

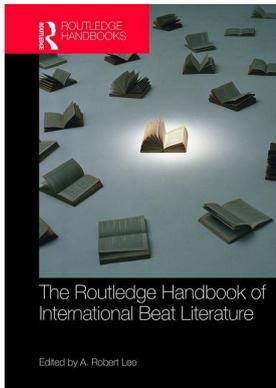
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## The Routledge Handbook of International Beat Literature

A. Robert Lee

### German Beats

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# 10

## GERMAN BEATS

### Friendship and Collaboration

*Alexander Greiffenstern*

#### Beginnings

When the relationship between Europe and the US comes up for discussion it can easily be forgotten how closely they have been bonded together from the very start. In one way this can be seen by the fact that Europeans as well as Americans tend to refer to the United States simply as “America.” The name, which is about 270 years older than the United States itself, is often regarded as symptom of US hegemonic dominance of the continent. Yet “Amerika,” the first ever written use of the name, precisely underlines the historic connection between the US and Germany. For it was in 1507 that the German cartographer and poet Matthias Ringmann (1482–1511), falsely assuming the new continent to have been discovered by Amerigo Vespucci (1454–1512), chose the name in accordance with the female names of the other continents for the new map created by his fellow cartographer Martin Waldseemüller of Freiburg (1470–1520). This map and the name it put into circulation quickly gained traction, and, although Ringmann tried to correct his mistake, it was America that stuck.

Over the centuries German immigrants to America and the United States have always been a sizeable number, which has led to a considerable evolving cultural exchange between the two countries. Although the German contribution to the Beats was probably less significant than Ringmann’s naming of the continent, the relationship between German literature and the Beats has been based less upon inspiration or imitation than as the outcome of this encompassing and longstanding historic wider relationship with the United States. Although Kerouac and Ginsberg and their texts have had their effect, the Beat name most pre-eminent in Germany has been that of William S. Burroughs.

The reception of the Beats started early in Germany, but it wasn’t greeted with enthusiasm by many critics. Ginsberg’s *Howl and other Poems* was translated in 1959 (translation: *Das Geheul und andere Gedichte*) as was Kerouac’s *On the Road* (translation: *Untenwegs*). An essay about American poetry by Gregory Corso appeared in 1958 (“Dichter und Gesellschaft in Amerika” in *Akzente* 5/1958). Burroughs’s novels *Naked Lunch* (translation: *Naked Lunch*, 1962) and *Junky (Junkie: Bekenntnisse eines unbekehrten Rauschgiftsüchtigen)*, 1963) were published early compared to other countries, especially given that the American edition of *Naked Lunch* only appeared in 1962. Initially, German readers thought of the Beats mainly as poets. A number of Beat or Beat-related poets appeared in the late 1950s to be followed in the 1960s by inclusion in the anthologies.

In the late 1950s, a good many of the Beats lived as expatriates and at one time or another several of them could be found at 9 rue Gît-le-Coeur in Paris. The address of the so-called Beat Hotel became legendary among European poets, intellectuals, rebels and even scholars, and the friendship of Gregory Corso with the author and literary critic Walter Höllerer (1922–2003) led

to their co-edited anthology *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* (1961). In 1957 Höllerer met Ginsberg and Corso in Paris and he began supporting their work in Germany. He wrote a brief introduction to the German publication of “Howl” and his literary magazine *Akzente* published Beat poetry. Furthermore, in 1959 Höllerer would become professor of literary studies in Berlin making him the main supporter of the Beats in Germany in the late 1950s and early 1960s. After the end of the Second World War literary discussion in Germany was dominated mainly by Gruppe 47 (1947–67), founded by Hans Werner Richter (1908–1993) and pledged to the renewal of German literature after Nazism; the group’s best-known names include Heinrich Böll (1917–1985), Günter Grass (1927–2015), Peter Handke (1942–), Uwe Johnson (1934–1984), Siegfried Lenz (1926–2014) and Martin Walser (1927–). Although Höllerer was a member of the group from 1954 his interest gravitated more towards marginal figures with their often daring approaches to literature. His collaboration with Corso, moreover, reflects a more international interest beyond the focus of Gruppe 47 and the German post-war literary establishment.

The work on *Junge amerikanische Lyrik* began in 1958, and Corso and Höllerer selected poems by many writers who were unknown in Germany at the time, although not all of them by any means Beats. In all, thirty-nine poets are assembled in the book, which presents the original English poems with German translations on opposite pages. In his introduction Corso writes about the editing process and why, paradoxically, the book is actually not a collection of Beats: “My mistake two years ago was in wanting to make a Beat anthology, such a project is for the machinist not the poet, because poetry is poetry and Beat is something else” (Corso 1961: 252). As in his “Post-Script” to *Minutes To Go* (1960), Corso apparently wanted to maintain his distance from certain labels. Höllerer has a more exact understanding of the aims and fashioning of the collection. He sees a close connection between young American authors and the young German “Generation without good-bye”<sup>1</sup> (Höllerer 1961: 257), not least in the importance of small publishing houses in helping writers make their bow. One of these young German authors and publishers that Höllerer points to is Rainer M. Gerhardt (1927–1954), whose literary magazine *fragmente* published translations of poems by Black Mountain poets. Gerhardt was in contact with Robert Creeley (1926–2005) and Charles Olson (1910–1970) and developed strong friendships with them. Robert Creeley dedicates poems to Gerhardt and the first poem in the collection by Höllerer and Corso is an obituary poem by Charles Olson for Gerhardt with the title “The Death of Europe.” Gerhardt had died by suicide before the Beats appeared on the scene, but he was early to become an admirer of the formidable author and translator Arno Schmidt (1914–1979).

