



Gernot Wolfram

The Art of Speaking for Yourself

Essay

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Schriftenreihe volume 10405

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Bonn 2019

© Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung
Adenauerallee 86, 53113 Bonn

Project coordinator and editor: Benjamin Weiß, bpb
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Cover design and layout: Naumilkat – Agentur für Kommunikation und Design, Düsseldorf

Umschlagfoto: © REUTERS/Michaela Rehle. Hotel Room in the Grandhotel Cosmopolis in Augsburg, Germany.

Druck und Bindung: Druck- und Verlagshaus Zarbock GmbH & Co. KG, Frankfurt/Main

ISBN 978-3-7425-0405-0

www.bpb.de

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It's been said before: books are useful and suitable instruments for participating in something or for going on a journey. That is exactly what this book is: a tool. In other words, a raft.

Iván de la Nuez

Introduction

“For whom are you actually speaking?” someone asked me once during a lecture I was delivering at the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Berlin. One of the listeners was of the opinion that in Germany, in general, the discourse on foreigners, migrants, and refugees was too positive. She felt that you could not dare to voice an alternative opinion on the matter anymore. From what I was saying, she sensed that I, too, was *for* the foreigners. I answered that I had definitely not expressed that in any part of my talk and that I am not in favor of foreigners as a general principle. The term “foreigner” is a very broad term, I continued, and can be seen as a more differentiated way of referring to what we designate as “strange” or “different” – it serves as a tool in a well-balanced contemplation about how we might realize effective participation and discussion. “Yes, well that’s all very well and good, but for whom are you actually speaking?”

I am grateful for this listener’s critical question. My reflections on the issue were the beginning of this essay. This circling around the tiny word *for*. Who speaks *for* whom? In which roles do we feel justified in providing information on political and, in my case, culture affairs in our society? And when we do so, which voices are possible left unheard?

As a writer and a cultural studies scholar, I have been dealing with the themes of foreignness, self-empowerment, and cultural participation for many years. When I started writing this essay, I was conscious of the fact that it would have to be devised as a search for individual voices. As a “raft,” as the Cuban writer Iván de la Nuez has described one of his own essays. Something that is on its way somewhere. And of course, a construction – something handmade.

Nuez calls his chapters “coasts,”¹ in other words, formations onto which things are washed up. Flotsam, sand, both material and immaterial. Ideas, images, conceptions. I like this notion. It makes things very clear: this here is a subjective journey. A voyage to people, cultures and experiences, texts and knowledge, both certain and uncertain. Such a venture always brings risks along with it, but it is an endeavor that gives rise to further thoughts and – most importantly – also to contradictions.

“The one-sided design of bridges does not always establish a link between two banks, but can sometimes actually create the rift that was meant to be bridged.”

This noteworthy statement by Alexander Henschel is out of a small essay titled “The Bridge as a Rift.”² Its explosive potential is fierce. It is quite an exact description of some of the hidden challenges confronting anyone interested in how people can become more visible in politics and culture. What kind of bridges will sustain the weight of people who are not adequately included? Who will build these bridges? Who establishes which people are being excluded?

Well-meaning attempts to be inclusive often have the opposite effect from what was originally intended. For many years now, a broad range of cultural dialogues have been promoted, networks constructed, services established. The idea is for people to come together.³ Whether for refugees, for migrants, or for people with no interest in either politics or culture – there is a plethora of well-thought-out and not so well-thought-out offerings meant to give different social groups the opportunity to become active. From podium discussions to neighborhood projects, from theater productions to dance workshops: people need to learn to participate in civic life. To trust democratic values. To become curious about the worldview of others. “Successful integration can only be achieved by actual participation,”⁴ wrote the Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration a few years ago, simultaneously calling for a whole year of participation. But is not the prerequisite for participation that people first define for themselves the roles that they want to take?

To comprehend that many of the current challenges of our democracy are answered with catchphrases, we need not necessarily go so far as the educationalist Frank-Olaf Radtke who talks about the “dialogue industry”⁵ that has arisen in recent years. Catchphrases also tend to conceal more than they reveal. But, we do not want to gripe about all that goes wrong: this essay is far more an attempt to embark – together with the reader – upon a search for the approaches that lie behind these catchphrases. To set out on a quest for the meaning of the individual voice, and for the power inherent in reciprocal listening and in *speaking for yourself*. This also means seeing the validity of positions and narratives that do *not* derive from pre-formulated ideologies, party platforms, or group pressures. It means finding the routes that are off the beaten rhetorical paths. Finding answers through patience and attentiveness.

Here the term *empowerment* – overly fashionable and frequently a bit odd in its connotations – plays an important role. In Germany, the English

word is often used in place of the German *Ermächtigung*, which for many people arouses associations with the Enabling Act under the Third Reich. Hopefully, this connection will wane as time goes on. In the following essay, what the word *empowerment* mainly means is the strengthening of people's ability to express themselves. The intrinsic power in an individual's ability to express their thoughts and ideas and to demand their rights will become clear. There has recently been much criticism of the term empowerment⁶ and there have also been many interpretations and definitions. I would like to emphasize that in this context empowerment is to be understood not as a concept but rather as an encouragement to place what people themselves express to us at the very center of our attention.

In this essay, I will attempt not only to introduce various different individual positions of empowerment but also to show what happens when people, without being asked, take for themselves the right to speak for others and to advocate for them, without the necessary insights into the given situation. Rather than presenting solutions, I will take you along step by step, using individual examples, on my investigation of the possibilities as well as the pitfalls inherent in the word empowerment in the sense of strengthening one's powers of self-expression.

Numerous discussions in the past years with all different kinds of civil society actors, above all with people working in the arts and in cultural education, have made clear to me that there is a slowly growing understanding of the fact that the currently available options only reach those who are already "open to dialogue" anyway.

The sector of the population that feels under-represented and that reacts positively to populist slogans usually does not attend the podium discussions, workshops, and cultural offerings in which critical subjects are discussed and negotiated. At the same time, there is a growing fear concerning the radicality of some of the voices from these circles. How far should we let empowerment go? Shouldn't we also listen to those who are filled with hatred and anger towards the system in which they live? Isn't it also of value to practice a form of listening that doesn't pull back in dismay as soon as things get uncomfortable?

The point is not to give hatred a forum, but rather to start asking questions as soon as hatred is sown: where do these claims and denigrations come from? Are people just repeating phrases that they have heard somewhere else? Are they conscious of the fact that their words bear with them a responsibility? Above all, maybe those very people about whom the media often spreads such conflicting appraisals should be speaking more themselves: the "marginalized," the "foreign," and those who have recently arrived in the country.

Thus, in the realm of cultural education, the empowerment of people can be understood above all as an offer for changing perspectives. In this context, cultural education means “education in cultural participation”⁷ – impacting as many areas of societal life as possible.

Taking into consideration the fact that many international guests of the Federal Agency for Civic Education have repeatedly shown interest in these themes in Germany and have expressed the desire to follow and contribute to the discussions, the Federal Agency is publishing this essay in both German and English.

Berlin, August 2018



How a Rift Develops

A few years ago – at a time when the influx of refugees had reached its numeric highpoint in Germany – some students asked me, within the framework of our seminar, whether we could not create a project dealing with how to promote a greater participation on the part of refugees in the cultural life of the German capital, Berlin. I was immediately convinced of the idea. After just a few weeks, not only were the students' concepts completed but many cultural institutions had committed to providing free tickets to their events.

It was not long before more than 3,000 tickets from various Berlin cultural institutions had piled up on the students' desks. Sport associations called and asked whether they could join in and provide free tickets as well. New allotments arrived weekly. The students contacted the Berlin refugee centers to inform them of the offer and to distribute the tickets. The interest was overwhelming. Photographs appeared of children from Syria and Afghanistan entering a stadium in the evening floodlights, young women listening to a concert in a vaudeville theater, older people at the opera house. Other photos showed children at an ice rink, laughing as they glided across the glistening ice for the first time.

After a few weeks it became noticeable that, in spite of the careful preparation and the organization of accompaniment to the events, ever fewer tickets were being made use of. The students had been vigilant about making sure that none of the events would present language barriers. Now the young people started to wonder whether they had somehow made a mistake.

Upon inquiry, the refugees answered diffidently, mentioning that some people felt uncomfortable with the greetings at the beginnings of the programs: "Refugees welcome!" "We're pleased to have special guests with us today!" "Let's give a hand to..." Others had had a hard time relating

to what they experienced there. Once we were standing together on the street with a few guests after a contemporary Berlin dance theater performance. It was obvious that the young Arab men and women were trying hard to avoid having to comment on the piece. It had obviously not gotten through to them or enthralled them in any particular way. Experiences like this accumulated. When the students received invitations to attend a so-called *Refugee Opera* – over fifty refugees sang in the chorus of a Mozart opera – we observed how after the end of the performance, as the set was being disassembled, the members of the chorus took over the almost completely dark stage and started singing and dancing to songs from their homeland – with an openness and enthusiasm that they had not shown previously that evening. One of the students asked me: “Are we doing the right thing?”

We were starting to see the development of a rift, right where we had thought to construct a bridge.

At the end of the semester the students formed an association.⁸ Tickets to various cultural events continued to arrive. It was clear to everyone that there had to be a fundamental change in the concept. We had developed our ideas from our own perspective, from a universal approach to the word “solidarity.” From the deeply-rooted belief that culture and education are unquestionably helpful for the personal development of all human beings. It seemed self-evident that opera and theater performances would be an integral part of this. In the wake of the good feelings associated with these thoughts, we had managed to get caught up in a stance that shut out a central question: Had we given a thought as to whether the measures we were taking were even something that these people, for whom we now felt responsible, wanted?

We then began discussions and interviews with the refugees.⁹ We wanted to find out what lay at the root of the negative response of many of those who had received tickets. Soon it was clear that the individuals with whom we talked wanted mainly one thing: to be recognized for the roles that they themselves had once chosen in their lives. To be recognized as doctors, teachers, students, school children, as people with likes, wishes, dreams, and self-definition. No one had had the goal to be a refugee. One actor put the whole interview experience into a nutshell: “I am an actor who happens to be a refugee, not a refugee who happens to be an actor. When you’ve understood that, then it will be easier to understand which things I would like to be invited to and which not.”¹⁰

We had been talking to refugees instead of to individual people. The good feeling of wanting to help had created a secret agenda. The new

arrivals were supposed to participate and have positive feelings. The rift had developed through a lack of consideration about which invisible barriers must be overcome before a genuine conversation can take place.

In his description of the difference between “door” and “bridge,” cultural philosopher Georg Simmel once gave a good indication of the distinction between a successful and an unsuccessful dialogue.

“This is the basis for the richer and livelier significance of the door compared to the bridge, which is also revealed in the fact that it makes no difference in meaning in which direction one crosses a bridge, whereas the door displays a complete difference of intention between entering and exiting.”¹¹

A door can also be a door of a prison cell. In any case, it always bears with it the possibility of separation. You stay in, I come in. In our situation it meant: we were the door openers and wanted the others, namely the refugees, to go through this door and into the organized entertainment. We wanted to build a bridge, but instead we erected a gateway: you must enter here in order to arrive in the middle of our society.

This was the beginning of our more exacting investigation of the question of how one can recognize where one is starting from and what pitfalls are contained in the cumbersome term *participation*. Who speaks to whom and who does the inviting. And, how to develop sensitivity for seemingly insubstantial things, for the boundaries that cannot be seen.

A college teacher from Damascus once said to me, after a public event we had taken part in, that she always has to smile a bit when people in the audience say how wonderful it is that, together with her German colleagues, she upholds values such as education, tolerance and peace. “There’s just one difference, namely that the German colleagues go home afterwards to their nice apartments whereas I go back to my refugee center.” Apparent unity reigns on stage, but in everyday reality there lies a hidden imbalance, an irrefutable boundary. To catch hold of this reality, to translate it into arguments and above all speech, might very well be the fundamental prerequisite for making the rifts in our solidarity finally visible.



The Problem with Solidarity

In his book *Together*,¹² sociologist Richard Sennett traces the cultural history of working together. Sennett sees the use of the term “solidarity” in the history of the European leftists surprisingly critically.

From Marx to Lasalle, Sennett traces a permanent tradition of solidarity as compulsion. You must show solidarity with the workers, with the exploited, with the underlings of this earth. Look at them, they need you.

There was little recognition, according to Sennett, of the fact that, for example, working together, too, was a solid category of resistance. Solidarity, he notes, was repeatedly presented as a “top-down” approach. A good idea, but mandated from above. Extremely useful for political demands that are not so precisely defined. Solidarity can reach from the signing of an online petition to taking in a refugee into one’s home. Probably on account of this indefinable quality, showing solidarity is also always accompanied by certain subtle notions of hierarchy. There is always one person who shows solidarity and another who is a recipient of it. An evenly matched solidarity necessitates negotiation and clear definition. Sennett is a proponent of bringing the term co-operation into play in situations where we usually speak of solidarity. “Co-operation is the basis of human development.”¹³

Indeed, the term has its strong points. In contrast to solidarity, it emphasizes that there are special requirements if people are going to work together. In working together, I must not only give something but I can also expect to receive something in return. Above all, I must take my partner seriously. Voluntary co-operation is based upon the fundamental trust that I am entering into an encounter that is to be taken seriously.

At this point, it makes sense to stop a moment and to think about what makes up a serious encounter. For this, I would like to use the word *relationship*.

Co-operation necessitates the construction of a relationship. Solidarity does not necessarily require this. I can take part in a demonstration, write articles, or transfer money to help politically disadvantaged people. To do this, I do not need to build up a relationship to anyone. I do not need to question which form of support would be wise or appropriate. I decide on my own about the degree of solidarity I will show. If I decide upon co-operation, then I also decide to enter into communication. And, it means that I am willing to spend time with others and to give consideration to what I want to contribute. What is needed of me, and what I can demand from another person. What falls away is a bit of feeling. That warm feeling of solidarity in the sense of banding together, one in spirit, for a common cause. In this context, it makes sense to stop and consider whether or not all sides are really participating in the warm feeling. Or whether this is only the privilege of the ones who are showing their solidarity. Working together does not require helpers, only partners.

After the students' disappointment with the ticket project, some of them finally decided to search for new models for achieving something meaningful. Many of them, now grown critical of the word solidarity and its inflationary use in public – it had had an important role at the beginning of the ticket project as well – now asked themselves: if there is going to be co-operation, then something has to happen on the other side. They looked back over the interviews they had done and found that many of the people they had talked to had previously worked as teachers, art teachers, doctors, or had been students – all people used to speaking in front of others and to conveying knowledge. “How about if we put out a call among the refugees themselves for people to teach courses in the refugee centers?” said one student. “I mean, they have to go to integration courses and language courses. What about the knowledge that they themselves have?”

This student also remembered that some of her interviewees had helped marshal other people for the interviews by recommending our initiative as being trustworthy. These people must have enjoyed a certain authority in the refugee centers. In fact, a few of them did respond and express interest in the idea of teaching courses in their center. The students got together with these volunteers and started listening to their ideas. We decided that we should not make any specification as to what should be taught. The courses were to be designed and developed by the person involved; we would only ask that they keep records. And, we wanted to offer our help in the organization of the courses. Finally, four courses were offered. The subjects were inter-cultural communication, women's rights and female identity in Islam, a dance course, and a language course for Afghani men

taught by a seventeen-year-old Afghani. His compatriots had confided in him that they were ashamed to admit to the German authorities that they could not read or write.

At first the courses took place in the cramped rooms of the refugee centers, organized by the teachers themselves. It would be an exaggeration to speak of a raging success. It was far more the case that the courses were attended by all different refugees living in the centers on an irregular basis. The subject of women's rights was particularly popular. The teacher, a onetime college teacher in Damascus, would ever so often put out the question as to whether it wasn't time to read the Koran critically, especially here in Germany where the conditions were conducive to doing so. And to question the role of women. To find out whether many interpretations were not far more reflections of men's ideal image of women rather than considerations of the rights and responsibilities of women in Islam. Arguments flared up quickly. Threats and invectives followed, but courage and encouragement as well.

However, the most important point was: the attendees came back for more. It was obvious that there was something to learn here that interested them. In contrast to the previously offered integration courses, mostly taught by German experts, here someone was speaking with whom they could identify with. And against whom they could chafe, with whom they could argue, with whom they could compare themselves. Like those attending the courses, the teachers, too, lived in the refugee centers. They did not disappear after class into a distant, unattainable reality of the host country.

