

Radical Failure. The Reinvention of German Identity in the Films of Christian Schlingensief.

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Radical Failure.

German Identity and (Re)unification in the Films of Christian Schlingensief.

Bertolt Brecht, the German playwright, made a note about his play *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, written in 1941. The play depicts a Chicago gangster boss, clearly recognizable as a persiflage of Adolf Hitler. Brecht writes: “The big political criminals should be sacrificed, and first of all to ridicule. Because they are not big political criminals, they are perpetrators of big political crimes, which is something completely different.” (Brecht 1967, 1177). In 1997 the German filmmaker, theatre director and professional *provocateur* Christoph Schlingensief created the performance *Mein Filz, mein Fett, mein Hase* at the Documenta X – the notoriously political episode of the art manifestation in Kassel, Germany – as a tribute to Fluxus-artist Joseph Beuys. He made his audience shout “Tötet Helmut Kohl!” (“Kill Helmut Kohl”, then the federal chancellor of Germany) and he was shortly arrested for this appeal for murder, but never prosecuted (Schlingensief 1997). Helmut Kohl was no ‘big political criminal’, neither was he a perpetrator of big political crimes, comparable to Arturo Ui/Adolf Hitler. By shouting this death threat on stage and by including it in an accompanying poster campaign, Schlingensief points to Helmut Kohl’s major and longtime unthinkable political performance – the unification of Germany in 1990. This historical event was the result of favorable historical contingencies, together with the far-reaching voluntarism of both Kohl himself and Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the Soviet Union. Schlingensief frames it as a political crime and his author as a subject for ridicule. It is a reversal of Monty Python’s famous sketch where a joke becomes a deadly weapon: here the weapon – or the threat to kill – becomes a joke, a truly Brechtian gesture. But Schlingensief also subverts Brecht’s statement about the politician as a perpetrator, by juxtaposing imaginary crimes and imaginary perpetrators, without linking them by criminal accountability or political causality – at least not at first sight. As it happens, Schlingensief’s actionist performances about Helmut Kohl are the continuation of a political and artistic position about the new identity of Germany, its leaders and its people. Christoph Schlingensief was invited in 1992 to join the artistic team of the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz (Dietze 2015, 295-297), the only Berlin theatre led by an East-German director, Frank Castorf, a former member of the dissident avant-garde in the GDR. Castorf sought to deal, in his reportorial choices, with all the fundamental traumas in the aftermath of the (re)unification of Germany, and with the ‘anomy’, i.e. the shared and threatening awareness of disappearance of self-evident societal rules, more specifically in a cultural sphere bereft of its political mission (Bogusz 2007, 147-148).

The traumatic identity of unified Germany, raised to ecstatic heights by its victory in the Cold War, and its re-invention after the end of the Cold War, this was exactly the subject of three major films Schlingensief made about recent German history, his so-called *Deutschlandtrilogie*. In *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler. Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker* (Schlingensief 1989), he stages Hitler's death as an expressionist nightmare. *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* ('The German Chainsaw Massacre') (Schlingensief 1990) is a parody of 'splatter' movie, showing the disappearance of the intra-German borders as an orgy of bloody violence. In *Terror 2000. Intensivstation Deutschland / Deutschland ausser Kontrolle* (Schlingensief 1992) the rise of neo-Nazi violence becomes a political satire somewhere between Mel Brooks' *The Producers* and outright trash – including cardboard swastikas.

This paper aims to put Schlingensief's *Deutschlandtrilogie* in the larger context of German (re)unification as an historical phenomenon. A phenomenon that urged Germans, politicians as well as citizens, *Jammerossis* as well as *Besserwessis*, to reconsider their national identity. The paradigmatic narrative of the unification process as an historical inevitability (Rödter 2009) and the notion of *Verfassungspatriotismus* ('constitutional patriotism'), coined by political philosophers Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas (Müller 2010), will be the red threads in this exercise.