Born in 1914, the same year that also saw the birth of William S. Burroughs, Schmidt is not usually regarded as a Beat author. But a closer look reveals grounds for comparing him with Burroughs, notably as far as the latter’s cut-up technique is concerned. Schmidt kept much to himself and even rejected an invitation to join Gruppe 47. He found his literary heroes among the forgotten and “minor” authors of the German canon and fully embraced the greats of Anglo-American literature. One of Schmidt’s major influences was James Joyce, and his style mirrored Joyce’s stream of consciousness, even on occasion surpassing it in the fashioning of his typescript. His most obvious attempt to out-Joyce Joyce, *Zettel’s Traum* (1970), is a thousand-page novel in extra-large format, which is narrated in three different columns (an English translation called *Bottom’s Dream* was published 2016). One could compare it to Burroughs’s use of three columns in “The Moving Times” (1964/65, also published in *Nova Broadcast No. 5* in 1969 and in *Die alten Filme* in 1979, edited by Carl Weissner), or even more so to his collages, where Burroughs explores alternative styles of narration. Furthermore, in a manner to recall how other Burroughs’s texts can read like political pamphlets, *Zettel’s Traum* is an exercise in the so-called etym-theory. This is explained in detail through Daniel Pagenstecher, the novel’s protagonist, with examples taken from texts by Edgar Allan Poe who Arno Schmidt had previously translated into German. Schmidt liked to experiment with genre, and his writing is the result of extensive reading; not least in the novel *Kaff* (1960) which in part is set on the moon after atomic war has made the earth uninhabitable. Although Schmidt’s stories usually take place in a realistic

setting—there is no equivalent of Burroughs’s more fantastical Interzone—his sometimes apocalyptic landscapes and descriptions of sexual fantasies give grounds to consider Schmidt more than a distant relative of Burroughs.

If Schmidt offers one kind of German Beat ancestry, so, likewise, does Gottfried Benn (1886–1956) whom Höllerer likens to William Carlos Williams (1883–1963). Benn and Williams were roughly the same age, and both were medical doctors; they served as godfathers to a younger generation of poets respectively in Germany and America. Williams’s credo of “no ideas but in things” might readily apply to the writing of Benn, his emphasis on the ordinary grain of life. The one looked to quotidian life in New Jersey and the other in Berlin. Whether the poetry of Benn and Williams makes for a productive good comparison is of no great concern to Höllerer, who rather writes as a mediator for the German reader. Höllerer wanted to show similarities between German and American poetry in order to counter an image of the Beats as essentially “Holy Barbarians” which had dominated their early reception in German cultural discourse.<sup>2</sup> For German poets, Benn’s influence may have waned, but he remained an important touchstone. In the introduction Höllerer goes on to explore differences as well as affinities between German poetry in general and the young American poets collected in the anthology. But in both cases he links them to the larger context of modernism.

*Junge amerikanische Lyrik* can be seen as an extraordinary achievement for the time, as it assembles different Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Diane Di Prima, and LeRoi Jones alongside Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Alan Ansen, and Frank O’Hara. One even finds a poem by Peter Orlovsky, two short ones by infamous Jacques Stern, and a poem by Jack Kerouac. The anthology was accompanied by a record of several readings, a new multimedia approach that gave readers an idea about rhythm and intonation in the poems. Although the book, as Corso pointed out, is not exactly a Beat anthology, it nevertheless introduced many young American authors to the German literary public and it gave younger German poets alternative role models.

In 1962 the first Beat anthology followed, namely *Beat – Eine Anthologie* edited by Karl Otto Paetel (1906–1975). It sparked a short public discussion about the Beats between Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929–), German poet, critic, and member of Gruppe 47, and Paetel as editor. Enzensberger wrote a review for *Der Spiegel* (“Enzensbergers November Lektüre: Beat – eine Anthologie,” November 7, 1962) to which Paetel replied. Enzensberger dismissed Kerouac entirely, called Ginsberg a damaged genius and thought only Corso, Ferlinghetti, and the controversial figure of Burroughs and his hallucinations was of some interest. In a sense this episode is a good example of how the often criticized gatekeeper function of Gruppe 47 worked, because it could be argued that some of Enzensberger’s poems were actually influenced by Ginsberg. But in contrast to Höllerer, Paetel was an outsider to German academic and publications discourses, so his anthology was harshly condemned and it took until the later 1960s for the Beats to get wider recognition in Germany when a new group of young writers and publishers emerged.

### Carl Weissner

A key figure in the reception of the Beats in Germany, and undoubtedly a Beat himself, has to be Carl Weissner (1940–2012). Born during World War II, Weissner grew up in the Southwest of Germany, which was part of the American occupation zone. He became a keen reader of American fiction and soon realized that some of the German translations he was reading weren’t very good. Becoming a translator was therefore a logical step for him, and he got in touch with many of the authors who had won his interest. In 1968 he went to New York City on a Fulbright scholarship, an experience that he later fictionalized in his book *Die Abenteuer von Thrashman* (2011). When he wrote during these early years he wrote in English, becoming involved in collaborations like the small publication *So Who Owns Death TV* (1967, German: *Fernseh-Tuberkulose*, 1969) with William Burroughs and Claude Pélieu (1934–2002). In this regard he can be thought of as the very embodiment of German–American literary overlap and linkage.

Weissner's work as a translator and a small press publisher led to the creation of work such as *The Braille Film* (1970), *UFO* (1971, co-produced with Jürgen Ploog, Udo Breger, and Jörg Fauser), *Gasolin 23* (1972–1986, also with Ploog, Breger, Fauser), *Cut-Up or Shut Up* (1972, with Ploog and Jan Herman), and *Klacto/23*. He also acted as literary agent for Burroughs, Paul Bowles (1910–1999) and Charles Bukowski (1920–1994). He would become especially close with the German-born Bukowski and continued to translate him after the novelist's death. Bukowski is well known not to have favored the Beats, but that posed no issue for Weissner given that he did not consider Burroughs a Beat either. Weissner was not alone in thinking of Beat rather as a label attached to Burroughs simply on the grounds of his connection with Ginsberg and Kerouac.