The teachers began – often experiencing disappointments – to work together with the directors of the centers. They asked about schedules. They tried to reserve rooms for the courses in the already very crowded centers, took care of keeping their records. These teachers were suddenly filling up that great resource – time –, that can be such an ordeal in a refugee home, with new ideas and life.

It could just be chance that most of the teachers from this pilot project now have their own apartments and jobs. But what became clear, what they expressed in the discussions about the courses at the time, was that they felt they had recovered their lost dignity. Something from their old life was shining through in this new work.

It must also be said that two of the courses had to be terminated: in this case, the teacher involved was constantly cancelling classes, hardly kept records, and waited around for the students from the association to get in touch with her. After numerous discussions, the students agreed with her

that it would be best to cancel the co-operation. This would never have been possible from a stance of solidarity. They would have had to continue to offer help, possibly without seeing the imbalance this would have created in relation to the other teachers. Since they had decided in favor of co-operation, the students were at least able to delineate a way back into the project for this woman.

Co-operation can encourage people to make decisions that have consequences, whether good or bad. People who are recipients of solidarity are compelled, no matter what other options are available, to agree to what is being offered in order to avoid seeming ungrateful.



The Voices of the Marginalized

The composer John Cage once described silence as the sum of all random sounds. In his famous piece “4’33””, the pianist is not allowed to do any more than just sit there, hands on knees, staring concentratedly at the keys for four minutes. In this non-activity, suddenly the whole cosmos of surrounding sounds, big and little, becomes audible. The coughing, the stirring, the rustlings of the concertgoers, their nervousness, along with the acoustic signals of their expectant attitudes. Silence? Far more, we have here the discovery of the fact that there is no such thing as this mythical idea of the hushing of sound – its muting.

If we transfer this method onto the metaphorical image of those people of the world who have been hushed, who are marginalized and muted as described by Brecht and Noam Chomsky¹⁴ and many others, we suddenly feel the unease immanent in the word *mute*. For, the muted are in no way mute. Often, we just do not allow them to talk; that is, and this is the crux of the matter, we do not even listen in the first place. Frequently, under the assumption that we already know what they have to say. Their *sounds*, however, cannot fail to be heard.

How the marginalized are viewed is closely linked to a long tradition stemming from the European Enlightenment. To embrace and to draw close to a suffering person, to compare one’s own life to theirs and in so doing to feel the desire to change one’s *own biography* is an uplifting feeling. The musician and songwriter Christiane Rösinger, who as a result of her own creative crises and search for meaning started to offer free courses in basic German to refugees, admits this publicly: “And even if after a year it’s all a bit too much for me and the people on my team are getting on my nerves – I never want to go back to my old life, in which I only had to do with my white middle-class friends, other musicians and writers, and had no contact whatsoever with refugees or people with other problems.”¹⁵

The helping becomes a kind of therapy – one that simultaneously makes one happy, gives meaning, and helps to make the world a little better place. But should one use people in need as symbols for one’s own well-being? In her account, Rösinger at one point remarks that the people in her courses practically never talked about their traumas. When, as a language exercise, she asked people in class to introduce their families, to talk about where their siblings were, there was a sudden silence. She saw that some people were fighting back tears. She altered the exercise by introducing her own family and to use this as the basis for the practice.

Sometimes, in situations like this, wounds break open and make clear that suffering really cannot be shared. The desire to help often overlooks the fact that a lack of certain experiences cannot just be replaced by well-meaning closeness. No matter how sensitive the method, nothing can prevent the different worlds that people come from to suddenly clash – from one moment to the next, through a single word or a single gesture.

To use your own sense, as Kant so famously demanded, even today, in our Western understanding: start from yourself. From the standpoint of your own needs and desires. This is only natural and surely people all over the world do this. But to make this into a stance of improving the world is something that put out shoots only in Europe.

The “shut out” speak for themselves if we let them, more than ever in the digital age.¹⁶ The question is only whether there is any resonance. The show of solidarity for the experience of migration, post-colonial discourses, and excluded human beings is part and parcel of the self-understanding of many theaters, colleges, and museums in the Western world: it enhances their programs and their profiles.

The organization RISE, seated in Melbourne and completely organized by refugee survivors, makes a crystal-clear demand on their website: “Nothing about us without us.”¹⁷ Some time ago they published a manifesto on this site, addressed to artists. With noticeable displeasure, they refer to the numerous inquiries about projects that wanted to do something or other with refugees. “We are not raw material for your projects.” Exchange, or words to this effect, only makes sense if those who are the focus of the project can also be part of deciding what will be said by and through them.

But what does it mean, exactly, that the excluded speak for themselves? Here, I want to say something heretical: to answer this question, one must start by asking how the term “excluded” even has come to be used for these people? Or simpler still: Who has the right to designate the excluded as being excluded? To stand by people who have been deprived of their rights

is a moral position which, above all, feels good for those who take it. I do not exclude myself. It fills me with satisfaction, as I research and write, to search for voices that have been forgotten or lost. Or that can barely be heard. But, it is important to understand that as a Western writer one does not “discover” or “awaken” anything, as though one could lift a secret curtain and bring things to light. The real objective is always a conversation. A conversation in which each side is able to be autonomous. And I mean: *each* side.

To be a Western writer does not automatically mean to take a stance of shame or guilt. We, too, speak for ourselves, out of our own stories and experiences. With an awareness of shadows, of power, and of misery. But we are not small. To make yourself small can be a subtle gesture of power. And so, in the end, a game of hide and seek. To carry on a successful conversation also means not to start out on either side with judgments and accusations. To be critical of traditions in which you stand does not mean that one must conceal that which is positive. We come from different places, work and write under different conditions, but the beginning of a true conversation should be marked not by mutual recriminations, but by wanting to learn and desiring to know.

IV.

On Bukoto Street

When I was invited in the Fall of 2017 to speak at Makerere University in the Ugandan capital Kampala, I stayed at a small hotel on Bukoto Street. A little further up was a hill full of airy trees where diplomats resided in their enclosed villas; one street down from the hotel was the start of a slum that seemed to go on without end.

Awoken early by street noise, I went out every morning on long walks through this area, the visual axes of which constantly shifted and turned. In the neighborhood of diplomatic buildings, I observed the entranceways where security companies were a constant presence, with countless men and women coming into view, dressed in gleaming, spotless, fantasy uniforms, leaning on their firearms, hardly raising their eyes and in no way willing to enter into a conversation. After numerous attempts, I gave up trying for any kind of entertaining exchange. Instead, I met quite a few people in the streets of the slum who even at this early morning hour were enthusiastic about engaging in long discussions with me.

Kampala is one of the most polluted cities in the world. A strong stench of burned coal, gasoline, and plastic fills the air. Not a moment goes by in which one does not breathe in a cloud of fumes from some car or motorcycle exhaust pipe. In the streets of the slum, children play in puddles shimmering with oil. Sometimes I was addressed as “Muzungu” in the Luganda language, a Bantu word that is used for white people and Europeans. Originally, the word meant someone who wanders aimlessly around. According to the given situation, it can be used ironically, derogatorily, or as a pure statement of fact. Usually, I heard it used when I was alone at a market or walking down a street and someone wanted to call to me. “Muzungu, come here.” “Wait, Muzungu, I wanna ask you something.”

On my morning meanderings, I saw many huts that were designated “church,” or “center” or “assembly,” little buildings on which the word

“empowerment” was emblazoned, a word that in Germany I had mostly only encountered in seminars or in books. Later a colleague at the university told me that one problem in this country was the plethora of good ideas that no one talked about, however, because funding was an impossibility. This vicious circle of waiting often led to the perception in the West that the African nations were backwards. But the fact is that the innovative energy on the African continent is tremendous. Empowerment is nothing more than giving themselves the strength to make something of this wealth of ideas – as long as they have not yet despaired.

Wandering around in Kampala in the side streets around Bukoto Street, getting from the villas to the slum in a mere fifteen minutes, the considerable extent of this unending wait becomes clear. While here in the slums the issues of daily survival hold the inhabitant captive, just around the corner near the Arena Bar we meet a young man named Raymond¹⁸ who talks, looks, and moves like so many other young start-up founders in New York, Berlin, and Amsterdam in their newly leased offices, their fingers flitting over the keys of their notebooks. He had opened a co-working space that he named the “Kampala Tribe.”¹⁹ Light-flooded rooms with internet connection, conference rooms, artsy black-and-white photos on the walls. Outside, under a roof offering shade from the sun, there is a café with brioches and croissants for sale. Raymond, with just the very top of his white shirt unbuttoned, is sitting in his office waiting for clients. “I’m optimistic that it can work out. There’s a new generation of Africans, like me, returnees. I studied abroad. I know that spaces like my “Kampala Tribe” can function.”

As I sit in his office, I look through the big window panes and notice that no one is coming into the empty rooms at this time of day. After about an hour, a Frenchwoman comes by and hurriedly disappears with her computer, back into one of the more private booths in the rear.

Taking my leave, I ask Raymond why he has named this co-working space “Kampala Tribe.” “It’s the energy of the tribes which made Africa great. Living together, working together – that’s the memory we want to awaken in the people who come here.”

The fact that outside, a few steps away, there is a world in which frequently not even the basic power supply can be relied upon seems to be irrelevant in Raymond’s well-lit office. He himself uses the vocabulary of unflinching optimism and constant progress that is the engine of the digital world. It is noticeably a borrowed language, one that does not reach those on the outside. It occurs to me to wonder which new form of tribe Raymond might be meaning, as he gazes over the bare tables of his Kampala

Tribe. Isn't this at least a beginning, this attempt to link to older traditions and to find a common voice? This could be the very place in which the muteness starts to crumble? In which new *tribes* come into being? The community of digital nomads, whose energy at some point will spread to all the others?

Back outside again, it only takes me a short time before I start having doubts about my vague hopes. It may very well have been on these short walks of mine that I came up with the actual questions for this essay. I came to the realization that I was still caught up in the dualistic thinking of the "one" and the "other." Of those who speak and those who do not. But Bukoto Street is not like that. It is a street that touches upon very different worlds over its wide span and whose inhabitants definitely have no desire to be categorized by anyone. In order to understand this on more than just a rational level, you just have to wander around long enough.



Everyone Has a Story, Only for Them to Tell

It is worth staying in Kampala a bit longer to take one more step forward on our search for speaking-for-yourself.

One afternoon during my stay, I was standing under the tall trees on the vast campus of Makerere University, fascinated by the sound of the wings of the marabous, those huge scavenger birds whose wingspan is comparable to the condors. When they rise up off the branches, it sounds like helicopter wings setting into motion. I urgently needed a break. The event that I had been invited to had already been going on for a few hours. Along with musical interludes, the lectures and discussions were dragging on too long. The *Main Hall* of the university was well-filled by both students and guests. New people streamed in and out constantly.

I thought I had heard everything worth hearing when a speaker came to my attention who, it was said, together with refugees, had constructed an empowerment-village in Uganda outside of Kampala. Etienne Salborn, a young man with blonde dreadlocks tied together at the back of his head, stepped onto the stage. After a while, I figured out he was from Germany. Etienne spoke calmly, initially a bit shy, in crystal-clear English. It was soon evident that he would not spend a lot of time on technicalities.

He started telling about his work, about the principles behind SINA, the acronym for the project “Social Innovation Academy”²⁰ which he had founded. He related the story of a young woman, Ruth Nabembezi, who had lost almost her whole family to AIDS and as a result had grown up in an orphanage. Then he showed a photo of her: at Buckingham Palace, in a breathlessly beautiful evening gown, Ruth was shaking the hand of the Queen. Behind all this was the history of an idea. Ruth had developed an app, “Ask Without Shame,” a platform for young people where they could anonymously ask questions about sexuality and AIDS.

At first hesitantly, but with growing interest, hundreds, then thousands, of people started using this simple and useful service. Its success attracted

the attention of Western media. The young woman was invited to Germany, the United States, and Great Britain, finally arriving – over fifty years after the British had withdrawn from Uganda – in London, where she accepted an award from the head of state. In front of the Queen, stood a self-confident African with a sad history and an obviously promising future. She had set into motion a possibility for mass communication, just through her idea and her drive to express her idea and manifest it.

Etienne Salborn, who grew up in Berlin, had come to East Africa through the civilian service. First, he founded a sponsorship program for orphans, to which Ruth Nabembezi also belonged. Later, when the orphans had grown up, he started building up SINA. Etienne told numerous other stories of mostly younger refugees with whom he had worked together and to whom he still had contact. Since 2015, more than one hundred people have experienced positive, fundamental changes in their lives and have founded their own social projects. Some have settled in and around the village Mpigi. Others have opened their own offices in Kampala (for example, Ask Without Shame, Ruth Nambezi's organization). And some continue to live in Nakivale Refugee Camp and are trying to improve the living conditions of other refugees through their social organization on location, in that they carry on the concept of SINA independently and self-organized. Etienne's contribution to the lives of these people is low-key but at the same time highly effective. He and his team start from the simple fact that in every human being there is slumbering a story, a discovery, or possibly a business idea which with the right questions and methods can be found and developed.

No matter where someone comes from, no matter what kind of past they have endured, these hidden stories are there and can be called to life. "You have to trust the power of self-organization. I've become skeptical about when people start talking about empowerment. Who takes for themselves the right to give power to whom? This is why we would rather give people space," he says, "to find their own solutions and implement them." With these words, his voice remains calm and firm. (An almost uncanny calmness for a young man who is hardly thirty years old.) In this way, together with others, he has built up his Social Innovation Academy in the village of Mpigi on a green hill outside of Kampala, the manifestation of an idea arisen out of the rich imagination of people who for the first time were able to show what they were able to do.

The goal was and is to develop the capacities of people in that they design the village themselves and, in this way, learn the necessary skills to start their own projects. For example, some houses were built out of the

thousands of plastic bottles that lie scattered everywhere around the capital. In the course of construction, the idea then came up to produce flooring out of egg shells and plastic bags.

Etienne related all of these stories without the least bit of any kind of posturing as a savior or an expert. On the contrary, he was speaking in the spirit of co-operation, which, in the eyes of Richard Sennett, can sometimes be more important than solidarity. Later, when we conversed more, I noticed that some of the people that he had mentioned as examples were personally present at the university. For example, Patrick Muvungu, a young artist, a refugee from the Congo, who had become a member of Etienne's village project. I was astonished, coming from Germany and having in mind the still sharp distinction between the world of art and the world of business, at how the artists and the entrepreneurs formed a unity, almost as a matter of course. "I have learned that there is a path open for me, that I don't have to give in to the despair that has taken hold of so many people in this country."

A few days later, Patrick met with me again for a cup of tea. Thinking back on my encounters with many refugee artists in Germany, it occurred to me that Patrick had a special gift for looking straight into the eyes of his counterpart – without doubt or skepticism. Maybe this could be described as the gentle self-confidence that arises when a person has found the opportunity to formulate his future for himself. Patrick had left the huge camp of Nakivale but later returned in order to help other people there. Now he shows them how to find out what paths are open to them to do what he himself did.

One gets the impression that far more than relying on the definition of himself as an artist or as someone who sells things to earn a living, Patrick operates out of a very definite principle of taking action. Etienne Salborn radiates this principle as well. Are he and Patrick developmental aid workers? Are they social entrepreneurs, as we now like to say in German? Idealists? Maybe all of these? Mainly, however, they are people who follow a new art of taking action: the step by step discovery of how the strengths of the other can be combined with one's own. If nothing else, they clearly show that this principle can function.

And in reference to the above, a short addendum: a few weeks after my return to Germany, a friend of mine showed me a German brochure with the awkward title "Manual for the Effectivity-Oriented Planning and Implication of Peace Projects."²¹ The pamphlet had been published by a large, renowned foundation in Germany, which among other undertakings also promoted projects in Africa. "Read through this, why don't

you?” said my friend, with a knowing smile. In the manual, I came across sentences like “In making plans, conditions are no longer formulated, but rather the changes.”

That it could be possible to plan changes by *formulating* them seemed strange to me. But even stranger was the language of this manual, in which not human beings, but rather an abstract term of effectivity determined the thinking: “Instead of result, we speak rather of output, instead of project goal rather outcome, instead of uppermost goal rather impact.” What were these terms supposed to say? What kind of thinking and acting were they meant to inspire? At the end of the manual, the authors indicated that, in order to apply for funding, sufficient information needed to be obtained and specified concerning the most important persons involved in the planned projects. “For example, gender, religion, ethnicity, age, regional affiliations, sexual orientation.” The last item alone testifies to a rather odd stance in respect to the political situation in many of the countries of the global south. In Uganda, for example, coming out as a homosexual still means social ostracism, persecution, and in the worst case imprisonment.