1 The Films

1.1 *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler. Die letzte Stunde im Führerbunker*

The best known Hitler-parody in film is of course Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (Chaplin 1940), but Chaplin himself was famously quoted, after the war, that he wouldn't have made fun about this dictator, if he had known the horror of the concentration camps (Maubach 2005, 38). Did Schlingensief break a taboo by showing, once again, Hitler as a morphine addict, surrounded by social and sexual perverts? Schlingensief's *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, announced as 'the last hour of the *Führer*', is the most radical counterexample to the would-be historiography of *Der Untergang*, Oliver Hirschbiegels film about the downfall of Hitler in his bunker, told through the eyes of his secretary (Eichinger 2004): *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* is a maximal hyperbole, writing a history of its own (Vander Lugt 2010, 42). Schlingensief's script gives prominent roles to Hermann Goering, who was not present in the bunker and Hermann Fegelein, who was executed two days before Hitler's death. This Goering claims obsessively the succession as *Reichskanzler*, and this Fegelein harasses constantly his partners in distress, shouting "Ficken! Ficken". This is an allusion to a character the same actor, Volker Spengler, plays in Rainer Werner Fassbinders film *Satansbraten* (Fassbinder 1976), a retarded man who collects dead flies. Fassbinder is a crucial influence for Schlingensief, both in his esthetics as in his appreciation of *die Bonner Republik* in post-war (West-)Germany. Spengler will play again a comparable character in *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* (Seeblen

2015, 90). The alternative narrative of Schlingensiefel's last moments in the bunker show Eva Braun taking the lead, killing Hitler, succeeding him by painting his infamous moustache on her upper lip. The children of Joseph and Martha Goebbels are poisoned by their parents – this is historically accurate indeed – but here Martha marries Eva/Adolf, she gives birth to a cloth doll and dies. Eva and Fegelein leave the bunker in a boat, after having set out the doll in a bath tub, a Moses-like gesture. This last image is intersected with a speech by Franz-Joseph Strauss, the conservative political leader in Bavaria, during the 1960ies and 1970ies, who praises the German race for its historical exploits: the Federal Republic of Germany is created in direct lineage with the Nazi regime or its renegades (Vander Lugt 2010, 41). *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, a no-budget project, was filmed during an uninterrupted session of sixteen hours, with one handheld camera and one handheld spot, and the fatigue of the actors often becomes tangible, as if we witness a marathon theatre play. The inserts of television images of Strauss and other editorial interventions contribute substantially to its cultural and political urgency. Simple anti-illusionary effects, such as an uncut transition from the clapper to the action, right in the first scene, and the inserted, anachronistic footage, all refer to the theatricality of the early Fassbinder – like *Die Niklashauser Fart* (Fassbinder and Fengler 1970), about a mad medieval preacher, climaxing in a contemporary shootout – and, more substantially, they subvert any attempt of political recuperation of the filmic content. A first insert shows Wim Wenders, the most successful director of the *Neuer Deutsche Film* ('new German cinema'), at the awards ceremony of the Cannes film festival. He says that "we can make better images of the world, and so we can make a better world". In the provocative juxtaposition of this footage next to a withering Hitler-character, he ridicules any form of messianic art (Maubach 2005, 58-59). At the same time, he suggests that Hitler – born in 1889, 100 years earlier, indeed – should be a part of the famous German remembrance culture, where birthdays serve as fetishes of memory. Hitler is as much a part of German culture as Goethe, Schiller or Bismarck (Seeßlen 2015, 87). *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* is actually some kind of registration of a theatrical performance, and Schlingensiefel manages to retain that performative quality. The anachronistic references and inserts – Hitler as body artist and *Aktionist*, using his ass as a brush and his excrements as paint, the cloth doll as the fetus of the *Bonner Republik* – do not wake up the universal do-gooder in us, as spectators, but rather, to our major disgust, the well-hidden fascist.

1.2 *Das deutsche Kettensagenmassaker*

Christoph Schlingensiefel made the first part of this German trilogy just before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the (re)unification, 1989-1990, but the hints to the ensuing identity crisis of both German states, bastard children of the post-war world order, are unmistakable. This problematic offspring is

