


INTRODUCTION: SCENES OF CLOSE READING

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This special issue of *German Life and Letters* brings together former students and colleagues of Andrew Webber to celebrate his contribution to German Studies — and its many resonances beyond — on the occasion of his retirement in summer 2026. In dialogue with various aspects of his scholarship, contributors illuminate the breadth and depth of Webber's work, which ranges from his landmark study of the *Doppelgänger* to his most recent co-authored monograph on the films of Christian Petzold, from his central involvement with the Digital Critical Edition of Arthur Schnitzler to projects on urban cultural studies and which, methodologically, encompasses unique perspectives that draw on Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin, gender, queer and performance theories; on art history and film criticism. One thread that runs through Webber's wide-ranging research is its focus on the material at hand through practices of careful close reading. This special issue pays homage to this critical practice in Webber's own work while drawing out its wider implications for German Studies today. To this end, the volume is thematically organised around acts of close reading, whether of literary or filmic texts, that are staged as acts of looking and showing. Close reading, then, takes place on various 'Schauplätze', to cite a term used by Freud as well as Benjamin that is central to Webber's thinking. That is, we would like to draw attention to 'scenes' of critical engagement which take shape in the performative dynamic of reading itself. The focus of the articles gathered here ranges from nineteenth-century literature via literary modernism and psychoanalytic methodology to twenty-first-century literature and film, echoing Webber's varied and extensive interests in these fields. They also respond to his sustained contribution to critical method. Given that Freud's 'Schauplätze' are as much about the unseen as they are about the seen, close reading here constitutes a politics and ethics of 'parapraxis', of the ways in which careful analysis enables understanding of the distortions in the field of vision and text, while being prone itself to the Freudian slips and slipperiness of signification. This special issue pays homage to Webber's work as a practice of attentiveness, a form of lived collegial and pedagogical sociability, sometimes even engendering a 'sociability of style' in the sense

of a 'site of encounter and relation', as Polly Dickson calls it in her article on the 'Hoffmannesque'.

Our introduction sets out some of the 'Schauplätze' of Webber's close reading, focusing on three key publications: *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (1996), *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography* (2008) and *Screening Work: The Films of Christian Petzold* (2024), the latter co-authored with Stephan Hilpert. We each trace the concerns of one of these studies while undertaking a personal close reading that shows how Webber's work has informed and inspired our own thinking about text and image, body and space, history, memory and materiality.

DOUBLE DANCES (LUCIA RUPRECHT)

Webber's modes of close reading are shaped less by the tradition of British scholars like I. A. Richards, William Empson and later F. R. Leavis, who established the term in Cambridge in the field of English literature,¹ than by Germanic and more generally continental approaches, by the associative reading practices of Freud and post-Freudian thinkers. A passage from *The Doppelgänger*, which lays the groundwork for the kinds of psychoanalytically inclined readings that follow, seems to have relevance for Webber's work also beyond this foundational contribution:

As is so often the case with psychoanalytic work, much of the reading will turn on close attention to the letter, not least to what is apparently unlikely, what is at the edge or under the surface of the text but no less constitutive for that. The texts will be read, in other words, for traces of 'Textentstellung', with a sort of critical double vision, split between direct and oblique focuses; read for the ways in which they double-talk to the reader.²

While close reading might not always be concerned with the double-talk that suits the case histories of the *Doppelgänger* so well, its attention to the unexpected and the marginal remains a strong motivation both in Webber's work and in the contributions in this special issue. The concept of textual displacement or 'dislocation'³ points out the deconstructive ethics of Webber's readings, sustaining an ongoing dynamic of meaning making and unmaking that is committed to '[t]aking care in interpretation'.⁴

¹ See Joseph North, *Literary Criticism: A Concise Political History* (Harvard University Press, 2017).

² Andrew J. Webber, *The Doppelgänger: Double Visions in German Literature* (Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 55.

³ Andrew Webber, *Sexuality and the Sense of Self in the Works of Robert Musil and Georg Trakl* (Modern Humanities Research Association, 1990), p. 19.

⁴ Andrew J. Webber, "'Good Work': Speed, Slowness and Taking Care in Christian Petzold's *Barbara*", in *Time in German Literature and Culture, 1900–2015: Between Acceleration and Slowness*, ed. by Anne Fuchs and J. J. Long (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 173–88 (p. 182).

Acknowledging dancerly moves in Webber's critical language, such as when he writes that his readings 'turn *on* close attention to the letter',⁵ and his responsiveness to how bodies negotiate space, not least in film, I would like to think through some of the leads from *The Doppelgänger* in terms of dance. The following is a compact close reading of choreographer Marco Goecke's work *Midnight Raga*, which was created for Nederlands Dans Theater II and premiered at Zuiderstrandtheater in The Hague on 30 March 2017, starring dancers Alexander Anderson and Guido Dutilh.⁶ More specifically, my close reading plays with the figure of the double as figuration not only of visual, but also of movement compulsion, and of the latter's potential physical resolutions. If Webber has amply shown that there is certainly a 'characteristic visuality'⁷ of Doppelgänger texts, Goecke delivers a Doppelgänger choreography, making manifest the performative quality of literary stagings of doubling while also adding his own twist to the paradigm.

