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Contemporary Ukrainian Writers as "Masters of Dialogue" in the German Literary and Media Landscape

1 Introduction

Having fled from Kyiv to Berlin in 2022, following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kateryna Mishchenko has been highly present in print media, talk shows, on digital platforms and is frequently invited to comment as a Ukrainian writer, editor and translator in exile on current events in the context of her own work.[1] A second prominent Ukrainian voice in Germany has been that of writer and journalist Katja Petrowskaja. In the following, I will discuss how their work and media presence contributes to the public debate in Germany on what has become known as the "Krieg in Europa" [war in Europe] following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and, inextricably linked to it, to memory discourses on the Holocaust and World War II. Petrowskaja, who moved to Berlin in 1999 and made a name for herself as a writer with her family history *Vielleicht Esther* (2014), has been finding herself in a role similar to that of Mishchenko in German media, making the case for Ukraine and placing it within a European historical narrative. This narrative expands German memory discourses on the Holocaust and World War II to include Eastern European experiences while questioning Soviet and contemporary imperialist Russian discourses.

Both Mishchenko and Petrowskaja can be regarded as part of an increasing number of writers and artists from Ukraine and other post-Soviet states who have found themselves exiled in Berlin since February 2022.[2] In the following I will ask how contemporary writers from Ukraine, with a focus on women authors, are contributing to a politicisation of the German literary field within a

1 Peter Neumann, in his article for the German weekly *Die Zeit*, described her as a "Meisterin des Dialogs" (master of dialogue; 13 July 2022).

2 See Egger (2023) on "Contemporary Ukrainian writers as an 'avant-garde' of exile". Both the journal article, published in *Oxford German Studies*, and this chapter are outcomes of a paper I presented at the Turku conference *Out of the USSR: Travelling Women, Travelling Memories* in February 2023. While the article discusses in how far Petrowskaja and Mishchenko could be regarded as refugees and a "vanguard" in Hannah Arendt's sense, this essay focuses on the role of various media for them and other authors, both as a mode of expression and platform to reach a wider audience.

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European context (Bourdieu 2001), and what role memory of the Holocaust and World War II may play within this process. How does their positioning in the German literary field impact on the dynamics of this field and the interaction between literature and public media? This extends to memory discourses, as "[c]ultural memory is based on communication through media" (Erll 2008, 389). I would argue that what has been described as an "Eastern turn" in German writing (Haines 2008) and has become more prominent with the Russian invasion of Ukraine is, firstly, moving memory discourses further east and, secondly, contributing to a greater presence of international politics in the literary field. While there has been an increasing presence of writers as political voices in public media and literary texts in the past two decades, this has taken on a new dynamic since 2022. At the same time, intermediality has become more prominent in the work of writers looking for adequate forms to share their experience of this war in a post-Soviet historical context. This includes, for example, the collaboration among writers, and of writers with photographers and film makers such as Oksana Karpovych. Furthermore, it is worth asking how recent publications by German authors, such as Marcel Beyer's *Die tonlosen Stimmen beim Anblick der Toten auf den Straßen von Butscha* (2023), a literary response to events in Ukraine reflecting on its own intermediality, can be placed within this context. Are these publications also pointing toward a stronger politicisation and "Eastern turn" within the German literary field in the context of the war in Ukraine? While I cannot explore the last point in further depth, some thematic links will be highlighted.

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu describes the structure of society in terms of social fields. Such fields are environments in which competition between individuals and groups takes place as a result of status competition fueled by capital. Art in general, and the literary field in particular, is interpreted by Bourdieu as a differentiated social field that is autonomous in the sense that it follows its own logic – the competition for cultural legitimation, fueled by cultural capital. Cultural capital refers to symbols, ideas and preferences that can be strategically used within a structured space of positions and their interrelations. The literary field, in our case the German literary field as part of German social structures, can thus be described as "a horizontally differentiated system that is, however, vertically differentiated internally" (Gerhards and Anheier 1989, 131). What impacts on the value of particular works in a literary field are individual cultural producers, i.e., how they claim their positions, as well as organisations and networks. While more powerful actors establish the rules within the field, protecting their positions by designating some forms of cultural capital as more valuable than others, the value of capital is also influenced by readers, critics, the book market and public visibility in other media. Such dynamics form the basis for many of the processes and logics of fields. The literary field is interconnected

with other social fields, in particular those of politics and economics, but also the media field (cf. Champagne 1999). These interconnections affect its level of autonomy. A central struggle in the literary field therefore concerns the differentiation between those authors, publishers and critics who submit to religious, political or economic constraints – to use Bourdieu's term, those who are heteronomous – from those who operate more autonomously by only responding to the literary norms and the judgements of their peers. While, according to Bourdieu, only those “autonomous” authors are regarded as writing literature, recent studies focus on how what is regarded as literature changes over time and differs across space, thus considering the role of different media to a greater extent than Bourdieu did (cf. Benson 1999; Hesmondhalgh 2006). This includes “scale shifting” in fields also in view of the impact peripheral writers may acquire over time and through interconnections with other fields (Sievers and Levitt 2020, 469).

