit of Weimar-era Modernisms.<sup>11</sup> However, the poem also makes use of techniques strongly associated with more classical literary writing, including allegory, high intertextual reference (to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe) and elliptical expression. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that 'Man sollte ihnen die Fressen...' was not in fact the last poem Frank was to publish about Vietnam.<sup>12</sup> That is to say, his valedictory words in *gegen den krieg in vietnam* cannot be taken at face value as an unequivocal dismissal of poetry, but as something rather more ambiguous and complex. Indeed, they are best reframed as a poetic trope of the time which embraces poetry as much as it rejects it.

It is in fact more precise to suggest that *gegen den krieg in vietnam* and its polemical yet indubitably poetic ending illustrate the sustained importance of poetry to anti-authoritarians, as well as the contradictions of that vision. Certainly there were shifts in emphasis and interest among poets, writers and activists in the later 1960s and early 1970s, and levels of poetic production fluctuated over these years and to an extent declined. Nonetheless, this study has found that anti-war poetry was produced throughout the Vietnam War years, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, both in and beyond anti-authoritarian culture in a narrow sense.

The earliest example of anti-war poetry featured in this monograph is Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 'abendnachrichten' ['evening news'] of 1964.<sup>13</sup> Hundreds more poems followed, long after the Frankfurt arson and the end of KI. In 1974, ten years on from 'abendnachrichten', the important left-wing literary journal *Kürbiskern* [*Pumpkin Seed*] was still publishing anti-war poetry, as it had done since 1966.<sup>14</sup> In the same year, socialist feminist theologian Dorothee Sölle published poems in her collection *die revolutionäre geduld* [*revolutionary patience*], about a visit she had made in 1972 to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), or North Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> She later wrote of the influence during the war years of her friend, the doctor Erich Wulff.<sup>16</sup> Wulff was better known to West German readers in the 1960s as the pseudonymous memoirist Georg W.

Alsheimer, who recorded his time in Vietnam in his *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre: Sechs Jahre als deutscher Arzt in Vietnam 1961–1967* [*Vietnamese Apprentice Years: Six years as a German doctor in Vietnam*] (1968).<sup>17</sup> Significantly in context, Alsheimer's account of his political education in Vietnam makes a place for classic poetry.

Yet at the same time, no neat division between poetry and other kinds of writing exists in West German anti-war culture. For example, Chapter 5 of this study has argued that KI's May flyers were as poetic as they were political. On one hand, they deployed the same themes and tropes as the era's poetry, albeit parodically; on the other, they drew on avant-garde textual strategies. Indeed, Domin's postcard, including as it did a poem, demonstrates that resonances between the May flyers and modern poetry could be fully recognised in their day, in this case by the author(s) of the card. Seen in this way, the May flyers mark an apotheosis of poetic writing about Vietnam, for in early summer 1967, as KI's work dominated the headlines, it briefly outshone all other anti-war discourse and achieved an impact that eludes most conventional literary texts. Here, poetic writing not only called the political shots; it had unprecedented demotic reach. Therefore the May flyers and their aftermath constituted a remarkable moment in the cultural history of West Germany, pushing political poetics into new realms.

Such unorthodox forms did not simply succeed poetry in a linear development, for anti-war culture had included distinctive blends of text, aesthetics and action from the start. An early example is the irreverent output of West Berlin cabarettist Wolfgang Neuss, which became a political *cause célèbre* in 1965.<sup>18</sup> Neither did this type of textuality come to an end with KI. The Frankfurt arson of 1968 was no doubt intended as an offensive rejection of the supposedly powerless written word; yet it is hallmarked by a distinctive interest in text. Most notably, the accused gave a speech during their trial which was rapidly published under the title *Vor einer solchen Justiz verteidigen wir uns nicht! Schlußwort im Kaufhausbrandprozeß* [*We Won't Defend Ourselves Before This Judicial System! Our Summing-Up in the Department Store Fire Trial*].<sup>19</sup> This work's heteroglossia, conspicuous intertextual references and performative aspects are reminiscent of KI's, and more generally of a particular anti-authoritarian style, both of which can be understood as poetic in an expansive sense. The Frankfurt arson can therefore be understood as a knowing part of a complex intertextual fabric; without accompanying writings like *Vor einer solchen Justiz verteidigen wir uns nicht!*, it could not have had conveyed the meanings that it did.<sup>20</sup>

*Vor einer solchen Justiz verteidigen wir uns nicht!* was published in the *Voltaire Flugschriften*, a series that showcased key anti-authoritarian



writings as well as simple yet striking Modernist design by Christian Chruxin. Later, he styled Sölle's book *die revolutionäre geduld* and there are clear similarities in the look of these volumes. Thus for all the fundamental differences between the positions of Sölle and the Frankfurt arsonists, in visual, cultural historical senses their work is, at some level, linked. Exploration of all sorts of anti-war writings therefore starts to reveal that they are densely patterned with such relationships. Neglected as much of this prolific, long-lived production has been in scholarship to date, it offers a rich field for further research which would consider not only individual works, but also the complex, avant-garde intertextuality that holds them together and defies generic boundaries.

## In different voices

The emblematic volume *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, and its origins in the literary magazine *amBEATion*, demonstrate that anti-war poetic writing flourished above all in non-canonical contexts like underground publications, little periodicals and small, independent presses. Investigation of these forgotten spaces therefore casts corrective light on common perceptions of West German counterculture. *tode's* anthology is also important in part because it presents the work of many poets, and so communicates something of the depth and breadth of the era's anti-war poetry. Some contributors are reckoned to be literary writers in a classic sense and remain better known, for instance Nicolas Born, Volker Braun and Fried. Others were aligned with the era's more fleeting agit-prop movement, and still others are quite unknown today. In addition, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* highlights the transnational connections of anti-war culture. It includes works by such East German poets as Braun, demonstrating the importance of GDR writing for West German protest culture. This volume also presents German-language texts produced elsewhere, including in Switzerland or, in Fried's case, London, as well as poems in translation from Vietnam itself.

Nonetheless, *gegen den krieg in vietnam* offers only a partial picture of the wider body of poetry uncovered by this study. It is not the only anti-war anthology of its time: for example, two double issues of the magazine *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurlkunst* [*working notebooks of the amateur art circle*] were devoted to Vietnam in 1966 and 1970. This periodical was based in Oberhausen, in North Rhine-Westphalia in the far west of Germany. It was linked not to a student or anti-authoritarian

organisation, but to the FRG's Deutsche Kommunistische Partei [German Communist Party] (DKP).<sup>21</sup>

Likewise, the anthology *Beispiele Beispiele: Texte aus der Literarischen Werkstatt Gelsenkirchen* [Examples Examples: Texts from the Gelsenkirchen Literary Workshop] (1969), which contains a significant group of anti-war poems, was produced by a non-student, leftist writing group in another city in North Rhine-Westphalia.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, this book's title emphasises a local identity by referencing its roots in Gelsenkirchen, and so draws attention to the fact that anti-war poetry and protest were important well beyond high-profile anti-authoritarian settings like West Berlin in 1968.

