# RESTORING BEAUTY TO POLITICS

WORKING TOWARDS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN ART
AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF
THE CENTRE FOR POLITICAL BEAUTY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the attempts of the political activist group Centre for Political Beauty to restore beauty to politics. While the Centre for Political Beauty claims that their performances can be traced back to the multimedia artist Christoph Schlingensief, my contention is that their self-understanding as artists is problematic. By approaching selected interventions against the backdrop of their respective contexts in the history of the avant-garde, I develop criteria facilitating a differentiation between protest art and political activism. I posit that protest art, in contrast to political activism, need not be driven by a goal-oriented artistic intention, and must possess openness as a strategy. Rather than aiming at a direct pedagogical or educational effect on the audience, protest art desires to open up a dialogue between the artwork and the audience. The way in which shame operates in the interventions of the Centre for Political Beauty calls into question whether their interventions actually allow for the open and dialogical engagement that is promoted by protest art.

## KEYWORDS

On 22 November 2017, twenty-four concrete steles were revealed in the East German village Bornhagen in Thuringia [Fig. 1].[1] Resembling the 2,711 concrete steles of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, these objects constituted a response to a speech delivered by the extreme right-wing politician Björn Höcke. In January 2017, the key member of the German nationalist-populist party, Alternative for Germany (AfD), spoke in front of supporters in Dresden, centre of the right-wing and anti-immigration organisation Pegida. In the speech, he referred to the so-called Holocaust Memorial as a "monument of shame" and demanded a change in Germany's culture of "self-recriminating" commemoration which, according to Höcke, fails to mourn its country's own victims. In erecting these steles, the Centre for Political Beauty (the "Zentrum für politische Schönheit", hereafter "ZPS") wanted to establish a sign of protest against Höcke's speech. The political philosopher Philipp Ruch and his collaborators founded the ZPS in 2008, inspired by a utopian vision to create political beauty through the arts. This claim is extremely problematic since it seems to ignore Walter Benjamin's warning that "the aestheticizing of politics" is a practice closely tied to fascism.[2] Ruch elaborates on this vision in his purportedly political manifesto, *If Not Us, Then Who?* (the original German title is *Wenn nicht wir, wer dann?*), published in 2015, where he characterises human beings as perceptive to (moral) values.[3] He introduces beauty as a normative standard, and argues that those capable of feeling beauty will not only feel better, but will become better human beings.[4] Ruch attacks a diversity of contemporary political decisions as lacking beauty and announces that the ZPS will introduce beauty into politics in order to inspire morally refined behaviour.

*Deine Stele* (2017), the title of this work by the Berlin-based group of activists, is only one example of the numerous interventions of the ZPS with which they aim to restore beauty to politics. But what does it mean to reunite politics with beauty? Does disinterestedness, the Kantian criterion for beauty, not conflict with the nature of the political, which is naturally interested in the implementation of its own goals? Does art not lose one of its key characteristics, namely autonomy, then? And finally, if art is no longer characterised by its autonomy, how may we distinguish art from other goal-oriented practices, such as political activism?

[2]
Walter Benjamin, The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, in: *Selected Writings,* vol. 3, *1935–1938,* edited by Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA 2002, 101–133, here 122.

[3]
Philipp Ruch, *Wenn nicht wir, wer dann? Ein politisches Manifest*, München 2015, 116. Unless stated otherwise, translations from the German are my own.

[4]
Ruch, Politisches Manifest, 136.

[Fig. 1]
Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, Holocaust-Mahnmal in Bornhagen [Deine Stele],
2017 © Patryk Witt / Zentrum für Politische Schönheit.

While the political philosopher Oliver Marchart would assert that this very question proves that I am trapped in the ideology of the art field, whose "functionaries" view every turn toward political activism "as a disturbance to the smooth functioning of the field", I believe that it is important to still be able to differentiate between political activism and artistic practice.[5] If a differentiation is no longer possible, political extremists could invoke article 5 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*), which guarantees the freedom of art, in order to legitimise their political endeavours under the label "art". Another practical reason is that a blurring of boundaries between art and political activism would enable political activists to apply for the rather limited funding sources that are reserved for the arts. My main reason for insisting on this differentiation is, however, a philosophical one. A blurring between the boundaries of art and political activism would deny art the distinctive epistemic potential it possesses, namely, to stimulate critical reflection and independent thinking through aesthetic engagement. Since political activism pursues a clearly defined goal from the very beginning, it is only interested in persuading audiences from this goal rather than providing a realm in which the aesthetic allows for critical engagement that might end in dissensus with the goal of this specific kind of political activism. Therefore, I also find the plea Jonas Staal makes for "emancipatory propaganda art" as problematic as Chantal Mouffe's recent arguments in favour of a left populism.[6]

This explains the motivation behind this paper. My aim is to develop criteria facilitating a differentiation between art and political activism. It is important to note that I do not mean to deny that political activist art or "artivism", the word is a neologism combining the words activism and art, exists. While I would not go so far as Peter Weibel, who argues that it is "perhaps the twenty-first century's first new art form", I believe that "artivism" operates in a liminal sphere that allows audiences to develop their own responses to the representation while political activism does not.[7]

Artivism, as Gabriela Léon points out, "operates from the intersection of the 'expanded fields' [...] of art and activism to create scenarios that advance social criticism".[8] Léon references Rosalind Krauss's essay on "Sculpture in the Expanded Field", published in 1979, which introduces the expanded field to show how postmodern

[5]
Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics. Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*, Berlin 2019, 12.

[6]
Jonas Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA 2019, 3. See also Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, London/New York 2018.

[7]
Peter Weibel (ed.), *Global Activism. Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, Cambridge, MA 2015, 23.

[8]
Gabriela Léon, Artivism, in: *Beautiful Rising*, https://beautifulrising.org/tool/artivism (11.05.2020).

sculpture pushed the boundaries of conventional conceptions of art forms. My account of the art field is influenced by her formal explanation of the expanded field and less so Pierre Bourdieu's account of the cultural field which Marchart favours.[9] According to Bourdieu's explanation, the art field resembles the cultural field, in which people or institutions try to gain power.[10]

Another concern of this paper is to show why the practice of the ZPS has to be differentiated from the work of the German multimedia artist Christoph Schlingensief, who is frequently cited as their role model. In contrast to the ZPS, I will argue that Schlingensief operates in the realm of art rather than in the field of political activism. When Schlingensief died very prematurely at the age of forty-nine in 2010, the ZPS had existed for about two years.[11] Since the ZPS repeatedly emphasised that they understand themselves as Schlingensief's artistic heirs, a comparison of their strategies to involve and address the public may help establish criteria that make it easier to distinguish political protest art from political activism.[12] My hypothesis is that a consideration of "less visible forms of artistic-political engagement", namely Dada and Surrealism, could disambiguate key features of art and activism.[13] I will do this by approaching selected interventions by Schlingensief and the ZPS against the backdrop of their respective contexts in the history of the avant-garde. Prior to a comparison between Schlingensief and the ZPS, a distinction between the nature of protest art and political activism is merited.

## I. Protest Art versus Political Activism

The way in which the Occupy movement celebrated the art of protest led to a renewed interest in protest art, a sub-category of the broader genre public art that encompasses non-ephemeral public works, such as monuments, as well as socially engaged art projects and partici-

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Oliver Marchart, *Hegemonie im Kunstfeld. Die Documenta-Ausstellungen DX, D11, D12 und die Politik der Biennalisierung*, Köln 2008, 93–96.

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See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art. Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Stanford, CA 1996, 231.

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Given that Schlingensief was diagnosed with lung cancer in early 2008, he did not pay much attention to the early stages of the ZPS. His widow Aino Laberenz confirmed this in an email correspondence on 13 December 2017.

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See Tobias Timm, Schön politisch, in: *Die Zeit* 23, 2014, https://www.zeit.de/2014/23/kuenstlergruppe-berlin-rettung-syrische-kinder (14.04.2020).

