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// Katrin Köppert

FURNITURING THE FUTURE: HENRIKE NAUMANN'S PIECE OF CARPET

Mohammad Zatareih, who in 2015 initiated the March of Hope[1)] in response to Hungary's disastrous refugee policies, now lives in Zwickau, from where the terror cell Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU) planned the racially motivated murders of nine Turkish and Greek Germans[2)] from 2000 to 2007. Close to Zwickau is the city Hof, where in 1989 13,600 GDR refugees were welcomed after they had left the GDR by way of Prague. At the main station in Hof the refugees of the GDR were applauded, just as those from Syria and other states of the Middle East were in Munich after the March of Hope seemingly came to an end. That the arrival in Germany was not the end of their journey towards a better, a safer life, and that the promise of being happy was played on to redescribe Western social norms as universal social goods (Ahmed 2010: 2) has already been the experience of former GDR refugees. Their dreams of living in a state of no borders and no walls were turned into a sad joke. Though they could travel freely and talk openly, they were held back by social, economic and emotional restraints. The history of the GDR refugees and the processing of the GDR as such is one of the best practical examples of disintegration and non-participation. The vacuum that was left after the annexation[3)] of the GDR was instead filled with extreme ambivalences within the population; ambivalences forming the basis of skepticism, envy and racism, both then and now. The complexity of being the victims of Western ideology and of incriminating those not belonging to it is what Henrike Naumann puts at the center of her art.

A PIECE OF CARPET ____ A piece of carpet, grey, cut off by green-yellow-blue-red lines. On top of it characters in the typography of Gothic print, which was idealized during the rule of National Socialism. The characters, forming the word "Wut-Land," are arranged above the cut out of a stencil showing a face that once belonged to a Wehrmacht soldier. The carpet, taken from a vanished space near Henrike Naumann's birthplace Zwickau and reused in her solo-exhibition "Aufbau Ost,"[4)] serves as the canvas for the characters taken from sweatshirts from the now illegal neo-Nazi Band "Landser."[5)] Western insignia like interior

1)
In September 2015 the March of Hope was initiated to prohibit and protest the internment of refugees by Hungary's government. More than 1000 refugees left for Austria. The images showing the long rows of refugees walking on the highway are now iconic for the collapse of European migration policies.

2)
The neo-Nazi organization NSU is held responsible for ten murders. Nine of the victims were killed out of racist motives.

3)
Using the term "annexation" empathizes with the defect that Christa Wolf mentions to express her refusal to uncritically worship the historical impact of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 (2010: 25). She accuses West Germany of having annexed the GDR, instead of having united the two countries (Stephan 1997: 2)

4)
http://www.henrikenaumann.com/aufbauost.html, last accessed February 20, 2017.

5)
The name of the band refers to a publication about soldiers in the Second World War.

furnishings that flooded eastern Germany shortly after German reunification and that stand in for the sell-out of social values and everyday commodities of the GDR are combined here with National Socialist emblems. By assembling the leftovers of the postmodern aesthetic of the everyday and the brutal politics of neo-Nazis, the montage hits the center of ongoing discussions about Saxony as the breeding ground for what today can be perceived as the normalization of right-wing and nationalist ideology in Germany. But what, other than simply though relentlessly pointing out that it is no coincidence that NSU, Pegida & Co. evolved in Saxony, is Henrike Naumanns approach? Here it seems revealing to bring in questions of materiality.

TOXIC LETTERS Henrike Naumann wants the audience to put itself into a political position by physically entering the spatial installation or touching the materials from which the art piece is made. She relates to questions of materiality and touchability not just since she herself seems to like touching her own youth by feeling the materials of all the weird stuff that flooded apartments shortly after the fall (when I stumbled into her atelier she greeted me with a strident 'piece of art' in her hands: a lilac Salvador Dali-like clock that instantly catapulted me into my teenage bedroom). But also because material relations somehow speak to complex entanglements of societal systems, even more: they co-produce them.

To make this clear it is necessary to mention that the sweatshirts, out of which the characters were cut, were supposed to serve as the material she wanted to manipulate in order to create the edition for FKW in the first place. But since the fabric of the sweaters is made of unknown, but seemingly crazy materials, she was not able to transform their color by chemicals or their design by gluing on rhinestones. So the material of the sweater acted out and forced her not just to rethink her idea for the edition, but rather to dig deep into the stories the agentiality of the materials were telling her. Here I rely on those posthumanist approaches that try to think "more-than-human agencies that matter as an intra-active force of practices of worlding" (Gorska 2016: 148). This, I suppose, cannot be dropped laterally. So let me sketch this briefly.

Thinking art through material agencies of materials like fabric and chemicals enables "to understand them not as objects but as agential forces of knowledge production" (ibid: 159). With the agency of materials a sort of knowledge is produced that allows us to capture the worlding and with it the dynamism

and steady transformation of power relations in everyday life. But – please – don't get me wrong at this point. By saying that material agentiality helps to relate to steady transformations one should not get the impression that it is all about a non-situated vitality, a flow, no matter what and in which specific arrangement. Every agential move of matter is to be understood in the spatiotemporal, material and linguistic-discursive specificity and situatedness of its processuality. We can thus understand the agential move of the sweater only within its embeddedness in geopolitical, social and eco-economic dynamics. So by acting out in terms of withdrawing from the subject-centered dealing with materials, the fabric not only helps to reorient the artist's approach, but indicates the dynamic power relations within the processes of the present assemblage of eastern Germany. And what is that assemblage all about?