Authorship of the poetry as a whole is similarly more diverse than *gegen den krieg in vietnam* suggests. There are no women among its 49 contributors, for instance, a gap which is all the more striking given that *amBEATion* had previously included writing by women as a matter of course. Narrative writing about Vietnam by women, notably reportage and memoir, was widely available in the FRG, often in translation.<sup>23</sup> The absence of women poets from *gegen den krieg in vietnam* is also misleading in that women like Sölle published poetry about Vietnam, albeit apparently in small numbers.<sup>24</sup> The two substantial special issues of *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* on Vietnam, from 1966 and 1970, for instance, do contain work by women. Contemporary recognition of one of these contributors, singer-songwriter Fasia Jansen, is underlined by a photograph of her with her guitar, published in *Kürbiskern* in 1968.<sup>25</sup> In this picture, she is jointly leading part of the annual country-wide peace march, the Ostermarsch [Easter March] in 1965. Gendered canons thus seem to be at work within high anti-authoritarian contexts like *gegen den krieg in vietnam* and the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß.<sup>26</sup> These insights indicate the importance of exploring further the work of women writers in the protest movements, and ways in which they were sidelined in both protest and mainstream cultures.<sup>27</sup>

The examples of Sölle and Jansen indicate the diversity of anti-war writing in respects beyond gender, too. Sölle's Vietnam poems demonstrate that the peace movement's partially Christian roots were not simply effaced in the late 1960s by the more eye-catching, non-pacifist, militant, if unorthodox Marxist politics of the anti-authoritarian movement. Sölle's work also highlights the transnationalism of anti-war engagement, for it emphasises, along with the impact of her visit to North Vietnam, the ongoing influence of the US Christian peace movement. Meanwhile the fact that Jansen wrote song lyrics about Vietnam expands

an understanding of anti-war poetic writing beyond lyric poetry in a conventional sense.

The protagonists of protest are often imagined as members of the post-war generation, born during or shortly after the Second World War and raised in the nascent Federal Republic. However, Sölle and Jansen, both born in 1929, had lived through the Nazi and wartime eras as teenagers; and Jansen's position as an Afro-German placed her at highly complex historical intersections in those years and later. Other poets included in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurlkunst und gegen den krieg in Vietnam* were of an older generation. Gerd Semmer, for example, was born in 1917, while Swiss citizen Walter Matthias Diggelmann was born in 1927. Fried spoke at the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß, and was in general more closely aligned with the anti-authoritarian movement than other prominent writers, but he too was of a different generation from many participants, for he was born in 1921. In addition, he was a Londoner, a Jewish exile from Austria who had escaped anti-Semitic persecution under Nazism.

Therefore not all anti-war poets are younger, German-born, FRG-based anti-authoritarians, and as a result, their political and subjective loci are by no means identical. This circumstance is made clear in a remark by another anti-war campaigner, the artist, dramatist and author Peter Weiss. Weiss, like Fried, was in many ways sympathetic to the anti-authoritarian anti-war movement, and he too spoke at the West Berlin conference. He was known as the author of an important anti-war play, generally known as *Viet Nam Diskurs [Discourse on Vietnam]*; he also published a book-length account of a visit he made to North Vietnam in 1968.<sup>28</sup> Weiss was born in 1916 and, as a Czechoslovakian citizen of Jewish descent, in the Nazi years had to flee to Sweden where he lived for the rest of his life. He reflected in his *Notizbücher 1960–1971 [Notebooks 1960–1971]* (1982) on a frustrating attempt at collaboration with an SDS project on theatre in 1968:

Merke immer wieder: ich komm von ganz wo anders her

[I keep noticing: I'm coming from a completely different place].<sup>29</sup>

At first sight this remark seems to address differences in poetics or politics, but Weiss's very next note reads:

Vielleicht dies alles nur Versuche, die Emigration zu überwinden.  
Verspätet. Oder zu spät.

[Perhaps all nothing but attempts to get over emigration. Belatedly. Or too late]. (607)

In context, then, it seems that Weiss was mindful of painful differences in areas beyond dramatic theory. Awareness of anti-war writers' varied positionalities, in terms of gender, politics, generation, home and heritage, among other factors, invites future research into protest culture which foregrounds and reflects further on its diversity. Such awareness underscores the possibility that delicate, distinct interpretations are required of the differing significance of the German past for different anti-war writers, and of the ways in which it plays into their work on Vietnam.

## Transnational, translational poetry

In 1966 Alsheimer noted:

Der Mangel an zuverlässiger Information über den Vietnamkonflikt ist in der Bundesrepublik besonders groß

[The lack of reliable information about the Vietnam conflict is especially great in the Federal Republic].<sup>30</sup>

Confirming this view, not many original historical or analytical texts about Vietnam appeared in West Germany.<sup>31</sup> Very few publications were based on personal knowledge of the country, to the extent that memoirs or poems such as Alsheimer's, Sölle's and Weiss's were highly unusual.<sup>32</sup> Just a handful of originally Vietnamese-language political texts relating to the war became available in translation for West German readers.<sup>33</sup> These works made their way into German via initial translations into other languages, primarily French, and this provenance meant that editors, translators or publishers in the FRG were not necessarily working from first-hand knowledge of Vietnamese culture. Moreover, the comparatively late publication of these works, starting in 1968, meant that they did not have a formative influence on the West German discourse on Vietnam, by then well developed.

This publishing landscape reflects the generally extremely limited engagement in the anti-war movement with voices from Vietnam itself. For instance, speakers from Vietnam are not represented in the published proceedings of the Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß.<sup>34</sup> A contemporary flyer detailing participants in the large demonstration which followed it

includes such varied groups as ‘Pfarrer’ [‘priests’] and ‘Berufsschüler’ [‘vocational school students’], and attendees from as far afield as Chile, Norway, Iraq, Italy and Turkey. However, it does not mention Vietnamese representatives.<sup>35</sup>

In a 1968 essay, prominent anti-authoritarian Rudi Dutschke described the only organised debate West Berlin anti-authoritarians held on Vietnam with US diplomats, in 1965.<sup>36</sup> He stressed that the activists based their arguments exclusively on sources from US media, to indicate the power of the anti-authoritarians’ arguments, given that they were supported even by documents from the US. It also emphasises that knowledge of US wrongdoing in Vietnam was fully in the public domain, and hence undeniable. Striking too, however, is the implication in Dutschke’s account that his comrades had only indirect access to and knowledge of Vietnam, and that the dialogue he highlighted as being so formative took place about, not with, Vietnamese people.

Yet there is one key exception to this apparent dearth of engagement with Vietnam, namely poetry. From 1966 onwards and well into the 1970s, a small but significant body of Vietnamese poems appeared in translation in the FRG.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the very first publication of texts from Vietnam in the war years may well be a group of poems by To Huu, Thich Nhat Hanh and Thai Luan in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* in 1966.<sup>38</sup> Significantly too, in the Federal Republic, poems by iconic North Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh appeared before any of his political writings.<sup>39</sup>

This interest in poetry from Vietnam mirrors the emphasis which supporters of the DRV and the South Vietnamese rebel organisation, the National Liberation Front (NLF), placed internationally on that organisation’s literacy campaigns in rural Vietnam, as evidence for its creditable intentions.<sup>40</sup> As Weiss recorded in his *Notizbücher 1960–61* after his visit to the DRV:

In Viet Nam ist die Bildung nur etwas Wünschenswertes –

[In Viet Nam education is nothing but desirable – ]. (606)

Simultaneously, more local factors are at work here. Like Weiss’s emphasis on the literary arts in his travel memoir, the relative visibility of poems from the Vietnamese in West Germany emphasises and amplifies the protest movements’ literary interests.<sup>41</sup> In the German context, with its particular reverence for high culture, to identify the Vietnamese revolution with poetry was to lend it prestige and moral authority. In a

related way, publication of Ho Chi Minh's poems resonates with anti-authoritarian theories about the so-called subjective factors of politics. To see him not only as a visionary leader but also as a person of deep artistic sensibility made Ho Chi Minh a template for the ideal anti-authoritarian subject which, for West Germans, was equally attuned to the political, the personal, the aesthetic and the symbolic.