Weissner's list of translations reads like an anthology of post-war American literature: William Burroughs, Charles Bukowski, Allen Ginsberg, Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Frank Zappa, Will Eisner, Ken Kesey, Nelson Algren, and Harold Norse's *Beat Hotel*, which first appeared in German in 1975 before the English version came out in 1983. It is very difficult to quantify the influence of Weissner's translations on the reception of American literature in Germany, but many of them were both cheaply priced and easily available, and they became little short of bestsellers from the 1970s onward. In his introduction to *Manhattan Muffdiver* (2010) the Austrian author and musician Fritz Ostermayer (1956–) offers his great thanks to Weissner: the latter's translations of Burroughs had helped him survive his time at a Catholic boarding school and the texts provided a recourse from the sexual molestation he suffered at the hands of the priests (cf. Weissner 2010: 7). Even if Weissner's translations were not always quite this life-saving, they supplied a means to Beat figures of interest and not least among them Bob Dylan, because he had a keen understanding of the culture behind many of the texts and sometimes even insider knowledge, which all helped him to transport the meaning of a text. To translate Burroughs's cut-ups he was able to often look at the source texts before Burroughs had cut or folded them. And, of course, he did cut-ups himself and understood the technique from this perspective.

Weissner's own literary work seemed to be always delayed by yet another translation or new edition of Bukowski. In 2010 he finally published *Manhattan Muffdiver*, his first novel in German if, loosely, it can be called a novel. It has more the character of text-collages or dreams as the book is a collection of emails written by an unnamed author, who is in New York City where he tries to write a novel. While he is in New York he has the idea for a text about necrophilia and duly begins research. In the emails fact and fiction become increasingly difficult to differentiate. The reader, for sure, recognizes Weissner as the sender of these emails in which he gives his opinions on literature and the cultural scene of New York. He meets Beat authors like Ed Sanders and others, recounts earlier encounters in the 1960s, and offers explorations of necrophilia as subculture. The text lives by its humor and tongue-in-cheek self-referentiality:

As a book? This here? I don't see it. Such messages are rather unpleasant to the natives back home. First, because of its radical cabaret approach, which overextend most of them humor wise. Second, because my product is stylistically far superior to the commodities of the competitors and this is automatically regarded as apish.

Weissner 2010: 74<sup>3</sup>

A visit to the New York Public Library leads on to an extract from Burroughs's *A Book of Dreams* (1995) translated into German, in which Burroughs writes about Weissner, mimicking in a way how the Beats became figures in each other's writing. Here Weissner becomes a figure in his own writing through Burroughs.

*Die Abenteuer von Thrashman* (2011) followed a mere year later and Weissner announced that he was working on several other books, doubtlessly realizing that it was time to publish more of his own writing. The book is in all likelihood even more autobiographical than *Manhattan Muffdiver* because it is based on Weissner's time in New York in 1968. Weissner again deploys a mix of fact and fiction, the upshot, despite the reflexive fashioning, being an "authentic" image of New York. Weissner states that

he was helped by consulting Ed Sanders's *1968: A History in Verse* (1997) as a mirror to the political unrest both in the US and Europe signified by the very mention of 1968. The autobiographical insights contribute to the feeling of authenticity: "A year is enough to put down roots here. You curse the conditions and trust that they don't run down the city entirely. Somehow you cope and you stay. [...]. In addition, haven't I written pretty good stuff here? If I was superstitious, I wouldn't budge" (Weissner 2011: 147).<sup>4</sup> At the close of the text Weissner leaves the city, not to head back to Germany but to drive to the West Coast. The book ends rather fittingly with a film metaphor: "The projectionist at the Roxy has seen enough. He doesn't rewind. He switches off the light and leaves" (Weissner 2011: 149).

### Jügen Ploog, Udo Breger, Wolf Wondratschek

Much as Carl Weissner can lay claim to be a Beat laurel in Germany, he was far from alone, not least in the names of fellow writers and frequent collaborators: Jügen Ploog (1935–) and Udo Breger (1941–). Ploog has achieved near legendary status, thirty years an airline pilot while becoming a prolific writer and graphic artist with William Burroughs as a main influence. His dedication to the cut-up method has held throughout his career. In Germany Ploog has been more than an outsider: for the literary establishment he simply does not exist. His first novel *Cola-Hinterland* (1969), a lively text-and-image narrative influenced by Burroughs's collages and candid sexual language, opened a long literary career of fiction, essay-writing and verse. Of his connection to the Beats he has said the following in an interview:

Sometimes I am called a 'Beat poet', even though I am far off from meeting the requirements. First I am not American. Beats are bohemians in the best sense, they live for the moments, but write damn good texts in the process. Burroughs didn't fit into this formula, he was different, rather European, something nobody wants to believe in this country. Very considered and very well-read. He also kept a 100 percent control during the application of the cut-up method by considering his texts the next day and throwing them away if they were no good. Burroughs also always kept his artistic distance from the Beats. Even though I have taken over the literary approach as far as I could, one only gets the attitude towards life, when one has lived on the lower east side for a while, and I haven't done this. An attitude towards life only emerges through experience. It is about how often somebody falls flat on his face, what it means to get up again. It is about an encounter with death or love or about how somebody reacts when he gets punched in the nose. This shapes the view on the world and of people. What are you standing for, what is your opinion? Tell it to me. That is what poetry is all about, not about sliding words around or building beautiful sentences.

Ploog 2016<sup>5</sup>

This revealing quotation by Ploog summarizes the attitude of many of his German colleagues and collaborators who saw something in the writing and personalities of the American Beats that they could not detect in German literature at the time. Instead of inventing a German Beat version by superficially imitating the American texts, Ploog, Weissner, and the others started an imaginative interaction with both American texts and authors and with each other—very much in the spirit of what Burroughs and Brion Gysin (1916–1986) called "the third mind."

Udo Breger, translator and publisher, equally needs to be entered into the reckoning. His Expanded Media Editions would publish Burroughs, Ploog, Allen Ginsberg, Brion Gysin, Mary Beach, and Claude Pélieu. Breger was a close friend of Brion Gysin and William Burroughs and has curated a number of exhibitions of their work, most notably "The Name is Burroughs – Expanded Media" at the ZKM, Karlsruhe in 2012. His recent memoir about his time with Burroughs and Gysin, *Road Stops* (2016), is structured around photos from Breger's extensive collection. Each of the photos acts as a cue and the text leaves no doubt how closely interconnected was their group:

Jürgen Ploog was still flying back then. And every time New York was on his route he got in touch with Burroughs; he inquired whether he had time, was in the mood for a meeting. This evening in November 1981 we three spent together. We ate and drank, talked, walked up and down the bunker; maybe we did target practice with the blowpipe, the target stood right rear.