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Gavin Grindon, Surrealism, Dada, and the Refusal of Work. Autonomy, Activism, and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde, in: *Oxford Art Journal* 34, 2011, 79–96, here 84.

patory art forms.[14] What differentiates protest art from other public art forms is that it positions itself *against* something, often the predominant political or economic system of capitalism, but also against new legislation or obsolete norms and conventions. Protest art may feature centrally in acts of civil disobedience. The Russian artist Pjotr Pawlenski famously stitched up his mouth as a gesture of solidarity with the convicted artist group Pussy Riot. In doing so, Pawlenski expressed his opposition to the way in which the ruling government led by Vladimir Putin violated the right for freedom of speech [Fig. 2].

The image Pawlenski created as sign of protest possessed a universal openness that engaged both the imaginations and cognitive faculties of its viewers, allowing them to make transferrals to their own life. It was not clear from the image as such, for example, that the protest was directed against Putin. The haggard face with the stitched-up mouth might, for example, be similarly evocative of a holocaust survivor rescued from a camp whose gesture was directed to the appeasement policy of the Western allies before their intervention against the German atrocities. Equally, it could have appealed to teenagers protesting against dominant parents by signalling that their voices are not heard.

By utilising aesthetic resources, protest art attempts to activate audiences to resist laws, policies or governmental decisions which are conceived as unjust. It therefore goes beyond participatory art whose main aim consists in engaging the audience in the process of creation. I have developed in a previous paper a virtue account of participatory art.[15] Virtues, according to the philosopher Julia Annas, are states of character that "enable us to respond in creative and imaginative ways to new challenges".[16] These challenges can occur in the moral, or in the aesthetic (or other) realms. Virtues are those excellent skills that enable us to overcome these novel challenges. If one assumes that virtues are required to respond to the challenge of shaping the open meaning of a participatory artwork, there is reason to suspect that a successful production of novel meaning depends on the way in which we activate and employ our virtues. Approaching the value of a participatory artwork from a virtue perspective will thereby allow us to take the important role the audience has in the construction of the value of a participatory artwork into account. My virtue account of participatory art bridges the gap between Claire Bishop's aesthetic
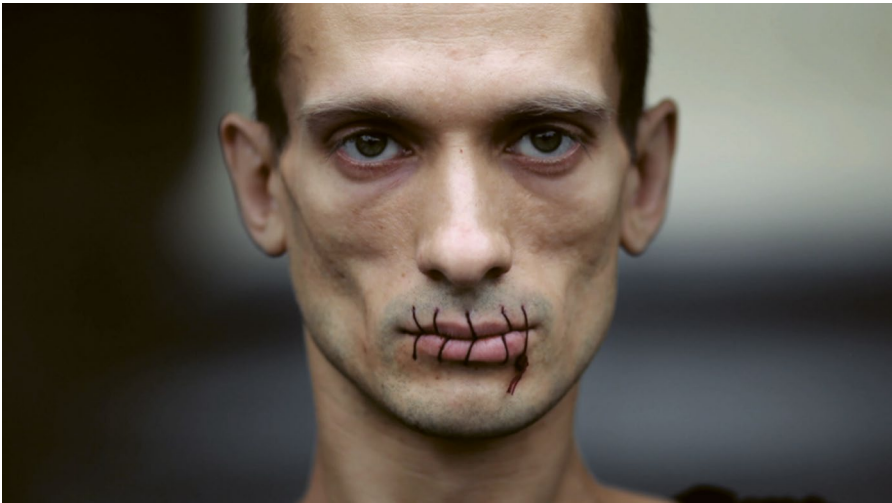
account and Grant Kester's ethical account of participatory art.[17] As they focus on either the aesthetic or the ethical aspect of participatory art whilst ignoring what makes participatory artworks so unique – their inextricable link between the ethical and the aesthetic – I find neither Bishop's nor Kester's account entirely persuasive.

Yet, protest art shares a distinctive feature with participatory art: both art forms depend on the active response and engagement of the audience to be successful. Their aesthetic value does not exist prior to its exposition to the audience. Therefore, they share the feature of other art forms, such as installation art, that their meaning is "constitutively open".[18]

The fact that protest art draws from and expands aesthetic resources allows us to distinguish between protest art qua art and protest as a form of political activism. Take, for example, the large egg-shaped balloon depicting Donald Trump as a baby in diapers that featured some of the then US president's significant characteristics, such as his yellow-orange quiff, his open mouth crying out angrily, and his mobile phone primed for his famous tweets. The balloon formed part of a protest against Trump in Edinburgh when he visited Scotland to play golf at his club in July 2018. While the balloon also employed aesthetic means in the broadest sense, it pursued an obvious agenda, namely to ridicule Trump by portraying him as an infant and hence lacking the capacities of insight and consideration that a president requires. In conveying this perspective on Trump so directly, the balloon lacked a form of aesthetic openness. Only one normatively desired viewer response to this balloon exists, namely, to join the resistance against Trump. This differentiates the balloon as a token of political activism pursuing the implementation of a clearly fixed agenda from protest art. In order to achieve this goal, political activists might make use of propaganda. Since propaganda derives from a normatively closed ideology, it lacks precisely this openness of response that is characteristic for the aesthetic realm in which protest art moves.[19] There is a long history in Germany concerning the autonomy of art and the danger of engaged art – beginning with Immanuel Kant, running through German Idealism and being again prevalent in Critical Theory. As Theodor W. Adorno emphasised in his essay "Engagement", political engagement has to remain ambiguous. If it is reduced to propaganda, it ridicules in its undignified form the whole

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See Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London/New York 2012; Claire Bishop (ed.), *Participation. Documents of Contemporary Art*, London/Cambridge, MA 2006; Claire Bishop, The Social Turn. Collaboration and Its Discontents, *Artforum* 44, 2006, 178–183; Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces. Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA/London 2004; and Grant H. Kester, *The One and the Many. Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context*, Durham, NC/London 2011.

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Juliane Rebentisch, *Aesthetics of Installation Art*, Berlin 2012, 262.

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W. E. B. Du Bois, Criteria of Negro Art, in: *The Crisis* 32, 1926, http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html (19.09.2018).

engagement of the subject.[20] Adorno argues that Schiller's essay "The Theatre Considered as a Moral Institution" launched a tradition in Germany that denied a reading of art as *l'art pour l'art*.[21] At the same time, art must not become too morally or politically involved. Adorno therefore took a very critical stance on Bertolt Brecht's "manipulative technique", which he employs to "coerce the desired effect".[22] Since the early 1990s, there has been a trend towards more socio-politically engaged communal activist art, for which Nicolas Bourriaud coined the term "relational aesthetics".[23] These art forms seem to conflict so strongly with Adorno's emphasis on artistic autonomy that scholars such as Oliver Marchart rejected Adorno's autonomy thesis altogether.[24] However, I rather align with Juliane Rebentisch who showed that the culture of freedom is constitutive for both the political and the aesthetic. Art's political power, in contrast to the functioning of political activism, is very subtle and nuanced (rather than explicit and propagandistic) and therefore expresses art's autonomy rather than limiting its freedom. Therefore, I am sceptical of recent claims, as put forward by Marchart and Staal, that art must not be afraid to operate as propaganda. Even W. E. B Du Bois, who famously claimed that "all Art is propaganda", conceded that it must never be "confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent".[25] The danger of propaganda, as the philosopher Jason Stanley notes, is the appeal to an ideal that has the effect of undermining this very ideal.[26] Therefore, protest art which makes use of aesthetic resources and facilitates open responses falls under the definition of art rather than political activism. Since the aesthetic realm encourages openness, it is "the only path towards the establishment of new values".[27]

While the exercise of free aesthetic judgements allows one to constitute values autonomously, the ZPS desires the audience to adopt values that their group – with its normative conception of beauty – has already established. This is why I disagree with scholars

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[20]
Theodor W. Adorno, Engagement, in: Rolf Tiedemannn (ed.), *Noten zur Literatur*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981, 409–430, here 410.

[21]
Ibid., 427.

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Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, London/New York 1997, 242.

[23]
Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon 2002, 28.