Therefore, to the extent that Vietnamese voices could be heard in the Federal Republic, it was perhaps above all in poetry. Vietnamese poems in German contexts, the discourses around them and their routes into the FRG's anti-war culture all provide important subjects for future research. Such study could also include the ways in which German literature travelled in turn to wartime Vietnam, and so open up Asian-German perspectives which are genuinely comparative, dialogical and timely.

There is scope here too to reflect further on the powers and properties of poetry itself. West German interest in the Vietnamese poems was no doubt partly due to their formal qualities, for their brevity made them comparatively quick and inexpensive to translate and disseminate. Poetry seems especially amenable to swift, intercultural circulation and transnational exchange, and to have privileged communicative potential in times of historical change and crisis.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, in making space for Vietnamese voices, the anti-war poetry in West Germany went against the grain of much conventional discourse about the war, both mainstream and countercultural. Poetry is thus revealed as a complex, multivalent political space; and all these insights can flow into new accounts of the place of poetry in twentieth-century history and politics.

## Mythologies of war

The speaker of Enzensberger's poem 'abendnachrichten' (1964) reflects on a news report he hears indistinctly, probably on the radio, during his evening meal. The bulletin describes a massacre taking place over a handful of rice, a shortage of rice to eat and heavy gunfire on lightly built cottages. At the close, the protagonist imagines he hears rice pattering on the roof of his own home:

Reiskörner auf meinem Dach:  
den ersten Märzregen, deutlich

[Rice grains on my roof:  
the first March rains, distinct].

The distant war intrudes into the speaker's life, as far as that most private of spaces and times, the home in the evening. He has a roof over his head, modern comforts and communications and food to eat. He is perhaps looking forward to spring showers, traditional harbingers of a hopeful season of new life. But here the imagined sounds of firing, scarce and wastefully spilt grains and raindrops blur, unsettling the domestic peacetime idyll.

Enzensberger's 'abendnachrichten' makes no specific allusion to Vietnam and is suggestive rather than explicit in its meanings.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, it is in many respects characteristic of the anti-war poetry which was to follow in West Germany. Like most later poems, 'abendnachrichten' is short and expressed simply in free verse. In the tight confines of two five-line stanzas, its representation of the war is, of necessity, sparing. Nonetheless, this poem contains *in nuce* some predominant themes and images in West German poetry about the Vietnam War.

The conflict on the news is transformed into the heavily freighted images of rice, flimsy homes and gunfire. In this respect, 'abendnachrichten' anticipates an anti-war poetry that often prefers symbolic to realist representations. To the extent that this poem identifies the theatre of war at all, it is through the signifier of rice, which suggests the imagined East in stereotypical, generic ways. Enzensberger also foreshadows a later poetic but clichéd focus on rural settings and attacks on civilians. Reference to 'Trommelfeuer' ['barrage of gunfire'] heralds, indirectly, some of the anti-war writing's most central tropes for representing warfare, namely hi-tech weaponry and fire, savagely deployed against a defenceless population by an aggressor who commands vastly superior *matériel*.

In 'abendnachrichten' there is no identifiable fighter behind the gunfire. This feature aligns with another tendency in the corpus, that of depersonalising scenes of war. Indeed, in the most extreme cases, Vietnam becomes an apocalyptic locus in which technology and fire are the only agents on a dehumanised battlefield, the epitome of a technological Modernity embodied by the US and its horrific armaments. By contrast, apparently absent from 'abendnachrichten' is the distinctive gendering that characterises some of these scenarios in the later poetry, and as such may go some way to illuminating the more limited engagement of women poets in this corpus.<sup>44</sup> However, very much in the manner of many poems that followed, 'abendnachrichten' reflects on a helpless European bystander's consumption of news media.

Such prolific connections between 'abendnachrichten' and later poems draw attention to the remarkable consistency of many West

German poetic representations of the war. These works tend to minimise historical specificity about what US historian George C. Herring has called the seemingly ‘impossibly confusing’ historical situation of wartime Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> In reality Vietnam’s two states, the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, or South Vietnam), encompassed a tremendous diversity and profusion of regional, social, ethnic, religious and political settings, positions and divisions. The two states’ political life, the war itself and people’s lived experience of them unfolded in highly complex ways which far exceed the poems’ pared-back, limited representations.

Poets may have held that attempts to render even some of that complexity could diffuse their most vital message: namely that the conflict was terrible, unjust and had to stop. Especially as the 1960s progressed too, this abstract kind of depiction seemed compatible with the era’s increasingly common, Marxist-inspired, universalising analysis of the war.<sup>46</sup> On grounds like these, it could have been argued, albeit counter-intuitively, that interest in the detail – and contradictions – of war was at best a distraction, which might weaken the anti-war message. As such therefore, at worst it could even be seen as harmful to the wellbeing of the oppressed in not doing enough to end the conflict.

Such poetic treatment resembles the kind of discourse identified just a few years previously, in 1957, by the French critic Roland Barthes as ‘mythology’.<sup>47</sup> Barthes identifies this mode of representation as an important component, for example, of news media or advertising. He argues that mythology in this sense strips history and context away from a text or image in order to strengthen its claim to unassailable validity. In so doing, it simplifies and mystifies more than it clarifies. The anti-war poetry, of course, had very different objectives from the kinds of media Barthes analyses. Nonetheless, the case can be made that it too produces mythologies which occlude and exclude the real, highly diverse and involved situations of people in the two Vietnamese states, and of US and other foreign forces and agents stationed there. As this study has shown, such representations can play *inter alia* into stereotypes of a supposedly helpless (feminine) Orient and a powerful (masculine) West.

## War, representation, critique

Yet simultaneously, and at a more subtle level, ‘abendnachrichten’ calls such mythologising into question. It identifies the radio as the source of its unclear, excessively schematic portrayal of events (rice, unspecified countryside, civilians, gunfire). Consequently, the poem thematises



obstacles to understanding and communicating meaningfully about the East Asian conflict in Western Europe when listeners have to rely on such scant, biased information. The position of the European witness is fraught and uncertain, and the poem's unsettling vagueness about its subject matter (which war?) augments this sense.

Such preoccupations persist in many later poems. They often call into question the presentation of the war not only in news media, but also in many other kinds of text and image. Indeed, all the poems and related texts discussed in previous chapters of this study highlight and cite critically various domesticating, euphemistic, cynical or sentimental representations of Vietnam. In turn, KI's May flyers mock anti-war poetry, too. Such writings aim to expose the shortcomings of the genres and media they reference, and poems such as 'abendnachrichten', as well as the May flyers themselves, do not exempt themselves from such challenge, albeit often at an implicit level. Read in this context, Frank's poetic call 'Keine Gedichte gegen den Krieg in Vietnam!' takes on a different complexion. It can be understood not (only) as a call to action, but as part of a deceptively difficult fabric of poetic self-reflexivity.