Breger 2016: 15<sup>6</sup>

Breger had met Burroughs and Gysin at their place in London in 1972 when he visited to discuss a publication with Burroughs. The meeting was initiated by Weissner who had called Breger in the summer of 1971 and suggested he should get in touch with Burroughs and ask about a possible publication. For Breger this became far more than a business meeting. It inaugurated a life-long friendship.

Associated with Jörg Fauser and what in the early 1970s was known as the new Frankfurt poetry scene with writers like Carl Weissner and Jürgen Ploog is Wolf Wondratschek (1943–). He made his bow with the novel *Früher begann der Tag mit einer Schußwunde* (1969) (In Former Times the Day Started with a Gunshot Wound, no translation) and was early to establish himself as one of Germany's leading new poets with his collection *Chuck's Zimmer* (1974). Some of the included poems have English titles and some are even written in English. Wondratschek's early style is similar to that of Jörg Fauser, but he himself explained in an interview that everyone in the group had their own distinctive style. Wondratschek was not involved in the cut-up projects and small press publications of Weissner and Ploog. But like Rolf Dieter Brinkmann he traveled through the US and Mexico (following the footsteps of Malcolm Lowry) and makes reference to the Beats directly and indirectly when, in a poem like "Death Valley," he celebrates the American landscape in a manner to evoke Kerouac's *On the Road*. Another of the America-sited poems in *Chuck's Zimmer*, "The Ticket that Exploded," not only references Burroughs in title but deploys cut-up techniques. Reflexively, too, Wondratschek makes reference to movie theaters to create his own poem about the experience of going to the movies.

In almost all respects Wondratschek makes for a singular presence in German literature. On the one hand he refuses to take part in many aspects of the cultural discourse and publishing industry and with certain books has bypassed publishing houses to reach a large readership. On the other hand his rejections make him a writer of interest not least in how he has learned to use his rebel image to advantage. In the 1980s some of his texts were also set to music by the German Blues-rock band *Interzone*, which contributed to his outsider status. After the death of Brinkmann and Fauser he is the only original German Beat poet who is still alive, and even if his literary work is no longer Beat, he continues to make his persona part of his art, which nowadays can perversely mean giving long interviews about the advantages of smoking cigarettes.

### Rolf Dieter Brinkmann

Rolf Dieter Brinkmann (1940–1975) has long been held to be a key figure in Germany's Beat or Beat-inspired literary pantheon. But in many ways he lacks the affirmative tone of the American Beats. His poetry and prose is much darker, even when he deploys images of human existence similar to those of Ginsberg. Where Ginsberg's "best minds of my generation [...] let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy," Brinkmann is matter of fact and almost comically disillusioned: "Romance: My cock (penis) in your cunt (vagina), 'just a perfect day.' Is it not passion to paint your rooftop blue and live underneath it?" (Brinkmann 2005: 86). It is a stereotypical trope that Germans can take anything joyful and beautiful and make it gloomy or simply just rationalize it. It sometimes seems as if Brinkmann wants to embody this stereotype, and the sheer quantity and quality of pain, hate and suffering that can be found in Brinkmann's writing suggests that there is no ironic wink. In the quotation above, Brinkmann probably refers to Lou Reed's song "Perfect Day." One would think that Lou Reed's song is a good example of such a vision, but Brinkmann doesn't

present the beauty of such a simple, “perfect” day, he rather asks questions: “What about memories that are good for nothing?” “What about the ‘dark’ fantasies?” or “Is the sun bigger than the foot where it appears?” (Brinkmann 2005: 86).<sup>7</sup>

Following early publication of a number of small volumes of prose and poetry Brinkmann became better known for his first and only novel, *Keiner weiß mehr* (1968), the closely observed anatomy of a marriage, and for his work as script writer for German television—not to mention his provocative public appearance in 1968 when he threatened to shoot the German critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920–2013) during a panel discussion by authors and critics. At this point he fully embraced American literature and his main focus for some time was on translation because, as he later explained, he wanted to read certain American texts in German. In short succession Brinkmann published Frank O’Hara’s *Lunch Poems* (1969), the collection (with Ralf Rainer Rygulla) *Acid: Neue amerikanische Szene* (1969), the anthology *Silverscreen: Neue amerikanische Lyrik* (1969), and a selection of poems by Ted Berrigan under the title *Guillaume Apollinaire ist tot* (1970).

*Silverscreen* underscores Brinkmann’s fascination with movies, movie stars, and American pop culture. He even wrote a poem about the “naked foot of Ava Gardner.” His work with film and photography would continue throughout his career and different visual techniques enter and help fashion his poetry. Yet in later years, when he was working on *Rom, Blicke* the experimental collage text based upon his stay in Rome in 1972 and published posthumously in 1979, he seemed to feel regret about some of his earlier work and his fascination with American literature.<sup>8</sup>

During a visit to London, on April 23, 1975 Brinkmann was hit by a car while crossing the street and killed; he was never to see the success of his last poetry collection, for which he was posthumously awarded the Petrarca prize—*Westwärts 1 & 2* (Westward 1 & 2). The title suggests that his relationship with America was far from over. Some of the poems were written during a stay as guest lecturer in Austin, Texas, in 1974. The book includes photos that Brinkmann took over the years, notably in the US.<sup>9</sup> In a way, *Westwärts 1 & 2* chronicles Brinkmann’s movement between 1970 and 1974 both in poetry and in the world at large. The photos, which frame the book at the beginning and at the end, make it clear that many of the poems, if not all of them, are connected to a powerful sense of place: places that are always also a state of mind. Some poems simply identify their location in the title: “Im Voyageurs Apt. 311 East 31st Street, Austin” or “In London, Flat 6,” while others more clearly have a second meaning: “Lied am Samstagabend in Köln” or “Notizen zu einer Landschaft bei Vechta i. O. für H.P.” Brinkmann had in fact grown up in the small town of Vechta in the North of Germany before moving to Cologne where he studied and began his writing career in the early 1960s.