2 Transnational Memory

The “Eastern turn” in recent German-language literature describes a surge in voices from Eastern Europe since 2000. While this is not restricted to German-Jewish writing, “a considerable number of Eastern European migrant authors of Jewish origin are currently lifting Holocaust memory in a German context to a new level” (Ortner 2017, 36; see also Müller and Garloff 2018; Ortner 2022). They write in German about historical events in former communist countries, thus expanding the German framework of memory from a national to a transnational one. This includes the exploration of interconnections between the Holocaust and the Gulag, as Timothy Snyder has done from a historian's perspective in *Bloodlands* (2010).[3] Petrowskaja's *Vielleicht Esther*[4] (2014) has been read in this context by literary scholars (Egger 2020; Eigler 2005; Lizarazu 2020). Born in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv in 1970, Petrowskaja does not remember her family's Jewishness as something given much attention in her childhood home. To some extent this re-

3 Ortner (2017), 43. Ortner's perspective thus overlaps to some extent with Snyder's in *Bloodlands*. On the other hand, Jenny Watson has pointed to the risk inherent in the “metaphorical transference of violent intent, danger and contamination onto the landscape” through Snyder's book title, which “also appeals to historical preconceptions of the region rooted in a colonial sensibility and has the potential to allow the act of killing to recede from the reaches of imagination” (Watson 2023, 626).

4 The book was translated into English under the title *Maybe Esther* in 2018. Translations of lines from Celan's poem “Todesfuge” cited by Mishchenko are taken from Weimar (1974). All other translations in this chapter are my own.

flected the official discourse in the atheist Soviet Union which excluded religious or ethnic belonging from its grand narrative of twentieth-century history and identity. In *Vielleicht Esther* the narrator thus sets out to trace the history of her Jewish ancestors through the twentieth and back into the nineteenth century, with a focus on those who fell victim to the Holocaust, in particular her great-grandmother Esther who was killed in Babyn Yar in September 1941. Babyn Yar, a ravine just outside Kyiv where one of the largest massacres of World War II took place, emerges in the book as a place of genocide on the eastern margins of Europe, which seems to have been largely forgotten within both (post-)Soviet and German discourses of memory. In addition to this "Leerstelle", or void, which is at the centre of the narrative, the book traces other instances of historical violence that have been forgotten (Egger 2020). The narrative's "multidirectional" perspective makes Petrowskaja's family history an example of the complex entwinement of victimhood and guilt in Central and Eastern Europe (Rothberg 2009). This also becomes apparent from the narrator's research into the part of individual family members in historic events. By reconstructing her grandfather's role as a socialist official, for example, he is not reduced to a victim of Stalin's warfare and later a prisoner of war in Germany; instead, he might also have been an accomplice in the Stalinist atrocities that took place before the war. The "maybe" in the book title, *Vielleicht Esther*, alerts the reader to ambiguity as a central feature of the narrative and, in turn, of various modes of historical memory. According to Michael Rothberg, cultures of memory develop through borrowing, appropriation, juxtaposition and repetition of other histories and traditions of remembrance, a process in which literary texts participate by highlighting points of contact, similarities and ambiguity, and which should not be understood as a "zero-sum game" (Rothberg 2009, 11). Despite certain shortcomings, which have been discussed intensively both in academic and public media in Germany,[5] Rothberg's multidirectional approach proves useful here as it highlights the dialogical relationship and connection points between collective memory discourses, without simply equating these.

It may be worth noting that Mishchenko does not approach the past by way of her family history, or as a Jewish experience, and she does not have a Jewish

5 The theoretical fuzziness that Rothberg's approach has been accused of due to its conflation of the Holocaust and colonialism is not relevant to the key concepts applied in my analysis. On the debate about Rothberg's book in German-language media after the publication of the German translation in 2021, see Tania Martini's (2021) article in *taz* and Thomas Schmid's (2021) review in *Die Welt*, as well as Rothberg's (2022) own contribution to this debate in *Frankfurter Rundschau*. In it, the author points to the different reception of his book in German- and English-language research and attributes this to the singularity thesis that from his perspective still dominates German memory and academic discourses.

family background. Instead, she takes a passionate stance on current events in Ukraine from a human rights perspective, placing events in the wider context of German and post-Soviet European history. What she has in common with Petrowskaja, however, is how she uses both the Holocaust and Soviet history as points of reference in this context and works with an intermedial aesthetics, as well as her reception as a Ukrainian exile in the German literary and cultural landscape since 2022.

3 Narratives of War and Peace in Visual and Textual Media

According to their fellow Ukrainian writer Yuri Andrukhovych, the “autogeographic” interlinking of biography and geography through an associative aesthetic which distorts and thus questions reality has been a feature of a Central and Eastern European “geopoetics” that reclaims European identity and history from Soviet discourses and geopolitics (Andrukhovych 2016, 12–13). *Vielleicht Esther* can thus also be placed in the wider context of post-Soviet writing that has emerged in German-language and other European literatures in the last two decades, with authors reflecting on more recent Soviet and post-Soviet history and memory in addition to that of the first half of the twentieth century.

This also applies to Petrowskaja’s most recent book, *Das Foto schaute mich an* (The photograph looked at me) of 2022, in which she addresses current political issues, using snapshots of a Soviet and post-Soviet reality from the 1980s to today. The photographs spark associations and memories which are put into short reflective texts. From 2015, and influenced by the Russian annexation of Crimea, Petrowskaja had written a series of newspaper columns, based on photographs, for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Fifty-seven of these are included in the book. The texts were written before the current invasion of Ukraine but invite associations with it. Soviet imperialism is interlinked with more contemporary Russian geopolitics, both in response to the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and, by extension, to events in 2022.