In other words, the poetry about the Vietnam conflict is centrally preoccupied not only with war, but with the very possibility of depicting it. Consequently, it takes its place in a German literary tradition which is profoundly sceptical of direct representation.<sup>48</sup> In the theoretical debate of 1967 on anti-war poetry, critic and author Peter Härtling stated:

Da Nang und Hanoi widersetzen sich der Metrik, diese Geographie ist nicht poetisch, sie ist vermessen für Schlachten

[Da Nang and Hanoi resist poetic metre, this geography is not poetic, it is measured out for battle]. (58)

In other words, he argued that it is impossible to write valuable poetry which represents Vietnam itself, evoked synecdochally here by the names of two cities in South and North respectively. Härtling went on to assert:

Wir [machen] uns unmündig, indem wir [...] einer Beschreibungsliteratur das Wort reden. Wir ziehen uns an die Oberfläche zurück, begnügen uns mit der Haut der Dinge, halten uns in den Peripherien der Ereignisse auf.

[We disenfranchise ourselves when we [...] defend descriptive literature. We retreat to the surface, content ourselves with the outer skin of things, wait at the edges of events]. (60)

Härtling concludes that, faced with the Vietnam War, writers have to choose between the stark alternatives 'schreibe oder handle' ['write or take action'] (58). He thus espouses a canonical position in German art and literature, one which is sceptical about the aesthetic validity of the representational. Paradoxically, in so doing, he shares unexpected ground with anti-war poets like Frank, so underlining the paradoxes and complexity of protest textuality.

Perhaps equally unexpectedly, such ideas reverberate in wider anti-authoritarian thought. In 1968, Dutschke outlined a need for new kinds of political demonstration. He criticised conventional protests for being 'fast reine Informationsveranstaltungen' ['almost exclusively information sessions'] (83), presumably because they sought primarily to impart political knowledge. Indeed, the etymology of the word 'demonstration', from the Latin verb *demonstrare*, meaning to explain or show, suggests that the essence of such an undertaking is to represent political topics in comprehensible ways. But Dutschke rejects demonstrations which try to do so because they are targeted outwards, at explaining things to others. By contrast, he argues that protest should be directed inwards, at the protesting subject, in order to transform it.

Reflecting on innovative forms of protest as they were tested in the streets by anti-authoritarians, Dutschke notes:

Vielen Genossen von uns wurde [...] von anderen unseres Schlages vorgeworfen, Demonstrationen durchzuführen, ohne politische Inhalte sichtbar werden zu lassen

[Many of our comrades were [...] accused by others in our camp of carrying out demonstrations without making their political messages visible]. (75)

Dutschke is describing demonstrations which are controversial even among activists because they do not display their messages in the usual way: that is to say, because they forego representation. His critique of traditional demonstrations as 'reine Informationsveranstaltungen' thus resonates with the debate on representation which runs more explicitly through some of the anti-war poems and poetic writings.

Dutschke's essay suggests that this issue was a real preoccupation for anti-authoritarians. Their scepticism about representation has plural, profoundly entwined philosophical and theoretical roots, identification of which fosters understanding of anti-authoritarian thought. It derives in part from the classic view of art that was articulated by Härtling in 1967

and proved formative in the intellectual socialisation of many protagonists of the 1960s. At the same time, and in a related way, critique of conventional representation was familiar to the New Left from its intensive readings of Critical Theory. This scepticism also points to the anti-authoritarian movement's partial roots in avant-garde aesthetic theory, uninterested as it was in traditional art and its presentation of the world.<sup>49</sup> The significance of this shared theme in anti-war poetry and anti-authoritarian thought, poetics, praxis and direct action offers important prospects for new scholarship.

## Poetry and history

The debate in 1967 between Härtling and others on anti-war poetics suggests a further, related reason for the poems' scepticism about representation. Härtling and two further contributors to the discussion, Harald Hartung and Peter Rühmkorf, referred in their essays to the controversy about post-Holocaust art that was instigated by philosopher Theodor W. Adorno just six years after the end of the National Socialist era.<sup>50</sup> In a key formulation at the end of his essay 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' ['Cultural criticism and society'] (1951), Adorno commented:

nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch und das frisst auch die Erkenntnis an, die ausspricht, warum es unmöglich ward, heute Gedichte zu schreiben

[To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today].<sup>51</sup>

That is to say a poem, however apparently ahistorical, apolitical or personal, cannot exist independently from the barbarism of a society which has committed genocide. Rather, it is deeply implicated within it, just like the critical reader who tries to call it to account.

Adorno's statement is often read, or mis-read, as a comment on the representability of atrocity, especially when taken in tandem with another of his well-known writings on the topic, namely 'Engagement' ['Commitment'] (1962).<sup>52</sup> That essay refers back to 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' and takes more direct issue with the possibility of depicting the Holocaust in art. Adorno argues here *inter alia* that to do so is ethically

questionable, for it allows its audience cheap catharsis at the expense of historical victims. Moreover, in its affective impact, such representation blurs issues of culpability, complicity and guilt.

Yet at the same time, Adorno's dialectical approach means that he is not making the case for renouncing literature absolutely, as was, and is, often thought. Critic Charlotte Ryland sums up his thinking in this respect:

To write poetry is [...] to take part in a culture that is identified with barbarism, and yet not to write poetry is to fail to attempt to counter that barbarism. Adorno's pronouncement of this dialectic is consequently a call-to-arms: the production of poetry must not be discontinued, but any such production must remain permanently aware of its own impossibility.<sup>53</sup>

Adorno's work prompted extensive discussion which would probably have been familiar to sections of Hartung's, Härtling's and Rühmkorf's readerships, as well as to many poets in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>54</sup> It therefore forms an important theoretical hinterland not only for the 1967 debate on anti-war poetics, but for the poetry itself.

In the 1960s, this conversation about atrocity and representation gained new urgency through the daily profusion of shocking photographs, film footage and reportage coming out of Vietnam. Indeed, the decade knew a significant discourse in which the Vietnam conflict was explicitly compared with German wartime experiences and Nazi atrocities, including, frequently, in poetry.<sup>55</sup> An emphatic, representative example is a poem included in both Vietnam issues of *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurlkunst*, in 1966 and 1970: Semmer's 'Vietnam 1966'. This poem states:

Vietnam ist Lidice und Oradour,  
Vietnam ist Auschwitz, ist verbrannte Erde,  
[...]  
Konzentrationslager,  
  
[Vietnam is Lidice and Oradour,  
Vietnam is Auschwitz, is scorched earth,  
[...]  
Concentration camps,]<sup>56</sup>

This poem explicitly condenses atrocities in Vietnam with those in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz, as well as wartime massacres by German

personnel in Lidice in Czechoslovakia and Oradour-sur-Glane in France.<sup>57</sup> This kind of parallel was controversial and by no means universally accepted. Its presence in Fried's poems, for instance, partially catalysed the 1967 debate in which Härtling explicitly criticised poetic condensations of Vietnam and the Holocaust. All the same, Härtling shared with others in that exchange a sense that debate about art and National Socialist crimes was a relevant context for a discussion of poetry and Vietnam.<sup>58</sup>

The essays of 1967 by Hartung, Härtling and Rühmkorf demonstrate that anti-war writing's reflections on representation and Vietnam can be understood in part as an indirect yet painful reprise of the era's debate about poetry, Nazi atrocities and representation. Of course, the manifest anti-war engagement expressed in poems from the FRG can be taken and analysed as such; it is unsurprising that contemporary concerns about the representability of extreme violence in art should play a part in its reception. But in addition, if often in a more latent sense, poetry about Vietnam may simultaneously articulate ideas about recent German history which, as Adorno suggested, resisted more direct expression.<sup>59</sup> Put another way, the Vietnam topic allowed poets obliquely to write about extreme violence perpetrated relatively recently by Germans, or in their name. It may, in some cases, have offered a kind of projection screen for thoughts about crimes close to home. It also permitted an exploration, at a remove, of the challenges of representing such violence in poetry.