Naumann bought the sweater at the market in Johanngeorgenstadt, where Vietnamese migrants sell illegal copies of illegal fashion brands of neo-Nazi bands like "Landser." And that is not a bad joke. Those markets are well known for the sale of highly synthetic and cheaply produced clothes by marginalized and underpaid migrant traders. Forced to survive in a globalized world they non-intentionally feed the emotional hunger of East Germans for nationalist identification. At the same time the toxicity of the fabrics, which reached out to Nauman in the moment of trying to adopt them for her artwork and which thus produce an awareness of global ecological conditions of production and consumption, somehow enmesh the bodies of the sellers and the consumers. By the potentiality of vulnerability through toxicity a proximity of just seemingly separate subject positions is created. Would we have considered this non-obvious relation without also having sensed the knowledge of materials agentiality?

By refusing to react only to the authorship of the artist and by having their own, though non-teleological agenda, the synthetics – though in intra-activity with the artist's thoughts and worlds – reveal the inter-relationality of current environmental and health-related impacts of globalized markets and the GDR's history of producing trashy chemical fibres. Moreover, they, entangled with Naumann's political interest, enable an understanding of the simultaneities of contradictory relations that were set up in the GDR and are reinforced today. Then: chemical textile technologies (DeDeRon & Co) met petty bourgeois ruralness, toxins met the remote romanticism of familial living in 'Schrebergärten'; today: plastic-facade-engineering meets abandoned buildings, crystal meth meets 'Nazis im Vogtland.'

Acknowledging materials being a "force among forces" (Braidotti 2006: 5) we are enabled to become sensible towards the political layers in their processes of co-production, that is, in their processual coexistence of nature and culture (Haraway 2008: 56). Maybe the cultivation of this sensibility (Bennett 2010) or awareness describes what we might call the political of agential materiality or – to put it differently – where material agency becomes political insofar as we can sensually learn to perceive proximity where it is expected the least. From there on new worlds might be created. We might reconsider creativity within the arts with this kind of politicalness. Responsivity might be understood as a form of creativity (Coole 2014: 48). And creativity becomes the mode not of mastery, but of queer intimacy.

FLOATING MATERIALITY The characters almost seem to float on the carpet. Don't they touch the carpet? Is the carpet digitally manipulated? Or is it literally the carrier of the characters, the material environment of what the political stance of the Nazi-ish designed words suggests it to be? Is the carpet as a synecdoche for the aesthetic of the vacuum after the fall of the Berlin Wall and before the universalization of globalization and neoliberalism the template for racist radicalization? Is the furniture the entry point, to be perceived materially, of how we can understand nationalist and right-wing ideology in Saxony nowadays?

The toxic characters, which Henrike Naumann ultimately cut out of the stubborn sweaters and pinned on the carpet, affect the piece of carpet as the materialization of hopeful emotions and imaginations of a better future. They turn the carpet, and with it the hopes, into trash. Even more: The conviction, that all those hopes have always been trash, that they have always been what Western Germany has scrapped, brutally materializes. So yes, to look at the carnal aesthetics of the everyday like furniture, carpets, and sweaters can be of help in grasping ambiguous histories.

At the same time, transforming the carpet not just into the canvas, but the embodied image revaluates furniture. Furniture becomes the matter of reimagining a future. A future might come by at least reaffirming some parts of GDR's history like the everyday, the ordinary, the profane. This means that everyday items become the flat surface, the virtuality of a future that may come.

The open-ended-ness of future feeds the mode of reaffirming the past by undoing it instead of controlling it. That the GDR under the umbrella of anti-fascism failed to question its nationalism

right at the moment of yelling "Wir sind das Volk" has often been and still is the practice of controlling the past. Naumann explicitly addresses the pitfall of the disguise of the shift from a peaceful revolution to a movement of national-minded folks instead of oppositional positions against what has been called the 'natural' outcome of the "The Change": namely the "Volk." So reaffirming might mean being affected by the profane materiality, which is not fully occupied by right-wing ideology. Thus the letters on the carpet do not look as if they were irrecoverably branded on the carpet. They rather seem to float. Hence I do think that Naumann is making an argument about processes of affect as processes of floating materiality. Because of the floating instability of agential materials matter does not just matter and does not just "weigh on some bodies more than others" (Chen 2012: 187), but rather demonstrates that categories of class, race or migration are unstable. Though theories of the instability of categories and identities like queer and nomadic theory have often been deployed by neoliberal agendas of plurality and diversity, I would still like to embrace their potentiality to open up imaginaries of futures beyond fixed assumptions in the present. Responding to and speaking with floating materiality does not contradict taking a tough political stance. And art spaces still and again need to be furniture stores of political stances. Art needs the political furnituring of the future more than ever. Henrike Naumann's art is a best-practice example, an important one.

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