One of the pictures shows ten-year-old American Ambassador for Peace, Samantha Smith, in the Soviet Union in 1983 (See Figure 1 below.). The Cold War is at its height. And yet there are an American girl and a Soviet militiaman smiling together in a photograph. Samantha had written a letter to the Soviet head of state Yuri Andropov in 1982, expressing her concern about a nuclear war. He invited her to the Soviet Union. And so Smith landed “in der Mitte unseres Lebens [. . .], wie vom Himmel gefallen”, Petrowskaja writes [in the middle of our lives,

Fig. 1: "Samantha aus dem All" (Petrowskaja 2022, 98), © Unknown photographer, Samantha Smith, 1983, Maine State Museum.

as if dropped from the sky] (2022, 100). The moment, and the face of the enthusiastic young girl, had something disarming about it, thus giving hope at the time. However, reading the piece in the context of the Russian occupation of Crimea, and renewed fears of a nuclear war across Europe heightened further with the invasion in 2022, puts this and the friendly smile of the Soviet militiaman in a different light. This is already foreshadowed by the mention of Samantha's early death at the end of the first paragraph, a counterpoint to the chapter's title "Samantha aus dem All" [Samantha from outer space] (Petrowskaja 2022, 99). She would die in a plane crash at the age of 13.

In her newspaper columns and interviews Petrowskaja had criticised Russian geopolitics and memory discourses already before 2022. She diagnosed a lack of critical confrontation with less-heroic aspects of the Soviet Union's role during World War II in Soviet and post-Soviet collective and cultural memory (Petrowskaja 2015). Her background in journalism, as well as having grown up in a family of critical intellectuals, informed her own understanding of an engaged literature. In her contribution to a collection of essays from 2018 Petrowskaja explains: "Wir waren nicht religiös, aber das Wort, die Literatur, ist uns zu einer Art Religion geworden und wir glaubten daran" [We were not religious, but the word, literature, became a kind of religion for us and we believed in it] (Kästner 2018, 18–19). She remembers her parents and their friends critically discussing topics that were taboo under the Soviet regime from an ethical point of view. Such topics included the crushing of the Prague Spring by Soviet tanks, the war in Afghanistan and the treatment of political prisoners in the Soviet Union. Petrowskaja's

work straddles different media. Her journalistic approach also informs her literary work, both with regard to its ethical perspective and her partly documentary approach. In addition, her journalism offers further points of contact with the wider public. Being awarded the prestigious Bachmann Prize in 2013 for a chapter of *Vielleicht Esther* had allowed Petrowskaja to position herself in the German literary field.[6] However, she gained increased attention from public media in 2022 when the Russian invasion of Ukraine was perceived internationally as a "Krieg in Europa" [war in Europe], and "Zeitenwende" [turning point], the latter a term coined by the then German chancellor Olaf Scholz in his speech on 27 February 2022. In turn, Petrowskaja's own statements have taken on a greater political urgency. On talk shows of German public broadcasters she has argued that the West has a moral obligation to intervene militarily in the conflict (Maischberger 2022; Will 2022). In his article for *Die Zeit* in July 2022 journalist Bernd Neumann sees Petrowskaja – together with other Ukrainian intellectuals who find themselves in exile, such as Kateryna Mishchenko – taking a clear political stance on this war as an act of resistance on the part of her people:

> Schaut man sich unter ukrainischen Intellektuellen gegenwärtig um, gibt es verschiedene Tonlagen, um über den Krieg zu sprechen. Da ist zum Beispiel Katja Petrowskaja, die auf einer Veranstaltung im Literaturhaus Berlin kürzlich sagte, es gebe für sie im Moment nur zwei Dinge: entweder kämpfen oder in eine kleine Brigade eintreten und Unterstützung im Hintergrund leisten.
>
> [If you look around among Ukrainian intellectuals at this point in time you note different pitches for talking about the war. For example, there is Katja Petrowskaja, who said at a recent event in the *Literaturhaus Berlin* that there are only two things for her at the moment: either fight or join a small brigade and provide support in the background.] (Neumann 2022)

However, who these intellectuals regard as "their people" goes beyond their family members and fellow Ukrainians.

6 In 2010 Petrowskaja received a Robert Bosch fellowship to undertake research on *Vielleicht Esther*. In addition to the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for excerpts of chapter 5, she has received further literary awards in the following years, including the Aspekte-Literature Prize (2014), the Ernst Toller Prize, the Schubart Literature Award, the Premio Strega Europeo (2015) and the Gustav Regler Prize in 2023. These include awards that highlight political engagement, such as the Human Rights Award of the Gerhart and Renate Baum Foundation (2022).