It goes without saying that the ten-minute *Midnight Raga*, which Goecke created '*on and for*' the two dancers,⁸ forms a very different case history of the double than the texts (and films) that are under scrutiny in *The Doppelgänger*. In contrast to the elaborate scaffolding of narrative literature and film, this dance represents an extreme condensation that does not come with any 'interpretative framework' and so puts the reader in the position of the more-or-less erring analyst.⁹ A further complication arises when we ask what it actually means to stay close to the letter if the object of study is dance; and, beyond this, what might be the equivalent of 'Textentstellung' in dancing?¹⁰ Dance plays out, with and through the bodies that are both repressed and given shape by words, and renders three-dimensional that which in film is confined to the two dimensions of the screen. Dance might be called the performance artist alter ego of literary and filmic media;¹¹ to some extent, dancing is always also the alter ego of choreography, a manifest performance of bodies that never keep exactly to their latent choreographic script. Dance gestures rather than speaks; it moves rather than tells. Its critical 'reading' demands associative awareness and playfulness, which are unavoidably subjective, but such subjective associations also gain shareability when they are explained

⁵ Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 55, italics mine.

⁶ Marco Goecke is currently artistic director and resident choreographer at Theater Basel, and associate choreographer at Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT). NDT II is NDT's company for emerging artists, of which Anderson and Dutilh were members in 2017. My reading is based on a recording of the premiere. For a publicly available video recording, see <<https://vimeo.com/466496055>> [accessed 6 April 2026].

⁷ Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 3.

⁸ 'Guido Dutilh on *Midnight Raga*', *Nederlands Dans Theater*, n.d. <<https://www.ndt.nl/en/agenda/smoke-and-mirrors-2/>> [accessed 6 April 2026], italics mine.

⁹ Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 330.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 318.

through movement analysis. I propose that *Midnight Raga* can be read as a danced statement with regard to the literary or filmic double on the level of intermedial conversation, but also in the sense of a contemporary performative engagement with the trope of the double as a figure of return, 'resisting temporal change by stepping out of time and then stepping back in as revenant'.¹²

However, in *Midnight Raga*, it is not a stepping but a slipping back in, when Dutilh slides on stage from the left to take his position, at first on his own, at its centre. Ravi Shankar's Raga 'Puriya-Dhanashri/Gat in Sawarital' begins to play as Dutilh enters his first posture, a medium-wide stance with the left foot pointing stage right, while his right foot and his torso are turned towards the audience and his arms start to gesticulate in angular fashion. The stance is very soon broken up by a rapid dis- and replacement of the position, and a weight shift towards the left leg that frees the right leg to begin ornamental moves. A very quick pace is set, which will continue throughout the piece. While at the beginning, more stable stances of the legs allow for more agitated arm gestures, simultaneous (not synchronous) movements of arms and legs soon follow, among them a brief walk forwards and backwards, executed with the dancer's back to the audience, his knees bent and his hips shifting left and right in fast succession, duck-style, while his equally bent arms maintain their position framing the upper body, the right one above the head, with one flat hand directed against its crown, the left one held akimbo, with the hand pointing to the left side of the body at the height of the midriff (this will be repeated together with Anderson later, a little less pronouncedly, with the two facing each other). These descriptions cover a fraction of the moves that happen during the first minute of the choreography.

After about two and a half minutes, Dutilh exits. The light is turned off and on again and Anderson appears centre stage, for his solo sequence that is of roughly equal length and echoes the style of Dutilh's while also looking distinctly personalised. When the Raga ends and Etta James's 'I'd Rather Go Blind' sets in for the second half of the piece, Dutilh joins Anderson, re-entering the stage from the left. Both wear socks, their trousers are made of heavy blue silk, and their upper bodies are naked. The change-over to the second soundtrack marks a caesura in the piece. The frantic pace stops as the two dancers stand in wide-legged, medium-deep squats, their arms with bent elbows held closely at their upper bodies, pointing in front of them towards the audience while forming two sides of a square, their torsos slowly moving left and right, holding the arm position, heads aligned with their spines, eyes gazing downwards. This is a sequence of decisive placement, both in the sense of the aligned structure within the individual pose and the alignment of the two bodies next to each other (still with some distance) on stage. Their movements are in synchronicity with one another,

¹² Ibid., p. 10.

and also rhythmically match the first guitar notes of James's song. Once her voice sets in, the dancers meet lined up in close proximity, Anderson behind Dutilh. A now quick-again *pas de deux* unfolds, the choreography of which is made up of synchronous movement, often performed with one dancer positioned slightly diagonally behind the other. There are also sequences where the two dance with, rather than next to, each other, or where one dancer conducts a form of intervention on the body of the other, as for example when Anderson, standing behind Dutilh, places his head in a series of small staccato moves on the contour made up of Dutilh's arm and shoulder, both facing the audience: we are reminded perhaps of Egon Schiele's *Doppel-Selbstbildnis* of 1915 as well as his other self-portraits. Webber writes that Schiele's 'self-seeing doubles stare out of the canvas, beholding the beholder', implicating the 'viewer in their ambiguous, double gaze'.¹³ The rapid pace of Goecke's choreography hardly allows for sustained moments of staring, but the pronounced abruptness of its moves on a restricted site implicates the audience in a powerful psycho-physical relationality.