With these “impact-categories,” it would be hard for an individual undiscovered story or idea to find the light of day. What could possibly be the “impact” that someone like Patrick or Etienne is pursuing? Hard to answer in the language of a manual like this one, maybe a bit easier in another, self-formulated language that grows slowly, developing its strengths over the course of prolonged endeavor.

VI.

Poetic Lies I

The exotic Other frequently needs more than a different appearance. He or she must also do things differently than how we do them. The Other's appearance and language cannot be too similar to our own appearance and language. When it comes right down to it, *the Other* first has to become mute and then stand on his or her head. Otherwise, the figure of the Other would not be electrifying enough. The exotic is dependent upon complacent wonderment and fascination.

Let us now hazard a leap over to the so-called *fringes* of Europe. We shall soon see why the italics of the word fringe are necessary.

When the Romanian city Timisoara was in the running for the title “European Capital of Culture” (which it finally did win for the year 2021), many producers of culture here and abroad were delighted. Something long-forgotten had surfaced. The city, with its grand palaces, boulevards, and squares, its many different religions, ethnicities, traditions and cultural monuments cropped up in many (Western European) mental maps for the first time and as a *discovery*. Along with the application for the honorary title, awarded yearly by the European Commission in Brussels, came the announcement of the restoration of the old town and the proclamation of new cultural events of international magnitude. Full of enthusiasm and curiosity, creative artists from all over the world began to flock to Romania.

Those who arrived from Western countries had for the most part neither a grasp of the language nor any kind of deeper comprehension of contemporary Romanian art. Their motivation usually stemmed from a desire to “discover the fringe.” To unveil for themselves the Other, the unfamiliar, something slumbering and not yet used-up – like layers of hidden stone. Indeed, they meant well. They came with the intention to spark change. With the wish to give people a voice, to make the hidden wealth of the city visible and to rouse the younger generation of the country. At some

point in the course of all this eagerness, the so-called “Creative Morning Talks” were introduced in Timisoara. Developed in Brooklyn, these morning encounters over coffee and croissants were get-togethers in galleries or bars for the purpose of brainstorming about *creativity* – whatever that might mean.

One American creative artist active in Timisoara, Chris Torch, a professional actor, who had worked for a long time in Sweden and had carried out many projects in the Balkan countries, was among the lecturers in this series. He had short gray hair and wore a tight-fitting shirt. He had a warm, powerful voice – was someone who could rivet the attention of an audience in just a few short minutes. I admire people like Torch for their charisma and eloquence. He has the exact tone that so many intellectuals have who were socialized in the United States and then came to Europe to find their roots, but without developing into brooders.

The title he gave his *Morning Lecture*, which is still accessible on Youtube, is “Beyond Ourselves”²² – a panegyric to the cultures, peoples, and landscapes of Eastern Europe. I have watched the professionally-made video recording of this lecture numerous times and each time have discovered something new. Certainly, it is obvious that Torch has studied acting. Grasping around him into space with quick, precise movements, his eyes assessing his audience – both the visible and invisible audience – he gives form to his art of elocution. A cultural activist, his aspiration is that, within the European crises, the voices of culture should once again come into their own. He presents his lecture in crystal-clear English. As though he were asking them to dance, he flings out questions to the young people about their identity.

Not until my second viewing did I notice, right at the beginning of the film, that in the entrance to the lecture hall a table can be seen behind which young people wearing T-shirts are sitting. “Creative Mornings Timisoara” is the typically designed logo on the T-shirts. The camera then takes a quick shot of an almost dutiful-sounding text: “We love our global partners.” Listed there are the names of sponsor companies, obviously none of them Romanian. But what occupied my thoughts more was the story that Torch told between video-minutes 21’00 and 24’00. Introduced with the emphatic statement “On the fringes of Europe, culture is still alive and well,”²³ the story goes on to tell about an art project being put into action by an artist with whom he had been travelling in Georgia – his name is not important for our purposes here.

The artist, we’ll call him Nedyalko, together with his American friend, found a photograph at the flea market in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia. It

showed two old people, both unknown to him. The photo was a random purchase, and they took it with them when they travelled to Georgia. Upon arrival there, as Torch recounts it, Nedyalko and his American friend wandered through the marketplace in a small town and showed the photograph around. He told the people there that the two figures seen in the photo were his grandfather and grandmother. He informed the villagers that they had emigrated from this place long ago. Nedyalko even made up a family name for them. He asked whether there might be anyone who knew them. He was on a search for them, he said.

This was the artwork. An intervention into reality, inspired by a fantasy. A simple allegation, leading to a search for real people. During Torch's talk, a background picture comes on the screen, showing Nedyalko, surrounded by curiously peering men, bent over a photo in the marketplace of a Georgian village and starting to think about whether they might know these two old people. Torch goes on to say that the villagers puzzled over the photos, then shook their heads, or called up relatives, saying: No, no, we don't know your relatives; but we will ask around.

Pause.

The narrator looks around at the audience. Something is still coming. A European-fringe miracle, a twist in the story. Nedyalko and he, he continues, went back to the hotel and on the next morning got on the bus leaving for the next city in the direction of Azerbaijan. Then came the call.

In front of the hotel, it seems, was a pick-up truck with people asking for Nedyalko. They had found relatives of his. They wanted to pick him up so that he could meet them and celebrate the reunion. Nedyalko threw his plans to the wind, got off the bus on the spot, and went back and celebrated "for three days with these people in their village," without ever disclosing that he was not really the long-lost grandchild.

Miracles do still occur on the *fringes* of continents. The drama of the telephone call, just when the protagonists get on the bus, has electrified the audience. One minute later, Nedyalko's artwork would have gone up in smoke. Maybe the story is true. Maybe not. But this is actually irrelevant. It shows the people of the Georgian village in a somewhat strange light. And for me it throws up a few questions.

If one of us were one of these villagers, would we not have been able to find out, through a few well-placed questions, that Nedyalko could not have been the grandson? And is not the false portrayal of oneself as a relative one of the worst affronts towards people? Except in the case of really

mindless people whose hearts are in the right place but who believe anything you tell them. These people spent half the night calling around, trying to identify the two faces on the photograph. They organized a three-day feast, in economically difficult times, for someone who was doing no more than pulling the wool over their eyes.

I refuse to believe that these people were as naïve and dull-witted as they were presented here. In this story, which Torch so masterfully tells at his morning lecture, the villagers play the role of the Other, the exotic and foreign fringe inhabitants. They are not allowed to comment upon or think about what is obvious. With their emotions and liveliness, they react to the foreign visitor and envelop him in their warmth.

The fringe-people open their homes, put bread and wine on the table, give back to us the family for which we yearn – to us, the lost sons and daughters from the middle of the continent. The creators of cultural capitals. A sociologist would likely be extremely interested in the deeper dimensions of this story. The story accompanies me like a thorn on my search for the art of advocating-for-yourself, the art of speaking-for-yourself.

Artists like Chris Torch undoubtedly have a soft heart for the people they meet on their journeys to the fringes of Europe. They believe in the power that they discover in the *natives*. They *believe* and they speak like the early missionaries with all the passion that they can muster about their convictions. But maybe they would discover something else if they would focus not only on what they themselves believe but on what those whom they are supposedly paying attention to really are saying and expressing – on the ambiguities, contradictions, and unremarkable details in these peoples' own descriptions of themselves. In order to become storytellers, mightn't they have to first become listeners themselves?

"Taking yourself seriously,"²⁴ as the philosopher Harry Frankfurt said in one of his Stanford lectures, necessitates reason and love. One could add to that: and empathy for the other. Only when I am in a position to be able to find myself in the stories of others, only when I am able to be sensitive to the real differences – and not just those that satisfy my own yearnings – only if I want not just to *believe* but first to listen (or am I being too high-minded?), can I then discover my own stance and then take it seriously. Or discover nothing at all. That too is a liberty. To listen and to find out that there is nothing special to report upon. Instead of looking for the unusual in the fringes, one might also just find the usual. And in the usual, the actual *events*.

Poetic Lies II

I remember an Italian-Brazilian film that starts out with a strange river scene. The name of the film is *Birdwatchers*, by Marco Bechis, and came out in 2009.²⁵ It is early morning. The fog is rising. There is jungle on either side of the river. The prow of a boat is gliding through the water. Tourists are scanning the thicket with anticipation. Then, in the green flickering light, silently the natives appear from under the trees. Their hair is dark, their faces mute, painted with red stripes, their hands supported by wooden spears. They look toward the boat, come closer to the water, and slowly raise their spears. The tour guide revs the engine and speeds away with his enthusiastically shocked guests.

Cut.

The camera zooms in on the backs of the natives. They turn away, lift their spears and stomp up the slope through the rustling jungle terrain. Not long after, they reach a road. Waiting for them is a pick-up truck from the vacation resort. They throw their spears in the back, take their T-shirts and jeans out of a bag and take an envelope with money from the driver – payment for their performance.

I remember being confused at the sight of the truck. The river scene had moved me. The green water, the lights, the stillness, the emergence of people from out of the labyrinthine darkness of the jungle, the thought of the secrets of these indigenous forests people– and then, shortly after, the awful banality of everyday tourism. But still – *this* scene stuck with me: the way these people cheerfully re-counted the banknotes in the envelopes, then climbed into the back of the pick-up laughing and talking. Native Indians turned into regular people. People with money worries. Hungry for breakfast. And here is where the film took its start.

The yearning for knowledge through the experience of the unknown is hard to get rid of. Maybe it is even encouraging to know that even self-critical, rationally-thinking people sometimes find themselves caught deep in this trap.

Before leaving the subject of poetic lies behind me, it is worth taking a look at the involuntary fall of the philosopher Michel Foucault into just such a trap. Because Foucault is repeatedly cited as an icon of critical thought, who addresses the suppression of other discourses, this example is particularly revealing. The philosopher Michel Foucault considered himself to be an archaeologist of the soul. His reading was associative.²⁶ It led him into areas of knowledge that shattered previous paths of inquiry and made possible new insights into the structure of the world.

Thus, the title of his main work, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Les Mots et les choses. Une archéologie des sciences humaines, 1966), is not surprising.²⁷ Behind it is hiding a revolutionary book that is nothing less than a radical day of reckoning for the European history of ideas with its boundaries and black holes. A whole series of holy cows of Western culture gets slaughtered here – for example, the concept of an individual having moral agency. At the end of the book, the Enlightenment idea of the human being as a self-determined thinking and acting being has become little more than “a face in the sand at the edge of the sea.”²⁸

In the Foreword of *The Order of Things*, Foucault attempts to give his revolution a new horizon by citing a primary inspiration for his book. He refers to an old Chinese encyclopedia titled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. Foucault writes that an unusual section in the encyclopedia in which animals were categorized had “shaken up” his way of thinking. The animals were divided up into contradictory, strange categories that did not fit together (“uncountable, drawn with the finest camelhair brush, resembling flies from a distance”). To be exact, Foucault first refers to the actual source of the animal list, a poetic narrative by the Argentine poet Jorge Luis Borges: “This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of our thought, the thought that bears the marks of our time and space (...) and still continues to rock the foundation of and to threaten with collapse our age-old distinction between the Same and the Other.”²⁹

China and its hidden secrets appeared to him as an exotic beacon of a different way of thinking, in which “Same” and the “Other” start to totter. The factual and the bizarre, the banal and the significant were mixed together here in a fascinating way. This foreign world seemed to offer a

contradictory horizon for a new philosophical future. And, in 1966, China was still distant enough away that it could not instantly defend itself against the prevalence of this faulty Western interpretation.

You will have already guessed: the Chinese encyclopedia referred to by Borges does not exist. It is a literary fantasy that is nothing but a surreal joke in Borges' essay. But in a scholarly text, it has an unsettling effect if it is presented, as in Foucault, as a serious source in the philosophy of the Far East. Possibly, Foucault even knew that the *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* was a literary creation. The renowned name of Jorge Luis Borges may have insured against any wagging of heads. And, in this way, Foucault turned this Argentine author's literary fantasy of a supposed Chinese categorization of animals into a reality. He saw "at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture ... that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, and think."³⁰

Suddenly the Other was irretrievably back, without necessitating even a single original Chinese source to confirm or to supplement the exotic fantasies of this philosopher. The Swiss Sinologist Harro von Senger tracked down these and traces of other cultural brainchildren and, in reference to Foucault's argumentation, observed: "This is an interpretation frequently found in the West of the "Middle Kingdom" as a foreign planet, a treasury of very different ways of thought that are incomprehensible to Europeans."³¹ Also noteworthy is that, in his criticism of such false portrayals, Senger repeatedly brings in the voices and assessments of Chinese authors. Not to cast aspersions on the Europeans, but rather to set straight what has been put out into the world. In the case of Foucault's historical daydreams about China's different way of thinking, many Chinese authors react towards this Western philosopher with elegant indulgence.

For example, an article by Zhan Yiguo, on Michel Foucault's enthusiasm for the fictitious Chinese animal classification published in the newspaper *Shehui Guancha* (Societal Observations), bears the ironically forbearing title "Catching a Breath of Fresh Air with Unspoiled Thinking."³² Maybe this is an important phrase for the rest of my search. I want to get away from criticism and out of the unsatisfying perspective that is purely focused on exposing, on finding those spots where poetic lies are hidden and where "foreignness" is put on display.

I find it unsatisfying to stop at just describing such lies. Back in my university days, criticism that stayed purely static instead of developing into a search repelled me. And I was always irritated by the glimmer in the eye of the lecturers when they were able find someone guilty of an error:

“See here, again, the latent racism,” and “here we see a pure case of white authoritarian thinking,” or “this passage takes us to the heart of the problem,” and so on.

To observe is not to vilify. To educate does not mean to know better. Far more, what is important is to bring together opposites, to understand the progression of false information. Important is to stir up a debate.



Hidden Talents

We can hold people back from speaking in many different ways: a) we can just refrain from asking them for their opinions, b) we can shut their mouths, metaphorically or literally, c) we can ridicule them, d) defame them as liars, and e) bring them to the point at which they hide their abilities and conceal whatever knowledge they may have that would allow them to express themselves appropriately.³³ (I am formalizing intentionally so as to make the options clearer.)

Category “e” is the most illuminating for my considerations. It is frequently a subtle means of pressuring those concerned into hiding their actual talents. The fear – or rather the inclination towards caution – that they could suffer some disadvantage if they show their true capacity becomes awakened in them.

For example, the Syrian actor Ramadan Ali, who fled Bashar al-Assad’s regime and is today the most successful actor of his generation in German-language roles, always was able to turn these categories into advantages for himself. In the course of his flight from Syria, he acted in various roles at the various border-points between Syria, Turkey, and Greece – roles of which he is still the master on stage today. The astonished dupe, the naïve questioner, the depressed introvert, the drug addict on the very verge of unconsciousness. Border guards and police always pushed him on through, as though glad to be rid of such a person from their country as quickly as possible.

In one of our talks, he once told me that since arriving in Germany he has tried to speak German as much as possible. From the very beginning, it had been like a compulsion for him. He had the feeling at that time that he had to learn the language as quickly as possible in order to have any vision at all of a future for himself in this country. Even though he had already learned, as he says, almost everything there was to learn of this difficult

language from movies and videos, he one day inquired about a German course in his first refugee center. The woman who was offering the course told him the class was not for him as his command of the language was far too good. She said she could not admit him. As she explained to him, the course she was offering was for beginners. But that would be good, he answered, because then I would learn it all again, but this time right.

The teacher would not budge from her decision. He stood up, walked to the door, turned back around, sat down on the chair and suddenly was only able to speak very broken German. She was not amused and told him to stop this silly business at once. "It no play. Language class want." At this, she got the point that he would neither leave the room nor his current role until he had been accepted for the course. And, she let him enroll. What may seem like a funny twist to the story is actually the bitter truth of the art of survival for many immigrants. It is also an example for category "e," hide your capabilities.

The British theater studies scholar Alison Jeffers speaks of the "bureaucratic performances"³⁴ that immigrants experience and are also forced into. Upon arrival in a country, they on the one hand see an open door in front of them, but there is no security that this door will stay open for long. Just like the man in Franz Kafka's parable *Before the Law* stands waiting at the entrance of the Great Door, where he finally, after years of waiting in despair and with longing to be let in, discovers from the doorkeeper that this entrance had been made only for him and was now going to be shut, likewise the immigrant is at the threshold of either finding a future or coming up against a giant stop sign that will threaten his whole existence.