4 "Euromaidan"

Writer, publisher and translator Kateryna Mishchenko, who is at the centre of Neumann's article, flew from Kyiv to Berlin shortly after the Russian offensive began in February 2022. However, for Mishchenko, the political tectonic plates had shifted long before. This shift is palpable in "Ein schwarzer Kreis" [a black circle], her contribution to *Euromaidan,* published in 2014 by Yuri Andrukhovych. The book is a collection of memories and reflections by Ukrainian intellectuals who participated in large-scale protests in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities from November 2013 to February 2014, which became known as "Euromaidan".[7] Demonstrations and civil unrest had begun in response to President Yanukovych's sudden decision not to sign a political association and free trade agreement with the European Union, instead choosing closer ties to Russia. Despite the violent response on the part of the police, resulting in 49 killed and 157 wounded protesters, the movement was successful and led to the ousting of President Yanukovych. While this was soon to be followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, for Mishchenko and others participating in the movement it constituted an important experience of civil unrest winning against an overpowering system, as Mishchenko writes (2014, 32). In the course of the protests she realises that active opposition against Ukrainian oligarchs and a political system controlled by Putin's government is essential, both in a national and transnational context. It becomes evident to her that the Euromaidan is not so much about economic advantages resulting from EU accession but about the fight for democracy and independence from Russian imperialism. She takes a strong stance for political activism by writers, both through their work and other channels of public discourse, putting this struggle for national freedom into a broader European and global context and concluding her essay with a call to European governments to support Ukrainian citizens:

> Europa hat die Augen geschlossen. Im Traum sieht es den Maidan. Aber wenn es aufwacht, kann es sich nicht mehr an den Traum erinnern, nicht begreifen, dass die Ukraine kein fernes Randgebiet mehr ist, sondern der Schauplatz dramatischer europäischer Veränderungen. Die Ukraine und Europa sind zwei Schlafwandler, zwischen denen auf einmal eine ganz andere als die Schengen-Mauer steht. [Europe has closed its eyes. In its dream it sees the Maidan. But when it wakes up, it can no longer remember the dream, cannot understand that Ukraine is no longer a distant periphery, but the scene of dramatic changes in

7 The anthology also contains short essays by international historians and journalists like Martin Pollack and Timothy Snyder. Among the pieces by Ukrainian writers is "Mein Kiew" by Katja Petrowskaja.

> Europe. Ukraine and Europe are two sleepwalkers, between whom suddenly stands a very different wall than the Schengen wall.] (Mishchenko 2014, 32)

The text voices a moral call for European and American government support of the protests in order to defend European and global democratic values, thus also moving Ukraine out of a marginal borderland position towards the centre of Europe from a western perspective. On the one hand, making a case for a country that has to defend itself against the Russian aggressor and, as Mishchenko says, is fighting for its "existence", reflects Serhij Zhadan's "patriotism". Zhadan, another Ukrainian author and contributor to *Euromaidan*, differentiates between patriotism and nationalism in his contribution "Vier Monate Winter". On the other hand, Mishchenko stresses the European and global dimension of what is happening in Ukraine and makes it a call for transnational citizenship and solidarity. This perspective has also informed the author's statements on various German talk shows, public events and across social media. Her strong media presence has brought her wider attention: "Irgendwann war sie überall. In den Zeitungen, auf den Podien, in den Talkshows. Selbst im Berliner Dom saß Kateryna Mishchenko auf einmal ganz vorne im Altarraum [. . .] und diskutierte über die aktuelle Friedensethik, als hätte sie nie etwas anderes getan" [At some point she was everywhere. In the newspapers, on podiums, in talk shows. Even in Berlin Cathedral, Kateryna Mishchenko was suddenly sitting at the very front of the chancel [. . .] discussing the current ethics of peace as if she had never done anything else] (Neumann 2022).

In "Ein schwarzer Kreis" Mishchenko introduces a historical dimension that is further emphasised if one reads her use of the word "Schlafwandler" [sleepwalker] as a reference to Christopher Clark's book on World War I, which was published in 2012 and widely discussed at the time.[8] However, in the images of dream and reality that Mishchenko evokes throughout her text, sleepwalking has a more ambivalent meaning. Walking in a dream means believing in the power of protest and active citizenship despite the inhumanity experienced through the violent government response, i.e. it has its own rationality and a utopian dimension: "Schon bald hatte ich beschlossen, mich der Unwirklichkeit ringsum ganz und gar hinzugeben, ihr und ihrer Traumlogik zu folgen, also dem Unmöglichen, das vor meinen Augen möglich geworden war" [I soon decided to surrender completely to the unreality all around me, to follow it and its dream logic, in other words the impossible that had become possible before my eyes] (2014, 24) It

8 In his book Clark interprets pre-war structures and alliances. European powers are portrayed "sleepwalkers, watchful but unseeing, haunted by dreams, yet blind to the reality of the horror they were about to bring into the world" (Clark 2012, 562).

includes the awareness of a dark "Abgrund" [abyss] that opened up beneath her feet when witnessing the killing of protesters during the Euromaidan (2014, 37). This abyss has become even more visible since 2022: "Ich denke, es braucht eine erweiterte Geschichtsschreibung" [I think we need an expanded historiography], as she explains in her interview with Neumann: "Es gibt nicht nur eine horizontale Beschreibung der Geschehnisse, wie wir sie als Chronologie kennen, sondern auch eine vertikale" [There is not only a horizontal description of events, as we know it as chronology, but also a vertical one].