There are further moments of intervention, of which two stand out for their association with an exceptional calm that is uncharacteristic of Goecke's signature, a mechanical, nervous and ostensibly compulsive mode of choreography. This is when Anderson places his hands softly yet decisively on Dutilh's shoulders from behind, towards the beginning of their duo, as if to quieten him down, and when Dutilh in turn performs this gesture, touching Anderson's shoulders as the duo ends. The latter instance of the gesture has the effect of quietening down and bringing to an end the entire piece, leading to a repetition of the earlier squat-sequence, now performed to the slowed-down finale of James's song, and closing with a choreographed head-bow by Anderson and Dutilh that marks the piece's ending. If Webber writes of the *Doppelgänger* that he is '[d]ivided between person and persona', thereby creating 'scenes which may be parodic play or in deadly earnest',¹⁴ then we detect a hint of this specific condition in the choreographed bow, where bowing and taking applause normally mark the switch from embodying a role to being a performer (there is this kind of applause-taking too, after a black-out). We also sense in Goecke's gestural spasms of auto-affection, with the performers' hands moving towards and away from their own bodies in repetitive strain, as well as in the echoes of such gestures once the dancers turn towards each other, the '[p]leasure and unpleasure, desire and terror' that Webber locates in his corpus of texts.¹⁵ When looking at Anderson's and Dutilh's facial expressions of exertion but also of almost rapturous inwardness, we realise, finally, that their focus on staying within their score, or on staying synchronous with

¹³ Ibid., p. 321.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid.

each other, is hyper intense.¹⁶ If their synchronicity reminds us of Webber's *mise-en-abyme* that 'serves to repeat and so affirm *ad infinitum* the identity' for which figures of the double stand, but that also casts 'the sign of identity into [...] nonentity', then Anderson's and Dutilh's dancing still remains unrepeatably individual, in spite of their virtuosic technique. Their doubling of each other does not, therefore, seem 'abysmal or groundless', as is the case in the literature of Romanticism, but rather opens up living potential within a compulsive script.¹⁷

The gesture that embodies this living potential most beautifully is the hands-placed-on-shoulders gesture. Punctuating the speed of the rest of the choreography, it serves as an ever-so-fleeting reminder to slow down amid the piece's rapture and terror, articulating as it does an instance of care and relief. Among the many moments of twinning, doubling and shadowing in *Midnight Raga*, the gesture of a healing touch may recall what Webber describes as 'the double in its original benevolent aspect, as "protective spirit" and narcissistic supplement to the self's wishes'.¹⁸ This gesture's extraordinariness derives from the feeling that it introduces a different register to the choreography and thereby also goes beyond the choreographic. It moves us precisely because its tenderness is not part of the technicity of Goecke's vocabulary, but could happen in an everyday setting, as an act of love.

SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGES (CAROLIN DUTTLINGER)

Benjamin's unfinished magnum opus has become known as the *Passagen-Werk*, though its author called it the *Passagenarbeit*.¹⁹ At first sight, its structure of self-contained thematic *Konvolute* seems sprawling and fragmented, and yet these individual parts are interconnected, part of a configuration of quotations and commentary through which Benjamin tries to capture both the city of Paris and the period (the nineteenth century) which it embodies. This work provides the cue for Webber's 2008 monograph *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography*. Indeed, the subtitle of Webber's Introduction, 'capital of the twentieth century?', which he had originally proposed as the title of the entire book, playfully references Benjamin's 1938 essay 'Berlin, Hauptstadt des 19. Jahrhunderts', a condensed offshoot of the *Passagen-Werk*. In his Introduction, Webber outlines the shape of his own study:

¹⁶ Dutilh writes in the programme leaflet on the rehearsal process: 'Creating with Marco is physically very intense and requires a lot of brainwork. The choreography takes shape movement by movement and he then lets you perform it as fast as possible.' 'Guido Dutilh on *Midnight Raga*'.

¹⁷ Webber, *The Doppelgänger*, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁹ See *Walter Benjamin: Gesammelte Briefe*, ed. by the Theodor W. Adorno Archiv, 6 vols (Suhrkamp, 1995–2000), III, 1925–1930, ed. by Christoph Gödde and Henri Lonitz (1997), p. 387 and *passim*.

the book will have something of the design of the *Passagen-Werk*, where different sites and their histories at once maintain a specific character and intersect with, turn or return upon, others. It is a spatio-temporal mapping exercise that, following the allegorical principle, seeks to figure the continuities of cultural developments and also to respect their discontinuities, their fragmentations.²⁰

If, as we have already noted, Webber's practice of close reading is a matter of careful attention, then it also has another dimension, namely that of mimetic emulation, whereby the examined works are allowed to deeply infuse the critical response at the level of form and content, of language, style and structure. The *Berlin* book is a supreme example of this type of performative engagement, for it is modelled not just on the *Passagen-Werk* but on Benjamin's writings more generally. Webber employs some key terms from Benjamin's urban vocabulary as they feature in both *Berliner Chronik* and *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, such as 'Hof', 'Markthalle', 'Weichbild', 'Bannraum' and, most crucially, the Freudian 'Schauplatz', which is here overlaid with a Benjaminian inflection. Throughout the book, Webber's close readings take their cue from Benjamin's allegorical method, which he defines as a way of 'speaking otherwise': of time through space, for instance, of the public through the private, or of life through death.²¹ Rather than searching for meaning 'at the edge or under the surface' of a text, then, allegorical readings advance this methodology to use the material at hand to look both at and beyond it. As Webber elaborates, in Benjaminian allegoresis, 'the turning towards the other can indeed become a form of *Entstellung*, at once a removal to another place and a disfigurement and disfiguration'.²² There is a latent violence inherent in such a reading practice, one which mirrors the violence inscribed into the sites of the city, but again also a creative sense of dislocation, *Ent-stellung*. In the *Berlin* book, allegoresis thus gives close reading a new inflection; it's a way of looking both at and beyond the material at hand by forging new constellations of meaning which, while melancholy at times, can also be playful and subversive.