[24]
See Karen van den Berg, Riskante Manöver. Das Zentrum für Politische Schönheit (ZPS) und die politische Wahrheit der Illusion, in: Miriam Rummel, Raimar Stange, and Florian Waldvogel (eds.), *Haltung als Handlung. Das Zentrum für Politische Schönheit*, München 2018, 306–320, here 307.

[25]
Du Bois, Criteria of Negro Art, 290–297, http://www.webdubois.org/dbCriteriaNArt.html (23.03.2021).

[26]
Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, Princeton, NJ 2015, 53.

[27]
Ken-ichi Sasaki, Politics of Beauty, in: *Contemporary Aesthetics* 9, 2011, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.7523862.0009.005 (19.09.2018).

such as art historian Karen van den Berg who argued that the ZPS does not provide a form of political activism comprising clear guidance for action and convictions.[28] If, as Hannah Arendt suggests, the aesthetic judgement resembles the form of the political in "the fact of its being plural", it also impacts on political imagination.[29] This political imagination may consist in "the ability to imagine a political state of being that deviates significantly from the prevailing states of affairs", as Ariella Azoulay argues.[30]

The distinction between civil disobedience and aesthetic disobedience that Jonathan A. Neufeld draws might be helpful for further distinguishing between art and political activism. Neufeld introduces the concept of aesthetic disobedience as parallel to civil disobedience. While he describes an act of civil disobedience as "a public communicative act that breaks a law in order to draw attention to and reform perceived conflicts between law and other shared normative commitments", he conceives of an act of aesthetic disobedience as questioning and breaking the norms and laws of the artworld.[31] Neufeld claims that,

> [an] aesthetically disobedient act draws attention to a conflict in normative commitments that the citizens of the artworld may not have noticed and about which they may need convincing.[32]

This raises two questions; firstly, the question of what it means to be a citizen of the artworld; and, secondly, the question about the nature and content of the norms and the laws of the artwork that aesthetic disobedience challenges. While Neufeld does not specify what citizenship of the artworld consists in, he appears to conceive of the artworld as an institutionalised sphere, which gains its authority through these very institutions, such as museums and art associations. His account of the artworld seems to be coined by institutional theorists such as Arthur Danto and George Dickie who understood the artworld quite vaguely as "a certain social institution".[33] Since Neufeld refers mainly to artists, institutions and members of audiences as the artworld, he pays less consideration to the complex "cooperative networks through which art happens", which Howard S. Becker in-

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28
Van den Berg, Riskante Manöver, 320.

29
Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination. A Political Ontology of Photography*, London 2012, 35.

30
Ibid., 5.

31
Jonathan A. Neufeld, Aesthetic Disobedience, in: *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 73, 2015, 115–125, here 116.

32
Neufeld, Aesthetic Disobedience, 123.

33
Arthur Danto coined the term "artworld" in his seminal essay Arthur Danto, The Artworld, in: *The Journal of Philosophy* 61, 1964, 571–584; George Dickie, *Art and the Aesthetic. An Institutional Analysis*, Ithaca, NY/London 1974, 34.

troduces in his sociological account of artworlds published in 1982.[34]

Citizenship, as Richard Bellamy defines it, consists of the possession of a status of membership of a

> political and legal entity and having particular sorts of rights and obligations within it that distinguish one from being either a subject or a casual visitor, on the one hand, or performing some other noncivic social role, such as a friend, a neighbor, or a Good Samaritan, on the other.

Accordingly, aesthetic citizenship could be constituted by being part of a museum or gallery setting, being affiliated with an association such as the College Art Association or ICOM, being part of an artist collective or being an art critic or art historian.[35] The equivalent of the noncivic social role in the artworld could be acting as a donor, volunteer, art educator or tour guide. However, aesthetic citizenship does not impede other forms of citizenship or obligation. As Richard Schechner has pointed out, citizens of the artworld "will hold dual or even multiple citizenships".[36] With regard to the second question, regarding the nature and content of the norms and the laws of the artworld, Neufeld's reply might appear slightly opaque at first sight:

> Since some of the very boundaries of an artworld might be called into question, we need to leave open a characterization of the norms that might be targeted by acts of aesthetic disobedience.[37]

Neufeld concedes that "the norms of the artworld are not identified in the same way that laws are" as the "sources of artworld norms are more varied, and their authority is less formal than the sources of law".[38] The aesthetic realm subsequently appears to be characterised by an openness and ambiguity that the political realm in which civic disobedience is exercised lacks. This ambiguity extends to the content, form and audience responses within the artworld. In what follows, I will argue that it is specifically this openness and ambiguity that facilitates a distinction between art and political activism. So, let us agree on a preliminary definition of what, respectively, constitutes good protest art and effective political activism. Protest art is suc-

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[34]
Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, Berkeley, CA 2008, 1.

[35]
Richard Bellamy, Citizenship, Historical Development of, in: James D. Wright (ed.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 3, Oxford ²2015, 643–649, here 643 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.62078-0).

[36]
Richard Schechner, A Polity of Its Own Called Art, in: Mary Schmidt Campbell and Randy Martin (eds.), *Artistic Citizenship. A Public Voice for the Arts,* New York 2006, 33–41, here 39.

[37]
Neufeld, Aesthetic Disobedience, 124.

[38]
Ibid., 119.

cessful if it makes use of aesthetic resources to create a framework in which audiences can engage in a critical exchange about norms and laws. Political activism, by contrast, succeeds if it uses available resources, which may also be aesthetic resources, in order to convince an audience of a preconceived agenda, and ideally motivate them to stand against the contested norms or legal agenda and to join a form of resistance. In addition, protest art might (but does not necessarily need to) challenge the norms and conventions of the art world in a form of aesthetic disobedience. While the latter Neufeld-inspired criterion is certainly an asset to protest art, I would not go as far as establishing it as a necessary condition for something to count as protest art.

In order to develop criteria for the distinction between art and non-art, I will now examine (1) the artistic intentions behind different types of protest art in order to clarify the desired impact their artwork is intended to have on the audience, (2) the strategy utilised to achieve this impact and (3) the effect different types of protest art have on the audience. I posit that protest art, in contrast to political activism, need not be driven by a goal-oriented artistic intention, and must possess openness as a strategy. Rather than aiming at a direct pedagogical or educational effect on the audience, protest art desires to open up a dialogue between the artwork and the audience. Aligning with Boris Groys, I believe that this aesthetic element "creates an ultimate horizon for successful political action, if this action has a revolutionary perspective".[39] Therefore, I hope to map out and characterise the distinctive aesthetic component that protest art, in contrast to mere activism, entails.

## II. Public Shaming I: *Deine Stele* (2017)

The aforementioned Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin is located in the centre of Berlin between the Brandenburg Gate and Potsdamer Platz, close to the location where Hitler committed suicide in his bunker. Its construction by the US architect Peter Eisenman resembles a grid: the steles of differing heights and widths are arranged in rows. Some of them are slightly askew, which contributes to an effect of increasing disorientation the deeper one walks into the memorial. The ground of the path between the grid slopes down at points, furthering the effect of being overwhelmed and trapped by the solid concrete steles. Resembling a labyrinth, the memorial intends to evoke impressions of anxiety, hopelessness and disorientation, a reference to the emotions the memorialised experienced while trapped in concentration camps [Fig. 3]. At the same time, the memorial does not occlude a skyward perspective, as if to indicate that the future is still open.

[39] Boris Groys, On Art Activism, in: *E-flux* 56, 2014, 1–14, here 13, http://www.e-flux.com/journal/56/60343/on-art-activism/ (15.01.2018).

[Fig. 3]
Peter Eisenman, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, 2005. Berlin.
Photo: Sarah Hegenbart.

When the memorial opened to the public in 2005, sixty years after the end of the Second World War, there was finally a central public memorial to the Jews killed by the National Socialists. While the memorial has overall been well received, the extreme right-wing politician Höcke criticised it heavily in his speech on 17 January 2017:

> We Germans, that is our people, are the only people in the world that have planted a memorial of shame in the heart of their capital.[40]

Höcke purported that the "memorial of shame" impeded a more positive engagement with German history. In fact, the opposite was the case: internationally, the memorial was frequently lauded as a positive sign of Germany's capacity to learn from its history. In a nationalistic manner, Höcke went on to argue that Germans have failed to mourn their own victims and he demanded a complete reversal in Germany's culture and politics of commemoration.