Jeffers contends that immigrants, in front of the great door of the authorities, with no knowledge of the language, the culture, or the expectations had of them, start acting a part, delivering a *performance*. The essential gesture of this performance is sitting and waiting. Anyone who has ever glanced into the waiting halls of the immigration authorities knows the aesthetics of these fundamental gestures. The motionless faces, the endless sitting; getting up a bit, walking around a bit, sitting down again. The refusal to look at the clock on the wall. (Even the repeated look at the watch is rare – waiting and sitting is about being patient and is beyond the logic of measured time.) In addition, part of this performance is to say certain sentences and also certain words, like "asylum," the timing of which must be remembered.

On the Kafkaesque stage of the governmental bureaus, all the dramatic devices can be found: up-stage, down-stage, the stage whisper, indecipherable sounds, expectations, and the fear not to fulfill expectations. There

is also the script, the plot, and the predetermined action. In such an environment, it is better to hide one's talents, be they good or bad. The more one reveals, the more risks one is taking. Here category "e" – the hiding of one's talents – is concentrated as though under a burning-glass. Hiding one's own proficiencies, not as a strategy but as a result of fear and insecurity, becomes an advantage.

We all know the phenomenon of trying to speak in a foreign language. We need a feeling of confidence and mastery before we will try to tell a joke or attempt to describe a complex feeling. And, we need a feeling of safety. Otherwise, it is far more comfortable to set the stage with a long explanation of our own incompetency, to stress that we are beginners, still learning, and all the rest of those easy phrases that help explain our own lack of courage.

Muteness can temporarily give the person who is waiting strength. It can also give other persons the feeling that the mute person is in constant need of their help. This is the point at which the vortex that is contained in the word "solidarity" begins. Many of the volunteers who become engaged with helping refugees, who bring them clothes, go with them to the authorities, cook for them, or offer German lessons want to show solidarity, want to give the "foreigner" a voice, want to help them obtain their rights. This leads to a phenomenon that I myself have often observed in my talks with volunteers and "their" refugees. The volunteers begin to speak for them. They tell their stories, even the parts that they themselves have not experienced. And, the persons being helped – they start playing their roles.

One day, an older couple, who had taken a young Syrian man into their home in the south of Berlin and had put a lot of energy into fighting for his future, came to one of the public events of the students' association. They introduced themselves, told me that they had no children of their own, but that they now "felt the responsibility to do something for Bashar." The woman looked at me. When she saw that I was ready to listen, she started telling the story of twenty-five-year-old Bashar.

She told me he no longer had any parents, was an orphan, and that he wanted to learn, to study something that had to do with gardening. Together with her husband, she said, he had helped shape their hedge. He really had talent. What might they do?

She explained that they had been retired for quite a while, and that now they were considering adopting Bashar. After all, she remarked, he was lost dealing with the authorities on his own – this German system with its hundreds of forms to fill out, this jungle. Her husband, she continued, had

done some research and knew exactly what the young man's rights were. She herself had signed Bashar up at the adult education center for a German class that used special didactic methods. She added that she even knew the teacher there from when she used to be professionally active.

While she was talking, she was constantly glancing over to Bashar standing next to her. He was a slender, dark-haired young man with a friendly, open expression in his eyes, a bit shy, with slight scars on his cheeks. He smiled when he heard his name being used, and he nodded when the two older people looked at him. When I asked him how he liked the city, he started answering with simple words: "Good. My German still bad though." He seemed to be searching for other words, when the woman broke in: "He speaks very well for this short time. It's just not easy for him because he's insecure." After that, he went back to just nodding. He had understood that there just was no time to wait and listen to his broken sentences. He had obviously had good experiences – or so it seemed to me – in the role of a friendly, nodding bystander. He was used to that part.

And I have to admit that for me, too, it would have taken an effort to carefully listen to his broken German. But would that not have been exactly what was necessary? To let him speak? To see and hear who he was, even and precisely with this kind of German? I only knew his story in the version provided me by the couple who was caring for him. They had clearly taken over his story. When I invited him to come to one of the next meetings of the association, the woman answered that this would be difficult as he couldn't yet make the trip from their house in the southern part of the city all the way to the center of town: "He's not so good at dealing with the subway system yet." She then offered to try to make time and come with him if I could give her enough advance notice.

Later, I met him at another event that he was attending without them. He did not say much more than at our first encounter, and his German was still an arduous search for words. But, from the little he said, and above all from *how* he said it, I was able to recognize a different person in front of me. Not necessarily more attractive or confident, but rather someone who no longer constantly glanced to the side – he had stopped a certain *performance*. Tellingly, the subject of gardening did not come up.

In the course of some of our discussions, Etienne Salborn once told me – making a movement with both hands as though he was pressing a top onto a barrel – that many of the volunteers whom he had so far encountered were making the mistake of considering their own level of accomplishment as the standard for what might be achievable. "But actually," he went on, "it would have to be like in the Asian martial arts, where the

goal of the master is that the student someday outdistance him.” The idea that someone like Bashar might someday achieve more in Germany than other young men of his generation would have seemed absurd to his foster parents. They assumed that someone like him, who had set out without a future, would at least be able to make his way in gardening.

Like many parents, they had obviously hardly reflected upon the fact that one of the important responsibilities of good parents is to transform dependency into self-reliance and competence.

IX.

Avalanches, Stopping at our Mouths

In the noteworthy Swedish movie *Turist*³⁵(shown under the title *Force Majeure* in most English-speaking countries), a powerful avalanche suddenly changes people's speaking.

A couple from Stockholm, Tomas and Ebba, are spending their Winter vacation in a luxury hotel in the French Alps. Bright sunshine floods the tranquil snow-covered meadows and glaciers stretched out across the screen. The mountaintops soar upwards in glistening white. As evening falls, we hear the eerie sounds of explosions in the distance from the triggering of small avalanches. The ceiling lamps in the hotel rooms radiate an orange light into the surrounding darkness.

We see a couple, newly arrived from stressful everyday-life in Northern Europe, busy with daily rituals like teeth-brushing with the children in front of a huge mirror in their bathroom at the hotel. The family is trying to have a good time in this world of costly pleasures. In the morning, the ski-lifts sway along slowly, bringing the skiers up on high. The light shimmers in their faces. There's not a lot of talking.

Now and then, we see Tomas and Ebba pat the heads of their children, or a caress between the two of them, a random exchange of words. In the halls of the hotel, the camera pans by the expensive wood paneling of the walls. We hear muted conversations of various vacationers. The world goes on. Breakfast is served, weather permitting, on the large terrace with a view of the sun-lit Alps. Once in a while, alerts from Tomas's smart-phone remind us that hectic everyday life has not completely ceased to exist in the midst of this white stillness. One day, while eating on the terrace, the family hears shouts of surprise. A few people jump up. There has been an avalanche.

Huge masses of snow are moving, rearing up, in slow but threatening waves, towards the terrace – like a white fog of dust, light, power, and destruction. No one can really believe that this mass of snow could ever reach the terrace. But suddenly the torrent of sopping fog spills over the

railing. We hear a short hissing sound, the screams of the people. There is a light-grey gloom. And then: silence.

If we were not in complete shock, we might have observed that Tomas, in the very moment the avalanche reached them, grabbed his phone and ran to the left, out of the picture and away from his family.

The fog recedes. The tables are still standing. The people compose themselves. Only the fringe of the avalanche has reached the terrace. There are deep sighs of relief. The waiters clear the tables and reset them. Incredibly enough, not even much of the tableware has fallen over. A near catastrophe – they're saved by just a hair's breadth. Ebba and the children are now sitting at the table, still a bit bewildered and lost in thought, when Tomas shows up. "Well, that was quite something, wasn't it?" he asked, with somewhat forced casualness.

Later, Ebba will come back to this remark repeatedly in the course of the movie, as she goes over this scene in her mind.

She will blame her husband for having left his family at a critical moment. At a dinner party with friends, she will accuse him of cowardice and failure, at which he reacts with an embarrassed smile and attempts to explain that he sees the situation completely differently. But later on in the movie, he will break down in tears and admit that she is right. Interestingly enough, the director, Ruben Östlund, has rendered the whole thing as a festive, subtly-conveyed comedy. The story never takes on completely tragic dimensions; even the scene of Tomas crying is made to go on for so long that his wife, children, and even we, the viewers, feel impelled to yell out to him: "Ok, that's enough now, don't exaggerate, it isn't really about that anyway." – But, then, what is it about?

The movie is very careful with its symbolism. The avalanche is an avalanche, nothing more. It is, however, also a jolt. It is a shaking up of this tranquil world in which tourists from the North try to escape the stress of their lives. The avalanche, if we look at it poetically, comes to a halt right at the brink of the protagonists' mouths. And Ebba, at least, begins to speak. She suddenly finds language for issues which have previously been buried under the rituals of everyday routine.

I am not someone who likes to burden things with heavy symbolism. Upon viewing this movie, though, I thought it was valuable precisely because the weighty symbol is rather a buoyant one. An avalanche spills over onto the terrace, similar to how the political events of recent years have spilled over into the Western countries, but without budging the foundations of these places. Life continued as always without any major curtailments for the majority society.

Somewhere out there – this seems to be a widespread feeling – are masses of people in movement. These people arouse fear in us because their arrival, even into our family life, awakens words and phrases in us that were not there before. The avalanche is not the refugees and is also not the political crisis. The avalanche, it seems to me, is far more the burden of the questions that we have for so long avoided asking. What is still holding our communities – and I am intentionally not saying “societies” – together? How robust are the stories and rituals with which we comfort and protect ourselves really? Are we startled by the new arrivals, by their hunger for a future, by their capacity for community? And perhaps most urgent of all: how much humor and how much emotional distance do we have in order to offer sensible answers in this context – so that we do not fall into the hysteria that in recent years both the radical Right and Left has been trying desperately to talk us into?

Watching this movie, I feared that the director was going to make a drama out of it after all. But as the story went on, the scenes got progressively funnier, more irrational, absurd, and at the same time more realistic. At the end, the still distraught family leaves the mountain resort and gets into a bus, which will drive them down the narrow, serpentine road into the valley. The bus driver is obviously inexperienced and gets the bus into a risky situation: on one of the curves, he almost drives off the road. There's a jamming of brakes, a killed motor, then reverse gear. Ebba gets nervous and wants to get out. The other guests start to protest as well. The bus driver lets them out and drives on. The final image: Tomas, Ebba, the children, and the other vacationers walk down the mountain from the pass as dusk falls.

They do not talk, but their bodies display a strength that has been otherwise lacking in the whole of the film. Out of speaking emerges agency, an agency that is neither spectacular nor particularly noticeable. The endless babble about the relationship has transformed into the ability to make a sensible decision. The inexperienced bus driver has become a greater danger than the powerful avalanche. Rather than the previous irrational accusations, something like practical, community-based, common sense has surfaced: it is better to walk down into the valley together. Here we have a celebration of pragmatism, arisen out of the spirit of clear thinking which Ebba has discovered for herself.

Maybe this is the lesson offered by the arts: the encouragement to reveal for the readers or viewers this very spirit of thinking and acting.

On my search for the power of speaking-for-yourself, I would have been lost without books, movies, and images. In the midst of the jarring

cacophony of opinions, prognoses, and analyses constantly flung out by the media, there is the language of the arts, which – at least when successful – allows Ebba's doubts to appear. Allows us to start questioning, not just to keep going as though nothing had happened. To start doubting. Whom can we actually trust? What behavior and which norms are solid and do not go up in smoke at the first threat? And what kind of forbearance do we actually need in the face of the phenomenon that under pressure values can suddenly break down and temporarily disappear? The artistic approach can help narrow down the ambiguity that people will find on their own searches for understanding of these issues.

I contend – in full recognition that this idea is all too general – that in seeing and in reading we are not only practicing another form of perception, but that seeing and reading enables us to learn a new form of speaking. A certain amount of empathy is necessary in order to understand and to communicate with a complex character in a film or novel. We must be capable of believing what they are saying – even the lies. Even the tricks and the twists. We can only take in information if it comes from the figures themselves. If they are part of an intelligent design. Then we begin to speak with them, to question them, to try out our own voices on them.

Art that speaks for others is usually propaganda – whether good or bad is beside the point. Art that shows what is really possible when people start to speak their truth and tell their own stories is searching for something. It does not have answers, but instead it may have something else, something more convincing: voices. Such art can sometimes trigger the avalanche that can bring people to think. Thus, in many cultures we can observe the extreme importance of stories and art in times of crisis.

Stories and other works of art can hold hidden within them the voices that find no place in the everyday world. Here they can be hidden and kept safe. And, suddenly, they can break open: the potentialities concealed there can then at least be tried out, discussed, and negotiated in life. The old division between fiction and reality dissolves anyway when, in the course of hearing and seeing, one comprehends that the rifts as well as the bridges between people are primarily constructed on the foundation of the stories that they tell each other.



Ideas, Images

During my talks with refugees in Berlin, Kampala, Athens, and other cities, I noticed that, as soon as the people had developed a bit more confidence, they would start citing the poetry, songs, or proverbs from their homelands. Or passages from films. I learned about artists and traditions, the names of which I had never before heard. Often, I could feel that with these references a new feeling of closeness came into being that had to do with the direct connection to the past life of the speaker. Here, they were at home. Here, they could awaken old memories, make comparisons clear, and offer examples that would bring a distant world closer to the listener. I could also feel that these references brought up some pride on the part of the speaker: look here, this is my world, this is where I come from. These are the songs we sang, the movies that we have seen, the books we read. These are the people we cheered and trusted, these are the slogans we put our hearts into on the streets. This was our life. This is how we spoke. This is the aroma of our old existence, and what we yearn for.

There is a very particular facial expression that arises when people speak about the everyday culture of their homeland. More than ever in the diaspora. On the one hand, there is some sentimentality. But there is also a very exact knowledge of details, and an enjoyment of certain formulations, of ambiguities of language, of some little malice, and of jokes. Never, though, is the pleasure greater than in the moment when there is someone to share these associations with. When someone says: “Of course, that was the program in which the moderator kept singing that really old song of Umm Kulthum’s. After a while, people couldn’t stand to hear it anymore, when he started on it.” “We sometimes say that the heart is like a bird, you must never startle it.” Or someone cites a passage out of a movie, from a particular scene: “At this movie, my brother fell in love with his wife Ariana. They were showing it in Tirana for a couple of weeks. No one cared

what was happening on the screen. The people just went to it so they could finally be alone together in a semi-dark room and kiss, without having the whole family around them.”³⁶

At the same time, I perceived that many of the helpers, whether volunteer or professional, that I met in the refugee homes only rarely had any knowledge about or even interest in the cultural backgrounds of their charges. How many volunteers could say anything about modern-day culture in Syria, Afghanistan, Eritrea, or Albania? Or about the media in those places, or about the characters in these culture’s children’s books? Or about their popular television programs? In other words, about the things that make up everyday life and construct collective memory in those cultures. Certainly there are people who can, but they are in the minority.

A helper deals with existential needs. How can the helpers also be concerned with the heroes of children’s books? They accompany those who need it to the authorities, invite them into their homes, show them the country in which destiny has landed them. They take care of them in their plight – and this is, without any underlying irony, both excellent and admirable. It just depends upon what kind of questions one wants to ask in these encounters. Should something like closeness develop? Reciprocal understanding? Maybe even friendship? Then knowledge may be necessary. Associative knowledge,³⁷ on both sides.

I still remember the time when Ramadan Ali, the Syrian actor, worked together with me on a theater performance for the International Literature Festival in Berlin. He lived in Ulm at that time, and I in Berlin. At night, we sent each other versions of the texts. Ramadan sent me recordings of songs that he had practiced via cell phone. One part of the theater piece was the song “Fremd bin ich eingezogen/Fremd zieh ich wieder aus” (A stranger I arrived here/a stranger I go hence) from Franz Schubert’s Lieder cycle “Winterreise” (1827). Ramadan was determined to sing it, even though the old-style German was obviously difficult for him. He kept sending me new versions. He did not want to just understand the content of the song – the concept of being a stranger was familiar enough to him. He was especially interested in appropriating the specifically cultural essence of this song. The aromas, colors, nuances of the German and the Romantic music of Schubert. His ambition was to look behind the curtain that still concealed what, ever since his arrival, people had been trying to communicate to him with such awkward words as *integration* or *participation*.

Ramadan Ali is a professional on stage. If something does not go well, he knows how to cover it up so that it does not even cross the mind of any-

one in the audience to excuse him. But with this of all songs, Ramadan Ali made mistakes at almost every single performance. Or he stopped in the middle of a song and then started over. At the same time, I knew how important this hurdle of a piece was to him. We could have easily just left the song-cycle out. If I remember correctly, there was even a performance in which for some unknown reason he refrained from singing it. But there was something missing then, and the next time he again struggled through the difficult passages. “Und auf den weißen Matten/Such’ ich des Wildes Tritt” (And on the white meadows/I search for the tracks of the wild).