In the following, I will apply this method to one of Benjamin's more obscure Berlin texts, namely to a short piece of journalistic writing. Though Benjamin's journalism may seem less 'weighty' than his longer, academic projects, it in fact provides unique perspectives on issues with which Benjamin grapples elsewhere in his oeuvre.

The article 'Unterirdischer Gang in der Tiergartenstraße' appeared in April 1930 in the weekly magazine *Die Literarische Welt*. Its focus is an art exhibition hosted in Paul Graupe's art gallery in Tiergartenstraße 4,

²⁰ Andrew J. Webber, *Berlin in the Twentieth Century: A Cultural Topography*, paperback edn (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 51.

featuring two contemporary artists: the illustrator Rolf von Hoerschelmann (1885–1947) and the painter Otto A. Hirth (1899–1969). At first sight, Benjamin notes, their styles are diametrically opposed. Hoerschelmann's drawings of locations in Germany, Paris and Croatia have an 'eigensinnige topographische Präzision, die da sagt: Hier bin ich gewesen'.²³ While Hoerschelmann's images are all about space — Benjamin singles out his ability 'Ort und Stelle schwarz auf weiß nach Hause zu tragen' — Hirth's 'baroque' paintings evoke a different time. His ornate labyrinths testify to an 'echter allegorischer Eigensinn', the 'Geste des barocken Menschen, der sich das Kinderantlitz als Maske vorhielt, um desto schwermütiger seine unergründlichen Spiele zu spielen'. As Benjamin adds by way of chiasmic contrast, 'in Hoerschelmanns Sachen lebt Kinderernst' (*WuN*, xiv.1, p. 222).

Summing up the artists' complementary perspectives, Benjamin concludes that 'genius loci und genius saeculi haben die Erde unter sich aufgeteilt' (*WuN*, xiv.1, p. 223). Webber echoes this point almost verbatim and even takes it one step further when he notes that in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*, 'the *genius loci* is at the same time a *genius saeculi*'.²⁴ Indeed, such linkages (or slippages) between the temporal and the spatial occur throughout Benjamin's writings, and particularly in his Berlin texts. Though the 'Tiergartenstraße' review precedes *Berliner Chronik* by two years, it already anticipates key features of this approach. It centres on the literal 'Schau-platz' of Graupe's gallery, a space for both showing and viewing, and its ability to hold different modes of representation in suspension. However, Benjamin's initial focus is not actually on the artworks but on their surroundings. As he writes at the start of his review:

Es gibt in Berlin wieder eine schöne Ausstellung, mit anderen Worten ein paar Säle, in denen es still und friedlich ist und wo man sich tagelang aufhalten kann, ohne einer lebenden Seele zu begegnen. Gäbe es nichts in diesen Sälen als die Ruhe und den schönen Blick auf den Tiergarten, den man von Paul Graupes Fenstern aus hat — der Aufenthalt darin wäre an sich schon empfehlenswert. (*WuN*, xiv.1, p. 221)

This is the fourth review of a Berlin exhibition which Benjamin publishes within the space of two years. His preceding three pieces single out ingenious display strategies intended to induce shock or surprise. In a review of the 'Gesunde Nerven' exhibition, which appeared just two months earlier, also in *Die Literarische Welt*, he declares: 'echte Darstellung drängt die Kontemplation zurück' (*WuN*, xiv.1, p. 219). In the

²³ *Walter Benjamin: Werke und Nachlaß: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. by Christoph Göttsche, Henri Lonitz and Thomas Rahn, 22 vols (Suhrkamp, 2008–), xiv.1, *Texte über Städte, Berichte, Feuilletons*, ed. by Bernhard Veitenheimer with Klaus Reichert (2021), p. 222. Subsequent references to this edition will be given in the text as *WuN* followed by volume and page number.

²⁴ Webber, *Berlin*, p. 62.

'Tiergartenstraße' review, a very different mood prevails. The understated opening focuses not on the exhibited artworks but on the surrounding spaces: the grand, deserted rooms, which are 'still and friedlich', granting beautiful views of the adjacent Tiergarten. Here, the 'Schauplatz' thus 'becomes [...] the spectacle itself',²⁵ but even this description is an overstatement. Benjamin's opening lines are not about spectacle; indeed, they are less about seeing than about dwelling. His account is permeated by a sense of nostalgia, a melancholy yearning to linger in these rooms for days on end. This longing can be read as an oblique reflection of Benjamin's own situation at the time as a freelance journalist, always on the move, on the lookout for the next commission. But there is also a more personal side to these remarks. Tiergartenstraße 4 was only a fifteen-minute stroll from Magdeburger Platz 4, where Benjamin was born in 1892. Both houses were part of the Tiergartenviertel, Berlin's premier residential area. In 'Tiergarten', the opening piece of the so-called 'Stefan-Exemplar' of *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, Benjamin recalls 'die Friese und Architrave der Tiergartenvillen' before taking us inside one of these grand houses to evoke the child's view of the windows and staircase (*WuN*, XI.1, pp. 259–60). But it's not just the proximity of the two addresses which must have struck Benjamin. The gallery owner Paul Graupe was also an art dealer, a profession he shared with Benjamin's late father. Emil Benjamin lost his fortune in the hyperinflation of the early 1920s and died in 1926; by the time Benjamin wrote his review, the bourgeois lifestyle of his childhood was a mere memory and the villa in the Tiergartenviertel a temporary dwelling place rather than a permanent home.