Ruch and his collaborators experienced Höcke's Dresden speech as an ultimate "fall of man" and were determined to defend the Memorial as the sign of a societal agreement against fascism.[41] Their memorial in Bornhagen, constructed by the ZPS on a plot adjoining Höcke's residence in the village as a direct response to Höcke's speech, was erected in defence of the Holocaust Memorial with the clear message not to tolerate right-extremism and history revisionism any longer.[42] In reminiscence of Willy Brandt's historical gesture to fall on his knees as an expression of humility towards the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, the ZPS vowed only to leave Höcke alone if he knelt down in front of the ZPS's memorial erected next to his house. The steles the ZPS built in Bornhagen mimic those in Berlin. Two members of the ZPS had observed Höcke and his family for more than nine months because, as they argued, the German state security services had failed to investigate Höcke's activities.

Accordingly, Ruch conceived of *Deine Stele* as a monument that would refine Höcke's behaviour by virtue of public shaming. The ZPS's announcement that they would only withdraw the steles if Höcke knelt down in front of the pseudo-memorial as a gesture of apology was part of the performance. The ZPS's intention to utilise the arts to challenge the right-wing beliefs of people such as Höcke at first appears to align with Schlingensief's *Hamlet* (2001) production that premiered at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich on 10 May 2001. In an interview I conducted with Ruch, he frequently quoted *Hamlet*

[40]
Björn Höcke, Dresdner Gespräche, 17 January 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sti51c8abaw&feature=youtu.be&t=5800s (19.12.2017). My translation.

[41]
Jana Simon, Zentrum für Politische Schönheit. Höcke hat Besuch, in: *Die Zeit* 49, 2017, https://www.zeit.de/2017/49/zentrum-fuer-politische-schoenheit-bjoern-hoecke-holocaust-mahnmal/komplettansicht (19.09.2018).

[42]
Philipp Ruch, Die Zivilgesellschaft hat Deutschlands oberstem Hetzer ein Mahnmal gesetzt, in: *Political Beauty* [September 2018], https://www.politicalbeauty.de/mahnmal.html (19.09.2018).

as providing fundamental inspiration for his founding of the ZPS.[43] For this production, Schlingensief had founded the website naziline. com where he announced a casting for five acting jobs. Eligibility for this job required having a right-wing mind-set but considering leaving the extremist right-wing scene. The actors' task was to participate in Schlingensief's *Hamlet* production for which they were promised "real moolah".

Peter Kern's eighty-minute-long documentary *Hamlet – This Is Your Family* (2002) facilitates nuanced insights into the multiple conflicting perspectives that this production brought together. In addition, Thekla Heineke and Sandra Umathum edited the volume *Nazis Rein / Nazis Raus,* a volume that could be read either from the back or from its front cover.[44] The front part of the book focused on the perspective of Schlingensief and his team: it comprised diary entries and essays, such as by Schlingensief's dramaturge Carl Hegemann, emails, newspaper articles, letters, quotes and photos, material that inspired the production and a collection of its reviews. The neo-Nazi, Torsten Lemmer, filled the reverse part of the book with his ideas. This included an essay justifying the decision to join the neo-Nazi scene, lyrics by the neo-Nazi band Landser, portraits of the other neo-Nazis who took part in the production as well as various letters and emails. Rather than opposing and attacking the neo-Nazis, Schlingensief treated them according to the principle of equality and took them seriously as actors in a theatre piece. Throughout their collaboration, both groups had the opportunity to critically reflect on acquired positions and to refine their viewpoints and their conceptions of "truth", a theme pivotal to "Hamlet".[45] The realisation of the instability of conventional normative systems became part of the aesthetic experience.[46] The collaborative engagement allowed both groups to view the supposed "enemy" no longer against the backdrop of a mirror of one's own self, but as a distinct individual with whom one could enter into dialogue. This conflicts with the way in which the ZPS treats Höcke. In the case of the ZPS work, dialogue is denied outright. The ZPS's desire to educate Höcke and to bring about a change in his behaviour not only resembles "black pedagogy", but it also suggests that the ZPS is incapable of entering into a dialogue with those who represent other viewpoints.

In what follows, I will elucidate how fundamentally the ZPS and Schlingensief differ in their artistic intentions (while the ZPS at-

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[43]
Ruch pointed this out in a private conversation we had in December 2017.

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Thekla Heineke and Sandra Umathum (eds.), *Christoph Schlingensiefs Nazis Rein,* Frankfurt a. M. 2002.

[45]
See also Anna Teresa Scheer, *Christoph Schlingensief. Staging Chaos, Performing Politics and Theatrical Phantasmagoria*, London 2018, 163.

[46]
See Franziska Schößler, Nationale Mythen und avantgardistischer Widerstand bei Christoph Schlingensief, in: *Revue d'Allemagne et des pays de langue allemande* 45, 2013, 306 (DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/allemagne.1489).

tempts to educate Nazis, Schlingensief collaborates with them); the strategies employed by their works (while the ZPS employs public shaming as a strategy, the situations Schlingensief creates cause friction and thereby provide a platform to negotiate the tension in an act of dialogue); and their desired impact on the audience (while the ZPS desires to convey their prefixed ideology of beauty, Schlingensief prefers to inspire the audience to open-ended aesthetic imagination and self-reflection). I will here suggest that their different approaches derive from their understanding of aesthetics as either a normative standard, in the case of the ZPS, or a field for creative experimentation, as practised by Schlingensief.

## III. Beauty as a Normative Standard?

The idea of political beauty evokes parallels to Friedrich Schiller's vision of an aesthetic state. Schiller envisioned the aesthetic state as a realm mediating "the objective and generic character" of its individuals with "their subjective and specific character".[47] He believed that every human being

> carries within him, potentially and prescriptively, an ideal man, the archetype of a human being, and it is his life's task to be, through all his changing manifestations, in harmony with the unchanging unity of this ideal. This archetype, which is to be discerned more or less clearly in every individual, is represented by the state.[48]

The way in which fascist movements in the twentieth century perverted the idea of an aesthetic state might have contributed to the separation between the political and the aesthetic realm. Beauty became a contested notion, a symbol of undemocratic selectiveness based on physical appearance. Considering the reasons why beauty appears to have disappeared from politics in the first place, the ZPS's aspiration to reconcile beauty with politics seems surprising. And indeed Ruch suggests in his manifesto that the ZPS still conceives of beauty as a normative ideal that should be implemented. However, only few, namely those who are "blessed with the rare gift to feel beauty and to act according to her", will be able to live up to this task.[49] Not only will those few be privileged to "feel better than others, but (they) will become better".[50] Whereas the inextricable link between beauty and

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[47] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*, edited and translated by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, Oxford 1967, 19.

[48] Ibid., 17.

[49] Ruch, Politisches Manifest, 136.

[50] Ibid.

morality that Schiller described in his famous "Kallias-letters" was conceived as inclusive, Ruch introduces a hierarchy between those that are "blessed" and those that lack this blessing. Whether or not someone is blessed seems to be pure luck. Only those lucky ones have the chance to improve morally. Does Ruch seriously buy into the implication of his statement that those remaining are simply morally flawed?