Because it was such a challenge for him, he was fiercely determined to perform the work. On the one hand, the cycle told something about him and his foreignness. On the other, it came from the depths of the culture that he had already triumphed over in his outer life; but, the artist in him wanted to go further. We never talked about why he did not just remove that song from the theater piece, since it had always led to mistakes and standstill. I saw his persistence as an attempt to reach the menacing-unwieldy part of Germanness, and to arrive there too. However, maybe it was something else like ambition, a game, a conscious flirtation with the audience as he sat in the saddle of his mistake (for, the people liked it when he came to a halt, rolled his eyes, remarked on the difficulty of the German language, and started over from the beginning).

For Ramadan it is the music, for other new arrivals it is the television programs, the comics, and everyday slang that accomplish their entrance into the “inner cultural association” space that is ever so important for “speaking-for-yourself.”³⁸ Indeed, I also observed that many people were either afraid of, refused to deal with, or had absolutely no interest in the culture of the new country. Sometimes even, though rarely, there was hatred and anger in respect to the supposedly sinful liberties that existed in the country they had ended up in.

Through the eyes of the new arrivals, I learned to newly appreciate some of the components of everyday life in Germany as freedoms and values. When bold art interventions take place in Berlin or also in the more rural areas of Germany, when spontaneous concerts crop up at the employment agencies or the FEMEN activists bare their breasts at a press conference, when no one gasps at the sight of a man kissing a man, a woman kissing a woman, or when women sit alone in cafés and read, when the communication between the generations no longer is limited by taboos, when different religions organize concerts together, when on the way to my office I see the *House of One* in Berlin making progress (a building which will contain a synagogue, a mosque, and a church), when gay parades and farm-

ers' protest marches move through the city with whimsical floats and creative protest, then I recognize the contours of a freedom that is really not to be taken for granted.

It is sometime a sluggish freedom, a tranquil freedom that has gained some unneeded weight over the years, but for this very reason it is also a stable, defiant freedom that ties me fast to Western culture. There is a long history to this, and it involves all of us. I would not be surprised if many of the desires for freedom that are tucked into these stories soon become indispensable for many of those who have recently arrived. The question is only, how do we tell others our story, our understanding of freedom? How do we tell it without making it into a tale of heroes?

In Germany, the country where I am from, even the use of the word *our* has become problematic in most gatherings. It is – who knows, for better or worse – a country that is distrustful of quick consensus in dealings with one another, and even more distrustful of the bliss of collective experiences, apart from the ever-present football euphoria of course. Might we also have to find a new way to tell our own story and our individual stories? To learn to share our memories and culture in a different way? Are we in the situation that Ebba found herself in the movie I described above, in which a seeming threat drove her to think about her life, how she was living it and how others were living it with her?

At least it has to be possible to think about the meaning of speaking-for-yourself, from all points of view. I am seeing some light on the horizon. In recent years in Germany, there has been an increase in books, movies, and theater pieces that by all means do use the words *our* and *we*, without meaning *the Germans*, but rather *all the people* who live in this country: those who speak quickly and those who speak haltingly.



XI.

A Look Back, a Look Forward

For a moment, I would like to take a step back, into the memories of my own biography. There lie the roots of my questions about the conditions for a fair discussion, in which no one puts words in the mouth of the other.

I come from a small town along the south-eastern border of Germany. Within half an hour, you can explore the surroundings by car and at the same time pass through three different countries. Narrow sections of Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic lie like tired tongues across the region of my old homeland that borders on the Bohemian mountain range, the Oberlausitz.

Already back in the time of the Iron Curtain the area was called the “Tal der Ahnungslosen” (Valley of the Clueless). Not even illegally could we get Western television programs here. So those who wanted to were all the more intent on getting information about the outside world in whatever way they could. Today’s visitors to this area experience first-hand what it means to travel through three different linguistic regions and to have memories of things that are practically unknown across the respective borders. Though the inhabitants may be very open to other cultures, to this day I hardly know anyone from here who can think spontaneously of a single thing to say about the contemporary cultures of the Czech Republic or Poland – a nearby foreign world, which always fascinated me as a child in the German Democratic Republic.

I remember that in my childhood not much was said at school about the neighboring countries. And even less about contemporary cultural developments in nearby cities like Prague, Wrocław, or Liberec. Aside from the ubiquitous school movies about fascist concentration camps, with their tales of Communist heroes or courageous Polish camp-elders, we border children heard little about what was happening beyond the fence. Things did not stop at constructing an impermeable border to the Western

world. Subtle walls of silence were also formed, especially in the schools. If there had been a real exchange, we might have found out that the people, whether here or there, had similar worries and ideas, and were ready for change. The government of this little German state found this principle of silence so successful that it used it for the foreigners inside of its own country as well.

People from, for example, Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, or Mozambique, who had been brought into the country as contract laborers, were discouraged from having a voice. Though there may have been a few authorized exceptions here and there, in general, especially in the big cities, the *Exoten* (exotics) were to be found in their ghetto-like apartment blocks or in other locations, in the visibly and invisibly fenced-in territories of exclusion. The Exoten had already deeply inhaled the prohibition: no contact with the natives.

Relationships – above all love relationships – between East Germans and foreigners were not only discouraged but, in many cases, even strictly forbidden. Vietnamese women who were expecting a child from a non-Vietnamese man had to either undergo an abortion or leave the country.³⁹ Similar rules pertained to women from African countries. The men were allowed much more freedom sexually. This led to a well-known form of racism that emerged in the 80s of the last century: the blacks bewitch our women with their potency and their virility. As a child I often heard, even in the course of family conversations – especially when a relative living in Berlin was told by his wife that she was leaving him for a Cuban contract worker –, that foreigners had no business being in our country, that their culture was so different from the German, and that they asked themselves why the state had to even heap them with privileges and benefits along with it.

The story of these foreigners offers ample opportunity to study the consequences of not speaking-for-yourself. Especially disastrous up to this day have been the effects of the silence imposed upon them in the German Democratic Republic.

Had we children ever heard a word in school about the views, the thoughts, the expectations of a Vietnamese, Angolan, Congolese, Mozambican, or Cuban contract worker? No, we had not. No individual voices, no inside views, no authentic stories. Nothing that would have opened up our own thinking and feeling to a reality outside of our sober, Eastern bloc “brother-states” logic. Far more, the government wished for the information given out by the official organs to suffice: “These are people from our brother-states, who are helping to build up the socialist freedom state.”

“Together we are strong.” “United under the idea of communism.” There was no need to know more.

One reason for this politics of silence was rooted in the fear that the citizens of the country might have started asking: What is it like in your countries? How do you live, how do you eat? Is the countryside where you live beautiful? Would we like it? And consequently, the desire to go visit would arise. To see Havana. Maputo. Hanoi. The small town or village from where one or the other of them comes.

Again, the already discussed fear of associations crops up. Fear of the little peculiarities of language, of the memories of everyday life. An inside view of people, through their stories, their origin. When people start speaking, really start speaking about themselves, details enter into it. Jokes, rhetorical twists, references, and – maybe most important of all – self-descriptions and self-identifications that are freely chosen.

The “virile black man” suddenly becomes a passionate football player who learned Portuguese as a child, and is interested in the educational systems in Germany and Mozambique. The “Fidschi” (an invective used shamelessly even today in some neighborhoods of eastern Berlin) becomes an expert in types of Asian fish, which she knows how to filet optimally with a certain cutting technique. Also, she is proud of her oldest daughter, who lives in Göttingen and speaks fluent French. Admittedly, after a longer discussion, the nice vendor at the kiosk who always talks cheerfully about his youth in Cameroon can turn out to be an unattractive chauvinist with a world view concerning gender relations that takes us back to the Dark Ages.

Speaking-for-yourself, at any rate, promotes accuracy: images, impressions, character traits, individualities.

Exactly this was what this smaller half of Germany was afraid of. The offensive and derogatory terms “Neger”, “Bimbo” (both applied to persons of African descent), “Fidschi” (applied to persons of Asian descent) were ever-present in the everyday life of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) at that time.⁴⁰ Familiarity with the biographies, the countries of origin, the different educational levels, interests, and cultures of the people who had been brought into the country was rare. It is thus no wonder that hatred of the foreigner and fantasies of violence flourished in the shadows of this imposed silence. The first murders of contract workers happened long before, rather than after, the fall of the wall.⁴¹ Neo-Nazi groups were already forming in the 1980s in the GDR.⁴²

The state remained silent. It kept the crimes hidden. Those who were responsible knew very well that a lot was at stake. If there had been a pub-

lic outcry, stories might have come to light that would have revealed more than “just” the distress of the foreigners at the mercy of the Neo-Nazis. The truth could have come out – a truth becoming clear to many African workers – that the socialist state was not treating them like brothers and sisters at all, but was actually following a long colonial tradition, namely the systematic exploitation of these workers, and the domestication of their speech and their resistance. The reason of state was willing to put up with cold-blooded murder rather than risk the exposure of a public discussion.

Different than in the case of many immigrants in the West, after the fall of the wall the tradition of silence continued in the eastern regions of Germany.

To this day, there is little talk in German schools, whether in the east or the west, about the stories of those contract workers in East Germany. The fact that these workers were an important factor in preventing serious economic difficulties from coming up much sooner in this one-time state is something that people have a hard time even considering. But even more crucial is the actuality that the lives of these workers, their arrival, and their participation in the everyday life of the country never entered the collective consciousness of its citizens.

Up to the present day, others speak about them and for them, as indeed is the case in this essay. There is quite a bit of good literature, and there are many interview collections, research reports, and essays available.⁴³ But one cannot say that there is a broad stream of interest anchored in the public discourse that would promote the surfacing of inner views that have so far rarely been sought after.⁴⁴ And, the fact is that these invisible experts have a lot to say, when given a chance: not only about fringe topics, but about essential subjects concerning our lives in a community. About the questions of who we are, and how we have become. How we have become together.

The question is only whether we are willing to recognize that the forms and patterns for these respective discussions will not always be what we have been used to. Does everything always have to be translated into familiar terms for us? Do the others always have to translate their experiences into our terms, or do we want to learn about other means of expression? And to give a higher value than we have before to what is halting, hesitant, and associative?

Speaking-for-yourself has a further meaning – to have expectations of the listener as well.

XIII.

Ghosts that Write

I would like to once more dive back into the now submerged world of the GDR for a moment in order to introduce a person who can stand for this speaking-for-yourself – though with certain reservations, as you will see.

This person is an extraordinary human being. Not a poet, not an intellectual. He is a simple man from Mozambique, by the name of Ibraimo Alberto, who grew up in the 70s of the twentieth century in the jungle on one of the last Portuguese slave farms, surrounded by the ancient traditions of his people, the Matué. His father was a respected medicine-man in his village. Ibraimo's mother, a rather shy and reserved woman, recognized early on that the young boy had a hunger for learning and an urge to break away from the rigid traditions. Every morning before sunrise, he got up and made his way 18 kilometers through the jungle to the nearest school.

To come to the point: Ibraimo Alberto was later among the first generation of Mozambique contract workers in the GDR. Together with other ambitious young men, Ibraimo had undergone a hard training in Maputo with the goal of entering the university in the far-off “brother-state.”

He arrived at Schönefeld Airport in Berlin, was stuck into a high-rise in East Berlin, and instead of being given the opportunity of studying at the university had to join his fellow arrivals in working at a meat factory. Over time, he developed into a successful boxer in an East Berlin boxing club. Ibraimo wanted to maintain his belief that he had hit the jackpot – he had made it out of his slave farm in the jungle and into the world of the “white Gods,” as he called the Europeans. He had a rude awakening when in 1987, three years before the downfall of the state, he experienced the murder of a Mozambican friend by Neo-Nazis.⁴⁵

Alberto himself did not become prey until after the fall of the wall. Mobbed, insulted, attacked, and the victim of multiple injuries at the hands of several thugs in the eastern German city of Schwedt/Oder, he was lit-

erally fighting for survival. The increasing threat caused his marriage with his German wife to fall apart. After years of desperate struggle, he started a new life in the southern part of the country. Alberto published a book about his life. The title is: *I Wanted to Live Like the Gods: What Became of my African Dreams in Germany*.⁴⁶

As exotic as much of his story sounds from its outer appearances, the reader soon understands that the human conflicts within the family of the hero are of a general nature. The description of the history of Mozambique is fascinating, as are Alberto's view of the peculiarities of everyday life, the details, the expressions and remarks that come up in the daily conversations. Behind the façade of the GDR contract worker, living somewhere in a bleak hostel on Gehrensee Street, appears a wide horizon of African references. Starting with the magical practices in the world of his medicine-man father, to the survival of a massacre by the Boer para-military, who attacked Alberto's school in Nyazonia, to the attacks he experienced in front of the Oder-Center in Schwedt, we see a human being who has bearing.

Here is someone who is stepping out of the imposed role of "black foreigner." He describes himself as a German with as much clarity as he recounts his participation in an African incantation ritual that connects him with the spirit of his father. The story makes it possible. We believe him. And, he knows how to tell it so that an intimacy develops. Did he have to learn that? Or did the publishers of his life story find some other solution to make Alberto's speaking-for-himself consumable?

On the cover of the book there is more than one name: "Ibraimo Alberto with Daniel Bachmann." About the co-author there is little more than a short note in typical publisher's German: "Daniel Bachmann writes novels, travel books, audiobooks, and film scripts. He also works as a documentary filmmaker."⁴⁷

As we start looking for more information, we find that Bachmann is also a specialist for ghost-writing, and that he has already written biographies for numerous actors and other celebrities. Among others, he has written for the pop-star Conchita Wurst, who in her role as a hybrid art-figure (dancing in evening gowns, with her long hair and a beard) pleads for more tolerance in the world. In addition, Bachmann offers seminars "for professionals" in which he offers participants tips on dramaturgy and effective arcs of suspense for their writing: how to create a hero's journey and such.

The word "ghost writer" has something magical to it. As though an invisible spirit is doing the writing. It is someone who stands behind you and knows a lot more about what you are writing than is to your liking –

and whom for that very reason you trust. Alexandre Dumas the Elder, the creator of the wonderful *Three Musketeers* and the son of a French marquis and a black slave from Saint-Domingue, supposedly was called upon by the young Parisian playwrights of the time, the mid-nineteenth century, to make some last-minute necessary changes to their newest works shortly before their premieres. Sometimes he only needed one night to re-write a piece. This earned him the title “The Orthopedist.”⁴⁸ What he did was no more than an early form of ghost-writing, in which the invisible ghost – since Dumas never let himself be clearly identified in his revisions – was empowered by his exact knowledge of the audience. Dumas knew what people liked and what worked.

The ghost-writer, too, is obviously just as clever a master of bewitching an audience. He knows how to organize the material in a way that allows a story to emerge out of the distant land of Mozambique and captivate the German reader. A ghost-writer does not change his characters. All he does is adjust the lighting here and there, or the timing of the revelation of certain crucial information. And, perhaps most important of all, he know how to tell a story so that German readers will listen.

Ibraimo Alberto, who himself speaks excellent German, put his life-story into the hands of someone else. His ghost-writer not only could tell the story, but he could *present* the story. This makes a difference. The book is a dramaturgical gem. From the scene of the child swimming in the crocodile-filled river in the jungle to the fights with the East German Nazi gangs in front of the mall in Schwedt – there is constant movement in Ibraimo’s narrative. Even when, in fairness to the actual author, some of the dialogue is just not credible (for example, the German equivalent of something like “Mother Hubbard has always ruled *my* kitchen.”), we sink into Ibraimo Alberto’s biography as though it were a novel. (As over-used as the word “sink” may be, it still describes quite sensuously the feeling of disappearing into a good book.) What takes place happens like in a movie. With grand arcs and deep valleys, breathless turns, hazards, and abysses. The modern *orthopedist* knows his stuff. It hardly matters that some of the associative truth gets lost in the process. Ibraimo Alberto’s story is an example for the small, slow steps forward that are obviously necessary for us to be able to approach and listen to people whose stories we usually hear second or third-hand.