Paul Graupe's business, by contrast, really took off in the late 1920s when he expanded from antiquarian books and graphic art to fine art. In 1927, he started to rent the first floor of Tiergartenstraße 4, a space which also included a large and handsome auction hall, where Graupe sold some major art collections together with the art dealer Hermann Ball. Their auctions attracted international attention, with adverts regularly appearing in *Le Figaro*.²⁶ In Tiergartenstraße 4, then, the 'Schauplatz' of the art gallery was also a capitalist marketplace, and it is this second purpose which acted as the bridge between the Weimar years and the Third Reich. Though Graupe was Jewish, he was able to continue trading with the special permission of the 'Reichskulturkammer'. Between 1933 and 1937, he was involved in the liquidation of major Jewish art collections and libraries, including those of Max Alsberg, Max Silberberg, Rosa Oppenheimer and Oscar Wassermann. After his business was Aryanised in 1936, Graupe emigrated to Paris via Switzerland, and from there to the United States;

²⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

²⁶ These included artworks owned by Prince Friedrich Leopold von Preußen, Oscar Hudschinsky and Erich von Goldschmidt-Rothschild. See Annette Hinz-Wessels, *Tiergartenstraße 4: Schaltzentrale der nationalsozialistischen 'Euthanasie'-Morde* (Chr. Links, 2015), pp. 30–31.

though he founded another art dealership, he was unable to revive his earlier success.²⁷

Highlighting the etymological link between the (baroque) court, the 'Hof', and the 'Gerichtshof', a place of tribunal and judgement, Webber describes how 'the baroque palaces of the Wilhelminian era are appropriated for new regimes to hold court'.²⁸ The villa in Tiergartenstraße 4 is a poignant example.²⁹ It was purchased in 1909 by the Jewish entrepreneur Georg Liebermann (brother of the painter Max Liebermann); after he died in 1926, he left the house to his children Eva Köbener and Hans Liebermann. By this time, parts of the building were rented to various businesses, including Graupe's gallery and auction house. After 1933 the villa was requisitioned by the Nazi government and used by various groups, such as the SA-Obergruppe III. In 1940 the heirs were forced to sell it for a sum far below its actual value. In the same year, the villa became the headquarters of the National Socialists' 'euthanasia' programme, which resulted in the murder of 70,000 physically and mentally disabled children and adults as well as of people with mental illnesses — though the true number of victims is likely to be much higher. This programme of mass extermination and the secretive organisation in charge of it, the Gemeinnützige Stiftung für Anstaltspflege, were both known under the cypher 'T4', after the headquarters in Tiergartenstraße 4. The villa was badly damaged during an allied bombing raid in 1944 and demolished in the 1950s. Today, the site is adjacent to the Berliner Philharmonie, which was opened in 1963; the memorial and information centre, T4, which commemorates the victims of the Nazis' 'euthanasia' murders, was installed at the edge of Tiergarten in 2014.

In the Preface to the last version of *Berliner Kindheit um neunzehnhundert*, Benjamin speculates that the recounted images might be able 'in ihrem Innern spätere geschichtliche Erfahrung zu präformieren' (*WuN*, XI.1, p. 502). His exhibition review can be read in a similar light. The 'unterirdischer Gang' evoked in the title is not explained until the very end of the piece when Benjamin, elaborating on his comparison of the two artists, writes: 'Dies ist der unterirdische Gang, der von Hoerschelmans Bildern zu Hirths Phantasien führt. Vergessen wir aber darüber nicht, wie bequem sich's durch eine Tür von einem dieser Säle in den andern spazieren läßt' (*WuN*, XIV.1, p. 223). In this closing sentence Benjamin styles himself as a flaneur, inviting his readers to join him on his leisurely stroll through the gallery space. But there is another journey which is evoked, namely that through the 'subterranean passage' which connects the work of the two artists. It's a phrase which echoes the *Passagen-Werk*

²⁷ See Patrick Golenia, Kristina Kratz-Kessemeier and Isabelle Le Masne de Chermont, *Paul Graupe (1881–1953): Ein Berliner Kunsthändler zwischen Republik, Nationalsozialismus und Exil* (Böhlau, 2015).

²⁸ Webber, *Berlin*, p. 68.

²⁹ For the following summary I am indebted to Hinz-Wessels, *Tiergartenstraße 4*.

on which Benjamin had embarked three years earlier and where ‘Passage’ is understood ‘in both spatial and temporal terms’,³⁰ but this image also applies to his writing more generally, his way of drawing attention to the subterranean connections between different objects, times and places. As Webber notes, the Benjaminian ‘Schauplatz’ is a scene ‘for structures and relationships both evident and subliminal’.³¹ In the case of Tiergartenstraße 4, which became one of the key sites of Nazi mass murder, these relationships take on an unbearable poignancy. Even as he revels in the peace and quiet of the gallery, then, Benjamin remains alive to the ‘subterranean passages’ which connect this space to other times and places, in his writing and beyond.