Ruch's approach to beauty appears untimely in post-war Germany – an environment that Theodor W. Adorno had already analysed as incapable of poetry and beauty until it works through its past under fascism. While Adorno commanded psychoanalysis as a strategy to confront the underlying schemes, such as the collective narcissism that catered to fascism, Ruch attacks psychoanalysis very forcefully when he blames Sigmund Freud for being responsible for the lack of beauty.[51] He contends that it is due to Freud's "image-raging" (translated from the German "bildwütig" which appears to be a neologism invented by Ruch) and feculent allegations that human beings have become ugly and vulnerable. Ruch's fierce attacks on Freudian psychoanalysis and his upholding of beauty as a normative ideal (while it remains unclear what this ideal consists in) evoke eerie parallels to the cultural politics in Germany under the National Socialists. Naturally, this observation does not constitute a claim that Ruch aligns with the Nazis' ideology. On the contrary, I believe in the sincerity of the ZPS's motivations to alert the German public to re-emerging fascist tendencies which have increased with the advent of the extreme right-wing party AfD. However, my suspicion is that the underlying notion of beauty that inspires the ZPS does not allow for ambiguity and fragmentation, but targets a holistic utopian ideal which prevents an accommodation of otherness. This holistic approach to beauty implicates an incapacity to bear nuances, ambivalences, ruptures or differences. As Eric L. Santner pointed out, an incapacity to bear differences is linked to an incapacity to mourn since the task of mourning requires integrating novel (often different) characteristics adopted from the lost object into one's personality.[52]

If one compares Ruch's manifesto with other manifestos, such as the Dada Manifesto published in 1918, it becomes clear that Ruch's seriousness about restoring beauty to the political realm lacks the self-irony and ambiguity that would provide a realm for self-reflection and the modification of one's patterns of behaviour led by distinctive normative conceptions. This prevents him and his audience from playfully engaging with his writing and his political actions. If Ruch had not overlooked Schiller's concept of aesthetic play that is key to the Romanticist's vision of beauty, he might have been more susceptible to a different standard of beauty. Schiller argues that the "Spieltrieb" (play-drive) facilitates freedom by bringing the "sinnli-

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[51]
See ibid., 79.

[52]
See Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects. Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany*, Ithaca, NY/London 1990, 9.

che Trieb" (sense-drive) and "Formtrieb" (form drive) in concert. This freedom, to be experienced only at the aesthetic stage, enables human beings to differentiate themselves from their individual personality to open up a new world to them.[53] Since beauty results from "the work of free contemplation", it is questionable if it can be achieved if implemented ideologically.[54] Hence it is surprising that the ZPS frequently cites the German multimedia artist Christoph Schlingensief, and his performative actions, as a role model. While the content of Schlingensief's artistic interventions, many of which aim to alert us to increased anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism in post-war Germany, might sometimes coincide with the themes pursued by the ZPS, the artistic strategy guiding his performances fundamentally differs from that of the ZPS. This may be due to the fact that Schlingensief was inspired by Dada and Surrealism, in particular by Dada's use of ambiguity, incoherence, nonsense, self-irony and humour. As David Hughes emphasised:

> Schlingensief's atomized signifiers close out meaning almost completely. Rather than communicating any particular message about the world or about a given area of human experience, they tend to spread across all areas of experience, to cover all times, all places, all classes and all styles.[55]

In particular, André Breton's Second Surrealist Manifesto, according to which the "simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd", deeply fascinated Schlingensief since it left the question of where to draw the line between art performance and political action open.[56] In contrast to the Dadaists declaration that "the magic of a word – Dada – which has brought journalists to the gates of a world unforeseen, is of no importance to us", Ruch takes the concept of beauty, which lends his activist group its name, at face value rather than being suspicious of the ambivalences and connotations of this term.[57]

In contrast to Schlingensief's aesthetics of ambiguity, Ruch's fixed normative conceptions, which inform his public interventions, do nothing to allay my suspicion that the aesthetic strategies of the ZPS and Schlingensief are fundamentally different. Integration of the body into their performances is a key tool of both the ZPS and Schlin-

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[53] Schiller, Aesthetic Education, 97.

[54] Ibid., 185.

[55] David Hughes, Everything in Excess. Christoph Schlingensief and the Crisis of the German Left, in: *The Germanic Review. Literature, Culture, Theory* 81, 2006, 317–339, here 325.

[56] André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, Ann Arbor, MI 1972, 125.

[57] Tristan Tzara, Dada Manifesto (1918), in: Robert Motherwell (ed.), *The Dada Painters and Poets. An Anthology*, Cambridge, MA 1981, 76–81, here 76.

gensief to draw attention to failures in the German democratic system and to provoke the German state authorities into revealing their latent violence. However, I would contend that the ZPS pursues a pedagogical intention, whereas Schlingensief merely creates an (aesthetic) framework which provokes his audience to critically reflect on phenomena they may encounter in everyday life. A pedagogical device utilised by the ZPS is public shaming, as the following comparison of Schlingensief's *Aktion 18* (2002) and the ZPS's *Schweiz Entköppeln* (2016), an openly declared plagiarism of *Aktion 18,* will reveal.

### IV. The Etymological Link between Shame (*aidos*) and Genitalia (*aidoia*) Viewed against the Backdrop of Infant Narcissism

In *Hiding from Humanity. Disgust, Shame, and the Law,* Martha Nussbaum maps out a history of shame and highlights the etymological link between the Greek words for genitals (*aidoia*) and shame (*aidos*).[58] She argued that the genitals are a constant reminder of non-omnipotence since they need an external object (a sexual partner) to fulfil their function. Nussbaum asserts that basic shame is linked with the realisation that one is a non-self-sufficient human being dependent on the other. The subject needs to develop ways of relating to the external other, which involves, according to Donald Winnicott, an element of "subtle interchange" through which the subject learns to compensate for its lack of omnipotence.[59] Without this experience, shame might prevent one from working through anxieties so that one remains at the stage of infant narcissism.

The way in which the roots of public shaming can be traced back to infant narcissism is brought out very clearly in the ZPS's *Schweiz Entköppeln.* As part of the 2016 project, the ZPS set up a petition not only to kill Roger Köppel, but to select the means of his execution. Köppel is a right-wing Swiss nationalist publisher and politician. On their website, the ZPS invited the public to join them in "legally cursing" Köppel. The public were able to choose among options for Köppel's death, among them death by forced masturbation, incontinence or impotence. The way in which shame operates here as an intended response to a scenario created by the ZPS calls into question whether the scenario is actually an aesthetic one. Immanuel Kant, in explicating the openness of an aesthetic setting, posited that aesthetic engagement requires the free play of cognitive faculties in which the imagination is not directed towards a previously fixed goal. As such, the emotion of shame is clearly opposed to aesthetic engagement since it conflicts with the openness of a situation. Rather, shame operates as an indicator of failure at not having reached the desired

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[58] See Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity. Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, Princeton, NJ 2004, ch. 4.

[59] Donald W. Winnicot, *Holding and Interpretation. Fragments of an Analysis*, New York 1986, 96f. passim; Nussbaum, Hiding from Humanity, 165.

normative standard. The function of shame is to force the subject to conform to a norm.

Needless to say, there are moderate forms of shaming which do not so strongly appeal to our infant narcissism. In 1995, the philosopher Antanas Mockus became the mayor of Colombia's capital Bogotá, which suffered from severe traffic problems, among other things.[60] Mockus was determined to employ "artistically creative strategies" rather than "preaching" to solve these problems.[61] For example, he made use of mimes to mock people who did not stick to the traffic rules. This form of mockery proved to be more effective than fining. The mimes mirrored the culprits' behaviour in a surreal way. By simply mirroring people violating traffic rules, the mimes opened up a space for self-critical contemplation rather than pedagogical indication of the right manner of behaviour. If public shaming, such as in the form of mockery, creates a sphere in which one is forced to think critically and independently, it may prove an effective strategy. This requires a willingness to engage with others rather than teaching them from the position of a moral superior.

Rather than shaming the other, Schlingensief's performances can be characterised by a desire to work through the anxieties that endorse infant narcissism and the incapacity to bear ambiguities (of beauty). In contrast to Jack Davis's analysis of Schlingensief's narcissism that focuses on the staging of his artistic persona, I believe that Schlingensief rather attempts to challenge collective narcissism in post-war Germany, a relic of the failure to mourn.[62]

While Schlingensief's *Aktion 18* staged on 24 June 2002, which the ZPS appropriated from Schlingensief, also involved the cursing of a politician, namely Jürgen Möllemann, the ritual of exorcism which Schlingensief staged operates on a different symbolic level: its aim was therapeutic healing and a cathartic cleansing from anti-Semitic contamination. Yet, the strategy Schlingensief adopted involved a blurring between reality and fiction that forced the audience to reflect on the situation independently. Rather than using his production to persuade the audience of the pre-existing normative convictions of the ZPS, Schlingensief created a sphere for contemplation, challenging the audience to develop their own viewpoints. He did so by

[60]
Many thanks to Nick Riggle for drawing my attention to the artistic strategies of Antanas Mockus, see also Nick Riggle, *On Being Awesome. A Unified Theory of How Not to Suck*, New York 2017, 56–59.