Surprisingly, perhaps, his poetry seems to have been driven as much by anger and hate. The misanthropic and misogynistic language is sometimes hard to bear. Brinkmann gives no quarter in sounding bored, even disgusted, by his own life and human life in general. In the Preface to *Westwärts 1 & 2* he states that he would like to write poems as readily as songs, but he can’t play the guitar, he can just type and he muses that German might die because it is not suited for songs. For his poetry in *Westwärts* this is undoubtedly true, as the writing is not easy to read, let alone sing. The poems usually consist of a multitude of perceptions, images, and voices that in various poems look to be simply scattered on the page. These challenge the reader and force an extra degree of attention to enable full understanding of the complete sense of the sentences and images. Brinkmann is aware that his poems come alive only through an effort of collaborative will. Although he refuses to give the reader aesthetic or textual unity, he wants the poems to be part of life. His “Preface” addresses the role of the reader and the quality of the writing at hand: “They are poems. All questions go on, as all answers go on. The space goes on. I open the eyes and I look at a white sheet of paper” (Brinkmann 2005: 9).<sup>10</sup> For Brinkmann there is nothing other than poetry, it is part of everyday life and it consist of random perceptions and snapshots that are filtered through language.

Brinkmann’s fascination with American stardom and his interest in American music intersect in recurring references to Jim Morrison and *The Doors*, which can be found throughout his work (cf.

Behme 1981). Brinkmann no doubt liked the music of *The Doors* and Morrison's lyrics, but he also uses them as entry into a discussion of aging, death, and maybe more importantly, the distinction between high and pop culture. As noted earlier, Brinkmann was early to disclose his links to film in the very title *Silverscreen*. But his thoughts as to the connection between literature and film can be found in the essay "Der Film in Worten" at the end of his first anthology *Acid*. Here Brinkmann starts with a reply to Enzensberger's critique of the Beats and Kerouac in particular, voiced in "Die Aporien der Avantgarde" (1962). Brinkmann takes the side of the Beats, or the young American poets as he calls them, and points out a closeness to pop culture in the work of Kerouac, Ginsberg, Warhol, Ron Padgett, Ted Berrigan, Ed Sanders, and Michael McClure. The distinction between high and low culture is for Brinkmann the main reason these new American authors are disregarded by German critics and why German literature is not developing new forms. He particularly embraces William Burroughs and his techniques of cut-up and fold-in and experimentation in film, photography and tape recordings. Brinkmann's collages undoubtedly owe much to Burroughs.

Nevertheless, Brinkmann's repeated call for an aesthetic of the immediate, even the superficial, as based on the short-term memory of pop culture, was a controversial topic in German cultural discourses of the 1960s and 1970s and is still so today. Understandably, remembrance has dominated German cultural production after the Holocaust—political calls to close this chapter of German history usually have come from the far right. Brinkmann, in truth, is not taking up a political but literary stance, one that given the seriousness of Gruppe 47 was hardly imaginable. The emphasis for Brinkmann was to fall rather upon celebration of the beauty and joy of life. The strength of Brinkmann's poetry comes exactly from putting this tension into effect. He tries to create everyday images of life that capture passing moments of human existence but which, in effect, point to deep emotions. In a sense, this is what makes Brinkmann very German and very Beat at the same time.

### Jörg Fauser

Jörg Fauser (1944–1987) can be said to have produced the most varied body of work among the authors discussed here. He wrote poems, autobiographical prose, essays, crime-fiction, movie-scripts, a biography of Marlon Brando, and song lyrics for the German musician Achim Reichel (1944–). Besides earning money through his writing, he worked as a night watchman, did office work at the Bundesbank, and sorted luggage at Frankfurt airport. During community service at a hospital he became addicted to opium, and during 1967–68 he lived in Tophane, a part of Istanbul well known for its junkie population. He managed to kick his habit with the help of Dr. Dent's apomorphine cure, recommended to him by Burroughs when the two met for an interview in London. The connection to Burroughs, however, goes further: it lies in their affinity with crime and spy stories and not the least, their literary outsider status.

Fauser's early publications were mostly in magazines and small press outlets. In 1971 he became the editor of the short-lived underground magazine *Zoom* and later that year published another underground magazine called *UFO* together with Carl Weissner, Jürgen Ploog, and Udo Breger. In 1973 he founded the literary magazine *Gasolin 23*, again with Weissner and Ploog. The same year he published his poetry collection *Die Harry Gelb Story*, for which Carl Weissner wrote a preface pointing out the uniqueness of Fauser's voice in German literary discourse. Connected to the preface is a poem called "Dichter in der Nacht," based in all probability on prior discussions of poetry between Fauser and Weissner. They compare the differing viewpoints of two other writers—the observation by Charles Bukowski that "Poetry is a wet rag in the sink," and a line from German author Günter Grass, "Im Schulhof blüht das Butterbrotpapier" ("In the schoolyard the sandwich paper blooms").<sup>11</sup>

The contrast is striking. Grass aims to turn a waste wrapping into a flower; Bukowski wants poetry to smell and touch something you actually don't want to smell and touch—the poet should stick his nose there and describe what you really smell, especially when it's unpleasant. This is what Fauser is trying to do, through the eyes and nose of his alter ego Harry Gelb, and he leaves no doubt of the

role models for this approach. Besides Bukowski, one finds a picture of Neal Cassady opposite the first poem. One also finds panels from a Rip-Kirby comic strip and a movie still from *The Big Sleep* showing Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. The latter reflects Fauser's fondness for the hard-boiled detective genre. Furthermore, many of the poems are accompanied by music references: Janis Joplin, Howlin' Wolf, Ray Charles, Lou Reed. And of course there is Jack Kerouac: "I was in Istanbul when Jack Kerouac died/ a year later my mother incidentally said/ 'he has been dead all along'" (Fauser 1985: 58). Istanbul here means not only the Turkish city, but also his opium addiction, a link back to the problems of a Beat/morphine driven lifestyle. These and other Beat references run through *Die Harry Gelb Story*, free verse and language which itself might strike some reader as exactly Bukowski's "wet rag."