BUSY BEES (DORA OSBORNE)

The topos of the ‘Schauplatz’ serves as a stage for the acts of close reading that, as we have seen, are fundamental to Webber’s scholarship. Understood, as Carolin Duttlinger outlines above, as ‘a space for both showing and viewing’, it reveals the didactic impulse of his method, whereby looking at the text is always also showing what can be gleaned from it and done with it. The pivotal significance of the visual, moreover, relates to the way Webber’s mode of textual engagement is, as Lucia Ruprecht argues, inherently intermedial. An article from 1999 on Brecht’s collaborative film *Kuhle Wampe* (1932) demonstrates, in self-reflexively and performatively Brechtian style, how images can be read and be shown to be read. ‘*Kuhle Wampe*, or How to Read a Film’ playfully repurposes Brecht’s own subtitle, ‘*oder Wem gehört die Welt?*’, to show how the ‘Schaustück of film’ is rendered a ‘certain type of Lehrstück’.³² What Webber goes on to show will be fundamental to his own work on film, which, following Brecht, is attentive to the visual medium’s ‘textualisation’³³ and, following Benjamin, to the ‘reformulat[ion] of imagery into critical text’.³⁴ Close reading for Webber is, then, performative and demonstrative, and where this implies process, it is also a form of work to be enacted on and with the text. His reading of Brecht turns on an understanding of *Kuhle Wampe* as ‘a filmwork that sets out to redefine the idea of work’, shifting away from the idea of work as product to ‘work as collective process’.³⁵ Across Webber’s

³⁰ Andrew J. Webber, ‘Introduction: Benjamin’s Passage-Work’, in *Passage-Work: Walter Benjamin between the Disciplines*, ed. by Andrew J. Webber, special issue of *Paragraph*, 32.3 (2009), pp. 265–72 (p. 267).

³¹ Webber, *Berlin*, p. 61.

³² Andrew Webber, ‘*Kuhle Wampe*, or How to Read a Film’, in *From Classical Shades to Vickers Victorious: Shifting Perspectives in British German Studies*, ed. by Steve Giles and Peter Graves (Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 171–82 (p. 171).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

scholarship, reading the text-as-work reveals its internal dynamics, that is, its various modes of operation, with psychoanalytic, dialectic or performative inflection, as mourning work, memory work, dreamwork, passage work, digging work, case work or detective work.³⁶

Webber's interest in work finds its most expansive expression to date in his monograph, co-authored with Stephan Hilpert, on the filmmaker Christian Petzold.³⁷ *Screening Work* considers the significance of work in Petzold's films, where this is understood as defining identity — what you do determines who you are — but also as increasingly precarious.³⁸ This lack of job security renders any sense of self uncertain and unstable. If, as Petzold's mentor Harun Farocki understood, commercial cinema has always refused to show the reality of working life, then Petzold is interested, Webber and Hilpert argue, in what happens after work, that is, after the workers have left the factory, possibly for good, and are forced to lead an 'itinerant, spectral' existence in the new neoliberal order.³⁹ Beyond the individual crises provoked by these socio-economic changes, the loss of the 'historical *Arbeitsgesellschaft*' signals a collapse of community equally defined by work.⁴⁰ The study draws on Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of inoperative community to think about work also in relation to communities and, against the grain of capitalist production, as 'shared process'.⁴¹

The tension between work as it is performed by the individual, in order to define them/him, and the work that might be done in and for the community, is fundamental to Petzold's 2012 feature, *Barbara*. The chapter focusing on this film in *Screening Work* reprises a single-authored article by Webber, which shows the work of close reading as an act of 'taking care'. This functions both for the good of others and to ensure any interpretation is made with caution and a critical eye.⁴² Webber's close

³⁶ See, for example, the following, all by Andrew J. Webber: 'Worst of all Possible Worlds? Ingeborg Bachmann's *Ein Ort für Zufälle*', *Austrian Studies*, 15 (2007), pp. 112–29 (p. 119 for 'mourning-work'); 'Visual Culture in the Berlin Republic: Memory Work and Arts of the Present', in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary German Politics and Culture*, ed. by Sarah Colvin (Routledge, 2014), pp. 163–77; 'Mann's Man's World: Gender and Sexuality', in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Mann*, ed. by Ritchie Robertson (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 64–83 (p. 74 for 'dream-work'); *Passage-work: Walter Benjamin between the Disciplines*, pp. 265–72; 'Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*', in *Landmarks in the German Novel (I)*, ed. by Peter Hutchinson (Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 167–82 (p. 175 for 'digging work'); 'Psychoanalysis, Homosexuality and Modernism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. by Hugh Stevens (Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 34–49 (p. 41 for casework); and *Eight German Novellas*, ed. by Andrew J. Webber (Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xix for 'detective work'. These references pinpoint uses of this work-related terminology but Webber's performance of and commentary on these different modes of work are found throughout his scholarship.

³⁷ Stephan Hilpert and Andrew J. Webber, *Screening Work: The Films of Christian Petzold* (Legenda, 2024).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–7.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴² Webber, "'Good Work'", p. 174.

reading of *Barbara* is, then, ethical in focus, considering how the film works to portray the eponymous protagonist and her compromised position in the GDR. Barbara's experience of state power renders her melancholic, an affliction that is not only spiritual but 'psycho-anatomical'.⁴³ Indeed, her 'melancholic inertia' defines her 'Haltung', which refers to her attitude, her comportment, but also to her halting gestures.⁴⁴ 'Haltung' is her response to 'the controlling apparatus of the state', which reflects its oppression, but also works as a 'stylisation' that reveals her agency even while this is subject to strict control.⁴⁵ It is in this slow mode of taking time that is proper to the task (Webber calls this 'Eigenzeit', following Helga Nowotny), that is, to Barbara's work of taking care, that she is able to do 'good work [...] under a bad regime'.⁴⁶ Webber's careful reading, staged as a pedagogical act — as educational work, or even further education, to borrow designations used elsewhere⁴⁷ — functions not only as a model for our own work with texts; it shows us how, faced with the many challenges of our present moment, we might similarly strive to do 'good work' under difficult circumstances.