5 Bearing Witness

Her 2023 anthology of essays by Ukrainian authors reflecting on the current reality of the war, *Aus dem Nebel des Krieges. Die Gegenwart der Ukraine* [From the fog of war: Ukraine's present], which Mishchenko edited together with Katharina Raabe, can be seen as a follow-on project to *Euromaidan*, revisiting ideas that emerged in 2014, now in the context of a full-scale war. The book was immediately placed on the best of non-fiction list of broadstream and high-brow public media (*DLF Kultur*/*ZDF*/*DIE ZEIT*) in 2023. Its overall format is similar to that of *Euromaidan*. It brings together texts by Ukrainian authors, activists and journalists with contributions by two well-known scholars in German memory studies and Central Eastern European history: Aleida Assmann and Karl Schlögel. Most of the contributors are women who find themselves exiled from Ukraine. The book takes up core ideas that Mishchenko reflected on in "Ein schwarzer Kreis": to develop a historical understanding from the dark experience of terror and destruction, and to resist a political system employing such forces.[9] In her piece, "Spiegel der Seele" (mirror of the soul), opening *Aus dem Nebel des Krieges*, she writes:

> Wenn ich früher die Nacht als einen Rückzugsort des sozial Verdrängten gesehen habe, erscheint jetzt die Existenz selbst im Schatten. Ich muss von neuem versuchen, den Menschen und das Menschliche in einem konkreten historischen Moment zu verstehen – das ist es, was diese lange Nacht des Vernichtungskrieges für mich bedeutet.
>
> [If I used to see the night as a retreat of what tends to be blended out in society, now existence itself appears in the shadows. I have to try anew to understand the human being and

9 Darkness is also prominent in the everyday reality of socially disadvantaged and marginalised groups portrayed in Kateryna Mishchenko and Miron Zownir's book *Ukrainische Nacht* (2015). According to the blurb it exposes "fault lines in Ukrainian society, in which the harbingers of revolution can already be felt".

> humanity in an actual historical moment – that is what this long night of the war of annihilation means to me.] (2023, 9)

In the daily speeches by Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, she finds “die Position einer radikalen Menschlichkeit als Gegenpol zur Entmenschlichung des Krieges” [the position of a radical humanity as an antithesis to the dehumanisation of war] (2023, 16). In her book, *Men in Dark Times*, Hannah Arendt maintained that, even in situations of political evil, there are those who function as moral exemplars (1968, ix). Zelenskyy has undoubtedly taken on this role in his public appearances, both for his domestic and wider international audiences. From the position of a refugee who finds herself separated from her normal life, Mishchenko again stresses the global dimension of the conflict, together with her responsibility and that of others to bear witness:

> Wenn man in den Geflüchteten oder den Ukrainern in ihrer Heimat nicht nur Opfer sieht, die man zutiefst bedauert, sondern Zeugen, dann wird auch dieser Krieg nicht als große Naturkatastrophe, sondern als kalkulierter Genozid wahrgenommen werden.
>
> [If one sees in the refugees or the Ukrainians in their homeland not only victims whom one is deeply sympathetic to, but witnesses, then this war will also be perceived not so much as a great natural disaster, but as a calculated genocide.] (2023, 13)

For Mishchenko, this is a war of annihilation, a form of genocide, which necessitates the fight of humanity against fascism, embodied by the Russian government and its soldiers. Here and in other texts she makes explicit references to the Holocaust.

6 How to Record the Disruption of Normality?

The centre pages of the book show a series of black- and-white photographs, entitled “Die Aufnahme der Veränderung” [Recording the change], documenting the intrusion of war into the normality of everyday life in Ukraine, with the first photograph showing the corpse of a civilian lying in the street in front of a house in Bucha (Mishchenko 2023, 143–164). The image on the following page shows a soldier. Without further knowledge, it is difficult to make out whether he is a Russian soldier, thus part of the army that committed war crimes in places like Bucha during the invasion in 2022, or part of the Ukrainian army. Furthermore, his moustache, the soft light on his face and the way the outlines of an arched window provide an oval frame for his upper body, turn the photograph into an almost timeless portrait, while evoking memories of older photographs, as well as

images of previous wars in Europe. Another image shows schoolchildren securing a doorway with bricks against shrapnel. If not aware of its historical context, one may think the photograph merely depicts a playful activity. On the opposite page a photograph shows the facade of an apartment block, focusing on a window filled with books on the inside, probably to prevent broken glass flying into the apartment. Both highlight the perversion of normality through war by making it part of everyday objects and activities.

The following chapter, written by Ukrainian documentary filmmaker and photographer Yuriy Hrytsyna, reflects on the interrelation of visual images and historical narratives in this war. Like the preceding photographs, his reflections challenge what the author describes as Russia's "Krieg um die Bilderhoheit" [war over visual sovereignty] and the Russian historical narrative constructed by these images (Hrytsyna 2023, 168). Hrytsyna quotes the subtitle of a documentary film montage, *Den Krieg schauen*, anonymously produced and released in 2018, and critically commenting on the Russian annexation of Crimea, to raise questions on the impact photographs may have on such narratives: "Dieser Krieg wurde begonnen, um gesehen zu werden" [This war was started in order to be seen] (168). While "forensische" photographs document what has happened, he explains, "narrative" photographs tell a story by means of their aesthetics and topic in order to engage the viewer and turning him into an agent (170). The author diagnoses an overwhelming number of forensic images of the Ukraine war that have been shared on the internet since 2014 by internet users in Ukraine and its global diaspora, their sheer number working against their suppression or appropriation by Russian media. Like Mishchenko, Hrytsyna links this to the Holocaust, thus reversing the Russian victim narrative,[10] when he refers to Harun Farocki's documentary film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges* (1989) at the end of his text. In his film, Farocki asks why the Allies refrained from bombing the infrastructure of the Holocaust, even though they were in possession of detailed aerial shots of National Socialist concentration camps. For Hrytsyna this highlights the limits of forensic documentation of photography and film but also maintains a strong sense of hope against all odds. Drawing on transcultural memory of the Holocaust, when linking the Russian invasion with the systematic, state-sponsored mass murder of European Jews, his text concludes with a call to his readers not to disregard images but to take political action.