Fauser further chronicles his years of addiction and the beginning of his literary career in his 1984 novel *Rohstoff*. An English translation of the novel was published in 2014 under the title *Raw Material*, a title that plays with the double meaning of a text that might in its own right be raw and rough and a protagonist, again Fauser's alter ego Harry Gelb, who regards heroin, alcohol, and countercultural writing resources necessary for his style of life. Fauser describes in detail his life in Istanbul and his attempt to find his place in the German society of the late 1960s and early 1970s. He struggles between the pulls of aligning himself with the revolutionary political fights of the time and normal middle-class existence. Harry Gelb joins and stays for a while with a communist group because of a French girl with whom he has fallen in love. He also likes a quiet beer after work, but not enough to take on a middle-class career. In some ways this is also reflected in his literary work. Gelb, alias Fauser, tries cut-ups but soon realizes that this might not be for him. In the novel, Fauser has Anatol Stern, alias Jürgen Ploog, explain cut-up as both a philosophy of life and as an aesthetic to Harry Gelb: "'Texts have to open up new regions of the consciousness. Otherwise why write? Texts are trips through time and space.' I didn't even have a drivers' license" (Fauser 2009a: 85). Looking at Anglo-American literature and culture was probably not the answer to everything, but it was preferable to the cultural mainstream in Germany at that time.

Fauser is not just criticizing German literature, but also German society and politics. This marks an important difference with Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, who lived mainly in and for his own immediate world. Fauser goes out there and in his essays he describes the small everyday lives of people and presents forgotten or underestimated authors in a unique way. His essays emphasize the importance of morals and ethics and the role that literature has to play in upholding them in society. For Fauser, literature should not be pleasant or merely comfortable, but rather urgent and painful: "On the edge between ecstasy and consternation" (Fauser 2009b: 95).

Fauser was especially drawn to exploring the work of the great authors of detective and crime fiction: Raymond Chandler, John le Carré, and Eric Ambler, all of whom he feels are overlooked by critics because they write "just" for entertainment. But Fauser was keen to insist that popular fiction refract the truth of society far better than other literary forms. Along with his biographical essays on American authors, notably a fairly straight forward biography of Jack Kerouac, Fauser adds under-attended German authors. Notable are essays on Christian Dietrich Grabbe (1801–1836), which Fauser disguises as a travel piece, and Hans Fallada (1893–1947), with whom Fauser greatly identifies because Fallada also led kind of a double life—working as a journalist and newspaperman besides writing novels. Fallada, whose real name was Rudolf Ditzen, was also addicted to morphine and an alcoholic. Fauser's description of Fallada is in a way a self-description: "Rudolf Dietzen was addicted all his life—to alcohol, to alkaloids, most of all to the rush of writing—and reading Fallada makes one addicted too" (Fauser 2009b: 187).

In the 1980s Fauser reached a larger audience. His 1981 novel *Der Schneemann* (English: *The Snowman*, 2004) was made into a movie in 1984, starring the German rock-singer Marius Müller-Westernhagen as the small-time criminal who accidentally comes into possession of five pounds of cocaine. In the 1980s Fauser had also formed a collaboration with German musician Achim Reichel, for whom he wrote lyrics. Worth special mention is the 1981 album *Blues in Blond* that had

considerable success. Fauser went on tour with Reichel and his band, an experience he describes in his essay “Das große Aufbäumen”:

I had never lived mentally healthier since I took to making a living as an entertainer. Finally I wrote for people who cut my hair and drew the beer, collected my taxes and fed the computer with my data. For the first time since I started writing I had the feeling of belonging once again to people who did work I had for so long successfully avoided... If authors wrote only for people who themselves live on scribbling, they would write dead stuff.

Fauser 2009b: 262–263<sup>12</sup>

An attitude like this was hardly acceptable to the German literary establishment. In 1984, when Fauser took part in the competition at the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize, an important event for German literature, the critics came down hard on him, and Marcel Reich-Ranicki, the prolific German essayist and key member of the Gruppe 47, told Fauser that he didn't belong there. Nevertheless, his standing as a Beat-style underground author made him an important influence for the succeeding next generation of German authors. Jörg Fauser himself died in 1987 when, for unknown reasons, he was walking on a highway near Munich in the middle of the night and was hit by a car.<sup>13</sup>

In Germany, authors have rarely been described as Beat, but rather as “pop.” The term already came up in the 1960s and made a dashing comeback in the 1990s when a new generation of authors, following the likes of Fauser and Brinkmann, produced literature related to Anglo-American pop culture. Some of them connected to Brinkmann's idea of creating a surface text with no double meaning, but as one can imagine some of these were very shallow. Others had highly visible Anglo-American role models that were successful at that time like Nick Hornby or Douglas Coupland. In contrast, Thomas Meinecke's *The Church of John F. Kennedy* (1996) is very much aware of the deep historical ties between Germany and America, it even becomes part of the story.

### Thomas Meinecke

Thomas Meinecke (1955–) started his writing career as columnist and DJ, and among other engagements he has been working since 1985 for radio station Bayern 2. Along with his music he has become known for his novels *Tomboy* (1998; English 2011) where he again uses an English title to take on the gender discussion in Germany in the 1990s, and *Hellblau* (2001; English *Pale Blue* 2012) that presents a Europe–America cultural discussion of three characters about music, race, and identity through emails and other communication. Their exchanges reflect ongoing discussions as to the status of Pop/Beat literature. In this light *Hellblau* contrasts with *The Church of John F. Kennedy* as his first novel which on first reading would seem to have few Beat connections. The first thing to note is its strange English-language title, namely *The Church of John F. Kennedy*; A pamphlet issued by a rather obscure church and kept in the glove compartment of the book's protagonist becomes emblematic for the book's topic. Many immigrants came to the US in search for religious freedom and the very diverse and sometimes obscure religious landscape is a direct result of this immigration. With a German name that defies Americanization, Meinecke's protagonist, Wenzel Assmann, makes a road trip through the US in search of obscure and forgotten traces of German immigration. He finances his trip in part by selling German phone books from the trunk of his car to German immigrants and their descendants in search of their historic family roots. Assmann's journey takes place shortly after German reunification, with which he keeps updated through letters and phone calls to an ex-girlfriend. The book was written a few years prior to its publication in 1996 and its political assessment of the time is still very accurate: racism and fascism are a constant theme in the novel.<sup>14</sup> The narrative of Assmann's journey is frequently interrupted with quotations from the immigrants who report on their new life in “Amerika” to their relatives back in Germany.