That we have to rely on the ghosts of translation and rhetorical witchcraft in order to happen upon an approach is not bad. It is a little like learning to read, when at the outset we still need painted pictures on the side of the page, until we finally get to the level at which just the text itself, the

spoken word, is enough to keep our attention. The question is only: do we recognize “translations” like that of Daniel Bachmann, as what they are – those easily accessible substitutes for the real thing, the raw material of which is often so much more awkward and complex? And what talents must the “cultural translators” bring to the table when they want to transcend the mere illusion of understanding and move beyond to make visible new horizons of understanding that are both deeper and true.

Trust XIII.

The more I think about why the difficult word “voice” (in the sense of the genuine speaking of individuals⁴⁹) is so important to me in this essay, and not only the denied rights or the marginalized thoughts of people, the clearer it becomes that the crux of the issue is the term “trust.” We can talk about political rights and aesthetic principles publicly. We can also talk about our standpoints and our opinions. But to make our own voices audible, to put the individual characteristics and vulnerabilities of our own biographies at the disposal of others is far more difficult. The prerequisite is trust in the trust of others.

Where are we free to be halting, hesitant, lacking an immediate dramaturgy for what we have experienced? Where are we free to *not* be immediately clear and comprehensible? Where can we be without fear of derisive smiles when we make a mistake?⁵⁰ Happily enough, there are quite a few studies that offer a clear answer to these questions: there where we feel trust. Where what is said is protected, where we do not need to justify ourselves. The philosopher Alphonso Lingis devoted a whole book to the subject: *Trust*. In it he writes:

*“Trust, which is as compelling as belief, is not produced by knowledge. In trust one adheres to something one sees only partially or unclearly or understands vaguely or ambiguously. One attaches to someone whose words or whose movements one does not understand, whose reasons or motives one does not see.”*⁵¹

Lingis emphasizes the great advantage that trust can offer. Even when I cannot immediately understand what the other wants, means, and thinks, I can make the decision to trust that person in spite of this. In the face of all doubt and caution, one person lends the other scope and a sphere of action. This may sound banal. Within the reality of many debates, however, particularly in Germany, this kind of trust is a rarity.

Anyone who has ever attended a public podium discussion on political or cultural issues, in Hamburg, Munich, Frankfurt, Berlin, or Dresden, frequently (fortunately not always!) has experienced the prevalent culture of interruption, derision, disparagement, and belittlement. It is part and parcel of public discussion in this country (fortunately not always!) and is surprisingly accepted in subtle ways, if not even with a secret display of self-opinionated pride and flexing of muscles. I have rarely experienced that on the stage or podium someone would publicly say without arrogance or irony to a person who thinks differently: "I am not sure whether I understand you right. But for now, I am going to trust that you have something relevant to say."

It is even rarer that a pause will be given appreciation as a moment of self-doubt, above all when it arises out of insecurity. I am thinking of interviews in newspapers or films, of those moving moments when people are telling about incisive experiences. Now and then there will always be moments in which the person being questioned stops and thinks, loses their train of thought, falls silent, gazes into the distance – and it is now that we can separate the wheat from the chaff among the questioners. Some interviewers will immediately break the silence with the next question, while others will go along with the movement of the pause, will wait with a patience and trust that sends the message that this halting is important in order to proceed. In talking to some of the many refugee artists I sometimes heard the remark, "I don't know what I should say when I'm asked about my future. I have no idea." Some, like the internet blog-writer About Saeed, who worked in Aleppo as a blacksmith and described daily wartime life in a wild Bukowski-like style, can be more self-confident and declare that they have no intention of continuing with what they had been doing. Saeed does not want to keep writing, would rather try out another profession. "This here," he says, "is just a responsibility that I'm taking care of. The culture world is just a vapid world of illusion. I would rather work as a blacksmith, or in a pizza place. That way I can meet people."⁵² Such a stance is essentially fatal within the logic of our literary and arts journalism – an artist has to have something to say, and he has to want to be an artist. To doubt one of these categories is to turn the idea of artistic identity and clarity upside down.

I also have frequently observed that many of the newly arrived artists could not care less about the effect they generate in the newspapers, or the impact they have within the world of "high culture." Many of them understand themselves to be the voices of a digital generation. The resonance and the trust they receive from their internet community is often

much more important to them than the weal and woe rhetoric of German journalists. What counts is what their friends and acquaintances on Facebook say. Their trust is in other audiences. The other side of the coin is that they are riskily placing their trust in communities that they can only roughly assess. But this is also a trust in a certain form of freedom. As Zygmunt Bauman has expressed it, “The privilege of living in a community has a price. The currency in which this price must be paid is called freedom.”⁵³ Without risk, trust is not to be had.

XIV.

Incomprehension and Trust

During the opening of an exhibit of photographs from Aleppo by a Syrian photographer at Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, the photographer was expected to give a short talk about his work. He had jotted down some sentences in German and a few in English on a small piece of paper, something that already caused a bit of confusion. To tell the truth, it was hard to extract any kind of standpoint from his words. He then closed his introduction with an Arabic poem, which he recited in German. It was positively dripping with clichés. To be precise: it was dripping with clichés that I perceived as such. I remember images of blossoms that make the heart heavy, of things that have been forgotten or have been lost in the light of the evening sun, and words like *when* and *where to* at the end of a verse.

A short look around showed me a picture of pure incomprehension. After all, here someone had just presented photographs of the brutal war in his homeland. A photographer, an artist. And possibly that was also an important poem. But instead of trust, perplexity reigned. Neither the pictures nor the recited text fit into any of our familiar frameworks. The only possibility was to trust that it would take time to find categories that would allow us to say clearly: this art is unconvincing. Or alternately: one has to view these pictures differently than one views pictures by a photographer presenting his impressions of maybe Kazakhstan or California. I was not sure on this evening. Ultimately, the poem moved me the most. The way in which the photographer recited it. The awkward spots in the translation which allowed the original meaning to shimmer through. I struggled against the feeling: this is Kitsch what you are hearing, this seriously cannot really move you.

A few weeks later, I was able to sort out my contradictory feelings a little better. A teacher at the Weißensee Academy of Art was telling me about how he, as a designer, together with his students, was trying to reconstruct their lost portfolios. He remarked upon how every day he was realizing that he

had to rethink many of his aesthetic positions. Not out of humanitarian considerations, but for the simple reason that it just was not enough to say: they are not as far along as we are. On the contrary, in the works of his students, he had been recognizing certain feelings that he had had in respect to form and aesthetics as a young man. It was first of all necessary to understand this direct power of emotions, he declared. In this way, he went on, one might recognize what kinds of approaches to art have been lost in Europe. Here lay concealed the statement: I am not sure if I understand everything that you want to tell and show me, but for now I am trusting that it is relevant.

However, trust also plays a very important role within the diaspora communities. My colleague Halah Al-Hayik, one of the women who offered courses at her own refugee center on the subject of women's rights and identity, as part of the project *The Moving Network*, once told me how hard it had been for her not only to survive in the refugee center in north-eastern Berlin as a Muslim, divorced woman, single mother and a woman without a headscarf, but also to survive the courses. "Older women would come up to me at the end of class and yell 'Halah, do not touch the Koran!' after I had told the young women that one doesn't need to take everything that is in the book literally. I could see the hatred in their eyes. Then I thought of my daughter and of our team, and that gave me strength."

According to the studies that have come out of the research into building trust in immigrants, the exchange of knowledge within and outside of their own circles is decisive as well as the formulation of common objectives. The Italian communications scholar Mafalda Sandrini adds to this the importance of persons of trust (multipliers), people who have the trust of certain communities and thus are in a position to create and strengthen new themes and identificatory images.⁵⁴

An important constituent of the feeling of trust is the possession of an inner image of a community that supports you: to be able to say what you think and feel, to have other people around you who can share your associations. These are the *small qualities* of life in community. They gain in value, the more threatened and fragile your own situation is. Communities of trust can be held together on the basis of very different motives.⁵⁵ Origin, religion, sexual orientation, but also common interests and, above all, repeated rituals can be the binding forces. Above all, communities depend upon individual voices, people who are capable of being the neuralgic center of a social network. Furthermore, they are sometimes also important for self-defense against being made part of an arbitrary community by others. Sometimes, as Zygmunt Bauman put it, "People are declared to be part of an 'ethnic minority' without asking for their approval."⁵⁶



Room 505 in the Grandhotel

In the Spring of 2018, I received an invitation to attend a lecture in the “Grandhotel Cosmopolis” in Augsburg. I had read a lot about this project, which was causing quite a stir in the papers: a hotel and, at the same time, a refugee home, conceived and designed by artists. Or a refugee home that is, at the same time a hotel. According to your perspective, your perception can sway this way or that.

The five-story building is situated near the cathedral, nestled in the midst of narrow streets in the old part of town that so clearly bears the stamp of the prominent fifteenth- and sixteenth-century patrician Fugger family. Colorful chairs are arranged on gravel in the garden of the Cosmopolis. Adjacent to a long wooden pavilion, a staircase leads up to the entrance hall. To me, the building makes the impression of a strange sort of school or a transformed orphanage, which, the longer I look at it, seems to be made up of a profusion of whimsical details, crazy little features that could have sprung out of the world of Astrid Lindgren’s Pippi Langstrumpf.

Here, I see a yellow bicycle in the hallway. There, I see a ticking clock which shows the time in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea. Colorful drawings and sayings are splashed across the walls. One of them says something like: be open to the thinking of others.

I am given a room on the top floor. The key consists of a small, blue wood-carved ship similar to the paper boats children like to set afloat in streams. Inside the room, a blue giant sprawls from one wall to the other, its mouth gaping wide. A human face peers timidly out of its throat. On its nose, there is a pointer finger that seems to be pressing against the mouth. The artist Eva Kursche designed the room in 2012. Its name is *Masquerade of Life*.

The giant has birds and masks distributed wildly all over its body. The small details (on the easy-chair at the edge of the room is a pillow with

the words “Did you understand me?” hidden in its folds) give me the feeling of a bizarre, and in a certain way beautiful, environment. In the next wing is the refugee residence. One comes into contact with the residents in the stairwells, in the café, in the garden. Or down in the basement at the large table in the dining room with its nooks and crannies. They seem to be used to the fact that people come and go here in this building. New faces are no surprise. Everyday life goes on with its rituals and procedures, right alongside all the other proceedings in the building: cooking, washing, going outside with the children. The personal living space of the refugees, however, is separate and inaccessible from the world of the hotel.

“Sometimes people come here who have heard the name Grandhotel and are expecting something luxurious. Some of them get out of here as fast as they can when they hear what our actual concept is,” says Thomas smiling. He is talented in the realm of theater and is one of the original founders of this place. “But most people,” he continues, “come for that very reason. It seems like they are looking for a certain kind of experience here.” The rooms are quite austere; the bath and toilet are down the hall. From the balconies you have a view of big, powerful city towers and the town hall, which crowns the city like a giant ark. Bertold Brecht, who was born here, would have been pleased with this crazy hotel, I think. “The world is once again full of the most absurd demands and unreasonable expectations,” he once said in his *Flüchtlingsgespräche* (Refugee conversations).

I understand the fact that this place is based on ideas that demand something from visitors. It asks to be looked at, asks for observation and an attitude of openness towards something that one cannot (and maybe does not want to) give a name. But one can just go ahead and call it *Grandhotel*, as the subtle irony of the name shapes the spirit of the building. Here people are giving things a try, but without any ideological corset or long exaggerated excursions into theory. “For many of us, doing and talking are simply two pairs of boots,” says Thomas, who is visibly weary of having to always talk about concepts.

Suzie, also one of the founders, explained to me the principle of the silent meal that would be taking place right after my lecture. People would be eating in carpeted niches below the garage window, as quietly as possible. Speaking was not forbidden, but one was encouraged to being open to other ways of enjoying a meal together. She would be accompanying the meal with music. At first skeptically, but then with increasing conviction, I sat in the silence of my niche, after 90 minutes of my own talking, and listened to the sounds emitting from the loudspeakers (a wild mix of

Israeli and Arabic songs, piano pieces that sounded like Mozart, sounds of Nature, electronic beats), happy that I no longer had to say anything. None of the others said anything either. The Israeli social worker Roi, also of the first-generation founders of the building, later told me how important it was for everyone to be able to encounter one another in ways that did not break down as a result of language hurdles or barriers. Silent meals were one of these ways.

In the Grandhotel Cosmopolis, I comprehend that not only the voices of those who are marginalized are important, but also their silence – not the silence to which they have been condemned as a result of their situation, but the silence that, in spaces which are perceived as secure, is a sign of self-confidence.

I notice that some people that are running around in the kitchen have a very limited knowledge of German. Others are just not in the mood to chat with one more curious person from the outside. When I asked for a glass, a young man with black hair came over and took me into the kitchen, where only the huge Bavarian beer glasses were left on the shelf. “Come, take this. Whether it’s beer or water makes no difference in Bavaria.” This tone allows each of us to feel comfortable. I sense that here I am not just in *housing* but in a *place to live*.

The urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg published an instructive book in the early 90s, *The Great Good Place*.⁵⁷ In it he differentiates between essential places in our lives: first, the private space, like our home, apartment, or room. Second, our working place, such as school, university, the employment office, the spaces in which we make our role in society visible daily. The third place consists of spaces like cafes, museums, parks, libraries, gardens, bars, theater, galleries, public spaces in which we meet friends and like-minded people through which we confirm to ourselves that we are not alone – and in which we speak a different language than in the first and second places.

Oldenburg names three important prerequisites for such third places. They must be relatively easy to enter and be neutral in their conditions for entry. Coming and going should in no way be thorny. And maybe most important of all in the context of this essay: speaking and communicating, watching and exchanging, are the main activities and the central capillary systems of these places. In addition, it helps if old-timers frequent such places regularly as well: people who can provide a sense of the rituals and rules of the game, who know a place and can contribute to the feeling that here – for a few hours, days or weeks – one can find a *home away from home*, as Oldenburg calls it. Younger sociologists have taken up this differ-

entiation and use it to describe the increasing merger of living and working spaces (first and second places) as well as of private and public space (first and third space) in the hybrid labor society of the twenty-first century.⁵⁸ The culture researcher Patrick Föhl also speaks of hybrid “anchor facilities.”⁵⁹ Boundaries disappear. New ideas of private and public sphere develop. Grandhotel Cosmopolis seems to be swimming along in this stream of slow and at the same time incalculably fast change. Living space, container, café, warehouse, hotel, playground, work, camp, home, garden, gallery – all these forms crowd together into the concept, they fit or do not fit, they chafe against each other.

While dinner was going on, further guests arrived in the seminar room where the lecture had taken place and found places to sit on the carpet. Creative artists of all kinds from Cameroon, Ukraine, Spain, Afghanistan, and Germany. None of them refugees, but rather people working for NGOs or foreign cultural institutes. They got comfortable, looked at their smart-phones, sent messages, relaxed, and suddenly I had the feeling that for a short moment all the differences evened out. Here were people in a world community, who were eating together. It was nothing spectacular, nothing spiritual in nature, but something very fundamental. The only tiny ritual magic that was carried out here was the slow and deliberate delivery of the eating utensils.

First came the fork, then the knife, then the spoon, brought out by the people who worked in the kitchen. One of these people, a woman, stood before me, looked at me, went on to the next person, as she handed out the next fork. Just as in the Japanese tea ceremony, where before you drink the tea you first thoroughly observe and admire the utensils, the water containers and cups, everyone here was looking, some longer some shorter, at the silverware that had been handed to them. And I noticed that it really makes a difference to become aware that someone is handing you a knife and a fork – it is like a promise. Wait just a moment, dinner will follow. No need for haste, wait until the others also have received theirs. No one starts until all have been given their due.

Roi later told me that at the beginning it had reminded him of life and work on a kibbutz in Israel. “This permanent spirit of euphoria, everyone helps out, everyone contributes something. But then I had children, and I came to the realization that I hadn’t left Israel to live in Germany like in a kibbutz. I only come here now in my free time, and I work somewhere else.”

The Grandhotel Cosmopolis is no utopia, and also no experiment. Perhaps it is far more: an inconclusively negotiated compromise between the demands of different people in one place. The idea itself, one’s own life,

and how one wants to speak and live with others are all still open. And, through this openness, something is already changing.

As we ambled through the old-town in the evening, I heard how some of the seminar attendees were expressing their ideas about how to improve Grandhotel. Thomas, the theater person, remained silent. When asked about his reaction to the suggestions, he said that their ideas were probably right. But, he added, the place had not developed that way. The building grew through the process of doing, through discussions and arguments, through trial and error. Of course, after all the attention the project had been getting, it was important to find a structure. But, he continued, he was not sure that was his approach. Nor that of the others. Who knows, he added, as his voice trailed off.