10 In Putin's speeches and state-controlled media coverage, Russia tends to be presented as a blameless victim of foreign aggression throughout history, heroically repelling invaders and foreign attempts to destroy it, culminating in World War II. In line with this, Putin has justified his invasion of Ukraine as a "Special Military Operation" to "denazify" a state controlled by "Neonazis" (Troianovski 2022).

The way Oksana Karpovych collects images to document how the war intrudes into her everyday life in Ukraine and how this is changing her individual perception in her contribution at the beginning of the volume, entitled "Verfinsterte Orte" [darkened places], may at first sight differ from Hrytsyna's call for agency on the part of the public.[11] However, there are a number of parallels, particularly in the intermediality of image and text. Like Hrytsyna's chapter, Karpovych's contribution does not include photographs. Instead she works with descriptions of scenes, textual forensic images that make the ever-increasing level of intrusion of the war into everyday life palpable, while not providing a linear narrative or logical reasoning. The author uses the words "Störung" – which can be translated as "disruption" or "malfunction" – and "Lakunen" [lacunae] for her documentation, pointing to the futility of this war from a human perspective (Karpovych 2023, 42). Her turning away from logical reasoning in the face of such senselessness distinguishes her chapter from Hrytsyna's. This is further illustrated by her textual image of an avenue in the centre of Kharkiv that has been hit by a Russian grenade with a number of pedestrians killed. The fact this has happened close to a "huge" Soviet memorial for "the city's liberator" (Karpovych 2023, 37) gives the image a sad irony. While the author herself does not see the human body parts that she is told about by other witnesses, she describes the bodies of pigeons that have been killed lying around while those birds that have survived are sitting on the asphalt in a disturbed state. These birds take on a symbolic value, as a symbol of violated innocence and abnormality. A man with a plastic bag and black umbrella is in tears, shouting at passers-by: "Sie töten Menschen, klar, aber Vögel, warum die Vögel? Was haben die denen getan? Wir haben sie hier gefüttert!" [They kill people, sure, but birds, why the birds? What have they done to them? We fed them here!] (Karpovych 2023, 38). Karpovych's entry to the 2024 *Berlinale*, an international film festival in Berlin that prides itself on its political edge, was a documentary film with the title *Intercepted*. The film also works with the principle of disruption, or "cognitive dissonance", as the director explains in an interview with public broadcaster *Arte* in 2024. The film juxtaposes images of civilians trying to continue their lives somehow in places that have become uninhabitable, for example in cellars, or of rural and urban landscapes in Ukraine that have been disfigured by the war, with excerpts from phone conversations of Russian soldiers with their family members in Russia, thus highlighting the abnormality of this war. Visual images of destruction dissonate with the seeming normality of phone conversations between mothers and

11 Karpovych currently lives in Canada but is closely linked to the exile community in Berlin. This also applies to Hrytsyna who studied in Berlin.

sons about everyday life and family birthdays. In this context, it may be worth noting that images devoid of people, or with animals at their centre, communicate a similar message in the 2023 book *Die tonlosen Stimmen* by German author Marcel Beyer, in which he comments on "Die Präsenz der Tiere in Zeiten der Bestialität" (Beyer 2023, 10).[12] They may be read as a reflection of similar discourses in the work of Ukrainian exile authors and media coverage of the war. Both Karpovych and Hrytsyna, as well as Beyer, focus on their own perception of this war through media and their own experience on the ground, while asking how to document this process and share it with a wider public through their writing and visual media.

7 On the Question of Language

In a 2022 podcast as part of the series *Stimmen zum Ukraine-Krieg* (voices on the war in Ukraine), produced by German public broadcaster MDR, Mishchenko interlinks the suffering of Ukrainian victims in the current war with those of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, through explicit references to Paul Celan's famous poem "Todesfuge" [Fugue of Death]. The Ukrainians are finding themselves treated as "Untermenschen" [subhumans], to be annihilated both physically and culturally. This comparison creates a "noeud de mémoire", in terms of multidirectional memory as defined by Rothberg (2009, 7), i.e., a knotted intersection of memory and history that shows both difference and similarity, rather than equating the experience of the current war with that of the Holocaust. However, it may still be read as an act of provocation in the context of German Holocaust memory:

> In der ersten Morgendämmerung nach der Flucht aus Kiew hatte ich einen kurzen Traum. Im Himbeergarten von meinen Großeltern sah ich eine große olivgrüne Schlange.
>
> Augenblicklich stand sie vor mir und wollte angreifen. Ich habe ganz vorsichtig das Tor geöffnet und sie langsam auf die Dorfstraße herausgelockt. Dann war das Tor zu und ich allein.
>
> "Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt." Diese Worte aus Celans "Todesfuge" gingen mir durch den Kopf, als ich aufwachte. Das Haus des Russlandmeisters ist irgendwo in einem anderen Universum, und ich habe kein Haus mehr. Er hat mich in meinem dornigen Himbeerversteck erwischt, ohne zu wissen, dass es mich überhaupt gibt. Ich habe Angst vor diesem kommenden Bösen, und es hat keine Ängste, denn es gibt keinen Bezug zu mir. Ich bin nicht eines Bezuges wert, nur einer Vernichtung. "Der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland." Vernichtungskrieg ist ein

12 In a different chapter he describes a cat that is saved from a destroyed block of flats in Borodjanka (Beyer 2023, 52).