Hence, for West German writers, the Vietnam conflict was in one sense their own in quite particular ways. The civil war in East Asia was long and destructive, and in addition, it lacked the clear boundaries and parameters of more traditional warfare. As such it may have worked as an exceptionally apt correlative to deep, internal conflicts within German culture, about past crimes and poetics and the relationships between them. In these conflicts, as in the Vietnam War itself, the very terms of engagement were uncertain and no end seemed to be in sight. Analysis of this highly challenging complex in poetry offers a key focus for future investigation.

Despite the pressures of history and theory, many writers and poets interested in Vietnam did not respond with resignation to the era's widespread suspicion of representation. In the debate on Vietnam poetry, Fried, Hartung and Rühmkorf all offered explicit counter-arguments to Härtling's. And indeed, even as Härtling argues against the very possibility of anti-war poetry, he concludes his essay with an

understated yet significant relativisation of his argument in this respect. Thus, while writers and poets may have considered portraying something of the war to be at best a fragile and equivocal undertaking, and at worst an impossible one, they often sought ways through this poetic dilemma.

This study and its conclusion highlight some of these forays. In context, for instance, the poems' frequent recourse to mythology in a Barthesian sense may be an acknowledgement that scenarios of extreme violence defy more realist representational forms. Another distinctive feature of the poetry is its intertextuality and frequent, insistent citation of other texts, for example news reports and photographs. This heteroglossia foregrounds modes such as irony, parody and satire, and so has the potential to defamiliarise the complacent yet subliminally monstrous languages of everyday life. It dovetails, albeit discreetly, with the Situationist strategy of *détournement* that KI mobilised more spectacularly in its May flyers. In so doing, it not only challenges powerful language, but also foregrounds profound epistemological doubt and disturbance. In these respects, the poetic writing is distinctively Modernist. It highlights the fact that avant-garde aesthetics associated with the earlier twentieth century maintained its disruptive, sometimes explosive, political presence in post-war West Germany, albeit in sometimes occluded or unexpected locations and forms.

Even while anti-war poetry mirrors above all its authors' world, and is often very limited in what it says about others, it can, at least at times, embed its imagery in a critical self-reflexivity. On such an interpretation, the poems and poetic writings sometimes offer a space in which critique of the representation and meaning of distant violence is possible. They can simultaneously create and challenge mythologies, draw readers' attention to the difficulty of accessing the dense reality of Vietnam from afar and wrong-foot their certainties. In these ways, the texts in question showcase the capacity of poetic writing – and, indeed, of all language – to hold mutually opposing meanings, to be and to mean more than one (contradictory) thing at once. In the wider contexts of oppositional, anti-war publications, they have potential, too, to enter into an exchange with those few poetic voices from Vietnam itself that could sometimes be heard, albeit distantly and intermittently, in the war years. Taking the long view, and looking back from a different time, it is perhaps in this dialogue that West German poetic writing may prove to be most eloquent about the faraway war.

## Notes

- 1 See [Chapter 1](#).
- 2 Erich Fried, *und VIETNAM und: einundvierzig Gedichte* (1966), in Erich Fried, *Gesammelte Werke*, edited by Volker Kaukoreit and Klaus Wagenbach, 4 vols (Berlin: Klaus Wagenbach, 1998), I.
- 3 Günter Grass, *Ausgefragt: Gedichte und Zeichnungen* (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967), 58. Further page references follow in the text. See [Chapter 2](#).
- 4 See Harald Hartung, 'Poesie und Vietnam: Eine Entgegnung', *Der Monat* 19, no. 226 (July 1967): 78; Peter Härtling, 'Gegen rhetorische Ohnmacht: Kann man über Vietnam Gedichte schreiben?', *Der Monat* 19, no. 224 (May 1967), also in Erich Fried: *Gespräche und Kritiken*, edited by Rudolf Wolf (Bonn: Bouvier, 1986) and *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, edited by Petra Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995); Peter Rühmkorf, 'Haben wir zu viele Vietnam-Gedichte?', *konkret* no. 5, 1967 (May 1967). On this debate see Klaus Briegleb, *1968: Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 206–21.
- 5 *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by riewert qu. tode (Berlin: amBEATion, 1968). Further page references appear in the text. See [Chapter 2](#).
- 6 See e.g. Rudi Dutschke, 'Die geschichtlichen Bedingungen für den internationalen Emanzipationskampf', in Rudi Dutschke, Uwe Bergmann, Wolfgang Lefèvre and Bernd Rabehl, *Rebellion der Studenten oder die neue Opposition. Eine Analyse von Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968), 90; Peter Weiss, untitled address in *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes und die Globalstrategie des Imperialismus. Internationaler Vietnam-Kongreß 17./18. Februar 1968 Westberlin*, edited by Sibylle Plogstedt, SDS Westberlin and Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut (Berlin: INFL, 1968).
- 7 See [Chapter 5](#).
- 8 See e.g. Stefan Aust, *Der Baader-Meinhof-Komplex* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1997), 64–8; Ingo Juchler, *Die Studentenbewegungen in den Vereinigten Staaten und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland der sechziger Jahre: Eine Untersuchung hinsichtlich ihrer Beeinflussung durch Befreiungsbewegungen und -theorien aus der Dritten Welt* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1996); Gerd Koenen, *Vesper, Ensslin, Baader: Urszenen des deutschen Terrorismus* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2003), 133–49.
- 9 Hilde Domin, 'Nachwort: Das politische Gedicht und die Öffentlichkeit', in *Nachkrieg und Unfriede: Gedichte als Index*, edited by Hilde Domin (Neuwied and Berlin: Luchterhand, 1970), 161.
- 10 Cf. e.g. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Gemeinplätze, die neueste Literatur betreffend', *Kursbuch* 15 (November 1968); 'Commonplaces on the newest literature', translated by Michael Roloff, in Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Critical Essays*, edited by Reinhold Grimm and Bruce Armstrong (New York: Continuum, 1982).
- 11 Cf. e.g. Walter Benjamin, 'Der Autor als Produzent' (1934), in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991); 'The Author as Producer', translated by Edmund Jephcott (1968), in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 2 vols, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: Belknap, 1999).
- 12 Karlhans Frank, 'Das teuerste Kino der Welt', *Kürbiskern* no. 2, 1973 (June 1973), 261–3. Also noteworthy in context is the exuberant wordplay of Frank's near-contemporary, experimental volume *66&1 Gebrechelte Worte gestärkt von karlhans frank* (Frankfurt am Main: dipa, 1967).
- 13 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'abendnachrichten', in Enzensberger, *blindenschrift* (1964) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 11.
- 14 Dorothee Sölle, 'Bericht aus Hanoi', which is the collective title of a group of two poems, 'Das Reichtum der Armen' and 'Nachtrag zum 218', *Kürbiskern* no. 4, 1974 (December 1974): 35.
- 15 Dorothee Sölle, *die revolutionäre geduld* (Berlin: Wolfgang Fietkau, 1974). On Sölle's visit to the DRV see also Sölle, *Gegenwind: Erinnerungen* (1995) (Munich: Piper, 1999), 86–93; Renate Wind, *Dorothee Sölle – Rebellin und Mystikerin. Die Biografie* (2008) (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 87–99.
- 16 Sölle, *Gegenwind*, 86.
- 17 See [Chapter 3](#).
- 18 See [Chapter 1](#).