suddenly forced, spurred by its own inner forces, to live together in the same country, under the same constitution. Immediately after the unification ceremonies, October 3, 1990, Schlingensief writes, in a few days, an extremely violent script about this basically peaceful process, with the tagline: “they came as friends, they finished as sausage”. *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* is an attempt to test how gross a metaphor can be, before losing its relevance. The film starts with footage from the unification ceremony at the Brandenburger Tor, Berlin. Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker finishes his speech, he steps aside and you can hear him say “And now the national anthem” – he is the director of a theatre performance. As it happens, von Weizsäcker, with his considerable moral authority, had always been skeptical about the way Chancellor Kohl lead the unification process, at high speed and without too much attention for hesitations from the succeeding East-German governments. In another speech, on that same festive day, the President repeated the words of the previously humiliated East-German Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière: “to unify means learning to share” – openly irritating Chancellor Kohl (Rödter 2009, 296). Once this political theatricality established as a framework, Schlingensief starts the horror. He cites, as Tobe Hooper did himself in the original *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Hooper and Henkel 1974), from Alfred Hitchcock’s iconic *Psycho* (Stefano 1960). Clara, the main character, kills her husband in the shower, wearing a blonde wig. She leaves Leipzig with her lover Artur and crosses the vanishing German-German border. The couple runs into a cannibalistic and incestuous butcher family. Clara manages to escape relatively harmlessly, but Artur is beaten together over and over and turns gradually into a zombie. Superficially, the narrative is a succession of bloody demonstrations – a body cut in two, and the upper part continues to shout aggressively – and revelations about the sadistic and pervert nature of an allegorical family, led by the patriarchic sausage-maker Alfred, who receives orders from his father, a skeleton with a *Stahlhelm*, a story framed by a ridiculous, endless hunt for *Ossis*, exemplified in Clara. The story closes as a vicious circle, Clara being abducted by Alfred and his retarded accomplices Hank and Jonny, played by Fassbinder-heirs Volker Spengler and Udo Kier. *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler* could be seen as a pastiche of the German expressionist silent movies, such as Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Janowitz and Mayer 1920) or Friedrich Murnau’s *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens* (Galeen 1922). But the reference to the horror film and particularly the ‘splatter’ subgenre in *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* is of a different kind, since this style and its assumed tastelessness – Tobe Hooper’s original was actually forbidden in Germany, at the time – are used as metaphors for the actual situation in unified nation, for the *Verwüstung* (‘sausaging’) or colonization of the GDR, as Schlingensief perceived it. In the context of German unification, ‘colonisation’ should be understood as (1) the almost seamless implementation of West-German institutions in the East-German *Länder*, (2) the overnight introduction of the West-

German D-Mark as a unified currency and the expropriation of GDR-assets, (3) the takeover of crucial political positions by imported West-German politicians and (4) the pressure on the East-German population to adapt to a Western ‘way of life’ (Dümcke and Vilmar 1996). Schlingensief’s interpretation of recent history and its transformation into a horrific fairytale, reveals, apart from the perception of circularity in history – history returns as a farce, as Marx once noted (Marx 1852/2007, 9) – a deep distrust towards ideological voluntarism and, more specifically in the political value of a ‘mystical body’, as the German nation pretends to be, in its expression in the old preamble of the West-German *Grundgesetz*. This *Grundgesetz* or ‘basic law’ of the first Federal Republic of Germany or *Bonner Republik* (1949-1990) – conceived as a provisional text, until a unified Germany has its full-fledged *Verfassung* or ‘constitution’ – said, until 1990, that “the entire German people continues to be summoned to achieve, in free self-determination, the unity and freedom of Germany” (*Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland* von 23. Mai 1949 2004). The unification treaty of August, 30, 1990 changes the preamble and says: “Germans in the *Länder* of [follows a list of the German states] have achieved the unity and liberty of Germany, in free self-determination. This basic law thus applies to the entire German people” (*Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany* 2017). The political process of (re)unification never referred, at least not officially, to anything else than this preamble, apart from the procedural rules. But in its performative use, also by jurists, the notion of ‘self-determination’, the ‘mystical body’ of the German nation hovered in the background. Schlingensief catches this ghost, this Hamletian specter of unknowable lineage and turns it into flesh. In other words: Germany as the Eucharistic transubstantiation of two administrative entities into one Nation. And Schlingensief is particularly sensible for catholic imagery and theatricality, as his later work demonstrates. In *Eine Kirche der Angst vor dem Fremden in mir* (*Church of Fear for the Stranger inside Me*) for instance, a ‘Fluxus-oratorio’ about his cancer (Schlingensief 2008), a medical video-recording of his tumor is shown in a monstrosity – a strange collusion of liturgical mysticism and Joseph Beuys’ exclamation “Show thy wounds!”. In *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker*, Schlingensief aggrandizes Germany’s open wounds after unification, 15 years later he exhibits his own wounds, but the bodily character of both demonstrations is not a coincidence, it signifies a particular historical imagination (Tindemans 2011, 126-127). But his dramaturgy of history is way quite different from other contemporary German splatter horror, with the *Nekromantik*-films of Jörg Buttgerit as the most notorious examples. In *Nekromantik* (Buttgerit and Rodenkirchen 1987) and *Nekromantik 2* (Buttgerit and Rodenkirchen 1991), the very transgressive theme of necrophilia symbolizes only indirectly the refusal of previous generations to face Germany’s own historical horror. Buttgerit chiefly thematizes Germany’s tragic will to self-destruction (Blake 2008, 38), its Romanticist deadlocks – a motive close to Hans-Jürgen Syberberg’s