Even if Meinecke's novel does not appear typically Beat, its use of the road trip is closer to Kerouac and also stands in line with the journeys of Fauser, Brinkmann, and the others. Meinecke's Assmann is fascinated by the diversity of American life and the history of the country in a way similar to Sal Paradise. While Sal sees the ghosts of old miners or meets the ghost of the Susquehanna, Meinecke actually lets them talk by inserting old letters into the text. Sal travels West and ultimately to the South, Assmann starts in the South and goes North, which for him means traveling further back into East Coast history. Assmann is also an admirer of American literature, or better of the interaction between American and German literature, typically, for example when he reads a translation of Faulkner by Arno Schmidt with his Native American-German girlfriend. Throughout *The Church of John F. Kennedy* America and Germany function as mirror images of each other. A number of characters who Assmann meets say things that could interchangeably be said by both Germans and Americans; and when a German-American expresses his admiration for the Nazis, does he say this as a German or an American? In his research Assmann meets people who define themselves as German-American showing the strong ties and forces of assimilation and cultural exchange that work in both directions. In immigrant letters that appear in the novel a mixture of English and German gives evidence: for example strike breakers, who were often poor black workers were called "blacklegs," or in German-American "Pläckling" (Meinecke 1996: 176–177).

Assmann journeys through towns bearing names that reflect their early German settlement, creating, as it were, a kind of alternative German landscape. Assmann's journey is driven not only by historical research, but also by his search for love. The novel begins with him courting a Native American woman of German descent. She accompanies him when he continues his journey, but his research and her wish to continue her life in Texas bring them to a parting of ways. After most of his journey has taken place in the Southern states of Texas and Louisiana, Assmann drives north to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, where he researches the Pennsylvania Dutch. Of course for an historian this is an incredible opportunity to observe people who mostly still live in a way similar to that of 100 or 200 years ago. Assmann falls in love with a young Amish girl, but the cultural gap seems too big to even try and cross it. Whether Assmann's failed love affairs are similar to Sal's short relationship with Terry in *On the Road* is not important; Assmann is an historian who is probably aware of the more recent connections between Germany and the US through Beat literature or pop-culture. He makes the road trip through America to develop a deeper understanding of this connection. The immigrant voices, to which there is no reference in the narrative, are part of this process. Assmann leaves the Amish at the beginning of the Columbus year 1992, in search as it now seems of Native American history during the colonization of North America. The book ends with the historical anecdote of Martin Waldseemüller's map of the new world.

## Conclusion

Burroughs is surely the main influence on German Beat literature, most of all through his cut-up techniques. He is also the most European author of the core Beats as he lived in Europe for a long time and clearly knows his Beckett, Kafka, and Proust. Burroughs had an especially close connection to the German group around Weissner and Udo Breger, as did a Beat associate like Brion Gysin. Weissner's assertion that Burroughs is not Beat is grounded in this European perspective as is the view of Charles Bukowski held by Jörg Fauser. Burroughs, in other words, is being claimed as much for Europe as America.

An evident connected interest for the writers under discussion is music, as indeed it was for Kerouac, Ginsberg, and other US Beats. Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, for instance, wanted his poetry to resemble pop songs—*Westwärts* starts with the lyrics of the song "Plane, Too" by Loudon Wainwright III. Thomas Meinecke, as noted, has worked as a DJ and musician. Jörg Fauser composed many songs for Achim Reichel. Various of Wondratschek's poems have been set to music. The beat of music that is essential to US Beat is also an essential part of German Beat. More generally references to Beat

authors and Beat texts can be found frequently in the texts by these German authors. Brinkmann has his title poem in *Westwärts* make a telling reference both to Kerouac and to Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra": "Sunflowers and express trains, which race through dark plains, remind me of American poetry. / This is dedicated to Jack Kerouac" (Brinkmann 2005: 78).

In all these respects Beat in Germany has sought to establish directions of its own imaginative making. Collaborations and friendships have been of prime importance. It is the way these German Beats worked together and outside of established publishing houses that has made them stand out and risk the suspicion and often hostility of the literary establishment. To summarize their approach we might turn to an explanation from Jürgen Ploog:

Correct, I had cut-up a text by him [Claude Pèlieu]. We called it collaboration. Carl Weissner sent me a text, I took one of mine, and so a new one was created that I sent back to Carl, who again did something new with it. Look, these are structural events that are interesting because they contain something, which wasn't expected in the first place and they stay somehow undefined. It expects the reader, to travel along on this unknown map. [...] Without thinking, reading is impossible.