- 19 Andreas Baader, Gudrun Ensslin, Thorwald Proll and Horst Söhnlein, *Vor einer solchen Justiz verteidigen wir uns nicht! Schlußwort im Kaufhausbrandprozeß* (Frankfurt am Main and Berlin: Voltaire, n.d.).
- 20 Cf. Sara Hakemi, 'Das terroristische Manifest: Die RAF im Kontext avantgardistischer und neo-avantgardistischer Diskurse', in *1968: Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Studentenbewegung*, edited by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2007); Martin Klimke, "'We are not going to defend ourselves before such a justice system!' – 1968 and the courts", *German Law Journal* 10, no. 3 (2009); Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), 271–5.
- 21 *sonderheft vietnam, werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20+21 (1966); *Frieden für Vietnam: Sprechtexte Agitation Lieder*, edited by Annemarie Stern (Oberhausen: Arbeitskreis für Amateurliteratur, 1970), special issue, *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970). Further page references follow in the text.
- 22 *Beispiele Beispiele: Texte aus der Literarischen Werkstatt Gelsenkirchen*, edited by Hugo Ernst Käufer (Recklinghausen: Georg Bitter, 1969).
- 23 E.g. the Swiss journalist Lily Abegg, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung's* Tokyo correspondent, investigated the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, or South Vietnam) regime, but did not visit; Marion Gräfin Dönhoff of *Die Zeit* visited the RVN in 1966, Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, 159 and 356–7 respectively. Polish journalist Monika Warneńska reported in *konkret*; see [Chapter 1](#). Memoirs include e.g. Mary McCarthy, *Vietnam-Report*, translated by Klaus Harpprecht (Munich: Droemer Knauer, 1967); Susan Sontag, *Reise nach Hanoi*, translated by Anne Uhde (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1969); Sara Lidman, *Gespräche in Hanoi*, translated by A. O. Schwede (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1967). Cf. Ulla Hahn, *Literatur in der Aktion: Zur Entwicklung operativer Literaturformen in der Bundesrepublik* (Wiesbaden: Athenäum, 1978), 208.
- 24 E.g. Therese Angeloff, 'Der Knüppel Gottes' (lyric to music by Fasia Jansen), in *sonderheft vietnam, werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20–1 (1966) and 30–1 (1970): 15–6 and 48–9 respectively; Heike Doutiné, 'Überlegungen beim Lesen einer Zeitungsnotiz', in *agitprop: Lyrik, Thesen, Berichte*, edited by Fuhrmann et al. (Hamburg: Quer-Verlag, n.d.), 158; Renate v. Gyzicki, 'Befrieden', *Kürbiskern* no. 1, 1968 (1968): 29; Heike Doutiné, 'Vietnamesisch für Anfänger', *Kürbiskern* no. 2, 1968 (1968): 237–9; Ulla Hahn, 'Nixon in Moskau' (1972), in *Denkzettel: Politische Lyrik aus der BRD und Westberlin*, edited by Annie Voigtländer and Hubert Witt (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1974), 439–40; Linda Herold, '[gestern]' (untitled poem), *es darf: literarische jugendzeitschrift* 2, no. 6 (August 1968): n.p.; Fasia Jansen, 'Mutter, gib deinen Jungen nicht her' (song lyric) (1967), in Voigtländer and Witt, 435–6; Fasia [Jansen], 'An meinen amerikanischen Brieffreund Jonny' (song lyric), in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20+21 (1966) and 30+31 (1970): 14 and 50 respectively; Josianne Maas, 'Ausverkauf der Menschlichkeit', in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970): 62–3; Liselotte Rauner, 'Ich zähle zu denen', in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970): 65; Sölle, 'Bericht aus Hanoi' and *die revolutionäre geduld*; Annemarie Stern, 'Abzählreim für den Deutschen Franz Gerhard Prediger', *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20+21 (1966): 38.
- 25 Thomas Billhardt, *Ostermarsch 1965 mit Fasia Jansen, R. Conrads, Perry Friedman, Dieter Süverkrüp, Kürbiskern* no. 2, 1968 (June 1968), n.p. Cf. Marina Achenbach, *Fasia: Geliebte Rebellin* (Oberhausen: Asso, 2004).
- 26 Three women participants, Sarah Haffner, Elke Regehr and Helke Sander, have described the male-dominated character of the conference. Sarah Haffner, 'Die Kunst als Weg zu sich selbst'; Elke Regehr, 'Die Zerreißprobe zwischen Kunst und Politik'; Helke Sander, 'Nicht Opfer sein, sondern Macht haben', all in *Die 68erinnen: Porträt einer rebellischen Frauengeneration*, edited by Ute Kätzel (Berlin: Rowohlt, 2002).
- 27 Cf. [Chapter 3](#).
- 28 Peter Weiss, with additional research by Jürgen Horlemann, *Diskurs über die Vorgeschichte und den Verlauf des lang andauernden Befreiungskrieges in Viet Nam als Beispiel für die Notwendigkeit des bewaffneten Kampfes der Unterdrückten gegen ihre Unterdrücker sowie über die Versuche der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika die Grundlagen der Revolution zu vernichten* (1967), in Peter Weiss, *Stücke*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), II. 1; *Discourse on the Progress / of the Prolonged War of Liberation / in Viet Nam and the Events Leading up to It / as Illustration of the Necessity / for Armed Resistance Against Oppression / and on the Attempts / of the United States of America / to Destroy the Foundations of Revolution / (Discourse on Vietnam)*, translated by Geoffrey Skelton (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971). See [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#). Peter