Hitler. Ein Film aus Deutschland (Syberberg 1977) – and focuses less on the contemporary political reactions to it, as Fassbinder and Schlingensief try to do.

1.3 *Terror 2000*

As in the previous parts of his *Deutschlandtrilogie*, Schlingensief revisits recent German history in *Terror 2000*, and he manipulates again the relationship between anecdotic facticity and the societal chaos – the presence of ‘anomy’, in the largest possible sense – in recently unified Germany. This time, as in *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*, he creates again his own referential ‘truth’ – different from *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker*, where he uses to the actual (and televised) theatricality of the unification ceremony. *Terror 2000*, made in 1991-1992, combines two major criminal incidents, but with a major twist: the over-mediatized hijacking and subsequent flight by bank robbers in Gladbeck, North-Rhine-Westphalia, in 1988, and the attack, by neo-Nazis, on an asylum center in Hoyerswerda, Saxony, in 1991. After the release of the film, the same violence materialized in the notorious riots in the East German city of Rostock, where hundreds of neo-Nazis attacked houses of immigrants. Thousands of local bystanders applauded, three days long. Once again, Schlingensief foreboded the societal climate, better than many professional observer, even in a grotesque portrait of a neurotic police officer – after Hoyerswerda and Rostock, such a character would, sadly enough, become a mediatic commonplace. Peter Körn, the main character of *Terror 2000*, has failed to end the Gladbeck hijacking peacefully, and now he finds these perpetrators back, somewhere in former East-Germany, as a local businessman and a local pastor, both sponsoring neo-Nazi-gangs to chase immigrants and to terrorize the local center for asylum seekers. The medical quack Pupilla finds the bodies of a Polish family, killed by the neo-Nazis. At their funeral, the Home Secretary, posing as an empathic politician, shows too overtly that he is not interested in finding the murderers. As the inhabitants of the asylum center become aware that the police will not protect them, they destroy their own residence, they demonstrate in the town center, and it all results in a bloody confrontation with the local population, incited by the Gladbeck-gang. Parallel to these events, Körn pursues his inquiries with the most unorthodox means, a stout version of Sylvester Stallone’s infamous Rambo character (Maubach 2005, 89). *Terror 2000* stages a grotesque German civil war in front of a media circus: the media, in the slipstream of Körn’s inquiry, create their own version of the horrifying events. Spitting on the Home Secretary is scandalous, hunting for strangers isn’t worth mentioning. This ‘state of nature’ – to use Thomas Hobbes’ often misunderstood postulate of a lawless ‘ground zero’ society – in Schlingensief’s East German horror village appears in a different light however, compared with a widespread legal opinion about the constitutional status of the GDR in the last months of its existence as an independent state. German unification had become ineluctable after the