[61]
Mara Cristina Caballero, Academic Turns City into a Social Experiment, in: *The Harvard Gazette*, 11 March 2004, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2004/03/academic-turns-city-into-a-social-experiment/ (19.09.2018).

[62]
Jack Davis, Through Performance to Social Justice. Schlingensief's Narcissistic Sociality, in: Axel Hildebrandt and Jill Twark (eds.), *Envisioning Social Justice*, Rochester, NY 2015, 205–226. See Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (1967), München 2014, 78.

performing a voodoo ritual in front of Achenbachstraße 56 in Düsseldorf, where Möllemann's company Web/Tec was located.[63]

"Web/Tec" is an abbreviation for "Wirtschafts- und Exportberatung" rather than an internet tech company, as the name might suggest. How euphemistic the translated title "economic and export consultancy" becomes is clear if one considers that Möllemann was heavily involved in exporting tanks to Saudi Arabia.

As part of the performance, Schlingensief burnt the Israeli flag and created a scenario reminiscent of the Nazis' public burning of books. On the website of *Aktion 18,* the public could choose between different books that ought to be burnt. During his performance, Schlingensief screamed that it is Möllemann's fault that something like this is possible in Germany again. Inspired by voodoo rituals, Schlingensief re-enacted Möllemann's verbal attacks against Israel. At the same time, he tried to cleanse Germany's culture by spreading Dalli laundry detergent over a piano. While Schlingensief also demanded Jürgen Möllemann be killed, the way in which he demonstratively burnt a voodoo doll symbolising the body of Möllemann suggested that the body here stands symbolically for certain character traits rejected by Schlingensief. The exercise of art in the form of a ritual, with which Möllemann's anti-Semitism was supposed to be exorcised, testifies to Schlingensief's long-standing fascination with the ritualistic function of art. The reference to ritual as well as the blurring of boundaries between fact and fiction open up parallels to Dada artists. Hugo Ball's *Magical Bishop* performance at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in June 1916 [Fig. 4], for example, epitomises the ways in which he was "entranced by ritual magic" in being "exorcist and possessed" at the same time.[64]

As Ball reports in his diary, *Flight Out of Time,* he "had made [him]self a special costume" and his legs were in "a cylinder of shiny blue cardboard, which came up to [his] hips so that [he] looked like an obelisk".[65] Ball remembers:

> I could not walk inside the cylinder so I was carried onto the stage in the dark and began slowly and solemnly:
>
> gadji beri bimba
> glandridi lauli lonni cadori
> gadjama bim beri glassala
> glandridi glassala tuffm i zimbrabim
> blassa galassasa tuffm i zimbrabim ...[66]

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[63]
Video documentation of the performance as well as the press conference Möllemann gave in response to it can be found online, see Schlingensief, *Aktion 18,* http://www.aktion18.de/start.htm (23.03.2021).

[64]
Hal Foster, Dada Mime, in: *October* 105, 2003, 166–176, here 167.

[65]
Hugo Ball, *Flight out of Time. A Dada Diary,* Berkeley, CA/Los Angeles, CA 1996, 70.

[66]
Ibid.

[Fig. 4]
Hugo Ball, Magical Bishop, 1916. Zurich © Stiftung Arp e.V., Berlin/Rolandswerth.

He continues:

> Then I noticed that my voice had no choice but to take on the ancient cadence of priestly lamentation, that style of liturgical singing that wails in all the Catholic churches of East and West. I do not know what gave me the idea of this music, but I began to chant my vowel sequences in a church style like a recitative, and tried not only to look serious but to force myself to be serious. For a moment it seemed as if there were a pale, bewildered face in my Cubist mask, that half-frightened, half-curious face of a ten-year-old boy, trembling and hanging avidly on the priest's words in the requiems and high masses in his home parish. Then the lights went out, as I had ordered, and bathed in sweat, I was carried down off the stage like a magical bishop.[67]

The Dadaists considered Dada as a "requiem mass" to bury conventional norms and societal restrictions. Similarly, Schlingensief employed his performances to protest against tendencies in his society, such as anti-Semitism, that he wanted to destroy.[68] Art here operates as an exorcism of suffering, induced by society. While Schlingensief's performance aimed at being a therapeutic treatment for anti-Semitism, right-wing propaganda and emerging nationalism, the ZPS does not appear to believe in healing any longer. Rather they posit a normative ideal of beauty towards which they want to educate their audience. Since many might not achieve the high moral standards they demand, they utilise shame as a sanction for behaviour they reject. The problem with the ZPS's approach of shaming, however, is that it might not be successful in realising their stated aim of guiding society towards self-knowledge.[69] The very dogmatism with which the ZPS demands self-knowledge might simply contradict the irony and playful engagement with one's environment that is constitutive for a creative development of one's distinctive personality. By prescribing beauty as a normative standard, the ZPS appears to avoid the critical task of "Trauerarbeit" (mourning work), which allows a coming to terms with the past. Referencing Freud, Santner argues that only the completion of the process of mourning enables the mourner to be free and to lovingly engage with new objects.[70] Facing the challenge of mourning requires a sense of openness, which has the capacity to

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[67] Ibid., 71.

[68] Hugo Ball, quoted from Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh (eds.), *Art since 1900. Modernism. Antimodernism. Postmodernism*, London 2004, 135.

[69] Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, Schweiz entköppeln!, in: *Political Beauty*, March 2016, https://www.politicalbeauty.de/koeppel.html (19.09.2018).

[70] See Santner, Stranded Objects, 2.

open up "extravagant and excessive possibilities of recollection, re-combination, and interpretation".[71] It is precisely the command of a sense of openness that the ZPS lacks.

## V. (Anti-)Manifestos and the Rejection of Principles

The charge of dogmatism not only results from the seriousness with which the ZPS stages their interventions and the detailed documentation of those on the group's website but also from the political manifesto published by Ruch. He declares there that those searching "for human greatness and ideals will find them in the beauty of democracy".[72] This statement appears surprising if one considers how heavily the ZPS, in interventions such as *Deine Stele*, attacked existing democracies as fallible. What kind of democracy is it that the artists conceive of as beautiful?

Analysing Thomas Hirschhorn's *Bataille Monument* as a case study, Anthony Gardner argues that the way in which democracy as political framework has been appropriated to sustain capitalist and imperialist interests "has risked buttressing and legitimizing the very politics it seeks to challenge".[73]

This is why in his opinion recent artists have attempted to "deidealize democracy" by mapping out its limits.[74] Moreover, non-Western countries, such as Afghanistan or Iraq, have frequently perceived the attempt to democratise them as a violent imposition by the West. Viewed against the backdrop of Gardner's challenge to "aesthetics of democratization", Ruch's appraisal of the beauty of democracy appears comparatively naive.[75] While Ruch's quest for ideals is most likely rooted in his Romanticism-inspired philosophy, his belief in the "beauty of democracy" as a facilitator of human greatness evokes parallels to a capitalist developmental logic. In Western capitalist ideology, democracy provides the basis not only for human self-realisation but also for a form of self-optimisation resulting in human greatness. Ruch's utopian vision of progress towards beauty mirrors the capitalist logic of the system from which the art of the ZPS emerged. The entanglement of the ZPS within the constraints of developmental thinking is reflected on their website. The way in which they validate their own interventions by referencing news coverage and sensational quotes, such as Höcke's characterisation of the ZPS as a "terrorist organisation", appears as if the ZPS measure the success of

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[71] See ibid., 12.

[72] Ruch, Politisches Manifest, 74.

[73] Anthony Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming. Postsocialist Art against Democracy*, Cambridge, MA 2017, 11.