- Weiss, *Notizen zum kulturellen Leben der demokratischen Republik Viet Nam* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968); *Notes on the Cultural Life of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam*, no trans. (1970) (London: Calder & Boyars, 1971). See [Chapter 3](#).
- 29 Peter Weiss, *Notizbücher 1960–1971* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 2 vols, II, 607. Further page references follow in the text.
- 30 Georg W. Alsheimer, 'Jürgen Horlemann und Peter Gäng, *Vietnam, Genesis eines Konfliktes*' (review), *Das Argument: Berliner Hefte für Probleme der Gesellschaft* 41 (December 1966): 520. While this volume, the standard anti-authoritarian work on the conflict, does cite texts from Vietnam, references are to English or French translations. Alsheimer points out that it did not reference French-language standard works on Vietnam, an important body of work since France was the region's former colonial power. This omission is significant in that materials in French would have been accessible to many educated West Germans.
- 31 E.g. *Das Argument* 36 (February 1966), special issue on 'Die Amerikaner in Vietnam'; Kurt Steinhaus, *Vietnam: Zum Problem der kolonialen Revolution und Konterrevolution* (1966) (Berlin: Voltaire, 1967), Jutta von Freyberg and Kurt Steinhaus, *Dokumente und Materialien der vietnamesischen Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Marxistische Blätter, 1969), 2 vols; Jürgen Horlemann and Peter Gäng, *Vietnam: Genesis eines Konflikts* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966). Horlemann had collaborated with Weiss in researching *Viet Nam Diskurs*, and *Vietnam: Genesis eines Konflikts* was the anti-authoritarians' key work on the conflict; it grew out of the authors' work in the SDS. Siegwald Lönnendonker, Bernd Rabehl and Jochen Staadt, *Die antiautoritäre Revolte: Der Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund nach der Trennung von der SPD. Band 1: 1960–1967* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002), 212. The bibliographies to texts such as these indicate what books on Vietnam were read or available. Cf. e.g. also reviews of books by Alsheimer in *Das Argument* 51 (April 1969).
- 32 See [Chapter 3](#).
- 33 Vo Nguyen Giap, *Volkskrieg, Volksarmee: Der Befreiungskrieg des vietnamesischen Volkes gegen die französischen Imperialisten und amerikanischen Interventionen (1945–1954)*, translated (from French) by Winfried Hauck (Munich: Trikont, 1968); Ho Chi Minh, *Gegen die amerikanische Aggression*, translated (from French) by Gisela Erler (Munich: Trikont, 1968); Lê Châu, *Bauernrevolution in Süd Vietnam*, translated (from French) by R. Weber and J. Heisburg (Munich: Trikont, 1968) and Le Duan, *Die vietnamesische Revolution: Grundprobleme und Hauptaufgaben*, translated (from French and English) by Günter Giesenfeld (Frankfurt am Main: Marxistische Blätter, 1973). Notable here is the work of the countercultural Trikont-Verlag, founded in 1968 in order to publish writing from and about the three decolonising continents, Africa, Asia and South America. Cf. Trikont Verlags-Kooperative, *Zerschlagt das bürgerliche Publikationswesen! Zur Politischen Funktion der Trikont Verlags-Kooperative. Polizeirazzia vom 24 September 1969* (Munich: Trikont, 1969).
- 34 *Der Kampf des vietnamesischen Volkes*, edited by Plogstedt, SDS Westberlin and Internationales Nachrichten- und Forschungsinstitut.
- 35 Unpublished, untitled flyer, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (HIS), Sammlung 'Sozialistisches Anwaltskollektiv Berlin', file no. 03.09 ('Flugblätter Einladungen Zirkulare Oberbaum KII, III, etc..').
- 36 Rudi Dutschke, 'Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus', in Bergmann, Dutschke, Lefèvre and Rabehl, *Rebellion der Studenten*, 64. US intelligence interpreted the event very differently. Wilfried Mausbach, 'Auschwitz und Vietnam: West German protest against America's war during the 1960s', in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and international perspectives*, edited by Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner and Mausbach (Washington, DC and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), 286, note 32.
- 37 Literary prose appeared later, in *Vietnamesische Erzählungen*, edited by Renate Riemack (Frankfurt am Main: Stimme, n.d., likely 1970). Further page references follow in the text.
- 38 To Huu, 'Mädchen aus Vietnam'; Thich Nhat Hanh, 'Meine Stimme', 'Friede', 'Unser grünender Garten'; Thai Luan 'Gleichgültigkeit', all translated by Annemarie Stern, *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20+21 (1966): 19, 20, 21, 22, 21 respectively; all, with the exception of 'Unser grünender Garten', reprinted in *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970): 16, 14, 16, 15 respectively. See also e.g. Do Quy Toan, 'Beweine ich den Tod', no translation, in *es darf... literarische jugendzeitschrift* 15 (January/February 1968): n.p.; Te Hanh, 'Zwischen meinen Töchtern sitzend', 'Hanoi 1966', both translated by Paul Wiens, in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 14 and 15 respectively; Xuân Diệu, 'Nächte auf dem

- Marsch', translated by K. Balsler, H. Heinrich, A. Klotsch and L. Schirmer, in Riemeck, *Vietnamesische Erzählungen*, 43–4. See also e.g. the later GDR volume *Gedichte für Vietnam*, edited by Klaus-Dieter Sommer (Berlin: Neues Leben, 1979), which includes poems from Vietnamese.
- 39 Ho Chi Minh, three poems, translated by Martin Jürgens, *konkret* no. 3, 1967 (March 1967): 48; *Gefängnistagebuch: 102 Gedichte. Als Sonderdruck der Lyrischen Hefte herausgegeben von Arnfrid Astel*, translated (from English) by Annegret Kirchhoff, Jürgens and Astel (Saarbrücken: Lyrische Hefte, 1968); 'Drei Gedichte' ('mitgeteilt von Peter Weiss, Stockholm') ['(shared by Peter Weiss, Stockholm)'], *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970): 12–3; 'nach vier monaten', *SPARTACUS: zeitschrift für lesbare literatur* 3, no. 4 (September 1970): 25; 'aus dem gefängnistagebuch', translated by Martin Jürgens, *Splitter: Zeitschrift für Literatur, Graphik und Kritik* 5, nos. 2+3 (December 1967): 36; three poems, translated by K. Balsler, H. Heinrich, A. Klotsch and L. Schirmer, in Riemeck, *Vietnamesische Erzählungen*, 6 and back cover; ten poems, translated by Marianne Bretschneider, in Lidman, *Gespräche in Hanoi*, 148–51; three poems translated by Erhard and Helga Scherner, in Sommer, *Gedichte für Vietnam*, 3, 4, 30.
- 40 E.g. Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organisation and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA. and London: The MIT Press, 1966), 281–3. Cf. Heiner Müller, '[In Vietnam werden die Zeitungen]' (untitled poem), in *gegen den krieg in vietnam*, edited by tode, 35.
- 41 Cf. e.g. Alsheimer's and Weiss's memoirs; Gabriele Sprigath, 'Über die vietnamesische Kulturfront', *Kürbiskern* no. 3, 1969 (September 1969) and 'Vietnamesische Frauen und nationale Befreiung', *Kürbiskern* no. 1, 1971 (March, 1971). At a later date, Sprigath was denied a university post due to the so-called 'Radikalen-Erlaß' ['Decree Against Radicals'] (1972) – FRG legislation that excluded individuals with supposedly politically undesirable, mostly leftist pasts, from public-sector appointments. The official dossier compiled about Sprigath in this process included an anti-war flyer she had written in 1968 for the Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterjugend [Socialist German Worker Youth] (SDAJ). Jutta Rübke, *Berufsverbote in Niedersachsen 1972–1990 – eine Dokumentation [Professional bans in Lower Saxony 1972–1990 – A documentation]* (Hanover: Niedersächsische Landeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 2018), 128–37; 'Berufsverbote in Niedersachsen 1972–1990 – eine Dokumentation', accessed 15 July 2021, [https://demokratie.niedersachsen.de/startseite/news/aktuelles\\_archiv/berufsverbote-in-niedersachsen-1972--1990-eine-dokumentation-170943.html](https://demokratie.niedersachsen.de/startseite/news/aktuelles_archiv/berufsverbote-in-niedersachsen-1972--1990-eine-dokumentation-170943.html). Sprigath's contributions to *Kürbiskern* show her engagement with Vietnamese writers and visitors in Europe: see [Chapter 3](#). Her fractured professional biography points to the underexplored significance of West Germans' dialogue with Vietnam and its impacts, a further field for future scholarship.
- 42 Cf. e.g. *Wo ist Vietnam? 89 Amerikanische Dichter gegen den Krieg*, edited by Walter Lowenfels (1967), translated by Renate Sami and Horst Tomayer (Darmstadt: Joseph Melzer, 1968).
- 43 On 'abendnachrichten' and Vietnam, see Reinhold Grimm, 'On Enzensberger', *Neohelicon* 34, no. 1 (June 2007): 223–4; Charlotte Melin, 'Celan and Enzensberger on an Asian conflict', *Germanic Notes* 18 (nos. 1/2) (1987).
- 44 See [Chapter 3](#).
- 45 George C. Herring, *America's Longest War: The United States and Vietnam, 1950–1975*, 3rd edn. (New York etc: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 150. Cf. Alsheimer, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*.
- 46 Cf. e.g. Wolfgang Kraushaar, 'Der Vietcong als Mythos des bewaffneten Volksaufstandes', in *Die RAF und der linke Terrorismus*, edited by Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2006), 2 vols, II. This work highlights the extreme partiality of such discourse. See [Chapter 1](#), n.79. Cf. Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third world politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 135–69.
- 47 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (1957), selected and translated by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993).
- 48 Cf. e.g. Keith Bullivant, *Realism Today: Aspects of the contemporary West German novel* (Leamington Spa, Hamburg and New York: Berg, 1987). This scepticism is crystallised in Günter Grass, 'In Ohnmacht gefallen', *Ausgefragt*, 58. See [Chapter 2](#).
- 49 From 1964 Dutschke was a member of a group called Subversive Aktion, which traced its philosophical origins partly through avant-garde aesthetic and political traditions. See e.g. *Nilferd des höllischen Urwalds – Spuren in eine unbekannt Stadt – Situationisten Gruppe SPUR*