In what follows, I focus on what might seem like a frivolous detail in Petzold's films, but one that might offer a further example of work being 'hidden in plain sight',⁴⁸ namely bees. Icons of work and industry, bees are venerated for their selfless occupation and ability to cooperate. They are, moreover, an 'artisanal civilisation', as Claire Preston describes, working in a manner unique among other animals, to produce 'something by a kind of craft'.⁴⁹ For their dedication to work they have been connected to 'both public *and* private virtues', associated, on the one hand, with the common good and, on the other, with introversion and contemplation.⁵⁰ However, in more recent times, the selflessness of bees has been cast in terms of the unpredictable and unthinking behaviour of the masses that threatens the 'defenceless individual'.⁵¹ The different, often contradictory cultural significance attached to bees maps onto the changing status and image of work in the industrial and post-industrial eras, suggesting their presence in Petzold's films might be worth a closer look. They might also signal a connection to the way work has been screened in historical terms, namely via Brecht's then Benjamin's reference to a factory photograph — Siemens, Krupp or AEG — if we recall Peter Behrens's honeycomb AEG logo from

⁴³ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 175–76.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 179–80.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 185–86.

⁴⁷ Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, pp. 45; 51.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁹ Claire Preston, *Bee* (Reaktion, 2006), pp. 7–8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 11, italics in the original.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1908.⁵² Moreover, bees, who notoriously work themselves to death, seem apposite emblems for Petzold's project, where, as Webber and Hilpert note, 'work is so often imbricated with mortality'.⁵³

A bee makes a striking appearance in *Die innere Sicherheit* (2000), emblazoned in cartoon form on a sweatshirt bought by protagonist Hans to keep his daughter warm as the former terrorist family flees Portugal for Germany. The garment is supposed to keep Jeanne 'clothed in normality',⁵⁴ but in fact, through this motif (which Petzold wanted to be 'entsetzlich'⁵⁵), makes her stand out. It exposes her dispossession, that is, her failure to find her place in, or a sense of belonging through, the structures of work that would ordinarily define her via her parents.⁵⁶ This dilemma is even emblematised in the motif: a bee that is, paradoxically, surfing. This connects to other references in the film to surfing — the teenage surfer Heinrich, the poster on his wall of *The Endless Summer*, a 1966 surf documentary, which 'stand[s] for extended non-working activity'⁵⁷ — but shows this activity being performed by an animal characterised by work and caricatured as a worker. Where, in Petzold, clothes 'condition the way in which identity works', this bee sweatshirt, worn so begrudgingly by Jeanne and, notably, as the family cross the border to Germany, draws attention to the way, as Webber and Hilpert argue, identity — as iterative and performative — fails to work.⁵⁸ Jeanne is shrouded in this baggy garment which conceals her true form and announces her inability 'to "pass"'.⁵⁹

The work of bees is evoked in Petzold's films both through the buzzing of insects and the striped clothes worn by a number of his protagonists — Jeanne, for example, wears a stripey top before Hans gives her the bee sweatshirt. These aural and visual elements might signal the ambivalent, even antagonistic relation to work that plays out in the various storylines. In *Barbara*, the dissident doctor wears a brown cardigan with dark stripes that has an apian look. Barbara is no worker bee, however, performing instead, as Webber argues, a careful and strategic resistance to her work as prescribed and monitored by the state. Yet, in her selfless commitment to 'good work' for her patients and in the necessary cooperation of treating them (for example, in performing a lumbar puncture on Stella), she perhaps comes close to the image of the proverbial bee: '*una apis, nulla apis*'.⁶⁰ The dilemmas she faces in relation to work are felt keenly when she

⁵² See Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, p. 5 and Preston, *Bee*, p. 105.

⁵³ Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁵ Audio commentary of Petzold with Barbara Auer included on the DVD release of the film *Die innere Sicherheit*, dir. by Christian Petzold (Germany, 2000; good!movies/Piffl Medien, 2000).

⁵⁶ Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, pp. 36; 46.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Preston, *Bee*, p. 7.

withdraws from shared spaces to, for example, the doctors' mess. Here the walls are decorated with children's pictures — possibly the work of young patients — among them a bee-like creature, available to read as an emblem of either blind conformity or relentless labour for the common good, or even both. Barbara's dilemmas intensify through André, whose allegiances are unclear. Her otherwise cautious behaviour (her 'Haltung', perhaps) begins to change when André shows her kindness and offers to cook for her. Barbara stands at the open door to his garden, poised between distrust and affection, when a bee is heard — by us, but presumably also by her. At this point Barbara remembers herself and leaves.

Bees, real and cartoon, adopt a more prominent place in Petzold's *Roter Himmel* (2023). Here the childish motif seen on Jeanne's sweatshirt, a kind of derivative *Biene Maja*, returns on a cereal packet. In place of a surfing bee, active only in leisure, is the hyperactive superhero bee: the anthropomorphised face of 'Honig Pops' wears a red cape and is accompanied by two unadorned companions.⁶¹ The cereal packet features prominently at the beginning of the film: Leon helps himself to its contents after his first sleepless night at his friend's holiday home and he invites Felix to do the same. While Leon, self-absorbed and, despite his pretensions, rather infantile, is oblivious to the fact he is taking something that does not belong to him, Felix makes a point — captured by Petzold at length — of getting a replacement, leaving the supermarket checkout to do so. With the apparently superfluous detail of the honey-flavoured cereal in its large 'Familienpackung', the bee once more signals tensions around work, here between activity and inactivity, community and solitude, selflessness and egotism.