victory of the conservative *Allianz für Deutschland* in the general elections of the *Volkskammer* of the GDR, in March 1990. A crucial issue in the implementation of this political choice, was the constitutional ground for this union of both states, even when they were founded, in 1949, as provisional states, with the perspective of unification – *Deutschland einig Vaterland* was a verse of the national anthem of the GDR, though it wasn't sung anymore after the building of the Berlin wall in 1961. The first legal option was the accession of the GDR to the existing Federal Republic (art. 23 GG), as the state of Saarland did in 1957. The other possibility was the substitution of the *Grundgesetz* by a new constitution (*Verfassung*), by a free decision of the 'entire German people' – by referendum, as it was generally understood (art. 146 GG). Most West German politicians and jurists preferred the quicker solution of art. 23, as it avoided a difficult process of constitutional negotiations, including intermediate and final consultations of the general public. Official West-German rhetoric emphasized that *Beitritt* was not synonymous at all with *Anschluss* – as happened to Austria, in 1938 – since this decision would be a free choice of the East German people, represented in the *Volkskammer*. But what were, from an East-German point of view, the legal grounds to use this procedure? Representative democracy, is the easy answer, but which constitution allows a correct and representative decision? An irreversible decision about the liquidation of one's own state, as it happens. The answer of the authoritative constitutionalist Josef Isensee was revealing. With the revolution and the fall of the Berlin wall, the official constitution of the GDR had ceased to exist, and the elected government should be considered as a constituent power, establishing a democratic system against the Marxist-Leninist teleology of the constitution of 1974. This *Verfassung* could only be used as a pragmatic repertory of institutional guidelines, to be used for practical measures leading to an democratically accepted decision in favor of a *Beitritt* (Isensee 1990, 321-324). The contradiction of constituent versus constituted power is always present in revolutionary circumstances, and institutional pragmatism helps to maintain the peace. But the substance and the societal significance of this constitution – communist constitutions, including this of the Stalin's Soviet Union, had the strange characteristic to use the most progressive language of humanism, as a veil over the totalitarian nature of the regime – is equally neglected here. Official 'anomy', lawlessness, is thus declared by a leading law professor in front of a parliamentary committee, in March 1990 – the clock of unification is ticking. In *Terror 2000*, three incarnations of authority meet in fictional Rassau: the policeman Körn, one gangster as a priest, and the other gangster as an entrepreneur – his furniture market is the social and economic center of this neo-Nazi town. As in the actual GDR, during the liminal period between revolutionary expectations and actual unification, there are no rules, there is no constitutional protection. The 'authorities' caricaturize the motives for unification – rule of law, humanistic values and economic prosperity – and turn them into horror.

With one more supplement: the (West German) media that are supposed to frame the cruelties as a quasi-colonial excess, as a tribal incident, in their efforts to depoliticize the tensions of the societal changes due to speedy unification. These tensions represent the economic takeover in the process, as the media themselves took over the party press to depoliticize information, to create ideological innocence (von Törne and Weber 1996). Media coverage takes here the form of violent neutrality, itself an appearance of ‘anomy’.

2 Politicians, Intellectuals & Artists

Flemish journalist Piet De Moor, traveling in the GDR in 1990, notes that the fall of the Berlin wall creates suddenly a *Hinterland*, a ‘back country’ for the cosmopolitan West-Berlin (De Moor 1992, 22-23): this clash of cultures opens space for imagination, even of the darkest nature. Hitler’s government district, around Potsdamer and Leipziger Platz, was radically erased, first in 1945, and finally in 1962, when the wall was built. Between the silenced past and the bright present, a void was left, soon to be transformed into Berlin’s most iconic spot of consumerism – transubstantiated emptiness, so to speak. Architectural utopianism was not an option. On a different level, Schlingensief’s films of his *Deutschlandtrilogie* also perform the clash between the illusion of cosmopolitanism in the *Bonner Republik* – West-German constitutional pride, conceptualized as *Verfassungspatriotismus* – and the somewhat twisted idea of an East German lust, not touched by 1960s libertinism or 1970s skepticism. To be clear, I am not referring to sociological facts, but to a perception and sometimes even an explanatory framework (Rödter 2009, 24) for mental distinctions between West and East and, inside the collapsing GDR, between the presumed ‘elite’ of the citizens’ movements and the economic migrants heading West in their *Trabant* cars. But at the same time, it is essential to conceive an important distinction between the societal tension, the political conflicts and the intellectual debates, on one hand, and the artistic ‘hyperbolizations’ in the work of Schlingensief, Buttgereit and other less blood-thirsty artists. The slogan “Tötet Helmut Kohl” has indeed a different meaning in a Schlingensief-performance and in a letter addressed at the Federal Chancery, as judges confirmed. Although that doesn’t imply that the slogan, shouted during a performance, is completely innocent.