Ploog 2016<sup>15</sup>

### Notes

- 1 All translations are by the author. The term "generation without good-bye" ("Generation ohne Abschied") stems from the German author Wolfgang Borchert (1921–1947).
- 2 The book *The Holy Barbarians* (1959) by Lawrence Lipton was already translated and published in Germany in 1960 and got a broad recognition. On its influence and the reception of the early Beats cf. Charis Goer 2015.
- 3 Original: "Als Buch? Das hier? Sehe ich nicht. Solche Meldungen sind den Eingeborenen daheim eher unangenehm. Erstens, wegen des radikalkabarettistischen Ansatzes, der die meisten stimmungsmäßig überfordert. Zweitens, weil mein Produkt stilistisch um Klassen besser ist als die Erzeugnisse der Konkurrenz, und das gilt automatisch als affig."
- 4 Original: "Ein Jahr reicht, um hier Wurzeln zu schlagen. Man flucht über die Zustände und vertraut darauf, dass sie die Stadt nicht vollends herunterwirtschaften. Irgendwie kommt man zurecht, also bleibt man da. [...] Außerdem, habe ich hier nicht ganz gutes Zeug geschrieben? Wenn ich abergläubisch wäre, würde ich mich nicht vom Fleck rühren."
- 5 Original: "Ich werde gelegentlich »Beatdichter« genannt, dabei bin ich weit davon entfernt, die Voraussetzungen dafür zu erfüllen. Schon weil ich kein Amerikaner bin. Beats sind im besten Sinn Bohemiens, sie leben in den Tag hinein, schreiben aber verdammt gute Texte dabei. Burroughs passte nicht in dieses Schema, er war aber anders, eher europäisch, was hierzulande niemand wahrhaben will. Sehr überlegt und sehr belesen. Auch bei der Anwendung der Cut-up-Methode behielt er die 100-prozentige Kontrolle, indem er die Texte am nächsten Tag prüfte und wegwarf, wenn sie nichts taugten. Burroughs hielt künstlerisch auch immer Distanz zu den Beats. Ich habe die literarische Herangehensweise zwar übernommen, soweit ich es konnte, aber das Lebensgefühl bekommt man nur, wenn man eine Zeitlang an der Lower Eastside gelebt hat, und das habe ich nicht. Ein Lebensgefühl entsteht nur durch Erfahrung. Es geht darum, wie oft jemand auf die Schnauze gefallen ist, was es bedeutet, wieder hochzukommen. Es geht um die Begegnung mit dem Tod oder der Liebe oder darum, wie sich jemand verhält, wenn er eins in die Fresse kriegt. Das prägt die Sicht auf Welt und auf Menschen. Wofür stehst du, was ist deine Sicht? Erzähl sie mir. Darum geht es in der Lyrik, nicht darum, Worte herumzuschieben oder schöne Sätze zu machen."
- 6 Original: "Jürgen Ploog flog damals noch. Und wann immer New York auf dem Flugplan stand, meldete er sich bei Burroughs; erkundigte sich, ob er Zeit und Lust für ein Treffen hätte. Diesen Abend im November 1981 verbrachten wir zu dritt. Wir aßen und tranken, erzählten uns was, spazierten im Bunker auf und ab; machten vielleicht Schießübungen mit dem Blasrohr, die Zielscheibe stand rechts hinten."
- 7 The whole passage in German: "Was ist mit den "finsteren" Fantasien?/ Was ist mit dem Anfang?/ ("Ticket To Ride?")/ Romanze: Mein Schwanz (Penis) in Deine Fut (Vagina),/ "just a perfect day." Ist das nicht Leidenschaft,/ ein Dach blau anzustreichen/ und darunter zu wohnen?/ Warum schließt du die Augen, westwärts?/ Warum brichst du zusammen, westwärts?/ Ist die Sonne größer als der Fuß, wo/ sie erscheint?"

- 8 Brinkmann reflects on this in *Rom, Blicke*. See also Schillo and Prikker 1981.
- 9 To pay for the photo prints Brinkmann had to sell his first edition of Arno Schmidt's *Zettel's Traum* (cf. Brinkmann 2005: 334).
- 10 Original: "Es sind Gedichte. Auch alle Fragen machen weiter, wie alle Antworten weitermachen. Der Raum macht weiter. Ich mache die Augen auf und sehe auf ein weißes Stück Papier."
- 11 Fauser and Weissner give no sources. The quote by Bukowski is very probably based on a personal conversation with Weissner, but one also finds similar phrases in his work. Whether the quote attributed to Grass is real is hard to tell. It appears in the introduction by Weissner as well as in the poem. It could be from a poem, but it is also possible that they invented it. They definitely give no hint from where they took it.
- 12 Original: "Geistig hatte ich jedoch nie gesünder gelebt, seit ich als Entertainer mein Brot verdiente. Endlich schrieb ich auch für die Leute, die mir die Haare schnitten und das Bier zapften, meine Steuern eintrrieben und mit meinen Daten die Computer fütterten. Zum ersten Mal, seit ich schrieb, hatte ich wieder das Gefühl, auch zu denen zu gehören, die all die Arbeiten verrichteten, vor denen ich mich erfolgreich gedrückt hatte [...]. Wenn Schriftsteller nur noch für Leute schrieben, die selber vom Tintenklecksen lebten, dann schrieben sie totes Zeug."
- 13 In the opening talk of the Ingeborg Bachmann prize 2013 Michael Köhlmeier remembered Jörg Fauser and talked about rumors that Fauser's death was not an accident. Fauser was doing research about the connections between drug mafia, German politics, and industry. According to a source Fauser was thrown out of a moving car on the autobahn. It would have been a death fitting for one of Fauser's characters. The speech of Köhlmeier can be found at [http://archiv.bachmannpreis.orf.at/bachmannpreis.eu/presse/tddl2013/koehlmeier\\_rede.pdf](http://archiv.bachmannpreis.orf.at/bachmannpreis.eu/presse/tddl2013/koehlmeier_rede.pdf).
- 14 The text has a reference to the first victim of right extremism after the reunification. In April 1991 Jorge Gomondai was pushed in front of a tram in Dresden and died a few days later due to his injuries. Especially in East Germany the problem of the concentration of right-wing extremism has been grossly mishandled by German authorities since the reunification. One result was a series of murders and terror attacks against people of foreign descent over about a decade by the so-called NSU. Another result is that certain areas in Eastern Germany should be avoided by people of color and that cities like Dresden and Leipzig have to regularly endure demonstrations against refugees by PEGIDA and other neo-fascist movements.
- 15 Original: "Stimmt, ich hatte einen Text von ihm zerschnitten. Wir nannten das Kollaboration. Carl Weissner schickte mir einen Text, ich nahm einen von mir, und so entstand ein neuer Text, den ich wiederum an Carl zurückschickte, der wieder etwas Neues daraus machte. Sehen Sie, das sind strukturelle Ereignisse, die interessant sind, weil sie etwas enthalten, was ursprünglich nicht zu erwarten war und auch etwas unbestimmt bleiben. Es setzt beim Leser voraus, dass er auf dieser unbekanntem Landkarte mitreist. [...] Ohne Denken ist lesen unmöglich."

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