In the evening, two women were entertaining themselves in the lobby, a young boy was playing at his computer. As I went up to my room I noticed that one of the floors was filled with that typical cold hall-lighting that I know so well. It seems to be a permanent interior-design feature of all the temporary shelters of this world, along with the baby-carriages parked there with their netting full of this and that. There was the familiar echoing in the halls, when someone called someone else out of their room. In spite of all this, here there was something different as well: the concept of asylum shelter was not a depressing one. In these rooms, at least, a fair discussion was thinkable; each person expressed what he or she could or wanted to. There was movement here, like in the famous stairwell of Homi Bhaba, where polarities or fixed identities could not settle in at either end.⁶⁰ The movement that is part and parcel of this building influences the behavior of the people who actually walk up and down through its five floors, the guests just as much as the inhabitants.

Since I had to take an early train the next day, and I had forgotten where the mailbox for the keys was, I asked one of the people in charge coming toward me on my floor whether she could please tell me where the mailboxes were. "You don't have to go back down. Just leave the key inside in the lock tomorrow morning." I would like to add what she said to Ray Oldenburg's definition of a third place. If you can leave your key in the lock in a place that is not your home, that is already a step forward. In any case, Room 505 had brought me a few steps further in my search for people who were speaking for themselves.

Translation

During the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos, a thought-provoking moment occurred for those who tend to look more skeptically at this sometimes quite cynical spectacle in the Swiss Alps. Of all people, the influential Chinese symbol of global capitalism, Jack Ma, – international business heavyweight, chairman up until 2018 of the world’s largest multinational business conglomerate, founded by him in 1999 (the Alibaba group located in Hangzhou) –, astonished the world with his remarks. At one of the meetings taking place in this hermetically sealed mountain village, he made a passionate declaration of his belief in “values, believing, independent thinking, teamwork, care for others.” “These are the soft part(s) the knowledge may not teach you,” he added.⁶¹

In this vein, he demanded a complete end to the system of education in schools and universities. Being a teacher, he said, did not mean “I know better than you ...;” rather it should be based on the idea: “... everything I know better than you ... because I learned from others.” Behind his plea, we soon realize, is not only snug philanthropy and concern about human education. This economist, familiar with the world’s harsh competition, was far more seeing the threat of the challenge looming before us: the robots and intelligent machines who according to his calculations could mean the end of millions of jobs by the year 2030. “We cannot teach our kids to compete with (a) machine – who is smarter.” With calculated pauses, he prodded his unsettled listeners towards the obvious question: What if anything can human beings really do better than the ever more intelligent and efficient robots? Ma came up with what for an economist was quite a surprising answer: “sports, music, painting, arts To make sure that everything we teach should be different than machines. If the machine can do better, then you have to think about it.”

Holding differences on high, valuing rituals and aesthetics, formulating one’s own biography with powerful images – not long ago, in the era

of postmodernism, these values were disparaged as being romantic, half-baked humanism, and now suddenly they are reappearing, re-entering our conscious, being heard from the mouths of new envisioners of the future. Suddenly, it is art that is supposed to rescue the topography of our knowledge. Because robots have no urge to express their feelings, if they have any, in poetry, drawings, or music these artistic realms are now appearing as life-saving anchors.

Jack Ma himself started his career in the 80s as an English teacher. His parents were traditional Chinese storytellers and musicians. He thus grew up in a home in which art and culture played an important role. According to the legend that he himself has cultivated, he was driven, as child, to a nearby hotel every morning so that he could converse in English with the people there (similar to Ibraimo Alberto, who walked through the jungle to get to school). Later he got the idea to give foreign travelers free tours of his native city, Hangzhou. In the course of the nine years conducting these tours, his English became very good (Ibraimo Alberto made it as far as a contract worker in the GDR, Jack Ma was named official advisor to the British government in 2015 by the British prime minister). And later too it became clear that above all Ma possessed one talent: to differentiate between the individual and the universal. According to a further rumor, Ma thought up the name of his business, Alibaba (which to my ears sounds like the name of a toy store), during a coffee-break at an American café. On a lark, he asked over thirty random people there whether they liked the name. When every single person reacted positively (already a statistical oddity), he was certain he had made a good choice.⁶²

Jack Ma obviously has one important ability: to translate and to connect. In the 90s in the United States, he got to know the internet, observed how Americans carry on business, then went home and tried to understand how exactly they were doing things differently in China. And what he could learn from that. I myself am not an economist and am unqualified to evaluate Ma's business strategies. But, his sensibility, schooled in the arts, for translating a way of thinking in one system into that of another is familiar to me. Ma understood early on that in order to carve out a place in the world, one needed to master language – in the broadest sense of the word. Now, at the apex of his career and at a turning point in the development of society – the entrance into the Second Age of Machines – he again is making use of this early realization: that the key to this encounter with the new intelligence lies in the metaphors and poetry – in the sense of the original Greek *ποίησις* or “creation” – of one's own biography.

I found this kind of translation ability in many of the people I encountered in preparing to write this essay. In Etienne Salborn and his methods

of listening, in Ramadan Ali, the Syrian actor, who allowed his audiences to observe his process of rowing back and forth between two different language shores, in the ghost-writer Daniel Bachmann, who attempted to convey an African story to his German readers through some small accommodations and dramatizations, in Halah Al-Hayik, the women's rights activist, who in courses at the refugee center tried to lessen the young veiled women's fears of a different reading of the Koran. These people are not teachers in the classical sense. All of them are *cultural translators*, as the cultural scholar Christiane Dätsch⁶³ calls them. These are people who in their work try to make visible that which is invisible and to shed light on things that are not understood. They do not convey knowledge, but rather a path by way of which one can learn from others and in this way can shape one's own voice.

What Jack Ma describes as an important talent for our future life together with "artificial-intelligence citizens" might have to have some success first among normal citizens – that they recognize what their respective specialties, talents and *resources*⁶⁴ are. Recognize that every human being has a voice and above all: that every human being has the gift to speak for themselves – when one encourages them and enables them. This is, indeed, still a huge task standing before us, in cultural education just as much as in political education. Not to pre-formulate what people should know and think, but rather to find it with them together, to find it anew. Maybe also, this is how we are different from robots in a fundamental way: that this path of searching is not only a succession of algorithms and technical steps, but an adventure, an amusing fray, something that can make us happy – even when it concerns as drab topics as life in a through-and-through regulated state.

Cultural translation⁶⁵ is a particular perspective that one can make use of in many fields. As Doris Bachmann-Medick puts it, "Translation expands to a reference point for action in a complex world."⁶⁶ Put more simply, translation is not only necessary between languages and cultures, but also for human activity itself. The question then arises as to who is to act as a translator for whom?

After the infamous New Year's Eve event⁶⁷ in the last hours of the year 2015 in Cologne, there were numerous explanations and "translations" of what happened.⁶⁸ Some cultural scholars explained that sexual violence had little to do with the culture of Northern African men, but rather that it stemmed from the milieu from which the men came. Outraged political voices from the Right countered this and interpreted the event as an expression of the deeply-rooted hatred of women in Islam, if not even an

abhorrence of Western culture; others considered the failure of the police to be the actual problem that night. Looking back now, after several years, at this decisive New Years' celebration and how it was dealt with in the media, it becomes clear that there was a group of potential translators of the occurrences that hardly got a word in edgewise, at least not in the role of a fully communicative actor.

Where were the innumerable *North African men*, who also celebrated in Cologne and who did not molest women? Where were the North African men and women who were just as repelled by the groping and grasping of their fellow citizens? Would they not have been important sources of information for questions such as whether this had been a case of cultural conflict? I, for one, would not particularly like to be placed under arrest for everything, whether good or bad, that my fellow Germans have been responsible for on this earth. I would insist on differentiation. As an author, I can insist on that, because I have the right and also the possibility to explain my standpoint and to publish it when others make general declarations about German culture and try to include me in them. Should not this right belong to everyone? Do not explanations and translations always offer some insight?

Translation means creating understanding. And complicity – in the best sense of the word. We read certain things in a similar way, if we understand them in a similar way.⁶⁹ Some Islamic associations in Germany, but also other groups and institutions in the political and cultural discourse, are noticeably hesitant when they are reminded that they actually have the authority to translate, portray, and also to condemn, or at least to stand by closely to those whom they supposedly represent. And they do not. Through lack of courage, through fear, through a secret distancing of themselves from the formulated values of the “majority society” – who knows.

The translator, according to Tania Blixen, has to “throw his heart over the fence”⁷⁰ – a metaphor for the courage that it takes to stand by what one says, thinks, expresses, writes. It is not only a way to make friends. The path of this kind of translating can be uncomfortable and cumbersome. But exactly that will also make friends.



The Art of Speaking for Yourself

After finishing this essay, I followed my usual habit of letting a few weeks go by before re-reading it. Under the critical gaze of fresh eyes, the tricks and ploys that one has fallen for in the course of a day's deliberations suddenly become apparent.

The well-known demand in cultural studies and anthropology,⁷¹ that the author must constantly reflect upon and evaluate himself, his language, and his positions in the course of writing is a challenge. Who wants to admit that they consider their own knowledge shaky? That the terminology that has finally been reached may possibly be problematic? Knowledge is in a constant state of flux and movement. The insistence upon unequivocal positions, the stipulation that everything must be rational and objective, that we so often find in the German discourse, is in itself the source of many pitfalls of thinking and argumentation.

Especially in the literature on empowerment, on the sensitive self-entitlement of people, statements are sometimes made that sound straight out of the dictionaries of technocrats in dictatorial systems. Just recently, I came upon the following sentence in a dossier on empowerment published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation: "The background of white *Swedish women* in Germany plays no role, unlike for people of color."⁷² Automatically, the image arises of light-skinned, self-confident, blonde women – otherwise the statement would not make sense. The problems of Swedish women, born in Sweden, who are not tall and blonde, who might have Roma roots or some other *background* are completely non-existent in the sentence. It is well-meant, but no less radical in its consequences than the rhetoric of the populists.

To want what is right and to no longer be willing to ask in what kind of language or with what demands one is pursuing one's objectives fits the age-old pattern of failure with good intent. If in speaking-for-yourself, you

see an art that is neither egoistical nor emblematic, neither obsequious nor swaggering, then you will find your way to questions that will be fruitful for both writers and speakers – and not only within the realm of cultural activities and education. Such questions now follow.

The first question might read: *How much differentiation is necessary in order to avoid being controlled by others?*

Differentiation is often the first thing to fall by the wayside in the assertion of convictions. If I am spoken to as a white person, a European, a German, then in what function? As professor, an author, a citizen, a voter or non-voter, a father, a husband, or a still-member of a Nazi-grandchild-generation who is not able to completely shed light on the dark past? And in what role do I reply, write, or categorize my own disclosures? If one were to clarify these questions right from the beginning in certain heated political debates, a lot of the fire would quickly subside right from the start.

In the forms of resistance appropriate to our times, it is becoming increasingly clear that differentiation is necessary. Furthermore, encouragement is also necessary – of withstanding the temptation to take over some new uniform terminology, of resisting in alliances and partnerships of people who “take matters into their own hands.”⁷³ The word *matters* is anyway a wonderfully neutral term from the world of self-empowerment. What matters people are concerned about, and what they want to share with others are things that they must decide themselves. And for this, they need to know their own role.

A second questions could be formulated thus: *In what role does a person see themselves, do I see myself, and do I get asked about this role?*

When for example artist refugees or people with other roots are constantly being invited to partake in conferences and podium discussions in which they are expected to talk about flight and migration, they then remain captured in a magical thematic circle that others have drawn on the floor for them. I remember being at the Berlin Fahimi Bar one evening for an event for which a Berlin organizer of literary events had extended an invitation to get to know the work of a Vietnamese publisher⁷⁴ in the city. This business supported authors who lived in Berlin, had Vietnamese roots, dealt with Vietnamese themes, or translated German books into Vietnamese. The publisher himself, The Dung (in English: the brave one), an elderly man with a grey mustache and goatee, sat at the table on stage together

with a few colleagues and a well-known blogger from Hanoi, in front of a small group of interested listeners in the half-empty bar with its view of the elevated subway station at Kottbusser Tor.

The subject was experiences in Germany: stories, poems, perceptions, images, thoughts, and the loss of atmosphere that takes place in translating texts. I was astonished that a Vietnamese publisher even existed and could survive in Berlin. The Dung had arrived in 1989 as a 35-year-old contract worker in the GDR. He first lived in a residential accommodation across from the Tierpark and worked in a brake factory at Ostkreuz. All this life he had written. In Germany, he started writing novels. For a while he was unemployed, until his work finally became internationally known and was translated into many languages. Now, alongside his writing, he manages an Asian restaurant chain. At the Fahimi Bar, The Dung did not want to talk about migration. He wanted to talk about literature and poetry. About publishing books, about his life in Berlin, his writing between the worlds.

A third, related, question is also a piece of advice: *“If I am speaking for others, have I asked them what they want and whether they feel represented by me?”*

The words “speaking *for* someone” have a nice double meaning. First, in the sense of a lecture, which one gives *for* someone, then in the sense of advocacy. I am speaking for someone, because the other for whatever reason cannot.

I remember some lectures at the Federal Agency for Civic Education in Berlin at which the listeners stared at me in wonder when I started out my talk with the question: “Did anyone ask you if you wanted to hear this lecture?”

Usually, the offices of the parliamentarians decide on what themes the visitor groups from their electoral districts should hear. Next, they invite a lecturer. For international delegations, the associated foundations make a suggestion. Or the guests themselves formulate themes that indicate a clear direction – for example, when groups from South Korea ask for a talk on the theme of re-unification. In all cases, the Federal Agency decides whether they will accept the suggestion and whom they will ask to talk. One could call that *primary* or *institutional authorization*. As an outsider who has repeatedly been asked to talk, I have had the experience that it makes sense to get a second authorization – from the people *for* whom one will be giving the lecture. “Would you like to hear this talk?” “Are you interested in listening to me?” This may sound like a rhetorical trick, but it always

has an amazing effect if one really takes this *second authorization* seriously. The listeners start to think about if they really want to hear something.

Since school times, we have been conditioned to have to listen – for our education, our report cards, our grades. And in our working lives as well, we hardly come across an institution, a publisher or a radio station that can get along without addresses, introductions and explanations given by someone or other. Here, not the didactics are important, or how short or long we will be expected to pay attention. Of far greater significance is our consent. This same principle lies in the well-known common retort when someone gives us undesired advice: “Did anyone ask you for your opinion?” In stressful situations, remarks that we do not want to hear have the effect of additional hammer blows.

The *second authorization* also increases the value of the word *for*. It creates true listeners. One is speaking *for* someone who really wants to listen.

And, in the other sense of the word, in its function of describing advocacy – I speak *for* those who have been muted, marginalized, and excluded – the question is basically needed too: Do they want this? Am I the one who can and should raise their voice for you? The Australian refugee organization RISE, run and organized only by refugees, has a clear stance in this regard: No, we do not want that. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US. This is not stubbornness that refuses dialogue, but far more a position that has been reached after much experience. Countless art initiatives, theater projects, human rights projects, and podium discussions had repeatedly approached the organization wanting “to do something with the refugees” – with this magical “raw material” that would add excitement and call attention to their own work. Sometimes, indeed, it is also different, like when refugees or other groups clearly ask for help. Usually in these cases, however, the issues will not be language or information but rather pure questions of survival – or of translation.

“I believe, that what you have to say has a meaning – may I nevertheless have a different opinion?”

In the shrewd observation of art historian Elke aus dem Moore, I found confirmation of my skeptical assumption that positions should always be understood as being interim and should include empathy in respect to the views of others. She speaks of “non-rational systems of knowledge,” to which we should be open, and of another approach to acquiring knowledge and thus to speaking about things that affect our lives. “It is necessary to be open to non-rational systems of knowledge, and to include and develop

techniques that activate old knowledge and recognize the ‘own world’ of things. (...) not to be driven by the desire-to-explore-everything, but rather to develop a practice of letting-yourself-be-led.”⁷⁵

Thus, as I would put it in the context of this essay, it is important to establish a culture of reciprocal evaluation, in which one respects the position of the other without immediately either damning or glorifying that position. In many podium discussions, readings, lectures, and talk shows I have the impression that what it is really about is to save democracy short before an impending implosion. One emotive remark from either the Right or the Left is enough to set the outraged citizens on high alert. I have developed a self-disciplining system for myself for when I start feeling anger about something that someone says. I write the comment down, publicly too if it is at a lecture, and I mull over the formulation: Is there some truth to this? Why does this infuriate me? Can I take it seriously? When a spoken sentence is transformed into a written one, something miraculous happens. It either collapses or it shows its resilience.