2.1 The intellectual impasse of the Left

In a comprehensive analysis of the intellectual debates on the German nation and its unification after 1989, political scientist Jan-Werner Müller is particularly sharp in his description of Left-wing intellectuals as melancholic if not stubbornly defensive. He observes remarkable reifications of both the appreciation of the GDR and the assessment of the Federal Republic. Unification as an

unachievable dream had always been a Right-wing theme, and since Chancellor Willy Brandt's *Ostverträge* and the *de facto* recognition of the GDR, the idea, even during the Leipzig protests in September and October 1989, hardly crossed the minds of the citizens' movements and their West German sympathizers. But with the 'ten points program', Chancellor Kohl, in a speech on November 28, 1989, marked the point of no political return, claiming the initiative of the Federal Republic in every step (Rödter 2009, 137-142). The political inevitability of unification forced the intellectual discourse to take a different turn. The traditional skepticism of the Left about the liberal-democratic achievements of the *Bonner Republik* turned into fear for loss of the post-national (non-)identity of this same republic: opposition to Kohl's voluntarism meant applause for the pragmatism of the first Federal Chancellor, the conservative Konrad Adenauer. Some commentators observed that the revolution had taken a turn Hannah Arendt had always warned for: a shift of attention from political issues to social and material demands (Müller 2000, 130-131). Not the claims for democracy caused the collapse of 'real socialism' but the desire for consumerist freedom and the welfare state. Paradoxically, this 'materialism' would, so the argument went, allow the 'colonizing' Federal Government and its intellectual entourage to resuscitate a 'normalized' national identity of a kind that Left academia had considered as definitively foregone. Ironically, considering again Arendt's reasoning, the marginalized citizens' movement seemed to make the same mistake, defining the heritage of a post-communist East-Germany in terms of material certainties. Alternative concepts focused on new constitutional rights to labor and to affordable housing, and on more generous financial support and fiscal solidarity (Vilmar 1996, 109-113). Generally, the intellectual uneasiness about the voluntarist unification appeared as veiled melancholia and disguised utopia – two sides of the same coin – with respect to 'paradises lost': a socialist GDR and a post-national Federal Republic. Only horror movies could reveal both *Lebenslügen*, 'vital lies': that could be Schlingensief's conclusion.

2.2 German wounds and social sculptures

Christoph Schlingensief belonged to the generation of the *Zaungäste* – literally an observer behind the fence, or an uninvited visitor – who watched the transformations in German society but who didn't participate in it. Their political coming-of-age took place in the late 1980s, and their intellectual (and artistic) advantage lies in their distance from the burden of both the wartime and the 1968 generations: no questions about their position in the war, nor about their attitude towards Left-extremist terrorism – *die bleierne Zeit*, the 'leaden years'. Schlingensief was born and raised, as the only child of a normal family, in Oberhausen, an industrial city in the West German Ruhr area and home of the famous short film festival and the 'Oberhausen Manifesto', the symbolic birth of the

new German cinema (Oberhausener Manifest 2017). With *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker* he obtained the underground title of ‘the only successor to Fassbinder’ (Bogusz 2007, 208) and Mattias Lilienthal, chief dramaturge of the Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz recruited, in 1992, the film director as a counterweight to theatre directors, as a West German invader on an East-Berlin scene still suffering from *Utopieverlust* (‘loss of utopia’), and as a permanent and public challenge to the limits of institutionalized art (Bogusz 2007, 206) – three roles he would assume perfectly. In his theatrical work he would radicalize, on stage, his concept of ‘juxtaposition’ of events – the refusal to accept the logic of *post hoc ergo propter hoc* in mimetic narrative – with which he had already experimented in film. This meant a further destruction of the hierarchy between foreground and background, maximal contingency in the behavior of his actors – with an increasing presence of disabled performers – and rising edginess of the overall scenic atmosphere (Diederichsen 2011, 61). A characteristic example is the way he uses his preference for physical ‘wrenching’ (*Verrenkung*): in *Terror 2000*, a series of Hitler salutes transforms into a parade of wrenched limbs, thus subverting the distinction between action and background and turning the scene into visual noise (Seeßlen 2015, 59). According to film critic Georg Seeßlen, this style concretizes Schlingensiefels most famous slogan: *Scheitern als Chance* (‘failure as a chance’): opposites clash all the time, megalomania versus self-debasement, foolishness versus pathos, thrown away versus well preserved, narrative script versus experimental filming, etc. (Seeßlen 2015, 131). And this effort to create a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is indeed bound to fail from the start, as is the unification process, one might conclude. In the ‘real Germany’ of 1989-1990, the oppositions between pride and self-pity, between cynicism and sentimentality, between trash and treasure, between entrenched ideologies and political experimentation also resulted in the ‘wrenched’ state of the early *Berliner Republik*. The political fall of Helmut Kohl – lost elections in 1998, financial scandals in 1999 – looked like the deflating of real-size inflatable elephant: profoundly sad, but finally nobody cares. Illness, ‘woundedness’, these are the ‘natural’ conditions of a human society overdetermined by history – as Germany is said to be. This famous wound, this mythical failure, once symbolized in Amfortas’ suffering in Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin*, could be interpreted in two contradictory ways: as a historical-societal disease to be healed and to be forgotten, or as an indelible scar that should be contained by remembrance culture and constitutional patriotism as pain-killers. Writer Günter Grass suggested, on different occasions, that due to its double historical failure – the *Third Reich* and the *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* – Germany has lost the right to redefine itself politically as a nation, and culturally only in an extremely cautious way (Grass 1990, passim).