> deutsches Wort, und es bezeichnet sehr genau, was sich in meinem Land heute abspielt und gleichzeitig nachgespielt wird.
>
> [In my first dawn after fleeing from Kyiv, I had a short dream. In my grandparents' raspberry garden I saw a large olive-green snake. Instantly it stood in front of me and wanted to attack. I very carefully opened the gate and slowly coaxed it out onto the village street. Then the gate was closed and I was alone. "A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes". These words from Celan's "Fugue of Death" ran through my head when I woke up. The house of the master of Russia is somewhere in another universe, and I no longer have a house. He got hold of me in my thorny raspberry hideout without knowing I even existed. I am afraid of this coming evil, and it has no fears because there is no reference to me. I am not worthy of a reference, only of annihilation.] (Mishchenko 2022)

Mishchenko mourns the disintegration of value and meaning this war represents. She identifies with the darkness and despair that inform Celan's poem in the light of the disintegration of human values under National Socialism. In "Todesfuge" ritual is converted into "a grotesque funeral dirge cried out into the dark" (Weimar 1974, 90). For Mishchenko this process is "re-enacted" in Putin's war, which is making her own reality both absurd and threatening in the context of German and European history of the twentieth century (Michchenko 2022). A central part of this re-enactment is how Putin taps into cultural memory of the Soviet Union's struggle against Adolf Hitler's Third Reich on the Eastern Front during World War II. In his "Address concerning the events in Ukraine" of 21 February 2022, Putin justifies his invasion by claiming that the Ukrainian government, supported by "neo-Nazis and Banderites", is carrying out a "genocide" against Russians in Ukraine. Mishchenko describes how the sense of shock she felt at the hatred behind Putin's "fascist speech" has stayed with her: "Der Hass gegen die Ukrainer, der mich an der faschistischen Rede vom 21. Februar so erschrocken hat, ist wie eine klebrige Marke." She reflects on this as one of the reasons why she is now writing and publishing in German:

> Ich schreibe auf Deutsch. Ich weiß nicht, ob das eine Subversion in Bezug auf faschistische Anspielungen des russischen Krieges sein sollte, oder ob ich mich in dem Bunker der deutschen Sprache verstecke und hier nach großen Antworten suche, auf die Fragen:
> Was heißt denn heute "nie wieder"?
> Wie soll eine antifaschistische Agenda des 21. Jahrhunderts aussehen?
> Was ist die Position der deutschen Enkel- und Urenkelgeneration in Bezug auf diesen Vernichtungskrieg?
> Und darf ich als ukrainische, vom russischen Regime zu einem Untermenschen erklärte Person im deutschen Diskurs mitsprechen?
>
> [I write in German. I don't know whether this is meant to be a subversion of the allusion to fascism inherent to the Russian war, or whether I am hiding in the bunker of the German language and searching here for grand answers to the questions:

> What does "never again" mean today? What should an anti-fascist agenda of the twenty- first century look like? What is the position of the German grandchildren and great-grandchildren generation in relation to this war of extermination? And as a Ukrainian person declared a subhuman by the Russian regime, am I allowed to have a say in the German discourse?] (Mishchenko 2022)

At the end of her text Mishchenko asks whether she has a right to appropriate the Holocaust in order to highlight Ukrainian suffering, and to address the German historic guilt and responsibility arising from it from a victim's perspective. The author specifically addresses the Germans in her 2022 podcast. She calls on their responsibility to prevent crimes against humanity committed by Russian soldiers under the leadership of a fascist government. This raises a number of questions that merit further discussion. Some of these the author formulates herself in above text while reflecting on her own writing.

One of her questions regards the language she chooses to write and publish in as an exiled writer. Explaining it with her aim of subverting fascist allusions in the Russian discourse bears similarities with Petrowskaja's decision to write *Vielleicht Esther* in German. In her interview with *Der Standard* in 2015 Petrowskaja explains how writing in German – for her as a child the language of Bach and Nazis in war films – allowed her to transcend stereotypical roles of victims and perpetrators dominating Soviet and post-Soviet discourse. Writing in German, rather than in Russian or Ukrainian as their first and second languages, thus allows both authors to create their own narrative space and open new perspectives on European history. Furthermore, Mishchenko asks whether writing in German on greater historical questions means sheltering from a more direct engagement on the part of the exiled writer who is finding herself in in a safe, thus somewhat privileged position, in contrast to those remaining in the war zone, or even physically participating in the fighting.[13] However, writing in German allows both authors to address a wider audience.

Moving between literature and other public media, both in terms of platforms of communication and their own literary style, allows their voices to have a wider impact in public discourse.[14] Mishchenko and Petrowskaja both combine, or switch between, complex literary language and an accessible stye of writing, addressing historical events and current political issues.