[74] Ibid., 164.

[75] Ibid., 10.

their own projects by the amount of (media) coverage they receive.[76] While the ZPS cites "real" media coverage, Schlingensief blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction with some made-up quotes used on his website. When the politician Jürgen Möllemann responded to Schlingensief's demand for his execution with a press conference, he somehow shifted a performance that happened in the suspended realm of fiction into the context of reality. While Schlingensief did not indicate whether his political protest was real or pure fiction to challenge his audiences to think independently, the approach the ZPS pursues leaves little room for imagination and open-ended reflection. Rather, their strategy follows an intention to infiltrate their audiences with their own normative beliefs and political utopias of a "beautiful democracy". The clearly defined goal behind this approach conflicts quite strongly with Schlingensief's openness as well as with Dada logic, which consists, according to Tristan Tzara, in "active simplicity".[77] Tzara argued for works of art "that are strong straight precise and forever beyond understanding. Logic is a complication. Logic is always wrong."[78] Even though Tzara famously introduced a "Dada Manifesto", he "immediately undermine[d] the socially instrumental logic of the manifesto genre".[79]

While Ruch's manifesto for the ZPS is driven by the idea of mapping out a utopian future, Tzara reverses the very idea of formulating principles for the future when declaring that "I write this manifesto and I want nothing, and in principle I am against manifestos, as I am against principles".[80] Dada was born, as Tzara emphasises, "of a need for independence, of a distrust toward unity".[81] Rather than aiming at the implementation of the ideal of harmonious beauty in politics, Tzara rejects beauty outright since beauty does not possess universality. Tying political beauty and morality together, as Ruch does, is diametrically opposed to Tzara's rejection of morality that he describes as an "injection of chocolate into the veins of all men".[82] Rather than working towards a clearly defined utopian future, Tzara underlines that imposing "your ABC is a natural thing – hence deplorable".[83] He supports instead a love for novelty as a "positive sign

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[76]
Björn Höcke, quoted from Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, Bau des Holocaust-Mahnmal direkt vor Höckes Haus, in: *Political Beauty*, November 2017, https://politicalbeauty.de/holocaust-mahnmal-bornhagen.html (02.02.2018).

[77]
Tzara, Dada Manifesto, 80.

[78]
Ibid.

[79]
Leah Dickerman, Dada Gambits, in: *October* 105, 2003, 3–12, here 10.

[80]
Tzara, Dada Manifesto, 76.

[81]
Ibid., 77.

[82]
Ibid., 81.

[83]
Ibid., 76.

without a cause".[84] This is rooted in his conviction that "no ultimate Truth" exists.[85] The Dadaist logic that Tzara outlines is opposed to the logic of the ZPS, whose interventions appear as if they were motivated by a fixed normative conception of what counts as right and wrong. While the ZPS's performances employ public shaming, among other strategies, to prevail on their audiences to adopt their values, Schlingensief follows the trajectory of Dada. His staging possesses an openness allowing for the active participation of the spectator. This can be attributed to the belief that life is in constant flux and hence requires the on-going adaptation of one's norms and values. Irony as a playful engagement with the ambiguity of life operates as a pivotal strategy in both Dada's and Schlingensief's art. The ZPS, by contrast, seem to lack the humour pivotal to an imaginative engagement with their environments. Rather they aim to push through their clearly defined set of values with maximum seriousness, as their performance *The Dead Are Coming* (2015) reveals.

## VI. Public Shaming II: Burying Bodies of Refugees in Berlin

In June 2015, the ZPS staged the public burial of a thirty-four-year-old mother from Syria who died in the Mediterranean Sea when seeking refuge in Europe. Having sought the family's permission, the ZPS exhumed the body from an anonymous grave in Sicily to rebury the woman at a Muslim graveyard in Gatow, Berlin according to Islamic burial rites.[86] An imam buried the woman in a white coffin. The burial also involved an empty white coffin which stood symbolically for the woman's two-year-old child, whom she lost on the journey. Since the child's body could not be found, the empty coffin was only allowed to be part of the ceremony but not of the burial itself. Prior to the burial, the ZPS invited prominent politicians, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and German Federal Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière, to attend the ceremony.[87] The empty chairs in the front rows of the burial ceremony bearing the nametags of the invited politicians highlighted the politicians' absence [Fig. 5]. The heavy media presence at the burial [Fig. 6] contributed to the effect of exposing the politicians' absence.

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[84]
Ibid.

[85]
Ibid., 79.

[86]
See Melissa Eddy, Migrant's Funeral in Berlin Highlights Europe's Refugee Crisis, in: *New York Times*, 16 June 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/17/world/europe/migrants-funeral-in-berlin-highlights-europes-refugee-crisis.html?_r=0 (07.02.2018).

[87]
The ZPS published the invitation card to the funeral ceremony online, see Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, Traueranzeige, in: *Political Beauty*, June 2015, https://www.politicalbeauty.de/dtk/Traueranzeige.pdf (12.02.2018).

Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, *Beerdigung europäischer Mauertoter in der deutschen Hauptstadt* [The Dead Are Coming], 2015. Berlin © Nick Jaussi.

At the same time, however, the strong media turnout weakened the reflective and dignified atmosphere that one would expect at a burial ceremony. This evoked the impression that the ZPS was less interested in a respectful engagement with the particular individual they buried than in shaming German politicians for their purported "inaction" to help migrants.[88]

In an interview with the journalist John Dyer from Vice, Justus Lenz from the ZPS expressed how shameful he considered the way in which politicians dealt with the corpses of refugees. Lenz stated that it "is simply outrageous and undignified how they are treating these bodies".[89] Lenz, however, did not reflect on how outrageous and undignified the ZPS's behaviour might appear to Syrian refugees who had escaped to Germany and were confronted with the *The Dead Are Coming* intervention in Berlin. Berlin-based Syrian refugee Monis Bukhari explained his feelings to *Vice:*

> I came out from Syria. I saw the war there and what it's doing to human minds when you deal with dead bodies every day. We have enough sadness inside our hearts. We don't want to bring it here. We came here to find refuge, not to bring death with us.[90]

Taking the "mixed emotions" of Syrian refugees into account provokes reconsideration of whether the ZPS's shaming of the government was not in fact shameful in its own right as it did not pay enough attention to refugees' voices.[91] To what extent did the ZPS contradict themselves by attempting to expose "undignified behaviour" while not behaving dignified themselves?[92]

Rather than engaging self-critically with the ambiguity of their intervention, the ZPS quoted on their website a positive review of the burial that was originally published in the *Berliner Zeitung*.[93] In the article, journalist Arno Widman argued the ZPS transformed refugees into human beings, a deeply problematic summary of this intervention since it is based on two false assumptions. Firstly, that refugees are not

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[88]
Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, The Dead Are Coming, in: *Political Beauty*, 2015, http://www.politicalbeauty.com/dead.html (20.02.2018).

[89]
John Dyer, Activists Shame German Government by Burying Corpses of Migrants in Berlin, in: *Vice News*, 17 June 2015, https://news.vice.com/article/activists-shame-german-government-by-burying-corpses-of-migrants-in-berlin (09.02.2018).

[90]
Quoted from Dyer, Activists Shame, n. p.

[91]
Ibid.

[92]
Ibid.