Bees are evoked in patterns that recur in the *mise-en-scène*: the slats of the shutters, the stripey canvas of a deckchair as well as striped clothes. Felix's yellow, stripey towel emphasises his status as a relatively busy bee: he attends to the domestic work that Leon refuses to acknowledge as such and also manages to fill his portfolio with potential images for his application to art college. Nevertheless, unlike the bee that works itself to death, Felix manages to balance work and leisure, and he repeatedly slings the apian towel over his shoulder in a gesture of readiness for a well-earned beach trip, something the tortured Leon cannot be persuaded to indulge. In this sense, Felix recalls the surfing bee, even if he prefers swimming to boarding.

The film's references to bees extend to diegetic sounds of buzzing insects and the tiered wooden beehives in shot when Leon and his publisher sit in the harbour. This pastoral view connotes the pleasure of solitary contemplation associated with beekeeping as well as the unseen labour of bees gathered in the hive, but is entirely overlooked by Leon who

⁶¹ Rather than any kind of product placement, the packet seems to have been produced for the film in imitation of Kellogg's Honey Bess Pops.

wants to know only one kind of work. As Webber and Hilpert note, Leon's preoccupation prevents him from acknowledging his attraction to Nadja, and so he recalls Norbert Hanold, the protagonist of *Gradiwa*, Wilhelm Jensen's novella made famous by Freud, as well as by the Surrealists.⁶² *Roter Himmel's* connection to Surrealism might also be traced through Nadja, who evokes the eponymous protagonist of André Breton's 1928 novel. If Breton's Nadja provokes the question 'Who Am I?', then Petzold's Nadja does the same for Leon, but framed through the question of work.⁶³

The question is explored through a kind of dreamwork, where the film more broadly operates in oneiric mode. It is bracketed by a dreamlike soundtrack, 'In My Mind' by Wallners, which enters the diegesis in Nadja's whistled version, and is marked by characters' nocturnal activities as well as by Leon's inability to stay awake during the day. On the threshold between sleeping and waking, Leon is bothered by buzzing insects. While the common house fly that plagues Hanold (and features in André Masson's 1939 painting *Gradiwa*) alerts him to reality — in swatting a fly he touches the hand of the woman he has ignored for so long — for Leon, buzzing insects, including bees, might draw him back to the realm of dreams, as in Salvador Dalí's *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening* (1944). In Dalí's painting, however, the dream is triggered just a second before waking and similarly for Leon, reality intrudes. Buzzing insects seen flitting through the air take on the more menacing forms of helicopters whirring overhead and flakes of ash falling from the sky, and the provisional community is devastated by wildfires. The superhero bee, initially seen as whimsical, takes on weightier significance: on the one hand, it manifests now as the poster creature of environmental activism, on the other, it serves as a kind of caricature of Leon's helplessness in the face of impending catastrophe.

As Webber and Hilpert argue, *Roter Himmel* is interested in the possibility of living and working together before *and after* the catastrophe. The impromptu community assembled at the house is configured, they explain, as 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft' and 'Wohngemeinschaft'.⁶⁴ When Leon scouts out the local hotel for his publisher, the camera pauses on a couple of books that decorate the 'Writer's Room', one by Uwe Johnson, in whose honour it has been named, and one about the artist colony in Ahrenshoop, which Johnson visited and which is where the film is set.⁶⁵ The working and living community converge in the idea of the colony, one that might model itself

⁶² Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, p. 231.

⁶³ Webber discusses Breton's *Nadja* as case history in Andrew J. Webber, *The European Avant-Garde: 1900–1940* (Polity, 2004), pp. 202–13.

⁶⁴ Hilpert and Webber, *Screening Work*, p. 233.

⁶⁵ Hannah Willcox and Louise Curtis, 'Baltic Blank Space: Imagining the German Baltic Coast in Christian Petzold's *Jerichow* (2008) and *Roter Himmel* (2023)', *Coastal Studies & Society*, 4.2–3 (2025), pp. 162–84, doi:10.1177/26349817251351076.

on the artisanal community of bees and even strive for a more sustainable co-existence with others.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The contributions gathered here are made by scholars who, in their admiration of and indebtedness to Webber's work, represent a community. They perform acts of close reading as a tribute to his methodology, which is attentive both in the sense of paying close attention to detail — of texts, images, bodies — and of performing this gesture with great care. The articles follow various points of focus in Webber's work: loss, survival and narrative (Michael Minden on the *Novelle's* 'Falke'), performance and repetition (Polly Dickson on Hoffmann and style), attention to 'minor' forms (Anne Fuchs on Walser's 'poetics of the tiny'), the case study (Marie Kolkenbrock's re-reading of Freud's Rat-Man), hybrid forms, the grotesque and the uncanny (Elizabeth Boa on Emine Sevgi Özdamar and Elif Shafak), normativity and acts of queering (Catherine Smale on Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo's poetry), on gestures of turning (Annie Ring on Harun Farocki and Christian Petzold), violence and its repression (Katya Krylova on Adrian Goiginger's film *Der Fuchs*) and intermediality and performativity (Lawrence Alexander on Paul B. Prčićado's *Orlando: My Political Biography*). These contributions are followed by a reflection on Webber's career by Ina Linge. Together with our brief readings — of scenes of dance, urban allegoresis and work — the texts assembled in this special issue are offered in gratefulness to Andrew Webber's generosity as scholar and teacher, as supervisor, colleague and friend, in UK German Studies and beyond.