13 Kateryna Mishchenko was awarded a fellowship of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin for 2022/23.

14 This would be the aim of a *littérature engagée* according to Sartre's (1997) concept.

8 Changes within the Literary Field?

Both authors have maintained a strong presence across different German-language media while participating in transnational artists’ networks. There are other very audible voices, for example that of author and musician Serhij Zhadan whose works, written in Ukrainian, have been translated and widely discussed in German media. This includes Zhadan’s war chronicle on social media.

Zhadan, who shares Mishchenko’s perception of this war as a genocide and has argued against pacifism, received the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in October 2022. On the one hand, it would be worth exploring to what extent Ukrainian and other post-Soviet writers currently form a transnational exile community in Berlin, and the extent to which Russian writers are excluded from it. An interview with Oksana Sabuschko, conducted in December 2022, points toward the latter. This also emerged from a conversation of the author of this chapter with Lena Gorelik at the University of Augsburg in November 2023, in which she commented on the current reluctance of Ukrainian writers to be part of joint events with Russian exile writers. On the other hand, German writers like Marcel Beyer or Durs Grünbein, both well established in the German literary canon, have published political texts dealing with the war in Ukraine. This points to a potential shift within the German literary landscape reaching beyond Ukrainian and Russian exile writers. Examples include Grünbein’s 2022 collection of poems, *Äquidistanz*, and Beyer’s literary essays, based on his lectures on factual narrative at the University of Wuppertal in 2022, in which he reflects on how writers and readers can be sensitised for a different, post-*Zeitenwende* reality.

Beyer writes: “Die Sensibilisierung erfolgte nicht, indem ich mich der außersprachlichen Welt zuwandte. Sie fand statt auf dem Feld der Literatur und hier, noch einmal enger umrissen, auf dem Feld des nicht-fiktionalen, faktualen Erzählens” [The sensitisation did not take place by turning to the non-linguistic world. It took place in the field of literature and here, even more narrowly defined, in the field of non-fictional, factual narrative] (Beyer 2023, 53). Beyer refer s here to his own reading of Russian writing, in particular Viktor Shklovsky’s memories of starvation during the siege of St. Petersburg in the Russian civil war 1919/20, which he links to the deeply unsettling effect photographs of scenes in Bucha after the Russian invasion have had on him. He asks how, as a writer, to integrate visuality in factual narratives. Beyer makes a case for the (re-)creation of images through text, rather than the inclusion of photographs. As mentioned earlier, there are some striking parallels between Beyer’s aesthetics and those of Karpovych. Obviously, Beyer is not affected by this war in the way the Ukrainian authors discussed are. He experiences it from the relative safety of his home in Dresden. However, it still seems to move closer to him than he might have ex-

pected, with military transports passing through his city, a reality difficult to grasp for a German of a generation that had believed the experience of World War II and the Holocaust would preclude any further war in Europe. Both authors refer in their work to Eastern European writers. Both Beyer and Grünbein have also made public statements or signed petitions calling for the support of Ukraine with German weapons, thus participating in heated debates among writers and intellectuals about Germany's role in current geopolitics in the context of its responsibility for World War II. Perspectives such as the one voiced so strongly by Mishchenko are taking on a new prominence within the literary field and in public discourse, while differing clearly from dominant German-Russian discourses since the 1970s, and even more so from those aiming for closer economic and cultural ties to Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Durs Grünbein was one of over 350 artists and intellectuals who signed an appeal against Russia's military threat to Ukraine in February 2022. This led to writer Eugen Ruge and others accusing the signatories of warmongering in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper. Further petitions and counter-petitions have followed since, including the February 2023 "Manifest für den Frieden" (manifest for peace) by politician Sarah Wagenknecht and journalist Alice Schwarzer against military support for Ukraine.

9 Conclusion

Transnational memory and international politics have been gaining prominence in the German literary field. This can be partly seen as a development in the context of the "Eastern turn" that German-language literature has been taking in the new millennium. Following the *Zeitenwende* in 2022, it has, however, taken on a new dynamic: firstly, memory discourses that situate themselves in a transnational, European framework, while questioning both German and post-Soviet discourses, have become highly topical. This is also reflected in Suhrkamp's announcement of Mishchenko's reading in the *Literarische Colloquium* in May 2023 under the title "Im kosmopolitischen Exil". Secondly, the work by Ukrainian authors like Petrowskaja, Mishchenko and Karpovych, as well as German writers such as Durs Grünbein or Marcel Beyer, is marked by an urgency to engage in public debate while reflecting on the intermediality of their work.

Applying Bourdieu's field theory, the dynamic described seems to mark a changing of positions, perhaps even of scales, in the current German literary field, moving it closer to the political field while opening it further to international trends. This differs from the structure of the field at the end of the 1990s. In

contrast to the prominent role of the author as a public intellectual up to the 1980s, political engagement seemed to have lost some of its value in the literary landscape at that point (Egger and Rompf 2020, 5–7). What appears to have emerged in recent years, however, is the development – now further accelerated through the Eastern European turn and the *Zeitenwende* – toward a literature that deliberately seeks out public forums through formats like essays, feature articles, panel discussions and corresponding internet platforms, thus moving the question of contemporaneity or political engagement back into the centre of both writerly and public interest. While this cannot only be attributed exclusively to exiled writers from Ukraine, or to Eastern European writers who have brought different perspectives and aesthetics to German-language literature already before the war in Ukraine,[15] their work is contributing to this potential shift.

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15 One may think of Saša Stanišić or Herta Müller. For examples of non-minority literature see Egger and Rompf 2020, 6–7.

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