[93]
Arno Widmann, So werden Flüchtlinge zu Menschen, in: *Berliner Zeitung*, 19 June 2015, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/1009808 (26.02.2018).

per se (conceived of as) human beings, and secondly, the implication that a corpse constitutes a human being. Widman claimed further:

> In light of the fact that the victims did not make it to our country alive, the Center for Political Beauty brings us their bodies. We are being confronted with the consequences of what we do or rather what we don't do. That is the one thing. The other is: the intervention transforms piles of corpses into individuals who lost their lives. It transforms refugees into people. The intervention also affirms our feeling that we are about to commit grave mistakes. We didn't ask what happened to those who died. The artists [sic!] are now doing exactly that.[94]

In his approval of the ZPS's rhetoric of shame, Widman ignores the dilemma of this moralising approach. Provoking shame may intensify a gap between "victims" and offenders rather than allowing each group to map out their positions. While the normative standard for the evaluation of what counts as shame was presupposed by the ZPS, they did not pay sufficient consideration to how shameful and undignified their intervention might appear to refugee audiences. Moreover, it seems as if the intervention was tailored to a homogenous stereotypically privileged "German" audience from which the refugees themselves were excluded. While the Dada and Schlingensief stagings were inclusive, the ZPS's tended to be designed for an exclusive audience. Hence this author's scepticism towards interpretations of the ZPS's interventions as "an act of citizenship".[95]

After an analysis of *The Dead Are Coming,* the cultural geographer Samuel Merrill concludes that this action,

> is still usefully considered as an act of citizenship particularly as, far from representing a habitual example of active citizenship, it created a scene, made a difference and brought about transformation through forms of performance, disturbance and rupture.[96]

Merrill's argument is based on the belief that active citizenship involves the obligation of public mourning for those who do not (yet) possess legal citizenship status. In challenging the ways in which Germans have failed to mourn dead refugees, the ZPS, according to Merrill, manifests a role model for new ways of public mourning. In order to substantiate his viewpoint, Merrill references research on

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[94]
Höcke's quote from *Berliner Zeitung* has been translated by the ZPS on their website, cf. Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, The Dead Are Coming.

[95]
Samuel Merrill, The Dead Are Coming. Political Performance Art, Activist Remembrance and Dig(ital) Protests, in: Ananda Breed and Tim Prentki (eds.), *Performance and Civic Engagement,* Cham 2017, 159–185, here 160.

[96]
Ibid., 164.

citizenship conducted by the sociologist Aleksandra Lewicki. Lewicki asserts that the ZPS "seek to mobilize a conscious, empathetic citizenry that does not look away, subjecting themselves to disturbing experiences of undignified practices".[97]

Although Merrill's argument that public mourning is constitutive of active citizenry may be justified, my contention is that the ZPS's piece, *The Dead Are Coming,* does not succeed in providing a platform for mourning, as the strategy of public shaming that the ZPS pursues conflicts with the idea of mourning. Adopting the psychoanalytical framework, mourning involves overcoming infant narcissism, which requires an acceptance of the other in its individuality. The audience, however, has no chance to properly grieve for the lost life of the dead woman since she remains anonymous and without individual features. Hence, her corpse functions as a mere tool needed for the staging of an event which does not primarily pursue a dignified memorial, but rather operates as a stage of public shaming, specifically a shaming of the politicians who ostensibly failed to rescue refugees like her. In taking the dignity of refugees into account, the question arises whether the ZPS's performance can reasonably be considered successful political activism. By aiming to cause shame, the ZPS only contributes to strengthening this type of infant narcissism that ought to be suspended in the act of mourning.[98] Not only did *The Dead Are Coming* not induce mourning in any substantial sense of the term, but it failed to facilitate an open engagement which would allow the audience to respond variously to an ambiguous scenario. Rather, the audience was co-opted into an exercise designed to induce shame. The shame, so the ZPS hoped, would result in a morally refined behaviour adhering to the standards they prescribed. This is problematic if one believes that active and self-determined citizenship requires the capacity to respond to situations spontaneously. Since the prevalent normative standard does not allow for a spontaneous response to the situation, it lacks the openness characteristic of a work of art. The following section briefly introduces Max Ernst's *Die Schammade* as a Dadaist strategy for overcoming infant narcissism and will conclude that Schlingensief's productions, such as *Aktion 18* and *Hamlet* (2001), are examples of public protest art that imaginatively engage with oppositional perspectives, rather than dismissing alternative ways of behaviour *tout court* by public shaming.

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[97] Aleksandra Lewicki, "The Dead Are Coming". Acts of Citizenship at Europe's Borders, in: *Citizenship Studies* 21, 2017, 275–290, here 286.

[98] In order to mourn, a dialogical engagement with the perspectives of the other, e.g. through a playful and ironic reflection about one's own norms and values, would be necessary and would need to replace an approach that only pursues the implementation of one's own normative beliefs.

## VII. *Die Schammade:* Shamans, Shame and Charade as Playful Engagement with Infant Narcissism

Max Ernst's Dadaist journal *Die Schammade,* published in Cologne in 1920, invites us to draw parallels to Schlingensief's shamanistic voodoo rituals, which I discussed against the backdrop of Hugo Ball's *Magical Bishop* performance. Similar to Schlingensief's cathartic desire to inspire processes of healing through his voodoo rituals, Ernst is fascinated by the figure of the shaman, which he sets in relation to the experience of shame. The term "*Sham*-man", which he introduces, conflates the terms shaman and man full of shame.[99] The title itself is a neologism and invites multiple interpretations: it condenses the German terms "Scham", which means "shame" as well as "genitals", with the noun "Made", the German word for "maggot". The term renders itself absurd in its deliberate ambiguity. Hal Foster references the Zurich Dadaist Hans Richter for whom the neologism sounded like *Scharade* (English: "charade"), an absurd pretence aiming at a pleasant and respectable appearance.[100] This evokes parallels to the functioning of infant narcissism, aiming to keep up the appearance of being omnipotent and strong rather than confessing one's dependence on another. By rendering all these attempts absurd, the Dadaist forces us to confront a world which is so incalculable that we have to step beyond the confinements of our self. Comparing *Die Schammade* to the manifesto of the ZPS reveals that the fixed normative conceptions of the ZPS fail to accommodate a humorous and ironical engagement with shame that would allow empathy with the needs of the other. This becomes especially clear if one compares the serious and dogmatic atmosphere of the ZPS's actions such as *Deine Stele* and *The Dead Are Coming* with the irony and openness in which Dada and Schlingensief address infant narcissism. In staging open-ended, fluid and confrontational performances, Schlingensief follows the path of Dada rather than aiming at a preconceived didactic result as the ZPS does.

## VIII. Conclusion

Having analysed selected case studies, this paper shows that protest art staged by the Dadaists and Schlingensief differs from political activism since it contains an openness and ambiguity that allows the audience to imaginatively engage with different perspectives. In contrast, political activism, as represented by the ZPS, pursues the implementation of a preconceived normative agenda by strategies that in fact impede the audience's personal development, a crucial episode of which is the moment where infant narcissism is overcome. Therefore, the ZPS's definition of themselves as Schlingensief's heirs is

[99]
Foster, Dada Mime, 171.

[100]
Ibid.

questionable to say the least. In intending to evoke "shame", an emotion that is linked with a fixed normative conception of what a human being ought to be like, the ZPS fail to follow Schlingensief's trajectory. Schlingensief, by contrast, created scenarios of ambivalence by utilising irony. This irony is linked with an open worldview that requires the spectators to reflect independently rather than inculcating them with a normative ideal. Since shame is rooted in the narcissistic desire for omnipotence and impedes a relation to external objects, public shaming is an ineffective strategy for initiating self-critical reflection. Rather than encouraging one to confront and modify one's norms and values by engaging with different perspectives, shame prevents one from working through one's anxieties. Ambivalence, by contrast, resembling characteristics of love, requires the audience to become actively engaged in order to "solve" inconclusive situations.

Schlingensief's early films, such as *Menu Total* (1986), reveal what the failure to overcome infant narcissism might lead to: cannibalism. The desire to incorporate others into one's own body to erase them may result from the realisation that it is too painful to bear their existences and the differences to one's own personality these existences implicate. I therefore consider the ZPS's engagement with right-wing populist politicians deeply problematic. Their mode of viewer or audience interaction and the failure to stage a dialogue signals a narcissistic desire to mould others until they coherently fit into one's own ideology of beauty. By contrast, the path Schlingensief suggested, namely to maintain a form of (self-)irony that allows one to remain open to new perspectives, may be more fruitful for developing a dialogue through which one can learn how to bear the other's difference and to engage with it. Hence, where ambivalence and irony have the capacity to lead to self-knowledge and moral refinement, the strategy of shaming consolidates a normative opposition based on a variety of infant narcissism which ought to be overcome through creative engagement rather than to be stabilised.

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