I remember that once during a lecture at the Federal Agency for Civic Education a Palestinian teacher called out to me: “You Germans always want to be neutral, you always feel guilty.”

At that time, I was too perplexed to do what a colleague later advised me. “You should have just written the sentence down, in large letters and visible to all. And then asked: Which Germans exactly do you mean? What span of time do you mean by the word “always”? What exactly do you understand under “neutrality” and “guilt”? Do you mean the policies of the federal government, the work of the Federal Agency for Civic Education, or my positions during this lecture? And what exactly is your point?”

Recognizing what the other has to say and asking exactly what they were saying is a process of approaching carefully. Frequently, it turns out that the statements that were made had not been meticulously thought out by the speaker. “I don’t know that now either” or “I can’t answer that in detail,” “I didn’t mean to formulate it so aggressively, but I still stand by my remark,” are typical responses in this context and they tend to steer the dialogue in another, usually *milder* direction.

At the end of my search for the conditions for critical, individual speaking that spurns appropriation, there remain questions – and a commitment to caution. If something like the art of speaking-for-yourself exists, then it is always a cautious art, that first investigates your own standpoints and then inquires what knowledge these are based on. It is an art that entrusts the word *for* with a bearing and a power that addresses both what is my own and what is of the other – each in equal measure.

Thanks

I would like to thank the team members of Moving Networks Berlin, especially Alicia Faridi, Mafalda Sandrini, Max Schindlbeck, Florian Kugler, Halah Al-Hayik, Ramadan Ali, Alen Tabakovic, Rosella Salzillo, Dana Alomari, Claire Burnill, Samir Hashemi and Bashar Al-Rifae for their support in the production of this essay.

Thanks also for the advice and support of Britta Gansebohm, Dr. Patrick Föhl, Prof. Dr. Ayad Al-Ani, Prof. Dr. Astrid Friese, Prof. Dr. Brigitte Kleinselbeck, Helmut Kuhn, Christa Eibl, Philippa Ebéné, Miriam Camara, Philip Grüneisen, Imke Grimmer, Ulrike Kaul, Dr. Jan Niklas Kocks and especially Dr. Ourania Kyriakopoulou and the “Athener Runde.”

In addition, my thanks go to Etienne Salborn, Anja Göbel and Patrick Muvungu in Kampala (Uganda) and my friend Bonny, without whom I would have neither seen nor understood anything of the city.

Many thanks to Simone Hartwich for the great cooperation with the Federal Agency for Civic Education over all these years, and to my lector, Benjamin Weiß.

I dedicate this book to Alexander and Angelika, who can already *speaking for themselves* wonderfully.

Notes

All citations, unless otherwise noted, have been rendered in English by the translator.

- 1 Nuez, Iván de la (2001): *Das treibende Floß. Kubanische Kulturpassagen*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- 2 Henschel, Alexander (2016): *Die Brücke als Riss. Reproduktive und transformative Momente von Kunstvermittlung*. In: Mandel, Birgit (ed.) (2016): *Teilhabeorientierte Kulturvermittlung. Diskurse und Konzepte für eine Neuausrichtung des öffentlich geförderten Kulturlebens*. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- 3 As an example, see this statement put out by Goethe Institute in Egypt, in which participation is clearly named as a concept: “Participation and thereby the reinforcement of the options for taking part in society comprise the second field of action in the Goethe Institute’s program Dialogue & Change. In this way, the collaborative and participatory possibilities for the younger generation in the Arab world are to be broadened. In this context, the Goethe Institute takes into consideration especially young people and women.” (see <https://www.goethe.de/ins/eg/de/kul/sup/trp/par.html>). Here, the words “are to be” are revealing. They imply that participation is plannable. In this regard, one could ask the question as to what extent participation is plannable.
- 4 See <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/teil-haben-teil-sein-auftaktzum-themenjahr-partizipation-749334> (accessed on 08 March 2019).
- 5 Radtke, Frank-Olaf (2011): *Kulturen sprechen nicht. Die Politik grenzüberschreitender Dialoge*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, p. 23.
- 6 See for example Kleefeldt, Esther (2018): *Resilienz, Empowerment und Selbstorganisation geflüchteter Menschen: Stärkenorientierte Ansätze und professionelle Unterstützung*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Herriger, Norbert (2014): *Empowerment in der Sozialen Arbeit. Eine Einführung*. 5. Aktualisierte Auflage. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer; Madubuko, Nkechi (2016): *Empowerment als Erziehungsaufgabe: Praktisches Wissen für den Umgang mit Rassismuserfahrungen*. Münster: Unrast Verlag.
- 7 Ermert, Karl (2009): *Was ist Kulturelle Bildung? Dossier der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*. See <http://www.bpb.de/gesellschaft/bildung/kulturellebildung/59910/wasistkulturellebildung>.
- 8 The research association The Moving Network, originally a students’ initiative, is today an association of very different people, whose common denominator is their interest in the issues of cultural and political education as well as in empowerment models. Artist, writers, scholars, and students come together here, offer workshops and seminars and exchange ideas about new forms of knowledge. See www.the-moving-network.de (accessed 13 April 2018).

- 9 See results in the publication by Wolfram, Gernot & Sandrini, Mafalda (2015): *Teachers for Life. Empowering Refugees to teach and share Knowledge*. Berlin: BoP Publishing.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Simmel, Georg (1909): *Brücke und Tür*. In: *Der Tag. Moderne illustrierte Zeitung* No.683, Morgenblatt, 15. September 1909, Illustrierter Teil No.216, p.1–3 (Berlin) Translation taken from *Simmel on Culture*, ed. D. Frisby and M. Featherstone, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- 12 Sennett, Richard (2012): *Together. The Rituals, Pleasures & Politics of Cooperation*. London: Allen Lane.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See for example Chomsky, Noam: *Profit Over People – War Against People: Neo liberalism und globale Weltordnung, Menschenrechte und Schurkenstaaten*. Munich: Piper; Frenz, Helmut (ed.) (1980:) *Die Stimme der Verstummen. Vom Einsatz für die Menschenrechte*. Gütersloh: GTB.
- 15 Rösinger, Christiane (2017). *Zukunft machen wir später*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer.
- 16 Instructive in this respect are for example refugee initiatives like those found in social media or in publication projects like “Heimfocus,” see <https://issuu.com/heimfocus>.
- 17 See <http://riserefugee.org/>.
- 18 Name changed.
- 19 See <https://tribekampala.com/> (accessed on 13 April 2018).
- 20 See <http://www.socialinnovationacademy.org/>.
- 21 See ifa Institut Stuttgart.
- 22 Chris Torch: *Beyond...Ourselves*. (publ. 20 May 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAXQu1L5UfA> (accessed on 12 July 2018)
- 23 “At the edges of Europe culture is still alive” (see video).
- 24 Frankfurt, Harry G. (2016): *Sich selbst ernst nehmen*. Ed. Debra Satz. With commentary by Christine M. Korsgaard, Michael E. Bratman and Meir Dan-Cohen. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- 25 *BirdWatchers (La terra degli uomini rossi)*, Brazil/Italy 2008, director: Marco Bechis.
- 26 See Erison, Didier (1999). *Michel Foucault. Eine Biographie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- 27 Foucault, Michel (2003): *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York City: Pantheon Books, 1970. See reference to the supposedly Chinese text.
- 28 Foucault, Michel (2004): *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London and New York City: Routledge Classics, p.422
- 29 See fn.28. p.xvi.
- 30 See fn.28. p.xxi.
- 31 Senger, Harro v. (2013): *Die Klaviatur der 36 Strategeme*. In *Gegensätzen denken lernen*. Munich: Hanser.

- 32 Zhang Yiguo: In urtümlichen Denken frische Luft holen, in: Shehui Guancha, Shanghai, No.4/2006, p.62 (transl. Harro v. Senger, see note 31).
- 33 A listing that neither attempts to be complete, nor wants to be.
- 34 Jeffers, Alison (2011): *Refugees, Theatre and Crisis: Performing Global Identities*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- 35 At the Cannes Film Festival 2014 *Turist* was awarded the jury prize in der section *Un Certain Regard*.
- 36 Citations taken from conversations at events of *The Moving Network* in Berlin in 2015.
- 37 On the term “Assoziationen” (associations) see Latour, Bruno (2007): *Eine neue Soziologie für eine neue Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- 38 Cf. here also: Wolfram, Gernot (2018): *Weißer Flecken in der Wahrnehmung*. Wie uns kulturelle Hierarchien beeinflussen. In: *KM. Das Magazin von Kultur Management Network*, No.133/May 2018. Weimar, pp. 12–18. Online: <https://www.kulturmanagement.net/dlf/32856b422ab65c6be0198f998343702b,1.pdf>.
- 39 See <https://www.zeit.de/zeit-geschichte/2015/04/ddr-propaganda-auslaender-einwanderer> (accessed on 08 March 2019).
- 40 See <https://www.welt.de/printwelt/article531122/FidschisNiggerdassindfuermichganznormaleWoerter.html> (accessed on 16 July 2018)
- 41 See fn.45.
- 42 See Wagner, Bernd (2017): *Vertuschte Gefahr: Die Stasi und Neonazis*. Dossier »Stasi« der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. See: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/deutschesgeschichte/stasi/218421/neonazis> (accessed on 16 July 2018); Waibel, Harry (1996): *Rechtsextremismus in der DDR bis 1989*. Cologne: PapyRossaVerlag, PapyRossaHochschulschriften 11.
- 43 See for example Priemel, Kim (2011): *Transit|Transfer: Politik und Praxis der Einwanderung in der DDR 1945–1990*. Berlin: Be.bra.
- 44 See Zwengel, Almut (2010): *Die ‘Gastarbeiter’ der DDR: Politischer Kontext und Lebenswelt*. Münster: LitVerlag.
- 45 Cf. on this the documentation of Harry Waibel: “In the night from the 19th to the 20th of September 1987, towards 11 o’clock in Staßfurt, the 18-year-old Mozambican apprentice, Carlos Conceicao (b. 1969) was murdered. Although his friends were able to inform the police, the corpse was not found until 20 September around 11 in the morning at the bottom of the river, about 100 meters from the bridge. Previously, on 19 September, there had been a disco party in the youth recreation center (JFZ) on Karl Marx Straße, at which two Germans and two Africans had had a heated verbal exchange, which was continued outside of the building. Racist remarks led to physical exchanges between one of the Germans and Carlos Conceicao and resulted in the throwing of Carlos over the railing of the bridge 5 meters down into the Bode River. His calls for help went unheard. The police broke off their immediately begun “search mission” around 4 in the morning after no success. The perpetrator (21-years-old), a German from Staßfurt with a previous criminal record, was arrested on 21 September and taken into custody in Magdeburg. He was divorced, the father of a child, and a member of the Free German Trade Union

- Federation (FDGB). Investigative procedures were begun in accordance with § 115 and 117 of the German penal code.
- 46 See Alberto, Ibraimo with Bachmann, Daniel (2014): *Ich wollte leben wie die Götter. Was in Deutschland aus meinen afrikanischen Träumen wurde*. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 See Maurois, André (1979): *Die drei Dumas*. Leipzig: Reclam.
- 49 The huge, complex discourse around the theme of agency in postcolonialism and its understanding of voice will not be dealt with here, since the author is an advocate of a discussion of the term “voice” that takes into consideration the individual and the individual’s options. In this regard, it is always necessary to give thought to the fact that political and economic frameworks can prevent people from speaking and can devalue their voices. But this cannot serve as a justification for not repeatedly trying to encourage people to speak and act, as has been shown in many of the examples and approaches described here. On the issues involved in the agency discourse, see for example Göttsche, Dirk; Dunker, Axel and Dürbeck, Gabriele (ed.) (2017): *Handbuch Postkolonialismus und Literatur*. Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler Verlag, p. 128ff; cf. on this also Aleida Assmann: “Agency in the sense of the power to act is the form in which today, after the ‘end of the subject,’ the subject debate is being rekindled in the field of cultural studies. In this context, voice is not only that which is produced by the larynx but that which has a chance to be heard and recognized in the public discourse.” The voice is thus always a collection of very different discourses that are bundled together into one channel. The promotion of this multilayered quality of voices within the voice is an integral part of working towards agency. Cf. Assmann, Aleida (2008): *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft. Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen*. 2nd newly revised edition. Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.
- 50 See for example Markova, Ivana (ed.) (2011): *Trust and Conflict: Representation, Culture and Dialogue*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.
- 51 Lingis, Alphonso (2004): *Trust*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 64.
- 52 TRACKS Arte (2015), *Portrait About Saeed*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fUeq0xALnWE>; (accessed on 13 April 2018, watch from 5’27”).
- 53 Bauman, Zygmunt (2009): *Gemeinschaften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- 54 Sandrini, Mafalda (2015): *The Model Empowerment Trust Circle*, in: Wolfram, Gernot & Sandrini, Mafalda (ed.) (2015) *Teachers for Life. Empowering Refugees to Teach and to Share Knowledge*. Berlin: BoP Publishing.
- 55 Dench, Geoff (1986): *Minorities in the Open Society: Prisoners of Ambivalence*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- 56 See note 53, p. 109.
- 57 Oldenburg, Ray (1991): *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. New York: Marlowe & Co.
- 58 Morisson, Arnault (2018). “A Typology of Places in the Knowledge Economy: Towards the Fourth Place”, in: *Smart Innovation, System and Technologies*, Forthcoming, vol. 100.

- 59 Föhl, Patrick S.; Künzel, Alexandra (2017): Abschlussbericht zur Kulturentwicklungsplanung der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf. Ergebnisse und Maßnahmen, im Auftrag der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf.
- 60 Bhabha, Homi K. (2000): Die Verortung der Kultur. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
- 61 Jack Ma about education, Davos 2018: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHt-5-RyTjk> (accessed on 26 February 2019).
- 62 <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-story-of-jack-ma-founder-of-alibaba-2014-9?IR=T>; (accessed on 13 April 2018)
- 63 See Dätsch, Christiane (ed.) (2018): Kulturelle Übersetzer. Kunst und Kulturmanagement im transkulturellen Kontext. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- 64 In reference to human beings, I have my difficulties with the word resources; but for collaborations it is important and decisive since it calls attention to the fact that we have strengths and capabilities that do not unfold except in exchanges. A person's time, for example, does not become a resource until it is used.
- 65 In the academic debates one often speaks of Translational Turn and in this context there is a discussion about the breadth and complexity of the term translation and its reciprocal relationships. Cf. for example Heller, Lavinia (2017): Interkulturalität. Studien zu Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft: Kultur und Übersetzung: Studien zu einem begrifflichen Verhältnis. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- 66 See Bachmann-Medick, Doris (2006): Cultural Turns. Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- 67 On New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015, massive sexual violations against women took place; many of the perpetrators were of North African origin. The police initially presented a positive picture of their operations, until many of the deployed police forces were later subject to the criticism that they had just looked away from the goings-on. In the aftermath, there were hefty discussions as to whether the young men had been encouraged to behave as they did through their cultural socialization. Ultimately, 1,000 violations were reported to the Cologne police.
- 68 See for example Schwarzer, Alice (2016): Der Schock. Die Silvesternacht in Köln. Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.
- 69 See Bender, Andrea & Beller, Sieghart (2015): Die Welt des Denkens: Kognitive Einheit, kulturelle Vielfalt. Munich: Hueber.
- 70 Blixen, Tania (1993): Mottos meines Lebens. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- 71 See for example Geertz, Clifford (1987): Dichte Beschreibung. Beiträge zum Verstehen kultureller Systeme. Suhrkamp; Clifford, James & Marcus, George E. (ed.) (2010): Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. University of California; Varela, María do Mar Castro & Dhawan, Nikita (2015): Postkoloniale Theorie. Eine kritische Einführung. 2nd completely revised and expanded edition. Bielefeld: Transcript.
- 72 Nassir-Shahinian, Natascha: Dekolonisierung und Empowerment, In: Heinrich Böll Foundation (2013). Empowerment. MIDDossier. Berlin, p. 13.
- 73 Herriger 2014, Empowerment.
- 74 Cf. Deutsch-Vietnamesischer Buchverlag VIPEN Berlin. <http://www.vipen.de/>; (accessed on 13 April 2018).

75 Aus dem Moore, Elke (2018): Imagination, Joy & Trust – Collective Wisdom: In: Dätsch, Christiane (ed.) (2018): Kulturelle Übersetzer. Kunst und Kulturmanagement im transkulturellen Kontext. Bielefeld: Transcript, p. 61.