- Kommune I*, edited by Wolfgang Dreßen, Dieter Kunzelmann and Eckhard Siepmann (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1991); *Subversive Aktion: Der Sinn der Organisation ist ihr Scheitern*, edited by Frank Böckelmann and Herbert Nagel (Frankfurt am Main: Neue Kritik, 1976); Ulrich Chaussy, *Die drei Leben des Rudi Dutschke: Eine Biographie* (Munich and Zurich: Pendo, 1993), 44–84; Ingo Juchler, 'Die Avantgardegruppe "Subversive Aktion" im Kontext der sich entwickelnden Studentenbewegung der sechziger Jahre', *Weimarer Beiträge* 49, no. 1 (1994). On avant-garde literary impulses in anti-authoritarianism, see Briegleb, 1968: *Literatur in der antiautoritären Bewegung*; Hakemi, 'Das terroristische Manifest'; Alexander Holmig, 'Die aktionistischen Wurzeln der Studentenbewegung: Subversive Aktion, Kommune I und die Neudefinition des Politischen', in 1968: *Handbuch zur Kultur- und Mediengeschichte der Studentenbewegung*, edited by Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2007).
- 50 Another participant in the debate on Vietnam poetry, Rühmkorf, also seems implicitly to reference Adorno's ideas. The authors come to varying conclusions on the representability of the Vietnam conflict in poetry.
- 51 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' (1951), in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz?*, edited by Petra Kiedaisch, 49; 'Cultural criticism and society', translated by Samuel and Shierry Weber (1981), in *The Adorno Reader*, edited by Brian O'Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 210.
- 52 Adorno, 'Engagement', in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz?*, edited by Petra Kiedaisch, 53–5; 'Commitment' (1962), translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen, in *Can One Live After Auschwitz? A Philosophical reader*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 240–58.
- 53 Charlotte Ryland, 'Re-membering Adorno: Political and cultural agendas in the debate about post-Holocaust art', *German Life and Letters* 62, no. 2 (April 2009), 144.
- 54 See Ryland for close critical readings of Hartung's and Härtling's arguments, and for further examples of the West German reception of Adorno's statement.
- 55 See Mausbach, who notes that these parallels shift over time. References in earlier anti-war discourse to German experiences of air raids in the Second World War gave way to equation of US actions in Vietnam with Nazi crimes. Finally, the trope of Auschwitz was 'repatriated' from Vietnam to Germany as activists began to see the FRG authorities themselves as a 'fascist' regime, complicit with the US.
- 56 Gerd Semmer, 'Vietnam 1966', *werkhefte des arbeitskreises für amateurliteratur* 20+21 (1966): 36–7, 36; *Frieden für Vietnam: Sprechtexte Agitation Lieder*, edited by Annemarie Stern (Oberhausen: Arbeitskreis für Amateurliteratur, 1970), 59–60, 59, a special issue of *werkhefte des kreises für amateurliteratur* 30+31 (1970).
- 57 Vietnam and Lidice are likewise condensed in Harry Oberländer's poem 'orte', in *Wir Kinder von Marx und Coca-Cola: Gedichte der Nachgeborenen. Texte von Autoren der Jahrgänge 1945–1955 aus der Bundesrepublik, Österreich und der Schweiz*, edited by Frank Brunner, Arnim Juhre and Heinz Kulas (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer, 1971), 14.
- 58 Inclusion of Härtling's essay in Kiedaisch's anthology on Adorno, *Lyrik nach Auschwitz?* underlines these tight connections.
- 59 Cf. Davies, 'West German representations of women and resistance in Vietnam, 1966–1973', in *Warlike Women and Death: Women warriors in the German imagination since 1500*, edited by Sarah Colvin and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Columbia SC: Camden House, 2009) and *Writing and the West German Protest Movements*, 75–103 and 134–8.

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In the 1960s and 1970s in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), or West Germany, newspaper readers and television viewers were appalled by terrible images of fires burning half a world away. The Vietnam War was a decisive catalyst for the era's wider protest movements and gave rise to an ardent anti-war discourse. This discourse privileged writing in many forms. Within it, poetry and poetic writing were key; and because coverage of the conflict in Vietnam often focused on spectacular, destructive conflagrations ignited by hi-tech machines of war, their dominant trope was fire. Hundreds of poems and related writings about Vietnam circulated in the FRG, yet they are almost entirely forgotten today.


*Poetic Writing and the Vietnam War in West Germany* uncovers and explores some of this rich production in order to present a new history of engaged poetic writing in the FRG in the 1960s and 1970s, and to draw out distinctive characteristics of wider protest culture. In doing so, it makes the case for attending to marginal, non-canonical or neglected literary and cultural forms, and for critical thinking about why they might, over time, have been obscured. This book offers, too, a case study for reflection on the representation of war, on ways in which German oppositional culture could imagine its others, and the ways in which other voices could speak to it in turn, and on the relationship of poetry to the historical world.

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