Schlingensief's redefinition of (collective, national) identity returns to the idea of *soziale Plastik* ('social sculpture'), coined by Joseph Beuys, as the task of the artist to use the social conditions of man(kind) as raw material for a complex artistic gesture: "Das Kunstwerk ist das allergrößte Rätsel, aber der Mensch ist die Lösung" ("The work of art is the largest enigma, but man is the solution") (Stachelhaus 2006, 85). But for Schlingensief this 'solution' is highly provisional, if not fatal. In *Terror 2000*, for example, a container is simply a logistic unit of 18 square meter to house 5 to 10 actors, in their role of asylum seekers. In the performance *Bitte liebt Österreich* (Schlingensief 2000), a group of 'asylum seekers' parodied, during a week, the infamous 'Big Brother' television format, while the internet public could send one of them home, every day. Here the same container, fully laden with stories of human suffering, became a 'social sculpture' indeed, of a morbid kind. Not a location or a prop anymore, but a metonymy for political and mediatic decadence (Seeßlen 2015, 41) – an open wound.

2.3 Horror movies, national identity and constitutional patriotism

Verfassungspatriotismus, 'constitutional patriotism', has a double significance: it refers to the 'patriotic' duty of post-war Germany, particularly for its political institutions and actors, to defend at all costs and with all means the constitution as the ethical backbone of a heavily damaged nation. This defensive paradigm not only asked for the erasure of national-socialist traces, but also explained the ban on the West-German communist party, in the 1950s and the *Berufsverbot* for presumed sympathizers with RAF-terrorism in the 1970s (Müller 2010, 31-34). Dolf Sternberger, who invented the term in 1970, uses words as *Staatsfreundschaft* ('friendship with the state') and *gepanzelter Freiheit* ('armoured liberty') to underline both the elements of loyalty and assertiveness in this civic attitude, which is primarily an institutional duty and less a moral position. Jürgen Habermas appropriates the term, in the mid-1980s, in a reversed, counterintuitive way, to confront it with the claim, by conservative historians, to return to a normalized patriotic pride in Germany: "The only patriotism that does not alienate us from the West, is constitutional patriotism. A connection with universalist constitutional principles, anchored in convictions, has unfortunately only developed in the cultural nation of the Germans after – and due to – Auschwitz." (Habermas 1986) The German constitution, the *Grundgesetz* opens with a high ethical standard: "Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller staatlichen Gewalt." ("Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.") (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany 2017). Both from a more conservative (Sternberger) and from a Left-liberal point of view (Habermas), a post-war consensus existed asserting that the identity of the nation should be defined by the status of its *Grundgesetz*. This position was challenged

however by a ‘new right’ – before and after unification – that claimed a ‘normal’, more substantial, organic notion of national identity and national interest, close to Carl Schmitts idea of *Feindsetzung*, i.e. the definition of the enemy as decisive political criterium, as expressed in an (in)famous essay by playwright Botho Strauss (Strauss 1993). The attempt to ‘normalize’ German national pride proved rather unsuccessful, due to its own intellectual contradictions, thus demonstrating that constitutional patriotism was more firmly rooted in German minds than it critics supposed (Müller 2000, 222-225). But, as I tried to argue here, two very different observations problematize this historical continuity of *Modell Deutschland*. First, there was the notion, developed by constitutionalist Josef Isensee, of the GDR as a constitutional ‘ground zero’, in order to facilitate the *Beitritt* to the Federal Republic, this instead of new constitutional framework, replacing both existing states and constitutions. The actual authorities could use the GDR constitution of 1974 as a mere grab bag: maybe some useful institutional structures, some basic rights, but definitely not the explicit Marxist-Leninist world view, laid down in its first chapter with ‘political foundations’ (Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik vom 6. April 1968 (in der Fassung vom 7. Oktober 1974) 2004). But the period between the fall of the wall should be ‘a-constitutional’, or ‘anomic’ in the most literal sense. With one exception, in Isensee’s account: market economy as a pre-political condition to any form of democracy (Isensee 1990, 310). Ironically, historians note that unification wouldn’t have been possible, i.e. politically acceptable, without an immense financial effort from the Federal Republic – estimated at 615 billion DM, more than 300 Billion € (Ritter 2009, 132-133) – and with strong state interventionism, against the ‘Thatcherite’ *Zeitgeist* (Rödder 2009, 375). The fact that this argument for a constitutional ‘state of nature’ was brought forward at the same moment that the foundational position and function of the constitution was central to the debates about the political-historical character of (re)unified Germany is paradoxical, to say the least. My second observation is of a completely different kind. The cinematic genre of horror provided an attractive ‘ground zero’ for violent imaginations about the unification: cruel romanticism, as in Jörg Buttgerit’s *Nekromantik*-diptych, or excessive ‘social sculptures’, as in Schlingensief’s trilogy. The relationship between (the popular appeal of) certain horror genres – gothic, hillbilly, zombie, etc. – and national identities or national traumas, including their intertwinement, is not arbitrary. According to Linnie Blake, horror cinema provides a “visceral and frequently non-linguistic lexicon in which the experience of cultural dislocation may be phrased” (Blake 2008, 189). As a transgressive genre, horror might indeed challenge hegemonic conceptions about national identity in a traumatized culture: it stages the ‘return of the repressed’ in the guise of the ‘undead’. But Christophs Schlingensiefs own brand of horror, and not just in its winks to the Wim Wenders’ *Neuer Deutscher Film* or Joseph Beuys’ Fluxus movement, exceeds more fundamentally the boundaries of the accepted discourse. The

intellectual climate, in the last years of the *Bonner Republik*, was dominated by the arguments and sensibilities of Grass and Habermas – even when, as conservatives were eager to say, they ended up at the wrong side of history – and in their references to an almost ‘congested’ German history, everybody overlooked the black holes. Everyone but Christoph Schlingensief, perhaps. He saw how an imaginary Germany created a phantom fatherland, a spectral nation in the form of cloth doll, in his film *100 Jahre Adolf Hitler*. Both the Federal Republic and the GDR affirmed themselves, in 1949, as provisional states, created with the perspective of German reunification. By framing this societal process as a violent, bloodthirsty colonization – though in the ‘real world’, everyone present perceived it as a relatively balanced reunification, even in its traumatic effects – he could lay bare the worst imaginable fantasies about cultural and political incompatibilities, in *Das deutsche Kettensägenmassaker*. Not claiming that his fiction is simply the flip side of an illusion of unity, but by exposing the brutal theatricality of the whole process, in political, economic and affective terms. In *Terror 2000*, he juxtaposes still more radically references to the mediatic frenzy about gangsters with sexy victims, to the outbreak of racist incendiarism, to the paranoia of coke-addicted artistry – police detective Körn comes close to the self-portrait as a hysteric that R.W. Fassbinder made for Alexander Kluge’s anthology film *Deutschland im Herbst* (Böll, et al. 1978). The spectator is always aware of the constructivism of the set – Schlingensief filmed in abandoned NVA barracks (*Neue Volksarmee*, the East German army) – and she/he is thus not simply immersed in an excessive image of a ‘unified’ and derailed society filled with wrenched human beings. By refusing narrative causality and by using almost simplistic devices of Brechtian *Verfremdung*, the black hole of ‘anomy’ is exposed and visualized, as Isensee did before the members of the West German *Bundestag*. Who is the cynic, finally? Who refuses to acknowledge *Verfassungspatriotismus* – this strange enthusiasm for a dry legal text, with a minimum of pathos – as the ethical imperative of Germany’s democratic identity? Not Christoph Schlingensief, I presume.

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